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The Four Stages of Team Development

As a manager, it's up to you to bring your team together so that everyone can reach their highest potential. Teams don't gel overnight. This course will help you facilitate optimal performance—together, as a team.

You'll learn how to take your team through four development stages—from first meeting to a well-oiled performance machine. Also, discover how to smooth over differences and harness team members' strengths. By stage four, you'll understand how the process inspires competent and committed achievement.

Dive into the first lesson below or use the *"Start Course"* button above.

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QUESTION BANKS

Introduction

Introduction

A team is a group of people who work together toward a common goal. It takes time for a collection of strangers to form an effective team. Members need to get to know one another, develop relationships, and discover how they fit and contribute within the context of the team.

Think of it this way: Every team forms its own culture, norms, and dynamics. It's unrealistic to expect a team to solidify these elements overnight. There will be hiccups, challenges, and experimentation along the way.

So, how do teams form? What are the stages of team development? And how can managers help their teams progress through the stages of development more quickly? Learn the answers to these questions in this course.



DEVELOPING YOUR TEAM

THE FOUR STAGES OF TEAM DEVELOPMENT

Watch this video to learn about the four stages of team development.

The Four Stages of Team Development

Dr. Bruce Tuckman's model of team development is a popular framework for understanding how teams form. According to Tuckman, teams move through a series of four stages of development:

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

The four stages of development describe how teams develop relationships with one another and learn to approach work as a group. As a team manager, your goal is to help your team successfully progress to the final stage of team development: *performing*. That's because the *performing* stage is where your team achieves optimal performance. Learn about what distinguishes each stage of development, and how to help your team progress through each, in the upcoming sections.



You need to know your team's starting point to give them the right directions from there. First identify what stage of development your team is in, then determine the best way to help them move forward.

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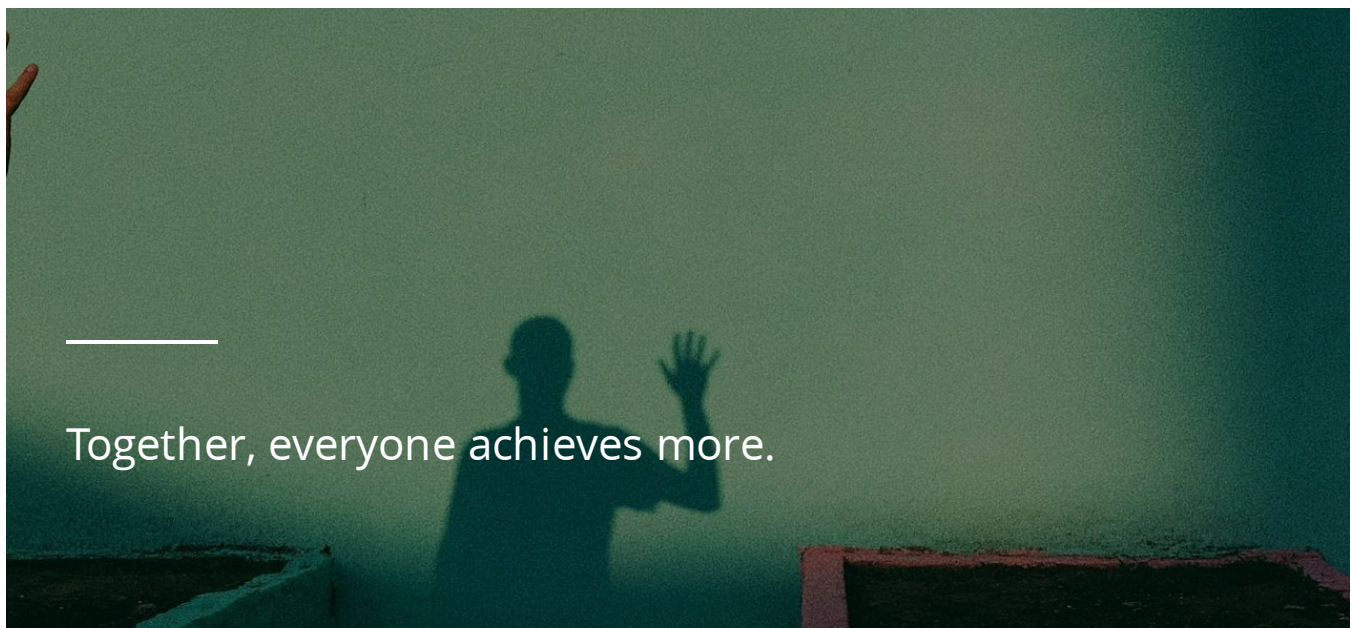
Let's get started with stage one.

