

# Group Dynamics Assessment Tool

This tool helps coaches and facilitators evaluate and enhance group dynamics.

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Complete each section sequentially to build a comprehensive understanding of your group’s current state and development needs. Begin with the pre-assessment to identify key areas for improvement, then clarify the group’s purpose and objectives. Use Tuckman’s stages to determine the group’s development phase, then document appropriate ground rules or norms. Reference the coach tactics section to anticipate and address common challenges that may arise when working in a group.

This assessment can be repeated periodically to track progress and adjust facilitation strategies as needed.

## Pre-Assessment

Complete the pre-assessment (Schein, 1999) to identify elements to address in enhancing the group's development and function.

Goals	Confused, conflicting	◀ 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 ▶	Clear, shared
Participation	Few dominate, poor listening	◀ 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 ▶	All get in, good listening
Feelings Expression	Ignored, not expressed	◀ 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 ▶	Freely expressed
Diagnosis of Group Problems	Jump directly to solutions	◀ 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 ▶	Seek basic causes before acting, listening
Decision-Making Processes	Self-authorization, minority rule	◀ 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 ▶	Consensus
Leadership	Autocratic, centralized	◀ 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 ▶	Distributed, widely shared
Trust Level	Members do not trust each other	◀ 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 ▶	Members have high trust
Skills and Knowledge	Skill/knowledge gap present	◀ 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 ▶	Members bring appropriate mix
Size of Group	Too large or too small	◀ 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 ▶	Appropriate size to handle task
Membership	Lacking continuity	◀ 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 ▶	Maintains stability through transitions



## Group Purpose and Objectives Analysis

Check your own understanding of the group's purpose and objectives and test your understanding by posing questions to the group.

### Why does this group exist?

(Check one or more):

- Meeting a performance challenge
- Defining a desired future
- Solving a persistent problem
- Building a common culture
- Fostering participation

### Overall Purpose

Your understanding of the group's purpose

Group members' understanding of the group's purpose

### Specific Objectives

**Explicit** (the outcomes the group is organized to achieve)

**Collateral** (underlying outcomes for the group's function, e.g., improving collaboration)



## Group Development Stage Evaluation

### Your Group's Stage of Development

Note the current stage of development (Tuckman, 1965) you observe in the group, considering ways to support the group at its current stage and continue its progress towards the next stage.

### Tuckman's Stages of Group Development

<input type="checkbox"/> Forming	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Little initial agreement</li><li>• Focus on establishing direction</li><li>• Seeking guidance and purpose</li></ul>
<input type="checkbox"/> Storming	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Power struggles and conflicts surface</li><li>• Emotional responses</li><li>• Resistance to group influence</li></ul>
<input type="checkbox"/> Norming	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Open exchange of ideas</li><li>• Agreement and consensus build</li><li>• Roles and responsibilities clarify</li></ul>
<input type="checkbox"/> Performing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Clear vision and purpose</li><li>• Group energy channeled into tasks</li><li>• Structure supports performance</li></ul>
<input type="checkbox"/> Adjourning / Mourning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Task completion</li><li>• Self-evaluation and recognition of accomplishments</li><li>• Sadness or anxiety about disbanding</li></ul>

Adapted from Tuckman (1965).

## Group Ground Rules/Norms Documentation

What are the ground rules or norms of the group?

Ground rules typically cover the areas in the table below.

### Interaction

(how members agree to communicate)

### Procedure

(how the group functions including schedule, agendas, record-keeping)

### Status

(the degree of influence members have, i.e., who makes decisions or whose voices matter more)



## Coach Tactics for Common Challenges

There are some common challenges that coaches working with groups can anticipate. Some of the challenges can characterize a whole group, and some others are related to an individual within the group. As coaches work with groups to help them achieve their explicit and collateral objectives, they should watch for and address these common challenges. The table below highlights some common challenges and tactics coaches can use to address them.

