Group Formation

Well functioning groups do not just form out of the blue. It takes time for a group to develop to a point where it can be effective and where all members feel connected to it. Bruce Tuckman has identified four stages that characterize the development of groups. Understanding these stages can help determine what is happening with a group and how to manage what is occurring. These four group development stages are known as forming, storming, norming, and performing as described below and the skills needed to successfully guide a group through these stages are described by clicking here.

Forming

This is the initial stage when the group comes together and members begin to develop their relationship with one another and learn what is expected of them. This is the stage when team building begins and trust starts to develop. Group members will start establishing limits on acceptable behavior through experimentation. Other members’ reactions will determine if a behavior will be repeated. This is also the time when the tasks of the group and the members will be decided.

Storming

During this stage of group development, interpersonal conflicts arise and differences of opinion about the group and its goals will surface. If the group is unable to clearly state its purposes and goals or if it cannot agree on shared goals, the group may collapse at this point. It is important to work through the conflict at this time and to establish clear goals. It is necessary for there to be discussion so everyone feels heard and can come to an agreement on the direction the group is to move in.

Norming

Once the group resolves its conflicts, it can now establish patterns of how to get its work done. Expectations of one another are clearly articulated and accepted by members of the group. Formal and informal procedures are established in delegating tasks, responding to questions, and in the process by which the group functions. Members of the group come to understand how the group as a whole operates.

Performing

During this final stage of development, issues related to roles, expectations, and norms are no longer of major importance. The group is now focused on its task, working intentionally and effectively to accomplish its goals. The group will find
that it can celebrate its accomplishments and that members will be learning new
skills and sharing roles.
After a group enters the performing stage, it is unrealistic to expect it to remain
there permanently. When new members join or some people leave, there will be
a new process of forming, storming, and norming engaged as everyone learns
about one another. External events may lead to conflicts within the group. To
remain healthy, groups will go through all of these processes in a continuous
loop.

When conflict arises in a group, do not try to silence the conflict or to run from it.
Let the conflict come out into the open so people can discuss it. If the conflict is
kept under the surface, members will not be able to build trusting relationships
and this could harm the group’s effectiveness. If handled properly, the group will
come out of the conflict with a stronger sense of cohesiveness then before.
Skills to Manage
Group Development

You may know the name of the different stages of development but there are
different skills and techniques needed to guide a group through the stages. Here
are some suggestions.

Forming

Be inclusive and empowering. Make sure that everyone connected to the group
is involved. Seek out diverse members and talents and model inclusive
leadership. Identify common purposes and targets of change. Create an
environment that fosters trust and builds commitment to the group.

Storming

Be ethical and open to other people’s ideas. Allow differences of opinion to be
discussed. Handle conflict directly and civilly. Keep everyone focused on the
purpose of the group and the topic of conflict. Avoid personal attacks. Examine
biases that may be blocking progress or preventing another member to be
treated fairly.

Norming

Be fair with processes. New members should feel welcomed, informed, and
involved. Continue to clarify expectations of individuals and of the group.
Engage in collaboration and teamwork.

Performing

Celebrate accomplishments and find renewal in relationships. Encourage and
empower members to learn new skills and to share roles that keep things fresh
and exciting. Revisit purpose and rebuild commitment.

Exploring Leadership For College Student Who Want to Make a Difference. San
Francisco, Jossey-Bass Publishers