CHAPTER 2

UNDERSTANDING TEAM PROCESSES, ROLES, AND BEHAVIORS

And the Lord said to the rabbi, "Come I will show you hell." They entered a room where a group of people sat around a huge pot of stew. Everyone was famished and desperate. Each held a spoon that reached the pot, but each spoon had a handle so long that it could not be used to reach each person's mouth. The suffering was terrible!

"Come, now I will show you heaven," the Lord said after a while. They entered another room, identical to the first — the pot of stew, the group of people, the same long spoons. But there everyone was happy and nourished.

"I don't understand," said the rabbi. "Why are they happy here when they were miserable in the other room and everything was the same?"

The Lord smiled. "Ah, but don't you see?" He said. "Here, they have learned to feed each other."

Merle Shain
Author

The Green Bay Packers, the Chicago Bulls, the Atlanta Braves, the New York Yankees, the San Francisco 49ers — all sports teams with an established record of winning. What is the key to their success? What characteristics do these teams possess that losing teams do not? Is there some magic formula or equation that we can use to develop successful work or student teams? How have *they* learned to feed each other?

In this chapter, we will examine the processes, roles, and behaviors that underlie team performance. We will identify some of the fundamental principles of highly effective teams. We will also [1] explore various stages teams go through to become effective, recognizing that [2] team success does not happen overnight but requires an ongoing process of growth and development. In Chapter 3, we present a model of team performance and examine four key behaviors (skill sets) in this model. [3]

Principles of Highly Effective Teams

One way of vividly [4] seeing what a highly performing team looks like is to examine [5] at a dysfunctional one. In such a case [6], you will first of all find little or no commitment to the team's overall purpose or mission among the team members. They spin their wheels and get very little accomplished. They think and act like a group of individuals rather than as a team. They [7] fail to challenge the status quo, and they do not view themselves as responsible for following through on agreed upon actions. In many instances, team members [8] lack the structure and direction required to succeed. Their goals are not

clearly defined, for example, or they have no milestones and no real action plans [9]. Meetings lack agendas and structure; confusion reigns over roles and expectations.

In addition to these structural problems, members of poorly [10] performing teams also lack an understanding of how their individual behavior can impact the team's overall [11] success or failure. Frequently [12], members are much more interested in satisfying their personal (selfish) needs than meeting team goals. Consequently, even though team members may have excellent technical skills, they lack the team skills necessary for transforming their technical competence into team success. Instead, individuals compete to be heard or just one person dominates the discussion. In either case, conflict resolution is poor and team synergy is nonexistent.

Think of what happened in a student group you were a part of [13] last semester. Agreed upon meeting times when people failed to show (or were late). Students not doing the work they promised so you had to do it yourself. Two-hour meetings where nothing appeared to be accomplished. Assignments handed in late because team members didn't do what was promised. Confusion with regard to who was doing what and when. " Big-mouthed" students telling everyone what to do and voicing their opinion on every topic, while some students not saying a word. Do these characteristics ring a bell?

Carl Larson and Frank LaFasto investigated dozens of teams during a three-year period. Their sole focus was to ascertain what were the characteristics of effectively functioning work teams. During the course of the study, they interviewed members and leaders of an extraordinarily diverse number of teams, ranging from cardiac surgery teams, executive management and project teams, airline cockpit crews, mountain climbing teams, and engineering teams. They wrote the results in a book entitled, *Teamwork: What Must Go Right / What Can Go Wrong* (1989). Overall, Larson and LaFasto found successful teams have the following eight critical features [14]:

1. **A clear, challenging goal; this goal gave the group members something to shoot for. The goal was *understood* and *accepted* by the entire group.**
2. **A results-driven structure (i.e., members had clear roles and accountabilities and there was an effective communication system within the team).**
3. **Competent, talented team members.**
4. **Unified commitment; in other words, members put the *team* goals ahead of *individual* needs.**
5. **A positive team culture. This factor consisted of four elements: (a) honesty, (b) openness, (c) respect, and (d) consistency of performance.**
6. **Standards of excellence (i.e., an expectation of high performance, to be successful as a team).**
7. **External support and recognition. Effective teams receive the necessary resources and encouragement from parties outside of the group.**
8. **Effective leadership. Simply put, successful teams have good leaders.**

Of these [15] eight characteristics, the authors reported that the most important one was that teams have a well-defined, specific goal for which to strive [16]. Unless groups have an over-arching team goal (or set of goals), confusion with regard to task accomplishment is likely to result. As students, you can hold all eight of these factors as guiding principles to achieve in your team.

