

ProSkills III - Working With a Team

Especially in large organisations, working as a Web developer requires the ability to work skillfully as part of a team. To be a better team member, it helps to *understand some of the roles common in teamwork, as well as how to identify problems that may crop up on teams*.

For more detailed coverage on Groups and Teamwork, read "[Groups & Teamwork: Theory and Practice](#)".

Roles You Might Play

If a team is to be successful for any length of time, members must see the value in both their contribution and what the team gets out of it. This means two important requirements must be met: **task performance** and **social satisfaction**.

The job of task performance is usually handled by one or more members who are task specialists. *Task specialists* spend a lot of time and effort ensuring that the team achieves its goals. Often, they are the ones to initiate ideas, give opinions, gather information, sort and cull details, and provide the spark that keeps the team on track.

The *socio-emotional role* is handled by individuals who strengthen the team's social bonds. This is often done through encouragement, empathy, conflict resolution, compromise, and tension reduction. Have you ever been in a group that had conflict and someone stepped in to tell a joke or soften the blow of criticism? That person held the socioemotional role.

Both of these roles are important for healthy teamwork. It's like the saying, "*All work and no play makes Jack a dull boy.*" Jack as the task specialist needs the complementary skills of the more social Jill to handle the socioemotional side of things for a healthy balance.

The task specialist and socioemotional roles are important to teams. However, most teams will have other roles as well, including *team leaders, work coordinators, idea people, and critics*. *These roles are not mutually exclusive*. For example, the team leader might also be a task specialist, while the ideal person also fills the socioemotional role. As your teamwork commences, these positions will be filled-maybe even by you. On a team, no

single role is more or less important than the others. The progress and results the team achieves depend on how well the roles mesh in getting the work done.

Performance Problems

Not every team works smoothly. Sometimes, individuals have their own agendas that run counter to the goals of the team. Others disengage and don't participate at all. This particular problem is called **social loafing**, and is usually the most common human issue teams struggle to overcome. People who are assigned to teams against their will, or when they don't have the skill or ability to contribute, may end up "*free-riding*" on the work of the rest of the team. They get the credit but they didn't do anything to deserve it. Does this sound familiar?

Teams may also suffer from other performance problems, such as:

- ☐ *Personality conflicts or power struggles;*
- ☐ *Different or incompatible work styles;*
- ☐ *Lack of clear goals or direction; and*
- ☐ *Communication breakdowns*

What do you do if a **performance problem** emerges? If the issue is trivial, you can try to ignore it. When it's important to come to a consensus quickly, try working out a compromise, with each party giving a bit. For situations where the outcome is too important and compromise won't work, a collaboration approach could be the solution where the two parties bargain and negotiate their way to a consensus that lets both win.

Accommodation - *giving in for the greater good of the group* - might work if the problematic parties are both in the wrong and want to resolve the point so the team can move on. Only when a situation is urgent and you need to get your way should you compete against team members to move forward.

Group Work in 158.256

In this course, some assessments worth up to 25% will be done in groups. The group theory outlined above also applies to group work in this course. The ability to manage group work is a key skill that is a key requirement in industry and so it's an important

attribute desired in job interviews. This is essentially because all jobs involve group work. Your degree programme may be accredited by an external standards body and such bodies require that each course must involve assessments done in groups. Group work theory is studied in the course **158.345**, which is compulsory for all CS and IT majors.