Chapter **2** Group Development

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Case Study Nice to Meet You, Too

A group of community volunteers meets for the first time to plan and raise funds for building a neighborhood playground. Although Dave, Betty, Ray, Bill, and Aisha live in the same community, they don't know one another well or at all. They begin the meeting by introducing themselves. They all smile a lot, but communication seems a bit stiff and awkward. Betty's handshake connects to other members only at her fingertips, while Ray and Bill offer firm handshakes. As Aisha introduces herself, she giggles and runs a hand through her long hair. Dave sits at the head of the table and chairs the meeting.

Aisha has come to the meeting well prepared. She hesitantly raises her hand to speak, and Dave recognizes her. She reports that, according to her research, a simple playground can range from $5,000 to $50,000. She suggests that $35,000 would be a good target budget. Bill starts to respond by saying, "Well, uh…" but when he sees that Ray has raised his hand, he concludes with "Go ahead." Ray says, "Oh, I was going to say—ah—I've looked it over a bit—$35,000 is—ah—I don't know—I guess that would be good, but I think we should stay as high as we can." Bill now responds with "Ah—I was thinking just the opposite—kind of—we should go lower—uh…." Dave interrupts and suggests that they go with the $35,000 Aisha proposed, just to get started. Bill seems a bit annoyed with Dave's suggestion, but doesn't say anything.

Dave notes that regardless of the cost, they need to discuss ways of raising money for the playground. At this point Aisha begins taking notes. Betty says, "Well—it worked at our church—in the other city where I lived…we had great bake sales—twice a year." Ray politely tells Betty that a bake sale is a great idea, but that it may not raise enough funds. The rest of the group grimaces and ignores Betty's offer to run a bake sale. Aisha then asks if group members know anyone who works for a foundation that might donate some

of the money. Betty reveals that she has a dear friend who is actively involved in a large, local foundation. The group sits up and pays a lot more attention to Betty. Ray even jokes that maybe the foundation can help with the bake sale, too. Everyone laughs.

Only three minutes of the meeting have gone by. The group has a lot more to discuss but members have slowly become better acquainted with one another and have a better feeling about how they will work together and get along.

When you finish reading this chapter, you should be able to answer the following critical thinking questions about this case study:

1. What verbal and nonverbal behaviors demonstrated the forming stage of group development?
2. In your opinion, which members are most likely to compete for status and influence in the storming stage?
3. What strategies did group members use or should they have used to decrease primary tension?
4. What, if any, dialectic tensions will affect how well this group achieves its goal and how well members get along with one another?

Before you read any further, visit Pearson's MyCommunicationLab website and watch this case study's video, "Planning the Playground." You may also want to watch the short video, "The Group Project," which illustrates **Chapter 2** concepts. Each video comes with a set of study questions to keep in mind as you read this chapter.

Planning the Playground

The Group Project

Group Development Stages

How do you behave when you attend the first meeting of a new group? Do you march into the room briskly, extend your hand to the first person you see, and say "Hi, I'm (your name)—Nice to meet you"? Or do you pause at the door, check things out as you move into the room, and look for a suitable moment to introduce yourself? Like many people, you may choose the second, more cautious entrance. Welcome to the world of group development! In this chapter, we examine how groups form and evolve as they try to balance the complex and contradictory dialectic tensions inevitable in group work.

Follow the Research

Group Development Models

Group development research began in the early 1950s and continues to this day. Dozens of theoretical models describe how a group moves through several "passages" during its lifetime.[1] By observing the behavior of groups and their members in a variety of settings and circumstances, researchers have identified distinct phases that groups experience as members work with one another to achieve a common goal. They also suggested that most groups need to move through at least four stages in order to achieve maximum effectiveness.[2]

The table to the right summarizes three major group development models. Although each model uses different words to describe the process, the descriptions of group development are strikingly similar.

All three of these development models are linear: They describe development stages as small changes that follow one another in a fixed path.[3] However, many groups don't move through each successive stage systematically or as though they are running a clearly marked obstacle course. Most groups work through a stage until circumstances motivate them to take on the challenges of another stage. Factors such as "changes in membership, external demands, and changes in leadership" may slow development or push a group back to a previous stage.[4]

Group communication scholar Marshall Scott Poole suggests that the stages described in most theoretical models may be "ideal" steps, but that groups often stray from the ideal.[5] For example, a very large, new group may have difficulty getting itself going, whereas a smaller group whose members have previously worked together may skip or move quickly through the early stages. Also, if a group's goal is unclear, the result can be wasted time, member frustration, and unproductive work. If, however, the group's goal is clear and members are cooperative, the group is more likely to move through the stages with ease.

Bruce Tuckman[6]	• Forming • Storming • Norming • Performing • Adjourning
B. Aubrey Fisher[7]	• Orientation • Conflict • Emergence • Reinforcing
Susan Wheelan[8]	• Dependency and Inclusion • Counterdependency and Fight • Trust and Structure • Work and Productivity • Termination

Group Development Models

There are recognizable milestones in the lives of most groups. Like individuals, groups move through stages as they develop and mature. An "infant" group behaves differently than a group that has worked together for a long time and has matured into an "adult." A group's ability to "grow up" directly affects how well its members work together to achieve a common goal.

