Building your virtual team (2018)

Research on virtual teams indicates that there are several key strategies for successful collaboration when team members are not located in the same place [Cramton 2002][1] As a team you will decide how you plan to address the following questions:

1. How can your team schedule regular communications to develop "mutual knowledge" ?
2. Which mediums will you use to communicate time sensitive "important " information?
3. What contextual information influences your team members' ability to work on projects?
4. As a team, make a list of the guidelines you will follow when working together (team contract)
5. **How will you handle a lack of communication – no response, no shows?**
6. **Name your team!**

The time you invest in building your intercultural team will assist you in completing the course projects through out the semester more efficiently. To get started your team members on both the Arlington campus and the Hanze campus will review discuss strategy. Place your answers to the questions that appear in blue on your main team page. These answers together form the basis of your team's code of conduct, which should be posted on your team page.

#1: All team members should communicate regularly to develop "mutual knowledge."

Mutual knowledge, or the information that you choose to share as a team, serves as the foundation for common ground among virtual team members (Cramton 2002 356). You need to establish a communication routine and develop a "clear understanding" of how your team members will check for and respond to messages. Without this understanding, teams run into problems and can draw inaccurate conclusions that negatively affect the team's working relationship. Here are a few tips for success:

- Provide prompt feedback. Acknowledge receipt of an email even if you only send a few words. This response helps people working in a virtual environment feel each other's presence, detect errors and correct inaccurate interpretations and attributions. Later in this team challenge you will determine what you mean by "prompt."
- (I)nvestigate ambiguous or unusual messages and occurrences before drawing conclusions because of the many sources of uncertainty inherent in communication across distance and via technology" (Cramton 2002 365).
- When you communicate on projects share information with the entire team.
- Schedule regular face-to-face meetings using Google Hangouts. This will be one of the quickest ways to build a working relationship as a team. (Cramton 2002 364-365).

- ➤ **TEAM CHALLENGE: Start this discussion by sharing your own daily schedule with team mates as well as any travel plans or big life events you have for the coming semester. Come up with a way you can all share responsibility for keeping track of "mutual knowledge." Make a schedule and rotate responsibility!**
  #1. How can your team schedule regular communications to develop "mutual knowledge"?

[1] For more detailed discussion of these issues, read Cramton, C. 2002 "Finding Common Ground in Dispersed Collaboration." *Organizational Dynamics,* Vol.30, No.4, pp.356- 367.

#2: Establish ways to communicate specific "important " information.

When we communicate with others within our own social context, we often rely on informal cues to interpret messages. For example, the tone of someone's voice or the expression on their face can convey what information is considered most important. This information is more difficult to convey in email or online text chats. The research suggests a few ways you might improve the effectiveness of email:

- Keep your communication brief and to the point.
- Use the subject line to indicate the main point of the correspondence.
- Create a system such as shorthand symbols that lets others identify the most important part of your message.
- When asking a question, be direct and let others know that an answer is being requested.
- Be sure to "reply all" so all team members are aware of the work underway, even if they are not directly involved in the discussion.
- When you change topics in a series of emails, re-label the topic line of the email.

- **TEAM CHALLENGE: Discuss how different communication technologies (including social media) might work best for collaboration. For example, when is using email better than Facebook? When would it be important to connect face-to-face with team members (Skype or Google Hangout) rather than simply share content per se (email)?**
  #2. Which mediums will you us to communicate time sensitive "important" information?

#3. Communicate contextual information.

Differences in team members' local situation can affect your team's process of collaboration. To the extent possible, successful teams are able to minimize the impact of these differences. All team members need to have an understanding of the contextual issues that influence the process of working together. Consider the following list of differences found important by Cramton (2002 364):

- the communication infrastructure and accessibility (internet access & reliability)
- work hour schedules and holidays (class schedules, holidays or breaks between semesters)
- location topography (commuting versus living on campus, transportation to class)
- tools and standard procedures
- incentives and priorities (how you manage time on evenings and weekends, importance of the grades received in classes - GPA & honors scholarships)

- **TEAM CHALLENGE: Discuss each item on the list above to map the contextual factors that could influence your collaboration this semester. For example, does everyone have reliable internet access at home or only from your campus? Write down this information on your team page, so it is accessible to all team members.**
  #3. What contextual information influences your team members' ability to work on projects?

#4. Silence is not always golden, we can interpret lack of communication in many different ways.

With globalization comes a faster pace of life. For example, internet technologies provide ready access to information, shopping and communication. We have come to expect a timely response when corresponding with others but do we all mean the same thing by "timely"? Sometimes emails go without an answer, tasks are not completed as expected or a classmate could miss class without letting you know they will not be there. Without communication these actions could be interpreted in many different ways (example: have other priorities or commitments that are more important).

➢ **TEAM CHALLENGE:**
   Make a list of all the ways this type of "silence" could be interpreted. Do you notice any patterns in your explanations?
   #4. As a team, make a list of the guidelines you will follow when working together.

#5. Learning from experience versus getting things right the first time….

True intercultural collaboration is very challenging and will involve a significant amount of learning from your experience. It is not possible to know in advance what will come up along the way. How you handle and learn from confusion or misunderstanding is critical to your success. Cramton (2002) found that those teams who analyzed their process of collaboration, looked for ways to improve and learned from their differences were most successful: "Even though blame could be laid on an individual, it is important to recognize how complex the situation and processes of dispersed teams tend to be. The perspectives of individuals and subgroups often differ far more than the group as a whole realizes. If people involved in dispersed collaboration and computer mediated communication are willing to learn from the differences they are likely to strengthen their overall effort." (Cramton 2002 363-4).

➢ **TEAM CHALLENGE: Using our first class session last week as the basis for discussion, how might you let one another know there is a need for troubleshooting?**
   #5. How will you handle a lack of communication – no response, no shows?

#6. Come up with a team name!

FOLLOW-UP:
About working on teams:
   Duhigg, Charles. 2016. "What Google Learned From Its Quest to Build the Perfect Team: New research reveals surprising truths about why some work groups thrive and others falter." *New York Times*. February 25th.