



BRADFORD
UNIVERSITY
School *of* Management

**Effective
Learning Service**

Group Work



GROUP WORK

This booklet looks at the roles that people play in groups, and includes a questionnaire to complete. It also looks at the stages of group formation, and the skills needed to succeed in any group today, whether it is at university, at work or in any other social situation.

THE IMPORTANCE OF GROUP WORK

During your degree studies you will be expected to work collaboratively with other students in small groups.

You will, for example, work with other students on joint projects that will be assessed. This will require all members of the group to contribute to the planning, research, presentation of findings and to a final written report. But you will also work informally in groups during seminars, tutorials and in non-assessed workshops.

Group size can be small, for example, 4-6 students, but it can also be much larger, with up to 15 or more students involved. The groups may be self-selecting, or the tutor may organise the composition of them to mix people from different backgrounds together.

Most students have had experience of being a member of a group before they come to university. This is likely to be as a member of a social grouping of some sort: family, neighbourhood or community, group, or member of a small or extended group for a particular interest, vocational or educational related purpose.

Every group of people will begin to form its own ground rules and ways of working together. The roles of people in these groups can be formalised and explicit - complete with titles - or implicit and informal. For example, in the latter case, the dominant role of an older family member may be implicitly acknowledged and accepted by others.

So working in a group in university will bring with it for most students a mixture of the familiar with the unfamiliar. Familiar, in the sense that it is another social situation in the life of that person that has to be negotiated, and navigated.

But unfamiliar too, in that the 'rules of the game' are unknown, and that the student's previous education experience may not have included any previous opportunity to work closely in a group for assessment purposes - and particularly with a culturally diverse group of unknown strangers.

Opportunity

What are the advantages of group work? Group work presents an opportunity to:

- Share your ideas and find solutions to problems
- Work closely with students from a range of different cultural and social backgrounds
- Develop your **key skills**, e.g. team working and time management that are essential for most jobs today
- Discover your specific strengths in group or team working
- Learn how to deal with challenge and conflict
- Gain new, additional, and even creative perspectives on study topics
- Get to know socially a small group of students
- Make new friends
- Develop your communication skills

"Group work has helped improve my spoken English, and time-Management as we all need to work together and communicate with each other." (MA student from Vietnam, School of Management).

Challenge

However, group work in a university context - and particularly when assessment is involved - also presents a challenge to students. Like most significant human endeavours and encounters it takes effort, and knowledge, to get it right, so read on...

A NIGHTMARE SCENARIO

Imagine you have joined a group of relative strangers to work on a project for your course together. There are ten of you. From the start things go badly wrong – and get worse! Group members fail to get on with each other and fail to work together successfully on the project. This is **a nightmare scenario**. So, what do you think would cause this to happen?

Try and separate out the reasons into two types: **process related reasons** (the procedures for running the group don't work) and **people related reasons** (there are problems among the group members themselves).

Over the next two pages, write in the spaces provided the reasons why a group would fail?

PROCESS RELATED REASONS:

PEOPLE RELATED PROBLEMS:

See our comments on the next page

WHY GROUPS FAIL

People Problems	Process Problems
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There is no attempt to get to know each other as people • One or two people try to dominate the others • Some group members try to dominate the discussion • Some group members do not speak at all – they just sit in silence • Most of the group wants to talk – and not listen • Group members are reluctant to take initiatives to start a discussion • Individual member's ideas are ridiculed or dismissed by other group members • Some group members make racist or sexist remarks that are not challenged • Individual members prove to be unreliable: they do not do what they say they will do • Group members are unpunctual, or fail to show up at all for meetings • Two or three group members quarrel and create a bad atmosphere • Some group members are deliberately isolated or ignored. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There are no 'ground rules' agreed, on, for example, when, where & how often the group will meet • There are no agreed agendas for meetings – there is a lack of clarity on the purpose of each meeting • Specific roles or tasks are not agreed and delegated to group members • No deadlines are agreed on • There is no chairperson agreed or allocated for each meeting • Meetings start late or run on over time

Many problems in groups stem from the individual members themselves. Specific problems, particularly talking too much – or not at all, often arise from anxiety and misunderstanding. But we all have strengths to contribute to the success of any group – and weaknesses that we need to be aware of. Try the exercise that follows to learn more about your potential strengths and weaknesses in any group.

It can be a good idea if all the members of your group try this exercise and then discuss the result collectively.

PERSONALITY & GROUP ROLES

This exercise introduces you to the **MYERS-BRIGGS Exercise**. It is a personality type exercise and will present you with a summary of your personality type and can help you to clarify what your strengths and weaknesses may be in any group or team.

The exercise they designed is built on their theory that there are sixteen different personality types and every person fits into one of these. This is not to say that there are **just** sixteen 'patterns' of expected behaviour and response to situations, but that people identify significantly with one main personality type.

The Myers-Briggs theory is based on four basic aspects of human personality:

- ❖ How we interact with the world and where we direct our energy
- ❖ The kind of information we naturally notice
- ❖ How we make decisions
- ❖ And whether we prefer to live in a more structured way or in a more spontaneous way

Myers-Briggs assert that everyone will incline to one end of a spectrum of response to each of these four basic aspects of personality:

How we interact with the world and where we direct our energy:
 (E) Extroversion----- Introversion (I)

The kind of information we naturally notice:
 (S) Sensing----- Intuition(N)

How we make decisions:
 (T) Thinking-----Feeling (F)

Whether we prefer to live in a more structured way (making decisions) or in a more spontaneous way (taking in information):

(J) Judging----- Perceiving (P)

Myers-Briggs argue that everyone's preference of response will fall on one side or the other of the midpoint on each of these four scales.

