



Intercultural Groupwork Tips for Success

Camosun College
Multilingual Support Services (MSS)



What is Intercultural Competence?

- Effectively “mediating between perspectives” (Byram et al., 2001, p. 5)
- Some characteristics: ambiguity tolerance, communication skills, empathy, flexibility, respect for difference, willingness to learn (Spencer-Oatey & Franklin, 2009)
- In practice, often expressed in skillfulness at negotiating meanings, creating shared understandings, and repairing misunderstandings (Ting-Toomey & Chung, 2005)

In your groups, don't aim to impose MY culture, nor to assimilate to YOUR culture, but to create OUR culture (Chao & Pardy, 2017).

Introduction

Intercultural groups, though slow to start, have outperformed monocultural groups (De Vita, 2002; Watson et al., 1993). Why do you think that is?

Some Principles

Every group is diverse – tips for intercultural groups are relevant to all (Shapiro et al., 2014)

Diversity



Intercultural groups increase challenge but also potential for growth and learning. (McAllister & Perron, 2017)

Potential



Be mindful of cultural influences but see the person first (Spencer-Oatey & Franklin, 2009)

Individual



Workshop Goals

CULTURE KNOWLEDGE:

Identify places where culture may show itself in groupwork

OTHER & SELF-AWARENESS:

Learn more about other members' – and your – values, expectations, and biases for groupwork

INTERCULTURAL COMPETENCE:

Identify areas where open-mindedness and communication skills need to be applied

COMMITMENT:

Reflect on your intercultural strengths and weaknesses and set goals for your next group project



Pre-Workshop Survey

- Your Instructor will show you some of the (anonymous) results of the pre-workshop survey
- Is there variety or sameness across your class? How do your responses compare with other classmates?



Cultural dimensions and groupwork

Individualism & Collectivism

Individualists:

Focus on benefit for me; focus on end goal; work on parts separately

Collectivists:

Focus on group benefits and relationships. Shared work

Hofstede (1980) as cited in Gudykunst, 1998

High-context & Low-context communication

High-context:

Adjust talk to the listener and situation; be indirect

Low-context:

Speak your mind; be clear, direct

Hall (1976) as cited in Gudykunst, 1998

Monochronic (fixed time) and Polychronic (fluid time)

Polychronic:

time is flexible to complete work and build relationships

Monochronic:

time is fixed and limited; be concise; be punctual; schedule tasks

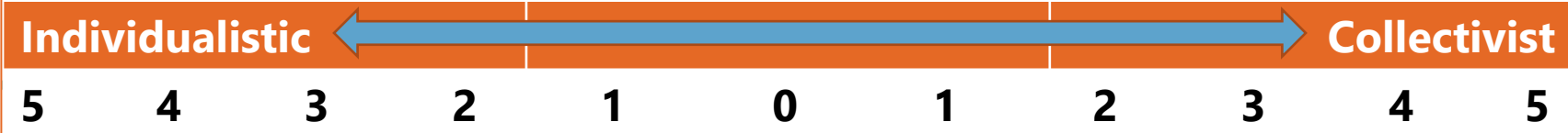
Chao & Pardy (2017)

Cultural Dimensions and Groupwork

Where do you see yourself on these lines?

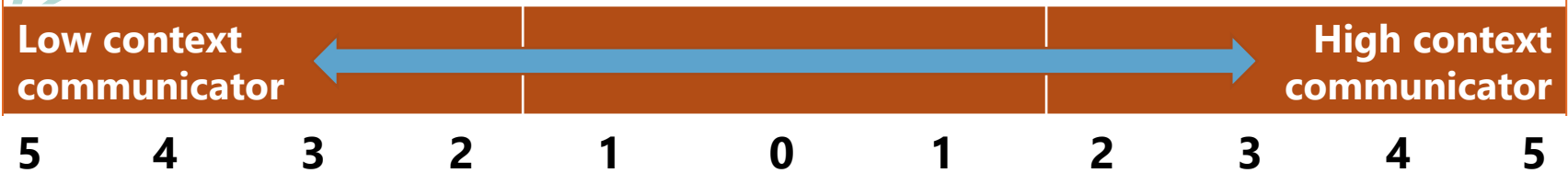
How might group members' differences affect your work?

