



Teamwork Module Student Guide

In the real world as well as in many aspects of your University studies you work in teams. This Module will help you to learn how to make your own teamwork more effective and pleasant. The Module has the following sections:

- **Preparation for this Module.** Things you should read and do before coming to the Practical.
- **Teamwork Basics.** This is a discussion of some of the issues that determine whether a team functions effectively, and ways to deal with any problems that arise. (Pages 1 – 5)
- **Teamwork Activity.** A set of characteristics of effective and ineffective teams. You both individually and as a team rank these characteristics. (Page 6)
- **Teamwork Homework.** After this Module you may be assigned to write a short paper about teamwork. The paper is described in this section. It will be due one week after the Practical that uses this Module. (Pages 7 – 8)

Preparation for this Module

1. Read the next section of this Module, **Teamwork Basics**.
2. Do the ranking exercise of the following section, **Teamwork Activity**.

Teamwork Basics

Two things get accomplished in good teams: the task gets accomplished *and* the satisfaction of team members is high. In order to achieve both of these ends:

- Get to know other members of your group and their strengths
- Set ground rules
- Use a facilitator
- Keep lines of communication open
- Know how to avoid (or solve) common problems

Ground Rules

Setting some basic ground rules helps to insure that everyone is in agreement about how the team will operate. You will want to establish norms about how work will be done, the role and responsibilities of a facilitator, how you will communicate with one another, and how your meetings will be run. Some of the ground rules can be decided on now; others will develop as the semester progresses.

1. **Work Norms:** How will work be distributed? Who will set deadlines? What happens if someone doesn't follow through on his/her commitment (for example, misses a deadline)? How will the work be reviewed? What happens if people have different opinions about the quality of the work? What happens if people have different work habits (e.g., some people like to get assignments done right away; others work better with the pressure of a deadline).
2. **Facilitator Norms:** Will you use a facilitator? How will the facilitator be chosen? Will you rotate the position? What are the responsibilities of the facilitator? (see below)
3. **Communication Norms:** When should communication takes place and through what medium (e.g., do some people prefer to communicate through e-mail while others would rather talk on the phone)?
4. **Meeting Norms:** What is everyone's schedule? Should one person be responsible for coordinating meetings? Do people have a preference for when meetings are held? Where is a good place to hold meetings? What happens if people are late to a meeting? What happens if a group member misses a meeting? What if he/ she misses several meetings?
5. **Consideration Norms:** Can people eat at meetings? smoke? What happens if someone is dominating the discussion? How can norms be changed if someone is not comfortable with what is going on in the team?

About Goals: Often there is the unstated assumption in student teams that everyone wants to get an "A" in the course, and that should be the team's primary goal. But sometimes, as the semester progresses and everyone gets pressed for time, people have to make decisions about which courses take priority. If this course is a higher priority for some team members than for others, that can create dissension in the group. Talking about this will help to lessen that tension and help you find solutions to the problem. Keep communicating with one another!

Also, there may be other goals you want to consider as you work together during the semester. These include: having a high level of camaraderie in the team, learning about how to work together on a team-based project, or learning how to interact with others as a member of a team.

The Responsibilities of the Facilitator

The facilitator is not necessarily the group's leader although he/she can be. It is better to think of the facilitator as the person who keeps the group progressing in the right direction (i.e., toward productivity). Therefore, the facilitator should:

- Focus the team on the task (both short term and long term)
- Get participation from all team members
- Keep the team to its agreed-upon time frame (both short term and long term)
- Suggest alternative procedures when the team is stalled
- Help team members confront problems
- Summarize and clarify the team's decisions

Hints for Handling Difficult Behavior

Just one difficult personality in a group can make the group unproductive and the teamwork experience unpleasant. Here are some suggestions for resolving problems:

<i>How the Person Acts</i>	<i>Description</i>	<i>What to Do</i>
Overly Talkative	This person is usually one of four types: (a) an "eager beaver"; (b) a show-off; (c) very well-informed and anxious to show it; (d) unable to read the responses of others and use the feedback to monitor his/her own behavior.	Sometimes humor can be used to discourage people from dominating the discussion; be sure when the person stops talking to direct the conversation to another person. If the person's behavior can't be changed subtly, one member of the group should speak to the person privately and explain that while his/her enthusiasm is appreciated, it's only fair to the whole group that every person gets an equal amount of air time.
Too quiet	The quiet person may be: shy, bored, tired, unsure of himself/herself, uninvolved in the group.	Make a special effort to draw this person out: ask for his/her opinion on something; ask him/her something about himself/herself; tell the person you appreciate his/her participation.
Argues	Is the person critical of ideas, the group process, or other group members?	If the person is critical of ideas, use that response to test the work the group is doing--the person may be providing good feedback. If he/she is critical of others, tell him/her how the effect that is having on both the team or individual team members. Be explicit about the fact that his/her behavior is detrimental to the goals of the team.

Complains	The person may have a pet peeve, or may complain for the sake of complaining.	Listen to the person's complaint; if it is legitimate, set aside group time to solve the problem. Point out that part of your work this semester is to learn how to solve problems. Ask the person to join with you to improve whatever is disturbing him/her.
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Hints for Handling Group Problems

Besides problems with individual team members, the team as a whole may run into some difficulties. Here are some suggestions for dealing with teams that aren't functioning properly:

Floundering

Groups are often not as productive as they could be especially when people are just getting to know one another and how each person works. Drawing up a list of tasks to be accomplished can help. So can saying something like: "What do we need in order to move forward?" or "Let's see if we can all come to an agreement about what we're trying to accomplish."

