

Title: Teamwork Makes the Dream Work? In Our Dreams!

Abstract: The use of groups and teams in management education is ubiquitous. However, despite a plethora of research and resources, educators' use of teamwork presents inherent problems and paradoxes. In this roundtable, we will highlight salient questions management educators can ask themselves to make more thoughtful decisions regarding how they implement group work in their classrooms. Participants will then form groups and discuss their practices and how they can mitigate some of the challenges such as, whether to allow students to exit their groups, whether to deduct points based on peer-evaluation, when and how to form groups, and more!

Keywords: group cohesion & performance, emotional intelligence, diversity & inclusion

Introduction

Understanding effective use of groups in the classroom has long been a topic of interest for management educators (e.g., Michaelsen, 1984). For example, in a foundational special issue at the *Journal of Management Education* (Michaelsen, 1984), scholars tackled challenging topics such as the legitimacy and purpose of groups (Boyer et al., 1984), understanding why groups fail (Feichtner & Davis, 1984), group conflict/feuds (Jalajas & Sutton, 1984), structuring groups for cooperative learning (Johnson & Johnson, 1984), exploring the effectiveness of peer evaluations (Murrell, 1984), and managing and facilitating student groups so that they maximize their opportunities to gain valuable workplace experiences while also taking responsibility for their own learning (Graf & Couch, 1984).

Since then, management educators have published a number of studies examining the benefits of using groups in the classroom and testing the effectiveness of these best practices (e.g., Lerner, 1995). For example, recent trends in online and hybrid formats have spurred interests in emerging topics like virtual classrooms (Dineen, 2005; O'Connor, Mullane, & Luethge, 2021). However, as Bacon and Stewart (2019) noted, many of the same burning research questions regarding groups and teams in management education remained unanswered. This is, in part, because of the inherent contradictions and paradoxes of the groups as a meso-level construct with emergent properties. As the number of individuals increase, and contexts vary, outcomes become very difficult to predict (Smith & Berg, 1987).

To mitigate these challenges, management educators have explored and proposed various solutions. For example, it is important for management educators to provide clear guidelines and expectations for group work and to provide training in group work skills. Many management educators use a form of assessing participation within groups as a part of the grading component.

Strategies such as assigning specific roles within the group, and providing regular check-ins and feedback can also help to promote active participation and engagement among all group members. Yet this process itself can be complex.

While there are some tools like CatMe¹ that instructors can use to create more effective team-based learning environments, including systems for assessment, feedback, and coaching, there aren't many tools that support and facilitate group members' ability to build trust, effective communication skills, and performance-based motivation. These competencies and skills are important for students to feel they are meaningfully contributing to their groups, for their contributions to be encouraged and valued by their peers, and for the outcomes of their group work to be positively evaluated by instructors.

Theoretical Foundations

The use of group work in management education has been the subject of numerous studies in prominent management education journals like the *Journal of Management Education* and the *Academy of Management Learning and Education* (Morgan & Stewart, 2019). These studies suggest that group work can be an effective teaching strategy in management education, promoting student engagement, collaboration, and deeper understanding of management concepts (Bacon, 2005).

In their book, *Paradoxes of group life: Understanding conflict, paralysis, and movement in group dynamics*, Smith & Berg (1987) identified several key paradoxes, or inherent tensions and contradictions that exist within groups and organizations, that have positive and negative impacts on group dynamics—and that need to be managed. These paradoxes include inclusion vs exclusion in groups, autonomy vs control, diversity vs unity (noting that too much diversity often leads to conflict and a lack of group cohesion), and creativity vs conformity to resistance to

¹ More information about CatMe can be found here <https://info.catme.org/>.

change. Group leaders and members, and instructors as group facilitators and managers, need to be aware of these paradoxes to develop strategies to navigate them and help students navigate them in a way that promotes group effectiveness, cohesion, performance, and opportunities to gain meaningful learning and team bonding experiences.

