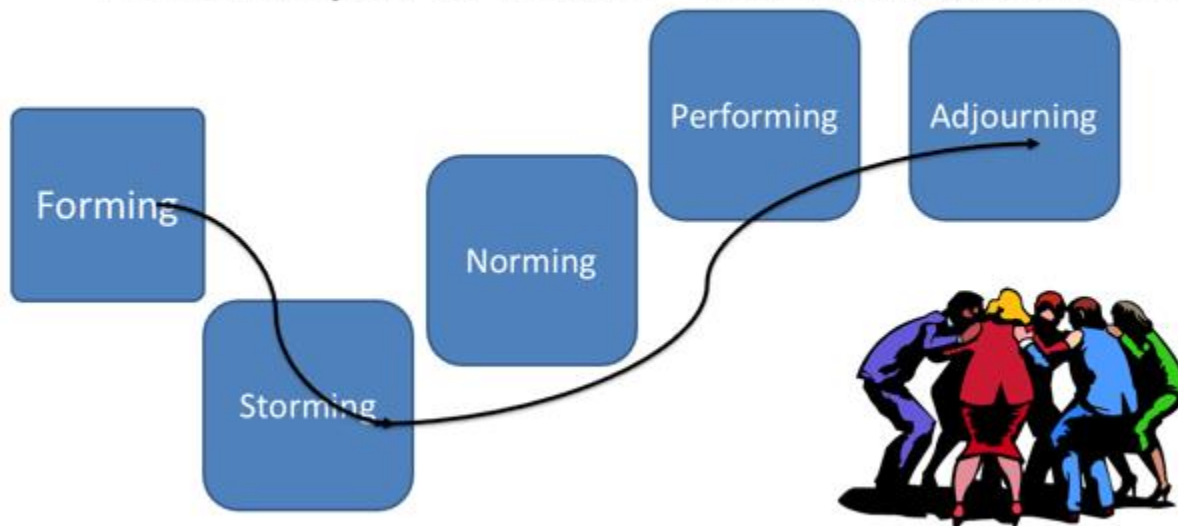


## Step to Their Side Often: Help Mold and Promote the Team

### Team Life Cycle Discussion

Discussion: The figure below shows the Tuckman model of the team life cycle. Notice how the performance line dips before it begins to climb into the norming and performing stages. Have you experienced early dips in team performance? What was the nature of the team? Why do you think it happened? What happened to bend the performance curve back up?

### The Life Cycle of Teams—The Tuckman Model



## **Dealing with Conflict and Disengagement: The Difficult Conversation**

Discussion: These steps summarize an approach to difficult conversations. Imagine you have a team member who is disengaged at team meetings. He has been absent with no explanation twice and when he's present says virtually nothing. He keeps his video off and never volunteers to help with needed actions. When he does speak, usually he is negative and a "contrarian." How would you approach the difficult conversation?

- Explore your "stories"; we almost always contribute in some way. Before the conversation, explore what has happened, your own feelings, and what may be the member's feelings.
- Know what the objective is for the conversation. If correcting behavior isn't a realistic outcome, as when previous conversations have not been successful, the nature of the discussion would be different. Otherwise, e.g., has the purpose for the group been clearly explained, and have the team's activities been consistent with what the group expected?
- Use an invitation to set aside a safe time to talk and signal the topic. In a virtual environment, perhaps "Sara, do you have a few minutes tomorrow to discuss the team meetings? I'll send a meeting invite if you can give a couple of available times."
- Be direct, but steer away from characterizing engagement issues as problems of "intention," and focus instead on impact. For example, "The team charter refers to participation expectations. During our first couple of meetings, you had great insights, but we've missed your contributions the last two meetings." Develop a succinct description of the impact of the behavior. Practice your opening.
- Use questions and inquiry. For example, "How have you felt about the team's work? What role do you see for yourself on the team?" Be comfortable with silence and avoid reacting. Paraphrasing/mirroring can be a constructive way to show that you are wanting to learn their perspective.
- But be prepared for some avoidance or no response if the member doesn't feel safe in the conversation. Deal directly with their prolonged silence, avoidance, or even attacks on you, as in, "I don't know what to make of your silence."
- Close with some kind of action plan. Consider asking them to co-lead a team meeting and help shape the agenda.
- Before the next meeting or other deadline, check-in informally with them to see whether the planned remedial action is on track.

