

Title: Evaluating the partnership between a university and a social enterprise development agency engaged in the set-up and development of a social enterprise.

Theoretical framework

Prior research conducted by Tuckman (1965) established a four stage, team-development model, based on four stages: forming, storming, norming and performing. Tuckman (1965) proposed that passing through this four stage process transformed a loose group into an effective team. Later research, Adair (1986), which examined group formation, postulated that groups of individuals share common needs that can be categorised into three basic elements (i.e. task, group and individual). Sheard & Kakabadse (2002) added a fourth basic element to the list of common needs (i.e. environment) based on the importance of organisation culture rooted in associated norms, routines and rituals. Sheard & Kakabadse (2002) argued that for a loose group to successfully transform into an effective team through the process of forming, storming, norming and performing, all four basic elements: task, group, individual and environment must be aligned. This alignment of the basic elements between individuals requires the management of any conflict between individuals in order to minimise negative aspects of the conflict. The developing nature of the management of conflict means that alignment of all the basic elements does not occur until the final stage (i.e. performing) which means during forming, storming and norming stages, alignment of the basic elements does not occur. Alignment of the basic elements evolves in three 'states', which can be assigned to each basic element at each stage of the team development process (Sheard & Kakabadse, 2002). These three 'states' are: (1). understanding and acceptance of issues associated with the basic element by team members; (2) acceptance and understanding of issues associated with the basic element by some team members; (3) non-shared assumptions about issues associated with the basic element by team members. It is the alignment of the basic elements of task, group, individual and environment, as indicated by state (1) above, that signals the team's arrival at the performing stage of team development.

Sheard & Kakabadse (2002) extended the integrated team development framework by adding a 'forming opt out' and a 'norming/storming cycle' to the original Tuckman (1965) forming, storming, norming and performing team development model (see Fig.1). The 'forming opt out' is taken by individuals who do not immediately enter the storming phase. The 'norming/storming cycle' is taken by individuals who do not progress to the performing stage. Deviation from the Tuckman (1965) direct route is because individuals are not prepared to accept decisions that would involve them in doing something differently and prefer to retreat into denial. It is essential for *key* individuals in the team to 'buy in' to what the team is attempting to accomplish in order for the team to reach the performing stage. If *non-key* individuals do not 'buy in' to what the team is attempting to accomplish, this won't necessarily prevent the team reaching the performing stage however greater efforts will be required from the others who do 'buy in' or the team will not perform as well as it could have done. However, without the support of key individuals the team will remain in the norming/storming cycle and fail to reach the performing stage.

In order to apply the proposed model to determining the stage of development a team has reached, the basic elements of task, individual, group and environment were broken down into nine key factors that collectively differentiate a loose group from an effective team (Sheard & Kakabadse, 2002). To transform a loose group into an effective team requires a *task* for them to engage in. A *task* requires a goal, which must be clearly articulated to the group. Also, because in any organisation there will be constraints of time, money and available resources, a set of priorities around the task must also be clearly articulated. An *individual* must be considered as a team member, which relates to roles and responsibilities within the team and the extent of self-awareness of the consequences of one's actions and behaviours on other team members. The *group* refers to the team's ability to function as a unit, which can be broken down into three key factors: leadership, group dynamics and communication. *Environment* is defined by infrastructure and organisational context where infrastructure encompasses: IT systems, HR support and the ability of senior management to translate its strategy into a series of goals suitable for the teams to tackle and context is the organisation of the company.

It is proposed in the current research-evaluation that elicitation of participant perception of these nine key factors will reveal the stage the partnership has reached in becoming an effective team in this 'early' phase of development (see Table 1).

Figure 1: The integrated team development framework (Sheard & Kakabadse, 2002, P. 137)

