**Session Proposal for OBTC 2017**

**Title:** Group Project Survival Guide: A Free Online Multimedia Resource for Students and Instructors

**Abstract:** In this session we will briefly present and demonstrate the Group Project Survival Guide, a series of free, publicly-available video presentations to help students with group effectiveness, managing group conflict, and dealing with problematic teammate behaviors such as free riders and dictators. The guide includes 21 interconnected presentations, each 3-5 minutes long with extensive graphics, animations, professional voiceovers, and follow-up quizzes. Recently HTML5-enabled and fully responsive, it can be viewed on all devices and has an improved navigation scheme. We will also review how one can create similar resources, as well as lead a general discussion on how best to provide sustainable support to student project groups.

**Keywords:** group projects, teamwork, technology

**Session Learning Objectives:** the end of the session, participants should be able to:

* Understand the learning objectives and kinds of content embedded in the Group Project Survival Guide
* Understand how to access the Group Project Survival Guide for their own courses
* Understand how to create video presentations (“Talking PowerPoints”) to create and deliver content to students
* Understand the variety of strategies other participants have used to support student group projects

**Proposed Audience:**   
All instructors who use group projects as part of their assigned coursework. The Group Project Survival Guide can be a complement to other instructor efforts to help students develop strong teamwork skills and successfully manage their group project experience. It can be especially helpful for instructors in non-OB disciplines who want to assign group projects but feel uncomfortable providing extensive advice and guidance to teams with emerging challenges, and would value a supporting resource.

**Maximum number of participants:** Unlimited

**Type of session:**   
Brief presentation and technology demo followed by group discussion and sharing about effective strategies for supporting group project teams.

**Length:** 30 minutes. We will focus mostly on demonstrating the guide and the underlying presentation technology and how instructors can access and use the resource in their courses.

**Special requirements:**  
Computer with projection and internet access (to show the Survival Guide presentations). Room setup could be in any configuration that supports group discussion. Participants do not need any advance preparation or equipment.

**Introduction**

Most management educators, and especially organizational behavior faculty, tend to use student group projects as part of their coursework. Group projects allow students to collectively tackle more complex and extensive learning activities, gain an understanding of collaboration styles similar to the workplace, as well as improve their teamwork, communication, and leadership skills. In OB courses, group projects also help students see course concepts like conflict, motivation, and team process “in action.”

Despite their pedagogical benefits, group projects can also cause frustration for students and instructors alike. Without proper guidance, student groups can be become inefficient, unproductive, nerve-wracking learning experiences that ultimately turn off students from group work. Instructors can find themselves spending excessive time outside of class dealing with problematic teams. For some instructors, such interventions are a welcome “teaching moment” to help students grow and develop. For others, especially those outside of OB disciplines, interventions are tense, anxiety-provoking situations in which instructors feel ill-prepared and unqualified to assist teams.

The Group Project Survival Guide was created as a supplementary resource to help undergraduate student project teams create and maintain a positive, efficient, and effective group process and proactively deal with emergent group issues.

Created as a series of 21 interconnected “video” presentations, the Guide includes the following topics (presentation length in parentheses):

**Effective Teamwork in Student Groups**

Clarify Expectations at the Beginning of a Project - Five Key Questions You Should Ask Each Other (4:33)  
Get to Know Each Other Before Starting Work (1:35)  
Define Task and Process Roles (3:47)   
Stay Connected Throughout the Project - Social Network Patterns (3:08)  
Deal with Conflict Early (Tuckman Team Stages) (4:30)  
5 Tips for Effective Meetings (3:05)  
Divide and Conquer and Integration Strategies (2:12)  
Avoid Doing Things at the Last Minute (2:44)

**Managing Conflicts in Project Teams**

The Nature of Conflict on Project Teams – Task vs Interpersonal Conflict (4:21)  
Five Conflict Handling Styles - the Thomas-Kilman Model (4:56)  
Six Effective Strategies for Managing Conflict (5:18)

**Dealing with Problematic Behavior on Project Teams**

General Advice for Dealing with Team Problems (3:03)  
The Free Rider (4:11)  
The Dictator (4:15)  
The Closet Dictator (2:27)  
The Do-It-All (4:12)  
The Procrastinator (3:37)  
The Socializer (3:05)  
The Poor Student (4:48)  
The Quiet Student (4:24) The Complainer (4:08)

Students can view and watch the entire Guide, or more typically identify, select and view specific topics “just in time” to help them plan group activities or deal with emergent issues. Instructors could also assign specific presentations as homework to complement group project assignments or OB course topics like managing conflict or team effectiveness.

