TEAM BUILDING MECHANISM FOR A GROUP OF STUDENTS

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INTRODUCTION

Group work can be an ultimate method to motivate students, develop key critical-thinking, and encourage active learning, decision making skills, communication. But without thoughtful planning and facilitation, group work can ultimately frustrate students, instructors and other key parties in the program and may feel like a waste of time.

The present report talks on importance of group, team effort and collaborative work for a small batch of students with a reputed Institute. The report talks on the diagnosis that was undertaken to find out the current impediments associated with the students for effective team work. The diagnosis focused on certain key findings, based on which few interventions have been suggested for optimum output from the group performance. It was also observed that this group lack cohesiveness, trust and commitments. The basic intention was to identify factors associated with the behaviour and attitude in context of present situation and plan, design an intervention to overcome the same.

For students

Team work can help students develop a number of skill sets that are increasingly important in the professional world. Positive experiences of group have been shown to contribute to students learning, retention and overall success. Properly formulated, group work can reinforce skills that are important to both individual work as well as group, including the ability to:

- Break complex tasks into easy to understand parts and steps
- Effectively plan and manage time
- Enhance understanding through group discussion and explanation
- Give and receive feedback on performance related to group performance
- Develop stronger communication skills.
- Develop cohesiveness, trust and commitment within group

Team work can also help students develop skills related to collaborative efforts, allowing students to

- Handle more complex situations than they could of their own.
- Understand the roles and responsibilities.
- Share diverse pool of ideas.

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- Hold one another and be held accountable for individual work.
- Get social support and empowerment to take risks.
- Develop new approaches to resolving differences.

For Instructors

Instructors can assign relatively complex problems to groups of students than they could to individuals. Group work also introduces more un-predictability in teaching, since groups may approach tasks and solve problems in novel, innovative and interesting ways. This can be refreshing for instructors. Further group assignments can be useful when there are a limited number of viable project topics to distribute among students. And they can reduce the number of final products instructors have to grade.

OD MODEL

Organizational development exists for the reason of improving the effectiveness of the organization in attainment of its goals and objectives. Diagnosis refers to assessing the current level of functioning so that required interventions can be designed and implemented. Below is the model for the present assignment on OD as seen in fig below.
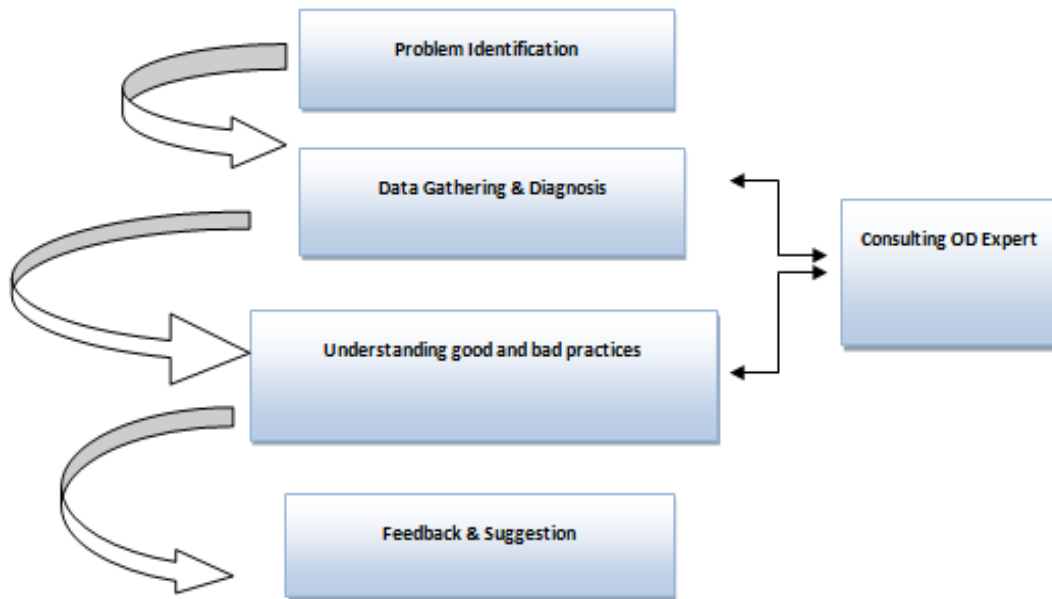