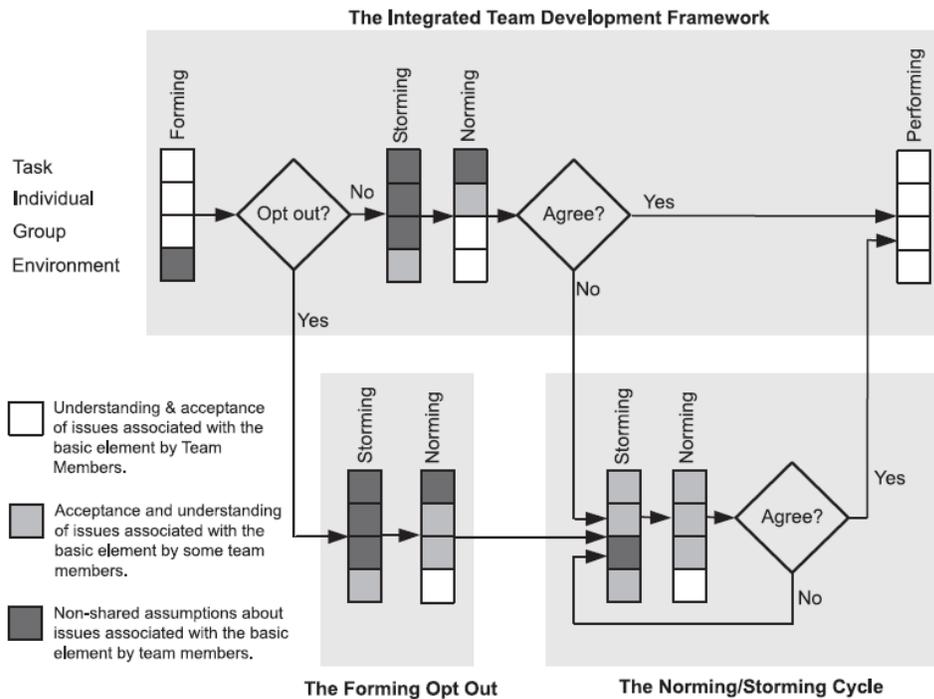


Table 1: The nine key factors (adapted from Sheard & Kakabadse, 2002, P. 137)

Basic element	Key factor	Loose group	Effective teams
Task	Clearly defined goals	Individuals opt out of goals not understood	Understood by all
	Priorities	Split loyalty of individuals to other groups	Cohesive team alignment
Individual	Roles and responsibilities	Unclear, with gaps and overlap	Agreed and understood by individuals
	Self-awareness	Individuals guarded	Social system established and accepted
Group	Leadership	Directive	Catalytic
	Group dynamics	Individuals guarded	Social system established and accepted
	Communications	Formal	Open dialogue
Environment	Infrastructure	Task focused	Stable support from organizational infrastructure
	Context	Task focused	Influenced, but not controlled by organisation

Method

Participants

The total number of participants was 20, which consisted of the members of the board of directors, the CEO, the steering group and the WISE staff. The original CEO resigned in August 2010 and a board director from the university fulfilled this role on a temporary basis up to the conclusion of the ‘early’ phase. The original CEO was asked to contribute to the research study but declined to take part.

Procedure

For this ‘early’ phase of the longitudinal study, all 20 participants engaged in individual semi-structured interviews with the researcher. The questions asked were open-ended in nature and were the same for all participants. The prescribed questions were constructed from the evaluation requirements of the ESF funding bid and the nine key factors outlined above (Sheard & Kakabadse, 2002).

Analysis

The method employed to analyse the 20 transcripts of the participant’s individual semi-structured interviews collected for this ‘early’ phase in the research, was ‘Constant Comparative Method’ (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Constant Comparative Method (CCM) is an iterative procedure designed for the qualitative analysis of text and is based on ‘Grounded Theory’ (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). This method of analysis focuses on a process where categories emerge from the data via inductive reasoning rather than coding the data according to predetermined categories (Maykut & Morehouse, 1994). Constant Comparative Method involves five main stages:

Stage one (i.e. ‘immersion’) revealed 55 units of analysis (e.g. ‘complex hierarchy’, ‘conflicting loyalties’, ‘empathy’ and ‘lack of clarity of thinking’). Stage two (i.e. categorisation), 12 categories emerged from the 55 units of analysis, which were: ‘the initial concept of 3e’, ‘the economic future of 3e’, ‘awareness of personal impact’, ‘partnership tensions’, ‘communication’, ‘direction and motivation’, ‘change of CEO’, ‘unity of purpose’, ‘company structure’, ‘group dynamics and teamwork’, ‘perceptions of board member impact’ and ‘personal reflections’. Stage three (i.e. phenomenological reduction) five themes emerged from the 12 categories, which were: ‘communication’, ‘unity’, ‘concept and planning’, ‘personalities’ and ‘personal perceptions’. A diagrammatic version of this process of analysis is provided for further clarification (see Diagram 1)

All participant quotations cited below are taken from units of analysis and serve to exemplify specific aspects of the overall themes of: ‘Communication’, ‘Unity’, ‘Concept and Planning’, ‘Personalities’, and ‘Personal Perceptions’. In order to maintain participant anonymity, participants are referred to only by their participant number. In order to provide the context for the participant’s perspective, the key below indicates the participant’s number in relation to their position in the partnership/company (CEO refers to any references made by participants to the original CEO who resigned and did not take part in the evaluation process).

