

Stages in Team Development

A team or crew that is assembled to work together is also a social system that deals with common development issues in somewhat predictable stages. In his work on group dynamics, Bruce Tuckman observed five stages that social groups typically proceed through:

Forming

Members give and form first impressions, get acquainted, and size up one another's capabilities and potential influences in the group.

Storming

Members offer their individual ideas and opinions and debate with one another. There may be a struggle over group goals and individual roles and status.

Norming

Members have settled into a functioning unit, have established norms for working together, and exhibit a degree of cohesiveness.

Performing

Members are set in their roles, know each other well, and operate smoothly as a unit producing results.

Transforming

Completion of a task or season, or the departure of a member, forces a change in dynamics. Members acknowledge group accomplishments and either disband or renew around a new task or with new membership.

This progression tends to go more smoothly if all the necessary abilities are present in the group, if each individual feels capable of performing his or her own piece of work, if all members identify with the group and feel responsibility for its overall goals, and if all are willing to pitch in to assist others when needed.

Suggestions for the Supervisor

The following ideas are offered to guide supervisors who want to accelerate team development and facilitate its operation:

- Explain the group purpose in a whole team meeting and ask if there is a need to adjust it.
- If any members are unfamiliar with any of the others, ask every member to get acquainted with and introduce one person to everyone else.
- Encourage every member to gradually learn about all of the jobs.
- Personally issue a standing offer to pitch in when needed to remove impediments and to balance the work flow.
- Recognize, report to all, and reward progress or accomplishments at the group level, at least as much as individual performance.
- Ask questions about areas of interdependence between people in the group.

Conversely, the following practices prevent development and erode teamwork and individual motivation, so they are to be avoided:

- Talk at your employees instead of with them.
- Discuss concerns in abstraction rather than with specific details.
- Tell your employees about their attitude rather than their behavior.
- Assume that because your employees are closest to the problems, they must be able to come up with all the solutions.
- Don't follow up on requests that employees make.
- Pay no attention to accomplishments of the team as a whole.

“I’m just a plowhand from Arkansas, but I have learned how to hold a team together. How to lift some men up, how to calm down others, until finally they’ve got one heartbeat together as a team. There are just three things I’d ever say as a leader:

‘If anything goes bad, I did it.’

‘If anything goes semi-good, then we did it.’

‘If anything goes real good, then they did it.’

“That’s all it takes to get people to win football games for you.”

—*Coach Bear Bryant*



