

TEACHING LAW STUDENTS TO WORK ON INTERDISCIPLINARY TEAMS

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Understanding Teamwork

Why Teamwork?

Studies show that students working in groups typically score higher in recall, comprehension mastery of subject matter, self-esteem & psychological well-being (Johnson & Johnson, 1989)¹

Law firms insist upon it. “Effective teamwork is critical to law firms.”² In a world of increasingly complex problems, we can no longer resolve issues without working together.

The Team Process³

Below are *typical* team stages (but each group varies). Teams typically spend about 75% of their time on their task, and 25% of their time on their team process.

Forming – The group gathers: roles defined; inclusion; politeness

Norming – The group begins its work. Individuals adjust to their roles (Report 1)

Storming – Individuals become more autonomous and positional, which can lead to personal conflict (note, lawyers often get stuck here, so actively listen for interests and be sure to acknowledge values!) (Report 2)

Reforming – The group reorganizes and re-focuses on its project; trust is increased; goals rethought; agreement reached on roles and division of labor. (Report 3)

Performing – The group problem solves more efficiently and more creatively

Adjourning – The group analyzes its work and process, and disengages

¹ John Magney, *Teamwork and the Need for Cooperative Learning*, 47 Lab L. J. 564 (1996)

² Julie Hayhoe & Larry Richard, *The Secret Lives of Teams*, Management, July 2006

³ Tuckman, B. & Jensen, M., Stages of Small Group Development, 419-427 (1977)); Whelan, S, *Group Processes: A Developmental Perspective* (2005); Julie Hayhoe & Larry Richard, *The Secret Lives of Teams*, Management, July 2006

Qualities of Successful Teams: Open Communication; Membership Empowerment; Culture of Collaboration⁴

Interdependence among team members

Members are committed to a collaborative approach in accomplishing shared goals

Each member is willing to contribute and actively participates

Communication is clear

Roles are defined

The team is clear about its goals

Team members are willing to be creative, and willing to take risks

Team members have a mutual trust

Each team member believes he or she can influence the outcome

Team members understand how to give constructive feedback

Team members can analyze errors without personal accusations

Team members are willing to praise others, as well as raise concerns.

Team Dysfunctions⁵

1. Absence of Trust – Competition/lack of vulnerability among members
2. Fear of Conflict – Focus on interpersonal differences, not substantive issues
3. Lack of Commitment – Unwillingness to deal with uncertainty/imperfection
4. Avoidance of Accountability – Unwillingness to call members on behaviors
5. Inattention to Results – Focus on ego/self-interest

Tips on Working Together

The most successful teams are interdependent. Joint contributions yield better results than individual. Don't leave reports until the last minute – everyone needs to contribute!

Effective teams play upon the strengths of its members, while accepting the weaknesses.

Everyone's contribution to the project is important. Encourage participation from everyone at your meetings. Make sure everyone knows what they are to accomplish for the next meeting.

Keep your team members informed of any problems you are having with your assigned tasks.

Bring up objections constructively, but do raise them. Don't leave the meeting with unresolved issues. Problem-solve. Go back to your Team Charter.

⁴ From a variety of sources. See, eg, Catherine B. Ahles & Courtney C. Bosworth, *The Perception and Reality of Student and Workplace Teams*, 59 *Journalism and Mass Communication Educator*, no.1 42 (spr 2004)

⁵ Patrick Lencioni, *The Five Dysfunctions of a Team* (2002)

Individual Teamwork Inventory

1. Describe your background, your interests, and your expertise. What do you have to offer to the team? What are your strengths and weaknesses generally? What do you envision your strengths and weaknesses to be regarding your assigned project?
2. How does your score on the Personal Style Inventory reflect your style in working with others on a team, if at all?
3. What are the positive aspects of teamwork generally? Name a positive experience you had working with a team. What do you look forward to?
4. What, if any, are your concerns with working in a team generally? Within your team, specifically? Have you had any negative experiences working on a team? What did you learn from that experience?
5. What are your expectations for your team? What are your goals for your team? For you individually? What skills and knowledge would you like to enhance through the process?

Having Difficult Conversations

Linda Morton and Janet Weinstein

Think it through first

- 1) Take a breath. What are you feeling and why?
- 2) What is the recipient of your communication experiencing? (*Empathize*)
- 3) What is the essence of what you want (need) to communicate?
How can you say it in a way that reflects your responsibility for what you are experiencing (*Self-awareness*)
How can you say it so that it can be heard without making the person defensive/angry?
(*Reframe; active listening*)
- 4) Is it possible to acknowledge something positive about the person and/or situation?
(*Acknowledgment; appreciative inquiry*)
- 5) Is there some way to find a connection between you and the other person, perhaps identifying a common interest? (*Common positive*)

When you are ready to speak to the individual

Acknowledge the positive aspects of the person's behavior

"You did a great job getting folks to meet with us about the problem."

Acknowledge your own contribution to the problem

"As you know, I get really worried about meeting deadlines."

State what happened. Pause. If necessary, ask the individual to explain.

"Your past few assignments have been late – is something going on we don't know about?"

Check with the other person to be sure that you have understood his/her response.

"Ok, so if I understand correctly..."

Acknowledge common interests. Look to the future.

"We both want to do well on this project. What can we do so we're both comfortable with the process?"

