Week 1

Today we were assigned teams. I have been placed on a team with one undergraduate DAAP student, and two MDes students. We have a diverse team of two men, two women, and representation of three countries in total (USA, Uruguay, and Mexico). My team members are Maddie, Natalia, and Norberto. Because the senior design project requires working for an organization, and myself, Norberto, and Natalia are all simply students taking this for a class, Maddie, an actual employee, is the official leader of our group.

As our first week developed, it became clear that Maddie had the necessary skills to lead our group, at least for the most part. She is adept in implementing numerous exercises to help keep the group moving forward, and remaining on task. She also seems very able to “say no” ass a leader, which I find to be an incredibly valuable quality in any form of team management. What Maddie really lacks is the firmness and decisiveness that is often necessary to motivate a team. She too often asks for reassurance of her ideas from the rest of our team, and can be easily swayed if at least two of us disagree, or choose to disregard her direction.

Natalia is extremely reserved, and often only speaks up for clarification on any English words she is unfamiliar with or doesn’t quite understand. She is extremely engaged and always working hard for the team, but seems disinterested in determining any type of direction or deliverables.

Norberto is very outspoken and is constantly questioning the group’s direction, also demonstrating leadership skills. Norberto is also nearly thirty years old and has experience working as a designer and manager in production facilities in Mexico. So, he has the most leadership experience among our group. This becomes apparent when he speaks, because he is very confident in himself, and also seems to be very confident in his designs/ideas.

For our first week, Maddie dominated the discussion. I attribute this to her being appointed the leader of our group by the company, also because she has the most information about our project at this time. Everyone in our group was very engaged, and I am interested to see if that engagement continues once the excitement of a new project inevitably wears off the team.

Week 2

In the second week, things are starting to come together a little bit. Maddie is still decidedly in charge, once again mostly because she has more information, and because she is a direct employee, not just a student. Norberto appears to be gaining more confidence, and is speaking up even more than he did in the first week. I also feel more comfortable interacting with the team, but I am unfamiliar with many of the design concepts we are working with, so I’ll take a backseat on things I don’t really understand. Natalia is speaking up a little bit more, and is beginning to show disagreement and personal opinions on some minor things.

Maddie and Norberto are the most outspoken, with myself mostly trying to understand how design processes work, and Natalia almost exclusively acting as a follower. As a team, this setup seems to work fairly well, because we don’t have too many people vying for control of the situation, but we do have some peer validation, and we are outpacing some other groups in our ability to move fluidly from one issue to the next due to our team structure.

I think everyone became more engaged this week, with Natalia speaking up, and Norberto and Maddie actively discussing things even more, our overall engagement was pretty solid. Everyone stays on task for the entirety of our meetings, and to date no one has been reprimanded or even needed to be told what they need to be doing. Everyone on the team is working passionately to attack the problems of the day, and really address some of the root issues that we are encountering in the design phase.

Week 3

Week three mostly consisted of sketching and working on our own to generate unique and non-cohesive ideas for our project. This left very little to analyze in the form of leadership or team dynamics. One thing that I did note is that every single member of my team would look around at the other members on occasion, except for Natalia. This could be because she was simply very engrossed and invested in her work, or, more likely, it says something about her in a social work environment. She places her contributions to the team of utmost importance, and cares far less about the social interaction or the cohesion of the team. I believe that Natalia is extremely results oriented, and possibly due to a slight language barrier is far less interested in socializing, or even knowing what other members of the team are doing. On one hand, this is not the most socially productive style of work, but on the other it can be extremely respected that Natalia simply wants to contribute in any way that she can, which is very beneficial because she is a skilled artist with an incredible work ethic and ability to focus on abstract concepts.

Discussions were very sparse this week, with Maddie mostly delegating work.

Team engagement was almost nonexistent other than the occasional comment or glance at someone else’s work. This was almost perfectly evenly distributed amongst team members.

Week 4

In week four, the team really started coming together. From a team building perspective, we’ve started joking with one another, and even started learning some personal facts about each other. From a leadership perspective, the dynamic has changed significantly. Maddie now trusts the team and understands that we are all capable in our own ways, so we no longer really experience having one leader. We have made the transition into a self-directed team.

As a self-directed team, we now exist in a democratic situation, with any major disagreements seriously discussed, and then any ties broken by Maddie, because she is ultimately most responsible for our end product. This shift has forced/allowed Natalia to come out of her shell and be a very outspoken member in our group. It has also allowed myself and Norberto to voice our opinions even more openly. This shift has certainly slowed our work a little bit, but we are still outpacing the other three groups, and with only four people, this structure allows for leadership to seamlessly transfer to the individual with the most knowledge on a given topic. Therefore, we can easily exploit each team member’s greatest strengths while mitigating any preexisting weaknesses that they may have brought to the table.

No one individual is dominating discussions at this juncture. Natalia is still contributing less to conversations than the other three of us, but this is a marginal difference.

In this week, leadership became almost equally distributed amongst members of the group.

Week 5

This week we received some key feedback from our various bosses both inside and outside of our normal management structure. Receiving feedback is something that everyone on the team appreciated, but it was very confusing because multiple people above our group offered differing perspectives. I often find that having too many people “managing” or in this case setting goals for a group, can be extremely confusing and lead to a lack of confident decision making in the team. However, I am quite proud of the way my team handled all of the feedback. First, all of the information was written down, and conflicting feedback was grouped together. Then once all of the conflicting statements were found, they were discussed at length to determine what the intent and general feeling they were trying to convey. Eventually this came down to having no truly conflicting statements, and a myriad of viewpoints that we could analyze our own work through. No one on the team took any of the feedback personally, and we moved forward stronger as a team because of it.

