



Keyword: Team Development

# The Team Development Cycle: The Stages of Team Development

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by Kevin Eikenberry

More than 35 years ago Bruce Tuckman wrote a paper entitled “Development Sequence in Small Groups.” Few people probably read that article itself, but many have heard of, tested and applied what he wrote.

At the heart of his thought was that teams go through a predictable developmental cycle on the path to success, achievement or high performance. With a predictable cycle, comes the ability to understand those steps, and actively do things to move more quickly to the more productive later steps. The use of Tuckman’s Model was further enhanced by the simplicity (or elegance) of the names of the steps: Forming, Storming, Norming and Performing.

What follows is a short introduction to the model and how to use it to improve the productivity and success of your team(s).

## Forming

When teams form, members are tentative and unsure. They aren’t sure how to act, what is expected of them, or how they will fit into the team socially. Because of this unease and lack of focus, there may be much activity, but there will be little accomplished.

Some of the feelings team members will have at this stage are:

- Fear and anxiety about the project.
- Pride in being chosen.
- Excitement, and anticipation about the team and the part they will play.

Some of the behaviors you will see in yourself or others are:

- Initial attempts to determine the goals and tasks.
- Initial attempts to determine group norms and acceptable behaviors.
- Decisions about the types of information that is needed.
- Abstract discussions about the task - and impatience with this discussion by some members.
- Complaining.

Some ways you can help the team move forward include:

- Begin building relationships - get to know each other.
- Discuss and understand individual strengths, weaknesses, similarities, and differences.



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- Clarify the team's purpose, mission, and goals.
- Focus all efforts on common goals.
- Establish or clarify team operating procedures.
- Identify tools and resources available to the team..
- Clarify roles.
- Determine role of leadership and decision making approaches.

### Storming

This is probably the most difficult of the stages. It's a stage that teams, unfortunately often get mired in for a long time. During Storming teams begin to get clear about the task in front of them and realize it might be difficult! Since teams still don't have strong personal relationships, individuals begin to rely on themselves and often don't collaborate.

Some of the feelings team members will have at this stage are:

- Resistance to the task itself.
- Big attitude swings among team members.
- Concern about excessive work required by the project.
- Frustration.

Some of the behaviors you will see in yourself or others are:

- Choosing of sides.
- Arguments.
- Increased tension.
- Lack of collaboration.

Some ways you can help the team move forward include:

- Surface and recognize the value of differences on the team.
- Discuss the tension, the causes and possible solutions.
- View conflicts as a useful and valid part of teamwork and deal them in an open and constructive manner.
- Address the disagreements and provide time for appropriate conversation.
- Get everyone involved.

### Norming

During this stage, teams start to "get it." The infighting starts to decrease; agreements are reached more successfully and less painfully. At this point, team roles become clearer and accepted. Overall, the team has started to gel. With the focus less on the each other and getting started, the team begins to become productive.

Some of the feelings team members will have at this stage are:

- Relief that everything will work out.
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- Accepted by other team members.
- Sense of team togetherness.

Some of the behaviors you will see in yourself or others are:

- More personal sharing – team members becoming closer.
- Team norms and expectations are set – people know what to expect of each other.

Some ways you can help the team move forward include:

- Develop a specific project management plan with detailed timeline.
- Establish methods for solving problems and resolving conflicts.
- Build in feedback and evaluation mechanisms (individual and team performance).
- Establish and maintain traditions for how the team works together.

### Performing

The team is settled now. They are really quite productive in identifying issues, solving problems, and coming to agreements – the stuff that makes effective teams. Members now know each other very well and are able to capitalize on each team member's strengths.

Some of the feelings team members will have at this stage are:

- Satisfaction.
- Closeness to other team members.
- Pride in the work of the team.

Some of the behaviors you will see in yourself or others are:

- Ability to prevent or quickly solve team problems.
- Greater collaboration.

### In Summary

These stages are always sequential – a team can be at Norming and drop back to Forming (if team members change for example). The length of time in each step cannot be predicted either. The key to the value of this model is thinking about the steps you can take to help move a team to the next highest stage.

### A Question to Ponder

Where are the teams I'm a part of in this "success progression"?



Kevin Eikenberry is a bestselling author, consultant, trainer, speaker, coach, leader, learner, husband and father. He is the Chief Potential Officer of the Kevin Eikenberry Group ([www.KevinEikenberry.com](http://www.KevinEikenberry.com)) and the Creator of the Remarkable Leadership Learning System ([www.Remarkable-Leadership.com](http://www.Remarkable-Leadership.com)), both of which are dedicated to life-long learning and helping Clients unleash their remarkable potential. Interested in becoming the remarkable leader you were born to be? Go to [www.Remarkable-Leadership.com](http://www.Remarkable-Leadership.com) today!

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