Teaching University Students How to Succeed in Group Assignments

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Abstract

The ability of university students to function effectively as team members in group assignments is essential for their success as they transition to the workforce. For this reason, many universities have teamwork as a required learning outcome for their graduates. Researchers have identified both the problems university students encounter with group assignments and the solutions to these problems. However, one main issue remains—university faculty do little in the way of teaching their students how to work as a team on group assignments. This descriptive practice-based paper reviews the problems associated with university group assignments and provides solutions to these problems and curriculum guidance with specific suggestions on how faculty can teach students to work in group projects. These suggestions can apply to any university group assignment.

Keywords: team member effectiveness, free-riders and social loafers, grade reciprocity

Introduction

Since the early 1990s, governments and their agencies, commissions, councils, foundations, and universities have created profiles of the attributes, capabilities, competencies, qualities, skills, and traits that employers want university graduates to have when they graduate (Emberg & Benson, 2010). These include the Finn Committee Report on Young People's Participation in Post-Secondary Education and Training (Australia) (Finn, 1991); Employability Skills (Canada) (Conference Board of Canada, 2024); European Ministers of Education Agreement and Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) (European Union) (Ananiadou & Claro, 2009); Assessment of Teaching 21st Century Skills (United States) (ATC21S, 2010); Association for Career and Technical Education (United States) (ACTE, 2018); Hewlett Foundation (United States) (Finegold & Notabartolo, n.d.); Institute for the Future (United States) (Davies et al., n.d.); Kennisnet University of Twente (United Kingdom) (Voogt & Pareja Roblin, 2010); the Dearing Review (United Kingdom) (Dearing, 1996); and the National Research Council (United States) (Binkley et al., 2012; Pellegrino & Hilton, 2012; Salas et al., 2011). One common theme that was consistently identified was team competencies (Benson, 2018).

Jackson and Chapman (2012) in their assessment of 500 organizations also identified "working effectively with others" as one competency that organizations wanted graduates to have. This has been recognized by the Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business (AACSB, 2020) and the European Federation of Management Development (EFMD, 2025), which require business schools to show evidence of student experiential learning related to teamwork skills (Aggarwal & O'Brien, 2008). The preceding requirement is relevant as 21st-century organizations want business graduates to work globally, thus requiring them to work collaboratively with colleagues with different languages, religions, cultures, and ethnic backgrounds (Benson, 2018).

I have indicated in previous research (Benson, 2015) that a problem still exists at many universities where instructors require students to work in teams to complete group assignments but do not teach students how to work in teams. Students then become frustrated and dissatisfied with group assignments (Goosen & Steenkamp, 2024). To teach students to work effectively as a team member in a university group assignment and to increase students' satisfaction in group assignments, I have suggested instructors must address several major problems: 1) team member selection, 2) team member meeting scheduling conflicts, 3) team member attitudes and behaviours, 4) team member communication, 5) team member contribution, free-riders, and social loafers, 6) team member dominance and shyness, and 7) team member grade reciprocity (Benson, 2015). This paper synthesizes past research for practitioners and offers suggestions for dealing with the major student team problems in group assignments.

After group problems and classroom applications are discussed in the paper, they will be examined through the lens of Tuckman's (1965) model of group development. Additionally, in the appendices, examples of student handouts are provided for instructors to use in their own courses with group assignments.

Practice-Based Approach

I have investigated best practices for group projects, and the criteria for reviewing articles were as follows:

1. The articles had to be about university student group projects, specifically problems students experienced and/or solutions to these problems.

2. The articles had to be about face-to-face group projects; therefore, virtual, distance, and online learning group projects were not included in the article search.

3. The articles had to focus on the process of the group project, rather than on the outcomes of the group project, group size, group development, decision making, or students' learning about course content.

Isaac and Michael (1974) define descriptive research as a research method that describes a situation or area of interest factually and accurately. McCombes (2023) further states descriptive research can answer *what*, *where*, *when*, and *how* questions but cannot answer *why* questions. These descriptive practice-based papers examine and review the

problems associated with university group assignments, the solutions to these problems, and provide curriculum guidance with specific suggestions on how faculty can teach students to work in group projects.

Research-Based Solutions

This section will include the following steps: 1) identify and examine the key issues with university student group projects, 2) provide researchers' suggested solutions to these problems, and 3) make suggestions to university faculty on how they can apply this information to their own group assignments.

A. Team member selection

Definition. The instructor assigns students to teams for group assignments.

Problems.
1. Some students protest that the instructor put them into a group where they were forced to work with less motivated students, and they had to do most of the work in the group assignment, which they say is not fair.

2. Because of previous negative experiences in group work, diligent students often prefer to work by themselves (Barr et al., 2005; Brown & McIlroy, 2011, as cited in Gossen & Steenkamp, 2024).

