4.7: Developing and Managing a Project Team

A team is “a group of individuals who interact interdependently and who are brought together or come together voluntarily to achieve certain outcomes or accomplish particular tasks” (Berry, 2011, p.136)[1]. Teams are utilized in organizations to establish novel combinations of people who would work on unique problems and generate critical decisions as outcomes (Gersick, 1988)[2]. Much of the work that is performed today in organizations requires a focus on teamwork. The ability to work successfully as a team member, as well as the ability to lead teams, is an ultimate advantage within the workforce. Teams themselves must be managed, in addition to managing just the individuals, to be successful. We’ve all heard the quote originally coined by Aristotle that states that “the whole is greater than the sum of its parts.” This captures the nature of the team perfectly—there is such a synergy that comes from a team that the individuals alone are not able to create.

A team is a collaboration of people with different personalities that is led by a person with a favored leadership style. Managing the interactions of these personalities and styles as a group is an important aspect of project management. The project team is made up of people dedicated to the project. These people, team members, are generally borrowed from other departmental units in an organization or are recruited from outside the organization. They may work full-time, part-time, or in some of the activities when their skills are needed. As discussed in Chapter 2 “Project Initiation”, the formal organizational structure would have a substantial impact on how project teams are created and managed. In a functional organization, project managers may have low authority and control over the resources and budget. Besides, they may not work full time as a project manager as they may still carry out the routine tasks of their functional unit. The main advantage of a functional organization type is that the project manager can acquire qualified and experienced human resources from other functional departments. In a strong matrix organization type, a Project Management Office (PMO) or a designated program management office is added besides functional departments. This department employs full-time project managers with a designated job role. They manage the project budget, and their authority becomes moderate to high. They can also have a full-time administrative staff. This organizational structure may be preferred by many project managers since they can still acquire qualified and experienced team members from functional departments inside the organization. Among functional, weak matrix, strong matrix, and project-oriented organization types, a strong matrix structure may suggest more opportunities for a project manager. However, it is of high importance for a project manager to keep in mind and consider various internal and external factors as well as organizational politics.

In particular, in the functional, weak matrix, and balanced matrix organization types, there may be some difficulties for project managers while dealing with project team members. Since these members are borrowed from other units, they may work at the project less than 100% of their working time, and project managers may not be their direct supervisors. Their priorities may be elsewhere. Thus, their dedication to the project objectives and activities couldn’t reach the level project managers expect from them to accomplish their tasks and responsibilities as desired. They may be juggling more than one project as well as their full-time job and have difficulty meeting deadlines.

Project managers need to provide leadership, direction, and above all, support to team members as they go about accomplishing their tasks. Working closely with the team to solve problems can help project managers learn from the team and build rapport. As some of them have been explained above in the “Leadership Skills” section, managing project team members requires interpersonal skills. Here are some suggestions that can help with more effective team management:

- Involve team members in project planning.
- Arrange to meet privately and informally with each team member at several points in the project, perhaps for lunch or coffee.
- Be available to hear team members’ concerns at any time.
- Encourage team members to pitch in and help others when needed.
- Complete a project performance review for team members.

