

Keep Learning | Troubleshooting Team & Group Performance

This guide is designed to help you prevent, identify or address typical problems that academic teams encounter. Having difficulty working as a team is NOT an indication of whether you have a “good team” or a “bad team”. However -- how a team handles difficulties IS an indication of whether the team will ultimately be successful. Reading through this guide before you experience problems may help you address situations before they affect your group’s performance.

This Guide is divided into 3 sections – Process, Relationships, and Tasks – and provides specific suggestions for resolving common team issues.

Process Issues: How Your Group Is Working Together	
<i>The problem is...</i>	<i>What you can do...</i>
<p>Members are not certain who is doing what task and how much work each person is doing.</p> <p>We do not set or do not follow agendas for our meetings.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • If your group has not established a group recorder as indicated on your Team Contract or if the recorder has not been recording assignments on each Meeting Worksheet, bring this up via email or at the next meeting for resolution. • If the Meeting Worksheets are being completed but there is still uncertainty, review your Team Contract and get agreement on who will communicate decisions/tasks. <i>Make sure you get verbal agreement from each team member about the method of communicating.</i> • If the recorder and/or the communicator are not following through, discuss directly with group using yourself as an example: <i>“I am not certain who is doing what. I think we decided that <u>Name</u> would keep us all on track. Can we talk about how this is working and what to do?”</i> • Use the Meeting Worksheet to set the agenda and decide in advance who will shepherd the team through the agenda at each meeting. Collectively set the agenda with small objectives and prioritize in terms of importance. • If agenda is set but is not followed, discuss directly with the entire team: <i>“I noticed we are not following the agenda and am wondering what we should do about this? Do you still want to take care of this, <u>Name</u>? Is there something we can all do to make following an easier process ?</i>
<p>There is a group leader/facilitator and an agenda, but group meetings</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Others are likely feeling the same and will be glad you brought it up. During a meeting, state directly your

<p>are too short to accomplish anything or too long and don't accomplish much.</p>	<p>concern: <i>"I'm feeling like our meetings are so long that we all check out and don't get much done at the end. We might be able to do more in less time if we stick with an agenda, or meet more often, or _____".</i> Make a positive suggestion to change things.</p>
<p>Members are not following through on goals or timelines.</p> <p>or</p> <p>Members do not respond to important emails.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Any team member can suggest that the recorder or communicator raise this issue with the whole group present. Discuss the contract in person and with all members present. • The recorder or communicator may need help bringing up this issue from other members, using your self as an example: <i>"I feel uncertain about how to proceed if I don't hear back from everyone. It just takes longer to get anything done and I know we all want to get this done well without extra effort.. What seems like a reasonable amount of time to respond to emails?"</i> • If one person has become the issue, address them directly in the meeting by asking: <i>"Will responding to emails in x amount of time work for you? Or "Does our timeline for your assignment seem doable for you? Can you do that for the group?"</i> It helps if you get a commitment from the individual in front of entire group.
<p>One member's schedule has changed and they can no longer meet at the time everyone else can.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Make an attempt to find another common time. If this is not possible, the person should talk with the professor about finding another group. It is not advisable to continue meeting without the person. It will negatively affect both the individual and the group.

Relationship Issues: How group members interact personally with each other	
<i>The Problem is....</i>	<i>What you can do...</i>
<p>We do not know each other's names or know which names go to which people in the group</p> <p>Members are disrespectful in meetings or over email.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • This is a very common problem, and it's likely others in your group are feeling similarly and will be grateful when someone addresses it. It is never too late. If you made introductions at your first meeting, simply acknowledge that you have met so many new people that you have forgotten names. If you did not do introductions, suggest to everyone that you guys backtrack so you will all connect the name with the right face. • You may be feeling disrespected or you may notice that this is occurring to others. Either way, you can effectively address the issue by stating directly how

<p>They may interrupt, ignore, criticize, or be distracted with texting or social media.</p> <p>Members talk or complain about one or several members behind their backs—either to group members or to others not in the group.</p> <p>Members become defensive when disagreed with or given feedback.</p> <p>Members “take over” and make decisions or tell others what to do without asking for any input or advice. OR Members are changing others’ work without discussing their reasons or concerns first.</p>	<p>you are feeling without criticizing the offender. <i>“I am noticing that we are not communicating very effectively or respectfully to each other. I know we are all stressed but think we should be more helpful to each other. Is something going on that we should talk about? OR “I don’t like this work anymore that anyone else but we would get out of here faster if we kept off our phones (or stopped interrupting, etc.) and dealt with our agenda. Does anyone else feel this way?”</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Do not engage in outside complaining; it creates greater tension in the group. If you or others have a legitimate concern about someone in the group, you can bring it up directly. It is very possible the offender does not know how they are impacting others. Avoid accusing, being critical or “ganging up” on the offender. For example: <i>“I feel upset/annoyed/etc. when my writing/meeting times/agreements are changed by you. It would help if we could discuss this first as we agreed to do at the beginning of the group.”</i> (See Difficult Conversations) • Sometimes people do not know they are being defensive and can benefit from the additional feedback. Ask them directly if they are feeling criticized or upset about the comments. Let them know that <i>“Your reaction makes me think you felt I was being too critical. I didn’t mean to offend you but I also want us to work out the issue without either of us getting upset with each other.”</i> • This often happens when the offender is frustrated with how other team members are performing. Rather than “attack” the offender, frame the issue from this perspective. Ask the offender: <i>“I noticed that you changed X or made a decision to do X without discussing it and am wondering if you are feeling like you are getting stuck with everything or like I/we are not pulling our weight? Is there something we can do here to help as I want to know if something is wrong with my work OR I/We want to help you make these kind of decisions....”</i>
---	---

Task Issues: How your team makes decisions related to content and quality of work

The Problem is....	What you can do...
<p>Assignment contributions are sloppy, poorly done, or incomplete. Members are missing agreed upon deadlines for their assignments.</p> <p>Members do NOT discuss the pros and cons of various solutions to the tasks at hand.</p> <p>Members disagree or argue about the various solutions to the tasks at hand.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Now is a good time to monitor your progress as you indicated in your Team Contract. Suggest that the group review the individual goals and priorities for each person and the grades folks stated that they wanted. • Ask each person to weigh in on how they think they are doing and to ask the team for feedback on their work thus far. Hopefully members will recognize themselves if they are not pulling their weight. If the offenders do not acknowledge the quality of their work, be direct with them and offer specific suggestions for improvement or offer to help. Get an agreement on how to address the issue. <i>“Will you be able to do more research and get some help with the writing by ____ time or before the next assignment?”</i> • When groups get pressed for time or are having relational issues, they avoid additional interactions and often decide on the quickest option without discussing. Members may have great ideas but feel like the group does not want to or doesn't have time to hear them. Say: <i>“We didn't really talk about other ways of doing this and it might help to do brainstorm other ideas. What are some other ways of approaching this section?”</i> • This can be a great sign, as group members are willing to share different opinions. What's important is that you ultimately come to a collaborative decision about how to proceed without members feeling silenced or criticized. If the group feels stuck in the discussion, have someone in the group summarize the disagreements with pros and cons. Then suggest that the group votes on how to proceed. Make sure the recorder notes the decision.