Which brings me to another point. Teams, especially this one, come together quite closely when faced with a challenge that is then overcome. The level of bonding and comradery after our feedback session was exponentially higher than before the session.

If anyone dominated discussion it would be Maddie because she was once again privy to more information than the rest of us, but once the information was disseminated to the whole team, everyone contributed equitably.

Leadership in the team has become even more equally spread amongst the group and even Natalia seems very eager to speak up in things she feels strongly about.

Week 6

This week built upon the momentum of the bonding of last week, with the most important contribution being a team bonding exercise outside of class. Spending time away from the space that we work in allowed for a more casual conversation pattern to develop. Also, we were able to bond over a commonly enjoyed activity that allowed for competition, learning, and connection. Though I organized the event, no one was really a leader in this situation, we were just a group of friends having a good time. One of the key takeaways is that a change in location can be a powerful event in the growth of a team because it can remove the stigmas and norms established in the workplace.

No one dominated discussions this week and leadership positions remain fixed and equal, but I believe this week will play a role in helping team engagement to develop more moving forward.

Week 7

This week was of interest mainly because the focus of our project shifted from ideation and design to engineering the actual deliverable. Because my entire team is in DAAP other than myself, I naturally took the lead this week in ordering supplies, delegating work, and beginning to build out prototype. However, I think that coming off of the past two weeks, we are all able to meld together as one cohesive unit so team engagement stayed at a peak level, even though this week did not exactly fall into the skillset of the rest of my team.

Because of the nature of our activities this week, I took more of the lead in our discussions and also therefore assumed a leadership role.

Week 8

Though this week was a struggle for the team (seeming to have issues finding direction with too many new ideas), there was an interesting lesson that I think was learned. Maddie threw out the idea to the group that we all work individually for the week to develop new ideas and pursue them to determine our own direction and their viability. This concept really comes down to empowerment. The team was trusted to work on their own and come back to the team with value-added ideas. Now, this was successful, but that’s only half of the battle. Next week the ideas will be presented and we will see how the team does with offering productive and constructive criticism. Because, though the ideas seem to be successfully generated, some people’s ideas will not be pursued, and the process that goes into selecting ideas will need to be fair and just or the team will struggle to follow the selected direction.

Maddie seemed to run the discussions and take a leadership role this week, I think because she sensed that the team needed some leadership in this uncertain time. Also, because she is the appointed leader, she is the logical choice for a team to turn to in a time of “crisis.”

Week 9

Following last week, this week went exceptionally well. Last week everyone worked on their own to find new directions to take our project forward. This week those individual developments were reviewed, thoroughly discussed, and systematically narrowed down to the best ideas. This was done with much conversation and disagreement, but everyone’s objections were heard and debated. This arduous process allowed for a baptism by fire of each idea, and instead of separating the team because individuals were too attached to their own ideas, it brought the team together so that we can continue pushing forward. Something that I have come to respect about this team is that every member puts the goal of the team above personal pride, and I can’t honestly remember the last time a group of people has been able to do that in such a complete manner. There is never a question about who comes first or fairness with regard to an individual because everyone understands that we are all fighting for the same thing, and it shows every single day we interact.

No one dominated discussions this week, but Norberto respectfully raised many good points about the plausibility of many of the ideas discussed. I found this to be very impressive because it is so easy to be offensive when discussing the ideas of others, but he was not.

Team engagement continues to be at a massive high, and is something I attribute a lot of our success as a team to, both in past achievements and I’m certain future ones as well.

Week 10

This week was unique because the week was spent preparing for a presentation to our customer, and so the first two thirds of the week was prep work, and the last meeting was the actual presentation. This clearly added a level of stress to our team interactions because two members of the team were decidedly uncomfortable with presenting. This led to the two of us who were comfortable presenting (myself and Maddie) spending less time on our sections of the presentation and more time preparing the rest of the team for the stresses and difficulties presenting. This demonstrated a crucial part of leadership on a team, which is sacrifice. I personally have some experiences with making serious sacrifices for a team, as I imagine most people do, but this entire experience went better than I could have expected. Both of the team members who were nervous were extremely receptive to constructive criticism and were more than thankful for the help that Maddie and I offered. Our presentation went off without a hitch, and our ideas were moved forward to the next stage of the project ahead of schedule.

For this week I think I took more of a leadership role purely because I was the most comfortable/experienced presenter. However, Maddie also stepped into a more classic leadership role of organization and helping the others.

Week 11 is Spring break, so the group did not meet this week

Week 12

Week 12 was an extremely interesting week. Our team merged with another team ot work on our final project and report out on our progress. I don’t think this was a good idea at all because each group had well established norms and had learned to work together amongst their 4 members. Combining the groups created a super group of 8 members, with two co-ops acting as “leaders” and very little shared experience and more importantly, very loosely connected shared goals. Though we do all happen to be on the same boat for the design experience, we have two different designs and we are also competing with other groups to have our names on a patent. So, through combing these groups, our reward for hard work does not align with personal goals. The fact that the incentive program put in place for teams (success/patents) means that the incentive is actually to compete, and not share information. This is clearly not ideal, and it has severely damaged our team dynamic at an extremely critical time in the project.

There is a decided gap in leadership with almost every individual being unsure of direction, who is in charge, or how to proceed. The co-ops are technically in charge, but seem uncertain in every decision that they make, and productivity is certainly suffering. The teams still sit amongst themselves with very little integration, which is disheartening.

An unfortunate week to end this experience, though absolutely full of learning.