# Making Teams More Agile: Strategies and Benefits

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| Phases of Team Development | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Forming | Storming | Norming | Performing | Adjourning |
| Characteristics of Forming include displaying eagerness, socializing, generally polite tone, sticking to safe topics, unclear about how one fits in, and some anxiety and questioning. | Strategies for this phase include taking the 'lead,' being highly visible, facilitating introductions, providing the 'big picture,' establishing clear expectations, communicating success criteria, and ensuring response times are quick. | Traits of Storming include some resistance, lack of participation, conflict based on differences of opinions, competition, and high emotions. | Strategies for this phase include requesting and encouraging feedback, identifying issues and facilitating their resolution, normalizing matters, and building trust by honoring commitments. | Strategies for this phase include celebrating the 'wins' of the team. |

Want happier and more productive and successful teams? Among other things, it takes great leadership. And proven strategies can provide you with a real advantage! That's where the work by Bruce W. Tuckman and others comes in.

Tuckman — Ph.D. in Psychology from Princeton — conducted extensive research on team dynamics, and he published a related framework in 1965. At that time, the model included four phases: forming, storming, norming, and performing. However, Dr. Tuckman subsequently determined that adjourning was so important that he, with Mary Ann C. Jensen, updated his model in 1977 to add adjourning as the fifth phase. According to Tuckman, all five phases — Forming, Storming, Norming, Performing, and Adjourning — are necessary for teams to grow, tackle problems, find solutions, plan work, and deliver results.

In 2008, Scott M. Graffius started developing material on advancing teams' happiness, productivity, and success. His respective Phases of Team Development content is informed by the work of Dr. Bruce W. Tuckman and Mary Ann C. Jensen; Graffius's experience with, and analysis of, team leadership and performance; and research, recommendations, and coverage from additional sources (examples are listed below).

The Phases of Team Development highlights the performance level, characteristics, and proven strategies for each of the five phases: Forming, Storming, Norming, Performing, and Adjourning. Project Managers, Scrum Masters, Agile Coaches, DevOps Leads, and other leaders can apply the information to help handle challenges or issues experienced by teams. By doing so, they'll advance the teams' (and their own) happiness, productivity, and success.

Graffius updates the content periodically. This article features the newest (2023) version of the Phases of Team Development material. Read on for details including information on permission requests and downloadable high-resolution versions of the image.

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## Five Phases of Team Development

**1. Forming**

Characteristics of Forming include displaying eagerness, socializing, generally polite tone, sticking to safe topics, unclear about how one fits in, and some anxiety and questioning.

Strategies for this phase include taking the 'lead,' being highly visible, facilitating introductions, providing the 'big picture,' establishing clear expectations, communicating success criteria, and ensuring response times are quick.

**2. Storming**

Traits of Storming include some resistance, lack of participation, conflict based on differences of opinions, competition, and high emotions.

Strategies for this phase include requesting and encouraging feedback, identifying issues and facilitating their resolution, normalizing matters, and building trust by honoring commitments.

**3. Norming**

Features of Norming include purpose and goals are well-understood, more confident, improved commitment, members are engaged and supportive, relief (lowered anxiety), and developing cohesion.

Strategies for this phase include recognizing individual and team efforts, providing learning opportunities and feedback, and monitoring the 'energy' of the team.

**4. Performing**

Characteristics of Performing include high motivation, trust, and empathy; individuals defer to team needs, effectively producing deliverables; consistent performance; and demonstrations of interdependence and self-management.

Strategies for this phase include 'guiding from the side' (minimal intervention), celebrating successes, and encouraging collective decision-making and problem-solving.

**5. Adjourning**

Typical traits of Adjourning (also referred to as Transitioning or Mourning) include potential sadness, recognition of team and individual efforts, and disbanding.

Strategies for this phase include recognizing change, providing an opportunity for summative team evaluations ('lessons learned'), providing an opportunity for individual acknowledgments, and celebrating the team's accomplishments — which may involve a party and possibly an after-party.

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As shown, performance fluctuates as teams move through the phases. Review the characteristics to help identify the team's current phase, then apply the corresponding proven strategies to help them advance.

## References /Sources

Select (partial) sources:


The Phases of Team Development by Scott M. Graffius factors the work of Dr. Bruce W. Tuckman and Mary Ann C. Jensen; Graffius's experience, observation, and analysis; and research, recommendations, and coverage from additional sources such as Google, Harvard Business Review, IEEE, MIT, Fast Company, NASA, Microsoft, TRW, Project Management Institute, Scrum Alliance, Scrum.org, Gartner, CSS, RAND Corporation, Software Engineering Institute, University of Edinburgh, Cisco, KPMG, Warsaw University of Technology, Software Engineering Institute, DevOps Institute, American Express, SANS Institute, Zurich University, SAP, VisionCBS, Oxford University, American Management Association, AT&T, University of Southern California, IBM, and many others.

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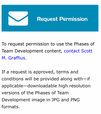


**Scott M. Graffius**, founder and CEO of Exceptional Agility, is an expert practitioner and thought leader in agile, project, program, portfolio, and PMO management. He has generated over $1.9 billion of business value in aggregate for Global Fortune 500 companies and other organizations he has served. Graffius a multi award-winning author and highly sought after international keynote speaker, having presented at 84 conferences and other events across 25 countries. Businesses, professional associations, governments, and universities have used and featured him and his content. Select examples include Microsoft, Oracle, Broadcom, Cisco, Gartner, EY, Project Management Institute, IEEE, SANS Institute, National Academy of Sciences, United States Department of Energy, Amsterdam Public Health Research Institute, Yale University, Tufts University, and many others.

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Thriving in today's marketplace frequently depends on making a transformation to become more agile. Those successful in the transition enjoy faster delivery speed and ROI, higher satisfaction, continuous improvement, and additional benefits.

Based on actual events, ***Agile Transformation: A Brief Story of How an Entertainment Company Developed New Capabilities and Unlocked Business Agility to Thrive in an Era of Rapid Change*** provides a quick (60-90 minute) read about a successful agile transformation at a multinational entertainment and media company, told from the author's perspective as an agile coach.

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