This can result in a profile for yourself that falls into one of sixteen possible combinations:

ISTJ	ISFJ	INFJ	INTJ
ISTP	ISFP	INFP	INTP
ESTP	ESFP	ENFP	ENTP
ESTJ	ESFJ	ENFJ	ENTJ

Each of these sixteen types can result in a preference and predisposition to respond in a particular way to situations, although these are not 'carved in stone' – people can and do behave in often surprising and unexpected ways to situations.

The exercise that follows will help you identify to which of these sixteen types you belong.

1. EXTROVERSION & INTROVERSION

Where, primarily, do you direct your energy?

To the outer world of activity, and spoken words

or

To the inner world of thoughts and emotions?

If it is toward the outer world of activity or words, it is called **Extroversion**, denoted by the letter E. If it is toward the inner world of ideas, information, or thoughts, it is called **Introversion**, denoted by the letter I. Extro- is a prefix meaning 'without' and Intro- is a prefix meaning 'within'.

Most people think that extroverted means 'talkative' and introverted means 'shy' or 'reserved'. But this is a very simplistic way of looking at these two dimensions

During each day you will undoubtedly spend time spontaneously doing or saying things, as well as retreating into the inner world of contemplation and thought. If your working day has involved much interaction with the world, even the clearest Extrovert may feel at the end of the day that he or she wants to be left alone with his thoughts. Conversely, if an Introvert has been working in isolation all day, he or she may feel that she needs to socialise in the evening to restore some balance.

You, like every other individual, need to find a particular balance of both introversion and extroversion. However, laying aside special circumstances like those in the previous paragraph, generally introverts enjoy spending time alone to 'recharge their batteries', whilst the reverse is true for extroverts.

Some general points about extroverts and introverts:

Extroverts:	Introverts:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Energized by being with others 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Energized by spending time alone
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Often thinks out aloud 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Inclined to think things through without speech
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Shares personal feelings easily 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • More private with their feelings

So on balance do you think you incline more to:

E or I ? Write which letter you incline to in this box:

2. THE KIND OF INFORMATION WE NATURALLY NOTICE

How do you prefer to process information?

In the form of known facts and familiar terms, or in the form of possibilities or new potential?

Some people focus on 'what is', whilst others focus on 'what could be'.

If it is in the form of facts or familiar terms, it is called **Sensing**, denoted by the letter S. If it is in the form of possibilities or new potential, it is called **iNtuition**, denoted by the letter N (N is used rather than I, to avoid confusion with Introversion).

The term Sensing is used because information is taken in primarily by way of the senses. The term iNtuition is used because information is perceived primarily in an intuitive fashion.

Sensing types tend to be interested in tangible reality, focusing on the present, and seeing what is, rather than what might be. At an extreme, Sensing types can have their feet so well and truly on the ground that they miss out on possibilities for the future.

The preference for iNtuition suggests a greater emphasis on insight and the future, focusing on what might be, rather than what is. At an extreme, iNtuition types can focus so much on possibilities that they lose touch with current realities.

Sensing types tend to communicate in direct ways, whilst iNtuition types prefer to communicate in creative ways.

Sensing:	iNtuition:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Trusts what is certain & 'concrete' 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Trusts instinct, inspiration & inference
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Likes new ideas only if they are 'practical' 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Likes new ideas for their own sake
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Values realism & common sense 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Values imagination & innovation
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Likes to use established skills 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Likes to learn new skills
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Presents information in a step-by-step way 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Gets bored easily after mastering new skills
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Good at noting & remembering facts 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Best at interpreting facts

It can be hard sometimes to decide which 'side' we are on with this particular element as people are often a mixture of the two – but again, it is about deciding which side generally we are inclined to.

So on balance do you think you incline more to:

S or **N** ? Write which letter you incline to in this box:

3. HOW WE MAKE DECISIONS

How do you prefer to make decisions?

On the basis of logic and objective considerations

or

On the basis of personal values?

If it is on the basis of logic and objective considerations, it is called **Thinking**, denoted by the letter T.

If it is on the basis of personal values, it is called **Feeling**, denoted by the letter F.

Thinking types prefer decisions that make sense logically. They pride themselves on their ability to be objective and analytical. They make decisions by analysing and weighing the evidence, even if it means coming to unpleasant conclusions.

Feeling types make decisions based on how much they care or what they feel is right. They pride themselves on their ability to be compassionate in their judgements.

The terms 'thinking' and 'feeling' carry certain connotations. In Western culture, for example, there is a strong gender bias to certain types of behaviour. Men may feel they should choose 'thinking', even though their instincts draw them to 'feeling'. Conversely, women may be more inclined instinctively to the 'thinking' type, but socialised to feel they should opt for the 'feeling' category.

Thinking:	Feeling:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Steps back from problems & analyses them 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Thinks hard about effects of decisions on individuals
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Truth more important than tact & can take a hard line when necessary 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Generally likes to satisfy or please others
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strong motivation to achieve 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Will look for compromises
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Trusts feelings only if they are logical 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Believes feelings important in decision making

So on balance do you think you incline more to: T or F? Write which letter you incline to in this box:

4. THE WAY WE ORGANISE OUR LIVES

How do you prefer to organise your life?

In a structured way, making decisions and knowing where you stand
or

In a flexible way, discovering life as you go along?