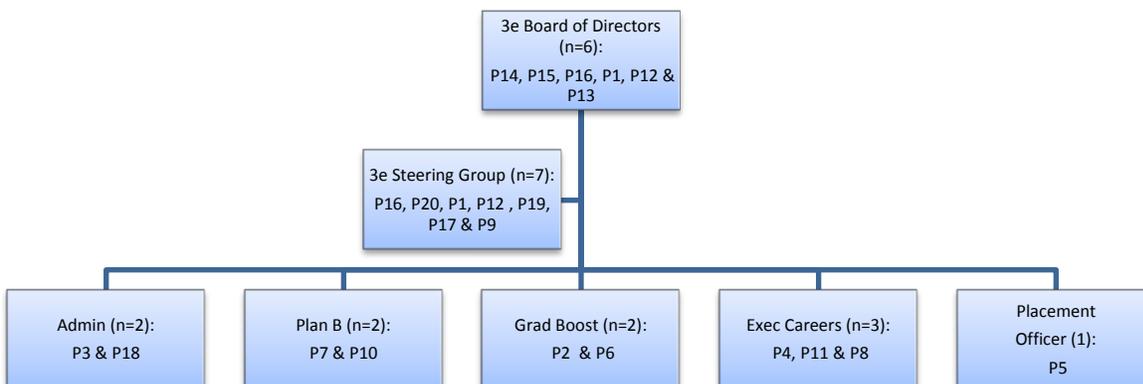
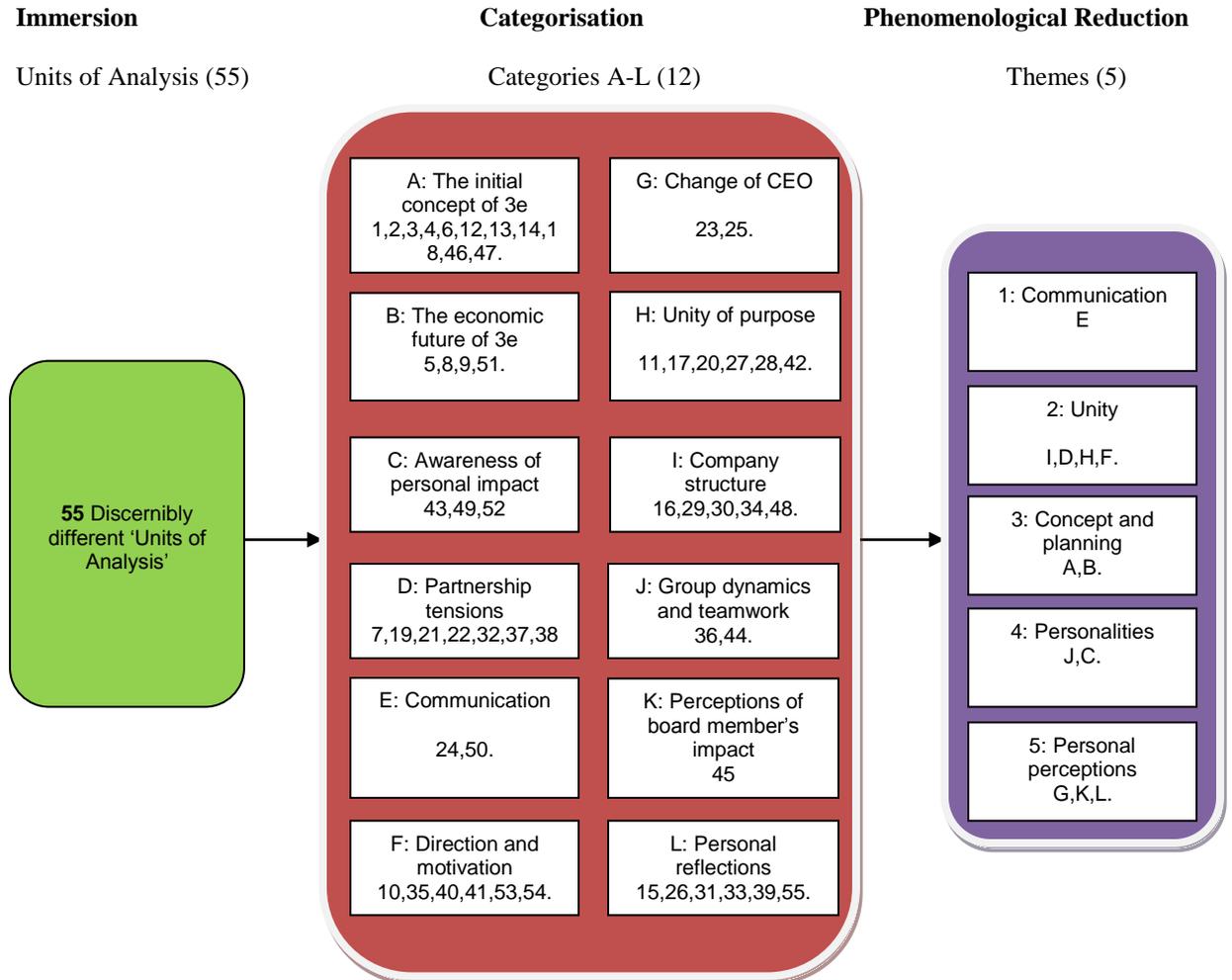


