

TKP4850 Experts in Teamwork

Village: Biofuels – A Good Solution?

Process Report for Green Skulls

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Introduction

The purpose of EiT is for students to acquire work experience in an interdisciplinary team, with particular focus on the cooperation within the team. It is important for the students to understand the dynamics of the process, and express their own perspectives and reflections about the team and its process.

In order to achieve this purpose a key prerequisite is to have a system to appropriately capture the thoughts, feelings and reflections of our whole team. In our case, this system is called the SITRA-exercise, which stands for Situation-Theory-Reflection-Action. Firstly, we – as a team – chose which concepts of the **theory** were suitable for the process that we've had. Secondly, we chose and described specific **situations** to exemplify concept; all of us gave our thoughts and feelings about them. Thirdly, we **reflected** as a team about the situations by asking questions such as “What is the point of view from each individual about situation A?”, “Why did situation A go like this?”, and “What effect did it have on us as a team?”, “What can we learn from it?” Finally, based on our reflections, we discussed and agreed on a course of **action** that we could take in order to better develop our cooperation.

In this report about our process we have chosen to explain our team's development using the Tuckman's stages of team dynamics. During the introduction of our team we included our MBTI types in order to make it easier for us as team members to reflect upon our personality and behavior.

An effective working group

A working group needs to acquire several characteristics to be defined as such. Individuals forming part of the group must have a common goal, a purpose that they have to achieve. This is the reason for which the group exists in the first place. Thus there must be communication and interaction between the members in a group happening in a framework of clear norms. In order to be a member of the group, individuals must perceive themselves as members of the group; nobody can be forced to be part of a group. In addition, clear roles and responsibilities must be distributed among all members in the group. Finally, the group must be able to evaluate and feedback itself in order to influence improvement in the work it performs [1] [2].

However, to reach these qualities, a group must focus on performance criteria, process criteria, and personal criteria. Performance refers to the quality of the product that the group is working on. Personal criteria are the individual benefits and improvement of the members as a result of being part of the group. Process criteria are the entire set of events, interactions and structures that allow the members of a group to work together. While working on these criteria, the group develops into an efficient group. A theory to describe this development in sequential stages was proposed by Bruce W. Tuckman; the five stages are forming, storming, norming, performing and adjourning. The group did not discuss adjourning, due to still being a group at this time, and it's something that's important for when the group has completed the work and is disbanding [1].

Forming

Theory

Forming is the first stage, also called orientation phase [3], when members of the group first start working together. The mood and motivation are usually high, a group identity is being created and members are starting to get to know each other. During this breaking-the-ice stage, members have a “wait and see” attitude and there is high dependency on the leader. In this stage, group members formulate norms that serve as a scaffold for the group’s behavior during teamwork; they may include: listening to each other without interrupting, be on time, respect each other, offer ideas and suggestions, and feedback actions, not personalities [2] [3].

Introduction of the team

The name of our group is Green Skulls; we will now introduce ourselves, our background, expertise and motivation. In addition we have analyzed our individual Myer-Briggs Type Indicator because this model was developed to help individuals recognize their own psychological preferences and how to apply this knowledge in daily life, self-development, team building, and problem solving, among others [4]. In order to do this we took an online test (<http://www.humanmetrics.com/cgi-win/jtypes2.asp>) [5] and then verified our types by reading more information about the topic [4].

Name: Gastón Courtade

Cultural background: I am originally from Argentina, I have lived in Mexico and I have been living in Norway for five years. I speak Spanish, English and Norwegian fluently.

Academic background: I am a fourth year student in biotechnology.

Skills: I have experience with writing reports and scientific research, I have been a member of a student organization for over two years, and I am currently a soft-skills trainer in that organization.

MBTI: I can identify with the type ENTP, which means I have a preference for generating ideas, and I am resourceful at problem solving.

Name: Md. Jahangir Hossain

Cultural background: I am Bangladeshi by birth. I have been in Norway for almost one year. Before coming to Norway, I was in Singapore for a few months. I speak Bengali and English.

Academic Background: I did my Bachelor of Science in Naval Architecture in Bangladesh and now I am doing my M.Sc. in Marine Technology.

Skills: I am able to plan, organize and develop day to day activities and can work in a group as well as independently and under pressure. I am a member of different student organizations and also of some professional organizations. Currently I am working as a secretary in a cultural organization at Trondheim. Sometimes I also arrange social work such as blood donation, child and mass education, etc. to help needed people.

MBTI: According to MBTI personality type test, I have preference for the type ESFJ which means I strive for cooperation; I like to complete tasks on time, and try to help others with what they need.

Name: Steffen Annfinsen

Cultural background: I was born and raised in Norway, and while I haven't lived in another country I have done a fair bit of traveling, around 12 two week vacations to countries like Spain, USA, Thailand, Cyprus, Bulgaria, Sweden, Finland and Denmark. I read, write and speak Norwegian and English fluently.

Academic background: I finished a bachelor degree in chemical engineering with a focus on analytical chemistry and biotechnology, and I am currently studying for a master's degree in chemical process technology.

Skills: I am fairly good at working with numbers and spreadsheets, and also writing reports in both English and Norwegian (although English reports are preferred nowadays because of the source material). I am very attentive to details, specifically when it comes to grammar and spelling.

MBTI: I identify with the INTJ personality type, which means I want things to be efficient and just work, which goes for both systems and people. While I don't necessarily want to be in a position of leadership, I have no problems being a leader if I see that it's the best option available.

Name: Nam Đoàn Xuân

Cultural background: I am originally from Vietnam. I can speak English.

Academic background: I am a researcher in the Aquaculture field.

Skills: I have experience with scientific research and writing reports.

MBTI: I prefer the ISFJ type, I feel that I am responsible and I like order and harmony in my working environment.

Name: Rufino David

Cultural background: I am from Angola. I have lived in Norway for one year and it is my first time to live abroad.

Academic background: I am in my first year of master in Petroleum Geoscience.

Skills: I like to help people when I think they are facing difficulties in something that I can do.

MBTI: I have preference for the INFJ type, I feel strongly about my personal values: responsibility, seriousness and acceptance of own failure.

Name: Reza Abdollahi

Cultural background: I am originally from Shiraz, one of the most beautiful cities in Iran. My people are famous because of their hospitality and being intelligent.

