

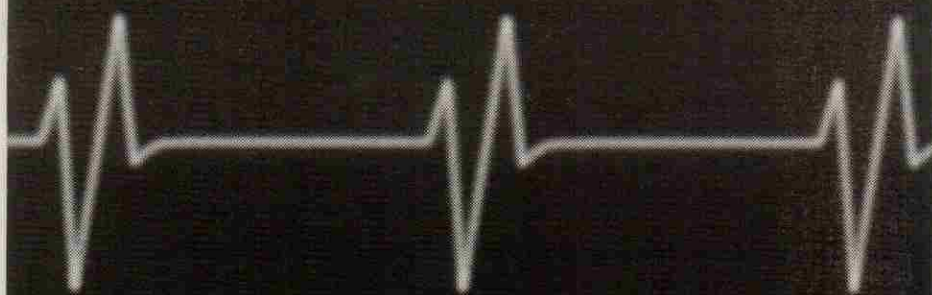
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Forming, storming, norming and performing as a team

All teams constantly move in and out of four predictable stages: forming, storming, norming and performing. As a leader, you can use this knowledge to manage a team's movement through these stages, making room for maximum productivity with minimal distraction. You need to recognize what stage your team is in, understand the business implications of that stage and apply stage-appropriate leadership techniques.



MiMi Paris
Guest Columnist

Forming

The first stage of team development, forming, is the stage in which people initially come together. They will have little interaction with each other. In addition, they will be confused and uncertain. They may not know where to sit in a room. They may not know their way around the work place. Their behavior will be tentative.

Trust level is low; interaction is minimal, and performance is virtually nonexistent. Business teams lose money in this stage, so teams need to move through it quickly. Effective managers move the team through this by being more directive than 'normal.' Effective managers will provide clear direction and provide more communication than usual, too.

Key leadership behaviors: Clear direction; vision; repetitious, clear messages; encouragement.

Is your direction clear? What about your vision? How do you know? What clear, concise, repetitious messages are you sending? How are you encouraging your forming team?

Storming

The next stage of team development, storming, is the stage in which team members experience conflict. They interact more now than in the forming stage, but still experience little trust with one another and the organizational leadership. You may notice arguments or cliques forming. You may notice people withdrawing or acting out.

Again, you need to move teams through this stage as quickly as possible because organizations lose money when teams storm. Effective managers move teams through this stage by providing clear direction, sending clear, consistent messages...and lots of them. Effective managers 'over' re-enforce messages in the storming stage. It isn't enough to say something once. Send the same message, over time, in many ways.

Key leadership behaviors: Clear messages, re-enforcement, conflict management, effective communication modeling.

Are your messages clear and consistent? Do you 'over' re-enforce...ad nauseam? How do you manage conflict

effectively? Are you the 'model' for good communication?

Norming

When your team moves into the norming stage, you're making progress (and money.) Norms are simply the rules we live by. All organizations, teams—even families—live according to these unwritten, and often unspoken, rules. In the norming stage of team development, you will notice a calming in the storm. People will get into a rhythm of working and relating with each other. The key here is to make certain that the norms that are created fully support the system. You want to make sure that the norms are productive norms. For example, some teams always start their meetings late and never end them on time. If that norm doesn't fully support your success, create a norm whereby you start and end meetings on time.

You can create effective norms by creating...and sticking to...a simple set of ground rules. Team members will spend less energy wondering what the rules of engagement are and focus more on moving the organization forward. While teams are in the norming stage, effective managers consistently re-state and stick to the ground rules. In addition, they encourage others to do the same.

Key leadership behaviors: Clear ground rules, encouragement, ideal behavior modeling.

What are the current norms of your team? Which ones support your success? Which ones don't? What ground rules will you and your team set up? How will you reinforce and encourage their use?

Performing

Your job as an effective manager in the performing stage becomes one of maintenance. You look ahead, watch for changes in the environment and encourage the performing efforts of your team members. You 'catch them doing something right.' You applaud them, even when they make mistakes. You remove barriers to their continued success. You constantly reward your team members. You are the 'go to' person for leadership.

As an effective manager you understand the following key points about team development:

All teams will move through these stages, in order.

■ Depending on the situation—and every situation is different—the time spent in each stage will be different.

■ In the forming and storming stages, you are losing ground. Keep time spent here minimal.

■ In the norming and performing stages, you are making money. Stay here as long as you can.

■ Performing is a nice place to visit. Any change in the environment or team membership will kick the team back to forming or storming.

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