

## Surviving Group Work

Ugh! Your professor has assigned, yet another group project. If you are like me, you might feel scared, sad or apprehensive. You might have the following questions:

- That's a lot of work --- How are we going to get the work done?
- What if I have to work with difficult people?
- What if we can't agree?
- What if I end of doing all of the work?
- What if they don't accept my ideas?
- What if I have to work with HIM?

Join the club – all of us feel or have felt these sentiments at one time or another. In general, most of us prefer to work by ourselves. We don't need to talk to anyone about what we want to do. We don't have to share the decision-making. We can do everything on our own time. We have control over when and how we get things done!

### *So, why assign THE group project?*

During the last twenty years, many academic programs have adopted the “project” based learning approach. Group projects enable members to take on more ambitious assignments and explore a specific topic from multiple perspectives. Group members can also share valuable resources such as textbooks, computers and lab equipment.

Group projects enable you to practice valuable life skills. As you get older, working alone will become the exception, not the rule. The goals will get bigger and the problems will become more difficult to solve. Sadly you will not be able to “do everything by yourself”! Time and time again, you will find that your success depends not just on innate smarts or technical knowledge but also on having some sort of “team” or “leadership” skills that involve cooperation, coordination and planning. Typical situations requiring these skills include your job, multi-disciplinary teams, and community or volunteer work.

Group projects will help prepare you for future employment. Employers recognize that how people work with one another and participate on a team is a good predictor of future job success. Frequently, employers will ask the following questions during a job interview:

- What kind of experience have you had working on or leading a team?
- Describe a significant contribution you have made while participating in a group or on a team.

- How would you describe your performance as a team player? What are your strengths and weaknesses? If we were to survey your teammates about your team performance, what would they say about you?
- Have you every worked on a difficult group project? What happened? How did you and the group manage the situation? What did you learn about your group and yourself?

### **The Academic Group Project is Different**

Let's be honest. Working in an academic project is HARD. In many ways, it is very different from playing on a sports team or working at a job. There is no manager or coach to provide direction or resolve differences. The task may be ambitious and has multiple parts. Leadership and group roles are ill defined and ambiguous. There is no official hierarchy. To produce a high quality product, the group needs to accommodate diverse working styles, unique personalities, competing priorities and different perceptions about what constitutes "success" and "meaningful contribution."

This is a grim prognosis. How does one survive the experience without having a nervous breakdown? What are some strategies for success?

Luckily, many people are interested in this topic. If you "Google" the topic group work, you will find a myriad of resources, especially from universities in Great Britain. This handout is designed to synthesize some of this work, and hopefully, provide you with some helpful pointers for managing the work with less stress and drama.

### **Working in a group requires a new "mindset"**

Working in a group is different. This is not an exercise where the participant controls every aspect of the project. Helpful working assumptions include:

- *This is a GROUP project -- No one individual should own the final outcome or control all aspects of the project.* Most people want to feel they made a meaningful contribution to the final outcome. Group members will need to "give and take," as well as compromise throughout the journey. While some steps are "owned" by individuals, most, if not all decisions need to be discussed and agreed upon by "the group."
- *Successful group projects are never a "last minute" opportunity. Do not underestimate the amount of required "planning" and decision making time.* By design, group assignments challenge members to accomplish a lot during a relatively short period of time. To minimize stress and frustration at the last minute, it is important to begin having conversations and start working together as soon as possible. Group members should plan to meet at least 3-7 times outside of class during the course of a large project.

- *One of the biggest challenges associated with group work is the need to “conform” to your group’s timelines, decisions and direction.* In group work, individual members need to learn to “march to the beat” of their group. Inevitably this means losing some personal control or “deferring” to the group direction. Group members may also need to compromise his/her personal priorities or schedule.
- *Each group member will bring unique talents, time constraints, and priorities.* Some group members may not have the capacity or desire to invest the same amount of time and energy as other members of the group. Groups need to acknowledge these situations and agree on what is “fair” and how they would like to proceed.
- *Language and communication style within a group is different in group work.* How group members interact and communicate with one another can be the difference between harmony and intense discord. Throughout the project, each member needs to monitor how his or her tone, messages, and actions support fellow team members to get the work done.
- *Groups have a life of their own.* Research during the last sixty years has shown that groups experience predictable stages on their path to effective performance. As your group comes together and begins to work (or struggle) together, it is helpful to acknowledge the “maturity” of your group and to recognize that each stage may require different levels of leadership and cooperation to keep the ball rolling. In short, groups need time and practice to become effective.

The most familiar model by Tuckman and Jensen identifies five distinct development stages as follows: “Forming, Storming, Norming, Performance, & Adjourning.”<sup>1</sup> Not all groups will go through every stage, and some groups may never mature into a “Performing” group.

**Stage I - Forming** - The first stage, when the group meets and starts to work together for the first time. During this time, group members get to know one another, establish rules and define goals. Members tend to be polite and may feel cautious, confused or uncertain.

**Stage 2 - Storming** – Disagreement and tension characterize the second stage of a group’s development. This is when the group may become confused about goals, roles, rules or priorities. During this time, group members will try to establish their position within the team. This can result in conflict, hostility, clique formation and leadership struggles. Some team members may question or resent relationships within the group or the perceived control of others.

To move out of this uncomfortable phase, the group needs to focus on how to organize itself to achieve the group objective. They may also need to revisit the ground rules and project plan to ensure that everyone is clear about what is required.

**Stage 3 - Norming** - During the third stage things are becoming more focused and positive. People understand the goals and their roles in achieving them. Consensus, accepted leadership, trust, agreed on standards, clear roles, and real cooperation, characterize this phase. The team has identified its strengths and weaknesses, and where in the past disagreements may have led

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<sup>1</sup> Blanchard, Ken; “Leading High Performing Teams” <http://www.kenblanchard.com/img/pub/Ken-Blanchard-Ignite-Newsletter-Reprint-0703.pdf>

to conflict, now they are consciously making sure that grievances, complaints and suggestions are listened to - conflict is beginning to be managed. Rules and standards of behavior have been agreed so that team members relate openly with each other and are able to agree on what is expected and how failure to meet expectations will be managed. Members are better able to deal with conflict, and there is a feeling of cohesion or team spirit.

**Stage 4 - Performing** -- The fourth stage is the mature, effective, performing team. This stage is characterized by successful performance, helpfulness, interdependence, and collaboration. Not every team will reach this stage but may get stuck in the norming stage where although there is a feeling of agreement, there is not yet the drive towards effective problem solving that characterizes an effective team. Team members have clear task roles, but are willing to expand their roles for the good of the team.

