TEAM WORK

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Problem

Group projects help students develop a wide range of employability relevant transferrable skills (Caruso & Woolley, 2008; Mannix & Neale, 2005).

Properly structured and managed group projects can develop abilities that are relevant to both individual and group work, including (Eberly Centre 2014):
- Break complex tasks into parts and steps
- Plan and manage time
- Refine understanding through discussion and explanation
- Give and receive feedback on performance
- Challenge assumptions
- Develop stronger communication skills.

- However no guarantee that these benefits will be achieved if groups are simply assigned and their conception and development is not supported.

- Unsupported group working can often backfire generating significant additional tutor time 'firefighting' issues and resulting in not all students engaging in a meaningful way.

➢ Group working must be carefully designed, supported and assessed to ensure that deep collaboration an effective learning is achieved.

Belbins Team Roles

- Most teams are self-assigned by students clustering into friendship groups or

- Assigned by tutors in a quasi-random fashion e.g. alphabetically.

  ➢ Both of the practices undermine the potential effectiveness and learning from the group work.

- Meredith Belbin prominent writer on group formation and the specific combination of roles that comprise highly effective groups.

- 9 different team roles have been identified as shown below.

- The most effective teams may comprise just 4-6 individuals since all individuals are inclined and able to perform more than one role (Belbin, 2010).

- Training using on-line resources student cohorts could discover their preferred team roles and their relative strengths and weaknesses

- Help the students to select the working partners or tutors who can seek to compile balanced and effective groups to support greater task achievement and effective collaborative learning.

Belbins Team Roles (Continued)

Team Role	Contribution	Allowable Weaknesses
Plant	Creative, imaginative, free-thinking. Generates ideas and solves difficult problems.	Ignores incidentals. Too preoccupied to communicate effectively.
Resource Investigator	Outgoing, enthusiastic, communicative. Explores opportunities and develops contacts.	Over-optimistic. Loses interest once initial enthusiasm has passed.
Co-ordinator	Mature, confident, identifies talent. Clarifies goals. Delegates effectively.	Can be seen as manipulative. Offloads own share of the work.
Shaper	Challenging, dynamic, thrives on pressure. Has the drive and courage to overcome obstacles.	Prone to provocation. Offends people's feelings.
Monitor Evaluator	Sober, strategic and discerning. Sees all options and judges accurately.	Lacks drive and ability to inspire others. Can be overly critical.
Teamworker	Co-operative, perceptive and diplomatic. Listens and averts friction.	Indecisive in crunch situations. Avoids confrontation.
Implementer	Practical, reliable, efficient. Turns ideas into actions and organises work that needs to be done.	Somewhat inflexible. Slow to respond to new possibilities.
Completer Finisher	Painstaking, conscientious, anxious. Searches out errors. Polishes and perfects.	Inclined to worry unduly. Reluctant to delegate.
Specialist	Single-minded, self-starting, dedicated. Provides knowledge and skills in rare supply.	Contributes only on a narrow front. Dwells on technicalities.

(Source: Belbin, 2013)

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Tuckmans Group Development Model

- Even if group members are friends or peers suggests that they will not perform well as a group initially (Tuckman, 1965).
- Groups will pass through 4 key stages of development and only at the last one that the effective group working is achieved.

Forming	In this stage, most team members are positive and polite. Some are anxious, as they haven't fully understood what work the team will do. Others are simply excited about the task ahead
Storming	People start to push against the boundaries established in the forming stage. This is the stage where many teams fail. Storming often starts where there is a conflict between team members' natural working styles. If differing working styles cause unforeseen problems, they may become frustrated.
Norming	Gradually, the team moves into the norming stage. This is when people start to resolve their differences, appreciate colleagues' strengths, and respect your authority as a leader.
Performing	The team reaches the performing stage when hard work leads, without friction, to the achievement of the team's goal. The structures and processes that you have set up support this well.

(Source: Source: MindTools 2014)

- Different groups will pass through the early stages at different speeds, but the approach taken by the tutor can accelerate the group formation process and ensure that groups are most functional and effective.
- Hersey and Blanchard (1969) on situational leadership shows how a leader should support teams through Tuckmans four stages of group development.
- They propose that leaders should be more directing in the early stages and follow the pattern outlined below.

Tuckmans Group Stages	Hersey and Blanchard's Situational Leadership
Forming	Telling
Stroming	Selling
Norming	Participating
Performing	Delegating

- Working with the right approach at the right time leaders will facilitated swifter group progression to productivity and enhance the overall learning achieved.

Proposal, Outcomes and Benefits

- Current practice in the group working of students does not appear to be well considered or optimal
- The tutors should consider more fully the composition of student groups supported by an assessment of their students characteristics through a tool such as Belbins team roles. Once teams have been carefully selected the principles outlined by Tuckmans and Hersey & Blanchard help guide tutors to the behaviours that they need to exhibit to support most effective group working.

➢ Therefore these proposals combined would facilitate more effective group working resulting in a higher quality of work being produced and better learning curve
➢ Help acquire subject related skills and transferrable employability skills.
➢ Less or no additional workload through reactive intervention by the tutors.