Teaching Teamwork

Teamwork Basics

A Team

A team is a small group of people with complementary skills who are committed to a common purpose, performance goals, and an approach for which they hold themselves mutually accountable.

Although student teams may not satisfy all the requirements of the definition, the degree to which they do often determines their effectiveness.

1

Students' Comments

I find it hard because I am on a scholarship and have to get high marks. I get extremely frustrated when other students don't care and are only prepared to put in minimum effort…

Group selection in multicultural tertiary classes – a meaningful assessment experience? Strauss/Alice U/Stuart Young, HERDSA 2007

Students' Comments

Group assignments mean that ONE person has to work harder and put in effort to make up for the other group members NOT to bring the overall mark DOWN. I feel that MY hard work efforts are contributing to other people's degrees…

Group selection in multicultural tertiary classes – a meaningful assessment experience? Strauss/Alice U/Stuart Young, HERDSA 2007

Students' Comments

Some people are not good group workers. They muck around too much and don't really care if they pass or not and this is a disadvantage to group members who really want to pass!!

Group selection in multicultural tertiary classes – a meaningful assessment experience? Strauss/Alice U/Stuart Young, HERDSA 2007

Discussion Topics

Two things get accomplished in good teams:

1. the task gets accomplished
2. the satisfaction of team members is high

In order to achieve both of these ends:

☐ Get to know other members of your group and their strengths
☐ Set ground rules
☐ Use a facilitator
☐ Keep lines of communication open
☐ Know how to avoid (or solve) common problems

Tuckman Team Development Model
(Forming, Storming, Norming, Performing)

Get to know each other

☐ Have an initial meeting for:

- ■ Introductions
- ■ Sharing contact information
- ■ Setting ground rules

Ground Rules

Setting some basic ground rules helps to insure that everyone is in agreement about how the team will operate. You will want to:

- ■ establish norms about how work will be done
- ■ the role and responsibilities of a facilitator
- ■ how you will communicate with one another
- ■ how your meetings will be run

Some of the ground rules can be decided on now; others will develop as the semester progresses.

Ground Rules: Work Norms

- ☐ How will work be distributed?
- ☐ Who will set deadlines?
- ☐ What happens if someone doesn't follow through on his/her commitment (for example, misses a deadline)?
- ☐ How will the work be reviewed?
- ☐ What happens if people have different opinions about the quality of the work?
- ☐ What happens if people have different work habits (e.g., some people like to get assignments done right away; others work better with the pressure of a deadline).

Ground Rules: Facilitator Norms

- ☐ Will you use a facilitator?
- ☐ How will the facilitator be chosen?
- ☐ How will you rotate the position?
- ☐ What are the responsibilities of the facilitator?

Ground Rules: Communication Norms

- ☐ When should communication take place?
- ☐ Through what medium?
  - ■ some people prefer to communicate through e-mail
  - ■ others would rather talk on the phone

Ground Rules: Meeting Norms

- ☐ What is everyone's schedule?
- ☐ Should one person be responsible for coordinating meetings?
- ☐ Do people have a preference for when meetings are held?
- ☐ Where is a good place to hold meetings?
- ☐ What happens if people are late to a meeting?
- ☐ What happens if a group member misses a meeting?
- ☐ What if he/ she misses several meetings?

Ground Rules: Consideration Norms

- ☐ Can people eat at meetings?
- ☐ What happens if someone is dominating the discussion?
- ☐ How can norms be changed if someone is not comfortable with what is going on in the team?

About Goals

- ☐ Often there is the unstated assumption in student teams that everyone wants to get an "A" in the course, and that should be the team's primary goal.
- ☐ But sometimes, as the semester progresses and everyone gets pressed for time, people have to make decisions about which courses take priority.
- ☐ If this course is a higher priority for some team members than for others, that can create dissension in the group.
- ☐ Talking about this will help to lessen that tension and help you find solutions to the problem.
- ☐ Keep communicating with one another!
- ☐ Also, there may be other goals you want to consider as you work together during the semester. These include:

  - ▪ having a high level of camaraderie in the team
  - ▪ learning about how to work together on a team-based project
  - ▪ learning how to interact with others as a member of a team

Responsibilities of the Facilitator

The facilitator is not necessarily the group's leader although he/she can be. It is better to think of the facilitator as the person who keeps the group progressing in the right direction (i.e., toward productivity).

Therefore, the facilitator should:

- Focus the team on the task (both short term and long term)
- Get participation from all team members
- Keep the team to its agreed-upon time frame (both short term and long term)
- Suggest alternative procedures when the team is stalled
- Help team members confront problems
- Summarize and clarify the team's decisions

Rotate the facilitator position throughout your semester work. It's good that each course member experiences being the facilitator, and it's good to experience a variety of facilitation styles.

Handling Difficult Behavior

Just one difficult personality in a group can make the group unproductive and the teamwork experience unpleasant.

The following are some suggestions for resolving problems.