**Stage 5 - ADJOURNING** - The final stage is that of 'disbanding' and comes about either because the task is complete or because members have left the team. Members may need to reflect, mourn what has passed or celebrate their time together.

## Sample Roadmap for Planning And Executing the Work

The heart of every group effort is the plan. This document contains a sample plan that includes many of the key steps, project milestones and helpful questions and notes to help guide your planning.

| Activities                    | Notes  |
|-------------------------------|--|
|                               | <p><b>Lay the Foundation for Success</b> -- This stage involves forming the group and requires 1-2 meetings. During this stage, group members introduce themselves, establish ground rules and begin to define what is the task at hand. This is an excellent time to establish expectations about personal commitment levels and how much time each member is willing to dedicate to the project.</p> <p><i>Refrain from skipping the process steps and digging into the work. This is perfectly natural, but often leads to one or more members feeling excluded or left out. From personal experience, you will PAY DEARLY if you do not have mechanisms to include all group members, manage interpersonal differences or resolve conflict. Remember to “go slow to go fast.” This can be hard when people just want to start doing the work.</i></p> <p>During this stage, spend some time getting to know one another. Try to establish relationships beyond project tasks. Get a feel for the strengths and weaknesses of each group member and how he or she likes to operate in a group. This will help create useful connections and will pay off when things get more challenging during the project.</p> |
| Make introductions            | <p>Spend some time getting to know each other personally and professionally. Potential questions might include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Why are you taking this class?</li> <li>• What do you hope to learn during this class?</li> <li>• Describe one of your personal strengths</li> <li>• Describe one skill you would like to improve or enhance</li> </ul>   |
| Review the Project Assignment | <p>Set the context for why you are working together. Discuss what is expected of you. Review the project assignment</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What is the project about?</li> <li>• What are we expected to do?</li> <li>• How will we be graded and what are the assessment criteria?</li> <li>• Do we have any ideas/perspectives about what is a “good” project (i.e. grading rubric)</li> </ul>   |
| Schedule regular meetings     | <p>Groups require “face-time” to plan, discuss, review the results, and make progress. Early on, plan for at least 3-7 meetings outside of class. If possible schedule the meetings at the beginning of the project. Word to the wise – It is much easier to release scheduled meeting time, instead of trying to find time to meet during the project. Coordinating calendars across four or five members can be especially challenging, especially at the end of the quarter or semester</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How often do we want to meet?</li> <li>• Where do we want to meet?</li> <li>• Will we have time in class to work on the project?</li> </ul>  |

| Activities  | Notes   |
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| Agree on ground rules   | <p>This is one of the most important steps in getting your group off to a good start. 15 – 30 minutes on this step can save hours and days of hand-wringing and frustration. Ground rules generally fall into the following categories:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Communication and attitudes: How the group decides to behave towards one another. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Direct and honest communication</li> <li>○ Active, respectful listening</li> <li>○ Try on new ideas and perspectives</li> <li>○ Don't let issues fester – deal with them when they arise</li> <li>○ How to notify one another when something comes up</li> <li>○ Maintaining a certain degree of confidentiality with people outside of the group (e.g. project direction, content, or conflict in the group)</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Working practices: How the group will organize itself and work together <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Be on time</li> <li>○ We all need to agree (consensus)</li> <li>○ When consensus fails, we will _____ (multi-vote, pros/cons, etc)</li> <li>○ Respond to e-mails from groups within 12/24/48 hours</li> <li>○ How work will be allocated</li> <li>○ How meetings will be run</li> <li>○ Follow through on the commitments we make</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Providing feedback/coaching: How the group will monitor performance and raise issues <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Hold regular check-ins about how the work, group and individuals are doing</li> <li>○ Ask for permission to raise sensitive issues</li> <li>○ Take a “good faith position” - - Begin with the assumption that everyone wants what is best for the group</li> <li>○ Be objective. Focus on the issues, not the personalities</li> <li>○ Communicate issues/concerns in a respectful manner</li> </ul> </li> </ul> |
| Establish some project goals and assess each member's level of commitment | <p>Let's face it. Students are busy people and have competing priorities. They may also have varying levels of desire or ability to dedicate as much time and energy as other members. To the extent possible, try to assess and discuss:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ What is an acceptable outcome for the project – Is it an “A” or is passing “good enough”?</li> <li>○ What quality of work do we want to deliver?</li> </ul> <p>How will the group manage different levels of personal commitment and ability to contribute?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Who will have control and have “decision rights”?</li> <li>○ In general, those who work the hardest believe they have the most right to drive project direction and</li> </ul>  |

| Activities  | Notes  |
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|   | <p>outcomes.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ If members cannot divide the work equally due to skill level, priorities or available time, consider re-framing what “fair” means. Possible options may include <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Dividing the work based on members’ individual goals and desired performance level. In other words, those individuals who want an A will expend a higher level of effort.</li> <li>▪ Giving up some decision rights or control in return for being less involved or expending less effort.</li> </ul> </li> </ul>   |
| Define the “process” roles on the project                   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What “role” will each member play and what “contribution” will they/can they make?</li> <li>• Determine who will coordinate/lead the group – Group efforts require someone to “herd” and/or “lead” the group. This is a vital and necessary role. However, it does not need to be the same person throughout the project. Provided members of the group are willing to share leadership and decision making roles, it is possible to rotate the “chair/leader” role. This role will: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Manage schedules</li> <li>○ Prepare meeting agendas</li> <li>○ Prepare and send out any follow up communications</li> <li>○ Facilitate group meetings, if necessary</li> <li>○ Contact people outside of your group (like the professor)</li> <li>○ Trouble shoot challenges</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Identify who will serve as the “facilitator” at each meeting – To ensure smooth meetings, it helps to have someone help keep the discussion focused and on track. To help spread the work, group members should share this role. This person will <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Review the purpose, objectives and agenda</li> <li>○ Keep the discussion on track</li> <li>○ Be aware of time</li> <li>○ Seek input from all group members</li> <li>○ Summarize key points, conclusions, and group decisions</li> <li>○ Revise the agenda as needed</li> <li>○ Propose a process when decisions need to be made</li> <li>○ Make sure there is an action planning process at the end of the meeting</li> <li>○ Ask for a brief group evaluation:</li> </ul> </li> </ul> |
| Develop common systems for communicating and doing the work | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Agree on how you will communicate during the project</li> <li>• Set up a contact sheet with names, phone numbers, and e-mail addresses</li> <li>• Create an e-mail distribution list</li> <li>• Agree on which software programs you want to use</li> </ul>   |

| Activities | Notes   |
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|            | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Create a common repository for all working papers (i.e. Google docs, Dropbox, etc)</li><li>• If necessary, set up a common calendar that everyone can access</li><li>• Identify where and how the group will meet</li></ul> |