Diagram 1, CCM Analysis at 'early' phase:



Theme 1: 'Communication'

The quotations from board members cited below exemplify the perceived quality of communication between board members as being 'distant' and 'formal'.

"You know agenda item number three is 'x' you have got to discuss it...moved, seconded, agreed, boom-boom. That is a very formal style of communication. And to make it work in the long run, you need much more intangible forms of communication." P15

Communication between members of the Steering Group and the CEO was also perceived as problematic as can be seen in the following quotation:

"I don't want to lay all the blame on CEO because she's not here but there were discussions, certainly in steering group, as to what the numbers were and there were meetings with CEO separately to go through outputs and things. So she should have understood what the outputs [an ESF requirement] were and how she communicated those to the staff team and that seems to be where it broke down." P20

This breakdown in communication was a major contributory factor leading to a crisis that threatened the funding and precipitated an important change of motivational emphasis for 3e programme staff. Communication *within* the staff employed to deliver the employment enhancement programmes was perceived by the staff themselves to be good.

"In our team I think our communication is perfectly fine. We communicate well. Communication between me and P6 is like great, we understand each other so, within our team communication is good." P2

When examining the overall communication that took place *between* all groups the following quotations exemplify individual's perceptions.

"I think the communication isn't as good as it could be. And again that's within the board itself but also between the board and the staff; if there is communication from the board, who takes on the responsibility for moving that to staff?" P14

From the evidence presented it would appear that there was a breakdown in communication *between* the directors of the company and the programme staff. Often the conduit for communication between the board and staff was assumed, by the board of directors, to be the CEO. However, it became apparent that the CEO didn't fully comprehend the detail of what was required to ensure adequate record keeping. This situation contributed to a crisis point that could have resulted in the loss of ESF funding. Subsequently, the CEO resigned in August 2010 and an acting CEO was appointed internally to instigate procedures to rectify the crisis situation. A further contributing factor to the crisis was rooted in many of the programme delivery staff's lack of competence in the use of the company's IT system ACT, which was designed to record this vital record keeping information. The quotation cited below exemplifies the remedial action taken to resolve IT competence but it seemed there were still some issues around understanding exactly what information was required to be recorded.

"I know a lot of people had big problems with ACT but if you just sit down and actually focus on what you need to do and how you need to work it, it's very, very easy and I've helped quite a few people figure it out and now they're fine with it." P20

There were also issues regarding the lack of clarity of information and the constantly changing administrative procedures that existed during this 'early' phase of the development of the WISE.

