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**STUDENTS' ATTITUDES TOWARD A GROUP COURSEWORK PROTOCOL AND
PEER ASSESSMENT SYSTEM**

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Abstract

This paper addresses a knowledge gap in that it presents an empirical investigation of a group coursework protocol and peer assessment system (GCP&PAS) used in a UK university to support postgraduate marketing students in their assessed group activities. The aim of this research is to examine students' understanding of the GCP&PAS, as well as their attitudes towards assessed group coursework and peer-assessments generally. The study also seeks to identify any differences in such attitudes as a result of group conflict. The study determines that students are supportive of the principles of assessed group work and peer evaluation, but that there are differences in students' attitudes toward the GCP&PAS between those who experience group conflict and those who do not. The paper contributes to the literature in that it highlights what the research findings mean regarding students' preparedness for work. It also recommends further examination of conflict and other factors such as culture and gender in the investigation of alternative peer evaluation systems.

Keywords

Student attitudes; group coursework protocol; peer assessment.

STUDENTS' ATTITUDES TOWARD A GROUP COURSEWORK PROTOCOL AND PEER ASSESSMENT SYSTEM

Introduction

Educators have long recognised the importance of collaborative learning and attempts have been made to develop collaborative learning environments in higher education (Allan and Temple, 2000). Educators have also devised pedagogic strategies to help higher education students become independent learners within small teams, so that they can develop the knowledge and skills required for the world of work and for ongoing professional development (Bramhall et al., 2010). Yet, higher education students are still criticised for their weak teamwork and interpersonal skills (Verzat et al., 2009), despite research results which suggest students' self-reported confidence in their teamwork skills (Krassadaki et al., 2014). Indeed, the importance of teamwork for students enrolled in business-related programmes has been highlighted by various stakeholders including employers, educators, QAA subject benchmarks and accreditation bodies such as the AACSB (Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business). The ability to work in diverse teams is a key business skill (Maleki, 2009) and essential to marketing professionals (Bacon et al., 1998; McCorkle et al., 1999; Lancellotti and Boyd, 2008; Pfaff and Huddleston, 2003). As a result, such skills have been increasingly fostered and assessed through group coursework projects, particularly in marketing-related disciplines (Aggarwal and O'Brien, 2008; Amato and Amato, 2005; Chapman and Van Auken, 2001; Haas et al., 1998; Huff et al., 2002).

Although the benefits of group coursework have been widely acknowledged, concerns related to students' negative experiences of summative group assessments have been highlighted by the extant literature (Aggarwal and O'Brien, 2008; Barr et al., 2005; Chapman et al., 2010;

Crossuard, 2012; Dommeyer, 2007; Fellenz, 2006; Neu, 2012; Phuang-Mai et al., 2009; Willcoxson, 2006). Such concerns, in turn, have driven marketing educators to devise innovative pedagogic strategies to enhance the benefits and minimise the potentially negative consequences of group work, including peer assessments (van den Berg et al., 2006a; 2006b; 2006c) linked to group work, group-based assessments (Bicen and Laverie, 2009), as well as encouragement of ownership and self-selection of team members (Wood, 2003; Strong and Anderson, 1990). One example of an attempt to prevent negative experiences of assessed group coursework was the implementation of a Group Coursework Protocol and Peer Assessment System (GCP&PAS) in the Business School of a UK University, across four cohorts of full-time postgraduate marketing students.

The aim of this research is to examine students' understanding of the GCP&PAS and their attitudes towards assessed group coursework as well as peer assessments. Attitudinal differences between students who did and those who did not experience group conflict are also investigated. Group conflict was chosen as the focus of this study given that it is highlighted by the extant relevant literature as a significant, common problem across higher education business schools; a problem which negatively affects student satisfaction. The extant literature on group coursework and peer assessment is reviewed next, followed by an overview of the methodology, key findings and discussion. Practical recommendations for improving the GCP&PAS and the experience of students in business and marketing modules containing assessed group coursework are also addressed.

Literature Review

There has been an increased attempt by marketing educators to make their modules more resonant with the business world (Barr et al., 2005; Amato and Amato, 2005). This is because

firms often believe that graduates lack essential employability skills (Hassall et al., 2005; Verzat et al., 2009). Such skills include the ability to communicate effectively and work collaboratively (Allan and Temple, 2000), in ways that enable ongoing professional development (Bramhall et al., 2010). As a result, many of the experiential learning projects designed to link the classroom with the real world (Barr et al., 2005) have relied on summative group coursework.