Academic background: I have done my bachelor in chemical engineering in the branch of Petrochemical industries in Iran and now I am doing my master in beautiful Trondheim.

Skills: I can concentrate on different articles to find relevant information and I can clarify concepts for others. Also, I am a good situation manager.

MBTI: I have preference for the ENFJ type, I feel that I can act as a catalyst for group work, and I pay close attention to positive and negative feedback.

We are clearly a diverse group in the sense that we all have different academic and cultural backgrounds, as well as different personalities. However, we are also a homogenous group in the sense that we are all males. There are clear advantages to having a diverse group, such as developing common values and principles shared by all cultures, clarification of concepts and ideas that are not common for all academic and cultural backgrounds, and the opportunity to gain knowledge about each other's culture through social interaction [1]. But the most important thing is that we have the opportunity to develop strong

communication bonds between us. After all, the most efficient groups are not the ones with the smartest people (these are in fact quite inefficient groups because of endless discussions), but the ones in which members can communicate best with each other.

Recurring situation – Individual work

From week 2 we got assigned together as a group and we started our forming stage by coming up with a group name that represented us, and by sharing about our background, skills and expertise. We exchanged our contact information, and created an Itslearning group and a Facebook group where we could easily communicate with each other and share all relevant information.

We chose Steffen as the “team manager” on week 3, who would be the leader figure with the role of taking care of coordinating the distribution of work and somebody to whom people could call if they were being late to Wednesday meetings due to unforeseen events. The election of the team manager was through a group debate, and it was a consensus that Steffen would take the position.

On week 4 we wrote our cooperation agreement which set the ground rules for communication, similar to points that might be included in the norms in the forming stage, we included being on time, working together towards agreements as a group by finding a common ground, focusing on the common group goal rather than individual goals, respect each other, be rational, ask for clarifications, and be constructive about feedback. At this point we were clearly a team in the forming stage; as we wrote in our group reflections for that week: we were committed to finishing the task in a satisfactory way, we were motivated to start it sooner to be able to have a better and more polished product, and we could joke around, while still managing to be productive and make decisions. At that time, we reflected upon these qualities and concluded that they were positive attributes of our group that should be reinforced and that we would try our best to keep that enthusiastic team spirit as high as possible throughout the course of our work. All of these are characteristics of the forming stage, as mentioned in the theory.

During the following weeks the work was being done mostly individually, as was pointed out by our village supervisor on week 7 when he saw that we were all sitting together, but each of us was reading on our laptops individually. At that moment we thought it was a good investment of our time, but later that day, during team reflections the question of if it was best to work individually on Wednesdays popped up. This triggered a discussion that led to personal and group reflections about the situation.

Steffen: During this part I wanted the group to get the infrastructure and start needed to be able to work effectively. Setting up the Itslearning group, making sure everyone had something they could work on individually and making sure everyone had the tools and vision necessary to be able to do that work. For most it went fairly well, but there were some that needed a bit more assistance to be able to start working properly. I figured that when it came to the project report, getting a good start would be the most important thing, because if someone didn't know what to do or hadn't started it until the last few weeks then it wouldn't be good for their ownership to or competence in the project. I intended for everyone to get continuous feedback on their writing and research, but I felt that there was always someone that hadn't done the work (including myself) and thus didn't want “feedback” to be brought up, so I think that's why we were postponing group work (such as feedback) and doing individual work instead.

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Gaston: I felt very comfortable working individually, but I think we missed out on a lot of benefits from teamwork. For example, if I've had feedback about my ideas in real-time instead of waiting until all my part was done could have helped me write my part in a way that better fitted the project as a whole.

Jahangir: From the very beginning of our EiT village, we worked for our project in an organized structure and divided the project into different sections. These different sections were assigned to different members on the basis of similarity with their educational background. Since the project work was distributed among members, it was decided by each member individually what he will do, how he will do his part, and he was completely independent to do his task. I think this made the members more efficient at finishing their parts by the deadlines in the predefined schedule. We could also have done the whole project together, but in this case, it would not be so effective since everyone would not have the same pace.

Rufino: I think it was not good to work individually because we did not realize from the beginning what we were supposed to do during EiT – learn about the process. As soon as we got feedback from the village supervisor we noticed that we had misunderstood the goal of EiT. It was then that we started to really work on our group's process. I guess we could have avoided this delay if we had spoken together and tried to understand what we needed to do in EiT.

Reza: I think in those days we were not that active and it was because of individual work. In my point of view, if we had been working all together from the initial days then everybody would've been able to become familiar with the project earlier. I felt that till the seventh week some of the group members didn't have a clear idea of what we were going to do with our project.

Nam: According to me, working individually was not the best way because we wasted a lot of time. There were some reasons for this: to warm up the group we need time for understanding the project together. Maybe someone did not understand clearly our project, so the individual work was not efficient. A group should have group work for the first two weeks, which can provide an overview of the project that can help doing better individual work later on. However it demands that one or two members have to work hard to make an overview and explain it for all the other members.

Group: While our group didn't have direct problems or conflicts at that time, we didn't put in extra effort to improve the group relations and communications either. This is because we were too focused on individual tasks. A reason for this, which also connects with the theory, is that the "ice" hadn't been completely broken yet. Some were shy to speak up and share their opinions, so since Steffen (the team leader) had set the schedule for the forthcoming weeks, we merely accepted that way of working and were dependent on that – a characteristic of the forming stage. However, because of our sharing of opinions about individual work during the group reflections on week 7, we managed to take action: we agreed that the group would spend more of time together to discuss issues as a group, and do more group exercises. This change of behavior would later allow us to acquire insight about communication within the team, particularly when it came to feedback.

Storming

Theory

If expectations about teamwork are not met, the group enters the storming stage, also known as the conflict phase [3]. Here, tensions rise and conflicts may spawn as a result of interpersonal differences, lack of skills, ineffective leadership, difficulty with the task, disagreement on how to do the task or lack of open communication. As a result of divisions in the group, motivation and mood drop, members complain, argue, don't listen to each other, unspoken issues surface, there is no consideration about the process, and no work is actually done [2] [3].

