

TEACHING COMMUNICATION, INTERPERSONAL, AND SMALL GROUP SKILLS:  
A GUIDE TO TEAM PRESENTATION PROJECTS

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ABSTRACT

Team presentation projects of case materials provide an excellent vehicle for experiential learning of skills important for business and life success. The following paper describes an approach that the author has used successfully for several years with over 50 different project teams. The paper describes how to select teams, set up the projects, make the case assignments, and evaluate team and individual performance. In the final section, the advantages and caveats of team presentation projects are discussed.

SETTING UP THE TEAM PRESENTATION PROJECT

Every instructor that has used the team project approach is aware that the project must be carefully defined and that each team needs to be appropriately sized and constructed in order to function well during the project period. If the project is not well defined, the students can spend enormous amounts of time and effort on the project and still not suitably complete it, consequently suffering distress and loss of motivation. The students must clearly understand the assignment and what is expected of them. The following sections provide one example of how to carefully structure the team presentation project.

1. Assignment and Case Selection During the course, each team is to prepare at least two or three presentations of 40 to 60 minutes in length using transparencies with an overhead projector. The focus of each presentation is the team's description, analysis, and recommendations of a suitable business case. The instructor can assign cases or permit students to select a case from a portfolio of instructor approved cases. In general, most students seem to exhibit greater motivation when given a choice of cases. Good sources of cases are the Case Research Journal published by the North

American Case Research Association and Annual Advances in Business Cases published by the Mid West Society for Case Research. Also, there are some very good collections of cases such as Lovelock and Weinberg's Marketing Challenges.

2. Team and Individual Evaluation To gain the full benefits of the team presentation project, the instructor should foster cooperative learning by carefully describing the interdependency of the team and the individual. The instructor should note that each team will receive an assessment (score) and that an individual's assessment (grade) is the team score adjusted by the individual contribution. No individual can receive a grade higher than the team score. The student can achieve only if the team achieves. The interdependency of group and individual achievement fosters cooperative learning, a major benefit of team projects. [Johnson and Johnson 1986] [Slavin 1990] [Williams, Beard, and Rymer 1991].

3. Presentation Outline Once the cases are selected, the presentation is to follow the outline shown in TABLE 1. Each line item requires at least one transparency for overhead projection. The outline in TABLE 1 is carefully reviewed with the students. The presentation order must follow the outline.

The outline serves several purposes. First, with each team following the same presentation format, it is easier for the instructor to fairly compare and assess each team's presentation.

Second, an important aspect of communications is listening and following directions. Students benefit from learning to follow detailed and complex directions--it is very similar to business situations for beginning marketing personnel. Third, the evaluation form makes the project more structured. The

students know they must move from the general (background) to the specific (analysis of alternatives and recommendations). Fourth, the presentation outline encourages students to move from "regurgitation" of the case towards data manipulation, analysis, and decision making.

TABLE 1  
CASE PRESENTATION  
EVALUATION FORM

Date	_____
Class	_____
Team	_____
Case	_____
Background.....	_____
Synopsis (5 points).....	_____
Identification of Issues.....	_____
Statement of Problem (5 points).....	_____
Development of Alternatives.....	_____
Analysis of Alternatives.....	_____
Recommendations.....	_____
Presentation Effectiveness.....	_____
Knowledge of Case.....	_____
Timeliness of Team (20 Points).....	_____
Total.....	_____

All categories are worth 10 points each unless otherwise indicated.

4. Selection of Teams The division of the class into teams can occur at the instructor's discretion. A good time for team selection can be the first class day. After discussion of the syllabus material and the first assignment, the students are directed to choose their team mates. Remind them that the proper team size is four to five people.

Once the students have chosen teams, the next step is the selection of cases. As mentioned earlier, the use of a collection of cases such as Marketing Challenges makes the choice of cases convenient for the teams and the instructor. To ensure

a dispersion of cases, no team is permitted to do the same case.

#### ASSESSMENT OF TEAM PRESENTATIONS

In team presentation projects, a wide range of assessment possibilities arise. In general, based upon review of the evaluation forms over the last several years, there appear to be four main areas of assessment which provide important opportunities for growth in most students. The four areas are: (1) content; (2) effectiveness; (3) individual contribution; and (4) presentation skills.

1. Presentation Content The assessment of presentation content is guided by the presentation evaluation form (TABLE 1). Did the team properly motivate and describe the case and issues during the "Background" portion of the presentation? Did the team explore all of the significant alternatives? Did the alternatives address the problem as stated? Did the analysis truly place the alternatives in perspective and support the recommendations? Finally, were the recommendations specific and detailed? For example, if a new advertising program is part of the recommendations, did the team develop a detailed budget and justify the expenditures?