Fig 1.1: OD Model

Step1.   Identifying and refining problem area/areas: This requires consulting with the key stakeholders to identify the gray areas and how it has impacted them. The focus was on clearly identifying the major problematic concerns. These major problems are listed as below

    i.   Group conflict
   ii.   Lack of cohesiveness

iii.   Lack of trust and commitment

Step2. Data gathering and Diagnosis: In this stage data was collected for further assessment particularly in two different ways

Indirect Assessment

Indirect or informant assessment relies heavily upon the use of structured interviews with students, teachers, and other key parties who have direct responsibility for the students concerned. Interviews was structured so that it yields concrete behavioural aspects such as

- In what settings does the observer, observes the behaviour?
- Is there any instance where the behaviour does not occur?
- What would be a more acceptable behaviour that might replace this behaviour?

Direct Assessment

This included observing and recording situational factors around the problem area.

Step3. Understanding good and bad practices: after the diagnosis of the data received got completed, it was important to understand the best and the worst practices in the present environment. This included conversation with several Industry members (outside of this context) and tried to get their opinion on the good and bad practices. Similarly emphasis was to link the practices of several other related institutions and match it with the institution under the study.

Step4. Once the problem areas are identified, the next step was to design an intervention/s and suggest the same to the authority in charge for their review. This includes recommendation depending on the situation and the diagnosis

DIAGNOSIS

The diagnosis as stated earlier is the process of assessing the current level of functioning. During the process key stake holders mainly students and faculty members were identified and were made part of the process to find out the following

• What roles do various individuals play within the group?

These questions speak to the notion of each group having a control and power structure. This is also indicated by the following questions: How do decisions get made in the group? Other than the leader's direction, how is it decided who proposes and what is discussed?

• Which coalitions have formed?

This answers as to who is aligned with whom? Which alliances have formed temporarily and permanently? Which members are in conflict and with whom?

• Are the boundaries within a group open enough to allow new information to enter the group? Boundaries can be tight or loose, depending on the needs of the group. An example of boundaries is the admission criteria for a group setting. Who gets into the group? What are the criteria?

• How do members communicate with one another*?* Are the lines of communication clear and direct? Where do members direct their attention when they speak?

• Do group interactions tend to move in patterns that move toward keeping the system stable*?* What norms have developed in the group that regulates behaviour? Which rules were established by the leader versus which ones emerged covertly by members? What are the meta-rules (the rules about rules) in the group? These are the ones such as "Make sure you don't say anything about bald people or it will piss the leader off."

• How is information exchanged among group members? How did people share what they know with one another? Who was excluded or ignored? Which data were accepted and rejected? What critical information was neglected? How was the information synthesized?

• Did change in a system occur via the use of positive and negative feedback? Rather than a value judgment, positive feedback tends to create change, whereas negative feedback tends to support the current system. Conflict can be an example of positive feedback that is change provoking. How are conflicts resolved? Who doesn't like whom? What are the ways that members try to sabotage or undermine one another or the leader? How do members show their disagreement with what is going on? At the same time, during conflict there will be group members who try to downplay or squash the conflict. This can be viewed as negative or change resistant feedback.

So who tries to make things better? Who squelches the conflict? Who tries to create distractions?

• What was the holistic outcome of the group? Rather than group members acting as solitary agents, each is interdependent on one other, meaning that the whole is greater than the sum of its parts While new group leaders may evaluate a group based on how some of the members did, holism instructs group leaders to ask "How did the group do today?"

FINDINGS

The diagnosis resulted into finds which are as below
  i.   Group conflict (among the students group, between students and instructors)
  ii.   Lack of cohesiveness among the group of students
  iii. Lack of trust and commitment between students group as well as between students and instructors

ADVANTAGES OF TEAM WORK

Good group work has great potential for the following reasons:
  • Students are encouraged to become active rather than passive learners by developing collaborative and co-operative skills, and lifelong learning skills.
  • It encourages the development of critical thinking skills.

