

TO START A PROJECT TEAM THE RIGHT WAY

The first phase of the project is the most important of the phases. In the following section we will give some alternatives for how to structure the start up of the team. These activities should be part of a project kick-off and at the start of the project.

Thinking comes before doing because thoughts guide deeds.

First, it is important to decide upon and to draw some general guidelines for **how to work together**. Second, in a project team it is important to find out about the **other project members' norms and habits** in order to avoid conflicts later on. Finally, when **the planning** is done you will have an excellent base for working effectively.

The checklist presented on the following pages can be used for many types of different teams. Some of the bullet points might not be relevant for the project you are carrying out; if this is the case, you can disregard the point at this stage. However, at the later stages of your project you should come back to the list, for example after a pre-study, when you have increased your comprehension of the project ahead.

The checklist is reliant on that the team work will function better if all of the team members are aware of the following:

- The objective/purpose of the project
- Which team norms the team will work under
- That they are dependent on one another
- Which resources are available
- Which basic routines are necessary
- Which decision making forms are to be used
- The personal responsibility

Eight steps to successful team work

There are a lot of good leaders in companies that start projects in a nice and soft way by discussing the way of working... For example "Welcome. Let us first get to know each other and look at the objectives and resources in general terms. Then we will make a detailed project plan and that we will start. So here we have Peter. What have you done earlier? (A while later) What do you think about the possibilities of finishing this project? Are there any clouds in the sky? Etc.

Let us look a bit closer on a nice way of starting the right way. In a project that lasts more than a few weeks it is important to go through all the points.

The first time together is crucial. It is important to decide upon how to work together, establish team norms and rules based on our way of being in general. The way of working and the rules will then change and adapt to the changes that always occur.

When the team goes through the checklist below it increases its chances of successful team work. In some of the steps it is good to write down what you have agreed upon, these are marked "**Write it down!**" Change the person who takes notes. What you are writing down will later be part of your team contract.

1 To become a team or who are we?

1.1 Get to know each other (BIOPICS)

Too often we start up project without really knowing each other! Start of with introducing yourselves to one another: background, family, hobbies, etc. You will for sure find some things to talk about. Take five minutes each. Do this even if there is only one new person in the team.

1.2 Expectations, needs and wishes

Tell the others of the expectations, needs and wishes you have in regards to the team work ahead. Someone might think that the subject is very interesting, some others only want to do the task and have it over and done with etc.

My expectations:

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My needs:

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My wishes:

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1.3 Start a team in a work related way

One way of building up a team spirit is to answer the following unfinished sentences – keep in mind what you want to achieve as a team and finish them in your own words.

First, each one of you thinks about and writes down the end of all the sentences. Please no long stories.

Second, each one of you should read out what you wrote under sentence 1, so that you will hear all the endings of the same sentence. Please add silence when someone has spoken in order to let everybody think about what have just been said.

When everybody has said his/hers sentence 1, go to 2, and so on. Take turns to begin!

This is a soft way of talking about what is personal and work related.

<i>Keeping in mind what we are doing in the team, how would you like to finish the following sentences:</i>
1. "The first time I meet a new team I feel..."
2. "I feel at home in a team when..."
3. "Normally, I am a person who..."
4. "I think I can manage to..."
5. "When I am thinking about what we shall do..."
6. "When things don't go the way I thought they would, I..."
7. "When it comes to planning I think..."
8. "My problem solving style is..."
9. "I appreciate things like..."
10. "When working, my strengths are..."
11. "When working, my greatest weakness is..."
12. "The next thing I want to achieve is..."
13. "I prefer working with people who..."

2 What do we want?

Roughly you should now tell the others (but also listen to the others!) about your vision and expectations on the team as a whole and what you are about to do. Listen carefully to each other and take your time to discuss disagreements. Please observe that the discussion will be in general terms, when you know your resources and limitations the purpose and objectives can be outlined in more detail (point 7).

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3 What is happening around us?

In order to function as a team we do not only need to know about each other's expectations, but also get some insight into the others' day-to-day life and problems. If we do not know anything about this, how can we be considerate if a problem arises that lies 'outside' the team work.

Therefore, it is important to clarify the activities and responsibilities that might compete for your time during the project. A good idea is to later include these in your time management schedule when you are planning the project.

The activities that might influence the project negatively is preferably analysed in a so called risk analysis. In the risk analysis you determine eventual consequences and how the event can be handled or even avoided.

- What am I doing in parallel to the project? (*hobbies, part time job, other projects etc.*)
- What other events/activities might influence the project? (*planned vacation, sister getting married etc.*)
- How do these events/activities influence the project once they have happened?
- Which ones could help the project significantly? (*E.g. Lots of rugby on TV during May, I hate rugby so it will help me not to watch too much TV....*)
- Which ones could disturb the project significantly? (*E.g. Lots of rugby on TV during May, I love rugby so....*)

Write them down!

4 How shall we work together?

At this point, you should have a fair insight into the things that influence yourself and your team members, and also what your common goals and individual goals are. Now it is time to get working! But...you won't get far if you don't figure out how you are going to work together!

The following checklist provides you with some activities to do and discuss:

4.1 Establish the rules for meetings and the project in general

- Decide upon the form of the agenda, set and/or flexible? How are we going to add new issues? Should every meeting have a leader who sets the agenda?

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- When and what time will we have our meetings? Shall we book all the meetings now? Decide upon issues such as if every meeting will have a person in charge of taking notes and how long the meetings should last....

