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Assignment #1: Lessons Learned

During the initial phases of the first senior design class, I had the opportunity to overview the various type of projects that other teams have completed before. I and my team members were merely interested in a software project. Ultimately, we are currently working on a degree planner for the CSE department at UT-Arlington. Using this as a steeping-stone and while working on our team’s project I was able to learn three important lessons. These are knowing the scope of the project you will be working on, planning ahead, and knowing your team members well.

Knowing the scope of the project was very essential to guide me in understanding the abstract high level definition of the project I wanted to do based on my interest, and its relation to what I want to do in the real world very soon. I researched the possible resources available, how long it would approximately take to finish major implementation tasks, and how practical the project actually is. This gave me and my team members a general overview of the mission, and vison of the project including what is expected from each of us. Following that, we were able to gather requirements including our own ones and design a system architecture for our project.

The other important technique while working on such a project is to always plan ahead. You should always make sure that the delivery due date for the team is actually further than the actual task completion date of the team. This is important because the gathered project requirements and documentations of the project need to be consistently updated, revised and refined before submission. Additionally, planning ahead helps you to realize which tasks needs to be prioritized. That is take baby steps first and make sure the completed task is good to go and behaving as expected before adding more details or implantation. To make all of this possible, record any information discussed with team members in your engineering notebook since the tasks the team wants to accomplish either modifies or builds up on the details discussed during those meetings. Furthermore, use version control and set communication methods with your team members to ensure that everyone is on the same page and working according to the planned schedule. This allowed our team to be able to identify risks and create a different plan which improved our performance remarkably. I was also able to assess our progress and identify which tasks can be done together and which should be done separately. This helped me significantly during team meeting discussions, while doing weekly status reports, and when doing end of sprint report.

Lastly, know your team members very well. The most important thing to note here is that weekly face to face meetings at least twice week is essential in addition to online communication methods. When you spend time together, there is more mindfulness in what you discuss and you can also improve communication. I noticed that my listening skills increased as well as picking up on even subtle cues. The emphasis here is knowing their technical background, semester schedule and other commitments, strength and weakness, and experiences with certain tools or subject matter. Knowing your team members availabilty would help you know when is a good time to reach them to get a quick response. On the other hand knowing their technical background including their strength and weakness allows you to ask for help on the subject matter, share your knowledge, learn from each other, and grow together both as a person and a team. Additionally, sharing experiences could help the team in reducing the time needed to research and analyze ways to do a certain things. Knowing your team member’s experience on a subject matter also comes in handy while allocating time for individual tasks. It might take a very small amount of time for the person to implement the task and walk the team through the implementation instead of having one person to research it, teach himself or herself first, implement it and then walk the whole team through it. Remember that as a team project, tasks should be done in such a way in order to provide completed first version deliverable and to have enough time to keep on improving it in order to provide updated deliverables.