

How can we get students to work in teams in online courses?

INTER AMERICAN UNIVERSITY OF PUERTO RICO,  
PONCE CAMPUS

# About

## The Session

The focus of this session is to present some of the elements and strategies faculty and instructional designers must take into consideration when planning, implementing and guiding virtual teams and team activities in online courses. The use of the team charter is proposed for the documentation and guidance of virtual teams' forming, organizing, and negotiation processes.

## The Presenter

Rolando Méndez, CME / CSE is an:

- Academic Manager
- Communicator
- Educator
- Problem Solver
- Organizational *Bricoleur*
- Lifelong Learner



# About

## The University

- Private non profit institution founded in 1912
- 9 campuses and 2 professional schools
- Ponce Campus founded in 1962
- Online project started in 1994

## The Distance Learning Division

- 23 online academic programs (undergraduate, graduate, and professional)
- Deanship established in 2009
- Academic department established in 2014
- Faculty assigned to department in 2014, 2015 & 2016

Let's Talk!

**What are your expectations for  
this session?**

# Context: The Online Classroom

CHALLENGES | STRATEGY | CASE STUDY

# Challenges in the Online Classroom

- Diversity
- Accessibility
- Adaptability
- Time management skills
- Information literacy skills
- Self motivation
- Social loafing
- Instructional Design
- Technical Issues
- Compliance / Integrity Issues



