

GROUP 3: PROCESS REPORT

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1 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report discusses the development of our group (Team #3) through the five group development stages defined by Tuckman and Jensen [1]. First, we discuss the **Forming** stage and how we used a team charter as a tool to clearly communicate our goals and team ground rules. In the forming stage we started to define team roles. Next, our team moved to the **Storming** phase where we found ourselves struggling as members determined their individual status in the group. To help us establish our group goals (project topic) during this stage, we used the Nominal Group Technique to help us decide the priority and value of suggested research ideas. We also further defined team roles for assignments and established a team leader. After a short period in the storming phase, our team migrated to the next stage in development, the **Norming** stage. In this stage we started to feel more comfortable with each others' performance. The class ownerships and reading briefs provided group members, who were previously unknown to other members, show that their contributions to the team were valuable. As a result, pre-established preferences between certain members start to erode resulting in a better sense of team cohesion and a common spirit. The team started to provide each other with informal rewards freely which further helped members build confidence in their contributions to the team. We found ourselves in the Norming stage for most of the term, until we started working on our biggest team challenge, the research project. The research project forced our communication and interaction both in class and outside of class to increase. The benefit of this focus was an increase in our productivity and improved interaction among members as our team worked towards our goal of getting an "A+" in the course. Through this period we found ourselves truly in the **Performing** stage, focusing our energy on completing the research project. During this stage, we gained a better understanding of each other and everyone's strengths and weaknesses.

2 INTRODUCTION

Team #3 is comprised of six members: Stephen, Nadja, Justus, Trevor, Joe, and James. Our team is possibly one of the most diverse teams in the course, bringing together different cultural backgrounds, genders, and ages. At the beginning of the term we came together somewhat reluctantly, worked to overcome some early hurdles, and by the end of the term we found ourselves in a performance stage; finishing tasks with ease and helping each other overcome obstacles. This team process report shares the highlights of our team development as well as some lowlights we had to work to overcome.

With the lowlights to overcome in our group, we also present a retrospective and "lessons learned". We provide some of the key lessons we learned through the course of the term. We learned the benefit of diversity on our team; how members from different backgrounds can add creative ideas and new approaches to problems. We learned that by establishing ground rules early, conflict during early group development stages can be minimized. We learned that open and frequent communication was essential to our success and that having fun outside of class allowed our team really come together.

3 FORMING

The first stage of the development process of a team is called Forming. It takes place after the team members come together and form a team. The Team Handbook describes this stage as a “transition from individual to team member status [2].” In this stage, team members explore boundaries of acceptable behavior in the team and test the leader’s guidance in a formal and informal way. The Team Handbook also suggests that team members would hold a cautious wait and see attitude “like hesitant swimmers, they stand by the pool, dabbling their toes in the water” [2].

For the first time, our team met in the second class. We talked about possible project topics and agreed on how we would split up the work with respect to the reading assignments, class ownerships and the research project. In that context, we decided that everybody should contribute equally and be involved in each assignment. Apart from that, we also talked about each others background. Along the conversation, we agreed on electing Stephen as our team leader since he is a very organized person. After this initial conversation, we all were excited and optimistic about working together to accomplish all assignments. As some of us have already known each other before the class, and the rest of the members had a good first impression, the level of distrust and fear was fairly low from the very beginning (according to team member’s team diary entries). Some of the new members still wondered if the certain individuals would ‘pull their weight’ in the course.

In order to structure our team and to develop clear directions and goals we used a Team Charter. Along the completion of the Team Charter, we established the basic framework for our team behavior by means of providing contact information, defining goals, discussing timelines and defining ground rules. The ground rules helped us to set boundaries of the team behavior and to prevent transgressing the borderline of acceptable behavior. Since all team members were involved in the definition of ground rules, there was no confusion or disagreement.

