

# University of Bradford

## Final Year Group Project Work To self-form or not to self-form?



## Outline

- What we set out to do
- Why it was important (context / background)
- What we did
- What we found
- Recommendations / considerations
- Questions and discussion



## What we set out to do

- Explore the practicality of allowing student groups to self-form within a high-stakes, industry-focussed final year group project:
  - DESIGN FOR INDUSTRY
  - 40 credits
  - Long-running module (since the days of EIMC, mid '90s)
  - Live brief, supervised by visiting lecturer from industry
  - Until recently, quite an interdisciplinary module

# Why it was important (context/background)

- Self-forming vs other methods

*Example – BA (Hons) Computer Animation*

- *Stage 1:*

- *by course, staggered alphabetical (20 credit module)*

- *Stage 2:*

- *hybrid of self-formed with some tweaks by tutor (20)*
- *Self-formed with coaching – ‘cohort not known well enough’ (10)*
- *Self-formed (10) – ‘not all formed in time though’*
- *Tutor assigned (10) – ‘poor input from some group members’*

## Why it was important (context/background)

- Self-forming vs other methods
  - *Previous approach to Design for Industry module (40):*
  - *Primarily BELBIN test-based + ‘mystery ingredient’*

PL	RI	CO	SH	ME	TW	IMP	CF	SP
<b>96</b>	0	0	16	<b>99</b>	47	52	12	<b>73</b>
4	0	26	<b>83</b>	<b>78</b>	<b>84</b>	<b>95</b>	<b>84</b>	11
29	<b>92</b>	<b>72</b>	38	<b>85</b>	3	52	<b>84</b>	18
<b>78</b>	0	<b>72</b>	<b>87</b>	42	3	<b>88</b>	<b>78</b>	<b>73</b>
<b>85</b>	46	63	11	55	27	11	<b>99</b>	63
96	92	72	87	99	84	95	99	73

## **The wake-up call (part 1) 'How could this module be improved?':**

*'The social engineering of the groups to include a mix of 'talents' is a fundamentally good idea that has gone horribly wrong.*

*I do believe in comprehensive education and its core claim that a mix of abilities drags up the less able much more than it compromises the more able, and in principle there is no reason why this wouldn't work in this module.*

*EXCEPT that we are, by the start of the third year, separated not by our talents, but by a full spectrum of willingness or otherwise to engage in the course, and there is NO EVIDENCE WHATSOEVER, that by mixing the engaged with the unengaged, the engaged have any effect on the motivation of those who have historically not been energised by the course.*

*A method of either weighting the marks even more towards individual efforts within the group and away from the aggregated mark would alleviate this, but the problem is remedied by this and not cured.'*

Design for Industry module questionnaire 2009

## The wake-up call (part 2) 'Please make further comments here':

*'The fundamental problem remains that, while talents can be raised by mixed ability groups, MOTIVATION patently cannot. It surely therefore can't be right that the mark of someone who has worked hard and met his commitments to the university, should have his mark, his goal and everything he has worked for, placed firmly in the hands of those that don't care.*

*There are surely people this year who will see a mark they have worked and aimed for be pulled from their grasp through no fault of their own, simply because they were socially engineered into a group that (entirely predictably) were never going to work. This group could have turned my university story into a dreadful lament about how three lazy people destroyed my last four years of work. Please don't do that to someone next year.*

*I know these degrees are largely designed now for 09/10 but this really must change as a matter of urgency.'*

Design for Industry module questionnaire 2009

## Why it was important (context/background)

- Never mind the ethics?



<http://backgroundartists.tumblr.com/post/326827401>



## Why it was important (context/background)

- Would self-formed teams be advantaged in terms of:
  - Having a head start?
  - Client in the bag?
  - The ‘Forming’ stage being undertaken already?,
  - Technical skill mix better?  
(I haven’t been able to convincingly use this as a factor where I have formed groups)

## What we did

- For the last two years, we've allowed groups to self-form in the module, provided that:
  - They submit a documented rationale as to why they'd make a complimentary team (no descriptor / pro-forma is provided)
  - They fulfil the module requirements that other groups would be based around (Belbin team roles, group size)

## What we did

- For the last two years, we've allowed groups to self-form in the module, provided that:
  - They approach the application professionally
    - not based on friendships,
    - might include other factors like having a client,
    - have worked on an extra-curricular project already?
    - varied courses in team?
  - We can fit any self-formed teams into the wider functionality of the module (eg– what if all the available teamworkers had been spoken for?)

## What we found (performance analysis)

In 2009-10:

	As't 1	As't 2	As't 3	As't 4
A	66 ↓	59 ↑	65.7 ↓	58.5
B	64 ↑	64.3 ↑	75.8 ↓	68.8
C	66 ↓	59 ↓	63.8 ↓	50
D	57 ↑	66 ↓	58 ↑	59.7
E	64 ↓	60 ↑	67.5 ↓	51.1
F	61 ↓	57 ↑	58.8 ↑	59.6
G	72 ↓	70 ↑	72.4 ↓	70.2
H	72 ↓	65 ↑	70.3 ↑	72.5
I	70 ↓	57 ↑	59.6 ↓	58.9
J	80 ↓	67 ↑	68.5 ↑	76
K	73 ↓	65 ↓	61.6 ↓	55.3
L	75 ↓	65.5 ↑	71.8 ↓	69.9
M	63 ↓	55 ↑	57.4 ↓	47.4
N	56 ↑	58 ↑	58.1 ↓	43.7
O	58 ↑	75 ↓	73.2 ↑	76

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D	60 ↑	64.5 ↑	68.1 ↓	66
F	60 ↑	61.5 ↓	59.1 ↑	60
G	60 ↑	65.5 ↓	61 ↑	74
H	70 ↑	66 ↓	62.8 ↓	62
I	65 ↑	67 ↑	73.7 ↑	75
J	55 ↑	67 ↓	55.6 ↓	38
K	35 ↑	66 ↓	64.2 ↓	61

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# The 'Game Republic' Student Showcase 2010 (self-formed team)



- 1<sup>st</sup> prize in Game Technology
- 2<sup>nd</sup> prize in Games Design, Best Team
- 3<sup>rd</sup> prize for Game Art

## What we found (anecdotes)

- It's not just 'whizz kids' that want to get together
- Maybe we tested it too far (BBC brief – groups of 3)
- No fallout from other (non self-formed) teams (yet)
- Not all ambitious students want to self-form teams
- Only good for the highflyers? ('pulling up' effect?)

## What we found (anecdotes)

- Self-forming is not a recipe for instant success (one group this year didn't really accomplish what felt they could)
- Games team success at Game Republic students showcase, continued team dynamic this year (Dare)
- Not as much of a stark contrast between formed / non-formed groups when it comes to client liaison



## What we found (student feedback)

**At final year debrief meeting in May 2010:**

*“Glad not to be in a self-formed team – it’s the reality of industry”*



## What we found (student feedback)

### **In module evaluation questionnaires 2011:**

***What were the major strengths of this module?***

*Great that we had the chance to pick our own groups if we made a good enough case.*

***How could this module be improved?***

*I wonder if it could be better with the students allowed to choose who to work with, but it's hard to say because there are arguments in support of both methods to make groups.*

## Recommendations / considerations

- Is it sustainable? Is it a likely candidate for a complaint time-bomb?
- So where do we go from here? Reverse, stick with the mixed economy idea or drive on?



# Any Questions?



*Amigo* Ravi Govind-Kamble