CHAPTER 2

Group Development

Learning Objectives

1. Discuss aspects of small group behavior theory as described in the literature.
2. Examine the conscious and unconscious components of group life.
3. Differentiate between the developmental stages of group life.
4. Analyze group behavior.
5. Facilitate teamwork throughout the group life span.

The Group

As members or leaders of groups, most of us notice the personalities of the members of the group, the topics discussed, the disagreements, and our own emotions. While individualistic Western cultures routinely view groups as collections of individuals, Eastern cultures have long recognized groups as distinct collectives rather than a collection of distinct individuals (Hofstede, 1983) (**Figure 2-1**).

This perspective informs the way the group harnesses its power in order to get something done. Shifting from an *I* perspective to a *We* perspective recognizes the group as a source of intelligence that is greater than any one individual. The *We* perspective facilitates the integration,

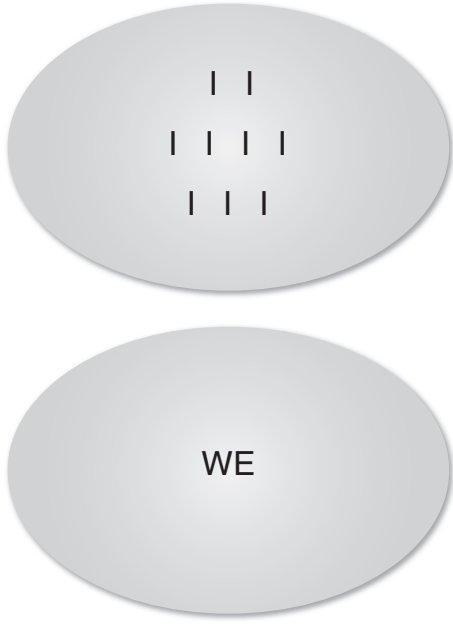

FIGURE 2-1 The I/We perception.

engagement, and creation of collective wisdom—ultimately achieving a whole that is more powerful and creative than the sum of its parts (Briskin, Erickson, Ott, & Callanan, 2009).

All groups demonstrate consistent patterns of member, leader, and group behaviors as they relate to the acquisition of roles, the assumption of and response to authority, norm development, and communication patterns. These patterns serve as indicators of developmental changes in the group over time. Neuroscience supports the notion of a social brain—a neurophysiological conduit for perceiving, processing, and mirroring the emotions and behaviors of others. In other words, our interactions with each other in groups have the potential to trigger neuronal activity, which, in turn, influences our emotions and behaviors (Goleman, 2011). Positive or negative action on the part of one person can trigger a like reaction in another. When repeated often enough, this positive or negative interaction pattern becomes a group norm (Frederickson, 2003).

We have all experienced a time when we were in sync or on the same wavelength or connected with another individual or group of individuals on a level that transcended the social psychological aspects of engagement. Integrating the systemic laws of neuropsychology and physics

with social psychology, Rene Levi (2005) examined and labeled these transcendent experiences as "collective resonance" and defined it as:

> A felt sense of energy, rhythm, or intuitive knowing that occurs in a group of human beings and positively affects the way they interact toward a positive purpose . . . that enables us to make greater progress toward our common human goals than we have been able to do using idea exchange and analytic problem-solving alone (p. 1).

This view is consistent with the "*We*ness" inherent to the Eastern conceptualization of groups and the emergence of collective intelligence in collectives of all types—including teams, organizations, and communities. It is important to note that these potentially generative, interactive, and integrative tendencies that are inherent to humans—when not managed mindfully—can devolve into group dysfunction or what Briskin, Erickson, Ott, and Callanan (2009) refer to as "collective folly." In these instances, the focus is on the barriers that divide and polarize the group rather than the connections that unify it (Briskin, Erickson, Ott, & Callanan, 2009).

These interactive patterns, carried out over the life of the group, contribute to the development of a unique social organism that is more than the sum of its parts (Bion, 1974; Lewin, 1951; Perls, Hefferline, & Goodman, 1951; Tilin & Broder, 2005; Tuckman, 1965; Wheelan, 2005).