Researcher solutions.
1. Allow students to withdraw or divorce themselves from their team and allow them to join another team (Strong & Anderson, 1990).

2. Have students self-select into groups but with a required interview of their members. Students are more responsible for their course grade by selecting the proper group members (Mesch, 1991).

3. Have students self-select into teams because the best teams are much more likely to be self-selected (Bacon et al., 1999).

4. Allow students to select their own teams. Students had 20% less conflict in student-selected teams compared to instructor-selected teams and had higher average grades (Bosco & Harvey, 2009). Students in self-selected groups had better communication, resolved conflict easier, asked for help more, and were more confident in their team members' abilities (Chapman et al., 2006).

Classroom applications for team member selection.
1. Instructors take the time in one class to have students introduce themselves to other classmates by doing a "getting acquainted" activity. In the same class, have students list the three most important behaviours they want their group members to demonstrate when they work on the group assignment (See Appendix D – 26

Behaviours of Team Member Effectiveness for suggestions). After this, have students interview each other to find potential teammates.

2. Then for the second class, have students self-select into teams.

3. However, if an instructor has a different goal for the group assignment, such as diversity and intercultural awareness, then have students form teams, for example, from different countries, religions, ethnic backgrounds, and rural/urban areas.

B. Team member meeting scheduling conflicts

Definition. Many teams have trouble setting up meetings because of conflicting schedules of team members.

Problems.

1. Many students juggle their education, social life, jobs, and extracurricular activities (Feichtner & Davis, 2016; Schultz et al., 2010).

2. Students have trouble setting a common meeting time when they commute, are a non-traditional student, or have outside employment (Buckenmeyer, 2000).

3. Students dislike group work because of the difficulty in scheduling group meetings (LaBeouf et al., 2016).

4. The teacher who asks groups to meet outside of class has created a scheduling problem that students cannot easily solve on their own (Fink, 2004). Students have trouble scheduling meetings outside of class time because they work and have other extracurricular activities.

Researcher solutions.

1. The instructor can schedule class time for team meetings (Pfaff & Huddleston, 2003).

2. When the instructor schedules class time for group assignments, it helps teams become more successful (Benson, 2015).

Classroom applications for team meeting scheduling conflicts.

1. The instructor can schedule class time for team meetings in the course outline schedule. When the group assignment is first presented to the class, review the in-class group meeting times. This will enable students to be more successful in their group assignments because students will know when they meet. Also, students will not have to meet outside of the regularly scheduled class. In addition, students will not have an excuse for not attending their group meetings.

2. In addition, it provides the instructor with the opportunity to observe if any group is having issues with their members. These activities will increase the likelihood of group success. For example, in a Monday, Wednesday, Friday class schedule, have the

Wednesday class time scheduled for the group assignment (see Appendix E for a sample class schedule).

3. The team creates an action plan document (see Appendix B, for example) that identifies the specific tasks required for completion of the team assignment. In the action plan document, each task has a specific student or group of students assigned responsibility for completing the task. This will also allow team meetings to take place but does not require all team members to be present at each meeting, provided the assigned work is completed and handed in.

C. Team member attitude behaviours

Definition. Team member attitude behaviours are either team focused versus personally focused. With teamwork, the team member should have the same goals, standards, and expectations for this assignment as the team does (Benson & Enstroem, 2012).

Problems.
1. A team member is not open-minded to other team members' ideas, suggestions, or ways of doing things (Benson & Enstroem, 2012).

2. A team member is not adaptable to changes made during the duration of this assignment by being willing to be flexible to accommodate others (Benson & Enstroem, 2012).

3. A team member does not display a positive and enthusiastic attitude (Benson & Enstroem, 2012).

4. A team member complains or make excuses (Benson & Enstroem, 2012).

Researcher solutions.
1. A provision of a group charter is a structured roadmap that outlines team member roles, responsibilities, personal accountability as well as the team vision in the project (Andrade et al., 2023).

2. Students in self-selected groups had better communication, resolved conflict easier, asked for help more, and were more confident in their team members' abilities (Chapman et al., 2006).

Classroom applications for communication.
1. The team creates a signed group charter or expectations agreement (see Appendix A) to clarify all team members' contribution expectations. A group charter is a common activity for university group assignments. It may also include a firing clause and a reduction/increase of mark clause for those team members who do not contribute (see Appendix C).

2. A face-to-face in-class group *360-degree feedback session* is provided (Benson & Enstroem, 2012). In a face-to-face group 360-degree feedback session, each student beforehand completes the 26 Behaviours of Team Member Effectiveness (see Appendix D) on each of their teammates. In the feedback session, one student starts by receiving feedback from all their teammates. Each teammate verbally goes through in detail the feedback for this student. Then the next student receives feedback, and so forth until all students have received feedback. At the end, all students receive completed feedback from their teammates to use in a personal reflection assignment on their behaviour in the team, specifically on their three major strengths and two areas to improve upon or change.

