

WORK GROUP DEVELOPMENT MODELS – THE EVOLUTION FROM SIMPLE GROUP TO EFFECTIVE TEAM

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Abstract

Currently, work teams are increasingly studied by virtue of the advantages they have compared to the work groups. But a true team does not appear overnight but must complete several steps to overcome the initial stage of its existence as a group. The question that arises is at what point a simple group is turning into an effective team. Even though the development process of group into a team is not a linear process, the models found in the literature provides a rich framework for analyzing and identifying the features which group acquires over time till it become a team in the true sense of word. Thus, in this article we propose an analysis of the main models of group development in order to point out, even in a relative manner, the stage when the simple work group becomes an effective work team.

Key words: *group, team, work group, work team, group development model*

JEL Classification: *J24, L29, M19, M54, O15*

I. INTRODUCTION

Organizations today are choosing increasingly more flattened hierarchies in order to adapt to changes in work environment in which employees who process information must work together to carry out what they have to do and much of this collaboration requires team work. (Yang & Guy, 2011)

How teams, which are so much needed and involved in highly complex activities, evolve within organizations? Research on groups and teams are numerous, especially in the area of psychosociology, and provides us with useful answers as far as natural groups resemble work groups. But the work teams constitutes the area of interest for companies' management and have specific characteristics, starting from the nature of the task they have to fulfill till the behaviors required from team members.

Regardless of the method of work group formation (according to various socio-demographic characteristics, to specific skills, to the affinities between members etc.) the group is not fully functional in terms of its primary task (task which group has to fulfill) from the moment it is constituted. There are a number of stages that groups go through so that a simple combination of people to become an authentic group and even more than that, to become a team. These stages are well theoretically described in the literature, even if the traditional models outlined further do not differentiate between groups and teams, work groups and work teams, differences that however are well highlighted in various articles (for example, Zoltan, R., Vancea, R., 2015a and respectively, Zoltan, Bordeianu, & Vancea, 2013; Zoltan & Vancea, 2015b).

Therefore, after analyzing and comparing different models proposed by authors well known in the field of group research (Tuckman, Bass and Ryterband, Woodcock, Hommans) we draw some theoretical conclusions, but of practical interest for managers who resort to the use of teams in order to achieve their goals.

II. TUCKMAN'S MODEL

Most theories of organizational groups' development focus on identifying a sequence of evolution that groups go through from the moment they are created until their dissolution. To explain the process of group formation, most publications rely on the model developed by Bruce W. Tuckman in 1965 and subsequently completed (Tuckman & Jensen, 1977). The model has been taken over and developed over the years in various approaches in management theory and in theory on organizational behavior, and includes five (originally four) stages or phases in the evolution of a group (Coulter, 2005):

- *setting up stage (forming)*: marks the first step in group formation, there is some confusion and uncertainty; it requires a leader to advise etc.;

- *conflict stage (storming)*: appear the first tensions, arise conflicts and internal struggles for leadership; is noticed an hostility between members etc.;
- *cohesion stage (norming)*: are being developed friendships and mutual support relations among group members, together they accept certain norms / rules etc.;
- *effectiveness stage (performing)*: the group becomes, voluntarily or not, an effective team: the members have developed interdependency of one another, relations between them are mature and based on mutual trust, they act daily as a whole, as a “mechanism” that works harmoniously and achieves effects of synergy; the competition between them is functional and beneficial for the common purpose, members display a maximum engagement to the motivating objectives etc. (Dessler, 2004);
- *dismantling stage* or “breaking” of the group, either as a consequence of the fact that the objectives were achieved, either because of the departure of some group members.

In order to identify the factors and relationships that arise and need to be taken into account in the construction and functioning of organizational team, we detail the stages of Tuckman's model as follows:

1. *Forming* (testing and creating dependency) (immature team or immature group) – it is the first stage of group formation when group members begin to know each other, exchange personal information and, at the same time, they testing each other. Usually, at this stage, group members are anxious and uncertain about the roles they have or about who will lead and coordinate them. If the formal leader will not assume the management of the group, at this stage usually will detach an informal leader, satisfying the members need to be guided. But it is possible another situation, namely the leader formally appointed by the organization imposes himself authoritatively and uses this early period as a mandate for the control of all group members.