Situation – Unfulfilled expectations

On week 8 we noticed that not everybody in the group had been putting an equal amount of effort on their part. We realized that the amount of commitment of each individual member was different and that each of us had slightly different expectations about the outcome of the project. Therefore we agreed to work harder on the project. In the subsequent weeks this situation did not change, and some issues about expectations kept coming up. An example of one these issues occurred in week 10. We had all done some significant progress in each of our parts of the project. So we used this village day to feedback each other's parts. When it was the turn to feedback Rufino's part, it turned out that Nam's expectations about the content of that part had not been fulfilled. He was trying to explain this to Rufino, but Rufino did not understand Nam. This led to tension in their conversation and the dialogue became more and more heated up. We all perceived this situation differently; unfortunately Reza was not present on that day.

Gaston: I was feeling hopeless and annoyed because an agreement was not reached, and the discussion was going in circles and getting heated up. I was expecting that somebody would try to facilitate the discussion (e.g. LA) but that didn't happen. So I tried to suggest to them to see the situation from a different perspective and try a different way of communicating.

Jahangir: I inferred that Nam was getting angry, but I didn't ask because if he was already stressed, me asking could have made him angrier.

Rufino: I felt bad because the communication was difficult when we couldn't understand each other; I wanted to achieve good communication in order to do my task.

Nam: I thought that I couldn't understand clearly either so we were discussing and trying but not being able to understand each other.

Steffen: When Nam wanted Rufino to find information about a very specific subject, I tried to explain to Nam that information at that kind of detail wouldn't only be close to impossible to find (if it existed at all), it wouldn't be needed. Those details were unnecessary both for the production of biofuels and our project, which was trying to have a certain depth of information. Trying to get Rufino to go that much deeper into details, when he was already having problems doing things correctly at a shallower level could become an insurmountable task for him.

Group: This situation clearly exemplifies the storming stage of a group. We spent the whole village day talking about a problem that we had with our group work, because there were clashes between our

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expectations about the project. In addition we were missing a common agreement for efficient communication and feedback. Our individual perceptions can be summarized in confusion, misunderstanding, stress and hopelessness – all characteristics of the storming stage.

During Nam's and Rufino's discussion Gaston realized that there was a communication problem happening, so he suggested that they try an alternative way to communicating: by drawing and writing instead of just talking. Eventually Nam and Rufino reached an agreement and ended the argument. After the event, the tension was still high, so we went outside for a few minutes to get some fresh air, there we reflected upon what had happened. Here we also include our reflections, in retrospective, about our behavior when taking part of a conflict and when being part of a group in which some members are in conflict.

Gaston: When I'm myself a part of the conflict, I take a very strong standpoint, but I try to keep calm and see both sides of the argument. However, if the conflict doesn't get resolved and it goes on and on, I can get angry and can speak in a harsh way. This is detrimental to teamwork because it causes discomfort in the team and hinders other members from speaking up. When observing other members in my group being in a conflict, I try to help them to find solutions. I think that because of my personality (connected to MBTI type) it comes to me naturally to suggest a solution to the communication problem between Nam and Rufino, and that's why I suggested that they try communicating by writing.

Rufino: When I am a part of conflict, usually I carefully observe the way the person or the people I am talking to react to what is being discussed, and I try to understand what the person is thinking. This makes it easier to understand the person and his reasoning. I do my best to make sure that people understand my view point about the discussion even if it takes me long time to explain. When others are in conflict I try to carefully follow the discussion to find out what is happening and find out if there is a need for me to help. In case of an open discussion with everyone, I can join the discussion, not to see who is right but to act as facilitator.

Reza: First I will try to get the source of the conflict, what the reason is. Then I will try to hear the other side to know more about the subject, in this way I can realize either if I am mistaken or if they don't have enough information. Then when they are finished I will start to express my side so they become familiar to my point of view. When observing others in conflict I will try to make them calm and less aggressive, and then I will ask them to speak one by one about the source of the conflict, so it is possible to help them solve it.

Nam: When I am a part of the conflict I will try to be calm to find the solution for the conflict. When observing others, I will let them try to solve their problem. I can try to give them some advice.

Jahangir: In a conflict I just try to be calm because by being angry a solution cannot be achieved. When observing a conflict I try to make them calm quoting a phrase from reputed book *You can win* by Shiv Khara: "If you get angry, you will lose". After getting calm, I make them understand exactly what to do to achieve our goal, while not getting angry.

Steffen: I try my best to keep calm when I'm part of a conflict, and to understand the point of view of the other person. I don't want to escalate the noise level, but I will if it's necessary, and then I'd do it to try to calm things down. When others are in conflict I try to see if can figure out the situation from the sideline,

and possibly interject with a third point of view when I have one. If it starts getting heated, I'll try to get people to calm down.

Group: From this experience we can learn that conflicts arise because members of a group don't always necessarily share the same point of view about various things. We have different backgrounds, but it is always nice to be positive no matter the situation, so that we can keep a right view about the matter and do our best to be helpful and motivating towards each other. Angry conflicts are detrimental for teamwork – long, heated up discussions don't lead anywhere. Nevertheless, conflicts can be beneficial if we try to learn from them. As a matter of fact, in the theory it is mentioned that groups that have too much cohesion are usually predetermined to agree with each other in order to avoid conflicts, and this leads to bad group decisions [3]. Therefore it is important that conflicts lead to a learning point so we can use them for the benefit of the group. Being aware of our own behavior can help us realize that our behavior may be detrimental to the group's process, and then we can find ways to act in different ways. A way to do this is to ask for feedback from the group about our own behavior. Another suggestion is to try to put ourselves in the other person's shoes before we react – then we can realize that getting angry or replying aggressively will not solve the problem. Also, when we all together took a break to go outside to relax the atmosphere, we realized that this helped facilitate communication and make the group more open to having discussions without so much tension. Indeed taking a time out during a conflict is also recommended in the theory [3]. We decided to try out all these actions whenever a conflict would arise in the future, and even though it did not always happen to the letter, we have tried out some of these actions (e.g. taking a time out and relaxing) and it has helped us to defuse tensions and engage in more objective and two-way conversations. These changes in behavior are what let us go a step forward in the development of our team, opening the door towards the norming stage.