"You know there's things in this office that change from one minute to the next. Things like form filling in, there has just been this huge thing about the right form has to be filled in with the right logos. There can't be one mistake on the form, it can't be crossed out and initialled over, a new form has to be completed. After going through reams of forms and speaking to over a hundred people and filling in over a hundred forms for instance, it was found out that there were seven different styles of this one particular form on the company hard drive and nobody had gone in every time one was amended and deleted the old one off." P4

Collectively, the above quotations taken from the theme 'Communication' reveal the quality and quantity of communication from the perspective of all participants in this 'early' phase of evaluation. The next theme to emerge during analysis was 'Unity'.

Theme 2: 'Unity'

As revealed in the theme 'Communication', the staff did not appear to have received clear directions on how to record vital information required by the funders. This difficult situation was exacerbated by differing viewpoints being expressed by P1 and the CEO over various aspects of the management. There were also some emerging issues around the unity of the 3e board that centered on board member's levels of commitment to the company.

"CEO would say something that was completely and blatantly wrong and I would contradict it without knowing what she had said. The complexities of this she never actually got to grips with. I think she found herself in a position where she was out of her depth because the paperwork wasn't set up. It was set up but then it changed for some reason." P1

"We knew he was going to act in the way he does because, quite reasonably from his point of view, he acts in what he sees to be the interests of [the university]. And I think he sometimes misunderstands the role of the director, which is to act in the best interests of the company. I think he sometimes finds it difficult to separate the two." P12

After the appointment of P1 as acting CEO there was a change in management style, which resulted in a new direction being given to the staff of the WISE. The management style was more directive and the focus of attention was shifted to focusing primarily on ensuring that the information required by the funder was collected and entered on the ACT data base. These changes produced clarity of overall objective for the staff and contributed to them adopting a more cohesive team mentality. A collective perception of an overall WISE team emerged and for a while the staff found this to be a positive and unifying experience.

"But now when we talk about participants it's as a whole. When we talk about Grad Boost and when we talk about Execs and we talk about Plan B yeah, we are still there but it's collectively as a whole company now, which is pretty good it gives us clear direction or clearer direction than we had before." P10

However, in spite of this overall increase in staff unity, there was still factional disaffection from the Executive Careers team that was contributing to overall disunity. For this group, the change in management style was not perceived as a positive one.

“P4 and I are both mature members of the team. We’ve had prior experience of the workplace and different management roles. Understanding that vision and that overall objective would explain some of the management decisions that have taken place; but I don’t have sight of that so it’s very difficult to justify the management style at times.” P11

The temporary appointment of P1 as acting CEO appeared to create staff unity around a specific cause (i.e. resolving the crisis), which created a unity of purpose around achieving the target figures required for the funder. However, this co-operative activity could be described as a form of crisis management providing temporary unity rather than the company moving forward in a united way to achieve sustainability. The problems faced by the company are summarised below by P17:

“I think it comes down to the fact that it is quite difficult to set up a relatively large organisation with complex activity through funding, which then allows you to employ a number of people who have to then function collaboratively and then to look at how to sustain that activity beyond the period of funding when perhaps the activities have been designed around a funding stream rather than necessarily around a business approach that would allow you to be able to sell some of those services in the open market or public sector market.” P17

Nevertheless, the company was now seeking to fulfil the targets contained in the original funding bid but sustainability tended to become sidelined in the pursuit of those specific targets. This change in emphasis characterised the next emergent theme.

Theme 3: ‘Concept and Planning’

As difficulties with ‘Communication’ and ‘Unity’ in the WISE emerged, there was a shift in emphasis towards achieving numerical targets in order to satisfy the funder’s demands. This meant that planning for a sustainable future for the WISE was sidelined in order to address more immediate financial problems. Also, some of the more altruistic aspirations of management and staff of the WISE suggest a certain naïveté and disregard for the necessity for profit making in order to achieve post funding sustainability. However, this naïveté was not widespread, especially among board and steering group members and in spite of the underlying naïveté among the WISE staff members there was a general awareness of sustainability issues:

“So, I like that side of it, that we are not just there to like bring money off people; we are there for help for the community as well as our thing. It is important to me, I love that, it feels like a more meaningful company than just a for profit thing.” P2

“The organisation [WISE] will have to look quite different in order to be able to bring in sufficient income, especially with the current situation and the highly competitive nature of contracts in this type of field where you have got players who have been in the market for a long time and big players as well.” P17

A further contributing factor to the problems the WISE was facing was rooted in the individual personalities across the partnership and the staff team, which form the basis of the next theme.