| Activities  | Notes   |
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| <b>Creating the Plan</b>                                  | This is the stage where the group needs to plan exactly what how and when things need to be done, who should do what. At the end of this stage, the team needs to have an action or project plan that is agreed upon by all members of the group.   |
| Scope the project deliverables and timelines              | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What are we expected to do? (i.e. research a topic, create a web page design, deliver a presentation)</li> <li>• What problem are we trying to solve? What questions are we trying to answer?</li> <li>• When is the project due and what is expected? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Presentation</li> <li>○ Written Paper</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Are there intermediate deliverables that need to be turned in? When?</li> </ul>   |
| Try to anticipate the teacher or professor's expectations | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What does the professor expect? What defines "success" according to the instructor? Is there a grading rubric or guidance from the teacher or instructor regarding what is expected? If this is available, make sure to refer to this document often. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Purpose of the assignment</li> <li>○ Specific activities (i.e. research, activities, etc)</li> <li>○ Overall quality of the finished product</li> <li>○ Types of questions that need to be answered</li> <li>○ For analytical or scientific projects – level of performance or quality of the analytical or scientific results</li> </ul> </li> <li>• How is the project scoped? What can the group use/not use to fulfill the project assignments? To save time, confirm: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Desired approach/process for meeting the assignment</li> <li>○ Any constraints (e.g. resources, research materials or time)</li> <li>○ Whether or not group members can utilize knowledge or skills they have learned in other classes</li> </ul> </li> </ul> |
| Define the work in detail (Tasks, Sequence & Timing)      | <p><i>Tasks/Work</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What steps do we need to complete this project? (i.e.) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Problem definition</li> <li>○ Research</li> <li>○ Develop measures/metrics</li> <li>○ Run a "pilot"/Develop a "prototype"</li> <li>○ Analyze the results – how much? What type?</li> <li>○ Interviews</li> <li>○ Experiments</li> <li>○ Data Collection</li> <li>○ Develop conclusions/takeaways</li> </ul> </li> </ul>   |

| Activities                                   | Notes  |
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|  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Identify potential next steps</li> <li>○ Storyboard the presentation</li> <li>○ Write rough drafts</li> <li>○ Meetings with clients/external resources</li> <li>○ Other activities defined by the teacher</li> </ul> <p><i>Group vs. Off-line work</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● What steps can be done individually vs. need to be completed by the group?</li> <li>● What tasks require the entire group’s participation?</li> <li>● Are there tasks that group members can work on “off line” and bring back for review and feedback?</li> </ul> <p><i>Sequence</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● What steps are dependent on other steps or need to be done sequentially?</li> <li>● What steps can be “fast tracked”?</li> <li>● What steps can be done in parallel with other parts of the work?</li> <li>● Are there steps that have long lead times and need to be started right away</li> </ul> <p><i>Timing</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● How long will each step take?</li> <li>● Are there “hard”/”can’t miss deadlines or milestones? What are they and when?</li> <li>● Are our timelines realistic? Have we provided enough time to do each step</li> </ul> |
| Define the working roles and assign the work | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Determine what role each member will play, given their strengths, weaknesses, priorities and available time</li> <li>● Because “you never know, until you KNOW,” what mechanism is in place to evaluate and re-balance the work? This is a good time to discuss how team members can ask for assistance or offer to help out. Develop a plan for managing identified challenges or workload issues and include this in your ground rules. Potential options include <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Working in pairs</li> <li>○ Setting up more frequent check-ins to ensure members are making progress</li> <li>○ Changing or adjusting assigned roles</li> <li>○ Creating a “no surprises” expectation where group members agree to share they are having problems early in the process, as opposed to during “crunch” time</li> </ul> </li> <li>● Confirm everyone in the group is comfortable with the plan. Try to discuss potential challenges meeting agreed upon deadlines or deliverables <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Time constraints</li> </ul> </li> </ul>   |

| Activities  | Notes  |
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|   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Skills</li> <li>○ Other commitments</li> <li>○ Known weaknesses, such as language or analytical ability</li> </ul>  |
| <p>Agree on timing of status updates AND how work will be reviewed and integrated</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• To ensure that everyone is moving in the same direction, when does the group need to see a “rough draft” or work in progress for each task? This check in should occur at least 1-3 days before the final product is due so that group members can make adjustments or further refine results.</li> <li>• If there is not time to meet, how we want to “check in”/provide feedback to ensure we are making progress on the work? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Group meetings</li> <li>○ E-mail</li> <li>○ Class time</li> </ul> </li> </ul> |
| <p>Write up plan and distribute</p>   | <p>Develop a written document that outlines tasks, deliverables, check-in points, responsibilities, and dates. This plan should be stored on line and available to all team members.</p>   |

| Activities   | Notes   |
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|  | <p><b>Execution/Implementation</b> – This is the phase where the project starts to gain momentum. Members will begin acting against the agreed upon plan and the group will feeling like it is making progress towards meeting its goals. Over time, the group will develop a “shared understanding” as it collects, discusses and draws conclusions from the planned activities.</p> <p>To ensure that members are engaged and project deadlines are met, the group should meet on a regular basis. During these meetings, project members should be prepared to provide updates, stimulate discussions about a specific topic, share results from an analyses or their research, or seek feedback on a document or presentation.</p> <p>Depending on where the group is in the process, meeting agendas can include the following activities:</p> |
| Progress updates   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Members provide individual progress update regarding where they are in the project <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ How are they doing in comparison to the plan? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ What kind of progress is they making towards delivering the expected deliverable</li> <li>▪ Will they be able to meet the schedule?</li> </ul> </li> <li>○ Are there any problems to date? Are they running into any roadblocks?</li> </ul> </li> <li>• The group evaluates how it is doing against the plan from both a schedule and a quality of work perspective</li> <li>• The group should discuss if it needs to make any course corrections, change its approach, or rebalance the work.</li> </ul>  |
| Engage in group “thinking” and “planning” activities where everyone needs to be involved | <p>Activities that work in the group context</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Brainstorming</li> <li>○ Reviewing drafts or documents</li> <li>○ Debating an issue</li> <li>○ Planning next steps</li> <li>○ Process Mapping</li> <li>○ Structured Problem Solving or developing conceptual maps</li> <li>○ Sharing perspectives and determining the best course of action</li> </ul> <p>Activities that are tough for a group to do together:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Writing/preparing a document</li> <li>○ Doing an analysis or building a spreadsheet that requires a lot of computation</li> <li>○ Doing research/collecting information</li> </ul>   |

