

Team Training Session 1

Group Work: Some Food for Thought

Why learn to work in a team?

Employers look for this skill. Many surveys of different employers have found that teamwork skills (along with communication skills) are at the top of the list of attributes they look for in people they hire (Oakley *et al.* 2004). No matter what field you end up working in, from medicine to environmental consulting to academic research, you will be working as part of a team.

This session and the follow up sessions later in semester aim to help you develop these skills. By having a positive team experience I also hope that you will enjoy making the documentary and consequently will gain higher grades.

Are we a team or group?

A group is any collection of 3 or more people while a team is a group in which each member **relies on the strengths and contributions of the other members**. A team spends time together, gets to know each other and hence achieves group cohesiveness. A team has a common objective and the members all work towards the same purpose. Most importantly the team members are interdependent. As mentioned above this means “each member relies on the strengths of each member to accomplish the objective” (Nazzaro and Strazzabosco 2003). **This does not mean that each individual works entirely alone on a section of work which then is incorporated into the problem solution without discussion. Nor does it mean that the whole group does all activities together. Instead certain tasks are carried out by different individuals and then the whole group discusses each task/activity and how it relates and should be incorporated into the group solution.**

What makes a successful team?

Well-functioning teams encourage participation by all members by providing a supportive environment and maintaining open minds. Members of good teams are also reliable and communicate well and of course contribute to the team project.

As part of your assessment you will mark yourself and your team-mates based on your contributions to the final product.

Below are a series of points on these aspects of well-functioning teams that you will be marked on (Nazzaro and Strazzabosco 2003).

Encourage participation

- Give positive comments to each other regularly and often, because it motivates teammates.
- Give negative observations when necessary, but give it constructively, for example: “Frank, that proposal you wrote is very good, but it’s a little weak in the evaluation section. Joe has done a lot of evaluations, perhaps he can help.”
- Receive negative observations from another member without becoming defensive, because the comments are not meant to be insulting, but are meant to help the team accomplish its goals.
- Support other team members in times of crisis, for example: “Lars, I’m sorry to hear about your family illness. Why don’t you go home and I will finish your task.”
- Are ambassadors of that team, and represent the team, not just themselves.
- Remain open-minded and receptive to all ideas, however different from their own.
- Accept every problem as a *team* problem, not one belonging only to one member.
- Never say “we can’t do this,” but say “how *can* we do this?”
- Encourage full participation by all members.

Reliable and communicates well

- Give another member time to get their idea out and paraphrase the idea to ensure they understand the intended message.
- Take turns speaking.
- Call a time-out if they feel another member’s behaviour is disruptive.
- Make the team meeting a priority so that attendance is consistent.
- Begin and end meetings on time, so members can use their time most efficiently.
- Obtain closure on topics and get a decision.
- Summarize and clarify the meeting at the end.
- Use consensus for major decisions, which results in finding the most acceptable decision for everyone, as opposed to voting, in which there are clear winners and losers.

Contribution

- Carry out tasks that are their responsibility
- Offer help to others when their own work is completed.
- Ask for help from other members when needed and don’t waste precious time struggling alone.
- Don’t have side conversations during a discussion, because participants might miss something important (and because it is disrespectful of the others).

- Determine the action items that any decision requires or think through how to carry out decisions.
- Share failures as a team, never blaming only one or two members.
- Look at failures as a way to improve the team functioning, because we can always learn something from failure.
- Stay focused on the task on hand and avoid engaging in distracting behaviours.
- Share all information, so that everyone is working from the same body of information.
- Stay focused on the purpose of the team, which is to accomplish something together.

Stages of group formation: What to expect.

There is a general progression that groups go through in completing the task set. It helps to be aware that these stages exist so that you can deal with each stage as it comes up. The points below are adapted from Bacon et al (1999) and Nazzaro and Strazzabosco (2003)

- Forming (members become acquainted with each other and orient themselves to the task and the teams expectations)
- Storming (individual roles and personalities emerge and conflict occurs about the team's mission, objectives and task)
- Norming (team conflict is resolved, members come to agree on team leadership, roles, and behavioural norms and team cohesiveness is established)
- Performing (team focuses on productive interaction and problem solving)
- Adjourning (members feel myriad of emotions as they experience the dissolution of the team once its mission is completed).