D. Team member communication

Definition. Team member communication involves listening and understanding others, being actively involved in the meetings by expressing thoughts, feelings, ideas, and opinions; being able to ask for help, encouraging and praising others, being not quiet or shy, and keeping team members informed and promptly replying to text, cell phone, and email messages (Benson & Enstroem, 2012).

Problems. Communication problems are often related to member free-riding behaviour and social loafing as well as member dominance and shyness. Benson and Enstroem (2012) found that free-rider meeting behaviours included not attending meetings, not being on time for meetings, and not being prepared for meetings. Benson and Enstroem (2012) found that free-rider work behaviours included not doing their fair share of the work, not doing high quality work, not completing work on time, not being organized, not putting in effort and not revising their work. Latne et al. (1979) explain social loafing is a reduction in motivation and effort when individuals work collectively compared to when they work individually.

Researcher solutions.
1. Several authors have documented that face-to-face communication reduces free-riding behaviour (Dawes et al., 1977; Joyce, 1999; Isaac & Walker, 1998; Jerdee & Rosen, 1974; Wichman, 1970).

2. Creating a group charter helped to improve team communication; there was more cohesive teamwork and an improved sense of personal contribution (Andrade et al., 2023).

3. Students in self-selected groups with better communication resolved their conflicts easier, asked for help more, and were more confident in their team members' abilities (Chapman et al., 2006).

Classroom applications for team communication.

1. The instructor teaches the class communication skills, such as listening and paraphrasing.

2. The instructor sets up group discussions in their course on the university's learning management system for students to communicate with each other and share documents.

3. The instructor encourages all students to ask a quiet team member for their thoughts if they see a team member is not saying anything or contributing to their team's discussion.

E. Team member contribution – Free-riders and social loafers

Definition.

1. The existence of the free-rider problem is perhaps the biggest negative cost associated with cooperative learning (group assignments) (Joyce, 1999).

2. Social loafing contributes to a reduction in motivation and effort when individuals work collectively compared to when they work individually or coactively (Latané et al., 1979).

3. Benson and Enstroem (2012) found that free-rider meeting behaviours included not attending meetings, not being on time for meetings, and not being prepared for meetings. As well, Benson and Enstroem (2012) found that free-rider work behaviours included not doing their fair share of the work, not doing high quality work, not completing work on time, not being organized, not putting in effort, and not revising their work.

4. Latne et al. (1979) explain that social loafing is a reduction in motivation and effort when individuals work collectively compared to when they work individually.

Problems.

1. There can be a "sucker effect" where individuals are averse to having others free-ride upon them and consequently free-ride themselves (Keer, 1983).

2. The more complex the task, the more difficult it is to measure individual performance (Strong & Anderson, 1990).

3. There can be hitchhikers or individuals who do not do their fair share of the work (Mesch, 1991).

4. Free-rider meeting behaviours include not attending meetings, not being on time for meetings, and not being prepared for meetings (Benson & Enstroem, 2012).

5. Free-rider work behaviours include not doing their fair share of the work, not doing high-quality work, not completing work on time, work not being organized, not putting in effort, and not revising their work (Benson & Enstroem, 2012).

Researcher solutions.

1. Free-riding can be prevented if group members have their tasks monitored or if they believe their performance can be accurately measured to prevent free-riding (Harkins & Jackson, 1985).

2. Internal self-evaluation is sufficient to eliminate low motivation and productivity if individuals are concerned about evaluating themselves (Szymanski & Harkins, 1988).

3. To control free-riders in academic projects, an educator might consider individual student evaluations that measure each teammate's contribution to the project (Strong & Anderson, 1990).

4. The free-rider can be penalized with a poor peer evaluation (LeClair, 1995).

5. Penalizing less motivated students for free-riding is not enough; unless there is a reward for carrying the less motivated ones along, the industrious student will be short-changed in terms of grades (Ashraf, 2004).

6. Force members to change roles on the team (Joyce, 1999). For example, the student who usually leads the meetings can become a meeting participant, and the meeting minute-taker could take over chairing the meeting. More examples of changing roles are found in Appendix B where students in teams rotate the meeting chair role. This forces all team members to actively contribute to the team project rather than being a passive team member.

7. The responsibility of the team is to provide feedback to the non-contributing team members so they can improve their behaviour (Benson & Enstroem, 2012).

8. In teams where there is a variation in the quantity and quality of each member's contribution to the work of the group, this can be best mitigated or accomplished by using peer assessment (Fink, 2004).

