

Team Process Report

Team 3

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ETM 522: Communication and Team Building

Spring 2011

Introduction

The team progress report of Team 3 is summarizing all the steps and lessons learned that the team has performed throughout the entire term. We have changed some strategies as deemed necessary to improve the delivery and performance of the team. The team members were very open and receptive to maximize their performance and to learn new skills of communication and team building.

Team Performance

We feel that our performance curve was gradually increasing with time as we pinpoint the shortfalls and discuss them as a team such that they can be avoided. The factors that helped in climbing up the curve so quickly are as follow:

- 1) The team spent much time in the formation stage as team members did not know each before this course. However, starting the following week, the team members were very decisive to alleviate the performance, as it was the only way out to achieve the course requirements in the time frame. The storming stage very short. The norming stage was also short. The performing stage was the longest one. The team has trust established earlier in the process and was easy to build team dynamics on it.
- 2) All team members have enormous team building background from work and fully understand the power of the team and how it can help achieve the most difficult obstacles. All team members also come from high-performance ethic culture and they share the same engineering culture background. Therefore, it was very homogeneous and harmonic as we got along very easily and understood one another.
- 3) The team members understood the busy schedules of each one, and we divided up the work fairly and equally in a way that insured commitment of 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.
- 4) 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.
- 5) 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.
- 6) Team members have previous virtual team experiences which helped this team work around schedule and availability conflicts

Meetings

The first meeting was carried out between two members only, as the rest of the members joined the team in the 2nd class during week two. 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 deliverables. 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. We tried to find the most suitable time for the regular weekly meeting, and we found that Sunday at 2 PM works for all team members. However, work was divided among team members and they were expected to deliver on time. All members were expected to submit the required work through the group email prior to the meeting time to allow for review before the meeting, and to maximize the benefit of the meeting. We acted more like a virtual team than a local team. This approach was successful since most team members have worked in virtual teams and developed the skills needed for high performance teams.

Decision meetings were reasonably well focused, short (1 hour after week 3). Most of the meetings focused on the main deliverables such as team ownership, selected readings, process report and the research part. However, it is worth mentioning that SRs were handled individually by each team member, and only updates and highlights were given during the meeting and to also give feedback.

The organizational aspects, scheduling conflicts, promptness and preparedness were the biggest challenge with the meetings. Moreover, the team did not appoint a leader at the first three week and we felt that the unguided team was loosely to perform specially after the first ownership presentation. The team decided to appoint a team leader such that he can follow up on the given work, milestones and make sure that the deliverables are submitted on time. Nonetheless, the team agreed to have different facilitator of the meetings, each time we meet we agreed on the next meeting's facilitator such that he can prepare the agenda and insure that critical elements are covered.

Contribution:

Contribution is considered one of the important factors for the team to reach their goals. Contribution within the team can be classified into two types of contribution; project or assignment contribution and discussion contribution. In our team we implemented two kinds of contribution, the team members were contributed on each selective reading that was assigned to the team, 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 for any future addition to be added to the summary report that gave the chance to all team members to contribute in each selective reading. Also the team members worked together on the research report and every one was assigned a work by the team that made every team members participate on the research report that divided the worked evenly between the team members, and every member had an equal load of work.

The second type of contribution the team had practiced is the discussion contribution which considers the best tools for team members to share their ideas and experiences, and most of this sharing happened through discussions. The team has practiced sharing opinions and ideas in the weekly meetings. In each weekly meeting the team members rotated the leader ship of the meeting which gives the opportunity to each team members to participate in the meeting as a facilitator. The team members faced some challenges to practice participation during the weekly meetings. The challenges that the team faced were overbearing, dominating, and reluctant participants.

Overbearing participants would lead to hold an unusual amount of impact in the team. Dominating participants dominate the meetings which irritate other team members and consume more time in meetings. Reluctant participants usually feel shy or have a fear of rejections. To overcome those challenges the team imposed some tips which deal with those challenges. First, implement balance participation which gives an equal participation to each individual on the team to share and propose his thoughts and ideas by taking turns which encourages every team members to contribute in the meetings. Secondly, when a team member takes more time in expressing his idea or deviating from the discussed topic, the team members or the meeting facilitator to interfere and get the meeting back on the track. Finally, contribution is an important ingredient for the recipe of successful team.