References/Further reading

<http://www.teambuildinginc.com/tps/020c9.htm>

Bacon, D.R., Stewart, K.A. and Silver, W.S. (1999) Lessons from the best and worst student team experiences: How a teacher can make the difference. *Journal of Management Education* 23 (5): 467-488.

Heller, P. and Hollabaugh, M. (1992) Teaching problem solving through cooperative grouping. Part 2: Designing problems and structuring groups. *American Journal of Physics* 60(7) 637-644.

Holton, J.A. (2001) Building trust and collaboration in a virtual team. *Team performance management*. 7 (3/4): 36-47.

Nazzaro, A. and Strazzabosco, J. (2003) Group dynamics and team building. *Hemophilia Organization Development*. 4: 1-21.

Oakley, B., Felder, R.M., Brent, R. and Elhadj, I. (2004) Turning student groups into effective teams. *Journal of Student Centred Learning*. 2(1): 9-34

Communication and Organisation in a Team

It is very important to begin communicating and organising contact details and group meeting times from the very beginning of a team project. Many students comment that they had difficulty doing this and so we have provided space below to begin organising the team.

Agree as a group on your mode of contact (circle):

Phone Email Microsoft Teams

Copy down the contact details of each member of your group:

	Name	Contact details
Member 1:		
Member 2:		
Member 3:		
Member 4:		

Use the timetable below to agree on at least 2 hours in the working week when every member of your group is available. Use these allocated times for group meetings.

	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY
08:00					
09:00					
10:00					
11:00					
12:00					
13:00					
14:00	Class				
15:00	Class				
16:00	Class				
17:00					
18:00					
19:00					

Role Assignment Documentary Video

When you sit back and watch a group you will see different patterns of behaviour. For example, there will be at least one person who will tend to take control and lead conversation, there might be someone who remains quiet, someone who questions everything being said, someone who wants things to move faster. These are just some of the roles that people often take on naturally according to their individual personality. Some more are listed below (Heller and Hollabaugh 1992).

- Executive manager who designs plans for action and suggests solutions
- The skeptic who questions premises and plans
- The educator who takes on the role of explaining and summarizing
- Record keeper who organizes and keeps track of results of the discussion
- Conciliator who resolves conflicts and strives to minimize interpersonal stress.

There are many different roles associated with the documentary video assignment. By acknowledging the different roles that different team members tend to assume the team will function more efficiently. This also highlights that the input from **every individual** is essential to the success of the assignment.

Below are spaces for the team to come up with roles they tend to fill. The name of the individual can be placed in the next space. Sometimes more than one individual may take on the same role. Feel free to add your own roles that aren't mentioned above.

Group member	Strengths	Role/tasks
1.		
2.		
3.		
4.		

Team meeting minutes template

You can use this as a template for your meetings – you will find this in your Teams Collaboration space (Meeting Minutes) so you can keep all your meeting records together.

Date:

Format *(in person/video call/chat session):*

Members present: *List whoever is present for this meeting*

Action points from last meeting: *(won't be relevant for the first meeting in class!).*

Current discussion points:

(first session will include agreed roles and discussion about the choice of topic)

Agreed action points:

This can be done in two ways:

Action 1: research on plant sensing of soil salinity – to be done by Person 1

Action 2: research on plant hormone responses to salinity – to be done by person 2.

Etc

OR

Person 1: to find and summarise 2 papers on plant sensing of soil salinity,

To start researching possible people to interview (to be further discussed at next meeting).

Person 2: to find and summarise 2 papers on plant hormone responses to salinity,

To look into video editing apps (to be further discussed at next meeting).

Etc

Agreed time and date for next meeting: *Make sure everyone agrees on the meeting checking timetables and calendars and put the agreed time in whatever diary/calendars you each use.*

Location of next meeting *(in person somewhere specific/ video call/chat session)*

The beauty of online collaborative software now is that meetings don't have to happen on the same campus or even in the same time-zone in the case of many of my science collaborations. Just make sure it's clear which type of meeting you are planning so there is no confusion.