

CHAPTER 13

Working in groups

Task 1: What would you do to resolve the issue(s) in the following group working scenarios?

Scenario A. One member of your group seems to be dominating group discussions and not allowing anyone else to express their opinions or suggestions about the assignment. What do you do?

If you have established ground rules, your appointed team leader/chair could politely remind the group that 'everyone' should have time to speak. If this doesn't work, the chair could (again politely) take the talkative member to one side and ask him/her to refrain from dominating the meetings.

Scenario B. Two members of your group have fallen out over a personal issue, and as a consequence, the project is running behind schedule and you may fail to submit on time. What do you do?

If you have established ground rules, then the chair could remind members not to bring personal issues to the group, and remind the group that everyone will suffer if the assignment is not handed in on time.

The chair or a 'neutral' friend could also talk to the pair (together or separately) and ask them to either resolve or set aside their differences for the sake of the group.

If the situation continues to escalate, you should consider talking to your tutor and asking for her/his advice.

As an absolute last resort, you could exclude the two members and report their behaviour to your tutor. But you should always aim to resolve issues quickly before they deteriorate further.

Scenario C. Everyone in your group seems to have different ideas about how to answer the assignment question, and as a consequence, you haven't reached any decisions about how to proceed. The project is now running behind schedule and you may fail to submit on time. What do you do?

Your group needs a reality check! You need to rationalise and simplify your decision-making process. You could appoint a team leader to make clear and definitive decisions and draw a line under debate and discussions. You need to act quickly and make bold and perhaps difficult decisions that will involve compromises across the group.

Scenario D. One member of your group is not contributing his share of work to the project and his non-participation has led to delays. As a consequence, you may fail to submit on time or submit sub-standard work. What do you do?

If you have established ground rules, your team leader or chair could remind 'everyone' of the importance of shared responsibilities and workloads.

If his behaviour continues, perhaps a friend or the chair could have a private word with him.

If the situation worsens, then the group could threaten to report his lack of commitment to the tutor, and you will request that he is removed from the group and the assignment grading.

In the worst-case scenario, the group would have no choice but to report him to the tutor.

Scenario E. One of your team is ill and is unlikely to recover in time to contribute to the project. To add to your problems, she was working on the main part of the project and it is difficult to ask her for the work she has done so far. What do you do?

You should report this issue to your tutor and ask for their advice. The tutor may give you an extension or take these mitigating circumstances into account when marking and grading your work.

The group member may have friends in other groups who would be able to contact her. It may be worth exploring this possibility.

Scenario F. You seem to be the only member of the group who is working on the project, and your team mates are contributing very little or nothing to the assignment. What do you do?

You need to talk to your group in a calm and rational manner. One approach to take would be to explain that you are having problems with some parts of the project, and that other members of the group are much better than you at resolving these. Try to emphasise the positive and encourage their contribution rather than attack or criticise them.

If their behaviour continues, then you should consider contacting your tutor for advice.

Scenario G. Three out of four of the group members are from the same country. During meetings, they discuss the project in their own language and you don't understand what they're saying. What do you do?

If you have set ground rules, then you could remind the group about effective communication and being inclusive. You could politely explain that you don't understand what they are saying and that you feel a little excluded from the conversations. You should try to remain positive and you could remind them that the project will be delivered in English, so it is important to work in this language.