



Tuckman's Group-Development Model

American psychologist Bruce Tuckman reviewed the literature on group dynamics, examining 50 articles about how groups develop. Having separated the stages identified in the articles into those relating to social/interpersonal activities and those relating to group-task activities, Tuckman proposed a four-stage model, which he described in a journal article in 1965.

Tuckman's Model

Tuckman's model originally comprised the following stages, which together represent the process through which every group or team must pass before being able to function as a fully productive and coherent unit:

- forming – comprising orientation through testing (in order to identify boundaries), and dependence on leaders, peers and pre-existing standards
- storming – referring to 'conflict and polarization around interpersonal issues', serving as 'resistance to group influence and task requirements' (Tuckman, 1965, p. 396)
- norming – 'in which ingroup feeling and cohesiveness develop, new standards evolve, and new roles are adopted' (ibid.)
- performing – constituting the use of flexible and functional roles, in a supportive structure, so allowing group energy to be channelled into the task.

Group Behaviours and Emotions

The following table summarises the behaviours and emotions that group members typically exhibit and experience at each stage of Tuckman’s model, in the context of counselling and psychotherapy training.

Stage	Group behaviours	Emotions
Forming	<p>In this stage, most group members are positive and polite. Some are anxious; others are simply excited about the task ahead.</p> <p>This stage can last for some time, as the members start to work together and make an effort to get to know their new peers.</p>	Anxious, nervous, fearful, helpless, worried, confused
Storming	<p>As the group moves into this phase, people start to push against the boundaries established in the previous stage. This is when there may be conflict in the group, and clashes of personality.</p> <p>People have different styles of learning. Sometimes, this can be frustrating for other members of the group. In some cases, people may feel overwhelmed by the amount of work and by assignment deadlines.</p>	Angry, frustrated, hurt, wary, annoyed, resentful
Norming	<p>Gradually, the group moves into the norming stage. This is where members try to resolve their differences, and begin to respect and value others.</p> <p>During this stage, personal-development or process groups can be useful as a way of safely exploring difficulties or misconceptions.</p>	Hopeful, brave, relieved, mindful
Performing	<p>The group members work together without friction. There is a better understanding of what is expected and what learning resources are available.</p>	Empathic, relaxed, valued, confident

Later Developments

Over time, several additional stages have been proposed.

Adjourning (mourning or de-forming)

Tuckman and Jensen added this stage in 1977, following a review of the original model and of new literature. 'Adjourning' refers to the completion of the task that brought the group together originally, and the subsequent breaking up of this group. The stage of adjourning is sometimes referred to instead as 'mourning' or as 'de-forming' (Life's Too Good, 2012, p. 15).

The adjourning stage recognises that everything has an end; for example, courses exist only for a fixed period of time. Because group members have built strong relationships with each other by now, they may experience this final stage as difficult. They may feel a mixture of emotions (e.g. sadness, happiness, excitement, grief, love and gratitude), as they realise that they are parting ways and moving on to an uncertain future.

Norming and re-norming

Biggs added another stage to Tuckman's model, moving the norming stage to between forming and storming, and changing the name of the original norming stage to 're-norming' (Miller, 2018, p. 4). Through this remodelling, he showed that teams can become stuck in the norming stage, where performance is satisfactory but depends on the leader. Teams that manage to get past this stage to storming, however, are then able to go through re-norming and achieve much greater effectiveness as high-performing units.

A similar addition to Tuckman's model was suggested by Rickards and Moger (2000), who wrote about groups that extend their effectiveness, breaking out of their existing norms, by using creative problem-solving.

Applying Tuckman's Model

Some people criticise Tuckman's model for being too rigid, seeing it as proposing a linear process rather than one in which team members can pass backwards and forwards between stages.

Whether or not you agree with this critique, it may well be valuable to reflect on any groups to which you belong. Does Tuckman's model – or any of the individual stages, and the behaviours and emotions that arise in you during each – offer an opportunity for development and increased self-awareness?

References

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