

Integrating Teams at Hernandez and Associates

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Introduction

Hernandez and Associates faces a common organizational problem: several groups need to work as one integrated team, but they differ in background, responsibilities, expectations, and working style. The success of the organization depends on more than bringing people into the same room. Integration requires clear goals, defined roles, trust, communication, conflict management, shared accountability, and leadership that helps members move from separate identities toward coordinated performance. Team-development theory is useful because groups typically need time and experience before they can collaborate effectively. Tuckman's model describes the stages of forming, storming, norming, and performing, with a later adjourning stage added to account for completion or transition. Hernandez and Associates can use this framework to understand conflict as part of development rather than immediate evidence that the team has failed (Tuckman, 1965).

Forming Stage

During forming, team members are usually polite and cautious because they are learning the purpose of the group, the expectations of leaders, and the behavior of colleagues. People may depend heavily on the leader for direction and may avoid disagreement.

At Hernandez and Associates, leaders should use this stage to define the team's mission, expected outcomes, decision-making process, communication channels, and individual responsibilities. Members should understand why integration is necessary and how their work contributes to organizational goals.

Introductions should go beyond job titles. Members can explain expertise, constraints, preferred communication styles, and what support they need from others. This reduces assumptions and begins building psychological safety.

Storming Stage

Storming occurs when differences become more visible. Members may disagree about priorities, authority, workload, procedures, or standards. Competition and frustration may emerge as people protect familiar ways of working.

This stage is especially likely when previously separate groups are integrated. Employees may fear losing autonomy, status, or professional identity. Conflict should not be suppressed, because unresolved disagreement can become hidden resistance.

Leaders should encourage direct but respectful discussion. The team should distinguish task conflict, which can improve decisions, from personal attacks or status competition, which can damage trust.

Norming Stage

During norming, members begin to develop shared expectations and more stable relationships. They understand one another's strengths, communication becomes easier, and informal norms emerge.

Hernandez and Associates should formalize useful norms rather than rely only on unspoken habits. Agreements may cover meeting preparation, response time, escalation, documentation, decision authority, and how disagreements are handled.

Shared routines reduce uncertainty and help new members join the group later without recreating every conflict (Tuckman & Jensen, 1977).

Performing Stage

A performing team can focus most of its energy on results rather than basic relationship management. Members coordinate work, solve problems, and adapt roles according to need.

Leadership may become more distributed because expertise rather than hierarchy determines who guides a particular issue. Members can challenge ideas without interpreting disagreement as disrespect.

Performance should be assessed through team outcomes, quality, timeliness, customer or client impact, and collaboration—not only individual productivity.

Adjourning and Transition

Tuckman and Jensen later added adjourning to describe the end of a project or major transition.

Teams may experience loss, relief, uncertainty, or concern about future roles.

Even if Hernandez and Associates is building a permanent team, projects and subgroups will still end. Closing work deliberately allows members to review lessons, recognize contributions, transfer knowledge, and clarify new responsibilities.

Without transition planning, valuable knowledge may disappear when employees leave or projects finish.

Clarifying Team Purpose

Integration begins with a shared purpose. Employees need to understand the problem the team exists to solve and why coordination matters.

A vague goal such as “improve teamwork” is difficult to act on. A stronger goal might specify reduced processing time, improved client satisfaction, fewer errors, or faster resolution of cases.

The purpose should be meaningful to each function so that members do not view collaboration as extra work added to their real jobs.

Role Clarity

Unclear roles create duplication, missed tasks, and conflict. Team members should know who is responsible, who provides input, who approves decisions, and who needs to be informed.

Tools such as responsibility matrices can make accountability visible. Roles should also allow flexibility because rigid boundaries can prevent collaboration.

Role clarity is particularly important when employees from different departments use the same words differently or assume another group owns a task.

Communication

Integrated teams need both formal and informal communication. Formal channels include meetings, reports, project systems, and documented decisions. Informal conversation allows rapid clarification and relationship building.

Meetings should have a clear purpose. Status information that can be read asynchronously should not consume all meeting time. Discussion should focus on decisions, dependencies, risks, and problems requiring shared attention.

Important agreements should be documented so that progress does not depend on memory.

Psychological Safety

Employees must feel able to ask questions, admit uncertainty, and raise concerns without humiliation. Psychological safety is especially important when status differences exist among team members.

A leader can build safety by inviting dissent, acknowledging personal mistakes, and responding constructively when someone identifies a problem.

Safety does not mean that all ideas are accepted. It means that people can participate honestly while maintaining performance standards.

Trust

Trust develops through consistent behavior. Members need evidence that colleagues will meet commitments, share relevant information, and avoid exploiting mistakes.

Leaders should avoid promising complete harmony. Productive teams may disagree frequently while trusting the process and one another's intentions.

Small reliable commitments build trust more effectively than occasional team-building events disconnected from daily work.

Managing Conflict

Conflict is inevitable in cross-functional teams because members have different goals and expertise. The objective is not to eliminate conflict but to make it useful.

Members should identify the issue, evidence, interests, and consequences rather than attack personalities. When disagreement persists, the team needs an escalation method.