Development Stage One

Getting to Know You: Stage1

The first stage of team development is called **forming**.

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





In this stage, individuals are meeting or working together for the first time. Introductions are being made, team goals are being set, and tasks and roles are being defined. Like arriving in a new country, team members may be both excited and nervous. They don't yet know the team rules, team culture, or customs. Their interactions are polite, and members are careful not to offend others as they get to know and observe their new environment.

What Defines This Stage of Development? —

- Information gathering—members are getting to know each other and their work
- Team goals, roles, and responsibilities are being defined
- Members may act polite, impersonal, or guarded toward one another
- Conflict avoidance or hesitant participation
- Anxiety and uncertainty over new tasks
- Excitement and enthusiasm over new goals
- The group feels like a collection of individuals rather than a cohesive unit



How Do I Help My Team at This Stage? —

The best thing you can do for newly forming teams is to provide **clarity** and encourage **emotional connection**. At this stage, teams need clarity on team roles, responsibilities, expectations, and goals. They need an emotional connection to break down barriers between people and start building familiarity and trust. Here are a few tips to provide your team with clarity and encourage emotional connection:

- Do formal introductions and create opportunities for members to get to know one another informally
- Give your team time to socialize
- Ask team members about their life outside of work, including their interests, experiences, hobbies, or family
- Set clear team goals and expectations
- Get your team's *input* regarding their strengths and preferred roles or responsibilities
- Communicate clear roles and responsibilities
- Make yourself available for questions
- Model desired behaviors or desired team values

- Expect to be more involved and provide more hands-on training at this stage



The first stage of team development is called **forming**. Team members are getting to know each other and their work for the first time. They need help from managers in building

emotional connections between members and gaining clarity around team goals, roles, and expectations.



Learn to guide your team through rough seas ahead. Move on to stage 2.


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Development Stage Two

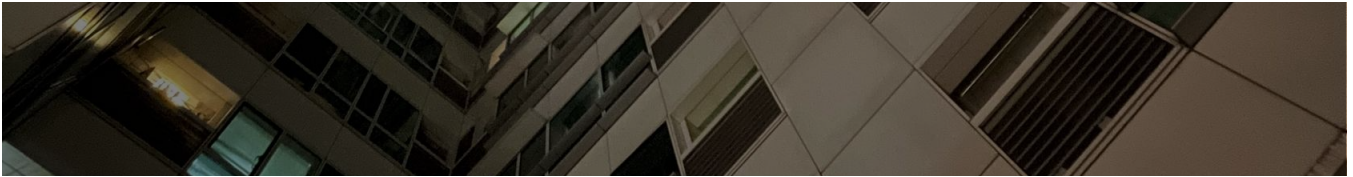
Let's Get Real: Stage 2

The next stage of team development in Tuckman's model is called **storming**.

