

Online Collaborative Project Group 5

Individual Report

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Online Collaborative Project report

Globalization is having a strong impact on social, economic and cultural issues, and in order to be able to move comfortably in such new context, students should learn how to communicate and cooperate with partners from across the globe and in different time zones (Serçe et al. 2011) and “become the leaders of the future” (CU 2015). To achieve this, teachers should become proficient themselves in such types of context; hence, it is necessary that we become online learners ourselves before we can teach our students.

As part of the M03 assessment, we were asked to “produce a collaborative output for sharing with other people” (PgCAPHE 2015). We did not form our group, instead five of us have been assigned to a specific one by module staff. Our group’s Online Collaboration Project (OCP5) got initiated already during the M03 session in December 2015 when we received the member list.

OCP5 went through all stages of formation: forming, storming, norming, and performing (Tuckman 1965). The ‘forming’ phase was rather reactive and speedy, mainly because we knew each other from working together during earlier sessions, hence we knew what to expect and where our strengths are. It then turned out that one member withdrew from the module. Considering that Jacques and Salomon (2010) suggest that a smaller group size “is a significant variable in achieving discussion to enhance academic learning” (p. 16), we discussed our group situation and mutually agreed that we would not request an additional member to be assigned to our group. We started the project officially in mid-January 2016 with the initial planning over email (see Figure 1). We then continued with a discussion and planning the theme of the resource and its detailed content in asynchronous way over Padlet (see Appendix 2).

I have noticed over the years, I work best on the things that interest me most. I attended an Internationalisation conference for Professional Services at CU in mid-December 2015 and gave a presentation on my experiences of moving to the UK and adjusting to work at CU. I noticed that there is already a guide for international students coming to study at CU. However, there is no such resource for the use of newly hired staff. Being a fairly new staff at CU and still going through the relocation and adjustment period, the international guide was perhaps closest to my heart, and so I knew that this theme will keep my attention for a longer time. I have shared this with my teammates on the Padlet (see Appendix 2) and as it turned out to be something that others also would find useful, we decided to commit to creating a resource that would collect all the information that a newly hired or current CU employee would find useful. The idea for OCP5 was that we create a repository that allows us not only to put information in, but also take some information out, get to know something about CU that we did not know ourselves.

Once we settled on the topic, we then moved to ‘performing’ stage and concentrated on achieving the team’s goal. Quip offered us a task list and a chat function to discuss things and make decisions in a more timely manner (see Appendix 4). We discussed the advantages and disadvantages of several tools and platforms through which we could deliver our output (i.e. Adobe Slate, Microsoft Sway, TopHat, Learnium), but in the end we decided to choose

'Coggle.it'. We wanted to share the information in an easy and intuitive way. 'Coggle.it' with its basic mapping features, simple graphics, and clickable links was a platform that fit our needs perfectly.

