

# Tools FOR SCHOOLS

FOR A DYNAMIC COMMUNITY OF LEARNERS AND LEADERS

## Transform your group into a **TEAM**

BY JOAN RICHARDSON

A professional learning community craze is sweeping the country. School after school is setting aside time for teachers to meet in grade-level groups or subject area teams. PLC time is noted on calendars that parents hang on refrigerator doors. Students start school later or leave school earlier so teachers have time to meet with colleagues.



But, as many schools are learning, professional learning communities don't just happen because a principal sets aside time for teachers to meet and slaps a new label on that meeting. That's especially the case when teachers have been accustomed to working in isolation.

Principals and teacher leaders must be very intentional about helping groups of teachers become communities of learners. And, somewhere between the naming and becoming highly productive teams, many schools get lost. How do you move from being a group of people with a common characteristic — such as teaching the same subject or grade level — to being a team or a community with a common vision and focus?

Ann Delehan, who consults with many school districts on team development issues, said many teachers don't immediately recognize that professional learning communities is "the new name for a team."

"A professional learning community is not a new thing. It's not a new fad. A PLC is what we call a team with an intentional focus on learn-

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# Transform your group into a team



## DEFINITION OF TEAM

**"A team is a small number of people with complementary skills who are committed to a common purpose, set of performance goals, and approach for which they hold themselves mutually accountable."**

Jon Katzenbach and Douglas Smith, "The discipline of teams," *Harvard Business Review*, March/April 1993.

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ing," she said.

Although many educators understand the need to devote time to group or team development, they often neglect to spend time on the basics when working on PLCs because they don't perceive PLCs to be teams that require the same kind of support, she said.

Understanding the four stages of group development is a good place to begin learning how a PLC might evolve from being a group to being a team. In 1965, psychologist Bruce Tuckman reviewed the literature on group functioning and described the four stages of group development as forming, norming, storming, and performing. (See illustration on Page 3.)

In the initial stage — "forming" — group members have high expectations and anxiety about how they fit in. They are testing themselves and each other. At this early stage, they depend on some authority or facilitator to create a structure for them. During this period, group members are likely to be polite but impersonal, watchful, and guarded in their behaviors.

Conflict characterizes the second stage of development — "storming." Group members rebel against each other and against authority. Storming behaviors, he said, are each

individual's response to being influenced by the group and by the work that is required to achieve the assigned tasks. Group members may describe themselves as feeling stuck. They may opt out of the process or they may compete with other group members for power and attention.

If groups successfully resolve their storming issues, they arrive at the third stage — "norming." At this point, group members have overcome their feelings of resistance and begin to feel that they are a cohesive group. Harmony, trust, and support develop. Participants develop a sense of cohesiveness and "intimate, personal opinions are expressed," Tuckman wrote. At this stage, the group is developing skills and agreeing on procedures for doing the work. They are confronting issues represented by their work, not other individuals.

If group members persist, they reach the fourth stage — "performing" — in which they become a team rather than a group of disparate individuals. They work collaboratively and interdependently, share leadership, and perform at high levels. They are flexible and resourceful, close and supportive.

Groups may spend different amounts of time at each stage and they may move through them in a different sequence but each group will experi-

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## NOT ALL GROUPS ARE TEAMS: HOW TO TELL THE DIFFERENCE

| WORKING GROUPS                                                                                 | TEAMS                                                                |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Strong, clearly focused leader                                                                 | Shared leadership roles                                              |
| Individual accountability                                                                      | Individual and mutual accountability                                 |
| The group's purpose is the same as the broader organizational mission                          | Specific team purpose that the team itself delivers                  |
| Individual work products                                                                       | Collective work products                                             |
| Runs efficient meetings                                                                        | Encourages open-ended discussion and active problem-solving meetings |
| Measures its effectiveness indirectly by its influence on others (e.g. student learning goals) | Measures performance directly by assessing collective work products  |
| Discusses, decides, delegates                                                                  | Discusses, decides, does real work together                          |

Source: "The discipline of teams," by Jon Katzenbach and Douglas Smith, *Harvard Business Review*, March/April 1993.

# Transform your group into a team

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ence each stage. You can use the survey on Pages 5-7 to help your groups determine which stage of development they are currently in.

Instead of relying on Tuckman, Delehant introduces school teams to M. Scott Peck’s model of community development — pseudo-community, chaos, trust building and listening, and community. For some schools, this language may be more successful than the traditional language of Tuckman, she said.