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



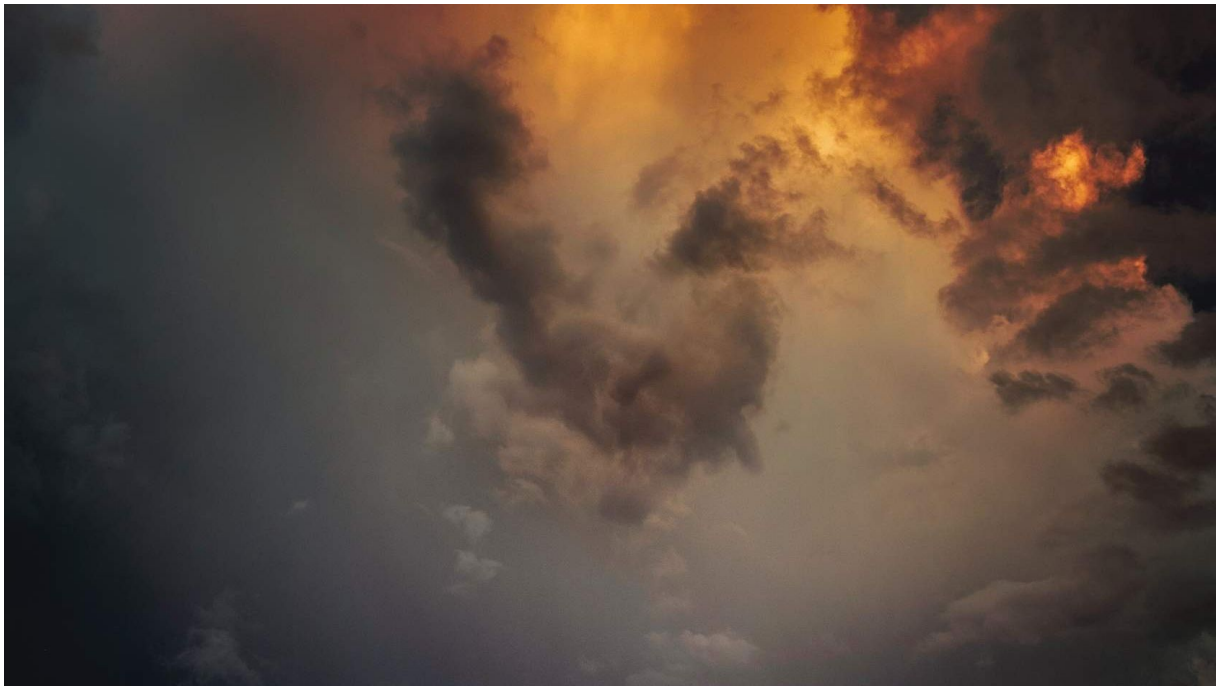
Storming is vital to Team Development, and is often the most productive Stage. Consider the Margaret Heffernan quote “for good ideas and true innovation, you need human interaction, conflict, argument, and debate



The honeymoon is over. People have gotten to know each other, and a new level of familiarity creates a new level of honesty. People start being “real” with one another. While this is a good thing, it also leads to more conflict due to differing opinions, personality clashes, and different communication or working styles. Teams may form subgroups. They have to learn how to navigate new differences and challenges, and their initial enthusiasm, excitement, or optimism may have diminished.

What Defines This Stage of Development? —

- Increased confrontation
- Team members may challenge one another, the rules, or you. They may rebel or test team boundaries and limitations
- Increased conflict, competitiveness, and defensiveness in group interactions
- Increased openness and willingness to voice differing perspectives or opinions
- Forming of subgroups
- Lower team morale, enthusiasm, or optimism
- Frustration or tension between group members



How Do I Help My Team? —

Remember that storming is a difficult but normal part of team development. Expect team members to be more confrontational at this stage. What's most important is that you help your team develop healthy and constructive strategies for navigating differences, overcoming challenges, and staying focused on shared goals. Here's how to focus your efforts and help your team make it through this stage:

- Serve as the team facilitator
- Help your team set ground rules for expressing disagreements
- Maintain an environment of inclusivity, respect, and openness to new ideas or different opinions
- Keep the balance; don't let individuals dominate the conversation or retreat from participation
- Support everyone in the group by conducting more one-on-one meetings and individual coaching
- Reassert shared goals
- Start giving your team more decision-making authority, but provide a framework or structure for discussing ideas and making decisions
- Remain positive
- Normalize conflict as a healthy part of collaboration



The second stage of team development is called **storming**. Team members must learn how to navigate conflict as their ideas, communication styles, and personalities start to clash.

They need a neutral facilitator to help weigh ideas, resolve issues, and establish ground rules for expressing different opinions while maintaining a respectful work environment.

Learn how teams resolve conflicts and succeed. Move ahead to stage 3.

