

TEAM PROCESS REPORT

ETM 522 – Engineering and Technology Management

Portland State University

Dr. Dryden

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Submitted by: Team 4

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Introduction to the Team

The team formed when the professor instructed the class to get into groups of five to six people. Individuals randomly introduced themselves primarily based on their proximity to each other. A couple of individuals gravitated toward the team when they were unable to find membership in other teams that had already found five or six members. Each individual had some initial common goals that also motivated the random formation. Common goals among each individual included gaining significant knowledge on team building and communication, accomplish more together than could have been individually, and to get an “A”.

The team consisted of six people with extensive cultural diversity and personality differences. Team 4’s members include:

1. *Phil Kuglin*, A full time at PSU majoring in Engineering Management and has a BSEE. For the past 30 years, Phil was an engineering manager and firmware engineer for a local electronic firm. He is a California (USA) native His hobbies include scuba diving, woodworking and landscape photography. He has one daughter and two grandsons.
2. *Mukundan Thirumalai* , a part time student at PSU’s ETM Department, and has his BS in Mathematics, followed by higher studies in Accounting and Auditing, and a Post Graduate Diva in Information Technology Applications. He is currently working at a Less-Than-Truckload Transportation Organization in their Data Warehousing and Business Intelligence provisioning.
3. *Liang Meng (Jason)*, a full time international student, who is from China. Liang is pursuing two Master degrees: M.A. in Educational Leadership and M.S. in Engineering and Technology Management. He works for three years as a Graduate Assistant in Graduate School of Education, PSU. His undergraduate background is Information System Management. This class is his last class to complete his study at PSU.
4. *Chih-Hsun Lin (Thomas)*: a full-time student at PSU’s ETM department, and has his master degree in Materials Engineering. Before he came to U.S., he had worked in Daxon tech, the branch of one of the biggest LCD manufacturing company in the world, for 2 years. He was a R&D engineer for designing Blu-ray disc in this company.
5. *Scott*, a part time student in PSU’s Civil Engineering Graduate School, and has his BS in Civil Engineering. Scott is a practicing professional engineer for the Oregon Air National Guard, grew up on a family cattle ranch in eastern Oregon, and enjoys hunting, fishing, and sailing. He’s conservative, is married, and has three sons.
6. *Mohammad*, A new full time student to the ETM department. This is his first class in the ETM department. He recently graduated with a B.S. in Civil Engineering. Mouhamad worked for few great companies as around the Portland Metro area. He worked for Intel as product developer, also worked for Portland International Airport as a project engineer. Mouhamad is easy going, fun and motivated to earn his Masters in Engineering and Technology Management.

The Team Charter

The team charter was created as a part of the class exercise during class 3 and then polished and handed over in week 4. It was agreed that knowledge gaining and good grades were the main objectives, in addition to fostering a sense of trust and fun while accomplishing those objectives. The Team agreed the charter should also include challenges and some guidelines for team interactions and responsibilities toward accomplishing the objectives. The charter also detailed the team's established milestones towards accomplishing required assignments and the objectives.

The class required each team to submit assignments consisting of both reports and presentations covering text book and selected reading material. The team charter was also developed to ensure each team member was accountable and prepared for each report and presentation. The charter detailed each member's agreed upon assignments and the team created a group in *Yahoo Groups* to aid in collaboration and reviewing assignments for quality.

The team developed a quality control plan that required each team member to review and provide comments on every written document turned in. This plan ensured every team member was familiar with the subject of each document. The team discovered another benefit of this plan when one team member had an unexpected absence from class on a night a presentation was required. Since each team member was familiar with the absent team member's work it was easy for another team member to substitute for the absent team member's portion of the presentation.

The different stages in team formation that the team went through

The team was one that had a great amount of cultural and life experience diversity. Members came from Dubai, the US, Taiwan, India, and China. Several good conversations about cultural diversity developed in the forming stage during the first few team meetings. The team members were able to speak frankly about their own cultures and about their preconceived understanding of each other's cultures. Although this conversation randomly came up, it flushed out a few incorrect understandings of each other's cultures and helped to set the foundation for trust. The conversation also indicated that none of the members were offended by making light of each other's cultures and talking about stereotypes associated with the teams different nationalities. The ability to speak and joke in this manner actually provided a candid and enjoyable learning experience for the team and became a common side-conversation at many of the team meetings.

Despite the friendly and frank conversations there were some communication obstacles due to differing language skills. This was born in mind so that not one member felt left out. Other than language barriers, the cultural mix did not pose problems.

