

TEAM EFFECTIVENESS

Process and Dynamics

Tuckman · Gersick · Marks, Mathieu & Zaccaro

PAPER 02 / 03

A Furtherance reference compendium on the intellectual traditions behind organisational design, leadership, execution, and culture.

IN THIS PAPER

A well-designed team still has to work together over time. This paper covers team process and development – how teams change, and what they actually do, as they move toward performance. The question it answers: how does a team evolve, and where should a leader intervene?

Tuckman offers the familiar developmental sequence. Gersick overturns it with evidence that teams change in a burst at their midpoint. Marks, Mathieu and Zaccaro give the modern, rigorous account: teams cycle through phases, each demanding different processes.

Bruce Tuckman 1938–2016

Group development · forming to performing

CORE THESIS

Groups develop through a predictable sequence of **stages**, each with its own interpersonal and task character, before they reach full effectiveness.

FRAMEWORK

Stage	What happens
Forming	Orientation; polite, dependent, uncertain
Storming	Conflict over roles, power and approach
Norming	Norms, cohesion and shared expectations settle
Performing	Energy goes to the task; the team delivers
Adjourning	The team disbands and reflects

METHODOLOGY

A synthesis of the small-group and therapy-group literature of its time.

SIGNIFICANCE AND CRITIQUE

Ubiquitous, intuitive and memorable – the default vocabulary for team development. The critique, expanded below: the strict linear sequence has weak empirical support, and many real teams do not pass tidily through the stages.

Connie Gersick Punctuated Equilibrium, 1988–1989

Group development · the midpoint transition

CORE THESIS

Project teams do not develop gradually. They settle into a **framework** at the first meeting and hold it through a long period of inertia, then undergo a sharp **transition at the temporal midpoint** – roughly halfway to the deadline – before a second burst of focused work. Time and deadlines, not stages, drive the change.

FRAMEWORK

Phase	Character
Phase 1	Inertia; the approach set at the first meeting persists
Midpoint transition	Sharp reorientation as the deadline looms into view
Phase 2	Renewed inertia – executing the revised plan
Completion	A final burst to finish

METHODOLOGY

Close empirical field study of real project teams from first meeting to deadline.

SIGNIFICANCE AND CRITIQUE

A rigorous empirical challenge to stage models, and the midpoint transition is a genuinely actionable finding; it is a natural moment to reset. The critique: the pattern is clearest in deadline-driven project teams.

Marks, Mathieu & Zaccaro A Temporal Framework, 2001

Team process · the modern taxonomy

CORE THESIS

“Team process” is not one thing. Teams work in recurring **episodes** that cycle between **transition** phases (planning) and **action** phases (execution), and different processes matter in each, with interpersonal processes running throughout.

FRAMEWORK

Process category	What it covers
Transition-phase	Mission analysis, goal specification, strategy formulation
Action-phase	Monitoring progress and systems, coordination, backup
Interpersonal	Conflict, motivation and affect management – throughout

METHODOLOGY

A theoretical synthesis that reorganised the team-process literature, now heavily used in empirical team research.

SIGNIFICANCE AND CRITIQUE

The rigorous modern account of what teams actually do over time, which superseded simple stage models in the academic literature. The critique: it is more complex and less memorable than a four-word sequence.

A NOTE ON EVIDENCE

A note on stage models: “forming–storming–norming–performing” is memorable but weakly evidenced as a fixed, linear sequence. The stronger evidence points to deadline-driven change (Gersick) and episodic transition–action cycles (Marks et al.). Use Tuckman as a shared vocabulary, not as a reliable prediction of how a given team will unfold.

Synthesis

Contribution	Model of change	Key idea	Evidence
Tuckman	Linear stages	Forming to performing	Weak for strict sequence
Gersick	Punctuated equilibrium	The midpoint transition	Strong; field study
Marks et al.	Episodic cycles	Transition and action phases	Strong; widely used

FOR THE OPERATOR

Team dynamics unfold over time – through a familiar (if shaky) stage sequence (Tuckman), a deadline-driven midpoint burst (Gersick), and an episodic cycle of transition and action processes (Marks et al.). For the operator: do not wait for “performing” to emerge – set direction at the first meeting, use the midpoint as a deliberate reset, and match your intervention to the phase the team is in. The final paper turns to what the modern data actually says drives team performance.