Focus on benefit for me; focus on end goal; work on parts separately



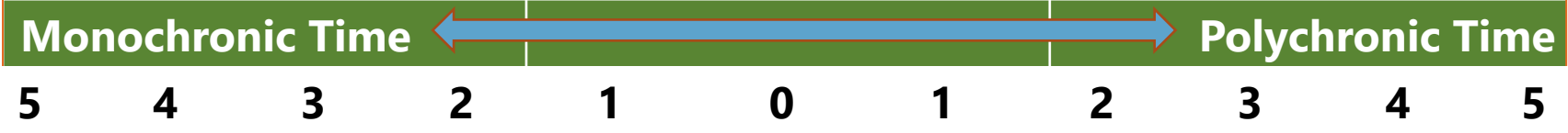
Focus on group benefits and relationships. Shared work

Speak your mind. Be clear & direct.



Adjust talk to the listener and situation; be indirect

Time is fixed and limited. Be concise & punctual. Schedule tasks.



Time is flexible to do good work and build relationships

Part 1: Team-Building Tips

1. Understand the range of attitudes to group projects and the reasons your instructor is using them
2. Get to know others (and yourself)
3. Develop a team contract
4. Use initial stages to improve processes



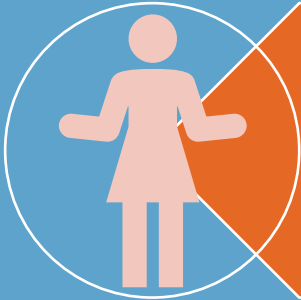
Part 1 – Team Building

Discuss these Questions:

1. How often did you do group projects in your previous educational experience? Did you enjoy them? Why might some students resist group projects?
2. Why is it particularly important for intercultural groups to spend time getting to know each other? How might personality surveys help with group formation?
3. What can teams do at early stages to prevent future trouble? What issues need to be discussed from the start?
4. How can minor tasks at the beginning of a project give teams time to improve processes?



Tip 1: Understand the Range of Attitudes to Group Projects and Why your Instructor is Using Them



Resistance to group projects:

- Personality (prefer solo work)
- No experience with group work
- Expects instructor-led learning

De Vita, 2001



Why Camosun values group projects:

- Companies expect teamwork skills in recruits → reflected in course outcomes
- Teaching best practices: students learn by doing

Rauer et al. (2021)



In favour of intercultural group projects:

- Reflects diversity at Camosun and workplaces
- Gain intercultural competence



Tip 2: Take Time to Build Rapport

Ice Breakers*

- Examples: -Interview (pairs & share) -In common (find as many in-common items as possible)
-2 truths and 1 lie, etc.

[Link to 50+ more icebreaker ideas](#)
(Cserti, 2023)

Discuss Groups

- Describe best/worst groups you've experienced
- Discuss what a successful team and good team member looks like
- Discuss what you're hoping for/ hoping to avoid in group

Understand Project

- Ensure all members understand project information:
Steps, deadlines, grading (rubrics), where documents are found, where to get help, etc.

Set Expectations

- Prioritize fair/inclusive communication
- Discuss distribution of work, group roles, dealing with conflict, meetings, tech to use

*Not just at the start of project. Begin all meetings with social check-ins

Tip 3: Raise Your Self-Awareness as a Team Member

Psychological surveys can show you to yourself

- Some free examples:
 - [DISC Personality Test](#) (123 Test Team, 2023)
 - [Five-minute Personality Test](#) (Smalley & Trent, 1999)
 - [Helen Fisher's Personality Test](#) (Fisher, 2013)
 - [Team Roles Test](#) (123 Test Team, 2023)
- Share result with your group & your level of agreement with the result.



Tip 3 (cont.): Raise Your Self-Awareness as a Team Member

Identify group roles

- Reflect/share your strengths/weaknesses for group projects
- Identify roles (in addition to writing/research) such as:
 1. **Leader** (runs meetings, clarifies goals, checks understanding, makes sure work gets done)
 2. **Mediator** (monitors 'feeling'; helps resolve trouble; ensures all are included)
 3. **Organizer** (takes notes; tracks deadlines; figures out tech; shares/submits assignments)
 4. **Quality Controller** (identifies problems; critiques ideas; checks details)

Other example roles: [Carnegie Mellon University](#) (n.d.); [University of Michigan](#) (2020).



Tip 4: Create a Team Contract

- Create and sign a contract. Review regularly. May include:
 - Communication
 - How (e.g., WhatsApp)
 - How often to check messages
 - Frequency of meetings
 - Commitment to inclusive and respectful discussions
 - Shareable app(s) to work in (e.g., Google Docs)
 - Detailed schedule
 - Deadlines for completing work
 - Task management log
 - Initial Roles (in addition to research/writing)
 - Revisit regularly – allow for rotation
 - Conflict resolution: Steps to take if a member...
 - Misses meetings? Misses deadlines? Produces unsatisfactory work?
 - At what point to ask the instructor to intervene

Some example team contracts that your team can adapt:

(1) [From Camosun's School of Business](#) (Camosun College, n.d.)