9. Students in self-selected groups were more confident in their team members' abilities, had better communication, resolved conflict easier, and asked for help more often (Chapman et al., 2006).

Classroom applications for member contribution – Free-riders and social loafers.

1. The team creates a signed group charter or expectations agreement (see Appendix A) to clarify team members' contribution expectations. This is a common activity for university group assignments. It may also include a firing clause and a reduction/increase of mark clause for those team members who do not contribute (see Appendix C). This ensures poor team members are not free-riding and good team members are rewarded for their contributions.

2. The team creates an action plan document that identifies the specific tasks required for completion of the team assignment. In the action plan document, each task has a specific student or group of students' assigned responsibility for completing the task (see Appendix B). This will hold team members accountable for their responsibilities and for their assigned work to be completed and handed in on time. If there are disputes about a team member's contribution to the group assignment, this action plan document can be referred to.

3. When dividing topics for work, many group members select the area that they are good at. While this is an easy solution, students often do not learn new skills. A variation is to require that each group have pairs assigned to each task, one student will be an expert in the task and then teach the other student how to do the task. For example, one student can teach their partner how to create PowerPoint slides. Another example is one student can teach their partner how to do in-text citations and references.

4. A formal, in-class, 360-degree feedback session can be done to provide every team member with information on how they are contributing or not contributing to the group assignment. A specific team member evaluation (see Appendix D) is completed before the first in-class, 360-degree feedback meeting. Each team member will complete the 26 Behaviours of Team Member Effectiveness Assessment (see Appendix D) and one assessment on every other team member. Based on this assessment, team members will give each other face-to-face feedback on their performance in the team during a scheduled in-class, first feedback session. This feedback will enable students to become more effective team members.

F. Team member dominance and shyness

Definition. Some team members exhibit domineering behaviour, while others withdraw due to shyness when working in the group (Napier & Gernshenfeld, 1993).

Problems.

1. Some people are naturally resistant to group participation because they are shy, and some people prefer to dominate a conversation (Michaelsen et al., 1997).

2. Specific domineering behaviour include trying to push their way around, always wanting to lead but not participate, not liking to be told to do things, acting like a "know-it-all," being very critical of everyone, and unwilling to listen to others' input (Paswan & Gollakota, 2004).

Researcher solutions. There should be enough class time provided to allow groups to give each other 360-degree feedback. Meeting behaviours, work quality, communication, and attitude are the most essential elements students think are required of an effective team member (Benson & Enstroem, 2012).

Classroom applications for member dominance and shyness.

1. The first application includes many of the activities referenced in the Team Member Contribution, Free-Riders and Social Loafers section, such as group charter/expectations agreement, reduction/increase of mark clause, action plan, and 360-degree feedback.

2. A second solution requires rotating the chair for each team meeting. This forces shy team members to contribute as a leader and dominant team members to contribute as a follower (see Appendix B – Action Plan). These activities ensure that shy team members are not free-riding and dominant team members are allowing others to contribute.

G. Team member grade reciprocity

Definition. The issue with grade reciprocity is fairness. In a group assignment, each person does not have self-determination of their grade (Schultz et al., 2010).

Problems.

1. Although team members want to give free-riders failing grades, they will not confront them and directly inform them of the negative evaluation that will result from free-riding. In these cases, free-riders do not suffer the effects of group evaluation until it is too late to change their behaviour (Strong & Anderson, 1990).

2. Students dislike group work because undeserving students get credit for work that they did not do (LaBeouf et al., 2016).

Researcher solutions.

1. Allow group members to grade each other's performance and count this grade in the overall grading of the project (Strong & Anderson, 1990).

2. Other punishment approaches force group members to "fire" free-riders from the group. Fired group members then make up a new group (Strong & Anderson, 1990).

3. Provide feedback during the project's time frame (Strong & Anderson, 1990).

4. Include a reduction of mark clause and a firing clause in the expectations agreement (Benson & Enstroem, 2012).

5. In teams where there is a variation in the quantity and quality of each member's contribution to the work of the group, it is useful to have a peer assessment (Fink,

2004) or peer evaluation system in the project (Gueldenzoph & May, 2002; Brutus & Donia, 2010).

Classroom applications for grade reciprocity.

1. The first solution includes many of the activities referenced in the Team Member Contribution, Free-Riders and Social Loafers section, such as group charter/expectations agreement, reduction/increase of mark clause, action plan, and 360-dgree feedback.

2. Each team member will complete the 26 Behaviours of Team Member Effectiveness assessment (see Appendix D) and one assessment on every other team member. Based on this assessment, team members will give each other face-to-face feedback on their performance in the team during a scheduled in-class, first feedback session. This feedback will enable students to become more effective team members.