| Activities                | Notes   |
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| Brainstorming             | <p>One of the most essential activities in group work is Brainstorming. It builds engagement among group members and ensures broader exploration of related ideas and perspectives. To get the most out of your brainstorming sessions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Focus on generating the maximum number of ideas. Do not analyze or assess the overall quality of the idea during the session.</li> <li>• Appoint someone to facilitate the conversation. This facilitator needs to actively: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Help the group define the scope of the brainstorming session – <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ What question or issue is the group trying to explore.</li> <li>▪ What is the context for asking this question or why are we asking this question?</li> <li>▪ What details does the group need to know to help “target” their ideas</li> </ul> </li> <li>○ Create an environment where everyone’s ideas are accepted <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Manage the conversation</li> <li>▪ Minimize negative opinions or analysis</li> <li>▪ Manage “zingers” or comments that make people feel uncomfortable with sharing</li> </ul> </li> <li>○ Redirects the conversation when the group gets off track</li> <li>○ Manages the groups time</li> </ul> </li> <li>• At the end of the conversation, the group needs to decide what to utilize the information they have generated and how it will be documented and communicated back to the team.</li> </ul> |
| Share any interim results | <p>Members need to be prepared to share any information or results they have worked on between meetings. To help build understanding and consensus, it is often useful to share the information using the following visual tools:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ List of written bullet points</li> <li>○ Process Charts</li> <li>○ Prototypes</li> <li>○ Drafts for Discussion</li> <li>○ Tables organizing collected data/information</li> <li>○ Simple analyses of the data (charts, graphs, tables)</li> </ul> <p>As new data or information is shared, the group should ask itself:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What does this new information mean?</li> </ul>   |

| Activities                               | Notes  |
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|  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How does this information fit into the goals and overall direction of the project?</li> <li>• What are our takeaways and conclusions?</li> <li>• Do we need to make any course adjustments?</li> </ul>  |
| Evaluate options and make decisions      | <p>At times, the group will need to evaluate options and make a decision. What is the rationale? Before diving into the detail, discuss available “problem solving” approaches or strategies and consider possible “decision criteria” for sifting through the range of options.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What problem are we trying to solve?</li> <li>• Have we considered all of the available options?</li> <li>• What are our decision criteria? (e.g. timing, available resources, client needs, teacher requirements, etc)</li> <li>• What is the rationale for choosing one option over another?</li> </ul> <p>As you can imagine, coming to consensus is not always the most expedient option. Depending on the complexity of the issue, the group will need to determine how it makes decisions.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ <i>Consensus</i> – Everyone is committed to the decision and feels part of it</li> <li>○ <i>Compromise</i> – Gets the group to a decision, but does not always resolve the underlying issues</li> <li>○ <i>Leader/chair decides</i> – Very simple, but can lead to team resentment – especially if the chair messes up</li> <li>○ <i>Vote</i> – usually considered fair and efficient</li> <li>○ <i>Pros/Cons table</i> – Efficient and can help clarify a difficult and complicated decision</li> </ul> |
| Provide feedback on any work in progress | <p>This activity is often the most contentious and sensitive part of any project. Throughout the project, group members will need to complete work “off-line” and bring the results back to the group for feedback and review. Providing feedback can lead to a higher quality, more cohesive end product. Providing feedback can also hurt feelings or cause members to “opt out” from the group effort if they do not feel respected.</p> <p>If you are giving feedback to one of your group members:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Set the stage for providing constructive review or comments. In general, the recipient is more likely to receive the feedback if: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ The recipient asks for commentary or review</li> <li>○ The issue comes up as part of the work plan or meeting agenda</li> <li>○ When you ask if you can provide some feedback and the recipient GIVES permission</li> </ul> </li> <li>• As part of the feedback and review process, provide the recipient with an opportunity to set the context about his or her work and what he or she is trying to accomplish. Key questions:</li> </ul>   |

| Activities | Notes   |
|------------|---|
|            | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ What are you trying to accomplish</li> <li>○ How does your specific piece fit into the overall goals of the group</li> <li>○ What approach did you choose to try and achieve this goal</li> <li>○ What worked/what didn't</li> <li>○ What do you see as the next steps</li> </ul> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Take your time thinking about the work and formulating your comments. When you have a chance to comment, focus on the issues and what the group is trying to accomplish NOT the individual. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ What are positive things about this particular piece of work?</li> <li>○ How does this work "fit" with the goals and objectives of the group project and plan?</li> </ul> </li> <li>● If the work requires further refinement or work: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ State your concerns clearly and objectively</li> <li>○ Focus on what actions need to be taken to improve the work.</li> <li>○ Avoid comments that blame the recipient or place them on the defensive. Phrases like "This work stinks" or "Why didn't you. . ." or "How come you don't. . ." can turn people off and make it hard for them to hear any constructive comments</li> </ul> </li> <li>● Listen to the recipient's response to your feedback. Try to walk in the recipient's shoes and understand why they made the specific choices.</li> </ul> <p>Most of us are uncomfortable receiving feedback. It requires us to take some personal risk and allow people to comment on both our strengths and our weaknesses. If you are receiving the feedback:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Mentally reassure yourself that the person (s) giving you the feedback is trying to help you and is interested in helping the group meet its goals and objectives</li> <li>● Try to objectively "hear" the feedback. Focus on the content of the statement.</li> <li>● Honestly evaluate the statement. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Does the statement address a real issue or concern?</li> <li>○ Is it a big or small issue?</li> <li>○ Can you address their comments?</li> <li>○ Will it require more work outside of the group or a different approach?</li> </ul> </li> <li>● If you believe the concern is inaccurate or mistaken, engage in a discussion about the person's perceptions</li> </ul> |

| Activities   | Notes   |
|--|---|
|  | <p>and concerns. Try to understand his or her conclusions and determine if you need to make some changes</p> <p>After all of the comments have been collected, the group needs to develop a plan for moving forward:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What are the next steps?</li> <li>• Do other people need to be involved?</li> <li>• When will the changes be made?</li> <li>• When will the group have a chance to look at the work again and comment? Depending on the amount of work required, this may require additional review within the group OR the document/piece of work can be circulated via e-mail for off line comment.</li> </ul>  |
| <p>Begin storyboarding or outlining the final document</p> | <p><i>Word to the wise -- Never underestimate how much focused time and energy necessary to create the final product. Slapping together the group members' contributions at the last minute is a highly risky strategy. In the best of worlds, the team will start "story-boarding" or developing the outline several weeks prior to the end of the project.</i></p> <p>As more information and conclusions emerge during the execution/implementation phase of your project, the group can start asking and documenting answers to the following questions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What do we know about the problem we are working on?</li> <li>• What "story" is emerging? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ What are our takeaways and conclusions?</li> <li>○ How did we get there?</li> <li>○ If we have to walk our audience through our journey, what is the beginning, middle, and end of the story?</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Who is the final audience and what do they want to know about this area?</li> <li>• If applicable, what actions should the reader take? What conclusions should they draw?</li> </ul> |



