Creating a Successful Team

The purpose of this assignment is to help your team create an agreement about how to work together effectively.

In creating this "contract," your team should have an honest and forthright discussion about team goals, how to build on the strengths of each individual member, and what are acceptable parameters for working together. This discussion may feel overly formal at this stage. However, research shows that the most successful (and happy) teams are deliberate about setting expectations and norms at the beginning of work to align expectations and set team standards.

Your team contract will be a "live" document—meaning it is highly likely that you will want to, or need to, revise your agreement as your team's circumstances change.

Your team should decide on the most constructive way to have this frank discussion given the personalities and preferences of your team members. It is often helpful to ask individuals to think about their own preferences prior to the group discussion. For example, if your team asks you how you prefer to be criticized—will you be able to answer?

It is essential that the final contract be representative of <u>all</u> team members. <u>You should avoid having one person create the "contract".</u> This creates very little buy-in and makes unpleasant violations more likely. The contract does not have to be written but writing it down does help make sure everyone is clear about expectations.

The guidelines below will help you create your team contract. The examples provided in bullet points below are <u>only guidelines</u>. You may create any agreement appropriate for your team. A sample contract is attached to guide you.

Part I: Team Goals

Decide on goals. You may choose to have only one goal or to have several. Not all teams will have the same or even a similar set of goals.

Part II: Identifying and Using the Expertise of Members

One of the reasons for teamwork is to pool knowledge and expertise of individuals. This is commonly related to how a group chooses to divide and assign work. Think about how your team can best use of each member's strengths.

Part III: Team Interaction

This section asks you to agree on how the team will manage interpersonal dynamics and group process. Here are some of the issues considered by previous teams:

- *Acceptable Truancy*: acceptable reasons for being late or not completing work, amount of time needed to "warn" the group, and how to communicate this and to which members, etc.

- *Constructive Disagreement*: how to disagree and not take it personally. For example, pre-meeting draft sharing, special time during meeting for feedback, etc.

- *Managing Conflict*: who gets involved and when (e.g., only those in conflict, the whole team, the project leader, etc.).

- *Expressing Dissatisfaction*: with individual team members' performance, team process, and work quality, etc.   What forum will be used: will a person be given warning, will the team take issue as a whole or will it be dealt with privately, etc.?

- *Decision Rules*: when the team will vote, when consensus is necessary, will one person be empowered to speak for the team, etc.

- *Payback*: if a team member requires special accommodation from the team—what is acceptable compensation (e.g., more individual work, none necessary, etc.)?

- *Enforcement*: if a member violates the contract, what will the team do about it (e.g., contribute to a group dinner fund, take on more work, be eliminated from the team etc.)? How is a 'violation' identified.

- *Communication:* how to use communication media (e.g., a 48-hour response rule for email communication), how to inform team members that could not attend face-to-face, online meetings, or phone conversations, etc.