Group Coursework Benefits

The ability to work in diverse teams is a key business skill (Maleki, 2009) that has been increasingly fostered and assessed through group coursework projects (Allan and Temple, 2000), particularly in marketing-related disciplines (Aggarwal and O'Brien, 2008; Amato and Amato, 2005; Chapman and Van Auken, 2001; Haas et al., 1998; Huff et al., 2002). The extant literature highlights that group projects can expose students to 'real world' work settings and help them learn to work collaboratively, in diverse self-managing teams (Aggarwal and O'Brien, 2008; Maleki, 2009; Bramhall et al., 2010). Group coursework can also enable students to achieve higher-level learning outcomes (Collier, 1980). This is because it can create more opportunities for critical thinking and peer feedback response, as well as foster student motivation and sense of achievement (Aggarwal and O'Brien, 2008; Boud et al., 1999). Further, group coursework can boost students' self-esteem and help them develop interpersonal, presentation, leadership, communication and time management skills (Aggarwal and O'Brien, 2008; Boud et al., 1999; McCorkle et al., 1999; Pffaf and Huddleston, 2003). Group assessments can also be beneficial to the educator, as they can be more comprehensive than individual assessments, reduce marking volume and enable enhanced interaction with students (Aggarwal and O'Brien, 2008; Boud and Falchikov, 1989). However, group coursework also presents several challenges, as addressed below.

Challenges and Shortcomings of Group Coursework

Aggarwal and O'Brien (2008, p. 256) suggest that "the benefits of group projects cannot be realized if groups are dysfunctional", which can happen for a number of reasons. For example, individualistic personalities and 'lone wolves' can have a negative impact on teamwork: such individuals prefer to work alone and dislike group processes and collective decision-making (Barr et al., 2005). Concerns with academic dishonesty among marketing students have also been highlighted by the literature (Rawwas et al., 2004). For instance, social loafing, also termed free-riding, has been considered a key issue affecting student satisfaction with assessed group coursework (Aggarwal and O'Brien, 2008; Dommeyer, 2007; Freeman and Greenacre, 2011; Strong and Anderson, 1990).

Group conflicts and student dissatisfaction may also arise due to various levels of motivational and moral maturity (Taylor et al., 2011), and incompatibility in personalities and communication styles (Amato and Amato, 2005). Workload management and diverse goals in relation to process, output quality and marks can also contribute to group conflicts (Conway et al., 1993; Walker, 2002). Furthermore, group issues can emerge due to specialisation of labour and aggressive leadership styles (Aggarwal and O'Brien, 2008; Pffaf and Huddleston, 2003). As a result, trust between peers often disintegrates and teamwork experiences may result in personal frustration and dissatisfaction (Huff et al., 2002; Lancellotti and Boyd, 2008). Trust is essential in group settings (Phuong-Mai et al., 2009) because, as Barr et al. (2005) and Huff et al. (2002) point out, it allows students to remain problem-focused, facilitates efficient interpersonal coordination and communication, enables students to help each other with the workload and has an impact on the quality of the collaborative work carried out.

There can be severe, unintended consequences of group assessments for students. Neu (2012) argues that behavioural consequences can include misconceptions about how to select groups, divide labour, provide labour and evaluate peers. Additionally, Neu (2012) suggests cognitive consequences such as perceptions of autonomous work, constraint on and disparity in learning, grade boost and injustice, as well as affective consequences including anxiety, frustration, stress and disappointment. Students' attitudes toward group coursework can pose a challenge to the running of assessed group coursework tasks. Such attitudes can be shaped by educators' mixed messages with regard to the purpose and effectiveness of group work (Mutch, 1998). They can also be shaped by the manner in which the coursework is operationalised (Willcoxson, 2006). Nevertheless, Chapman and Van Aiken (2001) argue that educators' negative attitudes toward group coursework due to recurrent group conflicts play a significant role in influencing students' attitudes, their perceptions of the benefits of teamwork, as well as their concerns in relation to fairness in marking. The authors also suggest that students are more likely to have positive attitudes toward assessed group coursework if their lecturers discuss group management issues with them and use tools such as peer evaluations to assess individual performance within the group (Chapman and Van Aiken, 2001). Similarly, Pffaf and Huddleston (2003) argue that some group conflicts can indeed be caused by the educator, due to practices such as determining groups without students' input, failing to reduce (or insignificantly reducing) the marks of social loafers, and not requiring peer evaluation. But peer evaluations can also be a challenge. Such peer evaluations can be used in group contexts for developmental and evaluative purposes (Fellenz, 2006), as well as for fostering social control, self-regulation, self-monitoring and active student participation (Gielen et al., 2011). However, educators may fear reciprocity in peer assessments (Magin, 2001), and students may hold negative attitudes toward such evaluation activities (Cheng and Warren, 1997). Nevertheless, alternative forms of assessment are needed (Reynolds and Trehan, 2000; Segers