Bruce W. Tuckman, an educational psychologist, identified four discrete stages in the life cycle of groups—forming, storming, norming, and performing.[6] He and Mary Ann Jensen later refined the model by adding a fifth stage—adjourning.[7] In this chapter, we use **Tuckman's Group Development Stages** model (see **Figure 2.1**) because it is well recognized in communication and business management literature, it is easy to remember, and it remains one of the most comprehensive models of group development relevant to *all* types of groups.[8]
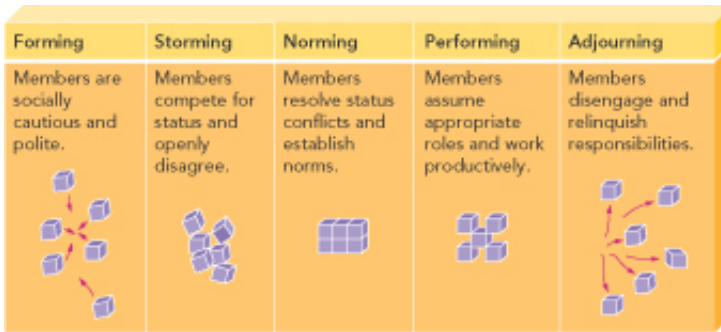
Figure 2.1 Tuckman's Group Development Stages

Forming Stage

When you join a group, you rarely know what to expect. Will everyone get along together and work hard? Will you make a good first impression? Will this be a positive group experience or a nightmare? Most people enter a new group with caution.

During the initial **forming stage**, members carefully explore *both* their personal goals *and* the group's goal. They may be tentative and somewhat uncomfortable about working with a group of strangers or unfamiliar colleagues. They try to understand their tasks, test personal relationships, and determine what behaviors are acceptable. Although little gets done during this orientation phase, members need this time to become acquainted with one another and to assess the group's goal. At this point in the group development process, "the most important job…is not to build a better rocket or debug…a new software product or double sales—it is to orient itself to itself."[9]

Primary Tension.

Group communication scholar Ernest G. Bormann describes **primary tension** as the social unease and stiffness that accompanies the getting-acquainted stage in a new group.[10] Because most members of a new group want to create a good first impression, they tend to be overly polite with one another. Members don't interrupt one another, and there may be long, awkward pauses between comments. When members do speak, they often speak softly and avoid expressing strong opinions. Although laughter may occur, it is often strained, inappropriate, or uncomfortable. When the group starts its discussion, the topic may be small talk about sports, the weather, or a recent news event.

A group that experiences primary tension may talk less, provide little in the way of ideas and opinions, and be perceived as ineffective. Before a group can work efficiently and effectively, members should try to reduce primary tension. In some groups, primary tension lasts for only a few minutes. In less fortunate groups, primary tension may continue for months, but eventually it should decrease as members come to feel more comfortable with one another.

Resolving Primary Tension.

Although primary tension often disappears quickly and naturally as group members get to know one another and gain confidence, some groups need direct intervention to relieve this early form of tension.

Recognizing and discussing primary tension is one way of breaking its cycle. A perceptive member may purposely behave in a way that counteracts primary tension, such as talking in a strong voice, looking involved and energized, sticking to the group's topic, and expressing an opinion. Here are some additional suggestions for resolving primary tension:

- Be positive and energetic. Smile. Nod in agreement. Laugh. Exhibit enthusiasm.

- Be patient and open-minded, knowing that primary tension should decrease with time.
- Be prepared and informed before your first meeting so you can help the group focus on its task.

Groups in Balance…

Socialize Newcomers

In some instances you will be a newcomer to an already well established group. Not surprisingly, your experiences in other groups affect how you adapt to and communicate with new group members. Understanding the socialization process can help you reduce the uncertainty that accompanies every new group experience.

In the context of group communication, **socialization** refers to "the process by which an individual acquires the social knowledge and skills necessary to assume an organizational role."[11] The socialization process is important in groups because "positive socialization creates stronger commitments to confront and balance the multiple issues and tensions involved in participating in group activities."[12] Carolyn Anderson and her colleagues describe the ways in which group members move through five phases as they experience the socialization process:

1. **Antecedent phase**. A newcomer brings beliefs and attitudes, cultural dimensions, needs and motives, communication skills, personality traits, knowledge, and prior group experiences to a new group. These factors can influence how well the group accepts the newcomer: If the group needs and values what the newcomer has to offer, socialization will be faster and easier.

2. **Anticipatory phase**. Members of an established group have expectations about newcomers. They may look for someone with certain types of knowledge or communication skills. They may have heard that the newcomer shares their beliefs and attitudes.

Socialization is more likely to succeed if the newcomer's characteristics and motives align with the group's expectations.

3. **Encounter phase**. During the encounter phase, newcomers try to fit in by adjusting to group expectations, assuming needed roles, communicating effectively, and finding an appropriate balance between individual goals and the group's goals.

4. **Assimilation phase**. During this phase, newcomers become fully integrated into the group's culture. Established members and newcomers blend into a comfortable state of working together to achieve common goals.

5. **Exit phase**. Some groups, such as families, may never disband, although they change as new members join and others leave. Working groups manage this process by giving departing members a warm send-off and welcoming new members who take their place. Regardless of the reason (whether positive or negative), leaving an established group can be a difficult experience.[13]

Generally, newcomers can gain acceptance by asking the group for help or information, offering assistance to other group members, and conforming to group norms.[14] Socialization in groups is a give-and-take process in which members and groups come together to satisfy needs and accomplish goals.

Remember This

"Early socialization experiences have a long-term impact on newcomers' satisfaction, performance, and intention to stay in a group."[15]

Storming Stage

After spending some time in the forming stage, group members realize that "being nice" to one another may not accomplish very much, particularly when there are critical issues to address and problems to solve. As a group gradually moves from the forming stage to the storming stage, disagreements arise.

In the **storming stage** , groups address the conflict↔cohesion dialectic and the leadership↔followership dialectic. Some members lose their patience with forming stage niceties, while others begin competing with one another to determine their status and to establish group roles. During this stage, group members may become argumentative and emotional. As the group tries to get down to business, the most confident members begin to compete for both social acceptance and leadership. They openly disagree on issues of substance. It is still too early in the group's existence, however, to predict the outcome of such competition.

