

Lesson 3

Preparing for the team meeting

As client projects are assigned to student teams, the teams need to bond as a group. It has been our experience that teams that meet regularly in the beginning of the semester, communicate much more effectively during the entire semester and have fewer problems.

We realize that you each have busy schedules, however we urge you to meet in person whenever possible, or in an online chat room once a week. This is in addition to your weekly meetings during the class lab time.

First Team Meeting Agenda

Please review the following issues in preparation for your first team meetings:

- Introductions
- Share contact info: email, phone, skype name (or other online meeting sites like Vsee.com)
- Compare schedules to determine a good time to meet face to face or hold "real time" chats or online video sessions
- Share your post for last week's homework on communication from the discussion forum.
- Look over what each of you is expected to do this week, share questions or concerns

After your meeting, the team will post a summary of the above points to the online project site. Be sure that all names of the team are included.

Please read through, review and discuss these teamwork guidelines:

Team Stages

Teams usually go through stages as they develop into a cohesive unit, and not every team goes through every stage. Some stages may be passed through quickly, others not. Each team is different. Here is a brief description of four stages we have seen and you might expect as you move from individuals on a team to a team of individuals.

Stage 1

Excitement and anxiety. Excitement about the project and being on the team. Anxiety about whether and how you will fit into or contribute to the team.

Defining the task and acceptable group behavior. Defining why the team exists,

what its purpose is. Defining what is acceptable behavior in this group, the rules of conduct.

Discussing things not considered relevant. This happens because the team members are still trying to get to know each other and are struggling with defining the team's purpose and rules.

Stage 2

Realizing the full scope of the task and beginning to feel overwhelmed. Team members now know just what they've taken on, how big the project is. At this point it may look like it's too big or there's too much to accomplish before the deadline.

Disunity. Individuals feel that others are doing too much or not doing enough or have all of the "easy" or "fun stuff" to do.

Arguing with each other even though there is basic agreement on real issues.

When this phase hits, please take a deep breath, remain calm, and remember that each team member is trying as hard as they can. **If the team reaches any impasse in communications, contact your instructors right away.**

Stage 3

Harmony. Team members now have a better understanding of their roles and each other. There is an agreement on what needs to be done, how it should be done, and who should do it.

Belief in ultimate success. Team members now feel that the project is "doable" and can envision the final product and what it will be like to have completed it.

Sense of team. Team members feel like a team instead of individuals. The team itself now has a distinct personality, a life of its own.

Stage 4

Acceptance of others' strengths and weaknesses. Each team member knows what the other members can or can't do, are good at or don't do well. The team capitalizes on each member's strengths and minimizes each members' weaknesses.

Loyalty to team. Team members support each other and defend the team from any outside attacks, both real or perceived. Team members also talk about the team and its members with pride.

Lots of work starts getting done. This is how you can tell you've reached Stage 4. Enthusiasm is high, tasks get accomplished, and visible progress is being made. Being on the team is fun!

How does a team get to Stage 4?

It takes time and effort. Some "teams" never make it, but most do. **Reaching Stage 4 does not mean that all members like each other or are friends.** What it does mean is that the individual members have worked through a number of issues and have concluded that the team's goal is worth accomplishing and that being on this team is the way to do it.

The following is a checklist of sorts to help you have a successful team experience. Doing all the things on the list can't guarantee success, but not doing them will almost certainly ensure failure. The list is not exhaustive, so feel free to add your own items.

1. The goal/vision/nature of what is to be done is understood and agreed to by everyone. This is probably the most important step in ensuring the team's ultimate success. Every member must clearly understand and agree on exactly what the team's purpose is, why the team exists, and/or what it wants to accomplish.
2. Team member roles are clearly understood by everyone. This is probably the second most important step followed closely by item #3. Each team defines the roles of its members differently. Your team must ensure that its members know what the roles are and which team members are to serve in which roles.
3. The responsibilities and accountability of team member roles are clearly defined and understood by everyone. This is closely tied to item #2. Each role will have its responsibilities. The team must determine what those are and how each team member will be held accountable for carrying out his/her responsibilities.
4. The team has developed specific strategies for achieving the goal, including work priorities.
5. Tasks do not overlap, nor are there gaps in what needs to be done. Avoid assigning more than one person to a task. Conversely, make sure each task is assigned to someone.
6. Conflict and disagreements are brought into the open and resolved collaboratively within the group. There will always be differences of opinion. Conflict or disagreement should not be ignored or swept under the rug and