# Strategy

## Virtual Teams (VT) as tools for

Managing  
Complexity in  
Online  
Environments

Creating Student  
Engagement

Promoting  
Collaborative  
Learning

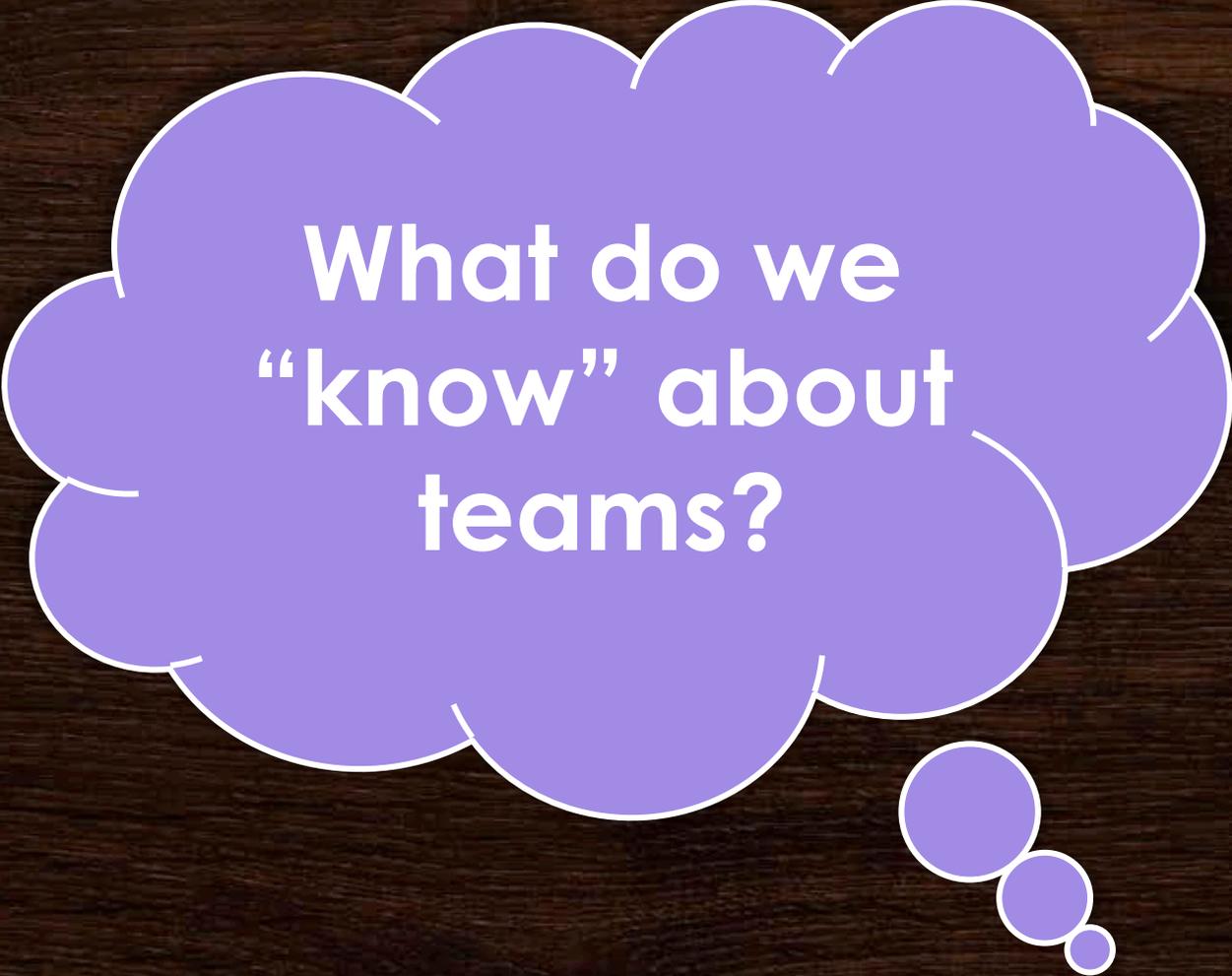
# Case Study

- **Online course:** *Human Behavior in Organizations [BADM 2650]*
- **Students:** Business Administration, Management, Human Resources Management, Operations Management, Other disciplines (Psychology, Health Sciences, Education)
- **Results:**
  - The course's passing rate was **60%**.
  - **49%** of students passed with a **B** or higher grade.

# Getting Students to Work in Virtual Teams: Theory

DEFINITION | LIFE CYCLE | EFFECTIVENESS | INFLUENCING  
FACTORS

Let's Talk!



What do we  
“know” about  
teams?

# Definition

Teams are groups of people with complimentary skills, organized and committed to accomplish a common purpose for which they are mutually accountable (Kurian, 2013; Katzenbach and Smith, on Zarraga-Rodriguez, Jaca, & Viles, 2015).

A virtual team does this using ICTs.