Many groups try to skip this stage in order to avoid competition and conflict. However, storming is a necessary part of a group's development. Without it, a group may fail to establish productive member roles, appropriate leadership responsibilities, and clear goals.

Secondary Tension.

The frustrations and personality conflicts experienced by group members as they compete for acceptance and achievement within a group are the source of what Bormann calls **secondary tension**.[16] Whereas primary tension arises from lack of confidence, secondary tension emerges when members have gained enough confidence to become assertive and even aggressive as they pursue positions of power and influence. Conflicts can result from disagreements over issues, conflicts in values, or an inability to deal with disruptive members. Regardless of the causes, a group cannot hope to achieve its common goal without managing secondary tension.

The signs of secondary tension are almost the direct opposite of those of primary tension. There is a high level of energy and agitation. The group is noisier, more dynamic, and physically active. Members speak in louder voices, interrupting and overlapping one another so that two or three people may be speaking at the same time. Members sit up straight, lean forward, or squirm in their seats. Everyone is alert and listening intently.

Resolving Secondary Tension.

Members of successful groups develop ways to handle this phase in a group's development. Often, one or two members will joke about the tension. The resulting laughter is likely to ease the stress. If secondary tension threatens to disable a group, someone needs to bring up secondary tension as an issue that the group needs to recognize and minimize by focusing on the group's goal. As was the case with primary tension, members should be patient and open-minded, knowing that secondary tension should decrease with time. In some cases, members will work outside the group setting to discuss the personal difficulties and anxieties of group members. Dealing with secondary tension can be difficult and even painful. However, when a group successfully resolves interpersonal problems, it can become an effective and cohesive work group.

Most groups experience some form of primary and secondary tension during the forming and storming stages. In fact, a little bit of tension is a good thing. It can motivate a group toward action and increase a group's sensitivity to feedback. Effective groups learn to balance the need for both conflict and cohesion. As group communication scholars Donald Ellis and Aubrey Fisher point out, "the successful and socially healthy group is not characterized by an absence of social tension, but by successful management of social tension."[17]
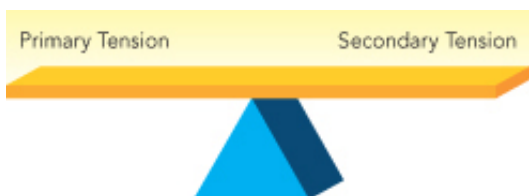
Norming Stage

During the forming and storming stages, groups lack balance; they are either too cautious or too confrontational. Once a group moves to the **norming stage**, members resolve these early tensions and learn to work as a committed and unified team. "Group members accept the group and accept the idiosyncrasies of fellow members."[18] As members begin to build trust in one another, they are more willing to disagree and express opinions. They develop methods for achieving group goals and establish norms and "rules of engagement." "Communication becomes more open and task oriented" as "members solidify positive working relationships with each other."[19]

There is more order and direction during this third stage of group development. Members have begun to balance a wide range of group dialectics, with special emphasis on norms (conforming↔nonconforming), task requirements (structure↔spontaneity), and adapting to member characteristics (homogeneous↔heterogeneous).

Performing Stage

When a group reaches the **performing stage**, members are fully engaged and eager to work. Roles and responsibilities are fluid; they adapt and change according to group needs and task requirements. In this stage, group identity, loyalty, and morale are generally high. When groups reach the performing stage, members focus their energies on both the task and social dimensions of group work as they make major decisions and solve critical problems. Just about everyone shares in and supports a unified effort to achieve a common goal. Although disagreements occur, they are usually resolved intelligently and amicably. During this stage, "interaction patterns reflect virtually no tension; rather, the members are jovial, loud, boisterous, laughing, and verbally backslapping each other."[20]

Chapter 9, "Structured and Creative Problem Solving in Groups," offers strategies that help groups solve problems and make decisions effectively during the performing stage.

Adjourning Stage

When a group reaches the **adjourning stage**, it has usually achieved its common goals and may begin to disband.[21] Groups end their work and their existence for many reasons. After achieving a goal or completing an assigned task, a group may

Virtual Groups

Developmental Tasks

Most group development theories assume that members interact face to face at the same time and in the same place. This assumption does not apply when

describing development stages in virtual groups. Two developmental features of virtual groups require added attention:

- The planning, organization, and use of technology add components to each stage of group development.
- Members' technical expertise, attitudes about, and confidence with technology can all affect how groups move through group development stages.

Forming Stage

During the forming stage of virtual groups, members begin to develop codes of virtual conduct, to review software and hardware requirements, and to raise and answer questions about how they will use technology to accomplish the group's goals. Because resolving this stage is critical to group development, some virtual groups arrange a face-to-face meeting before going online, especially when members "do not know each other and the project or work is complex and requires a high degree of interaction. Face-to-face orientation meetings also help orient groups when the task is new and ambiguous."[22]

Storming Stage

During a virtual group's storming stage, members must deal with the added complication imposed by the virtual environment. In addition to expressing opinions and debating substantive issues, the group may encounter technical problems and different levels in member expertise. For example, whereas some members can tolerate and adjust to a bad phone connection or slow online response rate, for other members—perhaps a non-native English speaker, a member who is hearing impaired, or a slow typist—these challenges can make interaction difficult or unintelligible. What should the group do if technical systems are not compatible, or if some members are technically unskilled or apprehensive about using advanced technology? Virtual groups must solve technical problems if they hope to address task-related issues and move beyond the storming stage.

Norming Stage

In the norming stage, virtual groups define members' roles, resolve conflicts, solve most technical problems, and accept the group's norms for interaction. They will be ready to focus on the task. They will also resolve issues related to differences in time, distance, technology, member cultures, and organizational environments. At this point, the group is ready to begin working virtually and effectively.