(2) [From HubSpot](#) (HubSpot, n.d.)

Some example team contracts that your team can adapt:

Tip 5: Use Initial Stages to Improve Group Processes

You can't plan away all trouble. Challenges will come up.

- **Use initial stages to address...**
 - Communication problems / not meeting deadlines
 - Discuss; refer to/update team contract
 - Low quality of work
 - Move up deadlines and get feedback (e.g., Writing Centre, instructor)
 - Offer constructive peer feedback
 - Ask instructor for examples/models of high-quality work
 - Adjust roles to mitigate weaknesses

Part 2: Effective Communication Tips

1. Recognize the particular importance of clear communication with intercultural groups
2. Include all members in discussion
3. Communicate respectfully and positively with peer feedback
4. Address conflicts respectfully and focus on solutions



Part 2 – Effective Communication

Read these situations. Be empathetic in thinking about both sides. Why might the members act that way?

1. During a meeting, one member seemed happy to join the discussion at the beginning; however, they became more and more quiet and finally stopped talking and following the talk. Other members were confused and frustrated...
2. A group was using Google Docs. One member read another member's section of the document and made lots of comments to improve the writing. The writer of that section was angry...
3. One group member missed a deadline for part of the project. Other members had to complete that part themselves. They complained to the instructor. The member who missed the deadline was shocked and angry that the others had gone to the instructor...

Follow up: Is there anything the groups could have done **BEFORE** or **DURING** these situations to improve the outcome?



Tip 6: Don't Assume Mutual Understanding

Before Meetings

- Provide STRUCTURE with agenda and meeting goals
- Designate LEADER to facilitate talk and ensure participation; select a NOTETAKER to record main points

During Meetings

- Fast talkers: slow down and be patient
- Use clear language: avoid phrasal verbs and idioms
- Ensure full participation: give time to formulate ideas
- Check understanding ('Is that clear?' 'So you mean...?')

After Meetings

- Summarize main ideas in writing (and/or visuals, audio/video recording)

See "Group Discussions" workshop (camosunmss.opened.ca)

Tip 7: Give/Receive Respectful Peer Feedback

Peer Feedback (Multilingual Support Specialists, 2023)

- Recognize that peer feedback is unusual in many educational cultures
- Define 'feedback' positively: Feedback (=help to improve) is not criticism (=identifying faults)
- Ask before providing feedback
 - Member resistant to peer feedback? → Suggest Writing Centre / Instructor for help
- Include both positive (what they did well) and negative (what to change)

Be specific

"This section isn't good enough." X

"Add stats and other supporting details." ✓

Use positive words

"Stop repeating 'car.'" X

"Use different words for 'car' to add variety." ✓

Effective Peer Feedback

Goal focused

"Give examples here." X

"To persuade the reader, give some examples." ✓

Avoid 'you'

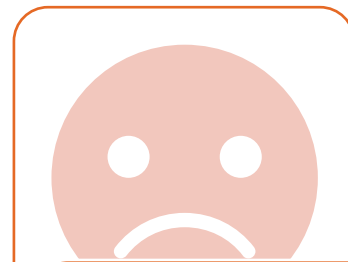
"You made lots of spelling mistakes." X

"There are spelling mistakes to check." ✓

See "Giving & Receiving Feedback" workshop (camosunmss.opened.ca)

Tip 8: Expect Conflict and Deal with It Early and Respectfully (Guffey et al., 2022)

- Discuss conflict-managing procedures before conflict happens
 - In Team Contract: Steps to follow / When to involve instructor
- Identify and address trouble early (don't let it brew!)



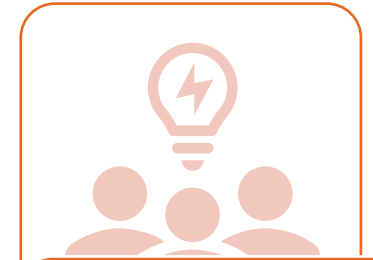
Postpone Judgment

- Manage your emotions
- Don't assume negative intent



Get Information

- Take time to understand member's position
- Focus on issue, not person



Focus on Solutions

- Don't stick on issue
- Move forward to finding solutions

Conclusion

Some aspects of group projects are out of your control: but you CAN positively influence your group in many ways. Set some goals...

