



Cooperative Extension Program  
Prairie View A&M University  
Prairie View, Texas

# Volunteer Administration in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century:

## Team Development in Organizations

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**T**eams are organized for various reasons and in different organizations. Although a team might be organized for a specific purpose, the members of that team could be participating for different reasons. Some groups are working groups; others may function as teams with synergy.

The *American Heritage Dictionary* defines *synergy* as “the interaction of two or more agents or forces so that their combined effect is greater than the sum of their individual effects.”

Sports teams illustrate the differences between a working group and a team that functions with synergy. A golf team is a working group because the members do not depend on the other team members during play. Each is responsible for his or her individual score, which combines as the team score. The players on a basketball team, however, work together to achieve a common goal, thus creating synergy. The team’s effort is more than what one individual could accomplish alone.

One of the most critical components of teams is goal setting. Members of a team should set goals, discuss, decide and work together to achieve them.

Some group members may choose to work independently to achieve a common goal. But within the team, the individual members must be able to work together toward a shared vision.

Groups with strong synergy have unique characteristics:

- Shared leadership roles among members
- Individual accountability
- Agreed-upon purposes and/or goals
- Collective work products
- Active problem-solving

Even though working groups work toward a common goal and make decisions as a group, the overall work may first be delegated to one

person—a leader who is clearly established in the group—and then each member is assigned a specific function. The leader, who should be identified before the group is established, makes sure all the goals are achieved and unity is maintained.

Other characteristics of working groups include:

- Individual accountability
- Individual work products
- Limited interaction while working toward the goals

Technology has made working together and achieving goals easier. E-mail, teleconferences and other forms of technology allow teams to work together from a distance and still accomplish their goals. For many teams, working at a distance is their only option. However, in these distant teams, the goals and each member's role must be clearly identified and extra provisions must be made so the duties can be fulfilled.

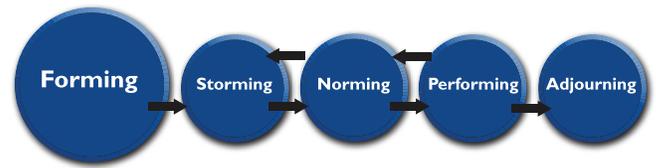
Some people dislike working on teams because of the possibility of chaos, conflicts and lack of understanding. The dynamics of a team can be complicated, especially as the members work out personal differences and build on their strengths. However, according to *The Team Handbook*, knowing what to expect as the team progresses equips members to better handle conflicts and make decisions.



## Five stages of team development

Regardless of the circumstances, all teams go through a development process. These groups develop in five stages, according to “Developmental Sequence in Small Groups,” by Bruce Tuckman, an educational psychology professor at Ohio State University. The five stages are forming, storming, norming, performing and adjourning.

As teams develop through this process, the members define their roles and become better acquainted. In the end, the team's main outcome should be the successful achievement of its goal.

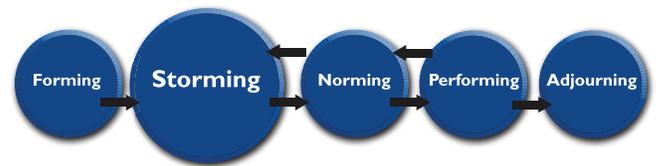


### Stage 1: Forming

The forming stage is a period of uncertainty as the members find their places in the group and form a unit. As the members become acquainted with each other and define the group, the leader's ability to guide is tested. At the same time, *The Team Handbook* reports, the members feel a growing sense of excitement about being a part of the team.

*Leader tip:* In this stage, the leader should provide opportunities for the group members to become acquainted with each other and build confidence and trust. The leader should provide clear direction and purpose while involving the members and clarifying their roles.

In this stage, the focus is on establishing the team, getting the members comfortable and defining goals. If the leader fails in this stage, the ensuing stages are likely to fail as well.



### Stage 2: Storming

Most team development experts say that the storming stage is the most difficult. Conflicts arise during this stage, and members realize the task is different and/or more difficult than they had thought at first. According to *The Team Handbook*, the team members sometimes become testy, anxious and overzealous, and they may argue about actions the team should take.

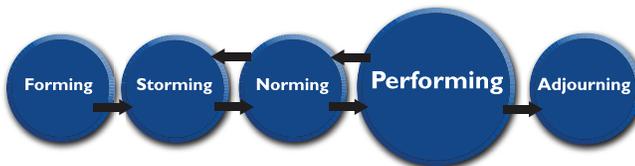
*Leader tip:* Leading through the storming stage involves resolving issues of power and authority and encouraging the members to take on more responsibilities. Each individual must have a role within the group. No member is more important or has more power than anyone else. The leader should emphasize this and help divide responsibilities so that some members do not feel left out of the decision-making process.