Performing Stage

Once a virtual group reaches the performing stage, members engage in ongoing virtual interaction and encourage equal participation by all members. They have overcome or adjusted to technical roadblocks and have become comfortable with the virtual media used by the group.

Adjourning Stage

Finally, a group may rely on virtual communication to blunt the separation anxiety that comes with the adjourning stage. If a group has matured and performed well, its members will be reluctant to give up their relationships with their colleagues. Even if a virtual group no longer operates in an official capacity, members may continue to use technological media to consult and interact with one another.

have no reason to continue. In other cases, individual members leave a group for personal or professional reasons or to seek out and join another group.

When an entire group disbands, most members experience the stress that comes with relinquishing group responsibilities. They also confront relational issues such as how to retain friendships with other members.[23] Although members are often proud of what they've achieved, they may also feel a sense of loss when the group dissolves. When groups adjourn, the dialectic balance shifts from engagement to disengagement. Some writers describe this fifth stage as "mourning," which recognizes the loss felt by group members.[24]

Group Goals

An effective group has *both* a clear understanding of its goal *and* a belief that its goal is meaningful and worthwhile.[25] In a three-year study of characteristics that explain how and why effective groups develop, Carl Larson and Frank LaFasto found "a clear and elevated goal" to be the top attribute on the list.[26] The Apollo Moon Project, initiated during the Kennedy administration, is a good example. Which goal is more motivating: "To be leaders in space exploration" or "To land a man on the moon by the end of the 1960s"? Fortunately, NASA adopted the second goal, and its simple words were both clear and inspiring.[27] Any old goal is not enough.

Clear, elevated goals challenge group members and give them the opportunity to excel— both as individuals and as a group. Here is how Larson and LaFasto describe what happens when groups work to achieve such goals:

> [Groups] lose their sense of time. They discover to their surprise that it's dark outside and they worked right through the supper hours. The rate of communication among team members increases dramatically, even to the point that individuals call each other at all hours of the night because they can't get something out of their minds. There is a sense of great excitement and feelings of elation whenever even minor progress is made toward the goal.[28]

Rescue teams, NASA astronauts, surgical teams, mountain climbers, and sports teams work together to achieve a goal. What are the characteristics of an effective group goal?

Establishing Group Goals

If your group is given what someone *else* thinks is a clear and elevated goal, group members may not be impressed or inspired. However, if your group develops its *own* goal, the motivation of members to achieve that goal is heightened.[29] This increase in motivation occurs because group-based goal setting produces a better balance of member and group needs, a better understanding of the group actions needed to achieve the goal, and a better appreciation of how individual members can contribute to group action. Moreover, when group members set the group's goals, the process can create a more interdependent, cooperative, and cohesive environment in which to work.[30]

Group goals should be both specific and challenging. Specific goals lead to higher performance than do generalized goals. For example, telling a group to "do your best" in choosing someone for a job is a generalized goal. A specific goal would be: Review the

candidates for the job, recommend three top candidates, and include a list of each top candidate's strengths and weaknesses.

Remember This

Clear, elevated goals create a sense of excitement and even urgency in groups.

Setting a specific, clear, and elevated goal benefits *every* group. You don't have to be a NASA scientist or a corporate executive to set impressive goals. Even if your only task is to participate in a graded classroom discussion, your group should take the time to develop a set of appropriate goals. For example, in many group communication classes, instructors require students to participate in a problem-solving discussion. The group usually chooses its topic, creates a discussion agenda, and demonstrates its preparation and group communication skills in class. This is nothing like "landing a man on the moon." Yet even a classroom discussion can be more effective if the group establishes a clear, elevated goal, such as "Our group and every member will earn an A on this assignment." In order to achieve this goal, your group will have to do many things: Choose a meaningful discussion topic, prepare a useful agenda, research the topic thoroughly, make sure that every member is well prepared and ready to contribute, and demonstrate effective group communication skills during the discussion.

A clear, elevated goal does more than set your sights on an outcome; it helps your group decide how to get there. **Figure 2.2** summarizes some questions to ask in deciding on goals.
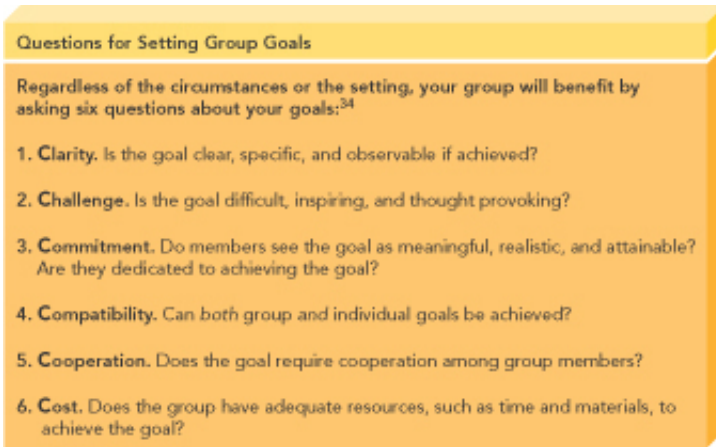
Questions for Setting Group Goals

Regardless of the circumstances or the setting, your group will benefit by asking six questions about your goals:[34]

1. **Clarity.** Is the goal clear, specific, and observable if achieved?

2. **Challenge.** Is the goal difficult, inspiring, and thought provoking?

3. **Commitment.** Do members see the goal as meaningful, realistic, and attainable? Are they dedicated to achieving the goal?

4. **Compatibility.** Can *both* group and individual goals be achieved?

5. **Cooperation.** Does the goal require cooperation among group members?

6. **Cost.** Does the group have adequate resources, such as time and materials, to achieve the goal?

