



Team Process Report

Course: Communication and Team Building in Engineering Management

Course Number: ETM 522/622

Instructor: Dr. Dryden

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Team: Team 1

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Executive Summary

The team process report describes the process lifecycle our team went through during the course of the term. Our team started with the advantage of being a potential team because many of the members had worked together in other classes and knew what worked and did not work in group projects.

Although we had very diverse backgrounds we had a strong common goal which was to excel in this class and master the material. We were very fortunate that all team members had similar work ethics, very hard working and professional, in addition to very diverse skill sets. Each person used their unique talents for the common good of the group.

This team strived for positive feedback from the class, when given constructive feedback it was immediately used to improve team performance. By the end of the class this team had traveled from forming, storming, norming to performing while also achieving skillsets in planning, delegating and encouraging others. These skills will allow us to progress not only through ETM but also throughout our lives.

Introduction

Our team consists of a very diverse and multicultural group of students; we have members from four different countries speaking six different native languages. Our team members have different professional backgrounds and levels of professional experience. Several members have worked together in other programs and classes at Portland State University. This team process report shares our successes, challenges, and obstacles as we have progressed during this class.

Teamwork

In order to analyze and describe the teamwork that has been done through the course, we will borrow a teamwork model from the Scrum software development methodology [1], this model consists of three components: People, Processes and Products. Within the Products component we distinguish between two categories: the course “Deliverables” and the “Tools”. People utilize these tools to work in the processes and generate deliverables. As mentioned above, team members selected the “People” component in the first session; other components were either proposed by the class instructor or selected collectively.

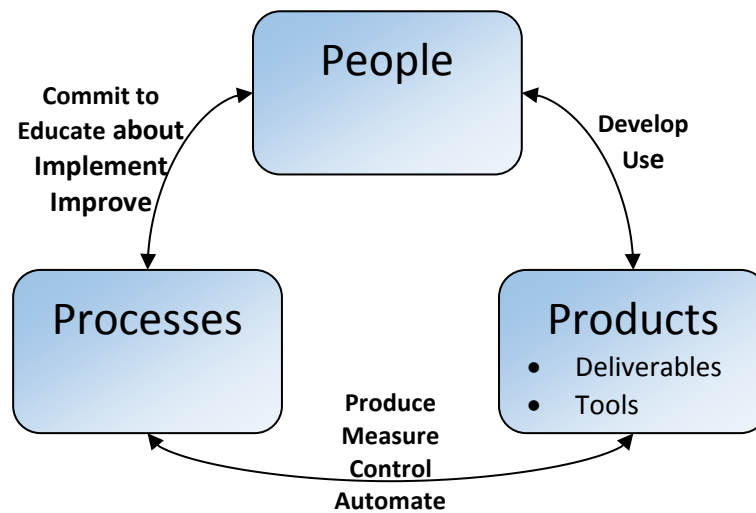


Figure 1 - People-Process-Product Model

People

The people component consisted of Nameer Al-Mulla, Ignacio Castillejos, Julie Golzarian, Kruti Narvekar, Kshiti Shah, and Namitha Shetty. Our team member's personal and professional backgrounds are very diverse as described in the brief profiles below:

Nameer Al-Mulla is a system test and QA Engineer. Nameer's education background is Civil engineering with a Master's degree from Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University. Nameer's work experience has been in software and system testing. Nameer is interested in gaining the right skills to develop his career in engineering management.

Ignacio Castillejos is a native of Mexico; he works as a Software Design Engineer in an electronics manufacturing company in Beaverton. He enjoys reading about science, technology and politics. He likes dancing and pretending he plays flamenco guitar. He earned a Master of Software Engineering at PSU and transferred to the ETM program, this is his fifth class in the program.

Julie Golzarian works full-time as a programmer analyst and balances family, work and school each day. She has three children all attending college. Julie previously attended the Oregon Masters of Software Engineering (OMSE) but just recently joined the ETM program. This is her first course in the Engineering and Technology Management (ETM) program.

Kruti Narvekar completed her MBA before joining the ETM program. She is very much interested in innovative technologies and management of emerging technologies. She hails from Texas and has been in Portland for about two years. Though she hates rain, she loves Portland for its uniqueness.

Kshiti Shah has an MBA in marketing. She has about eight years of work experience in sales and marketing in varied industries like banking, non-profit, food and telecom. She recently left her job to pursue ETM. This is her third term in the program and her interest area is project management. She enjoys spending time with her family, decorating cakes and dancing.

Namitha Shetty is a fulltime ETM student. She is from India and it's been 2 years for her in Portland. She loves everything about Portland from rain, street food, hiking, green and organic mania, to the hippie culture. She is inquisitive by nature and loves exploring and reading.

Products

Deliverables

Team members volunteered to lead the efforts on these assignments and asked for support from others. This worked particularly well because members felt empowered to choose what they wanted to work on, who they wanted to get help from and who they wanted to delegate tasks to. Within the team there was a sense of distributed leadership that was highly respected and appreciated [2]. The assignment types the team was tasked with were:

Team Charter - The team charter helped us define ourselves as a team and formulate a sense of purpose while collectively writing our mission and goal. Additionally it allowed us to create a draft plan for our activities for the term and identify, what we perceived at that point, as the key challenges we were going to face in our new endeavor.

Class Presentations - Presentations were the key learning in the course. It provided a valuable experience, especially for some of us who were not comfortable with public speaking and for whom English is not our first language. At the beginning of the course few of us suspected teams would play such a major role in delivering the class materials. Two of the team members had already worked together in a Communications class at PSU so we suspected the format would be similar. The team spent a good deal of time and effort not only preparing the presentations material but also practicing and timing them.

Suggested Readings - Team members were highly proactive about working on the Suggested Readings; in fact we never had to assign any of the Suggested Readings. Team members volunteered for reading and writing the reports well in advance of the deadlines set by the instructor. This allowed us to have several rounds of reviews and feedback to polish the final versions that were submitted to D2L.

Team Research Report - The team research report was owned by a couple of people and reviewed thoroughly by the team in one of the meetings. Julie and Kruti reviewed Organizational Studies literature and came up with a list of suggested books for our report. We decided to modify the original requirements for this deliverable and got approval from the instructor to concentrate on an in depth review of a single book. The selected book was "The Five Dysfunctions of a Team: A Leadership Fable" by Patrick Lencioni.

Team Process Report and Presentation - This report will give the reader an insight on our team development and the activities we carried out to transform ourselves into a high performing team. The process presentation is the planning phase as this report is being written. The draft plan includes presenting our experiences going through Tuckman's stages of group development and drawing an analogy to building a physical object during the presentation. At this point we plan on ending the presentation with a celebration for all of our team member's birthdays which happen to be in February and March.

Tools

In order for a team or individual to perform efficiently it has to have the right tools to collaborate and develop work products. The tools our team used are listed below:

Desire To Learn (D2L) - We used D2L mainly to retrieve class documents and to submit our deliverables. The platform proved to be very unreliable as it was down several times for extended periods of time. We have observed other courses use the Google Groups spaces, which are generated automatically for every course, as an alternative to D2L for sharing class documentation.

Dropbox - Dropbox was really helpful because all of us could access the class documents without having to go to PSU's D2L. It also allowed us to keep our work products synchronized and revision controlled in a very efficient way without having to worry about sharing emails with attachments. The team had ground rules in place that we all followed, such as, increasing the version number of each document after making changes (i.e. SR#1 Version 1.doc, SR#1 Version2.doc).

Traditional Communication Tools - More "traditional" communication tools like email and telephone were used for regular communication outside of the classroom. We mainly relied on email but also used phone calls for more personal one-on-one consultations.

Processes

Meetings - We modeled our agendas after the activity guidelines published in D2L. We tried to bring humor and fun to our meetings and preparations making them an enjoyable experience. Meetings were used for assigning and reviewing work as well as for planning and practicing the class presentations.

Individual Readings - Team members invested individual time reading the class materials (books, papers) as well as doing extensive research in books, papers and web resources in order to prepare the deliverables. These readings also included reviewing other team member's work and providing feedback.

Classes - Classes allowed us to play very different, albeit complementary roles. The first session, which was the only instructor led session, was a traditional class session and presented an opportunity to learn about the course and select the team members. As we volunteered for

presenting on the second session, our role changed from listeners to class facilitators. Finally the third session we played the role of active listeners again except this time the class was facilitated by our peers. The role switching between facilitators and listeners continued through the course. We definitely noticed that our confidence as facilitators grew as time progressed and we developed skills for researching and preparing relevant class material, as well as for speaking in front of an audience.

Stages of Group Development

The following sections describe how our team went through Tuckman's stages of group development as described in the Team Handbook [3].

Forming

Our team's forming stage started during the first class; we chose each other as team members mainly based on relationships we have built in previous classes. Julie and Nameer started a conversation about forming a team made up of members that live on the west side of the Portland Metro Area. Ignacio and Julie knew each other from previous classes so Julie invited Ignacio to be on her team and Ignacio brought along Namitha and Kshiti to be on the team too.

At that point our team had five members. Later Kruti Narvekar joined our team as a late addition to the class, rounding out the team to six members. We started with a very informal introduction and we probably almost immediately knew that our team members were very goal oriented and driven students. We exchanged our contact information, and Nameer took the initiative of sending it to the team.

