

# Inns + Outlets and Ups + Downs of Groups

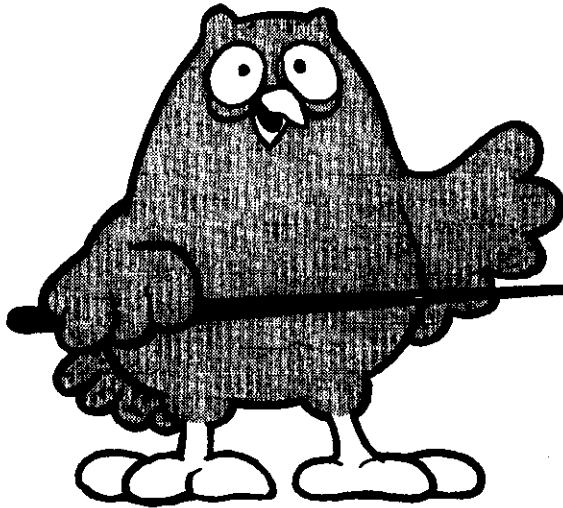


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# Ins and Outs and Ups and Downs of Groups



No two groups are exactly the same, but they all are similar in some respects. They all tend to go through similar processes as they try to reach their goals. Also, certain roles need to be filled in most groups. And, every group has to deal with difficult people sometime.

Group phases, roles, difficult people . . . how do all these things come together in a group? It may help to review what groups are.

## OK, so you have a group . . .

Once you have a group, what happens next? You are going to go through some phases of development: forming, storming, norming, performing, transforming. The phases usually follow in order, but sometimes groups go back to an earlier phase. Going through the phases is a normal part of being a group. Let's take a look at what goes on during each phase. If you understand what can happen, your group will know what to expect and can be more effective.

### Forming

Groups first go through the forming phase. Here the group is just a bunch of individuals who have a lot to do. The mood is upbeat and a little uptight because meeting new people is both exciting and nerve-wracking. There may be some anxiety and confusion as your group begins to organize. It may be too much too soon for some people.

Members have to get acquainted and decide to cooperate. They have to figure out how to make decisions, and set goals. They also have to decide who does what in the group. Dreamer, doer, quality controller, team builder, group leader, recorder, and facilitator are all roles that need to be filled if a group is to be effective. If your group can accomplish these things during forming, you'll have made good progress.

### Storming

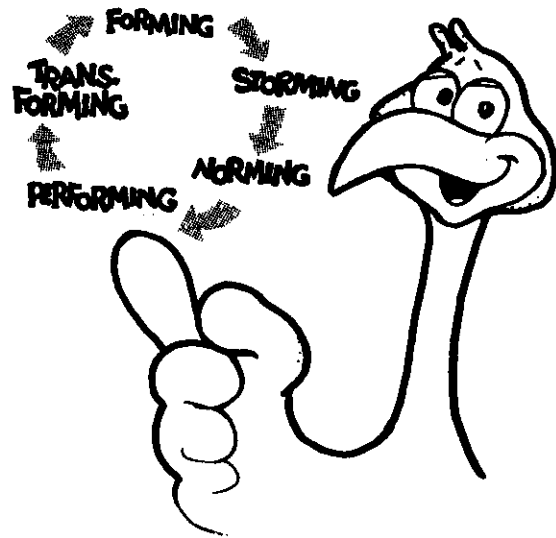
During the storming phase, anxiety increases, and group morale may sink. There may be some conflict. During this phase the group may "bottom out." But this is normal and will pass. Think of it as essential tension — accept it and prepare for it. It's energy your group can use.

It's OK for group members to disagree — voicing differences can benefit your group. You can manage storming by generating ideas to solve problems. Ideas are the key to group creativity. The more ideas you have, the better your ideas become.

## Norming

In the norming phase, you begin to act as a group, rather than as a bunch of individuals. The group has an identity, clear expectations and norms — informal rules about group behavior. Norms make it possible to count on certain things being done and other things not being done.

A group in the norming phase has cohesion — members like each other and want to stay in the group. The more the people in the group have similar tastes and values, the more the group will stick together, and be productive.