Communication:

The communication tools that our team had used were face-to-face, and Internet based communications. Face-to-face communication is used on our weekly meetings; it has a big impact on establishing a deeper trust between the team members, and offered the team members to understand each other's individually, and the communication style that every team member was used. On face-to-face meetings, clear communication among the team members was very important key to have fruitful discussion, active listening and clear speaking were the key for a clear communication during meetings discussion. Clear communication helped team member to convey their opinions and ideas to the other members.

The Internet based communication channel was the second means that the team was used to communicate virtually. Electronic communication channels solve and support networking collaboration among team members when they communicate. E-mail was the common scheme, which was used to send each individual work or assignment to the whole team to share it and review it, e-mail saves time for the team to share their work without the need to physically attend to see each individual work. Also, e-mail; it is considered a global platform, cost effective, easy to use and access, and the ability to send attachment effectively and quickly.

Commitment:

One crucial factor for the team is the responsibility that each team member should hold it to fulfill the team goal. Doing the work that was assigned to each team member on the appropriate way on the assigned time requires commitment and dedication of all team members. Each individual should commit to be a part of the team's success which can be done by focusing on the team's goal and helping other team members to complete their work. Also, each team members 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 to send an e-mail 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 over all team to progress and maintain strong momentum.

Roles

We tried to have an equal participation of each member in each of the contribution and the delivery of the materials. Also, we decided to try the roles rotation of the meeting facilitator, time keeper and note taker such that each member will have a different role to give a chance for learning of team building tactics. Nonetheless, the team decided from the beginning that flexibility is the theme such that whenever a member feels that a particular role conflicts with his interest or his other work, it is left optional. For example, we did not make a table of facilitators or the note takers as it was left to be decided during the meeting time. That was made flexible as some of the team members had several other commitments for other personal, school or work related reasons since they require a follow up work. Moreover, the team took the approach of having a consensus decision making process such that every one's opinion is valuable and taken into consideration. That approach made the team members feel accountable and share the sense of working together as a high performance team. However, when there are disagreements "such as in selecting the type of ice breaking game" the team opted to use the voting techniques. Moreover, there were some instances, where a one-man decision was practiced, which was proposed by a team member to provide incentives for the classmates' participations. The other team members bought in the idea and accepted the decision since that member agreed to take the responsibility of his decision

Relationships

It was that a good spirit is required to boost up the performance of the team. The team members had a great interpersonal relationship, which were based on mutual respect. There were absolutely no frictions whatsoever with the work distribution, or the decisions being made. There were good side discussions regarding one another's cultures and past experiences, which alleviated the trust and the level of collaborations. All of the team members were mature professionals, and have a great expectation of one another. Such diversity made the team fruitful in a sense that it gave a different "special" image of our team by having different approaches.

Team Progress

The team performance was increasing as the time went by. It was following the typical team performances such that the first stage was intensive work by clarifying the goals, the expectations, the work load, getting to know the members potentials and capabilities. As time passed by, the members had the same level of understanding; less time was being spent on clarifying the work, divisions of the load and so forth.

Problems and Conflicts Resolution

Our team is good at avoiding problems and conflicts, so we did not go through so many barriers in this area. However, the problem initially with the changing of the team members as the team started with 6 members in the first week. After a week, 4 members dropped out, yet it was overcome by having 3 new members to join the team. Afterwards, the main issue the new team had to deal with was schedule conflicts. With several team members being overcommitted in their school and professional work, it was difficult to find enough time to meet and do the work together as a team. However, since the team has the trust, early notice was accepted for deferral of the meetings, or having one member to be late or not to show when the time did not allow. The main conflict we face is meeting schedule. Most of us have jobs on working days and others, for some reasons, are very busy too. So it is very hard for us to figure out a suitable time for all to have a meeting. After some discussion and a little adjustment to individual schedules, we finally decided we will meet at 2:00pm of every Sunday. And we made ground rules that if somebody has a sudden issue and cannot attend the meeting, he should inform others before the meeting. We usually go well with team meetings. Just for one time, one member missed the meeting without any prior notice. We called him, but he did not answer. The team decided to proceed with the meeting and assign his part in his absence with a backup plan (dividing his parts amongst the remaining members) in case he has a serious matter to prevent him from delivering the assigned work. After the meeting, we email him for an explanation of the absence and if he can finish his part. Finally, he replied and apologized for disarrangement, because he suffered a terrible personal emergency that prevented him from even emailing communication, and confirming to deliver his part, which was done professionally. In our team, there are some members who are really talented planners and all other teammates have an open mind to receive ideas. Usually in a meeting, we can make a decision very fast. That member will present the tasks we have to go through and provide a potential solving plan. Since he is naturally good at analyzing problems and has considerable amount of experiences with work and a good education background, his plans are very effective and efficient. Then, others add some comments about the plan if there is any. After that we make a little modification and quickly sum up final version of plan. The next phase is dividing tasks. To make burden shared equally and wisely, we take some more time discussing the characteristics of the tasks and who has experiences of dealing with similar issue. We first arrange the most crucial tasks to the most suitable person and then leave other tasks to members who are flexible about work. In this way, we worked smoothly with class presentations, reading assignments and reports.

