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A Grounded Theory of "Not Pulling Weight" in

Online MBA Group Work

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Abstract

When project learners are not able to fulfil their academic responsibilities and contribute to a project assignment, it may be assumed they are *Not Pulling Their Weight*, and therefore at risk of negative sanctions. Drawing on data derived from narrative accounts, interviews with learners in an online master's in business administration (MBA) program, together with documentation analysis, the study used classical grounded theory (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Glaser, 1978; Glaser, 1992) to examine challenges professional graduate management learners may encounter in online group collaborations.

The constant comparative method, an important analytical tool in grounded theory, yielded two core operatives, the first pertaining to the structural operational arrangements of a learning context, or **Doing the Group Thing**. The second core operative, **Not Pulling Weight**, is representative of a basic social process and consists of two problematic group-level phenomena, Pushed Out and Opting Out.

In the 1st year of a program trajectory, uncertainty, pressure to excel, and the presence of punitive assessment measures may help explain the presence of marginalizing processes identified as *hijackings*. Hijackings were made up of four categories including: *task, role, project, tampering* and sub categories of *editorial*, and *compensatory*. A separate category under *hijackings*, are attempts to sabotage the efforts of project groups. By the 2nd year, a troublesome operative that disrupts and hampers project groups is the phenomenon of Opting Out. Opting Out refers to episodic or sustained acts of absenteeism and represents a continuum of "effort-avoidance" manoeuvres (Salomon & Globerson, 1989, p. 90).

The grounded theory study of Not Pulling Weight examined an under investigated phenomenon, that of excessive participatory practices in online group work. The theoretical framework emphasized the important mediating role of structural operatives that appeared to influence group level dynamics negatively. The study supports an emerging recognition in the networked management learning literature that there is a "dark side" with respect to online group collaboration and that groups can be places of inequity and oppression (Ferreday & Hodgson, 2008; Hodgson & Reynolds, 2005).

Dedication

For my dearly departed parents, Agnes (Heidi) and Maurice Picard.

And, for my son Brendan, and the joy he continues to bring.

Declaration

I acknowledge that this work is my own and I've made every effort to acknowledge the work of other authors in the writing of this thesis.

Acknowledgements

I'd like to acknowledge the support and assistance of individuals who were instrumental in the completion of this thesis. First, while I cannot identity a particular faculty member from the cooperating academic institution, I am very grateful for Professor H's support in facilitating access to the research setting and her assistance in guiding me through the approval process at the University and the EMBA Program. Second, I'm also grateful to the learners who volunteered their time to be part of the study. I'm in awe of their dedication to their academic pursuits, while managing competing career and family obligations. Third, I'd like to acknowledge my adviser, Professor Vivien Hodgson, for her staunch support, encouragement, and advice, and the Lancaster University Management School for their financial support. While on home base in Alberta Canada, access to a research community was facilitated by the International Qualitative Institute, University of Alberta. I am grateful for the Visiting Researcher opportunity they provided, along the camaraderie, patience and guidance that accompanied my all too brief stay. In particular, Dr. Caroline Porr took on the mantle of a theoretical guide, providing critical support, insights and friendship, in a time of great need.

Finally, a great deal is owed to my husband D'Arcy DePoe; he played a key role in my decision to pursue and complete a PhD. I also owe a special debt of gratitude to my son, Brendan Thomas, for enduring the many out of country absences with grace, agility and patience.

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Chapter 1

Background to the Study

This study arose from experiences encountered by one learner in an online learning environment. According to Easterby-Smith, Thorpe, and Lowe (2003) research ideas rarely emerge from trolling the literature. The development of a useful topic is often incremental and predicated by background and interests combined with where the researcher is employed or studying. In my former professional role and association with a unit that promoted online course work, group assignments were routinely recommended as an effective means to engage the learner and improve learning outcomes. Online computer software helped to facilitate high levels of interaction thereby allowing individuals to work collaboratively at a distance (Benbunan-Fich, Hiltz, & Harasim, 2005; Carajaba, LaPointe, & Gunawardenal, 2003; Garrison & Anderson, 2003). During the late 1990s, as today, group work was typically portrayed as harmonious and problem free (Hodgson & Reynolds, 2005; Reeves, Herrington, & Oliver, 2004), while the challenging aspects of group enhanced learning methods were minimized (Berry, 2002). Although I incorporated group work methods into my online courses I remained sceptical of an easy transition from face to face group methods into an online course work setting.

In 2002, an interest in conflict as phenomena led to my enrolment in a Certificate Program in Conflict Management with Alberta Arbitration and Mediation. When asked to provide our reasons for enrolling, a fellow enrolee, Louise, sought solutions to managing discord and problems she was experiencing in her online Masters in Management she was pursuing at the time. According to Louise group work was the most challenging aspect of her academic studies. Subsequent

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discussions with Louise, and there were many opportunities as we were progressing thought the certificate at a similar pace, led to my interest in studying conflict in online academic groups. Later, in a retrospective account of her time in the online program, Louise identified group work as being particularly problematic in how it was conceptualized and implemented.

[What] I would not want to repeat was the team based learning model that they [program] used. That to me was quite flawed because we were plunged into socially unstructured groups and forced to see what kind of... it was like *Survivor* in a way, unscripted... competitive... I don't know in some ways I think the process they used there brought out the worst in people. (Manager L.F. 547-550; recent alumnus)

Familiarity with the social world of learners is considered beneficial in learning design, it is similarly thought useful when considering research topics (Boaz, Elliott, Foshee, Hardy, & Olcott, 1999). Louise's experiences and subsequent pilot interviews with two learners in an online graduate management program, the hyperbole that continued to dominate discussions of online group learning, provided incentives to investigate online group dynamics and group work challenges.

Purpose of the Study and Justification for Research

The purpose of this study is to develop an empirical understanding of the challenges faced by learners in online graduate management education learning contexts. Following the literature review, four gaps in the literature were identified and informed the subsequently research questions set out in Chapter 2.

First, group dynamics are reported to be complex in face-to-face settings, and therefore moving groups to virtual settings adds to their complexity (Davis & Holt,

1998, p. 326). Yet, social conflict remains underreported in settings mediated by information and communications technologies (ICT) (Graham, 2002; Hobman, Bordia, Irmer, & Chang, 2002; Montoya-Weiss, Massey & Song, 2001; Mortensen & Hinds, 2001). Conflict in virtual settings is associated with the phenomenon of "flaming," with its incendiary attributes of hostility, criticism, and swearing (Burnett, 2000; Joinson, 2003: Lea, O'Shea, Fung, & Spears, 1992); however, published accounts of flaming in online academic settings are few in number. Third, our empirical understanding of group work is derived from laboratory settings, and to revolve around learner experiences in an ad hoc, face to face, single course offering (cf. Berry, 2002; McConnell, 2005; Zafeiriou, 2003) as opposed to online learner experiences over multiple course offerings. Fourth, an empirical understanding of collaborative environments had been acquired mainly through the use of course transcript analysis. Transcripts consist of archived discussions and interactions by learners (Mazur, 2004). Archived transcripts have allowed researchers to examine learner to learner interactions at a level of detail unavailable in face-to-face settings (Mazur, 2004). Mason (1992) has argued that transcripts offer greater opportunity for new and significant insights into learners' online worlds. Yet, there remains an assumption that transcripts represent a reasonable facsimile of learner engagements in technology-mediated settings (Jones & Cawood, 1998). According to Starr and Strauss (1999) group life is not easily captured in technology-mediated environments (Starr & Strauss, 1999). While important in furthering our knowledge of computer-mediated settings and collaboration in general, methodologically, it has privileged observable behaviour over informal behaviour (Jones & Cawood, 1998).

Group conflict theories are predicated on behaviours being visible and observable to researchers (cf. Kuhn & Poole, 2000). The emphasis on observable

phenomena in social science research suggests that current understanding of social conflict, particularly in collaborative group settings, has remained narrowly defined. The use of group strategies in online and networked settings (Montoya-Weiss et al., 2001) highlights the need to better understand potential challenges learners may face with respect to group collaboration requirements (Cramton, 2001; Graham, 2002; McConnell, 2005; Zafeiriou, 2002).

The focus of the current study is academic group work in professional online graduate management education. I examine learner accounts of difficulties associated with the initiation, execution, and completion of group assignments. Studying problematic situations requires a research method which is sensitive to learner accounts of online experiences. The methodical tools should privilege experiential knowledge; for example, learners who have experienced problems rather than a hypothetical knowledge (cf. Zafeiriou, 2002). The study methodology must also accommodate an interpretive understanding of social reality which privileges the individual's point of view (Stablein, 2002). Grounded theory (Glaser & Strauss, 1967;Glaser, 1992; 1998;) is well suited to illuminating the experiences, meanings, and actions of online MBA learners. Grounded theory is defined as an "inductive methodology... used to generate theory through the systematic and simultaneous process of data collection and analysis" (Goulding, 2005, p. 170). A Glaserian approach (Stern, 2008) to grounded theory (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Glaser, 1978, 1992) was chosen for the data collection, analysis, and theory generation and will be explained more thoroughly in Chapter 3.

Potential Significance of the Research

Management schools have been at the vanguard in deploying instructional strategies which emphasize group-based learning (Chen, Donahue & Klimoski, 2004). Researchers caution, however, that our understandings of these settings and instructional method deployment have not kept pace with their usage (McConnell, 2005; Perriton & Reynolds, 2012), with inexplicable problems (Riedinger & Rosenberg, 2006,) being reported (cf. Davis & Holt, 1998; Cramton, 2001).

Outcomes from this study will provide theoretical and professional practice-based benefits. From a theoretical standpoint, it will contribute new knowledge of group work practices in technology-mediated settings. Richer and more complete understandings of the meanings and dynamics of discord and disagreements are anticipated. An empirical study of group dynamics in online graduate management education may further our knowledge of problems experienced by professional academic groups. Outcomes are also expected to help guide policies and practices associated with group assignments in online graduate management learning environments.

Study Method

Studying group processes requires a method sensitive to group processes and dynamics and provides a systematic and inductive means of producing "practice-based" theory from data (N. Elliott, 2007). Grounded theory is suitable for identifying what is relevant and problematic for people in a social setting (Glaser, 1978), and useful for generating an account of patterns of behaviour (Wuest, 2007). Grounded theorists begin with the question, "What is going on here" (Glaser, 1978,

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p.94). Hence, as a qualitative research strategy, it is problem focused and useful in attempting to understand new or little understood social phenomena embedded in people's actions, interpretations, and meanings (Milliken & Schreiber, 2002; Morse, 2001; Schreiber, 2001). Grounded theory methods include the simultaneous collection, coding, analyzing, memoing, and the constant comparison process from which conceptual indicators are identified and their theoretical linkages and properties (Glaser, 1978, 1992). Although there are several grounded theory approaches, for example *Glaserian* and *Straussian* (Stern, 1994, cited by Morse & Richards, 2002), an early goal in *Glaserian* grounded theory is the generation of a core category, or a theoretical account of problematic behaviour, and how a problem is processed, managed, explained or resolved by those in the setting (Glaser, 1978; Wuest, 2007).

Research Context

The purpose of a grounded theory study is to "account for a pattern of behavior which is relevant and problematic for those involved" (Glaser, 1978, p. 93). The main theoretical interest in this study is individual learner experiences of group work in a technology-mediated setting. In networked settings, information and communication technologies connect remote learners with peers and learning resources that include instructors and course-related materials (Goodyear, Jones, Asnsio, Hodgson, & Steeples, 2004). Therefore, an academic institution was sought that offered an online graduate management education program, and instructional group work assignment. Permission was sought and received from an online graduate management education program offering a Graduate Diploma, a Master's in Business Administration or MBA, and an Executive Master's in Business Administration or EMBA.

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The online MBA program attracts middle to senior level managers wishing to pursue an advanced management degree.. Learners are drawn from business, health care, government, military, and non-profit sectors and work full-time while pursuing their studies. Applicants who lack an undergraduate degree require a minimum of 8 to 10 years of managerial experience. Non degree holders are enrolled in the Diploma program and, if successful fulfilling their academic requirements, receive a Diploma in Business Administration and have the option of proceeding to the second year of the MBA or EMBA graduate program. The number of learners not holding prior undergraduate credentials may range from 50% to 70% of the learner population (Information Session, September 2009). The average completion rate for an MBA/EMBA degree is 2.5 to 3 years.

The program uses a paced, cohort based, delivery model. In the 1st year, learners progress through core course work remaining in the same cohort group. In the 2nd year, access to course electives is permitted and allows for deviation from the lock step progression of the first year. By the 3rd year academic study is a largely an individual undertaking with the main emphasis being the submission of a final major project.

The program is self-financing, enjoying a largely autonomous relationship with the main institution. High autonomy is thought to provide greater flexibility in responding to changing market conditions, and to help ensure operational viability (personal communication, former senior official, July 9, 2006). Jurisdictional control extends to program and course scheduling, student support, admissions and registration, content development, production, technical support, assessing and grading, and hiring of tutoring and support staff.

Definitions

Group work is defined as instructional situations in which learners "are required to complete a small-group project" (Morris & Hayes, 1997, p. 229). In academic settings, the term "group" rather than "team" is used and refers to two or more individuals who come together to engage in instructional tasks and activities (Jaques, 2001;Davis, 2009). According to Davis, a "group" is a more appropriate designator for most short-term university assessment tasks" (p. 256). Therefore the term "group" will be adopted for this study.

Protocol

Protocol focuses on the manner in which theoretical framework concepts are to be identified. There are three conceptual levels of abstraction. First-level concepts or conceptual indicators represent a higher level of abstraction than secondary concepts, and conceptual properties and will appear in bolded text. For example, **Not Pulling Weight** is a first level concept under which secondary concepts are located. Second-level concepts appear in capitalized text. For example, Pushed Out is representative of a second level concept. Third-level concepts appear in italics, for example, *hijacking*.

Research participant quotes are accompanied by a research participant's professional affiliation, generally "manager", and the first initial of the participant's name and the first initial of their gender status. If the quote is taken from a second or third interview, this is also noted, along with the quote location in the transcribed text or narrative text. The timing of a participant's interview quote in an academic trajectory is also noted. For example, (Manager P.M. [2], 24-25; recent alumnus),

indicates that the research participant, "P" is male, or "M", with the interview quote taken from a second "[2]" interview. The interview clip is located at lines 24 to 25 of an interview transcript. "Recent alumnus" indicates that the participant was a recent graduate at the time of the interview.

Narrative accounts follow a similar but simplified format and omit professional designation and academic time frame. For example, "(Narrative account, M. M. 165-189)" indicates that the source is a retrospective narrative submitted by participant "M.M." who is male. Lines "165-189" refer to the location of the quote of a participant's narrative account. Periodically, information associated with the coding process, a sample memo, or theoretical insights emerging and associated with the development of a concept, will be illustrated. The latter protocol is adopted from Scott (2007), whereas the chapter summary that follows is adopted from Holton (2006).

Outline of the Thesis

Chapter 1. Backgrounder to the Study. Presents an overview of the research problem and the purpose of the study. I next introduce the qualitative method and details concerning the research setting. The chapter provides a breakdown of the reporting protocols adopted for the discussion of the theoretical framework and participant quotation protocols. The chapter concludes with a short summary of each chapter.

Chapter 2: Literature Review. Presents the literature review and justification for the study. It is argued that although conflict has been studied extensively in face-to-face settings, the Internet and the use of new information and communication technologies present new venues for discord to emerge and adopt

alternative forms of expression (Isenhart & Spangle, 2000; Landry, 2000). Limitations in the conflict literature, and in examinations of group conflict in online learning, conclude the chapter.

Chapter 3: Research Methods. Provides a detailed description of the research method, grounded theory. The rationale for method selection, philosophical position guiding the study, and research training efforts in qualitative methods and grounded theory are outlined. Next the chapter describes data sources, choice of research site, data collection methods deployed, and research participants. The final section of the chapter deals with the ethical review process and confidentiality assurances.

Chapter 4: Conceptual Development Process. Provides an overview of grounded theory and its key processes. These include the constant comparative process, memoing, open and theoretical coding, and the continual iteration of these elements in generating a theory to account for the behaviour of those in the setting (Glaser, 1978). Four key stages in the theoretical development process are explained; challenges encountered using the method and resolutions, are described. The chapter concludes with a description of the second of the two emergent grounded theories **of Not Pulling Weight**. .

Chapter 5: A Social Structural Process of "Doing the Group Thing". The second emergent theory in the theoretical framework is presented. Structure, according to Jaques, (2001), contains amenities and constraints and plays an important role in shaping online group dynamics (Blandin, 2006; Rennecker, 2002). **Doing the Group Thing** emphasizes the context-bound nature of the setting and a less commonly explored perspective in a classic grounded theory (Glaser, 1978). **Doing the Group Thing** sets out the structural and operational conditions that shape,

support, and informs group-level activities. The structural arrangements include Group Formation, Assessment, and finally Resourcing. Within the structural arrangements arise operatives with associated sub-concepts and their properties, and individually described.

Chapter 6: A Basic Social Process of Not Pulling "Weight". I present the second half of a theoretical framework and an outcome of two concerns of research participants, that of Pushed Out and Opting Out. Pushed Out is associated with excessive and at times aggressive participatory behaviour, whereas Opting Out refers to episodic or sustained "effort-avoidance" (Salomon & Globerson, 1989, p. 90) patterns of behaviour. The thesis reports on Pushed Out as it is associated with the first year of the academic trajectory and represents a time when learners are at a greater risk of being prevented from participating in collaborative group work assignments.

Chapter 7: Examining the Literature for Emergent Fit. In this chapter I compare the emergent theoretical frameworks with the extant literature. I begin by examining a dominant focus in educational research, underperformance or the under participation of individual learners in project groups. Consequently, social loafing, free-riding, and lurking literatures are examined. The literature surrounding overperformative behaviour is examined and organized around three themes, "difficult" group members "different" group members and, finally, "difficult" structures. The chapter concludes with a discussion the contribution to knowledge, professional practice recommendations, implications for future research, and finally, the contribution to the grounded theory method.

Summary

This chapter served as an introduction to the study. I began by explaining how my interest in problematic behaviour in online groups came about. Research suggested that group work in online and technology mediated settings was likely to be more complex and challenging for online learners (Davis & Holt, 1998, p. 326). I argued that although management schools have been at the vanguard in deploying instructional strategies which emphasize group-based learning (Chen, Donahue & Klimoski, 2004) our understandings of these settings and instructional method deployment have not kept pace with their usage (McConnell, 2005; Perriton & Reynolds, 2012). It was anticipated that outcomes from the study would provide theoretical and professional practice-based benefits. From a theoretical standpoint, it was expected to contribute new knowledge of group work practices in technology-mediated settings. Second, a better understanding of the meanings and dynamics of discord and disagreements was anticipated.

Grounded theory (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Glaser, 1992; 1998;) was chosen as a research method that would be well suited to illuminating the experiences, meanings, and actions of online MBA learners. A qualitative research strategy, it is problem focused and argued to be useful in attempting to understand new or little understood social phenomena embedded in people's actions, interpretations, and meanings (Milliken & Schreiber, 2002; Morse, 2001; Schreiber, 2001).

The research setting was briefly and research aims and objectives. The chapter concluded with an overview of the structure of the thesis. .

Chapter 2

Literature Review

I begin by providing an overview of the conflict construct and its associated properties. In addition to conflict definition and scope, group conflict and its key properties are reviewed. I then address shortfalls in the literature. I do not address the conflict management literature or the conflict resolution literature, both of which are subfields located in the organizational behaviour literature (Kamil, 1997). In the latter two cases, conflict management is concerned with resolving or managing conflict in constructive rather than destructive ways (Deutsch, 1994; Rubin, Pruitt, & Kim, 1994; Sandole, 2003). Conflict resolution is concerned with the resolution and prevention of conflicts (Burton, 1990).

Conflict Definitions and Scope

Conflict has long occupied the thinking of philosophers including Plato, Aristotle, Thomas Hobbes, John Locke, Karl Marx, and John Dewey (Thomas, 1979). Charles Darwin considered biological entities to be engaged in continual conflict (Rahim, 2011), a theme repeated in the work of Sigmund Freud and Karl Marx (Deutsch, 2006). Whereas early sociologists believed that conflict might benefit group functioning (Rubin et al., 1994), the conflict construct is more often associated with tension, unpleasantness, uncertainty, and fragility (Folger, Poole, & Strutman, 1993) and an undesirable feature of social life (Rahim, 2011).

Conflict is a pervasive phenomenon in the social sciences, and as such, numerous definitions have been proposed (Isenhart & Spangle, 2000), yet an agreed upon definition remains elusive (Porter, & Lilly, 1996; Thomas, 1992). It is

acknowledged to be a construct with "many interrelating elements that include parties, issues, dynamics and contexts" (Bartos & Wehr, 2002, p. 12).

A review of the literature reveals that conflict has been formally studied at the interpersonal (Barki & Hartwick, 2004), group (Pendell, 1990), and organizational levels (Thomas, 1979). Group-level conflict and interpersonal conflict were felt to be more relevant to the current study, and are examined below.

Group Conflict

The presence of conflict in groups is widely accepted and widely studied (Pendell, 1990) a result of the importance of groups in social life and organizational settings (Jehn, 1997). Group conflict has been investigated extensively within laboratory settings in order to explore the relationship between conflict expression, group productivity and member satisfaction (De Dreu & Weingart, 2003; Jehn, 1997). In the latter case, researchers have sought to better understand work group practices and its relationship with conflict in order to prevent its destructive qualities (Mack and Snyder, 1957).

Group conflict is defined as, "the incompatibility, incongruence or disagreement among the members of a group or its subgroups regarding goals, functions or activities of the group" (Rahim, 2011, p. 117). Incompatibilities are emphasized in a definition by Jehn and Mannix (2001) as an "awareness on the part of the parties involved of discrepancies, incompatible wishes, or irreconcilable desires" (p. 238). Similarly, Ayoko, Härtel, and Callan (2002) have defined group conflict as "behavior that involves the perceived incompatibilities between parties of the views, wishes, and the desires that each holds" (p. 168). Pendell (1990) broadened the group conflict definition by addressing nonconformity of group norms and practices. Three

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forms of conflict expression have dominated: task conflict, affective conflict, and process conflict. Each is briefly described below.

Task Conflict

Task conflict represents one of three sub-groupings associated with group conflict. Disagreements that arise in groups are thought to be task related and emphasize project-related concerns and considerations (Porter & Lilly, 1996). Task conflict has been defined is as, "an awareness of differences in viewpoints and opinions about the group's task" (Behfar, Mannix, Peterson, & Trochim, 2011, p. 128). Differences and disagreements are common when groups are responsible for achieving collective outcomes and may be attributed to varying perspectives and values adopted by individual group members (Jehn, 1997). Task disagreements may include differences regarding work expectations or the allocation of project roles or responsibilities. As the complexity of group work increases, more complicated task disagreements may arise and include a divergence in expectations surrounding personal aims and values among group members. Folger, Poole, & Strutman (2005) have studied disparities that may arise in classroom teams. Some group members may be willing to devote their time and labour required to achieve a quality submission, whereas others may be less tolerant of time demands, and contrary to their peers, only willing to devote minimal time for a maximum grade. Divergent values are likely to emerge when decisions pertaining to the scope of the assignment and time commitments are required.

Task conflicts may be beneficial to group functioning (Jehn, 1995; Jehn, 1997). Sharing of values and negotiating mutually agreed upon goals may also enhance group relationships (De Dreu & Weingart, 2003; Janssen, Van De Vliert, &

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Veenstra, 1999). In contrast, opposition regarding task-related issues is capable of being transformed into personal differences, either through misunderstandings (Friedman, Currall, & Tsai, 2000), or perceived perception of animosity, on the part of objectors (Amason & Schweiger, 1997). When differences and disagreements become personalized, attention shifts from the task at hand to the individual and affective conflict is assumed to be present (Amason & Schweiger, 1994; Porter & Lilly, 1996). Whereas task conflicts may be beneficial to groups functioning, affective conflict poses a risk to a group and its goals and is considered more likely to harm relations among group members (Wiiteman, 1991).

Affective Conflict

Affective conflict, or the commonly used "relationship conflict", emerges when discord, differences, and disagreements become personalized (Porter & Lilly, 1996) and individuals perceive a threat to their welfare (Sites, 1990). Relationship conflict is defined as "an awareness of interpersonal compatibilities" (Jehn & Mannix, 2001, p. 238). Whereas early conflict theorists associated conflict with violence, later theorists appeared to give priority to its emotional properties and characteristics (cf. Rahim, 2011). Affective emotions, or arousal, may include anger, aggression, frustration, dislike, friction (Jehn, 1997), acrimony, animosity (Amason & Schweiger, 1997), insecurity, distrust, suspicion (Mortensen & Hinds, 2001), and, finally, hostility (Bartos & Wehr, 2002).

Whereas early conflict researchers were preoccupied with anger (Rahim, 2011), hostility is considered a more pervasive and meaningful mediator of conflict behaviours (Bartos & Wehr, 2002). For example, hostility is considered a particularly harmful or an aversive emotion that may seriously affect relationships, tasks, and

responsibilities (Bowditch & Buono, 1997). Hostility may arise from secondary, negative, emotions such as frustration, and has the capability to initiate retaliatory responses, a key factor in a conflict spiral (Bartos & Wehr, 2002). A conflict spiral refers to an increase in the intensity of emotional responses and aggressive behaviours that target another individual or group, and initiate further negative and retaliatory responses (Anderson & Pearson,1999). Group theorists have argued that affective conflict in groups is a liability, negatively affecting group functioning and group member satisfaction; harming group processes, relationships, and the well-being of groups (De Dreu & Van de Vliert, 1997; Thomas, 1979; Wiiteman, 1991).

Process Conflict

Marks, Mathieu, and Zaccaro (2001) defined process as "members' interdependent acts that convert inputs to outcomes through cognitive, verbal, and behavioural activities directed towards organizing task work to achieve collective goals" (p. 357). Group processes are the means by which work is directed, aligned, and monitored. Whether workplace based or educational, groups are complex entities empowered to assign member tasks and roles. A group designs, implements, and monitors project development while developing and sustaining harmonious group relations (Hackman, 1983; Reynolds, 1994). The complexity of responsibilities affords ample opportunity for task, relationship, and process conflicts to occur (Jehn, 1997, 2000). Whereas task conflicts arise from differences and disagreements that affect the nature of a task, process conflicts are associated with "how" group tasks are accomplished (Marks et al., 2001). How a group performs requisite tasks and duties is associated with group success and group performance outcomes (Sims & Salas,

2007). Yet of the three identified conflicts, process conflict remains the least understood and investigated (Jehn & Mannix, 200).

Poorly managed task processes are increasingly linked with relationship conflicts (DeDreu & Weingart, 2003; DeChurch & Marks, 2001). For example, when a group disagrees over whose responsibility it is to complete a specific duty, relations among members risk being harmed (Jehn & Mannix, 2001). Subtle expressions of process conflict include behaviours which do not conform to internal expectations and norms of a group (Dimotakis, Ilies, & Mount, 2008), or underperformance or an under participation on the part of a group member (Pendell, 1990), and absenteeism (Ayoko et al., 2002).

To conclude, conditions that contribute to group conflict are increasingly important to organizations (Weiss & Hughes, 2005) and educators (Chapman, Meuter, Toy, & Wright, 2010). How group performance is affected by conflict is thought dependent on the type of conflict that arises (Hinds & Bailey, 2000). Whereas task conflict is considered less problematic and potentially beneficial to group functioning (Jehn, 1997), affective and process conflicts are thought more capable of causing harm to member relations and effective group functioning (Behfar et al., 2011).

Conflict is a dynamic social process that unfolds over time (De Church & Marks, 2001) however; group conflict researchers have traditionally examined conflict as a temporary condition (Hinds & Bailey, 2003; Jehn & Mannix, 2001). For example, group conflict is often associated with one of four stages in group development theory (Tuckman, 1965; Tuckman & Jensen, 1977). Conflict begins early in the formation of a group (storming) and is resolved as the group moves to the next, more socially advanced stage. Hostility, disunity, and emotional turmoil are typical outcomes of the storming stage. Newer group development theories treat

conflict stage theories in a less linear and more dynamic and cyclical manner (Carabajal, LaPointe, & Gunawardena, 2003); however, understandings of conflict, as a bounded, one-time event, permeate the literature on project groups (Jehn & Mannix, 2001).

Group conflict research has been criticized for adopting a reductionist approach, evident in the separate study of process, task and affective parameters (Jehn & Mannix, 2001;Janssen et al., 1999). Much of this research remains focused on face-to-face and simulated conditions. The group conflict literature is criticized for an over reliance on controlled laboratory studies that are contextually isolated, involved younger participants and dyadic groupings as opposed to mature working adults and larger sized groupings (McGrath, 1991). Increasingly, conflict arises in virtual settings (Landry, 2000) with groups and members exchanging messages via technology-mediated tools (Friedman & Currall, 2003).

Conflict in Technology-Mediated Settings

Although conflict has been studied extensively in face-to-face settings, the Internet and information and communication technologies present a new environment for group level conflicts to arise (Isenhart & Spangle, 2000; Zornona, Ripoll, & Peiro, 2002). According to Hobman et al. (2002), an understanding of how conflict develops and is expressed in computer-mediated environments is limited. The reported frequency of hostile statements and verbal missives associated with the phenomenon of flaming has encouraged an interest in investigating conflict in virtual settings (Hinds & Bailey, 2000; Suler, 2004).

Flaming

Problematic interactions in web-based settings are not new. Much fanfare has surrounded the phenomenon of flaming, or "anti-social messages" (Joinson, 2003) associated with "hostile, aggressive communicative behavior" (O'Sullivan & Flanagan, 2003, p. 70). Flaming has attracted considerable attention in the literature (Joinson, 2003) and popular press (Yap, 2011). Referred to as "digital road rage," (Goleman, 2007), flaming is considered the online environment's contribution to the conflict domain (Zafeiriou, 2003).

Early flaming research adopted a comparative approach and examined face-to-face interactions with technology-mediated interactions. The observation that virtuality influences inhibitions was reported and helped explain higher levels of offensive behaviour in computer-mediated exchanges (Kiesler, Zubrow, Moses, & Geller, 1985; Siegel, Dubrovsky, Kiesler, & McGuire, 1986). Social presence theory, or "clues filtered out," is derived from early telephone research by Short, Williams, and Christie (1976). Laboratory-based outcomes suggested that a reduction in technology mediated auditory, and physical sensory cues, altered the social awareness of users, and was therefore instrumental in encouraging uninhibited exchanges among users. However, the notion that the Internet is awash in uninhibited behaviour has been challenged (Lea, O'Shea, Fung, & Spears, 1992; Spears & Lea, 1992; Walther, Anderson, Park, & Walther, 1994) and criticized for being exaggerated and erroneously reported (Lea et al., 1992)

Flaming in Online Instructional Settings

Flaming has been described as personal attacks against group members (Hiltz, Turoff, & Johnson, 1989). It is characterized by hostile, inflammatory and offensive remarks (Kiesler, et al., 1985), or "verbal violence" (Burnett, 2000, para.14), or, inappropriate message content, emotions, and intentions (Markus & Robey, 1988). Although flaming was widely reported in early technology-mediated settings (Joinson, 2003; Kiesler, Siegel, & McGuire, 1984; Sproull & Kiesler, 1986), its presence in online project groups has not achieved the same level of notoriety. Flaming is argued to be a relatively rare form of conflict expression in online instructional settings (Burnett, 2000; Orlikowski & Yates, 1993). Indeed, flaming's rarity has surprised educators who anticipated personal attacks, disparaging remarks, insults, and hostile exchanges (Krol, 1992, cited in Wang, 1996). McCormick and McCormick (1992) reported on the camaraderie and supportive social exchanges evident in undergraduate learners' email exchanges rather than the hostile and socially inappropriate behaviour expected. Similarly, flaming incidents appeared to be underreported in Zafeiriou's (2003) interviews with 50 campus-based online learners and Orlikowski and Yates's three-year study of online programmers. One explanation for lower prevalence of flaming incidents is the heightened awareness among learners that postings are capable of conveying inappropriate tone or content (Borthick & Jones, 2000; Cutrim, 2002; Orlikowski & Yates, 1993). Conrad (2002) observed that learners, in a graduate level communications course, took considerable pains to be conciliatory and polite towards one another, to the point, that some learners were reported as being "scared to offend" (p. 201). Similarly, Orlikowski and Yates reported that learners were often self-vigilant in the content and tone of their postings, a finding also supported by Zafeiriou (2003).

In contrary cases, flaming was reported among graduate learners in an online computer software engineering course (Sheard, Ramakrishnan, & Miller, 2003). The ease with which a few negative exchanges are capable of erupting into a full scale war has surprised some online educators (cf. McLoughlin & Luca, 2001; Robertshaw, 2001). Negative commentary and exchanges may easily intensify and spiral into a tit-for-tat "flame war" with the potential to escalate if unimpeded. Engvig (2006) reported on a flaming incident between two online learners that culminated in threats to show-up in person and settle a disagreement. Flaming was also considered a factor in complaints and criticisms by learners enrolled in an online Master's in Business Administration (MBA) course (Regan & Tuchman, 1990). Online learners were harsher in their course delivery criticisms, and more likely to "rail against [the] administration" than videoconference learners or residential MBA learners (Riedinger & Rosenberg, 2006, p.38). Riedinger and Rosenberg adopted a flaming rationale to justify the harsh criticisms. Venting, in their view, "appear[ed] to confirm the phenomenon called flaming, where students' anger and frustration increases with their increasing distance form [sic] campus" (Regan & Tuchman, 1990, p. 5).

To conclude, whereas early flaming research reported a surfeit of criticisms, swearing, personal attacks against group members (Hiltz et al., 1989), or hostile, inflammatory, or offensive remarks (Kiesler, Zubrow, et al., 1985), the pervasiveness of incidents has been less apparent in naturalistic groups working in online settings. One explanation for the weaker presence is, unlike laboratory studies where the expectation of future interactions is unlikely, online groups are generally required to work together for a longer period of time. Online learners may adopt self-regulated norms and protocols to avoid offensive exchanges and remarks with peers (Conrad, 2002). Lea et al. (1992) argued that flaming has been over reported in the literature.

Their investigation of flaming related citations was found to be inflated and at times, unsubstantiated. Nevertheless, reports of flaming incidents and behaviours persist, particularly in informal online communities (Burnett, 2000; Kollock & Smith, 1996). As explained by Burnett,

> Indeed, some virtual communities—or, perhaps more accurately, all virtual communities at some time or another—can appear to be structured around a sort of verbal violence that includes out-and-out dismissive comments, vicious arguments involving either a handful of participants or, in extreme cases, the entire community (para. 15).

Researchers have further argued that authority, and hence norms, may be diminished in a technology-based setting. Control mechanisms that do exist may exert less control over negative forms of expression (Kollock & Smith, 1996; Suler, 2004).

Conflict in Online Group Work

Published studies of online group conflict appear to be largely drawn from anecdotal incidents, reported from the perspective of the course tutor or instructor, and in some cases, a coordinator of an online academic-informed initiative (cf. Spargo & Kelsey, 1996). In few cases has conflict has been the main focus of an empirical investigation (cf. Behfar et al., 2011). Zafeiriou (2003) investigated the role of conflict in online groups by surveying 50 online graduate management learners. Semi-structured interviews revealed no major conflicts; moreover, learners believed that conflict was less likely to occur online due to a perceived reduction in social interaction. In a second phase of the study, Zafeiriou sought to identity conditions or factors that contributed to conflict.

Yet, "contribution conflicts" (Behfar et al., 2011, p.150) defined as breaches in task expectations and work obligations, are reported in academic project groups and associated with uneven workloads, and learners compensating for other group members not pulling their weight (Aggarwal & O'Brien, 2008; Tagger & Neubert, 2008; O'Donnell & O'Kelly, 1994) . When disagreements did arise, online learners reported experiencing fewer restraints in disagreeing with others, in other words, it was "easier to have a go" (Zafeiriou, 2003, p.5). Last (2002) investigated the role of conflict in online project groups to determine whether conflict acted as a performance enhancer or detractor. Despite a large number of participants taking part in an international project, and the diversity in the composition of learning groups, few conflicts were reported among surveyed learners. Nevertheless, journal accounts and weekly sessions with the online tutor, suggested the presence of disagreements, misunderstandings, and poor communication problems.

Similarly, Cramton (2001) reported on conflicts among online groups undertaking a large scale international project. Cramton postulated that knowledge discrepancies were more likely to arise between off site and onsite group members. Mutual knowledge discrepancies were common and included learner challenges communicating and retaining pertinent information and the ability of groups to interpret the saliency of message content shared among members of a group. As well, pacing differences were cited, and difficulty interpreting group member silence. Cramton also observed the presence of an attribution bias, with dysfunctional groups more likely to attribute problems arising from situational, contextual, and technology sources to personal shortcomings of group members, as opposed to situational factors.

McConnell (2005) undertook an ethnographic examination of online group dynamics in a module course offering. Three networked learning groups, in a

master's-level program in education, were compared. Whereas two groups demonstrated harmonious and supportive relations between members, a third group was embroiled in on going discord that dominated group relations and impeded the group's ability to advance. One factor reported to negatively differentiate the three groups was the presence of "strong personalities" in the troubled and dysfunctional grouping, but not apparent in the more collegial groupings (p.175).

Discussion

Several commonalties are evident in the online conflict literature. Variations in the identification of negative behaviours are apparent. Differences and disagreements that erupt in online groups have been idenfied as flaming, (McLaughlin & Luca, 2001; Regan & Tuchman, 1990; Robertshaw, 2001), mutual knowledge differences (Cramton, 2001), and anxiety and division (McConnell, 2005). If "conflict" is introduced, it generally remains an undefined construct. Inconsistencies are apparent, in how flaming is conceptualized. Whereas flaming is described as "aggressive or hostile" text-based messages by O'Sullivan and Flanagan (2003, p. 70), flaming has also been thought to represent negative feedback (cf. Regan &Tuchman, 1990). For example, online MBA learners who complained of delivery short comings were not simply "difficult", they were deemed to be psychologically impaired. As Regan & Tuchman explained,

> Students who select online training programs enter with a complex and often
> psychologically inaccessible set of personal needs regarding their relationship
> with authority figures and peers, and that these needs later complicate
> instruction once the student is online. (p. 5)

In an anecdotal study reported by Robertshaw (2004) aggressive, hostile, and defamatory exchanges were labelled "flaming" and allowed to continue, as an experiential learning opportunity, despite indicators of a group mobbing of a singled out, but "difficult", group member. Aversive conflict has been defined as "long-lasting and badly managed" (Zapt & Gross, 2001, cited in Keashly & Nowell, 2011, p. 423), and characterized as escalating level of hostility and counter hostility (Andersson & Pearson, 1999). If left unattended, aversive conflicts risk evolving into aggression, a behaviour whose goal is to inflict harm on another (Baron, Neuman, & Geddes, 1999).

Whereas considerable attention has been paid to the types of conflict likely to arise in group work (Hollingshead, Wittenbaum, et al., 2005; Jehn, 1994; Porter & Lilly, 1996), for example, task, process, and interpersonal conflict, diverse expressions of aversive social behaviour, for example, sabotage and ostracizing, appear to be overlooked.

All conflict is contextually located (Donohue & Kolt, 1992); increasingly, social settings include online environments and are associated with social exchanges using a variety of social media and communication tools (Landry, 2000). Computer-mediated communication research suggests that virtual settings may be prone to higher levels of conflict (Kahai & Cooper, 2003) a result of reduced social cues and opportunities for task-related conflicts to develop (Mortensen & Hinds, 2001). Reported outcomes by Hobman et al. (2002) have suggested that greater diversity in online groups may increase conflicts. Recent research points to a relationship between high group autonomy and the rise of process conflicts (Behfar et al., 2011).

Thirdly, group diversity and longevity research (Hobman et al., 2002) suggests that context may play an important mediating role in group conflict. Early

organizational conflict scholars (Pondy, 1967) argued that contested or limited resources and structural characteristics of an environment may play an important mediating role in conflict. Online settings are likely to present challenges that may go unrecognized or unattended to as meanings, intentions, and interactions are more readily concealed in online settings (Suler, 2004). As well, conflict may adopt less conventional forms of expression in online settings (Kolb & Putnam, 1992; Landry, 2000

Alternative understandings of conflict (Bartunek, Kolb & Lewicki, 1992; Kolb & Putnam, 1992) are less concerned with sources of conflict, an early interest of conflict theorists (Bartos & Wehr, 2002), or types of conflict, a focus of group research. Instead, informal and covert expressions of conflict behaviour are of particular interest. Informal conflict dynamics may be located "alongside [an] outwardly collaborative 'front' because of the private behind the scenes conflict handling activities" (Bartunek et al., 1992, p. 214). Ethnographic research suggests that virtual spaces may provide refuge from conflict interactions, making it easier to avoid or more easily manage exchanges with distant others (Markus, 1994). This may explain why online authors Last, (2003) and Zafeiriou (2003) reported difficulties identifying conflict incidents among learning groups. According to Kates (2000) academic groups mired in discord can be remarkably collaborative when presenting an "illusion of harmonious and conflict free group processes and practices" (p.624). This suggests that online learners may intentionally manage impressions (Jones & Cawood, 1998) to avoid time-consuming skirmishes that may detract from instrumental concerns and productivity. The disparaging lament of one course instructor, observing online groups acquiescing to domineering member behaviour,

"they are only interested in getting the project completed" (Last, 2003, p. 157),
captures the nuance of instrumental tactics among project groups.

