

How Groups Develop



Guide

Prepared by: Transition Network 2016, updated by Vesna Ilievska 2025.

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Many groups go through the same stages of development (forming, storming, norming, performing and mourning) and it is very likely that your group will as well. Being aware of these stages beforehand can help group members immensely as they will be able to better understand what is happening to the group as it changes and how best to deal with any tensions.

Five Stages of Group Development

In the 1960s and 1970s psychological researcher Bruce Tuckman found that most groups go through the same five stages when they come together to work. His findings are still very relevant today and capture how most groups form, including your group.

The Tuckman model describes these five stages:

1. Forming
2. Storming
3. Norming
4. Performing
5. Mourning/ Adjourning (when the group ends)

Each stage comes with its challenges and opportunities. Knowing more about them and which stage your group is in can help you navigate group dynamics better. It can also help frame the problems your group is having and the behaviours you are seeing. So, if your group hits a rough patch, don't worry - it's normal! Your group is developing!

(see [How to Get and Keep People Involved](#), see [How to Deal with Stress in Teams](#), see [Effective Groups](#), see [Transition in Group Culture](#), see [Re-Framing Conflict](#), see [Compassion for Challenging Behaviour](#), see [Working Together Well](#)).



Stage 1: Forming

("We're all on our best behaviour!")

This is when a new group meets and starts working together. Members are polite, everyone is positive, and eager to be accepted. Your group is focused on routines like organising tasks or scheduling meetings. It can feel smooth and very encouraging because group members do not know each other well and the differences among members have not come out yet.

What can help in this stage:

- Find out what people's passions are and motivation for joining and create shared goals (see [Producing a Timeline](#)).
- Spend time getting to know each other (see [Building Trust](#), see [Connective Activities for Meetings](#), see [Offering Appreciation and Gratitude](#)).
- Agree on processes and roles (how decisions will be made, who does what, and so on)(see [Decision Making](#), see [Working Together Well](#)).
- Start with simple activities to build a sense of achievement (see [Small Practical Project Ideas](#)).
- Remind everyone that becoming a team takes time.

Stage 2: Storming

("We all have different ideas!")

At this stage members from your group will start to disagree and challenge each other's ideas. Conflict might make some group members feel uncomfortable, but it's usually a sign of trust. This stage is about being patient with each other, weathering the storm and finding various ways to collaborate.

What can help in this stage:

- Create a safe space where everyone can share their views without being interrupted (see [Building Trust](#), see [Making Space for Uncomfortable Emotions](#)).
- Use a facilitator (if possible) when the atmosphere is charged or the group feels stuck.
- Focus on shared goals that unite the group.
- Be patient with each other.
- Pay attention to how you communicate and try to be as clear as possible (see [Compassionate Communication](#)).
- Recognise that disagreements are part of the process (see [Sharing and Celebrating Failings](#)).
- If you get lost, go back to your shared purpose.



Stage 3: Norming

("We figured out how to work together.")

After storming, norming feels like your group is seeing a calm horizon ahead. This is when the group develops clear goals, knows how to reach them. Usually, this includes making decisions about the roles within the team, creating procedures for meetings, a code of conduct and so on. This may sound similar to the forming stage, but the crucial difference is that people now feel able to express themselves honestly, as relationships have been strengthened and can handle this new honesty. In this stage, all group members move towards sharing the responsibility and commitment to work for the groups' success.

What can help in this stage:

- Clarify your shared purpose and goals with the group.
- Create an agreement about how to continue working together and be respectful (see [Group Agreements](#), see [Feedback Culture](#)).
- Celebrate working together and honour everyone's contributions, even if their ideas were not chosen to be implemented (see [Organising an Annual Celebration](#)).
- Offer training or workshops to deepen people's skills and connections.
- Organise some type of training for all such as a [Work that Reconnects](#) event.

Please note that the storming and norming stages can often occur together because it is a natural cycle for conflict to come up and then as a reaction for the group to create new agreements to resolve the issue in a positive manner and move forward.

Stage 4: Performing

("We get things done!")

In the performing stage, your group is doing some smooth sailing towards its destination. Group members are productive, motivated, and their work complements each other's. Members understand their roles; disagreements and issues are resolved in a constructive manner, and accomplishments are celebrated.

