Collaboration Skills Quick Reference

Bruce Tuckman: Stages of Team Formation

- **Forming**: get together, get to know one another, "nice to meet you"
- **Storming**: get annoyed, get on one another's nerves, "no more mr. nice guy"
- **Norming**: getting to understand one another better, "now I see where you're coming from"
- **Performing**: getting to function as a team, "all for one, and one for all!"

and sometimes:
- **Adjourning**, or **Mourning**: When the project ends, there can be a period of adjustment where you miss the people, the work, the routine

Patrick Lencioni: Five Failures of a Team

1. **Absence of trust**: unwillingness to show weakness; defensive behaviour
2. **Fear of conflict**: Imposition of artificial harmony, leading to a reluctance to tackle issues
3. **Lack of commitment**: Lack of productive conflict (vigorous, but respectful, debate and discussion) results in artificial buy-in, and settling for mediocrity
4. **Avoidance of accountability**: without commitment, it's impossible to develop a "team standard of quality"
5. **Inattention to results**: without accountability, team members look out for their own interests rather than those of the the team

Develop a Group Profile / Resume

If you look at the "About" page on a website, it often highlights the purpose of the site, with brief biographies of the people involved, what skills they possess, and their role on the site. It also sometimes contains locations, opening hours, and methods of contact. It's pretty handy stuff.

When tackling a project, it can be useful for groups to create a **Group Profile**:
- to help you get to know one another,
- to share timetables, and determine when you can all meet (and what other commitments you have)
- establish your mutual interests and abilities in approaching the project, and
- discover the individual strengths and group deficiencies that may set the boundaries, or scope, of what you tackle.

A group profile / group resume can collect in one place a summary of your group's who, where, what, why and when. It's worth a discussion early in the project.

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Build a Team Charter, Group Contract, Group Expectations, Group Norms, or Code of Conduct[1]

As a group, it is useful to talk about what's important to each of the team members in terms of performance, deadlines, responsibility, and respect. By reaching consensus on what everyone is willing to commit to – or prepared to tolerate – the group will be able to understand one another better, and work better as a result. Revise and update as needed.

Document the group's consensus of behaviours expected from each member:
- **Temporal** – "let's start on time"
- **Procedural** – "one person speaks at a time"
- **Behavioural** – "be kind, rather than nice[2]"
- **Roles** – "who will facilitate next time; who'll take notes?"
- **Methods for resolving impasses** – "let's cool off, then talk."

Meet with an Agenda[3]

Meetings are useful for discussing, deciding, and determining future actions. Establishing an agenda ahead of time allows participants to prepare research and materials beforehand to bring into the discussion, to help in making decisions. During a meeting, if participants determine they need to do more research before making a decision, adjourn the meeting and reconvene after completing the research.

An agenda should include:
- Who's expected to be there
- What's expected to be discussed or decided
- Who will facilitate the discussion, and who will perform other useful roles
- How much time will be spent on each discussion or decision

Put important items at the top of the agenda. If an important item is contentious, schedule something simpler to start, to build group cohesion and openness.

The outcome of a meeting should include a record of what was discussed, what was decided, and a set of actions to complete in preparation for the next meeting.

Perform Useful Meeting Roles[4]

Roles such as these help a meeting run smoothly and productively.
- **Leader/Facilitator** – "It sounds like we're in agreement, let's move on."
- **Notetaker/Timekeeper** – "If it isn't written down, the meeting didn't happen."
- **Arbitrator/Monitor Watchdog** – "I think we're getting off topic here."
- **Devil's Advocate** – "What if it doesn't work? What's our back-up plan?"

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[1] https://uwaterloo.ca/centre-for-teaching-excellence/teaching-resources/teaching-tips/developing-assignments/group-work/making-group-contracts

[2] NICE is sometimes an acronym for: Nasty, Insincere, Condescending, Evasive

[3] https://uwaterloo.ca/centre-for-teaching-excellence/teaching-resources/teaching-tips/alternatives-lecturing/group-work/meeting-strategies-help-prepare-students-group-work

[4] https://uwaterloo.ca/centre-for-teaching-excellence/teaching-resources/teaching-tips/developing-assignments/group-work/group-roles-maximizing-group-performance

These roles should rotate, so that no one is always stuck taking notes, and everyone has an opportunity to develop their facilitation skills.

Start Team Meetings with a Check-in
Your team members are busy – and you are too – but make it a habit to start every meeting with a round-the-table check-in. See how everyone is doing – who's socked in and who's sailing along. It helps everyone understand who can give the most – and when – and builds the sort of open, honest, productive relationships that will sustain the group from first meeting to final report.