3. Also, a second out-of-class, 360-degree feedback session can be done to provide every team member with information on how they contributed or did not contribute to the group assignment. A second team member evaluation is completed before the second 360-degree feedback meeting. This second 360-degree feedback session is where the reduction or increase of marks will be determined. At the end of this feedback session, the group submits a statement of distribution marks signed by each group member (see Appendix B). Note that the instructor does not provide the team with their group assignment grade before receiving this statement of distribution of student marks.

Using Tuckman (1965) to Understand Group Assignment Problems and Curriculum Solutions

This section will analyze group problems and classroom applications through Tuckman's (1965) model of group development. To develop his theory, Tuckman (1965) reviewed 60 studies involving experimental, training, and therapeutic groups (as cited in Bass, 1981, p. 421). Tuckman (1965) indicated that groups go through five stages as they develop. These stages are 1) Forming, 2) Storming, 3) Norming, 4) Performing, and 5) Adjourning. In a practical sense, these stages are really phases because groups may revert to an earlier stage in a cyclical manner, or these stages may overlap. Tuckman's (1965) theory is used to explain the group development process, for the purposes of this paper, by examining the students coming together in a university group assignment. Please refer to the Classroom Applications above, and Table 1 below.

Forming

As the name *forming* suggests, this stage of group development occurs when individual students are forming relationships with other students in a group assignment. Students may feel anxious, and there are questions about acceptance, their role, and who is the leader. There is a high need for structure in this stage. This stage is where the instructor does "getting acquainted" activities for students to introduce themselves to other students before they self-select into

teams. Forming also continues with the team creating a group charter for clarifying individual and team expectations with a firing clause and a reducing or increasing mark clause, and by creating an action plan for assignment management with in-class meeting times.

Norming

This stage of group development is when the individual starts to become part of a team that has a common purpose and goals and establishes a common understanding of how the group is going to function. *Norming* also starts when the team creates a group charter for clarifying individual and team expectations with a firing clause and a reducing or increasing mark clause and when they create an action plan for assignment management with in-class meeting times.

Performing

The *performing* stage of group development happens because of the group charter and action plan. Students know the goals they are trying to achieve in the group assignment, their role, what is expected, and the tasks they are responsible for doing. They have regularly scheduled in-class meetings, good communication with each other, and know which student is chairing their meetings. In this stage, the team is very productive.

Storming

The storming stage of group development happens when one or more students in a team are violating the group charter. There is a clear violation of team goals and individual roles, so there is a loss of trust. This may result in conflict among the team members. Benson and Enstroem (2012) indicate a student may be personally focused versus team focused; is not open minded to other team members' ideas, suggestions, or ways of doing things; is not adaptable to changes made during the duration of this assignment by being willing to be flexible to accommodate others; does not display a positive and enthusiastic attitude, complains, or make excuses.

Benson and Enstroem (2012) also indicate conflict may also have to do with team communication if the student does not listen and understand others; is not actively involved in the meetings by expressing thoughts, feelings, ideas, and opinions; does not ask for help; does not encourage and praise other team members; is quiet or shy; does not keep team members informed; does not promptly reply to text, cell phone, and email messages. This conflict may happen before the first 360-degree feedback session, although many students will not confront the non-performing team member. However, if there is a nonperforming team member, storming most often happens during the first 360-degree feedback in-class meeting with the use of the 26 Behaviours of Team Member Effectiveness evaluation (Benson & Enstroem, 2012).

In most cases, this session gives a team member specific feedback about the student's positive contribution to the group project. In some cases, a student is given feedback about their lack of contribution to the group project. A non-performing student will be told what they must do to perform better. In some cases, the team may issue the student a warning about reducing their mark on the group assignment or firing the student from the group project. This is why and

when conflict often happens. Storming conflict may also happen during the second 360-degree feedback out-of-class meeting because this is when the team determines the allocation of each student's individual marks for the group assignment using the 26 Behaviours of Team Member Effectiveness evaluation (Benson & Enstroem, 2012). This is when each team member's contribution to the group project is discussed by all team members and the reduction of mark or increase of mark is enacted. Because the team already had a first 360-degree feedback session, all team members will know if there is any concern about their performance. Also, if any student had negative comments from before, the student has had the opportunity to improve their performance. Therefore, there should be no surprises in the feedback each student receives. In most instances, the feedback will be positive.

Adjourning

This adjourning stage is the end of the group assignment, where students leave the group project. If students have had a positive experience with their team members, they may develop friendships and want to stay in contact with some of their team members. If their experience was not positive, they will want to leave the team as quickly as possible.

Table 1 shows where the group assignment problems and curriculum solutions fall within Tuckman's (1965) five stages of group development: **Forming**, **Norming**, **Performing**, **Storming**, **Adjourning**. His stages are applied at different points in the matrix with overlapping influences among the curriculum solutions.