Intercultural Groupwork Skills	Self-Evaluation (1=weak; 5=strong)					SMART Goal(s) for that skill (<u>S</u> pecific, <u>M</u> easurable, <u>A</u> chievable, <u>R</u> elevant, <u>T</u> imely)
Understand cultural dimensions and be open to learning more about culture and group projects.	1	2	3	4	5	
Regularly get to know other members better; contribute to open, trusting 'climate.'	1	2	3	4	5	
Recognize my preferences, strengths & areas to improve related to group work.	1	2	3	4	5	
Cooperate in establishing group rules and commit to following and updating them.	1	2	3	4	5	
Monitor and adapt my communication for clarity; listen actively; ensure comprehension.	1	2	3	4	5	
Give and welcome feedback that is positive, specific, and useful.	1	2	3	4	5	
Bring up problems when I see them; discuss respectfully; work toward solutions.	1	2	3	4	5	



References

123 Test Team. (2023, May 12). Team roles test. 123 Test. <https://www.123test.com/team-roles-test/>

123 Test Team (2023b). DISC personality test. 123 Test. <https://www.123test.com/disc-personality-test/>

Byram, M., Nichols, A., & Stevens, D. (Eds.). (2001). *Developing intercultural competence in practice*. Multilingual Matters

Camosun College (n.d.). Appendix C: Sample team charter from the School of Business, Camosun College. <https://camosun.libguides.com/c.php?g=711496&p=5173179>

Carnegie Mellon University (n.d.). Possible roles on teams. Retrieved 2023 June 30 from <https://www.cmu.edu/teaching/design/teach/design/instructionalstrategies/groupprojects/tools/Groupworkroles.doc>

Chao, I.T., & Pardy, M.C. (2017). Your way or my way? Integrating cultural diversity into team-based learning at Royal Roads University. *Engaging in Life-Changing Learning*. Pressbooks. <https://pressbooks.pub/learningandteachingmodel/chapter/your-way-or-my-way-integrating-cultural-diversity-into-team-based-learning-at-royal-roads-university/>

Czerti, R. (2023, June 2). 59 icebreaker games [that your team won't find cheesy]. *SessionLab*. <https://www.sessionlab.com/blog/icebreaker-games/>

De Vita, G. (2001). The use of group work in large and diverse business management classes: Some critical issues. *Int'l Journal of Mgmt Education*

De Vita, G. (2002). Does assessed multicultural group work really pull UK students' average down? *Assessment and Evaluation in Higher Education*, 27(2), 153-161.

Eisenchlas, S., & Trevaskes, S. (2007). Developing intercultural communication skills through intergroup interaction. *Intercultural Education*, 18, 413-225.

Gudykunst, W.B. (1998). Individualistic and collectivistic perspectives on communication: an introduction. *International Journal of Intercultural Relations*, 22, 107-34.

Guffey, M.E., Loewy, D., & Griffin, E. (2022). *Business communication: Process and product* (7th Brief Canadian Ed.). Cengage.

HubSpot (n.d.) Group team contract. <https://f.hubspotusercontent10.net/hubfs/2497066/Team%20Contract%20-%20GWarren.pdf>

LSA Learning and Teaching Technology Consultants (2020). Assigning roles in student groups. <https://lsa.umich.edu/technology-services/news-events/all-news/teaching-tip-of-the-week/assigning-roles-in-student-groups.html>

McAlister, M., & Perron, J. (2017). Supporting culturally linguistically diverse learners in educational environments [D2L Course]. D2L@Camosun.

Multilingual Support Specialists. (2023). *Giving and receiving feedback* [Slide show]. Camosun College. <https://camosunmss.opened.ca/academic-english-support/self-access-study-resources/study-skills/>

Rauer, J.N., Kroiss, M., Kryvinska, N., Engelhardt-Nowitzki, C., & Aburaia, M. (2021). Cross-university virtual teamwork as a means of internationalization at home. *The International Journal of Management Education*, (19)3. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijme.2021.100512>.

Shapiro, S., Farrelly, R., & Tomaš, Z. (2014). *Fostering international student success in higher education*. TESOL Press.

Spencer-Oatey, H., & Franklin, P. (2009). *Intercultural interaction: A multidisciplinary approach to intercultural communication*. Houndmills, UK: Palgrave Macmillan.

The five minute personality test. (n.d.) <https://www.decal.ga.gov/documents/attachments/5minutepersonalitytest.pdf>

Ting-Toomey, S., & Chung, L.C. (2005). *Understanding intercultural communication*. Oxford University Press.

University of Waterloo. (n.d.). How to navigate group projects successfully. Retrieved May 31, 2023 from <https://uwaterloo.ca/student-success/resources/university-assignments#group-projects>

Watson, W.E., Kumar, K., & Michaelsen, L.K. (1993). Cultural diversity's impact on interaction process and performance: Comparing homogenous and diverse task groups. *Academy of Management Journal*, 36(3), 590-602.