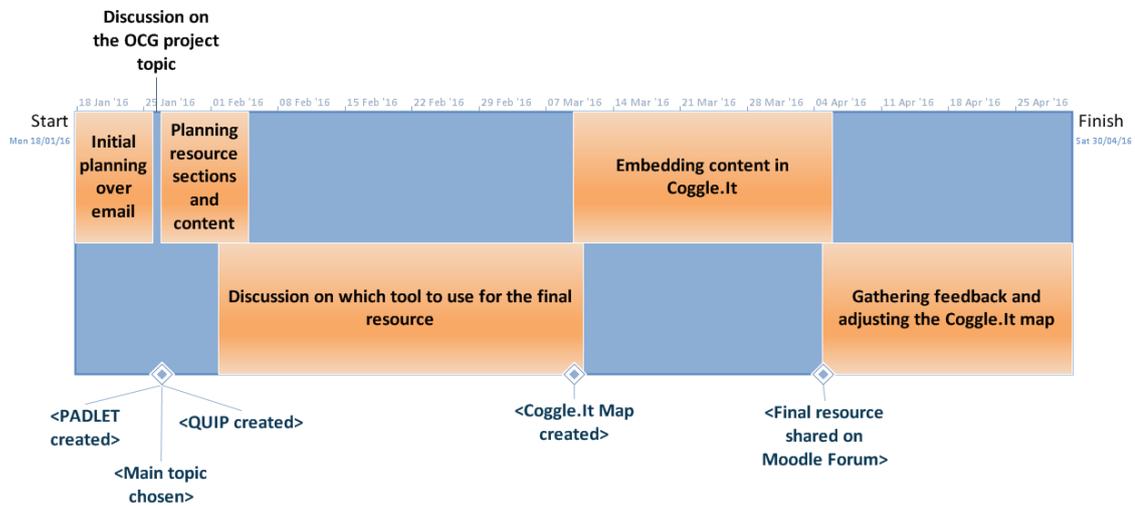


Figure 1 Timeline of the OCP5 project

The most important success factor for OCP5 was that we already had experience of working together. This allowed us to avoid conflicts and go through a relatively short 'storming' phase. Our teamwork was rather intuitive than systematic. We have not used any specific model to assess our suitability to specific team roles because we already knew what to expect from each other in terms of our skills and roles. But perhaps we could have used some assessment tool (i.e. Belbin Team Roles) to think about team roles and balance before our collaboration started. Belbin's model (1981) consists of eight team roles and their main contributions to the group (see Table 1). According to Belbin (n.d.) "typically, most people have two or three team roles that they are most comfortable with and prefer; a few others that they can manage to cover if they need to; and finally the rest that they prefer not to adopt at all." Some of us fulfilled the same role(s) and we also switched between roles depending on the current project phase (see Table 1). Looking back to the OCP5 we assumed the roles that fit our personalities and skills best. Such dynamic and intuitive approach certainly brought balance into our teamwork. I consider myself quite proficient with regard to technology, I was able to offer ideas and introduce tools that others did not know and share their knowledge with them along the process. I am also good in making sure that things are delivered on time, but at the same time I sometimes find it hard to delegate. I have earlier utilized Belbin's questionnaire for role preferences and as it turned out the roles I took in the OCP5 where consistent with the result from that self-analysis.

Because of our previous experience the OCP5 collaboration was much easier, clearly defined in terms of leadership, expectations, and responsibilities. Michinov and Michinov (2007) suggest suggests that it may be "advantageous to have a face-to-face meeting at the beginning of online collaboration" (p. 1541). According to Rovai and Jordan (2004) this would also have impact on teammate's sense of belonging and relationships. Therefore,

perhaps if we did not have the previous experience, we would have organised a small meeting to get acquainted with team-mates anyway.

Orientation	Team role	Contribution ¹	OCP5 teammate
Action oriented	Shaper	"Challenging, dynamic, thrives on pressure. Has the drive and courage to overcome obstacles."	Eleanor, Jon (suggested content and tool options)
	Company worker/ Implementer ²	"Practical, reliable, efficient. Turns ideas into actions and organises work that needs to be done."	Cherisse (created Quip space for communication and scheduling), Edyta (created Padlet and Coggle.it)
	Completer Finisher	"Painstaking, conscientious, anxious. Searches out errors. Polishes and perfects."	Edyta and Jon (final check-ups before sharing the resource)
People oriented	Chairman/ Co-ordinator ³	"Mature, confident, identifies talent. Clarifies goals. Delegates effectively."	Cherisse (through Qip)
	Team-worker	"Co-operative, perceptive and diplomatic. Listens and averts friction."	Jon and Eleanor
	Resource Investigator	"Outgoing, enthusiastic, communicative. Explores opportunities and develops contacts."	Edyta (proposed theme and various options for tools, talked to LEU)
Task oriented	Plant	"Creative, imaginative, free-thinking. Generates ideas and solves difficult problems."	Edyta (technical support and ideas), Cherisse (communication)
	Monitor Evaluator	"Sober, strategic and discerning. Sees all options and judges accurately."	Eleanor (made sure we were doing what the brief asked us to deliver)
	Specialist	"Single-minded, self-starting, dedicated. Provides knowledge and skills in rare supply."	Jon (sometimes dwelled in technical side of the assignment; insisted on using one specific tool)

