



| WHITE PAPER DRAFT

The GRPI model – an approach for team development

Steve Raue, Suk-Han Tang, Christian Weiland and Claas Wenzlik

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The GRPI model – an approach for team development

Abstract

Teamwork has developed from a buzzword to an organisational reality and effective work method. But while the advantages lie in combining the various skills, experience and competencies of individuals, finding an effective and efficient way of working together is a challenge. Building on extensive research and experience from teamwork in change processes, the paper at hand discusses the GRPI model - describing the different dimensions characterising a team, arranged in cascading priorities towards performance: goals, roles, processes and interactions – as a useful approach for team development. The addition of the TPC model, which reflects the technical, political and cultural dimensions of organisations, leads to a multi-dimensional approach for analysing team development as well as supporting team growth.

Key words:

Communication, GRPI efficacy, learning, methodology, team development

I The advantages and challenges of teamwork

Teamwork has developed from a buzzword to an organisational reality and effective work method. From cumulative expertise and knowledge (e.g. Surowiecki, 2005), opportunities for participatory learning and checks and balances (Nurmi, 1996) right through to enhanced motivation as a result of direct social contact (Covi, Olson, Rocco, Miller, & Allie, 1998), there are many possible advantages to working in teams compared with working single-handedly.

Yet with all the opportunities teamwork offers, just forming a team is no guarantee for successful work. Teams are social systems of communication (Luhmann, 1987) and have to develop their own entities, identities and an efficient way of working. This challenge is often approached in a unreflective way and can lead to teamwork being less efficient and effective and arrive at bad results through negative group dynamics (Janis, 1982).

The following paper will address the challenges of team development (II) by expanding on how the GRPI model – addressing the Goals, Roles, Processes and Interactions of teams – can be a useful tool to overcome phases of inefficiency and ineffectiveness (III). In a second dimension the GRPI will be viewed in conjunction with Noel Tichy's TPC matrix (1983), which reflects the technical, political and cultural dimensions of an organisation (IV). Following that, it will be shown how combining both models can help support team growth in different variations (V).

II Team development

We use “team development” as a contrast to the more familiar “team building”, a term suggesting a mechanical intervention from outside. Whether individuals are brought together or form a group on their own, a team has its own entity and identity, created and transformed by its members. Teams do not just improve, they have to learn how to work together. Team development offers teams the opportunity to share, work, grow together and achieve outstanding performances by themselves. Taking responsibility for their own development leads to pragmatic next practice (Klein, 2008) growth based on the teams' capabilities, instead of an unrealistic best practice framework constricting the team from the start.

A team can be characterised as a group of people possessing various skills, experience, competencies, and who are jointly responsible for achieving a collective goal. Team members have to work together and in the same direction, concentrating their energy into pursuing the same aims and fulfilling the common goals of the team. It is therefore important to ensure commitment and clarity at every stage of the team development process.

A successful team is a relative notion inherent to each team and defined by what it wants to accomplish. However, the paper at hand will argue that a successful team is characterised by its ability to grow – as individuals and as a team – in facing up to challenges, tackling problems, finding solutions and delivering results.

Phases of growth

Bruce Tuckman introduced the phases of team growth model (1965). Tuckman’s analysis concluded that successful teams work through four developmental phases of growth, known as:

