

There is a saying that often circulates around university students at the end of group assignments, “when I die I want my group to lower me into my grave, so they can let me down one last time”. This is the sentiment I expected to feel at the completion of this assignment. Instead, I feel devastated that this experience is about to come to an end. I cannot bring myself to comprehend that in a few short days, the six members of my group, who I have communicated with on a daily basis, are no longer going to be a central part of my university life.

These are not the feelings I anticipated. I like to be in control of every detail of the process. Yet, throughout this assignment I found myself willing to trust the judgment of my teammates, to let them work on sections of the report together, without my input. I realised they could write their section of the report to a high standard, so I needed to take a step back and allow them to collaborate with one another, whilst overseeing their efforts from a distance.

The time difference was sometimes frustrating, as waiting for everyone to reply would often take twelve hours. This presented a challenge when deciding on the project idea, but the time difference was overcome in the writing of the report by pairing group members together that are in similar time zones. For instance, Thenmoley lives in Malaysia and Amrita lives in Hong Kong, so they were responsible for writing the marketing section together.

The greatest problem I faced in the beginning of this project was communication. It was difficult to converse with Thenmoley and Amrita, as they were more timid than the rest of the group. However, by focusing the conversation on aspects of our lives, such as when we showed one another what our universities were like, the girls became more confident in expressing their opinions and increasingly added their own insights to group discussions. Thereafter, talking about ourselves became a reoccurring theme within our group; it allowed us to get to know one another on a personal level and to develop friendships with one another. I learnt that leadership involves trial and error, until the desired result is achieved. I wanted to ensure everyone felt his or her contribution was valued, but we also bonded over various topics. Furthermore, at the beginning of the project I would message everyone individually anytime I saw they were online. Subsequently, this improved the frequency of dialogue in our group chat.

Unfortunately, a member of our team had to be removed for his lack of communication and his insistence that he was far too busy to commit the same amount of time to the project as other members of our group, who were already passionate about creating a successful idea. This taught me an important lesson, that sometimes making hard decisions are beneficial to the group. Once he was removed we were left with a team of seven committed individuals, who wanted to succeed.

The decision to focus our project in Colombia, where Isabel and Mateo live, gave us a unique perspective on a number of aspects of our report, such as the underlying reasons for acid attacks. They were incredibly generous in spending hours finding information and translating it into English. Nothing was ever too much effort, even if it was 2am in Colombia and they had to be up for class at six.

A key area of difference within our group was access to the power. Oly, our Nigerian teammate, suffered from two power outages during our three-week assignment, the longest one lasting four days. Despite this factor being out of his control, he was incredibly apologetic when he was able to charge his phone again. This presented an idea for a project a team could focus on in the global enterprise experience next year, as power outages in Nigeria are a serious issue. Oly had to charge his phone, which he had purchased especially to be a part of the global enterprise experience, in a small shop, but could only do so for small periods of time. A number of attachments or links were often put up to our drop box account, however Oly could only read items on Facebook, as this was all his internet plan catered for. I overcame this obstacle by pasting the content on our Facebook group chat.

Furthermore, Paniz, our Iranian teammate, could not access Facebook, our main communication platform. I tried to use Wiggio, however, our team found Facebook an easier way of interacting. It also allowed me to see who had seen messages and who was online. To overcome this obstacle, I started emailing Paniz copies of our conversations and asking for her input, which I would then add to our Facebook conversation. This ensured she was still a part of the group, but if I was to do the GEE again I would create a Whatsapp group, so everyone could communicate at once. The best communication tool our group used was Skype. We had one Skype call, halfway through the project. It allowed us to decide on a number of key factors with relative ease and allowed everyone to express their ideas in a more effective manner, as speaking English was easier for some members of our team than trying to express in writing the point they wanted to put across.

Communicating with people from different cultures has helped me to understand the privileges I have in New Zealand. Our group faced a number of individual challenges in ensuring our report was a success. Oly often talks of the high corruption he experiences in Nigeria, which heavily impacts a number of aspects of his life. Mateo and Isabel talked about spending sixty hours a week studying for university. Moreover, Paniz, who is of the Baha’i faith, could go to jail for four years for communicating with foreigners. These revelations opened my eyes to the differences between New Zealand and the rest of the world. It made me realise the obstacles they face in contributing to this project and the effort I put in needed to ensure their hard work was reflected in the quality of our report.

We have learnt from one another’s experiences and examined the differences in our lives. We have worried together about our teammate, Paniz, possibly being prosecuted for her participation in this project. Every aspect of this assignment has been done as a group, a shared responsibility that has never become a burden on any single team member. Every member of our group understands the importance of working together and everyone has done this in an impeccable manner.

In the beginning of this project I feared the diversity of our group would be a hindrance in producing a high quality report. However, I quickly realised that the range of cultures and backgrounds in our group was an advantage, as it allowed us to examine issues from a range of perspectives. When undertaking the creativity process and deciding on an idea we initially thought of creating a service to help the elderly. The variety of different perspectives allowed me to view this group of society in a whole new light. In New Zealand the elderly receive support from their families and the Government, but Oly talked about the issue from his perspective, as the elderly present a new issue in Nigeria. This presented a new way of examining the issue, which allowed our team to explore a number of different ideas, in terms of services we could provide to help the elderly.

They truly are a remarkable group of individuals that I feel honoured to have had the chance to get to know over the past three weeks. I feel this project has been an extraordinary journey from day one and I feel privileged to call Isabel, Mateo, Oly, Thenmoley, Amrita and Paniz my friends. Our project is a reflection of our hard work and dedication, which we can all be proud of.