

Transforming Team Performance



The Team Life Cycle

(high-level overview)



Team Life Cycle: Key Ideas

- ① The elements of the Team Wheel that are most relevant to a team will vary depending on the team's stage of development.
- ② Working through task-related disagreements is essential not only for resolving real issues, but also for building trust and respect within the team.
- ③ Teamwork is energizing *and* challenging. Team members enjoy the good times and they stick together during the bad times.
- ④ High performance is a state, not a type of team.
- ⑤ Team development follows a predictable series of stages, but rarely occurs in a neat linear progression.

Team Life Cycle: Overview

Teams, like individual human beings, develop and change over time. Many different models have been advanced to explain how groups of people develop. The six-stage Team Life Cycle model below synthesizes concepts and research from a variety of sources, including the frameworks put forward by Bruce Tuckman, Performance Plus International (PPI), and Susan Wheelan.



The model is sequential, in that each stage is a necessary prerequisite to the stages that follow. It is not fully linear, however; teams may move back and forth across all six stages based upon the situations they face, and many get stuck in an early stage for extended periods of time. In fact, research suggests that the large majority of teams never make it to Stage 4: Perform & Sustain.

Tuckman (1965). "Developmental sequence in small groups."
Tuckman & Jensen (1977). "Stages of small-group development revisited." Wheelan (2004). *Group Processes*.

Team Wheel + Team Life Cycle

For a team to effectively apply the Team Wheel framework, the team needs to understand what stage of development it is most likely in. Work that provides great value in one stage of a team's life may be useless or even harmful in a different stage.

For example, while a focus on conflict management may be critical in Stage 2 (Storm & Clarify), it's typically premature—and likely counterproductive—in Stage 1 (Form & Connect). Similarly, while a team in Stage 4 (Perform & Sustain) may benefit from performance management around their established purpose and goals, teams in Stage 5 (Dorm & Drift) often need a whole new common purpose and set of goals to get re-focused and re-energized.

Learning about these limitations often comes as a relief to a team. The prospect of mastering the full range of capacities on the Team Wheel can be daunting. Many teams are happy to hear that they need not—and actually *cannot*—tackle every aspect of team performance all at once.



Adapted from Tuckman (1965). "Developmental sequence in small groups."
Tuckman & Jensen (1977). "Stages of small-group development revisited." Wheelan (2004). *Group Processes*.

Team Life Cycle: Stage Snapshots



Stage 1: Form & Connect

All team life cycles begin in Stage 1, the birth and early childhood of the team. At this beginning stage, it's never entirely clear how each individual is going to contribute and how those contributions are going to be received. That ambiguity tends to fuel a sense of anticipation, often including a blend of excitement, anxiety, and insecurity. Members tend to be preoccupied with issues of identity, influence, integration, and individual goals. (See the Corentus i4 Module for details.) Other signs of a team in this stage include dependence on the leader; tentative or polite communication; discussions dominated by a few vocal individuals; failure to clarify ambiguous roles and goals; and avoidance of conflict.



Stage 2: Storm & Clarify

Much like the adolescent stage of individual development, Stage 2 tends to be tumultuous, confusing, and frustrating for a team. As polite deference gives way to tension and disagreement and members start challenging roles and goals they'd previously agreed to, it may seem as though the group has regressed. But in fact, these changes are essential for team development. A team in Stage 2 is striving toward clarification, and that process is inherently challenging. The conflicts that emerge in Stage 2 can be very useful, though only if they're temporary and focused on tasks rather than personality issues.



Stage 3: Norm & Solidify

Stage 3 is the stage where a group starts to feel like a real team. United by a clear common purpose and goals, members feel a shared sense of belonging and increasing levels of trust and interdependence. As deeper professional and personal relationships develop, there's a stronger sense of "having each other's back" and being able to ask one another for help. You begin to hear the word *we* at least as much as *I* and *me*. Now that team members are starting to collaborate effectively, they can focus more energy on *norming*—clarifying and codifying the group's ways of working.

Team Life Cycle: Stage Snapshots



Stage 4: Perform & Sustain

The fourth stage of development marks a team's transition to full maturity. The groundwork established in Stage 3—including mutual trust and respect, as well as shared processes, methods, tools, and sets of norms—enables high levels of effectiveness and efficiency. With greater confidence and clarity on each person's role, the team becomes more comfortable taking risks and exploring innovative solutions. The typical mindset in Stage 4 is one of engagement, fulfillment, and excitement, with a focus on results.



