About Samantha

My name is M. Samantha Peverill, I am Canadian and a native English speaker. Here in Norway, I am doing a Masters of Science in Industrial Ecology. My bachelor’s degree is in Business and Environmental Studies. In addition, the expertise that I bring to the project includes an interest in food issues and environmental impacts.

Prior to Experts in Teamwork, I have had a lot of experience working with groups, both homogenous and diverse. Industrial Ecology is both an international and an interdisciplinary program. I am self motivated in my individual work and pride myself on a job well done.

In regards to my understanding of myself in group work I know that, depending on the project, I can act as either a leader or a follower. Also before this course I was aware that I tend to be fairly impatient with the inefficiency often inherent in group work and this frustration is generally apparent. However, this is a unique opportunity to observe how this tendency is perceived by the other group members and potential results of such.

About Vahid

My name is M.Vahid Sarfaraz, I come from Iran and my first language is Persian. I’m not fluent in English as a second language. I’m studying chemical engineering in master and I had the same background in bachelor degree. I never go thought the Biofuel as a chemical engineering deeply, but I had good background in processing and reactor design and economic analysis.

In daily life, I experienced lots of groups and team working but technically this time is my second course of experiencing group working in English language. From first experience I learned lots of experience even though this time I worked in a group in multidisciplinary group. I completely like working in a group, but English language is one of the weakest points of my job in team working.

In EIT course I can learn much more than I thought every day either technically or personally.

About Zekarias (Zak)

I am Zekarias Teshome; I was born in the capital city of Ethiopia, Addis Ababa (english translation new flower). Ethiopia is one of the countries found in the horn of Africa. My native language is Amharic; English is my second language. I study Electrical Engineering while I was doing my Bachelor Degree. Here at NTNU, I am studying Telematics (Msc).

I am interested working in technology; in addition to that, reading, sport, travel and tour are things I enjoy doing in my spare time. I believe in everything that is good (green) for human beings, and biofuel is one of the renewable energies that we can use to support the planet, that’s why I make it my second village choice.

Even though I am more comfortable working individually, I enjoyed most of the group works I have participated in. Other than the technical knowledge I am going to gain on this Village, I expect to use the opportunity to learn everything there is to learn from my colleges, and contribute as much as I can.

Aqeel Hussain

I am Aqeel Hussain and I belong to Pakistan. I done my Bachelor in Chemical Engineering from University of the Punjab Lahore Pakistan. To give international exposure to my education, I moved to Norway to study in M.Sc Chemical Engineering in Norwegian University of Scinece & Technology.

My Mother tongue is Urdu and I have also good English language skills . I always enjoyed team working either eduactional group working or team playing in sports. Group working always give me wide exposure to study behavioural pattern of others and adjusting my behaviour accordingly. As my expectation, Eit is giving me unique experience of working with people from different culture even people with different continent to achieve a common goal. I hope multidisciplinary skills within our group will bring a good solution towards biofuels.

Ly Trinh

My name is Trinh Thi Truc Ly. I have my bachelor degree from the Department of Biotechnology at International University (Ho Chi Minh City - Viet Nam) and now I am doing my master thesis in Marine Coastal Development at NTNU.

This is the first time I work with people from different backgrounds and countries. I think our broader range of skills and knowedges can be considered as an advantages in team working. Besides, sharing and disscussing ideas is also useful for me in deepening my understanding of a particular area.

However, my difficulty is how to convince other members agree with my point of views, it takes more efforts from me because English is just my second language. I supposed that team working does not only give me a chance to work with others, help me to develop my personal skills in speaking and listening, but also identify my own strenghs (independent thinking) and weaknesses (how to motivate others). I expect that biofuels project in EiT will be the link to connect members in our group during the time working together about 13 weeks.

Bhim Subedi

I am Bhim Subedi and i am from Nepal. Being Nepali i used to communicate in Nepalese language that is the reason i am not so fluent in English. I have completed my bachelors in Biotechnology and perhaps that may be the reason i am feeling quite comfortable with Biofuel in EIT.

I never had experience of teamwork before but in many cases apart from working together i felt good with team members. I always have faith in teamwork than individualism this is because many heads can create magic in decision making than single head. we can be involve in wide and distinct type of view and also learn to coordinate and develop conversation skills.

I am so happy that EIT has given me opportunity to work in group and people from different country. Personally i felt discussion among group members and good coordination helps us to find better solution regarding Biofuels.

The six individuals described above constitute together a small group, defined by a common goal, interdependency, interaction and structured relationships (Johnson, 2006). We have come together to complete two reports and we are dependent on the other group members in order to earn credits to complete our individual Masters degrees. We interact every Wednesday during our village day, and also at other times in person and electronically. Our group work is structured through a Cooperation Agreement that we wrote collectively. It contains rules and guidelines, agreed upon in order to give structure to our group and deal with decision making, absenteeism and conflicts.