and Dochy, 2001) and, as put by Lancellotti and Boyd (2008, p. 244), marketing “educators must find ways to retain the benefits of teamwork while addressing these negative effects”.

Attempts to Address the Pitfalls of Assessed Group Coursework

Educators have become increasingly sensitised to the need for enhanced student experience and effectiveness within group settings (Bacon et al., 1999; Joham and Clarke, 2012; Wood, 2003). Some educators have gone to the extent of offering money to incentivise participation in class activities (Chylinski, 2010). Nevertheless, other attempts to address the shortcomings of assessed group coursework can also be found in the literature. For example, Wood (2003, p. 241) argues that student experience and satisfaction with group coursework can be enhanced by “creating a sense of ownership in the minds of students”. Also, Strong and Anderson (1990) make a number of recommendations on how to avoid social loafing. Such recommendations include allowing teams to self-select, making group projects experiential and therefore meaningful, warning students of potential issues in group dynamics and keeping groups small. Additional suggestions include giving students opportunities for formative peer feedback and a ‘group divorce’ option, instituting anonymous individual peer evaluations and making such evaluations count towards the final mark. Strong and Anderson (1990) also suggest that tutors should provide continuous group feedback, discuss free-riding issues and emphasise that such behaviour does not help anyone in the group. Also useful are Strong and Anderson’s (1990) recommendations to communicate outcome goals clearly in order to set the tone in relation to expected output, emphasise the importance of open communication, encourage non-free-riders to confront social loafing in a non-threatening way and encourage the development of anti-free-riding norms. More importantly, Freeman and Greenacre (2011) make a number of recommendations on how to distinguish between actual social loafers and students who might just be struggling with their projects, and suggest that all students should be educated about the

difference between social loafers and strugglers. Freeman and Greenacre (2011) argue that if weak students are identified they should be addressed by the educator in a preventative way; the educator should also provide instructions on how to form effective groups with roles and relevant self-monitoring tools such as reflective journals or minute books. Finally, Freeman and Greenacre (2011) suggest that, when tackling group issues, peers and educators should focus on the destructive behaviour rather than the individual, as well as on the impact such behaviour can have on the whole group, not on specific individuals.

Further, in an examination of students' perceptions of their experiences of group learning and communication styles, Amato and Amato (2005) draw on the Myers-Briggs personality profiles; that is, the sixteen personality types used to explain and categorise behaviour based on the different ways in which people prefer to utilise their judgments and perceptions. In their work, Amato and Amato (2005) suggest that students who are less experienced in teamwork settings are more likely to have better experiences in 'compatible groups' (that is, groups formed of individuals with similar personalities), whereas students who are more experienced in teamwork are more likely to prefer 'complementary groups' (that is, groups of students with different talents and preferences). Thus, Amato and Amato (2005) suggest that sensitising module leaders to students' personalities and level of experience of teamwork is likely to enable educators to provide better guidance for students when choosing their teams for assessed group coursework. However, one of the weaknesses in Amato and Amato's (2005) recommendations is that it may not be possible for educators to access their students' personality profiles and such group formation strategy may well depend on the educator's objectives for a particular coursework.

Additionally, Barr et al. (2005) suggest that educators can address the negative implications of lone wolves by teaching students about group dynamics, profiling all team members to create diverse student groups, providing opportunities for students to know each other outside the classroom, identifying and capitalising on the strengths of the lone wolves, as well as helping the latter to function within groups. Furthermore, Barr et al. (2005) argue that such negative implications can also be addressed by helping students understand and deal with lone wolves, and setting individual assessments in addition to group coursework in order to acknowledge individual competencies and capabilities.