If it is in a structured way, making decisions and knowing where you stand, then it is called **Judgement (J)**. If it is in a flexible way, discovering life as you go along - this is called **Perception (P)**.

Someone whose preference is **Judgement** prefers, in their lifestyle, to make decisions. This means that they prefer to make decisions about what to do, where to go, what to say, and so on. As a result of these decisions, their

lifestyle appears organised. They like to feel they have control over their own bit of life

Someone whose preference is **Perception** prefers, in their lifestyle, to learn or experience new things. This means that they prefer to find out more, rather than making decisions, and are more comfortable when they keep their options open. As a result of this openness they can appear, and feel to be, flexible in outlook and behaviour.

An important distinction between Judgement and Perception types is in the issue of **closure of decisions**. J-type personalities experience tension until a final decision on an issue is made. P-types, however, experience tension when they are forced to make a decision, as they often prefer to keep their options open.

Judgement:	Perception:
• Happiest after decisions are made	• Prefers to leave options open
• Strong work ethic – work first, play later	• Strong play ethic
• Sets goals & works toward these	• Enjoys adapting to new situations
• Gains satisfaction from finishing projects	• Enjoys starting new projects
• Prefers knowing exactly what's involved	• Copes well with ambiguity

So on balance do you think you incline more to:

J or P ? Write which letter you incline to in this box:

Working out your own preference

Everyone's personality will reflect **all** aspects of the Myers Briggs model. You use Extroversion as well as Introversion, Sensing as well as iNtuition, Thinking as well as Feeling, and Judgement as well as Perception.

However, you are likely to have **preferences** of response to situations that will help you to arrive at your MBTI profile.

List the letters you have chosen for each of the four dimensions.

Your choice of letters:

The combination of letters you have arrived at is our MBTI Personality Type.

You can obtain a description of the personality traits associated with each of the sixteen personality types from the internet at www.personalitypathways.com/type_inventory.html

How do these types connect with the role or roles you might play in a group or team? See the next pages.

GROUP OR TEAM ROLES AND MBTI TYPE

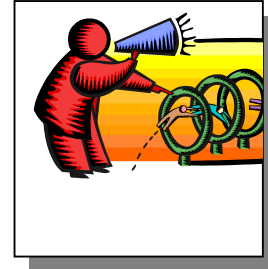
This table shows the relationship between team roles and MBTI type; this means the role you are likely to play in any team.

Team role	MBTI type
Coach	ESFJ/ENFJ
Crusader	ISFP/INFP
Explorer	ENTP/ENFP
Innovator	INTJ/INFJ
Sculptor	ESFP/ESTP
Curator	ISFJ/ISTJ
Conductor	ESTJ/ENTJ
Scientist	ISTP/INTP

The terms 'coach', 'crusader' etc. are explained on the next page.

COACH

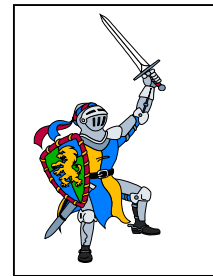
Coaches try to create **harmony** in the world around them, by building rapport with people, creating a positive team atmosphere, looking after people's welfare, motivating people and/or providing a service to the satisfaction of others. They value people's contributions, seek to develop the role that others play, and invest a lot of effort in building positive relationships. They try to overcome differences of opinion and find ways in which the team can agree.



However, they can be easily influenced and may not always be assertive enough to promote their own ideas. They can also be easily discouraged, particularly if their contributions to the group are ignored or rejected.

CRUSADER

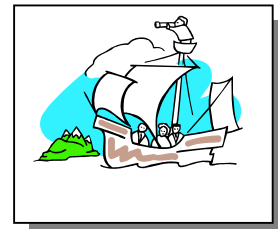
Crusaders give **importance** to particular thoughts, ideas, or beliefs. They are value driven, and in a team discussion they often bring a sense of priority that is derived from their strong convictions. They seize upon and emphasise ideas or thoughts that have the greatest import, bringing them to the fore and stressing their significance. They assess the inherent value or importance of new ideas, focusing on those about which they feel most strongly.



However, their own strong beliefs or values may lead them to distance themselves from, or clash with, others in the group who have contrary beliefs.

EXPLORER

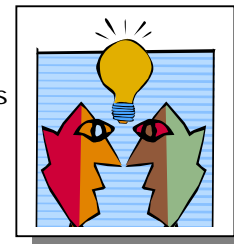
Explorers promote **exploration** of new and better ways of doing things, to uncover hidden potential in people, things or situations. They break new ground, and are often looking one step beyond the current situation to pursue unexplored avenues, until all the possibilities have been exhausted. Explorers often challenge the status quo and experiment with the introduction of change, to see if the situation can be improved or new potential uncovered.



However, they can get bored easily and may not pay attention to detail, or want to get involved in discussion on small details.

INNOVATOR

Innovators use their **imagination** to create new and different ideas and perspectives. They observe the world around them, then use their imaginations to consider what they have observed from a number of different perspectives, and dream up new ideas and insights. Innovators often produce radical solutions to problems, develop long-term vision and demonstrate an apparent understanding of what cannot be clearly known.



However, others may see them as 'up in the clouds' and inclined to disregard practical details of protocol. They can also ignore procedure and can be too preoccupied to communicate effectively with other group members.

