

Group working

Peter Rowlett

Sheffield Hallam University

`p.rowlett@shu.ac.uk`

Activity: Group work experience reflection

- ▶ You will have some experience of group work in the past.
- ▶ Read the prompts individually and make some notes.

Why group work?

- ▶ You will work with other students throughout your studies:
 - ▶ an effective way to learn, as a social activity in class;
 - ▶ also used for formal, assessed work at various points.
- ▶ Group working doesn't go away at the end of education!
 - ▶ Getting a job at a recruitment centre.
 - ▶ Working as part of a team in a job.
 - ▶ Even if you aren't formally part of a team, you are likely to be called on to work with others formally or informally.

Opportunity

- ▶ Try to see group work as an opportunity.
 - ▶ Learning more by sharing ideas and seeing things from others' perspectives.
 - ▶ Exposing yourself to people from different backgrounds.
 - ▶ Doing more by playing to each others' strengths.
 - ▶ Everyone has strengths and weaknesses. How can the group do better together?
 - ▶ Discover how you best work as part of a group.
 - ▶ Learn how to deal with challenge and conflict.
 - ▶ When you are in a job interview and they ask "tell me about a time where you were in conflict with others and how you resolved this?", how will you answer this?
 - ▶ Make friends.
 - ▶ Develop your communication skills.

Challenge

- ▶ There are challenges, particularly when assessment marks are involved.
- ▶ People work differently, for example in relation to pressure or deadlines.
- ▶ People have different expectations about levels of achievement.
- ▶ People have different prior experience of group work.
- ▶ People may be less able to understand what is expected of them or less able to communicate with the group.
- ▶ People see things differently, so may not agree on what the work is or how to approach it.

Activity: 'Why groups fail' discussion

- ▶ Discuss your response to the activity with others in your group.

Models of personality and team roles

- ▶ There are various models of personality and team roles you might like to investigate.
- ▶ e.g. the Myers-Briggs and Belbin models are popular.
- ▶ Beware: everyone is an individual, and a model is always a simplification that does not completely capture everything.

Models of personality and team roles

- ▶ For example,
 - ▶ talk through ideas / think quietly before sharing;

Models of personality and team roles

- ▶ For example,
 - ▶ talk through ideas / think quietly before sharing;
 - ▶ excited by new things / comfortable with familiar;

Models of personality and team roles

- ▶ For example,
 - ▶ talk through ideas / think quietly before sharing;
 - ▶ excited by new things / comfortable with familiar;
 - ▶ set and work to deadlines / let things develop;

Models of personality and team roles

- ▶ For example,
 - ▶ talk through ideas / think quietly before sharing;
 - ▶ excited by new things / comfortable with familiar;
 - ▶ set and work to deadlines / let things develop;
 - ▶ etc.

Models of personality and team roles

- ▶ For example,
 - ▶ talk through ideas / think quietly before sharing;
 - ▶ excited by new things / comfortable with familiar;
 - ▶ set and work to deadlines / let things develop;
 - ▶ etc.
- ▶ None of these are right or wrong, these are just differences.
- ▶ But they may affect how you work as part of a group, especially if other group members have different differences!

Models of personality and team roles

- ▶ People might be
 - ▶ creative at new ideas, enthusiastic in early stages . . . but less inclined to dig through details at the end;

Models of personality and team roles

- ▶ People might be
 - ▶ creative at new ideas, enthusiastic in early stages . . . but less inclined to dig through details at the end;
 - ▶ disciplined working through a plan, checking details and moving things along . . . but indecisive when dealing with uncertainty;

Models of personality and team roles

▶ People might be

- ▶ creative at new ideas, enthusiastic in early stages . . . but less inclined to dig through details at the end;
- ▶ disciplined working through a plan, checking details and moving things along . . . but indecisive when dealing with uncertainty;
- ▶ conscientious at 'big picture' thinking and completing the task . . . but inclined to worry or reluctant to rely on others;

Models of personality and team roles

- ▶ People might be
 - ▶ creative at new ideas, enthusiastic in early stages . . . but less inclined to dig through details at the end;
 - ▶ disciplined working through a plan, checking details and moving things along . . . but indecisive when dealing with uncertainty;
 - ▶ conscientious at 'big picture' thinking and completing the task . . . but inclined to worry or reluctant to rely on others;
 - ▶ etc.

