

Team Competency #4

Productivity goals and strategies guide

Goal: Monitor progress

Problem: There's no method for determining and recording progress.

Strategy: Work with the planning manager to keep up to date records of what tasks need to be done, who is responsible for which tasks, and what progress has been made and update at beginning and end of meetings.

“Okay, who is working on _____?”
“Sara, how is _____ coming along?”

Strategy: Make sure everyone has access to progress records.

“I am going to email this to everyone so we all have it.”

Strategy: Check off tasks as they get done.

“Great, you finished that already, let's check it off.”

Strategy: Have regular team meetings to discuss progress, or send regular emails.

“It's time for our progress meeting.”

Sample email:

To: Team@ist.psu

Subject: Team progress

Hi everyone,

Here's the weekly list of what we have already accomplished and what still needs to be done. Let me know if I missed anything. Also please let me know when you estimate to be finished with your current responsibilities so I can let the planning manger know.

Thanks

Goal: Deal with lack of progress

Problem: The team is running out of time.

Strategy: Have the team rethink the plan.

“We're not getting anywhere; what should we do differently?”

“We're falling behind schedule; what can we leave out?”

Problem: People are not doing their share.

Strategy: Decide from the beginning what actions the team will take if a member does not do their share.

“Okay, so we all agree that if for some reason one of us cannot participate equally then we should reassign that person’s tasks and inform the instructor?”

Strategy: Find out what the problem is without judgment and see if the team can provide a solution.

“Debra, it seems like you are having problems finishing your tasks, what’s going on? Do you need help?”

Strategy: Work with planning manager to set deadlines and ask if they will work.

“We need you to have this done by Friday, does that seem doable?”

Strategy: Keep records of deadlines and when they are not met.

“That is the second time you have missed a deadline.”

Strategy: Discuss reassigning tasks to other members and informing instructor.

“We really need your help with this project, but if you just can’t do that right now, we can reassign your tasks and let the instructor know your situation.”

Problem: The team is constantly off-task.

Strategy: Remind people about important deadlines.

“When are supposed to have this done by again?”

Strategy: Ask questions that will point out the problem.

“Sam what are you doing and is this related to the project?”

Strategy: Make sure the team and sub-teams are on task.

“Have you guys finished that yet?”

Strategy: Keep notes of members who are constantly off task for records and evaluations.

“I don’t want to write down that you’ve been goofing off, but if you don’t start working I may have to.”

Strategy: Ask team members if they are bored and perhaps need more to do.

“Brad, looks like you have some extra time on your hands, want to take on...”

Problem: The team is not making good progress, but no one notices.

Strategy: Learn to recognize when there is a problem.

“Does anyone see a problem with what we’ve done so far?”

Strategy: Don't single out an individual for criticism; make it the team's problem.
"We're off task a lot; how could we fix that?"

Goal: Evaluate and improve the quality of work

Problem: The team is producing low quality work. People care more about getting the work done, not about how good it is.

Strategy: Reread original instructions and grading criteria provided by the instructor and ask yourself if you are fulfilling all of the objectives.

Strategy: Have the team develop criteria for evaluating the work.
"I think it's important that what we write be clear and interesting. What do you think?"

Strategy: Check your work to see if it meets the criteria.
"I'm worried that this isn't clear; others won't be able to understand/use it."

Problem: The team never tries to improve its work.

Strategy: Ask the planning manager to make improving work an implicit goal for the team to focus on.

"Mary, since you're the planning manager, could you make sure we focus on improving this part of the project next time?"

Strategy: Have the team think about how the work could be improved and revise it.
"How could this be more persuasive?"

Strategy: Have members evaluate each other's work and provide feedback.
"Since you're done, why don't you look at this work and suggest improvements."

Problem: Deliverables are not clear or concise.

Strategy: Have someone outside of your team read your deliverables to ensure that they can be easily understood.

Strategy: Schedule time to check each other's work prior to submitting (peer editing) in order to reduce wordiness and improve readability.

Strategy: Set up a peer editing exchange with another team. Your team can check their deliverables and they can check yours.

Strategy: Read materials on writing style, i.e. Shrunken and White, Elements of Style, or others listed at: <http://www.personal.psu.edu/jth/Engl497.html>

Borge, Marcela.. (January, 2009). "Working with Teams" Workshop, College of Information Sciences & Technology, The Pennsylvania State University, University Park, PA.