SCULPTOR

Sculptors bring things to **fruition** by getting things done, and getting them done now! They are very action-oriented, dealing with whatever tasks the current situation presents, and spurring others into action as well. They make use of their experience and utilise tools or processes of which they already have knowledge. They try to have an immediate impact on things, injecting a sense of urgency, and aiming to achieve clear goals and tangible results.



However, they may be inclined to show their irritation with others, particularly those they feel are not contributing or taking the group task seriously enough.

CURATOR

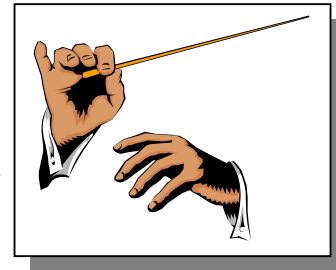
Curators bring **clarity** to the inner world of information, ideas and understanding. They listen, ask questions and absorb information, so that in their mind's eye they can achieve as clear a picture or understanding as is possible. They expand their knowledge and collection of experiences, and also look to the future by envisaging clear goals and clear pathways to achievement of those goals. The focus on clarity also brings greater attention to detail.



However, they may not always be responsive to new and unproven ideas and may be inclined to be over cautious to ideas outside their previous experience.

CONDUCTOR

Conductors introduce **organisation** and a logical structure into the way things are done. They organise and systematise the world around them, by establishing appropriate plans, identifying and implementing the correct procedures, and then endeavouring to make sure they are followed. They try to ensure that roles and responsibilities are properly defined and that appropriate resources or skills are available to undertake the work assigned.



However, others may perceive them as manipulative or overly bureaucratic, particularly if they try to dominate any group or steer it in a particular direction without proper discussion.

SCIENTIST

Scientists provide **explanation** of how and why things happen. They bring structure and organisation into the inner world of ideas and understanding. They analyse things, formulate hypotheses and explanations of how they function, and gather evidence to assess how true those explanations are. They produce mental models that replicate how particular aspects of the world works, and try to understand the full complexity of any situation.



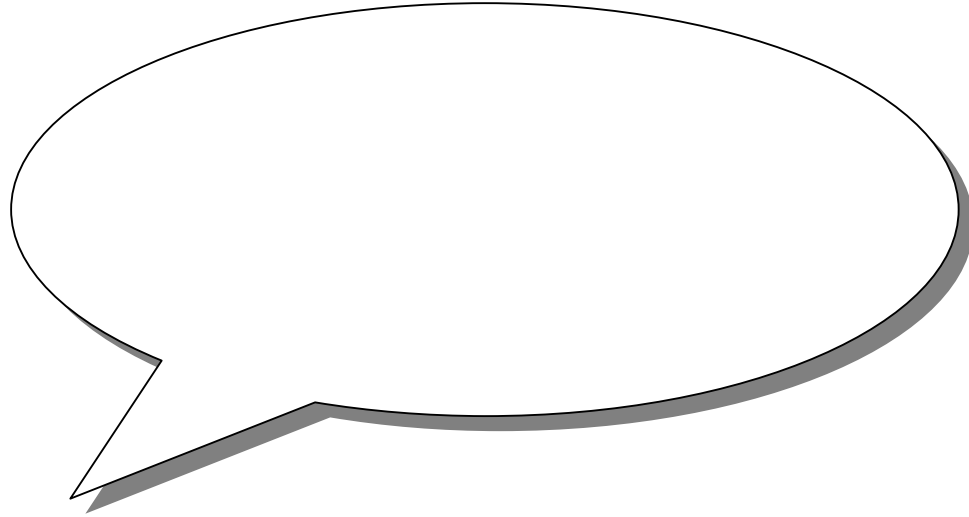
However, they may not always work collaboratively with others, preferring instead to work and pursue ideas independently.

See next page...

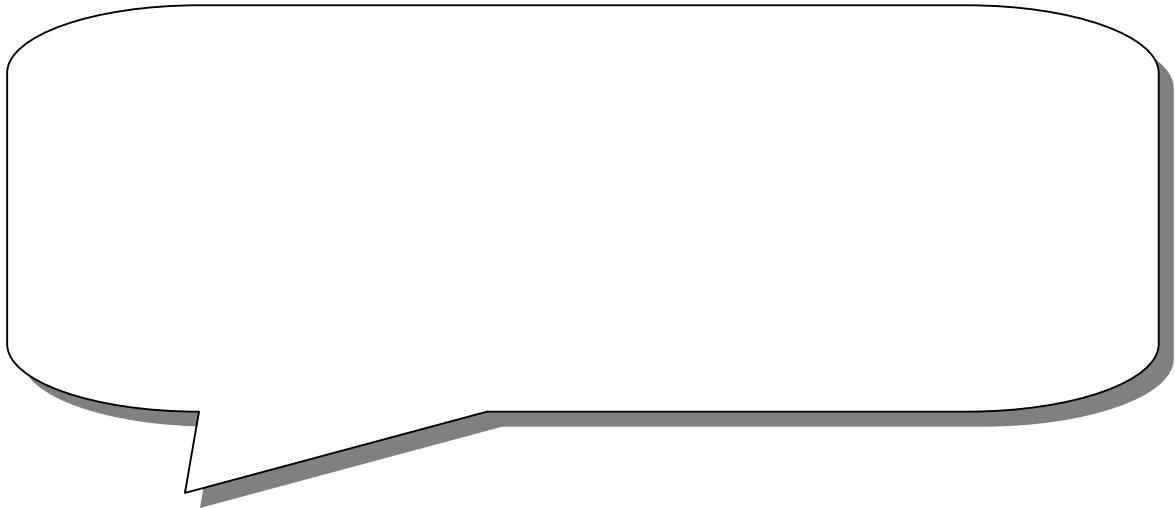
How You See Yourself

It can be helpful to complete this section individually, and then discuss it with other group members.

