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High-Performance Team Workplace Cultivation

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1 - Team Development Process

Irrespective of the team type (Traditional, Contemporary or High-Performance) all teams follow a developmental process. The two best known and most widely recognized are the Tuckman team cycle and the Kubler-Ross change curve. Knowing how these developmental processes work helps to understand how teams form, their internal dynamics, and the role that the manager plays.

1. The Tuckman team cycle

The Tuckman team cycle is a view of change specific to new teams or new team members showing how new behaviours emerge. Bruce Tuckman first published his model of group dynamics in 1965 comprising the four stages: forming, storming, norming and performing.
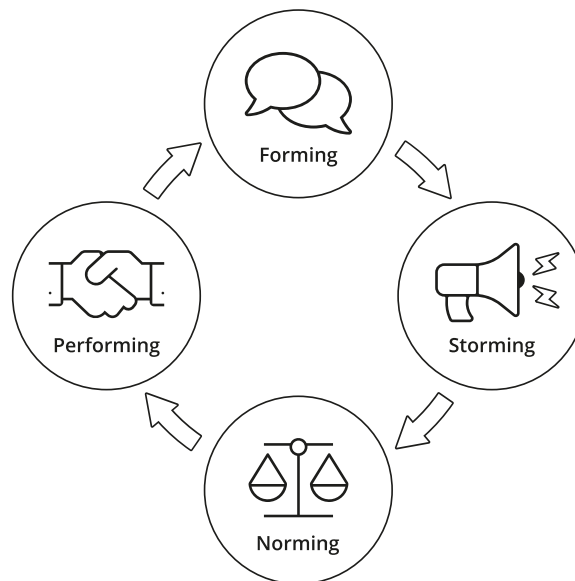

Figure 1, Tuckman's stages of team development.

Forming. The main difference between a random group of people and a team is the team's team vision. When individuals are first brought together, they do not have a team vision. They may be anxious about why they have been brought into this team; will be hesitant about their new environment, unsure of what they have in common with other team members and confused as to the purpose of a project or program. Typically, the individuals will indulge in some superficial questioning of colleagues to look for more information, common ground, and possible allegiances. Forming is successfully transitioned with completion of the Team Vision training step.

Storming. Different individuals will behave in very different ways during the storming stage with outbreaks of conflict being frequent between individuals or small sub-groups within the team. The more assertive individuals will try to impose some order by defining their own rules, resulting in leadership being challenged while a 'pecking order' is established. Assuming a team vision has been identified, very different views will arise as to how that goal should be achieved. Storming is reached and is successfully transitioned with completion of the Team Vision, Psychological Safety and Team Member Engagement training steps.

Norming. As the issues and conflicts of the storming stage are resolved, the team members start to settle down and concentrate on tasks and problems rather than personalities. An acceptance of shared values and behaviours develops with open communication that promotes constructive review and suggestions for alternatives. Team members are starting to become a cohesive unit, genuinely working as a team with its capabilities being greater than the sum of its parts. The norming stage is reached and accomplished with completion of the Team Vision and Psychological Safety training steps.

Performing. By this stage, the team is working as a focused unit. There is a collaboration between team members to solve problems with a visible change in mentality. There is a shared responsibility for the team vision, and individuals are confident enough to innovate and provide insights into problems. Team members demonstrate flexibility, with job titles becoming transparent and delegation of authority working efficiently.

All teams move through the stages of forming, storming, norming and performing, as with other teams. However, with the right training, a team uses the storming and norming phase effectively to define who they are and what their overall goal is, and how to interact together and resolve conflicts. Therefore, when a team reaches the performing phase, they have highly effective behaviours that allow them to overachieve in comparison to regular teams.

During High-Performance Team Building, the team reaches and accomplishes the performing stage with the completion of the Team Vision, Psychological Safety, Open Commination, Mutual Accountability and Effective Work Practices training steps.