Going Off on Digressions and Tangents

Group members may get caught up in chatting about things not central to the work at hand. A little of this can be O.K. because it helps to put people in contact with one another. But if that kind of conversation continues to dominate the group, it can be detrimental to progress.

Things to say include: "Can we go back to where we were a few minutes ago and see what we were trying to do?"

Making a Decision Too Quickly

Sometimes there is one person in the group who is less patient and more action-oriented than other group members. This person may reach a decision more quickly than others and pressure people to move on before it is a good idea to do so. Someone could say:

"Are we all ready to make a decision on this?"

"What needs to be done on this before we can move ahead?"

"Let's check and see where everyone stands on this."

Not Making a Decision

The best way to make a decision is by consensus with all team members agreeing on the decision together. As you are discussing various ideas, try to be open to what each person is saying. Remember you are trying to come to the best decision for the group as a whole, not for any one person.

If the team is having trouble reaching consensus, here are some tools to use:

Multivoting--List all the ideas the group has generated. Have each person vote on his/her top four choices. Choose the three or four ideas that have gotten the most votes. Identify similarities and differences among the ideas, then the positive and negative aspects of each. Have each person vote again, this time for his/her top two choices. Tally the votes to see which idea has the most support.

Plan A--List all the ideas the group has generated. Each person is given 100 points to allocate among the choices in any way he/she wants to. The alternate that receives the highest number is the team's choice.

(NOTE: Use Plan A to reach a quick solution when the decision is not very important. Use Multivoting for more important decisions.)

Feuding Between Group Members

A conflict--either related to a work project or to something outside of the group--can erupt and impede the group's progress. Usually nothing can be accomplished until the conflict is resolved. If that is the case, the parties need to discuss the problem, using the listening techniques that have been discussed.

Ignoring or Ridiculing Others

Subgroups or factions can form in groups with one or more people excluded. Sometimes the people who are outside of the "in" group will be the subject to criticism or ridicule. Knowing how to work with people we're not necessarily comfortable with is an ability that will serve you well in the work world. Each group member must make every effort to work with every other group member.

The Group Member Who Does Not Do His/Her Share of the Work

A group member may be unwilling to cooperate with others, may not complete assigned tasks, or may not come to meetings. You should be talk directly with the person to tell him/her the effect his/her actions are having on the group.

Activity 1

Note: you should complete this Activity yourself before the Practical. During the Practical all members of the Team will discuss their rankings and attempt to come to a consensus about the three most important characteristics, and the three characteristics that are most disruptive.

Listed below are 12 characteristics of work teams. Please go through those characteristics and pick three that you feel are essential for good team performance. Rank them in this way:

- 1--most important
- 2--second most important
- 3--third most important

Then go through the remaining items on the list and mark the three that you feel most interfere with team performance. Rank them:

- 4--most disruptive
- 5--second most disruptive
- 6--third most disruptive

- _____ 1. Competitiveness among members
- _____ 2. Everyone sticks closely to the point
- _____ 3. The team avoids conflict
- _____ 4. Members rotate the leadership position
- _____ 5. Each member gives and receives feedback
- _____ 6. A detailed plan is suggested for each team meeting
- _____ 7. Each team member is assertive
- _____ 8. Informal sub-teams form
- _____ 9. Members freely express negative feelings
- _____ 10. The overall goals of the team are explicitly set
- _____ 11. Information is freely shared among team members
- _____ 12. Each person's ideas are taken into consideration and assessed

Activity 2

This Assignment should be done by you individually, and turned in via turnitin.com. It should have a maximum length of three pages (750 words).

There are two objectives to this assignment. One is to give you practice in researching, writing about, and presenting on a real-world problem, situation, or topic that is more complex than what you have done in class so far (the *task*). The second is to give you an opportunity to observe team dynamics, including your own role in them, so that you can work more productively within a team (the *process*). To that end, please structure your analysis around the following questions.

Individual Behavior Analysis

1. Describe a specific instance in which you or another team member (but please don't identify the person by name) did something that furthered progress on either the *task* or the *process*.
2. Describe a specific instance in which you or another team member (but please don't identify the person by name) did something that hindered progress on either the *task* or the *process*.
3. Describe one or two ways in which you demonstrated leadership on the team, or ways in which you intend to demonstrate leadership.
4. Describe a specific instance in which you supported another team member who was in the leadership position.
5. Describe one or two ways in which you are working to make yourself a more effective team member.

Team Dynamics Analysis

6. Describe one or two situations in which the team functioned effectively. To what do you attribute that positive interaction?
7. Describe one or two situations in which the team functioned poorly. To what do you attribute those difficulties?

8. How does the team make decisions?
9. How does the team assign tasks?
10. Have specific team members taken on specific roles (again, no names, please)?
11. Are there mechanisms in place for team members to alternate roles? If not, how could that happen?
12. Are there any problems within the team that you want to discuss with your instructor or TA? (All conversations will be strictly confidential.)

This Module was written by David M. Harrison, Dept. of Physics, Univ. of Toronto in August 2007. It is largely based on materials developed by Lori Breslow, Director, MIT Teaching and Learning Laboratory and Senior Lecturer, MIT Sloan School of Management. We thank Dr. Breslow for supplying the originals or her materials.

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