Do you broadly agree, disagree with the MBTI group roles definition? If you disagree, please say why?



What strengths & weaknesses do you feel you will bring to the group? Please summarise these in the space below.



When individuals come together in groups there is often a 'life cycle' that group members need to be aware of. This is the subject of the next few pages.

GROUP 'LIFE CYCLE' ?

Some groups **may** pass through four stages of formation:

1. **Forming**
2. **Storming**
3. **Norming**
4. **Performing**

FORMING

At the forming stage, there is little sense of it being a group; it is still a collection of individuals. People in the group are cautious of each other and what is expected of them. Many individuals prefer to keep quiet rather than speak out at this stage, until they are sure of their role and position in the group. The group will seek direction at this stage from a 'higher authority', e.g. a tutor.

STORMING

As the group begins to work together, people become bolder, and conflicts may emerge openly. Factions may form, and individuals may jostle for dominant positions in the group. There may be mutterings about other people's behaviour. This can be a difficult stage in the life cycle of the group. The group needs to discuss problems openly if it is to move on to the next stage.

NORMING

Open discussion of problems in the group, or the urgency of a group task, can lead to the group 'norming' stage, when it begins to work collectively at the task. Informal or formal ground-rules have been established, and group members are beginning to get to know each other and have more confidence individually and collectively. Individual differences are tolerated, providing all group members are working at their appointed tasks.

PERFORMING

At this stage, the group is working well together. The group has its own unspoken rules and members are often very supportive of each other. The group may assert its own identity; it becomes 'our group'. There may be group rituals or rites of passage, to celebrate the completion of the task, e.g. a meal or a party.

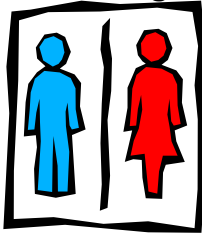
EXAMPLE OF 4 STAGES OF GROUP FORMATION

These stages of group formation can happen quite quickly. Below is an example of group formation that happened in just one day. The comments below are the observations of a trainer leading a short training session with a group of people who did not know each other at the start of the day.

(Taken from '*Adults Learning*' by Jenny Rogers, 1989)

<i>First session –</i>	<i>Second session –</i>	<i>Third session –</i>	<i>Fourth session-</i>
<i>quiet & cautious; not sure of each other yet.</i>	<i>glances of irritation exchanged at the 'things people say'.</i>	<i>the 'break in the clouds'...they've talked during coffee and have discovered that other people are not so awful after all.</i>	<i>purposeful: emergence of jokes, sense of where people are going. At the end of the day, people are exchanging addresses and phone numbers</i>

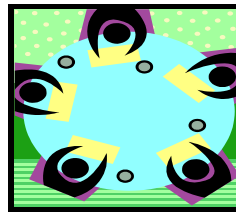
Forming



Storming



Norming



Performing



BUT GROUPS DON'T HAVE TO GO THROUGH THESE STAGES!

However, your group does not **have** to go through some of these stages.

Some groups move quickly to 'norming' and 'performing' stages without any storming! It depends on the mix of personalities in the groups. Some groups work because the members fit in well with each other from the start and the group is soon focused on the task.

Some move even more rapidly from forming to performing, because they target a particular outcome and work expediently together to do the tasks required of them. They may be indifferent to, or even dislike, each other. But they put this to one side and get on with the tasks because they have to. They are not interested in 'norming', because the group will break-up when the job is done. But this situation tends to apply to groups that form quickly and have to perform a particular task within a tight time schedule, or groups where members are arbitrarily grouped together for a particular purpose.

However, it is clear that the early stages of group formation are important to establish a good working relationship from the start.

CULTURAL DIFFERENCES

For many international students, working in a group as part of an assessed project is an entirely new experience and it can raise two particular issues for them: about protocol and communication.

Protocol

In every country there are accepted protocols about the roles and behaviour of individuals in groups. In many countries, for example, individuals learn that they need to assert their views to be heard and that their status in the group can depend on the extent, ease and ability to do this without upsetting other group members.

So they learn by listening and observing others that the frequency, pacing, pausing, intonation, and directness of their communication has an impact on this process. They learn to present their personal opinions in a way that encourages others in the same cultural grouping give them due attention.

In Britain and the USA, for example, the individualistic nature of these countries can result in UK/USA group members seizing opportunities to present a personal viewpoint, and to attempt to do it with confidence enough to gain the attention of others, but without antagonising them. This is a fine science, and not all get it right. Nevertheless, this form of individualistic communication has been encouraged by their teachers, who tend to support and encourage the idea that we learn through debate, interaction and the expression of personal opinion.

However, students from more consensual and collectivist cultures may have learned in a very different way. For example, in parts of the Far East students learn through imitation and observation. They may feel, subsequently, that they need to internalise and understand the existing knowledge before they contribute their own ideas. To air one's unformed opinions on a half-understood subject can seem like the height of arrogance to a student from such an educational background.

They may also be deeply uncomfortable in any situation, such as a group, where an argument can flare.

Alan Macfarlane, Professor of Anthropology at Cambridge University, observed this, for example, of Japanese students:

"Communication should never lead into disagreement. Interpersonal harmony is essential, and argument or debate avoided...much of British education is based on confrontational exchanges, where teachers and students are taught to think by way of an intellectual game or battle...Such an approach is puzzling to my Japanese students"
(The Times Higher, 10/08/2007, p.14).

