



# The Effectiveness of Team Building and Communications in Virtual Team

Team 4

**Course Title:** Communication and Team Building

**Course Number:** ETM 522 / 622

**Professor:** Ilknur H. Tekin

**Term:** Fall

**Year:** 2013

**Team R.A.M.S:**

Sean McGraw  
Ryan Menze  
Alaa Nour  
Melinda Pizzaro

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## **I. Introduction**

This team process report documents Team 3: R.A.M.S. behavior and its impact on team performance as we have embarked in the challenge of being a virtual team during this school term while completing our ETM 522 team project. In order to gain first-hand experience with team building and communication effectiveness, we participated in a case study, which includes all project related communications taking place over the various communications tools available.

## **II. Formation of teams**

The four stages of team formation: Forming; Storming; Norming; and Performing did take place throughout various times of the project. Team formation was quickly established during the first day of class. Proximity of where individuals sat during the initial class played a role in team member selection. Even though some team members have worked together on projects, all have not worked together as a team. Contact information was exchanged and placed on Google Drive. During this stage a team charter was written and agreed upon by the team. Also, a team name was selected. We chose the name R.A.M.S. which is an acronym made from the first initial from each of the team members names.

A storming stage did occur briefly during our class break where team members gave suggestions as to what would be a good topic to research for our team project. Assignment of roles on workload distribution took place in choosing which selected reading assignments we would like to turn in for our team writings. Some conflict did occur in that Alaa & Sean, Sean & Melinda, and Melinda & Alaa selected the same topics. But, team members were willing to trade-off and compromise as to who would actually take on the assignment. Next, we established a process of how we would be conducting our team meetings via web conferencing using Google Hangouts, which Ryan set up. Also, it was agreed upon that Google Drive would be used to store and share documents, again Ryan created our group folder.

The norming stage includes the progress that team members made towards our goal of our project. Sean was selected as the team leader. Regular team meetings were established, we would meet every Monday at 7:00 p.m. As part of our team charter, we did take into consideration personal life needs, because it is a reality that unexpected things come up in life. We had to adjust a couple of meetings, moving our regularly scheduled Monday meeting to Tuesday due to unavailability of team members. The first instance Sean had an appointment and the second, Melinda was traveling. Both times the three other team members were willing to be flexible and accommodate the needs of the two individuals.

Members acknowledged and took responsibility of assignments and tasks. We decided that as a team process for our selected writings that each team would write up their report then place it in Google Drive for team members to review and give feedback. On the day that the selected

reading is due, that person would also print out the report to hand in during class. For our class ownership presentations, we divided parts among group members letting team members choose the parts that they would be most comfortable presenting. As a team, we were constantly referring back to the class syllabus to ensure that we were providing the essential information required for the entire class to benefit from our presentation. We used the same process as with our selected readings to put our presentation slides on the Google Drive for critique and review. Alaa volunteered to print out the presentation for our instructor.

Our Team Project Report was constructed in the same fashion as the other assignments, guided by the syllabus. As a team plan, we wanted to have our rough draft of the paper done a week before its deadline. We all complied to this decision and this worked out well because we were able to review the paper and edit it with plenty of time. Therefore, we did not feel pressure of cramming to finish our report. An outline was constructed by Melinda and placed in the project folder. During our team meeting, it was used as a starting point to develop ideas and give suggestions on the creation of our report. Ryan took charge as the note taker during our meetings. He documented action items that the team members were assigned. We kept a single document that was updated weekly during our meetings as a reference document, which would be used in writing our process report. The document can be found in Appendix portion of this process report. We all agreed that this would aid us in remember what team members did by providing details of our contributions.

Performance is key to our team's success, which will be discussed more throughout this process report.

### **III. Pros and Cons of teams, team mission and goals**

All four team members committed from the first meeting to perform well to get a good grade in "Communication and Team Building" class. The team set up weekly meetings and established Google Drive to share ideas and files for the class projects and assignments. It did not take long for the team member to know each other as all the members worked together in former projects. Three team members, Sean, Melinda and Alaa, have worked together in several projects in the ETM department. Sean and Alaa were taking another class this quarter and were a team in the other class as well. Ryan and Melinda, both work at Daimler Trucks North America and have been on a project team together in the past. Interpersonal skills and mutual understanding was required in order to move forward.

As all R.A.M.S. team members are engineers, who usually work in teams, we understand that communication and team building skills are important to develop as early as possible. Moreover, many researchers show that individuals learn effectively from each other and point out that their are many advantages of working collaboratively with other students. By keeping these points in

minds, the team members' main interest was to develop communication and team building skills and have fun with the class.

