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## Empowering instructors to better understand student group dynamics

New studies done by Wiley Education Services revealed that the skills gap grew by double digits since 2018 and this puts a lot of pressure on businesses to find the talent they need for their companies' growth. Employers are concerned that many students are graduating without the necessary work skills needed to be an effective team player, leading to students being labeled as unhireable. As a result, universities are focusing on making 'work readiness' a priority. One solution that has become common is the usage of group projects in courses but instructors are struggling with the hidden complexity of implementation.

John Phelan, an associate professor at Smith School of Business at Queen's university, fully understands the importance of teaching students the critical collaboration and teamwork skills and how hard implementing effective group work can become:

*"I saw this happening 20 years ago. Students weren't doing 'group projects'. They just divided up the work, went home, put it together and handed it in. Students aren't really doing group work, so what happens is when students go through university they never actually learn how to work in a team."*



Part of the solution that John has been promoting is to create group projects that force students to come together and manage their work as a team. However he was always worried about how much actual preparation time students put into their projects and not just scrambling to finish with 3 weeks left before the deadline. He wanted students to understand that a project is something you need to commit to and work throughout the term.

# Feedback from Students and Instructors

When John discovered Enightful, he figured that a project management tool could help his students plan their projects ahead of time and stay on the right track. However, he had concerns that it might become 'just another tool' and he was quite skeptical about the platform's ability to track student group activity and engagement.

As the term progressed, the value emerged as students relied heavily on Enightful to plan and manage their project deliverables. Alexandra, a student in John's class recalls her impressions:

*"My first impression was 'what's the point?' but after we started using the platform to divide up the project, manage tasks, and set deadlines, we really liked it. It allowed us to see who was responsible and do check up's with one another."*



Her team used the Enightful platform to plan ahead of time and assign deadlines to one another to avoid falling behind and improve accountability within the team. When she saw other team members engaging with the platform, it was an indication that her team was still committed to the project. This in turn, helped her become more committed. When needed, she could follow up on specific tasks assigned to other students that weren't being updated. By planning the project ahead of time and identifying a path to success, the teams were able to complete their tasks ahead of time. Other groups had similar success of getting everyone back on track, especially after spring break, a challenge to reinvigorate any team.

Enightful managed to calm John's concerns as end of term student feedback concluded that 100% of the teams that engaged with Enightful said it improved their team organization and experience and helped them manage their project efficiently. John was delighted to hear that his students found the platform very beneficial.

One student, Muneeb, recalls his experience with Enightful:

*"The platform helped our team stay on track and really improved the accountability and responsibility of everyone."*



Alexandra further validated the positive student experience and wished it could be implemented at more universities:

*"I would love for every university to adapt this platform so students can manage their projects across courses. This platform is really amazing."*

John also saw the value for instructors because the platform enabled him to see whether his students were engaged in their project by tracking their engagement and progress on the platform. If a team had not engaged in quite a while, he would send a note to see if something was wrong and congratulate those that were doing well, motivating the team to do even better.

When asked if he would use Enightful again, John replied:

*“If I was teaching a course with group projects again, I would absolutely use this.”*

## Improvements to be made

John had great ideas on ways the Enightful platform could improve. One particular idea is how the student data is reported to him as an instructor. He would like more frequent reporting from the platform that would analyze team interactions and point out any glaring issues or teams that are off track. He thinks it would be a very valuable tool to do early check ins with the student teams. Additionally, he would like to receive notifications from Enightful alerting him to potential team issues. These requests have already been put into the pipeline for development in 2020.