- Forming
- Storming
- Norming
- Performing

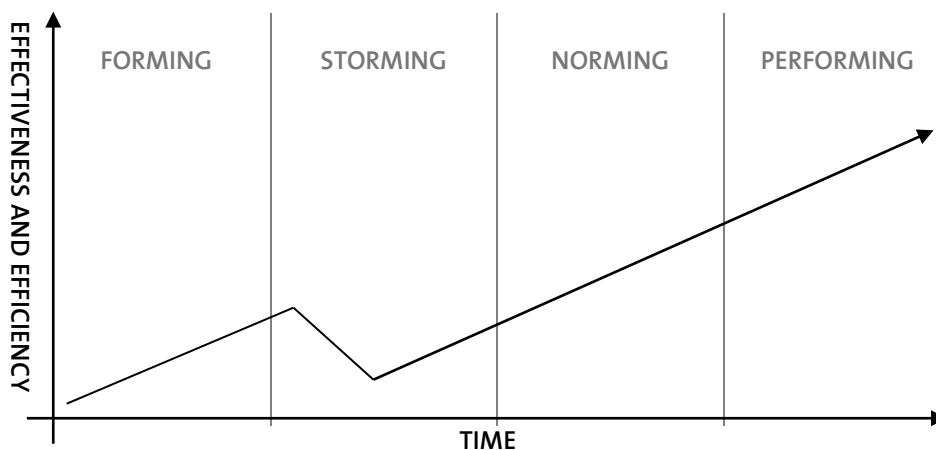


Figure 1: Phases of team growth

In the team formation stage, objectives are still vague, roles are not defined, procedures are missing and personal relationships have not yet evolved. It is the phase where the team orientates and defines itself. At this stage, motivation is high and performance is low.

In the storming phase, the individuals ‘collide’ for the first time; conflicts arise, team members start to lose focus, and work blockages emerge due to uncooperative behaviour.

In the norming phase, roles, procedures and relationships become clear, work is done in a productive and effective manner. Responsibilities are accepted, commitments are met and work is accomplished.

In the performing phase, productivity and effectiveness peak. At this level, members experience a high level of trust in their colleagues, which leads to optimal cooperation. The team operates at a high level of effectiveness and efficiency.

When working with teams, it is important that team leaders and members understand the different phases of growth and adapt their behaviour to maximize team effectiveness. The model should not be understood as an escalator; regression to storming or norming will occur when the team balance is offset by internal or external factors. Therefore team development facilitates the process by clarifying goals, by setting up team processes and communication and builds trust on an interpersonal level.

III The GRPI model of team development

The goal of team development is to shorten the time teams spend in their forming and storming phases, thus improving team effectiveness, ensuring productivity, efficiency and quality and at the same time enhancing the way members work together. This can be accomplished by utilising the GRPI. GRPI is an acronym describing the different dimensions characterising a team, arranged in cascading priorities towards performance:

- 1 Goals
- 2 Roles
- 3 Processes
- 4 Interactions

The GRPI model was first introduced by Richard Beckhard (1972) and highlights the different aspects of team cooperation by identify goals, clarifying roles, responsibilities and processes and the interpersonal relationships of team members.

It eases the process of establishing and prioritising the core mission of a team and framing it into a clear action plan. By setting priorities and identifying a potential cascade of problems, it enables solutions to be found at the right level.

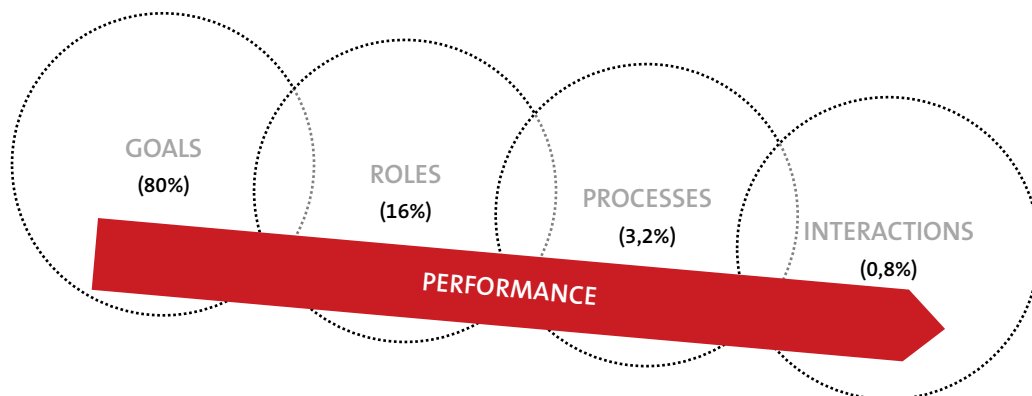


Figure 2: The GRPI model with team conflict potential ratios

During his work as an organisational development and transformation consultant, Noel Tichy analysed team conflicts based on the GRPI framework, underlining the cascading character (cp. Pritchett, Tichy, & Cohen, 1998; Tichy, 2002). He observed a ratio of 80:20 per cent of conflicts accumulating at each level:

- 80% of conflicts in teams are attributed to unclear goals.
- From the remaining 20%, 80% are assigned to unclear roles.
- From the remainder there is again 80% to be found in the field of unclear processes.
- Finally, only 1% of the conflicts in teams can be attributed to interpersonal relationships.

