TUCKMAN TWEAKED
A revised model of group development

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If you've ever taken a class or read a book on team development, you're probably familiar with Tuckman's stages of group development: forming, storming, norming, and performing (Smith 2005). According to this model, successful teams move through stages of group development on their way to becoming high performance teams. Within each stage lies both interpersonal and task challenges that the team, guided by the team leader, must effectively manage before moving on to the next stage.

The new and improved model
Although we've found this model useful, we've taken the liberty of reworking Tuckman's stages in order to enhance its applicability to groups, teams, and their leaders. The new model, described below, differs primarily in the third stage, where we've divided norming into two separate stages: good norming and bad norming. We're calling this new version, *Tuckman Tweaked: A Revised Model of Group Development*, or Tuckman Tweaked for short.

Tuckman Tweaked

Forming
Relationship Quality
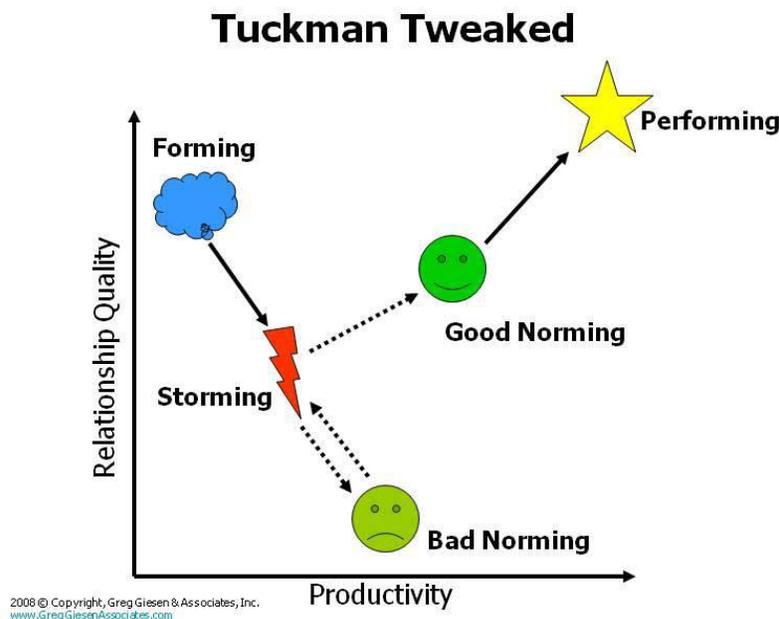Storming
Good Norming
Bad Norming
Performing
Productivity

Figure 1

The Forming Stage

The forming stage is the first phase of team development. As the name implies, much of what goes on at this early stage has to do with forming the team, both in terms of relationship building and in task development and implementation. All teams experience the forming stage in one manner or another. Typically, a new team in the early stages of development would fall into this category.

As you can see in Figure 1, the forming stage often includes an initial level of excitement and anticipation among team members. This accounts for the artificially high positioning of the forming stage on the *Relationship* side of the scale. However, don't be fooled; you are not getting a true glimpse of people's personalities or group dynamics yet. It is very common for team members in the forming stage to be on best behavior with one another. In fact, you won't see much disagreement at all, let alone much testing of individuals or the team leader. This is because in the forming stage team members are still assessing the team and their role within the team.

It is also possible for an experienced team in any of the advanced stages to revert back to forming, particularly when the team dynamics are altered within that team. Changes in team membership or roles within the team require a team to reform itself within the new group dynamics.

What teams need in the Forming Stage
Team members in the forming stage need to know:
- There is a plan and they have a role within that plan
- Specific performance expectations
- How they fit in within the group
- Rules of group membership
- A competent team leader is leading the group

In other words, they need to know that the ship they have just set sail on has a direction, a purpose, a place for them, and a skilled captain at the helm to lead them.

When teammates are able to get comfortable with one another over a period of time and have clarity on their roles, responsibilities, and tasks, they naturally will gravitate towards the next stage, storming.