As an example, in the matrix, **Team Member communication** takes place in all the classroom activities and is identified in all of Tuckman's five stages. Another example is **Student Self-selection**, which only occurs in Tuckman's (1965) forming and team member contribution stages.

Table 1: Using Tuckman's (1965) five stages to understand group assignment problems and issues and classroom solutions

Problems & Issues						
Team Member selection	Forming					
Team Meetings scheduling conflicts		Forming Norming	Forming Norming	Performing		
Team Member attitude behaviours		Forming Norming	Norming	Performing	Performing Storming Norming	Storming Performing Adjourning
Team Member contribution & free-rider syndrome & social loafing		Forming Norming	Forming Norming	Performing	Performing Storming Norming	Storming Performing Adjourning
Team Member dominance & shyness		Forming Norming	Forming Norming	Performing	Performing Storming Norming	Storming Performing Adjourning
Team Member communication	Forming	Forming Norming Performing	Forming Norming Performing	Performing	Performing Storming Norming	Storming Performing Adjourning
Grade Reciprocity		Norming			Performing Storming Norming	Storming Performing Adjourning
Solutions	Student Self-selection	Team charter for clarifying individual & team expectations with firing clause & reduce or increase mark clause	Action plan for assignment management with in-class meeting times	Team in-class meeting times & chairing in-class meetings	First 360-degree feedback in class using the "26 Behaviours" evaluation	Second 360-degree feedback out of class; Team determines allocation of individual marks for assignment based on "26 Behaviours" evaluation

Legend:
> **Left-hand column** – Problems and issues with group assignments
> **Bottom row** – Solutions with classroom applications
> **Interior rows and columns** – Tuckman's five-stages are shown with some stages intersecting in group assignment problems and classroom solutions

Conclusion

This practice-based paper addressed how government agencies in Australia, Canada, the European Union, the United Kingdom, and the United States established competencies that employers want university graduates to have, specifically team competencies. This was also substantiated by two university business schools' assurance of learning organizations, the Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business and the European Federation of Management Development. Next, the academic literature presented the problems associated with university group assignments and the solutions to these problems. Then, teaching practice guidance with specific practical suggestions and examples on how faculty can teach students to work in group projects was provided and examined through Tuckman's model of group development. By applying the suggestions outlined in this descriptive practice-based paper, faculty will teach their students how to work more collaboratively in group assignments, preparing them to be more effective team members when they graduate and enter the workforce.

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Appendix A – Expectations Agreement/Group Charter

Student example (Personal Communication, January 2013)

General

- Every member will work and contribute to the project with full effort and dedication.
- Engage in class conversation actively, contribute as much as possible to class discussion.
- Keep communication as open as possible to facilitate efficient and constructive progress on the team project.
- Work assigned must be completed by the set due date.
- Be open and constructive to all group member input and feedback.
- Firing a group member will be the last resort and must be a unanimous decision of the non-firing team members.
- Criteria for being fired requires at least two warnings.

Group members who cannot make a scheduled meeting must give adequate warning to other members. More than two missed meetings will be grounds for a warning, followed by a .5% deduction per infraction. The subtracted .5% will be given to the other group members.

Quality of work must meet unanimous group standards. Failure to do so will result in a warning, followed by .5% deduction per infraction. The subtracted .5% will be given to the other group members.

Meetings

- Acknowledge the chair as the leader of the group, and that the chair's decisions will be respected as per their position.
- Setting specific timelines and abiding by them.
- The chair for the meeting must come with an agenda and be prepared to set the following meeting's goals for the next chair.
- It is the chair's responsibility to set the time and place for the next meeting. Conflict Resolution
- Any member who chooses to abstain from votes will have their vote counted as an affirmative vote.
- Conflicts within the group will be brought up with the group present, and a solution will be worked on.
- The first matter in a conflict will be immediate and concise evaluation of what the problem is. The meeting will not continue until this problem is resolved to group satisfaction.
- Any group conflicts take precedence over scheduled work during meetings.

All the signed wholly agree to adhere to the contract:

Appendix B – Team Action Plan created by ORGA 330 students (Personal Communication, September 2011)