Stage 5: Dorm & Drift

After about 18 to 24 months of Stage 4 performance, even the most effective, productive teams often start to decline. Energized engagement gives way to boredom, fatigue, and stagnation. As members lose connection with the shared objectives that once united them, there's a sense of drifting away both from their work and from each other. If some individuals maintain a sharp focus on results while others become distracted and disengaged, this erodes team cohesion even further. Common signs of a Stage 5 team include the emergence of lax processes and procedures, difficulty setting goals and making plans, lengthy idle chit chat in team meetings, commiseration about a lack of direction and focus, and a general decline in energy and excitement.



Stage 6: Transform & Refocus

Even highly successful teams may eventually reach a point where it's impossible to continue in their current form. The final stage in the team life cycle—Transform & Refocus—can take one of two forms: either Rebirth (revitalization of the team) or Death. Both types of transformation can stir up strong emotions, particularly if the change is unexpected. In addition to a sense of grief and loss, members may experience anxiety, trepidation, or excitement about what the future holds. They face the challenge of coming to terms with these emotions, while also taking practical steps to complete the current work of the team.

Team Life Cycle: Stage Comparisons

The six stages of the Team Life Cycle differ from each other in myriad ways. The table below and the one on the following page highlight differences across a variety of dimensions.

Dimension Stage	Life Stage	Area of Focus	Characteristic Mindsets	Orientation toward Authority
1 Form & Connect	Birth and Early Childhood	Self	Anticipation Optimism Anxiety Insecurity	Dependent
2 Storm & Clarify	Adolescence	Differences and Conflict	Tension Frustration Determination	Counter-dependent
3 Norm & Solidify	Young Adulthood	Structure	Trust Acceptance Impatience	Collaborative
4 Perform & Sustain	Maturity	Results	Fulfillment Excitement	Participatory
5 Dorm & Drift	Senescence	Distractions	Boredom Complacency	Detached
6 Transform & Refocus	Rebirth or death	Future and/or Past	Excitement Trepidation Grief	Anticipatory

Team Life Cycle: Stage Comparisons

Stage	Critical Developmental Tasks & Goals
<p>1 Form & Connect</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Foster safety and inclusion ▪ Encourage participation and open communication ▪ Get to know one another ▪ Define rules of engagement ▪ Begin to unite around a common purpose ▪ Establish initial goals and roles
<p>2 Storm & Clarify</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Focus on tasks, not personalities ▪ Allow differing views to surface ▪ Revisit common purpose if necessary ▪ Clarify goals and roles ▪ Develop methods of collaboration ▪ Establish mutual accountability
<p>3 Norm & Solidify</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Codify team processes, methods, and tools ▪ Focus on managing resources (time, energy, money) ▪ Develop skills and methods in all areas of collaboration ▪ Modify roles as needed ▪ Deepen mutual accountability ▪ Agree on behavioral norms and call out deviations from them
<p>4 Perform & Sustain</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Support members' work/life balance and overall well-being ▪ Continue to encourage task-related conflict ▪ Reward individuals and team through performance management ▪ Track and actively develop individual competencies ▪ Maintain mutual accountability
<p>5 Dorm & Drift</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Focus on talent development ▪ Seek out new, energizing projects ▪ Build relationships and partnerships outside the team ▪ Define a new common purpose and set of goals ▪ Switch roles and/or change membership within the team ▪ Re-engage mutual accountability
<p>6 Transform & Refocus</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Review, document, and memorialize the team's history, processes, procedures, and tools ▪ Appropriately celebrate, complete, and close the past ▪ Come to terms with emotions evoked by the transition ▪ If the team will be continuing on in a new form, prepare to re-engage in Stage 1 work

Impact of Team Development on Receptivity to Team Coaching

A team's stage of development affects its response to any new challenge, including the introduction of a team coach. Each stage is associated with certain characteristic reactions from clients, both positive and negative. Being aware of these typical responses can help you avoid taking it personally when clients have a negative reaction to the work you're proposing to do. Such reactions provide valuable information about what's happening with the group's development and readiness for change. Paying attention to those signals can help you readjust your approach and communicate in ways they're more likely to hear.



Form & Connect

Positive: This is interesting. Let's see what kind of help this person can provide.

