



Module 4.1 Ground Rules - Meeting the Team's Expectations

Team Formation Model Step 5. Creation of ground rules including expectations of individual team members, faculty and consultants.

Assignment Instructions:

1. Ground rules are established during the initial team meeting.
2. Create ground rules for your team in the following areas:
 - a. Knowledge teams working in laboratories are responsible for six major activities: laboratory duties, writing papers, individual oral presentations, communicating with your faculty advisor and/or industrial advisor, and the team coordinator, team and faculty meetings, and conflict management.
3. A list of past ground rule examples are provided on the Collaboration Toolbox website Module 4.2. Use these rules to create your ground rules.
4. Copies of the ground rules are attached to your first Weekly Progress Report and are uploaded into your Dropbox.

Systems Thinking theory (von Bertalanffy, L) analyzes individuals and organizations within the context of their environments by comprehending the fundamentals of how a team functions, as a system within a set of larger organizational systems, making it possible to work through the complexity of these interactions and arrive at real, effective solutions to difficult individual, team, business, or organizational problems. Individuals, teams, and an organization do not exist as an island, but as part of a larger matrix of systems that function, more or less independently, yet are interdependent. Systems Thinking theory (von Bertalanffy, L) states that a system maintains its existence over time through the mutual interaction of its parts. Two such systems are collaborative and hierarchal. Hierarchies are developed through the mutual interaction of the power dynamic, while collaborative systems are developed through problem solving and agreed upon boundaries. We choose to use a collaborative ground rules system to describe how the team will function.

Viewing a project as a collaborative system of mutual interactions allows a team to create systems that support understanding of the project and allow each individual to contribute to creating successful projects. Often the understanding is an emergent result of trial and error. The ground rules are a tool to help the team develop agreement on how the team will work collaboratively to complete the project. Ground rules are systems of behavior that the team uses to establish boundaries, clarify task implementation, and promote understanding of the project, including creating patterns of behavior that result in successful completion of the tasks involved in reaching the

team's goals. Ground rules support the team members in understanding the framework or structure of the team. Ground rules help to establish, clearly define, and develop mutual understanding about the team's culture. "Norms" (rules which will predicate how you will act as a team member) will need to be established in specific areas. The rules are clear, concise, and are written.

Once the team members commit to the project the project leader manages the needed underlying structure being created so that all members take responsibility for their behavior in the context of working on a successful project. Being collaboratively interested in successfully completing a project and understanding the underlying structure enable the team to identify the most appropriate rules that define the optimum behavior that will support effective project management. This is the ground rules system. The first step in creating the system of ground rules is to define each situation the team will encounter while doing the project.

1. Are you going to write a collaborative paper or are papers being written individually? What rules will be needed to make this task run smoothly?
2. Who will be the spokesperson for the team and will the spokesperson be determined by technical expertise or by appointment.
3. How will tasks be delegated?
4. When, where, and how will the team meet?
5. How will the team meetings be organized and will one person take notes?

The ideal is to have the team learn to anticipate problems they may encounter while doing the project and incorporate solutions to these problems into the ground rules. Asking the right questions is imperative to success. If initial discussions are data focused then data focused rules will be created. If the discussions are relationship focused, i.e. cause and effect, then the ground rules will seek to establish "cause and effect" relationships. However, if the project leader can promote discussions that find solutions to understanding these patterns responsible for the situations the team will encounter then the ground rules will support knowledge of the project and the individuals performing the tasks associated with the projects. (adapted from <http://www.systems-thinking.org>, Gene Bellinger. Z 2009)

One of the most important aspects of a ground rules system is a collaborative feedback loop. In many teams the feedback loop created is a negative rather than collaborative. Project Leaders are responsible for creating positive collaborative feedback loops that are incorporated into the ground rules system. It is essential when deciding what activities need to be clearly defined to determine where to draw boundaries. Limiting and expanding will always create compromises. Excessively limiting what activities need to be clearly articulated may narrow the rules as to omit some of the relevant interactions essential to making the ground rules relevant to managing the team.

For example, we have observed in this course that some teams create cultures

with extensive ground rules, which work exemplary, while others create few ground rules ultimately running into problems as behaviors emerge that were not well defined in the ground rule system. Therefore, when we see unarticulated ground rules your team will be asked to have another meeting and transform the rules into more functional rules.

