Group Interactions: 4 Best Practices to Emphasize

Effective Group Practices Improve Results

In the working world, it is an essential skill to be able to work effectively on teams to achieve a goal.   Project groups have their own dynamic—some function at an efficient level and some do not. There has been much analysis of these groups and a set of "best practices" of high performing groups has been developed.

As your project group begins working, pay attention to these "best practices". Some will naturally develop. Others may take some attention.

1. Shared Vision—All members should have a clear understanding of the work required and expected outcome

2. Accountability--Assign clear roles and work assignment

There must be individual accountability within the team. Each member should have their own assignments and tasks for which they are accountable to the group.

3. Effective Communication

Everyone should participate in the discussions. Effective communication may require making space for the quieter members. The atmosphere must be maintained so that all can both express their ideas and disagree with others in a civilized and productive manner. Group members should report back on agreed basis and not disappear.

4. Share Leadership Responsibilities

All members have ownership in the project. If there is a designated leader who monitors the individual assignments, the other team members should have significant responsibility. In some groups, individuals may have unique skills or knowledge that make them especially suited for a specific role.
http://www.potentialsrealized.com/teams-365-blog/category/teamwork-skills

Stages of Group Development

Forming	The team act as individuals and there is a lack of clarity about the team's purpose and individual roles.
Storming	Conflict arises as people begin to establish their place in the team.
Norming	There is a level of consensus and agreement within the team. There is clarity about individual roles. The role of the leader is important in managing this.
Performing	The group has a clear strategy and shared vision. It can operate autonomously and resolve issues positively.

Adapted from Tuckman 1965

http://stephengraves.us/tips-improving-team-performance/

Decision Making

Discussions should be made by the collective group. There are two commonly used procedures for this: (i) Consensus—The discussion proceeds until all members can support the direction. In this method, each individual may not get their full satisfaction, but agree to support the team's direction. (ii) Voting—After the discussion is completed, the team takes a vote. In this procedure, those who disagree with the outcome of the vote must agree to put their opinions aside and support the direction. Decisions should not be made by an individual leader.

Group and Interpersonal Relations

Your personal success often depends on working effectively with others, whether you happen to like them or not. It is essential to develop the skills to both get along and move the project of the group forward. This may require considering the needs, motivations and skill of other members in the discussion. It certainly requires respect and giving your consideration to others suggestions and ideas.

There is a large body of evidence that Emotional Intelligence (EI) correlates strongly with success in the workspace. It will not be emphasized here, but be aware of these interactions for the future.

http://shuktij.blogspot.com/2010/04/emotional-intelligence-2-self-awareness.html
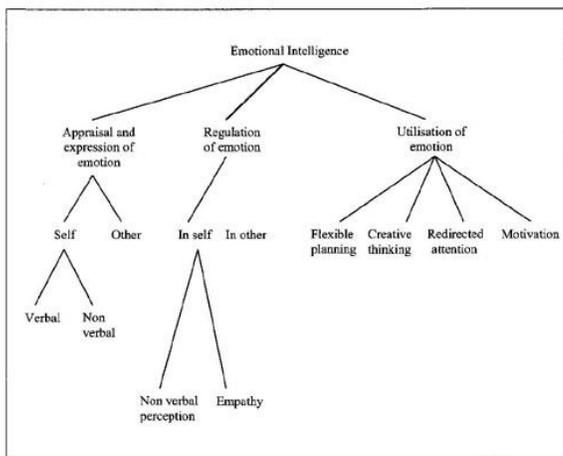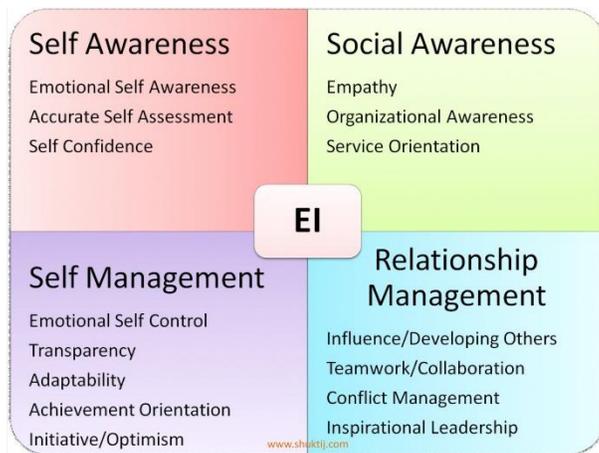
(Salovey & Mayer, 1990)

Resolving Team Problems

Project teams often get off to a rocky start. There are numerous different reasons for this, for example:

- o   Members were unable to work together cooperatively
- o   Goals were not shared by everyone on the team
- o   Members felt that they were not recognized for individual contributions to accomplish team goals
- o   Selfish interests were able to infiltrate the team cohesion.
- o   Members did not participate or did not complete assignments

Most of these problems can be recognized and resolved if they are addresses. Some examples are shown below

Symptoms of Virtual Team Problems	Possible Causes / Interventions
The team cannot get out of the inception and inclusion stage	Symptomatic of underlying issues. Review the team's composition and charter. The inception phase requires creativity and less control. As the manager, are you modeling these attributes?
The team appears to be stuck and is not moving toward execution	Assess the team in terms of task and social dynamics, and environmental factors. Go back and review expectations and identify obstacles to meeting those expectations.
A few team members seem to be doing all of the work	Talk (voice-to-voice) to all members separately to determine the reason(s) for the differences in contributions. Are tasks allocated properly? Are some team members clustered in one geography or culture? Is communication streamlined and straight forward?
Team members do not appear to be applying sufficient effort to the team's task	Talk (voice-to-voice) with those who are disengaged to determine the reason for effort and performance that is not congruent with team standards. Are the expectations unrealistic? Do they lack information / skills / training to be successful? Do they need a mentor? Are the non-performers in a matrixed relationship? Are there conflicting objectives?
The team misses or almost misses a deadline to deliverables	Determine root cause and take corrective action. Employ a deeper level of project management skills or assign a trained project manager to the team.
Conflict arises that derails the team's progress	Is the cause of the conflict task-related or social/cultural in nature? Take appropriate action.
Team members who are not co-located seem to be fading into obscurity	Work with the team leader to keep a record of contact with team members. Encourage team leaders to spend 70-80% of their time (virtual or face-to-face) with team members who are not co-located.

http://en.wikibooks.org/wiki/Managing_Groups_and_Teams/Print_version

Group Problem Resolution Worksheet

All project groups experience a conflict which may result in missed deadlines, low quality work, unequal participation. These are symptoms of an underlying cause. Groups can significantly improve their performance and results by analyzing and addressing these problems early in the project cycle.

Identify one aspect of the group that is not functioning well.

Observed project problem	
Causes of the problem/conflict	
Resolution Methods considered	
Resolution method selected with reasons	
Effect of resolution on the group's performance and personal interactions	