Ambiguity at one level has an impact on the ensuing levels and problems at a lower level are often symptoms of conflicts at a higher level.

- If goals are not clear, uncertainties in the individual roles will arise.
- If roles are unclear, this will result in cumulative conflict within the processes.
- If processes are unclear, accumulated conflicts at higher levels will appear at people level.

Therefore, it is crucial to establish absolute clarity at each level and to put in place a foundation of shared commitment by installing ownership of and commitment to those goals across the team and by identifying and addressing any issues which restrict the team from reaching their goals.

Goals

Goals provide the foundation of good teamwork by establishing the core mission of a team and framing its purpose. They give direction to a team, allowing them to understand where they are now, to define where they want to go and to unite each individual effort in getting there. They create identity and generate sense: a common goal is what makes a team a team. Without a clear, shared and agreed goal, any kind of team development will have a limited impact.

Team members have to understand, accept, share and commit to common objectives. Commitment can be engendered by aligning team goals and individual goals. Doran has come up with an effective method by which valid objectives can be identified and set: SMART goals. These goals have to be Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, and Time-bound (cp. Doran, 1981; Drucker, 1998).

Specific

Specific goals lead to specific results. The goal(s) should address a real business issue. This helps focus all efforts and clearly defines what the team is going to do. Before setting up a goal, a team should be able to answer the who, what, why, when and how questions.

Measurable

The goals must establish precise criteria for measuring progress in attaining the goal set. By measuring progress, the team can stay on track, feeling a sense of achievement while being encouraged to continue with their effort.

Achievable

The goals should be reasonable and within the ability of the team. They must be understood and agreed by all team members. On the one hand, setting overly difficult goals might waste resources or even end in complete failure. On the other hand, overly undemanding goals might not present enough of a challenge. It is about setting goals that can be achieved with some effort.

Relevant

Goals should be realistic and related to a real business objective. Skills and competencies are available to achieve the goal(s) and fit the overall strategy of the organisation. By identifying goals that are important to the team, they can find ways to realise them and to develop the attitudes, capabilities, skills etc. to achieve them.

Time-bound

Goals must include clear deadlines and milestones, committed to and owned by all team members. Framing goals into a timeline creates a sense of urgency and inspires people to work towards the goal.

Roles

A role can be described by its authority, responsibilities and tasks and it should be aligned to support the defined goals. A functional role is defined by tasks that need to be done and requires certain types of skill, knowledge, experience etc. (cp. Biddle, 1986).

To enable the team to function, each team member should have a clear picture of who is doing what, who is responsible for what, and should know the extent of their authority. They should understand, agree and be satisfied with their roles and responsibilities, being accountable individually and collectively. In this sense, it is crucial that team members cooperate with each other and accomplish goals as effectively as possible. This is the foundation of a clear process in addressing, clarifying and resolving issues.

Authority

This is the allowance attributed to a role and establishes a certain level of freedom for a person to act within this role. It is about framing the space for action, initiatives or decision-making within the role.

Responsibility

Every team member should be accountable for the deliverables defined by their respective role, which can be evaluated either qualitatively or quantitatively. It defines the quality of a certain task and gives team members a clear indication of whom to address. Establishing clear responsibilities eases the timeframe for resolving any issues by addressing the right person immediately.

Task

A task is defined as any activity set to achieve the goals within the role, within the team and it is crucial to ensure that the person has the necessary capabilities, skills, experience and drive to fulfil the role.

A clear role definition takes into account the interdependencies between authority, responsibility and tasks in order to deliver and achieve the goals of the role and team goals, aligned with individual goals.

Processes

Processes in organisations are a governance tool to overcome inefficiencies in the areas of decision-making, control, coordination and communication (Wong, 2009). They try to ensure a repeatability of a certain level of output quality, while allowing enough operating flexibility so as not to constrain the process-users' work (ibid).

In GRPI team development the same applies: after agreeing on team goals, the team needs to identify tasks and activities to achieve these goals. Defining processes during the forming phase can effectively support the team's goals by determining the interactions within a team.