| Activities   | Notes  |
|--|--|
|  | <p><b>Synthesis/Integration</b> – This is often the most difficult phase of the project and should be managed as a “mini-project” within the larger project. For most assignments, groups will need to produce an oral presentation or a written report that summarize the activities of the group or share the group’s analysis, conclusions and implications in response to a specific question.</p> <p>During this phase, members of the group will need to agree on what conclusions, analyses, and content need to be incorporated into the final product. This information needs to be presented in a logical, cohesive and consistent manner that flows between sections and from slide to slide.</p> |
| Confirm the assignment                                       | <p>Review the assignment and the grading requirements. Ensure that the group will be able to fulfill all of the professor’s requirements</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Key questions</li> <li>• Specific deliverables <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Presentation</li> <li>○ Written report</li> <li>○ Specific analytical or research approaches</li> <li>○ Documented sources</li> </ul> </li> </ul>  |
| Scope the final product and define what needs to be included | <p>Types of end products:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• PowerPoint presentation</li> <li>• Video</li> <li>• Skit</li> <li>• Written report</li> <li>• Panel discussion</li> <li>• Handouts</li> </ul> <p>Types of subsections/questions that need to be answered for your audience</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Purpose</li> <li>• Approach</li> <li>• Key research questions</li> <li>• Group activities/planning process</li> <li>• Analyses</li> <li>• Conclusions/Takeaways</li> <li>• Next steps</li> </ul>  |
| Begin developing storyline                                   | <p>Hopefully, the group has been documenting and collating its research, analyses and conclusions in a single place throughout the project. Determine how your activities inform each of these sections. Begin bringing together and collating the information. Revisit the following questions:</p>   |

| Activities  | Notes   |
|---|---|
|   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What do we know about the problem we are researching?</li> <li>• What is the story? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ What are the takeaways and conclusions?</li> <li>○ How did we get there?</li> <li>○ If we have to “walk” our audience through our journey, what are the beginning, middle, and end of the story?</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Who is the final audience and what do they want to know about this area?</li> <li>• If applicable, what actions should the reader take? What conclusions should they draw?</li> </ul> <p>At the end of this step, produce a story board for presentations or an outline for a written document</p>  |
| <p>Create a plan to produce the final document or product</p> | <p>Integrating the opinions and writing styles of multiple authors is challenging under the best of circumstances. To ensure a cohesive product develop a detailed plan</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Create a storyboard or outline for the final product which defines the: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Key parts of the document</li> <li>○ How information will be presented (written text, bullet points, graphically, charts)</li> <li>○ Agreed upon takeaways and conclusions</li> <li>○ The small details (PowerPoint format, writing tense, fonts, etc)</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Break the work up into “manageable chunks” of work. There are many different approaches, depending on the strengths and weaknesses of group members, including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Dividing the final product into sections</li> <li>○ Each member prepares a section of the document and then 1-2 people take responsibility for collating and integrating the work</li> <li>○ Dividing the work by each member’s strength – i.e. good writers prepare the written text, more artistic members develop visual aids or handouts</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Delegate writing responsibilities and/or production responsibilities to each member of the group. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Writing the first draft (slides or written document)</li> <li>○ Providing analysis and producing the final charts or graphs that inform the conversation</li> <li>○ Receiving feedback and revising the work to the group’s standards</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Set a date to have the first working draft and build a project timeline that allows for review, feedback and polishing the document (s). Ask yourself: Have we given ourselves enough time to synthesize our conclusions, as well as polish and practice our presentation?</li> <li>• If the end product includes a presentation or performance, plan out the big event</li> </ul> |

| Activities                        | Notes  |
|-----------------------------------|--|
|                                   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Agree on what will be presented – overheads, handouts, supporting documents and materials</li> <li>○ Develop a script that identifies what each group member will play</li> <li>○ Create the rehearsal schedule – Plan to have at least 2 or 3 rehearsals</li> <li>○ Identify and assemble other props – costumes, etc.</li> <li>○ Agree on what people will wear</li> <li>○ Remember your technology needs! Computers, Slides, Files, and Overhead projectors</li> </ul>   |
| Discuss the “worst case” scenario | <p>Producing the final presentation or report requires a lot of iteration, review and feedback. As a rule of thumb, the final project needs to include contributions from each group member. However, there may be situations, where an individual contribution does not “fit” and needs to be discarded or requires a lot of editing or re-work. In these cases, the group needs to be prepared to answer the following questions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Who has final editing rights about what gets included?</li> <li>● How will each member’s work get integrated into the final draft?</li> <li>● What is the balance between including everyone’s work in the final product and submitting a solid final product?</li> </ul> |
| Review working draft (s)          | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● See p. 12 for comments regarding feedback and review</li> </ul>   |

| Activities   | Notes  |
|--|--|
| <b>Submit the final product, reflect and celebrate –</b> |  |
| Submit your final product                                | <p>You have finally arrived at the DUE DATE. Before submitting the final project make sure you have the details right</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Double and triple check the “completeness” of the final product – Do you have all of the pages, handouts and/or slides</li> <li>• Double and triple check that the technology you plan to use works and you have submitted the right file</li> <li>• If you are giving a presentation, arrive 5-10 minutes early to prepare for the presentation and gain your composure</li> </ul> |
| Reflect on your experience                               | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How would you characterize your experience? What adjectives come to mind?</li> <li>• What worked?</li> <li>• What could have worked better?</li> <li>• What would have you done the same?</li> <li>• What would you have done differently?</li> <li>• What kind of personal would you set for your next group experience?</li> </ul>  |
| Celebrate  | To bring closure to your project, make sure to spend some time celebrating the completion of the project with your group members   |

## Practice Having Effective Group Discussions

Group discussions and working meetings are a critical part of a “group project.” Here are some strategies for ensuring effective interactions:

- *Select someone to facilitate/lead for the discussion.* Group discussions are more efficient when one person takes the “lead” and ensures the group achieves its planned objectives. This role can be shared or appointed by the group. For longer projects, it is helpful to rotate this role so that everyone shares the additional workload associated with “leading” the group)
- *Create an agenda/plan for the discussion.* Most groups have a difficult time getting work done if they do not know or understand what is supposed to happen during a discussion.
  - This agenda does not need to be complex; it can be a simple bullet list of items the group needs to discuss. A sample agenda might include:
  - Ideally, the facilitator/leader should send the agenda out in advance. If this does not happen distribute the agenda at the beginning of the meeting. In the worst-case scenario, develop the list of agenda items during the first five minutes of the meeting.

