

Organisational Psychology

The perils and joys of working with others

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Great organisational psychologists are like great chefs



So what did we get up to?

- I set up the Organisational Psychology module *as if* our students were actually working together in work teams
- Working in teams makes sense at every level:
 - Most Org. Psych. theory is about social interaction
 - Most learning in life is social: we watch others perform, we talk about what our experiences mean to us, we give each other feedback
 - Have siblings or friends? Then you know what I'm talking about.
- Each team prepares 2 presentations
 - Not graded by me, but each team votes on every other team presentation
 - Team members are invited to prepare and provide formal feedback to each other on everyone's performance in preparing these
 - Why do this twice?
- During every session, students do team exercises to apply Org. Psych. theories and frameworks and complete reflection sheets
 - To capture what the theories and frameworks mean to them personally
 - These form the basis of the 1 assignment for the module: a reflective essay
- 67 students completed this elective.
- What was it like?
 - In our students' words... *(from reflective essays; named individuals gave permission to share)*



SIMPLES!

First impressions

Before the first lecture I sat outside the lecture theatre and downloaded the slides for that session. To my horror I read that there was going to be activities where I would have to interact with class mates, talk to new people and potentially embarrass myself in front of a large group of 20 something year olds. This was extremely uncomfortable as I lack confidence when put into situations where I have to meet new people and where I may be seen as something I am not. I quickly looked to see if there were any other modules that I could switch to before giving this module a chance, but I managed to talk myself into sticking with Organisational Psychology. I kept in mind that the contents of this module and the skills I would learn would benefit my career progression and that I really needed to put my anxiety to one side and 'just get on with it'. This is a clear example of my system 1 trying to take control in a very fast,

for their lecture notes and ensuring that I am vocal and noticeable in the next lecture. The latter action was one I prepared myself for because I knew that three years of minimal social interaction with fellow students would be put to an end in this module. I personally felt that I was quite unknown by my peers within my degree and therefore I knew I had to prepare myself to seem sociable, confident and approachable in order to have a group who I could successfully work with. I knew that teamwork would be integral to the overall success within this module, therefore this was my primary motivation in why I wanted to be proactive towards socialising.

Admittedly it was my own fault for not reading the module specification in more detail before selecting or starting the organisational psychology module, but I did not realise that group work would be such a fundamental part of the module as it turned out to be. Even though I believed I was good at working in a team, this was unexpected and therefore slightly unnerving. Being more accustomed to simply listening to a lecturer talk about theories and research and having to write about it in an essay or exam, I initially considered changing to an 'easier' module. After more thought, I decided I would likely learn more from a new experience and it would have greater applications to my workplace and personal interactions.

I didn't know anyone else in my group except for one person that I had previously been allocated to work with in my second year, and I don't think I had ever spoken to any of the other group members in my almost three years of studying at City University. I remember reading the slides for the first lecture of the module at home because I didn't go to that lecture and when I saw the first exercise was a type of ice breaker where the class had to get up and introduced themselves I was thanking the lords that I missed that lecture because I didn't want to stand up in front of so many students and introduce myself. However, I regretted the decision of not going severely the following week when we were being put into random groups and I only knew one person from my group and some of my other group members knew each other from the previous week.

Session One: Setting personal goals

At the beginning of the module, Dr Tobias-Jutta instructed us to introduce ourselves to each other and discuss our feelings, hopes and fears. Even though I shared the majority of my modules with the students in the class, I had never really spoken to anyone except from my small circle of friends. According to Joseph LeDoux (2015), anxiety is our base condition and

progress from them as time goes on. The main goal I set out for myself at the start of

the module was to try to get out of my comfort zone. I encouraged myself to speak up

in class discussions which is something I have not done in my time at City. The first

time I spoke in class I was nervous in putting my hand up; to share my idea was the

most terrifying thing I can honestly say I have done at City. Presenting group

presentations was something I have become confident in doing over the years but

voluntarily participating in front of a large group was difficult. I am very proud of myself

for this achievement and in the future I hope I can continue to get myself out of my

comfort zone.

