Report 2 - Experience
17COD280 - Due on 17th May 2018, 4PM   **Henry Morgan**
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1   Introduction

This report covers my experience with managing the different teams and how my hypothesis, set out in the first semester, worked in practise. The report ends with how my management technique would differ in the future.

2   My Hypothesis

I had four main hypothesis going in to the project:

1. Teams are comprised of many **individuals** each with their own needs and desires, if attention is focused on fulfilling these requirements, for each person separately, then the entire team will prosper.
2. Large projects are hard for people to fully digest and work on effectively, therefore, they need to be broken into small achievable **tasks**. This not only helps to focus work but also to track progress of the team.
3. An understanding of **management techniques** and how teams operate is beneficial for a team. It would allow them to organize more effectively and helps to motivate the following of instructions.
4. Teams should take advantage of the experience of their managers. This can only be effective if the team believes that the **managers are invested** in the project and it's success. Therefore, by playing an active role in the team I can posit the idea of interest, encouraging them to utilize me as a resource as they do each other.

3   Other Managers

for every team I was partnered with a different manager, each with their own theories about how the team should be treated and what is expected of them. Luckily each manager was happy to fully compromise on their plans in favour of mine which resulted in me having full control of the groups. The once exception to this was team 20, which was managed by myself and two others. I decided it would be best for myself to compromise for this team as the other two managers had very complimenting methodologies.

Team 20 turned out to be very interesting as it allowed be to compare my strategy to a different one. This compromised allowed for an A/B test like comparison. For this reason, I believe I would have been able to gain further insights into my techniques if I had compromised on more teams.

4   Weekly Reports

The weekly reports were designed to act like a time sheet, recording every instance of work being done on the project. The reports were comprised of a series of records each containing a brief description of what was achieved, when the work was done and who participated in the work.

4.1   Reason For My Report Style

Other managers both for this years groups and the year in which I participated as a team member asked for reports which included a summary of the work that had been done as well as a plan for the following week. Whilst sounding good in theory, I believed this style to have two main issues.

The first issue trying to be solved was that of accuracy. Teams retroactively delegating work to every member of the group in order to avoid someone being shown to have done no work. The plan for the following week also tends to be non-specific and inflated to, once again, be inclusive.

The second issue is that I did not believe teams should be dedicated time to writing this report. I believed that the time the group has to fullfil the project is a very limited resource and should always be spent progressing the project directly. And although creating the weekly reports may take a very small amount of time teams tend to delegate work in tasks rather then actual time. For instance, given two tasks a and b each taking 30 minutes and 60 minutes respectively, teams would delegate each task to a different member rather then delegating 45 minutes of work time. Therefore the short task of writing a weekly report would hold as much weight as a longer task.

Team 20 was under the predominant management of a different manager which resulted in the team actually having to complete reports of this exact style - tasks completed and tasks to do. One week the team produced a report where five of the members had "Requirements" and "CMS Research" listed as their completed tasks, and "Create WordPress Account" and "Start developing Prototype" for their tasks for the following week. The main problem with these tasks is it looks like everyone has work assigned to them, however, their is no definition as to what it means to finish starting a prototype and it is unlikely that all five of the members spent their entire time creating project requirements. The sixth person in the group had listed for both their completed and upcoming tasks "Weekly Report" and "Meeting Notes".

In reality it is more likely that some of the members did not partake in any work, which some weeks is not necessarily a bad thing. People, however, believe that leaving a blank space against someone impacts negatively on that person.

4.2   My Reports In Practise

The meeting style I developed proved to be very effective at solving these issues. The reports I received often did not list everyone as completing work equally which shows teams did not feel obligated to portray all members as equal contributors. Furthermore, this suggests that my thoughts about teams balancing work load with the other style of report is accurate (though sample size is very small and different teams can act in extremely different ways).

Each member in the teams were responsible for recording their own work achieved as opposed to delegating the responsibility to a single member, something which I'm sure solved the second issue. One team recorded over 20 separate work points in a single week, this would not be feasibly if the reports had to be created by a single person.

There were however a few issues with the reports. Initially I described the reports as recording all the "meetings" the teams were having. This was a mistake as it resulted in teams only recording times when multiple members would meet to discuss and plan out the system. When I realized this confusion, I quickly clarified, to every team, exactly what I expected to be recorded. After this clarification, the reports started being as detailed as I would have hoped.

Another issue I had with the reports did not concern their format but rather my reviews of them. There were instances during the project where teams would add something to their reports which seemed wrong. For instance, team 8 included in one of their reports: "We also have developed a login system to the website". One way CMSs are beneficial is that they come packaged with many key features such as a user system. Because the team stated they had created one it indicates that they are attempting to inflate the amount of work they are presenting or have a fundamental misunderstanding of their CMS. Either way it is something that should be addressed. I, however, elected to not confront the group and instead sought avoid conflict which, in hindsight, was detrimental to the team and goes directly against my

intentions for hypothesis 4.

