

Group Theory and Process

Tuckman's model of group life

This model describes five stages through which a group progresses.

The stages are:

- **Forming**

The group is characterised by anxiety and is dependent on a leader. It is testing out acceptable behaviour and group norms. At this stage the feeling of the group towards the task is *what shall we do?*

- **Storming**

The group feeling is one of conflict. There is rebellion against the leader, polarisation of opinion, conflict between sub groups, and resistance to control. There may be a sense of the task being impossible. The feeling of the group may be *it can't be done* or *I won't do it*. This stage may be a testing of the leader and, viewed positively, may be the means by which the group starts to engage seriously with the task and individuals begin to work out the personal implications of the group.

- **Norming**

Group cohesion is developing, and group norms emerging. Resistance and conflict starts to be overcome. The group at this stage is capable of offering members mutual support. A determination to achieve the task is accompanied by an open exchange of views and a sense of co-operation. At this stage the feeling of the group will often be *we can do it*.

- **Performing**

The group is doing the task for which it came together. Roles within the group have been identified and are functional and flexible. Individuals feel safe within the group and compromises can be made if necessary. There is lots of energy within the group and the feeling is one of *we are doing it*

- **Ending**

Individuals leave and there is discussion around shared experience and ways to hold the group together. There is a desire for the group not to end finally.

It should be pointed out that some groups might not pass through all five stages, while some may jump back and forwards between stages.



Randall and Southgate's model of group life

This model identifies four stages that groups go through. These can manifest themselves constructively or destructively and the ways in which they are demonstrated will determine whether the group is *Creative, Intermediate or Destructive*. The stages are:

Nurturing

Creative: People in the group are honest and open, and are able to give and take support.

Intermediate: People are civil but have no real interest in each other. The group focuses on business. The confident, functional group members carry out the tasks without reference to less confident members.

Destructive: Groups members are either smothering attentive or overtly discontented.

Creative: Group members are confident about expressing ideas, and are able to challenge and accept challenge.

Intermediate: The work becomes bogged down with detail and trivia. Sub groups form to meet individual needs without reference to other.

Destructive: Some members bully, cajole and dominate the group. Members feel angry or frightened, rejected or rejecting.

Peak

Creative: People feel fulfilled and excited. The group can see the task being done and are able to congratulate themselves.

Intermediate: There may not be an identifiable peak. The group may simply exhaust itself. It may be that some group members experience a peak while others don't.

Destructive: The peak is replaced by direct hostility within the group.

Relaxing

Creative: The group celebrates and provides opportunities for summarising and reflecting.

Intermediate: The group dissolves leaving members unclear as to what has been achieved. Members reassure each other that 'things aren't that bad'.

Destructive: The group resorts to relying on external support to help it cope with failure. This support takes the form of 'magic' and illusion.

None of the above models is presented at the *right* model. They are simply illustrations to help the worker to understand what is happening within the group.

Bion Model



Bion has identified three common reactions, or *group mentalities*, of groups that are not working well. They are:

The Dependant Group

This is usually the group mentality when a group begins. This group believes that, in order to face the demands of the task, it needs a god or a magician who is responsible for all that takes place. A dependent group wants to have an identifiable leader.

This group can be recognised by the value that other members give to contributions from the leader. The leader's contributions are always considered, by the group, to be more valid and appropriate than the contributions of other members.

Many groups will move away from this position, but some will get stuck there or return there for protection.

The Flight/Fight Group

This group assumes that it has met to fight something. The leader is one whose demands on the group provide the opportunity for aggression or something to run from. Hostility or aggression will be displayed to a member who is neurotic or who wishes to approach a problem seriously.

The Pairing Group

This group is willing to accept long interchanges between two members. The assumption of the group is that such an exchange ensures the group a future, however limited.

The group has a kind of "Messianic" idea of hope – as long as *somebody* is talking the group must be getting somewhere. One effect of this is that other members may find it difficult to become involved in the discussion and may, as a result, withdraw.

Using group models such as the above, allows the group worker to make sense of what is happening within a group. The value of an accurate model of group life is that it frees the energy that a group leader may have spent in understanding group processes and that energy can then be utilised to help the group develop and achieve its goals.