Daring to 'play' at university

Within minute I had decided what kind of lecturer Jutta would be based on what she was wearing, her facial expression and her body language. I wrongly assumed this was going to be like any other module. In the first activity Jutta instructed us to stand up and shake our limbs about, I immediately thought about how I did not want to participate and move out of my physical and mental comfort zone, but I gave in. Jutta then broke the ice when she opened the floor up to ask us what we were feeling after that activity. The room was quiet, nobody wanted to 'play' with her and I tried to avoid eye contact as much as possible in fear of being picked on. A few people gave out some suggestions on how they felt, then our eyes met, and my heart started pounding as Jutta's facial expression prompted me to also suggest something. It was very daunting to me when I interacted with her in front of my whole cohort as I have done a very good job at hiding in the crowd since the beginning of University; never 'playing' with the lecturers, as Jutta would say. I remember feeling like I had compromised my personal rules by speaking out, but when the whole class laughed at my response (my coping mechanism is to make jokes) I didn't feel too bad.

“I Will” Statements



Session Two: Introduction to Team Work

When I first learned that we were required to work in groups within the Organisational Psychology module I was sceptical and resented the idea. Based on my previous experiences of working with others at university, I expected it to be awkward, time-consuming and unnecessary for our learning. At first I was nervous to meet my team members because there was no one I knew within my group, except for a girl I worked with on a project the year before.

To be completely frank, approaching this module, I was incredibly scared and worried about the idea of working in teams as in three years I had never enjoyed group projects, working or presenting in teams. At first, I hoped in the possibility of choosing our teammates, however, as soon as Jutta started randomly assigning numbers, I foresaw the obligation to work with “strangers”. That is the moment when the “Divergents” team was born.

“We Will” Team Statements



**WE WILL WORK TOGETHER TO GO OUT OF OUR COMFORT ZONE
AND CHALLENGE OURSELVES IN ORDER TO ACHIEVE OUR |
GOALS**

Amris, Rasana, Sofia, Anika, Emaan, Alexandra, and Mahgul.

Preparing Team Presentation #1

At this stage, the team and I were preparing for our first presentation which

initially seemed pointless since it was not graded. Personally, I do not mind presenting but the lack of bonding and comfort with my team members made it discouraging. I however did

understand presenting is a great skill to establish as it will be needed throughout careers and

for communicating clearly. Ironically, my team's presentation subject was about

psychological safety which refers to team members feeling safe enough to take risks and be