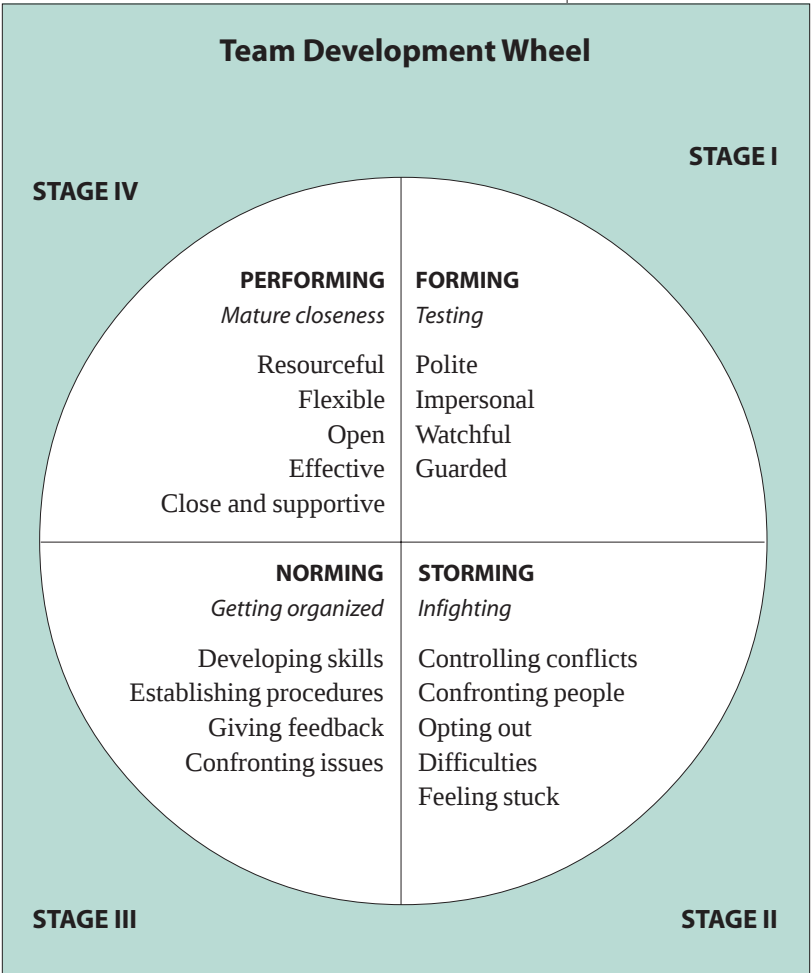
In Peck’s “pseudo-community,” members are afraid of differences and afraid of conflict. They are trying to get along, often pretending that they don’t have major differences.

“Pseudo-community is like early dating. This is the stage where all women love football,” Delehant said. Any time there is a new member of the group, the group goes back to pseudo-community and works its way back through the stages, typically in a smoother fashion than their initial foray, but not necessarily.

Peck’s second stage is the “chaos” stage. In this stage, there is struggle and often considerable conflict. Some members may feel that the situation is out of control because everyone is expressing different opinions. Some will try to “heal” the situation and convert others. Many want to return to the stage where everyone was nice to each other, Delehant said.

In Peck’s third stage, which he calls “emptiness,” group members are consciously removing their personal barriers to creating a community. Members will confront their expectations, prejudices, and ideologies and agree to suspend these points of view in favor of considering ideas presented by others. In a school situation, this might mean teachers agree that they will listen to ideas regarding the examination of data or they may agree to try to design a common lesson or assessment with other teachers.

The process of shedding these barriers is essential before members can move into Peck’s fourth stage which he labels “community.” At this stage, the group has become a team in which members trust and feel comfortable working with each other. They feel safe about exposing their vulnerabilities and resolve to work together on



common problems and issues.  
Whichever approach to thinking about team development is most appealing, Delehant urges facilitators and principals to spend time on the basics, including understanding the team development process.

“Teams need to have conversations about ‘how to do the work’ instead of just plunging in to do the work. They need to spend time building trust and relationships with each other. If they don’t do this in the beginning, teams will have to stop and do this eventually,” she warns.

“Every group has the delusion of uniqueness. They think they’re special. They tend to feel better when they know that there are predictable stages that they will go through. It makes them feel better to know that conflict is natural,” she said.

**“Teams need to have conversations about ‘how to do the work’ instead of just plunging in to do the work. They need to spend time building trust and relationships with each other.”**

# Developing norms

## EXAMPLES OF NORMS

**We will work together** as a community that values consensus rather than majority rule.

**We will be fully “present”** at the meeting by becoming familiar with materials before we arrive and by being attentive to behaviors which affect physical and mental engagement.

**We will invite and welcome** the contributions of every member and listen to each other.

**We will be involved** to our individual level of comfort. Each of us is responsible for airing disagreements during the meeting rather than carrying those disagreements outside the meeting.

**COMMENTS TO THE FACILITATOR:** This activity will enable a group to develop a set of operating norms or ground rules. In existing groups, anonymity will help ensure that everyone is able to express their ideas freely. That is the reason for suggesting that the facilitator provide pens or pencils and ask that everyone use the same type of writing implement.