Norming is essential for a group to achieve its goals, but problems may crop up. Sometimes people are so concerned about getting along that they don't think critically and consider all their options. Your group can keep its options open by airing doubts and exploring alternatives.

Groups may make poor decisions during the norming phase. Maybe the group had faulty information, made poor assumptions, or came to the wrong conclusions. The group may have defined the problem poorly or defined the wrong problem; it may have misevaluated the consequences, or violated procedures. Good decisions are informed decisions, so listen to everyone's ideas, positive and negative, so your group can make better decisions.

## Performing

A group reaches the performing phase when it "gets down to business." Leaders delegate responsibilities and group members go to work. The group's resources are fully mobilized to achieve a goal. There still may be breakdowns from time to time. However, if your group keeps working together, you'll get through those difficult times. After your group has completed its work, be sure to give credit to those members who've done a good job.

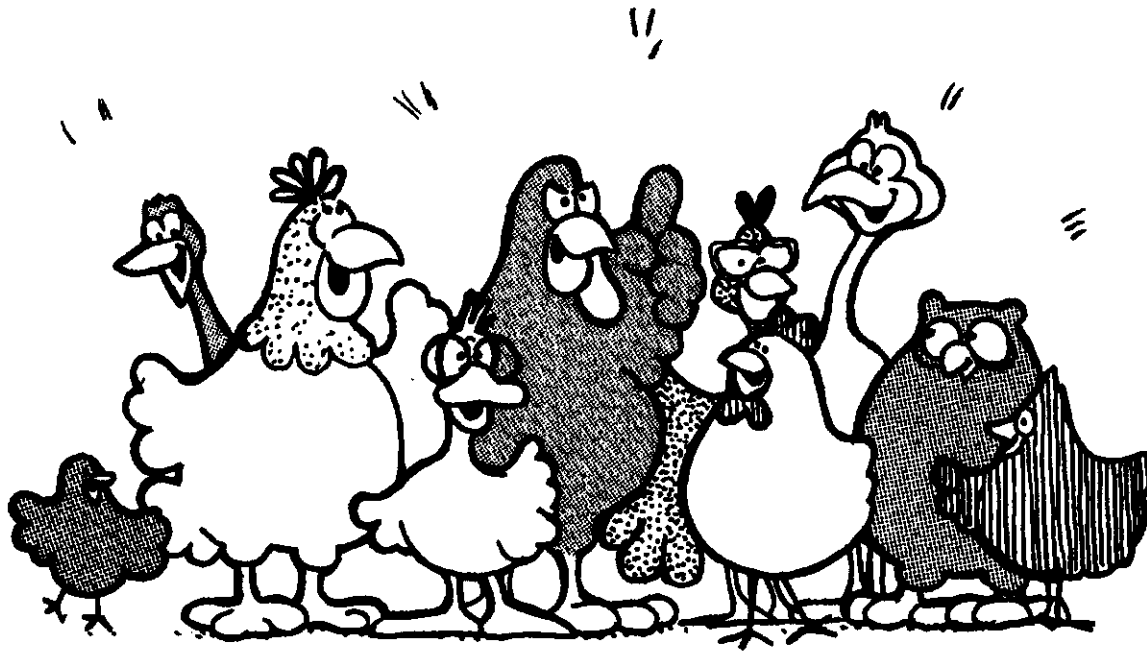
## Transforming

Inevitably, groups reach the transforming phase. They may go back to earlier phases, or regroup to tackle a new task. Some members may leave the group, or new members may join. A group may disband after accomplishing its task. For some groups, transforming is a time of sadness or loss. Members are disappointed that their goal has been achieved, or that the group may disband. But for other groups, transforming is a satisfying time as members look forward to new activities.

For groups that will continue, it's a good idea to redefine group goals and roles. This will help renew group commitment and vision, re-energize current members, and build a sense of ownership and belonging among new members.

## Watch out for footdraggers!

Now, as your group is going through these phases, be on the lookout for potential “footdraggers,” people who feel uncommitted to the group’s goal and slow down progress. Get to know them during forming, and get them involved in the energy of storming. Get them to want to stay in the group during norming, and get them to want to work during performing.