Each of the columns in **Table 2-1** represents a level of system in group life—the individual members within the group, the group as a unit, and the context or the environment within which the group exists. Under each component are aspects that contribute to the social-psychological landscape of every group at any point in time. The study of group dynamics attempts to analyze and interpret group life by examining these aspects in a systematic fashion.

What You See Is Not What You Get: The Unconscious Life of a Group

Wilfred Bion, a psychoanalyst, was one of the first researchers to identify patterns in groups. Bion maintained that groups have a conscious and an unconscious life. He named the conscious group the *work group* and the unconscious group the *basic assumption group*. The conscious work group focuses on rationally accomplishing overt tasks and activities. The basic assumption group describes the unconscious aspects of a group. Leaders and members often mistakenly perceive these unconscious

TABLE 2-1 Levels of the System in Group Life

Member	Group	Environment
Behavior—How does each member behave in the group?	**Norms/rules**—What are the explicit/tacit rules for behavior in this group?	**Physical/social proximity**—How much time does the group spend together?
Personal feelings—How do each of the members feel about working in the group?	**Roles**—Who are the talkers/listeners?	**Relations with outsiders**—Which is stronger, members' intragroup or extragroup relations?
Internalized norms—What are the personal rules that are held by each member?	**Authority**—Who are the leaders/followers?	**Responsibilities/expectations**—What is expected of this group?
Beliefs/values—What beliefs/values influence each member?	**Communication**—Who talks to whom?	**Cultural issues**—What are the cultural issues (age, ethnic, gender, professional) that might impact this group?
Self-concept—How does each member see himself or herself functioning in the group?		**Level of autonomy**—How much control over the outcomes of this group does the group have?

aspects as interfering with the real work of the group. In fact, this is the way that the collective membership and leadership of the group deal with the anxiety and polarities of individual identity and collective identity. Bion specifically identified the following three basic assumptions: dependency, fight-flight, and pairing (**Table 2-2**). Leaders and members who learn to identify these group processes as a natural part of a group's development are better prepared to be positive catalysts in the group. Rather than being caught up in the anxiety of the group, this knowledge can allow a person to be more objective, emotionally independent, and prepared to act in a constructive manner (Bennis & Shepherd, 1956, pp. 417–418).

Stages of Group Development

While there are multiple factors that influence group functioning, each group—like each human being—should be considered a unique organism that passes through predictable phases of development.

TABLE 2-2 Wilfred Bion Summary

		Group Aim	Anxiety	Member	Leader	Behavior
Unconscious	Dependency	Security	Anxiety is reduced through leader's superhuman ability to care for the group.	Knows nothing, inadequate and childlike.	Omnipotent, parent and protector.	Leader makes all decisions, provides all direction, and solves all problems.
Unconscious	Fight or flight	Balance group identity with individual identities	Anxiety is expressed by resisting or fleeing the group dynamic.	Paradoxically struggles to balance group identity with personal identity.	Leader loses omnipotent status and is often blamed for not resolving the individual vs. group problem.	Fluctuates between arguing and avoiding difficult topics. Scapegoating: Individuals and leaders can be sacrificed for the sake of the group.
Unconscious	Pairing	Hope and optimism	Anxiety is reduced by letting the pair take control.	Let the pair do the work.	The pair acts on behalf of the leader.	Two people in the group take on the task of working out the unconscious group dilemmas.
Conscious	Work group	Fulfills the actual goals and tasks of a group	Anxiety is reduced enough to focus on work.	Contributes to the group reaching its goals.	Contributes to the group reaching its goals.	Leader members will support the group to achieve tangible goals.

Data from Bion, W. (1974). *Experiences in Groups: And other papers.* Palo Alto, CA: Science and Behavior Books, Inc.

Characteristic member, leader, and group behaviors, as they relate to the acquisition of roles, the assumption of and response to authority, norm development, and communication patterns—like human developmental milestones—serve as indicators of developmental changes in the group over time. Awareness of the interacting determinants of group behavior and the unconscious assumptions of the group will facilitate an understanding of group behavior and facilitate effective group leadership and participation.