As mentioned in Johnson (2006), we believe that when individuals merge into a group, a unique new entity is formed that cannot be described fully by the characteristics of the individual members. We have chosen four situations from our weeks together that we believe represent our evolution as a group. In each situation we will attempt to give both individual reflections and perspectives, and also a discussion of the group dynamics observed.

Situation 1- Choosing a Project Topic

We would like to reflect on our first conversation regarding the choice of topic. This conversation happened on Week 3 (Jan 30) and only five of our six members were present, though Zekarias arrived shortly after the conversation. The day had begun with a check-in where we discovered that most of the group was feeling quite low energy and filled with uncertainty about the class. We were directed by the professor to begin discussing our ideas for project topics. At first, we had silence in the group. Samantha suggested that we should decide what format we wanted to choose (website, general article, scientific article etc) and that would guide our decision. Other members either did not understand, or did not agree so she moved on to topic ideas. Samantha said that the easiest thing to do would be to choose two things and compare them, either compare two feedstocks within one country (for example corn vs. wood in Norway) or choose one feedstock and compare two countries (for example corn in France vs. corn in the USA).

Samantha wrote in her reflection that, "I really tried to explain things as simply as possible but it wasn't working. I thought if we choose the format first, it would make the choice of topic easier. But the group did not seem to understand, so I switched to the topic choice."

 sometimes the topic might be simple but the manner in which it is presented to you, can be baffling. The first thing that we found, should do after hearing the topic is by structuring or make it clear by some examples. In addition,You should know what the topic is really about first,  If you have some  confusion about the topic then sometimes you don't notice to others statements which makes the discussion aimless.  Knowledge about the subject is very important,no matter how  good you might be communicating, but if your sentences don’t reflect  that you are knowledge bank then it’s probably not going to work out. Talking among the group discussion should have some value otherwise will not help in any way and makes the confusion more.

 The group discussed these ideas but it was not a fruitful conversation, no one had any strong opinions or ideas. in second day, we were not so  closed together so the ice had not been  broken yet, since we saw  sometimes members were shy to state their opinion.

 We decided for avoiding more confusion  everyone needs to read deeply about biofuel then we will have much more constructive discussion  in next week.

Meanwhile, Vahid suggested looking at food waste as a potential option for topic. At this suggestion the whole atmosphere and attitude in the group improved and people began to talk excitedly. Everyone had some background about the topic; Samantha in food industry Bhim and  Ly in biotechnology , Aqueel and vahid in process part. Therefore the confusion among the group member disapeared.This reflects that you have a different way of looking at things.Out of the box thinking is something that could help us get further selected. You need to  be creative and have to put points that might amaze the others. while working there are times when we need to find out  solutions to the problem in a better way, thinking out of the box helps  you finding smart and good solutions at times.

 It seemed that this project would allow us to use the expertise of all group members and Samantha was particularly excited because of her passion for food and efficiency in the food system. She wrote "This was the first time I got excited about EiT. And it wasn't even something I had thought of! Yay for Vahid! It is so good that everyone is excited, that means they will all buy in and work well on it".This statement reflects what Schwartz (2002) describes in his ground rule number nine, "Use a decision-making rule that generates the degree of commitment needed." The group had not decided on what decision making rule to use, for example consensus, democratic system or consultative (Schwartz, 2002). However, the discussion indicated that the aim was to have all members agree. As Schwartz discusses, a shared understanding was needed and each member needed to feel that the decision was their own, because it would determine much of the work we would be doing in this group.

 Ly  agreed to choose waste food as a feedstock for the project because she  supposed that topic has high potential in resolving both pollution  problem and garbage treatment in future. Samantha got out her computer and wrote up a quick outline of the topics we could discuss in our paper, including chemical engineering (Vahid and Aqeel), biotechnology (Ly and Bhim) and environmental issues (Samantha).

Zekarias was not present for the conversation and we were unsure of his expertise but when he returned we explained our ideas to him; even if his area of expertise is, some how, unrelated to biofuel, after listening to the proposed ideas he also find out the idea of food waste as a potential feedstock in Norway can be a good topic to work on.

Following this idea, even though we all liked it, we continued to brainstorm other ideas. Aqeel had been interested in the presentation on Lignin-to-Liquids that we had just had. Besides, Ly also mentioned an idea about using microalgae as raw material to produce biofuel because she has a solid background on that field, but she still wanted to choose food waste in her priority.