Various scholars have pointed to the limitation of traditional approaches to the
study of conflict in which quantitative methods dominate. Traditional methods have
been criticized for neglecting meaning and personal interpretations in conflict
dynamics (Kolb & Putnam, 1992; O'Sullivan & Flanagin, 2003; Van Maanen, 1992).
For example, flaming research has been criticized for presenting the interpretation of
the researcher while overlooking meanings and intentions of flame throwers and
recipients (O'Sullivan, & Flanagin, 2003). Alternative views of social conflict have
adopted a "disputing" perspective and take the meaning and interpretation of social
actors into account and the development and management of disputes, discord, and
difference. As Kolb and Putnam explain,

> To take a dispute (s) as the unit of analysis is to focus on the behavior of
> various parties to a conflict as it unfolds over time and to look at the
> interaction of a conflict and the procedures by which it is processed as the
> essential ways that issues are made meaningful and resolved. (p. 11)

A disputing perspective places greater emphasis on the social structures in
which discord dynamics play out. For example, bureaucratic rules and policies,
violated rights and interests, are considered to be factors that may contribute to group
friction (Bartunek et al., 1992). A broader interpretive perspective of online group
conflict represents an unexplored territory and hence is the focus of the current study.

Summary

In this chapter I presented an overview of key properties associated with the empirical study of group conflict. The focus on group conflict was intentional as the conflict literature is extensive and would require a substantially broader focus than space permits.

What constitutes a conflict was examined. Considerable attention has been paid to the nature of conflict whether task, process, and relationship (Jehn & Mannix, 2001) and therefore is considered likely to arise in collaborative group work (Jehn, 1994; Montoya-Weiss et al., 2001; Porter & Lilly, 1996). When problematic behaviours are discussed in technology-mediated settings, researchers have focused on the phenomenon of "flaming," or profanity-imbued messages arising in text-based communications (Joinson, 2003).

A review of a small literature dealing with online group conflict was presented. Researchers who actively sought to examine the conflict construct (cf. Last, 2003; Zafeiriou, 2003) encountered difficulties locating conflict incidents. I then identified weaknesses inherent in group conflict research. First, the group conflict literature has failed to address alternative expressions of conflict. Second, serious forms of conflict expression may be overlooked by positioning incidents as flaming but with little to say regarding underlying dynamics or antecedents. Third, the context and situational factors that frame conflict incidents are often overlooked in the group conflict literature. A disputing perspective and an emphasis on the social structures in which discord dynamics play out were reported as promising. For example, bureaucratic rules and policies, violated rights and interests, are argued to be important contributors to group friction (Bartunek et al., 1992). As argued, a broader interpretive perspective of online group conflict represents an unexplored territory and

hence is the focus of the current study. Reframing what constitutes differences and

discord in online settings is timely, particularly as group work methods become

increasingly utilized in online graduate management education (McConnell, 2005;

Elliott and Reynolds, 2005).

Chapter 3

Methodology

In this chapter I begin by introducing the research method selected to study online group work processes in a graduate management learning environment. My choices were informed by several factors, one being the method's philosophical foundation, its ontology and epistemological orientation, and its accommodation to my interpretivist orientation. Second, I was drawn to the method's utility in investigating the dynamic nature of problematic social behaviour while, at the same time, providing qualitative rigour. Grounded theory met these criteria and more specifically the classical work of the early method developers, Barney Glaser and Anselm Strauss and their early publications (Glaser 1978, 1992; Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Strauss 1987). I then describe the research design along with aims and objectives, research questions, data sources, and a data selection strategy. Procedures involved in obtaining entry into a suitable research setting and ethical considerations are also reviewed.

Philosophical Position

The consideration of philosophical debates is an essential feature in social science inquiry since a researcher's philosophical position informs their empirically based inquiry (Mason, 2002; Thomas, 2004). For example, the framing of questions and data-gathering methods must be congruent with responses to philosophical questions such as the nature of the phenomena or social reality to be investigated (Mason, 2002). Dualism refers to assumptions regarding the nature of reality (Easterby-Smith et. al., 2003) and whether physical and social entities have an

external reality separate from social actors. In other words, is there an objective world separate from people, or is it a subjective world? Are social actors continually engaged in constructing their world? Responses to the above questions make an ontological statement about social reality.

Epistemology is a branch of philosophy that deals with the nature of knowledge. It considers questions such as, what do we mean when we say that a claim is true? How can we be certain of what we know? and what justifies a belief? Epistemological concerns determine how social phenomena should be studied and whether the social world can be treated in the same manner as the natural word (Benton & Craib, 2001; Mason, 2002). Epistemological issues direct our attention to what we consider to be knowledge of the social world, what the status of this knowledge is, and what constitutes evidence and proof. As Mason explains,

> You should be able to connect the answers to these questions with your
> answers to the ontological questions, and the two sets of answers should be
> consistent so that... your epistemology helps you to generate knowledge and
> explanations about the ontological components of the social world. (p. 16)

Responses to the above questions provide a foundation on which the research enterprise rests (Grix, 2004; Maison, 2002). A comparative but simplified overview of two dominant perspectives in the social sciences, positivism and constructionism, is illustrated in Table 2 below. Under the constructionism banner I have situated my ontological orientation, that of relativist ontology of multiple social realities (Charmaz, 2000) and a constructionist epistemology.

Table 1. *Positivism and constructionism in social research*

Epistemological/ theory of knowledge Preferred conceptions of:	Positivism	Constructionism
The human world	Set of natural objects	Set of human meanings
Analytical approach	Variable analysis	Cultural analysis
Theory of human behaviour/action	Behaviourism	Symbolic interactionism
Relation between structure and action	Explain actions in terms of structures	Explain structures in terms of action
Knowledge	General, nomothetic, universal	Particular, ideographic, contextual
Data	Given, found	Constructed
Method of securing data	Data collection via observation	Data construction via interpretation
Description	Quantitative measurements	Qualitative descriptions
Explanation	Statistical relations	Narrative accounts
Causal emphasis	External to internal	Internal to external
Prediction	Based on statistical forecasts	Based on understanding of typical behaviour in typical situations
Preferred research approach		
Research strategies	Experiment, quasi-experiment, survey	Case study, ethnography, action research
Research methods	Self-completion questionnaires, structured interview, structured observation, psychological tests	Unstructured interview, participation observation, personal documents (diaries, letters, etc.)
Analytical method	Multivariate statistical analysis	Hermeneutics
Methodological problems	Internal validity, contextualization	Generalization, replication

Grounded theory, the method chosen for the current study, is closely linked with symbolic interactionism (SI) and the American philosophy of pragmatism. An overview of the philosophical basis of grounded theory, that of American pragmatism, and the theory of symbolic interactionism follows.

Pragmatism

Pragmatics, an American philosophical movement, emerged during a period of tremendous social upheaval and change in the American west in the 19th and early 20th centuries (Hall, 2003) According to Hall, social transformations proved to be an incubator for social and intellectual growth as "pragmatists' social thought was forged in the crucible of social action" (p. 50). Not surprisingly, collective social action, process, and solving practical social problems were to become key tenets of pragmatist thought and the focus of this new philosophy (Lauer & Handel, 1977).

Pragmatist ideas first appeared in a series of papers written by Charles Sanders Peirce (1839–1914), acknowledged as the founder of pragmatism. Pragmatism is derived from a Greek word (*pragma*), meaning action (Delanty & Strydom, 2003). Pragmatists claim there are "profound connections between human meaning and human bodies, and that biology is a significant factor in the highest and not simply the lowest, human endeavors" (Rochberg-Halton, 1987, p. 199). Pragmatics view meaning as having a physical, biological, and organic basis whereby meaning becomes, as Wiley (2006) implies, a living habit, which may be cultivated, practiced, or manipulated. For pragmatists, meaning assumes a living quality and not an objectified presence, separated or enacted separately from the human body. From

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their early beginnings, pragmatists disavowed the notion of an external reality, instead arguing that nothing ever "speaks for itself" (Charon, 1998, p. 29).

Dewey (1925/1996), an influential American pragmatist, was instrumental in shaping symbolic interactionism thinking and social psychology (Herman & Reynolds, 1994) and introducing symbolic interactionist thinking within a pragmatism foundation (Reynolds, 1994). Similar to Charles Sanders Peirce and William James, two influential pragmatists, Dewey viewed reality as dynamic (Delanty & Strydom, 2003). People were active knowers, rather than passive recipients, who engaged with their environment. Dewey saw individuals as actively negotiating or constructing meanings about the world through their interactions with objects and with others (Benton & Craib, 2001). In pragmatist philosophy the notion of human behaviour as a fixed entity driven by stable internal drives was replaced with a view of individuals as active meaning makers who formulated plans of actions and acted on them; social life was defined by social interaction influenced by processual and continuous evolution (Charon, 1998). Not surprisingly, these views align with a constructionist view of the social world (Benton & Craib, 2001).

Dewey's (1925/1996) contribution to pragmatism was his rejection of dualism. He attacked the notion of binary thinking associated with dualism, a Western metaphysical belief, that reality consisted of two separate entities, an internal, subjective world and an external, objective world (Gergen, 2003; Schwandt, 2001). Dewey shared, with fellow pragmatist George Herbert Mead, the belief that dualism creates "unreal problems" (Hickman, 1992, p.170). In the pragmatist tradition, philosophy serves practical aims and objectives; its role is instrumental in helping people find ways to better manage problems (L. Reynolds, 1994). This perspective was to gain a prominent foothold in pragmatist thinking. Overcoming collective

social problems has remained a central tenet of pragmatist thought (Delanty & Strydom, 2003).

Mead, a prominent pragmatist, sought to established closer linkages between pragmatist philosophy and sociology while acknowledging the work of his contemporaries, such as such as Dewey and Peirce. Mead drew from evolutionistic thinking spearheaded by Charles Darwin (Sandstrom, Martin, & Fine, 2000). Mead and fellow pragmatists were advocates of the notion of emergence, a theory, then later a philosophical orientation, that draws from Darwin's evolutionary thinking (Hodgson, 2004).

The term *emergent*, and later *emergence*, was coined by Scottish philosopher Alexander Lewes in the 1800s (Hodgson, 2004). Emergence was Darwin's explanation for evolutionary diversity; namely, that untraceable properties of a system might emerge that could not be explained by a system's components or the interactions among components. According to Hodgson, an emergent view of social reality included the belief that the manner in which novel properties emerged from biological systems, so too might diverse behaviours and properties emerge from social systems and capable of creating new social orders, organizational forms, and movements (Snow, 2001). Mead and his fellow pragmatists challenged existing perspectives that culture and behaviour could be explained by instincts and genetics alone (Wiley, 2006). Although Mead described himself as a social "behaviorist," a label that led to misconceptions of a positivist, behaviorist orientation (Joas, 1994), Mead avoided the behaviourist fondness for reductionism, the belief that mental states and behaviours are easily explainable and that only observable behaviour is worth knowing (Schwandth, 2001).

Symbolic Interactionism

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Symbolic interactionism (SI) is a social psychology theory of human action and interaction (Athens, 1993; Blumer, 1969) that originated from 20th-century sociology, and drew inspiration from American pragmatist social theory (Lemert, 1992), and interpretivism (Atkinson & Housley, 2003). It is associated with Mead, and his student, Herbert Blumer, the latter coining the term *symbolic interactionism*. However, the influence and ideas of pragmatists, including C. H. Cooley and Dewey must also be acknowledged (Meltzer, Petras, & Reynolds 1976). According to Snow (2001),

> Ontologically, symbolic interactionists view individuals, groups, or society as existing "only in relation to each other; thus one can fully understand them only through their interaction, whether actual, virtual, or imagined". (p. 371)

Meaning and interpretation are central to Blumer's definition of SI. According to Blumer (1969), [p]eople act toward things, including each other, on the basis of the meanings they have for them; that meanings are derived through social interaction with others; and that meanings are managed and transformed through an interpretive process that people use to make sense of and handle the objects that constitute their social worlds (p. 2). Blumer argued that human interaction operated at two levels, a level of interpretation and reflection and a patterned behavioural response level. According to SI, our responses to situations and our actions are explained by our interpretations and the meanings associated with those interpretations.

Acknowledging its pragmatist and interactionist roots, a second tenet of SI is process and the unfolding of social phenomena (Morse & Richards, 2002). Process is defined as "something which occurs over time and involves change over time" (Glaser, 1978, p. 97). Strauss and Corbin (1998) considered process to be made up of,

a series of evolving sequences of action/interaction that occur over time and space, changing or sometimes remaining the same in response to the situation or context. The action/interaction may be strategic, taken in response to problematic situations, or it may be quite routine…It may be orderly, interrupted, sequential, or coordinated—or in some cases a complete mess. (p. 165)

SI entails a view of reality as constantly changing, fluid, and subject to the meanings and interpretations of actors and of the human condition. Social actors do not react to something; they interpret, creating meanings through internal and external dialogues which they share and negotiate, and use symbols, often language, for communication (Annells, 1996). Whereas social structures and social life may imply a consistent or static quality (Gusfield, 2003), Blumer (1969/1986) argued that social stability was perceptual. Social processes may not move at the same pace, with some movement being less visible than others to actors (Athens, 1993).

A third assumption associated with SI is the priority given to situatedness. Behaviour is understood to be,

"a response to specific contexts as the actor interprets these contexts.

Therefore, to understand behavior, the analyst must know the situation of the actor and the actor's definition of that situation". (Gusfield, 2003, p. 123).

Consequently, SI notions differ from positivist notions of objectivity, the latter privileging researcher interpretations at the expense of the social actor.

A fourth assumption associated with SI is the importance of language and symbolism. According to Blumer (1969), it is our use of symbols which makes us human. Oral language and text are abstract symbolic tools that are pivotal to human interaction, communication, and meaning (Milliken & Schreiber, 2001).

A criticism of symbolic interactionism is its micro-sociological focus and ignoring of broader social struggles (Annells, 1996). Collective movement theorist, David Snow (2001), however, has argued that the study of broader social issues and collective social behaviour are accommodated under the SI framework. Snow identified three limitations of classical symbolic interactionism. First, the classical SI of Blumer (1969) overemphasized individual meaning and interaction, while neglecting broader interactionist perspectives. Snow (2001) has argued that an expanded view of SI may accommodate social roles and organizational practices, and does so by, taking the context in which meaning and interactions unfold into account.

Second, Snow (2001) has maintained that the SI emphasis on symbolism and in particular language has failed to emphasize, adequately, how symbols and meaning are "routinely, embedded in and reflective of existing cultural and organizational contexts and systems of meaning" (p. 371). Third, the basic elements of SI, those of meaning, interpretation, and symbolization, may exhibit structural and constructionist dimensions which Snow argued are more complex than previously stated by Blumer. In summary, Snow appears intent on re-establishing closer links between classical SI and early pragmatist interests in social change and transformations.

Symbolic Interactionism and Grounded Theory

The philosophical and theoretical underpinning of grounded theory is symbolic interactionism (Locke, 2005; Milliken & Schreiber, 2001). Acknowledging its pragmatic roots, grounded theory researchers have examined problems faced by different groups in society and in particular social contexts (Schreiber, 2001). Symbolic interactionists reiterate pragmatist values by examining social context and how social rules are enacted, along with prevailing ideologies, and the shared

meanings of people taking parting in the interaction (Chenitz & Swanson, 1986). As Chenitz and Swanson observed, SI provides a useful sensitizing framework for grounded theory research. According to Locke (2005), GT acknowledges its social interactionist heritage with its focus on symbols, behaviour, and the importance of direct contact with the social world being studied. Consequently, grounded theory researchers seek to understand human conduct, behaviour, and interactions. Like SI, GT advances a view of reality as being dynamic rather than static; consequently research interests emphasize processes, action and interaction both within the self and between others.

Closely associated with symbolic interactionism is the grounded theory concern with interactions occurring at a micro and a macro level (Strauss, 1987). At a macro level, GT enables the study of structural features which "hamper or hinder" social interactions, and it emphasizes the study of patterns of interaction and the consequences of these interactions. It remains sensitive to unresolved social issues or ideologies, particularly those influencing groups (Chenitz & Swanson, 1986).

The outcome of a grounded theory study is mid-range, or substantive, theory. Mid-range theories, according to Glaser and Strauss (1967), precede formal theory, and are considered more useful to professional practices and practitioners (Locke, 2005). This echoes pragmatist beliefs and specifically Dewey, that a theory should be judged by its usefulness and its adoption (Reynolds, 1994).

The Grounded Theory Method

In 1967 Barney Glaser and Anselm Strauss published *Grounded Theory: Strategies for Qualitative Research*. The publication served several functions. It was a response to the many methodological questions the authors received after publishing their research from *Death and Dying* (Baszanger, 1998). Glaser and Strauss sought to close the gap between theory and research by developing substantive theories rather than focusing on theory verification. They sought greater legitimacy for qualitative approaches that were less impressionistic, and more systematic, and demonstrated how theory could be developed using a continuous interplay between data gathering, analysis, and writing.

The key components of the grounded theory method include use of the constant comparative method throughout the data analysis process; writing of memos throughout data collection, sampling theoretically to test, elaborate on, and refine categories and to ensure representation and a full range of variation (Chenitz & Swanson, 1986, p. 9). Finally, GT includes the use of analytic induction, which involves an inductive/deductive approach, to integrate, refine and synthesize categories (Morse & Richards, 2002; Glaser & Strauss, 1967). GT methods are used to build theory or a conceptual framework that conceptualizes the problem area and how issues are processed, resolved, or managed (Baker, Wuest, & Stern, 1992).

According to Piantanida, Tananis, and Grubs (2004), the 1967 publication of *Discovery* raised more questions than it answered. However, Glaser and Strauss believed that a strict set of procedures would be counterintuitive to the method.

"Because this is only a beginning, we shall often state positions, counter-positions and examples, rather than offering clear-cut procedures and

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definitions, because at many points we believe our slight knowledge makes any formulation premature". (Glaser & Strauss, 1967, p. 1)

In 1978 Glaser published a follow-up to *Discovery* with *Theoretical Sensitivity*, where he introduced and elaborated on the methodological constructs introduced in *Discovery*. In 1987, Strauss published *Qualitative Analysis for Social Scientists*, and presented a collection of tutorials on how to think about qualitative data, offered further insights into the analytic abstracting process and acknowledged linkages between grounded theory and pragmatism. For example, Strauss stressed the need to understand the world from the perspective of social actors, the importance of change as an ontological underpinning, and the need to study change through social interaction and social processes (Wuest, 2007). In 1988, Strauss began a series of professional collaborations with Juliet Corbin, and co-authored two books on chronic illness. In 1990 their joint authorship of *Basics of Qualitative Research: Grounded Theory Procedures and Techniques* was to prove their most contentious collaboration for Barney Glaser. Their intention was to introduce novice researchers to qualitative methods and provide further guidance on doing GT research (Baszanger, 1998; Locke, 2005). In response, Glaser published *Emergence versus Forcing* (1992) attacking Strauss and Corbin's (1990) *Basics of Qualitative Research* and criticizing the work as a radical departure from the original grounded method.

The publication of Strauss and Corbin's (1990) *Basics of Qualitative Research* and Glaser's (1992) rejoinder, led to the bifurcation of the two methods (Goulding, 2002). Melia (1996) has referred to the differences as largely a one sided dispute. According to Melia, Strauss never defended his approach against Glaser's strident views and was reportedly unperturbed over differences in the two methods. In 1996 Anselm Strauss passed away, and in 1998, Corbin posthumously published the second

edition of *Basics of Qualitative Research.* That same year, Glaser (1998) claimed

principle ownership of the method while relegating his co-author and method

developer, Straus, to a less prominent role. Glaser received some support for his

claims. According to Hermandez (2007) Glaser's early (1965) publication, *The*

Constant Comparative Method of Qualitative Analysis was the basis for 7 of

Discovery's method chapters.

Choosing a Grounded Theory Method

Differences between the classical text of *Discovery* and Strauss and Corbin's

subsequent publications have been extensively critiqued by qualitative researchers (cf.

Heath & Cowley, 2004; Kendall, 1999; MacDonald, 2001). Proponents and

opponents, of *Glaserian* versus *Straussian,* (Stern, 1994) GT, has been one outcome

of the debates. Schreiber (2001) considers Glaser's work best for a novice researcher,

an opinion shared by Melia (2001). Yet, Strauss and Corbin are commended for their

ability to introduce complex ideas and process into texts that are easy to read and

digestible.

I was also discouraged by criticism of Strauss and Corbin's 'linear and

formulaic approach" (Schreiber, 2001, p. 56; see also Annells, 1996; Locke, 2005).

Nevertheless, over time, Strauss and Corbin's grounded theory method has adopted a

flexible orientation (cf. Corbin, 2009). In contrast, Glaser's (1998) "methodological

package" (Wilcox, 2009, p.36) has appeared less tolerant of deviation and

modification.

My introduction to grounded theory started with Easterby-Smith, Thorpe and

Lowe's (2003) overview of qualitative methods in management learning. Later,

Charmaz's (2000) critique of GT's constructivist short comings provided additional

insights into the method and its various elements. In 2005 I was avidly searching for a qualitative method suitable for a study of discord in online settings. In course work with Robert Gephart (University of Alberta, School of Business; see Table 2), I first read *Discovery* for the first time.

In 2006, I undertook qualitative research coursework at the International Institute for Qualitative Methodology, in Edmonton, Alberta. When grounded theory was tentatively chosen as a viable research method, a more in-depth understanding of which method of GT, whether Glaserian or Straussian (Stern, 1994), was sought (see Table 3). At the Institute, the early classical work and Glaser's subsequent renditions, for example, (Glaser, 1978) were often, although not exclusively, adopted.

Traditionally, researchers are asked to declare which approach they align themselves with, and to state their affiliation (Easterby-Smith et al., 2003). Choices today are more complex and diverse (Wuest, 2007). Five approaches to conducting a grounded theory study were identified including, the original work of Glaser and Strauss with additional refinements by Glaser (1978, 1992, 1998); the interpretive work by Strauss and Corbin (1990, 1994); Schatzman (1991) and dimensional analysis, the social constructivist perspective adopted by Charmaz (2000; 2006), and finally, the postmodern work of Adele Clarke (2005).

Table 2. *Research Training in Qualitative Methods*

Seminar: Introduction to the Philosophy of the Social Sciences. Faculty of Social Sciences, Lancaster University Convener: Bronislaw Szerszynski (Michaelmas, 2005).

Seminar: Doctorial Seminar in Qualitative Methodology. School of Management, University of Alberta. Robert Gephart (winter session, 2005).

Seminar: Inside Analysis, International Institute for Qualitative Methodology, University of Alberta. Janice Morse (July 5-21, 2005).

Thinking Qualitatively Workshops, International Institute for Qualitative Methodology, University of Alberta. Title: *Principles and Issues in Sampling* Janice M. Morse (July 26, 2005, ½ day).

Title: *Ethics and the Ethics Review Process* Kevin Haggerty (July 26,2005, ½ day).

Title: *Interviewing Issues in Qualitative Research* Anne Neufeld (July 27, 2005, ½ day).

Title: *Comparative Case Studies* Naomi Krogman (July 27, 2005, ½ day).

Title: *An Introduction to Narrative Research* Kristine Martin-McDonald (June 26, 2006, ½ day).

Title: *Unstructured Interviewing*

Kärin Olson (June 26, 2006, ½ day).

Table 3. *Grounded Theory Research Training*

Seminar: Grounded Theory Jamboree , Calgary, Alberta.

Facilitator: Paul Wishart.

Attendee: Phyllis Stern, (August 10-12, 2006).

Thinking Qualitatively Workshops,

International Institute for Qualitative Methodology,

University of Alberta.

Title: *Doing Grounded Theory*

Karin Olson (July 28, 2006, full day).

Title: *Generating Substantive Grounded Theory*

Judith Wuest (July 29, 2006, full day).

Title: *Coding and Categorization*

Lisa Given (June, 2007, ½ day).

Seminar: Grounded Theory

Grounded Theory Institute

Halifax, Nova Scotia,

Facilitator: Judith Holton, editor-in-chief, *Grounded Theory Review,*

(August 23-24, 2007).

Seminar: The Grounded Theory Bash

Qualitative Methods Conference

Banff, Alberta,

Facilitator: Janice Morse

Presenters: Juliet Corbin, Kathy Charmaz, Phyllis Stern, Adele F. Clarke, Barbara Bowers, (September 24, 2007, ½ day).

Seminar: Grounded Theory

Grounded Theory Institute

Mill Valley, California,

Facilitator: Barney Glaser, (March 17-19, 2009).

Grounded theory was founded on symbolic interactionism and pragmatism, although these linkages have been refuted by Glaser (2005), and criticized as "sloppy scholarship" by Hernandez, (2007, p. 51). Nevertheless, the method's SI roots are considered Strauss's most valuable contribution to *Discovery* (Bryant and Charmaz, 2007). According to Bryant and Charmaz (2007),

Thus scholars see Strauss's contribution to the GTM [grounded theory method] canon as having a far wider reach than narrow methodological questions and prescriptions because it goes well beyond the early collaborative work with Glaser, the later book on *Qualitative Research,* and the first edition of *Basics of Qualitative Research.* (p.5)

Given SI's emphasis on action and process (Blumer, 1969), it is not surprising the method would undergo change (Wuest, 2007). The method continued to evolve under Glaser (1998, 1999, 2002, 2004), making the choice between Glaser or Strauss more complex (Wuest, 2007). Increasingly, choices are based on the ontological and epistemological leanings of the method's developers (Charmaz, 2000, 2006; Clarke, 2005; Mill et al., 2006) and the researcher (cf. Annells, 1996; Mills, Bonner, Francis & Mills, 2006).

In summary, classical grounded theory is linked with symbolic interactionism and ultimately pragmatism (Milliken & Schreiber, 2001; Wuest, 2007), although early work, *Discovery*, has been criticism for its positivistic language (cf. Charmaz, 2000; Charmaz, 2006). In contrast, Strauss and Corbin's (1990) early work offered a stronger symbolic interactionist foundation. Charmaz (2006) has aligned her GT approach as social constructivist (Mill, Bonner, Francis, & Mills, 2006), and Clarke

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(2005) advocating a postmodern orientation. While Glaser (1999) has argued that GT is methodologically unburdened by epistemological and ontological concerns, claims of a positivist orientation remain (cf. Mills, Bonner, Francis, & Mills, 2006). Nevertheless, researchers who claim allegiance to an interpretive SI and social constructionist world view have selected Glaser's classic approach (cf. Chenitz & Swanson, 1993; Heath & Cowley, 2004; Haugen Bunch, 2004; Jeon, 2004; Melia, 1996; Schreiber, 2001; Wuest, 2007).

Studying online social practices and problematic situations requires a method sensitive to the constructs of context and social groups. Glaser has stated that grounded theory is able to "account for a pattern of behaviour which is relevant and problematic for those involved" (p. 93) which resonated with my research interests and goals. In alignment with grounded theory aims, it is problem-focused and concerned with new or little understood social phenomena and embedded in people's actions, interpretations, and meanings (Milliken & Schreiber, 2002; Morse, 2001; Schreiber, 2001). As I sought to understand what was problematic for learners in a graduate management online setting, the classic work of *Discovery*, (Glaser & Strauss, 1968) and Glaser's refinements (Glaser, 1978) appeared to be a useful fit. I also sought further guidance from grounded theory researchers including Schreiber (2001), Morse (2001), Locke (2005), and J. Wuest (personal communication, June 30, 2007) that this method was a suitable choice.

Overview of the Grounded Theory Process

Glaser (1999) is clear that research cannot be called grounded theory unless it "follows the grounded theory methodological package" (p. 836). For simplicity I

have outlined four stages associated with Glaserian grounded theory, taken from Locke (2005) and presented next.

Stage 1 Open or substantive coding

Open or substantive coding involves the fracturing of data, or breaking transcribed or written text into sentences and analyzing each sentence to determine its meaning. Fracturing serves several purposes. The researcher initially begins from a place of description, particularly when transcribing interviews and reading the participants' accounts. Fracturing helps put distance between initial thinking and may cause new ways of thinking to surface, possibly in ways that provide different interpretations from those of one's participants (Charmaz, 1995). Fracturing helps make it easier to begin conceptualizing, because new meanings may surface. It places the interviewer in a more critical stance by making it easier to question taken-for-granted assumptions (of both the researcher and the participant); this strategy aids in providing insights that might not otherwise occur, particularly in the surfacing of patterns and processes (Charmaz, 1995). Fracturing outcomes consist of numerous codes and the beginning of provisional conceptual codes, concepts, and, categories. It represents a highly interpretive process between the researcher and the data.

Table 4. *Stage 1: Open coding*

- Fracturing the data for analysis (sentences)
- Identifying and labelling provisional concepts (naming).
- Comparing incidents to each category
- Naming, comparing, and memoing of emerging ideas

According to Glaser, the relationship between theory and data is represented by a conceptual code (Glaser, 1978). Conceptual codes or concepts are the building blocks of a grounded theory and consist of theoretical abstractions of action, processes, and underlying patterns found in the data (Glaser, 1978; Glaser & Strauss, 1967).

Naming. When creating conceptual codes, the researcher engages in naming. At the simplest level, naming is merely assigning a name or code to each sentence in a transcript. Data are examined and a label applied which articulates or represents what the researcher considers to be happening in the data. This is where the constant comparison method comes into play. The researcher examines data to see whether they resemble key events, actions, or processes found in earlier codes labelled, either with a code of the researcher's choosing or an *invivo* code; that is, a word or expression used by the participant.

There is more to creating codes than focusing on what is obvious in the data; there is also the meaning which surrounds and supports social action (Charmaz, 2005). The task of the researcher, according to Charmaz (1995), is to make these meanings explicit in conceptual codes. The researcher is also instructed to pay attention to the layers of meaning associated with an account and might consider a participant's unstated assumptions and the consequences of individual actions on others.

Comparing requires examining a new piece of data and determining whether it has commonalities with a recently named code or whether there are sufficient differences to justify a unique code (Locke, 2005).

Memoing. A crucial process in GT, begins early and continues throughout the analytical process. First, it is used to document reasons for choosing conceptual

category labels. Second, it is used to document any ideas that may evolve concerning the development of the categories. It assists with the development of properties of each category. Third, it provides a space to reflect and interpret, follow up hunches and arguments, and to rationalize the decisions that are made. In GT, memoing is an on-going process. As the study progresses, the memoing process becomes increasingly analytical.

Stage 2 Further Category Development

In Stage 2 the researcher makes a choice as to which story they are going to tell, working with the phenomenon and increasingly abstract categories they have developed. At this point, delimiting occurs and categories are dropped or set aside. Increasingly, the categories in the story or framework become saturated, in other words new data sources begin to overlap with existing codes and properties. Existing categories become increasingly abstracted and refined and are able to account for new data.

Table 5. *Stage 2: Further Category Development*

• Delimiting the theory
• Further refinement of categories, showing properties, dimensions
• Development of processes, showing pattering between properties, dimensions and categories
• Conceptual reduction or selecting categories to tell a story

The aim in a grounded theory study is to identity a core category, and once identified, the theory that is constructed provides an explanation for how the main

concern of those in the setting is resolved or processed (Glaser, 1978). Glaser defined the resolution as, "a theory that accounts for a pattern of behavior which is relevant and problematic for those involved" (p. 93).

Stage 3 Integration

In Stage 3, categories become increasingly refined and more abstract as they are modified and collapsed into higher levels categories and a higher level of abstraction begins to occur.

Table 6. *Stage 3: Integration*

- Theoretical Coding
- Integrating categories and their properties
- Integration and refinement of provisional concepts, identification of groups, and the naming of new concepts and categories
- Use of coding paradigms (Glaser has developed 18) or Glaser's 6 c methods which include: context, conditions, causes, covariance, contingencies consequences to develop complex categories and to assist in the development of initial theoretical framework
- Memoing to identify the relationship among categories and concepts
- Seeking out literature
- Development of conceptual framework
- Possibly further data collection to refine developing categories and to expand on the theoretical framework

As the process continues, newer categories are able to account for variations in events, processes, and dimensional properties of categories. This process reflects an inductive to a deductive strategy in sampling and data collection and introduces the process of theoretical sampling. Theoretical sampling is defined as,

> the process of data collection for generating theory whereby the analyst jointly collects, codes, and analyzes his [sic] data and decides what data to collect next and where to find them, in order to develop his [sic] theory as it emerges. This process of data collection is controlled by the emerging theory. (Glaser, 1978, p. 36, emphasis in original)

Over time, the theoretical sampling of groups and subgroups becomes narrower in focus as new theoretical sampling is undertaken to refine the researcher's

emerging theoretical ideas. Data are compared (constant comparison) to provisional concepts and categories. The researcher begins to examine the properties of these provisional concepts and begins to collapse them into higher level categories when similar patterns and properties are identified. Glaser (1978) has provided a list of 18 coding families which the researcher may use to analyse provisional concepts and categories. The coding families are intended to assist researchers with their analysis and help identify relationships between categories and concepts. The most commonly used coding families are the "6 C's," which include causes, contexts, contingencies, consequences, covariances, and finally, conditions.

Stage 4 Writing

Memos represent a written draft of the theoretical framework as they become increasingly abstract in their focus and presentation. Sorting of memos, a key step in the classic GT process, further refines categories and explicates relationships.

Table 7. *Stage 4: Writing*

- Visiting the literature
- Writing the theory
- Assembling of all memos written to date
- Use of the memos to frame the discussion surrounding the development of the emerging theoretical framework

Glaser and Strauss (1967) agreed that an in-depth reading of the literature prior to the research is unwise as it encourages deductive thinking at too early a stage in the analytical process. Later they would differ with respect to the timing. Strauss recommended drawing on the literature once a relevant category appeared. In

contrast, Glaser (1978) has warned researchers to hold off until a more advanced stage when core categories and properties were identified (Holton, 2006). Therefore, in this latter stage, the literature is examined with respect to its overlap with the theoretical framework. Key concepts in the literature are coded, much like data, and may be used to expand on the theoretical framework. In refining the theoretical framework, I returned to the literature to identify overlap between the extant literature and the theoretical framework. The framework's relationship with the extent literature is elaborated on in Chapter 7.

Although the stages and steps which I have presented implies a linear progression, instead, grounded theory analytical work represents a highly iterative process in which the researcher will revisit earlier stages numerous times (Wuest, 2007). Ultimately, the grounded theory process results in a theoretical framework consisting of a main concern, and how the main concern is processed or resolved by those in the setting.

Research Aims and Objectives

Grounded theory begins inductively (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) and requires that the researcher enter the field without preconceived notions. To address Glaser's (1978) concern that problems are reflective of those in the setting, and not preconceived notions held by the researcher, the intent is to begin broadly and allow online learners to identify concerns and issues. In the current study the notion of a dispute (Kolb & Putnam, 1992), and backstage (Goffman, 1959) or hidden disputes, are treated as sensitizing concepts (Blumer, 1969). A sensitizing concept is defined as "back ground ideas or initial theoretical hunches which inform the research problem" (Charmaz, 2006, p. 515) but does not drive the research. Therefore aims and

objectives remain broadly stated. More specifically, my aim was to build a theory of group work challenges that online learners may encounter while undertaking group work and collaborative assignments. The study goals are as follows:

To identify structures and patterns (behaviours) associated with group work, and what in these structures and processes are interpreted as problematic by research participants, and

to create a new theory or to elaborate on an existing theory by constructing and articulating core themes and patterns that explains a fundamental problem associated with group work practices in a networked setting.

Research Questions

The research questions follow:

1. What are the challenges that individuals and online groups face working on group assignments?

2. How do actions, processes, policies, and practices become problematic for learners when working collaboratively on group assignments?

3. How do learners manage problems?

4. What is the role and purpose of the back stage (Goffman, 1969) in managing problems?

Site Selection

A key premise in theoretical sampling is that the researcher works strategically and purposefully in the selection of the research site and research participants (Locke, 2005). A grounded theory strategy requires that participants in the study, at least initially, have "experienced the phenomena or who have lived through the experience to tell their story" (Morse, 2001, p. 4). Prior research suggests that problems are more likely to arise in settings in which groups make extensive use of technology to support group practices and negotiations (Landry, 2000). It was therefore determined that preferred research participants would be learners enrolled in an off-campus, online program, that featured group assignments and group work as part of course related assessment criteria.

The context for this study is an online setting where learners, in this case MBA students, are located off-campus and rely extensively on information and communication technology to undertake collaborative group work. Martins, Gilson, and Maynard (2004) would categorize off-campus groups as "highly virtual," meaning the groups depend extensively on technology to support their communication and information needs.

Gaining access to a program and population exhibiting the above characteristics proved a lengthier process than anticipated. Grounded theory is as much political, as empirical (Easterby-Smith et al., 2003), necessitating that access arrangements be made well ahead of time. Presenting prospective academic programs with a negative research topic and the expressed wish to investigate group-level discord presented its own set of challenges, one being the greater unpopularity of a negative topic (Boice, 1996). The search for a suitable research venue commenced in

August 2004. Four programs were approached, with the third program agreeing to access.

Ethical Procedures and Guidelines

When access to a pool of potential research participants is required, a research application must undergo an ethical review process. Treatment of participants, their rights, and ethical considerations, are set out by the Canadian Tri-Council Social Science Humanities Research Council (or SSHRC) regulations, a federal Canadian government agency. Consequently, a *Request for Ethical Review* must be completed and submitted to each prospective institution that has tentatively agreed to the research initiative. The application is reviewed by a university Research Ethics Board (REB) which meets at select times over the course of a calendar year. The process is challenging since a great deal of information must be provided, yet the application is subject to restrictive space parameters. Information pertaining to research intentions, goals, and objectives, literature review, methodology and procedures, description of the population, recruitment procedures, informed consent sample, detailed listing of potential risks to the subject, benefits, confidentiality and anonymity assurances, safeguards for confidentiality, security of collected data, and so forth, must be provided. Following the *Request for Ethical Review* submission, approval was received in January 2006.

Informed consent and voluntary participation. Graduate Management Program learners were sent an announcement by internal email inviting them to take part in a study investigating online challenges. To ensure anonymity, participants were asked to contact the researcher directly. The recruitment announcement contained an attached letter from the researcher outlining pertinent details including,

time commitments and participation expectations (Appendix A). Research participant rights were detailed as specified by Tri-Council (SSHRC) regulations and the university's Ethics Review Board. Assurances were provided with respect to confidentiality and the option to withdraw at any time. Participants were required to submit a Consent Form (Appendix B) prior to taking part in the study. While procedures were intended to safeguard the rights and interests of a human subject, at times, it also meant, in some cases, the loss of interview opportunities. Prior to each interview, research participant rights, privileges and assurances of confidentiality were reviewed. The obligatory procedure was reported, by some learners, as intimidating and may have added to the anxiety of new research participants at an early stage in the interview process.

Data Sources

I collected data from three sources, narrative accounts of individual experiences working on a group-based assignment, and telephone interviews which built on the experiences and events discussed in a submitted narrative. Glaser (1998) has stated that "all is data" (p.8), therefore, documentation was included in the data collection process. This included internal documentation and published articles by internal academic faculty. An additional source of data was "shadow data" (Morse, 2000) in which participants were invited to share the experiences of fellow group members and to provide third-hand accounts of incidents. Morse has asserted that shadow data may be useful in understanding the phenomenon beyond the retrospective experiences of an individual and may assist in theoretical sampling and analysis. Shadow data may also provide a broader window into the world of online group experiences. In addition to a narrative account, two interviews were requested

with the second interview intended to develop and expand on emerging concepts and categories.

Narrative Accounts

The decision to use retrospective written accounts was influenced by recommendations from Morse (2001). Morse has argued that data methods in grounded theory research should be strategic and generate data that is amenable to the underlying interests of the method, such as process, action, and interaction (Blumer, 1969; Milliken & Schreiber, 2001). For the early inductive stages of GT, Morse has suggested narrative stories. According to Maines and Ulmer (1993), problematic situations have narratives qualities with repeated rehearsal and elaboration (Winslade & Monk, 2000). Writing encourages a dialectical process that enables the author to become both observer and subject becoming distant from, yet close to, the subject matter (Kellett & Dalton, 2001).

Narratives strategies are an interpretive process whereby the researcher does not attempt to capture the reality of events or incidents but rather, one reality of the storyteller (Frank, 2004). Furthermore, narratives have a quality of *"being where the action is"* (Frank, 2004, p. 434, citing Goffman, 1959; emphasis in original), and may contain unfolding action; depict social processes, perceived causes, and consequences. Stories or narratives are able to "reveal the ideological underpinnings of conflict in particular ways" (Kellett & Dalton, 2001, p. 39) and how ideologies are privileged. Finally, the use of narrative accounts, with its focus on action and process, ensures that the method achieves methodological congruence with respect to grounded theory's symbolic interactionist heritage (Morse & Richards, 2002).

Construction of narrative account instructions. In the narrative instructions, learners were asked to describe a group work experience in a story format, with a beginning, middle, and end or outcome (Appendix C). I crafted the instructions after carefully viewing narrative eliciting approaches described by Winslade and Monk (2000) and the work of Kellett and Dalton (2001). Chase (1995) has warned that the wording of narrative instructions may easily result in reports rather than stories. In her view, the interviewer risks eliciting reports when they determine what is important. In contrast, the ownership and responsibility of stories is on the "teller rather than the listener" (p. 3). Following various iterations of the instructions, I requested an incident or situation that the informant found to be challenging. Although positive and rewarding incidents were not sought in these retrospective accounts, I pursued this line of inquiry during an initial interview and at the conclusion of an interview, to ensure that the session ended on a positive note. A majority of the written narratives (15) contained positive and negative commentary, feedback and incidents. Appendix D contains an example of a submitted narrative.

Interviews

I requested two, 60- to 90-minute interviews. What guided the design choice was Charmaz's (2002) criticism of the single interview protocol, believing it overused in qualitative research. I did not feel a single 60 or 90 minute interview would be sufficient to gain insight into a learner's social world. Moreover, with a second interview request, I had the advantage of determining which experiences were more appropriate for follow up and subsequent theory development.