Moreover, Dommeyer (2007) investigated the use of individual and group diaries to manage free-riding in group coursework. The author argues that although diaries are ineffective in terms of preventing such behaviours, they enable non-loafers to become more aware and less tolerant of loafers, and empower non-loafers to take a stand and confront such members. Additionally, Aggarwal and O'Brien (2008) suggest four practical steps to prevent social loafing, which include reducing the scope of the project, reducing group size, allowing students to self-select group members and requiring multiple peer evaluations, which can alert individual group members if their peers feel their contribution is lacking. This is consistent with Chapman et al.'s (2010) recommendation that educators should use formative peer evaluation in order to alert underperforming peers during, rather than after, the completion of group work tasks. Similarly, Pffaf and Huddleston (2003) suggest that educators should assign a reasonable group workload, allow class time to work on group projects and use several peer evaluations as strategies to improve students' teamwork experiences.

Another example of an attempt to prevent the negative consequences of assessed group coursework is the implementation of the Group Coursework Protocol and Peer Assessment

System (GCP&PAS) across four cohorts of full-time postgraduate marketing students at a UK University, which is the context of the present study. Many modules in these postgraduate marketing programmes entail assessed group coursework and, in order to enhance students' experiences of such assessments, a GCP&PAS was introduced in 2010/11. Due to the complex nature of the GCP&PAS (appendix 1), and given its implementation across all four postgraduate marketing programmes, there was a need to investigate students' attitudes toward the guidelines and peer assessment procedures prescribed by the document.

Therefore, the objectives of this study are: to explore 2010/11 and 2011/12 postgraduate marketing students' attitudes toward the GCP&PAS; to examine students' understanding of the system, both in terms of its purpose and application; and to investigate students' attitudes toward peer assessment and group coursework more generally. Additionally, this study examines differences in the understanding of, and attitudes towards, assessed group work and peer assessments in general. It also examines differences in attitudes towards the GCP&PAS between students who experienced conflict and those who did not experience group conflict.

Methodology

This study takes a pragmatist approach as it focuses on the outcomes of the research (Creswell, 2007). Pragmatism's underlying concerns encompass research effects, applications and solutions to problems (Putnam, 1995; Creswell, 2007; Cherryholmes, 1992; Rorty, 1980). Such a standpoint puts no constraints on inquiry (Rorty, 1980), and methodological choices can be eclectic (Creswell, 2009). Given the objectives of this research, a quantitative methodology was deemed necessary, as it can provide a representative account of the student population at hand.

Instrument and Sample

A survey employing self-completion questionnaires was used to collect data from students enrolled in four postgraduate marketing programmes (N=173 in 2011 and N=193 in 2012). In order to comply with the research ethics committee's requirements, personal data such as students' names, ages and gender were not collected. This meant that questionnaire responses were not traceable to individual participants. Students were informed that participation was voluntary and the purpose of the research was fully explained on the cover page of the questionnaire. The research was carried out according to institutional guidelines for ethical research conduct and a total of 130 completed questionnaires were obtained, indicating a response rate of 47.5%.

Measures

We used Likert-type scales based on the extant literature (e.g., Wen and Tsai, 2006) to measure students' understanding of, and attitudes toward, the GCP&PAS. Specifically, 6 items were used to capture understanding of the GCP&PAS (e.g., *I fully understood the purpose of the protocol; the protocol was easy to understand; peer assessments were easy to carry out*), 4 items to capture attitudes toward assessed group coursework (e.g., *I enjoy taking part in assessed group coursework*) and 6 items to capture attitude towards peer assessments (e.g., *peer assessments linked to assessed group coursework are necessary; peer assessments linked to assessed group coursework are constructive*). An overall measure captured attitude towards the GCP&PAS (e.g., *overall the protocol enhances my experience of assessed group work*). All items were measured on a scale of 1 to 5 (very negative to very positive). An open-ended question was also used in order to capture any comments or observations students might have in relation to the GCP&PAS.

Results and Analysis

The survey generated 130 complete responses, 69 in year 1 (2010/11) and 61 in year 2 (2011/12), representing 47.5% of the total population ($n=366$). Initial statistics showed that 67% of the overall sample experienced conflict while involved in assessed group work as part of their postgraduate marketing programme. Prior to examining students' understanding of the GCP&PAS, reliability statistics were conducted reporting the following Cronbach alpha values: .84 for understanding; .86 for attitude towards assessed coursework; and .85 for attitudes towards peer assessments linked to assessed coursework. Given the acceptable α values, overall scores were computed and used in subsequent t-tests. Means and standard deviations are reported below for years 1 and 2 (table 1).