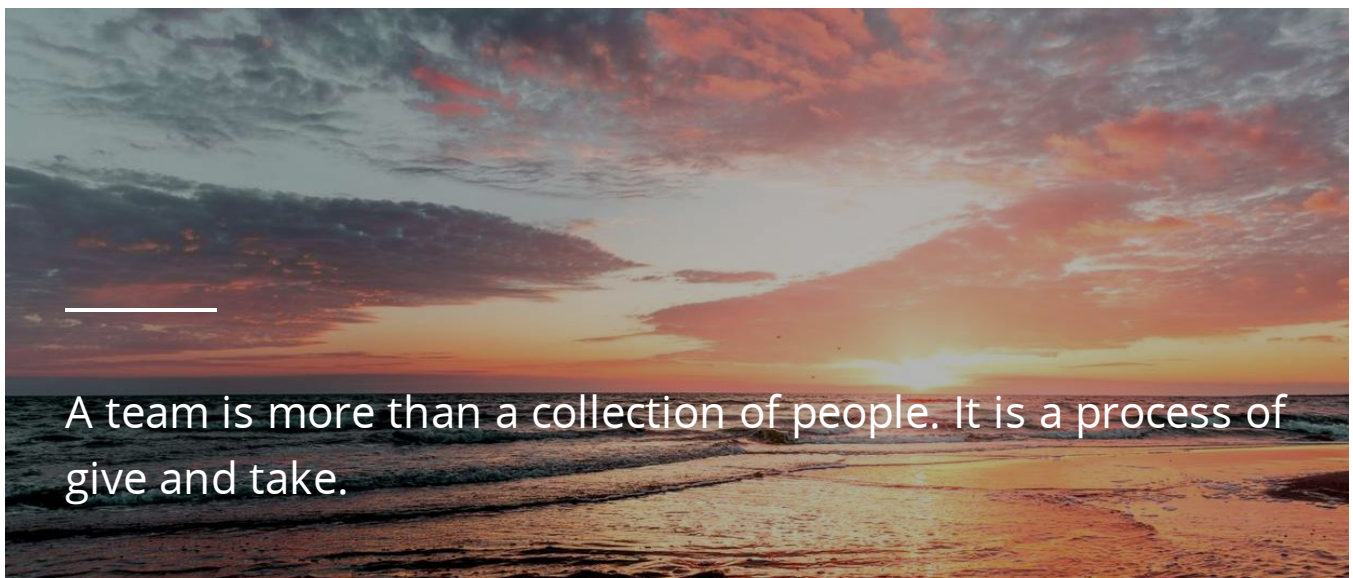
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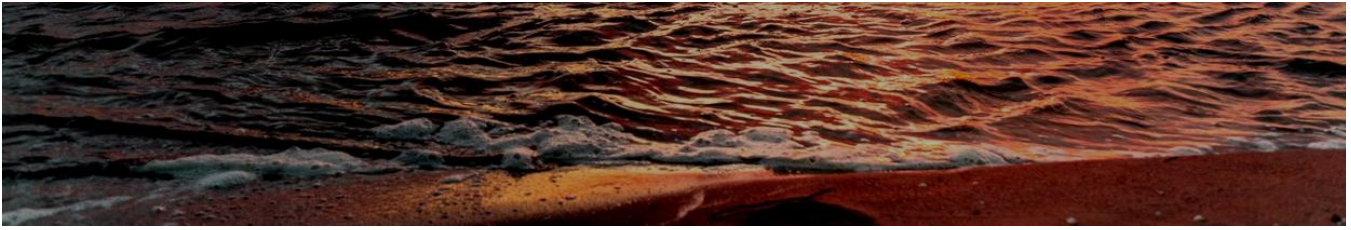
Development Stage Three

Making Progress: Stage 3

After storming comes **norming**. In this stage, you'll see equilibrium and real movement toward team goals.

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





The clouds have parted. Teams are starting to learn how to work together effectively. The focus shifts from the individual to the team. Members respect one another's ideas, perspectives, and contributions. They've also established team norms for working together. There are shared systems, tools, and processes for collaborating, sharing information, and expressing disagreement or resolving conflicts. Team goals are understood, and roles are clarified. Real progress is being made.