Charmaz (2005) has stated that a researcher's ontological and epistemological stance will dictate the shape and direction of an interview. For example,

constructionist interviews encourage a definition of situations and events, underlying assumptions, and meanings. Positivist interviews, on the other hand, privilege information regarding events, situations, and behaviours. I attempted to understand events, perceptions, and meanings but at the same time I focused on processes that were occurring, whether of a behavioural or contextual nature.

Once a narrative account was received I developed a set of clarifying and probing questions. Follow up questions were intended to gain additional insights into individual experiences, and served as a fall-back depending on how responsive a participant was in the interview process. The early stage of the interview process commenced with factual questions intended to put the informant at ease (McCracken, 1988).

Once preliminaries were over, and through trial and error, I found it best to lead with an open-ended question, "Tell me what online study has been like for you," before visiting a previously submitted narrative account. Open-ended questions, or "grand-tour" questions, are discussed by McCracken (1988). In Table 8, I outline what a typical interview protocol might look like, with housekeeping, ethical obligation reminders, prompting questions I might use, and narrative specific questions.

Table 8. *Example of interview notes*

Section Heading	ASK QUESTIONS SLOWLY SO THERE IS TIME TO REFLECT
Intro	Begin with an overview for the hour, Purpose of study Run through their 'rights', right to drop out, stop the tapping, privacy, confidentiality, etc.
Backgrounder	Background information required Their experiences in group work What percentage of courses had a group component? Their knowledge of teams, group dynamics, Their working knowledge of group work Challenges they've encountered in working in groups
Open ended questions	I'd like to hear about your experiences with group work.? Take me back to your first course. Describe what that was like?
Directed questions	What do you feel have been the most problematic aspect of working on group projects?
Clarify (example from a narrative account by P.M.).	"I would think the rest of us thought them to be necessary given the difficulty of the problem but also the very inclusive nature of the group and, in particular, the group leader"
Closing	Any thoughts that have occurred to you over the past hour, or anything else you'd like to share?

Most interviews contained at least a dozen pre-prepared questions. In some cases, preliminary questions were set aside to allow the participant greater control over the interview process. Later, to expedite the interview preparation process, I highlighted key words in a participant's narrative account, finding this easier to

reference during the intensity of the interview space. Charmaz (2002) has provided a list of generic questions suitable for a constructivist grounded theory approach to co-creating and co-constructing knowledge. The questions were useful in assessing the quality of my pre-prepared questions.

Preparation for each interview involved a close reading of the previously submitted narrative account. I flagged what appeared to be key words, actions, experiences. Following each interview, I reflected and memoed on initial impressions and insights, as well as overlap with other interviews. An important aspect of the early interview process was associated with my attempts to understand program operations in order to frame incidents. At times, access to information concerning routine operations was challenging; learners either had differing understandings or appeared uninformed. For example, group formation decisions were thought strategic, and in another, the respondent hoped group formation decisions were strategic. Later, I was able to ascertain, from key informants, that group formation relied on a *concocting* or randomized grouping strategy.

Documentation

Although access to program documentation was not specified in the proposal submitted to the University's Research Ethics Board, following an interview, some learners chose to send program and course-related information. Documentation included a Student Handbook, course related Codes of Conduct, a preliminary group work document outlining task allocation, group-devised rules and procedures, and tutor welcome letters. Select internal documentation was shared on condition that it not be cited or quoted from. As well, published studies surrounding program operations and managing online groups proved informative although safeguarding the

identities of the authors was necessary to ensure that the program's right to confidentiality was respected.

Data Collection

Four email announcements (January 18, 2006; January 27, 2006; March 10, 2006; and March 13, 2006) were sent to learners in their 2nd and 3rd year of the three year program. Initial response rates were low, consequently, 1st year learners were included in the March 10th email and subsequent announcement. The March 10th and March 13th announcements also contained personal appeals by program coordinators to encourage participation in the study. On average, each announcement generated four responses. One explanation for the low turnout was the perceived level of commitment associated with participation. Several learners commented that a written narrative and two interviews were thought substantial given their existing academic workloads.

As indicated previously, learners were asked to contact me directly to ensure their identity remained confidential. Most learners returned the research study Consent Form in a reasonably short turnaround time. Once Informed Consent form was received, procedures for writing a narrative account were emailed out and accompanied by a welcome letter. However delays were encountered at various stages in the data gathering process. Follow-up with a respondent could not proceed without a signed Consent form, and interviews did not generally proceed without a submitted narrative account. Once the first two steps were accomplished, arrangements for a first interview also took time. Consequently, the data gathering process could involve many email exchanges and reminders. In two cases, learners filled in the Informed Consent form but withdrew, informally, by not responding to

emails or a telephone follow up call. Some learners reported difficulty finding time to generate a written narrative account, and I waived this requirement if the narrative was proving a hardship. One learner submitted a narrative but subsequently withdrew from the study. Emails encouraged learners to continue to the next step in the participation process, while including reminders of their right to withdraw at any time. Non responsive learners were encouraged to contact me if they changed their minds. Further into the analytical process, I eliminated the use of narratives in the interests of reducing demands on a prospective participant's time. At this stage, patterning and concepts had emerged as the study entered the theoretical coding stage (Stage 3)

Interviewing

A majority of interviews were conducted by telephone, audio taped, and transcribed. The decision to conduct telephone interviews was logistical. In the initial phase of the interviewing, I was located in the United Kingdom, at Lancaster, whereas research respondents were located in North America. Following my return to Canada, distance still remained a barrier to conducting interviews in person, although arrangements were made for face to face interviews with 6 research respondents – generally due to taking advantage of business travel opportunities. In two cases, research participants resided locally.

The audio quality of recorded interviews between the UK and North America was erratic. In one interview the audio quality was too poor to transcribe however I had made handwritten notes during and following the interview which I drew upon. In one case an interview was rescheduled.

Learners were informed in the Consent form that interviews were tape recorded and verbal reminders were shared prior to the start of an interview. While a

majority of interviews were recorded, not all interviews were fully transcribed, particularly for a second or third interview, in which case, only portions of an interview considered important to the evolving concepts were transcribed.

Data Collection Outcomes

The exact number of participants required for a grounded theory project cannot be determined ahead of time (Morse, 2000; Schreiber, 2001). In GT research, it is the stories and experiences of individuals that are of particular interest, and not the individual per se. In addition to the quantity of interviews, and how articulate and reflective research participants are (Schreiber, 2001) access to individuals who have familiarity with the phenomena of interest and the number of repeat interviews are important determining factors.

However, Morse (2001), among others, has argued that a large sample size is preferable in GT. This ensures that evolving concepts, core concepts, and the basic social processes are sufficiently saturated to provide a theory which has broad applicability. Nevertheless, sample size in GT is traditionally determined by the data saturation of key concepts (Glaser, 1978; Glaser & Strauss, 1967).

Table 9. *Itemization of Data Sources and Frequency of Interviews*

Online Graduate Management Learners		
Data Sample	Gender	Total
Narratives	10 female, 5 male	15
1st interviews (learners)	14 female,* 9 male	23
2nd interviews	3 female, 6 male	9
3rd interviews	1 female, 2 male	3
4th interviews	0 female, 1 male	1
Sub-Total	25 learner participants	36 interviews, 15 narratives
Current and Former *Academic Insiders*		
1st interviews	2 male/1 female	3
2nd interviews	1 male/1 female	2
Sub-Total	3 academic participants	5 academic interviews
Combined Total:	28 research participants	41 interviews**
* Two female learners were from an alternative, but regionally located, online graduate management program. ** Does not include informal interviews and email exchanges.		

A total of 16 narrative accounts were submitted, with one narrative discarded as it did not deal with the topic, a strategy recommended by Becker (1998). In total, 15 narratives were collected in the data gathering process (see Table 9). In addition to narrative accounts, a total of 36 interviews were conducted with program learners. In addition to program learners were interviews conducted with 3 academic personnel consisting of *2 academic insiders* or tutoring personnel, and a senior administrative official. Academic personnel were referred to me through third-party contacts.

Summary

In Chapter 3 I set out my world view by drawing on the philosophical roots of pragmatism and its key tenets and symbolic interactionism. I described my rationale for choosing grounded theory as the study's research method, and presented a brief history of the method's early beginnings and its later divergence initiated by its co-developers. The research method selected was classical grounded theory as espoused by Glaser and Strauss (1967) and Glaser's classical approach (Glaser, 1978; Glaser, 1992), with guidance from GT researchers, including (Strauss, 1987), Schreiber (2001), Morse (2001), and Judith Wuest (2007). Four stages of a grounded theory process were outlined, drawing from Locke (2005), and select concepts associated with the method were expanded upon.

Research- aims and objectives were presented. I outlined ethical and methodological procedures associated with the study, site selection, data sources and collection, tools and strategies, and sample size and population. Key data gathering strategies, including narrative accounts and interviews and their implementation were discussed, including preparation and challenges encountered. The chapter concluded with an overview of the narrative accounts and interviews conducted.

Chapter 4

The Conceptual Development Process

The purpose of this chapter is to describe my theoretical journey and further expand on the methodological tools outlined in the previous chapter. I review each stage in the grounded theory analytical process, before describing my use of the methods, and its accompanying processes of data collection and analysis" (Glaser, 1978, p. 170). To demonstrate how I worked with the method, I present examples of memoing, open and substantive coding and a list of tentative key concepts in the early stages of the analytical process. Challenges associated with qualitative research in general and GT in particular, are touched on. The emergence of structural characteristics and properties and their importance are described. Social structural arrangements were named, **Doing the Group Thing** and represent a set of structural conditions and operatives that inform how learners and groups attempt to carry out their project level responsibilities. I present examples two key concepts from this operative, only way communique and dispensing and describe how the concepts evolved. The second half of the theoretical framework, Not Pulling Weight, an operative setting out the main reported in the first and second of academic trajectory, is also described The chapter concludes with an introduction to the theory of **"Not Pulling Weight"**.

Generating a Theory of Online MBA Group Work

The development of a grounded theory is a highly iterative process (Wuest, 2007) and four stages were reviewed in Chapter 3. Table 10 sets out study research questions, GT interrogation questions used as part of the coding process, and an

accompanying GT stage to demonstrate the manner in which the method guides the aims and objectives of the research initiative.

Glaser (1978) has identified two distinct but interconnected coding processes: Open coding (initial coding of data) and substantive or selective coding. During the open coding process the researcher attaches a name or label to the "actions, act, scenes, sentiments, stories and silences" (Charmaz, 2006, p. 46) and where possible, uses the terminology of the respondent (Glaser, 1978, Charmaz, 2006).

In the early phase of the open coding process, I reviewed narrative accounts as they were received, highlighted descriptions, references and commentary that were confusing or invited a closer examination in the interview. I noted early patterns and themes. Glaser encourages the search for patterning of similar and dissimilar incidents and assigning a code. In Table 11, bolded text represents preliminary and tentative codes associated with one learner's retrospective account.

An early reading of the narrative account pointed to internal group strife associated with domineering tactics in group work collaborations. Glaser (1978) encourages a search for patterning of similar and dissimilar incidents and assigning a code. In an early memo, at the bottom of Table 11, I have noted that the incident overlapped with a similar incident in another research participant's narrative.

When the interview process commenced in late February, 2006, I found it difficult to simultaneously code narratives, and prepare and conduct interviews. My intentions at the time were to gather as much data as quickly as possible due to concerns that recruited volunteers might grow impatient and withdraw. Interviews however added additional time requirements by the need to transcribe recorded interviews, some of which were much lengthier than the 60 to 90 minutes specified.

Within a four month time span 14 narratives had been collected and a similar number

of interviews conducted.

Table 10. *GT questions, GT stages, and research questions*

Classic GT Questions	Question Function	GT Coding Stages	Research Study Questions
Question 1, What is this data a study of?	Helps to surface the *core variable* which delineates the focus of the research.	1st stage (open) coding Focuses on naming of incidents	What are the challenges that individuals and online groups face working on group assignments?
Question 2, What category does this incident indicate?	Encourages the researcher to transition from description to conception.	2nd stage (substantive) coding Synthesis (collapsing) of first level (open) codes into categories	
Question 3, What is happening in the data?	Encourages theoretical codes, a more advanced	3rd stage (theoretical) coding Expands on the	What roles do actions, processes, policies play in the

	level of coding used to explain and describe the relationship between concepts	relationships among lower level codes and concepts Relationship between concepts are emphasized	challenges faced working on group assignments?
Question 4, What accounts for the basic problem and process?	Addresses how the problem is being processed, managed or resolved.	3rd stage (theoretical) coding This is the outcome of the GT analytical process	How are challenges being managed?
Source: Glaser (1978, p. 57)	Source: Christiansen (2007, 404, 409–410)	Source: Schreiber (2001)	Source: Current research study

It was soon apparent that the envisioned analytical process was not unfolding according to what I considered to be a neat and orderly grounded theory progression. Wuest (2007) has recommended that a researcher collect 8 to 12 interviews, and depending on the richness of the data, then commence a formal fracturing and open coding process. However this insight was not accessible at the time. Finding the progression of fracturing and coding to be slow, in June of 2006, I chose to introduce qualitative software (QSR International Nvivo qualitative software) to assist with the

coding. It later became apparent that the introduction of qualitative software tools, early in the analytical process, presented a new set of problems. Not wishing to miss anything important, I resorted to coding "anything that moved" (Morse & Richards, 2002, p. 45) particularly in the densely described narrative accounts. Table 12 summarizes the number of codes generated from ten data items (seven narrative accounts and three interviews) which resulted in 723 individual codes. The growing list of open and fractured codes was to prove overwhelming. In her PhD study using Glasarien GT, Holton (2007) described a similar outcome using qualitative tools. Wuest (2007) has advised to hand code at the open coding stage of the analytical process, and only later, introducing computer coding to manage theoretical properties and relationships.

While substantive and theoretical coding are identified as separate steps, the move from open to substantive to theoretical coding begins quite early and as indicated previously remains an iterative process (Wuest, 2007). At an early stage in the open and substantive coding process, 8 major categories emerged and listed in Table 14. Although identified as tentative, some early concepts were retained where as others were merged or dropped.

The eight concepts included group work challenges and included learner reported hijacking and sabotage incidents. The medium of instruction category was a precursor to *only way communique* the more advanced name. Doing the group thing, dealt with discussion-based group collaborations and a broad array of project work issues. This invivo expression was chosen to identify core structural operatives. Tutoring and the category of virtual disagreements were eventually subsumed under the concept of group work challenges. Each of the early tentative categories

contained a lengthy shopping list of codes and sub categories. Category descriptions in Table 13 are illustrative of their early and tentative development.

Table 11. Narrative Account with Open Codes

Of the **6 people** in the group, one person was **not satisfied** with the **schedule** and **how** we were going to tackle this assignment and she was **continuously complaining** up to the point where the schedule was rewritten twice.

This person finally **took the lead** of the assignment and everyone did what was asked to be done as per the schedule. This was a very laborious assignment as whatever was written **this person and her backup** would change the others text **making it unpleasant** for all as **we were a "Team"**. [CHANGING OTHERS WORK -WITHOUT Permission] [BEHAVING IN A DICTATORIAL MANNER]

[Dropping off the Face of the Earth]
In addition, we **had problems** with a colleague **not doing his part** of the **assignment** as he was **not logging in regularly** as he was **out of town**, thus changing our initial plan as someone took over his part of the assignment until he finally came on-line a few days later.

[NOT DOING ASSIGNMENT (IN VIVO]
[Memo: Clearly his excuse; but being out of town is not considered a valid excuse. As MM writes: *Her (tutor) explanation is that her computer does not work. Well, we students travel regularly and we all are required to post regardless of our computer issues. We are penalized with low participation grades if we do not post by the required time frames* (line 765)]

Note: Brackets [ ] indicate coding that appeared in the margin of a document or narrative account. Brackets also contain clips from other narrative accounts or interviews which were seen to overlap
Highlighted (bold) text is representative of preliminary codes or significant indicators in the data

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Table 12. *Number of Open Codes from 10 Data Items*

Participant	Number of Interviews	Narrative Account	Codes
B.M	2	1	253
P.M.	1	0	190
S.F.	3	1	200
M.F.	1	1	70
Total:	7	3	723
Individual research participants are identified by their first initial and by gender.			

In the bracketed content located under Description in Table 13, I have indicated how early coding decisions were altered as concepts evolved and the coding and analysis matured.

In coding trajectories, the timing of incidents were volunteered by the interviewee or asked about. Incidents were tracked according to course and placement within a program, a perfunctory move at the start, and whose meaning was to later assume greater importance. A sampling of select incidents is presented in Table 14. The incidents in question suggest that upheaval is not the prerogative of any single time frame, however, a greater number of problems were prevalent in the first academic year.

Table 13. *Early concepts from open and substantive coding*

Early Concept Name	Description
Group Work challenges (132 codes) plus 67 (codes)	Problems are associated with undertaking group collaboration either the discussion forum or the group work project. Some of the problems are associated with tutoring, however I've tried to keep the tutoring issues contained within that category for the moment. Currently contains mainly descriptive problems. The codes, which have their own sub headings in the main category include: absconding with the work [in vivo]; absent explanations [in vivo]; being uncertain as to frame of mind; encountering substantial disagreement [in vivo].
Medium of instruction (technology) (12 codes)	This category captured the different challenges associated with technology mediated exchanges and the described limitations associated with a text only learning context. Also contained codes associated with the group strategy of weekly discussions.
Doing the group thing iv.(87 codes)	At this institution, group work is evident in two separate phases: Group discussion and group project. Description: Captures the normal routines, tasks and make up of undertaking a collaborative group project. Some of the headings include *Being vigilant; code of conduct; contributing at a lower end;* getting a sense of people you want to work with [in vivo]; This category contains the sub category of Assuming new Responsibilities; Group Norms; Leading and Posting in Discussion Forums

Tutoring (59)	**Description** Both a role as well as a process, coaching encompasses the instructional activities provided by instructors. There are a number of subcategories associated with coaching including: Expectations of coaching role; Coaching Support; Coaching deficiencies and Coaches Role in Disputing,
Virtual disagreement (41)	**Description** Intended to captures the dynamics of specific disagreements or episodes and for identifying the properties and patterns associated with disagreements.
Internal Policies	_[Later is subsumed under *Doing the Group Thing]*
Internal Practices	**Description** Policies and Practices functioned as a holding spot for codes. It is expected that these codes will migrate to the appropriate events under the Structural Events header. For the moment, the separation of the two is a visual way of depicting a shift from policy to practice. For example, the concept entitled: *The only way technology* would be appropriately stored under organizational practices, although also appearing to be an internal policy.

[Later, the only way technology category is subsumed under *Doing the Group thing]* |
| **Marking Systems** | **Description**: Contains references to peer assessment, tutor assessment, gw assessment processes and practices found in the current setting. This is a temporary marker for placement of codes/categories for further analysis. |

	[This category eventually transition to multi-pass assessment, peer assessment and collective grades]

Going forward, structural indicators would link upheaval to a variety of resourcing and configuration decisions but this relationship became apparent as the analytical work progressed. I continued to encounter difficulty understanding program operations in general and consequently relied heavily on learners to share their understandings before seeking out additional sources by means of theoretical sampling, which in the latter case meant locating current and former academic personnel.

Table 14. Sample of Reported Incidents and Their Timing

Participant	Incident	Course Name	Trajectory Time Frame
M.F.	• Waiting for a submission that never arrives • Hijacking	Strategic Management	Year 1: Course #1
G.M.	• Target of public venting	Analytical Tools	Year 1 Course #2
B.M.	• Tampering • Ostracizing	Accounting	Year 1 Course #3
C.F.	• Virtual Hand Slap	Accounting	Year 1 Course #4
G.F.	• Hijacking	Operation Management	Year 1 Course 6
J.F.	• Downsizing- "deal with it"	Finance	Year 2 Course 2
J.F.	• Harassing: abuse of power	Conflict management	Year 2 or 3 Course elective

Documenting the trajectory of incidents provided insights into the processual challenges associated with online study in general and group work in particular. It was apparent that group work challenges might differ depending on where an individual or group was located in an academic trajectory. Patterns would eventually adopt two distinct time frames, depending on academic progression. The theory of **Not Pulling Weight** is closely connected with unique impediments that confront individuals and groups depending on their placement in the academic trajectory.

Further Category Development (Stage 2)

Memoing is a crucial aspect of a grounded theory study. It involves the writing and recording one's ideas and insights concerning emerging codes and concepts and is pivotal to advancing the development and refinement of analytical and conceptual abstraction. Memoing documents the reasons for naming of conceptual categories. It records and therefore tracks the development of categories and potential relationships and properties. Finally, memoing provides a space to reflect, vent, follow up hunches and arguments, and rationalize decisions being made (Wuest, 2007; Morse & Richards, 2002).

Only way technology to only way communique. The concept, *Only Way Communique,* is based on an early category, originally named *Medium of Instruction* and listed in Table 13. Medium of Instruction represented one of seven key concepts that emerged in the open coding process. For example, one interviewed participant discusses rules and procedures that accompanied the execution of project work, including, the need for communication to be confined to formal discussion forums. I noted in an early memo that this procedural requirement appeared highly unorthodox. In Appendix E, interview text is represented in italics, and located in the left hand column. The right hand column of Appendix E lists accompanying codes and the sorting of these codes under early dimensional headers. Two memos, dated March 10 and December 31, outline preliminary and later conceptualizing of the only way technology concept.

Early memos initiated a revisiting of previously coded data to seek out additional examples and indicators of *only way technology.* Select codes associated with operational limitations and later the appearance of an intolerance of offline interactions become properties of the *only one technology* concept, and later re-named, *way communiqué.*

Tutoring support to dispensing. Not surprisingly, the issue of tutoring

support was a frequent topic in early narrative accounts and interviews. Tutoring

support was coded and sorted into two general conceptual headings (dimensions),

hands off and hands on (see Table 15). Further refinements led to the categories set

out in Table 15. As Table 15 indicates, the Hands-Off categories include *dispensing*

one of four concepts associated with academic engagement. As the grounded theory

analysis progressed, dispensing evolved into a prominent description of academic

presence. This occurred initially by examining a compilation of codes under the early

header of *Tutoring* (Table 13), and internal documentation surrounding tutoring

support expectations (Tutor Handbook) and Student Handbook guidelines regarding

tutor contact. *Dispensing* is located under the category of Hands-Off, a form of

academic support.

Hands-on support describes on-going engagement between a course tutor and

learning groups and may include cheerleading and possibly signposting contributions.

Dialoguing positions the role of a course tutor as a learning partner, in contrast to a

reactive, "respond when contacted", level of engagement; the latter being more

typical of a *dispensing* mode of tutor-group engagement.

Table 15. Categories Associated with Academic Resourcing

HANDS-ON

Dialoguing

Cheerleading

Signposting

Dispensing

HANDS-OFF

Cheerleading

Signposting

Dispensing

ANTAGONISTIC

Predatory

Retaliatory -behaviours are considered predatory

Hostile

Terse

HANDS-OFF SUPPORT OUTCOMES

Non Intervening

 Not coming when you need them iv)

Low Guidance

Invisible presence [iv]

Negligence (an outcome of non-intervening)

Varying motivation [iv] (on the part of academic tutors) (Rational for hands-off and hands-on academic support)

Note: [iv] stands for *invivo*, or word choices of interviewees.

Concepts associated with a Hands-Off academic resourcing also include *cheerleading*, and refers to encouragement support. Similarly, *signposting* consists of periodic reminders of articles to read or work to be completed. Although *cheerleading* and *signposting* are properties of a Hands-On learning context, in a

Hands-Off context, *cheerleading* and *signposting* may be representative of limited learning support, although the course tutor may be considered a "great guy, if the learning context lacks *dialoguing* and is overly reliant on *dispensing* as academic engagement.

As I examined incidents involving contentious or disruptive behaviour, the reported incidents, for the most part, lacked academic presence or interventions suggesting a Hands-Off level of academic support. Further analysis revealed that an active intervention role was not treated as an academic responsibility. According to one tutor, "[Its] [interventions are] not my job", when confronted by a group of disgruntled learners upset with allowing disruptive and discourteous treatment by a group member, to persist. Not "bring[ing] order" and tutors "having to be dragged in" to intervene, when problems arose, were cited as one important difference between an online versus face to face instructional setting. Consequently *non- interventions* were positioned in the conceptual development process as an outcome of a Hands-Off, *dispensing* approach to academic resourcing. As such, Hands-Off and *dispensing* were recognized as an operational characteristic rather than individual tutor related characteristic or shortcoming, in spite of the latter being viewed as such, by interviewed learners.

Structural factors, and associated rules and procedures, some of which appeared unorthodox became more dominant within academic support arrangements and operations. The more information I gathered on structural arrangements, through theoretical sampling, or purposeful seeking out of research participants who were capable of sharing meaningful information, and opening coding and analysis of pertinent documentation, the more compelling and prominent the structural domain became. Indeed in the delimiting process, a number of concepts associated with this

domain were later set aside. Concepts either could not be subsumed into higher level concepts, for example, *Antagonistic* tutoring, or were set aside in the delimiting process as disclosing particular concepts and their properties risked revealing the identity of the program.

Structural factors associated with group assignments also underwent delimiting. Concepts associated with tutoring support, for example, *going for help and help desk support,* were collapsed under the concept of *dispensing.* Tutoring support personnel were named *academic insiders* due to the presence of preferential treatment. The structural resourcing operative of *preferential residential,* indicated that *academic insiders* enjoy residential opportunities not offered to program learners, despite a *group dominant* learning design. *Preferential residential* opportunities suggested that course tutors enjoyed a privileged social standing.

Theoretical coding and Integration (Stage 3)

As evident by the previous discussions, the analytical process had entered a more advanced stage of analysis, integration and refinement. As indicated, structural and group level categories were collapsed and delimited for parsimony (Charmaz, 2006; Glaser, 1998). In the theoretical coding and integrating, or Stage 3, I continued to open code, for example fracturing and assigning tentative labels to properties and relationships among concepts acquiring increasing importance.

As discussed in the previous section, structural characteristics of the setting, evident in the open coding and substantive phases of grounded theory, became increasingly prominent. Theoretical sampling ensued to locate new and relevant sources of information surrounding the program and its operations in order to build on existing categories and to better identity their relationship with group level categories.

However, by focusing on social structural arrangements trade-offs were made and described in more detail next. Paradoxically, in spite of my haste to accumulate as many narrative accounts and interviews early in the study, I had allowed time to lapse, before contacting a broader number of learners for a second, follow up interview. The latter was needed to further refine and clarify group level concepts. Furthermore, retrieving learner contact information was stymied by an unexpected program initiated termination of email accounts, shortly after graduation. By comparison, undergraduate business school email accounts at the University of Alberta are permanently active, and for substantially lower tuition fees. Whereas an alumni network may provide a means of staying connected with graduates, I viewed the practice as another indication of how structural arrangements may continue to isolate even after Getting Out, or graduating. In spite of the difficulty in locating learners by program issued email, I was able to recruit three additional learners enrolled in the program or who had recently graduated. Moreover, several research participants remained in contact, and continued to send along reports of incidents or were receptive to follow up calls, interviews and emails inquiries.

During the latter stage of the research project, in 2008, my difficulty in isolating a single main concern that would allow for the development of a viable theoretical framework became paramount. Given the complexity of this phase, I've organized it under a separate heading, below.

Isolating the Main Concern and Core Concept.

According to Glaser (2004), open coding typically transitions to substantive coding when a core concept, or the "key theme" or "basic social process" (Morse & Richards, 2002. p. 160) is identified. Typically, a core concept or a core variable, describes how those in a social setting resolve an issue or problem. As Glaser (2004) explained, "As the researcher proceeds to compare incident to incident in the data, then incidents to categories, a core category begins to emerge" (p. 15). Later (Glaser, 2005) stated, "Without a core category, an effort at grounded theory will drift in relevancy and workability" (p. 2). It appeared I had entered the drifting phase. Choosing a main concern and core concept would ensure that subsequent coding gained additional focus and selectivity.

Identifying a single main concern of those in the setting, what they find problematic, had become my main concern and challenge. Glaser has argued that clarity would emerge from a conceptualizing process, which would help ensure that minor concerns would be subsumed under a single main concern. Charmaz (2005) has questioned this premise, arguing there is frequently more than one main concern. Attempting to isolate a single main concerns and subsuming other problematic areas, was challenging. For example, one set of concepts arising in the 1st year, gravitated around varying dimensions of incivility and domineering exchanges. I eventually subsumed pertinent elements of the concept with hostile behaviours associated with *hijackings* dynamics that were more likely to appear in the first year of the academic trajectory.

My attempts to isolate a group level main concern and to integrate the structural factors required a return to paper and pencil and open and substantive coding of learner transcripts, although I had retained the original key concepts.

Second, I rank ordered concepts with respect to the number of citations and references within the various data sets, a process readily accomplished with qualitative software. An example of first level concepts, or concepts containing the largest number of citations and references, are presented in Table 16. While informative it still brought me no closer to identifying the main concern and its resolution, or the core concept. Nevertheless, the ranking did confirm existing dominant categories. Hand-coding, and fracturing of all *hijackings* and *sabotage* incidents, and their sub-categories and properties, as well as concepts associated with Opting Out, a 2nd year phenomena, may be attributed to the revisiting of the early coding stages and the continued pursuit for a single main concern and core concept, the latter referring to the resolving of a main concern.

Concerned with running out of time, I sought additional training in grounded theory. In 2009, I attended a grounded theory seminar in Mill Valley, California, with Dr. Barney Glaser, co-author of the grounded theory method. After presenting my dilemma, I was informed that I had most likely over conceptualized the data. While the workshop was beneficial, it still did not provide the insights I felt I needed to move forward.

My impasse was eventually resolved with assistance from Dr. Caroline Porr, a grounded theory researcher, and associated with the International Qualitative Research Institute, University of Alberta. Dr. Porr and I revisited my existing concepts and examined each concept's affiliation with surrounding concepts. This provided a much needed refocusing on the framework and group level dynamics. This initial brainstorming and list of concepts is illustrated in Appendix F.

Although grounded theory studies have traditionally focused on micro level social processes, for example, changes affecting individuals (Locke, 2005), the

concepts in the evolving theoretical framework emphasized a social structural phenomena as well as group level dynamics. In sorting out the relationship and their standing among the various emergent concepts, I struggled with social structural factors assuming a supporting role, and group level processes dominating. This is explained by my having observed the emphasis given to psychological (individual) and group level processes in various grounded theory studies I'd reviewed. In GT studies, a theoretical framework identifies a basic social process (BSP). Glaser defines a BSP as a "fundamental patterns in the organization of social behavior as it occurs over time" (Glaser, 1978, p. 106). A BSP adopts two forms, a basic social structural process (BSSP) defined as, social structure in process (Glaser, 1978) and a basic social psychological process (BSPP) defined as, a change over time occurring to individuals (Benoliel, 1996, p. 408; Glaser, 1978), although groups may be included in this definition.

As previously stated, GT has traditionally focused on basic social psychological processes occurring at the individual or group level (Locke, 2005). Although grounded theory is argued to be capable of excursions into broader social units (Glaser and Strauss, 1967, Hermandez, 2008) in a majority of GT studies, context is more likely to be treated as a back drop, such as a dimension, property or structural condition, to a core concept or social problem that individuals and groups attempt to manage or resolve–thus yielding a theoretical explanation in the form of a theoretical framework (Glaser, 1978).

Table 16. *Overview of first level concepts and themes*

Ist Level Codes:

Aggressing-overbearing

Domineering, harsh views and criticisms

Running Tab:, posting meter in Group Discussions [affiliated later with excessive performances behaivors]

Coping mechanisms: discussion database

Postings that are 2 or 3 times recommended

Absentia (absenteeism)

Consequences:

No consequences

Unforeseen circumstances (group work)

Sick leave sabotage (incident)

Group work is optional

Learner characteristics: dysfunctional leadership

Platform: you don't get

Code of conduct (group charter) –utility

Groupings: (aggressive-to-passive_

Unusual teams (in vivo term to describe over and under involved)

2nd Level Codes

Etc.

Note: I identified dominant themes by using Nvivo's coding and counting capability which stores each category and code reference. It also provides a running tally of individual indices. I identified four variables: Very high, for10 or more references; high, for8 to 10 references; medium, for 3 to 5 references; and finally low, for1-2 references. The listed concepts or codes met the very high criteria.

One difficulty I encountered working with grounded theory was that structural concepts infrequently assumed a place of prominence in published studies. It also became evident that the main concern (problem) is not always resolved (core concept), yet the former more often appears in published grounded theory studies; instead, a main concern may be processed or managed. Whereas previously, the matter of a single main concern had eluded me, it was resolved with the identification of two main concerns, Pushed-Out and Opting Out, as group level operatives.
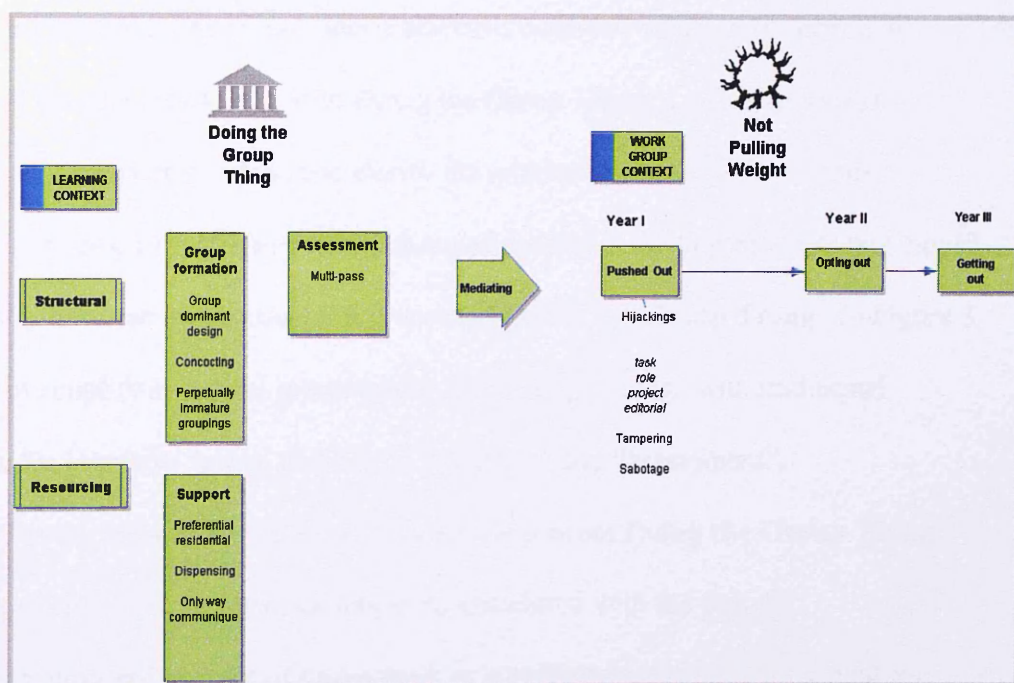
Figure 1. *Two part theoretical framework*

Therefore the decision to create two parts to the theoretical framework, one being social structural, the other being indicative of group level processes, was adopted along with the identification of two group level main concerns, Pushed-Out and Opting Out. I'd also recognized that ultimately the initial main concern, Pushed Out, was resolved by temporal elements at play, since by the 2nd year, the bigger

problem to plague project groups was a growing presence of group members choosing to Opt Out of their project work obligations and responsibilities with structural features and resourcing decisions playing mediating role. In the end, Opting Out is resolved by the 3rd academic year, when a majority of program learners Get Out, or graduate. However, the final theoretical framework did not coalesce without on-going refining of the theoretical framework which was accomplished through building and manipulating pictorial illustrations, memoing and writing up, to explain the emerging concepts.

Figure 2 (next page) provides a selective overview of an early sorting of structural concepts associated with Doing the Group Thing, a social structural process, and intended to refine and clarify the relationship among the various concepts. Figure 1 illustrates a more advanced sorting of the key concepts that would eventually form the social structural process of **Doing the Group Thing**. In Figure 3, I chose to simplify structural groupings by labelling groupings with traditional headers, for example, "group formation", "support" and "assessment".

The decision to label the social structural process **Doing the Group Thing** was three-fold. First, to illustrate functions associated with the design, implementation and support of group work in a graduate management curriculum. Second, the choice of names was intended to draw attention to a mechanistic orientation to group assignments, one highly reliant on technology and software to sort, allocate, resource and monitor group work practices. Third, the label was intended to convey a counter intuitive set of design choices and support decisions that appeared indifferent to a group dominant design and by extension, has implications with respect to the quality of project work experiences.
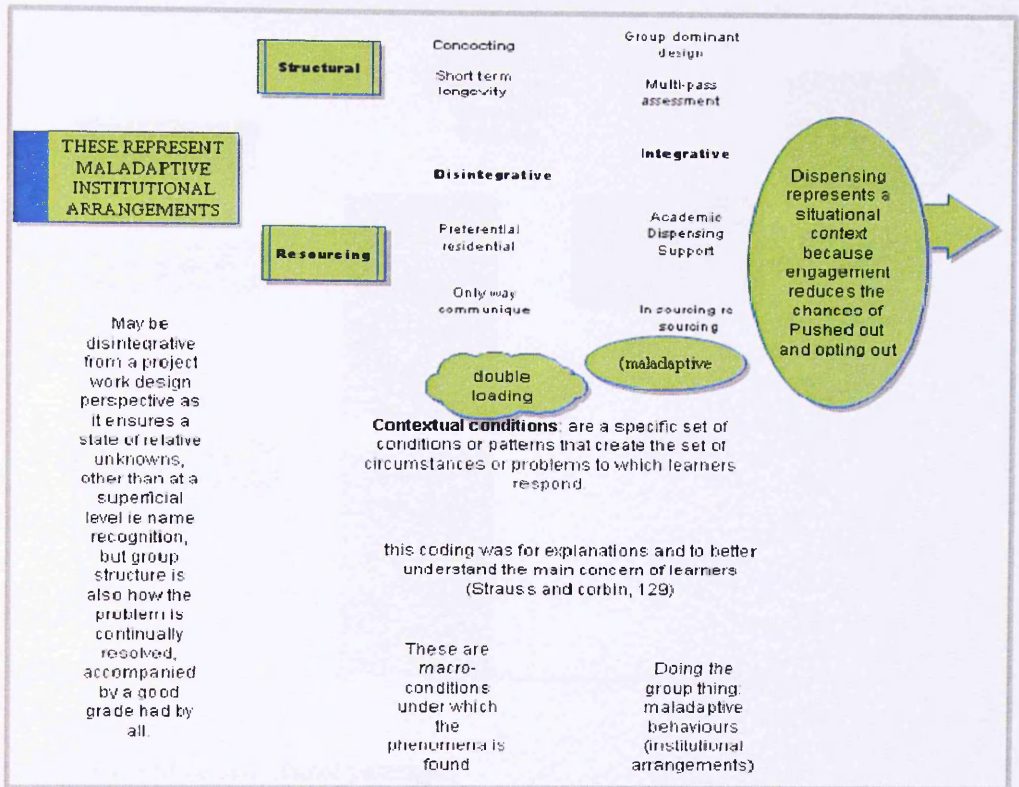
Figure 2. *Early sorting of structural concepts*

As stated previously, determining the core category and the main concern were eventually resolved through memoing and reworking the relationships between concepts within each arena (structural concepts and group level concepts). Support for the presence of two main concerns was subsequently confirmed by an acknowledgement appearing in a 1998 publication (Glaser, 1998), that a theoretical framework may contain two main concerns (p.150) and therefore was an oversight on my part that may have been more readily resolved with a more user friendly indexing in Sociology Press publications.
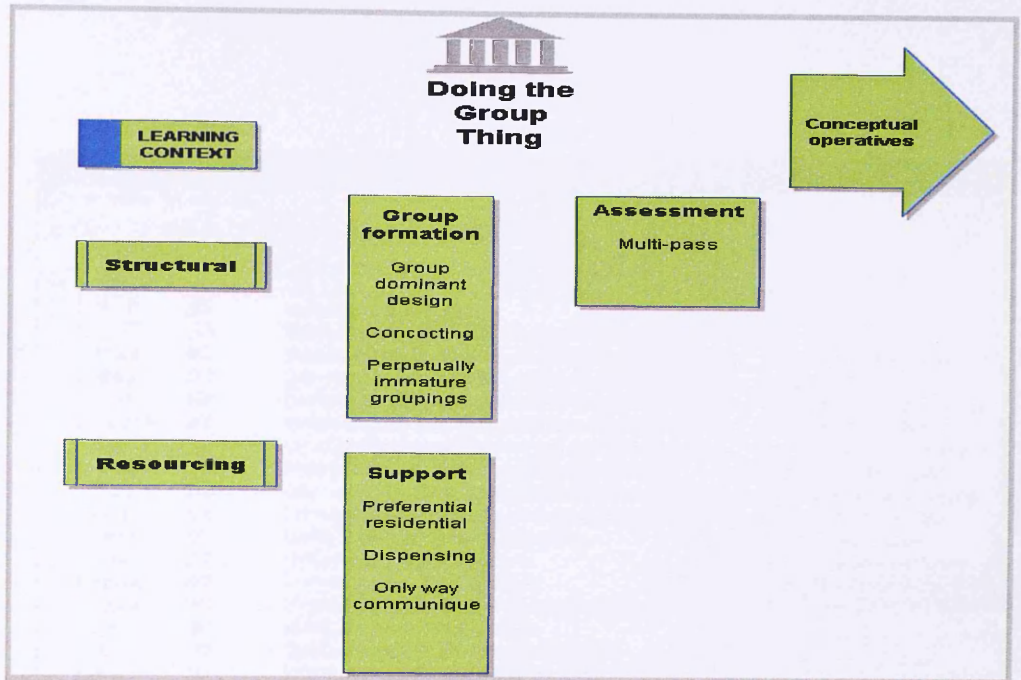
Figure 3. *Refinement of structural concepts*

Integration of the Literature and Write up.