Table 1 Team roles distribution across the OCP5 (based on Belbin.com)¹²³

Clear communication is fundamental to all aspects of online teams (Yukl, 1994), especially when it comes to agreeing on goals and making decisions. From the beginning, we were clear that we need to plan the whole process in a way that other work obligations would not interfere with the project delivery, nor the project would interfere with our regular work. We agreed that it is crucial to choose communication tools that would allow us to work in asynchronous way without sacrificing the schedule or quality of the OCP5 output. Synchronous tools would certainly allow us to deliver the project faster, however this would mean that the work is linked to a specific time (Romiszowski and Mason 2004). Relying on asynchronous communication allowed us to share our ideas whenever we felt like it and it did not require all of us to be present for the communication and work to happen (Serçe et al. 2011). This was a particularly good choice as over time we noticed that the main challenge we faced were time restrictions due to other work obligations or personal circumstances. For instance, Jon took a few weeks off at the beginning of the project to focus on his teaching obligations; I took some time off due to health issues in the middle of the project. Each of teammates supported the development of the output according to our

¹ Source: Belbin.com (n.d.) Belbin's team role summary descriptions [online] available from <<http://www.belbin.com/media/1160/belbin-howtousebelbinreports-toraiseself-awarenessand-increasepersonaleffectiveness-sept2013.pdf>> [21 March 2016]

² Company worker was a team role introduced by Belbin in 1981. It was later on re-labelled as an Implementer (Belbin Associates (1988)

³ Chairman was a team role introduced by Belbin in 1981. It was later on re-labelled as a Co-ordinator (Belbin Associates (1988)

availability and information we possessed at a given time and we made sure that whenever some of us are not available, other ones can pitch in and continue the work.

Participation in this activity was a rewarding experience that gave me insight into working in the online environment and how this could be utilized in my teaching. I usually employ collaborative work in my modules since they increase engagement and contribute to student learning and educational achievement (Astin 1997; Tinto 1998). Barkley et al. (2004) suggest that teams tend to come up with more advanced solutions than those of an individual person. Collaborative activities permit students to learn from each other and have been identified as a more effective educational method than when the information 'transmitted' purely by the teacher (Barkley et al. 2004). Finally, collaborative activities also advance critical thinking and problem-solving (Mannix and Neale 2005), as well as develop interpersonal aptitude (Caruso and Woolley, 2008), which is highly welcome by employers (Yorke 2004).

This experience showed me that the collaborative work does not have to necessarily be done in the classroom, but can also be delivered in an online context. I could perhaps utilize OIL projects within my modules. Previous studies suggest that an online collaborative groupwork can have a positive impact on students' performance (Uribe, Klein, and Sullivan 2003), their learning efficiency (Bruffee 1999), critical thinking, and communication skills (Johnson and Johnson 2000). Adopting OIL projects in my modules could not only provide my students with a chance to advance their interpersonal skills, but also intercultural and digital competences. For instance, on 345SAM Project Management students could engage in online interaction with peers from a partner institution abroad and develop a project plan together; on M106SSL Risk Management, students could develop a risk management procedure with their international peers.

However, "just because you can create an "online" dimension of community doesn't mean that you should " (Fichter 2005). 345SAM Project Management for Business is a module dedicated to international students; roughly 95% of them come from China. These students rarely ask questions in class or interact with each the teacher or each other. This usually relates to their various cultural backgrounds and being used to less interactive teaching styles. Their background usually hinders class participation, student engagement and certainly would pose a great challenge in collaborative work. Also there may be problems related to technology access and time-zones. This may influence the availability of live interactions and depth of communication.

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Appendix 1. Learning/knowledge resource

“Coventry University Staff Guide”:

[https://coggle.it/diagram/VwQx6J-](https://coggle.it/diagram/VwQx6J-5duBxNUQY/c55a085df3610fbf7783470db2217cb9e4504563dd6ef4597a3545b7db8eb971)

[5duBxNUQY/c55a085df3610fbf7783470db2217cb9e4504563dd6ef4597a3545b7db8eb971](https://coggle.it/diagram/VwQx6J-5duBxNUQY/c55a085df3610fbf7783470db2217cb9e4504563dd6ef4597a3545b7db8eb971)