During the discussion

- *Give everyone a chance to speak*
  - Allow for everyone to make their points
  - Provide space for members of the group to respond
  - Avoid dominating the floor
- *Listen and pay attention to one another*
  - Focus on understanding what each speaker is saying
  - Communicate that you have received and understand the message
  - If necessary, take notes, in case you want to check back on what was said, ask clarifying questions or follow up on a key point
- *Acknowledge each other's contributions during the discussion*
  - Instead of “I don’t like that idea,” try “That’s an interesting perspective. What was your rationale for making that choice?”
- *Watch out for group dynamics that may negatively impact participation or decision-making.* In particular, the leader/facilitator needs to respectfully call out situations where one or more members of the group:
  - Dominates the conversation or direction of the group
  - Is withdrawn or chooses not to participate
  - Is overly critical of other group members ideas or efforts
  - Makes snarky or funny comments that disrupt people’s conversation or thinking

- Reads the paper or plays with their phone
- Is overly negative about other members' ideas or group progress

At the end of each discussion

- Document any conclusions, questions, and issues that need to be discussed at the next meeting
- Determine next steps and start developing the next meetings' agenda
  - What analysis/products need to be shared at the next meeting?
  - Do we need any additional information? If so what? Who should get it?
- Evaluate the discussion
  - Were we respectful of one another?
  - Have we considered all ideas and perspectives?
  - Did we provide all members with sufficient opportunity to express their point of view?
  - Are our comments inclusive or exclusive (i.e. "we decided . . . (but implicitly did not include you) vs. we came up with a range of options what do you think?)
  - Did we keep an open mind while our peers expressed their point of view? Sometimes, the minority opinion actually is the right idea
  - Did we accommodate each member's communication style and way of thinking about issues and problems?
  - Did the group accommodate language or cultural differences?
- Make a commitment to send out the summary of the meeting via e-mail and post to the team's shared repository of information (dropbox, evernote, etc)

## Be the best group member you can be

A key part of working in a group is learning how to make a positive contribution and earn respect among your peers. According to Marty Brounstein in the book, "Managing Teams for Dummies,"<sup>2</sup> you can be an effective group member by

- **Demonstrating reliability** - Attend as many meetings and events as possible. Volunteer to do your fair share of the work. Follow through on your share of the assignments. Become someone your group can count on.
- **Participating actively** - Come prepared to listen and speak up in discussions. Take the initiative to help out and make things happen. Volunteer for assignments. Take the attitude: What contribution can I make to help the team achieve success?
- **Communicating in a constructive manner** - Be respectful. Make eye contact. Share your thoughts and ideas clearly, directly and honestly. Make your points, but do it in a respectful, positive, and confident manner. Avoid embarrassing or humiliating your peers.
- **Actively Listening** - This is the art of listening first and speaking second so that the group can have meaningful conversations. Practice considering different ideas and points of view without debating and arguing every point. Try to absorb and understand people's comments before judging it as a "good" or "bad" idea. Work on receiving criticism without reacting defensively.
- **Sharing openly and willingly** - Take the initiative to keep everyone in the "loop." To the extent possible, minimize surprises. Share your information, knowledge and experience. Beyond discussion at organized meetings, team members need to feel comfortable talking with one another and passing along important news and information day-to-day. Good team players are active in this informal sharing. They keep other team members in the loop with information and expertise that helps get the job done and prevents surprises.
- **Working on being flexible** - Throughout your project, the group will need to deal with an uncertain or changing environment. Try to consider new ideas and positively respond to course changes without complaint. Don't hold rigidly to a point of view and argue it to death, especially when the team needs to move forward to make a decision or get something done. Be firm in your thoughts while being open to what others have to offer. Be willing to work for the group's overall success, EVEN if it's not your idea or if you have questions or concerns.
- **Cooperating and pitching in to help** - Cooperation is the act of working *with* others and acting together to accomplish a job. Figure out ways to work with other members of the group even if you have different working styles and perspectives. Respond to requests for assistance and take the initiative to offer help.
- **Showing commitment to the group** - Demonstrate that you care about your work, the team, and the group's work. Show your commitment up front. Give the group your best effort.

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<sup>2</sup> Brounstein, Marty. "Managing Teams for Dummies"

- **Working as a problem-solver** -- Deal with problems that come up in a solutions-oriented manner. Be a problem-solvers, not a problem-dweller, problem-blamer, or problem-avoider. Don't look for others to fault. Don't put off dealing with issues. Get problems out in the open for discussion and then collaborate with others to find solutions and form action plans.
- **Treating others in a respectful and supportive manner** - Treat fellow group members with courtesy and consideration — not just some of the time but consistently. Be empathetic and try and help support group members. Have a sense of humor, but don't have fun at someone else's expense. Don't play with your computer/phone, roll your eyes, or read the paper during meetings. Quite simply, deal with other group members in a professional manner.

### **Avoid these traps!**

Unfortunately, there are some behaviors that can detract from your overall group/team performance. Avoid these behaviors at all costs! In their worst cases, you may appear like you are:

**Overwhelmed (The Doe in the Headlights)** -- Paralyzed or overwhelmed by the task at hand. Take on assignments, but have difficulty completing the work because you do not have the technical know-how or the time. You do not want to let the group down, but don't know how to tell the group that things are not going well. Your behaviors range from "laying low" and pretending things are going well to offering a range of excuses about why you're not meeting expectations.

**Marching to your own drum** – You complete assigned work, but do it on your own delayed timeline. Due to personal priorities, time or focus, usually comes to meetings unprepared. You hope that other group members will bring you up to speed. You may not know it, but you are insensitive to other people's time and have a lot of excuses about why you are having trouble meeting expectations. You fail to recognize that your lack of preparedness or inability to keep up impedes the group's effort. In the worst-case scenario, the group ultimately sees you as an obstructionist (see below)

**Deadweight** – You may have made contributions somewhere along the way, but not anymore. You completes the minimal amount of work to maintain their job or status on a team. Often you are a naysayer and when work is assigned you may push to do the least or minimum amount of work. You often wonder why you have not received recognition or advancement.

**An obstructionist** – You do not agree or want to comply with the group direction. You can be controlling, narcissistic or self-serving. You often have an agenda that is different than the main objective. You find ways to impede progress through negative or hostile behavior or outright resistance. You can be labeled "High Maintenance" or "Difficult." You often exhibit passive/aggressive behavior and will go over the group's head to get your way.

