

Helpful Teamwork Tips Courtesy of The Center for PSU Academic Computing (CAC) and other resources

Teamwork implies the intention to work cooperatively with others, working together as opposed to working separately or competitively.

This Means...	This Doesn't Mean...
soliciting and utilizing the skills, ideas and opinions of team members	preferring to be left alone to get on with your own work
keeping others informed and up-to-date about any relevant or useful information	attending team meetings without contributing
when taking action, keeping in mind the concerns of other members as well as your own concerns	engaging in win-lose competition with other members of the team
supporting and encouraging team members; defending the team's reputation when others criticize	laying blame or making judgments about other team members and keeping quiet or ignoring critical comments about your team members

Conditions that help develop and maintain effective teamwork:

1. Common group objectives and goals that are understood and committed to by all team members.
2. Efforts to develop and use the unique skills and abilities of each team member in a way that helps a team meet its objectives.
3. Efforts to develop in team member's flexibility, creativity and sensitivity to the needs of others.
4. A clear value reinforced by our management team, on trust, openness of communication among team members and between team members.
5. Efforts to increase each member's sense of belonging to the team.
6. Time and attention devoted to teamwork.
7. Rapid and accurate feedback to team members about the effectiveness of their actions and decisions.

Conditions that present challenges to effective teamwork:

1. Team members are new or change often.
2. Persons on the team are unsure of or not happy with their roles.
3. Time pressures make it difficult to adequately develop project and team.
4. The locations or workload of team members make it difficult for team members to have regular contact with each other.
5. There is uncertainty about the goals or tasks to be accomplished, or individual team members are unsure of their task proficiency.
6. Differences in perceptions exist among team members and team roles.
7. Communication break down exists. This goes for managers also.
8. There are taboo topics that affect team's performance.
9. Participation is not uniformly spread among team members, OR there is not adequate punishment for those that do not do their part.

Potential Roles of Team Members

1. Discussion Leader - Keeps group on track, maintains full participation.
2. Recorder - Records data in labs and problem solving activities in class, takes notes at meetings.
3. Reporter - Writes up final draft of labs/problems.

4. Accuracy Coach - Checks group understanding and findings, find resources.
5. Time Keeper - Sets time limits for agenda items.
6. Gate Keeper - Ensures that everyone in team has chance to speak.
7. Devil's Advocate - Brings up alternate points of view that have not been discussed. Challenges consensus so the team doesn't fall into "group-think" mentality and reach premature conclusions.

Your role as part of a team:

Courtesy and Understanding Make a Stronger Team

Each day provides new challenges for you and your teammates as you work together to solve problems. Your efforts will be more successful if you concentrate on increasing cooperation with your immediate co-workers and with other departments as well.

Remember that your relationship with your team affects productivity. How do you get along with your teammates? Try combining courtesy and understanding to build a unified team, and remember these tips:

- Maintain confidentiality - Breaching a confidence is not only unprofessional, it will cause you to lose your team members' trust.
- Do your part - If a team-member has a heavy assignment, don't hesitate to help. It will be remembered when your load is piling up!
- Be a friend to your teammates - Work together on your problems and ideas, and you may devise a whole new approach to problem-solving.
- Gain your teammates' trust by demonstrating honesty and integrity.
- Look for the best in everyone you meet - If you recognize that each person has unique qualities, everyone's work will be more gratifying.

Team Meetings

The arena in which many elements of team interaction are worked out is in the dreaded team meeting. In order for a group in a meeting to achieve anything, the team needs a certain amount of structure to guide the goals.

A successful meeting starts before the meeting when a project manager or team leader informs members of the following:

1. Meeting agenda
2. Purpose of the meeting (information sharing, problem solving, decision making, coordination, planning, etc.)
3. Whose attendance is required
4. Where to find background or support materials required
5. Schedule information (time, place, duration..)
6. Minutes of the previous meeting and any specific pre-meeting assignments

The meeting agenda is similar to a contract or agreement among team members and all team members should have input in the agenda. The meeting agenda should include:

1. Date, time and location of meeting
2. List of attendees expected
3. Purpose of the meeting
4. Order of business to be conducted at the meeting
5. Ending time

Since a team should be empowered to govern its own affairs, all members should be open to the fact that a team may modify an agenda. Teams often develop ground rules that extend to how they want a meeting conducted.

