

Skillbook

Building Effective Teams: Tuckman's Team Development Model



Mindtools

Building an Effective Team: Tuckman's Team Development Model Skillbook

This Skillbook is published by Mind Tools Ltd.
21 Young Street, Edinburgh, Scotland, EH2 4HU.

Copyright © Mind Tools Ltd, 2025.
All rights reserved.

Version 5.0.

This Skillbook is protected by international copyright law. You may use it only if you are a Mindtools member or have received it under corporate license.

If you have any queries, please contact us at
mtecustomerservices@mindtools.com.

Contents

1.	Introduction	1
2.	Assembling a Team	2
3.	The Four Stages of Team Development	3
4.	Scenarios: Testing Your Knowledge	7
5.	Scenarios: Suggested Solutions	13
6.	Key Points	15
7.	Apply This to Your Life	16

1. Introduction

Building a team is similar to assembling a race car engine. You need to put all the right components together correctly, so that each one fits and runs smoothly.

And, just as different engines have different parts, each team has its own particular qualities and characteristics.

In this **Skillbook**, we'll look at what building a team involves, using a proven model known popularly as **Forming, Storming, Norming, and Performing**.

The model was developed by educational psychologist, Dr Bruce Tuckman. It explores the team-building process from first introductions, right through the stages of development, to becoming a high-performing unit.

In particular, we'll explore:

- How to assemble a team.
- The key stages of team development.
- Ways to measure performance levels.

We'll also look at a scenario in which two different teams are assembled to meet a particular objective, and find out what a team needs to succeed.

2. Assembling a Team

Your team members need to work together effectively to achieve their goal. Moreover, each person has to contribute to the group's overall functioning by performing a particular, specialized task.

When you put a team together, start by looking at its leader. Their characteristics will have a significant impact on the team's development and productivity.

The leader should have a broad understanding of the issues that the team will face, and the ability to coordinate activities with internal and external stakeholders.

Next, look at the team's objectives, and consider the task- and relationship-oriented skills and experience that the team will need to achieve its goals. Select team members for their knowledge and expertise, and think about how each one can help to form an efficient, tight-knit group.

Aim for a good cross-section of skills, levels of responsibility, and experience. This will bring a diverse range of perspectives, and help the team to avoid "groupthink." (Groupthink occurs when individuals suppress their own opinions and ideas so that they don't upset the group's status quo.)

Then, communicate each member's roles and responsibilities clearly, and explain how they contribute to the team's overall objective.

You can also complement your team's core skills with outside facilitators or advisors, but this can affect team dynamics if it's not managed appropriately, as we shall see.

An understanding of team development will help you to bring people together to form a high-functioning team that is "greater than the sum of its parts."

So, in the next chapter, we'll look at how you can achieve this.

3. The Four Stages of Team Development

You can't expect your team to "hit the ground running." Team members need time to get to know one another before they can be effective. They also need to understand their role within the team and where they fit in within the wider group.

There are many theories about how teams mature into functional units, but perhaps the most famous is Dr Bruce Tuckman's Team Development Model.

By studying the behavior of groups in various environments, Tuckman identified four distinct stages of development that teams need to go through before they can become truly effective. He called these stages:

1. Forming.
2. Storming.
3. Norming.
4. Performing.

Most teams pass through these stages naturally, often without realizing it. But, as a manager, you need to be aware of the particular challenges and issues that your team will face as it progresses, and help people to deal with them.

Each step has its own purpose in strengthening the team, so it's counter-productive to bypass any of them to reach the performing stage more quickly. You need to steer the group back on course if you see this happening.

Forming

When team members first come together, they are individuals in a common setting. They need time to get to know one another, to understand what they bring to the group, to build trust, and to start to feel like a cohesive unit.

At this stage, it's important to focus on building acceptance and trust. If you dive straight into productive work, the team will miss out on this crucial stage, and may find it difficult to become anything more than a group of individuals.

At this stage, the time spent facilitating free and open discussion among your team members will pay off later. Encourage them to ask questions, to share information, to learn more about each other, and to understand one another's needs.

Now is also a good time to establish clear goals and expectations, and to outline your "rules of engagement," including training, strategy and goals, performance measures, levels of autonomy, and rewards.

Storming

As people start to work together and establish their positions within the team, conflict and tension can sometimes arise. They become familiar with one another's roles and perspectives, and often question one another's contributions. Your own leadership may also come under scrutiny during this stage, so be ready for it!

At the “Storming” stage of team formation, your team members are becoming more comfortable with their positions in the team. However, this added sense of security encourages them to be more frank in expressing how they really feel, which can create friction at times.

Though it can be difficult to deal with conflict, a small amount of discord can actually be useful because it provides opportunities to learn and to see things from different perspectives. These are critical skills for any team, because the whole point of bringing a diverse group of people together is to build a new awareness and create innovative solutions – not just to repeat what other people think.