Hence, group work is not without its challenges—for students as well as for instructors who manage and facilitate student group work. In management education, one of the main challenges is ensuring that all group members actively participate and contribute to the work. Common barriers to this outcome include students who take on a more dominant role while others may become passive in group work given personality differences, uncertainty (Gaffney, Rast III, & Hogg, 2018), and the tendency for some people to want to be a leader vs a follower (Yu, Kilduff, & West, 2023). Additionally, there are identity-based dynamics such as racism, sexism, cissexism, transphobia, identity issues, and layers of marginalization and privilege (Graham & MacFarlane, 2021; Villesèche & Teilmann-Lock, 2023; Wei & Bunjun, 2021). These dynamics can lead to ineffective group processes such as social loafing, where individual members may rely on the efforts of others and not fully or equitably contribute, which impacts the groups' dynamics, leads to group evaluation challenges, and impacts the classroom culture (Aggarwal & O'Brien, 2008; Davidson et al., 2013). In the section that follows, we offer a variety of questions management educators are faced with as they make crucial decisions with implications to their teaching practices. Importantly, many of these tough questions will serve as potential ideation points for our roundtable discussions.

Teaching Implications

There are a number of teaching implications related to the use of groups/teams in management education. In line with Bacon and colleagues' (1999) recommendations, which

emphasize the degree to which management educators' decisions influence student experiences working on teams, our aim is to add nuance to the ways in which we understand group dynamics and outcomes within our classrooms. We believe an effective way to do so is by examining the underlying questions that drive many of our decisions. Based on our experience and extant literature, there are a number of questions without definitive answers--just best and better practices. For example, there are a number of considerations regarding the degrees to which groups are homogenous or heterogenous and how we measure the construct in our classrooms (e.g., age, race, ethnicity, gender, degree major, personality traits, GPA, etc.) (Schullery & Schullery, 2006). We might expect heterogeneous groups to have a number of advantages, however, there may be situations where interpersonal conflict based on heterogeneous group membership may marginalize some students, through no fault of their own. This is just one example of many considerations management educators face when implementing group work. Below, we will describe several more salient questions management educators face when implementing group work in the classroom. These questions, and general themes in the Appendix, will help guide the discussions in this session.

First, what is the purpose of group work in management education? If the purpose of group work is to teach students about group dynamics, then ought we penalize students for lack of effectiveness in group work (i.e., regardless of if they demonstrated a mastery of course concepts in a non-group course)? Group work can help facilitate the development of knowledge, skills, abilities, but do we need group final projects? Since, presumably, we are looking to assess an individual's acquisition of the learning objectives which in some cases get hidden in group work (e.g., the A+ student in a low performing group).

Moreover, should we even be treating classes, and groups in particular, as a proxy to work? This is a central question because reasonable people disagree and, yet, many of our considerations and decisions stem from this assumption. For example, some management educators teach students with extensive work backgrounds and others teach primarily full-time students without work backgrounds. Hence, expectations of students will vary based on these contexts (e.g., a military veteran may resent group work structure/penalties when it is framed as teaching them about “real life”).

Relatedly, should students be able to voluntarily or involuntarily exit? If students "fire" a teammate, does the teammate have a chance to make up the points? Who determines whether someone has a fireable offense? What is the process of firing a student or allowing students to exit a group? These questions have major implications for the management educator and students. In particular, these considerations will be related to how students manage their expectations regarding conflict in their groups. As instructors, what lengths do we take to encourage “buy-in” from students who remain withdrawn or are involved with interpersonal conflict within the group?

Another pressing issue is determining best practices related to grading and evaluating group deliverables (Baker, 2008; Davison et al., 2014). Whereas some instructors award a uniform grade for all group participants, others adjust final grades based on peer evaluation forms to encourage fairness, penalize social loafing and account for variation in individual contributions. Still, there is ambiguity regarding how much weight should be assigned to this information. For example, should peer evaluations account for 15% of the individual grade awarded for a group project, or should there be potential for 100% of their grade to be affected, in the case of absolute non-participation? Moreover, given that peer evaluations are often

influenced by social bias, how should instructors account for inconsistency across peer evaluations? Additionally, there are instances where a lack of trust and communication within teams may put certain students at a disadvantage. For example, students may begrudgingly fulfill leadership roles but subsequently award their peers with low ratings, without setting expectations or providing meaningful contribution opportunities (see André, 2011 for potential uses of leaders in groups).

