



Team Process Report

Overcoming the Differences

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Overcoming the Differences - Team 4

Executive Summary

Differences are the key of conflicts in teams. Our team represents diverse nationalities and professional backgrounds. The five comprising members of our team each possess different experiences which together enrich the team. Corey is from America, Ahmed is from Saudi Arabia, Xiaowen is from China, Mehdi is from Iran, and finally Niharika is from India. Not only are the cultural backgrounds different, but also our career paths, work and personal experiences are a source of diversity. Some members of the group are working as project managers, whereas others are full time students. Life style choices also provide a source of diversity to draw from. Some of us are married with kids and live off-campus, and others are single and live on-campus. All these differences affected our team dynamics and posed as foundational material on which to build our team.

Our team (Team 4) is a group of five people with different sets of skills who are committed to a common purpose, performance and goals for which we hold ourselves mutually accountable. Initially, the behavior of the team members was purely motivated by the requirements placed upon the participating students to form groups to produce the required assignments throughout the duration of the class. As such, actions were taken to accomplishment the result of receiving passing grades. As we worked together and developed a relationship beyond the required level to merely accomplish the assigned work, behaviors “warmed” as comfort level or acceptance of members grew.

Although our team did not satisfy all the requirements of team, overall we felt very excited to be part of this team and to have this opportunity to work and learn together.

As a result of the actions taken by the individual team members, we believe the team experienced growth that reinforced the goals of a “team-building and communications” graduate level course. The learning objective of increasing collaborative skills and reinforcing communications skills was a consequence of the team experience in this course. Our expectation from this class was to learn and practice all the social skills needed to collaborate effectively with others. Therefore, all five members of our team were eager to have the opportunity to practice the appropriate communication and leadership skills, building trust, making decision, and motivate others in order for our group to function effectively. This is how our team overcame all these differences, and successfully delivered requirements and met deadlines. In this paper we discuss in depth the details of our team cooperation, and how we overcame our differences and dealt with sudden emergencies. At the end we included a recipe to reproduce a working team like ours.

Observation and Analysis

1. Forming

This is an essential part of team forming process. Not much work is produced in this stage, but it includes introduction of team members. In our team, we used this stage to get to know each other and plan for the rest of the term. Roles and meetings were the most important part of this stage. Initially, perceptions of team members was partly derived from the introductions given by all members of the class, preconceived notions based on stereotypes, and the first impressions made by team members when teams were formed. As a result, the team had to undergo the natural stages of group progression identified as Forming, Storming, Norming, and Performing.

Roles

At various times, each team member functioned in different roles. We believe these actions were a conscious decision, that purposely allowed each team member to feel his/her contributions was valuable and necessary. However, individuals did tend to gravitate towards the roles in which they normally performed or were more comfortable with over the course of the term. Additionally, the group made efforts to force the members of the team who reluctantly voiced their opinions to take their turn as team lead to build confidence.

The five team members in our group worked collaboratively and focused on inclusion consideration of ideas posed by others. We tried our best to have an equal participation of each member in each of the contribution and the delivery of the materials. Having said this, our team did not specify roles for each member. Each week, we all met, divided the work, and made appropriate decisions as a result. This process is explained in depth in the Appendix section.

Also, we employed a Democratic method of conflict resolution within our team. The team opted to use voting techniques, when disagreements did arise, such as in selecting the type of ice breaking game, [2]. We often utilized brainstorming as a means to generate and select ideas. This method was probably utilized most often as it was a familiar tool to all comprising members.

Meeting

The first unofficial meeting with all of the team members was after a class session to discuss how we are going to meet and plan for the course deliverable. After realizing how busy members were and how their work schedules did not allow for regular face-to-face meetings, the team decided meetings were going to be decision meetings rather than work meetings. This fact developed team norms that influenced the behavior and attitudes of team members in a positive way. Because time was a commodity that was valued by all members of the team, the

team developed a mean of focus and an ability to maximize face-to-face meeting productivity. The value of time also enabled the team to realize the value of input from all members of the team. Realization that our combined experiences and talents were greater than an individual contribution allowed the group to put aside individual preferences and or basis for the empowerment of the team. We tried to find the most suitable time for the regular weekly meeting, and we found that Saturday at 1 or 2 PM or Thursday 3 or 4 PM before class works for all team members.

2. Storming

Every group enters the next stage of storming. This stage addresses issues and problems, the team will face. This stage also decides how team will work individually and as a team. In some cases issues are resolved quickly and in some cases it takes time and team usually spend time in confronting and resolving issues. Leaders should be functioning guide role at this stage and provide right guidance to pass this stage successfully by resolving all the issues and assigning the proposed task to the right people by recognizing their capabilities.

