BESTEAMS Introductory Interpersonal Effectiveness Module

Acknowledgement of Support

The material is based upon work supported by the National Science Foundation under grant No. DUE-0089079: “Implementing the BESTEAMS model of team development across the curriculum.”

Any opinions, findings, and conclusions or recommendations expressed in this material are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily reflect the views of the National Science Foundation.

Additional support was provided by the A. James Clark School of Engineering, the Mechanical Engineering department at the University of Maryland, College Park, and Morgan State University, the United States Naval Academy, and Howard University.

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I. Introduction/Motivation: This is the one of three BESTEAM teamwork training modules for first year engineering students. The three modules address personal knowledge, interpersonal effectiveness in the team setting, and project management (see diagram of total curriculum below).

This module addresses several key aspects of interpersonal functioning within student project teams. Specifically, students will learn skills fundamental to successful teams: knowledge of typical stages of team development; giving and receiving feedback (with emphasis on developing good listening skills); and tools for generating new ideas in teams (e.g., brainstorming strategies). For students who have already been trained in the Kolb Learning Style, an optional training section outlines uses of their knowledge of Kolb learning styles in the context of team dynamics. Note, because the notions of individual learning style preferences are integral to our work, the MIP is organized so that each Learning Style preference is addressed.

II. Delivery Plan A: 50 minute class period option

A. Quadrant 1 (Divergers): Driven to learn by asking the question “Why”?

1. Learning activity: Higher level/Socratic questions

   - Why is teamwork becoming the most common means of engineering practice?
   - Why do some students dislike participation in student project teams?

2. Learning activity: Personal Experience

   - Instructor relates a personal experience that illustrates why teamwork and teamwork skills are important to successful functioning as an engineer

B. Quadrant 2 (Assimilators): Driven to learn by asking the question “What?”

1. Learning Activity: Formal Lecture by instructor (see background reading materials and power point presentation slides on disc provided)

   Provide information on stages of team development (forming, storming, norming, performing, adjourning).
Provide information on key building blocks for successful interpersonal functioning on teams: the ability to give and receive feedback and to listen effectively.

C. Quadrant 3 (Convergers): Driven to Learn by asking the question: “How”?

1. Learning Activity: Brainstorming/Brainwriting

Introduce brainstorming strategies/techniques for idea generation/problem solutions (see instructor materials)—a key requirement for successful team functioning.

D. Quadrant 4 (Accommodators): Driven to Learn by asking the question “What If?”

1. Learning Activity: Practicing brainstorming

Choose one of the typical problems of student project teams (identified in A: why students don’t like to participate in teams) and brainstorm creative solutions. If space and time permits, break the class into groups and have some “brain-write” while others “brainstorm”. Share reactions to exercise at beginning of next class session.

III. Delivery Plan B: 90 + minute class period option

A. Learning Activity: Lecture

1. Add explicit connection to Kolb learning style types and impact on interpersonal dynamics on teams (see instructor materials). Review basic Kolb learning styles (see Introductory Personal Module for background materials). Have students participate in group exercise.

B. Learning Activity: Group Exercises

1. Expand section on giving and receiving feedback. Have students participate in group exercise:

   “Exercise: Using Kolb to Enhance Team Skills” (provided in MIP). Have students group themselves according to team assignments and complete the brainstorming exercise using silent or verbal brainstorming techniques.

   OR: Use exercise on giving and receiving feedback (see instructor materials); have students break into groups of three (one giver of feedback, one receiver and one observer of the process). Have the giver of feedback give negative feedback to receiver, process interaction with observer. Reverse giving and receiving feedback, this time giving positive feedback. Have observers share w/ the entire class observations of the exercise: what did they learn?

IV. Class Adaptation Strategies:

A. Size: Large classes (200): have students turn to their neighbors (two behind/two in front to create small groups for brainstorming exercises). Use role play in front of large class (using student volunteers) for giving and receiving feedback exercise. Use teaching assistant as observer.
B. **Content:** Specific project course: attempt to link brainstorming and feedback exercises to aspects of the project; work rules for giving and receiving feedback into team operating procedures or charters (e.g., facilitates discussion of how individuals like to receive feedback plus moves them into the notion of the appropriateness of peer feedback and evaluation).

C. **Classroom Culture:** Depending on the culture, the instructor might want to identify common assumptions or behaviors that influence the performance of teams. For example, what is the culture’s perspective on peers evaluating peers? Instructor may need to explain why giving/receiving feedback from peers is an essential skill to learn even if it difficult. Similarly, the role of the instructor (distant authority, coach, learning facilitator, etc.) might be discussed and students assumptions challenged.

V. **Follow-up Materials:**

A. Homework: Reading assignment: Instructor choice (see instructor readings and references)
B. Homework: Reflective writing assignment or journal entry: “Are there cultural differences in the ways in which people function in groups that impact listening as well as giving and receiving feedback?” Please explain.
C. Classroom Follow-up: at beginning of next class, ask for volunteers to read their journal entries aloud. If posted electronically to the instructor, have the instructor read anonymous entries and discuss with the class.
D. Exam or Quiz Item: add questions such as the following to course quizzes or tests: “Describe the strengths and weakness of a selected brainstorming strategy” or “Under what conditions is feedback most likely to be effective?”

VI. **Assessment Materials:**

A. First Year Interpersonal Module Evaluation (Student): Distribute to students at close of class session. Evaluation can be completed in class, completed at home and returned to class, or completed as a homework assignment, etc.
B. First Year Interpersonal Module Evaluation (Faculty): Complete the instructor feedback form and return to BESTEAMS.
Interpersonal Effectiveness for First Year Students: References


Dally, J. Introduction to Engineering Design: Book 6 (Projects and Success Skills), College House Enterprises, LLC, Knoxville, TN. (2001).