The storming stage began about two weeks into the course. This stage initiated when there was a need for consensus among the team members towards an acceptable final paper. Some tension also developed when a team member notified the team he would be absent for his portion of a class presentation with very short notice. The other team members utilized the absent member's presentation slides and were able to continue the presentation despite the absence. This was an

unexpected event and the team found that there were no ground rules addressing the situation. However the team did engage in some feedback and resolved the issue by rebalancing future workloads to ensure the absent member compensated the members that covered for him.

Agreeing on meeting times posed a great challenge during the storming stage. Some members had work commitments that required them to regularly work on weekends. A couple of members refused to commute to off campus meeting locations. Both of these issues resulted in tension and it was apparent that the very same storming topics that were discussed in class were unfolding in the team. The team usually found solutions to these issues but it seemed the team charter was often disregarded due to higher individual priorities.

The team felt they did reach the norming stage despite the issues identified in the storming stage. The norming stage seemed to take hold when the team started developing the final research paper and presentation. The team agreed that a paper describing cultural difference and the interaction with generalized, individual personality traits would be the topic of the research paper. The team developed an outline for the paper and assigned separate groups of chapters to each team member to research and write.

The team worked well and members really compensated for one another and communicated efficiently. There was enthusiasm and personal interest from the team in ensuring the articles that were researched for the paper were understood, and that information was disseminated and utilized properly.

Further research into project management related journals had to be done on how the personality traits shaped the way the team members' potential could be harnessed and pitfalls avoided. It was a bit concerning that while personality traits were discussed by various researchers and behavioral analysts at length, and there was really not much written on how best the four personality traits (Driver, Analyst, Thinker, Affiliator) could be harnessed in a management environment. There was material researched in other aspects like the Big Five, Personality and OCB (Organizational Citizenship Behavior) [1] etc. These could therefore be potential areas where we could focus on from an organizational performance perspective.

The research topic was a bit abstract and it was a bit of a challenge to clearly identify everyone's part in writing the paper. There were occasions when unnecessary, redundant research was done by different team members. These members were writing different chapters with similar topics. One member was to write a chapter that defined generalized personality traits. The other member was to write a chapter that described how the generalized personality traits could be expected to interact. Both members' chapters had lengthy discussions that defined the personality traits, but there was little discussion on interactions. This resulted in some redundant information in both the research paper and the accompanying presentation. There was some frustration around this issue that resulted in some feedback sessions that regressed the team into a temporary storming stage. The team experienced a slight falling out over the course of a day or two, but worked together to get back on track in time to pull together a successful process report and presentation.

The team came to a consensus that the performing stage was never reached. There were some good discussions about the team's progress through the stages. The team agreed that with such a short course and with so many different assignments to accomplish in a short amount of time it was difficult to achieve a consistent, efficient process. The team worked well together but didn't have enough time to become extremely effective as no single assignment seemed to be large and ongoing enough to provide enough time for the performing stage to occur. This resulted in a few members feeling that the group meetings and interactions were more similar to a working group than a team.

The team agreed the experience gained in this class identified some important factors for successful team performance. These include the following:

a. Clarity of the goals to be accomplished:

The team was aware of the tasks defined by the team charter and was able to get the assignments completed. However, there was a lot left to be desired in terms of the communication about the team research project. The initial responsibility exhibited by each member eventually gave way to a bit of a disjointed functioning under stress. This occasionally resulted in a loss of sight of the team's goals.

b. Responsibility and Accountability:

Initially there was a significantly higher level of responsibility and accountability. However there was a perceivable decrease in individual responsibility and accountability over time. The team agreed that the causes of this were likely due to legitimate personal responsibilities outside of the team's objectives. Regardless of the legitimacy, it seemed that the team lost a bit more than what they could afford.

In addition, the majority of the team's meetings included long, nonproductive social conversations. Although socializing is important to reach the performing state this did interfere with the team's efficiency in completing assignments. This also frustrated some members who felt the meetings were non productive. However other members realized, as taught in class, that it's extremely important to get to know each other and to care for one another in addition to doing work if a team is going to experience the performing stage.

Some individuals in the team probably experienced a few meeting that could be defined as performing. Not all members chose to participate in team socializing so the team as a whole did not develop the level of friendship necessary to reach the performing stage. The lesson identified here is that it's crucial for all team members to both socialize and productively work together to develop relationships that motivate each member to be responsible and accountable. The challenge is determining the balance between socializing and working that results in the team remaining productive while working toward the performing stage.

c. *The Affinity of the team members to the overall goals:*

Initially team members were very cognizant and showed great affinity toward the overall goals and team charter. In addition, each team member was very talented and brought diverse benefits to the team. Cultural diversity did not once prove to be a deterrent other than some difficulties understanding each other's English. As time progressed team members became less cognizant of the team's goals and focused mostly on immediate tasks. This was especially apparent during the final research paper. The team became individualized in the research and also in their write-ups of each chapter.

