

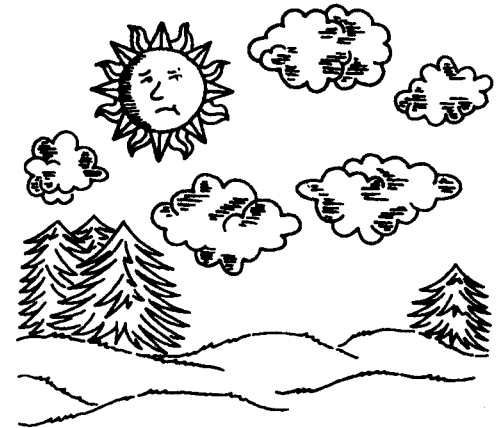
### Stage 1: Forming or Nominal Community

**Description:** An orientation period when members are anxious about what their team will be like and preoccupied by the question of how and if they fit into the team.

**Key tasks:** The whole team addresses the issues of goals, expectations, membership, and tasks to be done.

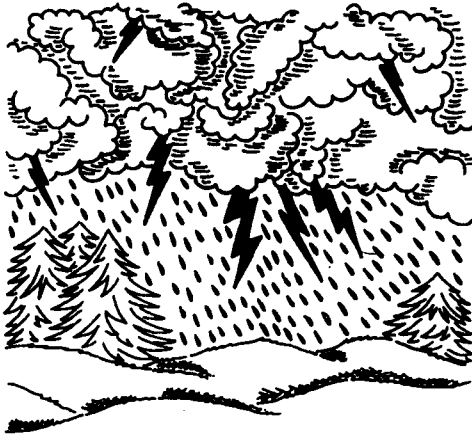
**Characteristic group behavior:** This stage is characterized by conflict avoidance. The group emphasizes similarities and ignores or glosses over differences and disagreements. Nominal teams—groups that are teams in name only—tend to look for easy answers, quick fixes, and external solutions. They discuss issues in a general way, but people tend not to share their individual experiences or the impact events have on them. Denial is common.

**Example:** A new math initiative is about to be launched and a K-12 team of teachers and parents is convened to oversee a pilot study of the new program. At the first meeting, team members are confused about their task—both its scope and purpose. They do not know each other, but are polite and engaging. Some may be wondering why they were selected for the team. Team members are anxious to get started, but may not know what to do first. Not everyone has the same level of familiarity or comfort with the new program.



*In the forming stage, members are anxious about what their team will be like and preoccupied by how they will fit in.*

Some people find the forming stage exciting; others just find it frustrating. Roles are changing; people are learning new skills; there is a rapid learning curve. The people who have the easiest time during this stage are those who have faith in a collaborative philosophy and are personally committed to helping their team succeed. These people look for small successes, even at this early stage; share their excitement about the little victories; and praise the efforts of colleagues. They don't dwell on failures (which are inevitable), and they don't find reasons for why this collaborative effort will never work.



*In the storming stage, members experience significant conflict concerning leadership, power, and control.*

## Stage 2: Storming or Chaos

**Description:** A period of frustration and disagreement among the members. There is usually significant conflict around the issues of leadership, power, control, and influence. Members wrestle with the question of how much influence they will exert on the team as well as who they will allow to influence them. There may be a power struggle between dominant members or different functions.

**Key tasks:** The team must resolve the issue of how leadership will be distributed. Roles and authorities need to be clarified. The mission of the team needs to be kept at the forefront of all discussions.

**Characteristic group behavior:** Conflicts are no longer kept below the surface. Long-standing differences erupt into the open, often resulting in intense polarization and fragmentation. Instead of dealing directly with problems, people form cliques or factions; they take sides. Gossip, backstabbing, and scapegoating may occur. Some people try to flee back into the false safety of nominal community (where politeness substitutes for reality); others leave the conflict and retreat into isolation. In this stage, people are intent on defending their own positions or turf. They tend to listen to the opposition only long enough to derive ammunition for the next round of debate. Neither side listens to nor appreciates the viewpoint of the other.