However, most international students with little previous experience of group work in education are driven hard by their need to succeed, and most will make a determined effort to fit in with the cultural norms of the host country and with their allocated group:

"Group work with other international students can be a difficult issue. Once you are 'tuned in' or adjust to different communication styles, it becomes easier" (postgraduate student from Dubai, School of Management).

But this process of adjustment can be eased by all students being aware that their peers may share very different experiences of group work. It should not, therefore, be assumed that a quiet member of a group has nothing to say, or is opting out of the discussion. It may be that their previous experience has not prepared them for this new situation - and they need time to weigh it up. For this reason, it is often a useful experience for students to share their cultural experiences of group work at an early stage of group formation.

The second important issue for international students is about **communication** - and overcoming anxiety associated with speaking in public.

"I found out that the problem was not my language skill itself but the confidence to speak in English. Sometimes I was just not confident enough to speak out my thoughts" (student from China, School of Management).

If English is their second language, then their responses of international students to discussion may be slower than others, as they seek the right words and mentally frame them into coherent sentences.

All group members need to be particularly sensitive to this issue and give support to international students who need time and encouragement to contribute their ideas - which the majority will want to do.

For many international students faced with group work, the answer is to band with other students in mono-cultural groups. This is understandable, but often a mistake, and a loss of opportunity.

"Working in a group makes synergy and you work faster; but when the group consists of people from more than one culture, it sometimes makes double synergy, as everyone in the group thinks from the different angle and has distinct knowledge" (Postgraduate student from Pakistan, School of Management).

"I think, on balance, it is good when students from different cultures are mixed together by the tutor. If left to their own devices students will stay in their own comfort zones and this often means grouping with others from the same country. In this situation you might have international students on the course, but it doesn't make it an international course!"
(Undergraduate student from Kenya, School of Engineering, Design and Technology, University of Bradford).

The way around this situation, in self-selecting groups, is for two or three students from one country to form a small sub-group, but then to try and integrate into a main group to work alongside students from other countries. In this way they gain support - and often the courage to speak up - from each other, but have taken an important step toward working across cultural boundaries.

FORMING A GROUP

At the first meeting, you may want to work through the following exercises and checklist

1. CONTACT LIST

You could start by all group members writing their names & contact details. This should be circulated to all members of the group. You may find that **Blackboard** will also help you identify group members and keep in touch with them by Email: check with your tutor.

Name	Email/Telephone number

2. INTRODUCTIONS

Group members should introduce themselves and say a little about their backgrounds. Even if group members know each other already, it can be useful to do this, as it gets everyone speaking.

3. CLARIFY AIM AND PURPOSE OF THE GROUP TASK

For the first meeting, someone should volunteer to lead the discussion and another to take notes. However, it is a good idea for the leadership and recording of meetings to be rotated around group members so everyone gets the chance to do it. This could feature in the 'ground rules' discussion (see below).

The group should also **clarify aim and purpose of the set task**. This can involve, for example, looking closely at the wording of any question or project and making sure everyone is clear on broadly **what** is involved and **when** the task as a whole must be completed and **who** is going to do what. It can be helpful if a written summary is made of this discussion. Everyone should then sign this and copies should be made for all members (see example below):

Group Task: For our group project for the PDP module we agreed that we would explore what problems we experienced when preparing and writing essays. We are starting from a position that many students find essay writing difficult, but we are seeking to identify the specific reasons for this.

We have agreed that we should search for previous research on this topic and conduct a small scale face-to-face survey of other students on the module, using a questionnaire. We have agreed on who does what, as shown below.

Time scale: work must be completed by 30th November; our presentation is on the 8th December, which will leave time to rehearse before the presentation day.

Method (agreed roles):

Search journal articles for previous research (Zak)
 Search books for previous research/opinion (Emma)
 Prepare questionnaire (Yusuf)
 Interview students: (Waqas, Paul, Shu, Adel, Mary)

Next meeting

20th October: Zak & Emma to report; Yusuf to present questionnaire for discussion. Adel will lead this meeting.

Signed & dated (all group members sign and date this)

4. GROUND RULES

Groups should formulate their own ground rules on the expected conduct of meetings and members.

Ground rules are simple written statements on agreed conduct. All group members should receive a copy of these.

Ground rules could include:

- Punctuality
- Attendance
- Leadership of meetings (who does it)
- Recording discussion (who does it)
- Commitment
- Contribution to the group (everyone should contribute something to its success, but individuals need to **commit** in writing to this)
- Confidentiality
- Mobile phones, e.g. switch off at meetings
- The importance of **listening** to each other
- Respect (e.g. not allowing, for example, sexist or racist comments, and not accepting abusive or aggressive remarks etc.)
- Decision making procedures

The sheets on the following two pages could be printed off or photocopied and used to formulate ground rules.

GROUP GROUND RULES

Topic

Agreed on (date)_____ by the following (names & signatures)

REVIEWING PROGRESS

Once your group has formed and has been running a while, it is a good idea to review its progress, particularly if members feel there are problems in the group to overcome.

The evaluation form on the next page can help your group to review its progress. With regards to your study group work experience, rank your study group in the following categories on a scale from 1-10. It can be helpful if individual members of the group first complete the questionnaire, then the group as a whole compares and discusses individual responses.

Score 1-5: is an indication that your group has suffered problems in this area and needs to find a solution.