Norming

Theory

It is very important for a team to be able to talk about the problems that had led to the storming stage and find a common ground for all members to express their points of view. From this, new norms can be formulated, to better suit the needs of the group. This stage is called norming, and it is a transition between storming and performing. Norms should focus on the communication within the group and for members to be able to give and receive feedback openly [2]. A good rule for efficient communication is to test inferences; this means that from observing a situation we as individuals infer something about it, if we accept the inference as an absolute truth, miscommunication may occur. Therefore it is better to check with the people involved in the situation if the inference is correct. In this way many misunderstandings can be avoided. Another very important rule is to give specific examples when giving feedback – saying “This is good.” or “This is bad.” is useless for improvement, it is better to say why things are good and bad and also explain what reasoning was followed to reach the comment or feedback. If rules are appropriately set, then the group will be much more likely to work together to make decisions in a way that everybody is equally engaged, find effective solutions to deal with differences in opinions, and be comfortable with talking about “undiscussable” issues, such as a team member not performing up to the others’ expectations [1].

Situation – Updated Cooperation Agreement

As mentioned in the section “Situation – Unfulfilled expectations”, we had realized that not everybody’s work was up to everybody’s expectations. After reflecting upon this issue in our group we concluded that we had to find a way of making the individual work up to everybody’s expectations. We also realized that this would be a difficult feat, since we all had different levels of experience in research and English writing. However, we figured out that a way in which we could at least make sure that everybody would have done their part before Wednesday. We updated the cooperation agreement to add two important points regarding the group work. The first point stated that each person had to check the Facebook group and the Itslearning group as often as once per day; in this way everybody would be informed of relevant updates and be able to follow all important information. The second point was that if we had homework for the next Wednesday, the documents should be uploaded to Itslearning by Monday; in this way if something in had to be expanded or changed, feedback could be given on Monday and the changes could be implemented before Wednesday.

After having worked under the new cooperation agreement for some weeks, we reflected upon the impact that it had on our team’s process and how it affected the way we worked.

Gaston: I think that discussing about what changes we could include in the cooperation agreement were necessary. In retrospective I feel that they made the members more aware of the importance of the project. Some of us followed the new norms in the cooperation agreement, but I don’t believe that they completely changed the behavior of the group – not everybody was checking the Facebook group and Itslearning daily, but everyone checked them more often.

Jahangir: We planned to change our group cooperation agreement to improve our team. When making the new agreement we focused on our previous one and why it didn’t work as it was intended to; we then

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made a new agreement in a more precise and clear way. Fortunately, the new cooperation agreement helped us a lot in reaching our goal because it resulted in the team working faster than before.

Rufino: The change in cooperation agreement helped us to work more effectively according to the norms that we had fixed. It motivated the group to work harder, because we realized that we had little time and we should work more effectively. By having the new guidelines about uploading documents on time we could give feedback to each other more easily and work in the best way we could.

Reza: I think by adding points to the cooperation agreement everybody became more aware of what was happening in the group. Also everybody had become more aware that other members are doing their parts of the work. In turn this made us feel more responsible and gain some motivation to work on our parts of the project.

Nam: It was great that we updated our cooperation agreement. It made us concentrate to work in the group and try to finish the report faster. However, we did not demand from members to work harder than the minimum in the cooperation agreement. Therefore, the working efficiency was improved, but not so much. In conclusion, I strongly agree with making cooperation agreement. It would've been better if we had updated it earlier.

Steffen: The changes that were done to the contract weren't really followed to a T. While the productivity in the later weeks increased compared to the first, I don't think the updated contract was the reason for it, it was more that we were all feeling the urgency of completion a bit more. Even if we hadn't added the points to the contract, we would still follow them, because the discussion about the norms was what changed the behavior.

Group: In conclusion, having a discussion about our ground rules improved the cooperation within the team, by raising awareness about the importance of deadlines, and being active at following up on the information exchanged within the group. The actual discussion was more important than the formal writing of the norms. The fact that we were all set into formulating new ground rules to improve our team's cooperation is a symptom of the norming stage; we were more focused on finding solutions than on arguing about our problems. This mindset is what led us to the following situation to assess the way in which we had been communicating.

Situation - Feedback

At the beginning of the village day in week 11, we were getting ready to put the individual parts of the project together. However, we observed that Rufino's part wasn't up to the quality of the rest of the project: it was shorter than others' sections and, in addition, it was inappropriately sourced. When we pointed this out to him, he said he had been expecting to receive feedback right after he uploaded his document to Itslearning on Monday, as the cooperation agreement said. However, he didn't receive any feedback at all before the actual village day. We quickly realized that the cause for this was lack of a communication and feedback structure in the group. Therefore we decided to spend the rest of the village day talking about feedback. First, we brainstormed together about how to behave when giving a receiving feedback.

When receiving feedback we should stay quiet and pay full attention when somebody is giving feedback, in this way we can understand exactly what they are trying to say and then reflect on what we can do to

do differently. Paying attention to feedback can help us improve ourselves so that we can become better, especially at working in groups. Do not defend yourself. If you are just thinking about how to convince yourself about how the person giving you feedback is wrong, you will not be able to see how you can use the feedback to improve something about yourself. Saying “thank you” helps defuse tensions, prevents escalations and makes communication flow better. If you react strongly when receiving feedback it will just escalate it to an emotionally charged argument, which is not beneficial for anyone. Listen to feedback, reflect upon it and remember it, in this way you can take action and improve. This is particularly important when receiving feedback about the project.

When giving feedback you should focus on the logic and facts, not in the person. Try to help the person: instead of just saying “you are lazy”, give constructive feedback suggesting how to improve. We should not give feedback saying that it is a “personal offense”. Similarly, we should not give feedback when we are emotionally charged and visibly angry; it is better to wait and give it later, when you have calmed down. Think about what you want to say before you say it, in this way you ensure that the feedback you give is complete and constructive – saying not only what your opinion is, but also how you arrived to it. This last point is also mentioned in the theory about communication in groups [1]. If when giving feedback you only focus on the problems, it can be perceived as only whining; it is much more helpful to focus on the solutions of the problems so that the feedback is constructive. However, feedback should also include positive aspects that should be reinforced, which also make the other person feel better. If we use the word “I think” when giving feedback, it sounds as something helpful to say, and thus the person receiving the feedback will pay more attention to it.