Communication

The communication strategies employed by the team (face-to-face communication, and emails, and phone calls) provided the necessary means to exchange critical information needed to complete the assigned tasks. The communication tools that our team had used were face-to-face, and Internet based communications. Face-to-face communication was used on our weekly meetings; it had a big impact on establishing a deeper trust between the team members, and helped the team members to understand each other individually, and their communication style that every team member used. The Internet based communication channel was another method that our team had used for virtual meetings. E-mail was used to send each individual work or assignment to the whole team to share and review it. E-mail saved time for the team to share their work without the need to physically attend to see each individual work. It is also considered as a global platform, cost effective, easy to use and access, and the ability to send attachment effectively and quickly. The team was able to find the right mix of media to allow for the involvement of all team members in a productive way.

Conflicts Resolution

Our team did not face any major barriers by addressing problems and resolving conflicts at right time. However, the team had six members initially which changed to five member team as one of team member dropped the class. Afterwards, the main issue the new team had was to deal with schedule conflicts. The conflict we faced usually, was meeting schedule. Most of us have job on working days and others, for some reasons, are very busy. It was very hard for us to figure out a suitable time for all to have a meeting. We finally decided we would meet at 1 or 2pm of every Saturday or 4pm Thursday, after some discussion by making little adjustment to

individual schedules. We also made ground rule that if somebody had a sudden issue and could not attend the meeting, he/she should inform others before the meeting.

The next phase was dividing tasks. To make burden shared equally and wisely, we took some more time discussing the characteristics of the tasks and who had experience with dealing with similar issue. We arranged the most crucial tasks to the most suitable person and then leave other tasks to members who were flexible about work. In this way, we worked smoothly with class presentations, reading assignments and reports.

Another source of conflict that we think most groups were not really prepared for defending individual understanding of the material presented by members of the class. The surprising, what almost felt like a personal attack, tone in which some members of the class choose to argue point of views related to material understanding caught some team members off guard. This forced the confronted member and team to reply in a manner which explicitly demonstrated subject matter expertise to the confronting individual and class, earning respect and acknowledgement from peers.

3. Norming

In this stage teams usually have one goal and a plan on which everybody have same opinions. Although team members can have disagreements on the plan but those disagreements are resolved constructively.

Commitment

Previous group experiences shaped actions by affording an understanding, beforehand, of the processes of a team's development which allowed members to act in ways that allowed the team to progress through each stage as effectively as possible. Realizing such phenomena as social loafing and how its effects can ruin team progress, efforts were made to ensure each member contributed equally and were respected and valued as members.

One crucial factor for the team was the responsibility that each team member held it to fulfill the team goals. Each individual committed to be a part of the team's success which was done by focusing on the team's goal and helping other team members to complete their work. Members of teams should take in consideration that they are working together, not against each other. One of the techniques that the team used to keep our commitments is an e-mail sent by the team leader to every member reminding them with the meetings time and the assignments that should be completed on time. Using this technique helped the team member to keep tracking their assignments work on time, and let everyone in the team knows that other team members depend on each other work to be completed on time which help the overall team to progress and maintain strong momentum.

4. Performing

At performing stage teams work without supervision and function as a unit to perform better every day without involving themselves in any conflicting situation. In order to achieve success team members are now self-motivated and knowledgeable and require little guidance from their leader.

Team Performance / Effectiveness

Our team spent much time in the forming stage as team members did not know each other before this course. However, starting from the following week, the team members were very decisive to alleviate the performance issues, as it was the only way out to achieve the course requirements in the time frame. The storming stage and the norming stage were short. The performing stage was the longest one. The team had established trust earlier in the process. The team dynamics was easy to build on the basis of established trust. All team members had good team building background from work and understood the power of the team. They also understood that how team members could help to achieve the most difficult goals. All team members were from high-performance ethic culture and they shared the same engineering background. Therefore it was easier to understand each other in team with great harmony and synergy.

The team members understood the busy schedules of each one, and we divided the work fairly and equally in a way that insured commitment from all members. Members bought in, on the division of responsibilities fairly quickly, as it was done in a manner to insure no overload is given in anyway. We were able to avoid any potential conflict for the most part and resolve any issues decisively. Establishing trust earlier in the team formation did pay off in minimizing the potential of conflict. The team established clear goals and roles for its members at the formation stage. The team also recognized capabilities of each member and assigned tasks as appropriate. Our team members have previous virtual team experiences which helped this team work around schedule and availability conflicts. We had disagreements till our last day but we resolved disagreements constructively which resulted in performing better day by day.