- It requires the establishment of an environment of support, trust and co-operative learning can be nurtured.
- It promotes student learning and achievement.
- Students have the opportunity to learn from and to teach each other.
- Deep rather than surface approaches to learning are encouraged.
- It facilitates greater transfer of previous knowledge and learning.
- The focus is on student centred approach to teaching and learning, and assessment.
- Students are involved in their own learning.
- It enhances social skills and interactions.
- Learning outcomes are improved.
- Large numbers of students can be catered for and work on task simultaneously.
- Interaction and co-operation on a micro scale is facilitated thus decreasing a sense of isolation felt by some.
- Quiet students have an opportunity to speak and be heard in small groups thus overcoming the anonymity and passivity associated with large groups.
- Teaching, learning and assessment options are increased.
- Teaching effectiveness and efficiency increases, and as a result there is increased enjoyment of teaching by staff (and students).
- Students get the chance to work on large projects (larger in scope or complexity than individual tasks).
- Students from diverse backgrounds are provided with the opportunity to be heard, share experiences and skills, and to participate in unique ways (may provide a new perspective).
- It can save time and requires a shared workload.
- Alternative ideas and points of view can be generated.
- It provides a structured learning experience that can prepare students for the realities and diversity of the workplace, working with people with different skills, cultures, approaches and from different places.
- Students develop and practice skills in: decision making, problem solving, values clarification, communication, critical thinking, negotiation, conflict resolution, and teamwork.
- The opportunity exists to nurture and develop Graduate Student Attributes.
- It makes the Unit of Study challenging, interesting, motivating, engaging, and fun (for everyone.[1]

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[1] Chapter 3. Understanding group dynamics and systems, Sage Publication.

OD Intervention

The term Intervention refers to a set of systematic, planned actions or events intended to help an organization to increase its effectiveness. Interventions purposely disrupt the status quo; they are deliberate attempts to change an organization or sub-unit toward a different and more effective state.

Group activities and best practices

What are true for the individual assignments can also be true for the group assignments. It is very important to clarify expectations, clearly communicate objectives of the assignments, design high quality work, define the task, and also communicate the performance criteria. But group work has complexities above and beyond individual work. So, to ensure the positive results, some of these effective practices can be implemented.

- Creating interdependence
- Devoting time specifically to teamwork skills
- Individual accountability

Create Interdependence:

Some of the instructors don't if their student divides their task and work separately, and other instructors expect higher degree of collaboration between the group members. If an instructor wants their students to work in team, then structure the project so that every group member will be dependent on each other's. Below are the few ways to create the interdependence

Strategy	Example
Ensure that the project is sufficiently complex that the students must be draw on one another's	For example we have to design a game in a group which requires technical skills like programming and designing skills. So to complete the game design successfully, group members from different disciplines must draw on one another's
Create shared goals, so that every group members will be depend on each other and goals will only be achieve through collaboration	For example in an engineering course, teams compete with other teams to design a boat with the help applying their skills and also working within the budgetary and material constraints. Therefore the fun and the intensity of a competition motivates the team to work together so that they create the best design and win the competition

Devote the time specifically to teamwork skills:

Instructors should not think that the student knows that how work in a team. Most of the students have worked in a team but there can be a chance they had not able to develop the effective teamwork skills which is necessary to work in team. By the same, the teamwork skills which students learned in one context (For Ex. module on team building and effectiveness) may not be applicable or use for different things like designing of interventions.

Therefore to work effectively in group or team, students have to learn that how to work with the other team or group members to do the things they might only know that how to do individually, for ex.

- Assess the difficulty and nature of a task
- Break the task into stages or steps
- Plan a strategy
- Manage time

Students are also need to know that how to handle the problems which arises while working in a teams or groups, for ex.

