Team Development Over Time

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In this lesson you will learn how teams develop over time. Specifically, this lesson will cover:

1. The Four Stages of Team Development

If you have been a part of a team—as most of us have—then you intuitively have felt that there are different "stages" of team development. Teams and team members often start from a position of friendliness and excitement about a project or endeavor, but the mood can sour and the team dynamics can go south very quickly once the real work begins. In 1965, educational psychologist Bruce Tuckman at Ohio State University developed a four-stage model to explain the complexities that he had witnessed in team development.
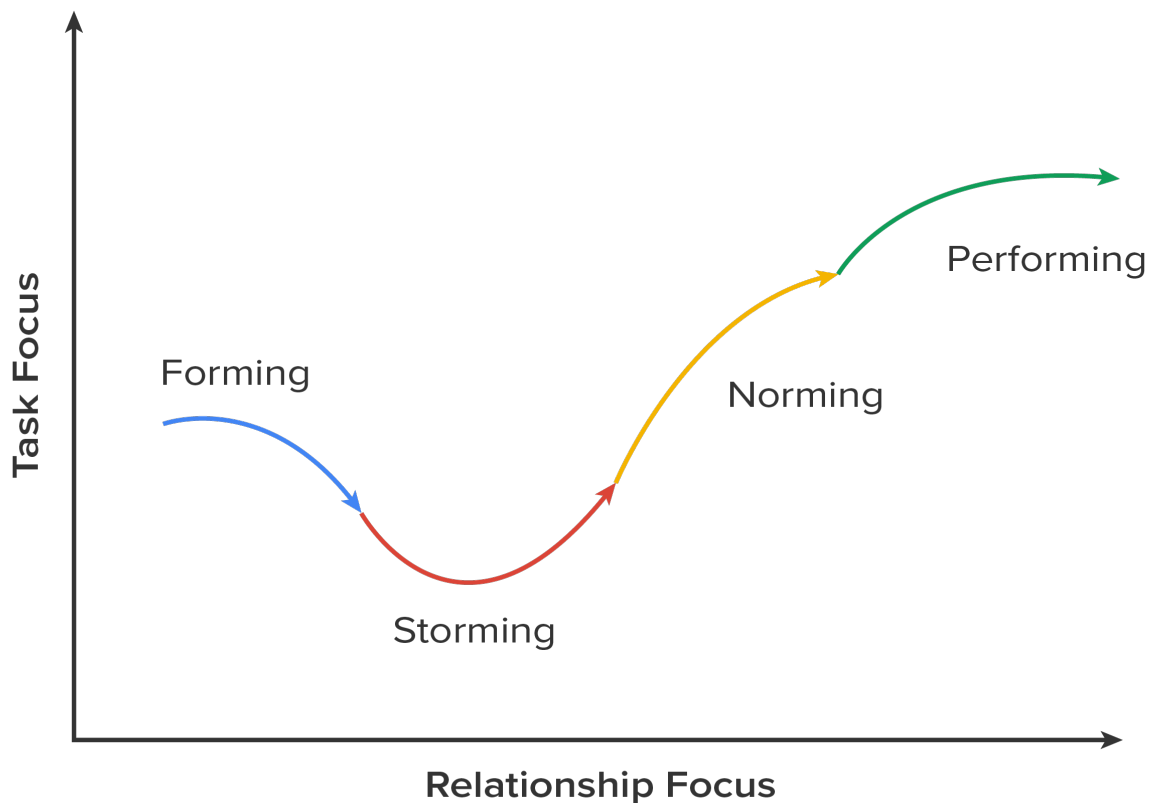
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The original model was called Tuckman's Stages of Group Development, and he added the fifth stage of "Adjourning" in 1977 to explain the disbanding of a team at the end of a project.

The four stages of the original Tuckman model are (Tuckman, 1965):

- Forming
- Storming
- Norming
- Performing

The stages are depicted in the following diagram.

The **Forming** stage begins with the introduction of team members. This is known as the "polite stage" in which the team is mainly focused on similarities and the group looks to the leader for structure and direction. The team members at this point are enthusiastic, and issues are still being discussed on a global, ambiguous level. This is when the informal pecking order begins to develop, but the team is still friendly.

The **Storming** stage begins as team members begin vying for leadership and testing the group processes. This is known as the "win-lose" stage, as members clash for control of the group and people begin to choose sides. The attitude about the team and the project begins to shift to negative, and there is frustration around goals, tasks, and progress.

After what can be a very long and painful Storming process for the team, slowly the **Norming** stage may start to take root. During Norming, the team is starting to work well together, and buy-in to group goals occurs. The team is establishing and maintaining ground rules and boundaries, and there is willingness to share responsibility and control. At this point in the team formation, members begin to value and respect each other and their contributions.