Groups display behavioral patterns that are common to all groups and are not dependent on the individuals in the group. A number of theorists have used various terms to describe the key issues that groups address over their life span. While these issues are ever present, some issues gain primacy depending upon the developmental level of the group. In summary, the group, as a whole, struggles to find the right balance between the unconscious desire to have a group identity and retain individual identities. Over time, a group is also challenged with dealing with the paradox of being safely protected by an omnipotent leader and taking control of its own destiny. A mature group learns to deal effectively with these issues. Its members work cooperatively as separate and discrete members who willingly choose to belong to the group because they identify with interests of the group. This group tests its conclusions, seeks knowledge, learns from its experience, and is in agreement with regard to the group's purpose and tasks (Bales, 1950; Bion, 1974; Rioch, 1983; Schutz, 1958; Tuckman, 1965; Wheelan, 2005; Yalom, 1995).

Tuckman (1965) conducted an extensive review of the group development literature and concluded that therapy groups, work groups, and human relations training groups (t-groups) had strong developmental similarities despite differences in group composition, task, goal, and the duration of group life. He noted a few critical common themes about groups:

- There is a distinction between groups as a social entity and a task entity.
- In all groups, the task and the social emotional functions occur simultaneously.
- All groups go through four stages of group development. The task and social emotional functions are different for each stage.
- The group moves from one stage to the next by successfully accomplishing the task and social emotional/group structure function at each stage.

TABLE 2-3 Tuckman's Description of the Stages of Group Development Based on Literature Review of Therapy and T-Groups

	Task Issues	Structure and Social-Emotional Issues
Forming	**Orientation to the task:** Group members attempt to define the group task by identifying information that will be needed and the ground rules that must be followed to complete the job of the group.	**Testing and dependence:** Group members attempt to discover acceptable behavior according to the leader and other group members.
Storming	**Emotional response to task demands:** Group members act emotionally to task demands and exhibit resistance to suggested actions.	**Intragroup conflict:** Group members disagree with one another and the leader as a way to express their own individuality.
Norming	**Discussing oneself and others:** Group members listen to each other and the leader and use information and input from everyone.	**Development of group cohesion:** Group members accept the group and the individuality of fellow members, thus becoming an entity through rule agreement and role clarification.
Performing	**Emergence of insight:** A variety of methods of inquiry are used and members adjust their behavior to serve the greater goals of the group.	**Functional role relatedness:** Members are focused on getting the task done and relate to each other in ways that will accomplish the task.

Data from Tuckman, B. (1965). Developmental sequence in small groups. *Psychological Bulletin, 63*(6), 384–394.

Tuckman named these stages of group development *forming*, *storming*, *norming*, and *performing* (**Table 2-3**). He later added a fifth stage called *adjourning*, which describes the characteristics of groups as they terminate.

An Integrated Model of Group Development

Susan Wheelan (2005) used empirical research to build on Tuckman's model. She proposed and validated an integrated model of group development using the Group Development Questionnaire (GDQ) (Wheelan,

1990; Wheelan & Hochberger, 1996). Using observational and survey data, this integrated model is consistent with previous models in that it describes group stages developing naturally and in a chronological fashion over time. In addition, Wheelan and her team of researchers found that:

- There are specific characteristics that emerge in each stage of a group's development. Early stages of group development are associated with specific issues and patterns of speech such as those related to dependency, counterdependency, and trust, which precede the actual work conducted during the more mature stages of a group's life.
- Groups navigate through the stages by accomplishing process-oriented goals like achieving a certain degree of member safety, expressing and tolerating different opinions, and devising agreed-upon methods of decision-making.
- There is a normative time frame that most groups need in order to traverse each stage.
- Organizational culture influences group norms and can influence group development.
- Member and leader behaviors are equally important in the development of a group and the dynamic between them must be addressed as the group develops.

Identifying the Stages of Group Development: Characteristics and Goals

While stages of group development are identified by the issues that predominate, there is always a percentage of group energy that is expended on dependency, conflict, trust, and work regardless of the stage (**Figure 2-2**). For example, work gets done at every stage of development. In earlier stages, most of the work is done under the leader's direction. In succeeding stages, members take increasingly more responsibility. By Stages 3 and 4, responsibility for work is evenly distributed among the members and the leader is used as a resource. The key challenge for group members and leaders is finding the balance between task and social-emotional issues and managing the conflict that these issues engender over the life span of the group. Wheelan and Williams (2003) found that the communication content of groups over their life span mirror key developmental issues (**Table 2-4**). In other words, the amount of time spent talking about task-related concerns increases over the life of the group while the amount of time talking