2. The Kubler-Ross change curve

The Kubler-Ross Change Curve has been adopted into the world of organisational change from an unlikely source. Elisabeth Kubler-Ross was a Swiss psychiatrist who developed it in response to working with terminally ill patients.

The Kubler Ross change curve works as a rough map to position employees on a change curve. Plus, it provides some simple steps for managing change and helping a team to move forward. One useful tool for leading change is the change curve. It provides a framework for mapping the emotions people are likely to be experiencing during different stages of the change management process.
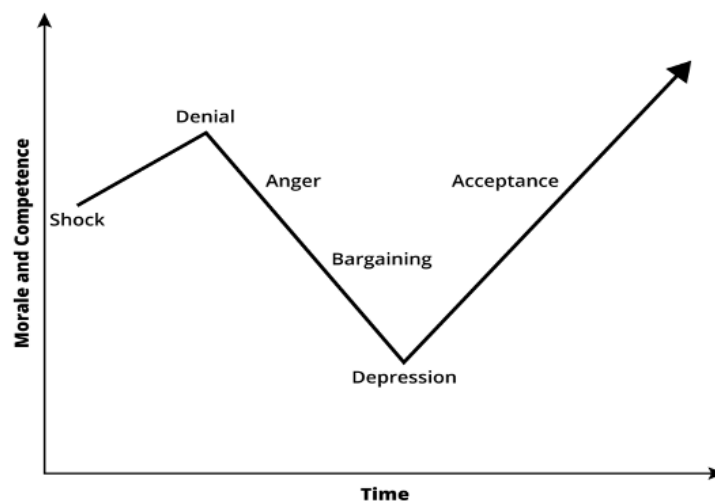

Figure 2, The Kubler-Ross change curve.

The stages of the Kubler-Ross curve. It is essential to understand that we do not always move along the stages step by step. People tend to move into stages in random order and may sometimes even return to a previous stage. Each stage can last for a different period, and someone can get stuck in a stage and not move on.

Shock. Surprise at the announcement of impending change. This can occur during the Team Discussion training step.

Denial. This stage is mostly short-lived. Team members may not be able to digest the fact that they are being asked to undergo a change. It can cause a reduction in productivity and a focus on the past. As manager, your role is to help employees understand why this is occurring and how it will be helpful. This stage requires communication with all questions answered. This can occur during and after the Team Discussion training step and can also show up in initial Team Member Engagement Weekly Check-Ins.

Anger. When reality sets in team members may begin to fear what lies ahead, turning into anger. This stage must be managed very carefully as some employees may tend to vent their anger. Open and honest communication and support should be the focus. Given time this will pass away and make way for acceptance. Expressions of anger usually turn up during Team Member Engagement Weekly Check-Ins. (Note, it is extremely rare for a team member to become angry at the prospect of becoming a high-performance team member.)

Bargaining. When team members and staff finally understand the change and realise how they must adapt, they may try to bargain their way out, so that little is compromised. People cannot be rushed into learning quickly or adapting to changes rapidly. Do not expect 100% productivity during this stage. Bargaining tends to turn up during the Team Vision training step and during initial Team Member Engagement Weekly Check-Ins.

Depression. This stage may not be a happy one for some team members. This stage results in low morale and enthusiasm. It is important to appreciate that this stage is not easy for everyone affected. Training has an important role to play here, the more that is provided, the better it enables everyone to move forward. This tends to turn up during the decision to move forward with a culture of Psychological Safety.

Acceptance. At this stage, people begin to accept change, accept the situation, and start moving forward. They accept and understand the need for the change. It's at this stage that benefits of the hard work put in by them so far start to materialise. The team is showing improvements now, and productivity begins to improve. It's now time to celebrate. This stage is reached and is successfully transitioned with the completion of the Team Vision, Open Commination, Mutual Accountability, Psychological Safety and Effective Work Practices training steps.

Dead car battery example

One of the best examples of the Kubler-Ross Change Curve is the Dead Car Battery example. The following example demonstrates the transition process from one stage to

another. It's a chilly winter morning, and it is dark outdoors. There is a thin layer of frost on the ground, but you are late for work and hence must rush out to the car parked outside. As you place the key in the ignition and turn the car on, you realise that the battery is dead.