Negative: How can we need a coach already? We're just starting!



Perform & Sustain

Positive: Here's a chance for us to get even better and learn to sustain performance over the long haul.

Negative: When we're doing so well, it's not helpful to focus on the few little things that aren't perfect.



Storm & Clarify

Positive: Thank goodness we're getting some support. We need someone to help us out here.

Negative: I don't want to deal with this. What are we getting ourselves into? I have no interest in going through group therapy.



Dorm & Drift

Positive: Thank goodness. Let's see what this person can bring us. Anything is better than this.

Negative: There's no point. This is not going to help. I have better things to do.



Norm & Solidify

Positive: Getting some help to create more clarity and more traction is just what we need.

Negative: We're making progress on our own. Now that we have our act together, we don't need any more help.



Transform & Refocus

Positive: We'll take whatever help we can get to manage this big transition effectively.

Negative: We don't really need to do process right now. We've got too much going on.

Team Life Cycle: *Critiques & Clarifications*

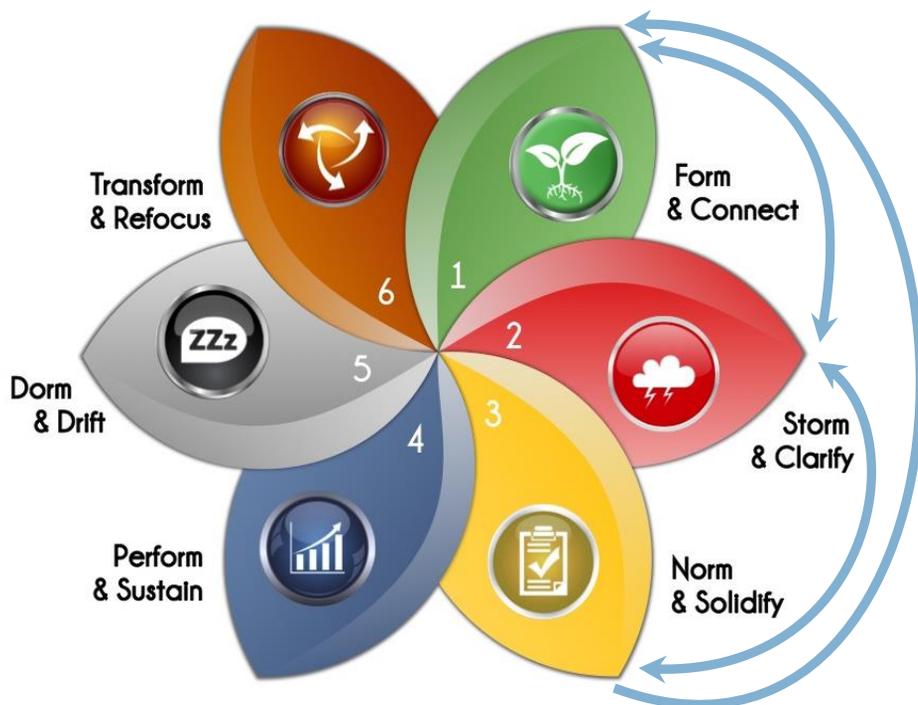
Tuckman's introduced the four stages of forming, storming, norming, and performing more than half a century ago. Over the years, this basic model has been highly influential in both research and practice, but various researchers and practitioners have voiced dissatisfactions and critiques. On the pages that follow is a review of some of the most common critiques, with our perspective on their validity and implications.

Critique #1

Groups don't evolve in a purely linear fashion.

It's true that few teams evolve in a neat progression from Stage 1 through Stage 4. Any number of factors may cause prolonged stagnation in a particular stage or regression to an earlier stage. The only claim of this model that is truly linear is that each stage sets the foundation for future stages.

For instance, a sense of safety and belonging must be established (Stage 1) before open conflict and disagreement fully emerge (Stage 2). And only by working through conflicts and disagreements can the team develop trust and focus more fully on the task at hand (Stage 3). From our experience and review of existing research, we firmly believe that this is accurate.



