### Background Information

Team Development

Effective teamwork has become essential in today’s world. A newly formed team cannot be expected to perform exceptionally well from the very outset, however. Becoming an effective team takes time, and usually follows some easily recognizable stages. A team will journey through these stages as it progresses from being a group of strangers to becoming a united team with a common goal.

Team Development Stages

Psychologist Bruce W. Tuckman first came up with a team development model in 1965 that is still used today. The stages of this model, referred to as the *Forming, Storming, Norming,* and *Performing* stages, describe the path to high performance that most teams follow. Later, Tuckman added a fifth stage that he called *Adjourning.* Tuckman’s model is one of the best-known team development theories and has formed the basis of many further ideas since its conception.

Tuckman’s model focuses on the way in which a team tackles a task, from the initial formation of the team through to the completion of the project. The theory is particularly relevant to team-building challenges, as the stages are relevant to the completion of any task undertaken by a team. One of the very useful aspects of team-building challenges is that teams have an opportunity to observe and discuss their behaviour within a short period of time.

Each stage of Tuckman’s team development model is briefly outlined below:

1. **Forming**

* The team is assembled and the task is determined or assigned.
* Team members are generally positive and polite.
* Team members tend to behave independently and, although friendliness may exist, they do not know each other well enough to trust one another unconditionally.
* Some members are anxious, as they are not yet clear as to what work will be involved.
* Some members are excited about the task ahead and want to get started.

1. **Storming**

* The team members begin to address the task by suggesting ideas that may compete for recognition and ultimate acceptance.
* The ways of working as a team begin to be defined, which creates discomfort for some members who may disagree with the approach being used or who feel overwhelmed with the amount of work to be done.
* Some members may react by questioning how worthwhile the goal of the team is and resist taking on a task.
* In extreme cases, the team can become stuck in the *Storming* stage.
* If a team is too focused on reaching consensus, it may decide on a plan that is less effective in completing the task for the sake of the team.
* Some members feel they are on an emotional roller coaster as they try to focus on the task without the support of established processes or relationships with their team members.

1. **Norming**

* During this stage, the team moves toward harmonious working practices, with members agreeing on the rules and values by which they operate.
* The members are developing a strong commitment to the team goal, and they begin to see good progress toward reaching it.
* In the ideal situation, team members begin to trust each other during this stage as they accept the vital contribution of each member to the team. Now that the team members know each other better, they may be socializing together, and they are able to ask each other for help and provide constructive criticism.

1. **Performing**

* Not all teams make it to this stage, which is essentially a time of high performance.
* Strong teams are identified by high levels of interdependence, independence, motivation, knowledge, and competence.
* Decision making is collaborative and dissent is expected and encouraged, as there will be a high level of respect and trust in the communication between team members.
* Team members understand that hard work leads directly to progress toward their shared vision and goal, supported by the structures and processes that have been established.
* Individual team members may join or leave the team without affecting the performing approach of the group.

1. **Adjourning**

* This is the final stage that ends the project and sees the disbanding of the team.
* This stage is also referred to as the *Mourning* stage, as it reflects the feelings experienced by team members at the conclusion of their work.

Note that a team can return to any phase within the team development model if they experience a change (e.g., a review of the project or goals, a change in members). When a member leaves or a new member joins a successful team, the team will revert to the *Forming* stage, but this stage may last for a very short time as the new member experiences the team culture.