

...DEVELOP GROUPS

At the core of most experiential education (EE) programs, **group development** is essential to enhancing interpersonal and intrapersonal relationships. Even the growth of individuals takes place within the milieu of small groups. Hence group development is often crucial to EE. In an EE context, the small group can promote:

- social interactions that develop and validate knowledge and behaviors,
- social learning that enables observing and imitating the behaviors of others,
- new behaviors and novel strategies that are explored and tested in a safe group, and
- pro-social exchanges that relate to sharing, open disclosure, affiliation, helping others, belonging, and social support.

GROUP DEVELOPMENT

Arguably the most famous group evolutionary model involves variations of Tuckman's stages: **forming** (discomfort or doubt in new situation), **storming** (elevated conflict among members), **norming** (order through consensual behaviors), and **performing** (accomplishing tasks through healthy relationships and mutual support).

GROUP FACILITATION

EE programs accentuating group development ought to consider the following progression of growth with these four stages and techniques.

FORMING: Expect a lack of structure and client confusion, uncertainty, mistrust, and distress. Enthusiastic clients may be accommodating, but will present themselves in their best light so as to assess the situation, avoid problems, and form alliances. Individual behaviors may show dependence towards their peers or a leader.

- De-inhibit clients and help them learn about each other (names, interests, and qualities).
- Clarify program goals and client objectives.

- Be aware of client needs and expectations, especially the importance of mutual trust and effective communication as a critical foundation for teamwork skill development.
- Propose EE activities that promote easy acclimatization to become familiar with new places, people, activities or equipment.

STORMING: Expect client competition, tension, impatience, confrontation, dissatisfaction, and disagreement. Clients put their own needs first, form cliques, struggle for leadership, and define their hierarchy. They need a full value contract.

- Encourage and teach clients how to resolve their own conflicts by clearly specifying the expected behaviors and non-negotiables.
- Propose EE activities that prepare clients to better manage trust and communication.
- Guide dialogues for clients to easily express themselves and listen to one another.

NORMING: Expect clients to begin adhering to values, agreeing on ways to work together, recognizing differences, accepting diversity, and establishing trust and communicative listening. Cooperative clients have accepted a leader and their own personal roles and responsibilities.

- Support the group in achieving their goals.
- Propose EE activities that further challenge their trust, communication, and teamwork.
- Systematize time allocated to shared dialog.

PERFORMING: Expect clients to be committed, open, supportive, accountable, productive, and efficient. Collaborative clients are supportive, fair, and just in their feedback and processes. Their actions are focused on the group's goals.

- Motivate and support leadership initiatives.
- Propose EE activities that challenge decision making, problem solving, and planning.
- Provide moments of solitude, reflection and introspection, usually through solo time.

Christian Mercure, Mario Bilodeau & Simon Priest

Twelve years after Tuckmans' original model, Jensen added a fifth stage: **adjourning**. Adjourning was a final break up and group dissolution, typical of loosely cohesive teams that come together only for the EE team-building program. To this end, we add an addendum here about adjourning in groups.

ADJOURNING: Expect clients to be insecure, sad, and either anxious or enthusiastic about getting ready to move on. Clients may have a tendency to minimize or magnify the success or importance of their groups. Anticipate disengagement and decreased effectiveness.

- Highlight and celebrate successes and learning.
- Prepare separation and return to everyday life.
- Facilitate integration and transfer of learning.
- Promote sharing moments, ceremonies or rituals.
- Enable clients to connect beyond the program through social media and other networks.

Christian Mercure
UNIVERSITY OF QUEBEC AT CHICOUTIMI
christian_mercure@uqac.ca
418-545-5011 x 5090

FURTHER RESOURCES

READINGS

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