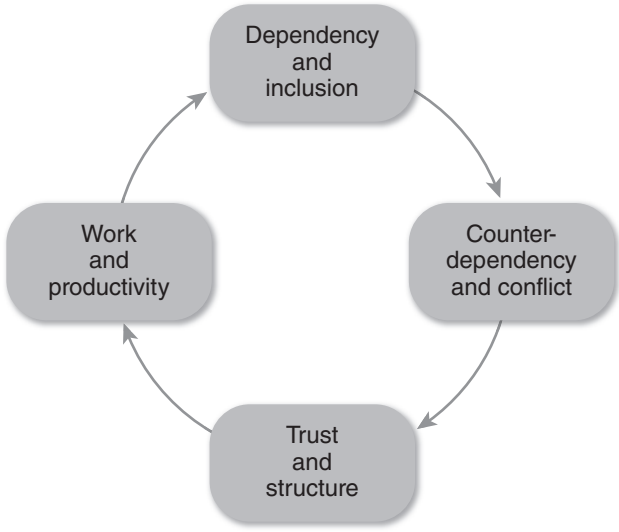

FIGURE 2-2 Key developmental issues of group life.

Data from Wheelan, S. (2005). *Group processes: A developmental perspective* (2nd ed.). Boston, MA: Allyn and Bacon.

about social-emotional concerns decreases as the group matures. **Figures 2-3A**, **B**, and **C** provide an example of how the proportion of attention on key issues might shift based on the developmental level of the group. As with people, no one size fits all and each group ultimately demonstrates unique developmental patterns.

Stage I (Dependency/Inclusion) is characterized by significant member dependency on the designated leader, concerns about safety, and inclusion issues. In this stage, members rely on the leader and powerful group members to provide direction. This is manifested by the percentage of statements that address dependency and pairing (when two people couple or pair by giving mutual compliments to each other) (8% and 16%, respectively). Statements regarding conflict are few (about 6%). About 17% of the time, team members engage in safe, noncontroversial discussions filled with flight statements by exchanging stories about outside activities or other topics that are not relevant to group goals while approximately 50% of the time is spent on work-related issues. The goals at Stage I are to: create a sense of belonging and the beginnings of predictable patterns of interaction, develop member loyalty to the group, and create an environment in which members feel safe enough to contribute ideas and suggestions.

TABLE 2-4 Wheelan: An Integrated Model of Group Development

Stage	Members	Group	Leader
I: Dependency/ Inclusion	• Tentative and polite • High compliance • Rarely express disagreement • Fear rejection • Conflict limited • Conformity high	• Assumes consensus • Roles based on external status and first impressions • Communication centralized • Lacks structure and organization	• Seen as benevolent and competent • Is expected to provide direction and safety • Is rarely challenged • Leader should facilitate communications, safety, and set standards
II: Counterdependency/ Conflict	• Disagree about goals and tasks • Feel safer to dissent • Challenge the leader • Increase participation	• Conflicts emerge • Goal and role clarification begins • Decreasing conformity • Subgroups form • Intolerance for subgroups • Conflict management attempted • Successful conflict resolution increases consensus (i.e., goals) and culture • Trust and cohesion increases	• Is challenged frequently • Leader should help develop values, accept changes, and encourage independence

III: Trust/Structure	• Satisfaction increases • Commitment to group tasks is high	• Increased goal clarity and consensus • Communications structure more flexible • Communications content more task oriented	• Leaders should be less directive, egalitarian, and more consultative
IV: Work/ Productivity	• Clear about group goals • Agree with group goals • Clear about their roles • Voluntary conformity is high • Cooperative	• Role assignments match member abilities • Communications structure matches task demands • Open communication allows participation of all members • Receives, gives, and uses feedback • Plans how to solve problems and make decisions • Implements and evaluates solutions and decisions • Highly cohesive • Task-related deviances tolerated	• Style matches group developmental level • Delegates • Leaders should move toward non-leadership

Data from Wheelan, S. (2005). *Group processes: A developmental perspective* (2nd ed.). Boston, MA: Allyn and Bacon.