(Insert table 1 about here)

Table 1 shows that students' attitudes towards assessed group work and peer assessments are relatively more positive than their attitudes towards the GCP&PAS. Mean comparisons between the two year cohorts (1 and 2) did not indicate any significant differences ($p > .05$; table 2).

(Insert table 2 about here)

As a result, independent sample t-tests were subsequently conducted with the overall sample ($n=130$) to explore any differences in understanding of the GCP&PAS and the attitudes of students who had experienced group conflict versus those who had not. Results show significant differences between students who did and those who did not experience group conflict, with regards to understanding of the GCP&PAS ($F = .774$, $df = 128$, $p = .05$) and attitude

towards GCP&PAS ($F= 3.282$, $df=128$, $p<.05$). In contrast, differences were not observed for attitudes toward assessed group work and peer assessments generally (table 3).

(Insert table 3 about here)

Results indicate that students who experienced conflict had a significantly lower understanding of the GCP&PAS ($M= 3.24$, $sd, .694$) than those who did not experience conflict ($M=3.49$, $sd .58$). Additionally, students who experienced conflict had a negative attitude towards the GCP&PAS ($M=2.9$, $sd 1.09$), compared to students who did not experience conflict ($M= 3.30$, $sd .86$; table 4).

(Insert table 4 about here)

Finally, the fact that more students experienced conflict than not suggests that, irrespective of the intentions or design of the GCP&PAS, the system results in negative associations rather than acting as a means through which students can understand and enhance their team working capabilities. This is reflected in comments students made through the open-ended question contained in the survey. We consider the significance of both the quantitative results and students' open-ended comments in the discussion that follows.

Discussion

The objective of this paper was to investigate students' understanding and attitudes towards group work and peer assessments in general, as well as their attitudes toward a group assessment protocol. The paper also sought to identify any differences in those attitudes as a result of students' experiences of group conflict. Our results indicate significant differences in

understanding and attitudes towards GCP&PAS between those who experienced conflict and those who did not. In particular, our results show that students who experienced conflict had a lower understanding and less positive attitudes towards the GCP&PAS compared to those who did not. Additionally, our results suggest that the majority of our respondents experienced conflict, which indicates neutral or more negative attitudes towards the GCP&PAS across the board. These results reflect the negative impacts that group conflict can have, as highlighted in the literature (Taylor et al., 2011; Amato and Amato, 2005; Conway et al., 1993; Walker, 2002; Neu, 2012). Such results also suggest that marketing instructors should identify ways to address conflict experienced in teamwork (Chapman and Van Auken, 2001). Indeed, in addressing such conflicts marketing educators can help their students to develop relevant professional skills such as the ability to communicate effectively and, thus, work collaboratively in industry (Allan and Temple, 2000).

In addition to the above results, our survey included an open-ended question to further shed light on students' attitudes towards the GCP&PAS. While the GCP&PAS attempts to extend the notion of student ownership beyond team selection (e.g. Wood, 2003), where students have the opportunity to negotiate and agree group functioning as well as clear guidelines in relation to how group difficulties are to be addressed, our findings indicate that this may not work in practice. For example, as one student indicates: *"even if someone wants to say that another person is doing less, s/he may not do so because s/he wants to keep classmates' relationships"*. Such observation suggests discomfort associated with group processes including communication (Barr et al., 2005), which is essential for teamwork and for students' understanding of their peers' and their own behaviours (Strong and Anderson, 1990).

Further, an important point is the cultural diversity of many cohorts across postgraduate programmes in the United Kingdom, and the attempt by marketing educators to encourage a mixture of nationalities amongst groups. Such mixture can exacerbate the reluctance of some students to engage in communication, while others are comfortable participating in discussions and influencing the views of group members: *“people have problems within the group most of the time. Personal bias of one person can influence others”*. While such influencing behaviour and receptiveness to the intervention of others can be linked to personality types (Amato and Amato, 2005), these might also be conditioned by students’ cultural backgrounds. Perhaps greater attention needs to be paid to the means by which group members are selected such that past experience and personality types (Amato and Amato, 2005), as well as cultural backgrounds, are taken into account. This might shape not only group formation, but also the guidance provided to students in managing teamwork process.

