



## Module 11.1 Team Life Cycles

Team Life Cycle Stages - Step 6. Discussion of the Team Life Cycle and what tasks are associated with each cycle to maintain the team's effectiveness.

### Instructions:

1. Describe the team process in the Weekly Progress Reports, section 4 and in the Team Leader Transition Reports.
2. Develop continuity in your descriptions to clearly describe how the team is interacting. Answer the questions once you identify the stage your team is experiencing.

Teams develop and move through stages having an agreed upon defined structure, equally maintained by all team members while a work group has a defined leader, who is defining, assessing, and directing the other group members in developing and performing the task. Teams can develop more flexibility than a work group by providing the members with a structure that allows the team members to become mutually and individually accountable to the team as an entity unto itself. To create this mutual and individual accountability a team needs structural, behavioral, and communication models that provide rules and boundaries. Team members get to know each other, learn about each team member's personal competencies, needs, mind-sets, and negotiation and conflict management skills.

Teams function in organizational environments that are ever changing. Providing team members with the proper tools and structure to make the team into a distinct entity with its own culture assures that the team can effectively communicate their accomplishments with others in the organization. Because the work environment is ever changing, teams are ever changing. These changes are called Team Life Cycle changes. The five stages of team development are Formation, Criticism, Synthesis, Accomplishment, and Completion.

Understanding these stages is critical because teams progress and regress through these stages of development and they are an indicator of performance. When a high performing team loses a team member, the team is pushed back into the Formation stage of development with goals and boundaries needing to be explained to the new team member. Equipment failure can make a team in the Accomplishment stage be pushed back into the Criticism stage. Understanding the progress and regression of stage development is useful in these circumstances because different sets of tasks need to be accomplished when a team is in a particular stage in order for the team to effectively maintain the team and task processes. To understand team stage development, there are mitigating factors that must be kept in mind when collaborating

with others. All team members have personal agendas that they wish to maintain while working collaboratively. Team members feel these personal expectations as outside pressures. Part of each person's personal agenda includes the desire to work and be viewed as competent. Assessment of yourself and other team members help to structure each member's competencies to support the performance of a team. Reporting on the changes in the Weekly Progress Reports, Section 4. Is not a competition to see if your team can move quickly through the stages. Identifying the stages is to present to the faculty and the team coordinator your knowledge of how the team is operating using an identification system that supports effective communication.

**Team Life Cycles:** (adapted from MIT Human Resources website: Stein, Judith, USING THE STAGES OF TEAM DEVELOPMENT; <http://hrweb.mit.edu/learning-development/learning-topics/teams/articles/stages-development> and Influential Teamwork Theories <http://www.team-building-bonanza.com/stages-of-team-development.html> and f Reference: Bruce W. Tuckman, "Development Sequence in Small Groups", *Psychological Bulletin*. 1965. In 1977 Tuckman (in collaboration with Mary Ann Jensen) updated the model to include the fifth stage – adjourning. And from Sharon Feltham, *Excellerate*, The Storm before the Team Performs. The Life Cycle of Teams)

## STAGE 1 - FORMATION

**"Honeymoon " period**  
**Excitement, anticipation, and optimism**  
**Initial, tentative commitment to the team**  
**Suspicion, fear, and anxiety about ability to accomplish the task**  
**Skepticism about what roles team members will play on team**  
**Idealistic discussion of concepts and issues**  
**Impatient about having to discuss the process**  
**Complaints about barriers to the task**  
**Resistance to building team, focus on task**  
**Team members strengths and weaknesses are discussed but not accepted**  
**Ground rules and mission statement are established**

**Challenge** – creating a purpose and managing team membership.

**What does it look like?** Team members are reserved and polite, acting their best to create a good first impression. Conflict is avoided because of the need to be accepted into the group. There may be a sense of excitement and opportunity, but also cautiousness and uncertainty about the future. Team members reflect not only on the tasks at hand, but also about each other. Initial ground rules are established as the team begins to discover how to work together.

