



Why Growth Feels Messy: A Path to Performing

Using Tuckman's Model of Team Building to
Better Understand the Stages of Growth

Tuckman's Stages of Development

A lens for teams, projects,
careers—and yourself

Most people learn Tuckman's
Stages of Group Development
as a team model.
Tuckman maintains that
teams exist in one of four
stages.

- Forming
- Storming
- Norming
- Performing

There is a fifth (alternate
stage):

- Adjourning

The real power of Tuckman's framework

Anything involving growth, change, or collaboration follows these stages.

That includes:

- Teams and classrooms
- Projects and organizations
- Careers and leadership journeys
- Even you



- Your head (logic, planning, skills)
- Your heart (values, emotions, motivation)
- Your environment (family, workload, timing, pressure)



**When those parts aren't aligned, you're storming.
When they are, you're performing.**

You should
also think of
yourself as a
“team”

From Theory to Diagnostic

This is how I use Tuckman in coaching and facilitation: not as theory, but as a diagnostic tool to answer one question:

“What stage am I in—and what’s actually needed next?”

Let’s look closer at these stages....

1. Forming

Orientation, uncertainty, and hope

What's happening

People are polite, cautious, and trying to understand expectations. Conflict is avoided. Everyone is looking for structure.

If this were a person, you're asking:

- Who am I in this situation?
- What's expected of me?
- Do I belong here?

What helps

- Clear goals and boundaries
- Psychological safety
- Permission to ask "basic" questions

Coaching insight:

You don't need confidence yet—you need clarity.

2. Storming

Tension, friction, and truth

What's happening

Differences surface. Frustration rises. Progress feels slow. Power, roles, and values are tested.

If this were a person:

- This isn't what I expected.
- Why is this so hard?
- Maybe I'm the problem... or maybe this is.

What helps

- Honest conversations
- Listening without defending
- Reframing conflict as information

Coaching insight:

Storming isn't failure. It's data.

3. Norming

Trust, alignment, and rhythm

What's happening

People start trusting each other. Roles become clearer.
Feedback improves. Progress resumes.

If this were a person:

- Decisions feel steadier
- Confidence grows
- You stop second-guessing everything

What helps

- Shared decision-making
- Reinforcing what's working
- Continued reflection and feedback

Coaching insight:

This is where momentum is built—but it still needs care.

4. Performing

Flow, ownership, and impact

What's happening

The team is effective, adaptable, and self-directed.
Energy is high. Results come more easily.

If this were a person, you feel:

- Capable and confident
- Clear on priorities
- Energized rather than drained

What helps

- Autonomy
- Purpose
- Minimal interference

Coaching insight:

Performing isn't about perfection—it's about alignment.

5. Adjourning

Closure, transition, and meaning

What's happening

Work ends. Roles dissolve. Emotions surface—pride, relief, sadness, reflection.

If this were a person:

- What did this chapter teach me?
- What do I carry forward?
- What do I release?

What helps

- Reflection and recognition
- Intentional closure
- Space to process change

Coaching insight:

Endings done well strengthen what comes next.

Tuckman for Different Audiences – Students

For Students

Why school projects (and group work) feel so hard

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- Storming doesn't mean your group is “bad”
 - Conflict is normal before things click
 - Knowing the stage helps you respond instead of react

Skill you're building: collaboration, not just content.

Tuckman for Different Audiences – Executives & Leaders

For Executives & Leaders

Why leadership feels different at every phase

- Early stages require direction
 - Middle stages require patience
 - High-performance stages require restraint
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Leadership maturity = adjusting your style to the stage.

Using Tuckman as a Shared Language

For Project Teams – Why progress isn't linear

- New scope, new people, or new pressure = new storming
- High-performing teams revisit earlier stages faster
- The goal isn't avoiding stages—it's moving through them intentionally

Awareness shortens recovery time.

How We Use This in A2 Achieve Coaching & Facilitation

- “You’re not stuck—you’re storming.”
- “This conflict makes sense given where you are.”
- “What would help you move one stage forward?”

We use it to:

- Diagnose friction without blame
- Normalize discomfort during growth
- Choose the right next action instead of forcing outcomes

Once you can name the stage, you can change your response.

Resources

Articles & Overviews

- “Tuckman’s Stages of Group Development” – MindTools
- “Forming, Storming, Norming, Performing” – Verywell Mind
- “Why Conflict Is Necessary for Team Growth” – Harvard Business Review

Academic Origins

- Tuckman, B. W. (1965). *Developmental sequence in small groups*
- Tuckman & Jensen (1977). *Stages of small-group development revisited*

Practical Applications

- Patrick Lencioni – *The Five Dysfunctions of a Team*
- Amy Edmondson – *The Fearless Organization*