During this activity we also remembered that there is a very useful communication model based on inference checking that can be implemented in the ground rules of a team. It is divided in two parts: awareness steps and explaining reasoning and intent. The awareness steps are: first, observing behavior – for example listening to A’s comment. Second, inferring meaning and recognizing our inferences – for example “I am inferring X from the A’s comment”. Third, decide what and how to deal with the inference – for example “I am going to ask A if my inference X is correct, in order to avoid miscommunication and the problems that result from it.” After these three steps, the course of action would be to approach A and explaining the inference X. Following that, it would be useful to ask if the inference X is correct, and to check with A if he has further inferences [1].

We had the opportunity to practice what we had learned about feedback right away by having an exercise in which everybody received positive and constructive (instead of negative) feedback from all the other members. Here we give our reflections about feedback; unfortunately Jahangir was not present during the exercise.

Gaston: It felt good to know that I was an important part of the team and that my teammates valued the effort I had been putting in the work; it motivated me to keep working hard. I was also glad to see that they had insight about my behavior. The constructive feedback that I received made me more aware of how I react under stress – by getting angry. I think that positive feedback is great to reinforce positive behavior in the group, while constructive feedback can help us do things differently in order to achieve a more harmonic and efficient cooperation inside the group.

Nam: When I worked in our group, I looked forward to receiving positive and constructive feedback from other members because I always think I can improve. When I received feedback, I use these to

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compare to myself and my work. I recognized that other member told me reliable feedback that was both positive and negative. It was very useful for me that the feedback was given in a direct way; I appreciated that effort from our group. I think I have improved myself from receiving feedback. I have to say: “Thanks for your feedback.”

Reza: When I realized that everybody was satisfied with me, this kind of feeling caused me to have more motivation for working more efficiently, I think this kind of feeling is in everybody. On the other hand, by receiving constructive feedback I could see what I was not able to see before, and I realized that others knew things about me that I didn't know. I can use these feedbacks to improve myself as a member of the group. I think everybody can also do this with constructive feedback.

Rufino: It felt good to receive positive feedback. I felt that I was useful for the group and that made me feel happy. I realized I was doing something good for the group and that was motivating. I was also happy to receive negative feedback because it was said in a nice way and so I could realize that my teammates wanted to help me to improve. After receiving feedback I tried to do my best to focus on improving, but I realized there were more things to improve. Eventually I realized I had made progress because my teammates gave me feedback about my recent writing and they said it was better quality than before.

Steffen: I didn't receive much negative feedback (from what I know of my own work effort compared to my own standards) compared to the positive feedback I got, which surprised me. I did however feel that the overall session was important. I didn't learn something new about myself, since I know my flaws fairly well, but it was still a good reminder. The session helped to bring out some issues that people had with others when it came to personal behavior and professional work, while at the same time defusing that with saying something positive. When giving feedback, it's important to focus on what is good, and what can be done do change anything bad, instead of just attacking with the bad while keeping silent about the good.

Group: In summary, we were satisfied to learn something new about ourselves or to be reminded about our improvement points, thus we agreed that we would try to give and receive feedback according to the outcomes of the day, and also we would be aware of the inference checking cycle and try to use it because it could be very useful for us. We in fact had several opportunities to give and receive feedback throughout the course of EiT, and we did indeed follow some of the points we brainstormed about. Connecting this with theory we can add that feedback is an important characteristic of cohesive groups – enabling groups to perform more efficiently because of open communication and mutual desire for improvement; groups that have no feedback are usually very insecure ones [1] [3]. Therefore the fact that we had used the day for the feedback exercise helped us move a step forwards in developing our team cooperation.

Performing

Theory

If the norming has been completed it means that the group has now a deep insight in its process, on how the work is being done in the group [1]. Only then can the group move on to the performing stage, also called the cohesive phase [3]. In this stage decision making is shared and involving, members express

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their opinions and feedback each other openly, discussions are structured in constructive debates rather than heated arguments, work is done efficiently, there is a strong sense of belonging to the group, and everybody participates actively to reach the group's common goals [2].

Right now, during the last weeks of EiT, our group has some traits of an efficiently performing team. We are aware that we have gone through the forming, storming and norming stages of a team development and, even though it is theoretically possible for a team to relapse from norming to storming [2], we have made progress in our team's development. As mentioned in the introduction of this report, in order to become an efficient team, performance, personal and process criteria have to be fulfilled by the group [1]. Examples of the three criteria are mentioned in the following paragraphs.

Process – Meeting on Saturdays

We have been meeting regularly for four Saturdays in a row from 10:00 to 13:00 to be able to finish our work in the project, the poster presentation and the process report. Attendance has been fairly good at all the meetings, even though it is in the morning of a weekend. Everybody has arrived highly motivated, joking around, bringing coffee and cookies for others, and trying our best to be supportive. At the beginning of the meeting we agree on what we have to work on. During these meetings, we are all sitting in the same computer room next to each other, so it is common that when one of us is finished with his workload he can just go around and try to help the others with their parts of the work. This means that we are mutually interdependent – we know that in order to succeed everybody in the group must succeed and that is why we are supportive to each other – this is also mentioned in the theory [1].

In synthesis, we have a structured and clear working process. This is a result of our development throughout the course of the semester, the inclusion of norms, the way in which we are giving and receiving feedback, and the fact that we are all highly motivated to achieve our goals: the production of a high-quality project and process report. Thus the process criteria are met by our team [1].

Progress – Making the poster

At the beginning, only two of the members in our team understood about biofuels. Now, all of us understand biofuel production from microalgae. This shows a clear development of each of the members' knowledge, something that benefits the group as a whole. An example of this benefit is our poster, which we are very proud of. The poster was made in a single Saturday where we sat down together and wrote each of the text boxes, searched the internet for relevant images, and agreed on the design. The product was given feedback extensively on spot by all members, and we finally reached a result that everybody was satisfied with. We used this opportunity to implement what we have learned about giving and receiving feedback. Even though we don't have an objective standard to measure the quality of the product of our work (the poster) we believe our team has fulfilled its process criteria [1].

Personal – Well-being

Gaston: At the beginning I felt unsure about my teammates' commitment to the outcome of the project; it was a real challenge to get everybody to understand the content of the project and to fulfill everybody's expectations. However, I have learned a lot about how people with other backgrounds work, and now I am experiencing that everybody is working very hard to hand in products of high quality. This motivates me immensely and inspires me to do my best. Also, I have realized that when I am under stress I should

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take time to calm down before giving feedback, which makes my comments and input much more constructive. I am proud to be a part of Green Skulls.

