Tools for a positive group-work experience

**WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW**
When comparing overall positive versus overall negative group-work experiences, there are substantial differences in the way group members interact. In particular, the overall climate of a group is established by the early planning stages and individual preparedness, which sets the stage for an overall positive or negative experience. The way a group collectively handles setbacks, stressors, and negative emotions also contributes to overall feelings towards a project.

**WHAT IS THIS RESEARCH ABOUT?**
Working in a group or team can be a demanding and sometimes exhausting task. With the increased use of Internet-based systems for collaboration, group work now occurs both in-person and remotely. Being able to effectively collaborate in an online environment is a necessary and important skill to have. Effective group interactions, as well as emotion regulation skills (the ability to control one’s emotions or responses to those emotions) are both required for a successful group dynamic. This research studied group interactions and emotion regulation in Internet-based group work to understand best practices for online collaboration.

**WHAT DID THE RESEARCHERS DO?**
The researchers studied online group work in an undergraduate class at the University of Victoria. In groups of four, students completed a 90-minute online group project. The authors analyzed the group interactions through the online chat log, and surveyed students about their emotions prior to, during, and after the project. Of all the groups in the class, one had an overall positive experience and one had an overall negative experience. These two groups were compared for similarities and differences.

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WHAT DID THE RESEARCHERS FIND?

There were some obvious differences in interactions and emotion regulation between the two groups:

- Preparation
  - The ‘positive’ group had better prior knowledge of course concepts.
  - Members of the ‘positive’ group planned to work together rather than independently.
  - Members of the ‘negative’ group were focused on how they would operate as individuals.

- Emotion regulation during the planning phase
  - Positive interactions dominated in the ‘positive’ group.
  - Planning was fast and productive in the ‘positive’ group, but drawn-out in the ‘negative’ group.

- Dealing with difficult situations
  - In the ‘positive’ group, members supported each other through setbacks and stressors such as time constraints, and worked as a team to complete the project.
  - In the ‘negative’ group, members were less supportive of each other, and worked individually to complete the project.

- Being nice
  - In the ‘positive’ group, members supported and encouraged each other, using mostly positive tone of voice in the chat room.

Overall, groups were more successful when members were individually prepared for their task, actively supported emotions brought up by group members, and were collectively responsible for the completion of the task.

HOW CAN YOU USE THIS RESEARCH?

When you are working in a group, whether in-person or online, rather than just jumping in to getting the task done, team members need to take personal responsibility for being well-prepared and ready to contribute to the collaboration, and groups together need to invest in planning and organizing their approach and interactions. Remember the importance of being an active and supportive team member. It is not helpful to use an abrasive tone, boss your group members around, or to have an “I’ll just do it myself” mentality. A group that, together, is able to emotionally support each other through setbacks and stressors will ultimately be more effective in completing their tasks, and feel better about the process overall.

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CITATION


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