Finally, as discussed in the literature review, peer evaluation is a mechanism to encourage teamwork and reflexivity about member contribution (Chapman et al., 2010; Gielen et al., 2011; Strong and Anderson, 1990). The peer evaluation tool featured in this investigation forms part of summative group assessments, and requires open discussion and agreement among team members on individual contribution. Additionally, as the intent of group assessment is to develop team-working capabilities that prepare students for the professional world (e.g. Allan and Temple, 2000; Bramhall et al., 2010; Maleki, 2009), the scope for anonymous evaluation is important. This is because anonymous evaluation provides individuals with feedback on their behaviour (as perceived by others) and allows team members to comment on that behaviour with impunity (Strong and Anderson, 1990), without resorting to reciprocity (Magin, 2001) or developing negative attitudes (Cheng and Warren, 1997). Our quantitative results complement the aforementioned literature, suggesting that evaluation via open group discussion is not

effective. A student's comment reflects this suggestion: *"the peer review system is unhelpful since it doesn't allow for anonymous opinions on our group members. Most groups will allot points evenly even though the workload was not distributed evenly"*. Although this finding supports existing understanding of peer evaluation systems (Strong and Anderson, 1990), it is unclear whether confidential methods might result in evaluations that more accurately reflect student experience of dealing with individual team members as well as their own behaviour. Hence, if peer evaluation is to encourage students to engage in group processes and develop related competencies (e.g. Gielen et al., 2011), then it is important that peer evaluation contributes adequately to final marks and that there are appropriate punitive measures for dysfunctional behaviour (Strong and Anderson, 1990; Pffaf and Huddleston, 2003). Our interpretation of our findings suggests that a nominal 10% allocation for group work to a final mark is insufficient motivation for students to engage in group processes, and that the possibility of group divorce (Strong and Anderson, 1990) might be an important penalty. For example: *"there seems little point in group members assigning each other marks when they only make up 10% of the overall mark anyway. I completed a piece of coursework where two members did no work whatsoever"*. Such observations make a case for summative peer evaluations that account for a more substantive proportion of group-based assessment activity.

Conclusion

This study explores postgraduate marketing students' attitudes toward a group coursework protocol and peer assessment system (GCP&PAS) used by a UK university, and investigates attitudinal differences between students who did and those who did not experience group conflicts between 2010 and 2012. The literature review highlights the key benefits, challenges and attempts to address the shortcomings of assessed group coursework. Using a student survey of postgraduate marketing students, a total of 130 questionnaire responses are analysed. Findings suggest that students' self-reported understanding of the GCP&PAS is good, that their attitudes toward the GCP&PAS are generally positive, and that students are supportive of the principles of assessed group work and peer evaluation. However, there is clear indication that students find the current collective approach to peer assessment uncomfortable, which must be improved. Data also suggests that students who have experienced group conflicts are not as positive about the effectiveness of the GCP&PAS as students who have not experienced such conflicts. Therefore, there is a need to rethink such a protocol and some of the assumptions it makes regarding postgraduate marketing students' team-working skills, in ways that resonate with students' views on assessed group coursework and what educators may be trying to achieve in terms of preparing students for the world of work.

Recommendations

Marketing educators can try and enhance students' experiences of team-based coursework through practices that can help students use tools such as the GCP&PAS more effectively. For example, postgraduate marketing module leaders can incorporate tutorials on teamwork management and the GCP&PAS during their modules' introductory lectures and/or during coursework-related seminars. Also, there is a need to highlight the relevance of peer assessments through student involvement in setting such assessments and their criteria.

Furthermore, we suggest social loafing can be prevented by allowing teams to self-select, potentially paying closer attention to cultural mix. This is in addition to what the literature already suggests regarding the benefits of keeping groups small, having opportunities for individual and anonymous formative peer feedback, implementing individual and anonymous summative peer assessments, making group divorce an option, and making such peer assessments count more significantly towards students' final marks (Strong and Anderson, 1990; Aggarwal and O'Brien, 2008; Chapman et al., 2010; Pffaf and Huddleston, 2003; Amato and Amato, 2005).

