

**Understanding group dynamics**Section  
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People make groups and just as individual learning needs and aspirations change so will the needs and aspirations of the group. The group dynamic will be in a constant state of flux, old conflicts will return and new conflicts will arise. Understanding how groups work and how people learn will help volunteer educators to deal with the issues as and when they arrive.

In 1965 Bruce Tuckman, who extensively researched the theory of group dynamics, proposed teams develop through a set of four stages, namely: Forming, Storming, Norming and Performing. These stages are widely recognised as normal and needed if a group is to work well together. Understanding these four stages can give an understanding to what is going on if a group is not working well together, or even if a group has difficulty trying to start to work together. If the group experiences major change, or a significant disruption, it can go back to the Storming or Norming stages again.



## Understanding group dynamics

### ● **Forming**

This is the stage where the group are introduced to each member. Boundaries of acceptable group behaviour are explored at this stage and it is where the transition from individual to group member begins. This is the “polite” stage in which the group starts to form. The group is usually positive and may appear to accomplish little, if anything, that is related to the project aims since there is so much going on to distract group members.

### ● **Storming**

This is the stage where the group begin to challenge each other and disagree. There may be clashing for control of the group or members disagree and may blame the group concept, saying it does not work. Conflict will be common and may cause some upset. Members of the group are testing the boundaries, and exploring the ways that the group could work together. It is at this stage facilitators need to negotiate compromise and offer solutions.

### ● **Norming**

Groups which reach this stage have started to adjust their behaviour to take account of the other members. Each member of the group knows where they fit in and are likely to reasonably happy about it. The group will start to work well and turned around from the “storming” phase. Often the group will continue to and fro from “storming” to “norming” when issues crop up. The more the group matures the quicker it will bounce back to norming. As the group works on its differences, they now have more time and energy to spend on the project objectives.

### ● **Performing**

At this stage each member of the group knows what they are doing. The facilitator is now able to delegate extensively as the group are confident and comfortable in taking more responsibility for their own work.