Contribution

In our team, the team members contributed on each selective reading that was assigned to the team. Additionally, each individual in the team was assigned a selective reading to write a summary about it. After writing the report, it was reviewed by the team members allowing each team member to contribute in each selective reading. Also the team members worked together on the research report allowing all to participate and be accountable for a portion of the research report. The team practiced sharing opinions and ideas in the weekly meetings. In each weekly meeting the team members rotated the leadership of the meeting which gave each member the opportunity to act as the meeting head.

Team member participation in the class presentations was a powerful tool which polished skills which are critical in the work environment. The ability to collaborate in a team environment with diverse membership is directly applicable skill, valued in the marketplace. Additionally, presentation skills were refined by the structure of the class, allowed members to polish their public speaking skills, again another valuable skill set in today's marketplace.

Discussion

Transforming

Lesson learned

Both formal and informal rewards played an important role in the development and progress of the team. Formal awards, such as grades received for assignments, set standards of maximum and minimum performance levels as outputs would be graded and weighed against requirements to determine subject matter expertise. Informal rewards, such as peer recognition and approval, influenced the team's behavior by making team members ready to show subject matter expertise when time came to present course material in front of the class. Being able to speak intelligibly and be able to defend ones understanding of the material only aided in the reinforcement of the course objectives.

- We did learn that mistakes often occur during our journey of becoming an effective team. We assumed that mistakes were little hurdles which made us realize that we needed to be more conscious and wise in our future planning.
- In some situations we learnt that there might be a case where one of the team members had some personal problems and could not make it to the team meeting. In this situation the team leader had learnt to plan the things ahead and made him aware of the team proceedings.
- If one of the team members was not effective in presenting the ideas or presentation, the team members had learnt to encourage him and boost up his confidence level by advising him to perform well next time
- We learned that constant review of each team member progress was necessary for the team to succeed.
- We learned that preparing an agenda for our team meetings would have been more helpful and it could have helped the team to wrap up the meetings in correct time and prior planning to the next meeting should have also be done.
- We realized that taking meeting minutes is one of the important tasks in team's proceedings. Though we had a clear idea of what was being done and what should we do in a meet, we learnt that we should have taken note of minutes in every meet.
- We realized that when a team member who would be most helpful at one stage of a project or discussion was not contributing it meant that it might be due to lack of confidence, troubles at home, fear of being wrong, or something else, we realized that we should give him encouragement and boost up synergy among the team members

but not discouraging him with sarcasm. By learning this we realized how a professional team leader should bring harmony in a team and should transform his team members.

- We learnt that not to jump to conclusions and to have patience in team. We gave time to team members to open up when they wanted but insured that team members would not cross the deadlines for their assignments.
- We learnt that taking notes from the team's discussions was very helpful in knowing the ideas and be sure about the discussions we make.
- Planning and proper time management is the one key element we have learnt from the class. We learnt that we should make the things get done early or at least a day prior to the presentation and there should be a final review or rehearsal before the presentation.
- We understood that if weak contributions from team members are criticized before submitting any assignment, then there is a scope for making corrections on time.

Conclusion

All of the team members were mature professionals, and had great expectation from one another. The team members had a great interpersonal relationship, which were based on mutual respect. The team performance was increased as the time went by. Finally, the members had the same level of understanding; less time was being spent on clarifying the work, divisions of the load and so forth. In conclusion, we feel that building an effective team is not an easy work. Furthermore, good planning, right team members and standing on clear ground rules can improve the level of expectation and the accountability of all the team members. Trust and communication are the essential and important elements to build an effective team.

References

- [1] Jon R. Katzenbach and Douglas K. Smith, *"The Wisdom of Teams: Creating the High-Performance Organization"*, Collins Business Essentials, 2003
- [2] Brassard, Michael; Ritter, Diane: *The memory Jogger II: A pocket Guide to Tools for Continuous Improvement and Effective Planning*, Salem, NH 1994 (GOAL/QPC).

Appendix A: Team Journal

Day 1: 09/29/2011

Formed a team of six people where everybody belongs to a different country

Corey: America, Dheeraj: India, Ahmed: Saudi Arabia, Xiaowen: China, Mehdi: Iran, Niharika: India

We decided to meet once in a week for team meeting but the day of team meeting was not decided.