What follows is a clear demonstration of a version of the Kubler-Ross stages.

1. Denial. Your first reaction is of absolute shock and denial. You cannot believe this is happening to you when you are already running late, and you, therefore, try to start the car again and again.
2. Anger. Now that you realise the car cannot be started, you begin to feel angry and very mad at the situation.
3. Bargaining. Even knowing it won't help, you start asking the car to start, just for once. You promise it in your mind that you will keep it maintained and get the battery charged as soon as possible.
4. Depression. All the negative thoughts start rushing to your mind. You begin to feel depressed, sad, and hopeless. You fear your job will be taken away and see no way out of the situation.
5. Acceptance. Now you figure out what you should do next. You can catch a cab and decide to deal with the situation later.

Taking the change curve into consideration can significantly boost the chances of success of change because it addresses the critical thing that makes change happen people. If you can't bring people along for the ride, the efforts for managing change will fail

The Tuckman and Kubler-Ross change models are the dominant two, the one that I have observed most often in practice is the Kubler-Ross curve. Each time you introduce something new, the team will move through or jump between these stages until a new skill or behaviour becomes the norm. As the rate of change increases, so will the speed of moving through the stages until the curve becomes normalised.

2 - Create a Supportive Environment

The workplace environment is the where the team operates, it is the social and physical context of its work that forms the team's ecosystem. Creating a supportive environment is one of the high-performance manager's most important responsibilities, for this reason it was covered early under Psychological Safety and Team Engagement. While it might be tempting to first focus on factors within the team as determinants of its effectiveness, the environment that a team operates within is the key to its success. The environment is the team's foundation, and shoddy foundations result in a poorly performing team.

It is particularly important that the team's environment be compatible with the team vision, and work practices, for example, some teams must navigate the tension between improving value for customers while also cutting costs. Similarly, a team focused on innovation must navigate the tension between prescriptive processes and creating new practices. A cross-functional team will also struggle if the performance metrics of team members are aligned to their home function and misaligned with the team's objective.

Having the right support is a vital condition that enables team effectiveness. This includes maintaining a reward system that reinforces good performance and celebration of success. Typical examples of support include an information system that provides access to the data needed for work, and an education system (such as an Intranet) that offers training, knowledge, and access to skills. Finally securing the material resources required to do the job, such as equipment, tools, utilities, and technological assistance is essential. While no team ever gets everything it wants, managers can head off a lot of problems by taking the time to get the essential pieces in place from the start.

It is up to the team manager to create the cultural environment in the first place and then to commit to holding team members accountable for maintaining its cultural elements. Regular feedback, especially for the first three months helps keep team members aligned and displays the managers commitment to the high-performance model. The manager needs to be on the lookout that agreed new behaviours and effective work practices are being consistently applied. The teams' activities need to be policed for at least the first three months, this requires the manager to commit to holding team members accountable for their successes and failures on the journey to high performance. Constant feedback is essential to keep the team aligned with everything it has learned. It also shows your commitment to a high-performance model.

3 - Maintain a High-Performance Culture

A high-performance culture is made up of two complimentary and inter-linked sides to how a high-performance team gets things done. The first is how teams behave, (what is the way we do things around here?) such as team members speaking their minds, practicing mutual accountability, and freely sharing of ideas. Behaviours are the strongest influence on culture. The second is the team mechanics, things like common work practices, processes, systems, and use of a shared knowledgebase. When these two sides of the culture coin are in place - a high-performance culture will start to emerge.

It's one thing to get the right team composition. But only when people start working together does the character of the team itself begin to be revealed, shaped by team dynamics that enable it to achieve either great things or, more commonly, mediocrity.

The secret is to start with changing behaviours, not mindsets. It is much easier to 'act your way into new thinking' than to 'think your way into new actions'. Recuring and consistent performance results from behaviour change will lead to lasting changes in the way people feel, think, and believe in the long run. The following behaviours are required to establish a high-performance work culture and build a High-Performance Team.