Stage 4 brought further refinements in the development of the theory. Overt indicators of domineering group level behaviour a feature of the 1st academic year in the academic trajectory were subsumed under *hijackings*, rather than remaining a separate set of categories. The latter was originally conceptualized as *online but out of line*. I also de-emphasized the division between weekly discussions and group work assignments.

My treatment of the literature resembled my treatment of the analytical and constant comparison process associated with grounded theory. The literature that aligned with key constructs located in the theoretical framework was examined and coded. An example of the coding for one key concept, , is presented below in Figure 4. Thirty-one articles were identified has having varying degrees of relevancy with respect to the concept.

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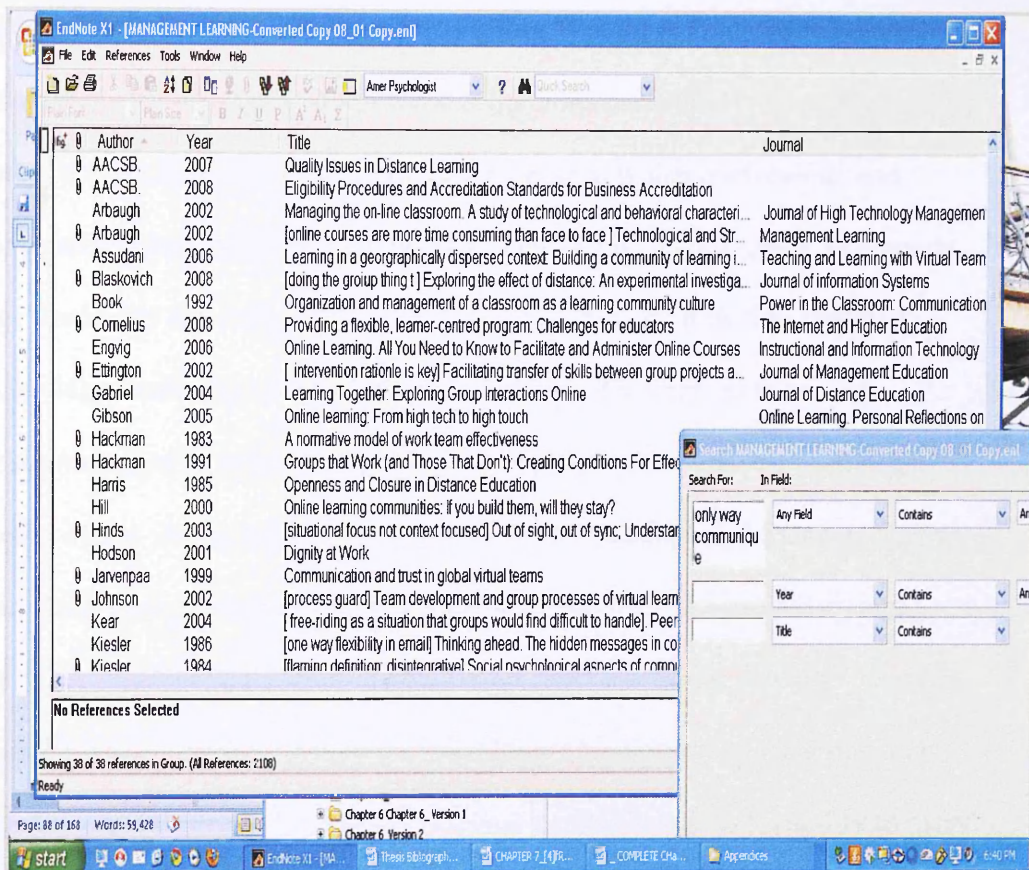
Figure 4. *Example of literature coded for only way communique*

A Grounded Theory of "Not Pulling Weight"

In this grounded theory study I examined challenges online groups encounter in project work collaborations. Data was derived from narrative accounts and interviews with learners in an online Masters in Business Administration program and supplemented with documentation. The analytical process made use of Glaserian grounded theory (Stern, 1994). Following the GT constant comparative method, two main concerns identified, Pushed Out and Opting Out. Each concept will be briefly described below.

When assigned group work contributions go unfulfilled and are compensated for by another, or learners self-elect to not participate, they may be perceived of as **Not Pulling Their Weight**. Whereas **Not Pulling Weight** is assumed to be a self-selected strategy for managing group work obligations particularly when other group members are available to do so, conditions may arise in which overzealous and excessive participatory behaviour on the part of group members impede, prevent or *sabotage* the ability for individuals, or a project group, from fulfilling assigned academic obligations. Pushed Out, the main concept of learners in their first academic year, consists of group members *hijacking* project work responsibilities assigned to others. Marginalizing processes include *hijackings* and four categories including: *task, role, project*, and sub categories of *editorial, compensatory* and *tampering*. A separate category under *hijackings*, are attempts to sabotage the efforts of the project group. Project groups may encounter situations in which a member may attempt to *sabotage* a submission or attempt to impede a group's ability to carry out project related obligations. However internal academic operatives may also impose similar disruptive constraints on project groups' attempts to **Do the Group Thing**.

Whereas Pushed Out represents the main concern of online MBA learners in their 1st academic year, this phenomenon wanes; by the 2nd year, groups encounter a reversed situation, in which group members attempt to Opt-Out of assigned responsibilities and obligations. Whereas Pushed Out is associated with excessive participatory behaviour, Opting Out, in contrast, is representative of nominal or minimal participation and characterized by a continuum of "effort-avoidance" manoeuvres on the part of autonomous group members (Salomon & Globerson, 1989, p. 90).

Temporal factors associated with the transitional nature of academic study appear responsible for resolving the two dominant main concerns of Pushed Out and Opting Out. *Hijackings, tampering* and *sabotage* appear to wane over the course of the first year, and by the second year, are overtaken by disruptions associated with members forfeiting their obligations onto others and Opting-Out. Opting Out is resolved by the 3rd academic year, when a majority of program learners Get Out, or graduate.

Although Opting-Out is identified as a main concern in the theoretical framework, it was not included in the thesis write up. Figure 5 (next page) provides an overview of the theoretical framework and its two core operatives: Doing the Group Thing and Not Pulling Weight.
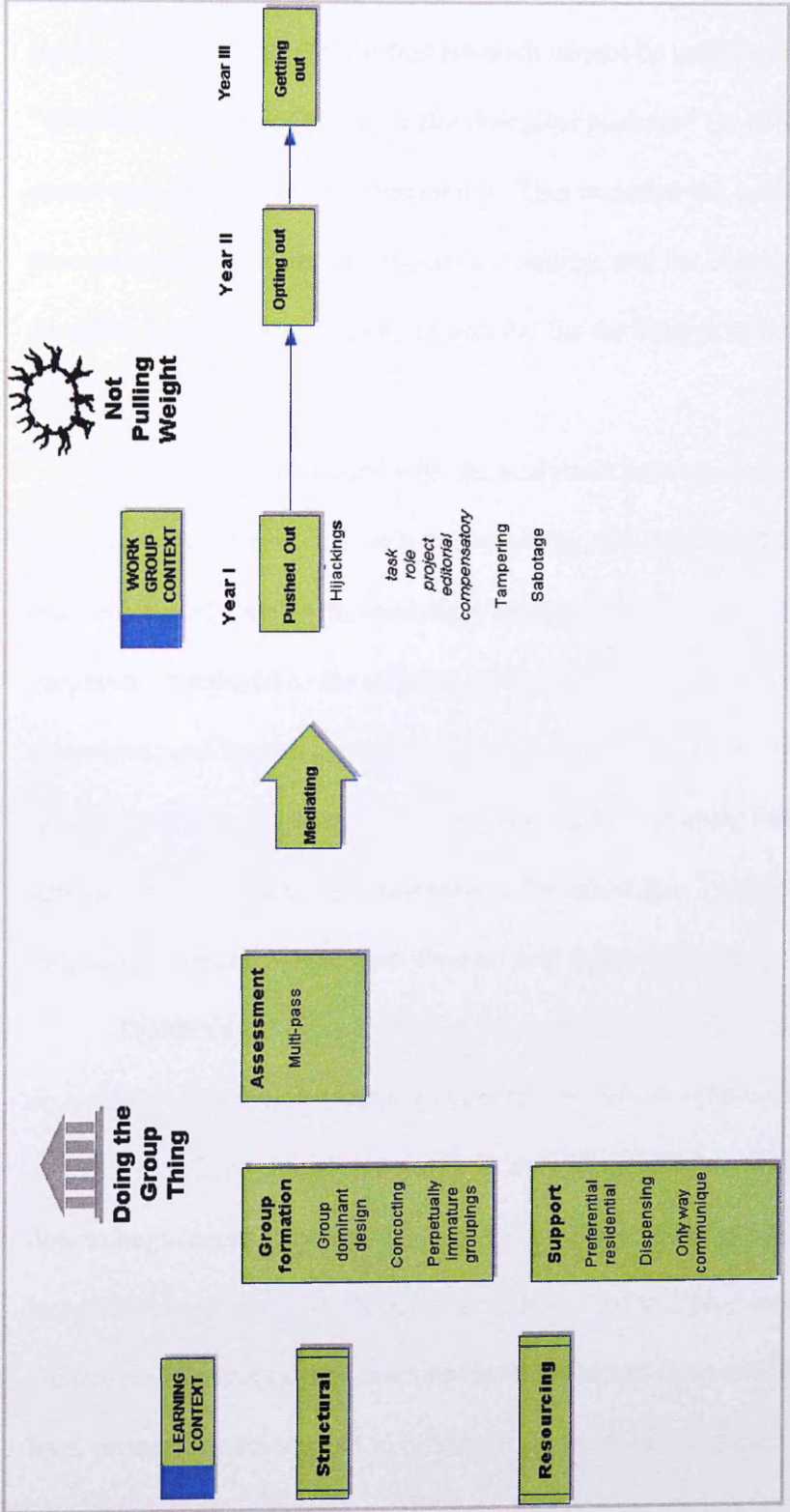
Figure 5. *Final theoretical framework*

Summary

In chapter 4, the Conceptual Development Process, I provided an overview of grounded theory and its key processes, returning to Locke's (2005) four stages as a guide. Glaser (1999) is clear that research cannot be called grounded theory unless it "follows the grounded theory methodological package" (p. 836), an iterative, processual and systematic undertaking. This included the constant comparative process, memoing, open and theoretical coding, and the continual iteration of these elements in generating a theory to account for the behaviour of those in the setting (Glaser, 1978).

Challenges associated with the analytical process were outlined and examples provided of early concepts such as *dispensing*, and outlined their evolution. I outlined challenges associated with, analytical work in general and grounded theory method in particular. I referred to the infusion of data, in the form of narrative accounts and interviews, and the time consuming process of transcription. In an attempt to expedite the analytical work, I turned to qualitative coding software, which compounded the situation with over coding. Secondly, I described how I experienced difficulties relocating research participants for a second follow up interview.

Problems associated with the GT method centered on the Glasarian emphasis on a single main concern and core concept, or the resolution of the main concern. I describe how I sought out assistance from a GT researcher, and later returned to the data to begin anew in re-analyzing group level processes in particular. This aided in integrating concepts, and identifying relationships and properties. The end result is a theoretical framework that examines both structural elements in the setting and group level processes with respect to online group work. In chapter 5, the social structural

process of **Doing the Group Thing** is presented and followed by **Not Pulling**

Weight, in chapter 6.

Chapter 5

A Social Structural Process of "Doing the Group Thing"

The chapter begins with an overview of the core operative of **Doing the Group Thing** and its associated properties. Where appropriate, literature associated with individual conceptual operatives will be referenced to provide a broader perspective and insights. A more in depth literature review is later presented in Chapter 7.

The operational framework of **Doing the Group Thing** specifies conditions and support associated with group work collaborations. The operational framework of **Not Pulling Weight** is indicative of what may transpire under similar academic resourcing and support conditions. Consequently, the two-part framework and theory is not meant to generalize to other online graduate management programs, but rather to programs which adopt similar forms of resourcing and structural characteristics. Group work, while highly rewarding (Kellogg & Smith, 2009), is also an arena for contention, disagreements, and when combined with limited resources and work pressures, conditions are more likely to give rise to mistreatment of individual learners and groups.

As discussed previously, in a grounded theory study, context is frequently treated as a back drop, in the form of a dimension or property or structural condition, to a core concept, and the main concern or social problem, that individuals and groups attempt to manage or resolve –thus yielding a theoretical explanation for social behaviour (Glaser, 1978). Aside from explaining how a "particular substantive unit functions" Glaser (1978, p.114), Glaser believed that contextual properties might function as a gateway to understanding complex social behaviour. In the current study structural factors represent an important contribution to understanding what

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transpires at the individual and group level and provides an alternative explanation for problematic group work behaviour that continue to frustrate graduate management learners and educators (Maiden & Perry, 2011). Consequently, the framework entails a macro- and micro-level perspective, and attempts to bridge institutional and operational practices with problematic behaviours that may arise within online group work.

Figure 6 sets out structural and operational conditions associated with **Doing the Group Thing** and posited to shape, support, and inform group-level activities. Structural arrangements include Group Formation, Resourcing Support and finally Assessment.

Doing the Group Thing, originates from an informant's description of group work obligations in the online curriculum. In the study framework, it represents a core pattern associated with the operational arrangements of an online Executive Master's degree in Business Administration. It is comprised of structural and resourcing decisions that influence how group work is processed, carried out and managed by learners. "Structure" and "resourcing" are further broken down into Group Formation, Support Mechanisms, and finally Assessment Practices (See Figure 6).
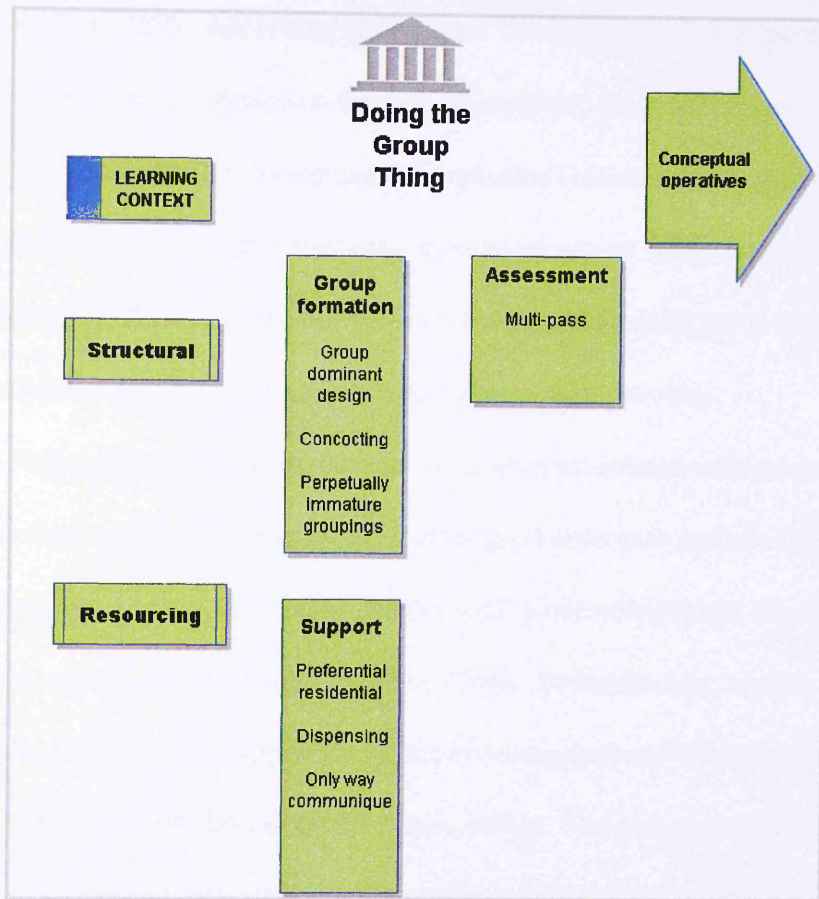
Figure 6. *Social structural operatives of Doing the group thing*

The three categories represent a conceptualizing of program based practices.

Concepts within each grouping will be reviewed, beginning with Group Formation

decisions and its subcategories of *group dominant design*, *concocting*, and finally

perpetually immature groupings, an outcome of concocting and the adopting of short-

term, temporary groupings.

Group Formation

Economic and social pressures are likely to prevail on management education

programs to **Do the Group Thing**. Group work is defined as any instructional

situation in which learners "are required to complete a small-group project" (Morris &

Hayes, 1997, p. 229). According to C. Elliott and Reynolds (2005, para. 4), "putting groups to work" is a response on the part of academic programs to employer and government pressures for "group ready" graduates (Maiden & Perry, 2011; Pfaff & Huddleston, 2003). Few graduate management programs fail to emphasize the "groupiness" of their program design, both for its pedagogical gains and the professional networking opportunities that group work provides.

Pedagogically, there are numerous benefits associated with project work and teaming at an academic course level. Pedagogical outcomes include the development of teaming skills, critical thinking benefits, and richer pedagogical experiences (Payne, Monk-Turner, Donald & Smuter, 2006). Professionally, virtual teamwork has become recognized as an important aspect of a management learner's skill repertoire (Roman & Joze, 2004; Welsh & Moynihan, 2002). The presence of group learning methods is a recognized commodity in graduate management programs and an important indicator of program quality (C. Elliott & Reynolds, 2005; AACSB, 2010). Similarly, group work has become an accreditation standard for online distance learning programs (Kellogg & Smith, 2009). The popularity of group work, and its increasingly relevance in business accreditation ensures its continued presence in program-based course offerings (Brutus & Donia, 2010). Less understood is the degree to which group activities should dominate the curriculum and course grades.

Group Dominant Design

A *group dominant design* is one in which assessed group work assignments prioritize group activities over individual course work. Project work or group work is perceived to be empowering for management education learners as it enables learners to play a more active role in the learning process (Ruël, Bastiaans, & Nauta, 2004,

citing Morris Hayes, 1991). The challenge of adopting a *group dominant* design is the difficulty assessing and rewarding participation and penalizing non-participation (The University Teaching Development Centre at Victoria University of Wellington, 2004). Some institutions have responded by placing limitations on the percentage of group assignment marks (Lewins, 2006). According to Lewins, Murdoch University, in Australia, adopted a faculty wide policy of limiting group assignments to a maximum of 30% of course grade, unless, as Lewins explained, "...student's individual contribution can be individually assessed" (p. 232).

Table 17 *Weighting of group work relative to course grades*

High: Is defined as 75%, of course marks are allocated to group assignments and 25% to individual assignments. **Mid-range**: Is defined as 60%, of courses marks are allocated to group assignments and 40% to individual assignments. **Low**: Is defined as 30% of courses marks are allocated to group assignments and 70% to individual assignments. . Source: Compiled by author and based on formal course syllabuses of core or required courses in an online MBA program.

In a group dominant design, a substantial percentage of course grades may be allocated to online group related activities. What percentage of course grades might be considered substantial was determined by examining the distribution of group work relative to individual work in core course offerings. Percentages were then calculated and a comparative scale prepared (Table 17). A program decision to adopt a *group dominant* design would entail allocating between 60% to 75% of grades to group assignments. In addition to course work weighting heavily towards group collaborations, a majority of program offerings would be structured around graded

group assignments. A *High* ranking is one in which approximately 85% of a

program's core courses are predominantly graded collaborative activities.

Table. 15 *Standard course lesson plan*

Week 1	Group Assignment Preparation of a group project document	Required Readings
Week 1 –3	Group Assignment ----/weekly discussion forum ----/case study (1)	Weekly reading
Week 4-Week 7	Group Assignment ----/weekly discussion forum ----/case study (2)	Weekly readings
Week 8	Individual Assignment ----/essay	

Table 18 lists individual and group assignment obligations in a *group*

dominant design. Other than an individual essay, a majority of instructional activities

are group based and concurrently offered. By the second year of academic study,

"group work", may become, in the words of one learner, an "unrelenting" exercise. In

a group dominant learning context, learners may not be aware of the pervasiveness of

group assignments across the curriculum. In addition to the high commitment

demands of a group dominant design, group formation strategies and the duration of

groupings introduces potentially new challenges.

Concocting

A concept associated with how project groups are configured is *concocting*, an expression borrowed from Moldasch and Weber (1998). According to Moldasch and Weber, employees at the General Electric Hawthorne studies, were a "team" only in so far as sharing a close proximity in their spatial positioning on an assembly line. *Concocting* refers to a group formation strategy in which group formation determinations are software based and predominantly randomized. This group formation strategy is contrasted with intentional group formations in which group membership is strategically, chosen rather than randomly, and mechanistically, determined. In an intentional grouping strategy, member selection is more likely to be based on predefined criteria, such as the skill set of potential group member or in a professional program, a learner's professional practice qualifications. Group membership decisions that are based on skills and back ground may better ensure a group has the requisite resources and member qualifications needed to carry out assigned tasks (Hackman, 1991). However, a drawback to intentional groupings is that it is labour intensive and time consuming to implement, and therefore less commonly associated with for profit online programs (Golden, 2009, para.25).

A randomized *concocting* strategy may prove useful when a pool of candidates is divergent, heterogeneous, and unknown. According to economic education research, randomization, a property of *concocting*, is one way to ensure learning groups will have a better chance of being assigned a competent and capable group member (Watkins, 2005). Capability is defined as verbal capability, language fluency or a specialist skill. Watkins cites Steiner (1972), in explaining that larger group sizes also improve the odds that a group will wind up with one capable performer. For example, Steiner (1992) calculated that a *concocted* five-person group

formation has a 92% probability it will be assigned at least one capable group member able to manage academic tasks. Similarly, *concocting* may also ensure that low-capability learners and conversely, high capability learners, do not overpopulate a group. Therefore, when a learning population is diverse, and unknown to program administers, and to help ensure a more equitable distribution of unknown learners, *concocting* may be a preferred group formation strategy. In contrast, self-selecting group formation choices may skew capability distribution, resulting in the clustering of capable learners with the more capable gravitating to similarly capable learners.

A second advantage of a *concocted* group formation strategy is its ease of use. Groups may be quickly and easily assembled. A mechanized *concocting* strategy is therefore likely to compliment *group dominant* design, where grouping configurations are frequent and the life span of a group is of short duration.

Group formation is an important although overlooked factor in group performance (Pfaff & Huddleston, 2003). In addition to a *group dominant* design, and a *concocting* group formation strategy, is the duration of formations, and the implications of short term, ad hoc groupings.

Perpetually Immature Groups

An academic group is defined as two or more individuals who come together to engage in instructional tasks and activities (Jaques, 2001). Depending on the task, a group's membership may be temporary, remaining together for "a few minutes" to longer durations, such as weeks, months or longer (Jaques, 2001, p.2). In graduate management education, an academic term is common (Davis, 2009; cf. Shah, Dirks, & Chervany, 2006). The life span of academic groups is one of several factors identified by Willcoxson (2006) to differentiate academic groups from the realism of

team work in the work place. In corporate settings, team member selection is intentional, rather than *concocted*, and teams are likely to remain together considerably longer in order to effectively, and collectively, collaborate. (Davis, 2009)

Longevity. The literature presents compelling arguments for keeping academic groups intact. Group development theories suggest that group performance, member behaviour, and task focus change as groups mature and develop. Consequently longevity plays an important role in helping to facilitate a group's understanding of its constituent's interests, weaknesses, and strengths and the ability of groups to marshal resources as needed (Hollingshead, Fulk, & Monge, 2002). According to Mennecke, Hoffer, and Wynn (1992), members with a shared history are better able to build social linkages and may enhance cohesion. Longer term relations make it easier for groups to develop positive social emotional linkages, build stronger networks, which increased a group's ability to engage in constructive versus destructive task or relationship conflicts and resolve process or relationship conflicts that may arise (Shah, Dirks, & Chervany, 2006). Empirical evidence further suggests that longer duration groups suffer fewer problems that plague temporary groups, such as under performance or "free riding". In a meta-analysis of social loafing factors, Karau and Williams (1993) reported that group configurations with groups made up of strangers were more likely to encounter free-riding and social loafing among group members. Free-riding was also reported to be more likely to occur in temporary grouping with randomized or *concocted* member selection, versus allowing groups to self-select group members (Aggarwal & O'Brien, 2008). When members are known and respected, this may encourage a stronger commitment to collective goals (Karau & Williams, 1993).

Evidence suggests that group longevity may help buffer impediments imposed by geographical, time and social distance (Webster & Staples, 2006). According to Webster and Staples, adjusting to technology and developing trust takes time. Too early rotations may impede the ability of groups to develop a richer understanding of its members past history, strengths and abilities (Walther, 2002).

The longevity of online groups has implications for how tasks are approached by groups, enabling earlier and more productive starts, offering greater ease in the handling the disruption of ambiguous directions or tasks, and helping to level out naturally occurring differences among members (Armstrong & Cole, 2002). Sustained interactions may help build internal group knowledge of its members and capabilities thereby reducing coordination losses (Webster & Staples, 2006). Goodyear (2001), drawing on social dilemma theory– a social sciences construct, reported that groups are more likely to work collaboratively, rather than individualistically, if future encounters, or "shadow of the future" (Walther, 2002, p. 248), are present. Consequently, temporary online groups may experience greater complexity and difficulties (Walther, 2002). According to Walther (2002),

> Despite their transmission speed, computer-based systems seem to operate more effectively for long-term associations. Short-term or ad hoc groups, especially those with a narrow time frame and limited opportunity to exchange messages, may find the media difficult for managing relations and reaching optimal conclusions. (p. 251)

Perpetually immature groupings represent an outcome of resourcing and structural decisions adopted by academic program choosing to **Doing the Group Thing.** The life span of a *perpetually immature* online group is eight weeks, following which groups are disbanded and re-configured into new grouping

formations. *Concocting* and a short duration group life span may perpetuate a condition in which learners wind up "rarely seeing another individual twice" particularly in the first year of studies. Alternatively, some learners may beat the odds and remain intact with the same individual over multiple *concocting* configurations. While the latter is reported to be a welcomed but recognized aberration, sub-grouping configurations, in which a sub group is placed with unknowns, has been linked with dysfunctional group behaviour and increased conflict (Katz, Lazer, Arrow, & Contractor, 2004).

Group formation practices that culminate in a *perpetually immature* status may impact negatively on a group's ability to develop and evolve and may deplete internal group resources to cope with exigencies and manage instructional expectations. Consequently, online groups with *concocting,* and *perpetually immature grouping* characteristics, will require resourcing measures to overcome design derived limitations, and which recognizes the greater resourcing needs of a distance-based *group dominant* learning design. Program resourcing and support follows.

Program Resourcing Support

Preferential residential

There may be compelling reasons why established online programs choose not to offer early residential opportunities for incoming learners. The inconveniences of travel, relative to the short time spent in a weekend residential, may be costly. The requirements to be on-campus may be counter intuitive to the proposed flexibility of an online delivery model (Kellogg & Smith, 2009). Furthermore, residential offerings are costly for programs to organize and consequently, for-profit online programs, as

opposed to non-profit online programs, are likelier to scale back or eliminate residential requirements (Smith & Mitry, 2008). However as Smith and Mitry, note, early residential opportunities are often an indicator of quality in online learning programs. The authors elaborate on this point below,

A part-time residency requirement, even of short duration, is also an indication of quality program standards. At the least, with some sort of residency, the schools can know that the online student is most probably the same person being examined and graded. (p.150)

The elimination of early residential stays may be justified as serving the needs of "customers" who may be disinclined to attend a costly and time-consuming activity. The elimination of an early residential visit may be justified if it lacks for-credit status, an impediment that could be redressed were a program motivated to do so. The above reasons were compelling arguments for an MBA program with an intensive *group dominant* design to eliminate early residential visits. In the excerpt below, a former program official further elaborates.

They [early residential offerings] weren't for credit and ah, they, people, were having to travel long distances for them, and because they weren't for something that wasn't a credit in the program. And, as we got more international student[s]; you know it was ridiculous to force someone in Saudi Arabia to fly in for a weekend. So, so we took them out. (Former senior official [1], 1832-1837)

Although *academic insiders*, or tutoring personnel, may face similar constraints of non-credit status, time and long distant travel, even for a short duration residential event, nevertheless an early and annual residential gatherings was

considered invaluable, due to its recognized social benefits. A former official explains,

> We organized a tutor's conference which [is] held every year; we pa[y] the airfare for them [academic insiders] to come in from wherever, including Europe, and places like that. Um.. it [is] over a weekend we would have sessions where people who were tutoring the same course would get to meet each other; they'd get to meet each other and where we'd get to know the tutors better. We'd have some social events; we'd go to watch baseball at [name] Field and things, and..and.. that, that, that, that helped us to have a closer relationship and I think increase the commitment they had to us. (Former senior official [1], 869-877)

To briefly expand on tutoring support arrangements, online course work is predominantly supervised by part-time, sessional personnel, or *academic insiders*, hired on contract to provide instructional (8 weeks) and assessment (2 weeks) support. A majority of *academic insiders* are located in the United States and Canada, with a smaller number residing in Australia, the United Kingdom, and Germany. Once hired, *academic insiders* tend to remain and therefore are considered a stable social group (personal communication, former senior-level administrator, July 9, 2006).

Preferential residential represents an unorthodox resourcing priority in which academic insiders, or part time course tutors, are the recipients of residential opportunities more typically devoted to incoming program learners In contrast, new learners receive an induction or abbreviated orientation more likely to be given to new online tutoring personnel. For clarity and contrast, this inverse resource relationship is illustrated below in Table 19.

Table 16 *Residential resourcing at 2 online MBA programs*

Enhanced Residential Resourcing		Reduced Residential Resourcing
Preferential residential academic insiders	**vs.**	*Preferential residential* program learners
- Face to face kick off - Annual face to face residential (3 - 4 days) - No online orientation		- No face to face residential kick off - No residential access in year 1 - Residential opportunities in years 2-3. - Online orientation (1 week)
Alternative Online MBA Program Learners	**vs.**	Alternative Online MBA Program Tutors
- Face to face kickoff - Annual face to face residential (3 weeks) - Online orientation (4 weeks)		- No annual face to face residential kick-off - No annual face to face residential - Online orientation (3 weeks)

Table 19 contrasts resourcing at two online MBA programs situated within the same geographical region. In the left hand column, resourcing priorities target new incoming academic insider, and legacy insiders, which is similar to resourcing for learners at an alternative online MBA. In the right hand column, reduced resourcing characteristics are evident, particularly for new online learners and as evident in the Enhanced Resourcing column, reduced resourcing of learners in the form of an online induction overlaps with the online induction resourcing of online faculty at an alternative online MBA program.

Preferential residential presents a disparity in program learner access to early residential opportunities, in effect giving rise to two distinct resource groupings, privileged and less privileged. In addition to marginalizing residential opportunities at a critical juncture, the commencement of academic studies, additional obstacles to residential access exist. They include: *restrictive access, scheduling disparity, availability,* and *cost*. Each sub category is discussed below.

Restrictive access. New learners and first-year learners are prevented from enrolling in course electives. However residential enhanced course electives offer a residential experience that is otherwise unavailable in a learner's first year but only offered in the second year of studies. Informally, learners are free to make their own arrangements to attend study groups and social functions. However informal opportunities favour urban residents and locals with a sufficiently large learner population.

Scheduling disparity. Planning and scheduling a residential site visit is easier when residential dates are pre-determined and shared ahead of time. In some flexible delivery MBA programs, for example, Queen's University and Royal Roads University, newcomers are notified of all residential obligations, and locations, with attendance dates, for the full program offering. Similarly, *preferential residential* schedules are fixed, stable being held at the same time and location, each year. In contrast, residential scheduling for 2nd and 3rd year learners is variable and uncertain, since access is limited by the variability associated with course elective offerings. Symbolically, assigning a residential stay to a course elective, rather than a core course, speaks to a devaluation of residential opportunities. Unlike core course offerings, course electives are subject to the uncertainty and vagaries of enrolment targets. As course elective scheduling is variable and not always assured, residential

scheduling, and therefore residential access, becomes more difficult for program learners. In contrast, a preferential residential offering is stand alone and less dependent on meeting enrolment targets. Consequently, *academic insiders* benefit from the assuredness of advanced scheduling and scheduling guarantees, that program learners are not.

Availability. In addition to the uncertainty of access to elective course offerings, elective course offerings, with a residential stay, are limited. In 2011 roughly 1/3rd of elective courses included a residential component, while a majority, or 2/3^{rds} of course electives, were in an online format.

Cost. A final deterrent to residential opportunities is the presence of differential pricing of online electives with a residential component, and an elective's online counterpart. Electives with a residential stay are more costly, yet do not include travel, accommodation, and meal expenses; the latter being the responsibility of course attendees. In contrast, *academic insiders* receive a fully subsidized residential experience including travel, 4-star accommodation, meals and a formal banquette.

Discussion

Preferential residential defines an internal resourcing strategy that systemically discourages real-time, face-to-face opportunities for learners while fully supporting residential stays for *academic insiders*. Once residential access is available to 2nd year learners, impediments that may impede and discourage residential access remain. Restrictions included variable scheduling of residential electives and hence greater uncertainty in offerings, reduced availability of residential

elective offerings relative to online course offerings, and higher tuition costs and travel related expenses associated with campus based attendance.

Preferential residential resourcing may prove particularly disadvantageous to new program learners; a higher than average percentage lack a prior college or university degrees (Program information session, 2008). Newcomers are more likely to be unfamiliar with academic study and online group work. Adult drop out research has suggested that online adult learners may experience higher levels of drop-out and non-completion of academic studies, when compared to campus based learners (cf. Powell & Keen 2006; Simpson, 2003, Simpson, 2004). According to drop-out expert, Vincent Tinto (2006), the first academic year is a critical time for new learners. According to Tinto,

> Students are more likely to persist and graduate in settings that provide academic, social, and personal support. Simply put, involvement matters, and at no point does it matter more than during the first year of college when student attachments are so tenuous and the pull of the institution so weak. The frequency and quality of contact with faculty, staff, and other students is an important independent predictor of student persistence. (para.5)

Preferential resourcing represents an unorthodox and marginalized expression of resourcing opportunities. A residential kick-off and annual residential refreshers to build connections and community with a program's constituents including learners, program administrators, and online tutoring faculty, is recommended by online program educators (cf. Conrad, 2002; Conrad, 2005).

Residential inductions offer compelling benefits. In addition to social benefits (Nardi & Whittaker, 2002), previously lauded by senior level program personnel to justify an annual tutor residential, academic challenges may be

addressed. For example, knowledge and skill shortfalls associated with complex instructional assignments, such as case studies and problem-based group work, were reported as being easier to resolve (Birmingham & McCord, 2004). According to Montano, Cardoso, & Joyce (2004) management learners are often uncertain how to search for information, write a report, implement project management, and perform a case study (Lohman, 2002). Establishing early and regular residential inductions may help build social connections with others, and improve the ability of individuals and groups to work collaboratively and harmoniously (Scagnoli, 2001).

Once online learners have completed several *group dominant* course offerings, the absence of a residential opportunities, become evident. This is touched on in a narrative account submitted by a first year learner,

> When people get together in order to form ad hoc teams for the first time in a classic brick and motor classroom, they meet, subconsciously assess each other, and then very quickly gain an immediate understanding and appreciation for who each other is and what makes them tick. It is a simple matter to read body language and discover a common basis for knowing one another. Whether they make uncomplicated assumptions or actually connect because of some cohesion of background, culture, work experience, sports interest, education, or any number of binding elements, it is still relatively easy to discover some common ground. Once in a while, the opposite occurs and they meet, but do not unite. In the online space, it is not as straightforward. The ability to form meaningful relationships instantly is much trickier. There is no body language to read. There is little ability to exchange personal stories. It is hard to get to know everyone. The online space is aloof, unfeeling, and somewhat sterile. Forming relationships and

building teams is a far slower process and is inhibited by the barrier imposed by the medium. (Narrative account, M. M. 165-189)

To summarize, despite research evidence that favours early and frequent residential opportunities (Scagnoli, 2001; Nardi & Whittaker, 2002), routine, secure, and no cost residential opportunities are exclusive to *academic insiders*. Potentially, an enhanced residential resourcing of academic personnel provides pedagogical benefits, in the form of better trained academic personnel. *Dispensing,* a concept associated with online tutoring support, is described next.

Dispensing

Dispensing describes a form of academic resourcing that appears widely adopted, in spite of program resourcing of *preferential residentials*. *Dispensing* describes an *absent partner* level of learning support in contrast to an advocated *learning partner* support. The two concepts will be described shortly.

As described earlier, course work is supervised by a cohort of academic personnel described as *academic insiders*. *Academic insiders* are contracted to provide 20 hours of support and typically supervise three groups of 6 to 8 learners or 8 to 10, to a maximum of 24 learners. Learning is managed by a Learning Management System (Lotus Notes). Each online course occupies space on the Lotus Server, and within each course reside three distinct instructional work spaces: Discussion, Case Study and Tutor Forum. *Academic insiders* are expected to monitor and oversee the three databases, including the above mentioned Discussion and Case Study database. Each learning space is briefly described below, drawing from Watland's (2007) PhD study of online tutoring practices within the current setting.

Discussion database: This database is the forum for the weekly discussions that arise within the respective intact learning groups. As Watland (2007) explained, "The online tutor responsible for each study group for the various course modules monitors the students' participation and may contribute to the discussion" (pp. 49–50). The discussion database is the exclusive site for what is described "participation discussion".

Case study database: This database is the location where work on the case study group assignments takes place. Learners have reported that the Case Study instructional space is considered to be learner specific and less likely occupied by an *academic insider*.

Tutor forum: A database that functions as an informational and instructional space; it houses program and course announcements, assignment updates and is a major repository for pedagogical queries by course learners. Unlike the previously cited forums, it is accessible by all course specific learners and assigned course tutors. Collectively, with fellow course tutors, tutors monitor and respond to questions posted in the public Tutor Forum.

Dispensing represents one of three forms of academic resourcing associated with a Hands-Off and Hands-On learning support and also includes *cheerleading* and *signposting*. As indicated in Table 20, where Hands-On and Hands-off differ, is the former includes the presence of an on-going *dialogue* between a course tutor and learners, and visibility in the three instructional forums.

Dispensing support is believed to have originated with Tutor Forum resourcing, defined as a Q & A learning space that resembles a Help Desk service support offering. The Tutor Forum has been described by one *academic insider* as a

social place occupied by "technical academic expert [s]" housed within a centralized course-specific database (Anonymous, date).

The *dispensing* concept was derived from interviews, narrative accounts, secondary data from Watland's PhD study (2007) and documentation procedures in the Student Handbook, where learners are encouraged view their course group as an informational and academic resource, and described below.

The first step in the procedural sequence states, "If you need help with assignments, you should first contact your colleagues in your own learning group" (Student Handbook, pp. 57-59). *Academic insiders*, or tutors, receive similar instructions, "If a student needs help with assignments, they should first contact their colleagues in their own learning group" (Tutor Handbook, 2000, p. 165). If an issue, whether pedagogical or otherwise, cannot be resolved, learners are directed to the Tutor Forum or *Help Desk*, and the primary location in which responses to queries and problems are *dispensed*. Direct contact with a course tutor is encouraged if the previous two options strategies have not been successful. Pressure to go public with questions or issues, rather than remaining a private matter between a tutor and learner, is suggested in a learner's explanation below.

> In our environment, you still have the opportunity to do that [private contact with a course tutor], you can still do it by email but [outtake of breath] but, it's not really encouraged. Because it's assumed that if you could have that problem there could be others, colleagues, that do, and you are robbing them of the opportunity to get past it by not bringing it up in a public [help desk] forum. (Manager B.M. [1], 859-863; year I)

In formal tutor documentation, learning groups are portrayed as relatively autonomous entities, which access *dispensed* help, preferably though the public Tutor

Forum, on an as needed basis. Otherwise, instructional support is derived largely

from project groups and course resources, such as course text books. As explained in

tutor documentation,

> Some students may require your elaboration of key concepts in order to
>
> complete their understanding of a topic (through questions posted in the
>
> Tutors' Forum [*help desk*] database), but most will use their static resources to
>
> create dialogue, share ideas, develop new understanding and linkages to their
>
> own work. (Tutor Handbook, 2000, p. 3)

Learners are encouraged to take advantage of the group's expertise and

knowledge, although individual expertise within a group is largely unknown, at

commencement, due to *concocting* and *perpetually immature grouping* decisions.

Table 20. *Performance measures for online tutors (Academic insiders)*

1. The [tutor] responded promptly to questions posted either in the [Tutors'] Corner or via email.
2. The [tutor] appeared to have good knowledge of the subject and reflected this in their contribution to the course.
3. The [tutor] feedback helped to improve my understanding of the course subject.

Dispensing's prominence within the instructional setting is apparent when

tutoring performance indicators are examined (Table 20). Indicators suggest that

academic assistance and support are predicated on turnaround time and the

conveyance or dispensing of content knowledge.

Tutor performance criteria differ from a *learning partner* model advanced in

public information sessions and promotional material. Rather, the academic

relationship proposed is one of a co-inquiry model of learning,

Really what we want to do is have our professors to be active learners right alongside you. So we take those small groups of eight to twelve students in a group and that's where, we call them, the tutor works right along with you. So in helping facilitating the group dynamics, they are helping you apply the theories and concepts back to the workplace, bring back your own experience, bring back into that group and supporting critical thinking, so its not just your are reading it and giving an answer but you are really thinking about why it is that you believe that; what's behind what you do in your workplace, and adding value to the core through knowledge based experience. (Marketing personnel, Information Session, October, 2008, 195-203)

Co-inquiry, which the depiction above suggests, includes a *dispensing* arrangement in the tutor-learner relationship but the latter is not exclusive. According to Johnston (2005), the "co-inquiry" process requires that students shed their traditional roles of receivers of knowledge and that teachers avoid being transmitters of knowledge" (p. 60). Instead, co-inquiry emphasizes a one-on-one relationship between tutor and learner (O'Neil & Hopkins, 2002). Rather than *academic insiders dispensing* responses to queries, implying a question-response monologue, knowledge is jointly constructed through dialogue. In place of an expert *dispenser*, the academic role assumes an "expert questioner" (Goodyear, 2001, p. 91) role. In contrast, in *dispensing* exchanges, knowledge is understood to be an unproblematic consumable that is accessible between sender (expert) to receiver (learner) (O'Neil & Hopkins, 2002). More importantly, *dispensing* imposes a reactive or Help Desk arrangement, rather than proactive academic presence of a *learning partner*.

