

Four Stages of Team Development

When a group of people is first brought together they start to coalesce and meld into a unified team. This process usually involves four stages. The stages include: forming, storming, norming, and performing. This is often a long process that requires dedication and a willingness to continue through all four stages, which may be difficult.

Stage 1: Forming

The Forming stage of team development is an exploration period. Team members are often cautious and guarded in their interactions not really knowing what to expect from other team members. They explore the boundaries of acceptable behavior. Behaviors expressed in this early stage are generally noncommittal.

Some questions raised during this stage of development are:

- Do I want to be part of this team?
- Will I be accepted as a member?

Stage 2: Storming

The Storming stage of development is characterized by competition and strained relationships among team members. There are various degrees of conflict that teams experience but basically the Storming stage deals with issues of power, leadership, and decision making. Conflict cannot be avoided during this stage. It is the most crucial stage for the team to work through.

Some questions raised during this stage of development are:

- How will I seek my autonomy?
- How much control will I have over others?
- Who do I support?
- Who supports me?

- How much influence do I have?

Stage 3: Norming

The Norming stage of team development is characterized by cohesiveness among team members. After working through the storming stage, team members discover that they in fact do have common interests with each other. They learn to appreciate their differences. They work better together. They problem solve together.

Some questions raised during this stage of development are:

- What kind of relationships can we develop?
- Will we be successful as a team?
- How do we measure up to other teams?
- What is my relationship to the rest of the team?

Stage 4: Performing

The Performing stage of team development is the result of working through the first three stages. This may take several months to achieve. By this time, team members have learned how to work together as a fully functioning unified team.

- They can define tasks.
- They can work out their relationships successfully.
- They can manage their conflicts.
- They can work together to accomplish their mission.
- They deliver results at astounding speeds.
- They are innovative and creative with problem solving.
- They are aware of strengths and weaknesses, and appreciate them.
- They work towards overcoming the team's weaknesses.
- They have fierce loyalty for the team.

Anytime team membership changes, the team reverts back to the Forming stage and goes through the development stages again.

	Forming	Storming	Norming	Performing
Team Leader's Style	More directive approach, outlining how the process will develop and laying down a clear structure.	Leader needs to be supportive, actively listening to team members, and managing the conflict, generating ideas, and explaining decisions.	Leader acts as a team member, as leadership is starting to be shared. Leader helps to develop consensus.	Leader takes overview, but within the day to day running, the group is sharing leadership between members.
Reaction to Leadership	Team members take a tentative, wait and see approach. Leader will be allowed to lead, but that doesn't guarantee support.	Leader is under pressure from more vociferous team members.	General support for the leadership within the team. Mutual respect underpins this.	Personal relationships have developed which underpin the leadership relationship.
Team Process	Process is driven by the leader. Some people are reluctant to contribute openly.	Process likely to break down until conflict is resolved.	The core process should operate smoothly, although there is a danger of focusing on smaller process issues rather than core team work.	Process functions well, and is adjusted as necessary. Leadership is shared and tasks delegated.
Trust within the team	Individuals are not clear about their contribution. "Getting to know you" phase. Trust may start to be built.	Trust is focused into smaller groups as sub-groups and alliances form.	As functions are accepted and clarified, trust and relationships start to develop to a greater degree.	Team starts to operate on higher levels of trust as loyalty and relationships develop.
How Decision are made	Nominated leader is expected to make decisions. Some more vocal members may dominate.	Decisions are hard to make. Members are unwilling to give way. Compromise is a frequent outcome.	Group is able to come to common decisions. Win-win is more likely than compromise.	Decision making is easier - some decisions are delegated to sub-groups or individuals.

Here is another way to gauge in which stage a team is presently in.

- 1. Forming:** The group comes together and gets to initially know one other and form as a group
- 2. Storming:** A chaotic vying for leadership and trialling of group processes
- 3. Norming:** Eventually agreement is reached on how the group operates
- 4. Performing:** The group practices its craft and becomes effective in meeting its objectives

Tip

As a team gets better at Reflection, Learning, Planning, and Action they will be able to move through the stages with relative ease and become a high performance team.

Storming also deals with the challenge of committing to the goal.