

Introduction to Group Dynamics for ADF Groves by: Medb Aodhamair

The study of groups is called group dynamics. A group is often defined as two or more individuals who are connected by social relationships. Members of groups interact with one another and influence each other developing together in ways that separate them from random sets of individuals. Understanding the way that groups work may help you better appreciate the process that your Grove is going through and how you can best support this process.

Bruce Tuckman (1965) suggested the model we know call Tuckman's Stages. His model consists of four primary stages of group development:

- *Forming* (pretending to get along with each other and showing their best sides, this stage is often identified by lack of deep communication and focus on superficial talk)
- *Storming* (dropping pretense and exposing issues, this stage is often defined by conflict)
- *Norming* (developing trust and increasing productivity)
- *Performing* (working toward a common goal in a highly efficient and cooperative way)
- *Adjourning* (recognizing accomplishments and saying goodbye)

It is not uncommon for groups to take a very long time to reach the norming stage, if they do at all. This is especially common in groups that are open to new members, as ADF Groves are. Individuals also work within a group work in many different ways and one member or a subgroup of members may not be at the norming stage while others are. The main key to getting the Grove to the norming stage is to help develop trust among the members.

Stage 1: Forming

During the forming stage the behavior of individuals is often driven by a need to be accepted and liked by others. Members at this stage will avoid conflict and serious issues are avoided. The organization of the Grove may be focused on at this time including member responsibilities, meeting dates, and other routines. During this time the members are also learning the boundaries of the group and the individuals within the group. They are evaluating the other members and trying to give the best possible impression of themselves. The members may go through a honeymoon stage at this time falling in love with the organization but the avoidance of conflict means that not a lot actually gets accomplished.

Stage 2: Storming

It doesn't take long before members of a group cannot maintain their façade of positive appearance. Eventually, people will lose their tempers and conflict will arise. This is the time when important issues are addressed. Some of these issues might relate to the Grove or to the roles and responsibilities of members in the Grove. Others may be interpersonal conflicts between members of the Grove. This is a tricky period to explore. Some of your members will want to dig into these issues while others will want to return to the security of the forming stage. It is important to recognize conflict when it arises in a sensitive way and to recognize that not all conflict is verbalized. Many people express their distaste for the behavior or beliefs of others by indirect aggression. Be on the lookout for rumor spreading and attempts to undermine authority. Other conflicts may linger under the surface, never fully being brought out into the light. Modeling appropriate conflict for your members can show them that conflict is normal and that it is okay to disagree with each other respectfully. Showing members

that you will not allow them to be harmed during this process instills trust. During this time members may ask for more clear rules to

prevent conflict from arising. Now may be a good time to explore bylaws and church conduct rules.

Stage 3: Norming

During the norming stage the rules of behavior have become established and the group members are clear about their rights and responsibilities. They now understand each other better and appreciate the skills that each person brings to the group. They also listen more often to each other and offer support to one another. During this time they feel like they are part of something important. This stage may be difficult to maintain especially if new members join the Grove during this stage. The established members may even appear to reject new members or resist changes that are suggested at this change out of fear that they will revert to the previous stage.

Stage 4: Performing

Few groups, especially churches, ever reach the performing stage which is characterized by flexibility and trust. Roles and responsibilities are able to remain fluid and may change according to need. The members of the group will often identify themselves in a familial way and most members will be goal-oriented. Once this stage is reached there is far less energy expended in conflict and all of the energy of the group can be focused on the tasks of the Grove.

