

A Project Team Analysis Using Tuckman's Model of Small-Group Development

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ABSTRACT

Background: Concerns about equitable workloads for nursing faculty have been well documented, yet a standardized system for workload management does not exist. A project team was challenged to establish an academic workload management system when two dissimilar universities were consolidated. **Method:** Tuckman's model of small-group development was used as the framework for the analysis of processes and effectiveness of a workload project team. Agendas, notes, and meeting minutes were used as the primary sources of information. **Results:** Analysis revealed the challenges the team encountered. Utilization of a team charter was an effective tool in guiding the team to become a highly productive group. Lessons learned from the analysis are discussed. **Conclusion:** Guiding a diverse group into a highly productive team is complex. The use of Tuckman's model of small-group development provided a systematic mechanism to review and understand group processes and tasks. [*J Nurs Educ.* 2016;55(12):675-681.]

To achieve outcomes and organizational success, academic organizations often rely on the work of teams. Harris, Roussel, Walters, and Dearman (2011) reported that "the implementation of any initiative from project planning and program management can be facilitated through the work of teams and thus it is essential to understand how to maximize the effectiveness of using a team approach" (p. 41). However, multiple barriers to establishing team effectiveness exist that prevent progression through developmental stages and lead to poor group performance. Examples of barriers include inadequate planning, lack of structure, role ambiguity, lack of time and commitment, avoidance of accountability, and a focus on individual rather than team results. Tuckman's five stages of small-group development serve as a model for enhancing project team success and the achievement of outcomes.

The purpose of the article is to share an analysis of the effectiveness of team process using Tuckman's model of small-group development as a framework for the review. As a part of the consolidation process of two nursing programs, a project team was charged with the development of a new workload management system. The experiences of the project team have been used to provide case examples of how the team functioned in each of Tuckman's five stages of development. Lessons learned from the analysis focus on the importance of effective preplanning, the development of a team charter, careful selection of a team leader and members, alignment with organizational priorities, and effective information management. Effective planning and the use of a charter can be key in helping teams as they progress through the stages of development and serve as a structural blueprint for a project vision to become a reality.

BACKGROUND

Nursing education faces a faculty shortage that may be jeopardizing the quality of education, as well as the number of students who can be admitted to programs (Gerolamo & Roemer, 2011). The shortage is due to an aging workforce, more lucrative career opportunities outside academia, and dissatisfaction

Received: March 15, 2016

Accepted: August 23, 2016

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The authors have disclosed no potential conflicts of interest, financial or otherwise.

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doi:10.3928/01484834-20161114-03

with certain aspects of the faculty role (Ellis, 2013). In a study by Bittner and O'Connor (2012), workload was identified by 44% ($n = 226$) of nurse educators as a source of dissatisfaction. Lack of workload management can lead to dissatisfaction, turnover, and inefficiencies (Cohen, Hickey, & Upchurch, 2009; Lobo & Liesveld, 2013).

Workload is defined as “the amount of work assigned to or expected from a worker in a specific period of time” (“Workload,” 2011). Workload for academic settings is defined more specifically by Mendoza (2015) as “all professional duties and responsibilities of faculty related to teaching, research, scholarship, service to the institution and the community, and professional development” (p. 153). Faculty are expected to meet student and organizational needs and perform administrative duties as part of their overall responsibilities (Mendoza, 2015).

Research to identify systems that are effective in developing equitable workload assignments is limited (Ellis, 2013). Although various procedures are being used to assign workloads to nursing faculty, a better understanding of workload processes and practices could be used to promote value-based services, maximize the use of resources, and improve faculty satisfaction.

Concerns about equitable workloads for nursing faculty have been well documented (Cohen et al., 2009; Ellis, 2013; Gerolamo & Roemer, 2011). However, a standardized methodology for workload measurement does not exist in nursing education (Lobo & Liesveld, 2013). Upon completion of a study on workload and the nurse faculty shortage, Gerolamo and Roemer (2011) recommended that nursing deans and directors systematically analyze faculty workloads to gain a better understanding of the impact that workload is having on retention in their schools.

One university created a simplified process for workload calculation that quantified the major activities engaged in by faculty. Based on their experience, Cohen et al. (2009) provided the following recommendations for best practices in establishing an equitable workload system:

- Faculty members should be included in the development and implementation of the workload instrument.
- Workload assignments among faculty should be as equitable as possible.
- Workload documents should be available and accessible to enhance transparency for stakeholders.
- A system of accountability that includes outcome measures for the scholarship, advisement, and service aspects of the faculty role should be developed and implemented.