What could prevent a team from moving beyond Forming
Not all teams are destined to move beyond the forming stage. Here are some of the reasons why:
- High turnover
- No effort given to building relationships
- Infrequent meetings

- Virtual team with little to no interaction
- Micro-managing team leader fosters a dependency on him/herself
- Team members primarily work independently of each other
- Immature teams
- No direction or leadership

The Storming Stage

As negative as the word "storming" might sound, it is a very natural phase of group development and one that should be encouraged. As Figure 1 indicates, once the novelty and newness of being on a team diminishes, so too, can the excitement around the relationships (and sometimes even around the work itself). This is because the more comfortable team members get with one another, the more their natural personalities and behaviors emerge, often revealing dramatic differences in everything from work ethic, to personality quirks, to opinions, and even to affiliations within the group. As a result, these differences between members become more prevalent, causing greater friction, strife, and conflict.

What teams need in the Storming Stage
Team members in the storming stage need to know:
- The team leader is not afraid of conflict
- There is a process to address and resolve differences
- There is no tolerance for dysfunctional and destructive behavior
- The team leader and the team are committed to create an environment that fosters teamwork and open communication
- Education, training, and teambuilding will be provided to help team members develop the skill sets to work and play together effectively
- Everybody on the team is held to the same standards of excellence

The significance of the Storming Stage
A team's ability or inability to effectively address and resolve disagreement and conflict will determine whether they move into the good norming or bad norming stage. In many ways, the storming stage tests the resolve of the team and the team leader to become a high performance team. Those teams able to effectively manage conflict move through storming to good norming and eventually on to performing. Conversely, those teams that don't effectively manage conflict move into the bad norming stage where team development stalls, leading to dysfunction and decay.

What could prevent a team from moving beyond Storming
- A conflict-averse team leader
- Hot-button issues that have gone unaddressed for long periods of time

• Team members not invested in becoming a high performance team
• Lack of open communication
• Team prefers superficial to authentic relationships
• Team lacks the ability and skill set to talk through conflict
• Team has no real incentive to resolve issues
• Team is completely dependent on the leader

The *Bad* Norming Stage

Teams that are unable to address or work through critical issues, conflict, or relationship dynamics, move into bad norming. In bad norming, interpersonal relationships become strained, dysfunctional norms evolve, subgroups and self-protective behaviors emerge, and the team leader's ability to lead continues to decline. In truth, it is the team leader who is primarily responsible for the team even being in the bad norming stage and it is not unusual to see a widening gap develop between the team leader and his/her team in this stage.

Example behaviors of a team stuck in the Bad Norming Stage
• Team member talks *about* another team member instead of *to* that team member
• Team leader refuses to handle a problem within the team and tells the complaining team member to mind his/her own business
• Team is made up of two or three cliques who refuse to cooperate with one-another except on a very minimal level
• Team members are so apprehensive about bringing up an issue that they'd rather avoid it or sweep it under the rug

What teams need in the Bad Norming Stage
Team members in the bad norming stage need to know:
• The problems within their team are either being addressed or will be addressed
• The team leader is accountable for his/her share of the situation
• The organization is aware of the problem and committed to resolving it
• The status quo is viewed as unacceptable by team members
• Team and team leader are willing to do whatever it takes to turn the situation around

When teams enter the bad norming stage, one of two things usually happens: 1) The team stays stuck in that stage and eventually have to be replaced, dissolved or at least dismantled in part; or 2) They fix whatever needs to be fixed by going back to storming and then hopefully on to good norming. As Figure 1 shows, a team in bad norming

cannot simply move to good norming without first going back through the storming stage. This means that the team needs to be prepared
to address, correct, and resolve the very issues that caused them to move into bad norming in the first place. Sometimes this calls for outside intervention and can include a potential dismissal of a team member or team leader as part of the solution.

What could prevent a team from moving out of Bad Norming
- Continued fear of conflict
- Team members unwilling to go back to the storming stage to revisit unresolved issues
- Teams who have gotten used to the dysfunction
- Distrust in the team leader's ability to lead
- Team's dysfunction has become too entrenched
- Team truly needs to have a member terminated but whose organization refuses to pull the trigger
- Team that is still able to meet their productivity goals, in spite of themselves
- Team leader denies any problem exists
- Organization refuses to intervene

The *Good* Norming Stage

A team can get to good norming by way of storming; more specifically, by effectively addressing issues and working through conflicts, and emerge as a more synergistic team as a result of their success. Once in good norming, the team quickly gains its balance and enters this tranquil phase as everything begins to settle into place. Team members find standard ways to do routine things, they drop the power plays and grandstanding, and everyone makes a conscious effort to work together. The newly formed norms are constructive in nature and foster teamwork and open communication.

