

Developing a Team Contract¹

Conflicts within teams usually arise from different expectations among team members, so it is crucial to develop a team contract that spells out the expectations in detail. The essential elements of a team contract are:

- A Vision Statement and Specific Goal(s)
- Definition of Roles and Team Structure
- Detailed Procedures
- Personal Accountability

1. Vision Statement and Specific Goal(s)

A good team needs a common purpose or vision and should take the time to write a concise *Vision Statement*. For example, a vision statement might be,

“Our vision for this project is to (1) learn about the design process, to (2) work together effectively as a team, to (3) design a [YOU FILL THE BLANK] that addresses the specific needs of our market, and to stay within the (4) budgetary and time constraints given.”

This statement can be further broken down into specific goals that must be achieved in order to fulfill the vision of the group. Individual goals should be S.M.A.R.T. :

- **S**pecific, **M**easurable, **A**chievable, **R**ealistic, and **T**ime Bound

2. Roles and Structure

When forming a team, it is essential to determine the following:

- How will work be divided among team members?
- Who is responsible for what?
- What is the team structure going to be?

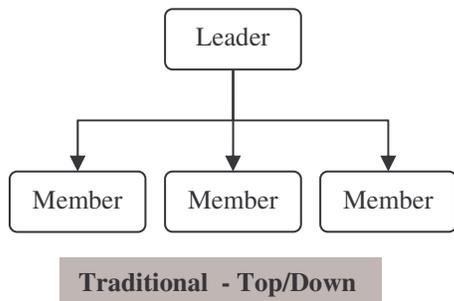
Team structure can take on several forms including:

- (1) *Traditional Top/Down Structure* - with a team leader that *directs* other members as to what they will be doing.
- (2) *Participatory Structure* - with a team coordinator that *supports* the efforts of individual team members.
- (3) *Flat Structure* - with equal members and no defined leader or coordinator.

¹ Johnson, V., Bailey, R., *Becoming a Technical Professional*, Kendall Hunt Publishing, 2003.

These three team structures are illustrated below along with some of the pro's and con's of each structure:

(1) Traditional Top/Down Structure:



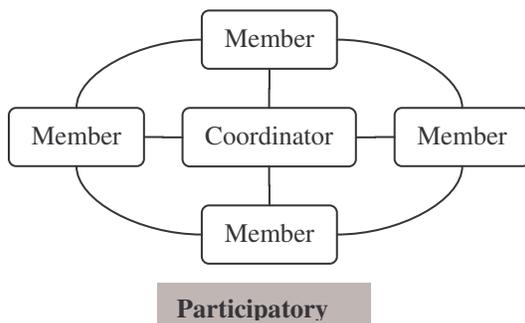
Pro's

- Efficient decision making.
- Good organization.
- Responds quickly to changes.
- Leader directs individual team members.

Con's

- Stifles creativity.
- Lacks consensus.
- Members wait for direction.

(2) Participatory Structure with a Team Coordinator



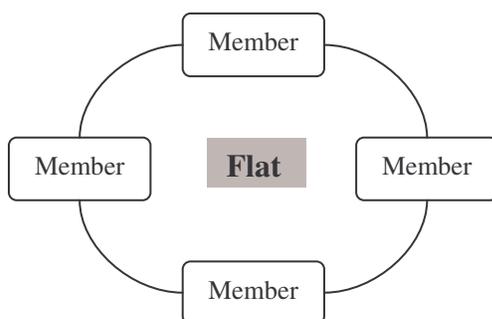
Pro's

- Greater team member participation.
- Room for individual decisions.
- More consensus.
- Coordinator *supports* individual team members.

Con's

- Inefficient decision making.
- Takes time to build consensus.

(3) Flat Structure (with no Leader or Coordinator)



Pro's

- Encourages creativity.
- Encourages equal participation.
- Ideas of equal value.
- Well-rounded decisions.

Con's

- Inefficient decision making.
- Requires self-motivated individuals.
- Slow to respond to changes.
- Difficulty keeping deadlines.

It is important to define the structure of your team in your contract, so that team members understand the expectations placed on them and to avoid misunderstandings during the project.

3. Procedures

Your Team Contract should address the following (10) areas:

- (1) Logistics (Agendas / Minutes / Start & End Times)
- (2) Running of Meetings (Facilitator / Staying on Track / Minimizing Topics)
- (3) Absenteeism and Tardiness (Policies / Consequences)
- (4) Meeting Cancellation and Rescheduling
- (5) Team Decisions and Consensus (Procedures agreed upon in advance.)
- (6) Handling of Team Conflicts
- (7) Quality of Work Standard
- (8) Incomplete Work and Individual Consequences
- (9) Personal Feedback
- (10) Awards for Excellence

4. Signatures

Your team contract should be signed and dated by all team members. Remember, when forming a team contract, “Either you bleed now, or you bleed later”. Can you explain what this means?