The duration of the first stage of group development is uncertain, but it depends on a series of factors related to the group composition, to management accountability and to task which group has to carry out. Leader qualities are a factor that can shorten or, conversely, may extend substantially the duration of forming phase. If the leader is an extrovert that exhibits consideration for group members and creates a pleasant interaction environment within the group, the duration of forming stage can be reduced, the leader acting as a “binder” for the group.

Temporary groups, which are created only for the accomplishment of a well-established task, will move from forming stage much faster than the permanent groups for which this forming phase can take longer. (Huczynski & Buchanan, 2007)

2. *Storming* (intragroup conflict) (divided team or divided group) – is a phase in which group members test the leader knowledge and his management and control strategies. Usually, this second step turns out to be a period of intense conflict, where each member tries to occupy a special position and to significantly participate in the process of construction the normative system of the group.

It is possible that subgroups to be established and highly tense situations to occur, issues which leads in many cases to the group dismantling already at this stage. The struggle for leadership protracts and even accentuates, members get over probing stage where they gathered information to a stage where they use this information for personal interest in order to strengthen their position in the group.

Because this stage is marked by intense conflicts, groups whose leaders know to direct conflicts toward constructive purposes will override this phase more quickly. Also the duration of this phase depends on the communication style of the group members. If they adopt an assertive style of communication the duration of this transition phase will be also reduced.

Although in Tuckman’s model the transition phase is mentioned as one necessary for group evolution, further analysis states that temporary groups can evolve without passing through this stage. (Burn, 2004)

3. *Norming* (development of group cohesion) (united team or shared group) – it is the third stage of group evolution. Tuckman describes it as a blue sky that arises at the end of the storm. Frequently, groups get over stage two aiming to openly resolve the emerging conflicts. It begins to develop a sense of individuality and there is a need to establish a set of rules for behaviors and these rules, in time, are crystallized in norms.

The most important result of the third stage is group cohesion that develops closely related to its normative system. Cohesion refers to the combination of forces that keep the group together, and the group’s normative system is a must for its unity. This step is essential for group moving to the stage of actual performance.

4. *Performing* (establishment of functional roles) (functional or effective team) – it is the stage when the group begins to address key issues associated with the task they has to accomplish. Typically, group members optimally interact and support each other in order to meet the common goal, and conflicts are resolved constructively. Group performance is optimal and the group is fully adapted to organizational structure. The role of the leader in providing real feedback about the group performance is essential at this stage.

5. *Adjourning* (suspended team or dissolved group) – it is the last stage; after the group purpose is fulfilled, the group ends its existence. Group members begin by emotionally detach from group and return to engage in other tasks. The time of group dissolution is often a negative emotional moment. In many cases, dissolving an organizational group is in fact the proof that its members will progress from a professional perspective. However, this is not a rule, there are situations when the group is dissolved due to underperformance and in these situations the adjourning step is driven quickly and its emotional connotations are not so intense.

Although this model presents a coherent sequence of phases in developing a group, Tuckman explicitly argues that all groups go through these stages of development, but contemporary authors argue that this is not mandatory. Tuckman's model is rather a general one, showing the processes through which a group develops over time. (Curşeu, 2007)

III. BASS AND RYTERBAND'S MODEL

Another model of group development is the one proposed by Bass and Ryterband (Bass & Ryterband, 1979). The authors describe four main stages in groups' formation, during which the groups learn how to use their resources:

1) *the stage of acceptance* – takes place only after the initial mistrust disappears and the group has developed into one characterized by mutual trust and acceptance. Going through this stage entails interpersonal awareness, sharing information, discussing topics unrelated to the task that group has to fulfill, mutual testing of group members reactions, knowledge and experience.

2) *the stage of communication and decisions making* – after the step of acceptance, communication is open and ensures the basis for establishing and usage of an effective mechanism for group decision making. In this stage take place the exposing of attitudes related to a problem, setting rules, discussing goals and tasks which group has to carry out.

3) *the stage of group solidarity* – group members become more involved in group activities, reaching to cooperate and to be engaged in order to increase the overall success of the group. It is the stage of motivation and productivity entailing cooperation and team work for the fulfillment of the common purpose.

