



5.0 Leading Teams

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5.1 Intro to High Performance Teams

Members? Check. Officers? Check. Project? Check. Ensuring everything is getting done? Not as simple. It takes a lot of work to get a team working together seamlessly. This a lot of theory out there about how to build good teams, and this chapter explores some of that knowledge. We are going to spend this chapter presenting specific leadership strategies you can take to promote good team dynamics in your own chapter.

Worst Case Scenario...

In this section we are going to explore what we want our teams in ESW, our executive board, our project groups, etc. to look like. But to kick-off that discussion, we are going to look at the opposite of the ideal team: what does ill-functioning team look like? If you think about the most frustrating team you have been on, you may come up with a list of characteristics similar to this one:

- Poor meeting attendance
- Lack of common goals
- Tasks not being complete
- Low team enthusiasm and motivation
- Mismatch of interests
- Lack of project leadership



- Poor or nonexistent communication
- Repeated roadblocks
- No one is having fun

Poor leadership can lead to poor teams, with members dropping off the face of the earth, unaccomplished tasks, and low enthusiasm. So what does the ideal team look like? With the proper leadership, your ESW teams may look a little something like this:

- committed to the project
- result oriented attitude
- innovative and creative
- concern for quality
- on time performance
- on-budget performance

- high involvement, work interest, and energy
- good communication
- good team spirit
- mutual trust
- high need for achievement¹

High Performance Teams

This is the kind of team business management people call High Performance Teams (HPT). That may sound like boring jargon, but it is actually a useful way to think about your ESW teams. Wikipedia defines a HPT as "...a group of people with specific roles and complementary talents and skills, aligned with and committed to a common purpose, who consistently show high levels of collaboration and innovation, that produce superior results."

How do you get from a low performance team to a high performance team? A guy by the name of Bruce Tuckman created a model of team development that we find useful in helping chapter leaders. He proposed that teams follow a five stage development process, involving forming, storming, norming, performing, and adjourning.

The end goal is to get to what Tuckman calls a "performing" team. A performing team has all the qualities of a high-performance team (HPT) discussed above, but just with a different name. He proposes that to get there, team first go through forming, storming, and norming phases.

In the **forming phase**, teams are coming together. It's the awkward getting to know each other part of team dynamics. Next, the team enters the **storming phase**. This is where many teams fail, as members begin to get pushy. Stress, high tensions, and control for leadership are normal here. The **norming phase** resolves team differences and team standards. This is where teams start to play nice, for real this time. Finally, a team enter the **performing phase**, where things finally settle down and the team starts producing meaningful work. Leaders can delegate work freely here.

In the next section we'll talk about specific strategies you as a leader can take to reach that performing stage.

1. Thamhain, Hans J., and David L. Wilemon. "Building high performing engineering project teams." Engineering Management, IEEE Transactions on 3 (1987): 130-137

5.2 Strategies for Building Teams

We ideally want members to be committed to projects, show up to meetings, and show genuine enthusiasm for ESW, but how you actually make this happen? There are many things you can do as a leader to promote the formation of High Performance Teams (HPT), teams that function like the description in the previous section.

In this section, we will talk about leadership strategies and methods for engaging members. This section draws heavily from the Student Leadership Challenge, which is a highly recommend read for all ESW chapter leaders. The Student Leadership Challenge presents five main methods for being a successful leader. For our purposes, we are going to focus on three methods from the Student Leadership Challenge plus one more.

Work With What You Got

Before we present the three leadership strategies, we want to share a pro-tip with you. One of the most common frustrations expressed among chapter leaders is that they do not have enough members to do cool work. They

believe that only 50+ member chapters can be outstanding. This could not be further from the truth. You don't need a lot of people to do good work. A project team can be as small as two people--we have seen it happen before with great results. There are some chapters that consist of a really tight-knit officer board that end up producing some really spectacular projects. So buckle down and work with what you got. You might be surprised what you can accomplish.

Inspire a Shared Vision

The first leadership strategy stems from the belief that a strong vision can help motivate students. A vision unites students under a common goal. According to the Student Leadership Challenge, "A leader's vision should stir people to become involved; that occurs when the leader identifies a common purpose" Luckily, ESW has already done all the hard work for you and has a vision all of its own:

"A world of environmental, social, and economic prosperity created and sustained by local and global collective action."