Reza: I am glad because I think that I know everybody in the group, their abilities, as well as their reaction to various situations. When working together, I think we are closer to each other now so we can contribute more. At first I thought working with someone from other subjects would be very hard because I thought they were not connected to the topic of our village subject. But with time I realized that they have something to share to the project, and then I felt better and started to enjoy working in the group. Actually I learned that having a positive mentality helps to have a good connection with others, and others can feel free to speak to you about various things.

Rufino: Being a member of Green Skulls is nice because we still have a good environment inside the group although we had some bad times when there were hot discussions and dissatisfaction from members whose expectations, about how much effort that each one was putting on the project, were unmet. This situation happened because of reasons such as different background, culture, religion and so on. As we learnt from the compendium, the most important thing is to find solutions to problems, because we will always encounter them through life. I can summarize my learning experience in the group with an example from the Bible, I learned that someone strong and powerful is the one that has power to control over his anger, and the best example is Jehovah Good; although patience has limits, we must use all opportunities to practice it. To work with people of other disciplines was challenging because we had to find common basis from which everyone could give his best contribution to the project and for the group. It was also a nice experience because we learnt something from each other; not only in academic aspects, but also for other aspects such as how we can behave during discussions. For example, trying to be motivating and sympathetic to make people feel good.

Steffen: My view on the group has improved since the start of the project (it was fairly good to start with); however it improved mostly by looking at other groups and how well we worked together in comparison. While some other groups ended up with group members that dropped out or didn't work well, everyone in our group produced something relevant to the reports. Working with people from other disciplines was challenging because the experiences and competence had a lot more variance compared to more homogenous group I've worked in before. However, it was enriching because I got better at working with them, and I learned methods (mostly just asking instead of assuming) to overcome those difficulties. If I'm selected to be leader, I should be stricter when it comes to getting other people to do their work. Since I'm not always the person that does my own work on time, I don't feel comfortable lambasting someone because they didn't do it.

Nam: Green Skulls is the best group that I have ever joined. I liked our group from the first meeting. I am very happy to be a member of Green Skulls. All the members of it are very friendly. I know that after the last meeting we will not have the chance to work together again, so I feel sad. I will miss you very much. I will remember by time with Green Skulls as an excellent experience. I think it was challenging to work with people from other disciplines because there was more hard work. For example, the person who has background about the group project has to spend more time to explain for others who don't know anything about the project, so the group needs more time for this. However, I can improve my work, my presentation skills and my communication. Furthermore, I always think that a group works better than one person because a group has many different perspectives. Therefore the group will have a better solution

for the project. It opened my mind to observe the behavior of other members because I have learnt from their strengths. I think all members of Green Skull have many qualities that I can learn from.

Jahangir: I am happy to be a member of Green Skulls; this is a unique group without any girls. First I was somewhat disappointed since I am not from the background the project requires. But later I realized that this was not a problem since the other members were so helpful to make me understand anything. They were very cordial. This built a strong relationship and mutual understanding among members and took the project progress in top. At the end I feel proud of such a group. For me the big challenge was biofuels. I had no knowledge about it and my background was marine technology. But I have not lost my confidence to work with it because I am working with people from other disciplines such as biotechnology, chemistry etc. which are directly related to biofuel. So at the end of EiT, I have a good knowledge about biofuel, algae, its production process, photobioreactor, etc. I have also learned that I need to improve my English fluency to communicate in a better way. Other than this I also need to be more extroverted. I should also be aware when it comes to following the pre-scheduled timetable.

Group: From everybody's reflections about well-being we can conclude that we have a positive attitude towards working with our group. We all feel that we have all learned important things about our behavior and how it impacts teamwork. Because we have all been a part of Green Skulls we have not only reached the team's goals but also our personal development goals, as illustrated by all the learning points included in the aforementioned reflections. This is a requirement for the fulfillment of personal criteria in the development of a team [1].

Recurring situation - Working as a five-man group

As a result of one or other cause, somebody in our group was absent for six consecutive weeks. Therefore we performed as a five-man group for six weeks. We decided to include this important situation at the end of the process because it is something that has been an underlying condition in our group, and not necessarily a part of any of the development stages in the dynamics of our team. In the following section each of us shares our perceptions, opinions and reflections about absences during group work.

Individual perspectives

Steffen: In a group work like EiT, you often get diminishing returns when you add one more person to the group. In a group of 6 people there are 15 possible connections, while in a group of 5 there are 10 possible connections. So with that extra person, there are a lot more opinions to be considered and discussed before anything can actually be done. So personally, I didn't really mind when we were only 5 people instead of 6. If the person that was away was important when it came to the actual work, I simultaneously trusted them to do the work they were supposed to do when they were away. If the person did not have the same expectations when it came to sharing the work load, it didn't really matter that much.

That is from a project work point of view, however from an interpersonal point of view it depended a lot more on the reason for the absence. If the person is away for a valid reason according to the norms, which I influenced when they were written, then the absence is completely fine. If the person was away for a reason that I did not think was valid, it made me perceive the person as someone that just couldn't be

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bothered, someone that didn't care about the group work. Of course there can be underlying reasons that I don't know about that are perfectly valid, but if the person doesn't reveal those reasons then from my point of view it will look like carelessness.

Nam: The group includes 6 people who have roles in the working group. This means that the work of each member contributes to a good result from everybody's work. A group works as a machine, and if it's missing any parts it will not work efficiently or even stop. Therefore, I conclude that our team working with 5 people for 6 consecutive weeks could not achieve the level of efficiency that would have been achieved by working with 6 people.

All members try to work to produce the best result, so they have responsibility to attend every group working day. There are two reasons for absence: health or special, unique reasons. Therefore, if someone is absent for no good reason, it will not be accepted. The absence of someone does not only influence the working plan of the group, but also makes group atmosphere less friendly because other members think that the absent one does not care about the group working. This results in the present ones not feeling so happy and also they do not try to work better.