After this discussion the group felt much more comfortable with the class and had a better idea of what the semester would look like. *[Is it a trend that we are very uncomfortable with uncertainty?]*

Reflecting on this situation, we can see that our patience when it came to choosing a topic served to pave the way for smooth group work. Aside from dividing the tasks and deciding in more detail what to write, we did not need to re-open the discussions on topic. This follows what Schwartz points out in his Skilled Facilitators approach, "Making a decision by consensus can take more time than other methods, but because people are then internally committed to the decision, it will usually take less time to implement effectively." (Schwartz, 2002, p.133)

Situation 2- Structure of Report- Introduction conflict

It was the six village day, Feb 20, 2013, and it was not like the previous weeks; we haven’t had the usual exercises from the village facilitators. Rather we were on our own; we had to make time tables and assign specific tasks for individuals.

It is possible to say, it was the day we started working as a group for real;

Since we had agreed to write a scientific paper, we started searching standard ways of writing scientific paper. After that we were discussing on how we can divide up the report writing. Most of the morning session was spent on conversation about the introduction part of the report, with some arguments within it. The first argument was whether introduction part should be written prior to other topics; because most members say it should be at the start we agreed to work on it.

But in the middle of this, another issue came up, one member didn’t agree on the way of our work. So we have to stop working and come back again to the issue of introduction. Samantha wrote "The conversation about the introduction today was incredibly frustrating. We had spent hours discussing it and it seemed that we all understood what we had decided. Then Ly said something that made it clear that she had not understood at all what we had decided. The conversation had to begin all over again. I felt frustrated and like I could have just written the introduction myself in the time that we had spent discussing it."

Ly was saying each topic in the reports should be written by different individuals, i.e. the introduction part by one person and methodology by other. Even if we spent lots of hours discussing on this issue, we were not able to resolve it, so we agreed to leave the issue

unresolved and to continue working on searching materials which can help us to write a background for the report. This conflict opened another constructive discussion about the construction of the introduction and methodology. Since everyone  has a different background, they have a different way of thinking about writing scientific paper. This time, knowledge about the way of writing project was not good. Because every one works with one way and that had made them stiff.This make you just hear the words and all the time think about your idea. Hearing does not involve any understanding. You must be open to other ideas as well as to the evaluation of your ideas.

we saw frustration in some of members becasue of long discussion about the issue. **I**n the state of endurance under difficult circumstances we should act on without annoyance or anger in a negative way. We saw that showing frustration in negative way sometimes blocks people from talking more and explaining what and how they think about something, because they think it bother others.

Finally giving respect to dominant idea, we decided to continue working instead of wasting time.

We emphasize for group members to listen carefully to what others say.

The disagreements mainly rise from, the group dynamics: different educational background, language barrier.

The village day, the day was somehow frustrating because of language barrier, misunderstandings and unresolved issues. We continue working as a group, on our individual tasks, hoping to resolve the unresolved issues on the coming village weeks.

 (Aqeel Hussain)

 While deciding the structure of report we had a conflict. The main conflict arises because no one have exact idea how to write the research report and no one had formal training of writing the research report. As no one had expertiese over writing research report, every one was giving their own ideas which arises conflict among the group. I personally felt that Ly had some research background and she want to bring us on a common point by sharing his experience. She had not loud voice and she did not convice the group on her point of view. That created conflict among the group and whole day wasted on this conflict without any creativity. One more reason of conflict was my (Aqeel) disagreeing behavior. I realized that my too much disagreement at some moment led the whole group away from creative discussion. One bright feature of these conflicts was that they acted as brainstorming agents  within and created spark to induce energy in our group.

Situation 3: Roles Exercise

On Day ? in the village, we had a very important day in terms of identifying trends in our group work. Though they could be considered separate situations, we will present them together due to the lessons they teach us about our group when transposed.

In the morning we were asked to do an exercise in groups. The exercise was called "Roles". When this was announced, Samantha was frustrated. She wrote in her log, "We have so much to do and these exercises are usually very time-consuming and rarely valuable to our work!" We were missing Bhim in the morning, but were still five in the group.

In an interdisciplinary group such as this, it is inevitable that different members end up in different roles when it comes to the content of our project report contributions. However, there are also other roles played by members where they "drift into various roles on the basis of their interests and skills." (Johnson, 2006, pp. 15) The Roles exercise focused more on these latter roles in the group, such as leadership. It is important to know what roles you are expected to play as a member of a group so that you can either meet or explicitly adjust those expectations.