What teams need in the Good Norming Stage
Team members in the good norming stage need to know:
- Team members are willing to build on their successes from the storming stage
- Team members will continue to raise issues and address disagreement and conflict
- The team leader's level of trust and confidence in the team grows, giving way to a coaching and empowering leadership style
- Team members are able to take on greater roles and responsibilities within the team
- There is a continued commitment to team building and efforts to enhance relationships
- New and exciting challenges await the team as they move forward

• The team and team leader are committed to move on to the performing stage

What could prevent a team from moving beyond Good Norming
- Comfort level with the present team atmosphere and an unwillingness to "rock the boat" by bringing up new concerns or problems
- Team leader eases up on continuous improvement efforts
- Team members not invested in becoming a high performance team
- Individual efforts and accomplishments gradually take on greater importance than team efforts and accomplishments

The Performing Stage

In this fourth phase, the team goes about its business with smooth self-confidence. By now, team members have learned to disagree constructively, take measured risks, make adjustments, trade-offs, and apply their full energy to a variety of challenges. Each team member also takes on greater responsibility within the team, making it more and more difficult to know who the actual team leader is anymore. But what really distinguishes a team in the performing stage is the overriding commitment level that each member has to both the team results and to each other.

It's important to note that reaching the performing phase doesn't mean smooth sailing forevermore. A team can experience a stormy period at any time – when it's under unusual pressure, for example, or when things aren't going as well as expected. The team can even temporarily return to the forming stage if it adds or loses members. But what distinguishes a team in the performing stage from other teams is that they have the experience and the first-hand knowledge of what it takes to move through each stage in order to get back into performing. And what's more, they are able to apply those lessons to any challenge or setback they may face.

What teams need in the Performing Stage
Team members in the performing stage need to know:
- Team leader is willing to delegate and further empower team members
- There is a team and organizational commitment for ongoing professional and personal development
- Team members are willing to take on greater responsibility within the team
- New and exciting challenges will continue to come their way

What could prevent a team from staying in the Performing Stage
- A significant change in membership, i.e., an influential member or the team leader leaves
- An unresolved conflict emerges that divides the team
- Team structure gives way to a more traditional work group format

- New team leader takes over and does not gel with the team
- Team feels neglected or abused by the organization

The Ending Stage

Tuckman later added a fifth phase, *adjourning*, that involves completing the task and breaking up the team. We prefer to use the term *ending* since adjourning infers that the team has decided to call it quits. In reality, a team can experience an ending at any time, and not necessarily by their own choosing.

What teams need in the Ending Stage
Team members in the ending stage need to know:
- Reason(s) the ending has occurred
- What happens next
- There is an opportunity to celebrate and/or put closure on the team
- Lessons learned are explored
- The team's contributions were appreciated by the organization

What could prevent a team from having an effective Ending Stage
- The team experiences an abrupt ending with no closure
- Lack of communication between the team leader and the team about what happens next
- Failure to assess the team's performance and lessons learned
- Lack of appreciation

Some final thoughts

The purpose of the Tuckman Tweaked model is to provide an additional framework for analysis and discussion on group development. We want to emphasize that this is a fluid model; meaning that teams can move back and forth through the various stages. It is also a dynamic model where a team as a whole could be in one stage while a subset within the team could be at an entirely different stage. This is why team members may not always agree as to which stage their team is currently residing.

Smith, M. K. (2005) 'Bruce W. Tuckman – forming, storming, norming and performing in groups, *the encyclopedia of informal education*, www.infed.org/thinkers/tuckman.htm. Last updated: November 16, 2006.

QUESTIONS

1. What stage of development is your current team (or work group) in? What are you basing this on?

2. Does your team have the potential to be a high performing team? If so, what might be getting in the way?

3. What do you need *more of* or *less of* from the team leader at this point in time?

4. What do you need *more of* or *less of* from your team members at this point in time?