Teamwork/Collaboration: Task Force Management

1. LEARNING OUTCOME
Students will become aware of the career-readiness competency Teamwork/Collaboration and connect this competency and the skills associated with it to the assignment topic.

2. OBJECTIVE
The following exercises are designed to help you identify your teamwork/collaboration skills and put them into practice. As you move through them, reflect on what you believe are your most significant strengths and weaknesses when it comes to teamwork/collaboration.

3. TEAMWORK/COLLABORATION DEFINED
In many instances, our jobs will involve working with others. Many work-based projects will involve collaboration. This is a product of both the “information age” as well as globalization, phenomena that lend themselves to complex challenges, requiring solutions that are multi-layered and carefully vetted.

Employers increasingly place emphasis on the ability to work collaboratively as this sort of work often results in more effective problem solving (Goltz, Hietapelto, Reinsch, & Tyrell, 2008).

Effective Teamwork Involves:
- A sense of trust among those in the organization
- Good communication skills
- The ability to see issues from multiple vantage points
- The ability to see, understand, and appreciate competing views
- Patience and flexibility
4. EXERCISE ONE

I. Familiarize Yourself with the Following Models of Teamwork

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Cog’s Ladder Versus Tuckman’s Stages

Cog’s “polite stage” mirrors Tuckman’s “forming” stage. In this stage, team members are simply getting to know one another; this is similar to a “meet and greet.” Individuals are generally polite during this stage, but will often engage in internal (mental) assessments of the personalities and strengths of their fellow team members.

The second stages of each model (“why we’re here” and “storming”) are also similar to one another. During this stage, group members will likely discuss the reasons why they find themselves in this group or team and begin to toss around some preliminary thoughts about how to proceed.

In Cog’s “bid for power” stage, group members compete for power and position. It is common for individuals to try and assert their ideas and their will upon others. Some individuals will attempt to take the lead, asserting the primacy of their ideas over others. They may also begin to assign roles, create a timeline, and assimilate into the role of group leader. Conflict is somewhat likely during this stage. Further, alliances may begin to form.

Tuckman’s “norming” stage involves the assignment of roles. It may also involve the creation of a calendar and specific guidelines for how each group member is to proceed. Norming, then, is essentially the creation of a specific blueprint for the group. Deadlines and responsibilities are established.

The final stages, as delineated by Cog and by Tuckman, are somewhat distinct. For Cog, the final stage is marked by happiness and excitement that the goals of the group were achieved. Often, there is a sense of renewed energy, friendship, and loyalty among group members. For Tuckman, there may also be a sense of relief that the task was accomplished. However, the final stage can be experienced as one of loss as group members mourn the end of the work and must say their goodbyes (Staggers, Garcia, & Nagelhout, 2008).
II. Convene a Task Force to Find a Solution to a Problem

Scenario/Context:
You are the executive assistant for the President of a college. Recently, a number of complaints have been made regarding the traffic flow around campus, which is located in a traditional, residential area. The main complaint is that the college has too many classes scheduled around the same times and this has resulted in a very heavy flow of student traffic in and around the campus. This flow is having a negative impact on homeowners in the area who often find themselves sitting in a line of traffic, unable to go about their normal routines.

The President has asked you to convene a task force to deal with this matter. She noted that you may invite a small number of colleagues to serve on the task force with you. The President is interested in getting feedback from the community and from others “who may be impacted” by this matter or who “need to be heard.”

You are being asked to:
- Learn more about the nature, and specifics, of the problem
- Devise one or two strategies to alleviate the problem
- Involve different constituencies in the discussion
- Present your strategies to her within 60 days. The presentation should involve a comprehensive overview of the above points, along with a summary of the different viewpoints expressed.

Focus:
For purposes of this exercise, you do not need to devise the actual strategies. Rather, focus on the information gathering and development phases.

Steps:
- Break into small groups and discuss how you would tackle this matter.
- Consider: would you recruit others to serve on the task force? Explain your reasoning and who you might involve?
- Would the work of the task force need to be carried out in phases? If so, what are the phases? Who would you involve in this discussion and why?
- How would you reach out to the various constituencies? What is involved in this process?
- How would you divide the work, given the time frame?
- How would the results be presented? In what form? Who would present?
- What challenges do you anticipate?

Challenges with Working Collaboratively
Cliques are likely to develop during the “polite” and “forming” stages. As the formation of a clique implies the establishment of “insiders” and “outsiders,” cliques are not helpful to group- or team-based projects.

Conflicts are common during the “bid for power” and “storming” stages. Conflict management skills are necessary at these stages. It is not ideal to suppress conflict, but rather to deal with it openly and constructively. Tools for success include – good communication skills; the ability to give & receive feedback in ways which are supportive and non-threatening; an openness to competing points of view; and mutual respect for group members.

During the work stages (“constructive” and “performing”), some group members may attempt to tackle the work on their own. If so, they may begin to withdraw from the team. Group members must guard against the tendency to retreat into a private, individual mode of work that is characteristic of western culture.