What Defines This Stage of Development? —

- Improved teamwork and collaboration
- The emergence of team norms and rules
- Established systems, tools, and processes for working together and solving problems
- Improved team performance and productivity
- Team members are comfortable with one another
- Acceptance of team roles and responsibilities
- Positive feelings toward you and coworkers
- Increased team consensus

How Do I Help My Team? —

This is the first stage where your team will actually start to feel like a team. A shared framework and understanding of team norms and rules help everyone perform at a higher level. Leverage this

momentum and help your team develop and refine their skills by employing the following strategies:

- Give feedback
- Delegate more decisions to the team
- Ask questions and use coaching techniques to lead your team to find answers or come up with ideas for themselves
- Encourage more leadership within the group
- Get your team to use data to evaluate ideas
- Enforce established team rules, systems, and processes
- Meet with individuals to develop personalized development plans



The third stage of team development is called **norming**. Teamwork and collaboration are becoming more natural for the team. Members have developed systems and norms for working together, and they accept their respective roles. Managers need to enforce team rules and use coaching techniques to help members continue to improve individual and collective performance.

You're ready for the final stage. Keep going to achieve maximum team performance.

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Development Stage Four

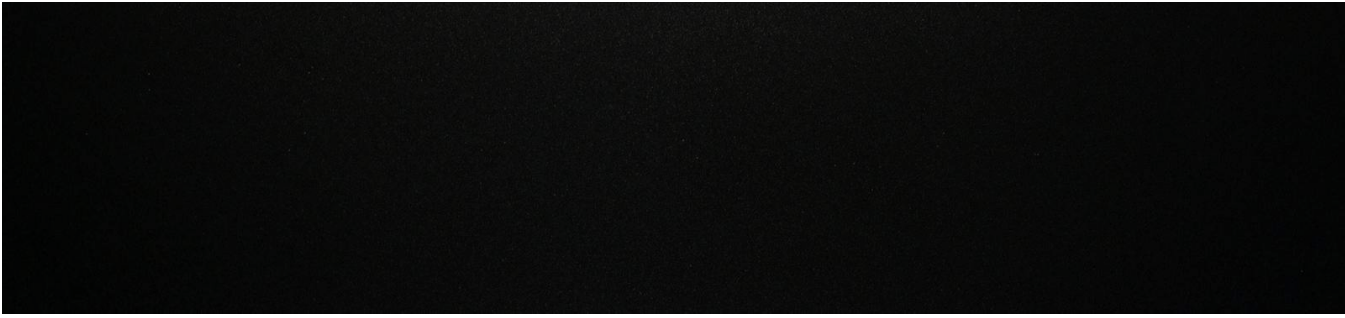
Well-Oiled Performance Machine: Stage 4

The final stage is where the magic happens—you're **performing**.

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

Talent wins games, but teamwork and intelligence win championships. —Michael Jordan





This is the point where your team is operating smoothly and reaching its highest level of effectiveness. Your team may still face challenges or setbacks, but they are competent and confident in handling them. Team members are adept at working together to solve problems and achieve shared goals. They are more motivated and self-directed than ever.

What Defines This Stage of Development? —

- A shared vision
- Creative problem-solving
- The team consistently meets and exceeds its goals
- Maximum team efficiency and productivity
- Members demonstrate mastery or expertise in their roles
- The team can easily make independent decisions
- Members understand the strengths and weaknesses of the team
- High level of teamwork and collaboration



How Do I Help My Team? —

Just because your team is performing doesn't mean that there's nothing left for you to do. Practice these do's and don'ts to help a team that has made it to this final stage of development:

- Practice continuous improvement—lead discussions with your team to continuously identify new ways to grow and evolve
- Delegate increasingly complex tasks and assign higher levels of autonomy or authority
- Avoid micromanagement—allow teams to be self-directing
- Set higher expectations and bigger goals for your team





The final stage of team development is called **performing**. The team is consistently meeting and exceeding its goals. Members understand and play to each other's strengths and weaknesses. Managers can challenge performing teams by advocating continuous improvement, delegating increasingly complex tasks, and assigning higher levels of authority and autonomy.