- Explain their ideas to others
- Listen to perspectives and alternative ideas
- Reach consensus
- Delegate responsibilities
- Coordinate efforts
- Resolve conflicts
- Integrate the contribution of the multiple team members

Here are the suggestions or recommendations that can be done to help the group members to develop these skills and also to see their value in their professional life.[2]

Strategy	Example
Emphasize more on the practical importance of the strong teamwork skills	Explain students the importance of teamwork skills in workplace by giving the real life examples of how teams works and explain that what can go wrong and how to handle that. One instructor asks his students to list the skills which they think company or employers look for in the interview. Then students listed the domain specific skills like

[2]https://www.cmu.edu/teaching/designteach/design/instructtionlstrategy/groupwork.desgn/html

	Programming. Then instructors explains their students that employer looks or concentrate more on skills like the ability to communicate properly with others and ability to work in a team
Address the inaccurate or negative perceptions about working in a group	If the student haven't taken the team project seriously in the previous term or course or if their experience were not good. Then it may affect the students to work this time in your course. So ask students about their experience and tell them to list the negative and positive aspects of working in team based on the previous term or course.
Provide the guidance and structure to help students plans	Model the process of planning for the complex task by explaining that how would you approach a similar task and also build time into the schedule of project which is specially for planning
Set interim deadlines	Break the project work into stages or steps and also set the deadlines to complete the every stage. In addition to setting the deadlines give students a rough knowledge of that how long various stage of the project are likely to take.
Establish ground rules	Create the rules and regulations which should be followed by students properly or ask the students to make themselves. Rules and regulations can include come to meeting on time, meet your deadlines, reply for emails within 24 hrs and etc.
Teach and reinforce conflict-resolution skills	Disagreements within the team members can give valuable opportunities for the team members to develop both better end products and better teamwork skills. But the conflict between the team members can also demotivate each other's. So help the students to handle the disagreements or conflicts and tensions productively. Provide students a language that can use to voice preferences and objections constructively and reinforce the listening skills. Structured role playing will also be helpful, for example present students with a hypothetical situation in which they have conflict with each other and ask students to work towards resolution.
Alert students to common pitfalls.	Identify the important pitfalls of team projects. Common pitfalls may include underestimating the amount of time required to schedule meetings, computer clusters, coordinating access to labs, preparing presentations, mailing reports to external clients and etc.

BUILD INDIVIDUAL ACCOUNTABILITY:

It is possible for a team or group member to work hard and yet fail to complete successfully. In order to ensure that the students are capable or meets your criteria for mastery and understanding, so it is important for instructor to structure the individual accountability into the group or team work assignments.

In addition to evaluate the work of the team as a whole, ask the team members to demonstrates their learning with the help of independent write ups, quizzes, or weekly journal entries and etc. Not only does this help instructor to monitor the team members learning's, it will also help to prevents the free rider phenomenon.

To create the individual accountability, some of the instructors combine their group projects with an individual quizzes to ensure the contribution of every individuals in a team. Other instructors base part of the project grade on a group project like report, paper, design and presentations and part on an individual submission. The individual portion of the group project might contain a summary of the group's decision-making process, a description of the individual's contribution in the project and etc.

Some instructors assign team members in team the task of evaluating, synthesising and presenting a set of article relevant to the project. It is very important for the every team members to have the knowledge of the whole project, even if they had divided their parts. So to ensure this instructor can warn each and every team members in advance that at the time of presentation he can ask any questions to anyone.