The political, cultural, and environmental context of the community, university, and nursing program may also influence how faculty workload is determined (Ellis, 2013). After a review of 236 nursing programs, Ellis (2013) concluded that the complex workload issue should be driven by and aligned with the mission and strategic plans of both the nursing program and the larger university. The workload management system for each nursing program will be unique if it is mission driven and articulates needs based on the educational programs offered, the characteristics of the students and faculty, and the resources available.

CONTEXT OF WORKLOAD IN ACADEMIC CONSOLIDATION

The board of regents of a university system in the southeastern United States analyzed the feasibility for the consolidation of institutions of higher learning to reduce administrative burden and increase efficiencies. Two universities, located in the same city, with different missions, organizational structure, governance, and cultures were selected for consolidation. One (university A) was primarily a graduate, health science, selective admission university associated with an academic health center. The university drew students from throughout the state, as well as nationally and internationally. The second university (university B) was predominantly an undergraduate, liberal arts, state university with the majority of the student population drawn from the local area. A baccalaureate degree in nursing (BSN) was the single degree the two universities had in common.

The nursing programs at university A were organized within a college of nursing (CON) inclusive of two departments and two satellite campuses across the state. The CON had approximately 60 full-time faculty and encompassed teaching (i.e., undergraduate and graduate programs), research, practice, and service. Faculty were employed by 12-month contracts. The annual enrollment was approximately 600 students. The nursing programs at university B were established as a single department within a college and included approximately 15 faculty members with a focus on undergraduate teaching and service. The majority of faculty were employed by 9-month contracts. Enrollment in nursing programs at university B was approximately 125 students annually. Goals for the consolidated program included the development of a new BSN curriculum, growth in graduate nursing programs, transition of master's-level nurse practitioner programs to the doctoral level, and growth in faculty practice opportunities.

Workload processes for each school were different. Workload at university A was assigned through two department chairpersons with oversight by the Associate Dean for Academic Affairs. Assignments were based on active and planned research, established academic faculty practice contracts, undergraduate and graduate teaching needs, and service. A team teaching model, with consideration of content expertise, was used for prelicensure programs. Program directors collaborated with department chairpersons for teaching assignments, and individual faculty preferences for course assignment were considered. The workload management plan relied heavily on metrics and used a full-time equivalent (FTE) model. In contrast, workload management at university B was accomplished through a shared decision-making process inclusive of all faculty and overseen by the department head. Faculty taught across the entire curriculum based on content expertise. As an example, a single faculty would teach diabetes content across all courses. All faculty were expected to participate in service. Contact hours were used as the metric for faculty teaching and service workloads.

Due to varying levels of faculty satisfaction with the workload models used by each program, the need to establish a single workload process for the consolidated nursing programs became a priority. The consolidation process added significant

challenges to existing issues of academic workload management.

TUCKMAN'S MODEL OF SMALL-GROUP DEVELOPMENT

A project team is generally made up of people from various parts of an organization who work together to solve a common problem and disband after the work is completed. However, an effective project team is more than a group of people drawn together to accomplish a specific task. Effective teams have certain characteristics that develop over time and contribute to their success. As teams evolve through a series of recognizable stages, the group's ability to improve team and individual member performance is enhanced (Catalyst Consulting Team, 2012).

Although several models of group development have been proposed, Tuckman's model of small-group development is commonly known and frequently referenced in the literature (Bonebright, 2010). The original model, which included the stages of forming, storming, norming, and performing, was developed in 1965 and amended in 1977 to include a final stage, adjourning (Tuckman, 1965; Tuckman & Jensen, 1977).

Although not always included in overview descriptors of the model, Tuckman (1965) described two realms—group structure and task—that are important in understanding the evolution of teams as they mature and move through each stage of development. The group structure realm focuses on the group members' behavior and the way they relate to one another, whereas the task realm focuses on what the group accomplishes in fulfilling its assigned task. Mathieu and Rapp (2009) contended that although teams often develop a list of tasks that must be accomplished, they generally do not take adequate time to develop strategies about how they will work together to accomplish the tasks. Their study demonstrated that the use of a team charter to lay the foundation for team functioning enhanced not only the performance trajectories or tasks assigned to the team but also the process the team follows.