In addition, we used the Charter as a tool to define our mission, our output target and the basis for interest which helped us clearly define and communicate our goals and to make sure everybody was clear on them. Moreover, the Team charter encouraged us to think about key challenge and to anticipate possible problems. Consequently, we developed strategies to overcome these challenges and problems, so that we would be able to succeed. Apart from that, the Team Hand book suggests that team members in the forming stage would direct most communication to the team leader. In that context, our team differed form the theoretical view. Our team leader took the leading role of communication but all team members participated proactively, too.

In conclusion, our team did a good job in handling this stage. As an output of this stage, everybody knew what would be expected from him/her and everybody shared the same purpose.

4 STORMING

In the second stage of team growth, we had to address and manage the Storming phase. As stated in the Team Handbook, this is a critical stage in how our group dynamics would be established. This stage is usually where individuals are transitioning to being a team member and testing the boundaries of acceptable group behavior. Early on, we each took a “big five” personality test to help us understand each other during this early stage of development. We shared the results with each other and discussed about the best ways for us to handle conflict and best tailor roles for each member.

As stated in the forming stage, the group was introduced and briefly discussed what the expected deliverables the team was required to provide. Being that the team unity was not established yet and trust was beginning to develop, we implemented an approach called the Nominal Group Technique to decide our group project topic. We did this to ensure everyone participated in this initial meeting. Our approach was each member was task to post their project idea on our group site before the prior class. This was important as this was an individual work and members could not hide in a group discussion. Once in class, we each discussed our ideas and clarified what the topic and approach would be for this topic. With this list, we consolidate the likely topics and let each team member vote on their top two choices. With these results, the group was able to identify the most agreed upon topic for our group research project.

Secondly, for assigning the actual deliverables of the reading assignments and each member’s section of the group research paper, we used the Multi-voting approach. In this process, we consolidated all of the individual deliverables on to a single piece of paper. Each person was asked to vote on their top three choices for each section (reading assignment and research paper). With the consolidated voting of the individuals, we formatted a matrix to see member’s preferences compared to others. We tried to assign members their highest preferred section. Given the ranking of their top three choices, we were able to easily identify the most preferred section for each member and also ensured all deliverables were assigned to a respective owner.

Once all of the deliverables/task were assigned, we created a Planning Grid to organize all of the required tasks. Next to each task we assigned the owner and the expected delivery date. We also allowed some buffer in the delivery date for unexpected issues. Thus, we listed another column of the actual date to see when tasks were accomplished and completed. This greatly helped in the management and consolidations of the materials. The Team Leader was able to see the next scheduled deliverables and prompted to remind members of their task(s). Then on the delivery date of the task(s), the Team Leader would review the Planning Grid and to ensure all deliverables were submitted and updated the document accordingly.

Lastly, as we had our regular team meetings to address any issues and/or get status updates, the Team Leader and members often referred to the principals to guide discussions (i.e. floundering, passive/dominant participants). For any conflicting interest or decisions, we referred to our Team Charter and agreed up the consensus approach.

5 NORMING

After the submission of the first reading assignments and the first class ownership session, everyone gained confidence in the work of the other team members. The differences between the members that knew each other before this class and the new members disappeared. At this point we entered the norming stage where we began to build a sense of team cohesion and a common spirit.

In the norming stage, each individual started to feel accepted and included in the team as a vital member of that team. With a more intimate knowledge of each team member, the Team Leader was able to build on the different strengths of the team members and encourage them in their weaknesses. During this stage, optimum team roles began to emerge. While Stephen was the Team Leader, James, as the oldest member of the team, served as a coach and contributed great insight and feedback. Justice developed into a soft of shaping role where he helped keep everyone motivated and on task. Joe had very strong analytical skills and was able to step back and evaluate the situation and provide logical judgments. Trevor was able to effectively implement or tie together ideas suggest by the team, and Nadja was the glue that held the team together by helping different team members come to an understanding without becoming confrontational.

