Tuckman's Stages of Team Development

In 1965, the American psychologist Bruce Tuckman described how small groups develop over time. He named four stages: forming, storming, norming and performing. In 1977, together with Mary Ann Jensen, he added a fifth stage called adjourning. The model shows that conflict and confusion are normal steps on the way to good teamwork. Leaders who know the stages can give each team the support it needs at the right time.

1. Forming

In the forming stage, people come together and get to know one another. They are polite and positive, but often unsure about the goal, their roles and the rules. Most people depend on the leader for direction. The leader's job is to make the purpose clear, set roles and help people connect.

Example: A new five-a-side football team is forming: the players are polite, and nobody knows who plays where. The captain sets the positions and the training time, and the first game runs in an organised way.

At work: Moataz forms a new team of six people from sales, finance and technology to launch a customer portal. In the forming stage, he explains the goal, sets clear roles and holds a short session to get to know one another, so everyone knows where they fit.

2. Storming

In the storming stage, differences come to the surface. People challenge ideas, roles and even the leader, and conflicts appear. This stage is uncomfortable, but it is a normal and common part of team development. Working through conflict openly usually helps the team. The leader's job is to listen, to keep the conflict about the work, and to help the team agree on ways of working.

Example: A family planning a holiday enters storming: one person wants the beach, and another wants the mountains. They listen to each other, agree on a budget and a way to decide, and the argument ends with a plan.

At work: In the storming stage, the sales and technology members of Moataz's team argue about the portal's features. Moataz brings the conflict into the open, asks each side for its reasons and helps them agree on one simple rule: customer needs come first.

3. Norming

In the norming stage, the team settles down. People accept their roles, agree on shared rules and start to trust one another. They give feedback more easily and take responsibility together. The leader steps back a little and supports the team as it takes more control.

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Example: A group of flatmates reaches norming: after a few weeks, they agree on a cleaning plan and a quiet time at night. The arguments stop, and the flat runs smoothly.

At work: Moataz's team reaches norming: they agree on a short weekly meeting and a clear way to make decisions. Moataz steps back, and team members start solving small problems without him.

4. Performing

In the performing stage, the team works smoothly towards its goal. Members know their roles, trust one another and solve problems on their own. Disagreements still happen, but they are handled quickly and openly. The leader delegates and focuses on development and on the bigger picture.

Example: A kitchen team in a busy restaurant is performing: on a full Saturday night, each person knows exactly what to do. Orders go out on time with very few instructions.

At work: Moataz's team is performing: when a technical problem appears a week before the launch, the team solves it within a day. Moataz delegates the launch plan and spends his time with senior clients.

5. Adjourning

In the adjourning stage, the task ends and the team breaks up. Tuckman and Jensen added this stage in 1977. People may feel proud of their success but also sad to lose the group. Practitioners later added that a new member or goal can send a team back to an earlier stage. The leader's job is to celebrate the results, capture the lessons and help people move on.

Example: A school drama group reaches adjourning after the final show: the members share photos, thank one another and talk about what they learned. Everyone leaves with good memories.

At work: Moataz's team reaches adjourning after the portal goes live. He holds a lessons-learned meeting, thanks each member in front of the managers and helps two of them join new projects.

Conclusion

In summary, Tuckman's model describes five stages of team development: forming, storming, norming, performing and adjourning. Leaders can adapt their support as the team moves on. Conflict in the storming stage is not a sign of failure but a normal step. Practitioners also note that teams can slip back when things change. Knowing where a team stands helps the leader give the right support at the right time.

Sources

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