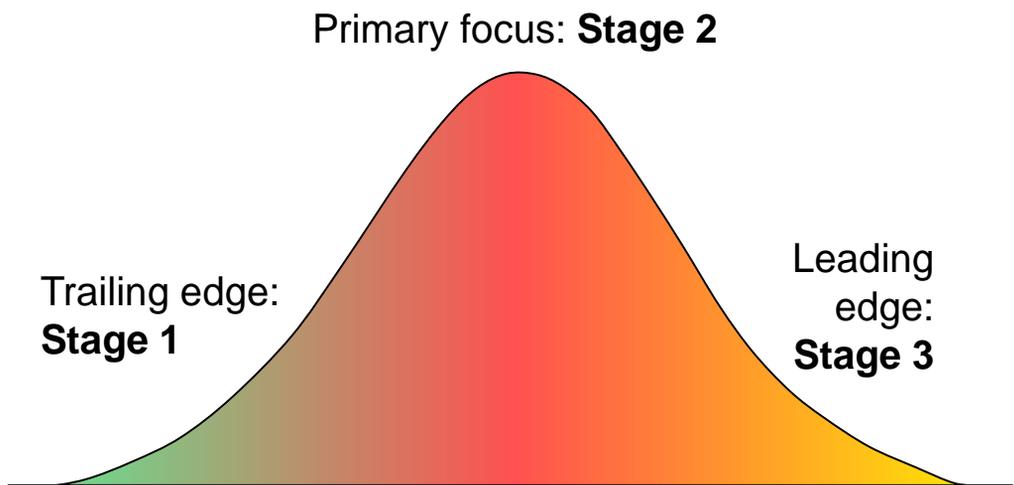
Team Life Cycle: *Critiques & Clarifications*

Critique #2

It's misleading to say that a group is in one stage or another. Groups operate at several different stages at the same time.

Being “in a stage” isn't an all-or-nothing phenomenon. One validated, reliable measure of group development (GDQ, developed by Susan Wheelan) measures groups along four scales—one for each of the first four stages. You'd never expect a group to show all of its activity in just one stage (e.g., exhibiting only Stage 2–related behaviors). Instead, what you see is a range. A group in Stage 2 will show moderate-to-high activity in characteristic Stage 2, with relatively low activity in Stage 1 and moderate-to-low activity in Stages 3 and 4.

You can think of team development as falling on a bell curve. While a large proportion of a team's behaviors and experiences will fall into one particular stage, you may see significant activity at the leading and trailing edges as well.



*Example of potential distribution of team behaviors and experiences—
not limited to a single stage.*

Team Life Cycle: *Critiques & Clarifications*

Critique #3

When you assess a group as a whole you lose information about individuals. Different group members may be in different stages.



Technically, a group development stage is a feature of a group, not of members. An individual person cannot be “in Stage 1,” because Stage 1 is not a category that applies to individual people. It is certainly true, however, that different individuals in a group may consistently exhibit behaviors and experiences characteristic of different stages of development. In a primarily Stage 1 group, you may see just one or two individuals displaying characteristic Stage 2 behaviors as part of the natural transition from Stage 1 to Stage 2. (In terms of a developmental bell curve, those Stage 2 behaviors represent the leading edge.)

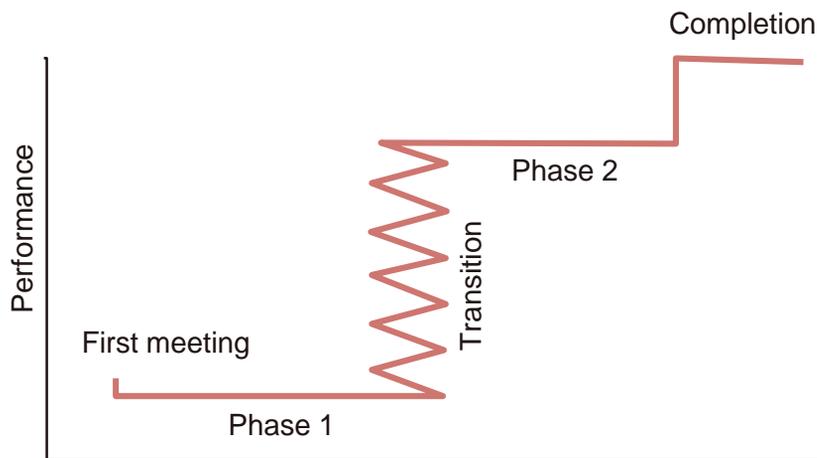
If you’re able to observe a particular individual in a variety of group settings, you may notice that she displays very similar behaviors (e.g., interrupting and challenging the leader) in each. This could indicate a lack of behavioral flexibility worth addressing through individual coaching. In group contexts, other people’s responses to this individual will likely vary by development stage. For instance, she may be a marginalized outlier in a Stage 1 group, leader of a powerful subgroup in a Stage 2 group, and a valued Devil’s advocate in a Stage 3 group.

