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Establishing a Team Contract

A team contract is one of the best practices of good project management. In creating this team contract you should have an open and comprehensive discussion about the norms, behaviors and responsibilities for which you will hold yourself and the other member(s) of your team accountable. In order to have an in-depth discussion it is useful for each team member to go through the contract topics in advance (see below) and think specifically about their own preferences. For example, would you have a ready answer if asked how to deal with a team member who was chronically late with assignments or deliverables? Would you be willing to address an issue around missed quality expectations with a team member?"

The guidelines below will help you create your team contract. These are only guidelines, but your contract should include *at least* these four sections. You will be submitting your team contract to the Team Coach, who will provide feedback on any issues that need clarification or refining.

Part 1: Team Goals

Teams should begin their relationship together by creating a set of shared goals. Take some time to identify the goals and motivations of each individual team member and then agree on a set in which you are in alignment. You may choose to have only one primary goal, or you may have several. Some goal topics might include:

- *Overall Experience:* Individuals often have an overall goal about what they hope to achieve as an outcome of receiving their degree (i.e.: work hard, learn new skills, develop new relationships, etc.)
- *Grades:* Some individuals strive only for "A" grades; others are fine with whatever grade they receive as long as they are learning the material
- *Learning:* Some individuals want to maximize their learning, even to the extent that it might compromise performance/grades; other individuals are solely outcome or results focused.
- *Social Experience*: Some individuals want to share social activities in addition to work; others want to minimize the social side and get down to business.

Part II: Role Assignments & Expertise

One of the reasons to use teams in the first place is to divide and assign work, allowing teams to leverage the expertise of their individual members. This only works if you do a good job of utilizing your members' strengths:

- *Group Expertise:* It is important to identify who is good, and not good, at what. This includes functional and technical knowledge as well as skills such as strategic and /or critical thinking, writing and/or presentation ability, and knowledge of data analysis and/or research tools.

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- *Group Roles & Dividing Work:* Once you know who is good at what you need to decide who will take what roles, and how you will divide the workload on your project. It can be based on expertise – *or not* – depending on your agreed to team goals. You will need to consider what to do if someone is weak in an area but wants to learn, or if someone is strong in an area but doesn't have the time to commit to the work. The criteria for determining the division of labor can be based on who is the expert, but also based on who has time, who wants to learn, who did more or less work for the last assignment or project component, etc.

Part III: Team & Norms

This is probably the least discussed aspect of most teams. Many teams assume that they can just "wing it." After all, you have all been in teams before, right? And they have all worked out just great, right? Although writing "rules" into your contract may seem like an overly formal process, research has shown that it can greatly increase the chances of a successful team outcome. Issues to consider include:

- *Constructive Disagreement & Managing Conflict:* High Performing Teams need a certain amount of 'Healthy Conflict' to perform effectively – but how will your team manage disagreements and not take it personally? Will you have an assigned Devil's Advocate? Will you always set aside time to consider alternative viewpoints? How will you express dissatisfaction with a team member's work quality without defensiveness?
- *Absences / Lateness:* What are the acceptable ways to advise the member(s) of your team if you are going to be late or unprepared for a meeting? What are the acceptable (if any) excuses?   What if this behavior is repeated, or goes on for an extended period? How are these infractions to be managed and resolved?
- *Communication Norms:* Will you have rules about how to run your meetings in an effective way so that both/all members have a chance to express views/ideas? What if one person begins to dominate the meetings, or interrupts consistently? What if a team member is not contributing during a team meeting, or is demonstrating rude or disrespectful behavior?
- *Decision Rules:* How will the team decide? What process will you use to reach consensus/alignment? Will it ever be acceptable to go against the wishes of one of more members of the team? When?
- *Enforcement:* If members violate the team contract what are the consequences? How will you all know if the violation is so severe that sanctions are necessary?

Part IV: Evaluation & Revision

All team contracts should be living documents. Your team should discuss when and how you will reevaluate your team contract over the course of the term to make sure it is still relevant and effective. If not, then appropriate revisions should be made.