

Group Dynamics

Our vision is to 'REACH THE CITY, REACH THE WORLD' with the Gospel of Jesus.

CONNECT to God through trusting in Jesus' death on the cross for your sins, and connect to church.

GROW in your relationship with Jesus and others following him, especially through a Growth Group.

SERVE Jesus and others according to their needs, especially a Ministry Team.

This MINISTRY PAPER is designed to help you think about, and be aware of how groups function.

“Will it ever end?”

I whispered these words to my Growth Group Coach as we ambled into church one Sunday. She was asking me how Growth Group was going.

The last time we had met, I had shared that our lovely new Growth Group seemed to be stuck in conflict, with members jockeying for position. Week after week, we had people “correcting” each other on points of theology, overruling suggestions for social events or being unavailable again and again for no apparent reason. These were followed by sharp intakes of breath and downcast eyes around the room. It's tough to bring it back to warm and intimate from there.

If it was just one person who was looking to have the final word, then you could take that person out to coffee, have a chat and begin to resolve the situation. But it's not. In a Growth Group of ten people, there are five acting like the leader, and that doesn't include me.

Praying, praying, praying.

The Growth Group was only four weeks old. We had started so well with warm farewells from our previous groups, new members from Connect events and a fun welcome Dinner.

“Maybe, I am expecting too much too soon?” I whispered to my Coach as we sat down. She replied “Let's make a time to catch-up. There are things that we can do to help this Growth Group, but it sounds relatively normal to me. Remember the stages of group development?”

This story will resonate with most everyone who has participated in a group setting, whether it be growth groups, social groups, professional groups - dynamics such as these are all too prevalent.

As a people, our point of reference is 'self' and our default predisposition is one of 'what is best for me'. So why do we persist – why not just go it solo? One reason I think is that we recognise we are more productive, more resilient in groups, which is re-enforced in the Bible:

“Two are better than one, because they have a good return for their labour: If either of them falls down, one can help the other up. But pity anyone who falls and has no one to help them up.” - Ecclesiastes 4:9-10

Perhaps a better reason though is that we are designed to relate to one another and intrinsically seek relationships along with the comfort and support they provide;

“It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for him.” - Genesis 2:18

So what has happened, since God installed the very first group into his perfect creation? Kids Church tells us Sin entered the world, and the cost was beyond measure. Fast forward to today and our Sin and idolatry still compete with the Spirit's work within us. But seriously, as Christians, image bearers of God, gathering in his name to grow in the Spirit, to share and to learn what it means to be more Christ-like, shouldn't we know better?

Paul, addresses concerns just like these in his letter to the Philippians, in chapter 2 he calls us to have the 'same love' and 'same mindset' as Jesus, especially Jesus crucified, 'in all our relationships' and suggests we do this as well as we 'value others above yourselves'. Which sounds simple, but just pages later we hear how hard this is in real relationships:

“I plead with Euodia and I plead with Syntyche to be of the same mind in the Lord. Yes, and I ask you, my true companion, help these women since they have contended at my side in the cause of the gospel, along with Clement and the rest of my co-workers, whose names are in the book of life.” - Philippians 4:2-3

Here we learn of two prominent women who contended at Paul's side for the gospel of Jesus, both apparently engaged in some quarrel which is a distraction from the ministry they share. Paul doesn't ignore the situation, nor does he reprimand them, or expel them. He purposefully encourages them to settle their dispute with the aid of a trusted mediator, to re-unite them in their cause to further the gospel message together.

“Whatever happens, conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ. Then, whether I come and see you or only hear about you in my absence, I will know that you stand firm in the one Spirit, striving together as one for the faith of the gospel...” (Philippians 1:27)

Through unity, in the Spirit, for the gospel of Christ, they best serve their ministry. Why would our approach be any different?

Every team goes through five stages of team development. This is based on research done in the 1960s and further refined in the 1970s by Tuckman and Jensen.

The five stages are a feature every team as they help the team to grow to a point where they can function together effectively.

The five stages are:

1. Forming
2. Storming
3. Norming
4. Performing
5. Adjourning

Forming.

- Happens when the group first meets
- Focuses on introductions and sharing information about backgrounds, interests and experience
- People form an impression of each other
- People learn about the group and the objectives and goals
- People think about the role they might play and how the group might work together
- The Growth Group Leader needs to be very clear about goals, direction and each person's role – the Growth Group Leader needs to guide the group.

Storming

- This stage is not avoidable, it is part of group development
- Group members compete with each other around status and acceptance, this often leads to conflict
- With the guidance of the Growth Group Leader, the group learns how to solve problems together and function within and as a Team
- Members settle into their roles and responsibilities
- Members need to learn to listen well and respect each other's differences
- Leaders need to manage those who seek to dominate and facilitate contributions from others
- This stage ends when members develop an acceptance of each other

Norming

- Beginning to work effectively as a Team
- Everyone is focused on the shared group goals
- Respect opinions and value differences
- Great time to agree to the group "rules"
- The group trusts each other and seeks each other out for advice
- No longer competing, moving to helping each other and as a result significant harmony and progress results
- Leader will have less involvement in decision making
- Group will resolve issues and conflict as a group
- Leader helps out if the group gets stuck, moving towards a Coach role

Performing

- Group functioning at a very high level
- The group is focused, members are well known to each other and have become interdependent
- Not every group makes it to this stage
- The group is highly motivated and energized by being together and achieving the group's goals together
- The leader's role transitions to monitor progress of the team, celebrating the wins and building camaraderie.
- It is possible that the group might revert to a previous stage – if someone starts working outside the group, storming will be revisited or if a new member joins the group will return to forming

Adjourning

- The Group has come to a place, perhaps because of size or because of changed circumstances, where it is coming to an end
- The role of the Leader is crucial in this stage
- Successes must be celebrated and lessons learnt recorded for future groups
- Provide opportunity to say good-bye and together share looking forward to their new group
- Acknowledge the sadness of separation and give permission for catching up and seeing each other again

How can you tell if your Growth Group is effective?

- Clear communication among all members
- All members contribute to plans
- Plans and goals are agreed by all members

- Problem solving is done by everyone in the group
- Members are committed to the group (time, energy, resources)
- Members respect and care about each other
- Members understand they have a role to play in the group and they contribute