

# Chapter 1

## Designing Successful Virtual Team Experiences: A Lifecycle Approach for Instructors

**McKenna P. Sperry**

 <https://orcid.org/0009-0006-6686-6845>

*University of Calgary, Canada*

**Aliza J. Aldana**

 <https://orcid.org/0009-0000-1829-595X>

*University of Calgary, Canada*

**Thomas A. O'Neill**

 <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-8336-5763>

*University of Calgary, Canada*

### **ABSTRACT**

*Team-based learning is the norm in higher education courses. However, in many online courses, students are expected to navigate teamwork independently with few supports built into the course design. Ultimately, this can lead to ineffective teamwork and negative learning experiences. This chapter presents a comprehensive lifecycle approach to supporting virtual team success, focusing on the design of three essential team development phases: 1) team launch, 2) task launch, and 3) performance cycles and evaluation. Drawing on established theoretical models and empirical research, the authors provide instructors with practical strategies, activities, and tools to help students develop teamwork competencies and support*

DOI: 10.4018/979-8-3373-0375-8.ch001

*overall team effectiveness in virtual learning environments.*

## **INTRODUCTION**

Team-based learning has become an important pedagogical practice in higher education, offering numerous benefits for students. Indeed, team projects can foster the development of teamwork skills, which have become widely recognized as an essential competency in the workplace. For instance, a recent report by the National Association of Colleges and Employers found that over 80% of employers evaluating job candidates seek evidence of teamwork ability (NACE, 2024). Teamwork projects can also enhance student learning, having been positively associated with a variety of beneficial learning outcomes (e.g., Gokhale, 1995; Lohmann et al., 2019; Terenzini et al., 2013). As such, incorporating teamwork into course design can strengthen learning while also providing an opportunity for skill development that will foster success in the job market. However, despite the value of teamwork projects, many student teams are left to “figure it out” on their own and struggle to collaborate effectively. Teams are unlikely to reach their full potential unless structural support is built into the course design. When this support is not provided, students and instructors alike may have negative experiences, perpetuating teamwork as a “dreaded” aspect of coursework. Teamwork challenges may be further exacerbated in online courses, as virtual collaboration can be more difficult to navigate and troubleshoot (e.g., Gilson et al., 2015; Hertel et al., 2005). However, with a thoughtful approach to integrating teamwork into course design, many challenges can be reduced or mitigated.

As such, the purpose of this chapter is to provide a guide for instructors seeking to effectively embed teamwork into online courses. We take a team lifecycle approach and discuss the phases teams progress through, from their initial formation to the completion of their final project. In doing so, we describe the key challenges that teams must navigate throughout their lifecycle, and recommend strategies, practices, and resources for instructors to scaffold teamwork at each phase. We emphasize that teamwork aspects of course design should be ongoing, and urge instructors to avoid what might be an all-too-familiar picture: forming the teams, throwing in a brief “team-building” activity, and sending them off to complete their project, intervening only if problems arise.

Instead of a haphazard approach, imagine the following scenario, in which teamwork development, monitoring, and feedback are embedded into the design of the course from start to finish:

34 more pages are available in the full version of this document, which may be purchased using the "Add to Cart" button on the publisher's webpage: [www.igi-global.com/chapter/designing-successful-virtual-team-experiences/385955](http://www.igi-global.com/chapter/designing-successful-virtual-team-experiences/385955)

## Related Content

---

### Entrepreneurship Reimagined: A Review of Avatar Led Branding and Customer Experience in the Metaverse

Sneha Kapoor, Ashwarya Kapoor and Rajiv Sindwani (2026). *Navigating Entrepreneurial Opportunities in the Metaverse* (pp. 111-146).

[www.irma-international.org/chapter/entrepreneurship-reimagined/395518](http://www.irma-international.org/chapter/entrepreneurship-reimagined/395518)

### Sustainable Business Models Implementation in Industry: Strategies and Challenges – A Systematic Review

Suhaila Abdalla Merghani (2021). *Remote Work and Sustainable Changes for the Future of Global Business* (pp. 237-261).

[www.irma-international.org/chapter/sustainable-business-models-implementation-in-industry/281453](http://www.irma-international.org/chapter/sustainable-business-models-implementation-in-industry/281453)

### Big Data HE Communities: Could Twitter Support UK Universities Amid the COVID-19 Transition?

Farag Edghiem and Moheeb Abualqumboz (2021). *Remote Work and Sustainable Changes for the Future of Global Business* (pp. 33-44).

[www.irma-international.org/chapter/big-data-he-communities/281442](http://www.irma-international.org/chapter/big-data-he-communities/281442)

### Enterprise Information Security Awareness and Behavior as an Element of Security Culture During Remote Work

Nur Sena Tanriverdi and Bilgin Metin (2021). *Remote Work and Sustainable Changes for the Future of Global Business* (pp. 119-138).

[www.irma-international.org/chapter/enterprise-information-security-awareness-and-behavior-as-an-element-of-security-culture-during-remote-work/281447](http://www.irma-international.org/chapter/enterprise-information-security-awareness-and-behavior-as-an-element-of-security-culture-during-remote-work/281447)

### Navigating Challenges and Mitigating Stereotypes in Digital, Interdisciplinary, and International Student Teams: "It's Like Being Stuck in the Mud"

Anett Hermann (2026). *Sustaining Creative Collaboration in Student Virtual Teams in Higher Education: Resources, Norms and Protocols, and Continual Assessment and Learning* (pp. 245-280).

[www.irma-international.org/chapter/navigating-challenges-and-mitigating-stereotypes-in-digital-interdisciplinary-and-international-student-teams/386490](http://www.irma-international.org/chapter/navigating-challenges-and-mitigating-stereotypes-in-digital-interdisciplinary-and-international-student-teams/386490)