Seminar Objectives

At the end of this seminar you should:
- Understand the importance of teams in today's IT workforce
- Identify the characteristics of an effective team
- Appreciate the skills required to work on a collaborative IS/IM team.

Overview

CROSS LIFECYCLE ACTIVITIES
- Group work
  > What is a group? What is a team?
  > What makes an efficient team?
  > Types of teams
  > Technology and teams
- Communication
  > Personal skills
  > Team skills
- Project Management (another seminar)
- Documentation (another seminar)
Teams and the IT professional [1]

- The most significant change to how we work is the increasing expectation that the new IT professional will be working as part of an effective collaborative team, and that they will be proficient in technologies which permit and encourage support between team members.

Teams and the IT professional [2]

- The use of teams can increase responsiveness, speed, and quality of outcome with a resulting higher quality than could have been achieved by any one individual
  
  (Katzenbach & Smith, 1993)

- Gerber and Lankshear (2000) claim that working in teams is a criterion for success in the workforce because team work is the smarter way to complete tasks and interact with colleagues.
What are groups and teams? [1]

- **Groups** are “collections of individuals whose contribution to a product or process are additive and can be collated and presented by a group manager as the results of group effort”
  
  (Furst, Blackburn and Rosen (1999 p.250)

- **Teams** are “collections of individuals who interact more extensively than group members to produce a deliverable, who are evaluated based on the team outcome, and who are accountable for team outcomes”
  
  (Furst, Blackburn and Rosen (1999 p.250)

Teams are….

A small number of people with complementary skills who are equally committed to a common purpose, goals, and working approach for which they hold themselves mutually accountable

(Katzenbach and Smith, 1993 np)

Effective teams [1]

To be effective, team members need

- to be aware of common goals,
- trust each other,
- have open and effective communication,
- appreciate diversity, and
- Have a balanced team focus

(Fisher, Rayner & Belgard, 1995)

Despite the long history of the existence of team work, working within a team is tricky due to the many differing personalities and individual experiences each team member brings to the effort.

(Davidow & Malone, 1992 p.203)
Effective teams

Common characteristics of effective teams
- an open and supportive social environment,
- active participation by all members,
- clearly defined goals to which all team members are committed, and
- shared leadership
- Sharing within a team can build confidence, trust, leadership and knowledge for all team members
  (LaFasto and Larson, 2001).

Hackman (1983) offers three simple factors that influence the effectiveness of groups; these are
1. meeting the team standards and goals
2. enhancing group processes, and
3. team members personal well-being or satisfaction.

Davidow and Malone (1992), Lipnack and Stamps (1997) and Welbourn (2001) argue that the most important factor impacting on a team’s success, and therefore its effectiveness, is trust.

Trust
- The building of trust does not necessarily happen quickly, it more often develops incrementally and is reciprocal “one has to give it to get it” (Reina & Reina, 1999).
- Reina and Reina (1999) formulated three forms of trust, each with specific behaviours that build trust in the workplace. They are listed in the order in which they are most often obtained:
  - Contractual trust is defined as managing expectations, establishing boundaries, delegating appropriately, keeping agreements, and being congruent in our behaviour.
  - Communication trust is the willingness to share information, tell the truth, admit mistakes, maintain confidentiality, give and receive constructive feedback, and speak with good purpose.
  - Competence trust involves respecting people's knowledge, skills, and judgement, involving others and seeking their input, and helping people learn skills / np.
- “What's In It For Me” syndrome (Coleman, 2000b p.2).
Personalities in teams

- the contributor, who is information and performance focused;
- the collaborator, who is the source of the team’s vision;
- the communicator, who is the facilitating heart of the team; and
- the challenger, who serves as the team’s devil’s advocate.


• Team members exhibiting these personalities need to trust each other to enable the team to be efficient and productive. To keep team members’ personalities in tune with the goals of the team, strong though not dictatorial leadership is required (Lengnick-Hall, 1992; Carney, 2000 p.1).

Collaboration

• “to work jointly with others or together especially in an intellectual endeavour”

(Merriam-Webster, n.d)

• “an act of shared creation .. and/or .. discovery”

(Schrage, 1990)

• “a coordinated, synchronous activity that is the result of a continued attempt to construct, and maintain a shared conception of a problem”

(Roschelle & Teasley, 1991)

• Collaboration stems from cooperation in that members cooperate together to achieve an end and at the same time work independently towards that end, whereas when members collaborate they draw upon each other’s expertise and skills to solve a problem (Schrage, 1990).

• This does not mean that members always work in ways that have total dependence on each other. Team members often work independently on some related task that may be critical to the success of the collaborative effort (Dourish & Belotti, 1992).

