

Some students *do not like* “group assessment”. Is the answer individual assessment or improved management of group-based practices?

University of Worcester Annual Learning, Teaching & Student Experience Conference

“Unlocking Potential: the Key to inspiring Life-long and Life-wide Learning”

13-14 June 2018

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Today's Session

- Theoretical and Practical Background
- Project Purpose & Objectives
- Methodology
- Initial Findings & Emerging Themes
- Suggestions for Improving Group-based Practices

Theoretical Background

- Research shows that students prefer student-centred, active learning to instructivist lectures (McKeachie, 2002; Oblinger and Oblinger, 2005; QAA, 2012) which encourages learning for insight rather than learning for technique (Beech and MacIntosh, 2012).
- Literature suggests active learning can increase student engagement (Cooper et al., 2010), can improve grades (Bleske et al., 2014), can generate softer skills (Christenson, Reschly and Wylie, 2012) and may also deliver benefits to students, lecturers and universities (Harvey et al., 2006).
- Collaborative learning (Johnson et al., 1991), problem-based learning (Savery and Duffy, 1995), team working (Michaelsen et al. 2009) and practical projects (Harvey et al, 2006) seem to be effective to enhance the quality of the students' learning and teaching (L&T) experience.

Practical Background

- Despite this, the massification and marketisation of Higher Education is leading us to treat students as consumers; therefore **should we dismiss LT&A approaches that students may not *like* today but may find beneficial in the future? Is the answer individual assessments or improved management of group-based practices?**
- In considering the answer to this, academics, however, are also faced with graduate employers' expectations of receiving employment-ready graduates who possess employment skills, particularly group-working skills. Together these create a significant dilemma for academics.



SAP Project Context

- This research is undertaken through the University of Worcester Students as Academic Partners (SAP) project scheme which employs students as active partners within a collaborative staff-student L&T research project.
- In the SAP project team are two module leaders, in the role of SAP Project Staff Partners and one of the current students, in the role of SAP Project Student Partner.



SAP Project Objectives

- Explore students' perspectives of group-based practices as learning approaches
- Identify key success factors for enhancing student experience and satisfaction
- Provide guidelines on how to get best out of teamwork (for students) and how to manage students' expectations of group assessment and teamwork (for staff)

Methodology

- The SAP project uses a survey to collect data from students enrolled on 5 modules across Levels 4, 5, 6 and 7 taught at Worcester Business School.
- All modules are designed by the module leaders to engage students in active, student-centred activities and experiential learning through teamwork on live projects and cases and use group assessment (formative and/or summative).
- This research seeks to unlock this dilemma by exploring students' perceived value of individual and group-based assessments and potential process improvement interventions.
- Students' perceptions were sought via a qualitative survey.
- 45 students participated in the survey.

Group Assessment: Like or Dislike?