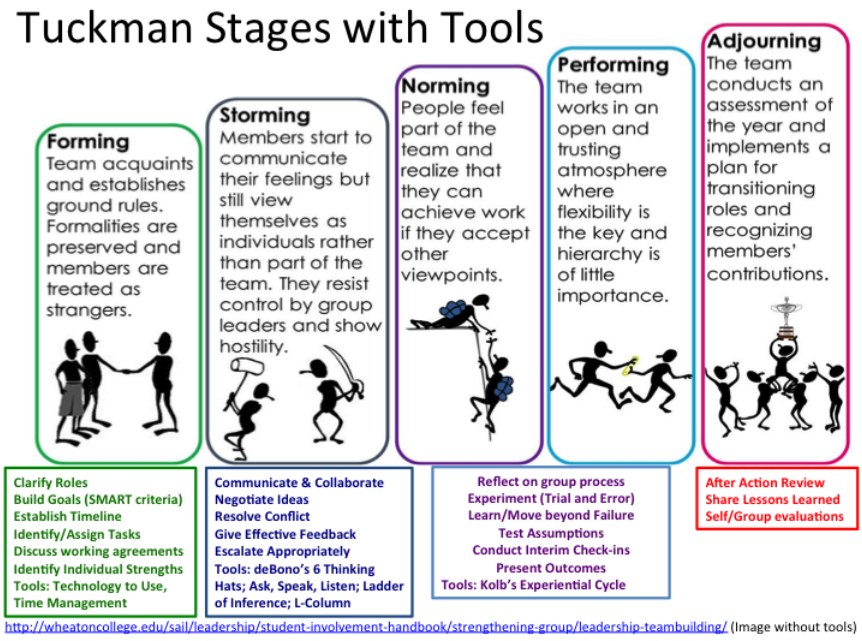
Team Development Stages

One of the models used to describe team development is the Tuckman ladder. According to Tuckman (1965), small groups go through four stages of development which are forming, storming, norming, and performing[3]. As a result of a literature review of fifty-five articles, Tuckman (1965) proposed a model of developmental stages for group settings over time. In respect to the group structure, he labeled these stages as (1) testing and dependence, (2) intragroup conflict, (3) development of group cohesion, and (4) functional role relatedness. Accordingly, he labeled the stages of task activity as (1) orientation to task, (2) emotional response to task demands, (3) open exchange of relevant interpretations, and (4) emergence of solutions. An essential correspondence between the perspectives of group structure and task activity caused Tuckman to summarize the group stages as “forming,” “storming,”

"norming," and "performing." These four stages covered both group interpersonal and task activities. Tuckman and Jensen (1977) added the fifth stage as adjourning after they reviewed twenty-two studies[4].

The first stage, forming, is characterized by orientation to the group setting, testing the boundaries of interpersonal and task behaviors of other members, and a dependency relationship with the leader. The storming stage following the forming stage is characterized by conflict and polarization around interpersonal issues, with concomitant emotional responses in the task sphere. These behaviors with hidden agendas and prejudices serve as resistance to group influence and task requirements. In the third stage, norming, resistance to authority is overcome, in-group feeling and cohesiveness develop, new standards evolve, and new roles are adopted. In the performing stage, group energy is channeled into the task after the structural issues are resolved and the structure becomes supportive of task performance. The last stage, adjourning, indicates the completion of the project where groups disband, and team members are reassigned to other projects or tasks.

Although these classic stages in group development may not be apparent for all groups, and not all groups may follow them, they would be useful for predicting team performance (Mannix and Jehn, 2004) as well as conflicts and harassment cases within an organized framework[5]. Besides, not all the teams could experience all stages and they may spend different times in stages (Ayoko et al., 2012)[6]. Some teams may also face challenges in the transition process from one stage to another, such as moving toward the norming stage from the storming stage. Nevertheless, all teams can find themselves in the performing stage while some of them would spend substantially longer times which could lead them to a higher achievement rating in the end. Johnson et al. (2002) proposed an iterative group development model based on Tuckman's model[7]. In their model based on student virtual learning teams, there was no evidence of the storming stage for all student teams due to rapid movement between each stage given the limited time in accomplishing assignments. Thus, teams moved along forming, norming, and performing stages and they resolved the conflict when it arose among team members. After the conflict was resolved, teams continued the process of forming, norming, and performing.



http://wheatoncollege.edu/sail/leadership/student-involvement-handbook/strengthening-group/leadership-teambuilding/ (Image without tools)

Virtual Teams

Advances in ICTs have enabled the creation and utilization of virtual teams (VTs) within organizations in the last three decades (Alsharo et al., 2017)[8]. The advent of the Internet accompanied by various ICTs, and the emergence of the COVID-19 pandemic by the end of 2019 accelerated the process of digitalization for people, organizations, and governments. Thus, the adoption and spread of ICTs worldwide across organizations and countries increased exponentially. The utilization of global virtual teams in organizations increased to unprecedented levels. 94% of the respondents of CultureWizard's Global Virtual Work Survey indicated that they want to continue working from home—at least part time[9]. These advances ensured the organizations to design their teams composed of members from different geographic locations and organizations virtually beyond a setting of the same location (Berry, 2011)[10]. Nevertheless, even though ICTs are prerequisites of VTs, other factors were also prominent in the process of shifting from traditional face-to-face teams to VTs. Some of these factors could be listed as increased use of horizontal

organizational structure, the emergence of environments that require inter-organizational cooperation, continued shift from production to service and knowledge-intense work environments, and increasing globalization of trade and corporate activity (Townsend et al., 1998)[11].