Summarize the agreement, adding it what you will contribute.

"Ok, so we've agreed that in the future we will...."

Remember; try to avoid direct criticism and blame.

Instead, empathize; acknowledge what you bring to the situation; use active listening throughout; find a common positive; focus on the future

Team Charter Outline

Our shared team goals are to...

Our shared expectations of each other are that we will...

Our team roles are as follows:

We will communicate as follows:

Our process for turning in time sheets each week will be...

Our process for submitting and reviewing drafts for the first report will be....

We will make decisions by ...

We will prevent conflicts by....

We will resolve our conflicts by ...

We will sustain and improve our individual and collective strengths by...

In addition, we agree to....

Team Signatures:

Dated:

Evaluate Your Team Development

Rating Team Development How do you feel about your team's progress? (Circle rating).

- | | | |
|--|-----------|--|
| 1. Team's purpose | 1 2 3 4 5 | |
| I'm uncertain | | I'm clear |
| 2. Team membership | 1 2 3 4 5 | |
| I'm out | | I'm in |
| 3. Communications | 1 2 3 4 5 | |
| Very guarded | | Very open |
| 4. Team goals | 1 2 3 4 5 | |
| Set from above | | Emerged through team interaction |
| 5. Use of team member's skills | 1 2 3 4 5 | |
| Poor use | | Good use |
| 6. Support | 1 2 3 4 5 | |
| Little help for individuals | | High level of support for individuals |
| 7. Conflict | 1 2 3 4 5 | |
| Difficult issues are avoided | | Problems are discussed openly and directly |
| 8. Influence on decisions | 1 2 3 4 5 | |
| By few members | | By all members |
| 9. Risk taking | 1 2 3 4 5 | |
| Not encouraged | | Encouraged and supported |
| 10. Working on relationships with others | 1 2 3 4 5 | |
| Little effort | | High level of effort |
| 11. Distribution of leadership | 1 2 3 4 5 | |
| Limited | | Shared |
| 12. Useful feedback | 1 2 3 4 5 | |
| Very little | | Considerable |

Mid-trimester Team Review (to be filled out individually and then discussed among team members)

1. What are the strengths of your team? What are the strengths of each individual, including yourself?
2. What challenges is your team currently facing? How will you handle them? What else do you need to be an effective team?
3. What challenges are you currently facing? How will you resolve them?
4. To what extent do you want to change your initial Team Charter ?

RATER _____

RATEE _____

CATEGORY	EXEMPLARY	PROFICIENT	PARTIALLY PROFICIENT	NOT PROFICIENT	COMMENTS
Reliability	Always competed assigned tasks on time	Completed most assigned tasks on time	Was sometimes late completing assigned tasks	Was often late completing assigned tasks	
	Always fulfilled commitments/promises	Usually fulfilled commitments/promises	Sometimes fulfilled commitments/promises	Often did not fulfill commitments or promises	
	Always notified group about problems/absences	Usually notified group about problems/absences	Sometimes did not notify group about problems/absences	Often did not notify group about problems/absences	
Productivity	Did more work than was expected	Did fair share of the work	Did less work than was expected	Did much less work than was expected	
	Exceeded quality expectations continuously on project/assignments	Produced good quality work on project/assignments	Produced fair quality work on projects and assignments	Quality of work hindered group performance	
	Continuously contributed creative and valid ideas	Often contributed creative and valid ideas	Sometimes contributed creative and valid ideas	Let others take most of the initiative	
Team Role Skills	Skillfully and consistently used many task behaviors that helped get the job done.	Usually demonstrated a number of task behaviors that helped get the job done.	Sometimes used task behaviors that helped the team get the job done.	Rarely exhibited task behaviors that helped the team get the job done.	
	Consistently stayed focused on task.	Focused on task most of the time	Focused on task some of the time; needed prodding/reminding	Was generally not focused on the task	

RATER _____

RATEE _____

Team Role Skills	Always willing to listen to, accept, and support the ideas of others	Often willing to listen to, accept, and support the ideas of others	Sometimes listened to or supported others; sometimes did not.	Rarely listened to or supported others.	
	Skillfully and consistently used many relationship behaviors that created a great team atmosphere.	Usually demonstrated relationship behaviors that created a comfortable team atmosphere	Sometimes used relationship behaviors; effect on team atmosphere was mixed or neutral.	Rarely exhibited any relationship behaviors; damaged group atmosphere.	
	Always had a helpful attitude towards the project and other team members	Usually had a helpful attitude towards the project and other team members	Attitude towards project and team mates was mixed or never expressed	Rarely had a helpful attitude towards project or teammates	
	Never displayed any disruptive behaviors	Usually did not display disruptive behaviors	Sometimes displayed disruptive behaviors	Often displayed disruptive behaviors.	
	Based on group feedback, made necessary behavioral changes	Based on group feedback, made most of necessary behavioral changes	Made some attempt to change behavior based on group feedback	Ignored group feedback and continued non-helpful behavior	
Tally	Number x 4 = ____	Number x 3 = ____	Number x 2 = ____	Number x 1 = ____	Total /14 = ____

Things this member does well:

Things this member should improve:

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

Based on this member's performance, he/she should receive:

- ____ Less than the group grade (how many points?)
- ____ The group grade
- ____ More than the group grade (how many points?)