Team building mechanism for students

Before we proceed further on team building mechanism it is expected that we understand the team development stages as seen in fig 1.2. Every team experiences these stages in one form or the other. *Forming* which is the initial stage of development. Here there is relatively little trust which can be observed with the team members. Members generally care about what they say and how they say. Everyone tries to be at their best behaviour. *Storming* *refers to the second stage* where the team defines itself. Conflict is likely when they discuss on the leadership, purpose and the working procedure. *Norming* is the stage where the team members develop a shared vision and the goals/objectives are made clear and the ground rules are set. People learn to work best together. *Performing* is a stage when people trust each other and there is an open communication. Team spirits are high and people have clear sense of shared vision. *Adjourning* is the stage where assessment of the past performance is considered and the team member gets recognised for the contribution.
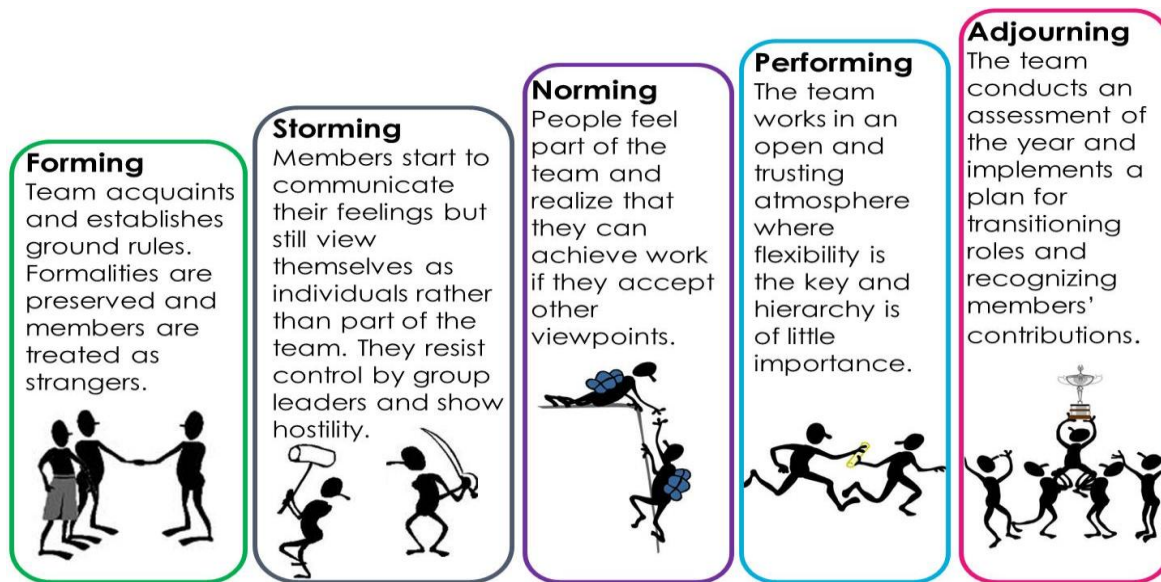
Fig 1.2: Team development stages

- **Physical arrangement in team and group should be carefully thought upon by the instructor**– Is it easy to form a groups and for all students to work comfortably? Also instructor should think that how the layout of the classroom will impact volume. Will students really be able to hear the other students clearly? How can you moderate the activity to control volume?

- **Insist on professionalism-** between the students to respect people's differences and create an inclusive environment.

- **Ask students about their past experiences while working in group** and allow them to make some rules and regulations for the successful collaboration between the group members

Designing the small group activity

- **Objective identification:** Determine what needs to be achieved through the small group activities, academically (e.g., knowledge of a topic) and socially (e.g., group objective). The activity should relate closely to the course objectives and content and should be designed to help students in their learning, not simply to occupy their time. The following question must be asked before assigning group activity. What is the objective of the assignment? How will that objective be achieved by asking students for group work? Will the assignment require true collaboration?

- **Making the task challenging.** Consider giving a easy task (relatively) early in the term to build students interest in the group work and encourage progress. In most of the cases, collaborative exercises should be challenging and stimulating. By dealing with differences of

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opinion that comes in, groups of students usually develop a more sophisticated product than they could as individuals.

- **Group tasks that encourage interdependence, involvement, and a fair division of labour.** Personal responsibility should be felt by each team member for the success of the team mates and understand that their individual success would depend on the group's success. Allocating essential resources across the group, so the group members are required to share information or to come up with a consensus, randomly select a person to speak for the group; or assign different roles to the group members so that they are all involved in the process. Another strategy for promoting interdependence and collaboration is specifying common rewards for the group, such as a group marks.

- **Group size.** The size chosen will depend on the total number of students, the variety of individuals needed within a group, and assigning the task. Groups of 2-4 tend to balance well the needs for productivity, active participation diversity and cohesion.

- **Division of students in a group.** Division based on proximity or students' choice is easiest and quickest, it means that the students end up working together with his/her friends or always with the same people. To change group composition and increase groups diversity, random assignment of students to groups by grouping them according to number. For some group tasks, the diversity within a group is especially very important. Alternately, students should be asked to express a preference (e.g., name three students with whom they would most like to work or two topics they would most like to study), and keep their preferences in mind as the groups is assigned.