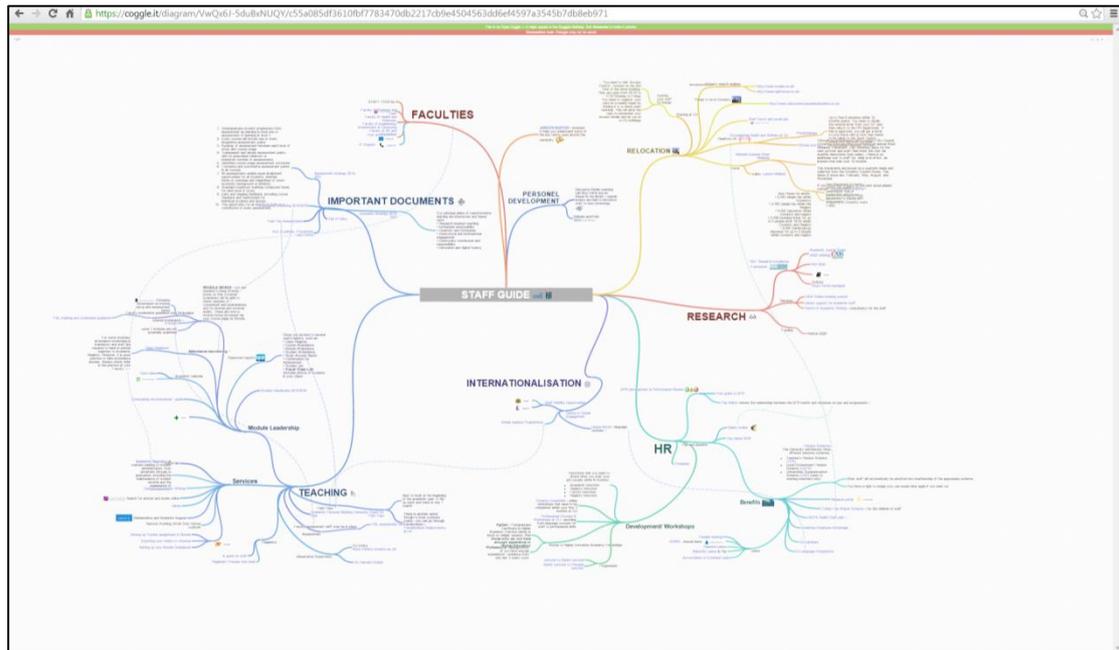


Figure 2 OCP5 knowledge resource

(source: Print screen from https://coggle.it/diagram/VuGwLg_jCUx8vwxG)

