

Group Formation (based on Tuckman and Jenson's Model)

What stages do groups go through?

You might think that forming a group is simply about choosing to work with some of your friends. However, when you work together in a specific group activity your relationship with each other needs to become professional. Before this can be achieved, the group may go through certain stages. Consider whether Tuckman and Jensen's suggestions below fit your own experience of group work.

Tuckman and Jensen's stages in group formation

Tuckman and Jensen draw on the movement known as group dynamics, which is concerned with why groups behave in particular ways. This offers various suggestions for how groups are formed and how they develop over time. The formation of some groups can be represented as a spiral; other groups form with sudden movements forward and then have periods with no change. Whatever variant of formation each group exhibits, they suggest that all groups pass through six sequential stages of development. These stages may be longer or shorter for each group, or for individual members of the group, but all groups will need to experience them. They are *forming*, *storming*, *norming*, *performing*, *mourning* and *retiring*.

The terms are reasonably self-explanatory. When a group is *forming*, participants can feel anxious not knowing how the group will work or what exactly will be required of them. *Storming*, as the word suggests, is when things may get stormy. Conflict can emerge, individual differences are expressed and the leader's role may be challenged. The value and the feasibility of the task may also be challenged. After the storm comes the calm of *norming*, where the group starts to function harmoniously and where participants co-operate and mutual support develops. This enables the *performing* stage to occur where the work really takes off and the group accepts a structure and

method for achieving the common task. When the group *retires* or *adjourns*, much learning happens through informal chat and feedback about the group performance. Tuckman and Jenson recognise that when groups dismantle themselves and the loose ends are all tied up, participants often go through a stage *of mourning or grieving*.

This model is useful to know, so that when your group appears to be going nowhere or perhaps members are arguing so much that no work can be started, you understand that this is normal! Most groups go through these phases. Understanding this pattern empowers you to work towards moving the group onto the next phase

Activity for individual reflection or as a group discussion following any group activity.

Think of a group that you have recently been involved with. Considering each stage of its development, can you recall any evidence of these stages?

A Forming

- What was the task?
- Did you all share the same expectations of the task?
- Did you all have the same attitude to working in a group?
- Did you feel any anxiety at the outset of the activity?

B Storming

- Was there any conflict in the group?
- Did you all agree on the means of carrying out the task?
- Did you have a leader and was his/her authority challenged?
- Did any group members withdraw from the group?

C Norming

- Did you move on to agree methods of working?
- Did you have a common goal?
- Did you cooperate with each other?
- Did you work out how to proceed at all? (If not, you were probably still storming.)

D Performing

- Did everyone take on a functional role to achieve the task?
- Did you work constructively and efficiently?
- Did the group's activity focus on fulfilling the task?
- Did you experience a sense of achievement?

E Retiring/Adjourning

- Did you stop abruptly and all go your separate ways or did you finish the task and then go off together and socialize?
- Did you talk about the group and your experience of it?
- What sort of issues did you discuss or think about after the group activity?
- Was it more or less acceptable to give and receive feedback in a relaxed atmosphere when *adjourning*?

F Mourning/Grieving

- Have you experienced the mourning stage following the completion of a show or project?
- Have you ever felt empty or sad when a group activity has finished?
- Why might some people feel the mourning stage more acutely than others?

- How do you deal with your own feelings after the project or show?

Do you recall any significant learning which took place outside of formal rehearsals and performances?

Are you aware of any of your colleagues who experience the *mourning* stage acutely? If so, what might you do to support them?

You have now analysed your group's formation using Tuckman and Jensen's theory. This should give you a good idea as to whether your group is progressing well towards being an effective group - or maybe it has already arrived at the performing stage. If so, congratulations! Many groups remain at the storming stage and find it difficult to achieve their goals.

If your group is just beginning to form, Tuckman and Jensen's comments should help you to recognise the stages, which may either help or hinder you from progressing to the next level. It would be useful to discuss with your group members how best to move forward.

References

Tuckman, B.W. & Jensen, M.A.C. (1977) *Stages of small group development revisited*. Group and Organizational Studies, 2, 419-427