## Tips for Virtual Teams and Committees

Discussion: This summary lists useful approaches to working in a virtual team environment. What would you add to make teams more effective in a virtual environment?

### Forming and Storming: The Early Stages of Teams

- Know the technology platform. Know the platform: how the video works; the best options for audio; how to share screens and change presenters; what features are available to engage, e.g. raising hands and chat features. And practice! Especially figure out how to avoid feedback and echoing using the various voice options.
- Turn on the video. Good teleconference software has a video mode. Turn it on, at least in the early stages so members can virtually meet each other.
- The first meeting. The first meeting is important. Consider circulating short bios with photos to post in the first meeting. On the agenda, use a virtual icebreaker. It could be simply starting with a bio summary and perhaps something that may not be known about you.
- Informal check-ins. Incorporate some informality in every meeting. The five-minutes before a teleconference begins can be used by asking a question like, “What are you leaving outside the door to be in this meeting?”
- Leveraging silence. Without visual cues, it’s easy to fall into the trap of answering a question you’ve posed. Let some time elapse. Then perhaps, “What do I make of the silence?”

### Norming: Preparing to Work

- Use of mute and hold functions. There are different opinions about the use of mute. The majority say that background noises are distracting. Others promote the humanizing effect of having some background noise. On balance, unless you can orchestrate this constructive use of background noise, use the mute button when not speaking. And everyone agrees with the unintended consequences of using a hold button; many phone systems play music on hold.
- Using an email chain to establish norms. In the past, I’ve seen a team member, not necessarily the leader, start an email chain about how she likes to work, inviting others to add to it. Points like, “I make it a practice of at least responding to an email within 24 hours, and completing an assigned task well in advance of the next meeting so I can report progress. Otherwise, I let teammates know when they can expect a response or completion.”
- Establish the communication strategy. Not too little. Not too much. Just right. Discuss the teammates’ needs.
- Email and community-post etiquette. Discuss issues about email use on early calls establishing norms. For example, when should “Reply to All” be used? Do members dispense with salutations and closings in the interest of brevity? Should courtesy replies like “thanks” not be sent globally; or in the interest of time send those privately. Some teams use a no-scroll rule to limit email length to what can be seen on the screen, reserving more lengthy responses or analysis to emails including only key points but using an attachment.

- Importance of agendas and attaching documents. Distributing team and committee meeting agendas and associated documents in advance is vitally important. Like any meeting, they promote advance reflection. But there is secondary value. Some members may only be able to attend via telephone. Moreover, the documents are a back-up if videoconferencing fails, and the group has to resort to more traditional telephone conferencing.
- Recording meetings. I am conflicted about recording virtual meetings. On the one hand, they enable members not able to attend to listen to the meeting. On the other hand, do they encourage non-attendance? I've settled on a compromise. I record only essential parts of meetings that the minutes might not adequately capture.

### Performing: Doing the Work

- Share meeting leadership. Sharing meeting leadership uses shared ownership as leverage to access expertise and foster commitment to the team purpose. Coordinate in advance topics that can be led by individual members of the team or committee. Discuss the approach to shared leadership as a team.
- Visual aids for a virtual environment. Microsoft's OneNote can be screen-shared and is a useful tool for organizing thoughts graphically. Some videoconferencing platforms may have built-in whiteboards.
- Use first names. Using first names as precursors to questions and comments personalizes the discussion. Also, some people may be multi-tasking on a call. Use setup pauses and comments to permit named members to orient themselves to any questions. Try to avoid embarrassing teammates.
- Decision-making. The method of decision-making has to be decided by a team. These range from the leader making the decision on routine items like organizing the team or maintaining the committee's documents, to democratic voting, to consensus (a norm different from unanimity). Discuss how the team will decide.
- Consolidated posts and minutes. Community posts and string emails can lead to disjointed, segmented narratives that are difficult to find and follow. Consolidating and organizing the thoughts in a single document could be posted to the community library and made available for easy, future reference.

### Adjourning: Endings and Transitions

- Celebrating with virtual cards. Celebrate accomplishments and individual achievements. There are free or nominally priced online cards that can be "signed" and shared virtually to celebrate retirements, achievements, or other milestones.
- After-Action Reviews. After-action reviews are important to any team, at the end of a project or after significant interim milestones. They are especially useful for virtual meetings to encourage engagement. The typical questions: What did we expect to see happen? What actually happened? Why were there differences? What worked, what didn't and why? What did we learn that can improve going forward.