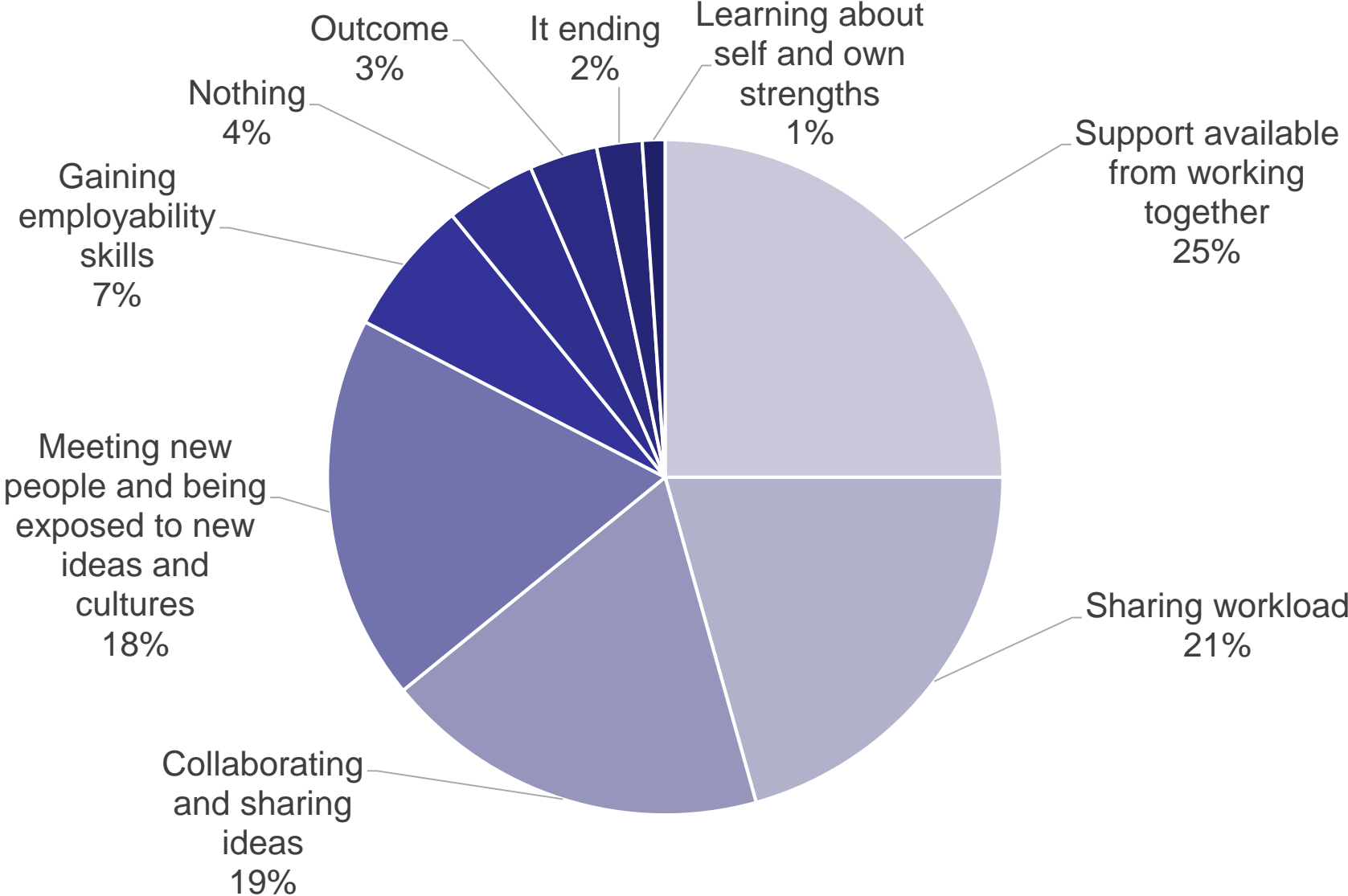
Aspects of group assessment enjoyed *most*:

1. Support available from working together (24%)
2. Sharing workload (21%)
3. Collaborating & sharing ideas (19%)
4. Meeting new people and being exposed to new ideas and cultures (18%)

Aspects of group assessment enjoyed *least*:

1. Lack of commitment by other team members (44%)
2. Team conflict & disagreements (17%)
3. Poor team communication (16%)

Group-based Practices: Likes?

