Regardless of size or type, small groups typically go through four predictable stages over time. Experts such as Kent Curtis, M. A. C. Jensen, R. B. Lacoursiere, George Manning, Steve McMillen, and B. W. Tuckman have named these stages:

**Forming → storming → norming → performing**

These stages involve both *interpersonal relationships* and *accomplishment of the task* at hand.

It is best for groups to move through the first three stages as quickly as possible in order to develop high performance teams. If you, as facilitator, understand the stages of small-group development, you likely will be better able to facilitate groups moving more quickly toward the fourth, high-performing stage.

**Stage I, Forming.** When groups first come together and form, they need to deal with the issue of trust. New groups are unclear on their purpose and members don't know what to expect. They are facing a new social situation, with some discomfort and apprehension. Consequently, they will be cautious. They'll be trying to figure out what is going to happen, who's who in the group, where they fit in, and how they will be treated by other group members. They'll also be trying to figure out what is OK behavior, what is the nature of their group's tasks, and how they will deal with each other to accomplish the tasks. Interactions likely will be light and superficial and mostly directed toward you, the formal leader. At this stage, groups will not have developed any skill and knowledge as teams. When you first form your base groups you can expect them to be cautious, excited, anxious, and to perform at a low level. You also can expect individual members to be anxious, searching for structure, silent, and cautious with you and group members.
In the forming stage, the facilitator can reduce uncertainty by:
   (1) explaining the purpose of the groups and their goals,
   (2) providing time for questions,
   (3) allowing time for members to get to know each other, and
   (4) modeling expected behaviors.

Stage II, Storming. Once the groups have formed, they usually move into a period of storming, when they need to deal with the issue of conflict. In this stage, individual members will react to what has to be done, question your authority, and feel increasingly comfortable being themselves. The groups likely will exhibit conflict and resistance to the task and structure, even as they increase their productivity through increased skills and knowledge. Members may express their concerns and frustrations more openly, and feel freer to exchange ideas. At this stage, they are learning to deal with differences in order to work together to meet their goals. Typically, members will exhibit power struggles for influence. Groups that don't get through the storming stage successfully will exhibit divisiveness and low creativity. After your base groups have formed you can expect them to exhibit conflict over the task and the structure. On some occasions you may have individual members who: confront you; polarize among the team members; test group tolerance; and behave in a fight or flight manner.

In the storming stage, the facilitator can reduce conflict by:
   (1) hearing all points of view;
   (2) acknowledging conflict as an opportunity for improvement;
   (3) adhering to core values, such as truth, trust, and respect;
   (4) maintaining democratic and humanistic ideals.

Stage III, Norming. This is the stage in which explicit or implicit norms of behavior are developed that are considered essential for the groups to accomplish their task. Order forms, as does group cohesiveness. Members begin to identify with their groups and develop acceptable ways to complete assignments, resolve differences, make decisions, and solve problems. They enjoy meetings and exchange information among themselves freely. Group (or team) productivity increases as skills and knowledge continue to develop. After your base groups have successfully stormed, you can expect them to reach
agreement on roles and tasks, and norms of behavior, including team member and leadership behavior; and to increase their cohesiveness, morale, and productivity. You also can expect individual members to shift from power struggles to affiliation; from confusion to clarity; from personal advantage to group success; and from detachment to involvement.

**In the norming stage, you can encourage norm development** by:

1. modeling listening skills,
2. fostering an atmosphere of trust,
3. teaching and facilitating consensus, and
4. providing team-centered learning.

**Stage IV, Performing.** The fourth stage, the payoff stage, is performing. If your base groups have successfully moved through issues of membership, purpose, structure, and roles, they will now be able to focus their energies on group performance: completing tasks and solving problems together. They will take initiative and achieve results. As they achieve progress, morale will go up and they will have positive feelings about each other and their accomplishments as a team. Base groups will now be teams that business and industry call "self-directed work teams." They will no longer be dependent upon you for direction and support; instead, members can take on leadership roles as necessary. You can expect your performing base groups to exhibit good communication and teamwork, individual commitment, high morale and group pride, and high team performance. You can also expect base groups to use a wide range of task and process behaviors: monitor and take pride in group accomplishments; focus on goals as well as interpersonal needs; and maintain the values and norms of the group. Individual members will exhibit interpersonal trust and mutual respect, actively resolve conflict, actively participate, and be personally committed to the success of the group.