Leaders should avoid resolving every conflict personally because this can prevent members from developing collaborative problem-solving skills.

Leadership Style

Leadership needs to change as the team develops. During forming, members may need more structure. During storming, the leader may facilitate conflict and clarify authority. During norming and performing, more responsibility can shift to the team.

A leader who remains highly controlling after the team is capable can reduce ownership. A leader who withdraws too early can leave uncertainty.

Situational flexibility is therefore more useful than one fixed style.

Diversity and Inclusion

Team members may differ in profession, age, culture, language, gender, personality, and experience. Diversity can improve problem-solving by increasing available perspectives, but it can also create misunderstanding when inclusion is weak.

Leaders should ensure that meeting time and decision influence are not dominated by a few confident members. Expertise should be actively invited from quieter or lower-status employees.

Inclusive norms should respect different communication styles without excusing disrespect.

Shared Decision Making

Not every decision requires consensus. The team should define which decisions are made by the leader, an expert, a vote, or consensus.

Consensus can increase commitment but may be slow. Expert authority can be efficient when the issue is technical. Leader decisions may be necessary during urgency.

Transparency about the method prevents employees from participating in a discussion believing they have authority that they do not actually possess.

Accountability

Integrated teams require mutual accountability. Members should track commitments and address missed deadlines openly.

Accountability should focus on behavior and outcomes rather than blame. If one person repeatedly cannot complete a task because another department delays information, the system problem should be addressed.

Performance reviews should recognize collaboration so that employees are not rewarded only for maximizing departmental metrics.

Team Metrics

Metrics should reflect the purpose of integration. Relevant measures may include cycle time, error rate, client satisfaction, rework, workload distribution, and completion of shared objectives.

Process measures can show whether collaboration is occurring, while outcome measures show whether it produces value.

Teams should avoid measuring activity such as number of meetings as if it were performance.

Feedback

Regular feedback helps teams correct problems before they become established. Feedback can occur after major tasks, during one-to-one conversations, or through formal retrospectives.

Useful feedback is specific, timely, and connected to observable behavior. It should explain the impact and invite response.

Leaders also need feedback and should demonstrate that criticism can be received without retaliation.

Training and Development

Integration may require new skills in communication, project management, technology, conflict resolution, or client service.

Training should be connected to actual work and reinforced through practice. A single workshop rarely changes long-term behavior by itself.

Mentoring and cross-training can help members understand how other functions operate and reduce unrealistic expectations.

Technology and Collaboration

Shared digital tools can improve coordination when they provide one source for tasks, documents, and decisions. Too many platforms can fragment information.

The team should decide which communication belongs in email, messaging, project systems, or meetings.

Technology should support the agreed process rather than become a substitute for role clarity.

Handling Resistance

Resistance to integration may reflect fear, past experience, workload, or disagreement with the proposed design. Leaders should investigate the reason rather than label employees as negative.

People are more likely to support change when they understand the need, have influence over implementation, and see early evidence of benefit.

Some resistance may identify genuine risk that leadership has overlooked.

Power and Status

Cross-functional teams may contain formal and informal power differences. Senior employees may dominate conversation even when another member has stronger expertise on the issue.

Facilitators can reduce this effect by requesting input before leaders state their preferences or by using written idea generation.

Status should not determine whose evidence receives attention.

Team Identity

People often identify strongly with their original department. Integration requires adding a shared team identity without eliminating professional expertise.

Shared goals, language, successes, and routines can create belonging. Leaders should avoid framing departments as competitors.

Celebrating team outcomes reinforces the idea that success depends on coordinated effort.

Learning from Mistakes

Teams improve when they examine errors and near misses without unnecessary blame. A review should ask what happened, why, what conditions contributed, and what should change.

Repeating “communicate better” is not enough. The team may need a new checklist, handoff process, role definition, or technology change.

Learning should be documented so that the same problem does not recur after staff turnover.

Managing Virtual or Hybrid Work

If members work remotely, the team needs additional clarity about availability, response times, meeting participation, document location, and decision recording.

Remote employees should not be excluded from informal decisions made by people who share an office.

Virtual meetings should use inclusive practices such as explicit turn-taking and shared digital documents.

Implementation Plan for Hernandez and Associates

First, leadership should define the purpose and desired outcomes of integration. Second, the team should map roles, dependencies, and decision rights. Third, members should establish communication and conflict norms.

Fourth, the organization should identify skills or technology needed for collaboration. Fifth, the team should begin with a limited set of shared objectives and review progress frequently.

Finally, leadership should measure outcomes and adapt the structure as the team moves through development stages.

Conclusion

Hernandez and Associates can improve integration by treating team development as a process rather than assuming cooperation will occur automatically. Tuckman's forming, storming, norming, performing, and adjourning framework explains why uncertainty and conflict often occur before effective performance (Tuckman, 1965).

Leaders should establish clear purpose and roles, create psychological safety, manage conflict, support inclusion, and align accountability with team outcomes. Technology and training can help, but they cannot replace trust and decision clarity.

Successful integration occurs when employees preserve their specialized expertise while developing a shared identity and responsibility for organizational results. The team should expect development to continue as membership, goals, and external conditions change (Tuckman & Jensen, 1977).

References

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