

Stages of Group Development Fact Sheet

When working with a coalition, it is helpful to realize that groups normally go through several “stages” of development. The most widely used model of the stages of team development is sometimes called the ‘Orming Model. Developed in 1965 by researcher Bruce Tuckman of the Naval Medical Research Institute at Bethesda, Maryland, it identified four stages through which a group normally proceeds:

Stage 1 - Forming: Individual behavior is driven by a desire to be accepted by the others and to avoid controversy or conflict. Serious issues and feelings are avoided as people instead focus on more impersonal routines such as team organization, tasks, meeting dates, etc. However, during this initial stage, individuals are also gathering information and impressions about each other, and about the scope of their task and how to approach it. This is a comfortable stage for members, but the avoidance of conflict and threat means that not much actually gets done.

Stage 2 - Storming: As important issues start to be addressed, individuals in the group only remain nice to each other for so long. Some people’s patience will break early and minor confrontations will arise that are quickly dealt with or glossed over. These may relate to the work of the group itself, or to roles and responsibilities within the group. Some will note that it’s good to be getting into the real issues, while others will wish for the comfort and security of stage one. Depending on the culture of the organization and individuals, the conflict will be more or less suppressed, but it will be there, under the surface. As this stage progresses, there will be a growing need for group agreements to be adhered to, and revised as needed to help the scope of the coalition tasks and responsibilities to become more clear.

Stage 3 - Norming: Having had their arguments, group members now understand each other better, and have a growing appreciation of each other’s skills and experience. Individuals listen to each other, appreciate and support each other, and are prepared to change pre-conceived views. They feel they’re part of a cohesive, effective group. However, individuals have had to work hard to attain this stage and may resist any pressure to change, especially from the outside, for fear that the group will break up or revert to a storm.

Stage 4 - Performing: Not all groups reach this stage, characterized by a state of interdependence and flexibility. Members know each other well enough to be able to work together, and trust each other enough to allow independent activity. Roles and responsibilities change according to need in an almost seamless way. Group identity, loyalty and morale are all high, and everyone is equally task-orientated and people-orientated. This high degree of comfort means that all the energy of the group can be directed towards the task(s) in hand.

Ten years after first describing the four stages, Dr. Tuckman revisited his original work and described another, final, stage:

Stage 5 - Adjourning: This stage is about completion and disengagement, both from the tasks and the group members. Individuals will be proud of having achieved much and glad to have been part of such an enjoyable group. They need to recognize what they’ve done and consciously move on. Some authors describe this stage as “Deforming and Mourning”, recognizing the sense of loss felt by group members.

(Tuckman, 1965)