

Exercise for Student Orientation: The Dysfunctional Team Meeting

During this exercise students and instructor are in the C-Bay scenario. The students are new C-Bay employees and the instructor is their manager, the Director of IT. C-Bay is an online real estate auction firm experiencing growing pains. Working in teams is a core element of the C-Bay culture. The new employees have had an orientation to the C-Bay Way and are ready to get to work.

Scene 1: The manager creates teams

The manager assigns students into work teams and briefly acknowledges the challenge of working in teams.

- Teams of 5 are recommended. If you are concerned about students dropping the class, start with groups of 6 to accommodate anticipated attrition.
- If you are assigning teams by abilities and skills, group them by similar competency levels.
- Give them a few minutes to move into teams and introduce themselves.

Scene 2: The HR Director assigns the task

Have someone outside the class be HR Director and do this “live” –or- have the manager tell the project team what the HR Director said

HR Director: The senior VP of Operations has just informed me (in very strong terms) that our 4th quarter performance is being adversely impacted by poor teamwork within the IT department.

She is scheduled to meet with our President/CEO, VP of Finance and VP of Sales in 30 minutes. He wants an answer to “how we plan to improve service team performance.”

I just observed a meeting and took detailed notes on what I observed. I want this to be an accurate experience, so members of each team should take on roles in this I want you to walk through the meeting. Then, work in your teams to answer these questions [write them on the board]

1. What is wrong with this team?
2. How can it be fixed?
3. What are Best Practices in teamwork?

I want workers from each team to take roles and read or act through the script in front of us all so you will have an accurate idea of what the meeting was like.

Scene 3: The group reads/acts the Dysfunctional Meeting

See Dysfunctional Meeting script below.

Scene 4: The teams work the task (8-10 min)

Manager: Work in your teams to answer the questions. You have 8 minutes.

Note for managers: It is essential that you actively facilitate the teamwork so students have a positive experience. Let them struggle to experience failure but not to the point of despair. Keep bringing them back to task. Remind them they are on a very tight deadline so the perfect complete solution is unlikely – they should be aiming for “good enough” and the core solution.

Facilitation Tips

Goal: to help students figure out what is confusing them, or share and comment on a new idea, or encourage a point of inquiry.

- *Provide students with strategies for arriving at solutions on their own, that they can use again when face with similar problems on the job.*
- *Make students aware of the strategies they are using*
- *Ask questions instead of providing answers*
- *Tell a story about a similar situation, to provide students with an example of a problem-solving approach.*
- *Let students first attempt to work on a task and come to you with questions before you provide them with information*
- *Refocus the discussion on the problem*
- *When a student says “I don’t know what to do,” ask the following types of questions:*
- *“What have you tried so far?”*
- *What happened?*
- *Why didn’t your strategy work?*
- *How could you modify it to make it work?*
- *Where might you be able to find an answer to this problem?”*

Scene 5: The teams present & discuss solutions (15-20 min)

Manager: We’re running out of time. Teams – what are your solutions – remember, you only have a minute or two each.

What is a key word or phrase that sums up your conclusions?

Write key words on board

Okay, so you’re suggesting the keys to a successful team are: *[read key words]*. Which would you work on first?

- *Encourage discussion of team work and Best practices*
- *Solicit commitment for their teams to follow the suggestions for Best Practices.*

Step back into your instructor role (15-20 min)

Spend as much time debriefing on the experience as they did on the task itself to reinforce the importance of reflecting on learning and to remind them of what they’ve accomplished and decided.

Initiate a discussion on what they experienced as students, how they plan to make their teams work better, and the realities of working large tasks in limited time.

Suggested Reflection Questions

- How successful was your team at following the work plan you created for this task? Did you have a work plan?
- What have you learned about each other as teammates?
- How can you use each other’s strengths to work more effectively in the next tasks?

- Did your group delegate responsibility well?
- What would you change if you had more time?
- If your manager had told you that your solutions were not feasible, what would you have done?
- Did you have alternate solutions in mind?

Closure

Sum up the day and send them on their way with assignment for the week.

Script: The Dysfunctional Meeting

Setting: Meeting room in which C-Bay employees are discussing a major deadline for their client, Ostrander Financial. They're sitting in front of a marker board.

Characters

Shanti –most intelligent of the group but defers to authority

Suzanne –is domineering and condescending; takes credit for other people's ideas

Rodney –middle level IT manager, group leader; doesn't listen; interrupts

Neil –clowns around; doesn't engage in the group

Tao –young, ambitious, has not learned the subtleties of when to speak and when to listen

The Meeting

Rodney: OK, everybody, let's get to work. We have the Ostrander deadline coming up, and we don't have anything to show. So we're going to sit in this room till we come up with some ideas.

Neil: (complaining) How long is this going to take? (He checks his cell phone)

Rodney: If it takes all day, we're going to stay here and do it. I'm not going to take the heat from management just because you guys haven't done the job.

Suzanne: Some of us have been doing the job.

(Noises of disagreement from the others)

Shanti: (raises her hand, shyly) Why don't we brainstorm –

(Nobody listens – they're still complaining)

Shanti: Suppose we list some tasks that need to be done and assign responsibilities.

(She starts to get up – picks up marker)

Tao: (Gets up quickly and grabs another marker) I'll do it! I have good handwriting!

Rodney: I don't know – maybe that's a waste of time.

(Neil's cell phone rings; he removes himself to talk)

Suzanne: (condescending) We're never going to get anything done. I prefer to do my own work. That way I can be sure it will be done right.

Tao: (writes "1. Everybody shut up")

Rodney: OK, we can try this. I don't think it will work – but we'll give it a shot. Who's got an idea?

Suzanne: We should start with a review of the software configurations to be sure they're current.

Tao: The place we should start is with a review of the firewall logs. (Writes what she says, not what Suzanne says)

Suzanne: No – we really should start with a review of the software. You’re the writer, Tao – you’re the one with good handwriting, so write what we tell you.

Tao: (writes “Software”)

(Neil joins the group again.)

Shanti: (raises hand) Perhaps we should –

Rodney: (interrupts) I think we need to review traffic logs.

Neil: I think we should break for margaritas.

Suzanne: Quit clowning, Neil. Why don’t you just go talk on your cell phone?

Rodney: Why don’t you give us an idea?

Neil: I’m keeping my ideas to myself. Some people in this group have been known to take credit for my ideas. Right, Suzanne?

Suzanne: I don’t know what you’re -

Rodney: (interrupts) I knew this wasn’t going to work.

Shanti: (raises her hand; speaks softly) Perhaps we should check the Help Desk logs to see what the complaints really are.

Suzanne: Check the Help Desk logs.

Tao: (writes “Review Help Desk logs”) I think the word is “Review.”

(Neil’s phone rings again. Everybody groans. He leaves the group.)

Rodney: This is a lot of work. You guys better plan to stay late and get it done.

Shanti: Shouldn’t we assign responsibilities?

Rodney: OK, I have another meeting. (Picks up his notebook) You guys work this out.

Suzanne: What happened to we? We are going to stay until –

Rodney: (interrupts) I’ll check back after my meeting. I hope you can get something done. (Shakes his head, mumbling as he goes out.) What a lousy team!

Credits

Scriptwriters: Phyllis Gobbell, Nashville State Community College; Jane Ostrander, De Anza College
Advisors: Paul McConnell, Foothill College; Ruth Loring, Nashville State Tech Community College