



## BEST PRACTICE

### Understanding Team Development Phases

The use of teams is critical in a quality management environment. As a result, understanding the team life cycle is important in order to set proper expectations for the team and to help it communicate and function effectively. Teams go through four phases:

- **Forming**

In this first stage, teams are dominated by feelings of confusion and anxiety, and are not able to focus on their purpose for long. Individuals may come to the team proud to be selected, but wondering why, and wondering about the other members. Information will be solicited and shared, and hidden agendas add to the uncertainty. Key accomplishments of this phase are identifying roles for team members, clarifying responsibilities and accepted behavior, and defining the team's purpose.

- **Storming**

Conflict, defensiveness, and competition are key during this stage. Team members still think individually and wrestle with loyalties outside the team. As ideas emerge, they are attacked and defended. There may be confrontations, disagreements, and fluctuating attitudes over the likelihood of achieving the team's purpose. Barriers will be examined and the team will focus on well-known observations and common beliefs. Some people will not participate to prevent unfavorable responses, and others will test the leader's authority and form cliques.

- **Norming**

In this stage the individuals start to become a team. Personal agendas, concerns, and loyalties are minimized. People are discussed less often than the issues, conflicts are resolved constructively, and the team focuses on its real purpose. As trust develops, riskier ideas are proposed and feelings exchanged. The willingness to discuss for the sake of the team grows, which results in better communication and cooperation.

- **Conforming**

During this final stage, the team has matured into a cohesive unit. Individual strengths and weaknesses are understood and appreciated, leading to an overall satisfaction with the team membership. As steps are



made toward the team's goals, there is individual learning and growth, and people feel satisfied with progress. There are many variables that affect the length of time a team spends in each of these stages. The team experience of individual members is a big factor, and use of a facilitator can help. Clarity of the team's purpose and the level of management support are other factors. Teams may also get to the norming or conforming stages and fall back to earlier stages if assumptions are found to be incorrect or team membership changes.

## References

Guide – CSQA Common Body Of Knowledge, V6.2