Stages of Team Development

One key to developing a highly performing team [17] is to remember that successful teams — whether they are airline crews, R & D units, or student groups — do not occur automatically or overnight. They take a lot of effort and time! You need to be aware of how groups form and evolve. You should recognize that all teams go through growing pains. In fact, many teams never reach full maturity. Instead, teams often flounder in a morass of personal agendas, misdirection, poor leadership, and little synergy.   You also must realize that teams are composed of *individuals* that not only look different but are different. Obviously, team members differ in terms of physical characteristics [18] such as gender, race, age, height and weight. However, member also differ in terms of personal needs, hot buttons and cold buttons, personalities, leadership preferences, motives, likes and dislikes, how they cope with stress and so on. Individual differences that you can see [19] are not nearly as important as those differences you cannot see.

It is generally [20] acknowledged that [21] there are five stages or phases of team development (Tuckmann, 1965; Gersick, 1988). These five stages are predictable and fairly observable to knowledgeable team members. As a team evolves from a collection of individuals (Stage 1) into a highly effective team (Stage 4), its maturation is similar in many respects to an infant growing into an adult [22].

Figure 2.1
"Here's looking at you, kid!" The challenge of getting a collection of diverse individuals to effectively work together as a team.

A wise leader. Just like a wise parent, recognizes that the needs of a group, or child, change over time and alter guidance accordingly [23]. Likewise [24], if you as a team member know what to expect, you can better understand what is going on, why it is happening, and [25] act accordingly.

Stage 1 — Forming

The formative stage involves the transformation of individuals into team members. Team members naturally struggle at this stage with (a) defining the nature of the task to be completed, (b) knowing each other's personalities, motives, work styles, etc., (c) determining acceptable and unacceptable group behavior, (d) deciding what information and resources are necessary to perform the given objective [26], and (e) simply trying to determine where, when, and how [27] to begin. In most instances, conversation among team members is polite but guarded. The group tends to be quite passive and dependent on a leader to tell them what to do [28]. As in infancy, when our parents needed to provide the structure and proper nurturing for us to grow, a team in Stage 1 is completely dependent on the course instructor to tell them what to do and help show members how to accomplish it [29]. Unfortunately, course instructors frequently fail to provide the proper setting for student teams to start off on the right foot.

Stage 2 — Storming

As the team progresses, it goes into a stage similar to adolescence. In this phase, team members vie for control over the group much like teenagers attempt to control their own life. Members begin to think they know more than they do, [30] set unrealistic expectations regarding their performance, and typically argue openly [31] amongst themselves. Oftentimes, the group has experienced some success and now believes it is ready "to take on the world." It is an emotionally charged time. On one hand, there is high energy, enthusiasm, and optimism. On the other hand, there can be anger, resentfulness, and restlessness. Polarization and scape-goating occur as the team tries to identify itself. Frequently [32], chastised members will voluntarily (or be forced to) leave the group [33]. Stage 2 is a very challenging time for the team. However, it is a necessary condition for the team as it matures to the next stage of development.

Stage 3 — Norming

During this stage, team members will have resolved their basic differences and begun [34] to work together. Some members may have left the group. The remaining ones are far more accepting of each other, their own roles, and the team's goals and objectives. A spirit of friendliness, cooperation, and mutual respect characterizes this stage. Members share information willingly, communicate openly, and solve problems effectively [35]. Individuals begin to understand the different strengths and weaknesses of various team members and consider them in task assignment. Members start [36] to identify as a group (i.e., become cohesive). They [37] often socialize and begin to become close friends.

Stage 4 — Performing

Team members feel an intimacy with each other during this phase [38] and gain a great deal of satisfaction from the exchanges that are possible within the team. There is no issue over power, control, or status. When problems occur, members accept them as part of

the interpersonal dynamics of the team process and openly work through them. Members are comfortable with their roles and with each other; they work as a unit to accomplish assignments. The team is productive, efficient, and highly focused. Credit for success is shared. The members recognize a synergy occurs when they work together.

Stage 5 — Adjourning

The final stage in team development is "adjourning." This phase may or may not occur during a team's life cycle. In many instances, a team will accomplish its mission and disband. This period is a time of letting go and moving on with our individual lives. Members recognize that their time as a group is over. Consequently, there might be [39] much sadness and grieving. Yet, it also is a very happy occasion. The team is proud of what they attained and members know they were part of a very special group. Overall, this stage is characterized as a time of mixed emotions. If at the end of the semester, you experience no remorse that your team is breaking up, it is doubtful that you ever reached Stage 4.