- It's all about me
- Mr. Know it all -- Always has a better answer
- The saboteur -- Overtly or covertly works against the efforts of the group
- In some cases, is actually right!



**Missing in Action** -- Due to time, priorities, or group dynamics, you either opt out or fail to participate, even when you are attending the meeting. You don't follow through on group assignments. In the worst case, you expect to have the same or more decision rights over project direction and outcomes even if you have made minimal contributions. You may want to receive credit for no effort.

**A Glory Hound** – You takes public credit for the outcome. You inflate your personal role and or effort in completing the task or achieving the identified outcome. You often overlook other people's contributions and hard work.

## Find Your Role Within the Group

During the 1970's, Meredith Belbin conducted a 9 year study of successful and unsuccessful teams competing in business games at Henley Management College. As time progressed, he realized that team performance is best predicted by both the presence and balance of 9 distinct clusters of behavior. He called these clusters "Team Roles" and defined them as *a tendency to behave and interrelate with others in a particular way*.

This model called the Belbin Team Role theory enables group members or the group to identify what roles they like to play and adjust their behavior according to the demands being made by the group composition or the assignment. The model also helps predict how the group's composition can contribute or impede performance.

So what does this information mean for you? The table on the next page summarizes each role's potential contribution to the team, as well as the traits or characteristics that can be seen as a weakness or challenge.

- Review the nine roles listed on the next page.
- As you review the different roles, ask yourself which one most resembles your preferred work style.
- Are there other roles that you could also fill? Most people have a "preferred role," but have the capacity to play other roles in the model on different teams or in different situations.
- Have you experienced some of the challenges outlined in the table?
- Have you had an opportunity to try out or experience the specific actions in the "What to do..." and "What Not to Do" columns?

What does this theory mean for your team? Taking an inventory of each group's technical skills, as well as their "Team Role" can help the group pro-actively manage and plan for some of the normal "glitches" associated with planning a project.

For instance:

- **"We can't agree and move forward"** – might be the result of having too many natural "shapers" on the team. In this situation, some of the shapers may need to recognize their natural tendencies and find a way to defer to the group's direction.
- **"The work is not divided evenly"** -- A surplus of coordinators can lead to low productivity. Coordinators are natural delegators and will try to limit their own workload. This may also cause resentment on the team as more individuals take on uncompleted work
- **"We've already changed the presentation 15 times, when is enough, ENOUGH?"** - A team filled with Completer-Finishers is likely to experience high levels of anxiety as the team strives to be "perfect" to the very last detail.

One thing to note is that these roles are not "fixed." From personal experience, every member has the capacity to "stretch" and assume a different team role when challenged. If your team finds itself lacking a particular role, it may be a great opportunity for one of your team members to take some risk and try to broaden their personal horizons and skill set

**Belbin Team Roles<sup>i</sup>** (Belbin 2012 – “Belbin is a registered trademark of Belbin UK – www.belbin.com)

| Team Role             | Contribution  | Allowable Weakness or Challenge  | If you are...Do...   | If you are...don't...   |
|-----------------------|---|--|--|---|
| Shaper                | Gets things moving. Inspires and leads the group from the front. Often dynamic.   | Prone to provoke other people on the team. Can offend people's feelings                | Get things moving. Be honest and straightforward and open with others. Make sure team is achieve goals.                                      | Hold grudges, become overbearing. Lose your sense of humor when the going gets tough.   |
| Implementer           | Turns ideas into actions and organizes the work that needs to be done. They are disciplined, systematic and love structure                      | Somewhat inflexible. Slow to respond to new possibilities.                             | Organize systems. Get down to practical ideas. Try and turn ideas into action. Ensure you and others follow laid out procedures              | Be resistant to new ideas of he team. Get in the way of change or be seen as a “stick in the mud.”  |
| Completer Finisher    | Ensures that every detail is correct. Painstaking, conscientious, anxious. Searches out errors  | Inclined to worry. Reluctant to delegate   | Try to raise performance in all that you do. Promote excellence. Use your ability to help other members of the team who may not be as strong | Obsess over getting it perfect. Fight about small or trivial issues.  |
| Co-ordinator          | Organizes tasks and delegates work. Clarifies goal, promotes decision making and involves others in appropriate ways                            | Can be seen as manipulative. May not assume their “fair share” of the work.            | Bring others into the discussions. Praise and encourage others. Hold the group together  | Take credit for the effort of the team. Overplay your role or position. Neglect to do your fair share of the work.                            |
| Teamworker            | Most diplomatic and sensitive member of the team. They get everyone to cooperate and work together  | Can't make up their mind in crunch situations. Avoids confrontations.                  | Support members of the group when necessary. Help smooth differences of opinion when group is in conflict                                    | Side with the most dominant group member to please.   |
| Resource Investigator | Helps identify resources that can help, which may be outside the group. They are enthusiastic, inquisitive and explore opportunities            | Overly optimistic. May lose interest in task at hand, once project has started moving. | Go outside of the group to initiate new ideas. Negotiate with others. Use personal enthusiasm to excite others.                              | Let people down by not following through. Dominate conversations or group discussions.  |
| Plant                 | Generate ideas and solve difficult problems. Often imaginative and unorthodox   | Ignores the details or incidentals. Can be no-nonsense and blunt.                      | Come up with ideas and suggestions for solving problems and working out solutions  | Hold on to your ideas when cooperation with others would yield to better results (i.e. defer)   |
| Monitor Evaluator     | Evaluates ideas and proposals. Points out possible flaws. They are logical, discriminating and always make the right decision                   | May not be able to inspire others. Can be overly critical.                             | Provide a balanced opinion on all ideas and options. Be ready to explain what actions you prefer and why. Take your time on decisions        | Act cynical. Give a negative reaction to every new idea. Take away from the positive energy in the group.                                     |
| Specialist            | Provides technical expertise and knowledge in rare supply. Professionally dedicated, single minded and are prepared to build up their knowledge | Contributes only in their area of expertise. Can be overly technical.                  | Show your enthusiasm for a particular subject. Encourage your group members to trust your knowledge  | Discount ideas from areas outside of your area of expertise. Become overly protective about your role and technical contribution to the group |

## Troubleshooting and Conflict Management

Depending on the length, scope and span of a project, conflict can arise on a project. Some of the most common difficulties include:

- Unfair division of labor or someone is not making a “fair” contribution to the group effort.
- Conflict between different group members due to control issues, working styles or disagreements about how to move forward.
- Frustration about group progress.
- Team members not showing up at meetings or not following through with their commitments
- Feeling an individual is not engaged in the group effort and/or feeling excluded from major decisions about project content or direction
- Not feeling included or heard

