

CREATING A TEAM CHARTER

The most effective and efficient teams are those that take the time to discuss and come to agreement on goals and norms. Creating a team charter will ensure that your team goes through this process thoughtfully, thoroughly, and early.

A team charter is a set of expectations with which everyone on the team agrees. You can also think of a team charter as an operating agreement on which everyone has signed off. The following elements are important to include in a team charter.

1. Group Objectives

Goals serve to motivate team members toward a similar endpoint. Undoubtedly, your team will need to establish specific goals for your team project. At this point, however, you should consider the more general objectives individuals might have in mind for themselves and the team. Before arriving at a set of team goals, it's useful to share individual goals for the class and the quarter each teammate has.

Directions: Team members should generate a list of general goals together. Some examples are “acing” all team assignments, learning as much as possible about each topic covered, experiencing high levels of camaraderie, having efficient team meetings, and so forth. After a list has been generated, have each person rate the importance of each objective. Then tally up the results of your ratings and discuss them. Come to a consensus on a set of team goals.

2. Group Ethos

Ethos in many groups is a ‘given’, but in team building, ethos has to be built or developed. So ‘ethos’ as we want to think about it here are the ‘virtues’ or ‘norms’ that the group wants to affirm as standards or expectations of behavior accepted and enforced by the group members. They tell members what they ought and ought not to do under certain circumstances. They also should specify team approaches to norm violation. Norms can cover all aspects of team members’ behavior, but they typically focus on those behaviors bearing on team performance.

Directions: Team members should identify a set of norms based on their previous group experiences. Please note that the norms causing the most disruption to team performance include meeting norms, working norms, leadership norms, communication norms, and consideration norms. Additionally, continuous improvement norms seem to be essential to long-run team effectiveness. Each norm type is discussed briefly below.

Meeting norms. Expectations include when, where, and how often to meet. What is expected of members with regard to attendance, timeliness, and preparation? In general, how should meetings be conducted (will there always be an agenda? An appointed meeting leader or project manager?)

Working norms. Expectations involve standards, deadlines, how equally effort and work should be distributed, and how work will be reviewed. Expectations also include how to insure adequate listening and support and how differences of opinion or decision “gridlock” will be handled.

Leadership norms. Expectations include whether a team leader is needed, if leadership is rotated, distribution of leadership and responsibilities (e.g. project manager, facilitator, etc.) and how to keep the leader from doing all the work (or not doing enough of the real work).

Communication norms. Expectations center on when communication should take place, who is responsible for insuring effective communication, what the main mediums of communication should be (phone, e-mail, net meeting, etc.), and how to discuss feelings about the team or its members.

Consideration norms. Expectations center on being considerate of members’ comfort with things like smoking, swearing, humor, etc., and the ability to change norms if members are uncomfortable with what is going on in the team.

Continuous improvement norms. Expectations revolve around the protocol (e.g. frequency of discussion, problem identification procedures) for addressing group performance issues. Examples of issues include the following: Are team goals being met? Why or why not? Are individuals able to meet their own individual goals within the context of the team? What works and what doesn’t work about team structure? How effectively do we make decisions and resolve conflict?

The Assignment

Each team will prepare a one to two-page charter identifying the most important team goals (include at least three) and norms (include at least two from each category) that all members have agreed to. The team charters must be signed by each member before it’s turned in.