**Feelings** - Team members are usually excited to be part of the team and eager about the work ahead. Members often have high positive expectations for the team experience. At the same time, they may also feel some anxiety, wondering how their personal agenda will fit into the team and if their performance will measure up.

**Behaviors** – Team members are inquisitive, asking a multitude of questions, reflecting both their excitement about the new team and the uncertainty or anxiety they might be feeling

about their place on the team. They share insights into personal and group process and are aware and share their own (and each other's) strengths and weaknesses. Team members explore how they will work together by identifying the boundaries of both interpersonal and task behaviors. Time is spent assessing other team members and their commitment to the project. Team evaluates potential risks and rewards. Time is spent establishing relationships with leaders and other team members.

**Team Tasks** - The principal work is to create a team with clear structure, goals, direction, and roles so that members begin to build trust. To develop a good orientation for team members, the team discusses the development of ground rules and their personal expectations of themselves, the team, the project, and any other person involved in the project. These discussions help to ground the members in terms of the team's mission and goals, and can establish team expectations about both the team's product and, more importantly, the team's process. During the Formation stage, much of the team's energy is focused on defining the team so task accomplishment may be relatively low. Having the team leader create weekly activity lists allows the team to move in a specific direction.

**Questions** - What are we supposed to do together?

Do I want to get involved in this?

Is everyone committed to this?

How can I contribute?

What is expected of me?

What are the pros and cons to being on this team?

What are the personal agendas of the other team members?

Will we get along?

What will you contribute?

Can I trust you?

## **STAGE 2 - CRITICISM**

**Ground rules are ignored**

**Near panic sets in over the realization of how much work lies ahead**

**Resistance to the task**

**Sharp fluctuations in attitude about the team**

**Skepticism about the project's chances of success**

**Argument begin amongst team members although there is agreement on the real issues**

**Defensiveness**

**Competition**

**Doubt over the competence of superiors who chose the project**

**Challenge** – managing expectations and roles.

**What does it look like?** Differences in opinion are more common and are expressed more openly. Conflicts emerge around interpersonal issues and task needs. Power struggles may emerge as leadership is challenged and factions begin to form. Team

members compete for positions, challenge goals, resent the group influence and resist task requirements. Note: Many groups commonly stall at this stage. If the ground rules, strengths and weaknesses, and personal expectations have been discussed properly in the Formation stage many of these characteristics are not present such as ignoring ground rules, sharp fluctuation in attitude, and competitiveness.

**Feelings** - As the team begins to move towards its goals, members discover that the team can't live up to all of their early excitement and expectations. Their focus may shift from the tasks at hand to feelings of frustration or anger with the team's progress or process. Members may express concerns about being unable to meet the team's goals. During the Criticism stage, members are trying to see how the team will respond to differences of opinion and how it will handle conflict. This is when the ground rules systems for conflict and negotiation become relevant, and the team leader will need to organize how the team's strengths and weaknesses will be utilized or compensated for.

**Behaviors** - Behaviors may be less polite than during the Formation stage, with frustration or disagreements about goals, expectations, roles and responsibilities being openly expressed. Members may express frustration about constraints that slow their individual or the team's progress; this frustration might be directed towards other members of the team, the team leadership, the team coordinator, or the faculty advisor. During the Criticism stage, team members may argue or become critical of the team's original mission or goals. Some of the behavioral pitfalls are: challenging the team's purpose, splintering into subgroups, struggling for power and control, resisting tasks and authority, and avoiding dealing with underlying tensions and hidden agendas.

**Team Tasks** - The team refocuses their attention on its goals, perhaps breaking larger goals down into smaller, achievable steps. Reviewing the Mission Statement and changing specific elements can help the team to foster more cohesiveness. The team may need to develop both task-related skills, revise the team process, and conflict management skills. A redefinition of the team's goals, roles, and tasks can help team members past the frustration or confusion they experience during the Criticism stage.

