

Introduction

University group projects are often described as a “necessary evil” but the difference between a stressful and a successful experience often comes down to one factor: Emotional Intelligence, Emotional Intelligence is the capacity to recognise, understand, and influencing the emotions of others, according to Wooll (2023). In academic settings, where grades and relationships are at stake, Emotional Intelligence becomes the invisible glue that holds teams together.

Leading Group Projects With Emotional Intelligence

El in Teamwork

Goleman’s Emotional Intelligence framework offers a practical toolkit for navigating common group project pitfalls. Here is how each component translates into action

- Self-Awareness - Knowing your default reactions (e.g., do you avoid conflict or become defensive?).
- Self-Regulation - Pausing before responding to a critical email or a missed deadline.
- Motivation - Maintaining optimism when progress stalls; reframing setbacks as learning opportunities.
- Empathy - Detecting when a teammate is overwhelmed, not just “lazy”.
- Social Skills - Facilitating a group check-in to realign expectations rather than letting tension simmer (Louise Petty, 2023)

Managing Own Emotions

When students actively seek to understand their teammates’ perspectives, they unlock several key benefits:

- Mindfulness - Teams where members feel understood are more likely to share ideas, admit mistakes, and take creative risks.
- Reflection - Instead of avoiding disagreements, empathetic teams view them as opportunities to refine ideas.
- Stress Management - Asking “What might be causing their stress or disengagement.
- Pausing Before Reacting - Try to rethink of that statement twice or more before acting (Harvard, 2025).

Conclusion

Emotional Intelligence is not an innate trait, it is a learnable set of skills that directly impacts group outcomes. Students who invest in developing Emotional Intelligence do not just complete projects; they build relationships, reduce stress, and gain a competitive edge for their careers.

The recommended tip I would give to a student in need for anything related to Emotional Intelligence is that they should check in with their colleagues to make sure everybody’s well being is in a great place.

Understanding Other’s Emotions

Stress is inevitable in group projects, but reactivity is optional. Students who master self-regulation can maintain focus and composure even under pressure. Key strategies include.

- Reflective Journaling: Spend 5 minutes after each meeting noting emotional triggers and responses. This builds self-awareness over time.
- Constructive Feedback - Allow yourself to learn the ability to process comments that might seem hurtful without it having negative connotations.
- Emotional Labelling: Simply naming the emotion *I feel anxious about this deadline* helps reduces its intensity and creates space for constructive action (Pogosyan, 2023).

References: Harvard DCE Professional. (2025) *How to Improve Your Emotional Intelligence*. [Available at: <https://professional.dce.harvard.edu/blog/how-to-improve-your-emotional-intelligence/#What-Are-the-Components-of-Emotional-Intelligence>].

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