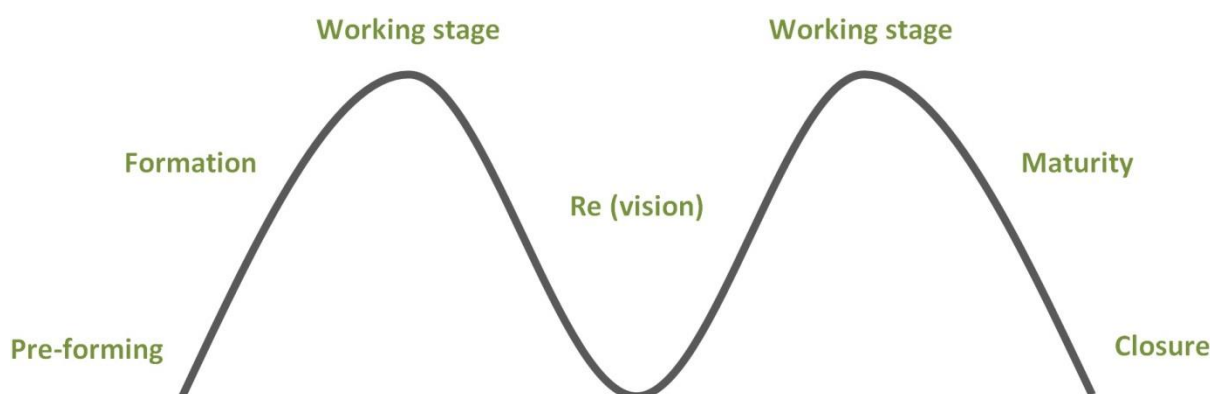


Life cycle of groups

Groups are constantly developing and changing...

However, they do follow some clear developmental patterns. As the figure below indicates, a group moves and changes over time



Stage	Tasks for the Group
Pre-forming	This refers to the pre-formation stage of the group and includes issues of resistance to working in the group, seeing the relevance of the purpose of the group, and the setting of the group. This is particularly relevant to the formation of new groups such as when a new residence is opened.
Formation	In this stage group members are often energetic in a more diffuse manner. Members seek similarities in background, personal values and attitudes in expectations of the group. Tentative relationships begin to emerge giving rise to structure of group. High level of anxiety in group members as they test out issues of safety, trust and boundaries
Working stage	This is really the first working stage in the group. Interpersonal ties increase which are visible in greater cohesiveness. Sub-groups may start to emerge as a result in the move to commonality. Increasing clarity develops around the purpose of the group at this stage.
Re (vision)	At this stage the group will start to develop behaviours that are generally called 'storming'. Conflict begins to emerge in the group as differences in values become more evident. Challenges to the leadership are common. The honeymoon is over. Norms and values need to be reworked and modified. Further clarification of the purpose and commitment to the group's aims is required

Working stage	This group goes through a series of working stages when things are functioning well. This phase cannot work well unless the issues at the revision stage are resolved. This is a more focused stage of working in the group. Group roles become clearer and more defined resulting in a high level of cohesion, identification and stability of the group structure. Group members take on greater responsibility for monitoring and challenging anti-group behaviour.
Maturity	This refers to the mature stage in the life of the group with clarity in the roles and responsibilities of the group. Group members own the group and see it as their group and are protective of purpose as well as members. A group feeling has emerged.
Closure	Closure occurs when: The goals of the group have been attained and there is no reason for the ongoing existence of the group. Groups are established for a defined purpose and this is now completed.
Overall comment	Groups often find themselves in the working stage, revision, working stage loop. It is useful to see this process as normal and to recognize that all groups will move through this stage regularly. The challenge is always to take re(vision) seriously, resolve issues and move back into a productive part of the cycle.

Adapted from Sarri, R. & Galinki, M. in Heap, K (1977) Group Theory for Social Workers: An Introduction. Pergamon Press: Oxford

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