The format of the exercise was that there were six statements and we needed to evaluate ourselves and the other group members. Then we shared our evaluations. First we would say the score that we had given ourselves, and then the others would state what they had given us for the same question. After we went around, we would discuss our results. It was a very informative and constructive conversation. This was an arena to give constructive criticism on how other members are working in the group. Samantha wrote after the exercise, "I was pleasantly surprised by how honest everyone was with each other and how well they accepted feedback about themselves. We were really able to talk openly about how each member can change to make group relations work more smoothly. This shows that we really have respect for each other and value their opinions. Also, I learned that I scored myself more harshly than the others scored me. That gave me something to think about personally as well"

The scores given were quite unanimous, meaning that different group members had similar perceptions of the roles in the group. For example, if the question was "Assumes leadership, has a major influence", there was no one who scored themselves high and the other members scored them low. It seemed that people had a good idea of themselves and others.

Some observations that came from this discussion were that, over time, Aqeel has become less argumentative, Vahid has really learned how to listen, and then respond and Zek really came out of his shell and became active when we gave him the responsibility of permanent manager.

Some recommendations that came from this discussion were that Ly should talk louder and Samantha more clearly.

Aqeel wrote in his personal reflection, "I felt feedback excercise very productive to know  ourself and to  understand what other persons think about your behavior. It gave each   member an opportunity to think about the strog and week point of their   own and of their group members. It provided freedom to express negative   and positive remarks at each other faces and courage to bear negative   remarks from the group member. I felt during discussion members still   feeling resistance to express negative remarks caring self respect of   each other and due to diversity of group." Vahid and Aqeel was more open   to express negative feedback and courgeous to learn from negative remarks. Ly and Zak were more reserved in giving negative feedback.

This type of feedback excercises have also negative influence on relations  when it is accomplished too openly. It some time create tention in relation within the group. This happen during the discussion when Vahid   gave some negative remarks about Bhim. Bhim become angry and it create some bad feeling within the group. Afterword, I realised that Bhim was   not feeling well that's day and he had some problem with him. That's  why  he behave in this way which lost the positivity of the excercise.

An important part of our work day is our work review, where we share what we have done since our last discussion. Each member speaks in turn, and the others are meant to listen and ask questions so that we all understand what the others are doing. During both of our discussion sessions, i.e. group reflection and work review, Bhim was not paying attention to the group discussions, but rather, was on his computer. This happened again later when we were discussing the feedback we received on the previous week’s group reflection report.

This issue was brought up by Samantha during the group reflection time. Samantha was sad because she thought the group was not interesting enough to get his attention; she was also worried because, lack of attension to group discussion might create a problem in repeating the same thing again and again. Aqeel thought that Bhim was browsing facebook and was not concentrating on the group work; he suggested we have to work with cooperation. Vahid said that he had invited Bhim twice to join the discussion, Bhim didn’t respond to both requests. Vahid assumed maybe he had headache or he is more comfortable in working alone. Still he believes that, if there is a discussion on board or some problem to solve, we should solve it together.

But we were able to see that, both Aqeel and Vahid were assuming things and didn’t ask Bhim about what he was up to. Ground Rule Number One from Schwarz (pp. 99, 2002) recommends that assumptions should be tested. “When you assume something, you take for granted that it is true without verifying it. When you infer something, you draw a conclusion about what you do not know on the basis of things that you do know”. Therefore if there is doubt on something among group members, we better ask and discuss on it rather than assuming.

Since Ly knew what Bhim was doing and Zekarias was sitting next to him and was able to see what he was doing, they both weren’t bothered by it. It is obvious here that the group members who had the same information as Bhim, namely that he was working on the group project, were much less uncertain in this situation and therefore less concerned. This is addressed in Schwarz’s second ground rule, where it states that everyone should share the group their information so that everyone has access to the same knowledge, because that affects how the group solves a problem or makes a decision. (Schwarz, 2002, p.109)

Finally, Bhim explained to us he was half listening and half working for the group on his own; because he believes raising new ideas can expand the discussion and kill our time, he choose to listen rather than talk. Also, he was absent last week, and wanted to catch up on lost time. He said he was not bothered by us bringing up our concerns with him and it was a constructive discussion in the group.

Therefore, after having a discussion, we finally decided to close our computers during our weekly review unless there it is necessary to show for the group. This is an example of what Johnson and Johnson (2006) refer to as a "group norm".  The expected norm that everyone would participate in group discussions was not influencing Bhim's behaviour for one of several reasons: he did not recognize it's existence, he wasn't aware that other group members accept and follow it or he choose not to accept and follow it himself (Johnson and Johnson, 2006, pp. 17). To make explicit our expectations, we created a more tangible rule governing behaviour during team discussions, excluding the presence of computers as a distraction.

This day really pointed out how our group was evolving. Five of us were more or less working closely and beginning to understand how we fit into and contribute to the team. Bhim however was less participative and possibly perceived as an outsider.

Are we an effective group or a high-performance group? Johnson p 20