**MARTIAL ARTS ACADEMY (MAA) ASSIGNMENT**

**Getting Started with Learning Cycles**

For many people, the beginning of a project can feel like walking in heavy fog with little sense of direction. Some- times it takes time for the project team to figure out where it’s going and how it’s going to get there. And once the team sets off in a direction, adjustments have to be made to make sure everyone stays on course.

Just like a compass, a map, or a GPS can help you navigate to your intended destination, learning cycles provide a useful tool that can guide you and your team throughout the project. You can use them regardless

of what project management methodology you follow or whether you use Waterfall or Agile for product development.

Learning cycles also give structure to your team meetings and provide direction and accountability for when you and your team work outside a regularly scheduled meeting. Team meetings provide an opportunity to share information, challenge assumptions, and develop a plan of action that details each member’s responsibilities (and accountability) for the next meeting where the learning cycle is repeated. Hopefully, this will make the team experience more efficient and effective as all members know their own responsibilities as well as the responsibilities of each member of the group.

**What to do:**

1. It might be a good idea to reread the section on Learning Cycles in this chapter so that you become more familiar with what they are and how they work. A learning cycle is pretty straightforward, so you should feel very comfortable with the process once you’ve had a chance to work through one or two.

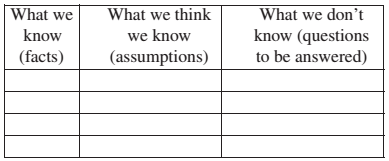
2. Learning cycles work best when the team meets face-to-face. Find a quiet place where the whole team can meet and work together. Ideally, this would be a comfortable room with a whiteboard or a poster chart that everyone can see, but just having a computer screen or even a piece of paper would work fine. You could even use a bunch of sticky notes on a wall or board. Just have some way to write ideas down for the group to see.

3. Assign roles to the group. From experience, you need only two roles: An organizer and a scribe. The organizer organizes the meeting by writing down the team’s ideas and puts them up for the group to see. The scribe documents the ideas and final action plan because the ideas and so forth that the organizer writes down may not be permanently available. A copy should be made avail- able to the whole team. Roles can be rotated or assigned based on whether someone likes or is good at a particular role.

4. Go back and reread the background information for the Martial Arts Academy case at the end of Chapter 1. This is the background information that was given to you when you developed your team charter. Based on the background information, write a short summary of the problem, challenge, or opportunity. This should be just a paragraph with no more than a few sentences.

5. Using the following table as a guide, have the organizer write down the team’s thoughts as to what you know (facts), what you think you know (assumptions), and what you don’t know (things to find out or questions to be answered). Both the organizer and scribe should feel free to participate actively in this brainstorming discussion. Be sure to challenge any assumptions or opinions before concluding they are facts. Remember, learning cycles work best when everyone admits

humility (i.e., we don’t have all the answers) and there is openness to everyone’s ideas.

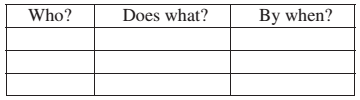


Team Learning Record

6. Chances are you will write down very few facts at this time. You probably will have a few more assumptions, and a larger list of things that you don’t know. That is common for many teams beginning the project (Remember the analogy of trying to find your bearings in a fog?). At this point, you and your team should not try to have a specific number of items for each category. It’s more important to be honest and open instead of trying to come up with a perfect solution. The pro- cess can be a bit messy as ideas can move from one category to another, so the scribe should document the finished product rather than the process (that’s the organizer’s job).

7. Once you and your team finish brainstorming the facts, assumptions, and questions, your next step is to develop an action plan to assign responsibilities to each team member. The responsibilities can be assigned individually or to two members who can work on a particular assignment together. Avoid giving the same assignment to more than two members to work on together unless there is good reason. It’s probably easiest to start by first listing what has to be done. This should be based on the assumptions and questions to be answered that you just brainstormed.

**Hint**: If someone suggests that a fact has to be checked, then it’s really not a fact—it’s an assumption. The organizer should organize the actions to be taken. Each team member should then volunteer or be assigned to the task, activity, or action. You are not trying to plan the whole project. You are just planning what has to be done before your next team meeting, which should be scheduled within a few days or a week. At your next meeting, each member should have completed his or her assigned tasks, share information that was learned, and then the team starts the whole learning cycle process again with another Team Learning Record and Action Plan.



Action Plan

8. The team should review the Action Plan before committing to it. Is the Action Plan doable in a few days? Are the assignments fair and balanced among the team members? Once you have agreement, you have team commitment and account- ability. All members of the team know what the team expects from them, and what they expect from other members of the group.

9. The scribe should document the Team Learning Record and Action Plan and make it available to everyone on the team.

**What to turn in:**

1. Turn in a professional-looking document that includes the following:
2. The project name, project team name, and the names of your project team. The brief summary of the challenge, problem, or opportunity statement that your team developed in this assignment.
3. Document the Team Learning Record and the Action Plan. You may not have had a chance to complete all of the tasks or assignments, so just include the Action Plan you developed during this learning cycle.