- The first is alignment with the organizations vision, where there is a shared belief about what the organization is striving toward and the role of the team vision in getting there.
- The second is Psychological Safety, meaning an environment in which team members feel they can take risks and speak truthfully.
- The third is Team Member Engagement, where Weekly Check-Ins and Quarterly Mentoring takes place.
- The fourth is high-quality interaction, characterized by Commitment and Trust, Open Communication, a Team vision, Effective Work Practices, Mutual Accountability, Interpersonal Skills, and a willingness to embrace Conflict.

Once your team has a healthy culture, where team members feel valued and are all exhibiting productive behaviours, productivity, innovation, and an attitude of nothing is insurmountable - will fall into place.

4 – Maintain a High Workload

As we know, busy people do more and do it in less time. The secret to an ordinary team transitioning to high-performance is the application of a high workload in conjunction with the use of high-performance behaviours and effective work practices

> Without a consistently high workload, a High-Performance Team will simply not perform as expected. Like Formula 1 cars, the fuel for High-Performance is a high workload.

As more work is processed and as more successes and fewer failures are realised, the team's confidence increases, and the ability to manage an ever-increasing workload result. Things start to change. Morale and job satisfaction go up, quality improves, fewer errors and failures occur, innovation emerges, and a feeling of being a contributor to

business growth becomes tangible. The team is no-longer ordinary, and its members know it.

We know from our own experience that when we have a lot to do and are pushed for time, we focus on the essential elements of the task at hand. We often accept that having completed 80% of the work (80/20 principle) that this is usually enough to finish, and we then quickly move on to the next task. Take a well-planned and managed project as an example; 20% of the expended project effort can produce 80% of the project deliverables.

High-performance teams work this way. A high workload motivates a team member to identify and focus their efforts on the 20% of their workload that can produce 80% of their results, meaning greater efficiency and higher productivity. When the 80/20 approach to work and effective work practices are combined, this causes all of those involved to become more reliant on each other, more trusting, more committed, and mutually accountable for the whole of the team's workload. The higher the workload, the more these elements come into play, resulting in actual high-performance outcomes.

This approach enforces adherence to due process, facilitates true collaboration, gets more people involved with a task, when necessary, each of whom is committed to its success, and it forges closer work bonds and a prevailing attitude of 'all for one and one for all' (Mutual Accountability). As more work is undertaken, the new behaviours and effective work practices become normalised and new levels of performance emerge. Performance and productivity receive an added boost when multiple team members or whole teams are focused on the same activities which works exceptionally well for businesses that require more than one team to be involved with the same activity such as IT or Engineering.

5 - High-Performance Behaviours

In a high-performing team every team member works not only for themselves, but also for the betterment of their teammates and the team itself. The sum is greater than the individual parts. As manager you need to police adherence to new behaviours and effective work practices by being on the lookout for.

- Are team members freely speaking their minds?
- Are team members abiding by the team rules and pulling each other up when a rule is broken?
- Is the language team members are using giving you a clear insight into how mutually accountable the team is and how tolerant team members are being of each other? Is team language supporting 'Team performance first, Personal performance second'?

- Are you seeing people asking questions about how WE can perform better together, or is the focus simply on overcoming difficulties that "I'm" having, or issues that are stopping "me" doing "my" job?
- You'll know when you have a truly accountable team when they're happy to be rewarded collectively, because they know that ultimately the collective reward will be greater, because everyone has exploited the collective expertise around them. Teams lower in mutual accountability will always want to take an individual reward option, because the individual team players will always feel that they can control their own personal reward by just keeping their head down and playing the game by their own rules.
- The high-performing team reaches its team vision by fully utilising the expertise and skills of every team member by.

    - Collaborating – working together.
    - Innovating – finding ways to remove barriers.
    - Supporting – helping other team members solve issues or take advantage of opportunities.
    - Continually improving – not only learning from each other but willing and open to challenging each other to be better.