### Common Challenges and Tactics for Coaches

<p>Low Energy</p>	<p>At times the coach may observe the group’s energy or attention dwindling.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ask the group what is going on.</li> <li>• Describe what you are observing and ask why.</li> <li>• Take a short break and do something physical.</li> <li>• Ask the group what they want to do.</li> </ul>
<p>Side Tracking</p>	<p>Groups sometimes lose track of the topic or decision they mean to address.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Refer back to the topic of discussion.</li> <li>• Ask if the side track is important to everyone or if it can be postponed until after the meeting.</li> <li>• Offer to change or reorder the agenda.</li> <li>• Inquire into why the group is off topic.</li> </ul>
<p>Getting Emotional</p>	<p>Some topics or situations may provoke strong collective emotional responses from groups.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Let it go. Watch how the group handles it.</li> <li>• Take a break. Ask people to step back and then come back with some input.</li> <li>• Watch for members who are uncomfortable with the dynamic.</li> <li>• Ask why it is an emotional topic, discussion, or decision.</li> </ul>
<p>Uneven Participation</p>	<p>Groups do not naturally fall into even participation among members. Some contribute more and others may be reticent to speak up.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Create structures and group processes that encourage participation and input from all.               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>□ Have members discuss in pairs or smaller groups.</li> <li>□ Use a whiparound strategy that calls on each person to answer briefly.</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Interpret unusually low or high participation.               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>□ High participation may signal enthusiasm or discontent.</li> <li>□ Low participation may signal boredom, agreement, or avoidance of a sensitive topic.</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Propose a ground rule that members ‘monitor air time.’</li> <li>• Manage dominators (see next page).</li> </ul>



<p><b>Dominators</b></p>	<p>Individual members may take up more than their share of the ‘air time’ talking.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Stop the person, thank them, and say you would like to hear from someone else.</li> <li>• Call attention to the agenda and allocated time.</li> <li>• Move away, and break eye contact. Stop giving the person focused attention.</li> <li>• Summarize what the person said and move on to someone else.</li> <li>• Give the person a time limit.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Personal Agendas</b></p>	<p>Someone repeatedly inserts a concern, disagreement, or alternate idea.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ask if the person’s comments or input are related to the current agenda topic.</li> <li>• Record the point and move on.</li> <li>• Ask what the person wants the group to do with the input.</li> <li>• Give the person a time limit.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Side Bars</b></p>	<p>During group discussions, people may engage in private side bar conversations.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Move closer to the people having the side conversation.</li> <li>• Say, “Let’s have one discussion,” or “Let’s all focus on the same thing.”</li> <li>• Point out the impact that a side conversation has on the rest of the group (i.e., distracting).</li> <li>• Ask them to stop.</li> <li>• Invite them to share what is being said.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Interrupting</b></p>	<p>Even if there is a ground rule against it, some members may be prone to cut others off or jump in too soon.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ask interrupters to write down their thoughts rather than say them out loud.</li> <li>• Be neutral and consistent. Do not allow some people interrupt and not others.</li> <li>• Use a hand (stop signal while keeping your eyes on the person being interrupted) or voice to stop the interrupting person.</li> <li>• Point out a ground rule or norm related to interrupting if the group has one.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Attendance Problems</b></p>	<p>Some members may consistently arrive late, leave early, or miss meetings completely.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Take time to get an attendance commitment from the group.</li> <li>• Don’t stop the meeting when someone arrives late or leaves early.</li> <li>• Speak to the person outside the meeting about the impact of their behavior on the group.</li> </ul>

The information in the table above draws heavily from the work of Holohan (2020).



## References

- Holohan, C. (2020). *The discussion group facilitator's handbook*. Teagasc. Retrieved August 2024 from <https://www.teagasc.ie/media/website/publications/2020/The-Discussion-Group-Facilitators-Handbook.pdf>
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- Tuckman, B. W. (1965). *Developmental sequence in small groups*. *Psychological Bulletin*, 63(6), 384–399. <https://doi.org/10.1037/h0022100>