Getting from storming to performing

Team Development Resource Guide

When groups of people begin to work in teams, they go through a fairly predictable series of stages in their growth and progress. This process can be seen in all sorts of groups: both inside and outside the workplace.

As the team matures and member relationships grow, members gradually learn to cope with the emotional and group pressures they face. Understanding this process can help work groups learn to work together to achieve significantly more than they could as individuals.

STAGES OF TEAM DEVELOPMENT

Teams typically move through four stages of group dynamics: forming ➔ storming ➔ norming ➔ high performing. Project teams have a fifth stage of development: adjournment. Each stage has its characteristics as described in the next section. Teams grow in effectiveness as members spend time together and learn to overcome differences and build on each other’s strengths.

Growth is enhanced as traditional workplace structures (bureaucratic hierarchy) are replaced with a collaborative, team-based approach to accomplishing results. As traditional work groups move through the stages towards high performing teams, supervision, competition, and individual performance give way to shared leadership, collaboration, and team performance.

Over time teams move back and forth through the stages of development as situations and the environment change. A team in the norming stage may find itself in the storming stage when it discovers it cannot accomplish a key goal. Likewise, a high performing team will likely find itself spending time in the forming stage when a new member joins the team. In addition, the speed and progress of the team through the stages will depend on their experience and teambuilding abilities.

It is not unusual for teams to become “stuck” in one of the stages: usually forming or storming. As a facilitator, understanding the characteristics and helping the group work through specific group problems can often help them move on to the next stage. For example, working on trust issues is key to move beyond the forming stage. A Team Charter including accepted norms and groundrules may be an effective tool for moving a group out of the storming stage.

A characteristic of a high performing team is its ability to recognize and quickly respond to situations when progress is slowed or the team has moved to another stage of growth. Upon accepting new members, for example, a high performing team knows how to adopt its norms and values to accept the perspec-
tive and input of the new member. The team also realizes trust needs to be earned and it takes an investment of time.

TUCKMAN’S MODEL OF GROUP DEVELOPMENT

Tuckman (1965) summarized the results of over fifty studies into the following four-stage model:

Stage I, Form  Characterized by testing and dependence
Stage II, Storm  Characterized by intrateam conflict
Stage III, Norm  Characterized by the development of team cohesion
Stage IV, Perform  Characterized by functional role relatedness

STAGE I  FORM

During Stage I, team members discover what behaviors are acceptable to the group. For newly established groups, this stage is the transition from individual to member status. For teams with new leadership, mission, or members, this stage is a period of testing behavior and dependence on formal or informal group leadership for guidance in a newly unstructured environment.

Characteristics of this stage include:
• Attempts to identify tasks in terms of relevant parameters and to decide how the group will accomplish the task
• Decisions on the type of information needed and how it will be used
• Hesitant participation
• Tests of behavioral expectations and ways to handle behavioral problems
• Feelings of initial attachment to the team

Stage II  STORM

During Stage II, team members become hostile or overzealous as a way to express their individuality and resist group formation. Members recognize the extent of the task demands and respond emotionally to the perceived requirements for self-change and self-denial.

Characteristics of this stage include:
• Infighting, defensiveness, and competition
• Establishment of unachievable goals
• Disunity, increased tension, and jealousy
• Resistance to the task demands because they are perceived to interfere with personal needs;
• Polarization of group members
• Sharp fluctuations of relationships and reversals of feelings
• Concern over excessive work
• Establishment of pecking orders
• Minimal work accomplishment

STAGE III  NORM

During Stage III, members accept the team, team norms, their own roles, and idiosyncrasies of fellow members. Emotional conflict is reduced by patching up previously conflicting relationships.

Characteristics of this stage include:
• An attempt to achieve maximum harmony by avoiding conflict

A high level of intimacy characterized by confiding in each other, sharing personal problems, and discussing team dynamics

A new ability to express emotions constructively

A sense of team cohesiveness with a common spirit and goals

The establishment and maintenance of team boundaries

Moderate work accomplishment

STAGE IV **PERFORM**

Now that the team has established its interpersonal norms, it becomes an entity capable of diagnosing and solving problems and making decisions. Stage IV is not always reached by management teams.

*Characteristics of this stage include:*

- Members experience insight into personal and interpersonal processes
- Constructive self-change is undertaken
- A great deal of work is accomplished

**THE ROLLER COASTER **PATH OF PROGRESS**

The path of team development is rarely as smooth as it might appear from the discussion above. Every team experiences a roller coaster of emotions and energy as members try new and different ways to work with each other. One day is full of enthusiasm and optimism about progress, and the next is frustration and anger when things did not work out as expected. Don’t despair!

Every group of people goes through periods of good times and bad as they learn to work with each other and as progress swings from forwards to stalled, then to backwards, the forward again.

Momentum is never smooth. Prepare yourself and your team for the range of emotions: *excited ➔ satisfied ➔ optimistic ➔ bored ➔ impatient ➔ discouraged ➔ frustrated ➔ breakthrough ➔ elation ➔ and on and on!* These swings are only partly linked to the stages of team development, and usually the shifts are unpredictable.

The best way to deal with this cycle is to understand and accept it as a part of the development of the team. Various strategies will help teams move through the stages, as suggested in the next pages. Changes in people’s attitude—like the stages of team growth—are normal. The team and team leader must cultivate patience for the process to occur. At the same time, they need to take a proactive approach to managing the stages and cycles they encounter. Each circumstance offers team members a chance to learn and experience when and how to deal with the challenges of working together as a team.