Project Team Development and How to Accelerate It

By Eric Wright, PhD

ABSTRACT

Because projects are temporary, time is of the essence in the context of any project. Project teams need to quickly become functional, producing timely, high-quality project work without delay. This article describes how a teaming model is applied in creating and developing academic project teams, and discusses that model's effectiveness within the academic project management environment. The article also addresses the use of the model within professional project teams.

INTRODUCTION

Projects are temporary; they have definite start dates and end dates. This fact suggests that effective project managers must get their project teams performing meaningful project work as soon as possible, as time is of the essence. Project managers can use Tuckman’s Team Development Model to cause groups to develop quickly and along a "fairly predictable path" (Smith, 2005). This model is valuable as a simple means of discussing and exploring team dynamics (Rickards & Moger, 2000), and powerful as a way to accelerate team formation. Project teams whose members are aware of the processes involved in their group’s development become more effective, more quickly, thus meeting the project manager’s need for timely productivity (Smith, 2005).

METHODOLOGY

The exercise described below (based on the Tuckman model) is designed to help groups of students rapidly develop into effective project teams at the beginning of their senior capstone courses. These groups have only eight weeks to produce course project deliverables, including a research paper and a formal Microsoft PowerPoint presentation. The exercise is used in undergraduate and graduate student classes on a private sector university campus located in the Midwest.

ADMINISTRATION OF THE EXERCISE

The exercise is initiated when the handout contained in Appendix A is provided to the students during the first course meeting. The process used then follows seven clear, intentional steps.

The first step is a twenty-minute discussion, using the handout mentioned, that provides the students the context for the exercise.
Next, background information on Bruce Tuckman and the Team Development Model's genesis is presented (see Smith, 2005).

The third step is an examination of the following aspects of the model: its stages, [including the 'adjourning' stage, which was added later (Tuckman & Jensen, 2010)], the construct and sequencing, and finally, the characteristics, behaviors, and tasks of team members.

The fourth step involves a collective group assessment of the model's usefulness in evaluating team development goals and diagnosing team development problems.

The fifth step is a role-play exercise that simulates a team discussion around one member's lack of participation. The exercise demonstrates how the model can be used to: guide difficult conversations around performance, diagnose areas in which the team needs further development, and prescribe actions the group can take to move a stalled team development process forward again.

Step six is a group oral debriefing of the experiential exercise in general, and more specifically, the application of the model during the role-play.

The seventh and final step is student participation in an online discussion board during the remainder of the week, which augments the group oral debriefing conducted in the classroom, and serves to solidify their learning.

**EVALUATION AND DISCUSSION**

Comments made in student discussion submissions, and written feedback from students about their use of Tuckman's Team Development Model throughout the remainder of their capstone course, lead to the following conclusion. The model, thoroughly taught via an experiential role-play exercise conducted at the onset of the course, helps student project teams to be successful in delivering their course project requirements. Additionally, it has been observed that student project teams that do not use the model in their team development and conflict resolution processes receive lower grades for their project deliverables than teams that demonstrate the use of the model. These observations have occurred consistently across time and scholastic level.

The author has also used the experiential exercise described in this article as a team-building activity for several business-process-reengineering and financial-system-modification projects. This was done in the 'initiation phase' of these projects, as identified by Patanakul, Lewwongcharoen, and Milosevic in 2010, and Besner and Hobbs in 2008 and 2012.

This application not only maps to the project lifecycle, but also maps to the 'human resource' knowledge area of the PMBOK, 5th edition (2013), and the 'Teamwork' project
management competence element (element #:  1.07) found in the IPMA Competence Baseline (Pantouvakis, 2013). However, no evidence of the exercise’s effectiveness in the business services project environment has been recorded by this author.

In summary, the author has utilized the indoctrination of project teams in the use of Tuckman's Team Development Model, through powerful experiential exercises, in both academic and professional project management environments. It has been observed to be effective in helping student project teams form quickly, perform effectively, and manage group conflict successfully. This has resulted in those teams producing high-quality course project deliverables in a timely manner.

The awareness of group development processes on the part of student project teams, and the training of those teams in the use of those processes to their advantage, seems to play a role in contributing to the performance of high-performing student project teams. A further research question is *would this effectiveness hold true in business services projects as well?*
REFERENCES


APPENDIX A

Tuckman’s Team Development Model

ADJOURNING

TASKS

- Achieve effective and satisfying results
- Members find solutions to problems using appropriate controls
- Members agree about roles and processes for problem solving

BEHAVIORS

- Decisions are made through negotiation and consensus building
- Members are independent

PERFORMING

- Members work collaboratively
- Members care about each other
- The group establishes a unique identity

NORMING

- Decisions are made through negotiation and consensus building
- Members are interdependent
- The group establishes a unique identity

STORMING

- Expressing differences of ideas, feelings, and opinions
- Reacting to leadership
- Members independent or
collaborative

FORMING

- Identifying power and control issues
- Gaining skills in communication

- Identifying resources
- Establishing base level expectations
- Establishing rules and roles

PM’s Objective: Get project team into the performing stage as quickly as possible and keep them there.