As a leader, you can engage members by sharing this vision with your members and new recruits.

Another method for inspiring a shared vision is to share your passion for ESW. Passion is contagious! One of the best methods for sharing your passion is to share you ESW story. What drives you to work with ESW? Why did you join in the first place? If you are comfortable, you can share your story at your next board meeting or recruitment event in order to inspire other students.

Enable other to Act

The guys over at the Student Leadership Challenge said it best when they wrote, "anyone with power can command commitment. A leader, however, inspires commitment." As an ESW chapter leader, you can enable others through a variety of methods. You can create specific positions to empower new members.

Many chapters have officer positions specifically crafted for first years or people with not that much free time. These positions

Student Leadership Challenge

The Student Leadership Challenge is a guide written by Jim Kouzes and Barry Posner for college students in leadership positions.

Rather than reinvent the wheel, we here at ESW want to highlight the excellent work that the guys at the Student Leadership Challenge have done to encourage student leadership. If you have an interest in learning more about leadership theory and becoming a better leader, we can not recommend the Student Leadership Challenge enough.

Some college campuses teach workshop from the Student Leadership Challenge. Check to see whether your college is one of them and take advantage of this great opportunity!

5.2 Leadership Strategies for Building Teams

vary depending on your chapter, but some examples include someone who manages your social media accounts, a liaison to other sustainability or engineering organizations on campus, or a protégé to a project leader. This is also a great way to involve humanities and social science students, as you can include them on grant writing, social media management, public relations, and event planning activities.

You should also know the strengths of your team in order to work with them the most effectively. One popular method is to use the professional equivalent of the Myers-Briggs test called Strengths Quest. It costs money, so see if your school will help pay for it. Regardless, the test is worth it and will help your team understand what they excel at—this boosts confidence and allows you as a leader to tailor your task delegation.

If you do not want to spend any more, or simply want to have fun, you could do something as simple and silly as the Hogwarts house sorting quiz for your team. The

point is not so much the results but the discussion you have afterwards.

Encourage the heart

Finally, to create high-performance teams, we encourage you to encourage others. A good leader will “recognize contributions by showing appreciation for individual excellence. “So reward your team! One popular and cheap method of rewarding your team is host a paper plate awards. Traditionally, you buy some paper plates, draw a cute award on one side, and host a banquet to award them to all your members. The purpose is to celebrate everyone’s unique strength on the team.

Some examples of paper plate award include Most Likely to Respond to Email at 3am or Best Gchat Fanatic. Let them know when they’ve succeeded or reached a goal and you will be doing your part as a leader to prevent burn-out and promote engagement.

Personality Tests for Teams

Myers Briggs

Also known as the MBTI, this is the personality tests to end all personality tests. The real test costs money, but there are numerous free versions online.

[Take the test!](#)

Strengths Finder

If the MBTI is for individuals, StrengthsFinder is perfect for teams. As the name implies,

the test returns your top five strengths. Comparing strengths within a team can help you figure out how to delegate tasks.

[Take the test!](#)

The Dutch Test for Conflict Handling

While not a personality test, this will show you how you handle conflict. Compare results between teammates to discuss how to handle difficult situations.

[Take the test!](#)

Annual Awards

Did you know that ESW-HQ “encourages the heart” by giving out awards every year at the annual conference in the spring? We give out awards for “outstanding chapter” in every region and a handful of “outstanding individuals.”

These awards are our way of saying thank you to the incredible and inspiring leaders and chapters in our community.

If you think your chapter is awesome or know of a dedicated ESW member in need of recognition, email your Chapter Relations Coordinator to nominate them! We accept nominations all year round, but will officially announce nominations some time in the early spring each year.

If you can not be there in person at the conference to accept the award, that is okay! We will mail the award to you.

5.3 Team Contracts

A team contract is a written and mutually agreed upon document detailing how the team will function. While creating one may seem a bit formal for a student project, team contracts help establish accountability, develop norms for the group to refer to, and set up procedures for difficult or awkward situations. When you engage in professional engineering work you might have to develop a team contract – so might as well start early!

If you choose to implement a

team contract, you should bring together everyone on the team. Including every officer's perspective and opinion is crucial to developing a fair and agreeable team contract. Arrange for a separate meeting before you begin working as a team to discuss and establish the contract. Trying to enact a team contract in the middle of a semester may disrupt your work flow and/or team dynamics.

