

# Turning Student Groups Into Teams



## What are the aims of this project?

Autonomous learners are expected to assume greater responsibility for, and take charge of, their own learning. This project will examine how a selected group of final year students equip themselves with the knowledge and skills to run team meetings with first year Information Systems students. The outcome of this research will help us to provide the necessary resources for students to develop leadership skills.

The study will also try to determine whether the first year students feel that they are developing team skills within the project team that is being lead by the final year students.

In particular the project will look into the following questions:

- Can students learn team skills and transfer them to practice?
- What resources will the final year students choose to use whilst leading the groups?
- Can first year students improve their team skills by vicarious learning?

## What is the background / rationale?

Due to the emphasis of group work in some degree programmes it might be assumed that team work skills are being taught and developed. A preliminary survey that was undertaken in 2007 suggested that students believed that communication skills were being developed during group work but that there were problems regarding leadership responsibilities within the group. It is this survey that has prompted me to investigate the effect of introducing leaders to the groups who will be skilled in leadership and other team work skills.

Within this institution some Information Systems students struggle in their group work projects. In many cases this is due to lack of or reluctant leadership within the groups. This project will introduce a final year student who will have developed systems analysis, data modelling and project management skills as well as completing a year in industry, into the first year groups. The final year student will guide and manage the teams but will not complete the project for or with the first year students. The reason for using final year students with these technical skills is to differentiate them as being skilled relative to the first year students thereby increasing their standing within the group they will lead. Due to their technical understanding of the project the final year students will be in a better position to advise the first years on how to move the project forward. This intervention is intended to improve the performance of the student teams by

promoting good team practice.

## What are the benefits to student learning?

Best practice for running group work always advises that staff members are active in the management of these groups. Unfortunately time constraints on staff are a problem. The introduction of student leaders is a way to mitigate this problem.

Final year students learn to scan/ map and capture team and leadership skills from journals and books to contribute to a knowledge base (with guidance)

First year students may have an improved experience within the project team and develop more skills in group work by vicarious learning (from the final year students)

## How will this project be evaluated?

*Can students learn team skills and transfer them to practice?*

This will be evaluated by analysing the student diaries by looking for codes and themes which refer to the knowledge base and or new resources that they draw upon during practice. The diaries will also be compared to the interviews/ debrief taken at the end of the project.

*What resources will the final year students choose to use whilst leading the groups?*

The codes and themes from the diaries should point to other resources that the students have used that were beyond the knowledge base.

The study will also try to determine whether the first year students feel that they are developing team skills within the project team that is being lead by the FY students by analysing the responses to the group work survey.

*Can first year students improve their team skills by vicarious learning?*

This can be done by comparing the group work survey to the May 2007 group work survey where there was no intervention.

### Project Leader

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