Team Life Cycle: *Critiques & Clarifications*

Critique #4

Many patterns of team behavior are driven less by internal group dynamics and more by external pressures, like project deadlines.

Gersick (1988) found that in deadline-driven project teams, performance followed a “punctuated equilibrium” pattern, with a major transition at the midpoint (see diagram). In short-term, project-driven teams, this model may in fact be more relevant than the Team Life Cycle. Many teams, however, lack clear midpoints and completion dates, and are better modeled by the Team Life Cycle.



Punctuated Equilibrium. Adapted from Gersick (1988).

Critique #5

Many of this model’s predictions relate to authority. With shifts in authority—including flattening of hierarchies and decreasing trust and deference toward leaders—these predictions may start to break down.

This concern actually comes from us. We believe that the predictions made by Tuckman-style models of group development have been helpful historically and continue to be helpful today. Yet we recognize the possibility that significant changes in organizational structures and cultures could make it less accurate going forward. Only time will tell!

References

References

- Barsade, S. & Ward, A., et al., *To Your Heart's Content: A Mode of Affective Diversity in Top Management Teams*, Administrative Science Quarterly 45, 2000.
- Barsade, S. & Gibson, M., *Group Emotion: A View From the Top and Bottom*, Research on Managing Groups and Teams, eds. D. Gruenfeld et al., JAI Press, Greenwich, CT, 1998.
- Benjamin, B., Yeager, A. & Simon, A., *Conversation Transformation*, McGraw Hill, New York, NY, 2012.
- Boosting Your Team's Emotional Intelligence – For Maximum Performance*, Harvard Business Review OnPoint Collection, March 1, 2001.
- Bossidy, L. & Charan, R., *Execution: The Discipline of Getting Things Done*, Crown Business, New York, NY, 2002.
- Brett, J., Behfar, K. & Kern, M. C., *Managing Multicultural Teams*, Harvard Business Review, November, 2006.
- Britton, J., *Effective Group Coaching: Tried and Tested Tools and Resources for Optimum Coaching Results*, John Wiley & Sons, Mississauga, Ontario, Canada, 2010.
- Buchholz, S. & Tomas, R., *Creating the High-Performance Team*, John Wiley & Sons, New York, NY, 1987.
- Clutterbuck, D., *How to Coach a Team in the Field*, Training Journal, February 2007.
- Clutterbuck, D., *Coaching the Team at Work*, Nicholas Brealey International, Clerkenwell, United Kingdom, 2007.
- Dyer, W., *Team Building Issues and Alternatives*, Addison-Wesley Publishing, Reading, MA, 1987.
- Fisher, K., *Leading Self-Directed Work Teams: A Guide To Developing New Team Leadership Skills*, R.R. Donnelley & Sons, New York, NY, 1993.
- Flaherty, J., *Coaching – Evoking Excellence in Others*, Butterworth Heinemann, Woburn, MA, 1999.
- Forsyth, D. R., *Group Dynamics: Fifth Edition*, Wadsworth, Cengage Learning, Belmont, CA, 2010.
- Francis, D. & Young, D., *Improving Work Groups: A Practical Manual for Team Building*, Pfeiffer & Co., San Diego, CA, 1994.
- Garfield, J. & Stanton, K., *Building Effective Teams in Real Time*, Harvard Management Update, Harvard Business School Publishing Corp., Boston, MA, November 2005.
- Hackman, J. & Wageman, R., *A Theory of Team Coaching*, Academy of Management Review, 2005, Vol. 30, No. 2, 269–287.
- Hawkins, P., *Leadership Team Coaching: Developing Collective Transformation Leadership*, Kogan Page Limited, London, United Kingdom, 2011.
- Herb, E., Leslie, K. & Price, C., *Teamwork at the Top*, McKinsey Quarterly, McKinsey & Co., 2001.
- Isgar, T., *The Ten Minute Team*, Seluera Press, Boulder, CO, 1993.
- Jaques, E., *The Requisite Organization*, Cason Hall & Co, Arlington, VA, 1996.
- Kantor, D., *Reading the Room: Group Dynamics for Coaches and Leaders*, John Wiley & Sons, Inc., San Francisco, CA, 2012.
- Katzenbach, J. & Smith, D., *The Discipline of Teams*, John Wiley & Sons, Inc., New York, NY, 2001.