Limitations and Areas for Future Research

The main limitations of this study include participant self-selection bias and lack of a predetermined definition of 'group conflict' in the questionnaire. Group conflict may vary in degree of intensity and be more or less acceptable to different individuals and cultures, which in turn may have been interpreted in different ways by different participants when answering our questionnaire. Future studies could look to gain a qualitative, in-depth understanding of how students interpret group conflict and what the implications are regarding how they manage teamwork activities. Future research could also explore lecturers' attitudes toward such a protocol and their suggestions on how to enhance postgraduate marketing students' experiences of assessed group coursework. Data for this study drew from students' experiences of a peer evaluation process that operates through open group discussions, for which a nominal percentage of marks was attributed to this element of group assessment. Further investigations should seek to determine whether alternative (confidential) methods of peer assessment that represent a higher percentage of overall group assessment marks might encourage students to engage in, and reflect on, team processes to a greater extent. An additional limitation results from the institutional ethics committee requirements regarding respondent traceability. The

stipulation that demographic data should not be collected meant that this investigation was unable to gather data on age, gender and ethnicity for analytical purposes. Subsequent investigations might specifically examine demographic factors in relation to peer evaluation.

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Tables

Table 1: Means and standard deviation values

		Year 1			Year 2		
	Variable	Mean	SD	n	Mean	SD	n
	Understanding of the GCP&PAS	3.32	.682	69	3.33	.655	61
	Attitudes towards Assessed Group Coursework	3.57	.766	69	3.65	.730	61
	Attitude towards Peer Assessments	3.58	.697	69	3.68	.635	61
	Attitude towards the GCP&PAS	3.04	1.11	69	3.02	.957	61
Conflict	Yes	68%			66%		
	No	32%			34%		

(Scale: 1-5, very negative to very positive)

Table 2: Independent sample t-tests (cohorts 1 and 2)

	F	T	df	Sig (2-tail)
Understanding of the GCP&PAS	.402	-.018	128	.989
Attitudes towards Assessed Group Coursework	.786	-1.241	128	.217
Attitude towards Peer Assessments	.906	-1.721	128	.088
Attitude towards the GCP&PAS	1.621	.227	128	.821

Table 3: Independent sample t-tests (conflict)

	F	t	df	Sig (2-tail)
Understanding of the GCP&PAS	.774	-1.976	128	.05
Attitudes towards Assessed Group Coursework	1.263	-1.397	128	.165
Attitude towards Peer Assessments	.796	-.620	128	.536
Attitude towards the GCP&PAS	3.282	-2.065	128	.04

Table 4: Means and standard deviation values

Variable	Conflict			No Conflict		
	Mean	SD	n	Mean	SD	n
Understanding of the GCP&PAS	3.24	.694	87	3.49	.584	43
Attitudes towards Assessed Group Coursework	3.50	.795	87	3.70	.641	43
Attitude towards Peer Assessments	3.54	.682	87	3.62	.662	43
Attitude towards the GCP&PAS	2.91	1.09	87	3.30	.860	43

Scale: 1-5, very negative to very positive)

Appendix 1

MSc Marketing Suite

GROUP WORK PROTOCOL

Group work is an important part of the student experience on our postgraduate marketing programmes, because of its role in developing team working skills, which are vital for future professional careers. This document outlines

- procedure for allocating students to groups
- protocol for working in groups and handling of difficulties
- use of peer review for distribution of marks to individual group members.

1. Procedure for allocating students to groups

Unless indicated in programme handbooks and module outlines, students will be notified of their team members prior to embarking on group assignments. Groups will consist of between 3-6 members.

2. Working in groups

Effective group work depends on all group members playing a role and taking collective responsibility for the tasks to be undertaken. Time spent at the outset in thinking about how the group will operate and be managed will help develop a strong group dynamic and give all group members' confidence to participate.

i. Protocol

At the outset of any group work, there must be agreement between all the participating students and the module leader about a protocol for behaviour within the group work situation. The protocol should cover matters such as:

- attendance at group meetings;
- timekeeping;
- meeting responsibilities to the group;
- equity in workload;
- the importance of delivering work attributed to individuals on time and to a good standard;
- steps to be taken in the event of failure to adhere to the protocol.

A protocol that covers these matters is set out below. However, if students wish to devise their own group protocol, then they should be encouraged to do so as long as they take these matters into account – the module leader should approve any protocols devised by the group.