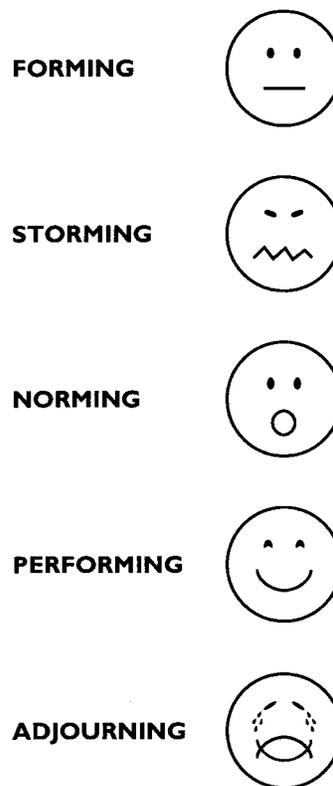## STAGES OF TEAM DEVELOPMENT

Figure 2.2

The five stages of team development are visually depicted in Figure 2.2. The [40] faces are designed to reflect the different phases of emotion a team goes through as it evolves and matures. Hopefully, they will enhance your understanding of the interpersonal dynamics in teams. Overall, you can anticipate two outcomes in the team to which you have

assigned. First, the team will experience various stages of activities and emotions as the semester unfolds. Your awareness of these stages as a natural evolution of team maturity will prepare you to better perform in that environment. Secondly, a team gradually performs at a higher level as it matures (see Figure 2.3). Having this knowledge, should help enable you to guide your group through the beginning stages of group formation more quickly and effectively. Your behavior can make a huge difference in leading the team. In the next chapter, we will discuss four key behaviors that will assist you in this effort.
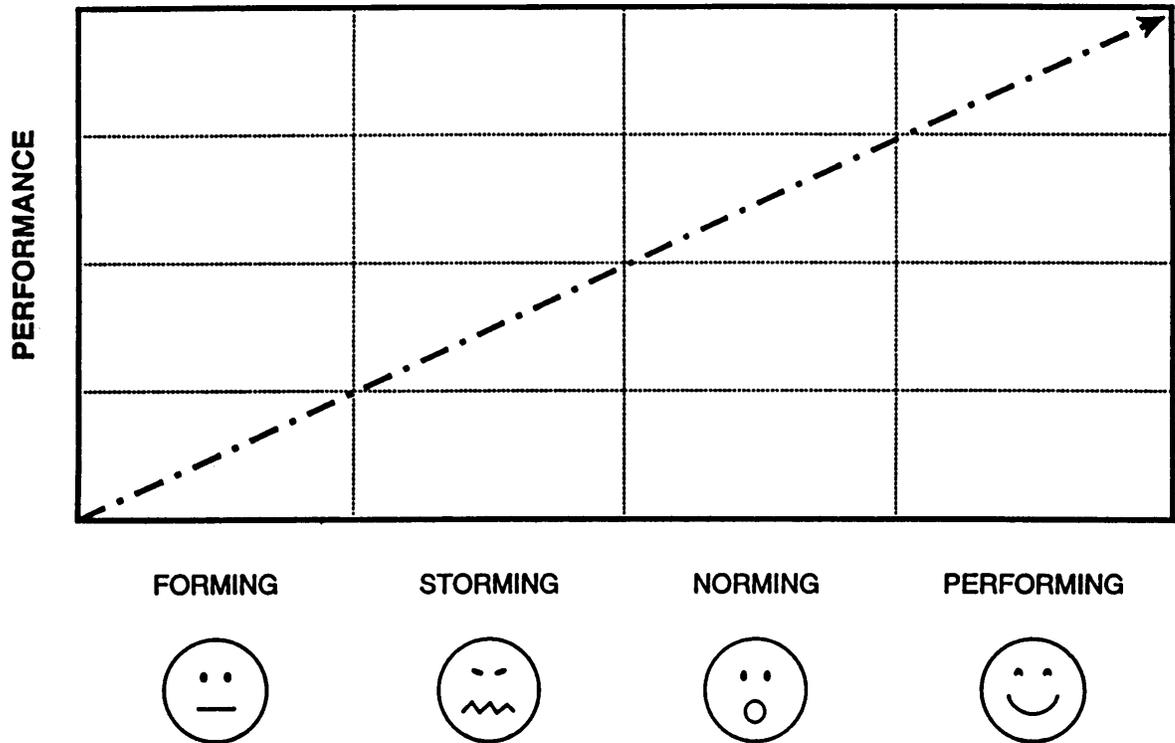

Figure 2.3
Performance increases as the team matures.