UNDERSTANDING AND MANAGING TEAM DEVELOPMENT PHASES - LIFE CYCLE

INTRODUCTION

Just like any other group, teams have a distinctive life of their own. They undergo various phases where they evolve and grow in response to different external and internal factors. There are a number of models that describe group life and suggest approaches to team leadership depending on the stage of team development (Tuckman Model, Randall and Southgate, Hersey and Blanchard's Situational Leadership model, Tannenbaum and Schmidt Continuum, Cog's Ladder …). For the sake of this handout, we will focus on the work of Bruce Tuckman (1965).

MAIN IDEAS

Team Development Models

Tuckman's Model of Team Development (1965) is one of the most widely quoted frameworks of group life. The framework suggests five consecutive stages (Forming, Storming, Norming, Performing and Mourning) and describes how teams come together, face challenges, find solutions, plan, deliver results and eventually dissolve. At each cycle, the team's performance and interpersonal dynamics are different and evolve into the next phase with the appropriate leadership support and interventions. The process is repeated when a member joins or leaves the team, until the dismissal of the group. The features of each phase in the Tuckman model are summarized on the next page.

M. Woodcock (1979) suggested a similar analysis and offered a simple four-stage model to help those working in teams better understand their level of development.

- **The Underdeveloped Team**
    - Feelings are avoided
    - Objectives are uncertain
    - Team replays old solutions to new problems
    - Mistakes are covered up. Not wanting to rock the boat
    - The leader takes most of the decisions
- **The Experimenting Team**
    - Issues are faced more openly
    - Listening takes place
    - The group may become temporarily introspective
    - Transitional stage. No real tangible outcomes yet
- **The Consolidating Team**
    - Members more comfortable with each other
    - Personal interaction is established on a cooperative basis
    - Refocusing attention on operating methods and procedures
    - The task is clarified
    - Objectives are agreed

- **The Mature Team**
  - Feelings are open
  - The group recognises its responsibility to the rest of the organization
  - A wide range of options are considered
  - Working methods are methodical
  - Leadership style is contributory
  - Individuals are flexible

Another model of group life was suggested by Randall and Southgate (1980) who identified four phases in the life of a 'creative group':

- Phase 1: Nurturing (people coming together, building emotional safety and trust, preparing group tasks and organizational issues that are needed for the group to achieve its collective task
- Phase 2: Energising (team is engaged and working to achieve its common task. As interaction is intensified and diverse views and skills are brought to the table, healthy conflict may be expected in this phase).
- Phase 3: Peak (moments of accomplishment and completion of the collective task and team purpose).
- Phase 4: Relaxing (moments of rest, celebration and learning following the team's achievement)

Tuckman's Model of Team Development

Tuckman's Model of Team Development (1965)	
1. Forming	In initial stages, the team is still new (it is often likely to still be a group of individuals who intend to be a team). Purpose, norms and individual roles are being gradually set but remain unclear and are still not owned by team members. Individuals still don't know each other well enough. They try to find out more about others members (their personalities, abilities) while being cautious about voicing original ideas. They often test the tolerance of the system and the team leader. Processes are not always respected and given that trust is still low, people seem to work as a collection of individuals without a clear commitment to the team.
2. Storming	Working with others and making collective decisions is not easy. As diverse people come together conflict is bound to happen even if roles, responsibilities and norms have been stated. Disagreement in this phase (which can be visible to other members or hidden) can have various reasons: a clash of personalities, opposing views, competing for status or fighting for the leadership of the team. The team can witness internal splits, diversions from the original goal, and challenges to procedures and rules that team members may have agreed upon in the starting phases. Storming is characterized by anxiety, internal competition, lack of team spirit and power struggles. Team members struggle at problem solving and suggest different ideas. The purpose of the team is becoming clearer despite the persistence of uncertainties and hidden agendas.

Tuckman's Model of Team Development (1965)	
3. Norming	Having been able to withstand the pressures of the previous stage, team members experience a sense of relief and progress. They realise at this stage that they can accomplish the task entrusted to them. They start seeing themselves as part of a team and begin to identify with their collective purpose. They demonstrate creativity, motivation and trust and are more committed to each other and to the team leader. Members start appreciating each other, they openly exchange ideas and viewpoints and reach common decisions through negotiation and consensus building. They discuss and adapt their ways of proceeding: standards, processes and norms are viewed as needed for problem solving and for the performance and unity of the team.
4. Performing	Having resolved in the previous stages key interpersonal and operational team challenges, members are not more aware and mature. They enjoy in this stage playing to each other's strengths and focusing their collective energy to fulfill their common task. This stage is characterized by high degrees of flexibility and interdependence as well as high levels of creativity and resourcefulness. Individuals take pride in their team membership and ability to work together through close teamwork and open communication. Aligned on a shared purpose and vision, they are able to collectively achieve outstanding results without major interference from the leader. They are supportive and trusting and are able to set aside individual needs and goals in service of the team's higher objectives. They have learned how to effectively resolve conflict and regularly adapt their team working style and internal processes.
5. Adjourning *(added in 1970s)*	The 5th stage is often referred to as Deforming/Mourning and describes the breaking up of the team. While this phase may not be linked to task completion (since the task has already been achieved) or to team development/management (since the team has decided to disperse), it carries a lot of relevance to individuals on the team. This last stage in a team's life is characterized by feelings of success and pride linked to the completion of the collective task mixed with feelings of sadness and loss.