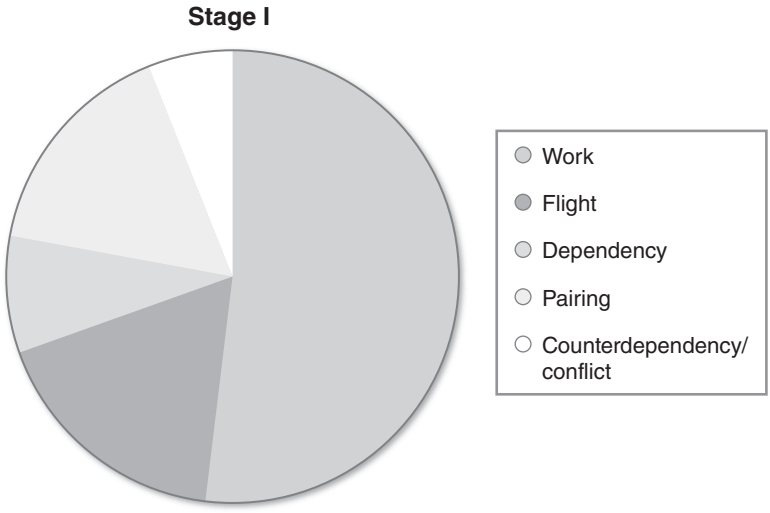

FIGURE 2-3A Stage I.

Data from Wheelan S. (2005). *Group processes: A developmental perspective* (2nd ed.). Boston, MA: Allyn and Bacon.

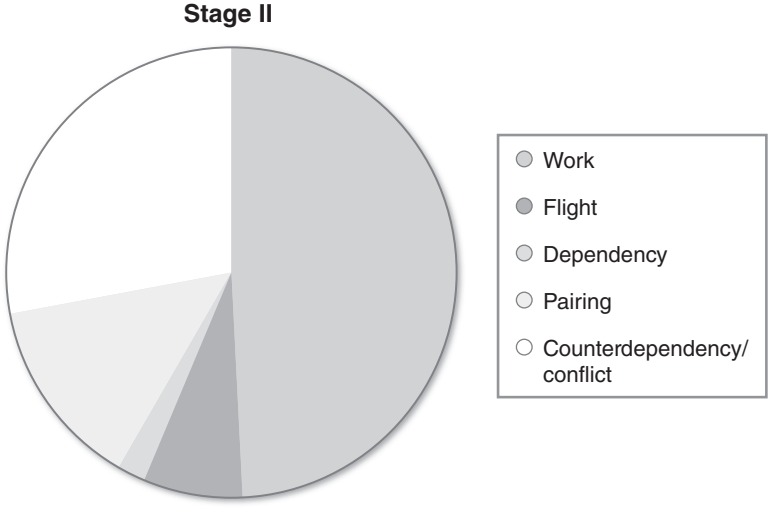

FIGURE 2-3B Stage II.

Data from Wheelan, S. (2005). *Group processes: A developmental perspective* (2nd ed.). Boston, MA: Allyn and Bacon.

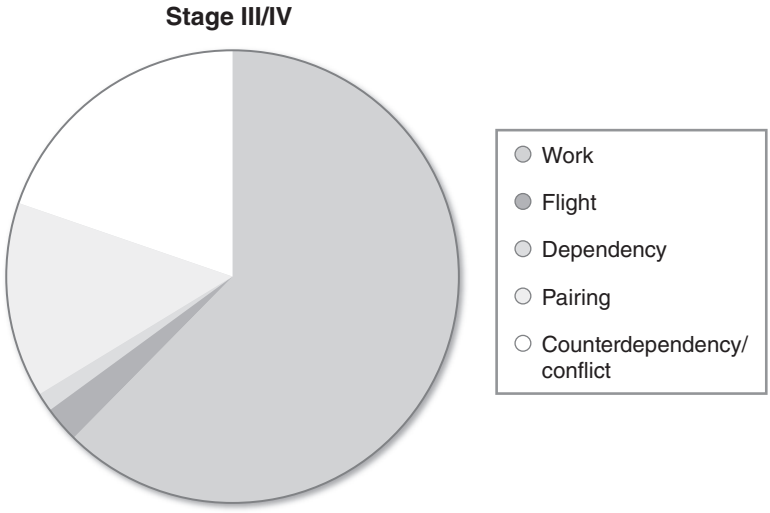

FIGURE 2-3C Stage III/IV.