## OK, who does what in the group?

One common condition for effective groups, whatever the size, is that members perform different jobs — called group member roles. They describe what people do and how they contribute to a group. The roles we’ll discuss here are dreamer, quality controller, doer, team builder, group leader, recorder, and facilitator.

Group member roles follow a basic set of rules:

1. Every person needs a role. Every member needs a way to contribute to the group.
2. Every role needs a person if the group is to be effective.
3. No person needs too many roles. One person can’t do everything.
4. No role needs too many people. Too many people doing the same thing is a poor use of talent, and can lead to conflict.
5. Some roles need more people than other roles. A group often can use several doers, but can get by with one recorder.

An effective group has someone filling each of the group member roles. A person may be elected or appointed to a role, or may take on a role informally. One person may serve several roles at once. Roles also may rotate among members during the life of the group, or even during a single meeting.

## **Dreamer**

The dreamer is good at generating ideas for solving problems, and often is excitable and talkative. All things are possible. Some of this person's ideas are wild, but some are true gems. Every group needs dreamers, but to be effective, dreamers need group support.

During the forming phase, dreamers may have a lot of ideas about how to get organized and about possible group goals. They may really shine in the storming phase as they help the group generate ideas to solve problems. During norming, dreamers may see some unthought of consequences of a decision. Listening to their ideas may help your group make better decisions.

## **Quality Controller**

The quality controller evaluates ideas. This person is a constructive critic who maintains group standards, spots problems, and suggests more workable solutions. The quality controller may help the group think critically throughout the group phases. During forming, this person may evaluate decision-making techniques and possible goals to help the group make good choices. In storming, he or she evaluates the many ideas the dreamers have suggested. During norming, the quality controller may be that gentle voice encouraging group members to think critically about all possible options in a situation. This person makes sure that group standards are maintained during performing.

## **Doer**

Doers are goal setters and get things done. They may get frustrated with slow progress, and at times may be impatient with dreamers. However, they usually complement dreamers. They take a new idea, refined by the quality controller, and run with it. They figure out how to turn ideas into reality.

Doers like having things to do — so they need to be kept busy during all of the group phases. They'll be eager to set goals during forming and be ready to go to work. However, their frustration with slow progress may contribute to the "bottoming out" that can occur during storming. But they'll perk up as the group begins to solve its problems. During norming, doers can begin to take action on those ideas that the dreamer has suggested and the quality controller has refined. Doers really "show their stuff" during the performing phase. They'll get the work done.

## **Team Builder**

The team builder supports group members and builds morale. This person helps the group work together and takes time to get to know the other members. He or she helps keep spirits high, and works hard to consider everyone's feelings.

The team builder has an important role during the forming phase, when new group members are meeting each other. It's part of the team builder's job to get to know group members and keep them at ease. He or she can help lessen the tension and direct group energy during storming.

## **Group Leader**

The group leader takes charge either as the elected chairperson or informally as a group member who sets the direction for the group. This person accepts responsibility for the group's output. The group leader's job is the most visible leadership role, but the other roles may also involve leadership.

The group leader directs the group's activity during the forming phase. In the storming phase, he or she is more of a coach. During norming, the group leader takes a supporting role, while in performing, he or she delegates responsibilities.

## **Recorder**

The recorder documents group ideas and decisions. This person serves the group, but needs help to keep accurate records. He or she should use the language of the group. Recorders are recorders, not interpreters. During all group phases, it is the recorder's job to keep an accurate record of group activity and decisions.

## **Facilitator**

The facilitator helps the group through the process of achieving its goals. This person helps focus the group's energies, suggests new approaches, and clarifies member roles. There is no "right" way to facilitate. The approach depends on the facilitator's style, the group, and the situation. The essential quality, though, is flexibility.

The facilitator may be a member of the group. However, this role could be played by someone outside the group, or by a professional. A facilitator is most helpful when the group needs help sorting through an emotional issue. Thus, he or she should be free of strong feelings about the discussion topic. An effective facilitator understands how a group works. He or she serves as a neutral party throughout the group phases and rarely contributes or evaluates substantive ideas when in the facilitative role.

