Tutor Support sheet: Supporting non-domestic students with working in groups

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This support sheet brings together some knowledge and tips for tutors at the EWI Faculty who support the international students in finding their way and making the best of their studies. Group work, project work is an important part of the TOM modules and might be difficult for non-domestic students to get started with. Making students think in advance of how this group work can best be done, how to prevent group disputes helps to get better group results and a better learning atmosphere is important.

Things that might happen in the group

Working in a group with different cultures has great potential benefits for the students:

1. Perspectives from different cultures can be shared and broaden the students' view;
2. Different solutions can be found than just from one cultural perspective;
3. Students get the opportunity to practice and work on their international (communication) competences.

These benefits might however easily be lost if the group does not work well together. Popov (2012) has done research into the kind of problems student groups can encounter in their group work. All groups, irrespective of their cultural composition, can face the same problems:

- Free riding: Some students do not participate in the group and the work to be done;
- Insufficient English language skills to communicate properly within the group;
- Students not communicating properly, not answering to their group members;
- Group conflicts about how the work should be done;
- A low level of motivation for the group work.

In mixed culture groups, some extra differences between students will appear that need attention and adaptation of everyone involved. These problems have been worked out in detail using the book of Erin Meyer, The Culture Map (2014).

- Different styles of decision making and problem solving:
    - Consensus seeking: Decisions are made in a group through unanimous agreement. Common in the Netherlands, Japan, Sweden, and Germany.
    - Top-down: Decisions are made by individuals (usually the teacher or a leader in the group). Common in Nigeria, China, India, Russia.
- Different ways of interacting:
    - Low context communication: Good communication is precise, simple and clear. Messages are expressed and understood at face value. Repetition is appreciated if it helps clarify the communication. Common in the US, the Netherlands, Australia, Canada, and Germany.
    - High context communication: Good communication is sophisticated, nuanced and layered. It is less direct. Messages are both spoken and read between the lines. Messages are often implied but not plainly expressed. Common in Japan, Korea, Indonesia, China, Kenya, Iran, India.
- Different styles of complying with supervisor's guidelines:
    - Egalitarian: The ideal distance between a boss (teacher) and a subordinate (student) is low. The best teacher is a facilitator amongst equals. The supervisor's guidelines will be discussed and followed if the group agrees. Common in Denmark, the Netherlands, Sweden, Israel, and Australia.
    - Hierarchical: The ideal distance between a teacher and student is high. The best teacher is a strong leader who leads from the front. The supervisor's guidelines will be followed exactly. Common in Japan, Korea, Nigeria, Arabia, India, and China.
- Different styles of conflict management:
    - Confrontational: Disagreement and debate are positive for the team. Open confrontation is appropriate and will not negatively impact the relationship. Common in Israel, France, Germany, Russia, the Netherlands, Denmark, and Spain.

o   Avoiding confrontation: Disagreement and debate are negative for the team. Open confrontation is inappropriate and will break group harmony or negatively impact the relationship. Common in Indonesia, Japan, Thailand, Ghana, China, Peru, and Arabia.

Tips for students

–   Read and learn about cultural differences themselves so they can recognize things happening in the group and bring them into the discussion. There is no right or wrong in these types of issues, main thing is to bring them on the table and try to find a solution. A good resources for this is Nunez, C. et al (2017). They use this book as well in the academic skills role Intercultural Communicator.
–   Adopt a structured approach for the group work so everybody knows what to do and what to expect from each other:
    o   Start the group work by discussing the task and how to work on this. Discuss the group's motivation level: what mark and kind of end product do you want to achieve. Write this down and make sure that every group member supports it.
    o   Split the tasks to share ownership and responsibility;
    o   Discuss the group process on a regular basis within the group and with your supervisor if necessary;
–   In order to have a good start with the group work, the students could prepare a contract for how they will work together as a group and all sign it. Then, if things happen it is more easy to go back to these and discuss what happened. And it is clear to everyone what is expected from him/her. In the IBA Master's programme this method is commonly used. Below you can see an example of such a contract.

STATEMENTS GROUP 28

1. When someone, out of our group 28, does not show up on one of the meetings, he or she gets a warning. Next to the warning, you have to bring food to the next meeting. When this happens one more time, he or she will get double work next time. How much work will be discussed with the other members of the group.
2. When someone, out of our group 28, does not deliver good work, and this is agreed with all the members, he or she has to do double work next time. How much work will be discussed with the other members of the group.
3. Everyone is responsible for his/her own work.
4. If you are ill at home, but still can work on one of the assignments, you still have to do the assignment.
5. When someone out of group 28 cannot join a meeting, or do his/her own work, she or he has to contact for help in the group WhatsApp.
6. Two days before the official deadline, the members of group 28 have finished their work. After that, at least two members of the group will check the assignment. If someone out of group 28 is too late with his or her part, group 28 will apply the consequences of statement number 2.
7. The goal of group number 28 is to get at least a 7.
8. If someone out of group 28 is too late for at least 10 minutes, he or she has to bring cookies to the next meeting.
9. All the members of group 28 have to put their phones on one big pile by a meeting. The first one who takes his/her phone, apart from the breaks or endings of the meetings, has to bring cookies to the next meeting.

Tips for supervisors

–   Read and learn about cultural differences yourself so you can recognize things happening in the group and bring them into the discussion. There is no right or wrong in these types of issues, main thing is to bring them on the table, discuss it with the group or individual student and create awareness. You could use the material from the academic skills role Intercultural Communicator for this.

- Concerning the group work:
  - o Compose the groups in such a way that they are culturally and gender well balanced;
  - o Make the group collaboration skills part of the learning outcomes and assessment;
  - o Give formative feedback as a supervisor at regular intervals during the group work process;
  - o Monitor the progress of the groups on a regular basis;
  - o Assign an individual mark for group work;
- If you would like to give individual marks for students working in a group, you could use the Web-PA software. http://webpaproject.lboro.ac.uk/ . This software allows you to set up a rubric for assessing participation in the group work, letting students assess their peers anonymously with this rubric, and adapt the group mark to an individual mark, including the group participation.

  Example rubric:

  - Excellent: present throughout the assignment; contributed to the highest degree; worked very hard. Even, in case the student was facing problem, he had the ability to generate ideas, discuss with the other members and give a solution.
  - Good: present throughout the assignment; contributed well and regularly; worked hard.
  - Fair: present in most parts of the assignment; contributed from time to time; showed some effort.
  - Poor: missed most parts of the assignment; contributed when prompted; showed little
  - Unacceptable: was not present at all; did not contribute to effort at all; showed no effort at all.

Resources:

- Internationalisation toolbox on the CELT website
  https://www.utwente.nl/en/ces/celt/toolboxes/internationalisation-celt/
- Popov, V. et. Al (2012) Multi-cultural student group work in higher education. An explorative case study on challenges as perceived by students. *International Journal of Intercultural Relations*, *36*, 302-317. https://www.mmulder.nl/wp-content/uploads/2011/11/Popov-2012-Multicultural-student-group-work-in-higher-education.-An-explorative-case-study-on-challenges-as-perceived-by-students.pdf
- Meyer, E. (2014). *The Culture Map. Breaking Through the Invisible Boundaries of Global Business.* INGRAM PUBLISHER SERVICES US. https://www.erinmeyer.com/book/
- Nunez, C. et al (2017). *Intercultural Sensitivity. From denial to intercultural competence.* 4th revised edition. Van Gorcum.