

Moving Teams to High Performance

Extensive research has shown that all teams go through discernable stages of development. The most commonly used framework for team development was created by Bruce Tuckman. His descriptions of the stages provide a useful framework for looking at teams, providing a common language and way to understand the causes for changes in team behaviors. It can also be a relevant model for looking at the phases that companies go through when changing and developing toward becoming a high performing organization.

In our dynamic and growing business today, the one thing we can count on is that change is a constant. One of the greatest challenges a leader has is helping his/her team members stay engaged and effectively perform amidst many changes, such as new organizational structure, changing leadership and/or membership, shifting goals and priorities, etc.

What you'll find in this guide:

- An overview of the 4 stages of team development – what you'll see and can anticipate
- Priority leadership tasks to effectively move teams through the stages
- Helping teams through endings
- What leaders of new teams can do to give them the best possible start (find more detailed information in **Team Kickoff Process Guide**)

The Stages of Team Development

In this model, there are four stages—each with its own recognizable and predictable feelings and behaviors. While the different stages are not so definite as to be thought of as steps, they are distinct, and all teams go through them. The stages are most useful as a basis for team conversation, rather than boxing a team into a “diagnosis.”

This process is not static. Any time there is an ending or a significant change in membership, structure, or operational functioning, the team will return to the Forming stage. For example, losing or gaining a member, merging teams, changing leaders, or an imposed change of assignment or goals.

Also, if it seems like your team might be skipping a stage, take a closer look to be sure you haven't missed something – teams almost never bypass any of the stages.

Forming

- Excited to be part of the team; eager for work ahead
- Some anxiety and uncertainty – What's expected of me? How will I fit in? How will my performance measure up to others?
- Politeness prevails; people may be reticent to ask questions and share ideas
- Commitment and motivation are high, and productivity is moderate, since people are still learning the goals, roles, and what's expected

Performing

- Focused on team vs. individual results
- Understanding and using team members' strengths and valuing differences
- Showing high confidence
- Sense of true collaboration and shared team leadership
- Commitment, morale and productivity are all high

Norming

- Starting to resolve discrepancies between individual expectations and reality of team experience.
- Turbulence subsides and sense of calm prevails
- Increased understanding of accountabilities and expectations
- Developing self-esteem, trust, and confidence in team
- Increasing sense of comfort in expressing “real” ideas and feelings
- Commitment and productivity “on the upswing”

Storming

- Discover team may not live up to early excitement & expectations
- Feeling frustrated, confused, or angry with team's progress or process
- Negative reactions to leader and other members; possible power struggles
- Conflicts and disagreements about goals, roles, responsibilities are either openly expressed or “behind the scenes”
- Commitment, morale, and productivity take a downturn

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