At this stage, team members need to feel free to share their thoughts and opinions openly, and to become their own people without taking disagreements personally.

However, it's important to strike an appropriate balance. If people are more interested in keeping the peace than solving problems, “groupthink” can arise. But, if tensions become too high, the trust you've built up can be damaged. You can manage conflict effectively by reinforcing the team's vision, recognizing its achievements, and being an effective mediator between its members.

Norming

Once a team has resolved the issues associated with Storming, consistent behavioral norms start to emerge. Feelings of loyalty develop, and members express their commitment to the team by cooperating with one another, overcoming differences, following instructions, and conforming to standards.

This is what gives a team its unique culture. For example, different teams can emerge under similar circumstances with competitive, collaborative, creative, or conservative characteristics.

But, once the initial uncertainty and conflict have been dealt with, individuals start to explore different roles and levels of support and commitment. Some people will be best at carrying out certain tasks, while others are strong collaborators and enjoy building the relationships that hold the team together. Both are important and necessary for taking the team to the next level.

An astute team leader will take note of who fills each role most naturally, and then help them to build their skills, to ensure that the team works toward its objectives, and that people are working together effectively.

Your constructive feedback is important here, as is articulating and sharing a powerful vision. Team members are more likely to pull together and get things done when you invoke a deeper meaning and purpose to their objective.



Note:

Many teams go back and forth between Storming and Norming before “finding their groove.” And some people may find that they settle into a comfortable way of working more quickly than others.

The process is complicated further if members come and go. But, if you understand the challenges that arise at each stage, you can still guide the team toward high performance.

Performing

Finally, when the team has worked through the conflicts and challenges of Forming, Storming and Norming, it can get down to the business of Performing.

In this stage, the team makes significant progress toward its goals, and each fresh accomplishment reinforces its members’ commitment. A performing team does best when it is given a high degree of autonomy, and doesn’t need you to intervene very often.

Your role should now be to delegate tasks and projects for the team to perform. However, you shouldn’t instruct or assist people unless you notice a problem, or they specifically ask you to do so. As the team continues to perform, you can introduce increasingly challenging tasks to raise its performance higher still.

Remember that changes to the team, or to the environment in which it operates, can take it back to an earlier stage of its development. Try to monitor and anticipate changes that will affect your team, and address it directly to keep people performing well.

Raising Performance Levels Higher Still

A team achieves high performance by striving for continuous improvement, fostering innovation, building on competencies, and maintaining a high level of energy and commitment.

The difference between normal performance and **high** performance often comes down to quality. High-performance teams focus on real improvement and innovation, rather than just avoiding errors. Whether it's improving a product or a system, or just completing a specific task, how the team measures quality makes all the difference.

There are three levels of quality that teams can focus on:

- **Detecting Errors** – this is the most basic level of quality, and it's where most teams begin. The focus is on providing what the customer wants and avoiding what they don't want. It's a reactive approach that assures the team will meet expectations, but it only picks up errors after they've been made.
- **Preventing Errors** – at this level, the team shifts its focus toward avoiding making mistakes in the first place. Members look at how things are done and they emphasize quality in each person's role. They are concerned with why mistakes happen and create systems and processes to prevent them being made. The team generally exceeds expectations and everyone is satisfied. This is the beginning of high performance, but it's also where the majority of teams stop.
- **Innovating With Continuous Improvement** – this is the pinnacle of team performance. Here, instead of simply addressing and preventing errors, people look at how they could meet client or customer needs that haven't yet been expressed. This type of team creates new standards and is always looking for ways to improve on its successes. It anticipates needs, and solves problems proactively.

Note:

Since first publishing the Team Development Model, Tuckman has added a fifth element, **Adjourning**. This is when a team comes to the end of its life, either because it was only established for a short or fixed period or, perhaps, because it is disbanded through organizational restructuring.

This can be a difficult time for people who have developed close working relationships. So take time to celebrate the team's achievements, and the positive experience that you've shared working together.

4. Scenarios: Testing Your Knowledge

Now, let's look at a team-building scenario. It concerns two teams: one that performs well, and one that fails to reach its full potential. See if you can spot which team is which.

As you read, consider the fundamental differences between the two teams, and think about how these have influenced the outcome of their work.

Record your observations in the boxes provided.

Background

Sayid is the general manager of a local magazine.

For a while now, the magazine has been failing. Profits and distribution levels have been declining for the last two quarters, and they don't look set to improve any time soon.

Sayid knows that the whole publishing industry is experiencing problems at the moment, but his magazine seems to have been suffering more than most. He decides that it's time he did something about it.

His biggest concern is that some of the companies that regularly advertise their services and products in his magazine are beginning to withdraw their custom; and, without them, the magazine is in real trouble. So, he decides to win them back by improving the service that they receive. To achieve this, he needs all of the departments in the publishing company to work together, so he assembles a cross-functional team.