Finally, as the team builds momentum and starts to get results, it is entering the **Performing** stage. The team is completely self-directed and requires little management direction. The team has confidence, pride, and enthusiasm, and there is a congruence of vision, team, and self. As the team continues to perform, it may even succeed in becoming a high-performing team. High-performing teams have optimized both task and people relationships—they are maximizing performance and team effectiveness. Katzenberg and Smith, in their study of teams, have created a "team performance curve" that graphs the journey of a team from a working group to a high-performing team. The team performance curve is illustrated in the graph below.
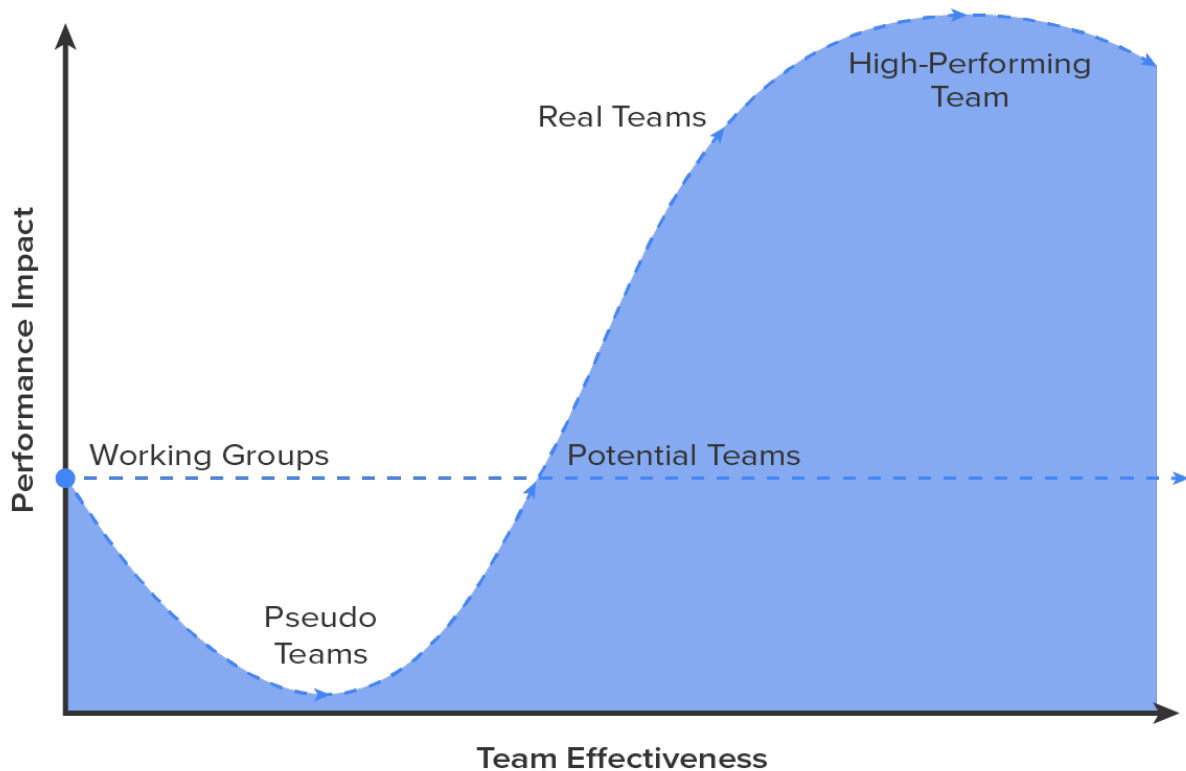
The process of becoming a high-performance team is not a linear process. Similarly, the four stages of team development in the Tuckman model are not linear, and there are also factors that may cause the team to regress to an earlier stage of development. When a team member is added to the group, this may change the dynamic enough and be disruptive enough to cause a backwards slide to an earlier stage. Similarly, if a new project task is introduced that causes confusion or anxiety for the group, then this may also cause a backwards slide to an earlier stage of development. Think of your own experiences with project teams and the backslide that the group may have taken when another team member was introduced. You may have personally found the same to be true when a leader or project sponsor changes the scope or adds a new project task. The team has to regroup and will likely re-Storm and re-Form before getting back to Performing as a team.

⟨?⟩ REFLECT

1. What are the four stages of team development?
2. What can cause a team to regress in its development?

📄 TERMS TO KNOW

Forming

The first stage of team development—the positive and polite stage.

Storming

The second stage of team development—when people are pushing against the boundaries.

Norming

The third stage of team development—when the team resolves its differences and begins making progress.

Performing

The fourth stage of team development—when hard work leads to the achievement of the team's goal.

☑ SUMMARY

In this lesson, you learned how teams develop over time. You learned about **the four stages of team development**, developed by educational psychologist Bruce Tuckman (the original model was called Tuckman's Stages of Group Development): Forming, Storming, Norming, and Performing. You learned that teams that succeed in maximizing performance and team effectiveness are known as high-performing teams; this evolution from a working group to a high-performing team is illustrated by the "team performance curve" created by Katzenberg and Smith in their study of teams. It is important to note that the process of becoming a high-performance team is not a linear process, nor are the four stages of team development in the Tuckman model. In addition, there are factors (e.g., addition of a new team member, introduction of a new project task) that may cause the team to regress to an earlier stage of development.

Best of luck in your learning!

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REFERENCES

Tuckman, B. W. (1965). Developmental sequence in small groups. *Psychological Bulletin, 63*(6), 384-399. **doi.org/10.1037/h0022100**

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Performing

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Storming

The second stage of team development—when people are pushing against the boundaries.