I think that the absence of someone because of any reason is a fault because they affect directly the group work. However, maybe we can accept the absent person who did his part of the work beforehand and prepared for his absence. If some ones did not finish his work, the 5 member have to work for 6 people's work. Therefore, it is important to make sure that your absence does not affect the group. One person who has responsibility for the group should prepare carefully so that the absence does not affect the group as much.

Jahangir: We are a group of six people and each does a certain amount of work to make our team advance progressively. When someone is missing in the group, it halts or slows down the progress of the project since all parts are inter-related. In addition, the remaining members need to do that same amount of work to keep the team progress in same pace, which increases the load on them and also sometime it hampers the team to go forwards. During discussions about teamwork that is relevant for the process, absence results in lack of some ideas and knowledge from missing person. These ideas or this knowledge is very important for any kind of work. So presence and sharing of feelings from everybody during project work is absolutely necessary to have an effective working group.

The experience of having been absent for one day in the village was also a learning point for me. If I had been present, I would have contributed to do work for the team. I would also have shared my views for that day's work and given discussion input which might have lead the team to progress in its work. Also during absence I tried to do work at home for the team, but I could not manage to do as much as I had done when I was present in the team. I started to perfectly realize the advantages and benefits of working in a group and how a team gathers everybody's skills and input to become more efficient.

Rufino: It was both positive and negative that we were a 5-man group. It was easier as a smaller group to agree when we were having discussions because it's more difficult to discuss in a group where there are more people involved. However, when working in a group it's always better to have the contribution of all the members, especially when it comes to solve a problem that the group has to deal with. Example: when we had to discuss about each one's part for the project, Gaston was absent, he had previously informed the group about his absence but while we were discussing Steffen had to read what Gaston had

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written beforehand and he couldn't do much more than that. It would've been better if he had been physically present, then he could have explained something about his reasoning and discussed about it. It happened in the same way with Reza, Jahangir and Nam when they were absent in other occasions. The absence left a gap, but it was not a big deal, because as a group we managed to overcome such problems by filling the gap in the best way we could. If I had been absent, no matter the reason, I would feel bad because as a member I must contribute in all aspects, such as giving and receive feedback, being physically present and so on.

Reza: In my point of view being one member less than what we were supposed to be made me feel less comfortable while doing the project. I think that the person who is absent in a day will never completely understand what we were already working on and what he is supposed to do for the next week.

Sometimes it happened that some members of the group were absent due to questionable reasons, for instance once one mate didn't participate and said that he was very tired due to being in a trip, but I think it was not a good reason to be absent. I think he would have been able to at least take a seat in the group and just sit there, in order to know what was going on.

I was also absent one time and it was because I was participating in our New Year celebration, which was very important for me and I was pretty sure if I was not participating in that and skipped it I would not be able to concentrate on what was going on in the group that day. So I tried to do work for Green Skulls for that day and then asked my group to let me be absent, which they did. During that day I was always thinking about the group and what they are doing. Maybe the reason was that I was used to being with my group every Wednesday.

Gaston: Working as a five-man group might have seemed easier at the time, but it was actually a real complication because the person who was absent missed out on a lot of discussions and decisions. We always made decisions by reaching a common, unanimous agreement, where everybody's input was equally valuable. Thus if someone was absent the outcomes of the decisions could not fully represent the whole group's opinion.

Whenever someone was absent they took care of doing their part of the work, so I didn't think that they were less committed because they had to be absent. I think this is because we had set ground rules for valid absences in the cooperation agreement.

I was absent for three village days because I had to take courses in Oslo. However, the first thing I did after Green Skulls was formed was to inform my teammates about the nature of my absences throughout the semester, with good time in advance. They were very empathic about it, and I also did my best to keep up to date with my part of the work. I also followed their discussions and outcomes by speaking with Steffen and reading the group reflections. However, I would have preferred to participate in the teambuilding exercises and decision making, I believe I could have given valuable input and learned more about teamwork if I had been there. I think being present for all the village days would have given me more insight about the process inside our group, and it would've also strengthened my bonds with the team.

Theory

When a member of a team is absent, the communication between the group and the missing member tend to be one-way. However, the prime condition to make an effective group is two-way communication

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among members to share ideas and feelings accurately and clearly; this can only be achieved if all the members are present together [1].

In addition, it is important for a person to achieve a sense of responsibility to the project, to have ownership of the project. If the subject that is being worked on (or the people involved in the work) is something we care about, then we're much more likely to attend all meetings and do the work we're supposed to do. To each individual member, it can give the feeling of "I'm doing this because I want to do it and because I want to perform well for the other people in the group". Then we're doing work because it makes each of us and everybody in the group feel better. In order to reach this state it is necessary that all members are present to take part in the decision making process of the team and to give their input in all relevant discussions [1].

From these statements we can conclude that absences in the group are certainly detrimental to the process, since constant interpersonal interactions between all members in a group are necessary to appropriately develop into an efficiently performing team [1] [2].

Reflections

From this situation we can learn several things. First, although we have worked with five members, we achieved good results because we always had solutions for somebody's absence. Second, we had an assessment of each individual absence through our cooperation agreement. Third, we have reflected about how the absence of teammates affected the group work. Finally, we can conclude the following:

- The absence of some of the members was acceptable, because the group had rules in which absences are valid in certain circumstances.
- It was very helpful that the group had been informed in advance about the absences.
- The people who were absent contributed by doing their part of the work.
- The presence of all members always motivates the group to do their best and work hard for each other.
- Even when absent, we can contribute to the group, for example: by understanding how the group works, the background of the people involved and each individual personality
- However, it is important that everybody is present in order to make decisions gathering everybody's input, have two-way communication with all members, and for everybody to have ownership about the project.

We agreed that all these outcomes should be used by us to realize how to deal with absences whenever we work in a team. It is also a key point for us as a team to reinforce the positive attitude of someone who is absent, but yet committed to making up for his absence.

Learning outcomes

Steffen: I think I will look back on EiT and see it as an overall positive experience. In many cases when things go wrong it's difficult to see the whole picture and reflect upon it, but when looking back it's possible to extract what was important about it. If the impression you walk away from the experience with is good or bad, often depends on the end result. For example when I spent 10 months serving my national

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service in the army, I did not like it. Doing things like living in a 15 m² room with 4-5 other guys, needing to do things that I often found to be a waste of time, or playing in the forest, did not make for a fun experience at the time. However, looking back on it, I did many things that showed me I had more tenacity than previously expected, and I learned many useful skills and overall grew as a person. One of my most important lessons however, is that I didn't like being in the army, but I'm still glad I did it. What does this have to do with EiT?