As the team was working on the team charter, the mission and goal to achieve a good grade (A) was established while building team member skills, committing and contributing to team work, meeting the schedule with all team members' agreement.

Team members were always aware of the team goals, deadlines, and personal responsibilities within the group, which in turn impacted the contribution of all the team members to all activities and presentations. Sean, the team leader, was always well-prepared before our regular weekly meeting and ensures that the team always working on the highest priority work and is aware of the priorities and schedule so that the team are delivering the most possible value to our tasks.

We, the R.A.M.S. team, fulfilled the team goals specified in our team charter. We working towards an A grade for all team members. We enjoyed our time and all team members were all fully committed to the success of the team. By meeting the team mission and goals, we expect an overall accomplishment for Communication and Team building class.

#### **IV. Understanding Teams: What is a high performing team?**

Each team member, while always looking out for the team, acted very independently of each other throughout the term. The reason behind this is due to our different backgrounds and due to schedule conflicts. Each team member throughout the term based their actions on their past and current experiences in their current position or interaction in teams through university studies.

Each team member in team R.A.M.S. consistently acted in a selfless way by offering up to help wherever needed regardless if it was an assigned task to them. As an example, just in the process of writing up this report Ryan constantly offered to help write extra sessions should one of the team members not be able to due to scheduling conflicts and workload. This is just one instance of this action amongst team members.

Fortunately, within the span of the term we did not see in negative actions that supported the need for consequences. Nor did any of the actions the team took in working through the term create unnecessary circumstances that were not expects.

Within team R.A.M.S. we did not employ any type of informal or formal rewards system by the setting of a team rule. Prizes or awards were not handed out amongst our team but consistent feedback and encouragement were. This led to everyone in the team to feel valued as a member of the team and strive to achieve to be a high performing team.

## **V. From Individual to team performance**

Just because an individual is a high performer does not mean that they will work well in a team. This is not true of everyone but can be the case for some. Our team of four people came from very different backgrounds and we had some hurdles to overcome. These hurdles were not unique to our team and due to everyone's initiative in being high performing individuals we overcame them with ease.

One team member, Alaa, is from Saudi Arabia. This individual is soft spoken but contributes greatly to the team. Upon further discussion it became apparent that Alaa was nervous as English is not her native language. Alaa was nervous giving group presentations being very self-conscious of her English speaking skills. However, as a team we agreed that Alaa's English skills were very good and encouraged her to challenge herself during the presentations. The outcome was great giving fresh perspective on teamwork to both the team and the class.

Two members of our team, Sean and Alaa, were taking additional classes during this quarter. This was a challenge with choosing a meeting time and in assigning tasks. In understanding these limitations we chose a meeting time that we could all meet in the evenings, Monday Evenings at 7 pm, and ensured that we planned everything far in advance. This planning process allowed individuals to utilize their strengths and reduced the number of surprises that would arise from deadlines coming up. The meeting was a standing weekly meeting and even if there were no major deliverables to discuss it allowed the team to discuss future plans and ensured we were all on the same page.

## **VI. Learning to work Together**

The R.A.M.S. team had a specific task, and a tight deadline. The four-member team was composed of three full time employees and one full time student. The team agreed to meet once a week and spend about two hours a week outside of their regular jobs to work on the project. The first challenge the team faced was the schedule conflict when conducting our team meeting. Since Ryan, Melinda, and Sean are full-time employees and Alaa is a full-time student, each member has different schedules. Alaa and Sean are committed to another class this quarter. Furthermore, members who have kids and family need to take care of their kids and families. The team overcame this conflicted schedule by becoming a virtual team.

In the first week meeting, the team members developed an outline for the team final project as well as the class ownership. The team agreed on showing high commitment to the success of the project. Early on in the project, Ryan began clustering various tasks into groups of work; the clustered works then were further explained in a shared word document via Google Drive. The team was assigned to create a high-quality team charter, which was agreed upon and executed to

improve communication among team members in regards of specifications of the team mission, roles of individual team members, authority and boundaries of the team and its members.

All the members in the team show an attitude of respect for professional colleagues, which in turn positively affected the virtual experience for all members. Each had an opportunity to contribute his or her own special interests and talents, and each trusted that others would see their portion of the work toward the completion of the project. Team members agreed to do high-quality individual work then brought it back to the team for discussion.