4) *the stage of group control* – group members attempt to maximize the group's success by matching the individual capacities with group activities and through mutual support. This stage is usually characterized by flexibility and informality.

IV. WOODCOCK'S MODEL

The analysis on groups' development conducted by Tuckman can be compared with the one of Woodcock who undertook a study on teams and their evolution. He believes that we are dealing with a development in four stages: (Woodcock, 1979)

- infant team (undeveloped team) – the open expression of feelings is avoided; objectives are uncertain; leader makes the most decisions;

- exploratory team – the issues are addressed in a more open manner; it is used the active listening; sometimes, for short periods of time, the group becomes introspectively;

- under consolidation team – is being established the personal interaction based on cooperation; the group task is clarified; it is agreed upon objectives and implementation procedures for probation are being put in practice;

- mature team – the feelings are openly expressed; are taken into account many different possibilities; working methods are rigorously structured; leadership style is a contributory kind; individuals are flexible and the group recognizes its responsibility towards the rest of the organization.

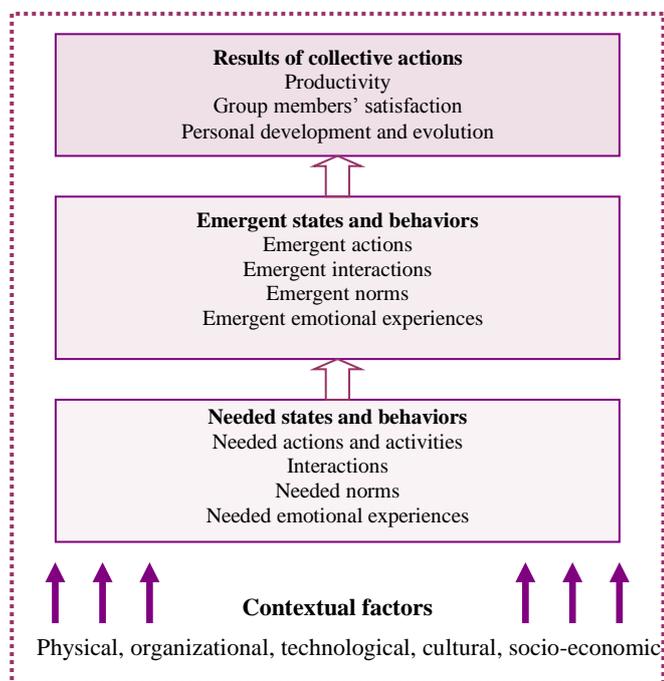
V. HOMAN'S MODEL

George Caspar Homans is one of the members of Elton Mayo' study team which identified the Hawthorne effect in the research conducted at General Electrics in the '20s and '30s. Homans proposes a model of organizational groups' development in three stages. (Homans, 1951)

According to Homans groups operates within an organizational context characterized by physical conditions of achieving their task (architectural elements of work space, work space furnishing), by technological equipment (what types of technology group uses for task fulfillment), by organizational factors

(organizational policies and practices), by cultural factors (norms, values shared by group members), as well as socioeconomic factors (legislation, profit). In this complex context, organizational groups evolve from required actions to emergent behaviors which lead to effective group performance.

Thus, Homans identifies a development of the group from desirable behaviors or behaviors required by those who set up the group (usually the managers of the organization) – the first stage – toward behaviors and actions performed in the actual way by groups (emerging actions and behaviors) – the second stage – and then to performance and productivity – the third stage. (Homans, 1951) (Figure no 1.)



Source: Curșeu, P.L., *Grupurile în organizații*, Ed. Polirom, Iași, 2007, p.44

Figure no 1. The model of organizational groups' development proposed by Homans

However, a number of behaviors and conditions surely emerge from the interactions that occur within the group. These states and emerging behaviors are influenced by behaviors and conditions which are necessary or asked for the group and, in turn, they influence the effectiveness of the group. The main argument of Homans is that the groups do not act according to normative models (which specifies what the group should make), but rather evolves through an intermediate state (that of emergence) in which its real behaviors are adjusted on the basis of imposed requirements until, finally, the group successfully achieves the demanded task. (Curșeu, 2007)

VI. DISCUSSION

The maximum level of maturity and efficiency which can be reached by the group as a result of going through the stages of evolution we presented above, gives the simple group those traits specific to an effective team, namely:

- members operate in a unitary manner;
- members effectively participate in the group effort;
- members are focused on a single purpose;
- members have the equipment, tools and skills necessary to achieve the group objectives;
- members seek and receive suggestions, opinions and information from each other.