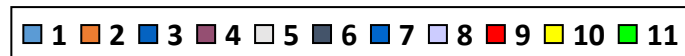
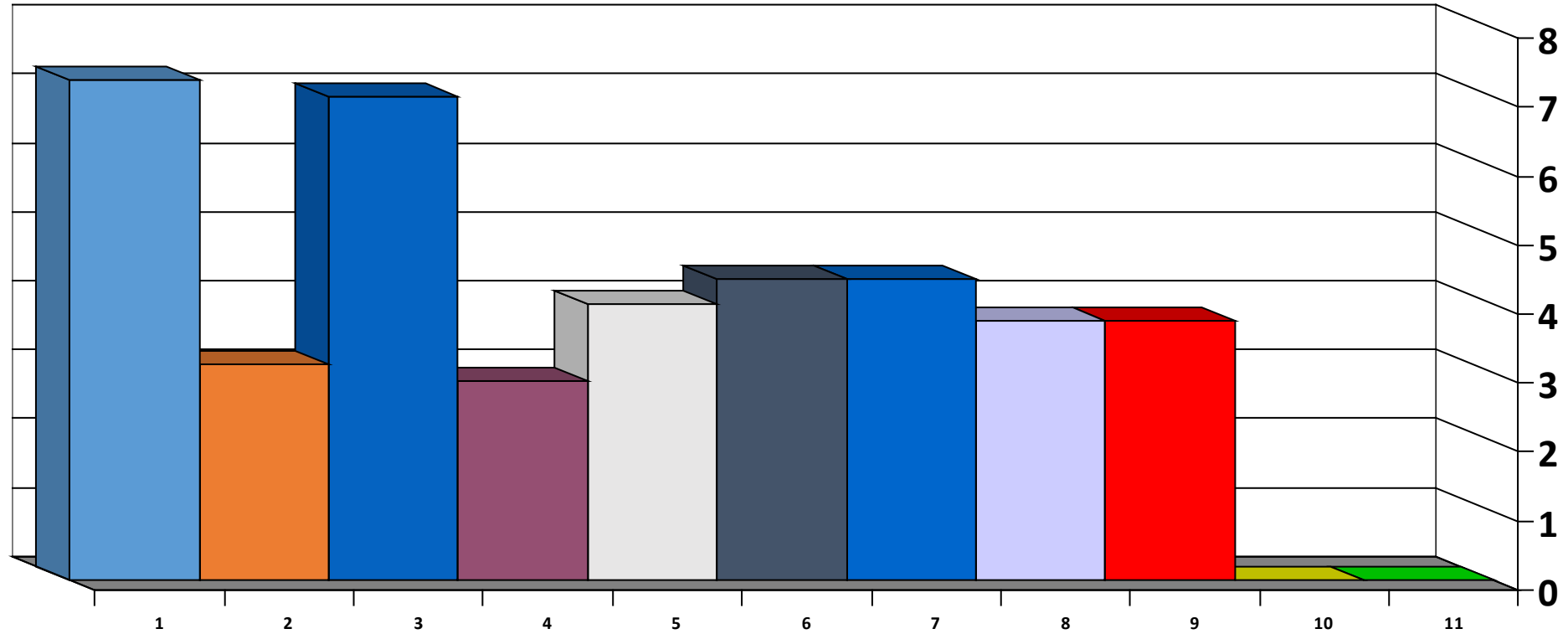
vulnerable in front of each other. At this point, I did not feel psychologically safe to take risks

and voice my true opinions within my team. Tasks were delegated to each team member on

