

# Negative aspects of teamwork

Some of the negative aspects from the lecturer's viewpoint and from students are:

- **its not relevant**

It may not be to your unit but it is to all graduates. 80% of US business use some form of teamwork (McNerney 1994). Many Australian companies include it in job advertisements (ranked as one of the top six criteria for employability). Students need to be exposed to group work somewhere in every degree to allow them to learn by doing.

- **Students don't like it**

- **There are too many 'free-loaders' in teams**

- **It can't be marked fairly**

- **it disadvantages good students/ you can't mark for individual effort**

Research shows that the answer to the last four points is usually because the activity hasn't been designed to allow for differentiation in assessment for students to demonstrate their superior ability; the rationale for the process hasn't been explained for what is often a new way of working; or individual accountability is not built in to the task. A combination of assessment allows for individual effort and detailed instructions are essential. Successful teamwork requires planning. Strategies to counter each of these will be provided as you work through this tutorial.

- **Students get together in colleges and all present the same answer (plagiarism)**

Divide the task into individual components with each member responsible for part of the whole (interdependence)

- **I don't know enough about team dynamics myself**

If it is important in your unit, invite a guest lecturer with the expertise.

Start small. Modify something you already do.

- **It's time consuming**

It can be if its not planned well. If it is important for your students the planning time is well spent and it can result in better learning for students. Design the team activity so it can be completed within the time frame, especially for online teams. Peer marking can be used for part of the grade reducing the amount of time you have to spend marking, especially if you have large enrolments. A separate section deals with assessment.

- **What if a group falls apart?**

Plan for this. For example, have a cut-off date after which students submit individual work if the group has broken down or someone has dropped out. If it is through no fault of other team members, give an individual mark, if it is because the team processes were unsuccessful, give a blanket Pass grade, or have these students reflect on the group processes and what could have been done differently in their team. Teams need to contact you early.

- **You can't teach teamwork to externals**

There are many options. Online communication in particular has been proven to be an excellent medium for teaching team skills and a section of this tutorial is devoted to online approaches. Other options include using community, work place or sporting team activities to practice some aspects of teamwork and to reflect on team processes.

This is not to say that teamwork will be a smooth path. Competitive, individualistic behaviours (encouraged in higher education), imbalances caused by personality/ability/cultural/gender/philosophical or other factors and process losses, are all risks (Watson 1995). However, negative outcomes can also represent significant learning opportunities when students are encouraged to think about what they'd do differently next time.

## **References**

McNerney, DJ 1994, 'The "Facts of Life" for Teambuilding', HR Focus, Dec

Watson, P. 1995, 'Making Teamwork Work' at [austlii.edu.au/special/alta/alta95/watson.html](http://austlii.edu.au/special/alta/alta95/watson.html)