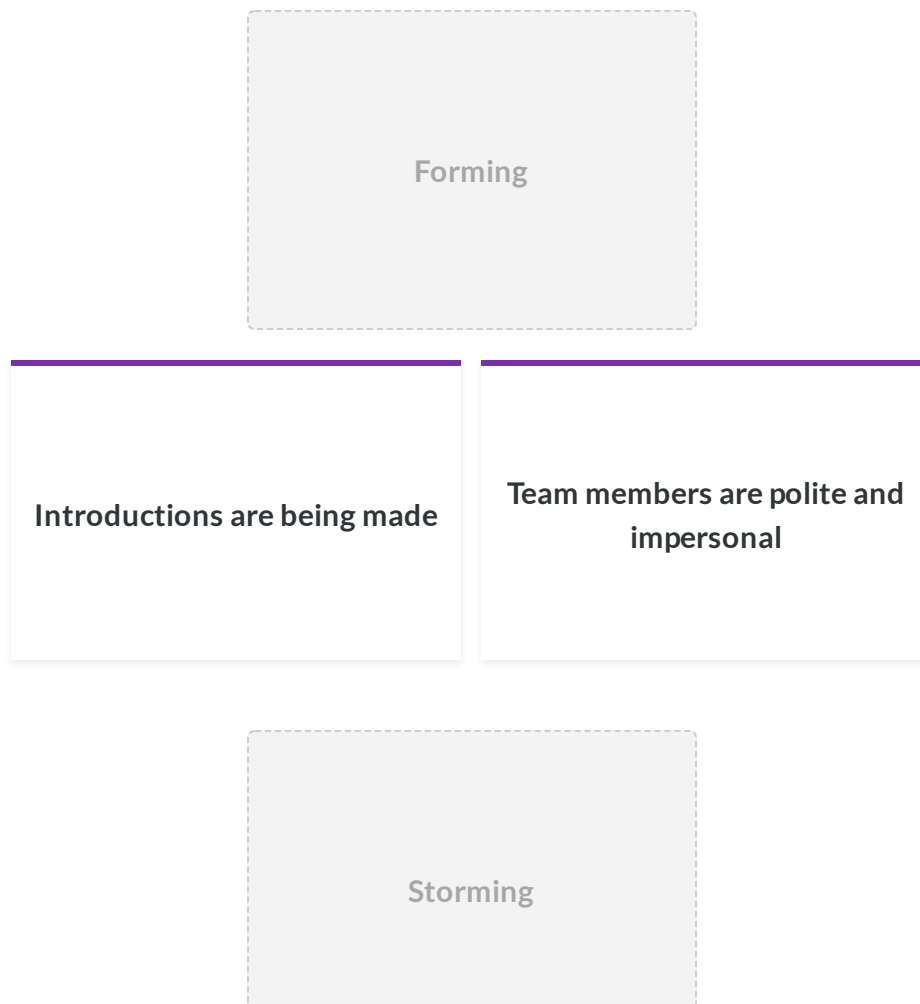
You've mastered the four stages of team development. Now let's practice what you've learned!

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Knowledge Check

Check Your Understanding

What stage of development is your team in? Check your understanding by completing the following sorting activity.



Team members are challenging you, each other, or the rules

Competing ideas, clashing communication styles, or power struggles

Norming

Team rules, systems, and roles are standardized and accepted by members

Teams are fully functional for the first time

Performing

Teams consistently meet and exceed their goals

Teams have a shared vision and can easily make independent decisions

i **Where is your team?** Review the four stages of team development to identify which stage resonates with your team. Which stage are they in? And how can you help them move forward?

CONTINUE

Summary

Summary

You've learned Dr. Bruce Tuckman's four stages of development: forming, storming, norming, and performing. Teams begin in the *forming* stage. Members are just getting to know one another and what they'll be working on together. Next, the *storming* stage is a rough patch marked by conflict and competing ideas or clashing communication styles. *Norming*, the third stage, is where teams accept a standard set of team rules, roles, and norms. They start to learn how to work together and get things done. The final stage of team development is performing, when teams reach optimal performance. Team managers should be aware of where their team is at so that they can tailor their management tactics to help teams progress to the next stage of development.

i **Teams can revert to previous stages at any time.** For example, established teams may revert to the *forming* stage when a new team member is added, or a new project is introduced. Teams might revert to the *storming* stage when a new challenge arises. Any significant change can shake up your team. So, never stop working to develop your team to reach optimal performance.

Congratulations! You've successfully completed this course.