Another consideration is the group selection process (Chapman et al., 2006; Hillier & Dunn-Jensen, 2013). Particularly, when should groups form and how should groups be selected? Moreover, should subsequent group work be completed with the same group for the group project?

Finally, we consider what we hope our students will learn from these group experiences that they can apply beyond the classroom—in ways that maximize positive outcomes for themselves, their families, friendships, workplaces, and society (Noble & McGrath, 2012). A version of these questions, and more, can be found in Appendix A. We will present a printed out version to stimulate discussion in our roundtable.

Session Description

This roundtable discussion will start by allowing each panelist to introduce themselves with a focus on the components of group work in the classroom that they have identified below. In this part, the focus is to describe salient issues many management educators face regarding group work in the classroom and raise awareness of different aspects of these group dynamics in the classroom (See Appendix B for brief overviews of each panelists' general perspectives and processes). We believe that the audience will relate to many, if not all of the issues identified by our panelists. Following the introduction, we will start the demonstration by asking participants

how they want to create groups. We will tentatively offer: Select your own groups, select your groups based on a predetermined topic (e.g., how to grade group work equitably), select groups based on primary teaching domain (OB/HR, Strategy, Entrepreneurship, etc.), select groups based on the state they currently teach, select groups based on public, private, or (nonacademic). For the topic-based grouping, we will ask participants to form groups based on a number of common teaching dilemmas related to overseeing/using group work throughout the course of a semester (i.e., the questions we've raised in the previous sections).

If they opt for an option other than being grouped by topic, we will offer a variety of topics for them to discuss as seen in the appendix. We will then ask each group to report what they discussed in their groups. We will start with a number of prepared questions first (e.g., how did they feel about the group formation), after which additional written questions will be taken from the audience. We strongly encourage the participants to voice their concerns, challenges, or their way of dealing with the issues. Finally, in conjunction with participants, panelists will come up with key take-aways and best practices that educators can use to strengthen group work in their classrooms. We will also gather everyone's email addresses so that we can send the takeaways to everybody and potentially form a community of management educators looking to continuously learn about groups and team dynamics in their classroom. Examples of tangible practices we'll provide participants are in Appendices C and D.

Session Format

● Introduction	15 minutes
● Roundtable: Group formation and roundtable discussions (This process is adaptive based on participant's group selection and preferences. Hence, we provide a variety of structures but give the participants the autonomy to choose)	30 minutes
● Summarizing best practices	10 minutes
● Addressing final concerns and next steps	5 minutes

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Appendix A.
Potential Topics for Roundtable Discussion Categorized By Group Stages

Forming:

- Creating a contract
- Meeting: coming up with rules/ expectations/ group norms
- What are your values?
- What are your personality types?
- What are your work/life considerations?
- What are students' levels of tech savviness?
- Do students choose their own groups or do we choose their groups?
- When to form student groups? At the beginning of the semester? After a few class sessions?
- What is the optimal group size?
- What is the group formation process?

Storming:

- DEI considerations
- Leader emergence
- Personalities
- Values

Norming:

- Meeting minutes
- Distribution of labor

- Intersectionality dynamics (e.g., race, gender, age)
- Psychological safety

Performing:

- Related to purpose: Is the purpose of groups to help students learn how to work in groups? If so, is that a reasonable learning outcome for the course since it is, presumably, independent from whether they grasp the concepts of the course.

Adjourning:

- When and how to exit the group? Or should exits even be allowed?
- How to fire a teammate?
- Who determines if there is a fireable offense? What is a fireable offense?
- Should there be 100% consensus or majority rules?
- Peer & self-evaluation
- CatMe
- Self-reflection activities

Purpose of Group Work:

- What are the proposed learning outcomes for group work?
- Helping students learn from each other
- Modality: In-class weekly group work vs only the final assignment as group work
- Helping students develop an emotional connection to each other as well as to the instructor

Challenges:

- Students live far away
 - Expensive cities
 - Commuter schools
- Students' diversity in life cycles (e.g., students who are parents, caring for elders, working full-time, etc.)
- Students have different work styles
- Group dynamics unfold over time
- Class size
- Personalities

Appendix B

Sample Group Implementation Processes Facilitated by Panelists

In this appendix, we will briefly discuss some of the panelists' backgrounds and perspectives which will ultimately form some of the content in the 15 minute introduction².