APPLICATION

Part 1: Connecting to experiences in teams

Based on Tuckman's model of team life, recall specific examples and situations that illustrate each of the 5 phases.

Part 2: Linking with leadership styles

Take some time to remember the various leadership behaviors and styles that you discussed in Module 1 and bring to mind the ones you often tend to operate from. Discuss in your group which leadership behaviors and attitudes you would suggest for the various stages of development in a team.

You can note down your insights in the table next page.

	Stage: _____ *Example: Forming, Storming, Norming, Performing, Adjourning*
Specific example that illustrates this stage	
What was it like during this stage?	
What did you feel as a team member?	
What did you need from others?	
How would you describe team cohesiveness during this stage?	
How would you describe team productivity during this stage?	
What did you need from authority?	
Which leadership behaviors and attitudes would you suggest for this stage?	

Note: If the group size allows it, and for timing and efficiency purposes, divide the large group in 5 subgroups and assign one stage for each. Then have each subgroup share the output of their work and have the rest of participants add their comments and experiences.

Managing stages of team development:

The above model facilitates a greater understanding of a team's formation process and carries implications for leadership as to how to manage the various phases. Effectively doing so relies on the leaders' awareness and disposition to invite the team to processes of collective inquiry where together they recognize the dynamics in questions and commit to mutual responsibility and engagement.

Among the key areas to keep in mind:
- noticing and managing the interpersonal dynamics of the group, while keeping focus on the tasks at hand (productivity, work avoidance,...)
- noticing and managing external pressures that the team is subject to,
- observing individual relationships within the team and their impact on the collective unit,
- monitoring membership (new members joining, individuals leaving) and their effect on team cohesiveness and productivity
- paying attention to individual team members' personal growth as well as levels of engagement/discipline, and the subsequent impact on the team,
- correctly interpreting each stage of the team development process and adapting interventions accordingly. While earlier stages require a more directing style, leaders role gradually shifts as the team grows in maturity and confidence.

Insights for leadership on managing the various stages
Forming
In the early stages, the leaders' tasks are oriented towards creating a safe and effective container for the work of the group. This includes: - Facilitating interaction on a regular basis (helping members in getting to know each other, bringing them together on common projects) - Building the first foundations of trust and respect within the team, identifying common grounds and similarities. - Establishing and communicating team purpose. Agreeing on common goals. - Establishing basic expectations. Answering questions. - Setting boundaries.
Storming
In this stage, the leader's task is to contain the energy that is expressed and help the team remain focused on its objectives. This includes: - Remaining positive, allowing conflict (instead of suppressing it) - Enabling the expression of differences in opinions and viewpoints - Working on harmonizing interests, creating positive work environment - Setting expectations/accountabilities and expecting results help the team avoid getting distracted by the emotional load of interpersonal issues - Supporting and rewarding positive team behavior and achievements - Initiating the development of team norms and work processes - Encouraging participation, asking for feedback - Coaching individuals (on managing their anxiety, their interpersonal differences, internal competition, on improving communication, on reacting to power and leadership…) - Being understanding and able to compromise to support progress

Insights for leadership on managing the various stages

Norming

As respect for leadership is more shared by team members, and performance is building up, the leader becomes more of a facilitator and enabler at this stage. This includes:

- Deepening relationships, promoting healthy socializing and engaging the team in fun and social activities
- Maintaining a team spirit
- Motivating, cheering and praising the team on progress
- Committing time to share success, communicate and update team members.
- Sharing responsibility. Involving members in big decisions. Delegating smaller decisions depending on members strengths and skills
- Selectively recruiting team members based on the processes and values that the team has developed
- Facilitating group processes to discuss and update the team's internal ways of work
- Evaluating performance, calling for personal and collective accountability to promote greater productivity

Performing

At this stage, the leader's intervention is more subtle. Focus is on:

- Delegating more responsibility. Overseeing progress
- Ensuring a light supporting presence
- Facilitating the accomplishment of tasks if needed
- Assisting with personal or interpersonal growth of team members
- Exploring new opportunities and projects for the team

Adjourning *(added in 1970s)*

Given the mixed feelings involved in this stage, the leader's task is mainly to recognize people's emotional state and be sensitive to their vulnerabilities. This involves:

- Helping team members manage their feelings of insecurity and sense of loss.
- Providing encouragement and support.