From the beginning, the team had agreed that in order to achieve high quality and efficient outcomes, we need proper and good communication skills including both written and oral. As a virtual team, we are interested in the ability of team members to communicate effectively using computer communication technologies. The teams decided to perform their tasks using emails, Google Drive for documentation, and Google Hangout for meetings.

The commitment to the task and to each other as team members helped to function as a whole, and keep up a high level of intensity. As most of our communication was through emails, the team's emails were considered as a high priority emails. The team meetings through Google Hangout were planned well by the team leader Sean prior to our weekly meetings in order for the team to be up to the schedule. During the team meeting Ryan kept notes on actions agreed upon. He was responsible to place agreed upon notes right into the text of the notes and schedule minutes document. Immediately, after the team meeting, the final copy of the meeting minutes was available in Google Drive. This was convenient so that team members could reference information about the meeting when needed and allow anyone who missed a call to be updated.

The team member's skills and abilities, shared commitment, and desire to contribute to achieve the team requirements contributed heavily to successful task completion. Pre-planned and electronically distributed agendas with action items and a lively and active interchange of emails were processes that enabled the team to fulfill the class requirements successfully.

## **VII. Constructive Feedback and Cross-Cultural team management**

Constructive feedback within our project team included reviews of written documents. Members would critique and give suggestions on how to improve our papers, it was a give and take mentality in order to learn from each other. We also received feedback during from our instructor, Ilknur Tekin, on the papers we submitted and after our class ownership session. Comments and suggestions were given to help our team improve where needed. We utilized the feedback from our first session to improve our second classroom ownership presentation, which we felt was a success because we received more points compared to the first presentation. When feedback is given members of the team respected the person speaking by actively listening to what they had to say. Suggestions on how to improve performance and recognition was given to

team members. Contributions to team progress was always recognized. Team members asked each other if assistance was needed in their parts of the project. All members were willing to jump in and help each other.

Feedback was also given to team members about our electronic communications. It was noticed by team members that Melinda had an echo the first few meetings that were held. Upon hearing this, she tried using another computer to resolve this issue, even though it was not a serious problem. It was mentioned to Sean that it seemed that his connection was lagging behind. During the meeting he tried another means of connecting, which allowed better communication. In both cases, team members were honest with each other, which continued to build trust within the team dynamics. Also, all were willing to be understanding to each others technical difficulties. Positive and negative feedback were used to make improvements to our team assignments. By having open communication between teammates makes it easy to trust one another.

Cross-cultural team management included four students from various backgrounds, which includes to men and two women. It was a good balance that gave a mixture of points-of-views. The class ownership presentations were a great opportunity to develop skills in presenting. We found it interesting how the two women and the two men in the group wrote our presentation notes similarly yet different. We saw that Alaa & Melinda placed our notes in paragraph form, while Ryan and Sean had bulleted slides and notes. Also, the men were more comfortable with the interactive style of presenting, while the women were more at ease with the lecture style.

Cultural background was not a factor in the way that we functioned as a group. It did play a part in comfort level during class ownership, since English as a second language can be a personal challenge. But with team support, a person can overcome their hesitation and give an excellent presentation, as we saw Alaa do. We all were surprised that Alaa mentioned that she was more comfortable presenting during session 3 rather than session 7, because to us, Melinda, Ryan, Sean, and the instructor she appeared to be more relaxed during the second session. Our take away from this experience is to be reassuring and encouraging in order to assist teammates that may be weary of presenting.

## **VIII. Major Team Problems & Distributed teams performance**

Seeing that our team comes from a diverse background there was potential for issues to arise such as, miscommunication, cultural differences, and ideology, among others. Our team, however, due to our diverse background have become versed in working in such situations. Sean works at Intel with a large multi-cultural workforce, while Melinda and Ryan work at Daimler and work with suppliers all over the world and Alaa is an international student who has spent many years living and studying abroad. Each member of the team treated each other's views and ideas with respect and thoughtfulness.



Our team also had the potential for major team problems due to our work and school schedules and our team's decision to work team meetings virtually. Due to our acceptance of each other and the understanding that our team research report would focus around virtual teams we took the challenge upon ourselves to work virtually. Each team member worked independently to complete different aspects of the work assigned during the term, but it was completed with such pride that each team member was perceived by the others as trustworthy and as an asset to the team.

## **IX. Team Leaders, team performance & Teams and Major Change**

As all the team members are in the Engineering and Technology Management program leadership was not a problem. All team members took a leadership type role within the various tasks that were assigned to them. This was each team members perception of their role in the team.