Going public for solutions to instructional problems may be intimidating for some and may create situations where questions go unasked and therefore remain

unanswered. One learner admitted a reluctance to divulge his struggles, with quantitative concepts, publically. More capable learners, the latter associated with individuals being in possession of prior undergraduate degrees in business and engineering, cited challenges in their ability to formulate questions that achieved a desired outcome or response. Not only was formulating questions found to be challenging, the medium hampered exchanges. As explained by one learner,

> So if I have questions about the material, I find that ah, those questions typically go unanswered or unasked because, you are either sending emails to tutors or posting things, but it's... I find when there's, when there's ah, a difficulty with the comprehension of a topic or um, you know a discussion point, um, you can spend hours or days just coming to a point of clarity of the question you are asking let alone getting the answer for it. Um, so I've, to some extent, given up on that and ahh and really embraced the concept of self-learning as opposed to going and asking questions of tutors or peers. (Manager I.M. [1], 219-225; year II)

Learners reported compensating for a *dispensing* support model by seeking out external sources of instructional support, generally, workplace colleagues. At times, locating knowledgeable external resources was reported to add individual stress.

A Help Desks arrangement may be beneficial when accompanied by a Hands-On *dialoguing* and visible tutor presence. Public postings may help ensure a broader array of issues or concerns across course specific groups is given voice. This may be advantageous in a learning context where course groups operate independently from one another. A centralized question depot may provide a glimpse into the instructional challenges faced by the broader learner community. An academic support model that adopts *dispensing* strategies may encourage groups to develop

greater self-reliance and autonomy, given that the instructional load appears assigned to autonomous project groups.

To summarize, *dispensing* draws from a service orientation that replicates a Help Desk learning environment. In a *dispensing* setting, questions are submitted and responded to by educational technicians (Larson, 2002), or "technical academic expert," the latter represents an *invivo* term adopted by an *academic insider* in a published account on the benefits of reduced tutor involvement in the learning process. In a *dispensing* arrangement, knowledge is treated as being directly, and easily accessible from sender to receiver. Questions are treated as neutral vehicles capable of conveying the intentions and needs of the sender. It assumes that recipients of questions are able to grasp and understand intentions and meanings.

Dispensing alters the nature of academic presence by reducing tutor visibility within the respective group assignment databases. Rather than receiving the guidance of a *learning partner*, and associated *dialoguing* interventions*, dispensing* conveys a passive and reactive arrangement between course tutors and learning groups. *Dispensing* may be applauded for the rapid turnaround of responses to queries, however, with a *dispensing* orientation, groups are more likely to be "on their own", instructed to "go for it." and otherwise "left to their own devices" as autonomous, self-supporting entities. A learner below summarizes how academic *dispensing* support was experienced over his three years of academic online study.

> No one ever said this but if I were to try to summarize um what my opinion of what I think their [*academic insider*] role is, if you will, [it] would be that they [*academic insider*] are there to facilitate the learning process only if it pertains to bringing clarity to salient points specific to the education, the vein of education; but that they are not there in fact to regulate or ahh, even

necessarily monitor any of the social interaction or even academic interaction between students, except in the most extreme circumstances. (B.M. interview [3], 688-695; year III)

Paradoxically, it is assurances of active monitoring of group work in the instructional databases that remains a cornerstone of the next structural support concept, *only way communiqué*.

Only-Way Communiqué

Individual course offerings occupy space on a Lotus Notes Server, the Learning Management System chosen to manage course web pages, accompanying resources, and assignment related communication exchanges. The LN server supports asynchronous, text-based communications, and manages the storing of postings from individuals and group level activities. In addition to the previously discussed Tutor Forum, the Discussion and Case Study databases are utilized program wide, and represent the two primary group assignment databases. These instructional spaces support asynchronous learning that is independent of time and geographical restrictions. Yet within the learning spaces, institutional restrictions become apparent.

The operative of *only way communiqué* describes a series of constraints imposed on learner exchanges in course assignment databases. Communicative restrictions are intended to discourage members of a project group from talking or communicating with one another, in real time, and outside of formally assigned asynchronous supported databases. Consequently, *only way communiqué* resembles a "no talking" internal policy imposed on a learning population of mid-career managers in their early 40s (Watland, 2007). Early indications of "no talking" program preferences are located in formal documentation,

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The [name] MBA learning environment is designed to support asynchronous

communications. There are exceptions where you may be asked to use

synchronous chats but, as a rule, the communications between students and

academic tutors will occur asynchronously. (Student Handbook, lines 27-29)

Only way represents a systemic attempt to dissuade and deter the use of

alternative technologies, and in doing so, adopts various measures to ensure learner

compliance. They are discussed below, beginning with program level

discouragements, before moving onto incentives.

Discouragements. Measures to dissuade learners from non-textual and

synchronous exchanges begin with the first course offering and continue over the first

academic year. Academic personnel play an important gate keeping role by

discouraging and preventing attempts on the part of groups to adopt alternative

communication tools. Gate keeping strategies include, *mild discouragement,*

conditional discouragement, ordering and *technical discouragement,* and are

addressed below.

Mild discouragement. New learners, bereft of early residential opportunities,

a result of *preferential residential,* and facing their first group assignment, are more

likely to recommend a live conference call. Formal program responses may be

reactive or proactive depending on the circumstances.

There are various reasons as to why an online group might wish to arrange for

a conference call, or text chat session. Aside from a potential unfamiliarity

communicating exclusively in text, group membership remains largely unknown. As

shared in interviews, new groups may be challenged by a need to resolve a problem or

impasse, or to clarify a group's case study strategy. Uncertainly surrounding

alternative media usage prompts groups to first seek clarification from their course

tutor. Tutor reaction, as one second year learner pointed out, was generally discouraging.

> I know that on a couple of occasions a couple of people posted to the tutor and said, "Can we do this [hold a conference call]?" The tutor said, "We would prefer not." (Manager R.M. [1], 903-905; year II)

Conditional discouragement. In one case, permission to hold a conference call was granted, but predicated on a group meeting tutor defined stipulations; this resulted in the group cancelling its plans to proceed. *Conditional discouragement* occurs when disincentives make the prospect more trouble than it is worth. As recalled by a learner,

> I had one professor who said, "If you guys are going to insist on doing a conference call someone will need to transcribe it word for word and then post that transcription into the data-base." *[Interviewer: Not the minutes?]* Right! (Manager S.F. 1214-1217; year III)

Ordering. *Ordering* represents a forceful intervention, and appears more likely to occur in early course offerings.

> In a lot of our early courses, we discussed having a telephone conference and that's when Gerry [tutor] came on and said, "no," he wants everything part of the database. He said, "Do-not-do-it!" (Manager R2M. 785-787; recent alumnus)

Technical discouragement. *Technical discouragement* deters usage by withholding technical assistance or support, for example, providing assistance with installation or trouble-shooting. One frustrated learner explains,

They [the program] will not officially support it [text chat]. They advise students not to use it, and tutors are not expected to be available on it. So, it has no value and thus it's a disaster. (Manager M. M. [3], 832-833; year III)

Increasingly, real-time chat tools are archival and sessions may be stored for future access. This offers one solution to potential scheduling conflicts that may arise for members of a group, or for the need for a group to create a verbatim transcript of exchanges, as requested earlier, in *conditional discouragement*. Nevertheless, capturing and storing of real time exchanges is discouraged. This becomes apparent when groups are forewarned not to attempt to post real-time chat sessions into formal group assignment databases. As stated in an internal email announcement,

There is absolutely no need to copy and paste any IM [Instant Messenger, or text chat] exchanges you have with your student peers into the course databases. These are neither graded nor followed by us. (Program email announcement)

Yet, in spite of the aforementioned discouragements, internal documentation presents a more conciliatory position regarding synchronous tool usage.

From time to time our students will contact each other by telephone or by instant messaging. This can be a convenient way to connect with fellow students as long as you ensure that you do not put other students at a disadvantage and that you keep the substance of your group discussions and decision making within the course databases. (Student Handbook, 36-39)

An individual's or group's desire for real time exchanges, whether by text chat or telephone, is framed as a sign of immaturity, to be outgrown once the benefits of asynchronous text become fully realized and appreciated. Presumably, as program learners evolve and mature, they will no longer require nor desire, real time contact.

As students gain experience working in the [name of program] MBA learning environment, they gain a better understanding and appreciation for asynchronous communications and their contributions to enhancing online participation and meaningful dialogue. (Student Handbook, 39-42)

Group discouragement. Project groups that attempt to deviate from formal communication channels may subsequently encounter resistance and opposition within their own ranks. Refusal to take part in real time group meetings is one form of resistive expression. As recalled by one objector,

Some groups would want to have a certain time that they'd get together on the telephone or get together on MSN, to chat if you will. I personally avoided that because I didn't think it was democratic. (Manager G.M. 1227-1230; alumnus)

Recalcitrant opposition to the wishes of a project group may arise, and act to stymie the wishes of a project group, while impeding project progress. A conference call proponent, below, described how opposition from a female group member resulted in cancelling an organized conference call their group had planned on holding.

I had recommended a conference call at one point. I'd asked [name's his company] for permission to use our [teleconference] bridge; and it was given, so that we could all talk and discuss the problem we had on hand, and come to consensus, because, it was a difficult thing to deal with over postings. And so um, we um, we went ahead and this one person was adamant, she wouldn't participate in any conference calls because it was outside the rules, if you will, and she wouldn't violate the rules. She was so anal retentive that she would not deviate and there was nothing anyone could say or do, so, what we all

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agreed is that if we couldn't all have the full team then we couldn't go forward with the conference call. So we cancelled it. I think it seriously took us off track; and I think it damaged the team because it created a rift and I almost wish it was[n't] thought of, or discussed or brought up. Yeah, it was just a suggestion, it was supported by five of the six team members and one revolted and ah, what can you do? (Manager M.M. [2], 349-362; year II)

Only way measures appeared capable of derailing a group's focus and substituting task or process concerns, with interpersonal differences. Some groups appear willing to adopt punitive measures to discourage use of real time communication exchanges. Group members, in the performance of project related duties, and deviate from asynchronous exchanges, may be at risk of group inflicted punishment. In the following incident, a project editor telephones a group member, after a series of exchanges do little to resolve a communication impasse, around an task submission. She explains her reason for the call,

After 5 or 6 postings and you still can't get an understanding of someone's answer [submission], you need some more communication than what is online, so there were some short falls in doing it strictly through email and through an online basis. OK, I thought I was doing the right thing. Reporting [to the group] on, as... I felt I would have done the same thing at work, had I'd had a couple of email exchanges from a co-worker. I certainly would have picked up the phone and said listen, "What are you really trying to tell me here?" So I think I certainly project my normal behaviour onto it.

Following a brief exchange, she notifies her group of the call, the gist of the conversation; potentially to ensure members were not disadvantaged. Her posted admission acts as an inducement for negative sanctions.

I believe that I'd posted [back to the group] that gee, I'd made this long

distance call to [name of region] or where ever it was, and you know, this was

the result of that discussion. So I had basically reported it as was described,

that this is what I did and got back, and then got back, "Gee you are not

supposed to talk to each other." The code of conduct [group developed project

charter] said that all transactions, that all communication must be done online

through the group discussion forum so that I'd basically gone above and

beyond what was acceptable within the code of conduct [project charter] for

communication [...] "You were wrong, you shouldn't have made that phone

call!" I was, "Oh! Ok. You were right, it wasn't covered in the code of

conduct [project charter]," it seemed expedient to me. I thought I was

informing them by posting that conversation but that wasn't accepted.

(Manager C.F. 524-584; alumnus)

Punishment involves a public scolding and a demand for a public apology.

According to the offender, "I had contravened the code of conduct and needed to

remedy this through an apology to the group and received an "e"-hand slap!". A

similar incident is reported in the Tutor Forum, a course-wide Help Desk database

with a group seeking advice on disciplinary appropriate for a group member found

"talking". A bystander describes the incident,

I became aware of it [talking incident] is that ah, when the group posted a

question to the Tutors' [forum] seeking clarification on ah, what or what not

was an acceptable conduct? [*Interviewer: What was the gist of that*

communication?] I think basically that they [a group member] were in

violation of the code of conduct they had agreed to and it was unacceptable

and one of the members of the group wanted to know what were the sanctions

available to the group and this individual. Yea, it got a little ugly [whistle]. I tried not [to] pay too much attention to some of the stuff that was going on. You just get sucked into a vortex worrying about all these things that are happening. You don't accomplish very much. (Manager G.M. 1193-1205; alumnus)

The two incidents suggest that internal measures to control group behaviour may be expropriated groups. As internal priorities are acquired, so too is the potential for accompanying values to follow suit. Internally, safeguarding access to project work opportunities and ensuring equity for all learners, appears paramount.

To summarize, *only way communiqué* measures are attempts to control and regulate learner behaviour. They are initiated by *academic insiders* and include *mild, conditional*, and *ordering* interventions. Withholding of *technical* resourcing is a fourth disincentive to discourage groups from "talking" or live texting. The incidents suggest that internal tactics to regulate group behaviour may be expropriated by individuals or groups to control, intimidate or humiliate. The measures appear capable of dissuading and discouraging deviations from approved databases, although they may impede group wishes, even at a risk of derailing groups. *Only way* measures appear indifferent to group-level wishes or requirements or its potential to negatively impact on task related processes. Ultimately measures subscribe to a "one size fits all" perspective of group functioning and collaboration, adopting a technological singularity reminiscent of early media aspirations in which a single powerful technology would serve all educational needs and functions (Willis, 1993).

Operating in parallel to disincentives are measures to encourage the adoption of a single media format for all pedagogical interactions. This is discussed next.

Learning groups spend a considerable amount of time online, therefore, over the long term, "regulative surveillance" (Gore, 2001, p. 170, citing Foucault, 1975) carried out by *academic insiders* may be time consuming and costly for an organization (Scott, 2001). Previously, course-level enforcement of *only way measures* were reported and assisted by the occasional, group level interventions. In addition to disincentives, are program level incentives that may encourage groups into adhering to *only way* directives, thereby reducing the need for academic gatekeeping. Three incentives are discussed below.

Enrichment incentive. The first incentive, *enrichment,* emphasizes the need for group exchanges to remain visible, and hence accessible, to *academic insiders* in order to provide supervision and support to groups. Groups are reminded of the potential for guidance in designated databases. According to the Student Handbook,

> "[...] asynchronous discussions allow your academic tutor to follow the
>
> discussion threads and provide guidance as needed". (p.32-35)

Marking incentive. The second incentive emphasizes the relationship between grading assessment and access to archived textual exchanges. Marking incentives represents a traditional yet powerful means by which learner behaviour is regulated to suit instructional aims and objectives (Gore, 2001). Guidelines and specifications around the earning of course grades are perhaps the most heavily scrutinized information are the part of course learners (Becker, Geer, & Hughes, 1968). Acquiring "evidence upon which to assign grades" (Neal & Miller, 2005, para.30) is necessary for ensuring exchanges are accessible to assessors. "We can't mark what we can't see," is an often quoted justification by *academic insiders* to encourage the sole use of asynchronous assignment forums. The need to access archived discussions to assign participation grades is a common practice among

educators (Motteram, 2001). However the "need to see" may be overstated when non-assessed interactions are also targeted. For example, previously cited discouragements and interventions were situated around project work assignments, an activity that is assessed on the quality of the output, a Case Study, rather than the quality of group processes. A learner describes how case study projects exchanges were routinely discouraged by a loss of participation grades if a conference call was scheduled.

> [In] year one, every professor was completely resistant to it [conference calls] and some, to the point, as I said, some professors even said our participation marks or however he graded participation, it would not count for the time or effort we put forth on conference calls. (Manager S.F. [1], 1273-1276; year II)

Moral incentive. Groups may feel pressure to ensure all group members are able to take part in group assignments. One means by which this is accomplished is through moral appeals to fairness and equity of treatment. For example,

> First of all, asynchronous discussions allow students in different time zones to participate according to their schedules. This ensures fairness in opportunities to participate in group work. (Student Handbook, 60-63)

Moral incentives draw from humanistic values of equality, fairness, and democratic ideals, with real-time communication representing an intrusion and threat to individual rights and freedoms. Consequently a telephone call or a textual or teleconference-based meeting may constitute a democratic breach. Safeguarding flexibility and the right of learners to take part in the pedagogical process suggests that compliance to *only way* measures is a moral obligation.

Discussion

Reactions to *only way communiqué* measures vary from embracing restrictions, to compliance and doing what the group is told, to tacitly or actively opposing group suggestions for schedule a conference call or text chat. Learners may be intimidated by the potential for a loss in marks or grades. "No the school tells us not to do that [schedule a meeting outside of the Case Study forum], we are not supposed to do anything outside of the notes because the teachers can't grade it". Yet individuals and groups will ignore pressures to refrain from alternative communication tools, seeing *only way* measures as an impractical imposition to getting the work done.

> [*Interviewer: How do people react to the "we are not supposed to go outside Lotus Notes"?*] Well that gets an interesting response. Because ah, well first of all, I disregard it. I don't respect it because I think we need to have the human contact side. (Manager M.M. [2], 571-573; year II)

In other cases, one or more group members will persuade the group to focus on their assignment priorities. This was the case when one group was told not to schedule a conference call,

> I remember just picking up the phone and saying, "I don't really care what they [tutor] said, we need to sort out this issue and if the telephone is the best way to do it, we are going to do it." I'd say it to another group member or say it to the group by email as opposed to on the [course] database. Like I really don't care what the tutor said. You know we are not doing this for every single thing we are discussing, but we need to discuss this so let's just get on the phone and make it happen. (Manager R.C.M. 1103-1111; year III)

Distributed arrangements impose an added logistical burden on remote groups (Willcoxson, 2006). When group work is mediated by a "one size fits all"

communication strategy and remote coordination skills given cursory attention, task demands may impose additional complexity challenge on remote groups (Staples & Webster, 2007). How remote coordination may be compromised by *only way* measures is described in detail below.

> It was nightmarish. [...] and to make matters worse, there were profs who actually discouraged us and some who flat out said, "no conference calls," so everything had to occur inside the constraints of the databases. Well imagine it! Imagine planning your last family barbecue, I don't know what your family is like but my father's family, my father is the oldest of 7. My mother is the oldest of 8. I have 22 first cousins. So planning a barbecue with my father's family is challenging but ok, you just pick up the phone and you sort it all out. Imagine just organizing a barbecue with everyone, and all you can do is email back and forth. Well now you have a group project to do that is worth 30 % of your final mark. There could literally be hundreds of emails just in the preparation [project charter] phase. I don't have that time and it's too complicated. I'd rather have a ten minute conference call, get everyone on the same page and say, "Suzie you're doing this and Joey you are doing this and Bob what would you like to do?" Instead of 70 emails to find out Bob would like to be the spell checker. (Manager S.F. 1024-1041; year II)

In a study of communication tool usage among collaborative project groups, Staples & Webster (2007) investigated the work methods of two face-to-face, two hybrid (co-located and virtual group members) and two virtual teams collaborated exclusively online, and consisting of 5 to 8 group members in stable grouping configurations. Although the virtual and hybrid groups scheduled face to face meetings at least three times a year, Staples & Webster reported that these teams were

more likely to experience isolation and consequently were heavily reliant on a diversity of communication tools, in contrast to the face to face teams. The virtual and hybrid teams were particularly reliant on audio conferencing and to a lesser extent text chat. Staples & Webster, reported that communication diversity was paramount for effectiveness as much as reducing social isolation.

> Communication was even more important in virtual teams for which face-to-face communication and impromptu meetings are infrequent. To solve this problem, virtual team members suggested working hard to keep lines of communication open by using communications tools that make up for the loss of face-to-face time and provide for informal interactions. (p. 71)

In addition to a greater need for technological diversity the authors reported that technology played a mediating role in enabling groups to more easily acquire knowledge of member skills, strengths and capabilities and providing a strategic performance advantage. Acquisition of social knowledge is impaired by *only way communication* measures. The adoption of *perpetually immature* groupings also helps ensure that social connections remain weak or non-existent. Staples and Webster reported that organizational resourcing practices were particularly critical for virtual groups. As the authors explained,

> ...organizations have to supply virtual teams with sufficient resources. These resources may include money, time, facilities, hardware, software, communication channels, technical equipment, proper training, and an adequate number of team members. In a virtual team, several of these resources are key to the actual operation of day-to-day activities. (p. 72)

Not surprisingly locating efficiencies in organizing and carrying out collective assignments is of paramount importance to online groups. Process efficiencies may

be achieved when groups are able to access multiple technologies, including synchronous tools (Gabriel, 2004; Assudani, 2006). Gabriel reported that experienced online learners, defined as learners who have taken several online courses, valued the productivity gains associated with alternative media and were less concerned with flexibility losses real time communications might impose. In other words, mature program learners may be more likely to value expediency in accomplishing instructional tasks.

In spite of restrictive resourcing associated with *only way communiqué*, *dispensing* academic support, limited residential access, perpetually immature group memberships, and the challenges that distal arrangements may impose, many project group initiatives were reported to be successful. A testament to the perseverance and creativity on the part of learners however, success was completing a group assignment on time, and being awarded a "good grade". How project work is accomplished is not evaluated in course assessment plans (Source: course syllabuses).

Next, I turn to the final concept associated with the structural operational arrangements of a learning context, **Doing the Group Thing.** Thus far assessment measures have touched on grading incentives and the potential for negative sanctions should groups deviate from formal databases and engage in talk, rather than asynchronous text. *Multi-pass* represents an unorthodox approach to assessing course work in general and group assignments in particular.

Multi-Pass Assessment

Grades play a particularly important role in academic transactions (Becker et al., 1968/1995). An assigned grade is a reflection of the time, labour, and effort learners have invested in their academic study (Webb, 1995). Grades perform an

important diagnostic role by identifying gaps in instruction and learning (Jaques & Salmon, 2007). They may motivate involvement in assignments, and reward effort. Grades are less likely to be a tool to intimidate and punish. *Multi-pass assessment* refers to an assessment strategy that requires of course learners that they meet performance benchmark for all course-based assignments. To better define the *multi-pass concept*, I begin with an overview of a conventional assessment practice, *single-pass assessment*.

Single pass. A final course mark is symbolic, a measure of the extent to which a learner has acquired knowledge and skills. Grades help differentiate individual performances from those of fellow learners (Hu, 2005). In *single-pass* assessment, accumulated assignment marks determine whether a course pass or fail. A course grade is a composite of how well a learner performed on various course assignments. An individual fails a course fails when the accumulated assignments fall short of the course pass benchmark. For example, if a final course grade was 58, when the passing grade is 60, course failure may be the end result.

Multi-pass. In contrast, in a *multi-pass* assessment environment, an individual who fails a course assignment is at risk of receiving a course fail. For example, if an assignment was awarded a 58, when the passing mark is 60, course failure may be the end result, irrespective of good grades on the remaining assignments. In the following section, I present two examples of a *multi-pass* assessment and later discuss the implications of a course fail.

For example, a learner may successfully complete their 1st year course work and pass an major, end of year, exam, yet be informed that a submitted essay in the last course, worth 30% from the course grade, was assigned a failing grade. The consequences may be substantial, and brought about by a simple two mark shortfall

on an assignment. A learner summarizes the consequences and her exchange with a course tutor, when informed of the course fail,

> I had to repeat the course, instead of giving me the option to re-write my paper, do a completely different assignment, just something. I submit a paper and you [tutor] tell me I "missed the mark". "Well, how did I miss the mark?" "Well it was, you didn't submit the type of paper we were looking for." "Well OK, was the information there?" "Could you gain an understanding that I understood the topic and learnt the lessons?" "OK, maybe it was a miscommunication? Can I re-write the paper?" And it just he [tutor] was, I just did not, never, there wasn't any point before or after the whole paper episode did I have a good feeling about it or him. (Manager S.F.[1], 207-231; year III)

In a second incident, when participation in weekly group discussions is considered insufficient, a learner may be at risk of a course fail. The incident below is recounted by a third party,

> I haven't [heard] of anyone failing because of a peer review [peer assessment], but I have heard of people failing because of poor involvement, poor participation. I wouldn't say it is specific to a group project; it was overall, in the daily discussion database [weekly discussion exercise]. I've heard of people failing for that. Yeah, one of them was an individual that had told me, "Oh, I failed it!" Yeah, he did great in his paper and did really good on the [group] project, and he had all of his submissions in, but he had a lot of work, like he had heavy loads at work and it kept him from commenting on other people's work, so his submissions for, like when he was answering questions they were right on the mark, but he didn't, but there was no discussion

[questions posted] elsewhere, so he was failed for it. I think it was a first [year] course, but I'm not absolutely sure, but I think it was. (Manager B.M. [3], 1339-1349; year II)

Multi-Pass Penalties

Failing learners for a two point shortfall in an assignment, or for not asking enough questions although apparently participating (answering questions) in weekly discussion exercise, is unusually punitive. Nor does it take into account additional sanctions triggered by a course fail, which pose a particular hardship for first year learners. These sanctions include *temporal, social, financial penalties* and *grade deflation*.

Temporal penalties. Any failed course must be repeated; however a failed core course is particularly problematic. First, there are accompanying delays in the course being reoffered which impose a temporal penalty. For one learner it meant considerable frustration, "because then that ended up delaying the whole MBA process by almost 4 months, 6 months."

Social penalties. Second, a course fail displaces first year learners by removing them from their intake cohort, the latter having proceeded to the next scheduled course offering. Cohort connections appear to provide an important sense of identity and camaraderie for 1st year learners, who otherwise are unable to participate in residential opportunities. According to one learner, "They [cohort learner] might be the one that I'd really like to choke in our family, but we're family."

Financial penalties. Financial penalties represent a third hardship, and shared by learners at any stage in their academic studies. Graduate management tuition fees are costly (Siegert, 2008). Consequently, a course fail inflates tuition costs. Learners

with company-sponsored tuition support are likely to be financially penalized when tuition reimbursement is based on the incumbent demonstrating proof of a passing course grade.

Grade deflation. In addition to *temporal, social*, and *financial* repercussions, *multi-pass* imposes a form of *grade deflation*. Grade inflation refers to an overgenerous awarding of marks resulting in an artificially boosted course grade (Hu, 2005). *Grade deflation,* in contrast, occurs when a course mark, that is otherwise sufficient for a course pass by a program's parent institution, is replaced with a course "F", or fail, designation on their course transcript. Consequently, recipients of a negative *multi-pass* assessment encounter an additional loss, a lack of recognition for successfully completed course assignments and disposal of these accumulated assignment marks. The discrepancy between a legitimately earned course grade and a *multi-pass* assigned "F" or Fail, is addressed by the learner below.

> (Sigh), I want to say, it was one of the [name of course] organizational management courses. I had um, I ended up with a mark high enough to pass the course but I, um, didn't pass my essay. Which meant you automatically failed the course. Well, I think if you end up with a grade high enough to pass the course, you should pass the course. (Manager S.F. [1], 196-199, 207-208; year III)

Finally, the presence of a *multi-pass* assessment is questionable. Post-secondary grading systems are regulated and subscribe to agreed upon standards established by a professional body of post-secondary institutions. This ensures consistency and assurances that what appears on a post-secondary transcript is merit based and importantly, correlates with earned course marks. For example, awarding an "A" when a composite course mark indicates a "C" would be frowned upon.

Similarly, awarding an "F" when a composite course mark indicates a "C", "B" or possibly an "A", would equally be frowned upon. Artificially lowering a formal course grade, or *grade deflation*, like its counterpart, grade inflation, misrepresents performance achievement and academic standing. It is indicative of a program initiated *hijacking* of legitimately earned marks and substituted with a *multi-pass* imposed grade. Whereas grade inflation is considered a chronic problem in graduate management education (Pfeffer & Fong, 2002), *grade deflation* is rarely discussed.

In spite of the challenges associated with an online environment and the structural and resourcing decisions associated with Group Formation, Resourcing Support, the consequences of an academic misstep or assignment fail results in a four-fold increase in the ability of program learners to experience a course fail.

Summary

In this chapter a core operative, **Doing the Group Thing** was presented. I identified structural and organizational strategies adopted by an online Master in Business Administration (MBA) program. According to Scott (2001), structural and operational features are an institutional dimension in the understanding of group work practices. I introduced and elaborated on two structural operatives: Group Formation and Assessment, and one resourcing operative, or Resourcing Support. Within each of these concepts, are sub concepts and associated properties that lend a richer understanding of the deleterious implications of operatives.

The first conceptual operative presented was Group Formation. It consisted of *group dominant design, concocting,* and *perpetually immature groupings.* A *group dominant design* is one in which assessed group work assignments prioritize group activities over individual course work and characteristic of a participative pedagogy, with an onus on learner participation and group autonomy (Hodgson & Reynolds, 2005). In spite of the weighting of group work, resourcing measures appeared selective, and purposefully limiting.

A second operative associated with Group Formation was *concocting;* it refers to a group formation strategy in which membership is based on randomized distribution as opposed to strategic or learner selected membership. *Concocting* was contrasted with an intentional group formation strategy in which group membership is strategic rather than random, and mechanistically determined. Drawbacks to intentional groupings were raised and strengths of *concocting* arrangement presented. However the primary weakness of a *concocting* and short duration groups was the likelihood of learning groups remaining *perpetually immature,* an outcome, and

hampering the acquisition of social knowledge, skills, and capability of group members.

Preferential residential treatment is defined as a systematic undermining of residential-based opportunities; with resourcing disproportionally allocated to academic insiders. *Preferential* treatment includes ease of access, scheduling, and financial accommodation.

Dispensing is reminiscent of a centralize *help desk* operation. It was argued that *dispensing*, while of pedagogical value, prioritizes a reactive and information conveyance relationship between academic resources and learners. This deviates from a "learning partner" ideology formally advocated as a dominant learning support model.

Only way communiqué encourages a "no talk" credo whose reported purpose is to ensure full and unfettered access to group work opportunities. Gatekeepers of an *only way communiqué* operative are *academic insiders*, who may intrude or respond to group inquiries with *mild, conditional,* and *ordering* discouragements. Additional discouragements include *technical* and *group level* dissuasion. Incentives to encourage learner exchanges in assigned assignment forums include *enrichment, marking,* and *moral.* An *only way communiqué* strategy may impose additional impediments onto group work by undermining the ability of groups to resolve difficulties or impasses. .

In spite of the challenges associated with an online environment and the structural and resourcing decisions associated with Group Formation, Resourcing Support, the consequences of an academic misstep or assignment fail results in a four-fold increase in the ability of program learners to experience a course fail. A *multi-pass assessment* strategy was contrasted with a *single-pass strategy,* in determining

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how course grades are tabulated. *Multi-pass* sanctions were reported as inconsistent, imposing harsher and hence inequitable penalties on 1st learners. It was further argued that a *multi-pass* course transcript may be misleading, through *grade deflating* of legitimately acquired course marks. *Multi-pass assessment* is indicative of program initiated *hijacking* of legitimately earned grades for a *multi-pass* imposed grade.

Doing the Group Thing appears to adopt a mechanistic orientation, one that is reliant on technology and software to sort, allocate, resource, and monitor groups. Furthermore, it adopts a counterintuitive set of design choices and support decisions that appear at odds with a *group dominant design* and may negatively impact on learner experiences and the undertaking of collaborative based activities, such as project work. Whereas Chapter 5 focused on the social structural aspects of a learning environment, in Chapter 6, group work practices that emerge from structural and resourcing decisions, are examined.

Chapter Six -

A Basic Social Process of "Not Pulling Weight"

This chapter presents the basic social process of **Not Pulling Weight**. **Not Pulling Weight** is comprised of two phases in an academic trajectory: Pushed Out and Opting Out. In spite of moral arguments of fairness and equality of access, and the obligation on the part of learners and groups to ensure unimpeded access to group work, access to project work opportunities is never certain. Marginalizing processes are named *hijackings,* and four main categories will be presented, *task, role, project* and *tampering*. As well, two sub-categories will be presented, *editorial* and *compensatory*. The final category associated with hijacking is *sabotage*. The chapter concludes with a discussion of sabotage before moving onto a final discussion, then summary.

In Chapter 5, I defined structural and resourcing decisions of the organizational context and their respective conceptual properties. Operatives were drawn from submitted narrative accounts, accompanying interviews, and pertinent documentation. Attention to conceptual operatives was influenced by narrative accounts and interviews first and theoretical sampling associated with a grounded theory approach (Glaser, 1978, 1992; Glaser & Strauss, 1967). The constant comparative method, an important analytical tool in grounded theory, yielded two core operatives, the first pertaining to the structural operational arrangements of a learning context, or **Doing the Group Thing**.

Doing the Group Thing represents a core structural concept that includes organizational arrangements and resourcing associated with a graduate management online program. Structural arrangements include decisions that dictate the formation of project groupings, their longevity, the level of group work obligations expected of

a program's learners, and assessment. **Doing the Group Thing** is concerned with the implementation and support of group work in a graduate management curriculum.

The second core operative, **Not Pulling Weight**, is representative of a basic social process, and consists of two problematic group-level phenomena, described as Pushed Out and Opting Out. The theory of **Not Pulling Weight** follows.

A Theory of Not Pulling Weight

Not Pulling Weight is concept derived from an *invivo* code to describe a prominent complaint among program learners and shared with program administrators and academic insiders.

> The only conflict [reported], that there were, that people didn't pull their weight. There, there would be conflict. I'd get emails from students saying, "You know, this person is not doing anything you know, what can we do about it?" Or, "What are you going to do about this?" You know? That would be the main thing that would inspire it; it wouldn't typically be around the decisions in the course it would be around people not doing what they committed to inside the group, and what was expected of them in the course. (Former senior-level official, [1], 2024-2030)

"**Not pulling weight**" was also located in internal documentation, alerting *academic insiders* of the possibility of course learners not fulfilling their academic duties and responsibilities. The second main concern, Opting-Out, and strongly linked to year 2 in the academic trajectory, focuses on learner withdrawal dynamics. Documentation (below) suggests that the issue of group members Opting-Out presented a group-level concern rather than a course tutor or, program-level concern.

Occasionally there will be people [in project groups] who do not seem to be "pulling their weight." When this occurs, it is the responsibility of team members to work with this person and encourage, engage, model, mentor and guide their behavior. (Tutor Handbook, 2000; italics emphasis in original)

According to Fellenz (2006), project groups are often expected to assume responsibility for the participatory behaviour of group members, and moreover, to manage discord and difficulties that arise from assignment-related transgressions and obligations. The issue of whether new comers to the online learning environment are equipped to take on the responsibility and do so while working under the auspices of *only way* measures, is speculative.

Unlike learners who may choose to withdraw, or Opt-Out, from academic study (Simpson, 2003, 2004), an alternative situation may arise in which group members over commit, and by doing so, exclude and force out their peers. This describes a coercive variation of **Not Pulling Weight**, one in which learners and groups are Forced Out or Pushed Out of their academic obligations. .

Not Pulling Weight represents the culmination of two phases: Pushed Out and Opting Out. Pushed Out is reported to be dominant in the first academic year and indicative of overzealous and excessive participative practices perpetrated on groups or group members.

WORK GROUP CONTEXT

Not Pulling Weight

Year I   Year II   Year III

Mediating

Pushed Out   Opting out   Getting out

Hijackings

task
role
project
editorial
compensatory

Tampering

Sabotage
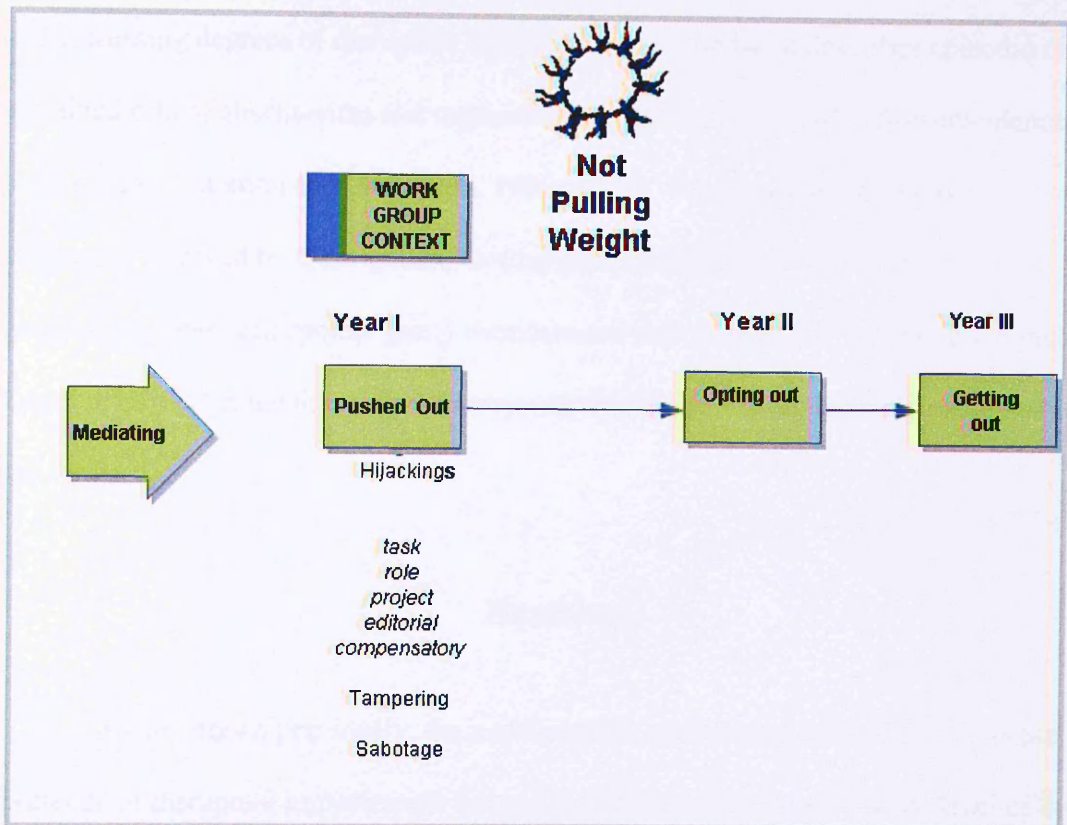
Figure 7. *A basic social process of "Not pulling weight"*

Pushed Out group members may be identified as Not Pulling Their Weight, an outcome of not fulfilling project related obligations. Completed submissions or nearly completed submissions may be coercively removed or impeded by other group members or the project group. Marginalizing processes include *hijackings* and four categories are identified, *task, role, project, tampering* and sub categories of *editorial,* and *compensatory*. A separate category under *hijackings*, are attempts to *sabotage* the efforts of the project group.

Pushed Out represents the main concern of online MBA learners in their 1st academic year of study and possessing dimensional qualities, it is subsequently overtaken with a new dilemma, an increase in group members choosing to Opt Out of project work responsibilities. Whereas Pushed Out is associated with excessive

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participatory behaviour, Opting Out describes varying degrees of reduction in effort and increasing degrees of disruptive ramifications. Opting-Out describes episodic or sustained acts of absenteeism and representative of a continuum of "effort-avoidance" manoeuvres (Salomon and Globerson, 1989, p. 90). Whereas Pushed Out is eventually resolved by Opting–Out, Opting-Out is eventually resolved when graduation occurs and project group members are able to Get Out. Although Opting Out is identified in the theoretical framework, this chapter is not formally presented in the thesis.

