TOOL 5

Forming/Storming/Norming/Performing (and perhaps Adjourning)

This useful theory is likely to be familiar to group facilitators. It was developed by psychologist Bruce Tuckman in 1965. Further information can be found at: www.mindtools.com/pages/article/newLDR_86.htm.

The theory maintains that groups or teams go through a staged process as follows:

1. Forming: usually fairly calm, with members positive and polite; there may be anxieties but these are likely to be hidden; people may hold back on expressing views and feelings, especially if they might be seen as contentious. Discussions may focus simply on how the team/collaboration will work (which can feel frustrating to those who are more task-oriented). This stage is unlikely to last very long.

2. Storming: as roles are clarified, there may be some jockeying for position; not everyone may be happy with the direction that the collaboration is taking or the way that roles and responsibilities are shared; members may feel unsure about what is expected of them and unclear about what others are contributing. Without established relationships and protocols for working together it can feel pretty rocky at times! It’s at this stage that members can start to question the value of their continuing involvement in the collaboration.

3. Norming: as roles are established, the collaboration will start to move into this stage (although there’s often an overlap between this and the storming stage and it’s possible to revert to the storming stage at any time, especially when there are changes in focus and/or tasks). This is a more constructive stage with team members starting to work towards common goals and to support each other in doing so.

4. Performing: this is where real progress is being made towards common goals, supported by agreed structures and processes. The collaboration is strong enough to withstand changes, for example members leaving or joining.

5. Adjourning: recognising that all projects exist for a fixed period and once they’ve achieved their goals (or if they’re unable to do so) partners will benefit from formally concluding (or ‘adjourning’).

Understanding this process can be helpful to you in understanding why there appears to be conflict (at the storming stage) – and that it’s almost certainly not because of anything you’ve said or done. It may also explain an apparent lack of progress in the early stages of partnership formation. For the same reasons, it might be helpful to explain this to the collaboration, and to recognise that this is normal group dynamics taking place.

“... You are dealing with people going through change, and anger might surface. ...”

Ian Curtis, CVS Mid and North Bedfordshire