Group dynamic

Description

Youth workers are very often in the position of group leader – as a trainer, moderator, teacher. In a group, people tend to behave and interact in different ways and the attitude and behavior of one person can in turn influence the behavior of others. This can be a real challenge for the group leaders. Creative groups are even more challenging to moderate. Apart from collaboration skills, members of such teams need to be activating their creative energy. Many of us have likely experienced how difficult it can be to maintain a forced creative flow for long periods of time. Therefore group leaders have to be mindful of group energy and dynamics and be ready to support team members while going through these experiences.

In this section you will learn:

- **What are group dynamics**
- **Important tips for youth workers and creative teams.**

What are group dynamics?

Like individual humans, a group goes through various stages of growth and development. This process concerns both the relationships between group members and their commitment to the performance of tasks or goals. Noticing these changes and understanding the group energy and dynamics are the main skills of any leader, trainer, teacher, moderator, or youth worker.

The most famous theory on group formation was created by Bruce Tuckman. The main takeaway of this theory is that groups only work effectively after required cooperation. Tuckman describes 5 stages of group development in which the group strives to become more productive and effective:

1. **Forming.** In this stage, group members are starting to get to know each other and work together, the main goals have been established. Most of the participants feel curiosity, but also insecurity and uncertainty. Everyone hopes that they will be accepted, find their place and have a valuable role in the new emerging group. Participants slowly get to know each other, notice the similarities and differences between themselves.
2. **Storming**. At this point, the differences between team members are becoming more apparent. Individuals may challenge group goals and struggle for power. The first conflicts appear. They can be related to tasks (who, what and how to do them), as well as interpersonal relations (e.g. someone is marginalized due to some character traits, culture). At this stage, the role of the leader/trainer can change as group members focus on the emotions of these interactions. The leader as a "central" person is seen as responsible for moderating certain areas of the group's equilibrium. Members often voice concern and criticism in this phase.
3. **Norming.** For the most part in this stage, differences between people are more or less resolved – they have been clarified, accepted, or even removed (themselves or by the group). The remaining group members find compromises and set rules for cooperation. Roles are becoming

clear and expectations are recognised. The team begins to really cooperate and focus on the project goals and the atmosphere has improved. There is a clear development of group cohesion and identity.

4. **Performing.** Group members feel the most competent, responsible, energetic and have a strong sense of belonging to a group at this stage.The team knows why, what and how to proceed. You can see results and members work together to solve problems and achieve new goals. They take care of themselves, take care of the atmosphere, possible conflicts are being resolved in a constructive manner and there is a conscious effort not to harm individual members.

5. **Adjourning.** The final stage. The group has accomplished its job and participants are more or less satisfied with the results and experience. Some people feel that they have achieved the goal while others would like to continue meeting and cooperating. Members of the group often feel a sense of closure and possibly nostalgia as they prepare to leave.

This simple linear concept of the group process has been verified with research many times, which confirmed that, yes, groups usually experience different phases, but in their own individual way. Many teams skip stages entirely or even pass through stages in a different sequence. And what is even more interesting, and very true at the same time, storming behaviors are present almost all the time. Each change (eg. some members leave the group or there are some newcomers) will evoke confusion or disturbance. Therefore the group's ability to cope with conflict is essential in terms of effectiveness and productivity.

Important tips and conclusions for youth workers and creative teams.

The awareness that a group may be going through a certain phase of development allows us to better understand and respond to people's behavior. And, thanks to this knowledge, we can better moderate the group and support them in overcoming difficulties. It's very important to remember that groups will not always take the path of least resistance. Being a mindful moderator will help you recognise what stage your group and individuals are in and what they need from you.

- **Forming** – This is a perfect time to utilize your group's natural positive energy and motivation. At this stage they still hope that this will be a great experience. You as a trainer can:
  - **Build a group contract together.** Establishing rules of cooperation and communication should be done in the initial phase of team life. Here you can find instructions on how to lead a session to do this.
  - **Discuss what team members expec**t. Talk about expectations regarding shared work, expectations from each other, from the group leader and from the course (depending on the team goal). Ask them: "Why are you here?"
- **Storming** – This stage might never really disappear, and it's normal. Different team members or the whole group will experience many changes which will affect their emotional balance and behavior. As a leader you can help them get through difficult moments by:
  - **Ensuring an open atmosphere and communication lines.** Hiding even small conflicts builds barriers and resistance or resentment in members.
  - **Showing how to give constructive feedback**. You can use this exercise. It's important to make it very clear that we solve all problems of this nature at once and with respect for others.

- **Norming** – This phase is important for successful conflict management in the future. With this experience under their belt, people more easily recognize when conflict is occurring and have a stronger desire to overcome it. A group leader could reinforce this by:

- **Reflecting on the group contract again**. Are the rules still effective and respected by all? Do we need to amend or confirm the list?
- **Answering all questions and doubts.**
- **Giving additional instruction or support**
- **Performing** – When groups work effectively and enjoy being together, the role of leader is still important and include:

- **Taking care of people's wellbeing** – Remind them to take breaks and have a snack or drink water/coffee/tea.
- **Delegating responsibility** – Recognize when a team is ready for self-management and larger responsibilities.
- **Observation and being sensitive** to changes and potantial conflicts.
- **Adjourning –** The last phase is as important as the first. Here are a couple of things that can be done:

- **Giving space for reflection.** Reflect on what they learned, how it was to be a member of the team. What do they expect for the future?
- **Review expectations.** Were they met by all members of the group? Which of the expectations were not fulfilled and why?

Like every theory, this one is verified through practice, by each one of us. Our experience confirms that groups grow and develop and that conflict occurs all the time. A good group experience (also during creative training) gives a strong sense of satisfaction and sometimes even nostalgia in the end.

Strong support of the Tuckman model is evident in the group dynamic displayed in the movie 'The Fellowship of the Ring' 🙂,
Explained in this video:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ysWWGf8VsOg

Category

1. Creative base
2. Group

Tags

1. Handbook

Meta Fields