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Forming, Storming, Norming, and Performing

Your 10-Minute Guide to Developing an Effective Team



Help your team work more
effectively together.

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It takes time for people in a new team to learn how to work together effectively. Find out what you can do to help your team members perform as a group.

Teams often go through recognizable stages as they change from being collections of strangers to becoming united groups with common goals.

The [Forming, Storming, Norming, and Performing](#) model describes these stages. By understanding it, you can help your team become productive more quickly.

In this 10-Minute-Guide, we'll look at how you can use this model to build a highly productive team.

How the Model Works

Psychologist Bruce Tuckman first came up with the memorable phrase, "forming, storming, norming, and performing" in 1965. He used it to describe the path that most teams follow on their way to high performance.

Later, he added a fifth stage, "adjourning" (which is also sometimes known as "mourning").

Let's look at each stage in more detail.

This guide outlines a simple framework that managers can use to help new teams become effective quickly.

Please feel free to share it inside your organization.



Forming

In this stage, most team members are positive and polite. Some are anxious, as they haven't fully understood what work the team will do. Others are simply excited about the task ahead.

As leader, you play a dominant role at this stage because team members' roles and responsibilities aren't clear.

This stage can last for some time, as people start to work together, and make an effort to get to know their new colleagues.

Storming

Next, the team moves into the storming phase, when members start to push against boundaries established in the forming stage. This is the stage where many teams fail.

Storming often starts when team members' work styles conflict. People may work in different ways for all sorts of reasons, but if they don't work in the same way as their colleagues, or if differing working styles cause unforeseen problems, people may become frustrated.

Storming can also happen in other situations. For example, team members may challenge your authority, or jockey for position as their roles are clarified. Or, if you haven't defined clearly how the team will work, team members may feel overwhelmed by their workload, or they could be uncomfortable with the approach that you're using. Some may question the worth of the team's goal, and they may resist taking on tasks.

Team members who stick with the task may experience stress as they try to focus on the job in hand, particularly as they don't have the support of established processes or relationships with their colleagues.

Norming

Gradually, the team moves into the norming stage, when people start to resolve their differences, appreciate colleagues' strengths, and respect your authority as a leader.

Now that the team members know each other better, they may socialize together, and they are able to ask each other for help and provide constructive feedback. People develop a stronger commitment to the team goal, and you start to see good progress towards it.

There is often a prolonged overlap between storming and norming, because, as new tasks come up, the team may lapse back into storming stage behavior.

Performing

The team reaches the performing stage when hard work leads, without friction, to the achievement of the team's goal. This is supported by the structures and processes that you have set up.

As leader, you can delegate much of your work, and you can concentrate on developing team members. It feels easy to be part of the team at this stage, and people who join or leave the team won't disrupt performance.

Adjourning

Many teams will reach this stage eventually. For example, project teams exist only for a fixed period, and even permanent teams may be disbanded through organizational restructuring.

Team members who like routine, or who have developed close working relationships with other team members, may find this stage difficult, particularly if their future now looks uncertain.

Using the Tool

As a team leader, your aim is to help your team reach and sustain high performance as quickly as possible. To do this, you will need to change your approach at each stage.

Follow the steps below to ensure that you're doing the right thing at the right time.

1. Identify which stage of team development your team is at from the descriptions above.
2. Then, consider what you need to do to move towards the performing stage. The table on the next page will help you understand your role, and how you can move the team forward.
3. Schedule regular reviews of where your team is, and adjust your behavior and leadership approach appropriately.

Stage	Activity
Forming	Direct the team, and establish objectives clearly. (A good way to do this is to create a team charter .)
Storming	<p>Establish processes and structures, and build good relationships between team members.</p> <p>Resolve conflicts swiftly if they occur. Provide support, especially to those team members who are less secure. Remain positive and firm in the face of challenges to your leadership or the team's goal.</p> <p>Explain the “forming, storming, norming and performing” idea, so that people understand why problems are occurring, and see that things will get better in the future. Coach team members in assertiveness and conflict resolution skills where this is necessary.</p> <p>Use psychometric indicators such as Myers-Briggs and the Margerison-McCann Team Management Profile to help people learn about different work styles and strengths.</p>
Norming	Step back and help team members take responsibility for progress towards the goal. (This is a good time to arrange a team building event.)
Performing	Delegate tasks and projects as far as you can. Once the team is achieving well, you should aim to have as light a touch as possible. You will now be able to start focusing on other goals and areas of work.
Adjourning	Take the time to celebrate the team's achievements – you may work with some of your people again, and this will be much easier if people view past experiences positively.

Key Points

Team formation usually follows easily recognizable stages known as “forming, storming, norming, and performing.” Psychologist Bruce Tuckman, who created this memorable phrase, later added a fifth stage, “adjourning” or “mourning.”

You can use Tuckman's model to help your team reach the performing stage as quickly as possible.

First you identify the stage of development that your team is at. Then, you use the specific strategies shown to move your team through to the next stage in the team formation process.

With focus and hard work you'll quickly have a high-performing team.

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