TEAM CHARTERS

A team charter is a written document generated by a work group assigned to complete a complex task and serves as a

TABLE
Components of a Team Charter

Charter Component	Explanation of Information
Project name or title	How is the team referred to?
Date of charter	When is the charter finalized and signed?
Team purpose and scope	Why is the team being formed? What will be the overall outcome of the project?
Organizational alignment	How does the project align with organizational goals?
Team leader and project sponsor	Who has direct responsibility for leading the team and its activities? Who is the project's administrative champion?
Key stakeholders	Who are the internal and external stakeholders?
Project goals and priorities	What are the team's primary objectives and priorities?
Deliverables	What will exist when the project is completed?
Boundaries	What will not be included in this project?
Members and responsibilities	Who are the team members? What are their roles?
Time commitments	How much time is each team member expected to contribute?
Success measures	How will success be determined or measured?
Project risks	What are known risks to success and can they be diminished?
Communication plan	How will communication be managed?
Assumptions	What is being assumed related to the work of this group?
Required resources	What financial and human resources are needed? Are there critical skill sets that team members must have?
Team ground rules	What are the rules of interaction and the conduct of meetings?
Signatures	Are team members validating their commitment to the work?

blueprint of how an envisioned project becomes a reality. The creation of a charter is a valuable start-up exercise for newly created teams (Mathieu & Rapp, 2009). The charter development process helps build consensus among group members and provides an agreed-on set of standards that lay the foundation for the team goals and how the team will function. According to Mathieu and Rapp (2009) "A well-designed charter helps clarify expectations, focus activities, and provide a basis for decision-making" (p. 92). Charters may be developed in a variety of formats and generally include many of the components included in the **Table**.

TUCKMAN'S STAGES OF GROUP DEVELOPMENT

The first stage of group development described by Tuckman (1965) is the forming stage. During this stage, boundaries are tested, the parameters of acceptable interpersonal behavior are discovered, ground rules are created, and relationships with leaders and other members of the group are established. Team members begin to identify the parameters of the assigned task and how the group experience will be used to complete it.

During the second stage (storming), chaos, confrontation, and conflict often occur. Members may be unsettled in their roles and resist moving forward as productive members of the group. Individual and group productivity is limited due to resentment

toward team members and leaders, lack of understanding of the purpose of the group, and overall resistance to change.

The norming stage is the period when new group-generated norms are established and members accept participants and the group as a whole. Openness and desire for harmony reduce conflict that was experienced in the storming stage. Group members begin sharing ideas and opinions and have the opportunity to respond to one another about the assigned task. The group becomes more cohesive and is established as an entity during this stage.

The fourth stage of Tuckman's model is the performing stage. Members understand and perform their roles effectively and the group becomes a mechanism for problem solving. Successful task completion becomes the focus of the group (Bonebright, 2010). Fluctuations in a team's movement back and forth between the four developmental stages may occur when the circumstances surrounding the team change. Examples would include changes in team membership, leadership, and organizational priorities (Abudi, 2010; Seck & Helton, 2014).

Following the publication of Tuckman's original model, it was found that the termination of the group was a necessary addition to the model (Seck & Helton, 2014). Tuckman and Jensen (1977) formally modified the model and added the adjourning stage as the fifth stage of small-group development. During the adjourning stage, the group performs a self-evaluation and analysis and reviews the outcomes of the project. This stage may include separation anxiety and mourning as the project team disbands, as well as feelings of accomplishment that tasks were completed (Tuckman, 2001).

PROJECT ANALYSIS BASED ON TUCKMAN'S MODEL OF SMALL-GROUP DEVELOPMENT

A project team was assigned the task of developing a new workload management system for the consolidated CON. To analyze the processes and outcomes of the project team, the agendas, notes, minutes from all meetings, and documents produced were reviewed and categorized into stages of team development using *Accelerating Team Development: The Tuckman Model* as a guide (Catalyst Consulting Team, 2012).

Forming Stage

The forming stage took place over a 2-month period. The workload project was created prior to the announcement of the consolidation in response to university A faculty dissatisfaction about workload and the lack of equity in assignments. In light of the consolidation decision, the need to establish a workload management process was identified as a continued need for the consolidated nursing programs. The workload project team was convened by the Dean of the CON for university A and charged to create a conceptual framework for establishing a valid method for assigning work among faculty. The desired outcomes of the project were to improve faculty satisfaction, demonstrate transparency of workload management through active communication, and develop tools for a workload management system.

During the first meeting, a general discussion about group and project leader expectations occurred; however, definitive ground rules for the team were not established. The newly an-

nounced mandate to consolidate the nursing programs drove the decision to immediately add representation from university B. A weekly meeting schedule was agreed on and a 2-month deadline for project completion was established. Information about the project was communicated with faculty from both universities to promote transparency, muster interest, and recruit additional faculty members for the project team. Additional members were added, and the final team was composed of representation across faculty ranks and roles from both universities.

