

Why Mentoring Fails - The Motivation Test

By Ann Rolfe

How is it that people enthusiastically embark on mentoring and then it falls over? Why does their initial excitement turn to fear? And what is it that causes the mentoring flame to fizzle out?

Tuckman's theory of group development may hold the answers. A mentoring partnership is a team, group mentoring and mentoring circles even more so. So Tuckman's Stages of Group Development is a useful lens through which to view what goes on in mentoring relationships. Here's a précis from a mentoring perspective

Forming – people aim for acceptance, so they avoid conflict, raising serious issues or discussing feelings. They want to get comfortable so they focus on logistics – when and where they'll meet, the scope of the mentoring task and how to approach it. They gather information and impressions of each other.

This is an important foundation but it may feel like not a lot is achieved. However, because there is a rosy glow around the start of something new – as long as participants have volunteered to mentor and be mentored, and the program gives them encouragement and support – motivation is high and people sail through this stage.

Storming – this sound ominous but Tuckman believed that no group would achieve high performance unless they worked through it. Essentially, it is a less comfortable stage of examining the real purpose of the team, confronting different needs and ideas. There may be some conflict and unless participants have the skills to resolve it, the relationship will not progress.

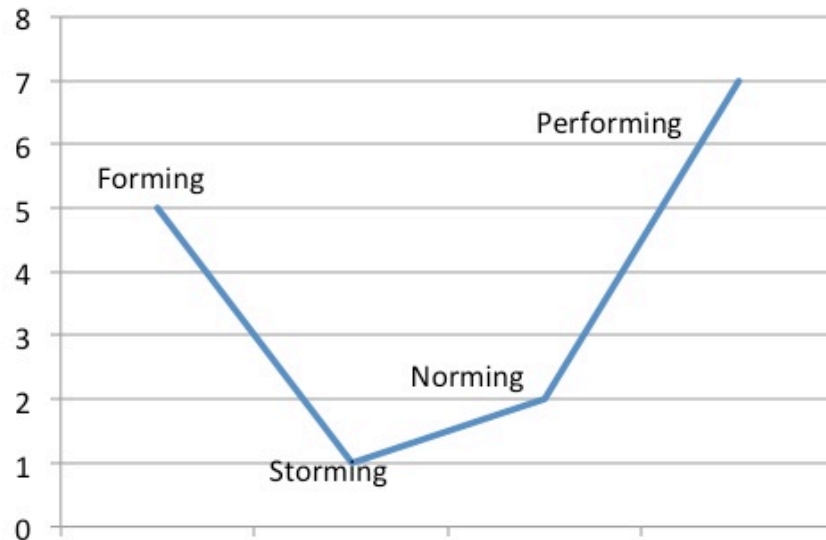
This is the point of departure for many mentoring relationships. Unless people have learned the value of conflict and the creativity it can unleash, if they don't have the maturity and experience to use it constructively, motivation plummets and they can't ride out the storm.

Norming – the calm after the storm is the result of agreeing to a goal and a mutual plan. This means accepting other points of view, agreeing to ways of working together as a team, taking responsibility and committing to the goal and plan.

Performing - once they've figured out how to function well together with focus on their purpose, teamwork gathers momentum. Visible progress is highly motivating and very satisfying.

The graph below plots motivation levels at each stage.

Motivation



Tuckman's Stages of Group Development

The Test

Does your mentoring program assist:

Forming – by bringing people together, developing their skills and equipping them to succeed?

Storming – by providing structure, support and follow-up to help them through the tough early days?

Norming – by checking in to make sure they have established agreements, ground rules and schedules?

Performing – by monitoring and feeding back group progress and providing ways to celebrate success?

This is the way we ensure mentoring works!