When tasked with the primary research position during our first presentation, Melinda took it upon herself to perform the research, build some presentation slides and share them with the rest of the team. However, Alaa had taken the same initiative preparing an almost identical presentation. While this demonstrates poor communication on the teams part it does exemplify the leadership and initiative the team was willing to take to achieve our goal. This poor communication happened early in the teams life so we quickly realized that the team needed to be pro-active in designating tasks to ensure there was no duplication of efforts.

The high performing individual characteristic of each team member was further reinforced when performing the marshmallow tower building activity in class. This activity also helped bring our team together further by achieving a difficult task. The task was to build the tallest tower we could that could support a large marshmallow at the top using only spaghetti noodles, tape and string. Our team achieved building the tallest tower through a combination of team members picking up the work that had to be done, given the short time period we had (12 minutes), and each member offering their experience and expertise to ensure a strong, free standing structure.

## **X. Conclusion**

Our team's success is based on a common goal, direction, and the team members commitment. There were obstacles that the team faced, but we were able to overcome because of the communication between team members and the willingness to help and support each other. We found team members were willing to step up and volunteer to help each other with all the work load we were assigned. Each individual showed commitment when it came to tasks assigned, work completed was done to the highest level, in order to become a high performance team. Everyone was willing to become the leader of the team, taking the initiative to lead certain

portions of the assignments. Communication was a key factor especially since we were conducting our meetings as a virtual team. There were a few pain points with technical difficulties during communications but this did not hinder the team in any way. As a team, we all felt that we progressed through the team performance curve to become a high performance team.

## **XI. Appendix A- Meeting Minutes and schedule**

### **Week 1:**

10/2 - Formed Project Team  
Team contact information collected and distributed to team members  
Distributed workload  
10/16 - Class ownership  
10/16 - Case Study “burlington” - Ryan  
10/16 - Team Charter Document - Discuss Wednesday  
10/23 - SR 3 - Alaa  
10/30 - SR 4 writeup - Ryan  
11/06 - SR 5 Writeup - Melinda  
11/13 - Class ownership  
11/13 - Team Research report  
11/13 - SR 6 Writeup - Sean  
12/04 - Team Process report and presentations, Final Presentations

Selected team project: Virtual Teams  
Set up meeting schedule  
Decision to meet using Google Hangout to get first hand experience  
Set up Google Drive for documentation  
Google Hangout invite sent out to team members

### **Week 2:**

10/7 - Initial project team meeting via Google Hangout  
Melinda’s first time to use Google Hangout (Technology challenges: first computer used did not have a webcam, so logged in with another laptop)  
Made changes to team writeups selected  
Team Report: Team collaboration using electronic meetings  
Sean has contacted grad school friend for survey  
Literary research - All  
Determine what is currently available for virtual meetings  
Selected readings:  
Sean to have something written tomorrow - Posted by noon on wednesday - Read through before class.  
Some team members have not received all of the books required for this class  
Team members were willing to share their resources  
Session 3 Plan: Team Discussion  
Agreed on presentation breakdown

Ryan and Sean will take first half  
Alaa and Melinda will take second half  
Suggestions on various ways of presenting brought up  
Slides  
Interactive discussion  
Q & A  
Decision to wait until we view other team presentations to gauge how we  
want to formulate our presentation  
Members should try to have all readings done by Friday 10/11  
Emails will be used to communicate ideas for presentation

### Week 3:

- Team Presentation
- Sean - Present first 6 slides
- Ryan - Present next 4 slides
- Melinda - High Performance/performance curve/team progress
- Alaa - What is a team, team basics
- Print a copy of the presentation - Alaa
- SR Case Study (Burlington Northern)
- All members to review Ryan's report and give feedback 6PM on Tuesday
  
- Team Charter
  - Add section stating "we are all leaders/there is no one leader"
  - Sean to be named "team leader"
  - Should we add a "skills" section? - No
  - Melinda to print and bring to class for everyone to sign
  
- Team Report
  - Sean to add report to the google drive
  - Areas of research:
    - Method for virtual Meetings
    - Methods for virtual Communication
    - Assembling virtual Teams
    - Challenges with Virtual Teams
    - Time Zones
    - Culture
- Bring research Ideas to Wednesday's class

## **Week 4:**

Notes on presentation:

- Pick packet from ETM office - Sean to pick up
- Discuss in class on Wednesday
  
- Team Project Report:
  - Melinda - Thank you for doing the outline! Looks great!
  - Translate into Google docs? - Ryan
  - Survey - Sean - Good to have real world data - 5-7 questions
  - Melinda - Ready paper that had survey data - to post to Google drive
  - Team Communication - Ryan
  - Communication Tools - Melinda
  - Challenges - Sean
  - Melinda - Learning towards do teams find it an effective way to build/run/communicate with teams

## **Week 5:**

Have done by next weeks meeting.