Suggested protocol for working in groups

1. At the beginning of the project all group members will agree the roles and responsibilities that each person will take on during the project.
2. Each group must decide whether it wishes to have a group leader/co-ordinator whose role will be to ensure the smooth running of the project. If the group is to have such a leader/co-ordinator all members must agree on the way in which this person will be identified (for example by democratic election, or requests for a volunteer, or on a rotating basis).
3. In dividing up the work to be carried out between the members of the group every effort will be made to make sure that workload is evenly shared.
4. When discussing the way in which the group will work members must make clear any constraints that will arise from personal circumstances and the group must discuss how they will organise their work to accommodate this.
5. Timing of meetings between group members, and timetables for completion of parts of the work, must be agreed between everyone concerned. Once dates and times are agreed all group members must do everything they can to be on time both in attending meetings and in completing work. If for any reason an individual group member cannot be present at a meeting or cannot finish a piece of work on time it is their responsibility to ensure that they let the other members know in advance and give them as much notice as possible.
6. Recognising that all members of the group will normally receive the same mark for their efforts, every group member will work to the best of their ability to produce work to a high standard within the time available.
7. If at any time any member of the group feels that another member is not responding to the agreed protocol (for example if someone is not carrying out their share of the work satisfactorily or is not attending meetings, or is creating difficulties of any other sort) they must feel free to raise their concerns with the group as a whole. If this should happen the group should first of all attempt to resolve the problem by discussion between **ALL** group members. Only if this approach fails should the group take more formal action, as below.

ii. Problems within the group

Any protocol that is adopted for group work needs to recognise that there may occasionally be a need to take action where individuals are not contributing equitably to the work of the group or where other difficulties arise. If problems do arise then these should be resolved within the group as far as possible, at an early stage. However, there should be clearly agreed procedures to be followed in the event that this proves impossible.

All protocols adopted must therefore include the following provisions:

The members of the group may, after discussion between themselves and attempts to address the problem within the group, contact the module leader with concerns if they consider that another group member is not contributing fairly to the shared work or is causing significant difficulties for the group in other ways. Any such problems should be tackled immediately by the group and if not resolved within two weeks, then the module leader should be informed. A module leader who is contacted with such issues:

- will contact the student concerned (and refer to programme tutor) and find out if there are any extenuating circumstances to explain the difficulties arising;
- if there are no extenuating circumstances, or if the student does not respond to the module leader's request for explanation, the module leader will warn the individual (verbally and by e-mail) about their behaviour, will provide the group with the opportunity to meet to discuss the functioning of the group, remind members of their responsibilities to the group and request a clear undertaking from each member to contribute fully and responsibly for the remainder of the project,
- if, after the issuing of such a warning, group members find that the individual concerned has not responded to the warning and the problems continue, they may draw this to the attention of the module leader for a second time. In this case the module leader will formally advise the student concerned that they will be penalised and that, in their case, marks will be deducted from the overall mark awarded to the group. The module leader will have discretion to decide on the level of penalty, but it should not normally exceed 10 marks (e.g. if a group mark of 65% is awarded the individual might, at worst, only receive a mark of 55%). If however it is absolutely clear that the student has made no contribution at all then a mark of 0% may be given for the group assignment,
- the issuing of warnings and deduction of marks will be recorded by the module leader on the student's personal file.

PEER REVIEW

The relative inputs of each member are assessed by the group. Peer review may take 2 forms:

- i. where peer review is an integral part of a group assignment, then the peer review component will account for 10% of the assessment and the remaining 90% will be accounted for by the group assessment itself. Peer review form 1 will be used for such assessment.
- ii. where peer review is a discrete assessment component then peer review form 2 will be used.

[NB. For the purposes of this study, only the first type of peer review has been explored.]

Peer Review Form 1

Peer review should reward those who contributed most to the group, and correctly and fairly reflect the contribution of those that did rather less. This will not make a large difference to the final marks, except in extreme cases. Give some thought to completing the form - this should be discussed as a group, weightings should be negotiated amongst the group and a single form submitted with the group assignment. Consider the contribution of each group member over the life cycle of the project and don't be vindictive or swayed by personality clashes and disagreements. Remember that some may have worked hard on an aspect not used, and that that this is still a contribution and should not be penalised by the group for its eventual exclusion. **What should be considered are issues relating to non-contribution, non-attendance, failing to do work to the standard of the group, and failing to meet deadlines set by the group.**

Your group has 10 marks per team member, so if there are 6 people in your group:

- you have 60 marks to be allocated amongst your team;
- where each member has contributed equally, then the marks should be distributed equally;
- where individuals have made a greater contribution, they should be awarded a higher proportion of the marks available;
- where individuals have contributed less, they should be awarded a smaller proportion of the marks available;
- the combined total of marks awarded to each group member should equal 60.

	Name and identity number of group member	Marks	Student signature confirming agreement to marks awarded
1			
2			
3			
4			
5			
6			
TOTAL			

Comments (if required):

This completed form must accompany your group assignment submission.