

Guidelines for Writing Team Contract

To prepare you for teamwork in the business world, you will be assigned a team for each project. Your team will work together to complete the collaborative projects in MATH 115b this semester.

Rationale

According to concepts from Organizational Behavior, there are five stages of team development: forming, storming, norming, performing, and adjourning. During the forming stage, teams tend to communicate in indirect polite ways rather than more directly. The storming stage, characterized by conflict, can be often be productive, but may consume excessive amounts of time and energy. In this stage it is important to listen well for differing expectations. Next, during the norming stage, teams formulate roles and standards, increasing trust and communication. This norming stage is characterized by agreement on procedures, reduction in role ambiguity, and increased “we-ness” or unity. These developments generally are precursors to the performing stage, during which teams achieve their goals, are highly task oriented, and focus on performance and production. When the task has been completed, the team adjourns.

To accelerate a team’s development, a team contract is generated to establish procedures and roles in order to move the team more quickly into the performing stage. This process of generating a team contract can actually help jump-start a group's collaborative efforts by immediately focusing the team members on a definite task. The group members must communicate and negotiate in order to identify the quality of work they all wish to achieve, and the level of group participation and individual accountability they all feel comfortable with.

Successful team performance depends on personal individual accountability. In a team environment, individuals are usually effectively motivated to maximize their own rewards and minimize their own costs. However, conflicts can arise when individualistic motives or behaviors disrupt team-oriented goals. For example, conflict can stem from an unequal division of resources. When team members believe they are receiving too little for what they are giving, they sometimes reduce their effort and turn in work of lower quality. Such "free riding" occurs most frequently when individual contributions are combined into a single product or performance, and individual effort is perceived as unequal. At this point, some individual team members may take on extra responsibilities while other team members may reduce their own efforts or withdraw from the team completely. These behaviors may engender anger, frustration, or isolation—resulting in a dysfunctional team and poor quality of work. However, with a well-formulated team contract, such obstacles can usually be avoided.

Team Contract Assignment

Your team contract template is divided into three major sections:

1. establishing team procedures
2. identifying expectations
3. specifying the consequences for failing to follow these procedures and fulfill these expectations

Since the basic purpose of this team contract is to accelerate your team's development, to increase individual accountability for team tasks, and to reduce the possibility for team conflict, make your contract **as specific as possible**: (a) specify each task as detailed as possible, (b) specify each step in a procedure or process as detailed as possible, (c) specify the exact person(s) responsible for each specific task, and (d) specify the exact time and exact place for completion or submission of each task. The more specifically you describe your team expectations, roles, and procedures, the greater chance you have for a successful team experience.

Use the Team Contract template to discuss and finalize your team roles, procedures, and standards. Complete, sign, and submit a **copy** your finalized contract to your Math 115b instructor in your next class meeting.

Once your team contract has been developed, your team is ready to begin work on collaborative assignments. However, you may soon find that your team is not working as well as you had hoped. This is normal but needs to be attended to immediately. Perhaps your team is simply not following the established contract procedures or roles as strictly as you should be, or perhaps you need to change some of the procedures or roles as outlined in your contract. Call a team meeting immediately to discuss and resolve the challenges your team is facing; do not delay. Seek guidance from your instructor, TA, or preceptor to resolve any conflicts so that you will have the most positive team experience possible.