Several of the guidelines presented in the Team handbook helped us to work efficiently and even improve everyone's individual skills. In particular the guideline for good team meetings was very helpful. By making sure that everybody was prepared and on time we experienced meetings that lasted less than an hour, which is significantly less than the average team meeting duration for ETM student projects, based on team member's experience.

During this stage, we also benefited from the guideline for good feedback. As The Team Handbook, "The key to this stage is to build the team's confidence in their ability to resolve differences without anyone feeling left out or discounted [2]." By following the rules of being descriptive, avoiding exaggeration, speaking only for you self and only talking about certain things we could increase the quality of the team's feedback. Quality in this respect means how helpful the given feedback was and how big the impact on everyone's learning process was. The team members that were new to the program reported that the given feedback was especially helpful for them in order to adjust quickly to the new requirements and expectations at the ETM department. As most of the delivered work was submitted already at a very high level, a lot of positive feedback was given. This matches the recommended leadership style in the Team Handbook.

In connection with providing good feedback, the team also learned the value of conflict during this stage. Since none of us had the same background, but we all felt safe sharing our feelings, we were able to understand that conflict can be helpful. As The Team Handbook says, "Different perspectives are often necessary for breakthrough thinking [2]." This healthy view of conflict allowed us to quickly identify the best ideas without leaving people feeling discredited. During this stage, the team also began to build a team atmosphere that was fun to be around. Jokes became more frequent and the laughter was contagious.

6 PERFORMING

According to the Team Handbook the performing stage is characterized as the following: "Now the team has settled its relationships and expectations. They can perform consistently-diagnosing and choosing and implementing changes [2]." We noticed that we entered this stage as we observed how much work we got done in a short time.

Toward the end of the term, the team began to focus more seriously on the research project, while continuing work on the reading briefs and the last class ownership, as well as looking toward the process report and presentation. It was during this time that the team was really challenged and felt stretched to meet all the requirements of the class. Based on the trust that had been built in the previous stages, the team was able to enter this phase of the class with great confidence. We did not have to worry that someone would not turn in their deliverables on time or perform sub-standard work.

We also had established the necessity of constructive criticism and were able to focus on giving honest and helpful feedback instead of how the other person might misinterpret what was being communicated. In addition, in this stage, we were able to prevent problems that might arise. Team members were quick to ask questions on the parts assigned to them, and feedback was quickly given. This open communication helped to keep the team on track, reduce unnecessary work, and avoid pitfalls. Building on the previous three stages, in the performing stage, the team was able to meet the difficult challenges by delivering high quality outputs in a timely manner.

The performing stage is also marked by a satisfaction of the team's progress, and the authors of the book stress the need to celebrate the team's achievements. After the final presentation of the research paper the whole team went out dining together. Building on the attempts to achieve harmony in the norming stage, this was a great way of celebrating the completed work and is also an indicator for the group spirit that the team developed during this class. During this celebration event, there was much discussion of the team and toasts to the hard work put into the team effort by each member. During this event and other subsequent interaction within the team, it was clear that true friendships were being formed. This matches the Team Handbook's characteristic for the performance stage of representing the team towards others.

The feelings that the team members reported in a retrospect analysis of the process also concur with the findings of the Team Handbook. The team members gained a better understanding of each other and everyone's strength and weaknesses. We also experienced situations, where team members helped each other. For instance group members had to leave for business trips or recreational trips and could therefore only work for limited time for the team, during a certain week. In these situations other team members voluntarily stood up and did the extra work. The close attachment to team made working in the team a pleasure, and strong sense of cohesion was achieved.

7 LESSONS LEARNED

Participation on any team provides each team member opportunities to learn valuable lessons. Our team was no exception. We learned many things throughout this course and within our team projects. Certainly, some information was already known by team members through past experiences leading and participating in focused groups, but undoubtedly we all increased our depth of knowledge regarding team dynamics and the tools available to facilitate the group process. It would be difficult to share all that we have learned within the context of this report, but we have touched on a few topics that we found to be absolutely essential to this particular team and its process.

