

# Forming, Storming, Norming, Performing, and Adjourning

## Understanding the Stages of Team Formation

You can't expect a new team to perform well when it first comes together. Forming a team takes time, and teams often go through recognizable stages as they change from being a collection of strangers to a united group with common goals. Bruce Tuckman's Forming, Storming, Norming, and Performing model describes these stages. When you understand it, you can help your new team become effective more quickly.

### About the Model

Psychologist Bruce Tuckman first came up with the memorable phrase "forming, storming, norming, and performing" in his 1965 article, "[Developmental Sequence in Small Groups](#)." He used it to describe the path that most teams follow on their way to high performance. Later, he added a fifth stage, "adjourning" (which is sometimes known as "mourning").

Let's look at each stage in more detail.

## **Forming**

In this stage, most team members are positive and polite. Some are anxious, as they haven't fully understood what work the team will do. Others are simply excited about the task ahead.

This stage can last for some time, as people start to work together, and as they make an effort to get to know their new colleagues.

### **Typical Behaviors:**

- The polite stage; focus on getting acquainted and feeling comfortable.
- Conflict is low, suppressed; need for approval high.
- Verbal members tend to dominate.
- Ability to accomplish group tasks and stay focused is low.
- Little listening; high distortion of what is heard.
- Watchful; guarded; personal feelings kept hidden.
- Much giving of/asking for information and data.
- Some inclusion/exclusion issues with "new" and "old" group members.

## **Storming**

Next, the team moves into the storming phase, where people start to push against the boundaries established in the forming stage. This is the stage where many teams fail.

Storming often starts where there is a conflict between team members' natural working styles. People may work in different ways for all sorts of reasons but, if differing working styles cause unforeseen problems, they may become frustrated.

Storming can also happen in other situations. For example, team members may challenge authority, or jockey for position as their roles are clarified. Or, people may feel overwhelmed by their workload, or they could be uncomfortable with the approach the team is using.

It is the lack of good communication that leads to unproductive storming. And it is the effective use of communication that will get you through the storming phase.

Some team members may question the worth of the team's goal, and they may resist taking on tasks.

Team members who stick with the task at hand may experience stress, particularly as they don't have the support of established processes or strong relationships with their colleagues.

### **Typical Behaviors:**

- Subgroups and individuals attempt to influence ideas, values, and opinions.
- Competition for attention, recognition, and influence.
- People confront each other; interpersonal conflict.
- Polarization; lack of shared vision.
- Members may opt out and/or cliques/alliances form.
- Unsolicited comments; opinions.
- Sense of feeling struck; frustrated.
- Emotional reaction to task or misperceptions about task.
- Process issues discussed outside of meeting.
- Quick fix: address symptoms, skirt problems.
- Power inequities, struggle as members "jockey for position."

## **Norming**

Gradually, the team moves into the norming stage. This is when people start to resolve their differences, appreciate colleagues' strengths, and respect the authority of the leader.

Now that team members know one another better, they may socialize together, and they are able to ask one another for help and provide constructive feedback. People develop a stronger commitment to the team goal, and you start to see good progress towards it.

There is often a prolonged overlap between storming and norming, because, as new tasks come up, the team may lapse back into behavior from the storming stage.

### **Typical Behaviors:**

- Authority/leadership issues discussed and resolved.
- Issues, not people, confronted.
- Cohesion among group members begins; subgroups disappear.
- Members actively listen to each other.
- Appreciation and acceptance of alternative points of view.
- Risky issues/process issues brought up in meetings.
- Ability to remain focused on task at hand.
- Quiet people now contributing more in the group.
- Values and assumptions begin to get discovered and discussed.
- Relevant questions are asked.
- Air of complacency may develop.
- Individuals move beyond blame to responsibility.

## Performing

The team reaches the performing stage, when hard work leads, without friction, to the achievement of the team's goal.

It feels easy to be part of the team at this stage, and people who join or leave won't disrupt performance.

### Typical Behaviors:

- Members try new behaviors and accept new ideas.
- Members relate with honesty, respect, authenticity.
- Problems and difficult issues are dealt with, handled creatively.
- Diversity is affirmed and welcomed.
- Member resourcefulness is utilized to energize each other.
- Decision-making process to be used is understood.
- Frequent review of process issues.
- Clarity on how members experience each other.
- Outside help/resources welcomed.
- Differences bridged with integrity.
- Commitment to work toward common goals.

## Adjourning

Many teams will reach this stage eventually. For example, project teams exist for only a fixed period, and even permanent teams may be disbanded through organizational restructuring.

Team members who like routine, or who have developed close working relationships with colleagues, may find this stage difficult, particularly if their future now looks uncertain.

### Typical Behaviors:

- The sense of the group is that the work is done.
- May be apprehension over the impending loss of group identity and friendships.
- Cleaning up the group's undone tasks and removing symbols of the group.
- Evaluating the results and producing final reports.
- Saying goodbye.