Tool 34: Tuckman (forming, norming, storming, performing)

Aim of the tool
Self-evaluation process to make groups cooperate more effectively.

When to use it?
The co-creation stage, when the focus shifts towards developing group outputs.

What is the Tuckman tool?

In 1965, Bruce Tuckman, an educational psychologist developed one of the most influential models for group formation. Based on his observations of group behaviour in different settings and on literature study, he came up with a model representing the different phases groups need to go through to grow as a team.

The model initially consisted of four distinct stages of group formation: forming, storming, norming and performing. Later, a fifth stage was added, called 'adjourning' or 'mourning'. They represent the necessary and inevitable stages from facing challenges, tackling problems, finding solutions and planning work to ultimately delivering results as a team.

Source: TrainTheTrainer 2011

As all stages have their own focus, they also correspond to a different set of feelings, behaviours and group tasks. According to Tuckman, raising awareness about the different stages and why things are happening in certain ways could positively influence the team's process and productivity.

Though Tuckman presented the different phases as a linear model, it is important to realize that in practice, the phases are rather fluid and group formation is not always a linear process.
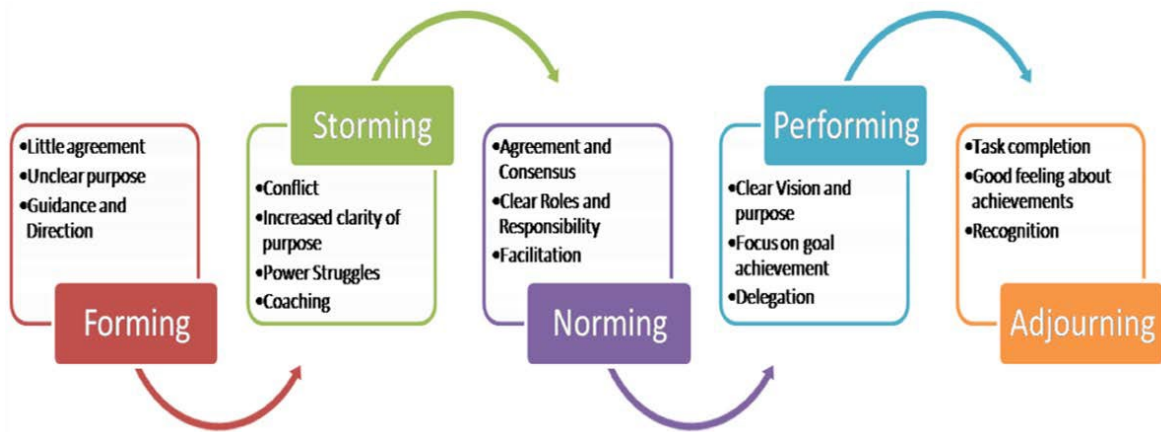
Team Development Stages. (Source: Okpalad, based on Tuckman and Jensen (1977))

Having a way to identify and understand causes for change in the team's behaviour can help theteam to maximize its process and productivity. This is especially the case when the Tuckman analysis is used as a basis for conversation instead of a fixed diagnosis.

Forming

The team is formed and everyone shows their best behaviour. A positive and polite atmosphere should be fostered. Strong guidance is needed by the facilitator as group tasks are not clearly defined yet.

Storming

Emerging boundaries become contested and conflicts occur. Also frustration with the lack of progress is common. Guidance is needed by the facilitator.

Norming

Team members start to resolve their differences, appreciate their colleagues' strengths, and respect the leader's authority. Behaviour from the storming and norming phases can overlap forsome time when new tasks arise.

Performing

Hard work goes hand-in-hand with satisfaction about the team's progress. Team confidencemakes team roles more fluid and more tasks can be delegated by the facilitator. Problems areprevented or solved as they pop up.

Adjourning

When all tasks are completed, it is important to celebrate the team's positive achievements. Letting go of the group structure after long periods of intensive team work can also generate uncertainty for individual team members.

Learn more
Stein, J. Using the Stages of Team Development. Open here

MindTools.com. Norming, forming, storming and performing. Understanding the stages of team formation. Open here

MindToolVideos: Forming, Storming, Norming, and Performing: Bruce Tuckman's Team Stages Model Explained. Open here