Hijackings

As mentioned previously, the main concern of first year online learners is the presence of disruptive impediments felt to be operative at the project work level of the learning context. *Hijackings* represent an imposed and non-voluntary exit from an academic task, role or project. It defines a situation in which project learners are impeded in their ability to perform their academic duties and project-related obligation. As *hijackings* represent an obstructive force (Cargill-Kipar, 2009) they may be particularly hazardous in a learning environment, in which under performance in a single assignment, is sufficient grounds for out right course failure.
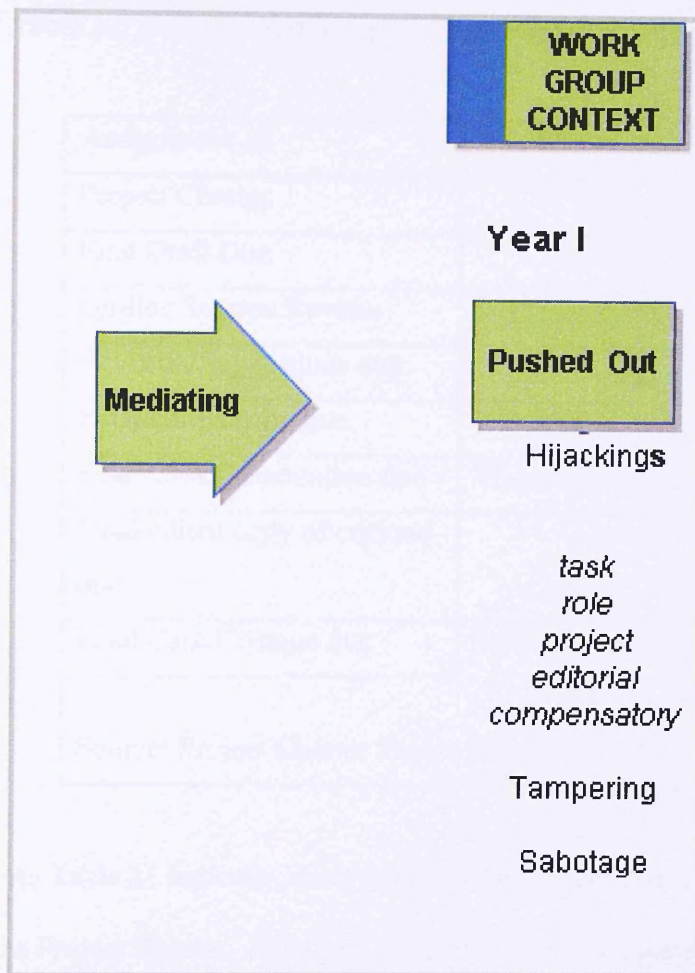
Figure 8. *Hijacking operatives*

Hijackings are more likely to arise during the initial task submission process
(First Draft) and when assigned task work is to be reviewed by the larger group (On-
line Session Review), and when group members submit feedback on the previously
posted work (Table 21). A third critical time is associated with editing (Final Edited
Copy), a juncture in the project development process when submitted work is
integrated into the project assignment. Table 21 (next page) illustrates time lines
associated with a project work process

Table 17. *Project charter tasks and due dates*

Assignment #1	Deadlines
Project Charter	
First Draft Due	
On-line Session Review	
Revision/Suggestions due	
Final edited copy due	
Final Case Presentation due	Thursday, April 15, 2004
Final edited copy of critique due	
Final Case Critique due	Sunday, April 18, 2004
Source: Project Charter from a first year course	

As Table 21 indicates, prior to beginning project work, groups are required to prepare a Project Charter. A Project Charter may contain pre-defined roles and responsibilities of individual group members for two or more required projects. Charter instructions and responsibilities are described below and taken from an information technology course.

Since you will submit this work as a group, each member of the group is expected to make a fair and equitable contribution to the final product. It is up to the group to determine an appropriate breakdown of tasks and responsibilities, and to assess each group member's contribution. [..] Some groups may, at the beginning of the course, decide to create a Team [Project Charter] outlining expectations and responsibilities, and a timeline for activities and milestones. Your group's [Project Charter], should you decide to prepare one, will be useful in evaluating team members' performances and contribution. (Source, Information course instructions)

Project related tasks consist of case study questions, allocated either by the project leader, or volunteered for. An example of task questions is set out in Table 22 (next page). Whether undertaken by an individual or a sub-group, responses to a case study question may entail a great deal of preparatory work and thought. Segmenting questions into dispensable units is indicative of a "divide and conquer" strategy in which work on assignments is a somewhat solitary process.

Previously, while I've briefly reviewed logistical components of project work assignments, additional back ground information concerning roles and responsibilities will be addressed in role hijackings. I now move on to describing the characteristics and properties of task hijacking.

Table 18. *Example of case study assignment and questions*

Group Case Analysis 1: Singapore TradeNet: A Tale of One City

Please click on the Related Readings tab above and read the case "Singapore TradeNet: A Tale of One City" (Reading 12), by John King and Benn Konsynski.

In your Group Case Analysis, please answer the following questions:

Describe the trade documentation process before and after the implementation of TradeNet. **Hint:** A value-chain type diagram might be useful. *Who were the major stakeholders involved in the process redesign? Identify the major process improvements and the competitive advantages they offered.*
Evaluate the process used to implement TradeNet. *Would you consider the implementation successful? If so, what were the key factors that led to the success of this project? If not, what factors contributed to its failure?*

Consider the *social context* (defined on page 21 of the textbook) of the TradeNet system and of Singapore. *Were there specific factors in the social context that made this transformation easier or more difficult?* (In your answer, please identify any relevant factors.) *Could this type of major transformation occur in North America, in the environment of western culture and of western-style business?* Support your answer.

How can Singapore sustain the competitive advantage provided by the TradeNet project?
Note: Potential task assigned questions have been italicized

Task Hijackings

Task related *hijackings* occur when an individual's task submission is damaged, tampered with, or replaced with the work of another member of the group. Task hijackings are defined as unauthorized replacement or tampering of a learner's property or assignment work, whether it is about to be done or has already been done in a project assignment (K.Lewins, personal communication, Oct. 1, 2009). Although hijackings are more prevalent across the first year of a program trajectory, impediments to project work participation may occur at varying times in the project development process.

Impatience and pacing disparities over the timing of a submission and reported to be a common occurrence in online project work (Goodyear, 2001). These factors represent *hijacking* triggers, likely to be perpetrated by *overeager, or eager beaver,* group members. Although assigned a particular task, hijacking targets may find that their completed work ready to be submitted, has been usurped and replaced by a another group member.

In the incident below, although an assignment is not due for several more days, a sub group of two learners, discover that their portion of the assignment has been completed and submitted by a third member of their sub group, and overly anxious to see the group's obligation completed.

[After submitting his portion of the assigned task], this guy [an eager beaver] actually [asked],"Where's your piece of work?" I said, "Well you know the deadline is Saturday and I spoke to this other guy [his task partner], and he is busy, so we'll work on it Friday night and you'll see the response by the deadline." So then he proceeds to post the response [their portion of an assignment] the next day! Whereas it was work that we had to be responsible

for. [*Interviewer: So he went ahead and did your work and posted it?*] Yeah, so I went back and posted, ah, to paraphrase, "Why are you doing our work? I told you yesterday we were going to do this, so why did you post our response?" He posted something else back saying, "I'm busy, I want to move forward." You know, doesn't really say, he doesn't recognize the fact that we are going to provide a response. (Manager R.C.M. 1420-1432; recent alumnus)

The matter is resolved amicably, by a phone call, and the impatient group member reassured that the work will be done within the allotted timelines.

The resolution of a *task hijacking* appears less certain when project groups become involved, and are willing to accommodate an early submission even if ownership responsibilities are questionable. In spite of project assigned tasks being painstakingly itemized in formal Project Charters, with a *task hijacking* representing a violation of the charter, some groups appear willing to overlook the allocation, in the interests of expedited pacing. In the incident below, project target dates are adjusted to accommodate an encroachment on another's group member's assigned task. A previously targeted group member explains how the process works and conveys a sense of helplessness in responding to a *hijacking*.

So, and the other thing that happens if someone goes and posts before a deadline, like let's say you start on a Sunday and you need to have the preliminary information posted by a Wednesday. Well, if they [*hijacker*] post by Monday, there could be two days of discussion before the deadline. So, by the time you go to post by the deadline they've [group] already discussed everything and moved on. So now the work you've done is pointless, even though you would have had it complete, and you've got it sitting on your

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computer. What is the point of posting it, because they've [group] already discussed it and moved on? (Manager S.F. [2], 1099-1108; year II)

In the above incident, pertinent information, such an alteration to the submission deadlines, is not shared. Group members play a key role in facilitating the *hijacking*, in the above example, by not questioning the legitimacy of a substitution, and collaborating with the *hijacker*. There is a disregard of a group member's time and effort, and a premature rejection of the legitimate submission. Project membership has a precarious status if contributions are treated as having little consequence to the viability of the group and it's functioning, further isolating those targeted. A project group's willingness to alter project deadlines implies a level of compliance and cooperation that underscore *hijacking* behaviours. Consequently, *hijackings* may exist as a taken-for-granted routine. This is suggested in an incident below in which duplicate task submissions, one with legitimate status, and one having illegitimate status, are received by a project group. Although the latter represents an infringement on the ability of group member to fulfil his or her assignment obligations, groups have been reported as responding to duplicate submissions by putting the matter to a vote, and asking for submission preferences. This may subject the legitimate submitter to a public and potentially humiliating ordeal. In describing the incident below, the hijacked target speaks to the ordeal adopting a first person and third person voice.

> [...] initially when the program started, I would, if someone had posted a question I would, I was supposed to do I would go ahead and post mine anyways. But.. [*Interviewer: So what happened there, someone has posted your response to a question you were to be doing, and you posted yours. What happens in that kind of a scenario?*] So now you debate. Now there's the

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debate about well they like Williams question better that he posted instead of mine and the way I did it. The group debates this. I personally couldn't care less. If you like Williams, go ahead. I, it's not, because personally when you are in a corporate business environment you learn rather quickly those types of things are not personal, but some people take them that way. They were given the responsibility for the group of doing an assignment and someone who was not went ahead and did it and now you are telling me that my work isn't worth anything? [*Interviewer: It sounds like they are taking it personally?*] Well sure they are! But again, you don't see "these people," you don't meet "these people," and you don't typically go to a residential elective until you are in year 2. We've already done six courses by then. (Manager S.F. [2], 1109-1125; year II)

The receptiveness of a group towards *hijacked* substitutions may discourage the legitimate owner from coming forward and affirming their rights and may therefore further normalize *hijacked* substitutions, particularly, if there are no objections or commentary from *academic insiders*. Interventions may be less likely when *dispensing* is adopted by course tutors. Rather, active tutor interventions have been evident in preventing "talk" versus preventing questionable work practices, such as theft.

A variation of a *task hijacking* is a reverse *hijacking,* an opportunistic behaviour, perpetrated by a legitimate task owner. In Opting-Out conditions, an assigned task is forfeited to the group when owner goes *awol,* or disappears without warning and refuses to respond to group emails. A group must subsequently make up for the missing work by assigning the work to another, to compensate for. However a late stage task reverse *hijacking* occurs when the original task owner re-emerges, at

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the eleventh hour, with a hastily assembled submission with demands that the substitution displace the compensated work, previously prepared by a volunteer. It creates a dilemma for a group and raises questions of reasonable accommodation and ownership rights. A reverse *hijacking* situation in described in detail below.

Well because let's say you've set up a schedule and let's say you have a start date and an end date and there are five gates that have to be gone through, and the five gates are the things like, post your draft so people can review; then all comments on the review have to be posted by such a date, right? So there is two gates, right. What happens is that they [AWOL group member] miss a gate, so no one gets the opportunity to contribute. And, because they are missing the gates, other members of the team start to become concerned so emails are sent or, you know, people try and reach out and say, "What's going on?" No response has come back, so someone else picks it up and says, "I'll do that work" and then, I've seen that done, 5 or 6, 7 times, and I've done that twice myself, I've compensated for somebody else and others on the team have done it and um..then, so you go and create a solution to their assignment and then you're all ready and at the 11th hour they go and post something. So then the last gate, which is the deadline for contribution, they post something which is poor and they think they got away with doing the job, but they haven't followed any of the process right? They just do a commando effort at the end and it just is not adequate for what needs to be done. So which do you use? The piece that you created to replace them or their piece, which they're supposed to do and they are supposed to be graded as part of the team? Now if you say, "Too late, sorry, we're not going to use what we did," you've got a

conflict. If you take it, you've got a conflict, so you are dammed if you do and dammed if you don't. (Manager M.M. [3], 511-526; year II)

Reverse *hijackings*, or assignment reclamations, are stressful to groups since it often involves a dominate personality who appears willing to rail road a group. The late appearance of a delinquent group member also creates disruptions at a critical juncture in the assignment submission trajectory, when it is being readied for submission.

As the above incident suggests, not only delegated tasks but volunteered tasks may be targeted. Although contributions are volunteered, nevertheless, outcomes may still be disturbing, distressful and demoralizing. Volunteering to take on additional project work is not inconsequential. One learner outlined his weekly academic time commitments and reportedly adhered to over a three year time frame. It suggests that free time is a limited and valuable commodity.

[In addition to full time employment], I consistently put in 30–35 hours per week [of academic study], 8:00 p.m. – midnight Monday–Friday, 5 to 7 hours on Saturday and Sunday; this was a normal process. When extra work was required I just did it on the weekend, 8:00 a.m. to midnight or 1:00 a.m. The longest was 2:30 a.m. and that may have very well been the marketing course. (Manager R.M. email, August 13, 2007)

In spite of demanding external and family commitments, group members do volunteer for additional workloads. A volunteer based *hijacking* is evident in the incident below. A group member's offer to edit a group's project submission (Final Edited Copy phase) and subsequent weekend work spent revising the project document, is *hijacked*. In spite of the editorial updates routinely posted to the group,

an otherwise silent group member issues the following directive with an accompanying attachment.

THIS IS THE REAL VERSION, DON'T USE [name of learner], THIS IS THE UPDATE NOW AND THIS IS THE ONE WE ARE GOING TO USE. (Manager R.M.,312-314; recent alumnus. capitalization in the original)

Response to the proclamation is confusion, then outrage and finally withdrawal. Conrad (2002) has reported that online learners often use silence as a conflict avoidance strategy. Silence and withdrawal is indicative of a conflict management strategy, one intended to avoid engaging in, as the target explains, a "pissing match" to determine whose edited work was better, and a situation evident in a group endorsed task *hijacking*. Moreover, concerns that voiced objections may jeopardize a project and subject a project group to a drawn out conflict, act as a deterrent to speaking up and speaking out. Furthermore, silence may be wielded as a tool to punish (Zembylas & Vrasidas, 2007), and by avoiding future contact with a perpetrator or *hijacker* (Conrad, 2002).

Fear of retaliation by targeted learners has been reported. Therefore, the hesitancy of those targeted to go public is understandable, particularly if *hijackings* are tacitly endorsed by the project group and *academic insiders*. The threat of retaliation is conveyed one learner's explanation why he chose to manage a task hijacking privately rather than publically.

(pause) I guess you don't want to be seen as a trouble maker [going public]. I did correspond before, before I responded back to this guy [hijacker], I did correspond with another group member. But I didn't correspond [with] the entire group. The entire group might think, "[hijacking target] is a trouble maker. This guy [hijacker] is very eager to do the work but [hijacking target]

for some reason is being a trouble maker"... [*Interviewer: Why would you want to avoid having that label?*]. I don't think you want to have that label (spoken more forcefully); you've got to work with these guys for another four or five weeks. You are potentially going to work with them for another two or three years. You've got to work with this tutor for the next, he [tutor] is going to be grading your assignments for the next four to five weeks, and you could potentially work with this tutor for the next couple of years, and, potentially working with people anytime down the road. (Manager R.C.M. 1130-1148; recent alumnus)

Tampering

Tampering with another's work is similar to a *hijacking*, in that it consists of unauthorized changes to a learner's academic property (Lewins, personal communication, October 1, 2009). Alternatively, from the perpetrator's perspective, *tampering* with someone's work may be considered an act of "aid" even if the "aid" is "forced". *Extending a helping hand*, represents an *invivo* concept, that describes how group members are encouragement to lend support and assistance to fellow group members. When "aid" is poorly managed, and permission not sought ahead of time, and "forced" on an unreceptive group member, the behaviour may be viewed unfavourably as an attack, perpetrated by an unknown, and responded to as such.

In the incident below, potentially well-meaning aid targets a struggling female group member. Her posted, but obviously flawed, submissions consisting of numerical calculations, have occupied the attention of a cynical and critical project group. In spite of, "you'd have to be an idiot to not see what was going on", according to one learner, the course tutor's attention is occupied with "cheerleading"

a group member's efforts to assist others, including the visibly struggling learner. Uninvited, the targeted learner's submission is removed, corrected with notes added, and reposted into the assignment forum. Assistance that may have been offered privately is instead performed publically. Similarly, the recipient's response to what appears to be an unwelcomed intrusion is expressed in a virtual hand slap. A witness to the incident outlines what transpires,

> She went off the deep end! Her next submission was a scathing diatribe on how she didn't need him to do her work for her, she isn't stupid (OK, this bit was arguable), and she thanked him very much to keep his scribblings to himself. She would let him know when she needed his help! She posted this publicly! (Narrative account, X.M. 37-40)

Following the outburst, an enraged group demands tutor assistance with the *tampering* recipient publically apologizing, for her inappropriate behaviour. Whereas, the uninvited *tampering* remains blameless. Retaliations against the female learner are immediate, first by ostracizing and secondly, at the completion of the course. There, group sanctions extend to a reported group-wide downgrading of the individual's participatory performance, in the form of a negative peer assessment score (although intended to apply to project work participation). The assumption that this might bring about *multi-pass* sanctions is implied in the commentary below.

> We each fill out an assessment form where we grade each of our colleagues on their contribution to the group project. [...] We are informed up front that these will affect our marks, as they can be adjusted based on the collective results (soooo, not good for [her name]). (Manager X.M., email communication, March 2, 2006)

Discussion

Hijackings and uninvited *tampering* of another's property may either be an annoyance, or it may extend to a harrowing and upsetting experience for those targeted. The ethical and moral significance (cf. Lewins, 2006) of *hijacking* and *tampering* remain understated. For project groups, *task hijackings,* in particular, may confer benefits by offering additional choices in task submissions. Nevertheless, removing another's assignment responsibility compromises the status of a group member and the legitimacy of their inclusion in a project submission. Those targeted are bereft of the means of proving their participative involvement and potentially risk lowered grades or, worse, a course fail. This predicament is described by a *hijacking* recipient who addresses social emotional factors as much as assessment repercussions.

> I want to feel like I'm a valuable member of the team. But also, I want to make sure I pass. If you've taken away my opportunity to contribute, I either, a. misunderstood or b. need to find a new opportunity. ... [*Interviewer: So you were concerned that you wouldn't have been given credit for working on the assignment.*] Correct! [*Interviewer: And what would be the ramification of that?*] Well if your group says, "Well you didn't do it!" They may give you a low, you know a low peer evaluation, and depending on your professor, if you don't pass your peer evaluation, it could either mean you couldn't pass the course or it would be taken into consideration when your professor gave you your participation component and you would receive a low mark. [*Interviewer: So that has the possibility of lowering your marks?*] *W*ell it is the participation component. (Manager S.F. [1], 1895-1913; year III)

Hijackings may interject chaos and confusion by instigating a domino effect as targeted learners scramble to find alternative ways to demonstrate their participative involvement. How a *hijacking* spiral begins is described below.

If someone is assigned to do questions 2, 3, 4, and Bobby does questions he wasn't assigned to, people get confused as to why Bobby was doing 6, 7, 8 and Suzie was supposed to do questions 2, 3 & 4. Well, does that mean that Suzie doesn't have to post to her questions and if she doesn't post her questions then what should she do? So maybe she won't post her questions to 2, 3, & 4 because Bobby already did but she thinks she knows the answer to 5, so she is going to post it to 5. Now that was Williams's question. Now William doesn't know what to do. [*Interviewer: Sounds like there is a domino effect?*] Absolutely! And so confusion ensues and you can't really interject to stop the confusion because people might take offense to what you are saying and your intention in trying to do it and so sometimes people don't end up doing anything, because they are confused about who should be doing what and a, it's just craziness! (Manager S.F. [1], 1088-1100; year III)

Moreover as suggested by the earlier *tampering* incident peer assessment measures may unfairly single out group member. Targeted learners may be mistaken for having Opted-Out thereby requiring compensation by a member of the group.

To summarize, *task hijackings* appear motivated by impatience on the part of a group member desiring to impose individual pacing preferences. Pacing appears as one source of contention (Goodyear, 2002). Learners may experience difficulty reconciling the restrictions that group work is capable of imposing on individual flexibility, and therefore project work synchronization or pacing challenges being reported (Deakin University Institute for Teaching and Learning, 2011). More

disconcerting are situations in which submission deadlines are altered, to accommodate those "eager to do the work". The ability of a group member to play an active role in fulfilling his or her instructional obligations may be sabotaged by a project group's willingness to "juggle" timelines, presumably to expedite project progress. When a group actively cooperates with *task hijackings*, those targeted may feel abandoned and betrayal (Leary, 2005).

The need for specificity and clarity in defining academic group work and roles has long been advocated by management educators (Freeman & Greenacre, 2011; McCorkle et al., 1999). Unexpected changes in tasks and responsibilities are particularly troublesome for online groups to reconcile and manage, according to Cramton (2001). The academic success of group members targeted by *task hijackings* may also be seriously compromised with *multi-pass* sanctions, and one reason why this sanctioning may be inappropriate in a group dominant learning design. Research suggests that online groups are more likely to attribute personal shortcomings to contextual operatives (Cramton, 2002).

Task hijackings may derail group processes as it may initiate a spiral of compensatory *hijacking* when those targeted scramble to find a suitable task replacement. This creates a situation where group members turn on other group members, with the goal of meeting individual participative expectations. The actions speak to a survival-of-the-fittest mentality having taken hold (Hubert, 2003). Thus far the focus has been on *task hijackings* and *tampering*. I next address a pattern of participatory behaviour associated with *role hijackings*.

Role Hijackings

Role hijackings provide backdoor access to opportunities to engage in *task hijackings* by assuming greater control over task submissions and the final group project. Certain key roles are granted formal authority by the group along with operational legitimacy, to made determinations regarding the content of a project submission. Consequently, an editorial role, once assumed, generally confers a great authority in how submissions are incorporated, and whether or not task submissions deal of decision-making authority in overseeing how and whose work is incorporated into the final document.

Role hijackings target key positions within the project development process. Two roles are favoured targets, the project leader and project editor. Duties associated with both roles are outlined below and draw from Project Charter documentation prepared by a project group and presented in Table 23. It is possible to generalize from the two roles and responsibilities as Project Charters are reported were reported by many to routinely being recycled, particularly since it represented a non-credited, but mandatory, exercise.

Project leader hijackings. A group may elect a project leader from within its ranks or individuals may volunteer. A leader's role is often demanding in project work assignments. Williams, Morgan, and Cameron (2011), define a project leader as "one who facilitates and keeps the group on task" (p. 52). In addition to responsibility for defining a project's organizational structure, deadlines, and work assignment, the project leader role involves continual monitoring, resolving problems, and motivating less involved group members. As explained by one project leader,

> When you are a project manager you are always checking: Has anybody
>
> posted something; is there a question being asked; are people submitted on

time; has someone fallen behind, has someone not contributing; are there any problems? (Manager N.F., 471-474; Year 2)

Whereas *task hijackings* may be selective, targeting a single group member, and representing a singular, isolated occurrence, *role hijackings* may be negatively felt across the project group. *Role hijackings* appear more complex than *task hijackings* as they require a greater level of compliance on the part of the group.

Table 19. *Roles and responsibilities of project leader and editor*

Project Stage	Role	Responsibility
For duration of the case	Leader	Develops and sets the timelines for the case project. Creates the necessary headings to organize the database. Provides overall guidance for the work. Follows up with group members to ensure deliverables are on track. Has responsibility to intervene when the group cannot reach consensus in a timely fashion and initiate vote. Enters the group case presentation into the Case Presentation database.
	Editor	Coordinates input from all team members. This includes: Adding text when required, incorporating people's feedback, and maintaining word count. Posts the draft submission to Case Preparation database 48 hours in advance of deadline for feedback. Makes final modifications resulting from proofreading
Case Preparation	Analysts (specify item to be analyzed)	Has responsibility for putting together a first draft of the response required for assigned issue for analysis as well as any supporting text.
Source: Project charter for an Information Technology course		

Whereas *task hijackings* and *tampering* may be considered an aggressive act that targets an isolated group member, *role hijackings* are attempts to dominate a project or group. As stated previously, certain roles are granted formal authority and operational legitimacy by means of a group's Project Charter. However, informal authority is acquired by other means, relying on dominance and aggression and often associated with a "stronger personality" (Rayner, Hoel, & Cooper, 2002, p. 12).

In the online setting, group member dominance may first appear as excessive postings performed by *eager beavers* and as previously discussed, the latter also being an instigator of *task hijackings*. *Eager beaver* is an *invivo* code to describe overzealous engagement in weekly discussion exercises and extended to project work activity. Observed by one learner, "The 'overachievers' appear to believe that quantity of work is of more value than quality" (emphasis in original). Another learner describes the nature of exchanges as a group member who is constantly "in your face".

> Yes, constantly posting and always asking a question and won't go away and just, kinda like someone's knocking on your shoulder. "I'm here, I'm here, I'm here". Like that. "Say, I've got another question for ya, I've got another question". Then there are other people who say, "yea...so what". (Manager J. F. 952-958; year II)

As stated previously, project leader *hijackings* are more likely to be accompanied by domineering ways of engaging with others. Project leader *hijackings* are associated with attempts on the part of an unauthorized individual to take the lead although responsibility has been formally conferred to another. Early stage *role hijackings* may involve *eager beavers* or over achievers who adopt less collaborative and dominating forms of interaction. Attempts to dominate a project submission

process may also emerge at the 11th hour, once a majority of the project work has been completed. In their study of roles in online groups, Williams et al. (2011) described this as being characteristic of a "wannabe," whom the authors defined as,

> ...the role taken on by an individual who tries to control the group without taking responsibility; in other words, they wannabe a leader in appearance without doing the actual work required. (p. 318)

Late-stage *role hijackings* may be preceded by an otherwise low level of learner involvement or effort. When the role *hijacking* is initiated, it may inject unnecessary confusion at a critical project completion stage. A late stage role *hijacking* is described below, by a frustrated learner,

> ... the roles were assigned for a particular project and someone was the leader and it wasn't him [hijacker] and he was very silent whether that suited him or not until like the last twelve hours before the assignment had to be submitted and he started like becoming really aggressive on line, "I think we done enough work!" Like "I'm just ready to submit this" and ah, and yet it wasn't his role to do [so], and he hadn't really contributed much to the project up till then anyway. It, it really became very muddy. (Manager R.F. 1241-1248; year III)

Role hijackings may involve a group member working autonomously or it may consist of a dyadic coalition with another group member. The following incident indicates how taking on the leader role, whether legitimately acquired or hijacked, may become a platform to engage in *tampering* and *task hijackings*. *Hijackings* may be preceded by an *over eager* group member unwilling to compromise or back down with respect to the wishes of the group.

In OPMT [course acronym] we had a group assignment to do in a short time, and a schedule was done as to what everyone's tasks and timelines were going to be. Of the 6 people in the group, one person was not satisfied with the schedule and how we were going to tackle this assignment and she was continuously complaining up to the point where the schedule was rewritten twice. This person finally took the lead of the assignment and everyone did what was asked to be done as per the schedule. This was a very laborious assignment as whatever was written this person and her backup would change the others text [*tampering*] making it unpleasant for all as we were a "Team." (Narrative account, G.F.15-26)

Hijackings may form part of a repertoire of unpleasant, "out of line" and negative behaviours, such as an unwillingness to compromise, back down and engaging in personal attacks. Harsh criticisms may be purposeful (Rayner, Hoel, & Cooper, 2002) potentially to legitimatize the subsequent discarding of legitimate submissions and replacing them with the hijacker's substitutions. Put downs may play an instrumental role in diminishing the submission as much as the submitter, and characteristic of learner mistreatment (Coloroso, 2003).

Discarding or *tampering* with submissions may be motivated by trivial differences between a legitimate submission and its replacement. Even accounting submissions may be rejected and replaced with an alternative layout and presentations. A learner below describes her frustration witnessing her own and group member's submissions being *tampered* with or discarded.

It gets to be quite frustrating especially if you've assigned a certain task, to do certain things and someone, this person is not even assigned to look at your stuff but she goes around redoing people's work. I mean it is totally unfair.

Perhaps, yes, maybe it could be done better. Perhaps, yes, she is better at writing, whatever. At least discuss it with the person. I think that as much as this is a learning experience we will put things that are incorrect or whatever, but you just don't go as a colleague as a team, taking people's excerpts or paragraphs or whatever and re-write them and change them completely where you don't even know, you don't even recognize what you've written. (Manager G.F., 552-556; Year II)

Formally, responsibility for problem resolving *hijackings*, or *out of line* behaviours, falls to the project leader, an obligation having been passed down by program administration. Therefore while members of a group may wish to voice their objections regarding the poor treatment of a group, ironically, learners are mindful of not overstepping their assigned role or authority, in speaking out.

But then again if you are not [the] team leader, the team leader should be doing this [intervening]; should be able to um, feel the situation [out], see what's going on in the team and, correct this type of thing. So sometime you say to yourself ok, well, not really my position to intervene or to say anything; should I or shouldn't I? It's difficult. (Manager G.F. 300-305; year II)

Why groups appear willing to tolerate unfair, disrespectful or poor treatment, and remain silent, may be a matter of logistics, and group longevity considerations. When asked why a group was willing to tolerate blatant and on-going mistreatment at the hands of an autocratic and highly critical project leader, a group member explains,

Because, you know what? Here is an interesting thing there. Because it [course length] is only 8 weeks. Um, when the conflicts will arise probably by week 5 or 6 and now you are saying to yourself, "gee I only have two weeks to go, I can survive this. I'm not going to let that insult bother me. I'm going to

persevere you know and it's over in 8 weeks and I'll be in a new group". So I can survive this right? So people ignore it or let it go by. [*Interviewer: they hang on?*] You got it. [*Head down?*] You've got it. And I've done that a bit. No one wants to push the problems to an extreme by forcing the issues. What do you gain from it? What do you lose from it? And then, what happens if you have to face them in another course? (Manager M.M. [1], 2056-2069; year I)

Not speaking out may be a preferred solution in conditions where group formation is temporary, lacks capable guardians and the presence of academic authority willing to intervene (Roscigno, Lopez, & Hodson, 2009). Moreover domineering tactics, occurring online, may be highly intimidating with the targeted, or bystanders fearful of being "picked out" and "picked on" by an aggressor in a *hijacking* role. As one learner explains,

> The last thing I want is to have a person that is down my back or down my neck, trying to, you know, always correct me or always be complaining or telling me this is not the way it should be or this is not what you should do, or always not picking on me but, you know almost. It's like someone that is almost like, not harassing you but like somebody who, I'm starting to sound like a child over here. (Manager G.F. 344-350; year II)

As well, structural restrictions, such as tight timelines, make it more difficult for contentious issues to be resolved. Simply figuring out the logistical parameters of an issue or dilemma consumes a great deal more time via text than groups usually have time for (O'Neill & Kline, 2010). Consequently, acquiescing to a dominant voice is often a preferred strategy for ensuring the "work gets done" and to avoid missteps or misunderstandings.

Editorial hijackings. The editorial role is responsible for assembling disparate submissions and crafting them into a document with a single voice. A project editor may work alone or with a second co-editor, or editing may consist of a coordinated effort with the group leader overseeing submission and assembly decisions.

Editorial hijackings occur when a legitimate role occupant is forced out, either through intimidation and domineering tactics, or the legitimate role occupant insists on occupying the role, although intended to be rotated from one case study project to the next. Therefore an occupant in an editorial role may remain firmly ensconced and therefore at greater liberty of engaging in what may be perceived of as exclusionary editorial practices. Those targeted may witness their submissions and contributions routinely being removed at the Final Edited Copy phase. This becomes evident from a learner's narrative account of an unpleasant group work experience,

> She [editor] compiled and submitted all the assignments, and in my opinion, the duties should be shared by team members. In compiling the final group assignments, she ignored my contributions in all [4] projects which made me feel ostracized. (Narrative account, M.F., 6-9)

Project Hijacking

As the editorial hijacking suggests above, a project may be dominated by one or two "stronger voices", and often, although not exclusively by aggressive measures and verbal attacks. Groups may be marginalized at the Final Case Presentation phase, when it is discovered that another group member has surreptitiously completed and submitted the assignment in the group's name. In other *project hijacking* cases, a group may have to endure contentious mannerisms and working conditions, yet

prevented from contributing to the initiative. *Project hijackings* are associated with autocratic and dictatorial behaviours adopted by a legitimate project leader or a "wannabe" project leader (Williams et al., 2011). Similar to *role hijackings* project hijackings may consist of *tampering* of other's submitted work or the discarding work.. This is depicted in the following *project hijacking* incident.

> One particularly negative experience with an on line work group came with a group where one individual insisted on taking control of the group project. Although tasks were delegated to each team member, this person felt it was necessary to do all the work and to write and rewrite every draft.[,,,]. The differences in the experience between a group with one or two overachievers and the rest of us who are muddling through is huge. (Narrative account, K.F. 25-27, 38-39)

Similar to earlier depictions, project hijackings may begin with attempts to stonewall the group and attempting to impose individual preferences.

> He [contentious group member] did not agree with what the group was saying. I think there were six or seven people in the group and he just didn't agree with the outline that we had presented for the document and he refuted everything that everybody said and he stood his ground. He wouldn't stand down and that's when we pulled out the charter [project charter] and we said, "No. This is what we agreed to, majority wins. We don't have time to discuss this, we need to move on. It needs to be done. It needs to be over with."
> "Well I don't agree with it" (contentious group member). (Manager J.F. 125-137; year II)

When discord is not fully resolved intentions may remain latent until an opportunity presents itself. . In the incident below, this opportunity was handed to the

contentious group member, ironically as a precautionary measure. When the official

project leader steps away for three days, and temporally hands the reins of power to

the perpetrator, it is sufficient to launch a *project hijacking*. The project leader

explains what transpires on her return,

> He [contentious group member] thought I guess, "Well I have three days I'm
>
> chief here this is the way I want to do it." What he had done in a period of
>
> three days was to dismantle the entire document and try to re-word it the way
>
> he wanted because he didn't see it going that way "This is the way I want to
>
> do it!" That made people very upset. So that was a very interesting and very
>
> challenging situation because I then had to return it [document] back, and
>
> people felt uncomfortable but I had to say in the forum, very publicly, "No, we
>
> don't agree with this; this is not the proper way to go, we do not use those
>
> three days to make it your mandate. And this is the way it's gotta go."
>
> (Manager J.F. 165-204; year II)

Although the project is reinstated to its original format, the official project

leader, in particular, becomes a target for her temerity in retracting the submission and

circumventing *the project hijacking*. She manages the verbal attacks with the vocal

support of the group in general.

> He was fighting; very antagonistic. But I said, "It's not me it's the group. It's
>
> coming through me, but..." And then, my colleagues would come back online,
>
> they were saying, "No, she is right and you were wrong" (exhaling), like I said
>
> it got pretty bad. Yea that was a, that was a,an explosive situation. It got
>
> pretty sick. (Manager J.F. 197-212; year II)

While the incident suggests that contentious *project hijackings* may be

successfully managed by an assertive project leader, there is little doubt that such

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incidents are disruptive and negatively impact on academic and learning outcomes (Kates, 2000), as much as being emotionally taxing for those involved (Goldman, 2005). One learner refers to negative and toxic behaviours being a "heavy load" to carry and "wearing". Research further suggests that being a witness to verbal violence may bestow similar repercussions on bystanders (Blazer, 2005). According to Blazer, learners witnessing mistreatment, which include *hijackings* and *tampering*, may be fearful of becoming a target and become increasingly insecure, particularly when formal constraints appear weak or non-existent.

Compensatory Hijacking

In situations that parallel a group member stepping in to compensate for missing assignment work, is the operative of *compensatory hijackings*. The operative of *compensatory hijackings* refers to situations in which a project group has run aground due to personality conflicts, inadequate leadership or editorial support, absentee group members, or indecisiveness, which hijacks the group's ability to effectively plan, organize, and fulfil course assignment objectives. In a *compensatory hijacking*, sub-groups of one or two learners may be compelled to mobilize and take control of an assignment to ensure project related outcomes are achieved. This is evident in a hijacking incident below that was precipitated by general apathy and internal stagnation, and further disadvantaged by the presence of restrictive communication channels.

> I think my sense is that they [another project group] couldn't agree on anything. There was no, the approach to things and... and that was a mess and people couldn't and didn't have adequate leadership and, and some people basically just didn't participate and in the end, of course what typically

happens because you don't have any more time is 2 or 3 people end up taking the whole thing over. Um, and ah, I think as I recall, she [another group member] told me this, yea, a bunch of people just basically checked out or whatever and 2 or 3 people sort of absconded with the whole thing and just kinda finished it in the last week and um, so she wasn't very happy about that. It doesn't allow and knowing her, the little bit that I do, I would think that ah she's the kind of person that would make the decision or be part of making the decision to ah just get the heck on with it, whoever was on board, that kind of thing. She'd make that really fast, right. Look this isn't working, there is no time, let's go. Right. Um, and the online environment that we have doesn't allow you a lot of time or opportunity to problem solve major personality conflicts, so you could spend the week trying to sort it all out and a, and I think they just decided, whoever she and a couple of other people just decided like let's just you know [take control]. So (sigh) I think that caused a lot of problems. (Manager P.M. (1) 840-865; recent alumnus)

Differences between benevolent rather than malevolent hijackings are illustrated below, which describe a similar predicament in which a group is stymied by a large number of members disappearing. Also depicted in the incident, are indicators of cheerleading support from otherwise absent academic insiders.

Ok there is also the opposite [hijacking] where one or two people are in a group are the only ones that aren't invisible and they aren't given any other choice but to hijack it. That actually happened to me twice and in both those instances the professor, or the tutor, in one of those instances, the professor or tutor, the core faculty, the one who is in charge in the program, actually even sent me an email [after words], commending me on what I'd done , "the

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situation was unfortunate but you certainly took control of it..blah..blah..".[...]
nobody did anything, nobody did anything, nobody would take control,
nobody would take direction. (Manager B.M. [3], 1271-1278; recent alumnus)

Whereas *compensatory hijackings* may involve a small sub group, there are
occasions in which, collaborative sub-group members are able to reenergize the
project group into collectively pushing a project through to completion.

Sabotage

Similar to specific domineering tactics to stonewall groups, or late stage role
or *hijacking* attempts, are attempts to impede the *ability* of a project group to carry out
its work. *Sabotage* is defined as "actions that prevent others from completing their
work" (Whitley & Keith-Spiegel, 2002, p. 17). According to Whitley and Keith-
Spiegel, *sabotage* may include disturbing other learners, or group members,
tampering with another's (academic) property, and/or removing or denying resources
needed by others. Given Whitley and Keith-Spiegel's definition of sabotage, group
efforts to doctor timelines to make it easier to accommodate a hijacker's submissions,
disallowing a legitimate submission when a substitution is favoured, and disruptive
behaviours such as stonewall or other forms of obstructive behaviour, including *only
way* interventions, may constitute academic sabotage or misconduct.

Several indications of what I term eleventh-hour *sabotage* are presented
below. As the name implies, sabotage occurs at a late stage in the project
construction process. Defining features include harsh criticism targeting an existing,
nearly completed or completed submission, rather than individual group members, or
their contributions. Furthermore, attacks are generally ambiguous and suggest more
going on than a sudden and intense disapproval of the direction a group submission

has adopted. Attacks convey a disregard or indifference for the time and effort put into submissions. A disregard and indifference shown for the time and effort put into submissions, or the time and effort needed for current submission, has been a common theme across *hijackings* and *tampering* incidents, and structurally, by *multi-pass assessment* grading and *only way* interventions.

In the first *sabotaging* incident, a project editor describes the effort put into finalizing the group's case study. Collaboration among members of a subgroup had been productive and highly positive, allowing the group to wrap up on a note of optimism and time to spend Easter Sunday with their respective families. An unexpected directive, from a group member, arrives and demands that the project be discarded and started anew, in spite of the pending weekend deadline. The editor explains,

> I had Good Friday off work and had cleared the day to send out more polished
> drafts [to to the group]. Other members of the group also agreed to be around
> to critique changes as they were made. By Saturday morning it was looking
> good and it looked like the final paper would be ready to post by Saturday
> night. A team member, who hadn't been on line much in the previous three
> days posted a suggestion that went completely against the recommendation
> that we had agreed to earlier in the week and wanted me to totally change the
> paper. I was looking forward to having Easter Sunday with my family. Such
> a suggestion struck me as far too late to even consider. (Narrative account,
> SUF. 5-22)

In a highly similar incident, a female editor and a colleague are finalizing the group's submission when a directive from an otherwise absent group member, demanding the submission be destroyed and a new submission re-drafted, is received.

The direct ends with, "You fix it; I'm not going to but I don't agree with it; but you fix it!." In spite of its ambiguity, the inappropriateness of the timing, and the subsequent disappearance of the objecting group member, who declines to respond to follow-up emails, the project becomes mired in delays. Other group members lose confidence in the submission and time is spent debating whether to redraft a full replacement and who best to do so, in spite of the short time remaining. The ambiguity of the attack was a factor in the editor's decision to not support replacing the initiative were it possible to do so. The rejection was also seen as playing a self-serving role, and whether a *multi-pass* deterrence strategy or not, is unstated.

> It wasn't a theoretical argument; it wasn't one of these [assignment] situations where the answer had to be either white or black. It was just the person saying, "I think you are wrong and I'm not supporting you." I guess if we had been wrong, the person could have gone to the tutor I suppose and said, "I didn't agree with this and you could go back to the database and seen where it is documented and they submitted it anyways and now I'm being penalized." It ended up that we were correct; I suppose the person didn't end up advancing that. (Manager SYF. 133-138; year II)

Eleventh hour *sabotage* may arise in groups experiencing severe under resourcing. Typically, groups average between 6 to 8 group members, or 8 to 12, according to marketing personnel. However situations arise in which a substantial number of learners formally withdraw, at the 11th hour, and at times, leading to the loss of a sizeable percentage of group members. Although reduced in membership, assignment obligations remain the same, and presumably assessment consequences. One learner whose group had encountered a substantial reduction in their size reported on an indifference to the group's predicament.

