Forming, storming, norming and performing

Tuckman And Tears: Developing Teams During Profound Organizational Change

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Dealing with profound organizational change can be a painful and disruptive experience for everyone on the team. Using a griefwork approach in the context of the Tuckman team growth model, managers and supervisors can facilitate team building while honoring team process.

Introduction

Both planned and unplanned change in organizations have an element of loss inherent in the process which is felt, but often is not acknowledged by either employees or their managers. Left unaddressed, the emotions experienced throughout the stages of change, like those accompanying the stages of grief, may be expressed by employees in behaviors which are obstructionistic, even destructive, to the goals of the change. Newly formed teams will confront the challenges of moving through these stages as a natural process and in a more or less orderly way, determined by the level of awareness of group members and the facilitator. Well-established teams who must deal with significant change, however, will also cycle through these stages and should be prepared to expect the emotional responses. Managers and supervisors who understand and can facilitate the movement through these developmental phases will be rewarded by reaching peak team performance much more quickly.

THE SHARED MODEL

	Kubler-Ross	Tuckman
Stage 1	Denial	Forming
Stage 2	Resistance	Storming
Stage 3	Exploration	Norming
Stage 4	Commitment	Performing

How The Models Complement One Another

The psychosocial process of team formation as described by Tuckman — *forming, storming, norming and performing* — combined with Kubler-Ross's grief model which addressees the emotional issues associated with change, including the growth of a new team, creates a powerful supervisory tool. Though human behavior is not linear and team members may

move into and out of phases more than once and at individual pace, the manager can predict the process to the members and reassure them that what they are experiencing is normal when facing something new. The following is a way to explain this to the members of your team:

■ During the first phase of team development, *forming,* it is natural for members to practice *denial.* For example, team members might be saying to themselves, "I can't believe this is happening again. I was just getting to know the people in my department and now I'm reassigned again." Unresolved fears about the change and mistrust of new team members need to be replaced by acceptance and a sense of membership in order for the team to move on. Supervisors can encourage this sense of inclusion by allowing time for trust-building activities and process work early on and by taking the emphasis off the completion of a particular task until a certain degree of social cohesion is reached. Schedule time in each meeting of the new team devoted to process. If the members of the new team do not know each other, consider using an external facilitator, perhaps from the Human Resources department, for this initial trust-building phase. Remember that members may still be grieving the separation from previous colleagues and functions, especially if major change has preceded.

■ Next, it is common for members of new teams to feel *resistance* as the group moves into what Tuckman described as the *storming* phase. Some members may be thinking, "These people don't know what they're doing; my old team would have already had the specs to development. I'll just hang back until this falls apart."

In this second stage, parallel in each model, team members may experience conflict, manifested by anger, blaming, anxiety or withdrawal. Storming naturally occurs when a group is struggling with assuming an identity. This is a critical period of letting go of old norms and relationships and becoming emotionally prepared for new ones. The members of the team with a higher tolerance for conflict should be encouraged to assume leadership roles in sup-

port of the manager during this period. Using their skills in negotiation, conciliation and conflict resolution, these members and the supervisor can normalize this phase and move the team past initial roadblocks.

As the anger recedes, it is common for individuals on the team to try to *bargain,* as Kubler-Ross named it, in an attempt to slow down or stop change. "Look, just give us a chance to do it the way we did it in R & D — it worked great there. We don't need this group." This early group formation phenomenon should be anticipated by the supervisor and predicted. Talking about this with the group moves the team closer to setting mutually agreed upon goals.

■ When the bargaining fails, members of the group finally begin to *explore* their new roles in the *norming* phase. Members now are more likely to think, "Well, this isn't as bad as I thought. John has some great ideas, and I think I can get my new software design on the table by the next meeting." Process comments from the supervisor helps members identify both individual roles and as well as the overall role of the group. This third stage of grieving, like Tuckman's third stage, is a time of implementing the new mission as a team. Conflict has been reduced and there is a method in place to resolve future inevitable conflicts; the attention of the team turns to the task at hand.

A caution to the supervisor of a new team, however, is to be alert to unresolved or unsurfaced feelings which can reduce productivity and slow the group down. This will be apparent if you notice a return to the behaviors you observed in the storming phase earlier. Again, human behavior is not linear and predictable, so you may need to revisit some of the techniques used in earlier stages of the team's life. This is a critical time for your team. A group member who remains angry about a

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previous reorganization, for example, can sabotage the efforts of the whole. He or she should be counseled by the manager at the first sign of falling back to old behaviors. If trust has been created among group members, then positive peer influence from other members is often effective in getting this person back on track.

■ The last part of the grief cycle, **commitment,** also the fourth phase of team development, **performing,** is characterized by the team's mutual commitment to the project and to one another as a team. "This is working out. We can do this."

In this stage, members of the team have established a pace and a shared language, even sometimes a "shorthand" language, for communicating both within process and for task. The significant obstacles have been removed and the focus is on successful outcome of the project.

In all the developmental phases of team building rests the inevitable end of the current project and the disbanding, or death, of the team. Managers and supervisors should begin to prepare for this loss, another change process, in a natural and progressive way. As the end of the project nears, let the team devote a part of each staff meeting to discuss what wrapping up the project means to them. Managers and supervisors skilled in facilitation should lead this part of the meeting, or a consultant with a background in debriefing and change management could be called in. This offers the team a chance to say a formal good-bye and prepares members to move on much more freely to the next group assignment without unresolved issues. **SV**
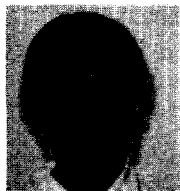
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Best Qualifications

When the board of directors of a large food company was considering the selection of a new president, one of the directors worked out this questionnaire:

1. Who of the possible candidates is the best known as a personality to the most company people?

2. Who is the most liked and trusted by them?

3. Who is held in the highest regard outside the organization... in public life and "in the trade"?

4. Who is the most warmly human in their dealings with people?

5. Who has demonstrated the best capacity for selecting able people, and the greatest willingness to delegate authority and responsibility?

6. Who will be apt to do the best job of keeping their desk and mind clear of day-to-day operating problems, so he/she will have time to think in broader terms of tomorrow and next year?

7. Who does the boldest — yet soundest — thinking?

8. Who is most open-minded and willing to revise decisions when important new facts come to light?

9. Who inspires the best cooperation and exercises the best control and coordination, without "trespassing" on responsibility once delegated?

10. Who is most self-possessed in all situations, best able to adjust to personalities and circumstances with tact and understanding?

11. Who can be depended upon to make the most of a promising new plan or idea?

12. Who can "take it" the best under a heavy load of responsibility?

13. Who is the best builder of the people under him?

14. Who is most likely, in good times and bad, to remember that the basic job of the president is to operate the business at a profit? **SV**