### Stage 3: Norming

During the norming stage, team members become accustomed to each other and begin working together and supporting each other rather than competing. During this stage, the members reconcile their competing loyalties and responsibilities. According to *The Team Handbook*, the members then accept the team, the ground rules, their roles within the team and the individuality of fellow members.

*Leader tip:* Fostering cooperation among members is important during the norming stage. The team leader should encourage the members to use their knowledge, skills and experiences to collaborate with each other. *The Team Handbook* advises that at this stage, the leader must encourage collaboration among team members and keep striving to achieve all goals.



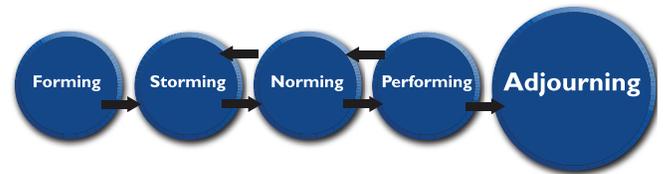
### Stage 4: Performing

During the performing stage, as the team settles its relationships and expectations and begins to diagnose and solve problems, working together becomes easier. Changes are identified and solutions are implemented as the team members learn about each other's strengths and weaknesses.

At this stage, the team members work through problems because they understand each other and can work as a unit. The team is fully effective in accomplishing more and experiencing less controversy among members. The amount of time required to reach this stage may vary among teams.

*Leader tip:* Because change may be a challenge during this stage, the team leader should help the members manage change. The leader should also recognize the members who overcome obstacles and/or changes. Team members who see their hard work pay off will have incentive to overcome other obstacles.

*The Team Handbook* notes that advocating for change and representing the team outside the team environment also helps build openness to change.



### Stage 5: Adjourning

Once the team has accomplished its goal, the members may disperse or move to new experiences and/or challenges. They may reflect on what worked for the team and what they could do differently next time to achieve better results. Tuckman wrote that during this stage, the members may feel a sense of loss because of the close bonds established on the team.

*Leader tip:* The leader should celebrate the accomplishments of all the team members and thank them for their hard work and dedication. The leader also may recognize the team's results, whether or not the targeted goal was reached. The leader should remember the teamwork that took place and the personal relations made throughout the process.

## Summary

The amount of time that a group takes to move from one stage to the next varies according to the dynamics of each team. Progression through each stage is unpredictable, and a team may lapse to a previous stage.

For example, the team members may plan and execute a leadership workshop but may revert to the storming stage when they have to coordinate an awards banquet. Cycles of good and bad times do not signify immediate success or failure—in fact, these cycles are normal.

The team leader must identify the changes within the team and react to those changes. A team leader must be able to identify the accomplishments of the development process and guide the group to the next stage.

A leader also may need to lead the group to a previous stage to strengthen or prepare the team. Leaders who are not receptive to change or to the individual team members can be more detrimental

than some of the members themselves. Leaders can achieve great success by helping their teams set goals, using the members' skills and maintaining good communication among the team members.

## Acknowledgments

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## For more information

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# Understanding Team Development in Organizations Quiz

Match the team development stage with the role that the leader plays in that particular stage for the following five questions.

## Stage of development

- \_\_\_ 1. The stage in which conflicts arise and the members begin to realize that the task is different from and more difficult than what they had imagined. It is typically the most difficult stage.
- \_\_\_ 2. The period in which the team members begin to work together and accept their roles. They believe in the cause and help each other.
- \_\_\_ 3. A time when all the goals have been reached or tasks completed and the members are ready to part. It can be difficult for some members because new relationships have been formed.
- \_\_\_ 4. Members begin to explore boundaries, become acquainted with each other and define expectations. They adjust from being individuals to functioning as group members.
- \_\_\_ 5. The team is a functional unit, dissecting and solving problems and experiencing less controversy. The members understand each other's strengths and weaknesses and rely on one another to solve problems.

## Leader role

- A. Help the members get to know each other. Provide clear direction and purpose while involving the members and clarifying their roles.
- B. Celebrate accomplishments and the relationships built during the process. Also thank individuals for their hard work.
- C. Resolve issues of power and authority among the members. Encourage the members to take more responsibilities.
- D. Help the team members navigate through obstacles and celebrate any accomplishments they may have made as a team.
- E. Continue collaboration and encourage the team members to use their talents and skills as resources. Collaboration is the key.

Wait until you fill in all the blanks before looking at the answers!

1. C 2. E 3. B 4. A 5. D