Stages of Team Development

There has been a great deal of study on teams and group dynamics, and the one theory most widely accepted is Bruce Tuckman’s process for team development. He first introduced this process in 1965 in his article Developmental sequence in small groups. Although teams do not necessarily go through these stages together or at the same time, all are present in the development and growth of a team.

Forming

This is the first stage of development. This stage is not unlike how you felt when you learned you were coming to this workshop: some of you would have been a bit excited, some would have been anxious. Others would have been concerned that they wouldn’t have the same level of experience and understanding as everyone else while others feared this would be a waste of time. Team members may have no clear idea of what to expect or what they will accomplish. The team leader will be influential and perhaps make many of the decisions. Your leadership style here is usually that of “Directing.”

Storming

This stage is referred to as team adolescence. As members of the group work together, they become more comfortable voicing their own opinion and they may not agree with either the team leader or the other members. There is often disagreement and conflict, with little cliques forming and alternate goals being suggested. Members of the team notice how different other members are and a pecking order may be established. In this stage of team development you will usually find “Coaching” style most useful.

Norming

This stage is often referred to as young adulthood for a team. Eventually, if you continue to encourage, support and communicate with your team they will work out their differences and begin to see that they are quite a bit alike after all. Now they begin to enjoy being together and they start having more fun—so much fun that occasionally they may forget about the work they are to get done. You will find that the “Supporting” style serves you well when a group is in this stage of development.

Performing

These are mature adult behaviors. Now the team is beginning to mature. They have skills, know their own strengths and limitations, and have a good deal of problem solving abilities. By now they have figured out—perhaps with your help—who does what to make the team effective and they work well together. The challenge for you now is to keep them from becoming bored. You will use your skills as a “delegating” style leader.

Adjourning

In 1977 Tuckman added a fifth stage called Adjourning. This phase involved completing the task, celebrating the success and breaking up the team. In groups that will perpetuate, the adjourning phase may actually be a new assignment or project that the team takes on. Keep in mind that group dynamics are never static. A new project may bring new team members or new responsibilities for the existing team. If that is the case, the team may regress to one of the earlier phases. Do not become complacent and expect that once your team has reached the Performing stage that they will remain there.
Key Factors in Team Building

Successful team performance can be summed up in two words: skills and motivation. While the development of teams may take more or less time depending on different situations, there are some key elements that must be present for team development to occur. In a study by Dr. Meredith Belbin, a highly recognized professor of Team Building, found that there are key elements that must be present for team development to occur, including:

1) Commitment, 2) Trust, 3) Purpose, 4) Communication, 5) Involvement, 6) Process, and 7) Leadership.

The faster these are adopted by the team, the quicker the group will move to a cohesive team unit.

Team Player Styles

Contributor
The contributor is a task-oriented team member who enjoys providing the team with good technical information and data. They push the team to set high performance standards, and use your resources wisely.

Collaborator
The collaborator is a goal-directed member who sees the vision, mission, or goal of the team as paramount. They are flexible, open to new ideas, willing to work outside their defined role and are able to share the limelight.

Communicator
The communicator is a process oriented member who is an effective listener. They are a facilitator of involvement, conflict resolution, consensus-building, feedback, and the building of an informal, relaxed climate.

Challenger
The challenger is the team member who questions the goals, methods and even the ethics of the team. They are willing to disagree with the leader or higher authority and encourage the team to take well conceived risks.

Team Motivation

While there is not one “silver bullet” for creating highly motivated teams and individuals, there are a few core elements that can lay the foundation for developing highly effective and productive teams. These truths can assist you in coaching your team to greater success. Three truths of motivation include:

Everyone’s motivation is different – Just as people are different, so is their motivation. While motivational theory suggests that we all have some basic motivations at our core, motivation is still very personal. While money is an excellent motivator for some, in many scientific surveys money is rarely the top motivator. Fear will motivate very effectively, but the motivation is short lived. Also, it will not create respect between managers and team members.

Individuals must be self-motivated to achieve perpetual success – People actually need to motivate themselves. While managers and coaches can influence other people’s motivational levels, ultimately, a person needs to motivate themselves to reach their peak performance.

Motivation can change for each individual over time – While a certain motivation may apply to you on one day, the motivation may be completely different the next. Do not assume that if someone’s motivation is money today that it will still be money as a motivator tomorrow.