Assembling Team A

It is clear to Sayid that the production, circulation and advertising teams were all acting as isolated departments. There had been complaints in the past from clients about their promotions appearing on the wrong page, or even in the wrong issue, of the magazine. These invariably led to power struggles between the departments, so Sayid decides to bring together a selection of leading executives from each department to address the situation.

The plan is to meet every Monday morning, so that managers can become familiar with the strengths and weaknesses of each department. Sayid figures that, once they have a solid understanding of one another's roles, responsibilities, routines, and challenges, some trust and cooperation can be established. This will help the departments to work together more efficiently and to avoid the miscommunications that are creating problems for advertisers.

Question 1:**What do you think of the composition of Team A?**

Team A Development

Each member of Team A is a good leader in their own right, so Sayid reasons that they should be able to collaborate with a minimal amount of input from him. In fact, he believes that they will probably come up with better ways of working together without his intervention.

Initially, Sayid's plan seems to be working. At the meetings, team members don't just talk – they seemed really focused on finding ways to establish interdependencies. For example, instead of each department creating its own budget, and fighting to get as much of the total pot as possible, the managers came together and agree budgets between themselves.

At the Monday meetings, managers seem to find it quite easy to set aside their individual departments' needs and act as a unified team. This new, collaborative culture soon starts to spread across the company. People come to believe that the cross-collaborative team are achieving great things, as everyone seemed happy and motivated.

Sayid is delighted! The future is beginning to look bright again.

Question 2:**Which stages of the model did Team A go through? What were the pros and cons of this?**

Team A Performance

After a year, however, Sayid has become frustrated. Despite the improvements that Team A had made, advertisers are still leaving the publication.

The number of errors in placing ads has fallen, but advertisers complain that the magazine is still unresponsive to their needs, and far too concerned with inflexible internal policies and procedures.

One client, for example, left dissatisfied when it was told that it couldn't amend one of its expensive, full-page adverts, even though the magazine had yet to go to press, because it had already been seen by an editor.

Clearly, attempts by the magazine's managers to improve customer service and win back lost clients are still not working. They are now able to collaborate and understand one another, but they still had no clue about how to achieve the original objective that Sayid set for them.

Question 3:

Why do you think Sayid's management team was unable to achieve its objective? What do you think it should have done to achieve high performance?

Assembling Team B

Now, Sayid is really concerned. A year on, the magazine is barely keeping its head above water, and if it's going to survive – never mind thrive – it's going to have to do more than just keep its existing advertisers. It's going to have to attract new ones, too.

He scours the latest management books and online articles, looking for inspiration. One idea that keeps coming up is the Japanese method of lean manufacturing and kaizen, which emphasizes the involvement of employees at all levels of the organization.

Sayid decides to assemble a team of frontline staff and mid-level managers, to see if they can add fresh insight to the problem. He selects individuals for the different skills they have, regardless of their status within the organization, and makes sure that every department is represented.

Sayid sets Team B a goal to “delight the customer,” but gives it free rein in deciding how they can achieve this. However, he has his doubts. If the management team was unable to save the magazine, then he's unsure whether this mixed group will do any better. But, “nothing ventured, nothing gained.”

Question 4:**What are the key differences between the compositions of Team A and Team B?**

Team B Development

At first, all the team seem to do is argue about what “delighting the customer” actually means or should mean.

People don’t seem to be able to agree with one another at all, and, if anything, they appeared to be moving backward, not forward. Everyone is so focused on their own issues, to the exclusion of all others.

The team leader seems unconcerned by the lack of progress, but Sayid is losing heart. However, just as he’s about to give up, the team has a breakthrough: the solution doesn’t lie in one area alone. Just like the members of Team B, different customers have different priorities. This is a revelation!

The team puts all of its ideas together in one list and creates a customer service “manifesto,” outlining the different ways that members feel they could “delight” their customers. Then, they contact all the clients that they lost during the past year, and ask them why they left and what it would take to bring them back.

Finally, they create a range of tariffs, which bundle services together in a way that appeals to different types of advertiser, and focuses on improving the services in the most popular tariffs.

Team B’s solution turns the magazine around. The business even manage to win back some old customers that they had lost, while the feedback from existing customers is glowing.

Question 5:

What factors do you think contributed to Team B's success?

5. Scenarios: Suggested Solutions

Question 1 – What do you think of the composition of Team A?

Although Team A incorporated individuals from different departments, the people Sayid chose were all top-level leaders, who took a high-level view of their departments' responsibilities. They lacked a detailed understanding of the “nuts and bolts” of the jobs that the frontline team members performed every day.