Revisiting the ground rules on a regular basis, especially during times of stress, will initially support the team to question if changes to the ground rules system are needed to make working together more effective and efficient. The ground rules system should include a combination of balancing and reinforcing structures. An example of a balancing and reinforcing ground rules systems is;

Faculty Advisor Meetings: These are guidelines that should be implemented

1. Weekly meetings with the faculty advisor will be held _____; Place_____.
2. All participants must have read the Weekly Progress Report before the meeting.
3. If there are any ambiguous statements in the Weekly Progress Report then the recorder will clear up the ambiguities at the meeting (agenda item) or via e-mail before the meeting.
4. The agenda is written by the Project Leader and sent to team members 24 hours in advance.
5. Items on the agenda will be discussed at the meeting.
6. The agenda items are those pre-selected from the team meetings and each member can add to them 24 hours before the faculty meeting.
7. The Project leader facilitates meeting.
8. All participants input will be considered during the meeting.
9. The Project Leader will manage tangential discussions.
10. The faculty advisor in this meeting will give as much input as necessary and will not take over the meeting.
11. Team members must be punctual to faculty meetings.
12. If a member is going to be absent, that member must inform other team members a day before the meeting.
13. Minutes are they optional or required or only required when someone is absent or late?

Bertalanffy's initial premise is that there are fundamental structures interacting across all systems and, if one learns the structures, when transferring from one discipline to another, much of the learning can be transferred. When studying a new discipline, one simply has to learn the labels on the structures in the new discipline. Therefore agreeing upon the definition of ambiguous labels such as respect, being non-judgmental, honesty, conflict management, and trust support the system being functional. You can consider the balancing and reinforcing structures as building blocks, which can be combined in numerous ways to describe more intricate interactions. When revisiting the ground rules review the problems that have come up during the project's execution and ask how the problems can be solved by incorporating changes to the systems already developed. An example from a past team follows:

“The Ground Rules proved to be a very effective way of managing team tasks and we referred back to them once the Proposal and Oral Presentation deadlines were approaching. Referring back to the rules helped to keep each person on track with their responsibilities to the team and was a good indicator of why things may not have worked. In my opinion, our ground rules were very comprehensive and should be carried forward into the next rotation without any changes. There was one area of the ground rules that was not adhered to which led to some difficulties in the preparation of the oral presentation. Flexibility was allowed in the oral presentation system initially and then the presenter modified the system during the first rotation. However, we realized that this was not an effective means of preparation. So we consulted with our faculty advisor who gave us excellent feedback on how to move forward with our time management and delegation of tasks and the revisions to the system were appropriately made.”

It is important to have a system of follow-through involving the team, your industrial consultant, your teaching assistant, project management coordinator, and faculty advisor in the problem-solving process. The system’s key elements should build short-term momentum by implementing the 10.26 procedures and continuing to deepen people’s understanding about the procedures as changes are made. Whenever possible, project leaders involve all team members by first helping to develop the leader’s own insights about why the team’s systems function as they do, and as time goes by the leader meets with the team and encourages clarification on what the team initially created. Part of your ground rules system will be a procedure for conflict management used when the team encounters internal and external conflicts, which we define as “Differences of Opinion”. The ground rules system when designed appropriately initiates negotiation and consensus building.

Individual behavior not accounted for within the ground rule system can emerge. By using the Entrance Conference information emergent behaviors can be prevented. Therefore team members should accurately describe their strengths, weaknesses, motivations, and how they behave in regard to lateness to meetings, working collaboratively, and managing their time when supplying their personal information. When emergent behavior occurs, the team should clearly define the emergent behavior and decide whether or not to adopt the behavior and change the ground rule system it is affecting or to have the project leader monitor the emergent behavior and extinguish it. An example of a behavior a team may want to extinguish is:

“Our biggest weakness continues to be our tendency to procrastinate, though there has been an improvement over the course of the semester. The busy schedules of the team members often make it difficult for us to meet our internal deadlines. However, there was a marked improvement from the writing of the original progress report to the revisions of the progress report. The writing process for the original progress report was poorly organized and procrastinated (and rushed through) to the

very last minute. The team had a long (voluntary and unofficial) team meeting to work on the progress report revisions together in which the team was able to bond as well as efficiently complete the revisions. We then redesigned our ground rules system for writing collaborative papers so the problems would not be encountered during writing the Final Report.”

