TIPS FOR EFFECTIVE GROUP WORKING

Ruziyeva Nigora Zohidjonovna
Samarkand Regional National Centre For training teachers for New Methods

Annotation: *There are various stages that you will go through in a group project to achieve a task. Planning is critical to effective group work and will give you direction and help you coordinate your work in order for efficient task completion.*
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An effective group work together to complete a task in an agreed time, with each member contributing to the team according to their skills, experience and personality.

There are various stages that you will go through in a group project to achieve a task. Planning is critical to effective group work and will give you direction and help you coordinate your work in order for efficient task completion. The following guidelines should help you make a start with your task:

• First of all it is important to establish a set of group guidelines. Get to know the members in your group, their strengths and preferred ways of working. Try to recognise that everyone has an opinion and that individuals have different methods of working and learning.

• It is advisable to appoint a group leader and also a scribe to record the group's activities.

• Discuss the group's task or activity in order to reach a shared understanding.

• Summaries the shared understanding of the problem on a board or piece of paper.

• Discuss how you are going to approach the problem. Brainstorm to create ideas, plans and tasks for your group. Everyone should be involved in discussion and in agreement on what direction the group is taking and why.

• Decide on specific tasks and allocate them to individuals or subgroups. The subdivision of the problem or topic into smaller tasks may already be apparent to some extent by the wording of the question. However, it may be necessary for you to read around the topic first to facilitate the division of the task and identify particular interests. Make sure you are clear on everyone else's tasks in order to prevent duplication.

• Ensure that each group member has responsibility and accountability for their task with an agreed deadline.

• Once you have decided on your tasks and roles it is vital that you arrange regular meetings to review your progress and decide on what direction your work should take next. Each member should attend these meetings.

• Consider a time-line for your project, this is particularly important for longer projects: Set dates for the completion of specific tasks.

• Any resources, information or knowledge should be shared.

The benefits of group work

Whatever form the group work takes on your course, the opportunity to work with others, rather than on your own, can provide distinct benefits.

1. Increased productivity and performance: groups that work well together can achieve much more than individuals working on their own. A broader range of skills can be applied to practical activities and sharing and discussing ideas can play a pivotal role in deepening your understanding of a particular subject area.

2. Skills development: being part of a team will help you develop your interpersonal skills such as speaking and listening as well as team working skills such as leadership, and working with and motivating others. Some of these skills will be useful throughout your academic career and all are valued by employers.

3. Knowing more about yourself: collaborating with others will help identify your own strengths and weaknesses (for example, you may be a better leader than listener, or you might be good at coming up with the 'big ideas' but not so good at putting them into action). Enhanced self-awareness will both help your approach to learning and will be invaluable when you come to write your CV or complete job application forms.

In order to maximise these benefits, you will need to manage your group work effectively.

"More hands make for lighter work." "Two heads are better than one." "The more the merrier."

These adages speak to the potential groups have to be more productive, creative, and motivated than individuals on their own.

Benefits for students

Group projects can help students develop a host of skills that are increasingly important in the professional world. Positive group experiences, moreover, have been shown to contribute to student learning, retention and overall college success.

Properly structured, group projects can reinforce skills that are relevant to both group and individual work, including the ability to:

- o Break complex tasks into parts and steps
- o Plan and manage time
- o Refine understanding through discussion and explanation
- o Give and receive feedback on performance
- o Challenge assumptions
- o Develop stronger communication skills.

Group projects can also help students develop skills specific to collaborative efforts, allowing students to...

- o Tackle more complex problems than they could on their own.
- o Delegate roles and responsibilities.
- o Share diverse perspectives.
- o Pool knowledge and skills.

o Hold one another (and be held) accountable.

o Receive social support and encouragement to take risks.

o Develop new approaches to resolving differences.

o Establish a shared identity with other group members.

o Find effective peers to emulate.

o Develop their own voice and perspectives in relation to peers.

While the potential learning benefits of group work are significant, simply assigning group work is no guarantee that these goals will be achieved. In fact, group projects can – and often do – backfire badly when they are not designed, supervised, and assessed in a way that promotes meaningful teamwork and deep collaboration.

Benefits for instructors

Faculty can often assign more complex, authentic problems to groups of students than they could to individuals. Group work also introduces more unpredictability in teaching, since groups may approach tasks and solve problems in novel, interesting ways. This can be refreshing for instructors. Additionally, group assignments can be useful when there are a limited number of viable project topics to distribute among students. And they can reduce the number of final products instructors have to grade.

Whatever the benefits in terms of teaching, instructors should take care only to assign as group work tasks that truly fulfill the learning objectives of the course and lend themselves to collaboration. Instructors should also be aware that group projects can add work for faculty at different points in the semester and introduce its own grading complexities.

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