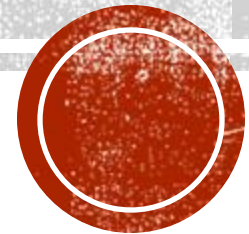# WORKING IN GROUPS

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WORKSHOP OUTLINE

Benefits

Necessary factors for effective group work

Challenges

DISCUSSION

What are the benefits of working in a group?

BENEFITS

- Builds on the skills of each member to achieve common goals

- Can accomplish more than individual members working solo

- Noticeable gains in productivity in the workplace

- Improves employee and/or corporate knowledge

- Enhances quality of life (professionally) among employees

- Leads to strategic advantage over the competition

DISCUSSION

What are the necessary factors for effective group work?

NECESSARY FACTORS

- Identification of compatible group members

- Establishment of clear expectations:

  - Who exactly will complete certain tasks?
  - When and how will members meet and communicate during the project term?
  - What are the group expectations for communication with each other?
  - How and when will members submit their part of the assignment to the group?
  - Who will be responsible for editing the final document?
  - Who will submit the final group assignment for the group?

NECESSARY FACTORS

- Communication:

  - Phone, email, discussion board updates

  - Asynchronous and synchronous methods

  - Can be limited when tasks are simple and each person knows his/her required roles/responsibilities

  - Relaxed and informal communication has been found to be more effective

  - Be receptive to others' ideas and information

NECESSARY FACTORS

- Accountability

  - Set deadlines

  - Report back to group regarding status of individual tasks

  - Are members' needs being met by the group?

  - Shared responsibilities, outcomes, and consequences

  - Individual and team accountabilities must MERGE

  - Team success is achieved when members are committed to the overall purpose and fully comprehend the importance of each role in the group

NECESSARY FACTORS

- Purpose, interpersonal interaction, and a desired outcome

- An established "group culture"

- Motivation

- Members need to share both credit and blame collectively

- Decision-making

- Trust

NECESSARY FACTORS

- Leadership

  - The leader "assigns responsibilities, allocates resources, ingests and disseminates information, and maintains schedule accountability" (Reitmeier).

  - Groups require oversight and management from some type of leader (group leader, instructor)

  - Facilitates task accomplishment and communication towards achieving goals

  - Leaders are still seen as members!

  - Rotating the role of the leader can increase cooperation within the group

DISCUSSION

What are the challenges to group work?

CHALLENGES

- Time management (other life commitments; different time zones)

- Unequal contributions of individual group members

- Coordination of group work

- Communication

- Procrastination

CHALLENGES

- Lack of clarity in regards to expectations

- Some are not prepared or trained for the increased amount of responsibility that comes with teamwork

- Lack of support for working in teams/companies rewarding individual work over group work

- Conflict over: tasks, personal issues, and processes

GETTING STARTED

How do we get the ball rolling?

BRAINSTORMING – FIRST PRINCIPLES

To answer the critical questions, give everyone a chance to contribute

- "Crazy" ideas are okay

- Don't evaluate until the end

- Quantity over quality – no need for perfection

- Try combining ideas (yes, AND rather than yes, BUT...)

BRAINSTORMING SUGGESTIONS

To help your members along:

- Try starting with a short idea session about something unrelated

- Keep the session to a manageable length (20-30 min.), and then, evaluate

- If people are afraid to speak, let them start by writing ideas down first

- If someone appears shy, try talking to them later one-on-one

AFTER THAT, IT'S DECISION TIME

Once you have enough ideas:

- Press for specifics and ask questions! (it's okay to admit you don't know)

- Piggy-back and combine ideas (highly encouraged)

- Have people rank their ideas (secret ballot)

- In case of disagreement, decide on a ruling method…

Types of Ruling Methods

- Majority Rule – seems fair, but deadlocks are a problem

- Expert rule – has the weight of experience, but be sure to verify!

- Authority rule – Can use trust to get an agreement, but it's open to influence... Make sure it's someone the whole group can trust

- Consensus rule – Unanimous agreement takes a long time even in the best of circumstances

ACTION PLANNING INGREDIENTS

- Purpose

- Timeframe

- Who's working on it?

- Methods (be specific)

- Any more resources needed (outside help, info, money)

- Time commitment per day/week

- Any difficulties anticipated?

- How to deal with unexpected obstacles?

- Who do we ask for assistance?

OBSTACLES TO BRAINSTORMING

- Some group members may have an agenda

- Some people may divert the discussion (big ego)

- Some people may feel lost (inexperience)

- Some people may not feel seen/heard (shyness)

Any of these can lead to...

DISENGAGEMENT – HOW TO TELL

Disengagement = not using the group's strength

- Doesn't say much – detached

- Isn't invested in decisions (radio silent)

- Diverts group discussions (ego trips)

- Doesn't accomplish their goals/procrastinates (during work)

REASONS FOR DISENGAGEMENT

- May have "impostor syndrome"

- May not have the experience level (hard to admit)

- May not see the value in the work

- May be placed in the wrong role

- Might be overcommitted/burnt out

TRY THIS!

- Let them do straightforward tasks (needing less creativity)

- Listen to their situation (be willing to change your mind)

- Find out how much you can help (but have boundaries)

- Tell them what they did RIGHT, too

- Check in at consistent times (specific action plan)

BUT DON'T DO THIS!

- DON'T call them out publicly

- DON'T assume you know their situation

- DON'T try to micromanage (unless they ask specifically)

- DON'T force them to figure it out alone

SUMMARY

- Aim for optimal meeting times

- Let everyone talk

- Check egos at the door

- Praise each other

- Phrase alternatives as questions

THANK YOU!

- https://www.waketech.edu/student-services/individualized-learning-center

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WHAT'S THE PROBLEM?

Look for common threads in these questions. Be as exact as possible!

- What is the problem SPECIFICALLY?

- Who is affected by the problem, and how affected are they?

- What might a solution look like?

- What needs to change?

WHAT CAN WE DO ABOUT IT?

Be honest about these questions sooner, not later!

- Minimum viable solutions? (if everything goes wrong…)

- Can we change this on our own?

- Do we have the time/money?

- Do we need outside help/information?

IS THE SOLUTION REALLY A SOLUTION?

When it comes time to evaluate...

- Who stands to gain? Does anyone lose?

- Is there anyone in opposition? Can we convince them?

- Are there any long-term effects?

- Do we need EVERYONE'S agreement?

KNOW THIS BEFORE YOU ACTION PLAN

- Who has what duties? (based on expertise)

- What method(s) will each person use? (be specific!)

- WHEN might the plan need to be edited?

- When will the group meet again? (schedule this!)

- What additional decisions need to be made? How will you make them?