One of the first lessons we learned was that team ground rules were essential to our team's success. Since we would not be able to meet frequently it was important to cover such topics as when and where we were expected to meet, how we would communicate and share information, team leadership and member responsibilities, etc. We discussed and documented these topics within our team charter. More importantly, we discussed what our goals and expectations were for our team. Our mission statement and success measures were generated through these discussions.

Since our team members were not to meet and work together daily, it was essential to establish simple and immediate communication channels. Fortunately, technology has made virtual interaction very easy. Through email and an online collaboration site we were able to communicate frequently and effectively. These tools enabled us to pose questions, submit ideas, and provide feedback quickly between all team members. Since each member's schedule and non-educational responsibilities made it difficult for frequent contact, the lack of virtual communication tools would have slowed our team's progress immensely.

Our team also learned to value the diversity within our team. Our team members come from different educational, experiential, and cultural backgrounds. With this diversity came a wealth of knowledge and skills. We were able to exploit these differences to the benefit of the team. One such cultural difference, once explained and discussed, allowed us to be more direct and frank with each other; thereby encouraging constructive criticism and feedback without damaging team relations. The breadth of knowledge and experience within our team also allowed us to streamline team work by delegating tasks to the best suited individuals.

Especially apparent was the need to develop clear guidelines for team consensus and decision making. Since all members of our team are highly motivated and independent graduate students, we decided it prudent to formalize our team process and decision making to encourage balanced participation and team consensus.

Another important aspect of teams is the level of personal commitment to each other and to the team's goals. We found it to be beneficial to get to know the other team members on a personal level as soon as possible. "Breaking the ice" allows for smooth interaction and helps develop trust between team members. In addition, it brings about a sense of camaraderie that increases the level of enjoyment and satisfaction of working within a successful team.

8 SUMMARY

As with any team during the forming / storming stage, we did experience trust issues. We were somewhat unsure of each other early, secretly wondering “will this team member do a good job and contribute to our goals?” By establishing clear goals, as Locke and Latham’s Goal Theory [2] states is essential, we were able to start off to a fairly smooth start. Early in the storming stage, each of us took a “big five” personality test to help us understand each other during the early stages of our development. We openly shared the results with each other and talked about the best approach for us to handle conflict and best tailor roles for each member. Luckily, nobody in our group played a self-centered role; we didn’t have to waste energy dealing with dominate personalities or members seeking recognition. We found that member confidence was high in our group due to the appearance of the “extravert” trait in each of our personality results. According to James McCroskey and Virginia Richmond “it is not an exaggeration to suggest that CA (communication apprehension) may be the single most important factor in predicting communication behavior in a small group [3].” Our group communication was very effective from the beginning. Each member felt confident in initiating discussions and speaking often. Each member asserted themselves and their beliefs.

The makeup of our group helped members better understand and develop strategies and skills for interaction with others from diverse backgrounds. Through getting to know each other on a personal level, we each learned to overcome ethnocentrism, stereotyping, prejudice, and discrimination. We found that member diversity really improved our group performance and member satisfaction. Leveraging off this diversity, we found ourselves better equipped to make the best “smart” decisions.

We were very efficient early at assigning tasks and helped each other produce top notch work though constructive criticism. As we navigated through the term, we found that genuine constructive feedback was essential in keeping the team on task. We had several meetings in the course of our voyage and spent time having fun; laughing, joking, and getting to know each other. It was during these sessions that our team begin its’ transformation from the norming stage to the performing stage. Taking time away from the classroom, we were able to remove barriers and facilitate the growth our team needed to be highly successful. In the end we all feel that we did the best job possible. We established some great relationships which will probably continue well beyond this term. We achieved all the milestones we established for ourselves and learned to apply many useful tools. We look forward to working with each other in the future if our paths happen to cross in academia or industry.

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