One of our panelists will guide participants in exploring how personalities, emotions, and values influence group dynamics (Brown, 2003; Wei & Bunjun, 2021), how emotional and cultural intelligence affect team cohesion and performance, and how shared values lead to a more meaningful group dynamic experience. For example, this panelist will share a few techniques they have used in the classroom to encourage students to have greater emotional intelligence as a leader, manager, and group member, including experiential activities to enhance their self-awareness skills. These activities help students understand and practice how to work through the various emotions and values that influence group dynamics, how to use the classroom to practice their communication skills, and how to create inclusive organizational cultures. Some of the challenges to these aims include classrooms where English is not students' first language, where students who are introverted have not yet stepped into their power, and where some immigrant and first gen students experience language barriers, marginalization, not feeling valued or respected by other group members, and a lack of familiarity with academic and social norms in a new institution and country. Also, this presenter found that helping students understand intersectionality is key to helping them understand diversity, equity, and inclusion more meaningfully. Students shared positive feedback about the importance of centering diversity, equity, and inclusion in conversations about how personalities, emotions, values, and differences in life experiences impact group dynamics. One surprising element that this panelist learned was the amount of stress that undergraduate students are experiencing, including

² Our introductions will be subject to change based on the research, practices, and shifts in perspectives that transpire over the Spring 2023 semester (i.e., time between submission and MOBTS).

balancing full-time work with parenting and eldercare obligations, along with their course expectations, and how these stressors impact their group cohesion and performance

Another one of our panelists has been teaching for several years across a variety of management subfields, including OB, HR and negotiations. Given that the cornerstone of highly functioning teams is psychological safety, this panelist focuses on providing small moments of emotional exchange and connection for students throughout the academic semester, sparking a positive downstream effect for student groups. Their approach to facilitating group work is heavily informed by their work as both an academic scholar and a meditation instructor, in that they emphasize the importance of mindful practices such as present-focused attention, active listening, and non-judgmental processing. They will share some of their favorite teaching exercises to help students build self-awareness, enhance their relational skills, increase their emotional intelligence, and lay the groundwork for psychological safety. In addition to building positive relationships, students are also confronted with the challenge of working with peers who may be unmotivated or unskilled. This educator will invite participants to share their best practices for reducing social loafing and facilitating skills transfer within student teams, especially as students encounter different personalities and perspectives.

One of our panelists has used groups in their class for nearly a decade in a variety of classes from strategy to OB. In doing so, they have changed their approach to a variety of the processes involved with implementing group work and has questioned previous assumptions like whether students ought to be able to leave their groups. Thus, a salient issue for this panelist has been how to create a selection process that will reduce conflict and increase inclusion and cohesiveness in groups. Additionally, their course is designed to do group work every class so they noticed that students in ineffective groups were effectively punished for the whole semester.

Given these tensions, this panelist has explored creating official groups after the midterm. In order to do this, the panelist used random groups during each class session so that students were familiar with the whole class. The panelist then asked students to declare two other students they wanted to work with and any number of students they didn't want to work with as long as they gave a brief explanation. For example, one student noted a classmate said something misogynistic in a breakout room and they felt they would be unable to work with them in a formal group setting.

Group Preferences Example

1. *Name *and* section (especially if different than enrolled):*
2. *Two people I would prefer to be in a group with this semester:*
3. *People I would not want to be in a group with this semester:*

Appendix C
Group Work Plan Example

CLASS ____ **GROUP #** ____ **GROUP NAME** _____

INDUSTRY _____ **FIRM** _____

STOCK SYMBOL _____ **SIC:** _____ **NAICS:** _____

A. Milestones

Milestone	Date

(Example milestones: finish individual research by... ; prepare draft material for team review by...; ensure access to recording equipment by... dry run of presentation on...; team review of video on...; rework completed by ...; final run of presentation on...)