## **Wow! Are all group roles so helpful?**

The roles we've discussed so far are positive — they help the group achieve its goals. But sometimes members fill other roles that work against progress. They're called "difficult people" roles. You might know them by other names — know-it-alls, bullies, complainers — people who go far beyond disagreement. The differences that come up when people disagree can lead to better group decisions. But "difficult people" are those who are predictably difficult. Fortunately, most groups have only a few difficult people, and other group members can cope with them. However, sometimes only one difficult person can do a lot of damage in a group.

To deal with difficult people, you can follow two general strategies:

1. Accept their disruptive behavior.
2. Plan to take action.

It's better to accept a difficult person's disruptive behavior than to ignore it. Accepting the behavior doesn't mean you agree with it. Focus on the behavior, but

acknowledge the person. Remember, he or she has feelings too. It also may help to develop a detached view of the behavior. Distance gives perspective.

You can follow acceptance of the behavior with action. Although you can rarely change the behavior of the other person, you need to address that behavior. Develop a strategy. You can adjust it when or if necessary. Generally, you should begin with the most subtle and least threatening action, saving direct confrontation as a last resort.



In addition to these general strategies, there are specific tactics you can use when dealing with each type of difficult person.

### **Bullies**

Bullies always want to get their way. They may make cutting remarks or throw temper tantrums. Plan to stand up to them. This may disarm them because they're not used to being stood up to. Avoid head-on fights with bullies, but speak for your own point of view.

### **Complainers**

Complainers gripe a lot, but rarely take action. Listen to complainers, but be ready to interrupt if necessary. Ask them for specifics. Then state the facts as you see them.

### **Know-it-alls**

Know-it-alls believe that they know all there is to know about anything worth knowing. They may be condescending, pompous, or impossible. Listen to them and let them be the experts they think they are. Then question them firmly, but don't become a know-it-all yourself.

### **Indecisives**

Indecisives put off until tomorrow things that need to be done, and decisions that need to be made, today. They may want to hold onto a project until everything is perfect. But things are never perfect. Help them clarify issues, and deal with their indecision. Suggest or rank alternatives. Support indecisives after they've made a decision.

### **Yea-sayers**

Yea-sayers are always reasonable, sincere and supportive in public. But they may not produce what they say they will. They may not do what you expect. Encourage them to say what they really think. Discourage them from making unrealistic commitments.

## **Nay-sayers**

Nay-sayers object to everything. Whatever is proposed won't work, or is impossible. They can completely deflate your optimism for a project. Don't get drawn into their attitude. State your own realistic optimism. Don't agree with them, and don't hurry to propose solutions. Remember, a "devil's advocate" can be useful.

## **Not-much-to-sayers**

Not-much-to-sayers never give long answers to questions or requests. To get them to talk, ask them open-ended questions, and pause for long periods, inviting them to fill in the silence. Also, you may want to limit the length of the discussion.

## **Difficult People and Group Phases**

Difficult people have the potential to cause trouble during any of the group phases. For example, complainers may increase group anxiety during storming. Know-it-alls may hamper decision-making during norming. Bullies may not want to do their assigned tasks during performing. You may not know what not-much-to-sayers are thinking during any of the phases.

But if you accept the disruptive behavior and plan to take action appropriate for the type of difficult person you're dealing with, you can cope with the person and your group can continue to work its way through the group phases.

## **Summary**

Although no two groups are exactly the same, all are similar in some respects. All groups go through certain phases as they try to reach their goals: forming, storming, norming, performing and transforming. Certain roles need to be filled for groups to be effective: dreamer, quality controller, doer, team builder, group leader, recorder and facilitator. Finally, all groups have to deal with difficult people sometimes: bullies, complainers, know-it-alls, indecisives, yea-sayers, nay-sayers, and not-much-to-sayers. If you understand the phases, the group member roles and the "difficult people" roles, you can better understand how your group works. And, you can help your group to be more effective.

**Three audio-visual resources have been created for use with this publication. They are available as slide/tape sets or as videos and may be rented from the Iowa State University Media Resources Center, (515) 294-1540. The titles are *Group Phases* (slide/tape set no. 795S, video no. 75748), *Group Member Roles* (slide/tape set no. 112S, video no. 75749), and *Difficult People in Groups* (slide/tape set no. 796S, video no. 75750). The videos also may be purchased from Extension Communication Systems, (515) 294-4972.**

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