Tuckman's Group Development Model

Wikipedia

Forming

In the first stages of team building, the forming of the team takes place. The individual's behavior is driven by a desire to be accepted by the others, and avoid controversy or conflict. Serious issues and feelings are avoided, and people focus on being busy with routines, such as team organization, who does what, when to meet, etc. But individuals are also gathering information and impressions - about each other, and about the scope of the task and how to approach it. This is a comfortable stage to be in, but the avoidance of conflict and threat means that not much actually gets done.

The team meets and learns about the opportunities and challenges, and then agrees on goals and begins to tackle the tasks. Team members tend to behave quite independently. They may be motivated but are usually relatively uninformed of the issues and objectives of the team. Team members are usually on their best behavior but very focused on themselves. Mature team members begin to model appropriate behavior even at this early phase. Sharing the knowledge of the concept of "Teams - Forming, Storming, Norming, Performing" is extremely helpful to the team.

Supervisors of the team tend to need to be directive during this phase.

The forming stage of any team is important because, in this stage, the members of the team get to know one another, exchange some personal information, and make new friends. This is also a good opportunity to see how each member of the team works as an individual and how they respond to pressure.

Storming

Every group will next enter the storming stage in which different ideas compete for consideration. The team addresses issues such as what problems they are really supposed to solve, how they will function independently and together and what leadership model they will accept. Team members open up to each other and confront each other's ideas and perspectives. In some cases storming can be resolved quickly. In others, the team never leaves this stage. The maturity of some team members usually determines whether the team will ever move out of this stage. Some team members will focus on minutiae to evade real issues.

The storming stage is necessary to the growth of the team. It can be contentious, unpleasant and even painful to members of the team who are averse to conflict. Tolerance of each team member and their differences should be emphasized. Without tolerance and patience the team will fail. This phase can become destructive to the team and will lower motivation if allowed to get out of control. Some teams will never develop past this stage.

Supervisors of the team during this phase may be more accessible, but tend to remain directive in their guidance of decision-making and professional behavior. The team members will therefore resolve their differences and members will be able to participate with one
another more comfortably. The ideal is that they will not feel that they are being judged, and will therefore share their opinions and views.

**Norming**

The team manages to have one goal and come to a mutual plan for the team at this stage. Some may have to give up their own ideas and agree with others in order to make the team function. In this stage, all team members take the responsibility and have the ambition to work for the success of the team's goals.

**Performing**

It is possible for some teams to reach the *performing* stage. These high-performing teams are able to function as a unit as they find ways to get the job done smoothly and effectively without inappropriate conflict or the need for external supervision. By this time, they are motivated and knowledgeable. The team members are now competent, autonomous and able to handle the decision-making process without supervision. Dissent is expected and allowed as long as it is channeled through means acceptable to the team.

Supervisors of the team during this phase are almost always participative. The team will make most of the necessary decisions. Even the most high-performing teams will revert to earlier stages in certain circumstances. Many long-standing teams go through these cycles many times as they react to changing circumstances. For example, a change in leadership may cause the team to revert to *storming* as the new people challenge the existing norms and dynamics of the team.

**Further developments**

**Adjourning and transforming**

In 1977, Tuckman, jointly with Mary Ann Jensen, added a fifth stage to the 4 stages: *adjourning*, that involves completing the task and breaking up the team.

**Norming and re-norming**

Timothy Biggs suggested that an additional stage be added of Norming after Forming and renaming the traditional Norming stage Re-Norming. This addition is designed to reflect that there is a period after Forming where the performance of a team gradually improves and the interference of a leader content with that level of performance will prevent a team progressing through the Storming stage to true performance. This puts the emphasis back on the team and leader as the Storming stage must be actively engaged in to succeed – too many 'diplomats' or 'peacemakers' especially in a leadership role may prevent the team from reaching their full potential.

Rickards and Moger propose a similar extension to the Tuckman model when a group breaks out of its norms through a process of creative problem-solving.
Contribution to White-Fairhurst TPR Model

Alasdair A. K. White together with his colleague, John Fairhurst, examined Tuckman's development sequence when developing the White-Fairhurst TPR Model. They simplify the sequence and group the Forming-Storming-Norming stages together as the Transforming phase, which they equate with the initial performance level. This is then followed by a Performing phase that leads to a new performance level which they call the Reforming phase. Their work was developed further by White in his essay "From Comfort Zone to Performance Management"[4] in which he demonstrates the linkage between Tuckman's work with that of Colin Carnall's "coping cycle" and the Comfort Zone Theory.

References

1. The Five Stages of Project Team Development, Gina Abudi - Retrieved May 18th 2010

Further reading


The team development life cycle: a new look


Understanding how teams function and what makes teams more effective can be meaningful in the classroom and in the workplace. Much has been studied and written about the traditional model of team development since Dr. Bruce Tuckman's 1965 study of small groups, which identified the traditional five phases experienced by project work teams: forming, storming, norming, performing, and adjourning. These phases help us to understand and interpret the changes and developmental stages that occur within teams, and they facilitate analyses of team behavior and aid in developing what are the necessary traits or behavior patterns for a team to become high-performing. The phases I introduce in this article
go beyond Tuckman's traditional phases and will, I hope, help in understanding a team's "complete" developmental life cycle.

The Traditional Tuckman Model

Tuckman's traditional model is very useful for understanding a team's basic functional stages, but his model needs to be expanded for greater understanding of team development, especially during a team's dysfunctional phases. Many people think this model is very useful, but other research has shown it is not applicable to all teams or situations. This article will identify some new characteristics or phases of team development that complement the classic five phases developed by Tuckman.

To save or transform a project team, it is necessary to understand and review the dysfunctional phases or negative forces that a team encounters so that appropriate corrective actions can be taken to aid a team in becoming high-performing. It is also meaningful to understand other characteristics that can enhance teamwork and team performance. Dr. Pamela Knight, a Defense Acquisition University professor, has conducted a similar study based on Tuckman's model. This research can be found at <www.dau/pubs/misc/Duration_Technical_Team_Dynamics.asp>.

Significant data were gathered from over 300 teams. Knight's results highlighted that Tuckman's model is useful for general understanding of the team development, but teams do not all follow Tuckman's development or growth throughout their life.

To begin understanding how teams become dysfunctional, it is relevant to create an extension to Tuckman's model. The figure below highlights the classical functional stages as introduced and explained by Tuckman and further discussed in "Leading Project Teams" by Dr. Owen Gadeken in Defense AT&L's predecessor publication Program Manager (July-August 2002). The additional team development phases described in this paper and shown in the figure are informing, conforming, transforming, and deforming. It should be stressed that these team form phases are based on work I conducted during dissertation research at Alliant International University and personal experiences working with teams as a Defense Acquisition University professor, especially in DAU's six-week Program Management Office Course (PMT 352B), which uses a team environment throughout the curriculum to solve problems and facilitate key learning and retention of acquisition and program management