

# Team Work as a Path to Employability – A Case Study

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## Abstract

Prospective employers like to employ candidates who can work as a team. But, unfortunately the present generation is unable to perform up to the expectations of their employers. Professional graduates should be equipped with employable skills during the graduation period so as to prepare for the competitive job market. The present article concentrates on one such topic – teamwork. To achieve this outcome, activities like oral presentations and poster presentations as a team were identified and a study was conducted to build teamwork skills among the student community.

**Keywords:** Teamwork, employability skills, and transferable skills

## 1. Introduction:

Many prospective employers opine that the present generation professional graduates lack essential skills like bonding and working in a team, flexibility, creativity, and taking initiation to work. In the present job market, employers are constantly filtering candidates in search of candidates who are capable to work along with the team members [1]. New recruits should have a flexible mentality to fit into the existing system without causing any disturbance. Innovative teaching methodologies can be used to impart transferable skills to professional undergraduate students to increase their flexibility and adaptability in the work atmosphere. Activities which demand energetic involvement of the students and which are student-centric and collaborative can be identified and practiced in the classrooms. Various transferable skills can be included in the teamwork activities so as to enhance the students' employability skills.

As there is no transition period for the students to learn employability skills, college is the only platform where employable skills can be instilled in the graduates. These skills cannot be learned in a short period of time. These activities should be spread over the four years and are to be taught along with core discipline. The activities should be designed in such a way that they prepare the students in all aspects to become employable. The present case study focuses on imparting teamwork which is one of the essential transferable skills spread throughout the first semester of engineering first year students. The objective of this study is to develop and assess the students' employable skills over a period of time through their performance in teamwork activities.

## 2. Objective:

Every single day, teachers face students with different levels of understanding, and who are from different economic and cultural backgrounds in their classrooms. Teachers should be prepared to teach a heterogeneous mixture of students coming from diverse backgrounds. At graduation level in professional colleges, a teacher should act as a medium to gauge the levels of perception and expression in students and guide them towards acquiring transferable skills such as responsibility, trust, mutual respect and cooperation [1].

The purpose of this study is not only to direct the students towards acquiring transferable skills but also to initiate a desire in them to become lifelong learners willing to adapt to the requirements of their career and personal life. Moreover, the activities were designed so as to develop the communicative skills of the students.

## 3. Methodology:

The procedure implemented to achieve this purpose was to divide the class of 66 into teams of 6 members each with a total of 11 teams. The sessions totaling eight were spread over a semester i.e. of four months' duration. As the timetable of a professional course is hectic, one hour out of the two-hour lab classes after completion of the laboratory session and a few library hours were utilized to conduct the study. Right at the initial stage, it was made clear that attending these sessions was not mandatory. At no point of time, discrimination was practiced against the students for not attending the sessions nor were the students who attended the sessions extolled. In

each session the students were given an activity which they were supposed to work in teams and achieve the targets. The activity was explained at the beginning of each class and the expected outcomes were discussed with the students so as to guide them towards the required objective. Just before the session was over, a time period of 15 minutes was given to all the teams to assess their team's performance as related to the performance of the other teams. The teams were instructed to assess their peers and compare their performances and deliberate on how to build on their strengths and how to eliminate their weaknesses.

The activities chosen for this study are oral presentation and poster presentation in teams, where each team was given a topic and all the members of the team were encouraged to contribute ideas and present their argument. The next two activities were also based on oral presentations on given topics. As the fourth activity, the teams were allowed to choose their preferred topic and present their arguments.

In the next session, the students were told to present their arguments of all the four activities in the form of poster presentations for which four sessions were utilized. This activity required involvement of all the team members regarding chalking out roles for each member, i. e. fetching the materials, brainstorming for creative ideas and presenting innovative posters.

#### **4. Findings and Discussion:**

The first session was treated as an introductory session as the team members were unknown to each other and their comfort levels in the team were at the lowest. Six students did not turn up for the second session as they were shy and reserved. The comfort levels increased in the second session as the team members were acquainted with each other. The students were aware of the strengths and weaknesses of the members in the team by the time they participated in the third session. Four more students dropped out as they felt pressurized. In the fourth session, as they were allowed to choose their own topics, their performance was up to the mark and also their comfort levels as a team was at its peak.

In the fifth session, three students who previously dropped out after the first session turned up to participate as they heard from their fellow classmates that the sessions were beneficial to them. The fifth session, as it was the beginning session, was a bit excited and the teams could not complete the task within the given time. But, this session also was the key session to draw all the students to the classes as the students were obviously excited to have a platform to showcase their creative skills. Out of a class of 66, 64 students participated animatedly in the next three sessions. In the process of this study the students also became aware of the importance of time management.

#### **5. Parameters of Assessment:**

The ideals to be inculcated are a sense of belonging to the team, identifying the goal of the team, identifying the strengths and weaknesses of the team members, strengthening the team and working towards realizing the goal with mutual trust and respect. Parameters of assessment for oral presentation are objectives, communication, participation, negotiation, realization, reflection and assessment. Each parameter for all the students was graded on a scale of 1 to 5. An assessment matrix for all the students was created and updated after every session. The gradual change in perceptions and development of transferable skills was obvious to all.