Stage 5: Adjourning

Tuckman's fifth stage was added about ten years after the first four. Adjourning

	Forming	Storming	Norming	Performing	Adjourning
Level of Structure Required	Greatest level of structure with predefined activities, clear definitions of roles and expectations. The leaders will have to take a very active role at this stage.	Activities continue to be structured but interactions are more collaborative. Allow members room to collaborate.	General direction is given regarding timeframes, and other expectations, etc. Definition of roles and interactions should be dealt with by the members of the Grove.	Members are presented with problems and are challenged to establish policies, deal with issues, and define roles. Step back and let them work together.	Activities are designed to focus on the issues surrounding the disbanding or restructuring of the Grove. Healing rituals if conflict led to the dissolution or sharing of Grove accomplishments is also appropriate.
Teambuilding	Issues regarding teamwork should be incorporated. Specific task steps can be identified to help members to learn to work as a team	Resources regarding conflict resolution are made available. Conflicts are discussed openly or privately (depending on the circumstances) and resolved.	Discussion threads that focus on the Grove process are included to promote continued collaboration skills.	Resources and tools are made available to the Grove to use as they judge necessary.	
Forums and Lists	Use predefined discussion topics that focus on introducing members to ADF and to fellow Grove members.	Provide discussion forums that focus on alternative conclusions or resolutions to conflict.	Discussion topics may focus on increasingly difficult or controversial issues.	There are no predetermined discussion topics. The Grove determines the topics they would like to discuss.	
Cooperative and Collaborative Learning Exercises	Structured, closed-ended, specific tasks with specific roles are assigned. Members are held individually accountable.	Continued structured, specific tasks. Role negotiation may be left up to Grove. Members remain individually accountable.	Decrease structure and increase openness of tasks. Allow Groves to determine tasks and roles. Design activities to transition Groves to cooperative and collaborative activities.	Structure is determined by the members. Complex tasks are undertaken. The Grove as a whole is responsible, not individuals.	

is the stage of dissolution of a group. This stage can be defined as the stage where the members recognize the progress they have made as a group and say their goodbyes to the group process. In ADF Groves this stage happens most often when it dissolves or goes defunct but it can also happen when a Grove decides to retire the old Grove and restructure into a new group.

In reality these stages may not be as linear as they are presented here. They may be more cyclical in nature or you may have subgroups within your Grove that are at different stages of the group process. Groups may even revert to earlier stages when threatened, uncertain, or apprehensive. There are a number of ways a Grove leader can help with the progression a group makes through these stages.

Inadequate communication of goals and expectations are often the largest problem in small groups. Make sure to meet with your members and ask them what they would like to see in the church. Discuss their goals and expectations and make sure you know what they hope to get out of the experience. Sometimes a Grove leader has different expectations or goals than the members of the Grove.

Having an undeclared agenda can have detrimental effects on the group and you may unconsciously manipulate the group to get the results you desire; however, if the members of your Grove have a different idea the church will not survive. If you do have a specific vision for the church try being clear about that from the beginning. For example, if you want the Protogrove to have a member-led study group but the group expects you to lead it you need to let them know that you would like them to manage this. You could say something like, "I have confidence that you are all the best experts on how ADF fits into your personal practice and I would like you to have an opportunity to discuss these

things without my presence influencing the development or your beliefs."

Involve them in the decision process. This can take place in a number of different ways but it is often subtle. Making changes to the calendar without consulting the group, even if that is in your job description, or talking too much during meetings instead of engaging the group can send the message that you are really not interested in what the Grove has to say and that they should probably not attempt to involve themselves. Even if you don't always take their advice, at least ask for it 75%-80% of the time. Asking for advice all the time will make you appear to be indecisive or uncertain so be careful how you word your requests. For instance, you might post the following on your Grove's list, "I am thinking about moving our next High Day from the second Saturday to the third Saturday of next month because there is a large public event in the park (where we are holding the rite) that might be distracting to participants. Would you recommend moving it to a different day or to a different location? If to a different location, do you have any ideas about a venue?"

Be aware of what stage your group may be in. Knowing what stage they are in can tell you how to behave. It is important to not place high expectations on a new group or members may give up on trying; by the same token setting expectations too low can have similar results. Know what types of behavior you should expect from the group and be prepared to handle conflicts that may arise during the changes that occur.

Empower them. Give members responsibilities consistent with their interests and abilities. Over time you may increase their responsibilities as they become more proficient. Make sure to recognize them for their accomplishments but also make your expectations of their performance clear. Do not forget to praise volunteers publicly for their contributions; when other members see

this happen they will want to be praised publicly as well and they will more than likely try even harder.

Know when to get out of the way. Groups at the norming and performing stages will not need as high a level of involvement from group leaders. They are engaged and may be offended by interference from the group's leaders. At this point they are confident or beginning to become confident

about their role in the group. When these stage is reached Grove leaders may feel left out or even rejected, especially if members are no longer looking to the leaders for guidance. It is important to remember that this is a thing to be celebrated and the fact that your Grove has reached this stage means that you and the other leaders of your Grove are doing a good job maintaining the integrity of the group and empowering the members.