



ORGANIZATIONAL GROWTH, INC

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STAGES IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF TEAMWORK AND COMMUNITY

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PSEUDO-COMMUNITY - During this stage, team members do not say what they really think and feel about problematic issues in order to avoid conflict and/or the perception by others that they are difficult. Niceness reigns as differences among team members are ignored. People who bring up issues that could be divisive are viewed as troublemakers who need to be silenced. When groups remain stuck in this stage, interpersonal understanding and team building are sacrificed in order for the “fragile peace” to be maintained.

CHAOS - As team members begin to voice what is on their minds, conflict emerges and the placid, but shallow veneer of pseudo-community is shattered. Interpersonal conflict among team members increases as opinions, feelings, overgeneralizations, theories, misconceptions, etc. tumble out. A “point-counterpoint” mentality predominates as team members cling defensively to rigidly held positions. Little or no listening or dialogue occurs because no one is interested in constructive problem solving or mutual understanding. Some people propose simplistic solutions to complicated issues that call on others rather than themselves to make changes. Others attempt to reduce the prevailing chaos by vying for the leadership role or by attacking the group leader or leaders as inadequate.

The destructiveness of the “chaos” stage eventually takes a toll on team members, leaving them feeling bogged down, discouraged, hurt, confused, etc. Issues and problems are viewed as overwhelming or unsolvable. If team members do not move beyond this stage, they often become embittered and avoid taking the risk of speaking their minds in the future.

EMPTINESS - In order to protect themselves from the fallout of the “chaos stage”, many team members retreat within themselves and begin to search for a way out of the quagmire. During their subsequent process of self-examination, team members begin to let go of the assumptions, attitudes etc. which block their capacity for self-insight and effective problem solving. They develop a more complex view of issues that allows them to let go of “either-or” thinking. They also replace the need to “be right” with the ability to experience uncertainty and the openness which comes with “not knowing”. The noise of the “chaos” is replaced with greater peace as group members experience greater humility and a genuine desire to develop mutual understanding.

TEAMWORK/COMMUNITY - Teamwork and community begin to develop as more and more team members take the risk of asking open ended questions of each other, listening with sensitivity and discussing their ideas, fears, hopes, etc. in a constructive manner. Team members take responsibility for past mistakes and for what they need to do to promote teamwork and community. Intimacy begins to develop as they appreciate how they are both different from and similar to each other. The vacuum created within people and the group during the “emptiness” stage is replaced with new and more complex perspectives concerning relevant issues. “Yes-and” thinking replaces “either-or” thinking as group members become expansive rather than defensive.

When a group has achieved teamwork, it is able to effectively confront and resolve complex problems and achieve group goals. The issues that which arose during the “chaos” stage can now be addressed again in an atmosphere characterized by mutual trust and respect rather than fear, anger, etc. Previously unknown solutions often magically emerge as group members let go of rigidly held viewpoints and join together the best parts of themselves to develop solutions which incorporate the diverse needs of group members. Each team member is able to commit to doing her/his part in to achieve the solutions and/or goals developed by the group.

Many groups that have achieved teamwork slip back to a previous stage when team members are confronted by a difficult problem or are less vigilant about maintaining the high level of communication required for the maintenance of teamwork. However, now that they know how teamwork can be achieved, it is easier for them to get it back. Members of highly functional teams and organizations have become so proficient at team building that they instinctively do the “work” required to reach teamwork whenever it is lost.