• The balance of these roles and behaviours requires skills, but human beings are individuals and not all of us can or wish to acquire the skills to be able to work collaboratively (Bronowicz & Gibbons, 2000 p1). Many of these skills need to be learnt, rehearsed, refined, expanded (American Society for Information Science, 1998).
Group communication

• Communication is very closely linked to collaboration, and the skills required to communicate are also required to collaborate.
• To collaborate you need to communicate, to communicate you need to trust

Teams and technology [1]

• The IS/IM workplace is becoming more and more diverse with the high probability of dislocation of co-workers: with team members located in diverse temporal and spatial spaces
  (Parker, 2000).
• The ever evolving ubiquitous nature of information technology, the influx of communications technologies, together with the change in the way people work, have brought about the traditional team structure to be coupled with technology

Teams and technology [2]

• Synergy between information technology and teams (Mankin et al., 1996 p.6)
• To develop this synergy, there needs to be an acceptance and adoption of the value of using technologies, in particular information and communication technologies (ICTs) in collaborative team projects. A number of barriers to the acceptance of the change in how work is done using technology, and at both personal and organisation levels, both need to be addressed if the technology is to have a chance of improving a team’s performance.
Teams and technology [3]

- ICTs are more than communication tools, they enable interactions between team members that could otherwise not happen.
- Reported to enable the team to work “better, faster, cheaper and smarter” (Furst, Blackburn & Rosen, 1999 p.249).
- Like all responses to challenges and the changes associated with them, there can be a ripple effect. New structures and interactions are required to support the changes, and new problems are created as old ones are resolved (Brenowitz & Gibbons, 2000 p.1).

Potential benefits of team-supported technology

- Transcend space and time
- Wider and more flexible communication structures
- Communication speed and convenience
- Organizational memory
- Shared context (Zack & Serino, 1996 np).

Team-supported technology

- Provide a number of tools for the creation, sharing and communication between team members.
- Access to ICTs that are able to be customised to suit their purposes, for example synchronous and asynchronous networked chat, shared drawing systems, file transfer, electronic mail, and audio and video-conferencing.
- The use of multiple ICTs within collaborative team environments encourages active participation, increases the depth and breath of interactions, and can overcome problems when one technology fails (Gay & Lentini , 1997).

Technology should not constrain the development and creativity of team members, but rather enhance and allow them to develop (Bijker & Law, 1997 p.105).
Social implications of teams and technology

- With technology comes roles, responsibilities and control of the technology.
- These social issues often develop in the first instances of using the technology, and therefore may change the relations between team members bringing rise to new problems, issues or challenges.
- One of the issues explored in the literature is the possible negative impact ICTs may have on a team. The training and adoption of technology, its modification and customisation to suit the team processes, and the ownership of the environments created, are all required in the use of ICTs by team members.
- Another issue is the need to follow both formal and informal rules established by the team when using technologies for team communication and information sharing. It is important to acknowledge that those comfortable with the technologies do not take personal advantage of the technology to the detriment of the team environment and effort (Castells, 2001 p.40).

Team skills

- In addition to personalities, skills are required for the team to be productive. Gould (1998) claims that individual skills brought to a team need to be complementary and of the right mix to complete the tasks at hand.
- Gould (1998) claims that the skills required within a team fall into three categories: technical expertise, problem solving and decision-making skills, and interpersonal skills.
- The interpersonal skills of each team member are as important, and in some instances more important, than the technical skills of all the members.
- Appraisal of one’s self is also an important factor in team effectiveness (Parker, 1990 cited in Davidow & Malone, 1992 p.201).

Soft skills

- Curtis and McKenzie (2001) argue that there has been a change in how work is conducted and in the ‘forms of work’, with each developing a heavy reliance on what are commonly referred to as ‘soft skills’. These skills include “the personal attributes or teamwork, a work ethic, and a preparedness to be flexible and to embrace change” (p.ix).
- The skills need learnt prior to joining the workforce, and practised and ‘mastered’ upon joining the workforce (Gerber & Lankshear, 2000; Hager, Crowley & Garrick, 2000 p.5).
Australian graduate attributes
(Nielson Report 2000)

- Academic achievement in a suitable discipline
- Written business communication skills
- Oral communication skills
- Written personal skills
- Numeracy in comprehension of business processes
- Basic computer skills
- Team working skills
- Time management skills
- Problem solving skills
- Leadership and management skills
- Inter-personal skills

IT graduate attributes

- The most frequently mentioned skills that are required by IT graduates are communication skills and team work (Hurst et al., 2001) and they are seen as the key skills used for effective collaboration by IT professionals in the 21st century (Southam, n.d.).

- “One of the reasons soft skills are so hot these days is because there is so much more interaction between roles like programmers and developers and the end user” and “soft skills are equally if not more important than technical skills” (Southam, n.d).

Skills required for team work by IS/IM graduates

- Communication skills (oral and written)
- Time management skills
- Team functionality skills
- Flexible and adaptable
- Show initiative
- Problem solving skills
- Tolerance
- Professionalism (including ethics and quality)
- ICT competent

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References [1]


References [2]


References [3]

- Wells, B. (2002). Research on employer satisfaction with graduate skills. Department of Employment, Education, Training and Youth Affairs, Australia (DEETYA), Australia
References [4]


Additional reading