**SUPPLIES:** Index cards, pens/pencils, poster paper, display board, tape, tacks.

**TIME:** Two hours.

## Directions

1. Indicate to the group that effective groups generally have a set of norms that governs individual behavior, facilitates the work of the group, and enables the group to accomplish its task.
2. Recommend to the group that it establish a set of norms:
  - To ensure that all individuals have the opportunity to contribute in the meeting;
  - To increase productivity and effectiveness; and
  - To facilitate the achievement of its goals.
3. Give five index cards and the same kind of writing tool to each person in the group.
4. Ask each person to reflect on and record behaviors they consider ideal behaviors for a group. Ask them to write one idea on each of their cards. Time: 10 minutes.
5. The facilitator should shuffle all the cards together. Every effort should be made to provide anonymity for individuals, especially if the group has worked together before.
6. Turn cards face up and read each card aloud. Allow time for the group members to discuss each idea. Tape or tack each card to a display board so that all group members can see it. As each subsequent card is read aloud, ask the group to determine if it is similar to another idea that already has been expressed. Cards with similar ideas should be grouped together.
7. When all of the cards have been sorted into groups, ask the group to write the norm suggested by that group of cards. Have one group member record these new norms onto a large sheet of paper.
8. Review the proposed norms with the group. Determine whether the group can support the norms before the group adopts them.

**Source:** Adapted from *Tools for change workshops* by Robby Champion. Oxford, Ohio: National Staff Development Council, 1993.

# Which stage is your team in?



## OBJECTIVES

To identify the present stage of the teamwork model that your team is presently operating in.

## DIRECTIONS

This questionnaire contains statements about teamwork. Next to each question, indicate how often your team displays each behavior by using the following scoring system:

1 = Almost never    2 = Seldom    3 = Occasionally    4 = Frequently    5 = Almost always

## POWERFUL WORDS

**"No one of us can be effective as all of us."**

— Unknown

**"Build with your team a feeling of oneness, of dependence on one another, and of strength derived from unity in the pursuit of your objective."**

— Vince Lombardi

**"Coming together is a beginning; keeping together is progress; and working together is success."**

— Henry Ford

## Questionnaire

- |                                                                                                                                                                                               |                                                                                                                            |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <p>1. _____ We try to have set procedures or protocols to ensure that things are orderly and run smoothly (e.g. minimize interruptions, everyone gets the opportunity to have their say).</p> | <p>4. _____ We have thorough procedures for agreeing on our objectives and planning the way we will perform our tasks.</p> |
| <p>2. _____ We are quick to get on with the task at hand and do not spend too much time in the planning stage.</p>                                                                            | <p>5. _____ Team members are afraid or do not like to ask others for help.</p>                                             |
| <p>3. _____ Our team feels that we are all in it together and shares responsibilities for the team's success or failure.</p>                                                                  | <p>6. _____ We take our team's goals and objectives literally, and assume a shared understanding.</p>                      |
|                                                                                                                                                                                               | <p>7. _____ The team leader tries to keep order and contributes to the task at hand.</p>                                   |

*Continued on p. 6*

## Which stage is your team in?

### SCORING SYSTEM:

1 = Almost never  
2 = Seldom  
3 = Occasionally  
4 = Frequently  
5 = Almost always

- |                                                                                                                                                |                                                                                                                                     |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 8. _____ We do not have fixed procedures, we make them up as the task or project progresses.                                                   | 20. _____ The tasks are very different from what we imagined and seem very difficult to accomplish.                                 |
| 9. _____ We generate lots of ideas, but we do not use many because we fail to listen to them and reject them without fully understanding them. | 21. _____ There are many abstract discussions of the concepts and issues, which make some members impatient with these discussions. |
| 10. _____ Team members do not fully trust the others members and closely monitor others who are working on a specific task.                    | 22. _____ We are able to work through group problems.                                                                               |
| 11. _____ The team leader ensures that we follow the procedures, do not argue, do not interrupt, and keep to the point.                        | 23. _____ We argue a lot even though we agree on the real issues.                                                                   |
| 12. _____ We enjoy working together; we have a fun and productive time.                                                                        | 24. _____ The team is often tempted to go above the original scope of the project.                                                  |
| 13. _____ We have accepted each other as members of the team.                                                                                  | 25. _____ We express criticism of others constructively                                                                             |
| 14. _____ The team leader is democratic and collaborative.                                                                                     | 26. _____ There is a close attachment to the team.                                                                                  |
| 15. _____ We are trying to define the goal and what tasks need to be accomplished.                                                             | 27. _____ It seems as if little is being accomplished with the project's goals.                                                     |
| 16. _____ Many of the team members have their own ideas about the process and personal agendas are rampant.                                    | 28. _____ The goals we have established seem unrealistic.                                                                           |
| 17. _____ We fully accept each other's strengths and weakness.                                                                                 | 29. _____ Although we are not fully sure of the project's goals and issues, we are excited and proud to be on the team.             |
| 18. _____ We assign specific roles to team members (team leader, facilitator, time keeper, note taker, etc.).                                  | 30. _____ We often share personal problems with each other.                                                                         |
| 19. _____ We try to achieve harmony by avoiding conflict.                                                                                      | 31. _____ There is a lot of resisting of the tasks on hand and quality improvement approaches.                                      |
|                                                                                                                                                | 32. _____ We get a lot of work done.                                                                                                |