4.3   Experience Report

At the end of the project I had to complete an experience report covering how each team worked. Having the work broken down in this format allowed be to construct a fairly concise timeline of development and I could easily see who was contributing the majority of the work and, in some cases, who had done nothing.

The experience report was the first time I had reviewed a teams recorded progress across multiple weeks. Previously I would look at a single weeks progress in isolation in order to prepare for the meeting or to write a weekly summary. When reviewing the teams overall progress I noticed many inconsistencies within some of the teams. For instance, team 18 stated in both the 6th and 7th development week report that they "started the testing report". This clearly shows that the team was not truthful in the weekly reports which is an exact issue I raised in the first report and was the underlying reasoning for collecting actual work entries in the reports rather than a future plan.

There were also cases where some teams did not start development until quite late into the project. Although, I was aware of it when reading each weeks reports, I did not fully comprehend what the lack of progress looked like on the larger scale, and how much of an issue it could have been.

4.4   Future Improvements

In the future I would create a work timeline (as shown in the experience report) for each group as the project progressed. This would mean I would mean the weekly reports would be viewed in the context of all previous progress, allowing me to notice any problems within the team such as idling members (as in team 5), or feature regression (something present in team 20).

I think that one major way the reports could be improved would be to be more transparent with their usage. If I informed the teams at the beginning that would be used to determine how much progress is being made. I believe this could further improve the accuracy and the completeness of the records, however, it could also cause groups to begin inflating their reported work. One, additional, way I could achieve this transparency would be make the project timeline available for the groups to see and review. This was they could self-reflect and be a longer term reminder of what they have accomplished.

I would also more formally prepare a definition for what was expected from this report, this would not only prevent the confusion that occurred this time but would also ensure that consistent information was conveyed to each team.

5   Weekly Meetings

During each meeting I planned to gather a list of tasks which were to be completed in the upcoming week. I would record who was assigned to which team and ensure the tasks fulfilled the SMART criteria. Then using the list during the following meeting I would be able to determine if progress was being made and identify people who are not performing. Additionally it would allow me to ensure work is evenly distributed between group members. This would further hypothesis 4 as I would be directly involved with the planning process, further hypothesis 1 as I could ensure a fair and balanced distribution of work, and hypothesis 2 as I could ensure the task is broken into sufficiently small and accomplishable parts.

This plan for the meetings did not come to fruition. Instead they mainly acted as a way for me to touch base with the group, and query as to whether there were any issues. Occasionally the groups would have questions which we would either answer. I think the meetings in this way

were wasted time and I failed to take advantage of them properly. I believe this was because of my lack of experience at confronting large groups of people and a lack of preparation. Entering the first meeting, I had a rough idea of the general areas I wanted to talk about but did not have a concrete plan, this was a mistake. As the weeks went on, the meetings started becoming more and more useful, feedback was started to be relayed back to the team and more guidance was being given.

In the third week of meeting I asked each team to make a start on their testing report. I told them that this report could be done almost entirely independently of system development and should be fully done as quickly as possible. By doing the test report early it force teams to think about exactly what features they needed and would set out a set of criteria to determine when a particular feature is done - if the tests pass, the feature is complete. This is a decision that I am very happy to have made.

In each week of meetings I would usually have some idea half way through the time which changed the information I was telling to the teams. One week I thought about the utility of the testing reports, another week Posco asked us to talk about agile development. This asymmetry of the teams information is something that I believe is undesirable. Teams who had meetings later in the day would get, what i believe to be, better advice. This is something, however, which I do not believe has a viable solution.

5.1   Final Demonstrations

During the final week of meetings each team presented a demonstration of their system. The demos were meant to be a practise run of what they were going to present to the lecturers. This allowed the teams to receive feedback on their system and the presentation style. The teams were briefed the week prior and were told they should be rehearsed demos where everyone is involved and the complete system is presented via use cases i.e a ticket being created, assigned, and solved.

Although we had been presented with demonstrations prior to this one, this one turned out to be much more useful in terms of gauging progress and providing feedback. Having the system shown in a rehearsed manner with user stories allowed us to spot missing features or potential errors. Where as in prior demos we would be shown isolated parts of the system and it was hard to fully grasp how everything fit together in the larger picture - though at the time I did not realise this was the case.

These demonstrations were incredibly useful, direct feedback was able to be presented to the group and discussions were had about certain changes that we, as managers, would like to see to improve the system.

5.2   Future Changes

Firstly, I think that if I were to conduct the meetings now they would be significantly better even with no other changes, purely through the experience I have gained from doing it once. This is both experience with the module specification and with management in general.

I would have the teams start development much earlier in the project, preferably during the first week. All of the CMSs are fully capable of developing the needed system, however lots of time was spent by teams changing which system they would use. Team 5, for example, final settled on their CMS on the fourth week of the project.