Theme 4: ‘Personalities’

Following his appointment as acting CEO, P1 brought his own personality and management style to the crisis management task, which seemed to be appreciated by the majority, if not all of the 3e staff.

“Before, I didn’t feel like any of us were working as one big team at all. I felt like we were like very individual on our projects. We were all really blinkered by our own targets what we had to achieve. And since P1 has taken over, we are much more, we have regular team meetings. So we interact with each other a lot better.” P7

The above quotation characterises the way P1’s management style and personality enabled him to generate a sense of teamwork among the staff. However, as effective P1 was with the majority of the staff, the individual personalities of a small group of individuals seemed to conflict with P1. This group were becoming increasingly isolated from the other WISE staff and discontented with P1’s management style.

“I think the group dynamics and the harmony within [disaffected group] has fallen apart, utterly fallen apart. And I am sure that P4 and P11 would crucify me for saying that. But I don’t think that it’s either of their faults at all. But it has, the cohesion there is.....it’s been undermined [by P1] to a point where it is just collapsing.” P5

Theme 5: 'Personal Perceptions'

Although the chronology of events is not in dispute, the personal perceptions of the individuals and groups involved are of primary importance because they impact upon the development of an 'effective team', which is the basis of this evaluation research. Perceptions are not formed within a vacuum but within an overall social environment constructed by the individuals and groups involved. For the evaluation research purpose, the veracity and uniformity of the perceptions is less important than how the individual and group perceptions impact on the overall team development. The personal perceptions of the 'disaffected' group, discussed in the previous theme, were influenced by P1's management style and their prior relationships with the original CEO. This group had aligned themselves with the prior CEO much more so than the other members of staff. Regardless of the veracity of their personal perceptions, it seems clear that the individuals involved felt they were being treated badly and this perception would prevent effective teamwork developing.

"I am uneasy about some of the management decisions and tactics that he [P1] adopts. I'm not aware of the reason why that management style is adopted. And I'm personally quite angry about that. To me it seems madness." P11

However, the personal perceptions of P1's management style by other WISE staff provide an alternative interpretation to the disaffected group's perception.

"All of the targets are improving and also everybody is working in the same sort of way and everyone is thinking in the same sort of way. And everybody seems to be much more focused on what seems to be right and it just feels better. Everyone seems happier." P7

The majority of the 3e staff member's personal perceptions of P1's procedural changes and management style were positive. Their personal perceptions enabled them to respond positively to given specific targets and a more direct management style. This resulted in a greater sense of cohesion for the 3e staff with the exception of the disaffected group as described above.

Summary

If the evidence of the research evaluation is triangulated with the Sheard & Kakabadse (2002) model proposed earlier in this report, it can be argued that the WISE was locked into the 'Norming/Storming Cycle' section of the model. By examining the basic elements of task, individual, group and environment in relation to their nine key contributory factors it can be argued that during this 'early' phase of the research evaluation, the partnership and WISE staff were still operating as a 'loose group' and not performing as an 'effective team'.

References

- Adair, J. (1986) *Effective Teambuilding*, Gower, Aldershot.
- Belbin, R.M. (1981) *Management Teams: Why They Succeed or Fail*, Butterworth-Heinemann, Oxford.
- Belbin, R.M. (1993) *Team Roles at work*, Butterworth-Heinemann, Oxford.
- Glaser, B. G. & Strauss, A. L. (1967) *The Discovery of Grounded Theory*, Chicago. IL: Aldine.
- Lincoln, Y. & Guba, E. (1985) *Naturalistic Inquiry*, Beverly Hills, CA: Sage.
- Maykut, P. S. & Morehouse, R. (1994), *Beginning qualitative research: A philosophic and practical guide*, Falmer Press: London and Washington DC.
- McLeod, J. (1994), *Doing Counselling Research*, London: Sage.
- Sheard, A.G. & Kakabadse, A.P. (2002) From loose groups to effective teams: The nine key factors of the team landscape, *Journal of Management Development*, 22(2), 133-151.
- Tuckman, B.W. (1965) Development sequences in small groups, *Psychology Bulletin*, 63(6), 384-399.