Some possible team ground rules:

1. Be prepared for the meeting
2. Come to the meeting on time
3. Start and end meeting on time
4. Value the diversity of team members
5. Support the team concept and process
6. Maintain POSITIVE group dynamics
7. Make decisions by consensus of all necessary team members
8. Participate in the meeting. Don't be a lurker
9. Keep records of your own work and the team's compiled work
10. Listen and have an open mind

Evaluate the meetings with the intent of improving future meeting:

1. Was the purpose of the meeting clear?
2. Did the ergonomics of the room help or hinder the meeting process?
3. Was jumping to conclusions allowed? Did the group help to suspend judgment and explore alternatives?
4. Did the group use conflict in a positive way to differentiate ideas?
5. Did the group work toward consensus?
6. Did the team leader document the interaction when the process seemed ineffective?
7. Did the group insist on action commitments (what is to be done, by when and who)?
8. Did the group identify follow-up processes?

Avoid destructive messages such as:

- Communication Shut-down - a statement or action that cuts off discussion with no plan to continue.
- You Should - statements like "You should do this..." which sound parental and insinuate that "I know better than you".
- Discounting - minimizing another person's comments by inappropriate reassuring, distracting or humoring.
- Threatening - expressing an intention to do harm.
- Communicating Through Someone Else - a statement that expresses dissatisfaction indirectly to the person but through someone else.
- Mind Reading - assuming that your perception of a confusing message is right without clarifying or assuming the other person can read your mind.
- Silent Treatment - feeling resentment or anger toward another, but not addressing it directly with that person.
- Double Bind - sending a message where the words say one thing but the body language or attitude convey a different meaning.
- Judging/Blaming - placing blame or making judgments about another person; often involves finger pointing.
- Premature Advice - offering immediate advice to someone without showing concern for their feelings, listening, or helping them problem-solve.

Managing Team Conflict

Identifying Types of Team Conflict:

- **Internal conflict** - An individual or team member is experiencing a personal conflict that may or may not be related to the team. The conflict is interfering with the person's ability to perform.
- **Individual conflict** with one other team member - One team member is in conflict with another.
- **Individual conflict with the entire team** - One team member is experiencing conflict with the entire team.
- **Conflict between several team members** - The entire team is experiencing conflict with several other team members.
- **Conflict between teams** - The entire team is in conflict with another team.
- **Team conflict with one person outside of the team.**

Most members of a team have to learn at least two fundamentals:

1. Disagreement is an essential part of teamwork.
2. Team members have strong feelings and emotions. We cannot expect a team to be authentic if all that is allowed is logic or information.

For leaders / moderators: Help the team's behavior by asking

1. What are we doing that is blocking the resolution of this problem?
2. How can we express differences without blaming others?
3. Help the individuals take ownership of their unproductive behavior.

Don't make an excuse when one of your subordinates behaves badly.

Define the team's problem as a shared need. As a group:

1. Identify the causes
2. Determine the criteria for a solution
3. Generate options
4. Determine possible solutions
5. Develop implementation plans
6. Review results on a regular basis

During the problem solving focus on issues *not* personalities.

- When the team is determining criteria for a solution, encourage each side to objectively explain its bottom line requirements.
- Keep reminding the team of ground rules while generating options such as: no criticizing statements by other people until all ideas are posted.
- Encourage everyone to listen to other points of view.
- During the process keep encouraging points of agreement.
- Don't stifle new anger, but also don't dwell on it.

Another set of steps to consider as a team:

1. Acknowledge that the conflict exists
2. Gain common ground
3. Seek to understand all angles
4. Attack the issue not each other
5. Develop an action plan

A structured way to handle conflicts:

1. Let each person state their view briefly
2. Avoid quick consensus.
3. Have neutral team members reflect on areas of agreement or disagreement or get a mediator.
4. Explore areas of disagreement for specific issues.
5. Play Devil's Advocate - switch sides to understand other points of view.
6. Summarize your "opponent's" perspective to his / her satisfaction, have him / her summarize yours.
7. Have opponents suggest modifications to their own points of view as well as others.
8. If blocked, ask opponents if they can accept the team's decision.

Questions to help teams through conflict:

1. What are we supposed to accomplish as a team?
2. What are each of our roles and responsibilities in accomplishing that goal?
3. Who and when do each of us need to get information from?
4. If we get into trouble, whom can we ask without feeling inadequate or helpless?
5. How will we arrive at decisions
6. What strengths do each of us bring in accomplishing our goals?
7. How are we going to make ourselves more accessible to one another??