While I don't focus too much on the few fun things that happened in EiT, I will learn from the times that were not that easy, for example how to deal with people that exceed my expectations in both positive and negative directions. In the positive direction it would be how to keep up with people that have a more positive outlook on situations than me or perform significantly better than me. In the negative direction it would be how to deal with it when people perform way below what I would consider to be a standard, not to use that as an excuse for "well at least I'm not the worst in the group", or try to be more positive when others give so much of themselves instead of being the emotional equivalent of a brick wall. What I'm getting at is that it's important to extract what is overall positive about all situations, good or bad, to help me grow as a person and worker. If I focus on the negative sides, instead of just mentioning it as a passing comment or viewing it light-heartedly, that negative energy will be noticeable by other people around me, and no one likes to be around a Debby Downer.

So overall I think that EiT will be a positive experience, both from the experiences I had when working with people with a large a variety of cultural and professional backgrounds, and figuring out how to try to make a group work together when the objective is the group itself, not just getting work done.

Nam: I had never had a course like Experts in Teamwork before. I have enormously enjoyed this course from the first class hour. I expected a lot from this course. Now, I am totally satisfied from it. I have got some important experiences such as having some international friends, understanding more about myself, and improving my teamwork skills.

My group has six people who are from different countries: Norway, Argentina, Bangladesh, Iran, Angola, and Vietnam. Although, we have different cultures and ages we can understand each other. All members are men, so we often have funny situations. This makes the group's atmosphere always comfortable. Moreover, I also made friends with others in the same EiT village. They are very friendly and I often talk to them when I have free time. I am very happy to have these friends.

I think this course significantly helped me to improve myself and my group working skills. When I am talking with other members of group who have different characteristic and opinions, I can open my mind. I recognize that there are many strong points from them that I have to learn. I also know weak points that I sometimes have. Therefore, I have to change by myself and sympathize with other members. In this course, I have worked with other people who are from different cultures and have different academic backgrounds. After I finish the EiT course, I will become more mature in an international working environment. I think I will work efficiently in groups in the future. I used to think that it was difficult to work efficiently in this kind of group because I had only worked in a group with my classmates who had the same academic background as me. In conclusion, I really like EiT course, which is one of the most useful courses for students.

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Jahangir: I found Experts in Teamwork to be interesting learning experience, and the first of its kind for me. Even though at some points the work and actions such as the personal/group reflections and exercises on village days seemed hopeless, they mattered a lot when it came to getting the end product and result. They definitely assisted us when it was time for us to reflect upon what we had been doing and what the next steps in our work would be.

Experts in Teamwork will have a great influence on me for my future life. In a career environment I will work with a lot of people from different cultures and disciplines, with different attitudes and objectives. The consequences of making mistakes in a work situation are much more costly than doing them in practice situations. So being able to obtain the experience beforehand on solving conflicts or how to deal with hard situations is a very precious achievement for me and my life.

During this semester I learned what a group is and what the importance of a group is, and what group structure is needed to be effective. We worked hard together, regardless of different backgrounds, to solve problems that we faced. One more valuable lesson I acquired by working in a group in EIT is communication. In order for the group to work efficiently and properly, communication among the members is a very valuable tool for the team.

Rufino: The EiT course in general was good for me; I learnt a lot of things by being in the group, such as cooperation and support from each other. For example, I learned from my teammates how to use EndNote for first time. It was also a bit hard for me, because I had to wake up early every Wednesday, and it was not easy to be understood when it came to what I had done for my part in the project. Working with others was nice because I learned a lot from people in all aspect of life: jokes, academic stuff and so on. For example Reza used to tell some jokes while we were working, to keep the group motivated and some advice for the group to be united and do the best for the project.

Reza: In my point of view, working as a member of a team is the best way to improve ourselves in various aspects due to the possibility to become familiar with various way of thinking. Honestly I enjoyed every minute of working in our group, because I realized that everybody likes the subject and they wanted to involve in the project and show that the project had some connection to everybody's studies. However, sometimes one or another of the members forgot the importance of the project, and in these situations other members were interested to find a solution to bring him back to the project. Therefore, sometimes we worked on members instead of project.

On the other hand, I found that we can take a look at everything from various points of view and things are not as simple as they seem to be. Another important factor that is necessary to taken into account is that I learned much from other group members during the course, for instance how to work with EndNote or how to find some useful sources for finding valuable articles and so on. As a matter of fact, this course was very beneficial for me since I learned how to react best in different situations to have everything under control. I think nowadays we can work more efficiently as a group, since we know each other better. For instance we know how capable everybody is and how they react in different situations.

Gaston: I think that the EiT experience was a good sample taste of what it feels like to work in a group. I don't think that we had enough time to really have a very deep insight in each other's behaviors. But I feel I can now put myself in my teammates' shoes and actually see the work process from their point of view. I believe this is an important point for my self-development because by being more empathic I can

think twice before I react and not fall into situations that leave people with negative feelings. Another important learning point is humor. Our team has had jokes and laughs since day one. This often helped us relax and be less tense. Now I strongly believe that humor is the best facilitation tool there is: it encourages people to speak, share their opinions, relax, and work hard, all while having fun at the same time. I will do my best to always keep up this kind of good spirit whenever I work in a group. All and all, I am very happy to have worked with my team; we had a very good time together while also getting a lot of work done.

Group reflection – What would we do differently if we had to start our teamwork all over again?

From the beginning of the project we would raise awareness about its importance to all members. In order to do this we would clarify the subject with everyone from the beginning, making sure that everyone understands the general concept. For example, to really check if everyone understands the topic we could write half a page about it and receive feedback. Understanding leads to ownership of the project, which helps everybody realize what they should do in order to reach the common vision for the project. We could also share expectations from the beginning and make sure that we all agree that we want a high quality project. Then it is easier to agree on how to work efficiently together. Since we already know each other and each other's qualities we could divide the roles in the team according to individual skills, making the whole work more efficient. In addition since we already have a clear agreement on how to feedback each other, it wouldn't be a problem to use this knowledge from the beginning of our work.

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