Trust building within student teams for an improved team performance

Following courses at a university gives the students the opportunity to learn new sets of skills and knowledge. Each course is an interaction between students, coaches and the coaches/people responsible for that course, with a clear starting point and end goal. Some courses rely on individual skills but the majority nowadays encourages team-work as it becoming more the standard form of co-working in higher education institutions and in the real world.

A case study

For this project, one of the main courses of the Integrated Product Design (IPD) master track at the faculty of Industrial Design Engineering in Delft is Advanced Embodiment Design (referred from now on as AED) will be used as a case study. During AED, a team of students work on a client-based design project for 20 weeks (a full semester) that is self-managed by the students and supported by a designated coach. Each team consists of 5-6 students with different:

1. cultural backgrounds,
2. engineering competences,
3. design approaches due to differences in prior education,
4. experiences and vision on teamwork. This poses a big challenge for the coaching team and for the teams themselves but at the same time it is a learning goal of the course.

In an attempt to support the students the best way possible and give the coaching team the opportunity to intervene when the team needs it the most, Bas Flipsen (the course coordinator and the initiator of this graduation assignment) introduced a coach journal where the coaches track the teams' performance.
The focus of this graduation assignment is to identify potential problems and act on them.

Design brief

Design a product-service that measures the position of the team in terms of performance by taking the U-Theory (Scharmer, 2009) as basis. What parameters will be measured and how they are communicated to the coaches are the focus of this thesis. The product-service should facilitate measuring the performance. In the current situation, the coaches only get a glimpse of what the students are doing. The students chose what to communicate and what not to communicate. Being able to look beyond what is presented by the students is the envisioned situation.

The approach

First, the current situation is observed and analysed. The course journal used in the AED course is a tool to visualize the data filled by the coaches and a way to prioritize the discussion topics of the coaching team. On the other hand, the students meet their coach once a week where they present their progress, voice their concerns, ask for feedback or questions and make agreements with the coach about future plans.
Then, a literature review has been conducted were different parameters have been researched in relationship to team performance such as team forming, coaching, team dynamics and reflection. The main findings were:

1. Designing an effective team influences the performance
2. Teamwork is a major contributor to improved performance, productivity and quality of decision making
3. Coaching does not influence the performance directly but by influencing the dynamics of the team that by itself influences the performance
4. A dynamic team is constantly changing. Once the team knows it dynamics -team members being aware of work habits and competencies of each other- the team can shift roles and responsibilities based on the general benefits, that influences the performance of the team in general
5. Reflection and peer evaluation are two techniques to measure team performance
6. Afterwards, two AED students and seven coaches have been interviewed.

Well-being tracking Toolkit

This project resulted into a learning activity toolkit providing a guideline for both the students and coaches to use during the coach session. The aim of the toolkit is to choose one to three emotion cards from the 'Premo' cards sets to express their emotion at that moment in regards to the team work and project. This concept contains 2 different guide of use, one for the students and one for the coaches, the 'Premo' cards sets and several scenario of use that support and explain possible ways of using it.
By voicing out the emotions on an early stage, it creates trust within the team, avoids conflicts on a later stage and results in a better team's performance.

Validation

Finally, the toolkit have (partly) been evaluated with a few students and coaches. The expectations are that the well-being tracking activity will help start the conversation within a student team, which will improve the teams' performance eventually.
However, to fully validate the effect of the well-being tracking activity on the team's performance, the activity must be applied and executed during the next run of AED. The effect created by the toolbox is subject to a dilemma that is present all the times, the fallacy of prevention, as team performance is not only defined by the trust built within the team. When a potential problem is being prevented, it is hard to access the effect of that problem as it did not happen. So did the toolbox prevent conflicts within the student team, or were there other factors who influenced the team's performance. This dilemma was, is and will be presented even by using this tool.

Recommendations

1. Emotions need time to be discussed and acknowledged, so speeding the process up will influence the quality of the discussion.
2. Using clear structure of discussion with main questions clearly designated for voicing out the underlying emotions will support both the students and coaches.
3. With enough data, a specific tool to represent the emotions should be developed and used instead of 'Premo'
4. Provide separate moments dedicated to voicing and discussing emotions in relation to the team, to the work delivered and to the personal aspect.Emotions need time to be discussed and acknowledged, so speeding the process up will influence the quality of the discussion.
5. The different scenarios of use should be tested further and change the tool accordingly.

Guideline for students

Introduction

This is a guideline on how to use the well-being tracking activity. This is part of a ongoing research about improving the performance of student teams. By tracking the performance of the students teams, coaches can support the teams accordingly.
This activity is a reoccurring one during the whole course of AED.

Goal

The goal of this activity is to **talk about the small emotions** felt during the project but are often overlooked or not given space due to the amount of work.

Benefits

- Build a stronger bond with your team members.
- Be more understanding and supporting to each other.
- Build trust.
- Manage expectations.
- Avoid conflicts in a later stage of the course.
- A better performance as a team.

Premo tool

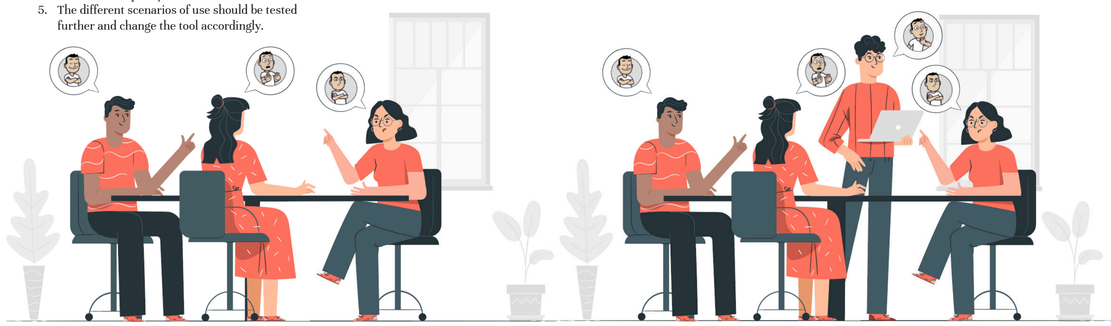
In appendix A, you can find the tool and explanation of the various emotions.

Rules

- Privacy is very important. What you discuss together as a team stays within the team.
- Feeling a certain emotion doesn't mean you can act on it. Stay respectful to each other.
- Every emotion is valid. None is more important than the other.
- In case of a serious problem, please talk to your coach, the course coordinator, student counselor or to a close friend or family member.
- When someone is talking, listen. Don't interrupt or assume what the other person meant.

Instructions

Who	The students & the coach
When	Before the coaching session & at the start of the coaching session. Every week.
What	Choose a minimum of one and a maximum of three emotions from the Premo tool
How	1. Your coach will print the Premo tool for you (just once, so keep it safe). Cut the circles and keep them safe to reuse every coaching session. 2. Get together with no electronic device around you (laptop closed, phones aways). 3. Each student choses between one to three emotions and puts them in the front of them. 4. Start by sharing the chosen emotion, why you chose it, and what you expect from the team in regards of this emotions. 5. Each one must share. 6. One student summarizes all the emotions shared, what is expected as a team. 7. Discuss how you can go further with the knowledge you have now. Make agreements. 8. Choose one emotion that represents the team at that moment. Share this emotion with your coach and explain why.



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