This project was a collaboration between Author 1 (who provided the content), and Author 2 (who manages institution’s instructional technology group, a team of instructional designers and graphic artists who work with faculty to create online teaching materials - presentations, websites, simulations, podcasts, videos, etc.) Each presentation contains professional-quality graphics, animations, and voiceovers. At the end of each presentation there is a brief quiz (checkpoint) to test comprehension.

The Group Project Survival Guide was initially used internally at the authors’ institution, with strong success. About 6 years ago it was made publically available, and each year over 15,000 students (from institutions around the world) use the free resource.

**Theoretical Grounding**

Given the ubiquity of student group projects in management education, there are countless articles exploring the antecedents and outcomes of group project work ([Brooks & Ammons, 2003](#_ENREF_1); [Kalliath & Laiken, 2006](#_ENREF_8); [Myers et al., 2009](#_ENREF_9); [Page & Donelan, 2003](#_ENREF_11); [Payne, Monk-Turner, Smith, & Sumter, 2006](#_ENREF_12); [Scherling, 2011](#_ENREF_13)). The Journal of Management Education had a special issue on project-based learning in 2006 ([Ferrante, Green, & Forster, 2006](#_ENREF_3); [Holtham, Melville, & Sodhi, 2006](#_ENREF_5); [Innes, 2006](#_ENREF_6); [Kalliath & Laiken, 2006](#_ENREF_8); [Schullery & Schullery, 2006](#_ENREF_14); [Willcoxson, 2006](#_ENREF_18)). Some researchers focus on group effectiveness ([Hansen, 2006](#_ENREF_4); [Scherling, 2011](#_ENREF_13); [Williams & Duray, 2006](#_ENREF_19)), while others focus on dealing with problematic behaviors like free riders ([Brooks & Ammons, 2003](#_ENREF_1); [Myers, et al., 2009](#_ENREF_9)), the impact of group composition on performance ([Cheng, Shui-fong, & Chan, 2008](#_ENREF_2); [Schullery & Schullery, 2006](#_ENREF_14)) or the power of strong team leadership ([Ferrante, et al., 2006](#_ENREF_3); [O'Connor & Yballe, 2007](#_ENREF_10)).

The content within the Student Group Survival Guide is based on this kind of research, and the guide includes a set of suggested readings on group effectiveness, managing group conflict, and dealing with problem team members. For example, in various presentations the guide refers to teamwork concepts such as Tuckman’s Stages of Small Group Development ([Tuckman & Jensen, 1977](#_ENREF_16)), Thomas’ Conflict-Handling Styles ([Thomas, 1975](#_ENREF_15)), Group Social Network Structures ([Wasserman & Faust, 1994](#_ENREF_17)), and Groupthink ([Janis, 1972](#_ENREF_7)).

**Session Description and Plan**

We expect the session to go something like this:

1. (5 minutes) Introduction
   1. Learning Objectives of the Group Project Survival Guide
   2. Context Behind Its Creation
2. (10 minutes) Group Project Survival Guide Demo
   1. Show the overall guide structure and topic list
   2. Play 1-2 of the “video” presentations as examples of guide content
3. (5 minutes) Application
   1. Briefly discuss how it has been used at the authors’ and other institutions
   2. Show how other students and instructors can access the Guide
4. (10 minutes) Q&A about the Survival Guide and General Discussion
   1. Answer questions
   2. If time permits, broaden the discussion to other ways and resources instructors can use to help support student project teams.

**Application to Conference Theme: Navigating the Changing Currents**

The Group Project Survival Guide represents an example of how web-based technology can help sustain interest and motivation among students to participate in project teams, and help sustain interest and motivation among instructors to keep assigning group projects. It is also an example of emerging HTML5-native, responsive web resources that can be viewed on any device, which is becoming increasingly important to satisfy student demands for 24/7, anywhere, any-device learning.

**Unique Contribution to OBTC:**

A 30 minute session about this resource was presented at OBTC 2012 just as we were making the original version (based on Flash technology) available to the general public. Recently we have done a complete overhaul to the resource based on user feedback, and besides making it HTML5-compliant and responsive (i.e. able to be viewed on any device), we’ve completely revised the navigation scheme. The new version should be much more accessible and useful, and we’d like to promote this free resource to a broader audience, as well as solicit feedback on the revised version.

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