Appendix 2. Rationale for choice of resource and social media delivery mechanism

Social media delivery mechanism: <http://padlet.com/EKostanek/M03>

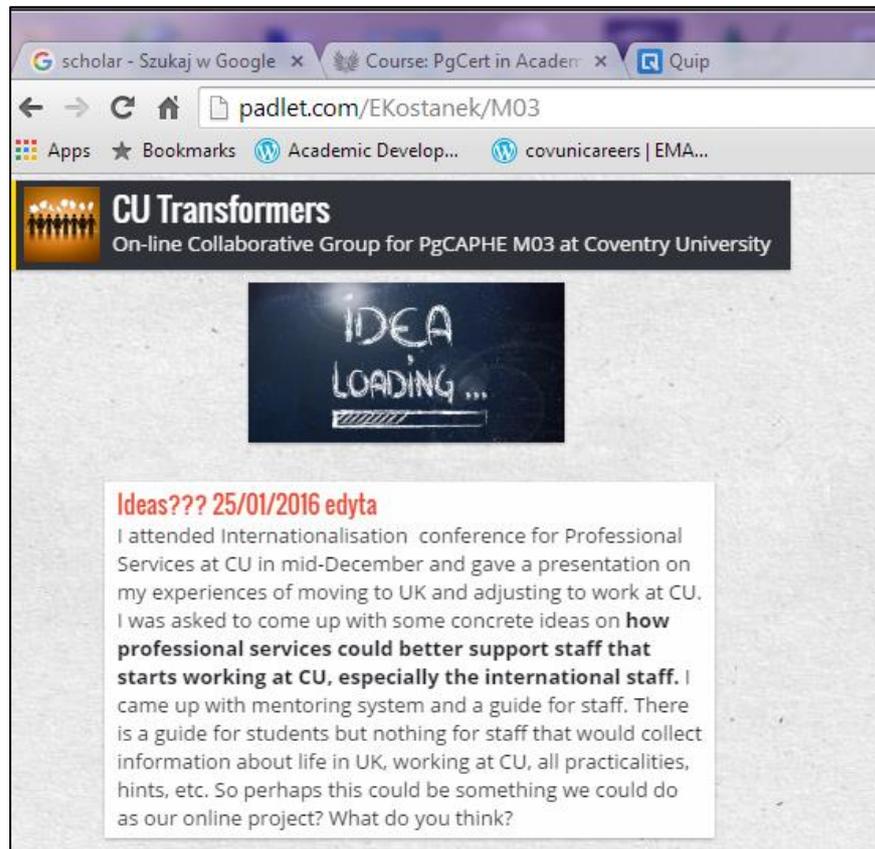


Figure 3 Rationale for the choice of resource
(source: Print screen from <http://padlet.com/EKostanek/M03>)

Appendix 3. Evidence of critical engagement with peers

<https://cumoodle.coventry.ac.uk/mod/forum/discuss.php?d=91675>

 **Online Collaborative Project - Group 5**
by Edyta Kostanek - Tuesday, 5 April 2016, 10:51 PM

Dear all,

We would like to share with you the output of our collaborative project.

We noticed that there is already a guide for international students coming to study at CU. However, there is no such resource for the use of newly hired staff. Hence, our group created a Staff Guide in the form of a mind map with clickable links that collects all the information in one place and presents it in a fairly simple form. We hope this will be a useful resource not only to newly hired employees but also to current staff.

Please find the Staff Guide here:
<https://coggle.it/diagram/VwQx6J-5duBxNUQY/c55a085df3610fb7783470db2217cb9e4504563dd6ef4597a3545b7db8eb971>

We would appreciate your feedback!

All the best,
Cherisse, Edyta, Eleanor & Jon

 **Re: Online Collaborative Project - Group 5**
by Steven Mowforth - Monday, 2 May 2016, 3:35 PM

Hi Group 5,

Really useful info for new (and old!) staff! It seems to cover just about everything.

Constructive feedback... Might be just my own take on it - since my learning style tends to be sequential rather than organic - but I wonder, in place of Coggle, whether Prezi might have offered the best of both worlds so to speak. If a recall correctly you can have it play a slideshow (focus on elements in the order you choose) and also give users the freedom to navigate independently of that.

All the best
Steve

 **Re: Online Collaborative Project - Group 5**
by Eleanor Parker - Thursday, 12 May 2016, 3:56 PM

Hi Steve

Thanks for the feedback. Although Coggle looked good, I think some of our group found it was not very intuitive to operate, and personally I found it difficult to navigate once completed, mainly because you could not see all aspects of it at once. So not a great a platform as we thought it might be!

Eleanor

Figure 4 Sharing the OCP5 with colleagues from PgCAPHE on the Moodle Forum
(source: Print screen from:
<https://cumoodle.coventry.ac.uk/mod/forum/discuss.php?d=91675>)

Appendix 4. Evidence of collaborative working within the group

We utilised documents on Quip:

