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.
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.
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.
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?
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.
Socio-emotional acts

Express positive reactions
  • Show solidarity, show tension release, agree

Express negative reactions
  • Disagree, show tension, show antagonism
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.
Sequential stage theory

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