Bass and Ryterband' model does not differ very much from Tuckman's model: the acceptance stage is the *forming* stage in Tuckman's model; is missing the transition stage (*storming*), but the stage of communication and decision making, along with the solidarity stage, represents in the reminded model the *norming* stage; and then control stage corresponds to the *performing* stage.

The names and descriptions of each stage from Tuckman's model sometimes know nuance differences, sometimes, content differences, depending on subsequent research regarding work groups development. Some authors present the same stages in describing the team evolution, making no distinction between team and group.

However, after careful consideration of these steps and also other models proposed by various authors, we conclude that *the transition from the status of group toward the status of team arises somewhere in the late stage of norming* – or, according to Bass and Ryterband’ model, *in the solidarity stage*, or, according to Woodcock, *in the consolidation stage* – when are formed and operates the rules and norms by which members act, it is created that interdependence, both personally and in terms of achieving the tasks, that differentiates the team from group. (Figure no 2.)

On the other hand, in reality, the boundaries between stages are diffuse: it can be difficult to determine when a team has completed the transition from one stage to another, like in Homan’s model. It is possible that just when one may think that the team progressed along the path of its development, the team “lose ground” while “revisits” its earlier stages in the effort to accommodate to new requirements such as departure or arrival of a member, new work processes or other changes which affect team dynamics. (Ito & Brotheridge, 2008) Thus, each of these stages of development are situated on a continuum of actions, in the sense that they do not clearly differentiate from one another, their edges are extremely flexible, malleable, and their scope in time and their intensity are specific to the existence of each individual group. (Pânișoară, 2008)

	Tuckman’s model	Bass and Ryterband’ model	Woodcock’s model	Homan’s model
Stage 1	Forming	Acceptance	Infant team	Needed states and behaviors
Stage 2	Storming		Exploratory team	
Stage 3	Norming	Communication and decision making Solidarity	Under consolidation team	Emergent states and behaviors
Stage 4	Performing	Control	Mature team	Results of collective actions

Figure no 2. The theoretical overlapping of group development models

Therefore, we consider desirable that the beginning stages of team development – steps essentially unproductive in organizational context, respectively, in relation to the objectives set by top management for team – to be as short as possible in order to avoid rerunning the entire process of its formation. This applies both to a new formed team, in which all members are in the position of working together for the first time, and also when are introduced new members in the team. Third, if the team members have worked together in the past, but now they have a new project, a new task to achieve in a new context, in which the variables which initially have brought them success have significantly changed, they will have to go again through stages of forming, storming and norming. Inevitably, conflicts related to the common task and how to achieve it will arise since it is hard to change the work pattern of the team once it has been used and functioned. Hence, in any of the three cases presented team members need to prove flexibility and constructively answer to every challenge expected from change.

VII. CONCLUSIONS

Although in the literature there is no unanimous consensus regarding the differences between groups and teams, rather than being a clear distinction between groups and teams, it seems that there is a continuum. At one extreme are gatherings of people whose individual efforts additively combine in order to reach different objectives and some purpose (simple groups). At the other extreme are specialized groups of people whose efforts are combined in order to achieve specific objectives of the group as well as objectives of the organization as a whole (effective teams). Such a continuum implies that, as the group grows and moves from the extreme “simple groups” to the extreme “fully developed”, skills and characteristics of both individuals as well as of their combined efforts accumulate and consolidate. (Senior & Swailes, 2004)

The key aspect which is highlighted by our analysis of group evolution models is that effectiveness is a resultant that is built throughout time, as the groups understand what is required from them and how to use

knowledge, skills and attributes of each member for the achievement of individual and group goals. On their way to achieving efficiency and become true teams, groups undoubtedly face uncertainties and even conflicts, but these processes should be considered a necessary cost for ensuring the harmony and the desirable behaviors, both oriented towards a common, well stated goal.

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