Action	Description	Responsibility	Method	Completion Date
Create & sign Group Charter	Clarify expectations of how we work together; Include reduction of mark clause and a firing team member clause	All Team Consensus	In-Person Class Meeting Chair - Ali	January 28 2009
Create Action Plan	Who does what, completion dates, etc.	All Team Consensus	In-Person Class Meeting Chair - Ben	February 01 2009
Choose topic	Everyone suggests topic of their choice, we can compile and make a group consensus	All Team Consensus	Email	February 6 2009
Divide up workload accordingly	Divide chapter/topic into 7 researchable/writable parts; Email group to find their preferred topic. Inform each member of their choice	Ali	In-Person Class Meeting Chair - Lyle	February 13 2009
Research	Everyone finds 3 academic research journals (one of which is academic research studies findings for their topic area)	All - Individual	Email	February 23 2009
Compilation of research sources	Email all your 3 research sources to make sure we don't duplicate	All - Individual	Email	February 23 2009
Gantt chart	Convert this action plan into Gantt Chart and hand in	Team	In-Person Class Meeting Chair - Brack	March 2
Set up presentation date	Contact Lyle and arrange presentation Date and Time	Sean	Email	March 2

Team process evaluation questions	Contact Lyle regarding team process evaluation (Re: group meetings, etc.)	Bob	Email	March 2
	Develop your part of report and share (5 minutes) during class meeting with 5 minutes for team feedback		In-Person Class Meeting Chair Ben	March 7
	Global cultural differences	Bob		
	Guidelines for improving cross-cultural communication	Lyle		
	Gender differences	Alex		
	Global cultural differences	Bob		
	Guidelines for improving cross-cultural communications	Kate		
	Gender differences	Sean		
360-degree feedback	Use 26 Team Behaviours. Complete one on each team member before the meeting.	All	In-Person Class Meeting Chair - Sam	March 13
References	Write up references page for assignment; Email to team member doing 1st draft of write-up	All		March 13
Complete individual parts of project	Work in 3 subgroups to have 10 minutes worth of presentation as well as approximately 2.5 pages of written	All	Email	March 15
Email your part	To Ali	All	Email	March 15
Email Kyla slide info	Send Kyla basic info on content, main points, highlights, etc. of your slides	All	Email	March 15
Compile project 1st draft	Compiled and emailed to group for input/suggestions; Email to Ben for use in slide presentation	Kate	Email	March 20
Reference page	Compile and Complete reference page and send to Ellen for final formatting and editing checks	Kate	Email	March 20

Editing / comments by group on 1st drafts	Group responds to Ali and Lyle with any suggestions or feedback	All	Email	March 23
First draft of slide presentation/ final edit of slide presentation	Compiled and emailed to group for input/suggestions	Lyle	Email	March 23
Completion & Final review of written paper	Complete written portion; Check APA formatting and editing; Email to group to have and be familiarized with before group meeting	Sean	Email	March 24
Group meeting	Group meeting to plan & practice presentation; Final edits of written copy & slides	All	In Person Meeting Chair - Ali	March 25
Presentation	Meet in class to give group presentation	All	In-class present-ation	March 27

Note: Pseudonyms are used in this example to protect the anonymity of the students.

Appendix C – Team Member Firing Clause and Reducing Mark Clause and Process

Dr. Lyle Benson - January 2011 Class Handout

1. The team member Expectation Agreement must have a reduction of mark clause. A non-contributing team member may have their contribution mark for the written report and the presentation reduced by a maximum of 30%. This person would then receive a 70% contribution mark for the written report and the presentation. This person's marks would then be given to other team members, who have contributed more, to increase their marks for the written report and presentation to a maximum of 110%. No final student grade for these two assignments can be over the maximum grade of the assignments.

   a. | Example | Contribution % | Report Grade | Student Grade |
      |---------|---------------|--------------|---------------|
      | Student A | 80% | 80% | 64% |
      | Student B | 99% | | 79.2% |
      | Student C | 101% | | 80.8% |
      | Student D | 105% | | 84% |
      | Student E | 105% | | 84% |
      | Student F | 110% | | 88% |

2. The team member Expectation Agreement must have a firing clause.
3. Team members are first made aware of their standing in the team by participating in the first 360-degree feedback session held during class. Each team member will complete the Team Member Effectiveness assessment on themselves and one assessment on every other team member. Based on this assessment, team members will give each other face-to-face feedback on their performance in the team.
4. By the course withdrawal date, found in the course outline, the team should have informed a team member about the possibility of a reduced mark or firing. This does not mean that a team member who does not contribute after the withdrawal deadline is exempt from receiving a reduced mark or firing. This is because some team written reports and presentations are due after the withdrawal date. The responsibility for the individual is to be an effective team member. The responsibility for the team is to provide the non-contributing team member with feedback.
5. At the final 360-degree feedback session, held out of class, the team will discuss and determine the contribution marks of each team member (see #1 above). Many teams will allocate a 100% contribution mark to each team member. Many other teams will allocate contribution marks between 95% and 105% (see #1 above). A few teams will reduce a team member's contribution mark to 70%–80% and increase other team members contribution marks to 110% (see #1 above).
6. Each team will type on a separate sheet of paper their report title, team member's names and the recommended team member's contribution mark, sign it, and turn it in to their instructor. Only then will the instructor tell the team their mark on the written report.