- Between regular team meetings, planned check-ins and spontaneous touch bases, managers will see the full spectrum of work that their team is accomplishing. In terms of teamwork, the manager is the one who is setting the expectations, highlighting opportunities to improve team collaboration, and oftentimes distributing the workload. This can only happen successfully when the manager chooses to remain involved in and engaged with their team that has the right team dynamics.

6 - Recognize and Reward Excellence

One manager described what she did when she first started leading people to manage change in the workplace:

"I started as a supervisor in our billing department. A lot of people in the company did not look at them as an important aspect of the company, but they really are. I went in and showed them how important they are and the role they have in the company. And within three to four months, I had employees come in my office to tell me what an impact that made."

How many of your team members show up for work believing they matter? Most team members would say that that in the last seven days they have not received recognition or praise for doing good work. As a high-performance leader you absolutely must appraise and compliment your team members efforts and do it often.

If you are a manager starting with a demoralized team, it may take some time to uncover the source of that discouragement. You must show them that you respect them and that they matter. You must be able to identify and celebrate successes -- even if they are small at first. Even if nobody else believes in your team, you must -- encourage your team members, and do it often. These are all qualities of a high-performance manager.

Reward team members after a long project or big achievement, a great way to do this is to host a team lunch or dinner. It's important to demonstrate that you appreciate and value people's effort at the end of a major project. Offer employees a day off after a long project or big achievement. This gives them time to celebrate success and recharge for the next task. If a full day isn't possible, a half day or an extra-long lunch period can also be great rewards.

7 - Team Maturity Timeframe

A team reaches high-performance maturity at 3, 6 and 12-month stages. The reason for this is it takes time for new behaviours to become normalised and a new team culture to materialize. Another key factor influencing these timeframes is how well high-performance adherence is policed by you as the team's manager during the first three months after training is complete.

At the 3-month stage.

Look out for these five key indicators that new behaviours are becoming normalised:

1. The first is alignment with the team vision, where there is a shared belief about what the company is striving toward and the role of the team in helping it getting there.
2. The second is adherence to team rules.
3. The third is high-quality interaction during team meetings, characterised by trust, commitment, open communication, a willingness to embrace conflict and shared leadership.
4. The fourth is that the team is using common work practices.
5. The fifth is a strong sense of renewal, meaning an environment in which team members are energised because they feel they can take risks, speak their minds, innovate, and learn from people outside the team.

Next, as manager ensure that you:

- Have stuck to and normalised your new management style, that it is now daily practice.
- Are policing adherence to team rules, work practices and psychological safety.
- Running Weekly Check-Ins and have held your first Quarterly Mentoring sessions.
- Have determined that you have the right people on the team and have moved out any team members who are not making the grade.
- Have commenced Weekly Check-Ins and Quarterly Mentoring.
- Are celebrating team successes.

At the 6-month stage.

Look out for these seven key indicators that new behaviours continue to be normalised:

1. The team's focus and orientation are directed towards achieving business aspirations such as growth and market position.
2. They understand that it is a partnership where members actively work to ensure everyone's success.
3. The team members share fears and routinely ask for help.
4. Communication at all levels has advanced, only honest, timely and high-value information is being exchanged.
5. The team is training their staff on high-performance ways of working.
6. Meetings are now informative, shorter, more focussed, and team members more happily attend.
7. The team's capability and productivity are substantially higher than before.

At the 12-month stage.

The team exhibits the following eight characteristics:

1. The team members can interchange their positions.
2. Shared leadership in decision making is the norm.
3. Team loyalty is high.
4. Team members are mutually accountable to each other, the team shares successes and failures.

5. The team demonstrates high levels of collaboration and innovation, they are tight knit and feel a strong sense of accountability for achieving their goals.
6. The team has put in place a set of supportive processes.
7. There is a sense of clear focus and intense energy.
8. Collectively, the team has its own consciousness, indicating shared norms and values.

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