Data from Wheelan, S. (2005). *Group processes: A developmental perspective* (2nd ed.). Boston, MA: Allyn and Bacon.

Stage II (Counterdependency/Conflict) is characterized by member disagreement about group goals and procedures. Conflict is inevitable. Flight statements decrease to about 7% and work statements remain at 49%. Dependency statements fall to 2% and those regarding conflict rise to 28%. Expressing disagreements and working them out is a necessary part of this process and allows members to communicate and begin to establish a trusting climate in which members feel free to disagree with each other and collaborate. The goals for Stage 2 are to develop a unified set of goals, values, and operational procedures, and to strike a balance between respect for the individual contributions and mediating individual needs with the group needs.

Stage III (Trust/Structure) is characterized by more mature negotiations about roles, organization, and procedures. The primary goal for Stage III is to solidify positive relationships that benefit the productivity of the group.

Stage IV (Work/Productivity) is characterized by a time of intense team productivity and effectiveness. Having resolved many of the issues of the previous stages, the group can focus most of its energy on goal achievement and task accomplishment. Roughly 62% of statements are related to work and 20% of the time is spent on sorting out differences of opinion on how the work should get done. At this point the group is resilient enough to remain cohesive while encouraging task-related conflicts.

Termination: When groups face their own ending point, some may address separation issues and members' appreciation of each other and the group experience. In other groups the impending end may cause disruption and conflict.

REFLECTION: *Identify the Stage of a Group*

Which stage does the behavior indicate?

- Members are listening and seeking to understand one another.
- Members attempt to figure out their roles and functions.
- Divisive feelings and subgroups within the group increase.
- Group members follow a self-appointed or designated leader's suggestions without enthusiasm.
- Disagreements become more civilized and less angry and emotional.
- Members argue with one another, even when they agree on the basic issues.

How Does the Stage of the Group Impact Team Productivity?

Wheelan (2005) found that aspects such as group size and group age affect development and productivity. It usually takes at least 6 months for a group to achieve the Stage IV developmental level. Newly formed groups are characterized by a higher percentage of dependency and counterdependency/flight statements ("I don't know what to do." "The leader is incompetent." "Did you see the game last night?"), while more established groups make more work statements ("Let's focus on the task at hand."). These findings are corroborated by Nembhard and Edmondson (2006), who found that long-standing membership in healthcare teams was correlated with the willingness of all members, irrespective of status, to share information and provide innovative solutions—behaviors that are indicative of more mature groups.

In a study involving 17 intensive care units, Wheelan, Davidson, and Tilin (2003) found a link between perceived group maturity and patients' outcomes in intensive care units. Staff members of units with mortality rates that were lower than predicted perceived their teams as functioning at higher stages of group development. They perceived their team members as less dependent and more trusting than did staff members of units with mortality rates that were higher than predicted.

Staff members of high-performing units also perceived their teams as more structured and organized than did staff members of lower performing units.

Group Size: Less Is More

It is not uncommon to hear members of groups complain that some members of the group are doing more work than others. This perceptual phenomenon can happen in any sized group but studies show that the larger the group, the less energy any individual exerts. In the late 19th century, Maximillian Ringelman performed one of the first experiments with group size by having groups of people play tug of war. He discovered that as the total number of people who pulled the rope increased, the less each individual contributed. Ringelman called this phenomenon "social loafing." In addition, larger groups tend to have a more difficult time coalescing around a single identity and distributing work in an equitable fashion. Studies indicate that cohesion and intimacy decrease as team size increases (Bogart & Lundgren, 1974; Fisher, 1953; Seashore, 1954). Members of larger groups perceive their groups to be more competitive, less cohesive, more argumentative, and less satisfying (Steiner, 1972). Wheelan (2009) found that small groups tended to be more productive than large groups, and small groups reached mature levels of group development more rapidly than large groups. (**Figure 2-4**)

The literature seems to indicate that groups are most productive when they are composed of three to eight members. Theoretically, this

