

# Bruce W. Tuckman:

## Forming, Storming, Norming, Performing, and Adjourning in Groups

---

### Tuckman's Biography:

**Bruce Wayne Tuckman (1938- )** is probably best known for a short article - 'Developmental sequence in small groups' first published in 1965. He followed up with his early group development theory work in the mid-seventies and added a stage to his original four-stage theory. However, the vast bulk of his published work has been concerned more broadly with educational research and educational psychology. Tuckman's book *Conducting Educational Research* (first published in 1972) has gone through five editions and his *Theories and Applications of Educational Psychology* (first published in 1996) is now in its third edition. Currently Bruce W. Tuckman directs the Academic Learning Lab at Ohio State University (from 1998). Previously he had been a Professor of Educational Psychology at Florida State University (1983-98). From 1965 to 1978 he held a variety of posts at Rutgers University before moving to the City University of New York. Currently Bruce W. Tuckman's scholarly interest focuses on motivation: 'its manifestation in the form of *self-regulatory behavior*, and its absence in the form of *procrastination*, particularly as applied to the behavior of studying' (Tuckman 2003). He is concerned with exploring the links between motivational factors and school achievement; and interventions that enhance the self-regulatory behavior of students (such as goal setting, planning, and incentives). Bruce W. Tuckman gained his Bachelor of Science from Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute in 1960, his Masters in Psychology from Princeton in 1962 and his PhD in 1963. He has also written a novel *The Long Road to Boston* (1988).

### Tuckman's Small Group Development Theory:

Bruce W. Tuckman produced one of the most quoted models of group development in the 1960s, updated in the 1970's, and is continued to use today as a model for small group development.

### The Five Stages

**I. Forming:** In this stage, group members learn about each other and the task at hand.

#### *Characteristics of this Stage:*

- Individual behavior is driven by a desire to be accepted by the others.
- Controversy, conflict, serious issues and feelings are avoided.
- People focus on being busy with routines, such as team organization, who does what, when to meet, etc.
- Individuals are also gathering information and impressions - about each other and about the scope of the task and how to approach it.
- This is a comfortable stage to be in, but the avoidance of conflict and threat means that not much actually gets done.

**II. Storming:** As group members become more comfortable with each other, they will engage each other in arguments and vie for status in the group. These activities mark the storming phase.

*Characteristics of this Stage:*

- Individuals in the group can only remain nice to each other for so long, as important issues start to be addressed.
- Some people's patience will break early and minor confrontations will arise that are quickly dealt with or glossed over. These may relate to the work of the group itself, or to roles and responsibilities within the group.
- Some will observe that it's good to be getting into the real issues, whilst others will wish to remain in the comfort and security of Stage I.
- Depending on the culture of the organization and individuals, the conflict will be more or less suppressed, but it'll be there, under the surface.
- To deal with the conflict, individuals may feel they are winning or losing battles. They will look for structural clarity and rules to prevent the conflict persisting.

**III. Norming:** Group members establish implicit or explicit rules about how they will achieve their goal. They address the types of communication that will or will not help with the task.

*Characteristics of this Stage:*

- As Stage II evolves, the "rules of engagement" for the group become established and the scope of the group's tasks or responsibilities is clear and agreed.
- Having had their arguments, they now understand each other better and can appreciate each other's skills and experience.
- Individuals listen to each other, appreciate and support each other, and are prepared to change pre-conceived views: they feel they're part of a cohesive, effective group.
- However, individuals have had to work hard to attain this stage, and may resist any pressure to change - especially from the outside - for fear that the group will break up, or revert to a storm.

**IV. Performing Stage:** In the performing stage, groups reach a conclusion and implement the conclusion.

*Characteristics of this Stage:*

- Not all groups reach this stage, characterized by a state of interdependence and flexibility.
- Everyone knows each other well enough to be able to work together, and trusts each other enough to allow independent activity.
- Roles and responsibilities change according to need in an almost seamless way. Group identity, loyalty and morale are all high. Everyone is equally task-orientated and people-orientated.
- Members experience insight into personal and interpersonal processes.
- Constructive self-change is undertaken.
- This high degree of comfort means that all the energy of the group can be directed towards the task(s) in hand.

**V. Adjourning:** As the group project ends, the group disbands in the adjournment phase.

*Characteristics of this Stage:*

- This is about completion and disengagement, both from the tasks and the group members.
- Individuals will be proud of having achieved much and glad to have been part of such an enjoyable group.
- They need to recognize what they've done and consciously move on.
- Some authors describe Stage V as "Deforming and Mourning", recognizing the sense of loss felt by group members.

**Other Small Group Development Theories:**

- Fisher, B. Aubrey (1970). Phases in group decision-making: <http://www.abacon.com/commstudies/groups/devgroup.html>.
- Hershey and Blanchard (1980). Situational leadership model of management and leadership: <http://www.businessballs.com/tuckmanformingstormingnormingperforming.htm>.
- Tannenbaum and Schmidt (1958). Model of delegation and team development: <http://www.businessballs.com/tannenbaum.htm>
- Tubbs, Stewart (1995). A systems approach to small group interaction: <http://www.abacon.com/commstudies/groups/devgroup.html>.

**References:**

- Allyn & Bacon book Publishers (1999). Small group communications, <http://www.abacon.com/commstudies/groups/devgroup.html>.
- Chimaera Consulting Limited (2001). Famous models: stages of group development, <http://www.chimaeraconsulting.com/tuckman.htm>.
- Rodkin, D.M. (1999). The art of student and group development theory, SAACURH Conference: <http://admn.sfcc.edu/~sla/resources/adviserresources/GroupDevelopment.htm>.
- Tuckman, Bruce (1965). Developmental sequence in small groups. *Psychological Bulletin*, 63, 384-399.