Figure 2.2 Questions for Setting Group Goals

Balancing Group Goals and Hidden Agendas

As we noted in **Chapter 1**, a group will *not* function well—or at all—if members only focus on their personal goals rather than on the group's common goal. When a group agrees on a clear and important goal, members can pursue both group *and* individual goals, as long as their personal goals do not undermine the group goal.

Goal Theory and Group Work

Researchers Edwin Locke and Gary Latham emphasize the value of setting group goals and methods for accomplishing those goals. Their research establishes a strong relationship between how difficult and specific a goal is and how well people work to achieve it. Likewise, having a goal that's too easy is not a strong motivator. For example, if you set out merely to pass a difficult college course, you may not work hard or feel proud of the results if you succeed. If you strive for an A or B, however, you will work harder, be proud of your work, and, if you succeed, enjoy the rewards that come with achieving an enviable grade in a notoriously "killer" course.

Locke and Latham conclude that groups function best when their goals are (1) specific, (2) hard but realistic, (3) accepted by members, (4) used to evaluate performance, (5) linked to feedback and rewards, (6) set by members and groups, and (7) framed to promote member growth.[31]

Effective goal setting does more than raise group productivity and improve work quality. It also clarifies group and member expectations, increases satisfaction with individual and group performance, and enhances members' self-confidence, pride, and willingness to accept future challenges. Difficult or challenging goals, provided the group accepts them as worthwhile, can lead to greater effort and persistence than do easy goals.[32]

When, however, a member's goal is kept private and is different from the group's common goal, the result is a **hidden agenda**. Hidden agendas represent what people really want rather than what they say they want. Hidden agendas can disrupt the flow of communication. When they become more important than a group's goal, the result can be group frustration and failure because real issues and concerns may be buried while pseudoarguments dominate the discussion.

A student reported this incident in which a hidden agenda disrupted a group's deliberations:

> I was on a student government board that decides how college activities funds should be distributed to student clubs and intramural teams. About halfway through the process, I became aware that several members were active in intramural sports. By the time I noticed their pro-sports voting pattern, they'd gotten most of what they wanted. You wouldn't believe the bizarre reasons they came up with to cut academic clubs while fully supporting the budgets of athletic teams. What made me mad was that they didn't care about what most students wanted; they only wanted to make sure that *their* favorite teams were funded.

If unrecognized and unresolved during the forming stage, hidden agendas can permeate and infect *all* stages of group development. Effective groups deal with hidden agendas by recognizing them and trying to resolve them whenever they occur. If a group member is hesitant to get involved in the group process, or if the group's progress is unusually slow, look for hidden agendas. A question such as "What seems to be hanging us up here?" may encourage members to reveal some of their private concerns. Recognizing the existence of hidden agendas may be sufficient to keep a group moving from one stage to another in its development.

Even when you recognize the existence of hidden agendas, some of them cannot and should not be shared because they may create an atmosphere of distrust. Not many people would want to deal with the following revelation during a group discussion: "I only joined this group because I thought it would look good on my résumé." Recognizing hidden agendas means knowing that some of them can and should be confronted, whereas others need not be shared with the group.

Groups can resolve the dialectic tensions caused by hidden agendas through early agreement on the group's goals and careful planning of the group's process. Sociologists Rodney Napier and Matti Gershenfeld suggest discussing hidden agendas during the early stages of group development.[33] Initial discussion could include some of the following questions:

- What are the group's goals?
- Does the leader have any personal concerns or goals that differ from these?
- Do any members have any personal concerns or goals that differ from these?
- What outcomes do members expect?

Group Norms

One factor that influences a group's successful passage from the forming to the performing stage is the creation of norms. Communication scholar Patricia Andrews defines **norms** as "sets of expectations held by group members concerning what kinds of behaviors or opinions are acceptable or unacceptable, good or bad, right or wrong, appropriate or inappropriate."[34] Norms serve several important purposes to ensure positive interaction among group members. Group norms:

- express the values of the group.
- help the group to function smoothly.
- define appropriate social behavior.
- help the group survive.[35]

Norms are the group's rules. They affect how members behave, dress, speak, and work. For example, the norms for the members of a company's sales team might include meeting before lunch, applauding one another's successes, and staying late at work

without complaining. Without norms, accomplishing group goals would be difficult. There would be no agreed-upon way to organize and perform work.

Some norms, however, can work against a group and its goals. If group norms place a premium on friendly and peaceful discussions, group members may be reluctant to voice disagreement or share bad news. If group norms permit members to arrive late and leave early, meetings may not have enough members to make important decisions. Norms that do not support a group's goal can prevent the group from succeeding.

Group norms are powerful predictors of group behavior. According to Nicky Hayes, a British psychologist, "Group norms are intangible and often difficult to express in words, but that doesn't mean that they are not real. People who belong to groups often try very hard to conform to their group's norms—because the price of failure may be exclusion from the group, or even ridicule."[36]

Types of Norms

There are two general types of group norms—explicit and implicit. Because **explicit norms** are put in writing or are stated verbally, they are easy to recognize. Explicit norms are often imposed on a group. The group leader may have the authority to determine work rules. A large group or organization may have standard procedures that it expects everyone to follow. For example, the workers in a customer service department may be required to wear name badges. The staff members may have recommended this rule, the supervisor may have ordered this "custom," or the company may have established a policy regarding employee identification.

Implicit norms are rarely discussed or openly communicated. As a result, they are not as easy to recognize. Generally, they evolve as members interact with one another. For example, it may take new group members several weeks to learn that meetings begin 15

minutes later than scheduled. Even seating arrangements may be governed by implicit norms: Almost all of us have been unsettled when we walked into a classroom and discovered someone sitting at "our" desk. Although not a word is spoken, offending members may sense that they have violated an implicit norm, whether or not they understand what that norm is. Members who fail to "get it" may be considered insensitive or clueless.

