

Group Development

All groups go through stages of development. The amount of time and intensity of each stage will depend on the group, its dynamics, its task and the amount of time it has. Groups develop in a variety of ways. Some go straight through, while others skip stages and need to come back to them later. It is possible for a group to get stuck in one stage—particularly storming—and never progress. However, with good facilitation, you can mirror back to the group where the group seems stuck, and help them move forward.

As external and internal factors cause change in the group and/or its task (new members join and old leave, crisis or change of direction in the organization, etc.), the group is likely to revisit earlier stages of development.

A useful and easy way to remember group development is the four-stage model:
forming, storming, norming and performing.

FORMING	<i>Forming:</i>	<i>Facilitator's Task:</i>
	<p><i>This characterizes the time when a group is first coming together, or when new members are joining the group.</i></p> <p>Some have referred to this as the “ritual sniffing” phase.</p> <p>Group members are concerned about inclusion: whether and how they belong and how safe it is to be part of this group. Therefore, this stage is characterized by politeness, low conflict and superficial disclosure.</p> <p>The group often looks to the facilitator or leader for strong direction.</p>	<p>The task of the facilitator in this stage is to assess what work needs to be done in the group around forming and then to structure an appropriate opening so that people can feel safe, legitimized, valued and have a sanctioned way to “sniff” one another, as needed.</p> <p>Forming can be accomplished through:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>introductions and orientation</i> • <i>reviewing the “road map” (desired outcomes and agenda)</i> • <i>warm up activities</i> • <i>inviting expressions of expectations</i> • <i>establishing ground rules or working agreements</i> • <i>agreeing upon decision-making methods</i>
	<i>When the Facilitator is new to an existing Group...</i>	
	<i>Facilitator's Task:</i>	
	<p>An interesting twist to the forming stage occurs when the facilitator is new to an intact group. In this instance, you need to draw the group back to the forming stage just long enough to get to know you and be assured that you are safe enough to include in the group. Beware doing too much forming for your sake (long introductions of each person); you may lose the group. You will have done some of this work, of course, prior to the start of the first meeting by meeting group members, learning about their history, culture, in-jokes, etc.</p>	



STORMING	<p><i>Storming:</i></p> <p><i>Storming is the stage where members are concerned about control, power and influence.</i></p> <p><i>It often manifests through disagreements about process, emotional responses to task demands, and challenges to the facilitator or leader.</i></p> <p><i>Note: Not every conflict is an indication of storming. Healthy conflict over content and process can occur at every stage of group development.</i></p>	<p><i>Facilitator's Task:</i></p> <p>The task of the facilitator in this stage is to assess and name the specific storming issues of the group, and guide and model good conflict resolution process.</p> <p>This can be accomplished by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>first and foremost, remembering you are not the target</i> • <i>servicing as a mirror to the group</i> • <i>separating the problem from the person</i> • <i>acknowledging, then dealing with or deferring concerns</i> • <i>enforcing the ground rules</i> • <i>being assertive in your role as process expert</i>
NORMING	<p><i>Norming:</i></p> <p><i>Norming is the stage in which group members move toward inter-dependence.</i></p> <p><i>Individually, group members are focused on building caring and a sense of belonging in the group.</i></p>	<p><i>Facilitator's Task:</i></p> <p>The task of the facilitator is to support the group in their high functioning by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>mirroring back and recording the norms that are emerging</i> • <i>affirming the group's cohesiveness and the work it has taken to get there</i> • <i>affirming the positive value of expressing differences</i> • <i>guiding the group through collaborative negotiation</i> • <i>providing opportunities for the group to enjoy its connectedness</i>
PERFORMING	<p><i>Performing:</i></p> <p><i>Performing is the stage where the group is working collaboratively and is highly productive.</i></p> <p><i>To an outsider, the group might appear to be only task focused, but the strong underpinnings of trust, respect, shared norms and overarching goals are in place.</i></p>	<p><i>Facilitator's Task:</i></p> <p>The task of the facilitator at this stage is to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>offer effective processes for getting the task accomplished</i> • <i>format the work in a way that is useful to the group</i> • <i>affirm the good work of the group</i> • <i>stay out of the way when not needed</i>

Excerpted and adapted from Dee Kelsey and Pam Plumb, *Great Meetings! Great Results*, (Portland, Maine: Hanson Park Press, 2004 ©), pp. 23–25. Used with permission.

Handout: *Group Development (p.2)*

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