References

- Katzenbach, J. & Smith, D., *The Wisdom of Teams*, Harvard Business School Press, Boston, MA, 1993.
- Katzenbach, J. & Smith, D., *The Discipline of Teams*, Harvard Business Review, Harvard Business School Press, Boston, MA, 1993.
- Larson, C.E., & LaFasto, F.M., *When Teams Work Best*, Sage Publications, Thousand Oaks, CA, 2001.
- Larson, C.E., & LaFasto, F.M., *Teamwork. What Must Go Right/What Can Go Wrong*, Sage Publications, Newbury Park, CA, 1989.
- Lencioni, P., *The Five Dysfunctions of a Team*, Jossey-Bass Publishers, San Francisco, CA, 2002.
- Lencioni, P., *Overcoming the Five Dysfunctions of a Team*, Jossey-Bass Publishers, San Francisco, CA, 2005.
- Levi, D., *Group Dynamics for Teams*, SAGE Publications, Inc., Thousand Oaks, CA, 2011.
- Marquardt, M. J. & Horvath, L., *Global Teams: How Top Multinationals Span Boundaries and Cultures with High-Speed Teamwork*, Davies-Black, Palo Alto, CA, 2006.
- Napier, R., & Gershenfeld, M., *Groups: Theory and Experience*, Houghton Mifflin Co., Boston, MA, 1973.
- Nash, S. & Courtney B., *Teamwork From The Inside Out Fieldbook*, Davis-Black Publishing.
- Nash, S., *Turning Team Performance Inside Out*, Davis-Black Publishing.
- Niemela, C. & Lewis, R., *Leading High Impact Teams: The Coach Approach to Peak Performance*, High Impact Publishing, Laguna Beach, CA, 2001.
- O'Neill, M., *Executive Coaching with Backbone and Heart*, Jossey-Bass Publishers, San Francisco, CA, 2000.
- Organ, D., & Bateman, T., *Organizational Behavior*, Irwin, Boston, MA, 1991.
- Orsborn, J., Moran, L., Musselwhite, E. & Zenger, J., *Self-directed Work Teams*, Irwin, New York, NY 1990.
- Phillips, S. & Elledge, R., *The Team-Building Source Book*, Pfeiffer & Company, San Diego, CA, 1989.
- Rapaport, R., *To Build a Winning Team: An Interview With Head Coach Bill Walsh*, Harvard Business Review, Vol. 71 & No. 1, January – February, 1993.
- Schein, E., *Process Consultation*, Addison-Wesley Publishing, Reading, MA, 1986.
- Senge, P. M., *The Fifth Discipline*, Doubleday/Currency, New York, NY 1990.
- Sherman, P. & Bailey, B., *Team Coaching: A Systems View*, The International Journal of Coaching in Organizations, 2009 7(4), 132-143.
- Stacke, E., *Coaching...for Winning Teams & Successful Companies*, 100 Ways, Paris, France, 2006.
- Stone, D., Patton, B. & Heen, S., *Difficult Conversations – How to Discuss What Matters Most*, The Penguin Group, New York, NY, 1999.
- Streibel, B. J., Joiner, B. L. & Scholtes, P.R., *The Team Handbook Third Edition*, Joiner/Oriel Inc., 2003.
- Sull, D. N. & Spinosa, C., *Promise Based Management – The Essence of Execution*, Harvard Business Review, Harvard Business School Publishing Corp., Boston, MA, April 2007.
- Thornton, C., *Group and Team Coaching: The Essential Guide*, Routledge, East Sussex, United Kingdom, 2010.

References

Urch Druskat, V., & Wolff, S., *Building the Emotional Intelligence of Groups*, Harvard Business Review, Harvard Business School Publishing Corp., Boston, MA, March 2001.

Wellins, Byham & Wilson, *Empowered Teams: Creating Self-Directed Work Groups That Improve Quality, Productivity, and Participation*, Jossey-Bass Publishers, San Francisco, CA, 1991.

Williams, R. B., *More Than 50 Ways To Build Team Consensus*, ICA Phoenix.

Zander, A., *Making Groups Effective*, Jossey-Bass, San Francisco, CA, 1982.