B. Group Member Assignments

Member 1:

Member 2:

Member 3:

Member 4:

C. Peer Evaluation Criteria

What criteria will your group use to evaluate each other's contributions? (Use Student Peer Evaluation Sheet attached, or develop criteria/form to be used by the whole group.)

D. Resolution of Group Conflict

How will the group resolve conflict or disagreement?

E. Non-Performance Agreement

How will the group deal with a member that is not performing their duties?

F. Signatures

We, the undersigned members of this group, agree to the statements in this work plan:

- 1. _____ **Date:** _____

- 2. _____ **Date:** _____

- 3. _____ **Date:** _____

- 4. _____ **Date:** _____

Appendix D

Peer Evaluation Form for Group Work

Your name: _____

The following document is divided into 2 parts. The first part focuses on the group dynamics for the group project. The second part focuses on attendance and participation. The goal is to provide a (comparatively) less biased multi-source assessment of group members over the past semester.

Part I: Write the name of each of your group members in a separate column. For each person, indicate the extent to which you agree with the statement on the left, using a scale of 1-4 (1=strongly disagree; 2=disagree; 3=agree; 4=strongly agree). Total the numbers in each column.

Evaluation Criteria	Group member: (You)	Group member:	Group Member:	Group member:
Attends group meetings regularly and arrives on time.				
Contributes meaningfully to group discussions.				
Completes group assignments on time.				
Prepares work in a quality manner.				
Demonstrates a cooperative and supportive attitude.				
Contributes significantly to the success of the project.				
TOTALS				

Feedback on Team Dynamics:

1. How effectively did your group work?
2. Were the behaviors of any of your team members particularly valuable or detrimental to the team? What grade (in a standard 0-100%) does each member (**INCLUDING YOURSELF**) deserve as a percent of the final product? Explain. (This is not a forced ranking. So giving one person a 95% does not mean you must give another person a 90%, another 85%, etc. All group members could, in theory, get a 100%. An explanation for each grade must be given.)

Example: Dr. XYZ (Myself)- I think I deserve 100% of the group grade due to my input. I coordinated every meeting and helped edit the final paper.

John Doe- John Doe deserves 70%. He never attended meetings and only did his parts without providing any input with the direction of our project. His parts were poorly done and would not edit them when we suggested making changes

Part II: Now consider attendance, group work participation, and class discussion. The goal of this portion of the assessment is to promote convergent validity between the student, peers, and myself (*i.e., I have documented attendance/participation with the turned in-class assignments*). For example, 2 students might say everybody in the group attended and participated regularly but the other 2 students might not agree. It would be appropriate to say, for example, “I did not attend regularly so I cannot assess my peers’ attendance/participation”. Because of the nature of the class, attendance is the major component followed by ingroup participation (*i.e., when we did group cases/assignments in class, did the person participate or text the whole time?*). A table is provided on the next page to provide some general guidelines (***GO TO THE NEXT PAGE***):

Examples of Grades and Corresponding Behaviors				
	A +	A/B	C	D/F
Frequency and Quality	Attends class regularly and <i>always contributes</i> to the discussion by raising thoughtful questions, analyzing relevant issues, building on others' ideas, synthesizing across readings and discussions, expanding the class' perspective, and appropriately challenging assumptions and perspectives	Attends class regularly and <i>sometimes contributes</i> to the discussion in the aforementioned ways.	Attends class sporadically and <i>rarely contributes</i> to the discussion in the aforementioned ways.	Attends class infrequently. If not for group work outside of class, I might have never known this person was in class!

3. **Part 1:**

- a. What do you think you deserve as a final participation grade (0-100%)?
- b. Explain why you think you deserve this grade?

Part 2: What do you think each group member deserves as a final participation grade (0-100%) (you can copy and paste names from question 2 to save time)? Provide explanations for participation grades below 75%.