We'd raised it up with the professor and we said that, "this is ridiculous".
"Like, we've gone from 9 to 4 and we've got a lot of work and we are only
finding out in the fourth week". He [tutor] said, "This is not our problem, deal
with it" in not so many words. (Manager J.F. 1210-1214; year II)

The loss of group members represents a loss of project work resources. While
some group have viewed the situation as challenging, it is seen as doable if remaining
members are committed. Whether formally withdrawing, or going *awol*, a loss of
group members was considered a routine occurrence, as one learner explains,

That's the way I would look at it, you know that the whole group isn't going
to be into it anyway, I took that as a given and you just said, hopefully there is
about 4 of us because we know we can get stuff done if there is about 4
people, but if there is only 2 which has happened, you know you are just about
dead in the water before you start. (Manager P.M. [1], 948-952; recent
alumnus)

For one undersized group, experiencing the sudden loss of four members, two
of the members, having no choice in the matter, were required to assume an onerous
workload. A third remaining member, adopted "*seagulling*" or disruptive tactics that
persistently intruded on the project construction process. A *seagulling* group member
was defined as an uninvolved group member who "flies in, makes a lot of noise, craps
on everybody and then leaves". Moreover the nature of the disruptions was often
ambiguous. As described by one of the two functional learners remaining,

So, he'd [seagulling] fly in, look at what we've done. And said, "No, don't
like that" and he's gone. I mean, don't like that? What don't you like about
it? Don't like that and then he's gone. Or then he would say, "I like this,

here's my input," he's changed something entirely, and then he's gone. There is no discussion. (Manager R.M. 886-887; 904-908; recent alumnus)

In addition to coping with the workload demands of an 8- person project, the two group members were forced to take on a truancy role in trying to locate the individual,

He [Grant] was very regimented in his time that he spent on the program. He would, Sue [second group member] and I are participating and here we've got a case and we'd like to have Grant's comment on this, but he is nowhere to be found. Um, we were left hanging a lot. We'd say, ok, we've got a case, it was marketing, so we are doing this marketing assignment and "Ok, Grant, you do this." It's the weekend and the paper's due on Sunday night and "Grant, you haven't done anything, we are waiting for your input!" We'd send him emails, both to his home email address and his [program] email addresses and he's not responding, (sounding frustrated), "Oh gee Sue, what are we going to do?" "Well, let's give him till after supper." And we'd give him until after supper and all of a sudden, "Oh! I'm in for 15 minutes and I've got a family barbecue this afternoon so I'm not going to be able to be here." (Manager R.M. 890-901; recent alumnus)

In addition to tactics that undermined the group's ability to assemble the project, at the 11th hour the submission is sabotaged. How this transpires is explained below,

Sue and I, we've work all day finalizing this paper with very little input from Grant, and he came on, about 11:00 [pm]. Sue and I were about to shut down. The paper was finished, we thought it was finished. Well he came in at 11:00 [pm] and said ahh, "Had this family barbecue well, I'm here now." Sue and I

were both exhausted. And I said, "Grant, you can make any minor editorial changes you like, but both us are done, we're exhausted, we both have busy days tomorrow, make minor editorial changes, and make the posting." And he said, "Fine." Well both Sue and I got on [line], on Monday. He didn't make the posting. He didn't post it. And um, I said, "Why didn't you make the posting?" And he said, "Well I disagreed with what you wrote." (Manager R.M. 908-923; recent alumnus)

Whereas *sabotage* has been expressed as a group-level phenomenon, perpetrated by individual group members, situational and structural factors may play an important mediating role. For example, Whitley and Keith-Spiegel's (2002) definition of *sabotage* encompasses situations in which academic progress is impeded by the removal of critical resources, needed to complete academic obligations. Critical resources, as indicated above, are to ensure that project groups have an adequate number of members to fulfil group assignment obligations. Critical resources also include guardianship and process interventions. According to Freeman and Greenacre (2011) destructive dynamics, including *sabotage*, are more likely to arise in conditions in which groups work autonomously, and where process guardianship and academic authority is weak (Ruël, Bastiaans, & Nauta, 2004). Consequently, academic resourcing may play an important mediating role in *sabotaging* online project group success.

Discussion

A myriad of challenges are associated with project work conducted in an online program format (Bernard & Richard, 2004; O'Neill & Kline, 2010; Webster & Staples, 2006). Two dominant group process patterns emerged in preliminary

narrative accounts and later retrospective interviews and conceptualized as a two-stage process, each exhibiting unique, asymmetrical properties but ultimately sharing a negatively aversive condition known as **Not Pulling Weight.**

The first dominant pattern is a proclivity towards divesting fellow group members and groups of their respective *task*, *role*, and *project* responsibilities and the presence of uninvited *tampering* with academic submissions. When *task hijackings* are first introduced, it appears as a relatively benign incident, a misunderstanding associated with an impatient group member anxious to see not only his, but others, obligations completed ahead of the assigned deadline. In another situation, a *project hijackings* is an unintentional outcome perpetrated by a sub-group of learners unaware of the importance of pacing in group work collaborations (Cramton, 2001; Lowyck & Poysa, 2001). In their enthusiasm, and drawing from a variety of communication tools, the sub group were able to complete a majority of a project assignment in a single day. Fellow group members entering the project database the following day experienced considerable difficulty playing catch up. The group did not intend to disadvantage, the *hijacking* was simply a result of a lack of familiarity with process coordination issues in an online environment. The ambiguity that may accompany task and role hijackings may be difficult for an online group to reconcile and manage (Lipnack & Stamps, 1996).

The prevalence of *hijacking* and *sabotage* in the first year of the academic trajectory suggests an internal laxness in responding to the phenomenon. Although collaboration does not rule out competitive behaviour, when competitiveness adopts negative, harming forms of expression, this is when problems and the potential for damage, arises (Deutsch, 2006). Weak process monitoring is associated with dysfunctional behaviour in project groups (Morris & Hayes 1997) and disruptive

group dynamics in general (Freeman & Greenacre, 2011; Pfaff & Huddleston, 2003; Ruël et al., 2004). An absence of intervention appears to inform each of the previously reported incidents associated with *hijackings, tampering*, and *sabotage*.

In Chapter 7, the manner in which *hijackings* and *sabotage* are treated in the empirical literature is explored.

Summary

The chapter presented the basic social process of **Not Pulling Weight. Not Pulling Weight** is comprised of two phases in an academic trajectory: Pushed Out and Opting Out. In spite of moral arguments of fairness and equality of access, and the obligation on the part of learners and groups to ensure unimpeded access to group work, access to project work opportunities is never certain. Pushed Out was reported to be dominant in the first academic year and indicative of overzealous and excessive participative practices perpetrated on groups or group members. Pushed Out group members may be considered Not Pulling Their Weight by not fulfilling their project related obligations. However, completed submissions or nearly completed submissions may be coercively removed, *tampered* with or discarded either by other group members or the project group. Marginalizing processes were named *hijackings*, and four main categories were identified: *task, role, project and tampering*. As well, two sub-categories were touched on, *editorial* and *compensatory*. The final category associated with hijacking is *sabotage*. Sabotage was formally defined as "actions that prevent others from completing their work" (Whitley & Keith-Spiegel, 2002, p. 17). According to Whitley and Keith-Spiegel, *sabotage* may include disturbing others, *tampering* with another's academic property, and/or removing or denying resources needed by others. Given Whitley and Keith-Spiegel's

definition, many of the hijacking related categories and the receptiveness of groups to accommodate *hijacked* work, and various internal operatives, namely, *only way communique, multi-pass* and denying groups needed resources whether man power or early residential opportunities, may constitute academic misconduct.

Chapter 7

Examining the Literature for Emergent Fit

In chapter 7, how the theoretical framework integrates with the existing empirical literature is the principle focus. The chapter begins with an examination of strategies to improve learner involvement and a revisiting of *multi-pass* assessment measures, argued to be an amplified extension of regulative measures used to ensure maximum use made of technological tools (Casey & Wilson, 2006). Debates over the legality of a high stakes assessment protocol will be examined drawing from research and operatives occurring in secondary education in the United States.

In a review of the literature the long-time preoccupation with under performance will be examined. A review of under-performance in online settings follows and the trade-offs made by over emphasizing online learner participation.

In examining over participation in the literature, three themes are identified. First, that over performances appears to be associated with domineering and aggressive mannerisms perpetrated by "difficult" group members. Second, over performance and the marginalizing of group members is indicative of how capable group members manage the perceived uncertainty of weaker or "different" group members (Freeman & Greenacre, 2011).

Third, deviating from targeting "difficult" learners and "difficult" groups perpetrating thoughtless to malicious attacks on unsuspecting peers, are "difficult" educational structures and operatives. Indicators of how research into "difficult" educational structures originated will be briefly addressed. Parallels will be drawn between resourcing of a group dominant design, and conditions that sustain "destructive" (Smith, 2005) and dysfunctional (Gabriel and Griffiths, 2008) group level routines.

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The contribution of the study to the literature will be reported. The remaining sections of the chapter will address professional practice recommendations, limitations of the research and contributions to the grounded theory method.

The Prioritization of Participation

Empirical research regarding over participation as an interactional practice among online learners is scarce, and understandably so. The potential for technology-mediated learning to provide a richer and more engaging experience is predicated on an active involvement of learners. Consequently, learner participation is considered "crucial for a community's survival" (Rafaeli, Ravid, & Soroka, 2004, para. 1), an enhancement to learning (Garrison & Anderson, 2003), a conveyer of knowledge, and an "unquestionable good" (Ferreday & Hodgson, 2008, p. 640). Participation in group work is perceived to be of particular importance and one solution to overcoming learner isolation (McConnell, 2006). However, online learners may not embrace online participation with the fervour and enthusiasm of promoters, or carry out group work in the manner required nor expected, and may be disconcerting to educators (Zembylas & Vrasidas, 2007). As learning is defined as active involvement in a participative community (Lowyck & Poysa, 2001), efforts to encourage online activity become paramount.

Regulative measures to encourage participation have become a widely adopted practice in online courses and programs. The role of regulative incentives is to entice the unwilling and to ensure online participants benefit from the enhanced learning that online transactions is thought to provide (Engvig, 2006). Regulative measures have included the establishment of minimum performance benchmarks (Haughey & Anderson, 1998), mandating participation (Thorpe, 1998) and finally, assigning

participative grades (Engvig, 2006; Fahy, 2004; Neal & Miller, 2005). What constitutes an optional participative grade has varied over time. Mason (2005) has argued that nominal marks may not be sufficient to ensure online learner interactions. As Mason (2005) explains,

> The life-blood of a conferencing system is the contributions and interactions of its users. It can integrate with and enhance other teaching media, particularly print, but not when relegated to a 5% stake in the course. (Mason, 1989, cited in Mason, 2005, p. 213)

With time, participative grades have increased. The "nominal 5 % incentive criticized by Mason, now typically range from 10% to 30% (Engvig, 2006) and may go as high as 40% to 50% of course grades (Goodfellow, 2007).

In a *group dominant* learning design, presented in Chapter 5, 30% of grades were reported to be allocated to weekly discussion exercises but not including project work commitments. Yet participative incentives were reported to include a *high stakes* strategy of negative sanctions in the form of an automatic course fail should participation levels and performance benchmarks in general, fall short (see Table 24). At Britain's Open University, a "participate or fail" assessment practice is selectively used rather than broadly applied. As M .Thorpe (personal communication, April 9, 2010) explains,

> Although many courses give a proportion of marks for online participation, it is very unusual for a student to fail a course overall, as a result of not participating. They might lose a proportion of marks, but my guess is that most course teams don't want students to fail purely as a result of non-participation online.

Table 20. Multi-pass assessment criteria

To be successful in most courses you are expected to receive an average of 60% in the participation components of the course. receive an average of 60% over all components of the course (that is, Assignment 1, Assignment 2, etc., and participation).

(Student Handbook, Discussion Participation, p. 15-17)

In the current study, participative incentives described in Chapter 5, require learners to meet minimum participation benchmarks, in addition to achieving individual course assignment benchmarks or otherwise risk a course fail. The limitations of a *multi-pass*, high stakes assessment strategy were discussed, namely, sanctioning inequities that arise between novice and mature program learners and the potential for grade deflation, the awarding of a "Fail" when accumulated assignment marks may be sufficient for a passing course grade. In the literature, the concept of a high stakes assessment is indicative of a controversial assessment practice adopted by select U.S. states. An examination of high stakes assessment and its implications follow.

High Stakes Participation

As discussed previously, the presence of a *multi-pass* assessment is comprised of high stakes sanctions capable of imposing harsh penalties on learners not meeting somewhat arbitrarily determined benchmarks. Nevertheless *multi-pass* assessment may help ensure high levels of participative activity through the use of high stakes sanctions. The term, *high stakes* (Lewis, 2000), also refers to an assessment strategy adopted at the secondary school level in the United States. Similar to *high stakes* outcomes associated with a *multi-pass* setting, a poor outcome on a state exam is

sufficient to prevent a student from receiving their high school diploma and consequently, graduating. Increasingly, parents, civil rights groups and Federal educational bodies have criticized the practice (Lewis, 2000). *High stakes* exams have been challenged in the US state courts and represents a cautionary tale of increasingly litigious constituents (Lewis, 2000). According to Lewis, in 2000, the Texas Educational Board was sued for disallowing a learner, who had failed the state's exit exam, to graduate from high school (citing GI Forum et al., v. Texas Education Agency et al,. 2000). Although the higher court recognized high school credits as the 'property' of the individual, the court found in favour of the defendant, the state educational body. The case for *high stakes* assessment while up held was due to mitigating factors. First, state educators were able to demonstrate that the exam was professionally developed, and extensively tested and validated (Mack, 2000). According to Mack, 'concocted tests' or tests developed by a local educational jurisdiction would not have been viewed favourably by the US justice system. A second factor was the follow up extended to exam fails; learners were allowed to retake or rewrite the exam and offered remedial support. In other words, "the better the remediation plan and the more opportunities students have to pass the test, the less successful plaintiffs seem to be" (Mack, 2000, item 6).

The contentious nature of *high stakes* assessment, the increasing challenges associated with its use in US state courts, and the vocal opposition by civil rights groups, and academic constituents (Lewis, 2000) argue against the deployment of a *high stakes*, *multi-pass* assessment in higher education, and in particular, graduate management education program. Factors that safeguarded *high stakes* state exams from being overturned in the US courts were due to the ability of state educators to demonstrate exam rigour. Instituting a similar degree of rigour in an online program,

would overwhelm program resources and prove costly. In the US, educational departments oversee a single *high stakes* state exam, whereas in a *multi-pass* environment there are approximately 40 *high stakes* "concocted" assignments, in addition to an end of year exam. Finally, the ability to retake or rewrite a failed assignment is not feasible with respect to a *group dominant* learning model.

In the U.S., concerns with *high stakes* assessment persist (Heller & Shapiro, 2001). Lewis cites three federal educational bodies in the US including, the American Educational Research Association, the American Psychological Association, and the National Council on Measurement in Education, which have adopted the position that, "In educational settings, a decision or characterization that will have a major impact on a student should not be made on the basis of a single test score" (as cited in Lewis, 2000, p. 146, citing from the National Council on Measurement in Education, 1999, item 13.7).

Assessment strategies may be political as much as pedagogical. *Multi-pass* and *high stakes* assessment go beyond acceptable online learner participation and appear more suitable as instruments to coerce and punish the constituents an academic body is otherwise mandated to protect (Hyman & Perone, 1998).

Underperformance

In spite of the ability of technology to widen communication and linkages among separated learners (Arbaugh & Warell, 2009), and the adoption of participative grading practices, learner resistance to participative involvement in online settings persist (Fung, 2004). In the theoretical framework, **Not Pulling Weight** was identified as an outcome of Pushed Out, and Opting Out, the latter referring to

episodic and sustained acts of underperformance that dominant group work assignments in the 2nd year of the academic trajectory.

Underperformance has been a topic of study for close to a century, beginning with an unpublished study by German psychologist Maximilien Ringelmann in 1913 (Kerr & Brunn, 1981, cited in Alnuaimi, Robert, & Maruping, 2010; Latane, Williams, & Harkin, 1979). Sociological, psychological, and economics studies have alluded to or described situations in which a member of a group contributes less or participates less than their peers and fail to do their fair share (Brooks & Ammons, 2003). Consequently a diversity of abstaining constructs have emerged including shirking (Kidwell & Robie, 2003), lurking (Beaudoin, 2002), academic withdrawal (Glomb & Miner, 2002; Yorke & Longden, 2004), and underperformance (Salomon & Globerson, 1989). Kidwell and Robie, (2003) have provided a useful guide to the plethora of terms and introduced two of their own, withholding effort and job neglect. However, free-riding and social loafing remain the two primary concepts in the underperformance literature.

Free-riding is defined as a situation in which one or more members of group neglect to do their fair share of the work (Brooks & Ammons, 2003). Social loafing is similarly defined as, "holding back effort toward completion of a *group* task or project" and the "failure to make *any* contribution to completing a task because the individual can enjoy the results (benefits) without doing so" (Kidwell & Robie, 2003, p. 539, italics emphasis in original).

Whether free-riding, social loafing or underperformance is adopted, they represent one of three dominant themes in the academic literature (Fellenz, 2006; McCorkle et al., 1999; Morris & Hayes, 1997). The two remaining themes include group work conflicts (Cramton, 2002; S. Johnson, Suriya, Won Yoon, Berrett, & La

Fleur, 2002) and project work assessment challenges (Fellenz, 2006; McCorkle et al., 1999).

Although the three themes are theoretically treated as distinct phenomena, they are interrelated. For example, a group member who is not putting in sufficient effort may cause internal discord to arise within a group, thereby negatively influencing group dynamics (Maiden & Perry, 2011). Inequities in participation, often associated with the underperformance of group members, and less commonly, over performances, in the form of *hijackings*, may introduce process related conflicts or contribution conflicts (Behfar et al., 2011). Behfar and colleagues defined contribution conflict as behaviour which "disrupt[s] the planned process for getting work done, because groups must compensate for members who free ride or otherwise fail to meet expectations" (p. 157).

Assessment in the form of reward inequities is a long-standing issue in education (Fellenz, 2006; Webb, 2005) and a significant contributor to group member dissatisfaction and hence conflict (Aggarwal & O'Brien, 2008). If group members are not putting in sufficient effort or pulling their weight, yet earn equivalent rewards, this disadvantages those compensating, while rewarding underperformance (Chidambaram & Tung, 2005; Ebner & Holzinger, 2005).

Underperformance in Technology Mediated Settings

It seems that there is nothing really to talk about online with all of the class and my group. (Smith, 2005, p. 191, citing learner feedback).

Social loafing has received limited attention in the online literature (Piezon & Ferree, 2008), instead, education researchers have preferred to focus on online lurking. Considered an emerging phenomenon in networked learning and online

settings (Arbaugh & Benbunan-Fich, 2005), lurking is viewed as an undesirable participatory behaviour (Kollock & Smith, 1996) that depletes online community resources (Ebner & Holzinger, 2005; Taylor, 2002). A negative group member behaviour, lurkers are accused of failing to "do their fair share", who "consume" — that is, "read", rather than contribute to participatory exchanges (Egan, Jefferies, & Johal, 2006). This is contrasted with "workers" (Taylor, 2002), often the "first responders" in online forums, and fully engaged participators in online activities. "Shirkers" are considered an extreme variation of lurkers (Egan, Jefferies, & Johal,, 2006). For example Taylor (2002, p.7) reported that shirkers in online graduate course work, contributed less than 1/3 the number of posting contributions of their more active peers, and were more likely to experience higher levels of drop-out and course failure. This supports Beaudoin's (2002) findings that suggest lower-visibility online learners are more likely to perform poorly on assessment measures than their more active "worker" counterparts.

The emphasis on non-participatory behaviour in online settings has come under increasing criticism. Notably Beaudoin (2002), has questioned whether the onus on learner activity in online settings neglects or diminishes less visible expressions of learning, for example, reflective learning. According to Beaudoin, "workers", preoccupied with continual postings, may have less time available for reflective activities. Moreover, rather than being a derogatory and hence negative presence in learning, Beaudoin contends that lurkers, defined as "bystanders to course discussions" (Ebner & Holzinger, 2005, p. 72) are no different from their classroom counterparts, who prefer to listen. Casey and Wilson (2006, citing P. Ramsden, 1992) are critical of the emphasis on learner and group "activity" in online forums which, in their view, downplays more critical aspects of the learning process in particular, the

learner instructor dialogue, which in their view, is essential in a quality online experience (O'Neil & Hopkins, 2002). Moreover, Casey and Wilson have expressed concerns that online group participation strategies may be carelessly adopted, and motivated less by pedagogical interests, than a desire to maximize technological tools that are available.

What constitutes appropriate levels online participative activity has been questioned. Taylor's (2002) categorization of workers, lurkers, and shirkers adopts a "worker" posting benchmark that remaining online participants simply fail to achieve. Optimal participatory levels may therefore be arbitrarily determined by a small group of potentially overzealous contributors. In her doctoral study of online newsgroup community, Graham (2002) reported that a majority of postings emanated from a small minority of intensely active participators, similar to "*eager beavers*" a form of overzealous participative behaviour, and associated with *hijackings*. The current study therefore provides a much needed perspective of overzealous participative behaviour in online graduate management education.

An alternative understanding of underperformance and lurking has been put forwarded by Kollock and Smith (1996) in their work on online newsgroup communities. According to Kollock and Smith, a viable online community depends on members abiding by the established norms and values of the community. Lurking was associated with "reading but not writing" and non-involvement in the "give and take" of knowledge sharing and collegiality (para. 7). Yet, over prolific, long-winded postings, going off topic and inconvenienced were also identified as inconsiderate and problematic. However, a greater threat to the viability of a community, was thought to be incivility, and defined as "hostile and provocative posts" (para. 4), or flaming. Free-riding was therefore defined as opportunistic behaviour that disregarded a

community's internal rules and norms, while exploiting the willingness of other community members to comply with the social order.

One of the few studies to investigate underperformance in online group work was undertaken by `Piezon and Ferree (2008). The authors surveyed 227 undergraduate and graduate learners who took part in a "web-enabled" group assignment. Although social loafing was reported by 35.7% of respondents, more pertinent were internal problems associated with dominant personalities. Outcomes suggested that withdrawal and underperformance may be a coping mechanism in contentious and domineering project groups. This aligns with findings from the organizational group literature (Felps, Mitchell, & Byington, 2006; Glomb & Miner., 2002). Therefore, while negative interactional behaviours are equated with underperformance and withdrawal, less recognized are domineering behaviours that directly, or indirectly, marginalize group members. Therefore the theoretical framework of **Not Pulling Weight** provides an important contribution in expanding negative group behaviours and repercussions at the project group level.

S. Johnson et al. (2002) examined group processes of graduate management learners in online project work. Thirty learners, unknown to one another, were assigned to four- or five-person groups. A variety of communication tools were made available to groups and mandatory attendance required at weekly chat sessions, involving the course tutor. Various problems were reported including underperformance, scheduling conflicts and individual disagreements. Surprising, project group members were not aware of internal difficulties which, the authors attributed to a lack of visual cues and may be one explanation for a project group's receptiveness to *task hijackings*.

In spite of the considerable research that has been conducted on free-riding and social loafing in work teams, critics argue that underperformance may be overstated and under experienced by academic groups (Chapman et al., 2010). In contrast, Jassawalla, Malshe, & Sashittal, (2009), reported that social loafing and underperformance was reported experienced by 394 under graduate business students taking part in a social loafing survey. As a theoretical construct, loafing, was considered narrowly defined, and under researched in management education..

There is little doubt underperformance may be counterproductive (Blaskovich, 2008), troublesome, and problematic (Fellenz, 2006; McCorkle et al., 1999; Tempelaar, 2006). In addition to the limited research on underperformance in online group projects, group members doing too much has been given less attention by researchers and educators. Research remains focused on underperformance deficiencies in participation without taking into account over performance and factors that may accompany either of these participative imbalances. One exception is research undertaken by Jassawalla et al. (2009) in which project groups reported on unprofessional and disruptive behaviours in addition to problems with social loafing. According to the authors, unprofessional conduct was both distracting and disruptive and reported to be more problematic for project groups who were more familiar compensating for absent or missing work, but not troublesome personalities. The current study provides a richer understanding of participative imbalances, and importantly, the mediating role of situational and contextual factors.

This review of underperformance in technology mediated settings highlights an on-going preoccupation with learner underperformance, while overlooking the collateral damage from excessive participatory behaviour in online project work. *Multi-pass* protocols and its four-fold potential for course failure may be indicative of

amplified measures to further bolster activity in autonomous project groups, irrespective of personal costs and unintended outcomes. Incentives highlight a preoccupation with mechanized posting quotas and archival surveillance, versus an active involvement in group assignments. According to Tiberous (1990), building a sense of obligation to oneself and one's group is more powerful and effective than dictating, demanding and threatening, but seemingly these measures are not fully compatible with a mechanized, Doing the Group Thing, approach.

Over-performance

Don't do what your assignments ask for, do MORE!

(McLoughlin & Luca, 2004, p. 46. Cited from a learner posting, capitalization emphasis in original)

Although technology-mediated learning has enhanced the ability of learners to contribute to discussions and group assignments, there remains the paradox of over participative activity (Beaudoin, 2002). According to Mason (2005), an online forum "allows everyone to be 'heard,' [yet it] leads to an overload of messages which many find completely overwhelming" (p. 221). Strategies to manage excessive postings in online discussion exercises have been proposed. They include submission expectations and interventions, on the part of course instructors, to rein in the over-engaged and discourage lurking (Carr & Carnevale, 2000; Salmon, 2004).

Early research into online learning applications cautioned that learners may became discouraged by posting volumes (Grint, 1989). The presence of learner participative asymmetry (Rafaeli, Ravid, & Soroka, 2004), was reported in early trials of computer-mediated conferencing (Alavi, 1994; Haughey & Anderson, 1998). Goodyear (2001, citing Goodyear, 1995), reported that over and under participation,

were problematic for online learners. Learners taking part in the Open University's first online enhanced course, complained of being "bombarded with messages" (Grint, 1989, p. 190) at the same time, course tutors expressed frustration over a lack of willingness by learners to use participative tools.

Excessive contributions are generally associated with the overuse of software tools or an abundance of exchanges in discussion assignments (Alavi, 1994). Mason (2005) has noted that in spite of the advances in web-based learning and design, contentious issues, such as excessive postings and its accompaniment, information overload, continue to challenge educators (Teuber, 2006). Citing research by Fussel et al. (1998) and Kohler (1994), Andriessen (2002) has argued that information overload may be stressful for online users. Excessive postings are frustrating (Salmon, 2004), may easily overwhelm (Arbaugh, 2002; Dumont, 1996; Teuber, 2006) and are thought to contribute to learner withdrawal (Salmon, 2004; Grint, 1989). In addition to the volume of postings on the part of "workers" (Taylor, 2002, p.7), highly active learners may monopolize and dominate threaded discussions (Carr & Carnevale, 2000) with over prolific and long-winded submissions (Goodyear, 2001; Kollock & Smith, p.1005).

Early online learning promoters believed that learning situations where "one or a few individual members may dominate group discussions and monopolize the group's time" (Alavi, 1994, para. 26), would remain a relic of the past. Contrary to early reported findings, technological tools were thought capable of eliminating the inconvenience and process losses of turn taking and discussion domination commonly associated with traditional classrooms (Alavi, 1994). Turn taking and process losses now appear as quaint concerns when contrasted with excessive participative behaviours that disrupt, mistreat and oppress (Zembylas & Vrasidas, 2007).

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In the following section I examine over-participatory behaviours associated with project work arrangements. In examining the literature three themes were apparent. First, over-performance is reported in project groups occupied by "difficult" group members, and instigators of group member exclusion. Second, over-performance is attributed to the presence of "different" group members and the perceived need on the part of groups to marginalize differences, as a coping strategy. Third, over-performance may be attributed to difficult structures, and emphasizes the social context, rules and procedures, that may perpetrate problematic behaviour.

"Difficult" Group Members

Post-secondary classrooms, as sites of intrusive, obstructive, or hostile behaviours, have received scant attention in the higher education literature (Boice, 1996). According to Boice, the study of difficult learners is under researched, due in large part to the unpopularity of the subject matter, particularly among academic administrations. Boice (1996) did not allow this hurtle to impede his five year study of disruptive, and hostile classroom behaviours. He observed "acts of inconvenience", for example, tardy arrivals or premature departures by learners or faculty, and a frequent occurrence in many of the post-secondary classrooms examined. Learners and faculty further identified an occasional, but consistent, presence of a "classroom terrorist". Terrorists were described as engaging in intimidating, attacking, uncivil and disrespectful behaviours that targeted and intimidated both learners and course instructors (p.463). Terrorists were described to Boice as,

> Whew, is ti unreal? She, all by herself, is screwing up everything. She talks all
> the time. She gets out of control, I think. She attacks anyone else who argues

with her. I feel sort of, how can I say it?, frightened by her. [...]Why isn't something being done about him? I think he's dangerous. He's drunk, I guess; you can smell it. Maybe crazy. And he gets so loud and aggressive. I hate it. (Boice, 1998, p. 467)

Difficult learners were also reported in a study of face-to-face MBA syndicate groups (Gabriel and Griffiths, 2008). Difficult group members were defined by Gabriel and Griffiths as learners willing to,

> ...enforce their own perfectionist standards on others. Under the guise of perfectionism, they constantly criticize the work of others and appear unaware of the anxiety they cause for their group. Sometimes, "difficult people" seek to take over a group, seizing power against the views of others and trying to force their ideas on them (p. 512).

Not surprisingly, the authors observed that dysfunctional groups were more likely to be populated with a "difficult" group member. Their descriptions share several similarities with *hijacking* incidents reported in Chapter 6

Difficult group member behaviour was reported in online academic initiatives. Riedinger and Rosenberg (2006) described the emergence of a "Werewolf Syndrome" (p. 38), among a group of faculty members enrolled in an online, 60-hour module, on distance teaching methods. Participatory conditions were not anonymous, faculty were known to one another and to members of staff at the Teaching and Learning department offering the workshop, yet, troublesome incidents were reported. The organizers explained what a "werewolf" syndrome entailed,

> Another peculiar phenomenon also arose. We dubbed this the Werewolf Syndrome. During the course of the program, a handful of the more than 60 instructors we ultimately trained morphed into people we barely recognized.

Although posts in the course were not anonymous, the transactional distance—like that in a chat room, which invites flaming, or that of an interstate highway, which enables road rage—seemed to inspire some of our instructors to let loose full-moon personality quirks that were disturbing as well as unexpected. One instructor, challenging the concept of an online teaching persona, assumed multiple personalities (none pleasant) in his postings. A seemingly placid on-site instructor picked a fight with another instructor she believed was "ignoring" her posts. Another, when gently and privately prompted to clean up typos and grammatical errors in the practice shell and forums had an emotional meltdown. One used the forums to rail against the "administration." Still another refused to post more than superficial comments in the forums, then complained bitterly that he couldn't figure out how to post animated cartoons. (p. 38)

In a case study of an early online attempt to *sabotage* a group initiative, Davis and Holt (1998) described efforts to organize a kick off of an online discussion forum involving two internationally based academic programs. The incident shares several similarities with *sabotaging* incidents reported in Chapter 6. Shortly before the commencement of the initiative, organizers and the broader educational community witnessed an unexpected attack on the pending initiative, targeting the integrity of the organizers and the initiative. The attack originated from several faculty members from the second institution. Once criticisms were aired, the attackers withdraw and remained unresponsive to follow-up inquiries from bewildered organizers. Organizers were perturbed that professional colleagues would air their complaints so publically. The ambiguity of the attack was rationalized as politically motivated by a sub group of dissenters.

In a study of face to face project groups, Kates (2000) identified power struggles and attempts by some group members to gain control or dominate a project, by means of task or project "hijackings". Similarly, Pfaff and Huddleston (2003) singled out the project leader role as one where efforts to take control of a project assignment, by dominating the initiative, and discouraging group member involvement, may arise. They described this form of takeover as, "a 'leader' in a team who takes over and works independently, discouraging—openly or suggestively—the participation of other team members" (p. 38).

Similar to Riedinger and Rosenberg's (2006) "Werewolf", Aggarwal and O'Brien (2008) drew from Dixon, Gassenheimer, and Barr's (2003) conceptualization of a "lone wolf," which they defined as, "a group member unable to collaborate and who "hamper[ed] others learning" and who preferred to "work alone when making decisions" (p. 256). The authors also identified the project leader role as a source of dysfunction, similar to (Gabriel and Griffiths, 2008). The leader role was described as a platform to impede the involvement of group members in the project initiative. Similar observations were reported by Last (2003), and also described in the current study involving the editorial and project leader role.

The presence of a dominating group member who *hijacks* a group project was reported in a case study by McLoughlin and Luca (2001). According to the authors, while a majority of online, multimedia group projects worked well together, one group contained a forceful and opinionated member willing to use intimidation and verbal attacks to dominate and succeeded in replacing a partially assembled project, with his own submission. Course tutors were hesitant to get involved in the ensuring discord, to avoid "influenc[ing] the educational experience" and "allowing learners to draw full value" (45). However the *hijacking* initiated a conflict spiral that

increasingly involved other group members into the discord. Whether the incident was resolved remains unclear, nor which project, the hijacked or group submission, took precedence.

Dominancy, disrespectful communication, *sabotage* and *hijacking* were reported outcomes from a study by Behfar et al. (2011) and their examination of project work challenges and conflict triggers in project work. Behfar et al. surveyed 252 MBA learners allocated to 4 and 5 member project groups and remained intact over four core courses. Learners identified seven sources of friction arising from project work collaborations, of which four are pertinent to the current study. Sources of friction included dominancy, disrespectful communication, passive behaviour, and workload inequalities. Dominance behaviours were described as "not listening," "always having to be right," "too self-centered", "unable to manage inclusion", and "disregarding the views of the larger group". The dominance category also contained a *hijacking* incident, described as, "One member cannot listen to others' ideas and worse, wrote up the final case without incorporating others' ideas" (p. 136). A second category, disrespectful communication, was associated with disrespectful exchanges and stonewalling tactics. Similar to previously cited research (cf. Davis and Holt, 1998; Kates, 2001), *sabotage* was reported, although congenially described as "Disagree with ideas, but then not offer alternative. This can be frustrating" (p. 137).

According to D. Johnson et al. (2007), social groupings may adopt one of three forms of interactional behaviour in project assignments. "Promotive" interactions that represent positive interdependency among members of a group and constructive interactions. "No interaction" that represent individualistic, self-interested, goal seeking and behaviour. Finally, "oppositional" interactions are

characteristic of *hijacking* manoeuvres by adopting an opportunistic and competitive orientation. D. Johnson et al defined oppositional interactions as,

> ... individuals discouraging and obstructing each other's efforts to complete tasks, achieve, or produce in order to reach their goals; individuals focus both on increasing their own productivity and on preventing any other person from producing more than they do. It consists of such variables as obstruction of each other's goal achievement efforts, tactics of threat and coercion, ineffective and misleading communication, distrust, and striving to win in conflicts. (p. 17)

Opportunistic interactions were also identified in a case study by Cargill-Kipar, (2009). Cargill Kipar drew from Johnson et al (2007) analytical categories of "promotive" (good), "oppositional" (bad) and "no interaction" (ugly). The case study examined project work collaborations among campus based undergraduate and graduate computer science learners, tasked with designing an artefact or virtual space for a *Second Life* (virtual web site) environment. Groups that displayed "promotive" interactions were described as cooperatively engaged in "mutual influence, trust and constructive management of conflict" (p. 540). "Oppositional" interactions adopted *hijacking* as a competitive strategy to achieve either individual or group goals. *Tampering* and the destruction of another's group member's property, was also indicated in one learner's commentary,

> Student H wrote: "Problem solved! I just deleted all the prims [software algorithms] of my teammate. Continue the building of the house [software]." (p. 541)

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Ultimately the initiative was considered highly successful, a result of the high calibre and creative programming associated with the "promotive" and cooperative project groups.

Thus far research examining over-performance has emphasized a dominant group member working alone or with another group member, behaving in a competitive and in self-serving manner. Incidents of *sabotage* and *hijackings* (Kates, 2000; Davis & Holt, 1998; Cargill-Kipar, 2009), *tampering* (Lewins, 2006), and coercive takeover of work and project assignments (Aggarwal & O'Brien, 2008; Pfaff & Huddleston, 2003) were reviewed or cited. According to Felps, Mitchell, and Byington, (2006) groups are likely to contain one proverbial "bad apple," or "toxic individual" (Gabriel & Griffiths, 2008), whose behaviours may make group interactions more a "source of angst than learning" (Felps et al., 2006, p. 176).

Contrary to the position that difficulties emerge from a single, solitary and "difficult" group member, the current study suggests that compliance, through acts of commission or omission, are necessary. Certainly *task hijackings* appear reliant on collusive arrangements between a "difficult" or "strong personality," the latter an *invivo* term used by an *academic inside, and* an absence of interventions characteristic of a Hands-off and *dispensing* academic support arrangement. It is less likely that competitive and domineering behaviours would be tolerated in groups occupied by "capable guardians" (Roscigno, Lopez, & Hodson, 2009, p. 1563; Boehm, 2006). The current theoretical framework, of **Not Pulling Weight**, does not attempt to isolate and "problematize" group member behaviour, by holding learners accountable, rather, *hijackings, tampering* and *sabotage,* are considered to be responses to program initiated pressures to **Do the Group Thing,** in a *group dominant design*, with impoverished resourcing and punitive assessment practices. Simply put, **Doing the**

Group Thing, may be interpreted as an internally support "dog-eat-dog" competition in how group work is framed, explained, understood and supported (D. Johnson et al., 2007, p. 16). Osler (2006) rejects the "bad apple" explanation of a single "problematic" learner, believing it to detract from broader contextual and operational factors associated with educational settings. The rise of a "problematic" group member, in her view, is associated with a "problematic" learning environment. As Osler explains,

> Policies, customs and practices of the school may lead to insecurity or feelings
>
> of insecurity among either staff or students. It also neglects the power
>
> relations and inequalities within institutions; it does not illuminate differences,
>
> for example, between the ways in which boys and girls may be treated.
>
> Equally importantly, it ignores the power relations within the wider society
>
> and the ways in which racist, sexist, homophobic and other anti-democratic
>
> discourses influence school cultures. (p. 577)

Osler (2006) has argued that "mini-violence" characterized by verbal and psychological abuse, tends to be downplayed or ignored in educational settings. Targets of mini-violence are individuals or learners who stand out in some manner, and consequently, when placed in a project group environment, may be further isolated and marginalized. This introduces the second theme, the relationship between project work over-performances being attributed to "different" group members

"Different" Group Members

Learners who "stand out" are likelier to experience marginalization in situations in which learners allowed to make their own group formation choices

(Cornelius and Gordon, 2008). Although the image this conveys may conjure up a schoolyard setting and the picking of team members for a sports team, in a case study reported on by Cornelius and Gordon, the learners in question were Scottish "further education" instructors, taking part in an online-classroom based course initiative. Cornelius and Gordon profiled an incident in which one individual was avoided by the class, essentially becoming a *persona non grata* or the "person no-one wanted in their group" (p. 38). According to the course tutor,

> At the very end of the programme, I found out how very difficult one of the students had been in...groups...He hadn't been able to build relationships that had allowed him to participate in groups. (p. 38)

The authors determined that marginalization may have been avoided with clearer ground rules and a greater onus on collaborative strategies. In a study of project group dynamics in a residential based marketing course, Kates (2000), reported on the presence of insecurities experienced by group members who felt liable for the academic contributions of other group members, and the risks this posed, such as a lower project grade. Consequently, groups could reduce the collateral damage of working with unknowns and unfamiliar group members through *tampering, hijackings*, and *sabotage*.

Research suggests that marginalization may be triggered by perceptions of weaker competencies and may be associated with language and cultural differences (Freeman & Greenacre, 2011; Gabriel & Griffiths, 2008). For example, biases associated with language were evident in a study undertaken by Freeman and Greenacre (2011) and centred on how learners in positions of authority redressed perceived wrong doings of weaker learners. Drawing from an earlier survey, Freeman and Greenacre reported that second language learners taking part in an experiential

marketing project were thought more likely to exert "minimum effort" (p.11) relative to other group members. The authors subsequently reported that struggling group members were often mislabelled as loafing and uninvolved, and were consequently subjected to "corrective" measures (p. 9) by dominant group members. *Sabotage* was a means to undermine and punish, justify initial negative impressions and scape goat. It consisted of the following. First, challenging project tasks were purposefully assigned to weaker members to complete, at the same time, more capable members intentionally withheld support or assistance. Second, pertinent information, such as meeting times, were withheld from less capable members with the latter left off from internal group correspondence. Finally, email inquiries were ignored and not responded to. Surprisingly, in spite of intentions to marginalize and to publically humiliate, targeted group members were often unaware of the malicious intentions of their peers.

According to Freeman and Greenacre, group members marginalized their weaker peers for strategic reasons, firstly to punish members mistakenly assumed to be loafing. By "naming and blaming" (7), and holding those targeted up to public humiliation, learners believed this afforded protection from a lower assignment grade. In follow-up interviews with saboteurs, the exclusionary behaviour was also justified by a latent curiosity, to see how those targeted might "confound expectations" (p. 12), in other words toying with group members and treating them with contempt and of little consequence (Hodson, 2001).

R. Smith (2005) adopted the term "deauthorized" (p. 192) to describe the manner in which group members are targeted, singled out for marginalization, and prevented from full participation in group activities. Her study followed project groups in a 16-week online course. Project work consisted of a problem-based

exercise involving residentially based learners collaborating exclusively online. According to Smith, "destructive" (p.196) routines were adopted by some groups to single out members whose nationality and verbal fluency differed from the dominant group. De-authorizing involved placing restrictions and boundaries around targeted group member involvement, and downgrading their responsibilities, while being rationalized as an act of generosity. As Smith explained,

> In their attempts to "get the work done," the groups often divided up tasks based on their perceptions of their fellow group members' abilities. For example, the groups assigned minimal responsibilities to their non-native English-speaking members because they felt these learners had faced unusual challenges of adapting to the United States and completing their studies. These efforts, although well intentioned, negatively influenced the non-native-English-speaking learners' experiences. (p. 192)

Although de-authorizing was reported to be a negative experience for those targeted, according to Smith, de-authorizing was also a way for groups to cope with the uncertainty associated with group member diversity.