In the future I have the teams perform rehearsed demos every week, starting from the second week of meetings. I believe doing this would make the teams focus on features which actually matter. For instance, some teams spent many weeks on design, however, if they had to present their system every week it would likely force the team to make tangible progress as it would be hard for them to justify nothing really changing in the system.

This style of demonstration also see who was and was not familiar with the system. If done regularly it would be easier to determine if someone had not contributed to the work effort which would allow be to delegate and balance work loads, helping with hypothesis 1.

During the first week, I would also ask for the testing report to be started. I would explain that the testing report can be constructed independently of development and can be used as a set of guidelines of what development needs doing and how it can be known to be complete. I think that by making the teams work on this early on it would force them to plan out the project in a way which is justified by the specification. Test driven development has been proven to be a very effective way of creating software and teaching the teams this would be a valuable lesson. If the testing report was done sufficiently early, I could additionally use it to assess whether the team is making actual progress.

Another thing I would do differently is speak to the assessors before the project in order to understand exactly what they are looking for in a good presentation. I made the assumption that, since the module is a group project, they would want to see everybody involved in the presentation. I instructed the teams that this was the case and even criticized one team for only having a single person do everything. Although I think that this is a feature of a good presentation, confirming it would have been good to ensure the information the teams are given is accurate.

6   Weekly Summaries

For the weekly summaries I elected not to prepare a template, as I was unsure exactly what information would be relevant and need to be recorded. This lack of template meant each weeks report varied in the content conveyed and also in the level of detail.

This also had an impact on the notes that I gathered during the meetings. Because I did not know precisely what I was going to talk about in the summary, I also did not know what I should have recorded during the meetings. This i believe was detrimental as the notes I took in the meetings varied wildly and in some cases were missing key points of information as I relied on myself thinking on the spot what to record.

In the future, I would prepare a very strict template, outlining exactly what needed to be conveyed. It would most likely be broken up into a section for each person, and in each section I would record whether they were present, and record what they were planning and what they had presented during the weekly presentations. This would mean I would create a more consistent week to week report, which would likely help out our "managers" as they could more easily compare weeks.

I would then use this template in the meetings themselves to record notes, as opposed to recording notes freely and then write them up into a report. This would hopefully prevent me from forgetting to gather information and would enable to be more certain as to when the meeting should be concluded; when all the boxes are filled, the meeting is done.

7   Teaching Management

The main way I had planned to teach management to the teams was to have them read about and then select which of Belbins team roles most applied to them. Every member was presented with a list of the roles and a description each one as well as a high level overview of what the roles were for. The purpose of this exercise was to get each member thinking about their place within a team and to have them realise what there skills were in a team environment.

I found that every team had at least a single person for all roles except for the *resource investigator*. The resource investigator is specialized in finding things of potential interest, in terms of the group projects this would have been someone who would have been adept at figuring out which CMS to choose and then find relevant plugins which the team can implement. Due

to the project being very defined and prescribed, there was very little need for this missing role. Almost all teams performed research together at the beginning of the project.

The well-rounded nature of all the teams of the teams meant I could effectively tailor my approach to anyone of them. If I was managing a single team I could have potentially took on the resource investigator role and conducted research and told teams about plugins that may be of use, however, I could not do that in this case as it would have: resulted in all teams producing very similar projects, be too much work to practically carry out, and most importantly have been over stepping my role within this course.

Even though I did not properly get the opportunity to test the hypothesis properly, I do not feel this module benefits from this exercise. This is due to both the very limited time-frame for which to make use of the information and the amount of extra work that is required to properly fulfill the obligations. Therefore, in the future I would not attempt this hypothesis again.

8 Evaluation

Overall, I think, the managment style contained many good ideas the meetings style being one of the best. But there were many things which could have been improved.

8.1 Future Improvements

As well as the chnages discussed in the previous sections, there are also some changes I would make to managment more in general.
- Read through my hypothesis frequently.
    - Realised while writing this report that I had forgotten three of the hypothesis

8.2 Module Improvements
- Review weekly meetings each week
    - more realistic
    - benifit the managers by keeping them focussed
    - Help to focus on the individual
    - Posco asked us after the final meeting to rate each member individually. We were not able to do this as accurately as I would have liked as I had not kept notice on an individual basis.

8.3 Reviewing the Criteria For Validated Learning

In report 1 I laid out a set of criteria to assess the hypothesis.
- The amount of communication I had with the group only happened a couple of times this was not different from the other managers. Although I have not fulfilled this criteria I do not belive that it was the hypothesis was incorrect. I think that even if i had implemented a more individual based approach, this criteria would not be a very effective judge of the hypothesis. Even if there was good focus on the individual it does not, and probably should not, encourage team members to go outside of the team dynamic. If anything it should encourage team cohesion.

8.4 Updated Hypothesis
9 Conclusion

Overall this module provided the opportunity for many new and interesting ideas.