Another important issue is making sure all teammates deliver what they promised in time. Since members of our team come from different cultures, we have different valuations about issues, like "being in time". So in the first few weeks, we made ground rules about deadline of finishing individual work and email it to others. We made this deadline a little earlier than class's so that we can review members' work

and make sure there is no digression or any obvious mistake. Comments are encouraged to increase the quality of our works and furthermore, make team members getting familiar to each other's ability of delivering a high quality work. We used these comments to evaluate our system of making plans and arranging tasks. In this feedback system, we all can benefit about knowing better of ourselves' advantages and disadvantages and of course others'.

Lessons Learned

We have learned a lot as the time proceeded, and we managed that a short meeting after the class can clarify a lot of points. Thus, most of the work was done by the individual at their own time and communicated later through emails and phones only. We also learned that with good planning, preparedness and commitments lots can be accomplished. The team members learned that they should be prepared for the short meetings after the class such that each individual can pick the work that interests him, then by Friday night they can share their findings with the team for review. We learned that virtual communication can be very helpful, but it has to be organized in such a way that each member knows what and when to expect an item for review and what to provide the feedback. Moreover, we learned that assigning a meeting facilitator who is responsible for preparing the agenda for the meeting and informing the team of the deliverables, and drawing a scheme of execution such that the members can come prepared. We also learned that taking a well formatted notes can help in summarizing the items discussed including the action plans, and we learned after the second meeting that a lap-top to be brought to the meeting such that the minutes can be written and sent to all members during the closure of the meeting. Such understanding made it possible for us to shorten the Sunday meeting and make it only a decision-making meeting. Also, we learned that the team members have different skills, so we had presentation's dry-runs with part of the team members, those who needed to rehearse as the schedule of the members did not allow all members to get together at the same time. We found this approach to help the team members and gave its fruits by building enough confidence to participants. We also learned that in some cases there could be some members who would not deliver the required work due to personal circumstances and the team learned to always have a backup member for the workload assigned to any of the other members.

Team Effectiveness

We would like to highlight some of the ways of how we strived to be an effective team.

- We are a small group of team of five in number and as illustrated by the team performance curve from the book "The wisdom of teams", we are committed to take the risks of conflict and collective action and built a set of goals for our team like to deliver the best in every week's presentation, divide the work in writing selected readings and setting up weekly meeting.

- We had a clear unity of purpose since the beginning of the term and we discussed the team objectives and made sure that the team goals are meaningful to each group member.
- On the very first day of our team meet we discussed the goals and ideas to form an effective team. We had clear, explicit and mutually agreed approach and rules in our team. We constantly cross checked among ourselves and if we had a problem then we took it to the open discussion and solved it accordingly.
- We set our meeting atmosphere (library) to be informal and comfortable, so that everyone is involved and interested but not tensed.
- We always used to get into lot of discussion which involved sharing of ideas and
- We gave ourselves freedom in expressing our feelings as well as our ideas at any point of time in the team discussions. Even when there is a disagreement between the team members we gave it a thought and understood the logical implications of the person's idea and came to an understanding of the situation.
- We did plan on shifting the leadership time to time on a weekly basis, because every team member would get a chance of leading the team and can understand the team leader's role very effectively in experience.
- In our team discussions, we ensured that all viewpoints are explored and properly understood by every team member. We also observed that each member of our team has participated voluntarily and has maintained confidentiality.
- We showed loyalty to our team leader whoever acted every week and strived to collect open and honest information from the available sources.
- We formed as a diversified team where each member of the team emphasized on attention to task, goal setting, and focus on progress at regular intervals.

Conclusion

In conclusion, we feel that building an effective team is an art and can be achieved. Furthermore, good planning, having the right team members and standing on clear ground rules can increase the level of expectation and the accountability of all the team members. We also learned that the trust in the team is an essential element that must not be ignored, especially if the team is aiming at being a high performance team.

References

[1] Jon R. Katzenbach and Douglas K. Smith, *The Wisdom of Teams: Creating the High-Performance Organization*, Collins Business Essentials, 2003