Also, the group was made up of people of a similar status and who reported directly to Sayid. Since Sayid was leading the group, and had set an objective to collaborate with one another, everyone worked hard to demonstrate how cooperative they were, rather than to create a group that was “greater than the sum of its parts.”

Question 2 – Which stages of the model did Team A go through? What were the pros and cons of this?

In its members' eagerness to collaborate, Team A skipped the first two stages of Tuckman's model and moved directly to Norming.

It missed the Forming stage, which is so important for learning what skills each individual is bringing to the group, and assumed that, as leaders, they were all starting from the same place.

It also skipped the Storming stage, because its members were concerned that Sayid would be disappointed in their performance and think them unprofessional if they voiced conflicting views or acted upon tensions that bubbled beneath the surface. This was a recipe for “groupthink.”

As a result, the group came across as conforming, but they didn't give themselves the chance to understand others' views and opinions before attempting to become a cohesive group.

Question 3 – Why do you think Sayid's management team was unable to achieve its objective? What do you think it should have done to achieve high performance?

In a way, Team A did achieve its objective, which was to stop the different departments from operating in isolation. Unfortunately, Sayid's true objective – which was to win back customers – got lost along the way.

The group's narrow composition meant that there was no representative from the front line – the people who really understood why problems had arisen in the past, and who had direct communication with the customers. They had no opportunity to share their insights.

Also, giving team members a goal of getting along with one another made the pressure to conform too great. All its energy went into interpersonal issues, leaving little space for the “real work.” While it did successfully complete a budget, that had little bearing on the original purpose of addressing the issue of lost advertising.

The team would have stood a better chance of performing if it'd had a wider cross-section of members, and if Sayid had set out its objectives more clearly.

Members could also have achieved that objective if they had been put under less pressure to conform, and had been led by someone more impartial, who had taken an active role in helping them to complete each stage of development.

Question 4 – What are the key differences between the composition of Team A and Team B?

Team A was made up of executive managers, who were selected by position rather than because of their specific personal qualities.

The members of Team B were selected primarily for their particular skills, and to represent each department.

As department leaders, each member of Team A had an equal status, while this had no bearing on the selection of people for Team B. This also means that Team B was likely to be more diverse in age and background than Team A.

Team A members took a high-level view of what went on in their departments, while Team B members were able to focus on day-to-day tasks.

Question 5 – What factors do you think contributed to Team B's success?

The greater diversity of roles and seniority in Team B gave it a much wider range of skills and experience to draw from. And, because none of its members had worked together before, they were less inclined to make assumptions. This helped with the Forming stage.

When Sayid gave the team a clear objective, without dictating how that should be achieved, he introduced the potential for disagreement. This contributed to the Storming phase, which was essential for getting the team to explore different perspectives.

Because each person understood the team's objective, they didn't stop when they realized that different customers would have different priorities. They strove to find a solution that worked for everyone, and this is when they became a high-performing team.

6. Key Points

A successful team is more than just a collection of individuals. When its members work on a project together in a collaborative way, they can often achieve far more than they would independently. But there's more to building a team than simply bringing people together.

In this Skillbook, we've looked how you can build an effective team using Tuckman's Team Development Model, which splits the team creation process into four distinct stages:

- **Forming** – when a team first forms they may feel uncertainty about their purpose, their roles and how well they'll work together. They may feel anxious, curious or excited. So, it's important that they are given a clear purpose and direction by the team leader at this stage.
- **Storming** – as people's confidence start to build, there may be differences of opinion and conflict around ways of working. But conflict can also be helpful - it can help you avoid groupthink, set boundaries and embrace different perspectives. However, if there's too much conflict, it's essential that team leaders' step in to maintain control and direction.
- **Norming** – once differences are resolved, the team settles into a cohesive group. They respect each other and the team leader's decisions. People have also become more confident asking for help and offering constructive feedback.
- **Performing** – once the team has gone through the first three stage they can start performing. At this stage, the team is clear on its goals, its strengths and its weaknesses, so it shouldn't need a huge amount of management. High-performing teams work best when they have autonomy, and are given space and time to solve problems and come up with solutions on their own.

The most effective teams are those that you've helped to lead through the four stages of Tuckman's Team Development Model.

However, remember that changes to the team's purpose, environment or members can take it back to earlier stages of its development. This is a necessary stage that you need to recognize and help people to deal with.

Ultimately, to be truly effective a team must have a clear objective and shared purpose that it's working toward together. However, as a team leader, it's best to take a hands off approach as your team becomes more confident, and allow it to flourish and innovate, as well as discover the way of working that suits it best.

7. Apply This to Your Life

Think about what you have learned about team building from this **Skillbook**. How can you apply these lessons to your own experience?

- What stage of development is your current team at?
- How would you change the membership of your team to make it more effective?
- What pitfalls will you be watching for as your team grows and develops?
- How do you know your team is performing well?
- What specific team-building skills do you need to develop?
How will you do that?