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# Team Life Cycle

Forming



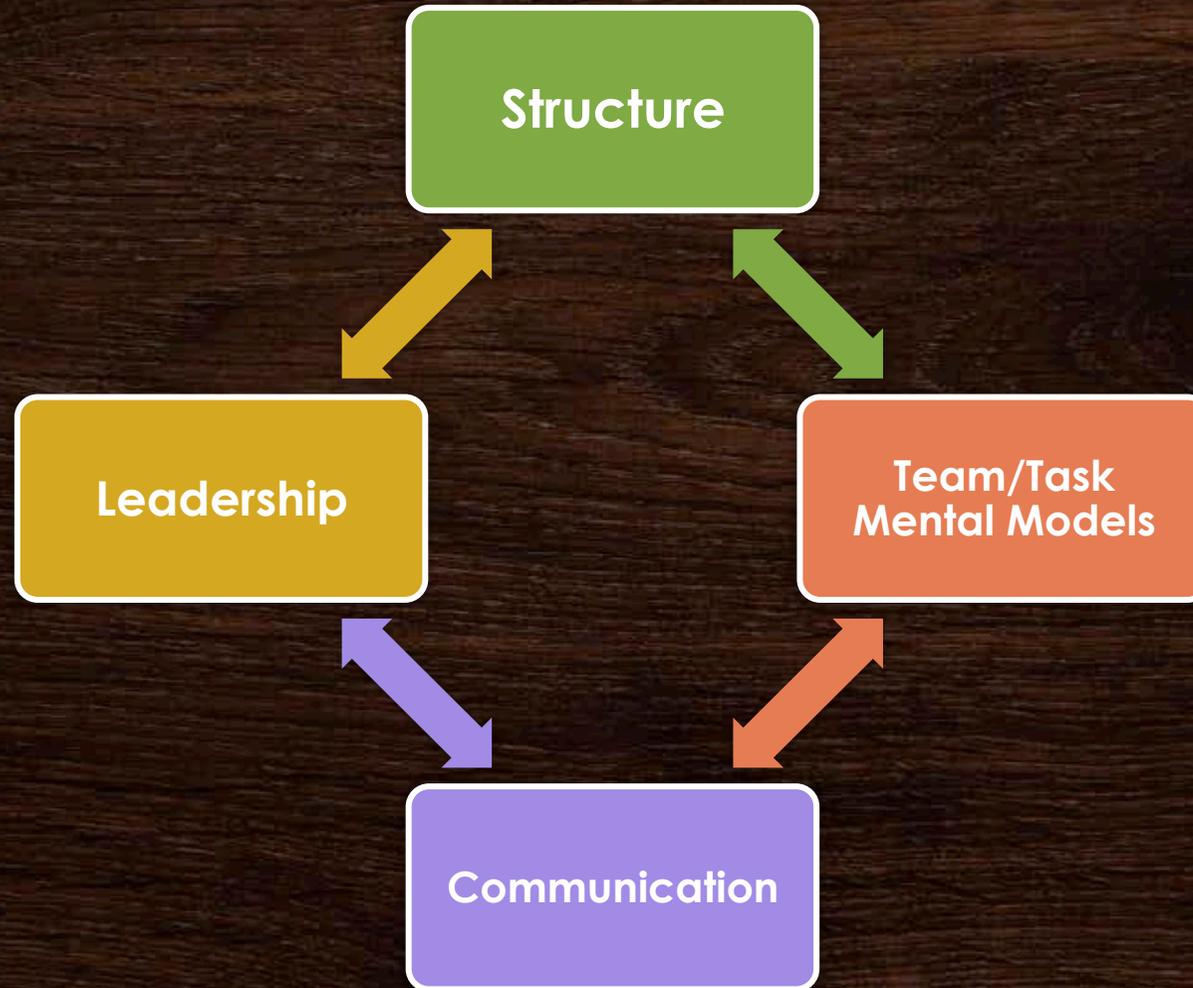
1. Team members get to know each other and decide how they will work together as a team
2. Team members negotiate on how they should function as a team
3. Team members work together to solve a problem and establish rules about how they will operate
4. Team works towards accomplishing the established goals
5. Team works through the process of disbanding

# Effective Teams



Cook, Mangla, & Ummer (2009)

# Influencing Factors



# Getting Students to Work in Virtual Teams: Practice

PLANNING | IMPLEMENTING | MANAGING | TEAM CHARTER | THE  
DELIVERABLE

Let's Talk!

**Share some of your  
experiences integrating teams  
in the online classroom.  
Challenges?**

# Planning

① **Purpose.** Define the purpose of integrating VTs in the classroom.

② **Structure.** Decide:

- Amount of teams to be created
- Size of teams (4 to 6 members recommended)
- How teams will be formed (automatic vs. self-enrollment)
- Team leadership (designated vs. emergent)

③ **Deliverables.**

- Plan and design deliverables
- Establish timeframe for deliverables (mid/end of semester recommended)

④ **Measurement.** Decide how teams will be evaluated.

# Implementing

- ① **Communicate.** Inform students about team activities in the course on the first day of class.
- ② **Understand.** Assess students' task and team mental models via survey or discussion forum. This helps you understand students' prior knowledge and experiences working in teams.

- ③ **Guide.** Help students:
  - Enroll in teams
  - Communicate and interact with each other
  - Understand expectations
  - Navigate forming, storming, and norming stages

# Managing

① **Facilitate.** Help students:

- Build trust
- Make decisions
- Solve conflicts
- Be accountable for individual and group performance
- Collaborate asynchronously

② **Observe** team processes and interactions.

③ **Clarify** doubts that may arise.

④ **Follow Up.** Remind students of expectations and due dates for deliverables.

⑤ **Evaluate** team performance.

⑥ **Ask** for student feedback.

⑦ **Integrate** student feedback into previous processes.

# The Team Charter

- A **team charter** is a document for **clarifying direction** and **establishing boundaries**.
- Students have to complete the team charter during the first four weeks of the course.
- This activity constitutes the first team assignment.