# Which stage is your team in?

## PART 2: SCORING

Next to each survey item number below, transfer the score that you give that item on the questionnaire. For example, if you scored item one with a 3 (Occasionally), then enter a 3 next to item one below. When you have entered all the scores for each question, total each of the four columns.

| Item                 | Score | Item                  | Score | Item                 | Score | Item                    | Score |
|----------------------|-------|-----------------------|-------|----------------------|-------|-------------------------|-------|
| 1.                   | _____ | 2.                    | _____ | 4.                   | _____ | 3.                      | _____ |
| 5.                   | _____ | 7.                    | _____ | 6.                   | _____ | 8.                      | _____ |
| 10.                  | _____ | 9.                    | _____ | 11.                  | _____ | 12.                     | _____ |
| 15.                  | _____ | 16.                   | _____ | 13.                  | _____ | 14.                     | _____ |
| 18.                  | _____ | 20.                   | _____ | 19.                  | _____ | 17.                     | _____ |
| 21.                  | _____ | 23.                   | _____ | 24.                  | _____ | 22.                     | _____ |
| 27.                  | _____ | 28.                   | _____ | 25.                  | _____ | 26.                     | _____ |
| 29.                  | _____ | 31.                   | _____ | 30.                  | _____ | 32.                     | _____ |
| <b>TOTAL</b>         | _____ | <b>TOTAL</b>          | _____ | <b>TOTAL</b>         | _____ | <b>TOTAL</b>            | _____ |
| <b>FORMING STAGE</b> |       | <b>STORMING STAGE</b> |       | <b>NORMING STAGE</b> |       | <b>PERFORMING STAGE</b> |       |

**This questionnaire is to help you** assess what stage your team normally operates in. It is based on Tuckman’s model of Forming, Storming, Norming, and Performing. The lowest score possible for a stage is 8 (Almost never) while the highest score possible for a stage is 40 (Almost always).

The highest of the four scores indicates which stage your team normally operates in. If your highest score is 32 or more, it is a strong indicator of the stage your team is in.

The lowest of the three scores is an indicator of the stage your team is least like. If your lowest score is 16 or less, it is a strong indicator that your team does not operate this way.

If two of the scores are close to the same, you are probably going through a transition phase, except:

- If you score high in Forming and Storming, you are in the Storming stage.
- If you score high in Norming and Performing, you are in the Performing stage.

If there is only a small difference between three or four scores, then this indicates that you have no clear perception of the way your team operates, the team’s performance is highly variable, or that you are in the Storming stage (this stage can be extremely volatile with high and low points).

**Source:** “What stage is your team in?,” a tool created by Don Clark. Used with permission. This tool is available for free download at [www.nwlink.com/~donclark/leader/leader.html](http://www.nwlink.com/~donclark/leader/leader.html)

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## resources / team development

### The Different Drum: Community Making and Peace

M. Scott Peck. New York: Simon & Schuster, 1987.

Details Peck's beliefs about community development which involve pseudo-community, chaos, emptiness, and community.

### "Developmental sequence in small groups"

Bruce Tuckman, *Psychological Bulletin*, 63, 1965, pp. 384-99.

Foundational research for the forming, norming, storming, performing model.

### How to Make Meetings Work

Michael Doyle and David Straus. New York: Jove Books, 1976.

Provides basic instruction about how to manage meetings to make them more productive.

### How to Make Collaboration Work

David Straus. San Francisco: Berrett-Koehler, 2002.

Introduces five principles of collaboration that have proven successful in a variety of settings.

### "Norms of collegiality and experimentation: Workplace conditions of school success"

Judith Warren Little, *American Educational Research Journal*, Vol. 19, 1982.

Foundational research and support for building a collaborative work environment.

### "The discipline of teams"

Jon Katzenbach and Douglas Smith. *Harvard Business Review*, March-April 1993.

One of the seminal articles about team development. Available for purchase through [www.harvardbusinessonline.org](http://www.harvardbusinessonline.org). Enter title of the article in the search function. Reprint # 93210

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