**Example:** A high school team has formed to explore the potential of moving to a block schedule. Representatives were nominated by their peers and then selected by the principal. The team has successfully organized its strategy for study and has surveyed staff, students, and parents to get their input and ideas. They are now faced with the task of interpreting the data and formulating recommendations. It becomes obvious that, with each potential scenario, at least one program will suffer—enrollment, schedule, number of prep periods, etc. It's also abundantly clear that most teachers will have to change both what and how they teach. Arguments break out; accusations are made and factions begin to form. Some even go back to their departments to rally the troops in preparation for war.

Chaos in some form or other is an essential phase in building community and teamwork. The problem is not the presence of chaos, but rather getting stuck in it. People flounder in the chaos, and their

attempts to get out include cutting off debate or discussion. ("Let's just get on with it!" or "Let's just take a vote and be done.") Any *mutual trust* or sense of safety that had started to develop is likely to degenerate into *mistrust*, aggravated by name-calling and personal attacks. There is little you can do except assure people that this stage is normal and that sometimes the only way out is through.

### Stage 3: Norming or Emptying

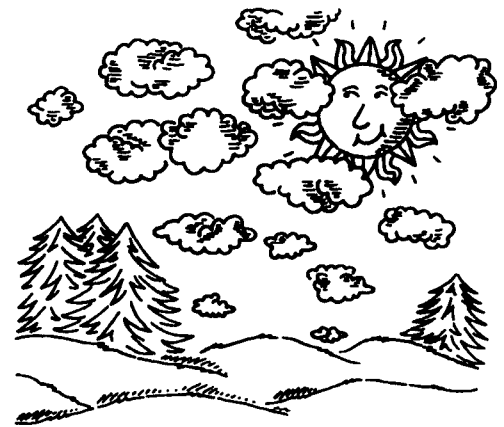
**Description:** A period when the team resolves many conflicts, negotiates disagreements, establishes norms of behavior that contribute to team productivity, and develops functional relationships among its members.

**Key tasks:** Team members openly identify and address their individual issues, agreeing to let go of or empty their personal agendas for the sake of the team's agenda. Review, renewal, or establishment of new ground rules is a key task at this stage.

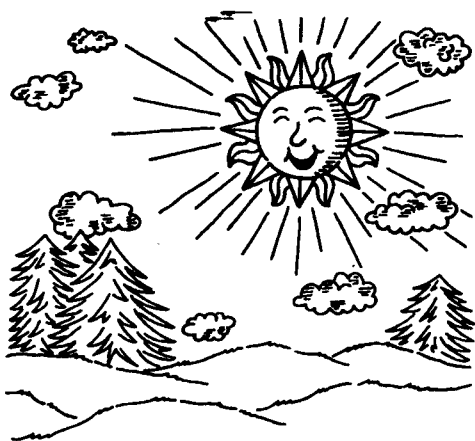
**Characteristic group behavior:** People remove their own barriers to communication. They let go of defensive stances (the need to be right, to prevail, or to hold their position); they begin looking for what is best for the system as the whole. They let go of abstractions and speak more personally; they become more willing to share their own experience.

**Example:** A team of school district administrators, staff and community members has been working on a plan for getting a building referendum developed and publicized. Some dominant members of the team have been taking up huge amounts of time in debates that support their personal agendas (chaos/storming). Finally, after heated arguments about budgets, building locations and boundaries, the team facilitator reminds the group of their common purpose: to get an educationally sound and economically responsible referendum out to the citizens in a timely way. The group then reviews and revises its ground rules and puts new ones in place. They clarify the issues and agree on a decision-making process.

During norming, the team finds a way to channel its chaotic energy into more productive means of communication and problem solving. Emptying, or norming, involves the decision to be a genuine part of the team and a willingness to let go of old patterns, unfinished business, past hurts and resentments, and the need to control the outcome.



