6th Tuckman Stage

by Bob Whipple, MBA, CPLP

In 1965, Bruce Tuckman coined the four stages of team development. He called the stages Forming, Storming, Norming, and Performing. Most groups in business or social activities are familiar with these four stages. The most interesting and challenging stage is Storming.

Teams enter into a time when members challenge each other for numerous reasons. Tuckman described it this way, " The storming stage is necessary to the growth of the team. It can be contentious, unpleasant and even painful to members of the team who are averse to conflict." The skill of the leader to guide a team through the Storming phase and into the Norming phase, when the group rules and policies are established, is critical for progress.

In 1977, Tuckman added a fifth stage he called "Adjourning." This is where the group completes and documents their activities, and the team breaks up.

It is now 36 years later, and I became curious whether a sixth stage might someday be added to the lexicon. Bruce would now be about 75 years old, if he is still living, so I asked one of my leadership classes to work in groups to think of a potential sixth stage.

One group came up with a "Feedback" stage between Performing and Adjourning. In this stage, the team would document the lessons learned and make them available for future teams. This practice is similar to the "After Action Review" (AAR) in the military where groups do a debrief after every mission to determine what went well and what could be improved in the future. The AAR technique has been credited with saving numerous lives by consolidating the learning from missions that did not go as well as hoped.

After much debate, the group felt that the feedback function is really part of the adjourning process, so they did not recommend it as a sixth stage in team development.

Another group felt that a "Trusting" phase ought to be inserted between Norming and Performing. This is an important addition because there is a big leap between establishing the rules for a team and actually performing at a high level. The team needs to knit into a unit where trust is the foundation of performing up to expectations. It is the time where mutual respect seasons into a bond where people recognize that the rules set up in Norming are not just words, but they actually form the basis for all actions.

In the "Trusting" phase, team members would learn how to walk the talk on stated actions, and they would learn how to call each other out if there were violations. Another word that could be used here is "Testing." This is the time when people realize that the good intentions set up in the first three stages are more than nice things to say. The enduring performance of the team is dependent on everyone in the unit meeting the stated expectations of the group.

I believe a "Trusting" phase is a great addition to the Tuckman five stages of team development. Without trust, you will have a lot of good intentions but the team will fall short during times of extreme challenge or stress. With trust, the team can withstand the vicissitudes of the real world and still accomplish their mission flawlessly.

Bob Whipple, MBA, CPLP, is a consultant, trainer, speaker, and author in the areas of leadership and trust. He is the author of: *The Trust Factor: Advanced Leadership for Professionals, Understanding E-Body Language: Building Trust Online,* and *Leading with Trust is Like Sailing Downwind.* Bob has many years as a senior executive with a Fortune 500 Company and with non-profit organizations. For more information, or to bring Bob in to speak at your next event, **contact him at** www.Leadergrow.com**,** bwhipple@leadergrow.com **or** 585.392.7763