



Group Development

How do groups change over time?

Inga Carboni, 9/04



Group Development Theories

Theories

- Sequential stage theories (e.g., Bennis & Shepard, 1955; Tuckman, 1965)
- Phase theories (e.g., Bales & Strodtbeck, 1951; Bales, 1965)
- Punctuated equilibrium (e.g., Gersick, 1988, 1989)



How do groups develop?

Successive Stage Theories

- Groups develop by going through a successive series of changes
- Move from an immature state to a mature state

Phase Theories

- Groups are continually shifting their focus from one focal concern to another focal concern

Punctuated Equilibrium

- Long periods of equilibrium are punctuated (interrupted) by periods of radical change and reorientation.



Bennis & Shepard, 1956

Based on observations of T-groups.

Groups have two fundamental issues to resolve:

1. Their relationship with authority and structure
2. Their issues of intimacy and interdependence among members



Bennis & Shepard, 1956

Two “phases,” each with three subphases

Phase One: Dependence

1. Dependence-Flight

The group as a whole searches for a common goal.

2. Counterdependence-Fight

Group splits into three groups: dependents, counterdependents, and independents.

3. Resolution-Catharsis

Dependence issue resolved.



Bennis & Shepard, 1956

Two phases, each with three subphases.

Phase Two: Interdependence

1. Enchantment/Flight

Everything is “sweetness” and “light.”

2. Disenchantment-Fight

Group splits into two groups: personals and counterpersonals.

3. Consensual Validation

Acceptance of group (and group members) as they really are.
Valid communication.



Bales, 1965

Equilibrium Model of Development (phase theory)

Based on observations of problem-solving groups.

Groups must perform the task and, in order to do so, they must form and maintain a productive social and emotional system.



Bales, 1965

Groups oscillate between focus on:

- task-oriented issues
- socio-emotional (i.e., interpersonal) issues



Bales, 1965

Equilibrium Model of Development (phase theory)

- Orientation
 - What is the problem?
- Evaluation
 - How do we feel about it?
- Control
 - What are we going to do about it?



Bales, 1965

Task-oriented acts

Ask questions

- Ask for orientation, ask for opinion (evaluation), ask for suggestion (control)

Give answers

- Give orientation, give opinion (evaluation), give suggestion (control)

Tension escalates as actions move toward control.



Bales, 1965

Socio-emotional acts

Express positive reactions

- Show solidarity, show tension release, agree

Express negative reactions

- Disagree, show tension, show antagonism



Bales, 1965

Equilibrium is reached when:

- problems created by task-related acts are balanced by socio-emotional adjustments and
- problems created by socio-emotional acts are balanced by task-related adjustments.



Tuckman, 1965

Sequential stage theory

- Forming
- Storming
- Norming
- Performing
- Adjourning (added in 1977)



Tuckman, 1965

All groups move through a predictable sequence of stages.

Groups move from an immature state to a mature state.

Each stage has both specific task and socio-emotional issues.



Tuckman, 1965

Forming

- Group members explore issues of dependency and inclusion
- "Will I be accepted by others in the group?"
- "What will I have to do in this group?"
- Heavily dependent upon leader
- Status is likely to be based on general characteristics, such as sex



Tuckman, 1965

Storming

- Group starts to feel comfortable enough to express their real feelings and values
- One major point of conflict is perceptions regarding the leader
- Leadership style may need to change if the group is to develop
- Groups may not leave this stage



Tuckman, 1965

Norming

- “We made it!” Group members care enough about the group to stick it out when the going gets tough
- Changes in dysfunctional norms
- Goal clarity
- Task-oriented



Tuckman, 1965

Performing

- Unified culture and structure; high cohesion
- Some degree of deviation is tolerated and even encouraged as way to encourage innovation and creativity.
- The group has adopted norms that encourage productivity, high performance standards, and is highly effective at moving toward goals.
- Conflict resolution strategies are in place as is a confidence that the group can resolve them before they move to a destructive level.



Tuckman, 1977

Adjourning

- Some stress and anxiety
- In order to transfer learning, need to formalize (or ritualize) termination (e.g., end party, etc.)



Criticisms of stage theories

- Don't describe the underlying psychological mechanism moving a group from one stage to another.
- Don't specify the time groups need or do spend in each stage.
- Don't take into account the external environment. Environments can constrain development but cannot alter it.



Gersick, 1988, 1989

Qualitative study (8 natural groups)

Laboratory based study (8 problem-solving groups)

Methods: observation, audiotape, videotape, transcripts, interviews

Critical points:

- Initial meeting
- Midway point
- Last meeting/completion of work



Gersick, 1988, 1989

Punctuated Equilibrium

All groups move through periods of inertia separated by a brief period of transition.

- Phase 1
- Transition
- Phase 2



Gersick, 1988, 1989

Periods of inertia are marked by the presence of deep structures and incremental changes.

Transition times are triggered by a problem. “We need to change the way we’re working.”

Transition times are “windows of opportunity” not inevitable (or inevitably good) changes



Arrow, 1997

Additional triggers for change

- a strong external shock
- a change in group composition
- any dramatically novel state of affairs (e.g., persistent poor performance)



Criticisms of punctuated equilibrium

- Does it describe group development or deadline pressure?
- Limited usefulness to managers.
- Narrowly focused (e.g., may only be applicable to temporary creative problem-solving groups).
- Ignores socio-emotional development.



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Group Discussion

Question

- Based on your personal experience, which theory do you think best describes group development? Why or why not?



Group Discussion

Question

- You are a manager in charge of assembling a new team to bring a product to market. How would you use your knowledge of group development to help this team develop as effectively as possible?