Completing the team charter helps a team become more effective by:

- Creating a climate for cooperation
- Establishing trust and communication
- Clarifying roles, responsibilities, and expectations
- Identifying most suitable leadership style

# The Team Charter

- Student information and availability
- Team rules
- Expectations for roles and processes
- Strategies for guaranteeing fair contribution and preventing social loafing
- Strategies for managing conflict

**TEAM CHARTER**

**CÓDIGO DEL CURSO:**  
**TÍTULO DEL CURSO:**  
**PROFESOR (A):**



**INFORMACIÓN DE CONTACTO DE LOS MIEMBROS DEL EQUIPO**

Nombre	Teléfono	Correo Electrónico	Disponibilidad

**ACUERDOS COMUNES DEL EQUIPO**

**Reglas**  
[Escribir en este espacio las reglas que acordaron como equipo.]

**Expectativas sobre las funciones, roles e interacciones de los miembros**  
[Describir en este espacio qué se espera de los miembros del equipo con respecto a la participación, comunicación y contribución.]

**Estrategias para asegurar la contribución y colaboración equitativa y justa**  
[Describir en este espacio cómo el equipo se asegurará de que todos sus miembros contribuyan equitativamente. Indicar cómo intervendrán cuando un miembro esté participando bajo las expectativas.]

**Estrategias para manejar el conflicto**  
[Describir en este espacio cómo el equipo manejará los conflictos que surjan, sin intervención del profesor]

# The Deliverable

Equipos de Trabajo Virtuales			
Características de los Equipos de Trabajo	Preguntas Guías	Recomendación (1pt c/u)	Justificación (1pt c/u)
Estructura	1. ¿Cómo deben conformarse los equipos de trabajo virtuales?		
	2. ¿Cómo se debe hacer la selección de miembros?		
	3. ¿Quién debe establecer las metas del equipo, la organización o los miembros del equipo?		
	4. ¿Cuánta autonomía deben tener los equipos de trabajo virtuales?		
Liderazgo	5. ¿Cuál debe ser la función del líder en los equipos de trabajo virtuales?		
	6. El líder del equipo virtual, ¿debe ser designado o debe ser emergente?		

	7. ¿Qué tipo de liderazgo es más recomendable para los equipos de trabajo virtuales?		
Procesos de Comunicación	8. ¿Qué herramientas deben utilizar los miembros de un equipo virtual para comunicarse?		
	9. ¿Qué aspectos podrían impedir buenos procesos de comunicación en un equipo virtual?		
Evaluación del Desempeño	10. ¿Cómo debe evaluarse el desempeño de los equipos de trabajo virtuales?		
	11. ¿Cómo se pueden evaluar a los miembros si están geográficamente dispersos?		

# Lessons Learned

STUDENT FEEDBACK | LESSONS LEARNED

# Student Feedback

“The team charter was the start to creating a good team.”

“In the end, the purpose is that we all benefit in some way from what each other can contribute to the team”

“It is a great tool for establishing rules. It is also a good tool for knowing your teammates and their strengths, for assigning tasks”

“It is an essential and fundamental piece for teams.”

“Is an excellent tool because – through a good structure and shared leadership – (the team) can share experiences, acquire knowledge, and take advantage of diversity. Strengths and weaknesses are defined and communication becomes clearer and more precise.”

“It is a guide that allows us to collaborate equitably as team members and work towards the same established goals.”

# Lessons Learned

- 1) The integration of teams in the online classroom requires understanding of VTs and their processes. One common mistake is assuming they work the same way as traditional teams.
- 2) Students tend to be reluctant to working in teams. They usually approach working in VTs the same way they would do in traditional teams. Therein lie the problems and frustrations.
- 3) Team processes take longer in virtual settings, so do team dynamics such as establishing trust and communicating. Thus, establish reasonable time frames.
- 4) Deliverables should be phased. Initial deliverables help teams refine their processes and dynamics. Students become better team players when they learn about their learning processes as a team.

# Lessons Learned

- 5) Reduce the complexity of working in virtuality. Integrate guides, instructions, and answers to frequently asked questions.
- 6) Dissuade social loafing by empowering teams (Team charter).
- 7) Communicate frequently.
- 8) Use templates to facilitate grading.
- 9) Give meaningful feedback.
- 10) Integrate feedback.



Let's Talk!

**What can you take from this session to get students to work in virtual teams?**

# References

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Thank you!

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