**Questions** - Why are we doing this?  
What's the point?  
Why are we doing it this way?  
Why don't we do it that way?

### **STAGE 3 - SYNTHESIS**

**Team members learn to work together successfully**

**Resistance fades**

**Collaborative efforts are initiated**

**Team members begin to give each other positive criticism**

**Members begin to reestablish a harmonious team culture**

**Begin committing to the tasks to accomplish the goals**

Realistic planning takes place  
Conflict management is established and agreed upon  
The team's mission begins to be realized  
Team and personal goals are discussed and implemented  
Ground rules are implemented  
Maintenance of team is established  
Discussion begins on how to maintain the team culture  
Beliefs, assumptions, and values are acknowledged  
Progress on the task is significant

**Challenge** – Managing relationships and task efforts.

**What does it look like?** A sense of renewed optimism as the team begins to feel a sense of team identity. Team members experience increased cooperation as roles and responsibilities become clearer and agreement on the team culture and expectations for behavior are reached.

**Feelings** - Team members begin to resolve the discrepancy they felt between their individual expectations and the reality of the team's experience. If the team is successful in setting more flexible and inclusive norms and expectations, members should experience an increased sense of comfort in expressing their "real" ideas and feelings. Team members feel an increasing acceptance of others on the team, recognizing that the variety of opinions and experiences makes the team stronger and the project more meaningful. Constructive criticism is both possible and welcomed. Members start to feel part of a team and can take pleasure from the increased group cohesion.

**Behaviors** - Behaviors may include members making a conscious effort to resolve problems and achieve group harmony. There might be more frequent and more meaningful communication amongst team members, and an increased willingness to share ideas or ask for help. Team members refocus on established ground rules and practices and return their focus to the team's tasks. Teams may begin to develop their own language (nicknames) or inside jokes. Leader spends time implementing the team's performance expectations, re-establishing specific roles and operating procedures. Roles are defined for problem solving. Ground rule system for settling conflicts is clarified. The team culture is reorganized and established with more concrete boundaries.

**Team Tasks** - Members shift their energy to the team's goals and show an increase in productivity, in both individual and collective work. The team may find that this is an appropriate time for an evaluation of team processes and productivity by assessing how the team is using their strengths and developing their weaknesses into strengths.

**Questions** - Who does what and when?  
How often will we meet?  
How do we settle problems?

How do we make decisions?  
How do we handle conflicts?  
What makes our team special?

#### **STAGE 4 – ACCOMPLISHMENT**

**Members skillfully discuss their strengths and weaknesses using the knowledge to accomplish their goals**

**Team members understand their roles on the team**

**Team members are satisfied with the team's progress**

**Members are committed to the team's goals**

**Team as a unit can implement change**

**Members are effective at problem-solving and decision-making**

**Dialogue amongst team members is established**

**Challenge** – managing task completion, evaluating results, striving for improvement.

**What does it look like?** Reaching this stage is largely dependent upon the successful transition through the previous stages. The team knows clearly what it is doing and why. Relationships are strong and while disagreements may occur they are settled quickly and positively. Roles become flexible and functional, and group energy is channeled into the task. There is maximum work accomplishment, interdependence, personal insight and constructive self-change.

**Feelings** - Members feel satisfaction in the team's progress. Members feel attached to the team as something "greater than the sum of its parts" and feel satisfaction in the team's effectiveness. Members feel confident in their individual abilities and those of their teammates.

**Behaviors** - Team members are able to prevent or solve problems in the team's process or in the team's progress. A "can do" attitude is visible as are offers to assist one another. Roles on the team may have become more fluid, with members taking on various roles and responsibilities as needed. Differences among members are appreciated and used to enhance the team's performance. Alignment is created where each person has an integral role in the team. People and the team as a whole are meeting and exceeding role and task expectations. Cohesion is created with the team feeling like a "team. Commitment is established to each other, the team, and accomplishing the team's goals. Loyalty and trust are firmly established.