Parameters of assessment for poster presentation are communication, initiative, teamwork, creativity, and presentation. Here also each parameter for all the students was grades on a scale of 1 to 5. The marks gained by each team in oral presentations and poster presentations are compared to measure the development of transferable skills.

#### **6. Conclusion:**

Oral and poster presentations as a team helped the team members to identify the strengths of each team member and utilize him/her in a manner to increase the chances of performance of their teams. They have learnt to keep their individual priorities aside and work for the benefit of their team. In the process they have learnt skills like communication, participation, negotiation, realization, reflection, creativity, teamwork, presentation and assessment.

#### **7. Recommendation:**

From the first set of team activities to the last set of team activities there is an evident growth in the requisite

skills for most students. There are sixteen students who need further practice to reach the levels of employability. Nevertheless, the seeds of learning importance at all levels have been implanted in them successfully. The oral presentations conducted in the beginning sessions helped the students to develop communication skills, teamwork skills, time management skill and learning skills. The poster presentations conducted in the second set of sessions helped the students to develop transferable skills such as communication skills, teamwork skills, time management skills, learning skills, and creativity skills. Given time to conduct such sessions, more activities and more sessions could be planned to develop employability skills in the students.

The students liked the poster presentation sessions as it involved utilizing their creative skills which generally do not get a platform for demonstration. The transferable skills should be gradually inculcated in the students as it is impossible to achieve an instantaneous major transformation at the start of the career. The author feels that there is a strong requisite for activities to foster teamwork spirit in the professional undergraduates at the college level itself so as to better equip them for employment.

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## Tables:

Table 1: Assessment matrix template for each team – Oral Presentation

	Objective	Communication	Participation	Negotiation	Realization	Reflection	Assessment
Student 1							
Student 2							
Student 3							
Student 4							
Student 5							
Student 6							

Table 2: Assessment matrix template for each team – Poster Presentations

	Communication	Initiative	Teamwork	Creativity	Presentation
Student 1					
Student 2					
Student 3					
Student 4					
Student 5					
Student 6					

Table 3: Assessment matrix for team No. 1 – Oral Presentations

	Objective	Communication	Participation	Negotiation	Realization	Reflection	Assessment
Student 1	3	3	3	3	3	3	3
Student 2	2	3	3	2	2	2	2
Student 3	2	1	1	1	0	0	0
Student 4	3	3	3	3	3	3	3
Student 5	2	2	2	1	2	1	1
Student 6	1	1	1	0	1	1	1

Table 4: Assessment matrix for team No. 1– Poster Presentations

	Communication	Initiative	Teamwork	Creativity	Presentation
Student 1	5	4	4	4	5
Student 2	4	4	5	4	4
Student 3	3	3	4	3	4
Student 4	5	4	4	4	5
Student 5	4	4	5	4	4
Student 6	3	3	4	3	4

Table 5: Overview of the performance of all the teams

Team	Total marks out of 210 – Oral Presentations	Total marks out of 150 – Poster Activities	Total marks - 360
1.	80	120	200
2.	110	120	230
3.	155	125	280
4.	113	118	231
5.	105	132	237
6.	140	130	270
7.	135	123	258
8.	120	127	247
9.	175	139	314
10.	140	132	272
11.	153	134	287

## **APPENDIX B**

The activities were theme based and the first team activity involved the students choosing topics related to environment like eliminating plastic usage, methods to prevent air, water and noise pollution, availability and utilization of natural resources available in their native places, utilizing solar energy, conservation of rain water, reducing paper usage, deforestation, supply of water for everyday usage, and affects of global warming. The second team activity was based on the theme hygiene where topics related to sanitation, fluorosis, smoking, addiction to narcotics and alcohol, keeping the surrounding clean, garbage disposal in a metro, personal hygiene habits, contagious diseases like swine flu - treatment, organic farming, ecosystem and compulsory inclusion of sports in professional colleges was discussed.

The theme for the third activity was based on social awareness and the topics were parents' pressure on students regarding their career, internet – as a potential learning platform, effect of movies on the present generation, ragging in professional colleges, corruption, terrorism, college life in Andhra Pradesh, social networking sites, conditions in government schools, involvement of college students in social service organizations, and social networking among college students.

The students chose the theme for the fourth activity based on socially relevant issues like role of students in politics, whether capital punishment should be banned or not, how to deal with terrorism in India, child labour in India, unemployment, mushrooming of corporate colleges, lack of sanctity in health care services, adulteration in food, fuel and medicines, corruption, making rural employment mandatory for professionals, and the role of religion in developing human relations.

The second set of team activities were poster presentations on the above topics. This activity involved in allotting roles to the team members regarding materials, medium, suggesting creative ideas and implementing them. It was interesting to watch the students put in efforts beyond their allotted roles for the benefit of their team performance.

### **Acknowledgement:**

The B. Tech I year students of Electrical and Electronics Engineering branch (2011- 12) of GITAM University, Hyderabad, Andhra Pradesh, India should be commended for their active cooperation and participation throughout the study.

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