Models of personality and team roles

- ▶ People might be
 - ▶ creative at new ideas, enthusiastic in early stages ... but less inclined to dig through details at the end;
 - ▶ disciplined working through a plan, checking details and moving things along ... but indecisive when dealing with uncertainty;
 - ▶ conscientious at 'big picture' thinking and completing the task ... but inclined to worry or reluctant to rely on others;
 - ▶ etc.
- ▶ The thing is: a variety of people and approaches are most effective when working as a group!

Making the most of group discussion

- ▶ Check everyone can see and hear everyone else.
- ▶ Be open to hearing something new.
- ▶ Jot down useful information.
- ▶ Jot down questions to ask.
- ▶ If you don't understand something, ask.
- ▶ Link what you hear to what you already know.
- ▶ Make contributions to the discussion – try and contribute something to each meeting. This could be encouraging others if you can't think of something to add to any discussion.

Check and clarify

- ▶ Try to expose hidden assumptions in yours and others' thinking as they can cause disagreements later.
- ▶ Check everyone understands the task the same way.
- ▶ Check everyone agrees what a successful completion would look like.
- ▶ This could mean writing a formal statement of aims, or just speaking through the purpose of the task.

Dealing with conflict

- ▶ It is often useful to talk about differences.
- ▶ e.g.
 - ▶ if you feel you are doing an unfair share of the work, someone else might feel their ideas are not listened to or they are not being involved in the group work enough.

Dealing with conflict

- ▶ It is often useful to talk about differences.
- ▶ e.g.
 - ▶ if you feel you are doing an unfair share of the work, someone else might feel their ideas are not listened to or they are not being involved in the group work enough.
 - ▶ if someone doesn't do something they agreed to do, it is important that the group is understanding and works positively to help them achieve next time.

Dealing with conflict

- ▶ It is often useful to talk about differences.
- ▶ e.g.
 - ▶ if you feel you are doing an unfair share of the work, someone else might feel their ideas are not listened to or they are not being involved in the group work enough.
 - ▶ if someone doesn't do something they agreed to do, it is important that the group is understanding and works positively to help them achieve next time.
 - ▶ if the group has nothing to say or gets stuck, is this productive thinking time (which is good) or do you need a way to get unstuck?

Dealing with conflict

- ▶ It is often useful to talk about differences.
- ▶ e.g.
 - ▶ if you feel you are doing an unfair share of the work, someone else might feel their ideas are not listened to or they are not being involved in the group work enough.
 - ▶ if someone doesn't do something they agreed to do, it is important that the group is understanding and works positively to help them achieve next time.
 - ▶ if the group has nothing to say or gets stuck, is this productive thinking time (which is good) or do you need a way to get unstuck?
 - ▶ if the group has a leader who is not doing a good job, is there a process for discussing this and possibly agreeing a different approach?

Dealing with conflict

- ▶ It is often useful to talk about differences.
- ▶ e.g.
 - ▶ if you feel you are doing an unfair share of the work, someone else might feel their ideas are not listened to or they are not being involved in the group work enough.
 - ▶ if someone doesn't do something they agreed to do, it is important that the group is understanding and works positively to help them achieve next time.
 - ▶ if the group has nothing to say or gets stuck, is this productive thinking time (which is good) or do you need a way to get unstuck?
 - ▶ if the group has a leader who is not doing a good job, is there a process for discussing this and possibly agreeing a different approach?
 - ▶ etc.

Advice

- ▶ Agree a method of communication outside of class.
- ▶ Be clear what each group member is expected to do and by when – write this down so you have a record you can all access.
- ▶ You might like to come up with a time plan for what work is to be done by when.
- ▶ If this room is too noisy, your group might like to work in the open area outside or one of the small meeting rooms.
- ▶ Talk to me (or email) if you are having problems, either as a group or as an individual.
- ▶ At the end you will complete a peer assessment of contribution. Remember that contributions are not only verbal and other forms of working are valued.

Overall

- ▶ Group work is hard, and your degree is a good opportunity to learn.
- ▶ Try to engage and get the most out of it.
- ▶ For the assignment, you are asked to
 - ▶ choose a mathematical problem/puzzle;
 - ▶ explain its solution clearly;
 - ▶ use this as an example to discuss an aspect of the problem-solving process:
 - ▶ planning your approach.
 - ▶ being stuck – how does it feel and how do you get unstuck?
 - ▶ extensions – what can you do now that you have solved the problem?
- ▶ In groups, talk about:
 1. how to organise the group work;
 2. which problem/puzzle you wish to use.