

Power Dynamics

Power is central to all group dynamics and is necessary for success; the question is whether it is well used or abused. Many leaders do not feel powerful, yet members will give all their comments a special status. The implicit power of the role means that it can be difficult to participate in the group as an equal. It may help to see yourself as a facilitator rather than a leader or participant.



When leadership is accepted by all and well handled a group flourishes, but problems arise when the leadership is challenged. That may be because someone else in the group also has a role. Having a clergy person, or an expert in your group requires careful handling.

A different form of power struggle occurs when there are "challenging" people in the group. People who talk too much or not at all. People who will not listen or disrespect views other than their own. People who undermine the group, are always negative or contest everything.

Every group has them, and there is no shame in seeking help from your ministers. However, begin by remembering that everyone is made in the image of God with gifts as well as weaknesses. Gifts are often the flipside of what is challenging. Seek to identify their gifts and find ways to use those gifts positively. The person will feel affirmed and the group gain. Find out why a person is negative and what they do care about. Try getting a person who talks too much to lead a session and think of others. Even

Deliberate listening exercises can help people to hear other views. In *Dwelling in the Word*, people have to report their partner's views not their own. Ask people to summarise the view of the person who has just spoken. Have a non-verbal activity or use a constrained activity with one-word answers.

You are the leader and can rightly recall people to the ground rules.

Group Dynamics



Small Group Leaders

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Understanding Small Groups

Small groups have their own life cycle. Tuckman's Theory can help us understand all small groups from home groups to PCCs.

Forming



When the group first comes together, everyone may be very polite or a bit edgy. Individuals do not know how much to trust the group and may hang back. Others may feel the need to prove themselves. Disagreement is seldom voiced unless someone feels threatened in which case it is defensive and destructive.

Leaders need to establish boundaries, build trust and help people to gently open up. It can help to affirm all contributions. Together set ground rules and clearly agree the purpose of the group. Avoid major challenges. Being slightly vulnerable might encourage openness.

Storming



Soon people are feeling less threatened but are still not secure. So, they may be defensive and not listen to alternative views. They may take sides, and form factions. In the church, storming may go on "underground", but leading this group is hard work.

Leaders need to encourage acceptance and sidestep provocative issues with material that all can appreciate. It can help to continue to affirm and welcome all viewpoints, gently bringing disagreement into the open. If people seek to hijack the group, then return to the ground rules. Hold gentle but firm control of the group.

Norming



As people become more secure, they relax and express their own viewpoints less defensively. People start to listen to others who are no longer considered threatening. The group begins to make progress.

Leaders need to encourage openness and true listening. It can help to let go of a little control and ask more probing questions. Let people speak direct to each other and encourage quieter members to join in.

Performing



This is the high point when the group freely give their views, respect each other's good points and accept the differences and weaknesses. If the group has a task (e.g. a PCC or planning committee) then it flourishes and is fruitful.

Leaders need to allow the group to grow and use everyone's talents. It can help to share leadership. Provide more demanding material, introduce new ideas and let the group develop its own direction.

Mourning



If a performing group does not change, then eventually it stagnates. Discussions can become predictable. Challenging conversations are avoided, or the same debates may be endlessly rerun. Tasks are no longer completed so creatively. People may unconsciously begin to mourn the "good old days". Loyal people may feel bound to attend, though they would rather not, or attendance may be erratic.

Leaders need to try introducing some changes so the group re-forms. However, there comes a time to let the group end so that new things can be resurrected. Vital tasks for the leader now are helping people find new places of growth and facilitating a constructive ending.

Re-forming

To get a new lease of life groups need to re-form from time to time. Taking a break, adding new people, changing the patterns or type of group, doing something different send the group back to the forming stage to start again. As with all theories, the reality is often messier than this and stages get mixed up.