Virtual interactions and virtual teams cannot be considered identical concepts. Virtual interactions also occur in collocated teams extensively, such as the widespread exchange of emails in the same office (Berry, 2011). A VT can be distinguished from a face-to-face team in terms of several factors. The most prominent factor would be the use of ICTs as the primary communication and collaboration media. Taking into consideration the utilization of ICTs, VT members are less likely to observe physical behaviors (e.g., gestures and intonation), which face-to-face team members rely upon to establish and sustain trust (Alsharo et al., 2017)[12]. Virtual teams have various benefits such as task, resource and schedule flexibility, access to and bringing specialized skills and diverse experiences together in a relatively short time, enhanced knowledge sharing and repository, easier documentation of performance outcomes, and opportunities for accelerated problem solving and solution finding (Jimenez et al., 2017)[13]. Virtual teams employ experts who have acquired more flexibility in temporal and spatial aspects since they save time by not traveling to meet their teammates. These time and cost-saving effects and flexible work schedule benefits are also commonly observed for the teleworkers who work outside of the office by means of virtual communication tools such as teleconferences, videoconferences, and intranets with remote log-in (Coenen and Kok, 2014)[14]. The ability to bridge time and space provides the team with the capability to respond and adjust to new tasks more rapidly, and human resources can be distributed more efficiently without physical relocation of employees thus leading to better utilization of human resources. Although flexibility is assumed to generate positive outcomes, it may cause inherent obstacles for virtual teams. The lack of shared work history among team members as well as less face-to-face interaction could bring about trust issues in virtual teams (Coenen and Kok, 2014).

While virtual teams can be confined to a region in a country or the entire country, they can extend beyond national and continental borders when members of VTs work and live in different countries (Pinjani and Palvia, 2013)[15]. One of the advantages of flexibility in Global Virtual Teams (GVTs) is easier access to skilled experts all around the world. This ensures the availability of resources in other parts of the world when scarcity exists in the organization's or project's geographical area. The dispersed structure of GVT members around the globe allows a 24-hour relay workflow (Carmel et al., 2010)[16]. For instance, members located in Asia and Australia can work on the project during their business hours. They can pass the work on to their colleagues in Europe and Africa for further processing, and then, they can pass it on to the colleagues in the Americas, who can work on it while their more eastern team members are asleep. This follow-the-sun approach creates a cycle of work through which GVT members pass the work on to the members in Asia and Australia, where 24-hour relay starts again (Carmel et al., 2010).

Despite the unprecedented benefits mostly owing to the developments in ICTs, the virtual nature of these teams is not immune to the challenges to effective collaboration and team outcomes (Alsharo et al., 2017). One of the essential challenges in virtual work is the elimination of face-to-face meetings that would otherwise help team members build interpersonal relationships (Cummings and Dennis, 2018)[17]. Lack of first impressions of other team members might have a substantial impact on the formation and functioning of the team, and the outcome of the teamwork. Cummings and Dennis (2018) contended that virtual team members examine each other's profiles on enterprise social networking sites to get acquainted with them, otherwise not possible in a dispersed team. Some of the problems that GVTs and their members might encounter can be enumerated as lack of trust, language and time barriers, cultural differences, lack of onsite monitoring, lack of tone and body language, and different interpretations by the members due to the lack of cues. Eventually, if these likely challenges are not addressed by the GVT leaders and upper hierarchical levels in the organization, virtual teams may cause disadvantages to the team members' well-being and job satisfaction, and team performance.

Team diversity or heterogeneity might have either a positive or negative impact on a team's performance. Although team diversity could exacerbate the conflict and emotional reactions in GVTs (Ayoko et al., 2012)[18], and team members can build higher trust and cohesiveness in homogeneous teams (Drescher and Garbers, 2016)[19], team diversity, on the contrary, could improve GVT effectiveness (Jimenez et al., 2017). The diverse backgrounds of team members could provide representation and exchange of different opinions and perspectives within the team. Hence, this process can create value by providing a more extensive range of information sources and thus aiding creativity and problem solving, and a higher level of organizational learning and synergy (Berry, 2011; Jimenez et al., 2017).

CultureWizard's Global Virtual Work Survey pointed to complications in global virtual teams such as difficulty in building relationships (37%), managing conflict (33%), and lack of responsiveness from team members (20%). The survey also highlighted an issue with the technology as it cannot completely erase the barriers of miscommunication. The survey indicated that 75% of respondents use webcams to compensate for lack of face-to-face contact, but webcams come with their complications, such as

ambient noise, feeling pressure to look attentive and professional on camera, and technical issues such as insufficient bandwidth or difficulty in operating new software.

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