Keys:

1. It’s a staircase, each step builds on the previous one.
2. Each step prepares the team for the performing stage.
3. Skipping any step effects performing negatively.
4. With any team additions/deletions, the process repeats.
## Stages of Team Development

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stage 1: Forming</th>
<th>Stage 2: Storming</th>
<th>Stage 3: Norming</th>
<th>Stage 4: Performing</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Individuals are not clear on what they're supposed to do</td>
<td>• Roles and responsibilities articulated</td>
<td>• Success occurs</td>
<td>• Motivation high across board</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• The mission isn't owned by the group</td>
<td>• Agendas displayed</td>
<td>• Team has sufficient resources to do job</td>
<td>• Individuals defer to team needs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Wondering where we're going</td>
<td>• Problem solving doesn't work well</td>
<td>• Appreciation and trust build</td>
<td>• No surprises</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• No trust</td>
<td>• Members want to modify team mission</td>
<td>• Purpose becomes well defined</td>
<td>• Little wasted effort; efficient team operations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• High levels of learning</td>
<td>• Try new ideas</td>
<td>• Feedback is high, well-received, and objective</td>
<td>• Members have objective outlook</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• No group history breeds unfamiliarity</td>
<td>• Splinter groups/cliques form</td>
<td>• Confidence and creativity is high</td>
<td>• Individuals take pleasure in team success</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Team norms nonexistent</td>
<td>• People set boundaries</td>
<td>• Leader reinforces team behavior</td>
<td>• We vs. I orientation/language</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Member interaction tentative</td>
<td>• High levels of anxiety and competition abound</td>
<td>• Members self-reinforce team norms</td>
<td>• High levels of pride, openness, support, empathy, trust, and performance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• No levels of commitment to the team</td>
<td>• Members push for power and position</td>
<td>• Hidden agendas become open</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Low esprit de corps</td>
<td>• More individual motivation</td>
<td>• Confrontations risked and resolved</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Lots of personal attacks</td>
<td>• Team gains commitment from all members on direction and goals</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Levels of participation fluctuate among members from low to high</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Action Steps: Forming to Storming

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Action Steps: Forming to Storming</th>
<th>Action Steps: Storming to Norming</th>
<th>Action Steps: Norming to Performing</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Set a mission and set goals</td>
<td>• Leader support and reinforce team behavior and group wins</td>
<td>• Maintain traditions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Establish roles</td>
<td>• Leader ask for and expect results</td>
<td>• Praise and flatter each other</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Recognize need to move to Storming phase</td>
<td>• Recognize need to move to Performing phase</td>
<td>• Self-evaluate without fuss</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Leader be directive</td>
<td>• Recognize and publicize team wins</td>
<td>• Share leadership role and rewards and successes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Figure out ways to build trust</td>
<td>• Buy into objectives and activities</td>
<td>• Communicate frequently and openly</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Define a reward structure</td>
<td>• Listen actively</td>
<td>• Share responsibility</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Promote risk-taking</td>
<td>• Crystallize the vision</td>
<td>• Delegate within team</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Have group work on common tasks periodically</td>
<td>• Request and accept feedback</td>
<td>• Commit time to team</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Decide to be on the team</td>
<td>• Honor commitments to build trust</td>
<td>• Keep raising bar on expectations and performance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Be selective of new team members, and train them to maintain team spirit</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
About the Author

**Eric Wright, PhD, PMP, CIA**

*Indianapolis, IN*

Eric Wright, PhD, PMP, CIA, is a project management professor, practitioner, speaker, trainer, and founding consultant/CEO of The PM Doctors. He holds a Ph.D. in Business Administration, with a Concentration in Financial Management, from Northcentral University, an MBA from the University of Phoenix, and a Bachelor of Science in Liberal Studies, with a Concentration in Psychology, from Excelsior College. Additionally, he is pursuing a Master’s in Project Management from the PMI GAC-accredited Keller Graduate School of Management. His doctoral dissertation focused on the leadership behaviors of project managers associated through LinkedIn, and examined variables that influence a project manager’s choice of leadership behavior. Eric is also a Certified Internal Auditor (CIA), Project Management Professional (PMP), and Process Improvement Expert (Lean 6 Green Belt). He has twenty-three years of experience as a project manager and facilitator, accountant, resource manager, teacher/trainer and leader at many levels of responsibility in various organizations. He has taught and trained in the fields of healthcare, public financial and accounting services, project management, the military, and education. His work, products, and services can be found at The PM Doctors, and he can be contacted at eric@tpm-d.com or at www.linkedin.com/pub/eric-wright-phd-pmp/29/579/569/.