Dimensions for different Background:

Full time working + part time student – Mehdi

Full time working + full time student - Corey

Full time student + GA at University – Ahmed

Full time student – Dheeraj

Full time student – Wendy

Full time student (non-degree) Niharika

Other dimensions which can be considered are: Marital status/Child responsibility/Responsibilities at home/Responsibilities at work. We started to discuss these dimensions in our class to know each other

Day 2: 10/8/2011

Dheeraj has dropped the ETM 522 class. We all met at library. Even though one of our team members was not able to arrive on time, everybody waited. We discussed about our next presentation and the timeline for the whole syllabus. We divided responsibilities among us for the presentation, team charter, and suggested readings.

Day3: 10/13/2011

We met for a team meeting for practicing and discussing presentation. Everybody could not make it on time due to different reasons. We did not have a strategy for our team since the team did not seem coordinated for this meeting. Despite that all, our relationship among the team members was good. To open up the conversation: Corey asked everybody: "what we had in our dinner", I asked: how was everyone's day? Corey also had invited everybody for dinner.

We discussed about each other educational background and work background. We prepared well for our presentation and were ready to present it. However, the presentation before us took longer time than expected, which caused us to be short on time. Ahmed tried to time our presentation and keep every section on time by counting left minutes. We had a good start in delivering our presentation with game and slides. Few students complained that the game had tough questions whereas few liked it. We tried to rush our slides since we started running out of time, however, one of the students kept arguing and the class went out of topic. We delivered the last slides of our presentation in hurry.

Day 4: 10/22/2011

We decided to cancel the second team meeting just one hour before the actual meeting because we decided that we do not meet to meet on that day and rather want to spend more time preparing for the meeting. Some of the team members were able to get the notification on time and therefore did not come to the library. However, one member went to the library and lately discovered the meeting was cancelled.

Day 5: 10/27/2011

Mehdi realized that he will be on a trip to Chicago for work, and he could not finish preparing for presenting one of the suggested readings. Ahmed volunteered to cover Mehdi's part despite the shortage of time. When Mehdi got back from his trip, he joined our meeting. We met on the day of presentation. We practiced even though only some of the team members were present. We helped each other in preparing their part, by giving explanation, by pointing out the missing points and changing presentation slides structure. All these helped us to deliver our presentation in better way. We also coordinated via email to know the status of presentation and at final moment we came up as team. We had good start with the game. Everybody delivered their part on time and we helped each other by giving answers for questions raised by audience. This presentation experience was much better than last time.

Day 6: 11/3/2011

Ahmed and Mehdi coordinated together to exchange responsibilities since Mehdi had to fly again to Chicago, but this time his trip is on the same day of the presentation. The initial plan was that Mehdi would prepare the write up Ahmed's assigned suggested reading while Ahmed will present Mehdi's part of the presentation. This decision was made between the two because Mehdi was comfortable with writing and Ahmed was comfortable with presenting. The decision was shared with the entire group afterward. However, after the team divided the work plan, Wendy ended up presenting Mehdi's suggested reading, which he helped her in preparing. We divided our responsibilities beforehand and decided to communicate via emails this time. We are working as a team now. We discussed our approach for team process report. We had got an email for postponing the team process report date.

Day 7: 11/10/2011

We decided to communicate via email and meet on the day of presentation because everybody has different valid reasons not to be at team meeting. Ahmed had an accident and he had to go to the hospital. Corey was late due to his office work. We had a good start in delivering our presentation. However, during presentation we got stuck at one point because one of our classmates insisted to keep disagreeing with our interpretation of the suggested reading. Corey helped by reverting back the question to that classmate. Over all, it was a good experience to know how to react to this kind of situation where an argument could come to an endless route. This experience made us to be extra cautious for next time and to be mentally prepared for this kind of situation.

Day 8: 11/26/2011

The team planned to meet at the library at 1:30pm. Corey realized at the last minute that he would not be able to meet us, but he was open to meet virtually. We went into a presentation room and displayed an outlined version of our report on the big screen. Quickly, we realized that method is not helpful, and then we used Google Docs to help us share the documents and make edits virtually yet individually. This was very helpful for us especially communicating with Corey who was a distance away from us. We connected with him through Skype, and using Google Docs he was able to contribute into the report. At this meeting, we decided on a title for our paper, partially planned for presentation, and planned how we will prepare our paper. Now that we have an outlined report online where everyone can edit into it, we decided that each member review the latest version and make their editions into it. We decided on color code to help us track changes and easily identify them. We have also decided that Niharika, Ahmed and Wendy will meet on Tuesday at 3 pm to discuss and plan for the presentation, and the entire team will meet on Thursday at 4 to put everything together and practice the presentation. Niharika proposed doing a skit, Ahmed said he will be looking into creating short videos, and Wendy proposed attaching photos and short bios to the presentation.