Score 6-8: is an indication that your group needs to make some improvement in this area.

Score 9-10: is an indication that your group has done well in this area.

Positive Points	10	9	8	7	6	5	4	3	2	1	Negative Points
Group goals clearly defined											Goals unclear
Agreement reached at most meetings											Disagreement a feature of most meetings
Tasks completed as agreed											Agreed tasks not completed
Everyone participating											Significant number not participating
We listen to each other											Listening skills weak
Open and trusting atmosphere											Distrust and defensiveness
All able to express opinions											No opportunity to express opinions
Opinions could be questioned without resentment											Opinions 'untouchable' and could not easily be challenged
Respect shown for each other											No or little respect shown by or for other group members
Consensus decisions											Authoritarian decisions
Leadership skills demonstrated											Drifting or dominating by individuals
People present on time or send apologies if unavailable											Unpunctuality a significant feature
Systematic approach to discussion											Lack of systematic approach to tasks
Time used efficiently											Time wasted
Challenging, rewarding, enjoying atmosphere											Flat, lifeless atmosphere
Group committed to tasks											Lack of commitment by significant number of group members

Source: NIMBAS 2005: adapted from a group evaluation questionnaire produced by NIMBAS, Utrecht, Netherlands.

SURVIVING THE 'STORM'



As mentioned earlier, Your group may blend well from the start and move quickly on to the 'norming' and 'performing' stages. This is much more likely to happen if you work through the exercises in the previous section. But if your group does hit a problem it needs to discuss it, and resolve it quickly.

Some particular problems that can occur, and some advice if they do:

Problem	Advice
<p>Someone gets upset if his or her ideas are challenged or rejected.</p>	<p>This problem usually arises because of the way an idea gets challenged in the group.</p> <p>The person who put forward the idea may feel personally rejected or insulted if their suggestions are scorned or insensitively rejected.</p> <p>If someone puts forward an idea, and others don't accept it, the objectors need to make clear that it is the idea that they want to challenge, and not the intelligence or integrity of the person proposing the idea.</p>
<p>Problems from outside being brought into the group</p>	<p>If group members are experiencing problems outside the group, they may find it difficult to ignore these. Worries from the outside can cause group members to be angry or aggressive to others without too much obvious provocation.</p> <p>It can be helpful if group meetings started with members saying what has happened to them generally since the last meeting. This may bring worrying issues up to the surface.</p> <p>The group may also want to build in a ground rule about not accepting abusive or aggressive behaviour.</p>

<p>Group imbalances, e.g. one or two people tend to dominate the discussion; a few people do all the work; some members opt out of most discussion/work</p>	<p>If these issues are coming up to the surface, they need to be openly discussed otherwise resentment will start to destroy group cohesion.</p> <p>The chairperson needs to lead discussion on to the topic of group dynamics by inviting group members to say openly, candidly, but not abusively or aggressively, how they feel the group is working.</p> <p>The chairperson should invite someone to start the discussion, and once someone has raised a sensitive issue, others will usually follow with their comments. The chairperson should ensure all group members get a chance to say what they think.</p> <p>This can lead to a difficult and tense meeting, particularly if a lot of resentment is below the surface. However, an honest discussion can clear the air and lead to a much more open and committed group. Some group members, for example, may be completely unaware that their opinions and actions have been causing problems.</p> <p>The meeting should try and close on a positive action point for the future.</p>
<p>Silences: sometimes a group will not have much if anything to say on a particular topic or occasion</p>	<p>This can be perceived as embarrassing in some cultural groupings, and often someone will jump in with a superfluous comment or joke to fill what they think is a void.</p> <p>However, silence is often a good thing, particularly when the group is considering an important point.</p> <p>The chairperson could, indeed, encourage group members to sit in silence for a minute or two to mentally weigh up important issues before commenting on them.</p>
<p>Sexist, racist or other stereotyping or abusive remarks</p>	<p>These should not be allowed, accepted or tolerated in the group, and there should be a ground rule to this effect.</p> <p>It should not be left to the chairperson to have to challenge these remarks; all members have a moral responsibility to intervene.</p>

<p>Not listening to others in the group.</p>	<p>It can take a lot of courage and encouragement before some members voice their opinions in a group. They may be a variety of reasons for this. The group member concerned may be a quiet, reserved person; and/or unsure what is expected of them; and/or a person who prefers to march to the beat of his or her own drum, rather than the synchronised rhythm of the group.</p> <p>Whatever the reasons, if the ideas or opinions of any member are not genuinely listened to, the speaker may retreat emotionally from further group discussion.</p> <p>A ground rule about the importance of listening to others and paying attention when others are talking is a good idea, as at least this will raise this often unacknowledged issue to the surface.</p> <p>Group members should find ways of encouraging quiet members to contribute to the discussion, and the chairperson has an important role to play in ensuring everyone is given the opportunity to speak - and be listened to.</p>
<p>Someone allocated a group task does not complete it, or completes it in a poor quality way.</p>	<p>This is a fairly common problem, unfortunately, and is a situation that can cause considerable frustration and resentment among group members who are willing to work to the best of their ability.</p> <p>The problem can be avoided by members discussing who does what at an early stage of group formation, and what results are expected. Individual group tasks should be:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> (a) identified (b) delegated, and (c) the expected outcome clarified. <p>If all members have entered into a contract on expectations, the group is then justified in asking the group member concerned to complete his or her part of the contract in the way previously agreed. However, in extreme and irresolvable cases, group members, and particularly if marks or grades are involved, should discuss the matter with the module leader.</p>