Regardless of whether norms are openly communicated or implicitly understood, they can be divided into four categories: interaction norms, procedural norms, status norms, and achievement norms (see **Figure 2.3**). **Interaction norms** determine how group members communicate with one another and reveal what types of communication behavior are appropriate in a group. **Procedural norms** dictate how the group operates. Knowing these norms will help you adapt to the rules and procedures the group typically follows. **Status norms** identify the levels of influence among group members and help explain how status (prestige, respect, influence) is determined. **Achievement norms** determine the quality and quantity of work expected from group members. They can help you make decisions about how much time and energy should be devoted to working with a particular group.

	Interaction Norms	Procedural Norms	Status Norms	Achievement Norms
Key Question	What communication behavior is appropriate?	How does the group operate?	Who has power and control?	What are the group's standards?
Implicit Norms	We tend to use the pronouns we, us, and our rather than I, me, and my.	Everyone turns off cell phones and other technologies during meetings.	The group leader always sits at the head of the table.	Everyone shows up on time or early for our scheduled meetings.
Explicit Norms	The group leader is responsible for making sure that everyone gets a chance to speak.	We always get an agenda in advance and use it during our meetings.	When a group vote is tied, the leader casts the deciding vote.	All members must have full references for any reports or research they cite.

Figure 2.3 Types of Norms

In **Chapter 1** , we noted that dialectic tensions can arise when one or more members challenge the group's norms or standards. At the same time, constructive criticism that promotes a group's goal can contribute to group effectiveness. As you read about the

conformity↔nonconformity dialectic, think of the ways in which you can help your group resolve this common tension.

Conformity

Group norms function only to the extent that members conform to them. **Conformity** occurs when group members adopt attitudes and actions that a majority favors or that adhere to the group's social norms.[37] We learn the value of conformity at a young age. In the classroom, children learn that standing in line and raising their hands are expected behaviors. On the playground, children who refuse to play by the rules may find themselves playing alone.

Although some group members may have reasons for ignoring or wanting to change norms, most groups pressure their members to conform. You are more likely to conform to norms when one or more of the following factors are present:

- You want to continue your membership in the group.
- You have a lower status than other group members and don't want to risk being seen as an upstart.
- You feel obligated to conform.
- You get along with and like working with the other group members.
- You may be punished for violating norms and/or rewarded for compliance.[38]

Nonconformity

Members decide whether they will or will not conform to group norms.
Nonconformity occurs when a member behaves counter to the expectations of the group. Although conformity to norms is essential to the functioning of a group,

Follow the Research

Beware of Unreasonable Norms

Groups can exert enormous pressure to conform. Two classic (and disturbing) studies illustrate our tendency to conform to unreasonable norms.[39]

During the 1960s, Stanley Milgram of Yale University designed a series of experiments to find out whether people would obey commands from a stranger who tells them to inflict what seems to be considerable pain on another person. Subjects were told by the supposed experimenter to administer painful electric shocks to a research associate if the associate answered a question incorrectly. In fact, *no* shock was given, but the associates were trained to writhe in pain, scream, and pound on walls. Even though these behaviors convinced the subjects that they were causing enormous pain, very few subjects refused to increase the shocks as directed by an experimenter. In this case, pressure from an authority figure outweighed individual judgment and morality.

In another famous study conducted in the early 1970s, Philip Zimbardo created a realistic-looking prison in a Stanford University basement in which student subjects were assigned to play the role of prison guard or prisoner for several days. Very quickly, the prison guards used their power and became increasingly abusive and cruel. After a brief period of rebellion, the prisoners became passive, demoralized, and depressed. Zimbardo halted the experiment because it was "out of control" and causing psychological and physical damage to the subjects.[40]

Student "guard" and "prisoner" form Zimbardo's prison experiment.

Figure 2.4 Dealing with Nonconformity

nonconformity can improve group performance when members have legitimate concerns and alternative suggestions. **Figure 2.4**   presents the process for dealing with nonconformity in a decision tree format.

Remember This

Effective groups balance the benefits of both conformity and nonconformity.

Constructive nonconformity occurs when a member resists a norm while still working to promote a group goal. Constructive nonconformity is occasionally needed and valuable. Movies, television shows, and books have championed the holdout juror, the stubbornly honest politician, and the principled but disobedient soldier or crew member. Sometimes there is so much pressure for group members to conform that they need a nonconformist to shake up the process, to provide critical feedback, and to create doubt about what had been a confident but wrong decision. Nonconformity can serve a group well if it prevents members from ignoring important information or making a poor decision. The following statements are examples of constructive nonconformity:

- "I know we always ask the newest group member to take minutes during the meeting, but we may be losing the insight of an experienced member and skilled note taker by continuing this practice."

Ethics in Groups

Ethical Group Norms

Group communication scholar Ernest G. Bormann contends that ethical dilemmas surface whenever groups face unavoidable dialectic tensions.[41] Group norms can present ethical dilemmas when they serve unethical purposes. In some groups, norms exclude people because of race, gender, age, or personal philosophy. When group norms restrict members' freedom of expression, an ethical member should object to the norm and try to change it. If all else fails, ethical members may publicly renounce the group or quit in protest.

A group and its members have ethical responsibilities. We offer some conclusions based on Bormann's advice and urge you to meet these standards as you interact with group members to achieve a common goal:[42]

- When you join a group, focus on the group's goals rather than your own.
- If someone asks you to do something unethical, object or decline the assignment—and make the rest of the group aware of the ethical issues and consequences.
- If a group adopts unethical norms, such as restricting the free flow of information or refusing to include diverse members, take responsibility and push for changes to such restrictive norms.
- Promote a group climate in which all members can develop their full potential as individuals of worth and dignity.
- Build group cohesiveness, raise the status of others, volunteer to help the group, and release social tensions.
- As you become more knowledgeable about group communication, develop a well-thought-out code of ethics.