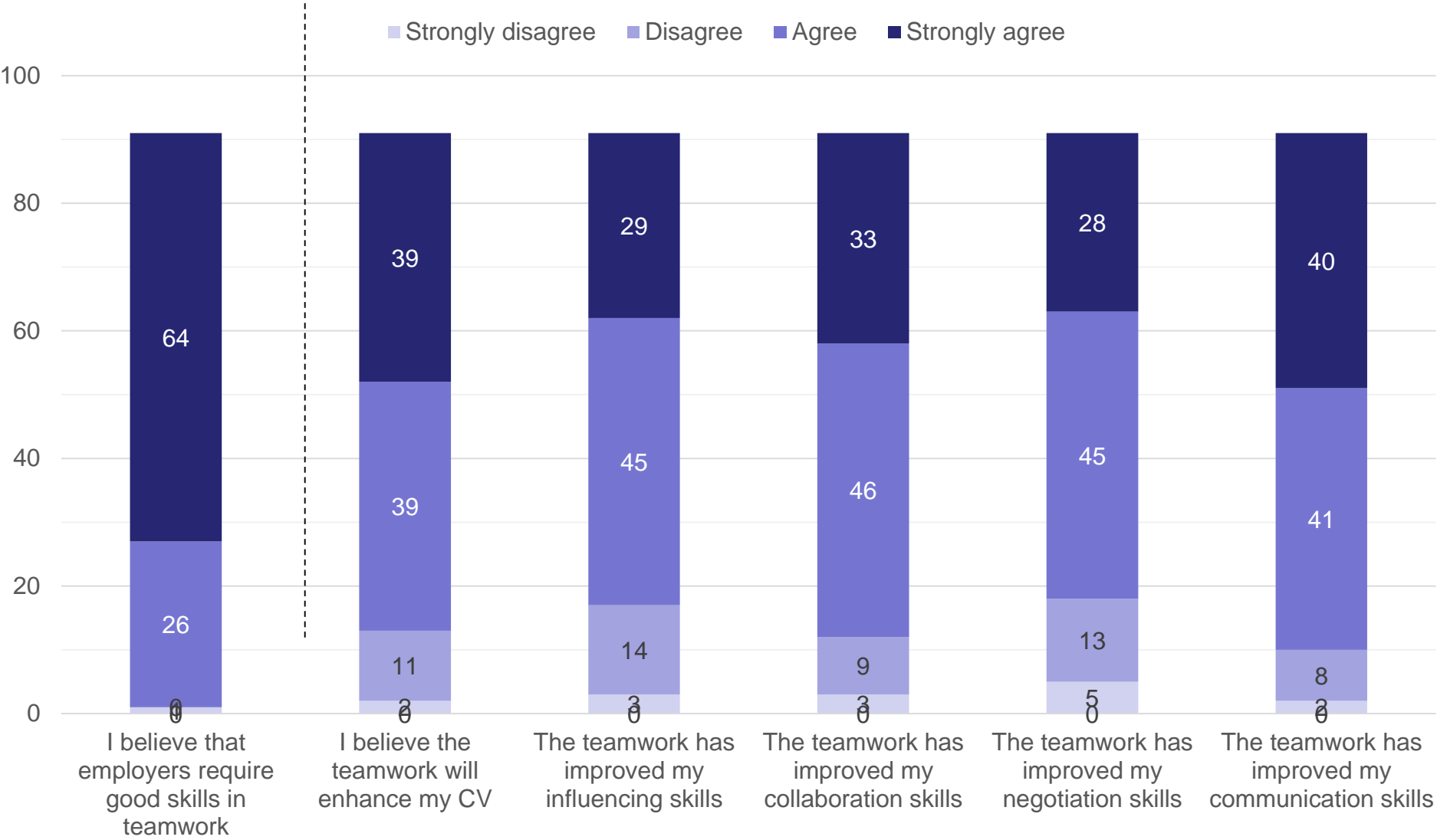


Group Grade: Fair or Unfair?

- It is fair if...
 - “...everyone participated”, “As long as everyone does their work”
 - “...the group works. It’s a punishment when one or two people are slacking”
- It is unfair if ...
 - “...it does not take into consideration the time and effort one person has put in compared to others in the group who didn’t get as involved”
 - “...it is not a true representation of an individual’s performance”
- Beyond (un)fairness....
 - “It’s the group’s task to perform the best of their abilities”
 - “They encourage you to motivate the other group members to try harder”



Group-based Practices: Promotion of Employability Skills?





Key Success Factors for Effective Group-based Practices

- Build in group building activities/time to enable students to get to know each other better before they form groups
- Students need specific upfront guidance in group work practices and group work related skills in order to learn how to be collaborative and productive in the process
- Build in checkpoints with teams to monitor progress, review learning and address performance issues
- Consider methods for grading individual contribution and group outcome
- Design curriculum to reflect different aspects of employability skills in different modules
- Make students aware of employability skills developed through modules and courses
- Support staff with group-based practices e.g. teaching facilities, technology, smaller module cohorts, module management time

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Thank You!

Questions?