Team Building

Development of teams

Kurt Lewis identifies three learning stages:

- Freezing
- Unfreezing
- Re-freezing

According to Cog's ladder, groups experience:

- Being polite
- Asking why we're here
- Bidding for power
- Being constructive
- Esprit

B W Tuckman cites four stages of team development:

- 1.Forming
- 2.Storming
- 3.Norming
- 4.Performing

Timing of development

How long it takes a group to successfully go through the various stages depends on:

- How people in the group get on with each other
- Values
- The amount of training and help that the group has received
- Progress from one stage to another
- The ability of the leader to recognise what's happening and take appropriate action at every stage

Stage 1: Forming

Look out for people:

- being polite
- who are guarded in what they say or do
- who say a lot and others who say nothing
- testing each other out

Tips for the leader

At the first meeting give thought to:

- what you want out of it
- who will be coming
- what those coming know about the reasons for setting up the team
- what they will expect
- what experience they can bring
- potential problems/concerns and possible questions
- differences in age and experience, and likely reactions to each other
- how to get them to share information, ideas and experiences
- how to put across your vision of what you want the team to achieve

Useful ideas

- If you can select your own team, think about the various areas of skills and knowledge that you need.
- If you can't select your team, try making contact with individuals beforehand to find out what experience they can bring and how they prefer to work
- Look at some of the teambuilding exercises and materials available
- Draw up a meaningful statement of purpose that the group can:
  - Identify with
  - Translate into some form of vision that they can all buy into
- Consider the advantages of holding your first meeting off site

Is time on your side?

- If you are providing a service then you may be expected to deliver from day one
- Often, lack of time means that you may not be able to work through all the group issues that emerge.
- It can be stressful, for both the leader and the team, as they struggle to deliver.

Stage 2: Storming

Watch out for people:

- expressing opinions about personalities and work methods
- testing the boundaries of roles
- challenging and jockeying for position
- revealing personal agendas
- opting out or feeling trapped
- showing signs of demotivation

Issues to be dealt with by the leader

As a leader you could find yourself:

- challenged and threatened by one or more individuals in the group
- sitting in the middle of a group which has split and is taking sides as to who should lead

Useful ideas

- Watch what's happening in the business and consider what people may be expecting from your team
- Ensure what you produce is up to standard and meets requirements
- Watch out for rumours starting to emerge that people aren't happy
- Make sure that you meet deadlines, or you could be called to account

Actions to take

- Be proactive by calling a meeting to look, in particular, at other ways of operating
- Look out for signs of conflict
- Lead from the front

Stage 3: Norming

- Be prepared for norms (ie standards or ground rules) starting to emerge that could influence behaviour
- This process is often helped by the need and pressures to produce results

Tips for the leader

- Help any new members into the team by explaining what you are doing and why
- Keep an open mind and look for new ideas
- Allow group members to get organised
- Keep contact and don’t allow members to go their own way

Useful ideas

- Recognise that you now have the potential to become a team in the true sense
- To move on to the next stage, the leader has to find ways of helping members identify with each other
- You might have explained it at the first meeting but, after all the in-fighting that's taken place, it's time for a recap

Beware:

- At this stage there is often a real danger that the group could slip back into the storming stage
- Newcomers to the group may challenge what's in place

Stage 4: Performing

You will notice:

- Problems get solved and work gets done
- Team members are more supportive of each other
- Information and ideas are shared
- Greater tolerance and flexibility
- More humour, energy and openness
- Nothing is too much trouble

Tips for the leader

The team could carry on performing well for a long time to come, or it could slip back into any of the earlier stages.

This will depend upon:

- how many people leave the team and how well newcomers are integrated
- how far the business climate remains the same

At the performing stage there is much that the leader can do to encourage teamwork.