

# Teaching and Learning Showcase 2025



## Success in Student Groupwork: Structured Team Contract 'Do-Overs'

### OVERVIEW

Student group contracts are attracting renewed attention in the Management Learning and Education literature, primarily as a result of the increasingly 'online' nature of student work following the Covid pandemic. This upsurge in interest has highlighted the limitations and downsides of virtual group-working: poor communication and group dynamics, increased conflict, reduced

information sharing and 'ghosting'. Prior research indicated that team contracts were only effective during early, 'forming', stages of team development and this poster outlines a process for students to revise and re-draft their team charters. The process focuses on the way that student groups gradually learn about the unique dynamics of their own team in way that can assist student improving their future performance as individuals in teams.

Learning Contract



### APPROACH

This exercise has been conducted over three in-person sessions over 30-45 minutes each, with teams of final year undergraduate or taught postgraduate students, with membership varying from 3 to 6 members. The sessions are typically interspersed between other group assignments. In the first session of the module students draft team contracts with minimal instructions. Students may ask questions to the lecturer about how to do this and open-source or recycled templates are permitted. Following the completion of another piece of groupwork, students participate in a range of exercises (including gap assessments of 'desired' group performance and actual group performance and appreciative reviews of individual performance) to assist them evaluate their outputs. They are guided through constructive activities which enable them to share their experiences of the first stage of group work. The experiences are then used to support the development of a second draft of the team contract. This process should undergo at least one additional iteration throughout the module to allow students to accommodate additional learning about their team's dynamics as the group becomes more familiar with each other.

### AIMS

After completing the exercise, students will be able to:

1. Analyse the social, technological and contextual factors which are driving the performance of their group.
2. Understand the different levels of motivation, capabilities and resources available to their group members.
3. Apply behavioural and technological solutions to improving the performance of the group and the quality of work submitted for assessment.

### KEY LEARNINGS

1. Working in groups has the potential to negatively impact student learning experiences.
2. Group contracts can help establish agreed behavioural standards amongst group members are frequently proposed as a solution to potential conflict or frustration.
3. However, these often fail as they are drafted at a 'pre-project' stage where the group doesn't understand its own dynamics or different understandings or motivations of individual team members.
4. Contracts are frequently re-visiting in professional or organisational contexts when it becomes clear that expectations are not being met. Student groups experience the same issues. The opportunity to reflect on productive and non-productive behaviours through allowing students to re-draft student contracts has resulted in: (i) enhanced reflexive capabilities for individual students (ii) reduced intra-group conflict and (iii) improved performance in assessed work.

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#### References/Acknowledgements

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