Setting intelligent standardised processes for actions, decision-making, conflict management, problem solving, communication procedures, resource allocations etc. will effectively support the team's goals by determining the interactions within a team. While the amount and types of processes depend on team and task size and composition, certain processes for team development are recommended.

Communication

We cannot not communicate. In everything we do or say, we communicate all the time. It is therefore important to know the communication channels and use them properly. Communication is vital for successful teams. Communication procedures are about providing space for team members, whether by means of a blog, coaching sessions, or regular meetings to enable the other team members to know what everyone is doing. By doing so, it provides measurements on how the team is progressing and gives team members and team leaders the information needed for adjustments.

Decision making

Clear role and authority definitions are the basis for decision making. However, for decisions that have to be made collectively, or where the decision maker can invite input from other team members, a process should be defined. It is a question of how team members should interact in order to take decisions, set up formats (e.g. emails, meetings etc.) and include a time frame. This will ensure rapid responses and reduce the delivery time.

Conflict management

There is no team without people, thus personal or interpersonal conflicts are natural and can arise

at any time. Conflict management is about following a clear process when conflicts occur. A clear process should be established for addressing issues in order to solve them quickly and to avoid escalation. Establishing clear processes provides a basis for success. By doing so, a team can gain significant insight into how work is actually completed, as a process flow will be identified. People will be in a position to work together efficiently by providing a rapid response to natural deficiencies within a team.

Interactions

The Interpersonal section of the GRPI model outlines relationships and individual styles and is about establishing trust, open communication and feedback in order to support a sound working environment. Like goals and roles, a specific format and rules have to be established, understood, shared and agreed upon.

Improving interpersonal relationships can be done in many ways and may consist of anything from smiling at someone to listening carefully, asking advice, passing on compliments etc. The level of trust, however, can be enhanced with the “Emotional Bank Account” (Covey, 2004), a metaphor for defining and building the amount of trust with deposits and withdrawals in a relationship.

Principles of interpersonal relationships

Building on the idea of the Emotional Bank Account, five principles of interpersonal relationships can support team development. They are based on the attempt to honestly seek to understand what is important to your team members without diminishing what is important to you and to adjust your behaviour accordingly.

- **Attend to the little things**
Perform small acts of courtesy and kindness, such as a smile or a compliment, and offer your help.
- **Keeping commitments**
This is a major and solid basis for developing trust. People believe in promises and not keeping them can lead to irritation.
- **Clarifying expectations**
Make sure that people understand each other when they deal with their expectations. Plenty of time and good listening skills are needed.
- **Show personal integrity**
Trust is the basis of good relations. Integrity means keeping promises, meeting expectations, showing respect.
- **Apologise sincerely when you make a withdrawal**
If making a withdrawal, be sincere and explain it to the other person.

Applying these principles will build a high level of trust within the team and communication will be relaxed. Negative behaviours such as showing disrespect, threatening, being harsh or judgemental will limit the options of communicating effectively and cause relationships to deteriorate.

IV Adding the TPC model

While the GRPI model supports a focussed team development, it does so while exploring project-specific goals, roles, processes and interpersonal relationships.

On a more general level, Noel Tichy has created a model that puts the three essential parts of an organisation – strategy, organisation/processes and people – together with the technical, political and cultural dimension. This makes the TPC matrix a tool for analysing the effects of these dimensions on the organisational structure during team development.

Based on these insights, team development processes can combine the TPC and the GRPI model. The respective matrix presents the technical, political and cultural dimension in relation to the goals, roles, processes and interactions in a team setting. The following aspects are then explored.

| | GOALS | ROLES | PROCESSES | INTERACTIONS |
|-----------|-------|-------|-----------|--------------|
| TECHNICAL | | | | |
| POLITICAL | | | | |
| CULTURAL | | | | |

Figure 3: The GRPI-TPC matrix

Technical Dimension

In the technical dimension, goals are formulated with respect to the immediate product or output. In engineering, this might be any kind of technical device, while in the service sector it could be a document. This also implies a clear structuring of the processes in order to achieve this output. Roles are clarified in terms of the skills and knowledge people bring into the team setting, which is the basis for the processes. Ultimately it is also about understanding the essential communication required for an effective performance.