You know you have reached this stage when:

- There are clear roles and open communication (see [Shared Governance and Working in Circles](#)).
- The group holds people accountable for their work and responsibilities (see [Effective Groups](#), see [Offering and Receiving Feedback](#)).
- Collaboration is smooth (see [Working Together Well](#)).
- There is time devoted to reflection and celebrating achievements (see [Action-Reflection Cycle](#), see [Task-Process-Relationship](#)).



Groups may go back and forth to earlier stages as they take on new challenges; this is normal and means that your group continues to grow and develop. It's important to know that with some work, skills, and luck, all groups can reach the performing stage.

Stage 5: Mourning

("It's time to say goodbye.")

The mourning or adjourning phase occurs when the group's work is finished and/or members leave their separate ways. For this stage, it's essential to end on a positive note, to celebrate the group and individual achievements and recognise everyone's contributions.

You can end working with your group on a good note by:

- Acknowledging what each person has brought to the group (if only one or a few people are leaving, you can still organise a meeting, show appreciation with a gift, a card and an exchange of stories).
- Holding a celebration to reflect on your journey together, acknowledging both successes and difficult times.
- Passing on the knowledge or resources to continue your group's legacy (see [Succession for Long Term Success](#)).
- Acknowledging and celebrating the new seeds or projects that came up from your group's work (see [From Founders to the Future](#)).

Understanding these stages will help you embrace the ups and downs of working together in a group or team. Each phase is an opportunity to grow, connect, and create something meaningful together.

Teaming-on-the-fly

"Teaming" or "teaming-on-the-fly" was coined by researcher Amy Edmondson to refer to situations when individuals or groups can come together really quickly, usually in a high-paced, very dynamic environment, and work together as a team. This would usually happen in emergencies and crisis situations where the group immediately starts working on challenges and does not have the time to progress through the stages outlined above. In other words, the group goes through all stages simultaneously.

The benefits of this approach are that the group is able to respond to the challenge quickly; it's highly agile and adaptable and access to the different skills and expertise is immediate since it's what brings the group together.

The challenges with teaming-on-the-fly is that group dynamics can be fragile, as the group has not had much time to build connection and trust and it requires a very high level of leadership that can resolve potential conflicts (see [Amy Edmondson's TED talk video](#)).



Activity

This is a good activity to repeat at different stages of your group's journey, or whenever newcomers join, since it can help them get oriented.

Before facilitating the activity, make sure to go through the document beforehand.	
Duration:	60 minutes
Participants:	Everyone in your group, work as a whole group and in small teams.
Purpose:	To get more familiarised with the five stages of group/ team development.
Materials needed:	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- A quiet space with enough room for everyone to sit comfortably.- A physical or digital copy of this document for everyone.
Flow:	
10 minutes	1. Ask everyone to read through the five stages of group development (above).
5 minutes	2. Invite any questions about the document. Make sure everyone understands the stages.
5 minutes	3. As a whole group, identify two stages from the document that feel most relevant to what your group is currently experiencing. If all the stages seem important, set a separate time to explore the others.
20 minutes	4. Divide the group into smaller groups. Ask members to discuss the two chosen stages and identify challenges and benefits related to each stage.
5 minutes	5. Bring back the whole group for a short debrief on challenges and benefits that were noted.
15 minutes	6. Agree on and plan for one or two specific activities your group can do to support the stages you're currently in.



Related Resources

[Transition in Group Culture](#)

[How to Get and Keep People Involved](#)

[How to Deal with Stress in Teams](#)

[Building Trust](#)

[Connective Activities for Meetings](#)

[Offering Appreciation and Gratitude](#)

[Compassion for Challenging Behaviour](#)

[Making Space for Uncomfortable Emotions](#)

[Compassionate Communication](#)

[Sharing and Celebrating Failings](#)

[Re-Framing Conflict](#)

[Offering and Receiving Feedback](#)

[Feedback Culture](#)

[Group Agreements](#)

[Shared Governance and Working in Circles](#)

[Decision Making](#)

[Effective Groups](#)

[Working Together Well](#)

[Producing a Timeline](#)

[Organising an Annual Celebration](#)

[Small Practical Project Ideas](#)

[Action-Reflection Cycle](#)

[Task-Process-Relationship](#)

[Succession for Long Term Success](#)

[From Founders to the Future](#)



References

[5 Stages of Team Development \(video\)](#)

[5 Stages \(toolkit\) - University of Chicago](#)

[How to turn a group of strangers into a team \(video\) - Amy Edmondson](#)

[Work That Reconnects](#)

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