Group Work.

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Why is group work important?

- Frequently set as part of a module assessment.

- Different skills used/developed.

- Graduates with good team working skills are valued highly by employers.

- Promotes critical thinking by discussion.

- Information is retained for longer than it would be if working alone.

- Many subjects are mastered through dialogue and discussion.

Advantages of group work.

- Important transferable skills: for example, team work, project management, communication and negotiation skills.

- Pool knowledge and expertise.

- Through this increase your own knowledge.

- Share the work load.

- 'Moral' support.

Challenges of group work.

- Communicating effectively.

- Sharing and agreeing roles.

- Planning.

- Coping with differing ways of working/commitment levels.

- Conflicts.

- Inclusion.

- learnhigher.ac.uk/groupwork

What makes an ineffective team?

- People talk more than they listen.

- Arguments between members as opposed to constructive differences of opinion. Ideas are dismissed.

- One or two members dominate. Roles are not delegated.

- Some members are unhappy with decisions and do not speak out.

- Little effort is made to keep to the point or work to deadlines. Lack of clarity regarding goals.

- Members do not reflect upon how the group is functioning.

What makes an effective group?

- Range of individuals who contribute in different ways and complement each other.
- Clear goals are agreed and everyone understands the tasks they have to do.
- Coordinator who may adopt a leadership style.
- Balance between the task (what do we need to do?). and the process (how do we achieve this?).
- Supportive atmosphere.
- Group members discuss, listen to each other and everyone's ideas are heard.
- The group learns from experience.

Destructive group roles to avoid.

- **Autocrat**: tries to dominate or constantly interrupt other members of the team.

- **Show off**: talks all the time and thinks they know all the answers.

- **Butterfly:** keeps changing the topic before others are ready.

- **Aggressor**: does not show respect to others, comments negatively about them.

- **Avoider**: refuses to focus on the task or group relationship problems.

- **Critic**: always sees the negative side to any argument, but never suggests alternatives. Dismisses the ideas of others.

- **Help seeker**: looks for sympathy from others: victim.

- **Self-confessor**: uses the group as a forum for inappropriate talk about self.

- **Clown**: shows no involvement in group and engages in distracting communication.

Constructive criticism.

- Criticism (evaluation) should be actively encouraged.

- When you criticise, raise and analyse the good points as well as the bad points.

- When raising negative points, formulate ways to build on them and move forward.

- If you criticise well, your comments and judgements will be valued highly by other group members.

- Good criticism will help others to evaluate their own work more effectively.

- Criticism should be neutral in tone.

Conflict.

- A certain degree of conflict is useful and is a sign that the group is functioning healthily.

- Too much conflict suggests communication problems.

- No conflict suggests apathy or lack of input.

- Conflict usually arises from unclear aims and objectives.

- Disagreements should never be personal.

- Conflict raises the level of discussion, critical thinking and reasoning skills.

1. There are 6 members of your group. The group has had 3 meetings but 1 member has not attended any of them.

2. In your group there are 2 members who both tend to insist that 'their way' is the best way of doing the tasks, and this is leading to tensions within the group.

3. You are worried that one of the group has not done her allocated task on time, and as a shared group mark will be given, this matters.

4. One of your group tends to talk most of the time and this makes it difficult to share ideas and report progress.

5. You are getting the impression that in your group there is an inner circle who are meeting and progressing the project without the involvement of the whole group.