Overly Talkative

This person is usually one of four types:	☐ Sometimes humor can be used to discourage people from dominating the discussion; be sure when the person stops talking to direct the conversation to another person.
(a) an "eager beaver";	
(b) a show-off;	☐ If the person's behavior can't be changed subtly, one member of the group should speak to the person privately and explain that while his/her enthusiasm is appreciated, it's only fair to the whole group that every person gets an equal amount of air time.
(c) very well-informed and anxious to show it;	
(d) unable to read the responses of others and use the feedback to monitor his/her own behavior.	

Too Quiet

The quiet person may be: shy, bored, tired, unsure of himself/ herself, uninvolved in the group.	☐ Make a special effort to draw this person out ☐ ask for his/her opinion on something; ☐ ask him/her something about himself/her-self; ☐ tell the person you appreciate his/her participation.

9

Argues

Is the person critical of ideas, the group process, or other group members?	□ If the person is critical of ideas, use that response to test the work the group is doing--the person may be providing good feedback.
	□ If he/she is critical of others, tell him/her how the effect that is having on both the team or individual team members.
	□ Be explicit about the fact that his/her behavior is detrimental to the goals of the team.

Complains

The person may have a pet peeve, or may complain for the sake of complaining	□ Listen to the person's complaint;
	□ if it is legitimate, set aside group time to solve the problem.
	□ Point out that part of your work this semester is to learn how to solve problems.
	□ Ask the person to join with you to improve whatever is disturbing him/her.

Handling Group Problems

Besides problems with individual team members, the team as a whole may run into some difficulties.

The following are some suggestions for dealing with teams that aren't functioning properly.

Floundering

- ☐ Groups are often not as productive as they could be especially when people are just getting to know one another and how each person works.
- ☐ Drawing up a list of tasks to be accomplished can help.
- ☐ So can saying something like:
  - ■ "What do we need in order to move forward?"
  - ■ "Let's see if we can all come to an agreement about what we're trying to accomplish."

Going Off on Digressions and Tangents

- ☐ Group members may get caught up in chatting about things not central to the work at hand.
- ☐ A little of this can be O.K. because it helps to put people in contact with one another.
- ☐ But if that kind of conversation continues to dominate the group, it can be detrimental to progress.
- ☐ Things to say include: "Can we go back to where we were a few minutes ago and see what we were trying to do?"

Making a Decision Too Quickly

- ☐ Sometimes there is one person in the group who is less patient and more action-oriented than other group members.
- ☐ This person may reach a decision more quickly than others and pressure people to move on before it is a good idea to do so.
- ☐ Someone could say:
  - ■ "Are we all ready to make a decision on this?"
  - ■ "What needs to be done on this before we can move ahead?"
  - ■ "Let's check and see where everyone stands on this."

Not Making a Decision

- ☐ The best way to make a decision is by consensus with all team members agreeing on the decision together.
- ☐ As you are discussing various ideas, try to be open to what each person is saying.
- ☐ Remember you are trying to come to the best decision for the group as a whole, not for any one person.

Reaching Consensus

- ☐ **Multivoting**
  - ■ List all the ideas the group has generated.
  - ■ Have each person vote on his/her top four choices.
  - ■ Choose the three or four ideas that have gotten the most votes.
  - ■ Identify similarities and differences among the ideas, then the positive and negative aspects of each.
  - ■ Have each person vote again, this time for his/her top two choices.
  - ■ Tally the votes to see which idea has the most support.

- ☐ **Plan A**
  - ■ List all the ideas the group has generated.
  - ■ Each person is given 100 points to allocate among the choices in any way he/she wants to.
  - ■ The alternate that receives the highest number is the team's choice.

- ☐ Use **Plan A** to reach a quick solution when the decision is not very important.
- ☐ Use **Multivoting** for more important decisions.

Feuding Between Group Members

- ☐ A conflict--either related to a work project or to something outside of the group--can erupt and impede the group's progress.

- ☐ Usually nothing can be accomplished until the conflict is resolved.

- ☐ If that is the case, the parties need to discuss the problem, using the listening techniques that have been discussed.

Ignoring or Ridiculing Others

- ☐ Subgroups or factions can form in groups with one or more people excluded.

- ☐ Sometimes the people who are outside of the "in" group will be the subject to criticism or ridicule.

- ☐ Knowing how to work with people we're not necessarily comfortable with is an ability that will serve you well in the work world.

- ☐ Each group member must make every effort to work with every other group member.

Member Does Not Cooperate

- A group member may:
  - not do his/her share of the work,
  - be unwilling to cooperate with others,
  - not complete assigned tasks,
  - not come to meetings.

- You should be talk directly with the person to tell him/her the effect his/her actions are having on the group.

Team Selection

- Random selection
- Lecturer selection
- Student Selection

Random selection places the fate of the students in the lap of the gods while lecturer selection seems to place the lecturer in the place of the gods. Perhaps it is wiser (and easier) to allow students to self-select as according to one L1 student, "If we pick the groups, the trust is in our own hands".

Group selection in multicultural tertiary classes – a meaningful assessment experience?
Strauss/Alice U/Stuart Young, HERDSA 2007