THE GROUND RULES SYSTEM – INCORPORATING KNOWLEDGE INTO A SYSTEM

Setting the Ground Rules –

Procedure to follow to formulate ground rules:

1. Choose ground rules from list provided in Module 4.2 on the Collaboration Toolbox website.
2. Develop others that would be unique to your team
3. Make sure to cover all areas of team interaction and plan ahead.

Overall Participation:

1. Discuss team ethics
2. Make an agreement to help each other to meet the team's goals
3. Commit to fulfilling your personal responsibility, sharing ideas and supporting each other in work
4. Reinforce positive ways to communicate support to each other and utilize the team's strength to be high performing
5. Commit to being on time. Being on time means when delayed communicating with the team quickly to manage the problem.
6. Commit to preparing materials in advance
7. Share the work equally. Equally means over the course of the project not daily.
8. System for brainstorming, including how you will present your ideas and narrow your decision making process.
9. System for decision-making
10. System for Identifying, defining, and setting the quality requirements for the team
11. System for reviewing the task assignment process including data analysis, writing assignments, and oral presentations.
12. System for holding meetings
 - a. Decide on regular times for weekly team and faculty meetings.
 - b. Decide how team will conduct short informal meetings, to maintain communication between the weekly, formalized meetings.
 - c. Plan with the team what evaluation criteria your team will use to assess if the meeting and how to implement evaluation process.
13. System for conflict management.

10.26/27/29 GROUND RULES FOR BEING TIMELY The following are NOT excuses for not being timely with assignments, showing up for team meetings, labs, or timely E-MAILING Weekly Progress Reports, or agendas.

1. Being a Double Major

2. Athletic Practices
3. Extra Curricula Activities
4. Ineffectual Organization of Team or Collaborative Experience in ICE
5. Lack of Organization in ICE by leaving ICE assignments to last minute
6. Having to track you down and get you to do an assessment
7. Other team member has part of assignment and you can not locate them
8. Faculty Advisor says you do not have to do it

Excuses for missing an assignment: (Accepted excuses must be communicated in advance with alternative plan to make up the assignment)

1. Job interviews
2. Graduate School Interviews
3. Confirmed Illness

Examples of Changes in Ground Rules that are effective:

“For example, other teams in our CI section held the Oral Presenter responsible for creating all of the slides, and the other team members were responsible for commenting and suggesting improvements. After a team discussion, we decided this was not an effective strategy because our team thought the Oral Presenter should really be focusing on understanding the content of the presentation and thinking about how to communicate the concepts in our project effectively, and not spending time on more lower-level tasks like making a slide theme or checking for the inclusion of references or checking for consistency of style or grammar. Consequently, we reworded our Ground Rules to emphasize that the Oral Presenter was not responsible for more routine tasks associated with the presentation, such as creating simple figures or fixing any formatting issues, and that this responsibility fell to the other two team members. The Oral Presenter would prepare a list of figures or tasks that needed to be done to the presentation so that she could focus on rehearsing her oral presentation. We found this was effective because it meant the Oral Presenter did not have to worry about checking that the slides were numbered, for example, and could instead focus on the more important task of practicing how she was going to explain the content in each slide the most effectively; this was especially helpful when there was limited time or a looming deadline. “

“We reworded the Ground Rules to emphasize this: that the Oral Presenter was responsible for creating the outline for what the presentation would contain and in what order concepts would be explained, in what way, and with which figures. Specifically, we said, “The Oral Presenter is responsible for deciding the higher-level concepts to be explained during the presentation, the logical flow of ideas, and how to illustrate any ideas with

figures. If any lower-level tasks are done by other team members (such as creating a graph from data points or formatting culture images onto a slide), then it is the responsibility of the Oral Presenter to go over the presentation slides in the end and make sure she is satisfied with the flow, style, and cohesiveness of the presentation slides. If she is not satisfied with a figure, table, formatting style, or similar element, it is the responsibility of the other team members to fix the element until the Oral Presenter is satisfied. The Oral Presenter has the final say in what will be included in the presentation and whether the work done by the other team members is satisfactory. “Hearing the strategies of other teams allowed us to fine tune the wording in our Ground Rules to fully develop the responsibilities of each team member for the Oral Presentation more concretely.”