First round of team presentations



When it clicked



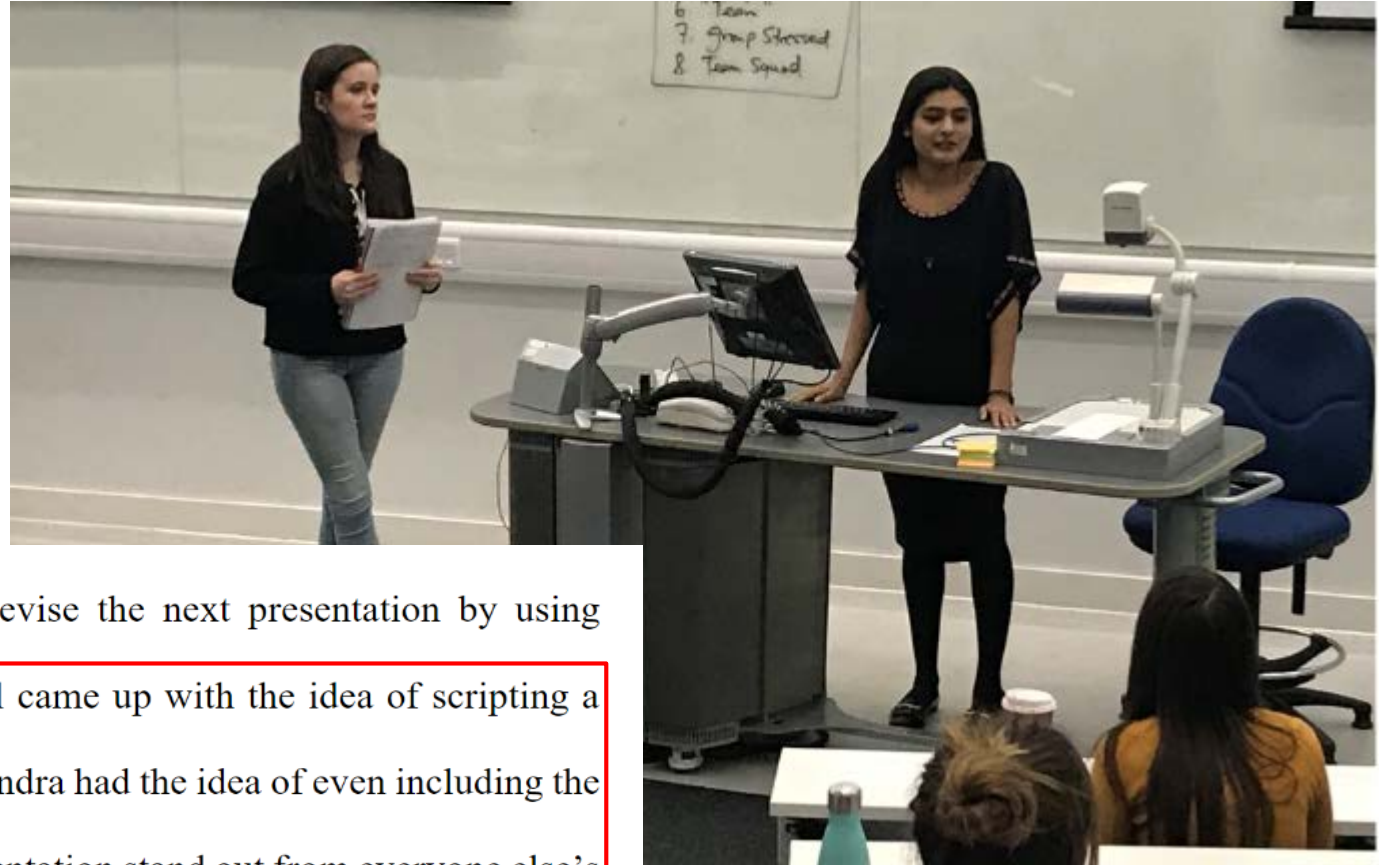
First round of feedback giving

After the first presentation, we were asked to give feedback to the members in our group regarding their performance and contribution to the task. However, I could not complete this task well as I was afraid that it may cause conflict and tension between us and I did not want to risk that. I gave very general feedback but nothing specific. This was definitely one of my biggest weaknesses because if I gave this feedback, they may have been able to perform better in the next round of presentations.

and Jutta due to the recency effect. Once all the teams performed, we were instructed to rank the teams as a group and discuss the strengths and weaknesses we noted down for each team.

This discussion allowed the team to communicate further by listening and engaging upon different opinions. For the first time, the team moved their seats in order to surround me as I was constantly sat at the end of the row and hardly heard. This made me feel appreciated and inclusive of the team. Moreover, I noticed team members fed off other team members opinions as if one person spoke up, this led to a domino effect of others vocalising their thoughts. Although there were some disagreements on the rankings, team members were

2nd round of team presentations & feedback-giving



After realising our mistake, our group decided to devise the next presentation by using unconventional strategies to catch people's attention. Mahgul came up with the idea of scripting a roleplay to make the presentation more engaging. Then, Alexandra had the idea of even including the audience in the presentation. These two aspects made our presentation stand out from everyone else's and allowed us to be recognised as the best one. However, my personal contribution to these unconventional ideas was null: I could not think outside the box because my thinking process is still highly schematic and based on the central route to influence.

On giving & receiving structured feedback (twice)

The most difficult task for me was giving and receiving feedback. The question which would arise is 'If I give my team members feedback, will I be criticised and will they be hurt?'. After taking part in two feedback sessions, I realised that it is not hard or scary to give and receive feedback. Many people, just like me, are afraid of criticism and negative feedback because it is unpleasant and hard to accept. We hold the belief that people are more hostile than we are. The reality is that giving and receiving feedback is a very powerful tool in the workplace.

embarrassment. In the first feedback session, I avoided giving honest and constructive feedback to my team and only gave praise to avoid offending the other person. For example, I felt that 5 was not confident presenting and did not make enough eye contact with the audience, however, in the feedback session I only praised her on her pro-activeness and contributions to the group. I also avoided giving 6, who I was particularly frustrated with, any feedback at all. On reflection, I also noticed that I avoided telling other members what their contribution meant for me as this required me to be vulnerable with my team which I did not feel able to do due to fear of embarrassing myself and being perceived as overenthusiastic.

