



Metro North Health CULTURE & ENGAGEMENT



Defining roles and responsibilities for better team collaboration

Time: Flexible (30 to 60 minutes, depending on team size).

Materials needed: Whiteboard or butchers' paper, sticky notes, markers, timer.

Participants: Team or department.

Values in Action: Respect, Teamwork, Integrity, High Performance.

Outcomes: Improves team clarity, collaboration, and communication by ensuring everyone understands their own and each other's roles.

Purpose

Clear roles and responsibilities are essential to move a team successfully through the well-established developmental stages of **Forming Storming Norming Performing Adjourning** (*Tuckman, 1965; Tuckman & Jensen, 1977*). When roles are unclear, teams remain stuck in the Storming phase, experiencing confusion, avoidable conflict, and reduced performance.

This activity helps teams:

- reduce misunderstandings
- improve accountability and transparency
- identify gaps and overlaps
- strengthen collaboration and psychological safety (*Edmondson, 1999*)

It also pairs well with a **Stakeholder Analysis**, which helps determine who should be involved, consulted or informed in key responsibilities (*Bryson, 2011*).

How to run this activity

Step 1: Create the table (5 minutes)

Draw a four-column table:

Role	Responsibilities (what I think)	Responsibilities (what others think)	Unassigned responsibilities
Example: <i>Team lead</i>			

Role	Responsibilities (what I think)	Responsibilities (what others think)	Unassigned responsibilities
Example: <i>Admin</i>			

Step 2: Identify team roles (5 minutes)

List key roles in the team (e.g. team lead, admin, project officer, clinician). Use general titles for now.

If multiple people share a role (like several nurses or developers), group them together.

Step 3: Define your own responsibilities (10 minutes)

Each person writes down their **top 3–5 responsibilities** on sticky notes and **ranks them by priority**.

These should reflect what you believe you're responsible for.

Step 4: Understand other roles (5 minutes)

For every other role listed, write 1–2 responsibilities you believe that role has.

This step:

- reveals mismatched expectations
- surfaces unspoken assumptions
- mirrors the insights of Stakeholder Analysis (*Bryson, 2011*)

Note any tasks with no clear owner.

Step 5: Consolidate by role (5 minutes)

Where multiple people share the same role (e.g. three project officers), they should briefly combine and agree on a shared list of responsibilities for their role.

Step 6: Share and align (25 minutes)

Each role group:

1. Shares their "*What I think*" responsibilities
2. Others add sticky notes under "*What others think*"
3. The group reviews, clarifies, corrects and assigns responsibilities

This process strengthens shared mental models and reduces ambiguity, key drivers of high-performance teamwork (*Mathieu et al., 2000*).

Teams should:

- Accept or refine others' expectations

- Clarify primary owner → contributor → backup
- Reassign tasks that fall to the wrong role
- Allocate unowned responsibilities
- Resolve overlaps transparently, supporting psychological safety (*Edmondson, 1999*)

Step 7: Summarise and identify next steps (5 minutes)

- Confirm final responsibilities for each role
- Assign someone to document and circulate the updated list
- Identify capacity, workload, or skill gaps
- Consider follow-up using a Stakeholder Analysis, RACI matrix, or workflow review
- Embed roles into onboarding, PDP conversations, and team planning

Congratulations! Your team now has better alignment and stronger foundations for collaboration!

Useful links

Model / Tool	Description
Bruck Tuckman's Team Development Model	A concise overview of the Forming Storming Norming Performing Adjourning model including descriptions of each stage.
Tuckman's Stages of Group Development	Quick online summary of stages and how teams typically evolve across them.
Stakeholder Analysis template	A practical, downloadable template to help you map stakeholders, assess interest/influence, and assign engagement roles.
Stakeholder mapping / Analysis guide	Clear explanation of stakeholder analysis process, plus a customisable template - useful for cross-checking roles, responsibilities and influence.

References

Bryson, J. M. (2011). *Strategic planning for public and nonprofit organizations* (4th ed.). John Wiley & Sons.

Edmondson, A. (1999). Psychological safety and learning behavior in work teams. *Administrative Science Quarterly*, 44(2), 350–383.

Ilggen, D. R., & Hollenbeck, J. R. (1991). The structure of work: Job design and roles. In M. D. Dunnette & L. M. Hough (Eds.), *Handbook of industrial and organizational psychology* (pp. 165–207). Consulting Psychologists Press.

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