- Survey results section - Sean
- Case study - Alaa, Melinda to help
- Recommendations - Melinda
- Conclusion - Ryan
- Selected Reading 4 - Read by noon tomorrow
- Ryan to print off and bring to class tomorrow.

Dog barking in background when Sean was on his phone.

## **Week 6:**

Talked with several people that have real world virtual team experience

- Have done by Wednesday
- Survey results section - Sean
- Conclusion - Ryan
- Recommendations and case study sections added to the report
- Melinda to print and bring selected reading to class
- Class Ownership
  - Activity from Memory Jogger - Discuss in class on Wednesday
  - Selected reading 6 - Sean to work on presentation

### **Week 7:**

- Team Report - Finalize - Alaa - Bring hard copy to class
- SR6 - Read and get back to Sean by Wednesday morning 9 am
- Class Ownership -
  - “Activity” - Draft Idea - Portland - Ryan
  - Melinda and Alaa to present results
  - SR 6 - Proposition slides - Sean
  - SR 6 - Intro - Ryan

### **Week 8:**

- Team Process report
  - Melinda got a great start
  - Use class syllabus as outline for paper
  - Each section should contain a success and challenge case.

### **Week 9:**

- Team Process Report
  - Add team-meeting minutes
  - Add specific examples for your sections
  - Use conclusion to stretch or shrink paper according to length requirements
- Team Process Presentation
  - Google hangout to present - Yes
  - Sean in room - Everyone else at ‘remote’ site
  - Reserve a room - Conference room across from GSA offices - Look on Wednesday
  - Screen share vs. Google presentation discuss on Wednesday
  - Write up outline for presentation - Ryan - discuss on Wednesday in class

## XII. Appendix B- Team Charter

Team Management

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### TEAM CHARTER

Team Name: Team 3 - R.A.M.S.

#### **Mission:**

This team has been formed as part of ETM 522 to complete the course, “Communication and Team Building” and the following team project, “Virtual Teams”. Our goal is to demonstrate understanding of the course material through class participation, a project report and a final presentation.

#### **Output Target:**

As team members we will help each other and we will be dedicated towards the progress of our project.

We will use our individual strengths to further our team performance.

We will use our time efficiently to accomplish all assigned tasks in a timely manner.

Participation is expected by all team members.

We will demonstrate mutual respect for each other.

#### **Basis for Interest:**

The team has elected to interact as a virtual team throughout the course, in order to get first hand experience.

**Team Members:** \*Team Leader--Even though we have selected a team leader, all members of the team will actively take the lead throughout the project to develop leadership skills and help support one another.

**Our team name “R.A.M.S.” was generated by using the initials of our first names.**

Ryan Menze  
Alaa Nour  
Melinda Pizarro  
Sean McGraw\*

**Team Sponsor:**

Professor Ilknur H. Tekin, MBA, MSc  
The Team Sponsor can assist the team with barriers.

Key Milestones	Timing	Resources
Class Ownership	10/16/13	Time availability- team members will commit an appropriate amount of time to assigned tasks
Case Study “Burlington”	10/16/13	
Team Charter	10/16/13	
Selected Reading 3	10/30/13	
Selected Reading 4	11/06/13	
Selected Reading 5	11/13/13	Literary research- selection of information through the Library or internet
Class Ownership	11/20/13	
Team Research Report	11/20/13	
Team Process report and presentations, Final Presentations	12/11/13	Communication- The willingness to talk, listen and share ideas and opinions with mutual respect is essential

Key Challenges	How to Overcome
Time Constraints	Virtual Meetings will be conducted; electronic communication will be used
Time Management	Come to meetings prepared; Documents will be used: Meeting agenda, minutes, progress notes will be implemented to
Personality Issues	We agree to work towards compromise



Personal Commitments	<p>Consideration given; All team member have agreed to be dedicated and a willing participant to accomplish our team's goal. We realize that there are various circumstances like employment, family emergency, sickness, etc., that might affect any individual's performance and success during this process. Therefore, we have a team agreement that the individual should notify the Group Leader immediately to help work out a solution.</p> <p>Address issues head-on and immediately as a team</p>
Conflicts	

Signature:

Sean McGraw	10/16/2013
	10/16/2013
Ryan Menze	10/16/2013
Alaa Nour	10/16/2013
Melinda Pizarro	