Phases of Team Development

In order to help build a team, we need to remember that, like humans, teams develop through a series of stages. Probably the best-known model of team development is that of Tuckman (1965)[1]. This model presents four stages of team development.

1. ***Forming.*** This is the very first stage of team development. Here team members meet for the first time; they determine their purpose, orient themselves to each other and the task and begin to establish trust between team members. Key tasks at this stage are:
    - o to establish the goals of the team;
    - o to learn about the skills and training of other team members; and
    - o to develop relationships based on mutual respect and shared goals.

2. ***Norming.*** Here the team starts to determine roles and responsibilities, sets and agrees on goals, develops operating guidelines for team functioning in their meetings and daily tasks, and determines the level of individual commitment needed to achieve the goals of the team. Key tasks at this stage are:
    - o to establish the tasks and roles of team members;
    - o to establish the mechanisms of communication; and
    - o to determine leadership and decision-making process.

3. ***Storming.*** A key issue for teams is to effectively manage conflict while avoiding group think (i.e., where everyone blindly follows along and no one asks any questions). It is critical that teams balance both of these elements. Too much conflict can delay performance, but too little conflict (i.e., group think) can stagnate creativity. So, in this stage, teams must determine how they will manage conflict, encourage differing views, and challenge the status quo. Key tasks at this stage are:
    - o to develop effective means of role negotiation and conflict resolution for the team to progress to the next stage;
    - o to develop methods of identifying problems with the team;
    - o to re-evaluate initial goals, tasks and roles; and
    - o developing processes to overcome group think.

4. ***Performing.*** Once teams have reached this level, they are well-oiled machines. The key task at this stage is to maintain effective mechanisms for (1) continued communication, (2) conflict resolution, (3) continued goal and role re-evaluation, (4) evaluation of outcomes of team functioning, and (5) making the appropriate adjustments to the team.[2]

A few notes of interest here. First, while scholars agree that teams go through four stages of development, there is some disagreement regarding the order of norming and storming. Some people argue that teams play nice first (i.e., norming) and then the issues of conflict emerge (i.e., storming); others argue that teams storm first and then determine norms (see Whetten & Cameron[3] for a discussion). Either way, all scholars agree that all four stages are necessary for teams to be effective. Second, some people believe that there is a fifth stage called synergy. This occurs after stage four (performing). In the synergy stage, the performance of the team

exceeds the sum of the performance of the individual team members. Third, teams will cycle through these stages. Every time a new team member is added, the team will start back at stage one. Fourth, note that teams develop in terms of both task processes and people processes (i.e., relationships) as they move from stage to stage.

---

[1]Tuckman, B.W. (1965). Developmental sequence in small groups. *Psychological Bulletin*, 63, 384-399.

[2]Grant RW, Finnocchio LJ, and the California Primary Care Consortium Subcommittee on Interdisciplinary Collaboration. (1995). Interdisciplinary Collaborative Teams in Primary Care: A Model Curriculum and Resource Guide. San Francisco, CA: Pew Health Professions Commission, 1995.

[3]Whetten, D. A., & Cameron, K. S. (2002). *Developing Management Skills* (4th ed.). Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley.