ETM 522/622
Communication and Team Building in Engineering Management

Winter 2015
Professor: Dr. Fatima Albar

# Team process report

**Team 3**
Ahmed Al Shareef
Felix Sie
Nithin
Sudipta Tripathy

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## *Executive Summary*

As part of ETM 522/622 course the students formed teams to work together throughout the quarter. They were expected to read through prescribed text books and research material, prepare and present the concepts discussed in them in front of the class. Along with this the teams were expected to work on a project related to team building and communication. Also the team is expected to document and submit a team process report that is the team's self-analysis and assessment of what and how the team learnt in their endeavor to produce the various deliverables during the "Communication and Team Building" course in the winter term of 2015.

The below process report depicts the journey of Team 3 as they came together and synergized their efforts to develop the conceptual and then practical framework of team and to apply the learnings from the class to produce high quality deliverables as part of the course curriculum.

## *Introduction*

A team has "a small number of people with complementary skills who are committed to a common purpose, performance goals, and a common approach for which they hold themselves mutually accountable."[1]

As part of the "Communication and Team Building" course we have learned why a team is formed and what the key elements of a team are and what makes a team high performing. At first, the team formation is necessitated by a need for productivity or a performance challenge. After that need has been identified, then individuals are arrayed and all should be made aware of the productivity goals and objectives and the matrixes for performance measurement. In our case, we were challenged by a set of deliverables all of which had to be worked upon and produced as a team. The goal for us like all other teams part of the course was to get the best grades and also understand the concepts described in the textbooks and reading materials. There was no room for just individual performance. Even though each of us had his personal preference, skills and work approach, we had to rally around these deliverables and work together to produce results for each deliverable. To achieve these desired results we had to come up with an understandable work approach which suited everyone's work schedule and working style.

There were challenges we faced in our quest to succeed. The first and foremost challenge was to trust three completely unknown students on the first day of the class to form a team for an entire term earn the best of grades. It was an uphill task to get to know each other as early as possible in order to feel comfortable working together. Our team had members from Asia, Middle East and Africa. This diversity comes with both positive and negative aspects. We had to quickly adjust and overcome the communication barriers relating to accent and cultural upbringing. In all, we have enjoyed our team's various phases of forming, storming, norming and performing by overcoming the challenges.

Not only did we harvest each other's skills, experience and unique perspective towards various topics, but also utilized them to successfully meet our goals and learn from each other during these few weeks. This report shares the unique experience, hardships and success of the team in this class of Communication & Team Building.

## *Team Member Profiles*

**Ahmed Al Shareef** is from Iraq. He is currently a full time student in ETM Department, pursuing a master's degree. This is his second term. He has a bachelor's degree in Mechanical Engineering from College of Engineering, AL-Mustansiriya University, Baghdad, Iraq. Ahmed had been working for six years in Midland Refinery Company (MRC), Ministry of Oil. During his tenure at MRC, he has the experience of working as a team leader of the boiler maintenance department. He then moved into the project execution department. He was involved as a team member in implementation of several important projects such as Crude Oil Distillation, Reverse Osmosis (R.O) and installation of new pipe line.

**Felix Sie** is from Ghana. He is currently a full time student in the ETM program, pursuing a master's degree. This is his third term. He has a bachelor's degree in Computer Engineering from Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology, Kumasi, Ghana. Felix has been working as software engineer and team lead. He currently works part-time at PSU as a Business Intelligence assistant. During his leisure time he enjoys watching international soccer matches.

**Nithin** is a full time student of the ETM program, pursuing a master's degree. Nithin has a bachelor's degree in Electronics & Communication Engineering from Jawaharlal Nehru Technological University, India. Nithin has work experience in data synthesis and visualization. He is a sportsman at heart, who plays cricket in summer and volleyball all round the year.

**Sudipta Tripathy** is a part time student in the ETM program pursuing a master's degree. He has a full time job working as a Business System Analyst. He has more than 10 years of IT experience in the global delivery model as a Business System Analyst, Onsite Coordinator and Developer with domain knowledge spread across Manufacturing, Supply Chain management, Warehouse management, Travel & Transportation and Insurance.

## *Team Charter*

| |
|---|
| **Mission:** To pursue Communication and Team Building course with effective intelligence and learn concepts of implementing them in our day today work activities. |
| Output: Effectively utilize our skills to work out the deliverables of the course work. |
| Team Members: Ahmed Al-Shareef, Felix Sie, Nithin Nimmala Ramesh, Sudipta Tripathy |
| Team Manager: Dr Fatima Albar |

| Milestones | Tools Used | Resources |
|---|---|---|
| 1. Team Structure and basic guidelines (1st week)<br>2. Project Topic Selection and SR deliverable (2nd week)<br>3. Class Presentation and case deliverable (3rd week) | 1. Google Docs<br>2. Qualtrics.com<br>3. Uber Conference Call<br>4. E-mail<br>5. Whatsapp | 1. PSU library<br>2. Harvard cases<br>3. YouTube<br>4. Journals & Articles<br>5. Mindtools.com and other web resources. |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| 4. Class Presentation & SR deliverable (6th week)<br>5. Project Submission (7th week)<br>6. Process report Presentation & Presentation (10th week) | | |

| Challenges | How to Overcome |
|---|---|
| 1. Language barrier<br>2. Schedule coordination<br>3. Task distribution<br>4. Conflicts due to Work revision | 1. Listen patiently and clarify any doubts<br>2. Stick to a particular timing every week<br>3. Assign one's expertize<br>4. Appropriate explanation of work revision. |

## *Planning and Scheduling*

As soon as we formed the team in our first class we exchanged our contact details, email ids and phone numbers. Through email we decided to conduct our first meeting to lay the ground for the term. With help from Nithin we chose PSU library meeting rooms as our venue for weekend (Saturday) discussions. During the first team meeting the team took the following decisions in the below mentioned categories:

**Deliverables:** In our first meeting the team decided to first go through the syllabus so that all team members are well aware of the weeks that the team is responsible for class ownerships, types of write-ups that the team has the option to submit, the format in which submissions should be made and criteria on which the team submissions will be evaluated. The team went through the session plans that had been put up on the D2L website to confirm on which weeks our team had the class ownership. The team agreed on the strategy that they would work on submitting the write ups on the selected readings that are assigned as part of the class ownership week. The team also decided to finish off the write up as soon as possible so that they can concentrate on the project work.

The team created a plan with schedule on an excel sheet (Appendix 1). The worksheet had team members' role defined for each submission and the deadlines were laid down.

**Collaboration:** Due to the team's constraints of not being able to meet face to face expect for one day in a week for collaborative work, the team decided to use Google Drive to share documents with all team members. Nithin took up the responsibility of creating a folder for the specific purpose and sharing it with all team members. The team members in the first meeting decided on the folder structure and various conventions for using and maintaining documents in the drive with an agreed understanding.

Please refer to Appendix 2 for screen shot of our Google Drive.

**Tools:** The team decided to use Google Docs for sharing write-ups and slides with each team member. Google Docs was selected by the team for its ease of editing and the ability that it provides to work on a single document collaboratively.

**Communication:** The team's main means of communication was email. The weekly face to face team meetings was. The team used emails to keep a track of the team members' progress twice a week. The team also decided to use UBER conference call app for setting up free conference numbers and sharing

details of the conference call over emails in case some team members could not make it to meetings or if they needed to discuss something with the whole team on a weekday. The team members also decided to use WhatsApp instant messaging for quick communications and clarifications of team members' ideas.

## *Stages of Team Development*

### *Forming – Weeks 1*

The team members came together to form the team on the very first class of ETM 522/622 course. The strategy was to have a 4 member team with a mix of new and old ETM students. In our first face to face team meeting conducted on Jan 10th 2015 the team started off by introducing each other. Each team members were asked to introduce themselves both professionally and personally. The first team meeting was used for establishing the basic ground rules for the effective functioning of the team. Though the meeting was conducted at a formal place, the meeting was kept very informal.

The following were finalized on the first team meeting:

- established a convenient place of meeting
- clearly establishment the goals
- clearly understood the measurements of performance
- established the means of communication
- decided on the tools for collaborative work
- distributed the assignments
- created a basic plan and schedule

The team also established in principle that every assignment of selected reading write up though was an individual responsibility every team member needed to go through the materials to share summary of the selected readings. This helped us in making sure that each write up that the team produces takes into account the different perspectives of each team member.

Each team member was entrusted with one or more responsibility for each kind of deliverable and was expected to update the team and the owner of the deliverable on what they have achieved. If there was a delay of any sort the team members were expected to promptly let the team members know about it as soon as possible.

### *Storming – Weeks 2 & 3*

After we formed the team, we faced some challenges. The team decided to categorize this challenges based on the concepts that the team acquired during the course of the term:

1> Conflicts – The team experienced both cognitive and assertive conflicts while working on the assignments. But the team slowly but steadily dampened the effects of assertive conflicts within the team by increasing the trust and mutuality factor.

2> Lack of mutual accountability – Some team members were not prompt enough to let the team know of any foreseen delays due to other commitments. Sometimes the team was slowed down due to interdependencies. The team members openly dealt with the scenario by bringing this

matter up in team meetings. The issue was discussed very openly and in a very professional manner with the intent of resolving the issue amicably.

3> Challenges posed by cultural diversity – For our team language barrier and accent was a major issue. Some team members at the start were very impatient and were not good listeners. This was impacting the team's performance. There were instances of communication gaps that were resulting in sub-standard deliverables coming up for review. The team was quick at acknowledging this as an issue and eagerly resolved the issues. The team openly discussed the situation. The team came up with a multi prong solution. First the team decided to always patiently hear, take notes and clarify their understanding immediately. The team soon saw the issues diminishing.

### *Norming – Weeks 4, 5 & 6*

The transition to this stage from the storming stage was smooth and with ease. Every team member was conscious of the due dates for all the different deliverables and was willing to get their part of the assignments done. Team members even were willing to share the workload if someone was facing difficulty. By this time (week 5 & 6), we had each chosen at least one selected reading (SR) to be completed and submitted on our shared location. We were working more independently and concurrently rather than working on one SR per week. The review sessions had by now become more of eyeballing rather than team discussions. Trust and mutuality had developed among team members. We were now very well accustomed to the working style of each other. We also had developed a common understanding which could be very well reflected in our email conversations which were now more bullet points rather than long detailed emails. The issues with accent and language had diminished. We had inculcated the habit of being a patient and good listener. Even sometimes if a conversation did not make sense the team requested for a written document that resolved the ambiguities.

Some team members offered help to resolve transportation issues related to meeting at PSU by offering team members ride to and from their home on their way to meetings. Apart from the course work team members had started discussing about each other's favorite sports, cuisines and cultures. Though our team consisted of members with diverse cultural and professional backgrounds but each one of us had various similarities based on which it was easier to establish a common ground for working together and amicably. The key to this was shunning any preconceived notions about the team members. The conflicts within the team members were always controlled and professional. The team members always respected each other's opinion and time.

### *Performing – Weeks 7, 8, 9 & 10*

We reached this stage around the 8$^{th}$ week of the process. We had most of our deliverables to submit at this time and would not have been able to meet our goals if we had not worked together with each other for some time. The first few weeks of forming, storming and norming had established a relationship between the team members that prepared us for taking up this challenged. We had two pending SR write ups, Project report and a class ownership to prepare for and deliver. Through the different stages of team formation we had discovered our strengths as a team and the individual expertise. This gave us the confidence to work out a plan to successfully meet the desired output. Various team members improvised and assumed roles outside of the planned roles and responsibilities to complement each other's task to

bring them to closure. As an example one of our team members was usually responsible for booking and arranging our meeting place, but there was a situation where he was engaged in other important duties at a very short notice and had to delegate that responsibility to others and yet everything worked out very smoothly. The team adopted a strategy of first agreeing to a format and basic layout for each deliverable. Each team member picked a section and provided relevant inputs and cross reviewed the sections for parallel processing. This reduced our cycle time by a very significant amount and thus we could meet the challenge. As a team we experienced the fact discussed in textbooks that relationships become stronger when team members work together on a problem.

## *Things we could have done better*

- Making the presentations more engaging - The team to some extent had not been very good at selection of in class activities and games to keep the class well engaged during class ownerships. The team agreed that we could have been more innovative with games and activities. The team also realized that we did not prioritize researching on game and activities as much as we should have. This resulted in the team trying to come up with something at the last moment which did not have the desired impact on the class.

- Time management and setting agenda for meetings – During the first class ownership the team members did not manage time well at all. The team members overshot the allotted time slots for presenting the slides. This resulted in the team rushing through the slides in the end which meant no class interaction and loss of attention. The team also did not very well follow the principles of setting agenda for a team meeting. This sometimes resulted in wastage of precious time with necessary topic being not discussed.

## *Key Learnings*

- The team members greatly improved their presentation skills. We learnt an important lesson that presentation should be implicit and communication should be explicit. We learnt how to make presentations engaging and visually appealing.
- The class helped us enhance our time management skills. During class ownerships we learnt to time our delivery along with keeping other classmates engaged in the discussion. We learnt to manage and drive the discussions to not deviate from the topic of discussion.
- The team by participating in different class discussions and activities learnt the conceptual and practical framework of communication and team building concepts.
- The team members learnt the crucial art of managing conflicts within a team set up arising due to various reasons like cultural diversity or difference in perspectives. The team also learnt an important lesson that such conflicts are important for more comprehensive results from a team. We learnt to acknowledge that conflict would be there but what is important is to manage conflict to drive the needed results.

## *Conclusion*

“Coming together is a beginning. Keeping together is progress. Working together is success” -Henry Ford

The above proverb very well highlights the importance of working together in teams. Organizations are much more likely to perform well when their people work effectively as a team. This is because good teamwork creates synergy – where the combined effect of the team is greater than the sum of individual efforts. Working together as a team can apply individual perspectives, experience, and skills to solve complex problems, creating new solutions and ideas that may be beyond the scope of any one individual.

The course of “Communication and Team building” gave us the valuable hands on experience of implementing the conceptual framework of team and presented us tools for successful team building, communication, and teamwork. It gave us a platform to learn by doing. The course and the assignments have provided each team member a sense of achievement, equity and camaraderie. The course has helped the team members to foster flexibility and responsiveness, especially in culturally diverse team setting.

All team members agree that the course has helped them improve their soft skills that are equally necessary to survive in this competitive and demanding corporate environment.

## *References*


[1] Katzenbach, Jon R., and Douglas K. Smith. *The Wisdom of Teams: Creating the High-Performance Organization.* Boston, Mass: Harvard Business School Press, 1993.

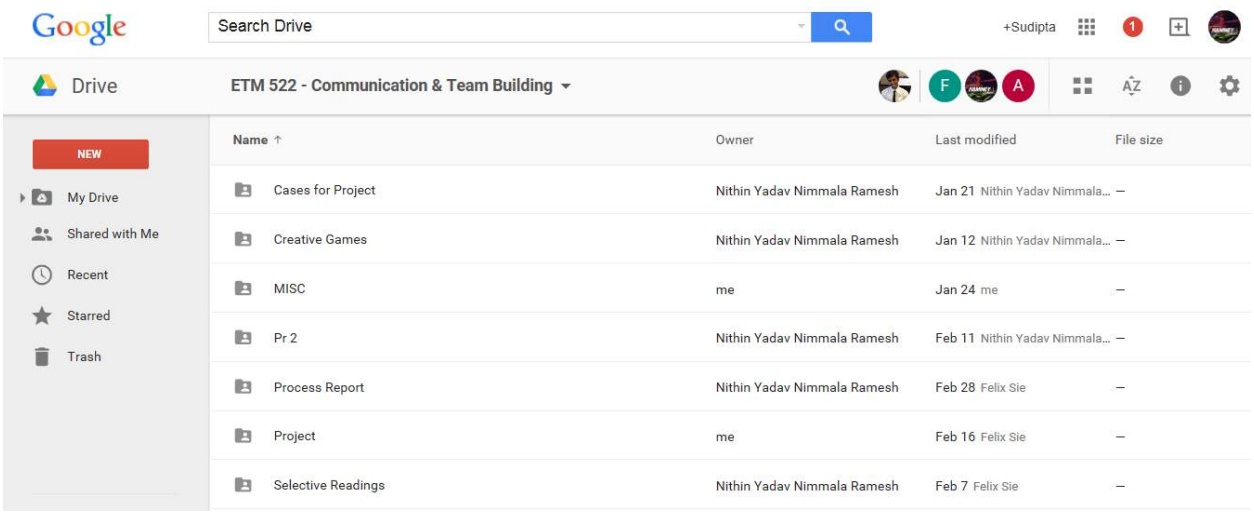
[2] Scholtes, Peter R., Brian L. Joiner, and Barbara J. Streibel. *The Team Handbook.* Madison, WI, USA: Joiner, 1996.

[3] http.//www.lib.pdx.edu/instrucition/survivalguide/index.htm (online tutorial: Portland State library)

[4] Craswell, Gail: Writing for Academic Success: A Postgraduate Guide, London et al. 2005, SAGE

# *Appendix*

1. Screenshot of the Google Drive used by the team to share and store information.




2. Initial Plan and schedule

| Deliverable | Week of Submission | Date of Meeting | Deliverable Name | Person Responsible | Date to submit for review | Reviewer | Date of submission |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Class Presentation 1 | 3 | | Team Basics | | | | 1/21/2015 |
| | | 1/17/2015 | Slide 3 - 6,20 | Felix | 1/19/2015 | ALL | 1/21/2015 |
| | | 1/17/2015 | Slide 7 - 8,18 | Ahmed | 1/19/2015 | ALL | 1/21/2015 |
| | | 1/17/2015 | Slide 9 - 10 ,19 | Nitin | 1/19/2015 | ALL | 1/21/2015 |
| | | 1/17/2015 | Slide 11 - 16 | Sudipta | 1/19/2015 | ALL | 1/21/2015 |
| Class Presentation 2 | 6 | | Team Toolbox & Improvement plan | ALL | | ALL | 2/11/2015 |
| Write Up 1 | 4 | 1/24/2015 | ETM 522-622 - Burlington Northern Case Study - Team 3 | Felix | 1/26/2015 | Sudipta | 1/28/2015 |
| Write Up 2 | 5 | 1/24/2015 | ETM 522-622 - ComTech Case Study Write Up - Team 3 | Ahmed | 2/1/2015 | Sudipta | 2/4/2015 |
| Write Up 3 | 3 | 1/17/2015 | ETM 522-622 - SR2 Write Up - Team 3 | Sudipta | 1/19/2015 | All | 1/21/2015 |
| Write Up 4 | 6 | 2/1/2015 | ETM 522-622 - SR5 Write Up - Team 3 | Felix | 2/8/2015 | Sudipta | 2/11/2015 |
| Write Up 5 | 6 | 2/1/2015 | ETM 522-622 - SR6 Write Up - Team 3 | Nitin | 2/8/2015 | Sudipta | 2/11/2015 |
| Project | 7 | Week 3 through 6 | ETM 522-622 - Project - Virtual Teams-How cultural diversity impacts communication in geographically spread teams - Team 3 | ALL | 2/18/2015 | ALL | 2/18/2015 |
| Process | 10 | 3/7/2015 | Process Report | ALL | 3/9/2015 | ALL | 3/11/2015 |

3. Roles and responsibilities assigned

| Name | Role |
|---|---|
| Nithin | Book meeting rooms, Animator, Tech Support |
| Ahmed | Scripter, Media references |
| Felix | Media references, Find Games and activities |
| Sudipta | Final Reviewer, Web references |