

Team working (part 1): creating a team

KEY WORDS

- » Forming
- » Group
- » Norming
- » Storming
- » Team

This paper discusses team creation, what constitutes a team and what it takes to make a team able to work together. We explore the application of team theory which may be used to improve team creation and team management. In health care, a leader who has no team is not really a leader, no one can effectively work in isolation (Gokenbach, 2008). In the next paper in this series, we will explore the different team roles which go toward making an effective team.

In all areas of healthcare provision team working are talked about as the ideal. Many adverts for jobs state they are looking for 'team players'. But what does it mean to be a team and what purpose do they play in the healthcare setting? How are teams formed and what does a functioning team do once they are formed?

Ward (2003) defines a team as a group of people who work together to achieve a common goal. In health care, there are speciality, professional and multidisciplinary teams working to manage and cure illness and disease. This may mean addressing a short-term project or series of projects as well as coming together to deliver care in a more long-term sense such as in a clinic or ward setting.

CREATING A TEAM

Famously Tuckman (1965) posited that team creation has four distinct phases: forming, storming, norming and performing. The stages of team development enable a person creating or leading a team to understand at what stage in the process they are. Until such time as a team has created formal and informal structures and agreed ways of working it is what is known as a group. A group is a more informal collection of people who do not necessarily have a shared function nor work together in a necessarily regulated or official manner.

FORMING

In the forming stage, the team is coming together for the first time or following a change, and the team are dependent on the manager for direction

and vision (we will discuss how to manage change and how to share a vision with your team in later papers in this series). At this stage, people may be uncertain as to their roles and there is a lot of testing of the leader and processes within the team.

If you are setting up a new team, have inherited or been promoted within a team, this can be stressful and it is at this time the need for clarity of purpose is at its greatest (Scott, Gill and Crowhurst, 2008). A failure of vision and purpose means that the team will not form to do the job which needs doing or the mission for which they are formed will morph into something never intended; they will lose sight of Ward's (2003) 'common goal'.

It is also at this point in the process that the manager needs to get to understand the strengths and weaknesses of the people in the team so that these may be used to their full advantage. It is now that the manager needs to ensure that they have the right mix of skills in the team and will need to recruit for the skills sets which are missing (Ellis and Abbott, 2014). We discuss the team member types which go toward making a team in the next paper in this series.

STORMING

This stage is more like the brainstorming stage of project planning. It does not, as the name might suggest, mean the team are at loggerheads or arguing. Storming is the process when the team start to get to grips with the task in hand. A failure of leadership and direction at this point can be destructive for the team who may go off task and start to plan for things outside their

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scope of work. At this stage, the members of the team start identifying the tasks and processes which need to be in place in order to work to achieve the agreed task.

During storming, people will be vying for their position in the team and establishing what part they will play and the areas which they control. It is important at this stage of the process that the manager is clear about the roles people will play in the team as well as where responsibilities and power lay. The leader will need to understand the skills available to them and ensure these are deployed to their full advantage.

NORMING

Norming is the stage of the process during which the team does exactly what the process suggest; they start to normalise. That is the team settles into the delivery of whatever it is that they were formed to do. This may be the delivery of care in a ward setting or working on a particular project. The normal routines of practice emerge and people start to understand what their working life will look like.

As the team settles into this stage the leader needs to allow some individuals the scope to exercise some consensus about ways of working and the delegation of tasks and duties either to subgroups or individuals. Boundaries become clearer and role clarity starts to emerge for members of the team.

Rather than being an entrepreneur at this stage, the leader of the team needs to start using facilitatory and coaching skills to develop the team members individual and collective skills. It is also important at this point that the leader develops and embeds respect among the team members, especially if the team have been created in order to work together for long periods of time. At this stage, the leader needs to act ethically and exercise emotional intelligence in order to create and maintain the relationships required to keep the team functioning towards its agreed goals.

PERFORMING

Performing refers to the team as they settle down into the practices and processes which have emerged during the norming stage of team creation. At this stage team members are aware

of the roles which they play and the tasks and interventions which they must perform time and again in order to support the working of the team.

As the team members start to perform as a team and the ward or clinic now is in operation, they will start to look more to each other for support. The leader or manager of the team will start to play more of a figurehead role. The best leaders will recognise that at this stage they should step back from the team and oversee rather than direct the activity of the team who have established their ways of working and shared out the work to suit the skills available to them.

CONCLUSION

Teams are created for several purposes. In some cases, these purposes are to fulfil a short project or series of projects in other cases teams come together in order to work towards doing a job or work over a long period of time. The role of the leader in this process is to ensure that the team understand why they have been formed as well as what the roles with individual team members will play in the new team.

According to Tuckman, there are a number of stages in the process which a group of individuals must go through in order to generate a team. Once a team has formed the role of the manager is to facilitate and coach the team members to continue to deliver the functions for which the team was created.

In the next paper in this management series, we will look at the role types which go towards creating a team as well as exploring the strengths and weaknesses associated with each role type.

KEY POINTS

- ▶▶ Teams are created to serve a purpose
- ▶▶ Team members need to understand the purpose of the team
- ▶▶ The leader needs to oversee the creation of the team
- ▶▶ Teams go through a number of stages as they form
- ▶▶ In order to perform well team members need to understand their role in the team
- ▶▶ Once performing the role of the manager is to coach and facilitate the team members in their activities.



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