**Team Tasks** - The team makes significant progress towards its goals. Commitment to the team's mission and the competence of team members is high. Team members continue to deepen their knowledge and skills, including working to continuously improving team development. Accomplishments in team process and project progress are measured and celebrated.

**Questions** - How can we improve this?  
Is there a better way?  
What more can we do?  
How can I help?

## **STAGE 5 – COMPLETION**

**Members assess goals they reached, collectively and personally**  
**Member discuss expectations that were met and not met for the project**  
**Members acknowledge the personal goals they did and did not attain**  
**Members discuss openly changes to be made when they participate again on a team**  
**Members say goodbye to each other**  
**Archival materials are stored and given to proper authorities**  
**Communication systems used by the team are closed down**

**Challenge** – Managing the completion of tasks. Assisting the team to let go of the group structure and move on.

**What does it look like?** Completion is typically related to the end of a project team. However; it is also relevant when the purpose and structure of team changes substantially due to merger or a restructuring process. This stage can be particularly stressful where the dissolution of the team is unplanned. This stage involves the disbandment of the team, termination of roles, and the completion of tasks. This stage is also referred to as 'mourning' given the sense of loss experienced by some team members.

**Feelings** - Team members may feel a variety of concerns about the team's impending dissolution. They may be feeling some anxiety because of uncertainty about their individual role or future responsibilities. They may feel sadness or a sense of loss about the changes coming to their team relationships. And at the same time, team members may feel a sense of deep satisfaction at the accomplishments of the team. Individual members might feel all of these things at the same time, or may cycle through feelings of loss followed by feelings of satisfaction. Given these conflicting feelings, individual and team morale may rise or fall throughout the ending stage. It is highly likely that at any given moment individuals on the team will be experiencing different emotions about the team's ending.

**Behaviors** - Some team members may become less focused on the team's tasks and their productivity may drop. Alternatively, some team members may find focusing on the task at hand is an effective response to their sadness or sense of loss. Their task productivity may increase. Team members can have conflicting emotions (sadness, anger, gratitude, happiness). Members are uncertain about how to end the project and

their future. Team members deal with this stage in different ways: *Avoiding tasks*, *Arguing* over minor details or past arguments resurface; *Denying*: pretending the team will continue; *Pollyanna*: focusing only on the positive experiences; or *Acknowledging*: facing the good, the bad and the ugly, letting go and saying goodbye.

**Team Tasks** - The team needs to acknowledge the upcoming transition and the variety of ways that individuals and the team may be feeling about the team's impending dissolution. During this stage, the team should focus on three tasks:

1. Completion of any deliverables and closure on any remaining teamwork.
2. Evaluation of the team's process and product, with a particular focus on identifying "lessons learned" and passing these on to the team coordinator for future teams to use.
3. Creating a closing celebration that acknowledges the contributions of individuals and the accomplishments of the team and that formally ends this particular team's existence.

**Questions** - What will I do now?

What will it be like now?

Shall I stay with this project or shall I go?

Once the Accomplishment stage is reached, there is a risk that some teams will neglect the task of maintaining commitment. This neglect will see the team slide gradually into complacency. During this time, the team becomes satisfied by past achievements they are content to leave challenges to "someone else". This is not a defined stage and most teams do not experience the following during the Accomplishment stage but the challenges, behaviors, and questions are worth mentioning.

**Challenge** - Avoiding these behaviors by maintaining the commitment and focus of the team.

**Behaviors** – The team becomes complacent and a cozy togetherness ensues. Self-preservation is the dominant issue. The team may be attempting to extend the life of the group. Mediocrity begins with a lackluster performance eventually leads to a decline in the quality and quantity of task activity. Comfortable routines are established and enforced i.e. don't rock the boat.

**Questions** - Have you followed the appropriate channels?

Why should we change?

We've always done it this way

We're doing OK as we are

When will this lab session be over?