

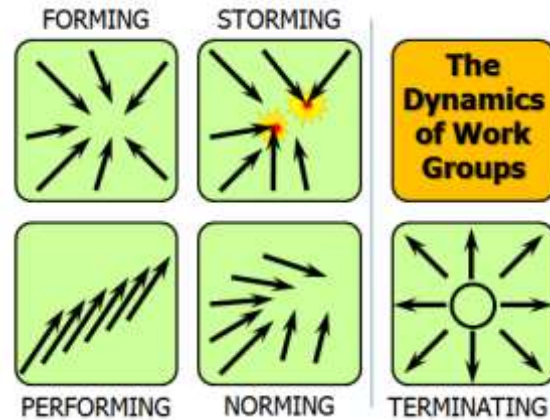
# Group Dynamics

**Background:** Group Dynamics is founded on Kurt Lewin's concept of action research. Lewin pioneered the use of theory, using experimentation to test hypothesis. He felt that social problems, including conflict, leadership and other essentials of group life, should be solved scientifically for there "is no hope of creating a better world without a deeper scientific insight into the function of leadership and culture". He ensured the entire discipline--group dynamics and action research continued to have a strong significance in the future.

Lewin had looked to the nature of group task in an attempt to understand the uniformity of some groups' behavior. He remained unconvinced of the explanatory power of individual motivational concepts such as those provided by psychoanalytical theory or frustration-aggression theory. He was able to argue that people may come to a group with very different dispositions, but if they share a common objective, they are likely to act together to achieve it. This is referred to as Lewin's Field Theory. An intrinsic state of tension within group members stimulates or motivates movement toward the achievement of desired common goals. Interdependence (of fate and task) also results in the group being a 'dynamic whole'. This means that a change in one member or subgroups impacts upon others.

From Lewin's Field Theory he posed two key ideas that are crucial to an appreciation of group process: interdependence of fate, and task interdependence.

**Interdependence of fate.** The basic line of argument is that groups come into being in a psychological sense 'not because their members necessarily are similar to one another (although they may be); rather, a group exists when people in it realize their fate depends on the fate of the group as a whole. It is not similarity or dissimilarity of individuals that



constitutes a group, but rather interdependence of fate. Any normal group includes individuals of very different character. What is more, a person who has learned to see how much his own fate depends upon the fate of his entire group will readily and even eagerly to take over a fair share of responsibility for its welfare.

**Task interdependence:** Interdependence of fate can be a fairly weak form of interdependence in many groups, argued Lewin. A more significant factor is where there is interdependence in the goals of group members. In other words, if the group's task is such that members of the group are dependent on each other for achievement, then a powerful dynamic is created.

These implications can be positive and cooperative, or negative and competitive. In the former case one person's success either directly facilitates another's success and, in the strongest cases, is actually necessary for those others to succeed. In competitive interdependence one person's success is another's failure.

## Group Development Stages

In 1965 Bruce Tuckman created the Group Development Model as the basis for examining group stages. All groups go

through a series of stages of development before performing in a fully mature and effective manner, if they ever get to that point. Tuckman identified **four stages of team development** that have been almost universally adopted by most researchers.

**Forming:** The group is a collection of individuals. At this stage, the purpose of the group is discussed along with its identity, composition, leadership and life-span. Individuals seek to establish their place within the group and make some impression on others. Important mechanisms include trust building, setting up 'rules' and norms, 'contracting' with group members, orientation to others, dependency, and inclusion. Team members determine each team member's strengths and assign roles and responsibilities.

**Storming:** Most groups go through a stage of conflict following the initial, often false, consensus. Purpose, leadership, roles and norms may all be challenged. Hidden agendas may be revealed, and some interpersonal hostility is to be expected. If successfully handled, storming leads to the formulation of more realistic objectives, procedures and norms. This stage is particularly important to the formation of trust within the group even though it is characterized by dissatisfaction, competition, and conflict. Members jockey for position, become aware of their differences and try to determine how they will work together.

**Norming:** The group establishes norms and patterns of work within which it functions. There will be a lot of tentative experimentation by individuals testing the temperature of the group and establishing their levels of commitment - development of structure, increased harmony. A group consensus emerges; it comes to an agreement on its purpose or function. Members are clear what their roles and responsibilities are. The group has a sense of identity and members strive to work together.

**Performing:** Only when the previous three stages have been successfully completed will

the group reach optimum performance level. Achievement orientation, productivity, group structure, norms, and behavior are understood and accepted. members know how to work with each other. They can handle disagreements and misunderstandings effectively. The group is focused on accomplishing its purpose.

**Adjourning:** Later Tuckman added a fifth phase for the dissolution of the group he called Adjourning (aka. Mourning).

For a group in which the task is clearly defined and seen by all members as highly important, the first three stages may be dealt with in the first few hours of meeting. For most groups it takes longer and needs to be anticipated. Managers of project teams (involving people from different parts of the organization) need to plan for and allow time for group development; less time should be needed when members come together from within one department.

### **Implications**

1. Stage of group development influences other processes (e.g., cohesiveness, conformity, production)
2. Interventions must take group's stage into account (e.g., leadership, therapy)
3. Diagnosing the group stage is important for facilitators and group leaders.

### **Resources:**

<http://fates.cns.muskingum.edu/~psych/psycweb/history/lewin.htm#Theory>

<http://www.onepine.info/mgrp.htm>

<http://www.ittheory.com/lewin.htm>

[www.FacilitationCenter.com](http://www.FacilitationCenter.com)

202-498-2310

[wvick@verizon.net](mailto:wvick@verizon.net)