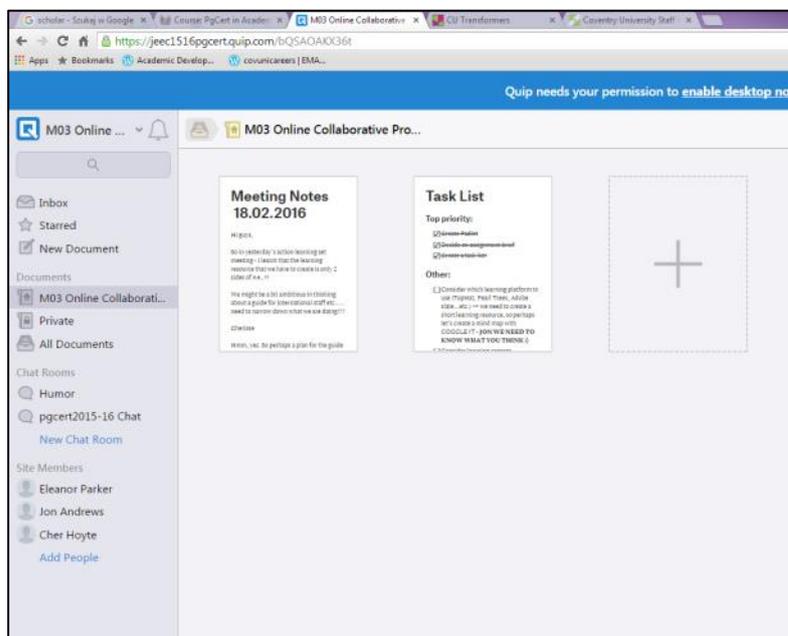


Figure 5 Documents used to exchange longer opinions (not suitable for chat) and to plan tasks that need to be completed to deliver the knowledge resource (source: Print screen from Quip)

We also utilized chat function on Quip:

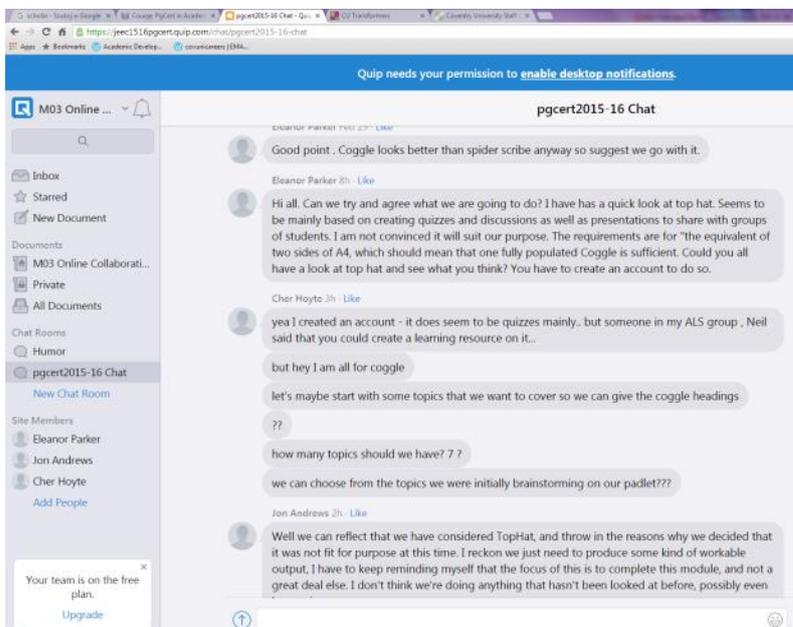


Figure 6 Example of chat conversations within OCP5 (source: Print screen from Quip)

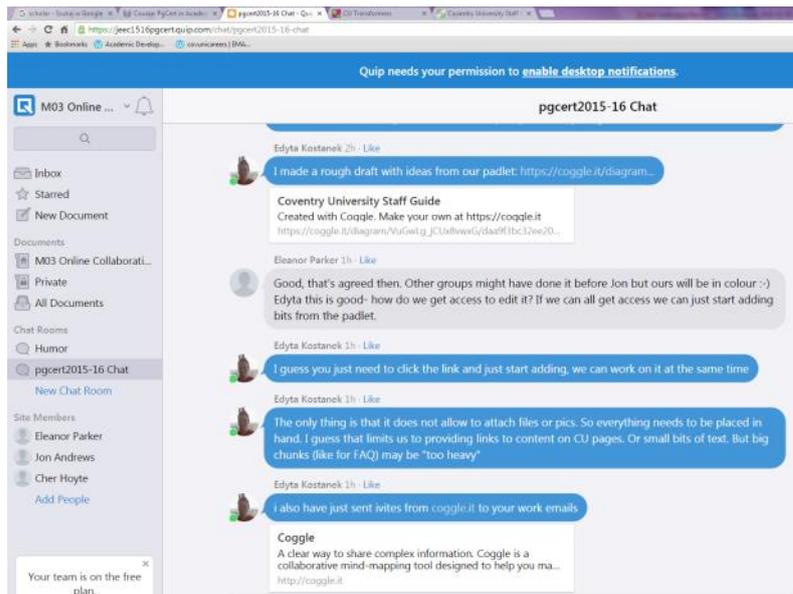


Figure 7 Example of chat conversations within OCP5 (source: Print screen from Quip)