

Exercise: Communicating Expectations

Capstone Design

Motivation:

To successfully complete a large project on time, it is necessary to divide the work among group members. In addition to this division of work, a group needs to establish a framework that allows it to function properly – things such as weekly meetings, delivery of status reports, maintenance of a project schedule etc. are needed to allow the group to reconfigure as necessary to see a project through to completion.

A common source of trouble in a group (and therefore for the project) relates to expectations that are not communicated. If one group member expects the group to show up on time for a weekly meeting, but a member does not even know about the meeting (a drastic, but possible, situation), then there is the likelihood that frustrations will begin to develop.

The motivation for this exercise is to help communicate these expectations, and thereby promote a healthy group dynamic.

Exercise:

1. Make a verbose list of what your group expects of you. Be as specific as possible. Include items that relate to the project and its schedule, and items that are administrative in nature.

Some examples are:

“I am to meet with the group every week at 12 noon on Saturday.”

“I am to remind group members of the weekly meeting 24 hours in advance.”

“I am responsible for the development of the 12 Watt power amplifier component of our project, and expected to complete subsystem verification (including frequency response, thermal response, and power tests) no later than February 2nd.”

“I am to report to my group the status of the power amplifier development in each weekly meeting.”

“I am to create high-quality EPS versions of the power amplifier schematic in order to include it in the final report, and perhaps the presentation slides or poster.”

Do not include expectations on this list that you are not able or willing to meet. If you have such items, keep them in a separate list to discuss with your group.

2. Meet with your group to discuss and modify the lists.
 - a) Discuss the items that you feel are expectations placed upon you that you are not able or willing to accept. Be prepared to explain your position, and be open to suggestions and comments by others.
 - b) Allow others to add items that you have missed – ones that you are comfortable accepting.
 - c) Compare lists – work should be divided in a roughly equal manner.Iterate through these stages until you have a complete list of expectations that you are willing and able to meet.
3. Have all group members sign each member's list of expectations.
4. Trade your lists – all group members should have a record of what can be expected from all other members.

You now have common ground!

Just like the project schedule, schematics, etc., this list of expectations is a “living document”. Changes to it will likely be required as you gain more information and encounter unforeseen obstacles. Since, however, changes affect the entire group, modifications need to be approved and accommodated for by the entire group: recreate the list and have it resigned by all group members.

Please remember that no one likes to be blind-sided by a situation that puts them under pressure: **if you are concerned about meeting an expectation that you have signed-off on, let your group know as early as possible.** Be expected to explain why the situation has come about!