> Participants reacted to different levels of expertise, age, perspectives, language proficiency, and so forth as though they were bad and potentially harmful to the group (p. 195)

Sexual and racial biases were reported to act as triggers in marginalizing group members in two studies examining MBA syndicate groupings (Griffiths, Winstanley, & Gabriel, 2005; Gabriel & Griffiths, 2008). Similar to Smith (2005), group members whose language skills differed from their syndicate group, were more likely to be targeted, marginalized or ignored (Gabriel & Griffiths, 2008). According to Gabriel and Griffiths, non-native English speakers were viewed less favourably if

they struggled expressing themselves in English or unable to maintain a similar pace of speech as their native-speaking counterparts. Adeptness in the English language also extended to understanding the idioms and humour of the dominant (British) culture. One group member was stigmatized for being a member of a visible minority, although English was their first language. Indeed, the level of English language competency expected of group members was considerably higher than institutional competency requirements. De-authorizing also extended to questioning the legitimacy of minority students in the graduate management program. Allegations of misrepresentation in minority student's qualifications were a concern, and the risk of "contaminating the [MBA] brand" (p. 515).

Overt racial and ethnic biases where however attributed to "difficult" learners and not surprisingly, groups occupied by "difficult" group member were reported to be particularly dysfunctional and troublesome for ethnic female learners. Although females representation in the MBA program were a minority or, 36% of the student population, both studies reported that female learners were overrepresented in surveyed reports of "distressing" and "unsettlingly experiences" (p.275). According to the authors, gender differences were thought to amplify language and cultural differences to the degree that 5 female learners were identified as having suffered "extensive psychological and unresolved trauma" (p. 514).

Groups able to manage difficulties and discord, constructively rather than destructively (D. Johnson et al., 2007), appeared better able to cope with overly aggressive members. The presence of project leaders skilled in leading their group across the minefield of negative emotions and destructive dynamics was thought to be particularly important.

While overt sexism and racism was attributed to a small number of "difficult" group members (Gabriel & Griffiths, 2008), R. Smith (2005) has argued that "deauthorizing" arises from impressionistic judgements and pre-existing prejudices existing in "societal hierarchical structures" (p. 182). This suggests that project groups, occupied by "difficult" and "different" group members are not isolated entities, but strongly influenced by the setting in which they are embedded.

"Difficult" Structures

Few researchers have examined organizational conditions and the marginalization of learners and group members, therefore the theme of "difficult" structures is not as prevalent in the literature as its two predecessors. More prevalent is the neutrality or absence of what might constitute "difficult structures" in the education literature in spite of virtual settings and virtual teaming being "difficult in all dimensions" (O'Neill & Kline, 2010, p. 189).

Previously, Behfar and colleagues (2011) identified seven sources of friction, arising in MBA group work. They included issues of dominancy, disrespectful communication, passive behaviour, and workload inequalities. Structural factors were not considered, although early classical conflict theorists identified structural operatives as an important source of individual and group strife (Kolb & Bartunek, 1992). McFarland (2001) adopted a structural perspective when he examined defiant and disruptive classroom behaviours. McFarland argued that behaviours that breach classroom rules and norms are strongly influenced by characteristics of the surrounding instructional setting and less by personality traits of perpetrators. In short, "organizational characteristics of classrooms define conditions under which overt acts of defiance are feasible strategies of action" (McFarland, 2001, p. 617).

Consequently, from McFarland's perspective, destructive and defensive mechanisms may be better understood as inadequacies sourced within the instructional setting.

Research has sought to isolate and explain problematic behaviour in secondary education settings. A case in point is the construct of truancy. Early research viewed truancy, and school absences to be a fast-track trajectory to juvenile, and subsequently adult delinquency, and a "manifestation of aggressive, anti-social conduct" (Reid, 1985, p. 67). Not simply an individual pathology, it was by extension, a "pathology of the family" (Carlen, Gleeson, & Wardhaugh, 1992, p. 5). By the late 1970s, attention shifted from the pathology of the learner and family to the learning context (Carlen et al., 1992). One indicator pointing to organizational factors was the persistence of chronically high truancy rates at some school jurisdictions but not others (Reid, 1985). Hence, truancy's selectivity encouraged a closer scrutiny of educational and classroom practices. Various conditions were identified as problematic to the welfare of learners, and predominantly responsible for propelling learners out the classroom door. They included, insufficient and inadequate academic resourcing; curriculum unsuitability; strife and peer bullying (Reid, 1985). In the 1980s, bullying was considered less significant and hence, a tolerated condition. Truancy became, in many respects, a physical and symbolic manifestation of "an inadequate educational system" (Cox, 1989, cited in Carlen et al., 1992, p. 67).

Osler (2006) has argued that, "A focus on the individual behaviour of students prevents consideration of schooling itself as problematic" (p. 577). Osler's concern centred on how women and girls are excluded and marginalized by the educational system. Osler has maintained that the situational and structural make-up of educational systems may impose a form of structural violence, which is particularly harmful for learners. One form of structural violence is the tolerance of incivilities,

and the "mundane tyrannies of everyday exclusion." (p. 578). A second example is associated with the systematic under resourcing of support services for learners, which Osler has equated with structural exclusion. Consequently, an educational setting may perpetrate "structural violence" (p. 585) on its occupants through its institutional policies and practices, and its tolerance of inequities in treatment.

To review, there are parallels in Osler's (2006) and Reid's (1985) work on the deleterious nature of a stressful environment and the role of deficiencies in academic resourcing that Reid argued was problematic to the welfare of learners. According to Reid, under resourcing was instrumental in propelling learners out the schoolroom door. Whereas Osler argued that systematic under resourcing of support services for learners constituted a form of exclusion and structural violence. According to Osler, educational policies, customs, and practices may contain exclusionary properties that systemically marginalize. In the current research setting, attention was paid to the nature of academic resourcing and in particular the under resourcing of online groups, while holding structural and resourcing decisions, in the form of **Doing the Group Thing**, accountable.

Difficult and Different: Doing the Group Thing

In the group project you could have lots of conversations but for whatever reason the tutor chose to or was told, they just did not get involved in the group projects. Many conversations have gone on about frustrations people have had with tutors. So we could have another conversation about that. But for the ones where we ah, you know, where we were on our own essentially. (Manager P.M. [1], 1086-1091; alumnus)

Freeman and Greenacre (2011) have argued that destructive processes in groups "are likely to arise as both the unintended consequences of an educator empowering contributing students to take action and a natural characteristic of group dynamics" (p. 7). Yet Osler (2006) and Reid (1985) emphasized structural deficiencies, and McFarland (2001) identified conditions in the educational setting as being more or less amenable to academic misbehaviour.

Marginalization associated with *hijackings, tampering* and *sabotage* appear indicative of acts of omission, on the part of academic authority, who have relegated "problems" arising from poor resourcing outcomes, as a group level concern, and hence, not privy to academic resourcing or interventions. It becomes clear that the adoption of a *dispensing* Help Desk learning support sustains conditions suitable for "destructive" (Smith, 2005) and dysfunctional (Gabriel & Griffiths, 2008) routines.

Dispensing favours a single supportive strategy to address a variety of informational, instructional, and process requirements of a group dominant learning design. Although *dispensing* may be appreciated by learners, it appears inadequate for safeguarding access to group work opportunities and ensuring respectful treatment. Non-interventions in project work difficulties have been attributed to a lack of knowledge of group dynamics (C. Elliott & Reynolds, 2005) or an unfamiliarity with online project work dynamics (McLoughlin & Luca, 2001; Robertshaw, 2001). According to Lizzio and Wilson (2006), faculty may lack both time and expertise to intervene, and provide meaningful support to groups on an as-needed basis. Interventions, such as mediation, are particularly useful when groups run aground due to personality differences and discord, but it is also time consuming (Chapman et al., 2010). Faculty may not be aware of problems transpiring within their learning

groups, or if faculty are aware, they may be indifferent and uncaring (Institute for Interactive Media and Learning, 2011).

Educators may equated group level discord to be a temporary phase, and expected, if not, desired (C.Elliott & Reynolds, 2005). In a well-known model of group development (Tuckman, 1965), groups are thought to begin as an aggregate of individuals that over time will enter a stage of struggle, or conflict, prior to coalescing into a cohesive, functioning, and productive unit. Hostility, disunity, and emotional turmoil, may be the hallmarks of a storming stage (Tuckman, 1965), as a group progresses onwards to a more amicable and productive stage.

Understanding conflict as a bounded, one-time event, consequently permeates the group literature (Jehn & Mannix, 2001), and may influence academic guidance. Online instructor, Robinson (2004), has assured online educators that group conflict is to be expected, a normal process providing experiential benefits as all conflicts are resolvable, and hence a group level responsibility. That all conflicts are resolvable has been challenged by conflict theorists who consider it a normative assumption and therefore questionable (Kolb & Putnam, 1992). Whether faculty should intervene in conflicts remains unclear (Hawk & Lyons, 2008). An extreme position shared by R. Smith (citing Miller, Trimbur, & Wilkes, 1994; K. Smith & Berg, 1987) warns of stagnation, or worse, total group destruction should academic interventions occur. Barron (2006) has argued that online groups are able to self-police when they have taken the time and trouble to create a Project Charter. A similar, and simplistic, attitude prevailed in the current research setting, where groups are required to prepare a project charter for each case study. The charter, expected to perform a guardian role, serves to provide guidance in decision-making junctures or when turbulence arises. As explained by a course tutor,

They [online groups] develop it [Project Charter] and they have to take

ownership of it, and either it helps them, or they work it out another way, but

they have to work it out. (Tutor 2, 884-885)

Ruël et al. (2004) have argued that online groups are in greater need of a

capable process expertise or a "process guardian." (Boehm, 2006). Without capable

guardians, groups are put at risk of becoming un-tethered from regulated and formal

expectations (Davis, 2009). Hijackings are an expression of this untethering. Non-

interventions and an absence of capable guardians (Roscigno et al., 2009) represent a

contextual influence, but not the only influence, that supports dysfunctional and

destructive group processes (R.Smith, 2005). Groups, whose members are required to

work collaboratively across distances, are highly dependent on structural

arrangements and operatives, and consequently are considered to be more sensitive to

"difficult" and "different" design and operational decisions (Armstrong & Cole, 2002;

Cornelius & Gordon, 2008).

To conclude, according to Arbaugh and Benbunan-Fich (2005), contextual

factors play a pivotal but under scrutinized role in our understanding of networked

settings, and more importantly, our understanding of how adverse conditions mediate

group work practices. Structural and operational decisions represent key dimensions

of the learning environment and consequently are instrumental in informing teaching

and learning practices (Laurillard, 1993). Structural and resourcing decisions may

further amplify the isolation experienced in distributive group work arrangements

(Staples & Webster, 2007; Armstrong & Cole, 2002; Walther, 2002). Hackman has

questioned the legitimacy of group work under adverse project work conditions.

Resourcing decisions appear to play a pivotal role in contributing to a higher level of

adversity for learning groups than is warranted (Hackman, 1983).

Dark Side

Just the fact that there was this person out there in the darkness and when are they going to come back and what is their reaction when they come back? (Manager R.M. 654-656; recent alumnus)

Formal and informal group arrangements have traditionally been framed in positive terms, drawing on the social learning theory of Vygotsky (1978), with its emphasis on collaboration and community (Tinto, 1998). Learning communities, and more recently, communities of practice, have advocated a participative pedagogy in which opportunity to work in groups implies collaborative arrangements that are consensual, consultative, supportive, and caring (Cousin & Deepwell, 2005; Hodgson & Reynolds, 2005, Perriton & Reynolds, 2012; Reynolds, 2008). Central to the notion of learning community is the notion of problem-free group activity and group assignments (cf. Tu & Corry, 2002).

That a "dark side" is associated with exclusion, easily accommodated by project work exercises, and potentially harmful and destructive, is rarely addressed in the academic group literature (Freeman & Greenacre 2011) and in networked learning (Ferreday & Hodgson, 2008).

From its early days, technology-mediated communications have been dogged by a shadowy side. Rumours of inappropriate language usage and behaviour or flaming (Sproull & Kiesler, 1986; Wang, 1996) were widely reported in the public press (Joinson, 2003). Uninhibited behaviours associated with anonymity, lack of visual cues, and weakened social and psychological safeguards, that would otherwise moderate and temper the behaviour of users, were reported (cf. Joinson, 2003). Negative outcomes associated with early laboratory research, however, has been questioned and accused of distortion, flawed research designs, and over reporting

(Spears & Lea, 1992; Walther et al., 1994). However, subsequent laboratory research continues to support the potential for flaming behaviour in technology mediated settings (Orengo, Zornoza, Prieto, & Peiro, 2000). In addition, technology-mediated settings are reported to be more conflict prone (Hobman et al., 2002).

Critical pedagogy perspectives associated with management learning have adopted a less idealized, harmonious, and darker notion of community (Reynolds, 2008). Rather than places of liberation and tolerance, learning communities may be "oppressive," where "practices of inclusion and exclusion" emerge as a means of achieving group-specific goals (Hodgson & Reynolds, 2005). Group level behaviours associated with *hijackings, tampering*, and *sabotag*e are additional representations of oppressive practices, as are select structural elements and operatives.

Gibson and Cohen (2002) alluded to a dark side to geographically dispersed group work, and anticipated collaborative work being affected by five factors, process impediments, technology failure, miscommunication, inefficient support process, and dysfunctional conflicts. The reported findings from the current study aligns with the presence of a "dark side of participation" as articulated by Ferreday and Hodgson (2008) and Reynolds (1999). Further indicators of a "dark side" are present in the negative project work indicators associated with "difficult" and "different" participative engagement and the presence of "difficult structures".

The literature on the prevention of "dark side" behaviours in face-to-face settings highlights the need for monitoring, proactive and appropriate involvement in the form of process guards or guardians (Morris & Hayes, 1997). Ironically, calls for process guardians, to monitor process and intervene, appear more prevalent in residential-based group work settings (e.g. Holmer, 2001; Pfaff & Huddleston, 2003; Ruël et al., 2004).

Contributions to Knowledge and Implications for Future Research

The study provides the following contributions. First, Pushed-Out presents an alternative and expanded perspective of the free-riding and social loafing phenomena. *Hijackings* are a form of non-voluntary, rather than voluntary, withdrawal in academic project work. Therefore, it expands our understanding of the underperformance construct and the presence of coercive impediments that marginalize project learners.

In addition to contributing to the "dark side" perspective of participative asymmetry (Rafaeli, Ravid, & Soroka, 2004), the study expands on the "dark side" perspective of participation and group work as potential sites of "oppressive" practices of exclusion as a means of achieving group-specific goals (Hodgson & Reynolds, 2005; Ferreday & Hodgson, 2008; Reynolds, 1999). The theoretical framework of **Doing the Group Thing** revealed power imbalances and program initiated marginalization and disruptive practices that aligned with academic mistreatment (Whitley & Keith-Spiegel, 2002). The theoretical framework, more specifically, Doing the Group Thing, and Not Pulling Weight, adopted a networked view of group behaviour as mediated by resourcing choices associated with organizational and contextual factors (Manfovani, 1994). Arbaugh (2002) considered institutional arrangements to be a neglected focus in technology-mediated learning. However, his interest however was on institutional arrangements that negatively impinge on technology uptake and usage. The group literature recognizes the crucial relationship between the viability and performance of project groups and organizational resourcing and support (Hackman, 1983; Hackman, 1991). In particular, organizational decisions have the capability to, as Hackman adroitly puts it,

"exploit, stress, and frustrate their members—sometimes all at the same time" (Hackman, 1983, p. 2, citing Hackman, 1976).

This study examined the organizational and structural architecture in which project group processes are embedded and elaborated on ways in which arrangements may become a site for oppressive practices (Albersson & Willmott, 2001). Oppressive practices, in the form of over participation, may be alluded to, but are rarely systematically addressed. Jassawalla et al. (2009) observed that group members may be more comfortable compensating for incomplete or poorly completed tasks, however distractive or disruptive behaviours "lies outside their skill set" (p. 50). Similar comparisons may be extended to resolving and addressing over-performative behaviours such as *hijacking and tampering*, particularly in technology mediated settings. It stands to reason that excessive participatory practices will be particularly challenging for online groups to manage, particularly circumstances where text-based communications (*only way communiqué*), *perpetually immature* groupings, short time lines and punitive assessment measures, are dominant. Adopting a pessimistic tone, Freeman and Greenacre (2011) have argued that it may be difficult to eradicate destructive behaviour in groups with the trend towards autonomous project groups and group assignments.

Hijackings, tampering, and *sabotage* represent a disruptive operative at the individual learner, group and program level, in the latter case, demonstrated by *grade deflation* of a merit-based course grade. The impact of marginalization and learners being Pushed Out warrants further exploration, in particular the potential for psychological or emotional harm that may arise (Leary, 2005). Future research on the pervasiveness of dominance behaviours and mistreatment is strongly warranted, given the increasing use of autonomous project groups in online settings and the potential

for psychological harm associated with mistreatment and harassment in academic settings (McKay, Arnold, Fratzl, & Thomas, 2008; Gabriel and Griffiths, 2008; Smith, 2005). Finally, the study adds to an emerging focus in the networked management learning literature, of a "dark side" in group work collaborations and academic policies and practices, as sites for inequity, mistreatment and oppression (Ferreday & Hodgson, 2008; Hodgson & Reynolds, 2005). The theoretical frameworks suggests that participative group dynamics are complex (C. Elliott & Reynolds, 2005), not always equitable (Ferreday & Hodgson, 2008) or ethical (Lewins, 2006).

Professional Practice Recommendations

In a day and age in which public listservs and discussion boards are routinely imbedded with the ability to report abuse confidentially, similar provisions should be adopted in online instructional settings. Abuse alerts are particularly important when the sheer volume of posting transactions may lead to diminished transparency of group level processes. Consequently the need is particularly acute in a reactionary, *dispensing* support system. A combination of a knowledgeable "process guard" (Ruël et al., 2004, p. 5) and confidential abuse alerts may help provide a more supportive environment for learners.

An abuse alert system may prove ineffectual alerts are ignored and decisive measures not taken to tackle mistreatment in words or deeds. If internal norms discourage learners from contacting academic personnel, as was reported in the current research setting, this would undermine an abuse alert system.

Second, online learners, tutors and program managers require an in-depth understanding of what constitutes abusive behaviour and mistreatment at a program

and group level. For example, the existence of group imposed punishments of targeted group members is ethically and morally questionable. Obstructive behaviours, otherwise known as academic misconduct (Whitley & Keith-Spiegel, 2002) were evident at the program, group and individual learner level. Online faculty would benefit from training in constructive and destructive conflicts. Assisting faculty to identity when conflicts cross the line into mistreatment and harassment would also be beneficial for safeguarding the welfare of program learners.

Contribution to the Grounded Theory Method

In chapter 3, I indicated the number of grounded theory seminars and workshops attended, including three days with the classical grounded theory developer Barney Glaser. I found Glaser's approach to not be user friendly. Part of the challenge was his style of writing and explanations, which at times I found ambiguous or bordering on the nonsensical, yet at other times, quite insightful. Taken for granted indexing aids in Sociology Press publications were often absent and hence proved frustrating when revisiting a concept or process was called for. Sociology Press forgoes indexing of conceptual which had the advantage of revisiting Glaser's writing, but there were occasions when a quick reference would have prevented delays. I often turned to Strauss and Corbin's, and others, (Charmaz, 2006; Wuest, 2007) for additional explanations of fundamentals concepts. For example, Strauss and Corbin were a primary source for basic qualitative concepts, such how the term "concept" or "dimension" was understood. I keenly felt constrained by the rigidness of Glaser's evolved approach. It later became apparent that alternative interpretations of the GT method had acquired a fluidity and flexibility that the Glaserian approach (Stern, 1995) lacked. This evident from attendance at a Grounded Theory Bash, as

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part of the International Qualitative Institute Conference, in (September, 2007) which

brought together grounded theory notables for the first time, including Juliet Corbin,

Kathy Charmaz ,Phyllis Stern, to name a few. Although I experienced the method as

less user friendly, the method's co-developer, Barney Glaser, is to be highly lauded

for the time he has devoted, informally, assisting doctoral students with their

struggles.

Research Limitations

Grounded theory provides indicators to judge when to exit from the research

setting. Glaser and Strauss (1967) have argued that a theoretical framework, with its

associated concepts and properties, is required to achieve theoretical saturation.

Theoretical saturation is defined as a situation in which new incidents of a category,

such as hijackings, do not yield additional properties or insights (Glaser, 1978).

The exit point from the research setting is also guided by resources brought to

bear on the undertaking of a research initiative. These include restrictions associated

with research setting access, prior agreements as to the nature of participant contact,

and the duration of an agreement. These constraints are derived from agreements

with the cooperating educational program and informed consent stipulations

associated with participant involvement. Therefore, my withdrawal from the research

setting, and hence access to a pool of research participants who were able to speak to

maturing concepts and properties, was premature from my perspective.

Thanks to program and participant generosity, I was fortunate to gain access to

2 distinct data sources (narrative accounts and interviews), the study would likely

have benefited from access over a longer time frame to more fully saturate properties

of theoretical concepts. In the end, a theoretical framework represents a work-in-

progress, modifiable according to grounded theory criteria (Glaser, 1978), and able to accommodate emergent concepts and properties. I believe the framework has achieved this goal.

Biases are a sensitive issue in grounded theory. The method is unique in qualitative methodologies, in the attention paid to the avoidance of preconceived theories or concepts prior to entering the research setting (Glaser & Strauss, 1967), to safeguard theoretical sensitivity and ensuring that the voice of participants is given priority (Glaser, 1978). Therefore, I was sensitive to the need to adopt an inductive mind-set, although I entered the research setting assuming discord was likely to exist. I routinely reflected on my personal biases, in so far as questioning the "dark side" interpretations I was drawing from the interviews and data, and was I being overly critical of operational factors located in the setting. When the analytical process evolved to a more deductive, theoretical sampling stage to enrich the conceptual properties of dominant constructs, Pushed Out and Opting-Out, research participants may have judged this deductive focus as one sided, emphasizing negative qualities of the online experience with less attention paid to beneficial and rewarding experiences. The theoretical framework and the "dark side" perspective adopted were not intended to negate the many positive and collaborative relations that are reported by learners.

Psychologists Baumeister, Bratslavsky, Finkenauer, and Vohs, (2001) have examined the saliency of negative events and their tendency to supersede the retrospective recall of positive experiences. The saliency of negative emotions over positive emotions is thought to mediate the recall of retrospective incidents. Chapman et al. (2010) have argued that group work experiences may be skewed by the intensity of complaints, whereas favourable group work experiences may be less

often recalled. This perspective was potentially operative and encouraged by the sensitizing concept of discord and online group work challenges.

Summary

In chapter 7, how the theoretical framework fit with the existing empirical literature was the principle focus. The chapter began with an examination of strategies to improve learner involvement and a revisiting of *multi-pass* assessment measures, argued to be an amplified extension of regulative measures used to ensure maximum use made of technological tools (Casey & Wilson, 2006). The legality of a high stakes assessment protocol drew from operatives and arguments in the United States. It was argued that the criteria justifying a *multi-pass* assessment would be difficult to replicate in a graduate management program. Hence the viability of the operative, it was suggested, was suspect.

In a review of the literature it was noted that education researchers have long been preoccupied with under performance. Whereas the group and education literature have examined under-performance in project groups, online researchers have traditionally focused on under performance in online discussion forums and where diminished involvement has been pejoratively labelled a lurking or shirking. (Beaudoin, 2002; Ebner & Holzinger, 2005; Kucuk, 2010). A review of under-performance in online settings followed and the trade-offs that are made by over emphasizing online learner participation. Firstly, that the emphasis on participation in online settings detracts from the importance of reflective learning (Beaudoin, 2002) and the need for instructor dialogue in a quality online experience (O'Neil & Hopkins, 2002). How appropriate online participative activity is defined was also questioned.

In examining over participation in the literature, three themes were identified. First, that over performances appeared to be associated with domineering and aggressive mannerisms perpetrated by "difficult" group members, a "bad apple" (Felps et al., 2006), or a "toxic individual" (Gabriel & Griffiths, 2008), or "classroom terrorist" (Boice, 1996), capable of transforming project work into a "source of angst than learning" (Felps et al., 2006, p. 176). "Difficult" learners appeared more willing to *hijack* or *sabotage* the work of other group members

Second, over performance and the marginalizing of group members represented a way in which more capable group members managed the perceived uncertainty of weaker competencies of group members (Freeman & Greenacre, 2011). It was observed that "different" group members were more likely to be marginalized, and their involvement in group initiatives more likely to be deauthorized" (R. Smith, 2005, p. 192). "Different" group members were picked out, as a result of differences attributed to language, culture and gender. "Difficult" and "different" converged in research reported by (Gabriel & Griffiths, 2008) and found to be particularly problematic for ethnic minority female learners in a residential MBA program, where a small minority were reported to have suffered "extensive psychological and unresolved trauma" (p. 514) from participation in syndicate MBA groups.

Third, deviating from targeting "difficult" learners and "difficult" groups perpetrating thoughtless to malicious attacks on unsuspecting peers, was the presence of "difficult" educational structures and operatives. Indicators of how research into "difficult" educational structures originated was briefly addressed by examining how the construct of truancy behaviour has evolved and the subsequent shift from the pathology of the individual "difficult learner" and the pathology of the family, (ie, "difficult group"), to the pathology of institutional policies and practices in

propelling learners out of the classroom door. One source of a pathology was its relationship with academic resourcing, more particularly, insufficient academic resourcing (Osler, 2006; McFarland 2001; Reid, 1985), and an internal tolerance of inequity in treatment and incivility which Osler (2006) referred to as institutional violence. Parallels were drawn between resourcing of a group dominant design, and conditions that sustain "destructive" (Smith, 2005) and dysfunctional (Gabriel and Griffiths, 2008) group level routines. It was argued that project groups, whose members are required to work collaboratively across distances, are highly dependent on structural arrangements and operatives, and consequently are considered to be more sensitive to "difficult" and "different" design and operational decisions (Armstrong & Cole, 2002; Cornelius & Gordon, 2008).

The contribution of the study to the literature was reported. First, Pushed-Out presents an alternative and expanded perspective of the free-riding and social loafing phenomena and therefore extends our understanding of the under-performance construct as a potentially non voluntary and coercive and marginalizes learners from taking part in project work opportunities. Second, the study examined the organizational and structural architecture in which project group processes are embedded and elaborated on ways in which arrangements may become a site for oppressive practices (Albersson & Willmott, 2001). Finally, the study adds to an emerging focus in the networked management learning literature, of a "dark side" in group work collaborations. The theoretical framework also contributed to the "dark side" perspective of participatory behaviour (Ferreday & Hodgson, 2008; Reynolds, 1999).

The remaining sections of the chapter reviewed professional practice recommendations, limitations of the research and contributions to the grounded theory method.

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Appendices

Appendix A

Invitation to the Study

January 27, 2006

Ten days ago an email was sent to you with an invitation to participate in a research study which examines your experiences working in online groups. Participants are still being sought to participate in the study.

Study Name: Experiences and challenges undertaking group work in online settings

In order to further our understanding of learners' experiences collaborating on group projects in online settings, a PhD research study is being undertaken by a student (Canadian) from the Department of Management Learning and Leadership, Management School, Lancaster University. The aim of this study is 2 fold:

- To learn about experiences working in groups or teams in the online/networked environment.
- To learn about the challenges faced by learners collaborating on group projects or assignments.

MBA students in their final year of studies are of particular interest. However, if you have collaborated on group projects and would like to share your experiences, your participation would be greatly appreciated.

Participation in the study entails the following:

- A written submission of your experiences. You may wish to focus on a specific event (s) or situation (s). Feel free to make the account of your experiences as short or as long as you feel warranted.

- A follow-up interview to discuss your experiences; your interpretations of the events as they unfolded and any new insights that may have dawned on you during the writing of your experiences. The interview would last roughly 45 to 60 minutes.

- A second interview may also be scheduled within a two month time frame lasting approximately 30 to 45 minutes. This interview would be semi-

structured and used to confirm emerging patterns and behaviors in managing problematic episodes.

The purpose of the study is not to judge or evaluate submissions. Your personal accounts will be treated with the upmost respect and consideration. Participation in the study is voluntary, and confidentiality is assured. You may also withdraw, without penality, at any time during the course of the study. The results of this research will be sent to you in a report format as well as being used in presentations, research papers, and the author's PhD thesis. All data used in this study is confidential AND ANONYMOUS - pseudonyms will be used. There is no penalty for not taking part in the study.

To participate, please email your name, and contact information to janice_picard@shaw.ca. I will follow up with a release form and some suggestions for writing about your experiences.

If you have any questions regarding this research please contact the primary researcher, Janice M. Picard directly by email janice_picard@shaw.ca and or by telephone 780.483.1188. Janice's PhD supervisor can also be contacted at the following telephone and email: Dr. Vivien Hodgson Email: v.hodgson@lancaster.ac.uk Telephone: +44(0)1524 594020

Thank you for your consideration and I hope to hear from you by February 15th. My thanks to those who have already agreed to take part.

Sincerely,

Janice M. Picard
PhD student,
Department of Management Learning and Leadership
School of Management, Lancaster University,
Lancaster, UK. LA1 4YX
Email: Canada: Janice_Picard@shaw.ca

<p style="text-align:center">Consent Form</p>

<p style="text-align:center">⚛ LANCASTER
UNIVERSITY</p>

Consent Form for Lancaster University Study

Please read the following information carefully. It concerns your rights as a research participant as stipulated by Tri-Council Regulations and the Athabasca University Ethics Review Board. If you are interested in taking part in the study, insert your name in the space provided and return it to me as an attachment for my files. Should you have questions, please email or call with your comments or concerns.

Thank you for your interest in my PhD student entitled: **Experiences and**

challenges undertaking group work in online settings.

My name is Janice M. Picard and I'm a PhD candidate at Lancaster University in the UK. The goals of this study are 2-fold:

- To learn about experiences working in groups or teams in the online/networked environment
- To learn about the challenges you've faced collaborating on group projects or assignments.

Please read the information below carefully.

I understand and agree that:

- NEITHER Athabasca University, nor any other party, will have access to the RAW DATA I will provide in this study.
- Data will be kept in a secure, locked facility; only the primary researcher and her advisor will have access to the interview transcripts and any other data sets.
- If interviewed, the interview will be recorded and transcribed and only the text will used for data analysis. Audio recordings will not be played in any public exhibition.
- Pseudonyms will be used in the report and all data will be reported anonymously to ensure both confidentiality and anonymity.
- Neither my program, institution, nor I, will be identifiable in any documents resulting from this research.
- I have right to refuse having the interview tape recorded.
- All data will be kept in a secure place for a period lasting no longer than 5 years, and then destroyed.

- Results from the study will be presented at conferences and written up in a PhD thesis
- I will continue to receive updates both on the study and reminders regarding the voluntary nature of this study and my participation.
- I may withdraw from the research at any time without penalty and will have no effect on my grades or standing in the program (or will not prejudice me in any way with my employer).
- The researcher has the right to terminate my participation.

My typed name inserted into this form indicates that I have understood to my satisfaction the information regarding my participation in the research project and that I agree to participate. If you are in agreement, please type your name in the space below.

I, _____(name) on this date of

_____hereby consent to participate in the study entitled:

Experiences and challenges undertaking group work in online settings.

My involvement consists of providing a written account of my experiences, and taking part in at least one but no more than two audio taped interview lasting no more than 60-90 minutes each.

Thank you for your response. I look forward to reading your story and speaking with you about your experiences. Should you have additional questions about the study please feel free to contact me at 780.483.1188 or by email at janice_picard@shaw.ca or Dr. Vivien Hodgson Email: v.hodgson@lancaster.ac.uk Telephone: 011 44 1524 594020

Appendix C

Narrative Account Guidelines

January 18, 2005

Guidelines for Writing Your Experiences

Personal stories or 'narratives', as they are more commonly known in social research, are an interpretive and personal discovery tool which may be used to better understand social life. I'm interested in hearing your personal story as it relates to your experiences working on group projects and assignments. I'm particularly interested in any challenges you may have encountered and how you managed those challenges.

To begin, reflect back either on a situation (s) or event (s) you wish to share. It would help me to better understand your story if you were start at the beginning, how you saw this situation unfolding, who were the principle players in the story (please no actual names) and the conclusion or outcome, if there is one. I'd like you to retrace and recreate your story as best you can, and try to keep it descriptive. Write as much as you want and have time for or as little as you want.

This isn't about accuracy, it's about your perceptions and interpretations and the unfolding of events as you remember them.

When I receive your story please be assured that it is not my intention to evaluate your story in any way. I'm interested in comparing your experiences with the experiences of other online learners in MBA programs to compare what differences and similarities evolve from working in groups; not to judge who did something right and who might have done something in a different way.

I will however read the story you share in a spirit of understanding and supportiveness.

Please send your story to my email address, either as an attachment or enclosed in the email body. I will contact you to confirm that I've received it, so please

save a copy just in case there is a technical glitch. Please try to send your story by February 1, 2006.

Should you have any questions about this process or concerns, please do not hesitate to contact me at your convenience.

Sincerely,

Janice M. Picard
PhD student,
Department of Management Learning and Leadership
School of Management, Lancaster University,
Lancaster, UK. LA1 4YX
Email: Canada: Janice_picard@shaw.ca

If you have any questions regarding this research please contact the primary researcher, Janice M. Picard directly by email janice_picard@shaw.ca and or by telephone 011 44 870 7507347. Janice's PhD supervisor can also be contacted at the following telephone and email: Dr. Vivien Hodgson Email: v.hodgson@lancaster.ac.uk Telephone: 011 44 1524 594020

Sample of a Narrative Account

Narrative submitted Manager R.F.

Group Interactions

The first year was plagued with hotdog students. I hated how some other students felt as though they were playing to an audience of coaches or professors, rather than relating to the other students. I found the exercise of creating a Code of Conduct meaningless. They became more elaborate with each course. Some of them were quite brilliant in fact, and then were left languishing in Week One discussions.

The coaches generally left the small groups to their own devices, working through concepts and problems, and didn't intervene when the group developed a stalemate. At those times, the bossiest or most aggressive member of the group (sadly to say, mostly male) dominated the thread, and assumed to be speaking for the group. The best coach I had was a man named Mark Julien. He participated in a thoughtful way that encouraged group cohesiveness and expansive discussion. Many of us are leaders in our own careers, and recognize the value of being both a leader and a follower. Some couldn't be followers, even if they assigned themselves those tasks!

Only Way Communiqué Memo examples and Accompanying Codes

Memo associated with an interview	Codes
Lots to say about tutoring and how it is accessed in this interview. This I found a bit perturbing for some reason: *...you can't be graded on communiqués that occur between you and your colleagues in any vehicle other than the Lotus Notes because that is the only way the professor or the academic coach has to observe. So all of the work that is done by the group or the individuals is done in that forum. [Excerpt from interview]* March 10, 2007 Memo on Only Way Technology: Note: from I.M's interview and S.F. interview there is a classic comparison of the problems associated with deploying a hammer when what is required is a screw driver. This is of course the *only way technology*. Such is the belief in the underlying values of the *only way*, that time and place are irrelevant, (which would explain having European faculty tutoring learners predominately situated in North	*Consequences* - Logistical [- you just can't talk right away [in vivo] - tiresome [iv - rich [iv vs poor [iv - reading between the lines [iv] - only written discussion - only one way feedback_lacking communication clues - losing a strategy for keeping the peace - disagreeing takes time (outcome of only way) - missing hitting the right communication thing [in vivo] associated with reading between lines - new ground [iv] case dB - impediment to tutoring mathematical concepts (see conveying concepts) - difficult to draw people into conversation [iv

America) […]. Example of how a legacy practice, only way interferes with supporting learning. In S.F.'s scenario, we see a leaching of time - associated with seemingly antiquated legacy practices of teaching or clarifying of mathematical concepts, by sending a spread sheet back and forth across five time zones. This is painstakingly cumber some. If there were no I.M. in one's group, as S.F. found, this is the only formal source for resolving your difficulties. So cumbersome a method might persuade learners to seek support elsewhere. Only way communiqué is one of the properties of a production blocking pattern. In the production process, a disparity arises in the implications of the only way communiqué within the two key interactive [group work activities]databases. Only way appears to have a less harming impact on [group] discussion only activities. Dec 31, 2007 Memo: only way communiqué Reducing all communications to a single, asynchronous platform, is characteristic of the *only way communiqué*: there can only be *one way* to communicate and this *only way* is by means of formally provisioned databases that can be captured and later accessed by the various constituents: learners, contract for service academic personnel. Therefore all academic support mechanisms occur	• delays in surfacing gw process discrepancies • cumbersome tool communicating with others • cumbersome device for communicating • cumbersome meetings • clarity of learning needs can take days_ask the tutor • (indirect) lapse in providing up to date emergency contact information • Ethical • unrealistic expectations [iv =reality gap [iv • troublesome[iv] • not natural [iv] • hardship (outcome) • disconnect_confined to forums but no feedback • damaging • can't mark what we can't see [iv_but marking the unseen • buffers questionable behaviour • outcome: discouraging hardship • Emotional • Conforming vs Resisting • tool to oppose collective wishes • talking perceived as an additional workload (self and group imposed) • resisting conferencing (learners)

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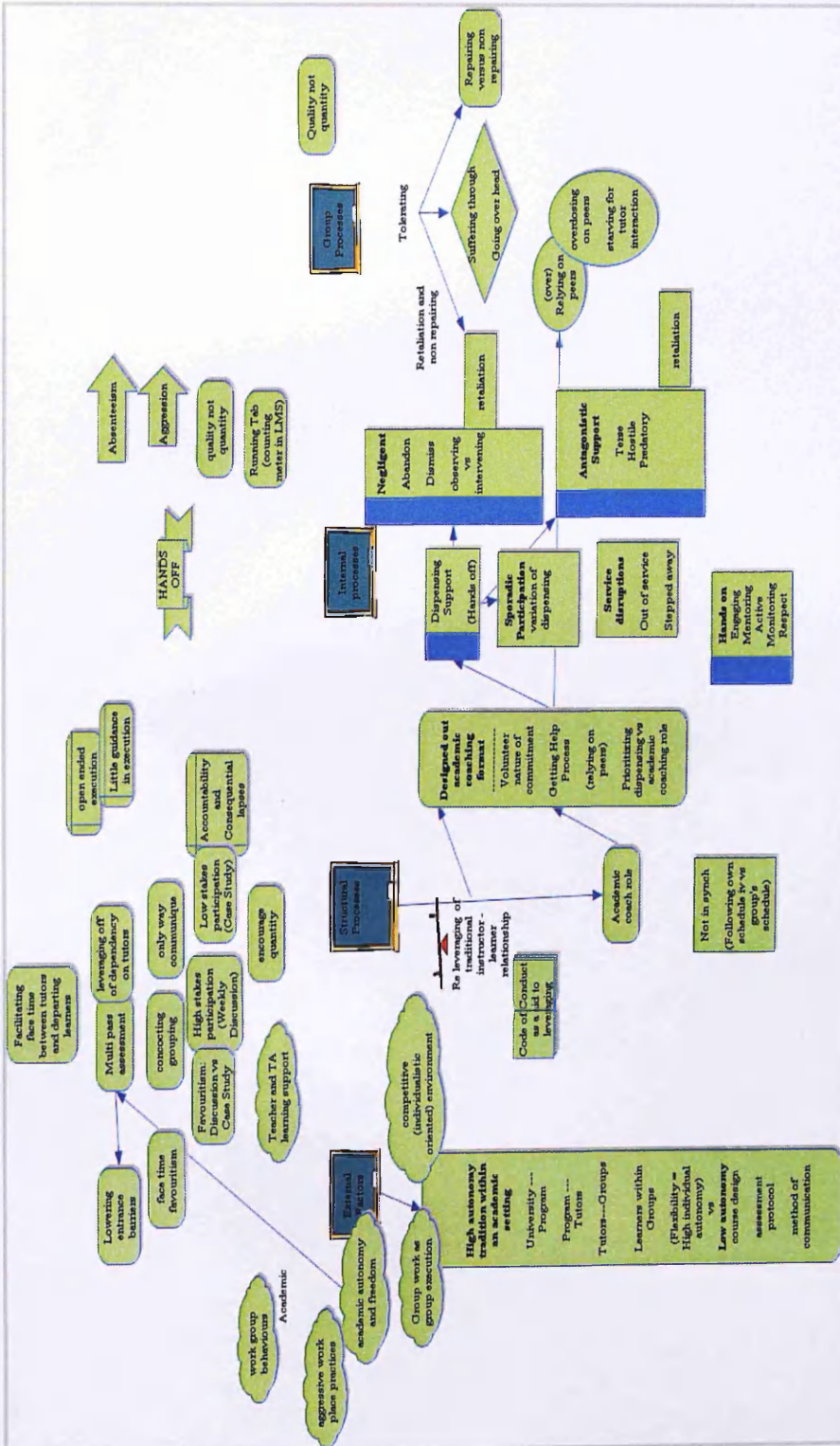|	
chiefly by means of the only way communiqué. Nevertheless learners do by pass this edict and those willing to ignore it may benefit from generous contact time.	(outcome of restraining order) • resisting • rejecting telephone contact • hesitant to use (formally and informally) • apologetic telephone usage • Couldn't go forward [in vivo] • Cancelling [in vivo] Damaging the team [in vivo] Created a rift [in vivo] Academic missing out [iv on spontaneous learning evolves into a knowledge deficiency questions go unasked conveying concepts is challenging [in vivo] frustrating [iv Real time intolerance varying enforcement [iv_year i vs year ii justification_monitoring and marking justification_doesn't bring value [iv asynchronous only course work ordering dissuading discouraging_ outcome is hardship Offering but not supporting Instant Messenger

Appendix F

Brainstorming Session

Figure 9. *GT Brain Storming, Sept 3, 2009*

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