Team contracts typically cover four main concepts: outline of

commitments, ground rules, meeting logistics, and accountability. Example team contracts are included in the Appendix, but the section below will help guide you in creating a personalized team contract for your chapter. If you have a standard template, the process of establishing a contract can be less time-consuming and formal.

Commitments

While each member will have their own specific responsibilities, a general set of responsibilities will apply to the team as a whole. These “commitments” clearly spell out what is required of all the members and sets the tone for the project team.

Examples:

- *We will do our best to attend all project meetings.*
- *We will attend all ESW related events unless excused.*
- *We will agree to only do work that we are qualified and capable of doing.*
- *We will be honest and realistic in setting goals for the project's future.*

Ground Rules

Ground rules are the set of expectations for how your team will communicate and interact with each other. They are first and foremost intended to create a safe and open environment for people to work and talk in, but they also provide clear guidelines for you to step in and do your job as a facilitator. If someone is not following the ground rules, you not only have the right but the responsibility to step in and correct the situation.

Examples:

- *We will stick to the agenda during meetings.*
- *Only the secretary and PM are allowed to have laptops open during board meetings.*
- *We will provide only constructive feedback.*
- *We will not interrupt other members during meetings.*
- *We will remember the wise words of Craig Ferguson: “Does this need to be said? Does this need to be said by me? Does this need to be said by me now?”*

Example Abbreviated Team Contract

Responsibilities

- Do whatever your board descriptions says!
- Attend all events or inform board that you can't make it.
- Complete the tasks assigned to you.
- 48 hour email response policy.
- Speak up. Either at board meetings or later to specific people, voice your concerns.

Amnesty Policy

Sometimes board members cannot finish a task or can no longer commit enough time to stay on board. These things happen all the time for a million different reasons. A board member's responsibility to ESW in this situation is to communicate the problem to someone else on board. No one should blame or be blamed for an incomplete task or role.

5.3 Team Contracts

Meeting Logistics

It is important to communicate meeting logistics with your team so that everyone can help to make meetings more efficient and effective.

Examples:

- *The team will meet every week.*
- *The meeting time and location will be determined by the first week of classes.*
- *The agenda will be released at least 12 hours before a meeting.*
- *We will come to meetings on time and prepared.*
- *We will inform the leader 12 hours in advance if we are unable to attend a meeting.*
- *The leader will facilitate the meeting.*

Accountability

Finding ways to hold people accountable is both hard and often awkward. As students in a volunteer extracurricular group, it is rare that you have any serious way to respond to individuals that are not meeting reasonable expectations. It is also likely that those individuals are friends, and asking them to leave or

imposing restrictions is never a fun conversation. These reasons are why accountability is a key piece of a team contract - if they are agreed to at the beginning of a project, the discussion has already occurred before the problems appeared.

Examples:

- *Failing to regularly communicate problems is grounds for an individual discussion with the project leader.*
- *Members that fail to attend meetings will receive lower preference in presenting the project at events, both locally and nationally (e.g. the ESW Annual Conference).*
- *Consistent failure to finish assigned tasks is grounds for dismissal from the team, and loss of credit for project completion*

Case Studies in Conflict

Here are some case studies to get you thinking about your team contract. Discuss your answers with your officers!

Case #1: Teammate Procrastination

One of the members of your three-person team is frequently late when completing assigned tasks. When work is completed, it is done so in a rushed manner. Ignoring this team member will add significant burden to others on the team, but waiting around for her will put the project at risk. What will jump start this under-performing team member?

Case #2: Member Differences

Two team members are in constant conflict about the quality of work produced. Member A is meticulous and particular about every detail of the project. Her work is very good, but she proceeds very slowly. Member B is responsible and does not cut corners, but she strives

to finish project work quickly by not being as meticulous. How can this difference be resolved?

Case #3: Member Autonomy

Several members of a design team are striking out on their own path. They are resistant to following suggestions by mentors with respect to their process, fabrication, and teamwork. When they do take part in recommended activities, it is done to “get it over with” and get back to doing things their way. What can be done to ensure that resources to the team are leveraged in a responsible manner?

Case #4: Client Unavailability

Your project client is a challenge to work with. He is frequently unavailable to meet with the team and is unresponsive to queries about design selection and preferences. What should be done to ameliorate the difficulties in client-team interaction and to ensure maximum client and team satisfaction with the project?