The expanded project team was formed less than 1 month after the decision was made to consolidate the two universities, thus many of the faculty did not have established working relationships. Members were experiencing feelings of grief and anger over the loss of the individual institution and nursing program identities. Members were cautious and demonstrated varying degrees of commitment to the project, whereas minimal emphasis was placed on building trust within the team. Expectations, interests, skills, and knowledge of all members related to the accomplishment of team outcomes were not thoroughly explored. Accountability, recognition, and rewards for the group and individual members were not clarified. Varying degrees of doubt existed that the project would be successful.

Minutes were maintained for each meeting; however, they did not reflect assigned responsibilities for tasks nor desired time frames for completion. The team began to go off track and test boundaries during this stage, as issues unrelated to workload were frequently intertwined in project meetings and activities. Without established ground rules, members missed meetings without consequence, were unprepared for discussion and decision making, and a lack of commitment to the project emerged. Due to time constraints and other pressing priorities, the project leader was not consistently available to facilitate group process, role model behaviors, and provide the group with direction toward project priorities and time lines.

Storming Stage

The storming stage of the project lasted approximately 4 months. A divergence of issues emerged during this phase that resulted in a lack of focus toward outcomes. Specific goals and time lines were not identified to help guide the group's work. Topics unrelated to the purpose of the project team were included in meeting agendas and discussions. The minutes of meetings included action items; however, responsibility and a time frame for completion were rarely assigned or specified. Decisions made were not adequately documented or disseminated.

The project team had difficulty relating to the multifaceted components comprising workload within the combined nursing program. Dialogue centered around teaching, whereas other aspects of workload lacked focused discussion. In an effort to identify existing workload resources, an extensive exploration of the literature was conducted for an existing workload model that could be adapted and applied. An applicable model was not found in the literature.

Because items unrelated to workload were of great importance to the success of the consolidation process, the leader was challenged to maintain the team's focus on workload issues. Also, the demands of the many facets of consolidation lead to

less time available for the leader and team members to work on the project. In addition, university B faculty participants were not on contract during summer months, which created a void in project discussion and decision making. The original deadline for project completion was extended from 2 to 7 months due to consolidation issues and the resulting demands on team members' time.

Faculty dissatisfaction seemed to increase as workload issues were debated. The understanding of members' responsibility for team deliverables decreased and resistance to change was exhibited by faculty from both universities. Clarity of the project charge diminished. Although outward confrontation was not demonstrated, the lack of engagement of team members created challenges for moving forward. At this point, the project team had been meeting for approximately 6 months without significant progress and the outcomes were limited. However, upon reflection of tasks completed during the storming stage, two positive elements of group performance emerged. The use of subgroups was introduced to accomplish tasks outside of regular meeting times and an interactive activity involving all faculty was conducted to identify and prioritize the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats (SWOT) of workload practices. The SWOT data provided the project team with relevant information to guide their work.

Norming Stage

During the norming stage, which lasted approximately 3 months, the team leader was unable to participate fully due to other priorities and campus-wide mandates. Therefore, the leadership role for the project team was often delegated to ensure the effective facilitation of the meetings. Due to the lack of progress and in an effort to enhance performance, the use of a team charter was adopted. Components of the charter were aligned with the organizational mission, as well as campus-level and CON initiatives and priorities. The team charter clarified the scope, objectives, deliverables, stakeholders, and the time frames for project completion. Boundaries, external dependencies, and resource requirements to support the work of the team were also identified. At the end of each project team meeting, action items were identified, responsibilities were assigned to specific team members or subgroups, and time frames for task completion determined. Following each meeting, minutes were distributed that reflected what had been accomplished, decisions made, new action items, time frames for completion, and responsibility.

The use of subgroups increased during this phase which expanded the exposure of the project to more faculty members. Key stakeholders and content experts were used at team meetings and during subgroup discussions which broadened perspectives and understanding of the workload issues. Subgroup leaders brought recommendations to the project team for action and decision. Each of these actions facilitated decision making at meetings.

Confidence and commitment increased when roles were more clearly defined. Attendance at meetings improved and team members volunteered or more readily agreed to work on specific tasks. The team gained structure and focus, and members accepted responsibility for action. The contributions of

individual faculty members and the overall project team were recognized publicly within the school. The adoption of a charter and the implementation of subgroups were key interventions that improved team efficiency and progress during this stage. A sense of momentum developed as outcomes toward the establishment of a workload management system for the consolidated universities began to emerge. Although much improved, the team structure and processes continued to need refinement.