Political Dimension

An exploration of the political dimension illuminates how stakeholder interests affect goals and puts the team and/or project into an overall organisational frame (cp. Klein, 2012). To build on the classic definition by Freeman and Reed (1986), stakeholders, in this case, are all persons and groups without whose support the team would cease to exist; they include the team members as well as external stakeholders. Thus the processes and roles of the team members are considered with regard to their interests, but also to the potentials, influence and connectivity within the organisation which can support the team building. This political reflection affects the interpersonal relationships as well and is a crucial element of any team building.

Cultural Dimension

Any team development is either directly or indirectly shaped by the cultural background that

team members bring into the new setting. Beyond immediate cultural differences in behaviour or habits on a national level, this also includes educational and professional backgrounds. In order to develop commonly agreed goals, roles and processes it is elementary to identify individual strengths to support the process. Aside from these strengths, an early reflection on the cultural dimension prevents potential problems in the interpersonal relationship at a later stage and creates commitment for performance.

V Applied GRPI-TPC for team development

Combining the GRPI and TPC model for team development is a powerful tool to support team growth. It can be utilised in an existing meeting structure or be the facilitator for scheduling meetings and workshops as the basis of an effective cooperation model. While these meetings can differ in their focus and setup, they can resemble each other in utilising the GRPI-TPC tool as an organising principle, visualisation aid and documentation basis. In the following section, four examples of meetings and workshops will be explained. For all these meetings, building on the insights of this paper, a general guideline for a GRPI-TPC matrix for team development is set up as follows:

| | GOALS | ROLES | PROCESSES | INTERACTIONS |
|-----------|----------------------|------------------|---------------------------------------|---|
| TECHNICAL | Output definition | Role allocation | Decision making & conflict management | Communication platforms |
| POLITICAL | Stakeholder analysis | Stakeholder care | Communication | Principles of interpersonal relationships |
| CULTURAL | Expectations | Expertise | Experience | Individual self-reflection |

Figure 4: GRPI-TPC matrix for team development

Kick-off meetings

After a team has been assembled, the kick-off meeting starts the forming phase. In terms of team development, it represents the groundwork for setting up an effective cooperation model. All team members should have the opportunity to elaborate on their self-perception and their expectations. As the forming stage is also about building trust and appreciation on an interpersonal level, the goal should be to create an open and comfortable atmosphere that leaves room for socialisation. A useful approach for kick-off meetings is the open space technology (Owen, 2008) that encourages all team members to participate. The GRPI-TPC matrix can be used as an addition, an alternative, a checklist and/or documentation.

Team mediation meetings

While a big step towards avoiding conflict can be accomplished by having established processes and communication from the kick-off meeting, conflict can still occur and should be addressed.

While the type of mediation meeting, including the question of internal and external moderation, greatly depends on the issues involved, the GRPI-TPC matrix can be utilised in the way of the Yohari window in individual coaching (cp. Luft, 1955). By having the co-created matrix, the self-perception of a person or the entire team is contrasted with the perspective of the other team members as well as with the goals, processes and already developed insights. The objective is to reveal and enlighten the "blind spot" in one's self-perception.

Scrum meetings

Building on the idea of agile project management (cp. Agile Leadership Network, 2013), team development can be supported by frequent scrum meetings. With roles, procedures and relationships clear, these meetings aim to provide institutionalised feedback loops based on the previously established communication procedures and platforms. Within these meetings, GRPI-TPC can work as a reality check for the status quo of team development as well as a means of identifying areas for improvement.

Lessons learnt workshops

Learning from successful or failed team development is key in order to repeat success or not repeat mistakes. This can be accomplished by lessons learnt workshops. In an interactive manner, based on understanding the cultural individuality of all members, the GRPI-TPC matrix can be used to check the different dimensions of team development in relation to their performance and to help understand which parts and interconnectivities led to an optimised performance, as well as what can be learnt and redefined for phases of regression in order to identify the most effective way of reaching and maintaining the performing phase.

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Contact

Systemic Excellence Group
Independent Think Tank for Leading Practice

Marienstraße 20
10117 Berlin-Mitte
Phone +49 (30) 284 82-180
Email office@segroup.de