However, I noticed that in the second feedback session I was able to give constructive feedback and let others know why I valued their contributions. For example, I told 5 I felt she was unconfident in her presentation and I told 2 that her engaging and confident introduction to the presentation eased my nerves when it was my turn to speak. I attribute the difference in my ability to be vulnerable between the two sessions to my levels of psychological safety.

Reflection sheets looked like this...

Reflection Sheet #1 **Your Name:**

Goal Setting: Towards Your “I Will” Statement
Personalising your success plan for PS3013 and beyond using key theories from session #1 Note: this is not for sharing (unless you want to)

1. Your Hopes and Fears
Discuss in pairs what you hope to achieve in this module (and beyond) and share what you feel is appropriate about what concerns or fears come up for you (write down what should be captured here):

Write down below what you noticed / what is interesting / what is worth remembering:

2. Write down one specific (achievable) goal you want to reach this term


3. Why do you want to achieve this goal?

What does your head/mind/cognition say?

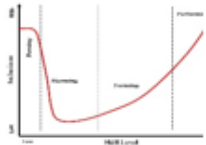
Reflection Sheet #2 **Your Name:**

Team Formation and Team Building
Helping you apply key theories from session #2 in PS3013 2019
Note: the content on this form is not for sharing in class (unless you want to)

1. How we make decisions
Write down below what you noticed / what is interesting / what is worth remembering about Dan Kahneman's System 1 & System 2 theory on how we make decisions in life and at work. What decisions have you taken in this module to date where one of these two dominated? What can you do about this?



2. Team stages
What is useful for you to remember about Bruce Tuckman's team development stages and team performance, in particular about you and your team members working well together in your learning team over the course of this term? What is worth discussing with your team members?



Using reflection sheets

Primarily, certain elements of the first few lectures for me felt strange and confusing. This was because I didn't expect the lecture to be as insightful and empowering as it was. Moreover, being introduced to reflection sheets made me very sceptical and doubtful of the usefulness behind it. This is because I felt very uptight about expressing myself and reporting my personal goals on paper to later go on to sharing them with pairs. My reflection sheets in the first few weeks were somewhat lacking extensive detail and enriched answers. Reflecting back to the first few weeks, this may have been due to the fact that I wasn't completely sure about my opinion of the course and felt as though I was out of my element. However, this eventually changed when I started to benefit from the reflection sheets as it was a way of

however, the biggest lesson I have learnt over the course of the module is the importance of reflection. Without the reflective worksheets, feedback sessions or this reflective paper, I would not have gained such insights into my behaviour and how that interacts with team dynamics, and therefore I would not have been able to set meaningful goals for the future.