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- How are we going to manage coordination and reporting within the team? For example: Does the team need a project manager to act as overall coordinator? If a person is unable to attend a meeting, how does he/she inform the others? How do we manage team member communications between scheduled meetings?

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- How do we manage the absentees? Additional tasks?

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- Etc..... Add important activities related to your specific project.

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4.2 Agree upon how you should reach agreement.

For example: project leader decides, majority vote, consensus or unanimously. What will you do if you happen to disagree? Write it down!

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4.3 Clarify team norms

The norms represent the social rules of behaviour within the team and between team members. Often the norms are not discussed openly; instead the team members believe they 'just' exist. Misunderstandings and conflicts can be avoided by discussing the norms more openly.

Which team norms do you want? Discuss! **Clearly write down the norms you have agreed upon!**

Rewrite the sentences so that they better represent your team's view. You do not have the prerequisite that everyone should put in the same amount of time and work. There might be some of you that are very interested in the subject and others that only want to pass. Be honest and allow different efforts. But keep your agreements!

<i>Some examples of common team norms. Do you want them in your team?</i>	<i>Yes/No</i>
The one who says nothing, agrees.	
If someone says something in the team, he/she must have clear stand point. No rambling!	
It is OK to openly criticise each other.	
As soon as somebody feels uncertain of what another person means, he/she should immediately tell the person/team.	
To not make demands indicates low dedication and low ambitions.	
It is OK to show feelings in this team.	
It is not allowed to say bad things about a team member outside the team.	

4.4 Criticism

Each one of you should tell the others how you would like to be made aware of misunderstandings, conflicts and if you have broken the rules:

**“If you think I have broken any deal or done something bad, I want you to tell me in this manner.....
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and I promise to listen without immediately defending myself”.**

Write it down!

This will facilitate for the team members to receive and give criticism during the project. Everyone should do their part of the job. Never allow a team member to misuse your trust - demand an explanation and do not allow the incident to repeat itself. We have seen too many students get a free ride. Stop protecting your friends from being responsible!

5 What can we do? Which are our competences?

We know now how we want to work together but what can we actually do? Everyone should tell the others what they can contribute with. Which are your resources, knowledge and experiences in the field? How can you all contribute? What competence do you lack and thus need to develop. Discuss if the team members need formal roles and what these should be.

Write it down!

Name:	Good at:	Need to develop the following competences:

6 What are our other resources? (External resources)

Try to map out from where/whom and with what you can get help externally. Do you have a budget? From where can you find funding (which are the needs)? Are there any other stakeholders apart from you? Are you – the team – reporting to someone else – how can they help?

With what can we get help externally (e.g. writing help, consultants, photography, workshops)? From whom?

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Which facilities can we use? Equipment?

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How much time do eventual external resources have available?

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How much money have we got and how are we allowed to use it?

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Other resources:

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7 What are the goal and objectives of the project?

Having gone through the steps above, you are now ready to discuss the objective/purpose of the project you are about to carry out as a team. The description of the purpose should cover the following:

BACKGROUND of the project

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WHAT is the goal? Why are you doing this? What are the aim(s), direction and effects? A large part of the goal should be measurable.

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LIMITATIONS – what is not our task? What should we avoid getting trapped in? Which closely related projects should we avoid taking over work from?

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WHEN are the deadlines: final deadline and checkpoints?

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8 Team contract

Summarise what you have agreed upon in a team contract, on the next page we have provided an example of how you can structure your contract. The contract should be signed by each team member and a single copy must be submitted to your academic project supervisor within the first two weeks of the project. Each team member should retain one copy of the signed contract.

Now your decisions about the goal and ways of working as a team have the support of the team. You have laid the foundations for creative and confident team work!

Example of the structure of the team contract

An easy way of writing your team contract is to provide bullet points under each of the headings below.

1. Goal of the project

Summarise the primary goal of the project, i.e. what you have discussed under point 7. Take into consideration the background information provided, outcomes expected, team members' previous knowledge/experience, time constraints, etc.

2. Communication within the team

Summarise the rules you have agreed upon for team meetings, communications and interactions, i.e. some of the issues you have discussed under point 4.1. Such as decisions on project manager, absentees, coordination and reporting, etc...

3. Meeting rules and procedures

Summarise what you have agreed upon for rules and procedures during team meetings, i.e. some of the issues you have discussed under point 4.1 and possibly also point 5. Such as if the team members need formal roles and what these should be, someone who takes notes (who?), agenda setting (who?). How long meetings should last, etc....

4. Resources and time management

Summarise things such as resources the team has or needs to access to, and how often the team is going to meet and at what times, i.e. what you have discussed under point 6. Also summarise how often the team is going to meet and at what times, for example: we will work on Monday and Friday between 8.00 and 11.00, we are going to avoid working on weekends and evenings.

5. Decisions

Summarise what you have discussed under point 4.2. How will you reach agreement? What happens if you disagree? How will you resolve conflicts if they arise?

6. Establish each team member's responsibilities

Summarise what you have discussed under point 5 and some of the issues under point 4.1. Specify what each team member should be responsible for during the project and at meetings. What happens if someone is not fulfilling agreed duties? Are any kinds of excuses/ reasons acceptable in the case of lack of activity? Will absence at meetings be accepted?

7. Write down your team norms

Clearly write down the team norms you have agreed upon under point 4.3.

8. Mini risk analysis

If you want you can also include your mini risk analysis in your team contract, see under point 3.