The team had to take responsibility quickly and get organized to teach the class the very next week. After the first class was over we stayed back to spend some time together since we took the ownership of class the next week. We decided quickly that the PSU library was our meeting location of choice. The very next Saturday afternoon was the best day and time, Namitha volunteered to reserve a meeting room. There was still some anxiety about the assignments and the workload sharing so we all agreed to read all the required materials to be prepared to put the presentation together. We met that Saturday, reviewed the material and finalized the PowerPoint presentation. We agreed to meet the next day (Sunday) to practice our presentation and time it. At that point we did not have any knowledge of timing or flow, nor did we really know how our first lesson might proceed.

In retrospective a key success factor was the fact that we spent a great deal of time together in the beginning to gain trust and confidence as team members. There was diversity in our team and team members were sensitive and respectful of each other.

Storming

Our team did not experience a storming phase per se, perhaps because we knew some of the members from previous classes. The transition was smoother for us probably because we hand-

selected each of the members and actually turned away people who we suspected were not a good fit for our group. In addition, everyone in the team was confident to carry out their roles and action items in a very professional manner.

At some point there was a conversation when the first meeting team was reviewing SR#1 which arose due to some assumptions and might have caused little tension among the members. However, after providing some clarification and background we were able to handle the situation better and avoid the blame game. An excerpt of the conversion is presented below.

Kshiti – We need to use the standard format showing ETM logo on the SR template. Julie I have formatted your SR write-up on that template.
Julie - We can't do that since we are stealing the logo! That is cheating!
Kshiti & Namitha – No, that is not cheating. This is the ETM standard logo that we use for all the ETM submissions.
Julie – Really! I am sorry of accusation.
Kshiti- No problem, you probably were not aware since this is your first class in the program.
Nameer (on a lighter note) - Julie you are fired from the team!!!
All – (Laughs)

Figure 2 - Storming Conversation

In this phase there was still some suspicion and anxiety, each one of us might have had doubts from time to time about something that was said or done by another team member. As we progressed we learned to trust each other and knew that we could count on others to do their part. It really helped that several of our team members had been on other class project teams that had been unsuccessful and not positive. Those negative experiences helped to shape the positivity in our group. Also several of the team members had worked together on highly successful teams and that was an important success factor too.

Norming

From the beginning we realized that the each team member had unique strengths and we let everybody excel and experiment with different roles. We did not formally agree on a set of rules but everybody was really respectful of each other's time, being punctual to meetings, respecting opinions, asking the right questions in a polite manner, providing constructive feedback and looking for common ground when opinions differed.

We never really discussed how each team member could help the team as a group; instead each team member took responsibility for certain parts of our assignments. For example, Kshiti was the coordinator for the PowerPoint presentation plan while Namitha was the image guru and found fabulous on point images. Ignacio volunteered for submitting the deliverables in D2L and Nameer was the person who researched in –class activities and brought the printed materials needed for class each week. Julie and Kruti invested a lot of time reading books and papers, and initiated document drafts that the rest of the team finalized. Further the team members also shared personal, professional and cultural experiences. We also strengthen our professional network and talked about new career opportunities.

We are fortunate for having a strong bond and sense of trust allowing us to participate in our own way and come together very well. It seemed that all of us were willing to always go an extra mile whether it was looking for an in-class activity or sharing some real life experiences.

Performing

We all knew that we would sacrifice our quality weekend time with our families, for the sake of class success. After that initial 6-8 hours of preparation time together we had a very strong sense of our commitment and drive. We all knew that we were on a team of driven, hardworking professionals. Spending a few minutes after the class helped us to clearly identify each person's contribution in the team's next ownership. This gave us an advantage to divide and conquer truly demonstrating that a team together can definitely accomplish more than one individual.

Another remarkable behavior in our team was the fact that we all attended the great majority of classes even if we did not have ownership of the particular sessions. When team members had to miss class due to circumstances beyond their control, like sickness or final exams, we communicated to other team members. This demonstrated a sense of engagement and commitment to the course.

Lessons Learned

Over the course of this term we have all grown, improved and polished our team communication skills. We learned how a team forms, storms, norms and performs. We acquired skillsets in planning, delegating and encouraging others. We experienced the model of moving from a working group (set of individuals) to Pseudo team (no interest in sharing information) and to Potential Team (some of us would argue we started here seeking improvement and clarity) and then to Real Team (common purpose and mutually accountability) and finally we have become a High Performance team that has deeply committed members that will push for each other's personal goals and success. We look forward to working together in other classes and helping each other succeed. We can count on each other and we are certain our relationships will transcend this class and this team.

Conclusion

Going from a group of individuals to a high performing team in only a matter of weeks can happen if people have a strong and clearly defined goal. This was definitely the case for our group. We were driven to make sacrifices and to prioritize our work in such a way that we completed our group responsibilities and ensured a high standard was followed. We completed each part on time with a high degree of precision and quality. Everyone on this team contributed equally and could be counted on to bring their A game to every class session. In fact it was amazing to watch the brain storming sessions in action. A good idea became a great idea with achievable steps to divide and conquer. We definitely think that this team is now unquestionably a high achieving team.

References

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