*In the norming stage, the team resolves many conflicts, negotiates disagreements, establishes norms that contribute to productivity, and develops functional relationships.*



In the performing stage, the team can focus on performance and results; all attention is directed toward achievement.

#### Stage 4: Performing or Fully Functioning Community

**Description:** The stage where the team can focus on performance and results. Members are realistic in their expectations; the team has resolved even the major conflicts and continued to clarify its behavioral norms. All attention is directed toward *achievement*: productivity and continued team development are now the primary issues.

**Key tasks:** The team reviews progress on its goals, adjusts strategies and timelines accordingly, and works together to accomplish all aspects of its task.

**Characteristic group behavior:** Competitiveness gives way to a spirit of cooperation. Individuals respect and honor diversity. Conflicts that arise are addressed *immediately* (not allowed to fester) and resolved according to common ground rules and guidelines.

**Example:** A team of middle school teachers has been working diligently throughout the year to create a career exploration experience for their eighth graders. After months of planning, surveying, and contacting local businesses, everything begins to fall into place. The team “sings” with productivity. Team members divide up the tasks and complete assignments quickly. Most decisions seem like no-brainers; when disagreements arise, the team knows how to work through them quickly. The team’s enthusiasm is permeating the rest of the school. There’s already talk about doing this again next year and the improvements that can be made to the process.

A burst of creative energy often appears quite spontaneously as group members discover their sense of community. Barriers that once seemed insurmountable are now manageable. The group becomes clear on both issues and priorities.

Teams become very efficient. They develop a bias for action. They replace self-defeating behaviors with creative and even brilliant solutions. Leadership is spontaneous and comes from anyone on the team, regardless of role or position. Fresh approaches now appear possible and desirable. The team generates great self-confidence through its successes. A bond can develop in such teams, which makes them seem invincible.

### Stage 5: Transforming

**Description:** A period of significant change that may happen in some groups. Types of changes that may occur include losing or adding members, redefining a team's primary mission, or a total break-up of the team. Any of these changes have a major impact on the team and will force members to address their fundamental expectations, goals, norms, and ground rules.

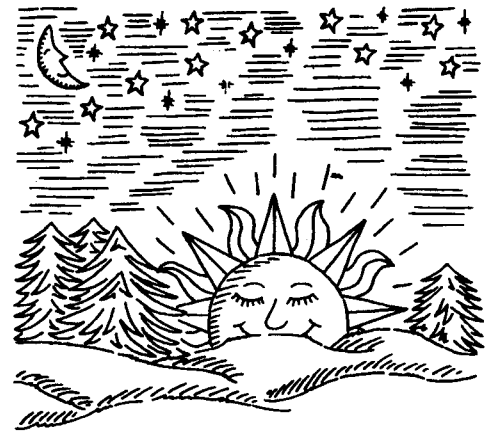
**Key tasks:** In the case of new membership, the team must revisit its mission, goals, ground rules, and assignments. If the team has accomplished its mission, the transformation is one of closure. Here the team addresses final details, evaluates its process, and celebrates its results.

**Characteristic group behavior:** In many cases, teams will regress to one of the previous stages and then work their way back to achievement.

**Example:** Under the direction of a new superintendent, the district is beginning its transition into a site-based decision-making model. Until now, school-based leadership teams consisted of staff members only and the mission of those teams was to oversee planning activities for special events (assemblies, chorus concerts, homecoming, science fairs, etc.). In this new model, the school teams will have the authority to make significant decisions and will manage 80% of the school's budget. Fifty percent of the members of the site teams are required to be parents. In this scenario, both the membership and the fundamental purpose of site-based leadership teams are transforming.

### Going Through the Stages

All teams generally go through all stages. The speed at which they do this will vary depending on their size, the complexity of the tasks, the personalities of the members, and the circumstances of the situation. They can develop faster if they are given the appropriate training, time to deal with issues, and support as they move through the stages.



*In the transforming stage, teams often regress to a previous stage and then work their way back to achievement; if the team has accomplished its mission, it evaluates the process, celebrates its results, and achieves closure.*