- "I have to question devoting my time to these weekly meetings if we continue to take three hours to get through a routine agenda."

In contrast, **destructive nonconformity** occurs when a member resists conforming to norms without regard for the best interests of the group and its goals. For example, a group member who routinely sends and responds to text messages during meetings in spite of the group's clear disapproval is both distracting and annoying.

Nonconformity of either type provides a group with an opportunity to examine its norms. When members deviate, the group may have to discuss the value of a particular norm and subsequently choose to change it, clarify it, or continue to accept it. At the very least, nonconforming behavior helps members recognize and understand the norms of the group. For instance, if a member is reprimanded for criticizing an office policy, other members will learn that the boss should not be challenged. Some groups may attempt to correct nonconforming members or change their norms as a result of constructive nonconformity.

While most groups can handle an occasional encounter with a renegade, dealing with highly disruptive members is another story. Fortunately, several strategies can help a group deal with a member whose disruptive behavior becomes destructive. The methods discussed in the following subsections begin with efforts to accommodate a disruptive member and escalate to a more permanent solution. A group can accept, confront, or even exclude the troublesome member.

Accept.

In some cases, a group will accept and put up with disruptive nonconformity. Acceptance is not the same as approval; it involves learning to live with disruptive behavior. When the disruption is not critical to the group's ultimate success, or when the member's positive contributions far outweigh the inconvenience and annoyance of putting up with the behavior, a group may allow the disruptive behavior to continue. For example, a member who is always late for meetings but puts in more than her fair share of work may find her tardy behavior accepted as an unavoidable fact of group life.

Confront.

Group norms express group values, help groups function efficiently, and define appropriate social behavior. Why does constructive nonconformity also help a group achieve its common goal?

Another strategy for dealing with disruptive nonconformity is confrontation, particularly when a member's behavior is impossible to accept or ignore and when it threatens the success of a group and its members. At first, rather than singling out the disruptive member, you may address the entire group about the issue by talking in general terms about coming to meetings prepared and on time, not interrupting others while they're speaking, or criticizing ideas rather than people. However, when a member becomes "impossible," groups may confront the perpetrator in several ways. At first, members may

direct a lot of attention to the wayward member in an attempt to reason with him or her. They may even talk about him or her during the course of the discussion: "Barry, it's distracting and disrupts our discussion when you answer your cell phone in meetings. Please turn it off." Although such attention can be intimidating and uncomfortable for the nonconforming member, it may not be sufficient to overcome the problem.

As an alternative to a public confrontation, there may be value in discussing the problem with the disruptive member outside the group setting. A frank and open conversation between the disruptive member and the leader or a trusted member of the group may uncover the causes of the problem as well as solutions for it. Some nonconforming members may not see their behavior as disruptive and, as a result, may not understand why the group is ignoring, confronting, or excluding them. Taking time to talk with a disruptive member in a nonthreatening setting can solve both a personal and a group problem.

Exclude.

When all else fails, a group may exclude disruptive members. Exclusion can take several forms. During discussions, group members can turn away from problem members, ignore their comments, or refuse to make eye contact. Exclusion might mean assigning disruptive members to unimportant, solo tasks or ones that will drive them away. Finally, a group may be able to expel unwanted members. Being asked to leave a group or being barred from participating is a humiliating experience that all but the most stubborn members would prefer to avoid.

Rather than covering up for disrupters and noncontributors, effective groups deal with such members. As Jon Katzenback and Douglas Smith wrote in *The Discipline of Teams*, "Sometimes that requires replacing members, sometimes it requires punishing them, and sometimes it requires working with them. [An effective group] does whatever it takes to

eliminate disruptive behavior and ensure productive contributions from all of its members."[43]

Groups in Balance…

Change Norms as Needed

When norms do not meet the needs of a group or its members, new ones should be established. Some norms may be too rigid, others too vague. Some norms may have outlived their usefulness. Finding an appropriate balance between old, rigid, or useless norms and creating new norms presents a challenge to every group. Effective groups learn how to change norms in order to prevent or curb recurring disruptions or problems. Norms can be difficult to change, especially when they are implicit or unspoken. Changes in group norms typically occur as the result of the following conditions or behaviors:

- Contagious behavior, as in dress style and speech patterns
- Suggestions or actions of high-status members
- Suggestions or actions of highly confident members
- Suggestions of consultants
- Group discussion and decision making (for explicit norms)
- Continued interaction (for implicit norms)[44]

When group norms do not help a group achieve its purpose, some members may resist changes simply because change can be disruptive and threatening. Fear of change, however, should be weighed against fear of failure. Effective groups know when to hold on to tried-and-true norms and when to change them. The natural development of most groups requires changes in goals, membership, and norms.

Group Motivation

The word *motivate* comes from a French word, *motif,* which means "causing to move." Thus, if you motivate someone, you give that person a cause, or reason, to act. Group motivation provides the inspiration and incentives that move group members to work together to achieve a common goal. Without motivation, we may know what we need to do and even how to do it, but we lack the will and energy to do it.