Performing Stage

The full project team was involved in the performing stage approximately 2 months. The charter provided the structure needed for the team to achieve project goals. The leadership role transitioned to another team member who did not have as many conflicting responsibilities and priorities related to consolidation. Team members took full responsibility for tasks and relationships and were actively engaged and productive. The charter was reviewed periodically to ensure the team was focused on assigned tasks and not expending resources on work outside the scope of the charter. Agendas reflected the purpose of the meeting and items for decision. Minutes provided a record of the decisions and the status of actionable items which promoted accountability. The level of administrative support to the team was elevated to facilitate group work and efficiency. Minutes were distributed immediately following meetings to promote team communication. To promote transparency, reports were provided to all faculty and the CON administrative team on project team progress.

During the performing stage, the policy, tools, and metrics needed to implement the workload management system were completed. As final draft documents were developed, they were shared with the full faculty for feedback and revision. Review and editorial revisions of final documents were completed by subgroups. The work of the project team as a whole was completed.

Adjourning Stage

On completion of the workload project, the team transitioned to the adjourning stage of group development. The purpose of the project team was to establish the initial structural foundation for workload management for the newly consolidated college; however, processes for the sustainability of a workload management system were needed. Evaluation and revision of the newly established workload policy, procedures, and metrics were addressed in the team's close-out report. The team recommended that responsibility for future improvements in the workload management system be aligned with the Office of Academic Affairs, which conducts ongoing data analyses and outcomes evaluations for the college.

The CON administrative team approved the defined deliverables for the workload project. The final workload project report highlighting outcomes was presented to all faculty at the end-of-the-year meeting. Members of the team expressed feelings of accomplishment, satisfaction, and relief after the new workload management system received final approval and was presented to the faculty. For those who were most actively committed to the project, some loss was experienced when they no longer had scheduled opportunities to interact and engage in a

meaningful work project with colleagues on the team. Approximately 1 year after the original charge was given to the team, a workload management system for the consolidated university had been developed and the project team disbanded.

LESSONS LEARNED

One of the most valuable lessons learned from the team analysis was understanding the need to guide elements of group structure and task to achieve outcomes. The use of a team charter served as an effective tool to provide structure and keep the group focused on the plan for accomplishing the desired outcomes. For approximately 6 months prior to implementation of a charter, the team's accomplishments were limited and poorly defined. After the charter was developed and used, it was instrumental in providing focus on the group's work and moving the team forward to project completion. A well-developed team charter can be an effective tool to facilitate group performance for academic projects.

A second lesson learned was the significance of effective preplanning by the team leader or group organizer. Although it is not possible to anticipate every issue associated with the work of a team in project preplanning, ensuring "a balance of external supports and internal structures can facilitate a team's work and the outcomes it can produce" (Persily, 2013, p. 63). Throughout the project, the workload team encountered multiple issues that hindered progress, such as a lack of existing models for workload management, conflicting priorities, unrealistic time lines, variation in leadership, and the fluctuating engagement and commitment of members.

A key element to successful project completion is the selection of a leader and team members. A leader who is adept at guiding the team through the phases of group development is essential. Comprehension of Tuckman's model of small-group development is beneficial for the team leader and members to promote movement through the stages and overall team performance. Selection of the team with consideration of expertise, availability, and project commitment is needed. An effective strategy utilized by the workload project team when a gap in knowledge or expertise was identified included the use of content experts and subgroups for problem solving. Use of these resources helped to expand the expertise of the team and promote effective decision making. Overall timing of the project, in light of other organizational priorities, is a vital element for consideration as well as the establishment of realistic expectations for the amount of time needed to accomplish project milestones and outcomes. Added emphasis on preplanning for the workload project team would have been beneficial to grasp the project complexity, enable movement through the stages of group development, and understand the commitment and resources needed for successful completion.

Finally, information management is critical to successful completion of multitiered projects. Organized tracking mechanisms for minutes, action items, decisions, and accountability are needed. It was the experience of the workload project team that the addition of staff support streamlined multiple elements of the information management process. Consideration of staff support needs for project teams should be given. The impor-

tance of a team's reflection on what went well and the identification of the processes, resources, and support needed cannot be understated. This can be accomplished through the use of a close-out report. A project close-out report can be a useful tool to share lessons learned and may be beneficial to future project teams.

CONCLUSION

The experience of developing a new workload management system as a part of the consolidation of two dissimilar universities presented many challenges. Guiding a diverse group of individuals into a highly productive team is complex and needs organization, leadership, and commitment. The Tuckman model served as an effective framework for analyzing the positive and negative aspects of the processes used by the project team. Lessons learned from the analysis focus on the development and use of a team charter, the importance of effective preplanning, selection of a leader and team members who have the necessary skills, commitment and time for project completion, and effective information management, along with administrative support and the use of a close-out report. Consideration of Tuckman's model of small-group development along with the lessons learned from this case example may serve as a mechanism to increase the overall effectiveness of project teams within an organization.

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