2. Presentation Effectiveness To gauge presentation effectiveness, the instructor can appraise class understanding by the depth of questions asked the team during the question and answer period after the presentation. (It is usually a good idea to defer questions until after the presentation is finished--some teams can become so rattled that they lose and can not regain their composure). Interest generated by the team is also important. If the team communicates well, their motivation and knowledge of the case is contagious. Did the class appear interested, or was the presentation boring and hard to follow? The instructor's assessment is recorded on the line denoted "Presentation Effectiveness" on the Case Presentation Evaluation Form.

TABLE 2  
TEAM MEMBERS' PEER EVALUATION

Date: \_\_\_\_\_ Team No.: \_\_\_\_\_ Case Name and No.: \_\_\_\_\_

INSTRUCTIONS:

1. Record the names of all your team members.
2. For each of the attributes listed, indicate (in percent) the extent to which the team member contributed to the team effort. A score less than 100% indicates that the team member contributed less than others.
3. Where needed, record your comments or suggestions in the designated "Memo" section.

All information submitted on this form will be treated as confidential and will be used by the instructor only to assess the relative contribution of the students in this course. Honesty and objectivity are necessary for this evaluation. Thank you.

Student Name	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
Attendance of Group Meetings	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
Degree of Cooperation	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
Willingness to Assume Responsibility	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
Preparedness for Group Sessions	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
Actual Contribution to Group Performance	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
Overall Rating	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____

Memo: \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_

3. Contribution of the Individual The third major area, assessment of the contribution of the individual to the team, is primarily dependent upon the team peer assessments (TABLE 2). The five major areas assessed by the Team Members' Peer Evaluation Form measure elements of effective group behavior (Rymer and Beard 1989). While the instructor can often detect grossly uneven contributions by an obviously unprepared or uninvolved individual, the peer evaluation form can often disclose important but hidden (from the instructor) uneven individual efforts. Note that the peer evaluation form has a memo portion. The memo portion allows a more open ended assessment of team members. Williams, Beard, and Rymer

[1991] recommend use of both a memo and a peer evaluation form.

4. Presentation Skills The fourth broad area of assessment is the evaluation of the presentation or speaking skills of each individual. The evaluations are done in a "Toastmasters" style. Each student is given at least one positive evaluation or compliment. After the positive statement, the student is given one or two suggestions to improve his or her public speaking. Suggestions can be simple hints such as avoiding excessive guttural punctuations (Ahhs) or to stop looking at the floor. However, depending upon the skill of the student, suggestions can encourage more advanced practices such as changing presentation speed according to audience response and information complexity.

The above summarizes four broad areas of assessment that the instructor can use with team presentation projects. Properly used, team presentation projects offer great potential to hone presentation skills as well as expand interpersonal skills within a small group framework. The concluding section below offers a brief summary of the advantages and caveats of the team presentation project.

ADVANTAGES AND CAVEATS OF TEAM PRESENTATION PROJECTS

The benefits of team presentation projects are practical and multidimensional. The most important benefit of the team presentation project is the practice and acquisition of good communication skills. Learning how to make good presentations is not easy. Public speaking requires practice and experiential learning. A number of complex interactive skills need to be mastered if the speaker's knowledge or experience is to be successfully transmitted to the audience.

Another major advantage of the team presentation project is the development and communication of analysis in support of recommendations. Compared to students

in more quantitative disciplines, marketing students appear to be less confident in their analytical and problem solving skills. The emphasis on presentation content coupled with the need to communicate their analysis to the class fosters confidence and skills in the important areas of quantitative analysis and communication. The caveat here is that students may require significant guidance from the instructor in some quantitative and financial areas.

The major caveats of team projects are unequal effort [Slavin 1990] and team dysfunction [Burleson, Levine and Samter 1984] [Strong 1988]. The problem of unequal effort is significantly mitigated by the use of peer evaluation forms with a memo portion for open ended comments, but the instructor must remain vigilant. Team dysfunction is rare, but can be severe. Usually, counseling is effective. However, if the team simply will not "jell" the instructor could move outcast individual to a new team as a last resort. The team presentation project approach as described in this article has been used with over 50 teams without a single case of dysfunction severe enough to require a reassignment of an individual to a new team.

In summary, the team presentation project as described above offers a rich learning opportunity that is challenging to the students and the instructor. During the project, analytical, communication and interpersonal skills, particularly those important to teams and small groups, are strongly stimulated and reinforced. The assessment opportunities are broad and cultivate growth of the individual student in a wide variety of areas. The instructor is rewarded by the observation of substantial growth in the students during the academic period. The team presentation project is an experience that all participants can enjoy and from which they can gain great satisfaction.

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