	<p>Cont...</p> <p>Tutors now are increasingly asking group members to identify and summarise their role and contribution in a group, or using peer assessment to decide whether or not individual members are entitled to share a group mark or grade.</p>
<p>The leader or chairperson of the group is proving to be unsuitable and unacceptable to the majority of the group.</p> <p>He/she may, for example, be too directive, dogmatic, or aggressive; or by contrast, indecisive and ineffective.</p>	<p>It is unusual in any group for the leader or chairperson to be completely isolated and without some partial support from one or two group members. So if there is a consensus among group members about the problem, it is best approached via those individuals who are most likely to be listened to by the leader.</p> <p>The leader should be given a chance to discuss the issues with all the group members, and make changes, if necessary. Sometimes, the leader simply does not understand the negative impact of his or her leadership style on others. It may have been fine in situation X, but not in the new Y or Z context.</p> <p>The real problem can occur if the group divides into two, or even three factions, because of leadership related issues.</p> <p>Often in this situation, the real problems are not aired and discussed and a general mood of disagreement, hostility and non-cooperation prevails. The answer is to discuss the problem, no matter how painful, awkward or difficult it is for a group.</p> <p>As stated earlier, a 'storm' is often necessary to clear the air. This was and still is probably true in your family life, and equally true in your relationships with your student peers.</p> <p>However, in extreme cases, the University counselling service will help by acting as an independent mediator or facilitator to allow individuals – including the leader – to have their say, and to make a fresh start.</p>

<p>The group has discussed a subject honestly and democratically, but no agreement or decision can be reached.</p>	<p>There are likely to be two or more positions within the group, and the role of the chairperson is to summarise these and then allow group members to vote on which option on balance they prefer.</p> <p>This can be done publicly, but is often best done privately and in writing, as the voting preferences of some members might be influenced by the dominant personalities of others in the group.</p> <p>One approach would be to briefly adjourn the meeting to give everyone a chance to think the issues over, but then ask group members to return after a break and to vote to reach a majority view.</p> <p>In the case of three options, an initial vote can identify the two strongest positions, which can then be voted on.</p> <p>If the three options all receive equal votes, the chairperson may have to decide which two options should be voted on. This may make him or her temporarily unpopular with some, but at least not for being indecisive.</p>
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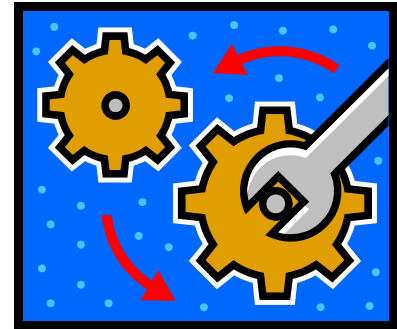
GET THE MOST OUT OF GROUP DISCUSSION

Get the most out of group discussion. The following advice will help your group to connect well together.

(**Source:** adapted specifically from: Cottrell, S. (2003) *The Study Skills Handbook*. Palgrave Study Guide.)

Before Discussion

- Ensure you have done any tasks agreed for the group
- Read around the subject
- What questions do you want answered?
- Decide who will chair the meeting – this can be done on a rotation basis to give everyone a chance



During the 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 take the form of encouraging others if you have no ideas of your own to add to any discussion

After the Discussion

- Go over your notes
- Check that you know exactly when you do activities arising out of the group.
- **Above all else: Don't let the group down – do what you said you would do.**

Listening to Other Group Members is a Key To Group Success:



TIPS FOR BETTER LISTENING

- **Body language:** nodding agreement, smiling, looking interested
- **Encouraging:** e.g. 'yes, that's a good idea'; 'yes, I agree'
- **Ask questions:** e.g. 'how do we do that?'
- **Make suggestions:** that build on the speaker's ideas
- **Disagreeing creatively:** if you disagree with the speaker's comments, you could ask for elaboration, e.g. 'what if...?' 'How will that work in practice?' When ask to elaborate on points made, speakers may begin to see the flaws in their own arguments!

Further Reading

These are all the titles in booklets in the 'Effective Learning' series:

1. *Return to Part-time Study*
2. *Return to Full-time Study*
3. *The First Semester*
4. *Time Management*
5. *Accelerated Learning*
6. *20 Tips for Effective Learning*
7. *Six Steps to Effective Reading*
8. *Effective Note Making*
9. *Effective Writing*
10. *Essay Writing (1) stages of essay writing*
11. *Essay Writing (2) planning and structuring your essays*
12. *Essay Writing (3) finding your own voice in essays*
13. *Essay writing (4): ten ways to liven your essays*
14. *References and Bibliographies*
15. *Report Writing*
16. *Pass Your Exams*
17. *Your Assignment Results – and how to improve them*
18. *Presentations*
19. *Group Work*
20. *Introduction to Research and Research Methods*
21. *Foundations of Good Research*
22. *Writing Your Management Project Report or Dissertation*

You can download any of these from the School of Management Homepages: **Resources– Effective Learning** link, or contact the Effective Learning Service, tel. 4414 (internal), Email: C.Neville@Bradford.ac.uk, or visit room 0.10 Airedale Building at the School of Management.

Recommended reading:

Hartley, P. & Bruckman, C.G. (2002) *Business Communication*, London: Routledge (see *chapter 14: Building Effective Teams*).

In the School of Management and J.B. Priestley libraries, there is a study skills section at **D.371.30281**.

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