

**Using CATME Peer Reviews for Student Organization Officer Teams**

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## Introduction

Team skills are highly sought after by recruiters, colleges, and organizations (Loughry et al., 2013). These skills that are developed in a group context are often called “soft skills” and are identified to be more difficult to train and measure than technical skills, yet these same skills are at the top of the list of what recruiters desire when hiring college graduates (American Management Association, 2010; Loughry et al., 2013). However, developing these skills requires tools to facilitate teamwork within college classes, student organizations, and the workplace, enabling supervisors to effectively gather, analyze, and share data on their students' and teams' progress (Loughry et al., 2013). Using peer evaluations to hold students accountable for their team contributions is one technique that has received empirical support (Loughry et al., 2013). Peer evaluations foster individual accountability and incentivize the display of strong interpersonal skills, self-awareness, and dedicated effort toward achieving team goals (Bacon, 2005; Hernandez, 2002; Mayo et al., 2012; Mills & Cottell, 1998).

The CATME system consists of web-based tools for peer and self-assessment designed to support team development through empirical activities (Andrew et al., 2012; Black et al., 2021; Chhabria et al., 2019; Ohland et al., 2012). It allows instructors to securely collect data from students in a web-based format and either access the data directly or import it into an Excel spreadsheet (Earnest, 2022). Using CATME for peer evaluations promotes accountability among employers, educators, and peers regarding their contributions to the team (Loughry et al., 2013). The CATME peer evaluation tool asks students to rate their teammates and themselves across five behavioral dimensions reflecting individual performance within team assignments (Morgan & Stewart, 2017). Additionally, the CATME self-rating tool helps identify both high- and low-performing students and those who may be struggling, allowing for early interventions to prevent more significant issues in the future. This system also clarifies the goals, tasks, timelines, roles, and accountabilities essential for effective teamwork (Earnest, 2022; Hrivnak, 2013).

## How it works

The peer review process is initiated by the faculty advisors of the officer teams, who are responsible for obtaining a license to create surveys for their officers. To obtain this license, the advisor must create an instructor account by clicking on the "Request Instructor Account" link, filling in the required information, and submitting the request. Once the instructor account is approved, CATME will email the advisor with instructions on how to create a password.

After purchasing the license, the advisors will allocate time to customize the survey. This customization process involves selecting the survey type, providing basic information, determining categories and activity content (e.g., contributions to work, interactions with teammates, keeping the team on track, peer-to-peer comments, etc.), adding the participating officer team, and including any extras if necessary (e.g., follow-up questions, team conflict, team satisfaction, team interdependence, team cohesiveness, peer influences, and psychological safety). Advisors can also add a co-advisor if needed and should review the license before completing the process.

Once the survey is finalized, each officer will be given time in their next officer meeting to complete the CATME survey. After all officers have completed the survey, the advisor must return to CATME to review the results. These results will allow the advisor to view the average scores for each of the five dimensions of teamwork. After reviewing the scores, the advisor will release the results via CATME to the officers.

Once the results have been released, the officers will be able to view their scores, and

the qualitative feedback provided by their peers. They can use this time for self-reflection before meeting with the advisor(s). This discussion will cover the next action plan for the officers, areas needing improvement, and encouragement to continue specific positive attributes and actions. After all officers have met with the advisor(s) individually, they will come together as a team to discuss their results. During this collective discussion, team members will evaluate their organization, communication, and planning as they move forward.

#### **Results to date**

The original team of officers who implemented these peer review tools consisted of five members, all of whom were studying agriculture and held a leadership position in a student organization. This student organization utilized the survey to evaluate their own and fellow officers' performance to collect valuable feedback from their peers. After viewing the results, officers talked with their advisor(s) about what they needed to improve in themselves to better the team. With the help of peer evaluation, officers are now cognitively aware of what they need to improve on to better themselves and their team. This method not only encouraged transparent and candid communication among the officers but also led to significant enhancements in both the organization and the officer team as a whole, resulting in improved group cohesiveness.

#### **Future plans/Advice to others:**

The student organization that funded this project is dedicated to integrating peer review tools into future officer teams. Our plans include collaborating with another organization's officer team to explore the potential adoption of CATME peer evaluation in their processes. To facilitate this process, we recommend that advisors establish clear deadlines for officers to meet with them, ensuring that discussions about organizational improvement are prioritized and not delayed by scheduling conflicts. Additionally, when meeting collectively with the officer team, we encourage fostering open communication while steering clear of direct criticism aimed at specific members. This approach will help maintain a positive atmosphere and minimize any potential hurt feelings or drama within the organization.

#### **Costs/resources needed**

The student organization generously provided funding for this project, with the only direct cost being the purchase of a CATME license for \$272.00, which allows us to create and administer the survey effectively. This investment not only benefits our current organization but also enables the advisors to utilize CATME across various contexts, including other organizations they oversee and in classes where they assign group projects. As a result, the versatility of the CATME tool enhances collaboration and feedback mechanisms in multiple settings, promoting a culture of continuous improvement. This multi-faceted use of CATME not only maximizes the value of our investment but also fosters a broader application of peer evaluation principles, ultimately enriching the learning and development experiences for all involved.

The most significant investment for this project was the time commitment from both the faculty advisor(s) and the organizations officers. The faculty advisor(s) dedicated three hours to obtain the license, import the students, developing the survey, and meeting with the officers both individually and as a group. Simultaneously, the officer team allocated their meeting time to complete the survey and spent additional personal time discussing their results with the advisor(s). This collaborative effort underscores the commitment of both the advisor(s) and the officers to enhance the effectiveness of the organization through constructive feedback.

### References

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