- allowed to turn into resentment or outright sabotage of the team's efforts. As a matter of fact, conflict should not always be viewed as a negative. Teams are usually stronger, more flexible, and more creative if their members regularly express and reconcile differing views.
7. Everyone feels he/she can participate and does. It is important that the atmosphere is one that encourages participation, but it is equally important for each team member to make an effort to contribute his/her knowledge, skills, insight, etc.
 8. Group members help and support each other.
 9. Group members recognize, appreciate and use each other's strengths and unique abilities.
 10. No single person dominates all the time.
 11. Meetings have an agenda or structure. Team members will be better prepared if they know in advance what they are expected to discuss or have prepared. The meeting will also proceed in a smoother and more timely manner if there is an agenda.
 12. Meetings are productive. This is closely tied to item #11. Meetings are more productive if there is an agenda, but also if decisions are actually made during meetings and/or specific task assignments are given to team members at the end of meetings.
 13. **Reach consensus whenever possible. Consensus does not mean that the vote was unanimous. What it does mean is that all team members can support the decision; no team member is against it.** In other words, while the decision may not be everyone's first choice, everyone can live with it.

Special thanks to Studio 1151 Guidebook by Karen McNally and Alan Levine
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for providing the information for this Teamwork Guideline Web Page.

A Case Study: Read the following case study and post your summary to the discussion forum.

Students are often tempted to "buddy up" with their roommates, significant other, or best friend. In most cases this can cause problems. When you find yourself in a new situation where you need to get to know your new teammates, you may not be as outgoing, if you already have one friend in the group.

If your spouse or best friend is also enrolled in the course, we recommend you serve on separate teams. Here is a case study which illustrates how a couple can be a problem.

Lucy and Desi (not their real names) were a young couple who insisted that they be placed on the same team, as content developers. As the project progressed the Project Manager and Designer grew concerned about the lack of communication between them and the CDs.

When we mentioned this concern to the CDs, they were surprised since they had been communicating with each other and felt things were going well. There were several misunderstandings regarding meetings and deadlines. Tensions were running high and the feeling was that the CDs were on one team and the PM, Designer, and Programmer, were ganging up on them and complaining to the instructors.

Another problem that emerged was that since the CDs were a couple one would speak for the other, and when a task was assigned to Desi, Lucy would complete it. We asked the team to treat the 2 CDs as unique individuals, to speak to the person involved, and not their partner. We also expected Lucy and Desi to perform the jobs they were assigned and not just do the work as a couple.

Finally we were forced to step in and set a standard for communication. We required the CDs to send at least 3 e-mail messages per week to the PM. If this was not done, the CDs would have points deducted from their grade. I sent this note out to the CDs and PM.

A meeting was scheduled 2 days later between the PM, Des, and the 2 CDs. The CDs did not attend and did not tell anyone that they would be absent. The Des and PM had driven 45 minutes to the meeting and waited 1.5 hours for the CDs to show up. When we spoke to Desi the next day he stated that they had not attended because they were mad about the way the team had treated them and the way we the instructors had treated them.

We told the CDs that they needed to apologize to the PM, meet with them ASAP, and conform to the 3 e-mail rule. If they were not willing to do this they needed to drop the class. Unfortunately the CDs decided to drop.

What lessons can be learned from this situation.

1. Everyone has their own definition of "adequate communication". When members of a team define this term differently, you need to follow the standard of the PM. They run the team and you need to adjust your e-mail style to match theirs. Silence is often interpreted as inactivity. It takes just a moment to send a note updating your teammates on your progress.

2. If a student has a problem with a decision we have made (such as the 3 e-mail rule), the appropriate response is to contact us through e-mail, phone or a personal visit. It is not appropriate to sit home and "pout" because your feelings are hurt.

By missing the meeting, Lucy and Desi were wasting their teammates time and causing unnecessary worry.

3. The PM and Designer had consistently reported that the CDs were not communicating and were not behaving maturely. We had defended Lucy and Desi, encouraging the team to work with them to help them understand what was expected of them.

When the CDs chose to stay home with their hurt feelings, without bothering to contact their teammates, we stopped defending them and began to set ultimatums. Problems are never solved by sulking in silence. Talk over the problems with your teammates and your instructor. We will mediate and find a solution that works for all involved.

4. The "them vs. us" mentality could have been avoided if Lucy and Desi had sat on separate teams. They would have been able to have unique identities and be treated as individuals. They would also have had 2 PMs expecting them to communicate regularly.