

Various stages of group developement



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The goal of most research on group development is to learn why and how small groups change over time. To do this, researchers examine patterns of change and continuity in groups over time. Aspects of a group that might be studied include the quality of the output produced by a group, the type and frequency of its activities, its cohesiveness, the existence of group conflict. In interpreting behaviour of a particular group, it is important to recognize not only a broad pattern of development but also the unique characteristics of the particular group and the circumstances that contribute to (or detract from) its development. The way in which a particular group develops, depends in part on such variables as the frequency with which group members interact and personal characteristics of group members. However, it is generally believed that groups pass through a standard sequence of five stages.

Forming:

In the first stage of team building, the forming of the team takes place. The individual's behavior is driven by a desire to be accepted by the others, and avoid controversy or conflict. Serious issues and feelings are avoided, and people focus on being busy with routines, such as team organization, who does what, when to meet, etc. Individuals are also gathering information and impressions - about each other, and about the scope of the task and how to approach it. This is a comfortable stage to be in, but the avoidance of conflict and threat means that not much actually gets done. The team meets and learns about the opportunities and challenges, and then agrees on goals and begins to tackle the tasks. Team members tend to behave quite independently. They may be motivated but are usually relatively uninformed

of the issues and objectives of the team. Team members are usually on their best behavior but very focused on themselves. Mature team members begin to model appropriate behavior even at this early phase. Supervisors of the team tend to need to be directive during this phase. The forming stage of any team is important because, in this stage, the members of the team get to know one another, exchange some personal information, and make new friends. This is also a good opportunity to see how each member of the team works as an individual and how they respond to pressure.

Storming:

Every group will next enter the storming stage in which different ideas compete for consideration. The team addresses issues such as what problems they are really supposed to solve, how they will function independently and together and what leadership model they will accept. Team members open up to each other and confront each other's ideas and perspectives. In some cases storming can be resolved quickly. In others, the team never leaves this stage. The maturity of some team members usually determines whether the team will ever move out of this stage. Some team members will focus on minutiae to evade real issues. The storming stage is necessary to the growth of the team. It can be contentious, unpleasant and even painful to members of the team who are averse to conflict. Tolerance of each team member and their differences should be emphasized. Without tolerance and patience the team will fail. This phase can become destructive to the team and will lower motivation if allowed to get out of control. Some teams will never develop past this stage. Supervisors of the team during this phase may be more accessible, but tend to remain directive in their

guidance of decision-making and professional behavior. The team members will therefore resolve their differences and members will be able to participate with one another more comfortably. The ideal is that they will not feel that they are being judged, and will therefore share their opinions and views. Normally tension, struggle and sometimes arguments occur. This stage can also be upsetting.

Norming:

The team manages to have one goal and come to a mutual plan for the team at this stage. Some may have to give up their own ideas and agree with others to make the team function. In this stage, all team members take the responsibility and have the ambition to work for the success of the team's goals. The danger here is that members may be so focused on preventing conflict that they are reluctant to share controversial ideas.

Performing: It is possible for some teams to reach the performing stage. These high-performing teams can function as a unit as they find ways to get the job done smoothly and effectively without inappropriate conflict or the need for external supervision. By this time, they are motivated and knowledgeable. The team members are now competent, autonomous and able to handle the decision-making process without supervision. Dissent is expected and allowed as long as it is channelled through means acceptable to the team. Supervisors of the team during this phase are almost always participative. The team will make most of the necessary decisions. Even the most high-performing teams will revert to earlier stages in certain circumstances. Many long-standing teams go through these cycles many times as they react to changing circumstances. For example, a change in

leadership may cause the team to revert to storming as the new people challenge the existing norms and dynamics of the team.

Adjourning and transforming:

For permanent work groups, performing is the last stage in their development. However for temporary groups, there is an adjourning stage. In this stage, the group prepares for its disbandment. High task performance is no longer the group's top priority. Instead, attention is directed toward wrapping up activities.