When conflict does arrive, consider using the following approach:

- Try to manage the conflict as part of the group’s normal course of business. Most conflicts are relatively minor and are a natural part of the group process. However, the longer a group waits to resolve disagreements or conflict, the more difficult it will become for the group to move on and return to work. Here is a useful set of tips from Harley and Dawson’s “Success in Groupwork” website

### ***Things that may help resolve conflict:***

- Have a ‘cooling-off’ period – sometimes people need some space to calm down and see clearly.
- Write down how you feel – writing can be a release that allows us to refocus on the practical stuff.
- Set aside a definite time to talk about the issue – resolution is usually impossible without communication!
- Talk a calm voice – it will make everyone feel less stressed and it discourages shouting.
- Repeat back what someone has said and ask if you have it right – it helps them know you are listening.
- Focus on common goals – is there something you all want to achieve? How will you get there?
- Admit you are/were wrong – sometimes this is the case, and people just need to hear us say it.
- Say sorry – if not for being wrong, then at least for not resolving the conflict more effectively.
- Find a neutral party to mediate – someone from outside the group may be able to help you see things more clearly.
- Agree to disagree.– you don’t always have to

### ***Things that will make conflict worse:***

- Avoiding discussion of the issue – this can cause serious resentment.
- Discussing an important issue at an inappropriate time (for example, leaving it till right at the end of the meeting when everyone is tired and wants to leave) – you need time and space to talk!
- Raising your voice – shouting will usually make things much worse.
- Swearing – is usually perceived as aggressive and unproductive.
- Being sarcastic – can make you seem like you are not being serious, or even aggressive.

- Not giving the other person time to speak/interrupting – is likely to cause frustration.
- Not acknowledging what they have said – may cause repetition of argument.
- Being overly defensive – will suggest you are not open to change or constructive feedback.
- Over-generalising – could cause offence and will be easy to refute, leading to further argument.
- Character attacks – very personal and irrelevant, actions are the issues, not the person!

### **When the conflict involves “the work”**

- If a problem cannot be resolved at a regular meeting, schedule time where everyone from the group agrees to sit down and discuss the problem. Discuss the nature of the problem
  - Is it about the work? Are we disagreeing about next steps or how to proceed?
  - Is it a people problem (in general)?
    - Are there reliability or commitment issues?
    - Are people following through?
    - Are we having trouble respecting one another or communicating?
  - Is the problem a deal breaker? Can the group continue or do we need to resolve the problem before we proceed?
- Refocus the discussion on the task and review the group’s ground rules. Are we honoring our ground rules? Do we need to adjust them for this new situation? While we are disagreeing as a group, how do we move forward and get the work done?
- If the group is still stuck and cannot resolve its issues, consult with your instructor for guidance.

### **When the conflict involves individual team members**

- In some cases, conflict within a group involves one or more individual’s actions or behavior. Many of these issues can be resolved within the regular meetings. However, there are certain situations, such as hurt feelings or aggressive behavior where someone from the group, preferably the appointed team leader, needs to approach the individual(s) and try to understand the problem
  - State the observed problem (i.e. conflict, not making a fair contribution, not showing up)
  - Explore why there is a problem (what’s up? Is there something the group should know?)
  - Ask permission to share the problem with the group face-to-face and seek assistance from the group
- If the individual does not want to go to the group, have individual seek assistance from the instructor.

## Conclusion and Resources

This handout provides you with a narrow snapshot regarding how to make the academic group project less stressful. I would like to thank Jeff Oxendine and Ellie Schindelman from UC Berkeley's Center for Health Leadership for their insights regarding teamwork. There is also a great deal of information on the Internet from leading universities in Great Britain. For those students who are interested in delving more deeply into the subject, here are some of the resources I used to develop this material:

Belbin, M. (2008, 2009) "The Belbin Guide to Succeeding at Work" London: A&C Black Publishers. Belbin has also commercialized his work.

Belbin, M. "Team Role Summary Discussions" from [http://www.belbin.com/content/page/5002/BELBIN\(uk\)-2012-TeamRoleSummaryDescriptions.pdf](http://www.belbin.com/content/page/5002/BELBIN(uk)-2012-TeamRoleSummaryDescriptions.pdf) (August 2013)

Belbin, M. "Things 'To do' and 'Not to do' from [http://www.belbin.com/content/page/5699/BELBIN\(uk\)-2012-ThingsToDo&NotToDo.pdf](http://www.belbin.com/content/page/5699/BELBIN(uk)-2012-ThingsToDo&NotToDo.pdf) (August 2013)

Blanchard, Ken; "Leading High Performing Teams" <http://www.kenblanchard.com/img/pub/Ken-Blanchard-Ignite-Newsletter-Reprint-0703.pdf> (August 2013)

Brounstein, Marty "Teamwork for Dummies" <http://www.dummies.com/how-to/content/ten-qualities-of-an-effective-team-player.html> (August 2013)

Harley P, Dawson M (2010). *Success in Groupwork*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan. This book also has a terrific associated website at <http://www.palgrave.com/pocketskills/groupwork/>

Kaner, Sam et al; "Facilitator's Guide to Participatory Decision Making" Gabriola Island, Canada; 1996

[www.learnhighergroup.com](http://www.learnhighergroup.com) - "Making Groupwork Work" – Learnhigher CETL, University of Bradford

Tips for Surviving Group Work – Ellie Schindelman

"Successful Group projects" – University of Leicester, Student Development 2000

Rabinowitz, Phil - "Providing Effective Feedback" Website: The Community Toolbox  
[http://ctb.ku.edu/en/tablecontents/sub\\_section\\_main\\_1236.aspx](http://ctb.ku.edu/en/tablecontents/sub_section_main_1236.aspx)

Rosen, Darryl "Table for Three – Using Your Smart Phone at Lunch and 50 Dumb Mistakes Smart Managers Don't Make" pp. 35-37 (Brainstorming)

Weaver & Farrell, "Managers as Facilitators" San Francisco: Berrett-Koehler Publishers, Inc.. 19

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Belbin, M. "Team Role Summary Discussions" from [http://www.belbin.com/content/page/5002/BELBIN\(uk\)-2012-TeamRoleSummaryDescriptions.pdf](http://www.belbin.com/content/page/5002/BELBIN(uk)-2012-TeamRoleSummaryDescriptions.pdf) (August 2013)

Belbin, M. "Things 'To do' and 'Not to do' from [http://www.belbin.com/content/page/5699/BELBIN\(uk\)-2012-ThingsToDo&NotToDo.pdf](http://www.belbin.com/content/page/5699/BELBIN(uk)-2012-ThingsToDo&NotToDo.pdf) (August 2013)