- **Collaborative work in multiple constellations and forms:** pairs, small groups, large groups etc. Some students are better at contributing after they have had time to digest material, further others might be better at thinking on the spot instantly, other students will defer to others in groups but even though actively contribute in pairs; all roles should be included and valued.

Role of Instructor

- **Demonstrate you are prepared for the group session.** Being punctually, carrying handout prepared that relates to the task, and carry through on tasks that was promised when group work was last taken in the classroom

- **Rationale for using group work.** Students must understand the benefits and use of collaborative learning. It must not be assumed that students know about the purpose of the same. Connection must be explained about these activities and learning outcomes whenever possible. If students do not see the value of the group activity, they might conclude that one is using group work merely to get out of course preparation or lecturing.

- **Expect students to form groups before instruction is given.** If instructions are given first, students may be too pre-occupied with deciding on group membership to listen to the instructor. Or by the time they have determined their groups, they may forget what they were supposed to do.

- **Facilitate some form of group cohesion.** Students generally would work together if they know or trust each other, at least to an extent. Even for brief group activities, students should introduce themselves to the group members before attending to the task. For longer periods of group work, introducing an ice breaker or an activity designed specifically to build a sense of teamwork should be considered.
- **Task explanation.** This means both instructing students exactly what they have to do and what the final product of their group work needs to be.
- **Ground rules for group interaction are explained.** Majorly for extended periods of group work, explain how group members should interact with one another, laying the principles such as respect, active listening, and process for decision making.
- **Students should be required to ask questions.** Even if the instructor thinks instructions are very clear, students may very well have genuine questions about the activity. Provide them opportunity to ask question before getting on to the task

Monitoring the group task

- **Monitor the group but do not hover –** clear the doubts rose during the discussions. Also listen for the trends which are emerging during discussions, so that you can refer that to the students during the plenary discussions. However be alert and also avoid the interfering with the group functions, allow time to students to handle their own issues before getting involved. Even also consider to leave the room for some time, because your absence will help to increase the student's willingness to express their disagreements.
- **Expect a lot from your students –** Assume that your students know so much and can do the work without your help. Express your confidence towards the students this will motivate the students.
- **Be slow to share what you know –** If you come up with a group that is experiencing the disagreements; avoid your natural tendency to give the suggestions or to resolve the disagreements between them. The learning which accomplished through working in group will be slow, but the learning will be effective.
- **Clarify your role as a facilitator –** If the students complaining that you are not contributing your work properly ensure that you have communicated with your students clearly or not that your role is of facilitator.[3]

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[3]https://uwaterloo.ca/centre-for-teaching-excellence/teaching-resources/teaching-tips/alternatives-lecturing/group-work/implementing-group-work-classroom

Evaluate*:* By the end of the intervention, it is important to measure the effectiveness, to ensure that the interventions actually addressed the complex organizational challenge. There are five levels of measurement

- **Level 1: Reaction-** How satisfied are the students and the instructors?
- **Level 2: Learning**-Did the students and participants learn what they needed to learn For example, did the participants learn new strategy skills, knowledge and attributes.
- **Level 3: Behaviour-** Has there been any significant impact on the behaviour of the individuals with respect to interventions
- **Level 4: Business Results** -Did the intervention lead to improved business results? For example: here in this context the ultimate outcome of the MBA program for the students group, and the institute as a whole
- **Level 5: Return on Investment**-Do the benefits of the intervention outweigh the costs involved?) For example, where the students able to build upon the managerial capabilities, acquire skills, knowledge and ability to perform on the job. Further was the institute able to create its mark in the industry and was it able to create it brand recognition.

CONCLUSION

Optimum results can be achieved through groups than that can be achieved by individuals alone, but to be productive a group must remain focused. Trust, commitment and open communication are the pillars to successful accomplishment of the desired task. One such example would be comparing the group to a motor vehicle. A group like a vehicle can get to a place faster. But most of us are more interested reaching to our destination, than we are in the motor vehicle that carries us to the destination. However if no attention is payed towards to the vehicle, it will fall into disrepair while movement. A group, too, needs fuelling and maintenance related to vehicle.

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