

THE PREPARATION OF A *TEAM PERFORMANCE AGREEMENT*¹

Most engineering assignments today are addressed by multidisciplinary teams, which are groups involving engineers as well as other interested and involved individuals (e.g. planners, marketing representatives). Modern engineering programs such as ours introduce teamwork in the Freshman year, build on the team concept with engineering laboratory courses, and culminate in a significant design experience involving open-ended design with a multidisciplinary team approach. We believe that repeated practice of team-building within our engineering programs is an important part of your preparation for engineering practice. However, team-building can be as challenging as it is rewarding. The purpose of this document is to introduce some aspects of teamwork, to describe the importance of the team performance agreement, and to give you some general guidelines for the preparation of your team performance agreement.

It is important that groups or teams understand two things:

1. When the group works together, the accomplishments will surpass any results associated with any one individual. Any team member functioning independently of other team members or competing with them will REDUCE the performance level of the team - EVERYONE's outcome.
2. Every person has some capabilities to contribute to the group efforts; every member should be encouraged to contribute and never should any member's contributions be automatically disregarded. Many of the best solutions to engineering problems can be traced to a seemingly "off the wall" or "out of the mainstream" suggestion.

What is the best way to accomplish this effective team performance? The most fundamental requirement is for every member of the team to have a *common vision of the tasks*. One way to do this is for the group to first develop a ***Team Performance Agreement (TPA)***. This TPA is intended to provide a framework for group efforts, helping each member to know what the goals of the group are,

¹ Adapted from J. C. Bennett, "The Preparation of a Team Performance Agreement" (2000).

what procedures are to be utilized within the groups, what the expectations will be for each member in the group efforts, how decisions will be made within the group, and what approach will be taken to resolve conflicts within the group.

It is suggested that the first item addressed by the TPA should be the group vision of what are the shared goals of the group for the course in terms of desired outcomes. This vision is general and forms the foundation for addressing specific tasks. Only when all members share a common concept of the group approach will positive, reinforcing cooperation and interaction occur. Items of a general nature that should be addressed in this vision building include the following:

1. As trivial as it may be, what does the group consider an acceptable result of their efforts? Are they looking to do the bare minimum work assigned or are they looking to achieve the best result possible? Are they looking to work together to make sure every member has a working knowledge of any “tool” or project outcome or are they satisfied having individual members with any specific skill?
2. How are decisions to be made? Ideally, one would hope for unanimous agreement among team members on all required decisions. The more shared the goals of the group are, the more likely that a consensus can be developed. It is important that procedures be developed by the group that addresses those cases for which unanimity or at least consensus cannot be found - *such that each member can accept her or his task-related role(s) in light of this decision.*
3. What happens in those instances when disagreement occurs - *two or more alternatives are under consideration with no consensus possible*? I.e., how can the negative consequences of this unresolved issue be avoided together with the accompanying bad feelings? It is suggested that this procedure include (a) acceptance of the importance that an alternative be found that meets all sides’ needs; (b) search for mutual understanding (of all the points of view involved, of the key issues involved, and of results that would constitute a fully acceptable solution); and (c) commitment to creative efforts to build an acceptable alternative based upon this understanding of the conflict.
4. How are roles going to be identified for group efforts? How is the classification of those roles (individual, sub-group, or group) going to be made? What are the group rules, expectations, and consequences associated with the inferior performance of team members?

5. What are the inter-group communication expectations? What approach is to be taken to insure that all members are heard and their ideas considered? What approach is taken to encourage all members to contribute suggestions? What approach is to be taken to insure that all members are aware of difficulties associated with sub-tasks - in order to avoid inferior performance? It's natural to anticipate difficulties; the important thing is to address role adjustments necessary to addressing the difficulties in a timely fashion.

It is only when approaches to these and possibly other issues are accepted by ALL members as part of the group TPA that the team can expect the type of individual contributions necessary for meeting the group's vision of its outcomes.

In considering the procedures associated with addressing any task, there are several items that must be considered:

1. What are the desired results? What are the outcomes the group wants and by when? In other words, what is the task objective and what is the required schedule? What are the specific task-related goals consistent with the general group vision?
2. What are the constraints or guidelines associated with this task? These are the parameters that cannot be violated in addressing the task. It makes no sense in pursuing any approach that is not legal or violates some absolute requirement for the task.
3. What are the resources that can be utilized? What is available for consideration, how much can be spent, and how do we access these resources as we address the task?
4. How are the outcomes or solutions for the task to be evaluated? What will be the criteria that will be used and who will be doing the evaluations?
5. What are consequences of the accomplishments? What are the consequences of the desired results are not accomplished?
6. What are the specific talents or capabilities of individual team members that can be utilized for addressing the specific task? *Equally importantly*, how will these talents or capabilities be taught or conveyed to other team members such that all member capabilities grow as the task is approached.

The sources from which the idea for the Team Performance Agreement was developed and from which the materials included in this handout were organized are as follows:

1. *First Things First* by Stephen R. Covey, A. Roger Merrill, and Rebecca R. Merrill, Simon & Schuster, New York, 1994. ISBN 0-671-86441-6.
2. *Team Building Workshop Overheads Notebook* by Lynn Bellamy, Don Evans, Darwyn Linder, Barry McNeill, and Greg Gaupp all from Arizona State University; distributed at the ASEE/ASU Workshop on Teaming presented at the ASEE 1993 Annual conference, Urbana-Champaign, Illinois, June 1993.
3. *The Preparation of a Team Performance Agreement* by J. C. Bennett, January 2000.