As a result of combining each individual's chapter the research paper was very disjointed. The ideas in the paper did not flow and there was redundant information presented in different formats. The research paper read as though it were a compilation of individual articles. This in itself made it apparent that individual members had lost sight of the team's overall goals as they became too focused on individual assignments. In hindsight, a team exercise on goal affinity (affinity chart or tree chart) during the preparation of the research paper could have helped the team get back on track.

d. *Constant communication and checkpoints:*

The team developed some great tools that ensured timely, effective communication in this fast paced, dynamic course. The *Yahoo Groups* team website proved to be a crucial asset for team collaboration. Members often found themselves communicating via e-mail and instant messaging while collaborating on documents shared on the website. This allowed for a great deal of communication outside of class and team meeting times. However, there were no formal checkpoints on communication issues, nor did the team formally discuss communication issues. There were offline and informal conversations about issues, but these issues were never brought to light for the entire team to discuss and solve.

The primary communication issues that could have been resolved early on with good checkpoints include understanding each other's English, and ensuring each team member had the same understanding of their portion of the assignments. It was apparent that politeness triumphed over discussions that should have occurred to help one another speak so that everyone could understand. This resulted in team members interpreting each other's assignments differently. This was a large issue in writing papers due to members doing work that others were doing or that the rest of the team wasn't expecting. Some members also unknowingly had a different understanding of the course requirements and syllabus and seemed to do their own thing not realizing the rest of the team had a different understanding of the course requirements.

These issues are both directly related to varying English language skills and the assumptions by each team member that we all had mastery of the language and politeness. Formal communication checkpoints might have alleviated the uncomfortable feelings that prevented members from speaking up about the team's communication issues.

e. *Constructive criticism:*

The team worked together to review assignments and provide feedback to one another to help improve assignments. There could have been more constructive criticism regarding the editing of written assignments. The dynamic for the team seemed result in the use of joking and light-hearted teasing to communicate criticisms. Whether or not this practice was effective is unknown because teasing may or may not be common in different cultures. Some cultures seem to internalize criticism and take it much more seriously than others. This was an area the team didn't address well. This resulted in frustration at times, but it seemed politeness and avoiding conflict triumphed over the necessity for constructive criticism throughout the course.

f. *Knowledge sharing:*

The sharing of knowledge by the team members was more than satisfactory. This is primarily due to the team's website and meetings. There is no recollection of any ideas that were discarded. There were moments when topics skewed from the main topic during meetings. This made some team members insecure and those members typically engaged to rein the team back in on the main topic.

g. *Conflict resolution:*

Some conflicts that the team faced resulted from absences at the meetings. Meeting times that could be conducive to the full-time students seemed to rarely fit the work situations that some other team members faced. This situation was routinely frustrating, as the same team members were consistently absent or late. Often times the majority of the team members accommodated one or two team member's schedules. The rest of the team would find that these members were still regularly late, had to leave early, or were absent all together even after accommodating them.

The team did not resort to conflict resolution on this issue. Instead team members that were able to consistently meet for the entire duration of each meeting made the bulk of the team's decisions, and ensured assignments and presentations were prepared and completed. No substantial conflict resolution tools were utilized; there was more of a compensation and work load balancing approach used. This proved to only react to the conflict rather than to resolve it.

Assignment and scheduling issues could have been resolved by incorporating conflict resolution strategies into the team. The lack of conflict resolution compounded the team's communication

issues and handicapped the team's potential. This substantially supports the strong need for incorporating conflict resolution strategies into teams.

Summary

The team initially started with strong enthusiasm and an adhered affinity toward the team's goals. The team did not reach a formal performing stage due to the short length of the course, multiple smaller assignments, and some short falls. The team was able to reach the norming stage but often regressed back to storming as a result of the shortfalls.

The primary shortfalls of the team included a lack of communication checkpoints and conflict resolution strategies. Varying language skills complicated communication and resulted in different interpretations of assignments and course requirements. This combined with conflicting schedules generated conflicts that were only reacted to and not resolved.

Overall the team worked well together despite the shortfalls and each member did accomplish the team goal of gaining significant knowledge on team building and communication. For this reason the team was successful and this course proved to be a good learning experience for all members.

References

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3. J. R. Katzenbach and D. K. Smith, *The Wisdom of Teams: Creating the High-Performance Organization*. Boston: McKinsey & Company Inc., 1993.