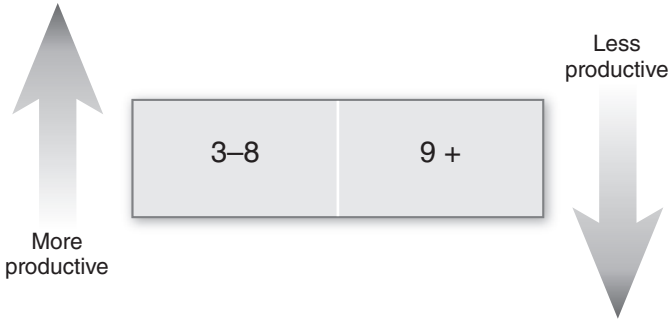

FIGURE 2-4 Correlation of group size and productivity. According to Wheelan, groups of three to eight were more productive and more mature at 6 months than groups with nine or more members.

Data from Wheelan, S.A. (2009). Group size, group development, and productivity. *Small Group Research, 40*(2), 247–262.

CASE STORY: *How Many People are Needed to Make This Decision?*

Our team needs to make decisions regarding who should be enrolled in the program. There are applications that could potentially be denied for various reasons. When I first got here, there were 40 people in the morning meeting where these decisions were made. Everyone read the report at that meeting and, after the coffee kicked in, people were talking amongst themselves, others were listening, and others were on cell phones. People were just getting confused and the decision process was taking around 2 hours. I worked with the marketing people and changed this system. We now have a separate smaller group of eight people in a meeting that includes social work, nursing, a physician, transportation, and four marketing people who give input but don't get a vote. We invite additional guests from other departments such as behavioral medicine as needed.

At first, there was a lot of stress associated with the transition because change is stressful. But after 6 months, the length of time from intake to decision was cut dramatically. The morning meeting can be done in 15 minutes!

—Karen J. Nichols, MD, Chief Medical Officer for VIP Plans at AmeriHealth Caritas

is because the larger the group, the longer and more difficult it is for the group to develop a common identity.

How Long Does It Take for a Group to Develop Through Each Stage?

The most common question team leaders ask us is, "How can I get my team to develop faster?" If teams could develop faster, work productivity would go up, problems would be solved faster, and disagreements would easily be resolved. Research supports that it takes time for groups to mature (Wheelan, Davidson, & Tilin, 2003). Under the right circumstances, groups can reach full maturity in 6 to 8 months. Attempting to rush the process would be like expecting a 5-year-old child to behave like a 25-year-old adult. It would not yield good results and would only serve to frustrate everyone involved.

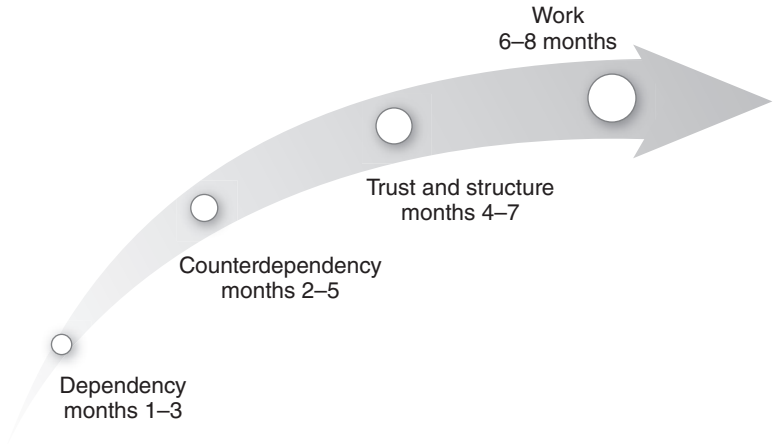

FIGURE 2-5 Time it takes for groups to mature.

Modified from Wheelan, S., Davidson, B., & Tilin, F. (2003). Group development across time: reality or illusion? *Small Group Research, 34*(2), 223–245.

Figure 2-5 is meant to be a guide to the average amount of time researchers have ascribed to the stages of development based on the integrated model of group development. Every group is a bit different, and some may actually get stuck at a certain level of development and take longer to move on to the next stage. Issues such as culture, diversity, group management, organizational dynamics, and complexity of tasks, as well as group commitment and identity impact group dynamics and the way groups develop.

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