In *Intrinsic Motivation at Work*, Kenneth Thomas explains the critical differences between two ways of using rewards to motivate group members. Most us of are familiar with the **extrinsic rewards** that come from the external environment (a boss, a business, an organization) and usually take the form of money, benefits, job perks, and special privileges. Thomas notes that extrinsic rewards rarely motivate group members. Rather, the rewards that motivate group members are **intrinsic rewards** that come from the group itself—pride in the work, the praise of others, a sense of personal accomplishment.[45] Every group has the potential to make group work an optimal experience for members by using Thomas's four categories of motivators to energize and reinforce an entire group (see **Figure 2.5**).[46]

A Sense of Meaningfulness

The shared feeling that the group is pursuing a meaningful goal creates a **sense of meaningfulness**. Highly motivated groups believe that the job is worth doing and that they are capable of getting it done. Whether your group is setting out to climb Mt. Everest, planning a homecoming rally, or establishing a new product line, make sure there is a clear and elevated goal supported by every member of the group. You can also promote a sense of meaningfulness in your group by meeting members' needs and adapting to their personality types. If you are leading a group, give group members feedback that tells them whether their efforts are contributing to the group's goal.[47]

Figure 2.5 Thomas's Intrinsic Motivators in Action

A Sense of Choice

Motivated groups feel they have a **sense of choice**—the shared feeling that the group has the power and ability to make decisions about how to organize and do its job. In addition to focusing on the group goal, group members should select agreed-upon strategies for achieving the goal. Every member knows what she or he is expected to do. Members communicate frequently in an effort to share information, discuss issues, and make decisions.[48] If you are the group's leader, you can promote a sense of choice by encouraging members to make decisions about how the group does its work and accept the inevitability of making mistakes when exploring innovative approaches. When group members have the power to make decisions, they are motivated by a greater sense of personal control and responsibility.

A Sense of Competence

The shared feeling that your group is doing good, high-quality work creates a **sense of competence**. Motivated groups need more than a clear goal and strategies for achieving that goal. They also need competent group members who are ready, willing, and able to perform the tasks necessary to achieve their common goal. You can promote a sense of competence in your group by providing constructive feedback to group members and listening to their feedback, complimenting member abilities and achievements, and setting high standards for yourself and the group.

A Sense of Progress

Motivated groups must feel a **sense of progress** —the shared feeling that the group is accomplishing something. "How are we doing?" is an important question for all groups. It's difficult for members to stay motivated if they have no idea whether the group is making progress toward its goal. A well-chosen, structured goal should be measurable. Motivated groups "create good, objective measurements that people can relate to their specific behavior."[49] A group can provide a sense of progress by tracking and measuring progress; monitoring and, if needed, finding ways to sustain group motivation; and celebrating group accomplishments.

Summary Study Guide

Group Development Stages

- According to Tuckman and Jensen, the life cycle of groups has five discrete stages— forming, storming, norming, performing, and adjourning.
- During the forming stage, many groups experience primary tension, the social unease that accompanies the getting–acquainted stage in a new group.
- During the storming stage, secondary tensions often emerge as members pursue positions of power and influence.
- Virtual groups must take into account their members' technical expertise, attitudes about, and confidence with technology in order to move through group development stages efficiently and effectively.
- The process of socializing newcomers in a group moves through five phases: antecedent, anticipatory, encounter, assimilation, and exit.

Group Goals

- An effective group has *both* a clear understanding of its goal *and* a belief that its goal is meaningful and worthwhile.
- Effective group goals require attention to their clarity, challenge, commitment, compatibility, cooperation, and cost.
- Locke and Latham's Goal Theory claims that groups function best when their goals are specific, challenging, accepted, used to evaluate performance, and promote member growth.
- Hidden agendas occur when a member's private goal conflicts with the group's goal.

Group Norms

- Norms are expectations held by group members concerning acceptable behavior; norms can be explicit or implicit.
- Norms can be classified as interaction, procedural, status, and achievement norms.
- Constructive nonconformity occurs when a member resists a norm while still working to promote a group goal. Destructive nonconformity occurs when a member resists conforming to norms without regard for the best interests of the group and its goal.
- When members engage in destructive nonconformity a group can accept, confront, and even exclude disruptive members.

Group Motivation

- Group motivation provides the inspiration and incentives that move group members to work together to achieve a common goal.
- Members are motivated when they have a sense of meaningfulness, a sense of choice, a sense of competence, and a sense of progress.

GroupWork Classroom Norms

Directions: Form a group of three to five members and discuss some of the norms in your classes. List at least five implicit norms and at least five explicit norms that operate in some of your classes. When you have identified examples of each type of norm, rank the norms in terms of their usefulness in ensuring quality instruction and effective learning. Do all of the norms that the group listed contribute to a positive classroom experience? Should some of the existing norms be modified? Are there any additional norms needed in some classes?

Explicit Classroom Norms	Your Ranking	Implicit Classroom Norms	Your Ranking
Example: The syllabus states that no makeup work is allowed without a legitimate written excuse.		*Example:* When students come in late, they tiptoe to the closest available seat near the door.	
1.		1.	
2.		2.	
3.		3.	
4.		4.	
5.		5.	

Group Assessment How Good Is Your Goal?

Directions: For each of the following questions, circle Yes or No to assess the goals of a group you belong to or belonged to in the past. Each time you circle a No response, consider how the goal or situation could have been improved.

1. Does the group have a goal?	Yes	No
2. Is the goal specific?	Yes	No
3. Do group members understand the goal?	Yes	No
4. Do group members believe the goal is worthwhile?	Yes	No
5. Is the goal achievable?	Yes	No
6. Are the resources available to achieve the goal?	Yes	No
7. Is the goal sufficiently challenging to group members?	Yes	No
8. Are all group members committed to the goal?	Yes	No
9. Do all group members understand their contribution to the goal?	Yes	No
10. Does the goal require group cooperation?	Yes	No
11. Does the group recognize any individual hidden agendas?	Yes	No
12. Has the group resolved any hidden agendas?	Yes	No
13. Will group members receive feedback about their progress toward the goal?	Yes	No
14. Is there a reward for achieving the group's goal?	Yes	No
15. When achieved, is the goal observable or measurable?	Yes	No

16. What could you and your group members do to improve their ability to achieve the groups' goal?

_____

_____

_____