

## DEVELOPMENTAL SEQUENCE IN SMALL GROUPS<sup>1</sup>

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50 articles dealing with stages of group development over time are separated by group setting, as follows: therapy-group studies, T-group studies, and natural- and laboratory-group studies. The stages identified in these articles are separated into those descriptive of social or interpersonal group activities and those descriptive of group-task activities. Usually, 4 general stages of development are proposed, and the review consists of fitting the stages identified in the literature to those proposed. In the social realm, these stages in the developmental sequence are testing-dependence, conflict, cohesion, and functional roles. In the task realm, they are orientation, emotionality, relevant opinion exchange, and the emergence of solutions. There is a good fit between observed stages and the proposed model. Further study of temporal change as a dependent variable via the manipulation of specific independent variables is suggested.

The purpose of this article is to review the literature dealing with the developmental sequence in small groups, to evaluate this literature as a body, to extrapolate general concepts about group development, and to suggest fruitful areas for further research.

While small-group processes have been given great attention in recent years by behavioral scientists, the question of change in process over time has been relatively neglected. Perhaps the major reason for this is the overwhelming tendency of the small-group researcher to run groups for short periods of time and thus avoid the "problems" created by temporal change. Laboratory studies of developmental phenomena are quite rare. The majority of articles dealing with sequential group development come from the group-therapy setting and human relations training-group setting, neither of which features strict experimental control nor manipulation of independent variables. Moreover, the only major theoretical statements of group development which have appeared are those of Bales (1953), Schutz (1958), and Bach (1954).

In an attempt to bring the facts and the issues into sharper focus, existing research in

the area of small-group development will be cited, and a framework within which this phenomenon can be better understood and further investigated will be presented. This framework will also serve to integrate the variety of studies cited in a meaningful way.

### CLASSIFICATION MODEL

The classification approach adopted for distinguishing between and within developmental studies is a threefold one. The delineations are based on (a) the setting in which the group is found, (b) the realm into which the group behavior falls at any point in time, that is, task or interpersonal, and (c) the position of the group in a hypothetical developmental sequence (referred to as the stage of development). It is this last delineation that allows not only for the separation and ordering of observations within each setting, but for the development of additional hypotheses as well.

#### *Setting*

Classification according to setting allows for the clustering of studies based on their similarity of features, for example, group size, group problem area, group composition, duration of "group life," etc. More similarity between observations made in the same setting than in different settings is expected.

In the *group-therapy setting* the task is to help individuals better deal with their personal problems. The goal is individual adjust-

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**Adam Cooper**



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