The instructor will then take the team's recommendations and enter each student's individual mark for the written assignment and the presentation.

7. The course instructor always has the final authority for student grades. Therefore, the reduction or increase of a contribution mark of a team member, or the firing of a team member is only a team recommendation. However, in most cases, the instructor will follow the team's recommendation. It would be unusual for an instructor not to follow the team's recommendations.

8. If any team member wishes to appeal their contribution mark or firing, then the instructor will meet with that team. The team member making the appeal must be specific about what they want and must provide specific evidence to support their appeal. The team will provide evidence to support the team's recommendation. As previously stated, in most cases, the instructor will support the team's recommendation. However, if there is other evidence that the instructor deems relevant, the instructor may change the team's recommendation in the following ways: 1) change the contribution mark of the student, the firing of the student, or both
2) change the contribution mark of the other team members

Example #1 – Student A is fired from Team A and Student A appeals. The instructor may:
1) agree with Team A and fire Student A
2) agree with Student A and reinstate Student A to the Team with a revised contribution mark ranging from 70%–110%; This may result in increasing Team A's members contribution marks ranging from 101%–110%.

Example #2 – Student B's contribution mark is 90% and Student B appeals. The instructor may:
1) agree with Team B and leave Student B's contribution mark at 90%
2) agree with Student B and increase Student B's contribution mark ranging from 91%–110%; This will result in reducing Team B's members contribution marks by the equivalent of Student B's increased mark.
3) disagree with Team B and reduce Students B's contribution mark ranging from 70% – 89%; This will result in increasing Team B's members contribution marks ranging from 101%–110%.
4) disagree with both Student B and Team B and fire Student B; This will result in reducing the remaining Team B's members contribution marks by the equivalent of Student B's decreased mark.

Appendix D – 26 Behaviours of Team Member Effectiveness

Dr. Lyle Benson & Dr. Rickard Enstroem, 2012

Student Instructions - Download the evaluation and complete one evaluation on yourself and one evaluation for each of your group members. Under each behaviour, write a comment and then at the end comment on the group members' three strengths and two areas to improve or change.

Feedback from _____ to _____

	MEETING BEHAVIOURS
1	Attends all in-class and out-of-class meetings
2	Is on time for all meetings
3	Is prepared for all meetings
4	Stays on task during meetings
5	Does not disrupt the team during meetings by joking around too much, getting the team off topic, or leaving the meeting
6	Does not disrupt the team during meetings by texting on cell phone, talking on cell phone, or playing on laptop
	LEADERSHIP BEHAVIOURS
7	Takes a leadership role within the team
8	Shares leadership with team members
	WORK BEHAVIOURS
9	Does their fair share of the work
10	Completes their work on time and does not procrastinate
11	Completes high-quality work
12	Work is organized
13	Quickly does any work revisions
14	Puts in lots of effort for this assignment project by working to the best of their ability and is not lazy
15	Is trustworthy, reliable, dependable, and delivers what is promised
	COMMUNICATION BEHAVIOURS

16	Keeps team members informed by promptly replying to text messages, cell phone messages, and email messages
17	Listens and understands others
18	Is actively invoked by expressing thoughts, feelings, opinions, and ideas; and asks questions
19	Actively helps make decisions
20	Asks for help when needed
21	Encourages and praises team members
	ATTITUDE BEHAVIOURS
22	Is team focused vs. personally focused, i.e., has the same goals, standards, and expectations for this assignment as the team does
23	Is open-minded to other team members' ideas, suggestions, or ways of doing things
24	Is adaptable to changes made during the duration of this assignment by being willing to be flexible to accommodate others
25	Displays a positive and enthusiastic attitude
26	Does not complain or make excuses
	Your three major strengths are:
	Two areas you need to improve, or change are:

Appendix E – Sample Class Schedule

A sample class schedule for teaching students how to work on group assignments is shown below. It is assumed the course is an hour-long class taught every Monday, Wednesday, and Friday throughout a four-month semester with in-class group assignment time every Wednesday. Variations can be adapted.

Class #1: Review class meeting times for the group assignment.

Class #2: A "get acquainted" activity where students interview each other for potential group members.

Class #3: Students self-select into groups.

Class #4: A group charter/expectations agreement is signed, which includes a firing clause and a reduction/increase of mark clause.

Class #5: A group action plan is created to identify which group member will chair each in-class meeting.

Class #6: Distribute 26 Behaviours of Team Member Effectiveness evaluation for students to complete on themselves and each of their group members.

Class #7: First in-class 360-degree feedback session.

Class #8: Second out-of-class 360-degree feedback session. This is when the reduction or increase of marks is determined. Signed statement of distribution of group assignment marks for each student in the group.