

THE FIVE STAGES OF GROUP LIFE

B.W. Tuckman and M.A. Jensen. "Stages of Small Group Development Revisited," *Group and Organization Studies* 2 (1977): 419-427, cited in Jerald Greenberg and Robert A. Baron. *Behavior in Organizations: Understanding and Managing the Human Side of Work*, 6th ed. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1997, 253-254.

Groups show fairly consistent patterns of development and maturation. Tuckman and Jensen have identified five stages through which groups progress.

FORMING

During "forming" members get acquainted with each other and establish ground rules. This stage is completed when individuals come to think of themselves as members of the group.

STORMING

"Storming" requires resolving initial conflicts regarding personalities and leadership. If the conflicts are not resolved the group will disband.

NORMING

During "norming" relationships develop and feelings are shared while group identity and cohesiveness increase. At the completion of stage three, the group emerges with a common set of expectations and behaviors.

PERFORMING

The group is now ready to focus on "performing," or devoting itself to the job it was originally formed to accomplish.

ADJOURNING

"Adjourning" is the final stage, when the group disbands because it has accomplished its goals or it is no longer meeting the needs of the members.

These developmental stages explain why a group's social structure tends to solidify shortly after a group is established. Small groups rest on shared values and contracts, so the norming of a group makes it more difficult for newcomers to be added. Forming a group may be compared to pouring cement. As cement is poured it can be easily shaped, but once cement "sets" it is difficult if not impossible to reform. In fact, when a new person is added to a group, it returns to "forming" no matter where it was in its development.

It is easier to add new cement alongside an existing section than it is to break up the old and re-pour it. This is not too unlike what must happen in churches—and it is why consultants like Schaller counsel, "New groups for new people." New groups are more easily added to the church than restructuring existing ones.