Take-Aways

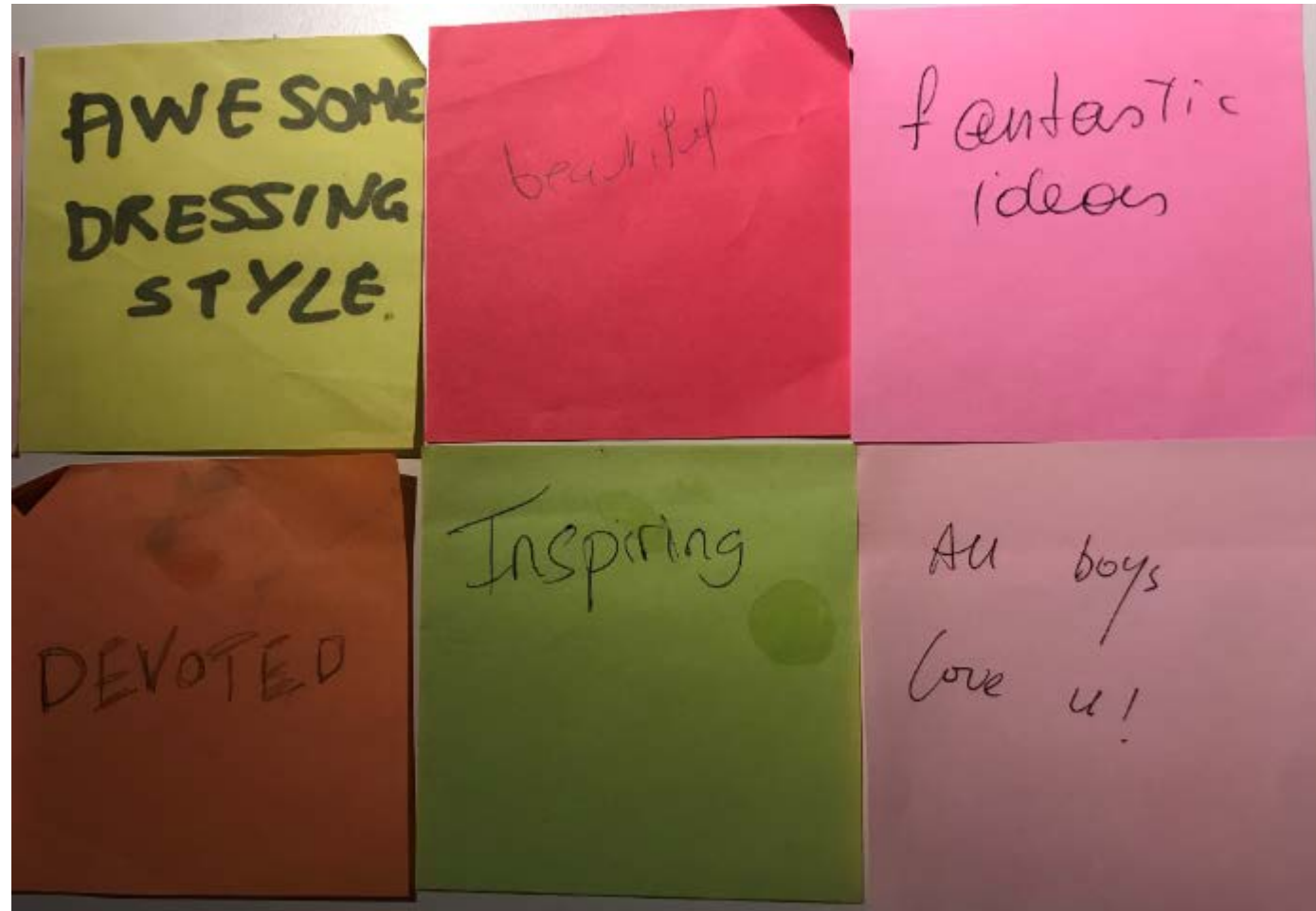
This module was overall a surprise to me. I wasn't even enrolled in the first place because I felt quite sceptic regarding the content of it, since I was not interested in working in organisations as a psychologist and thus felt like the topic was not that relevant to me. However, especially during Session 11, I finally realised how this module gave me the ability to take a step back, after completing a certain task, and critically analyse my behaviour and feelings in a situation and how this was affecting the group. Indeed, I found that verbalising my thoughts out loud to the rest of the group or discussing it with another student helped me really understand my position in regards to a certain topic or circumstance. Again, this brings my attention on how communication

Reflecting back to the beginning of the term, I set myself the goal to “embrace new challenges within this module”. I am proud to say that I embraced working with new people, presenting in front of a large audience, participating in role-plays and giving feedback to others, all of which were outside of my “comfort zone”. From doing so I have improved my confidence and willingness to work in teams and deal with conflicts. I have gained new skills and understandings which I will apply to future situations, especially in the workplace.

In hindsight...

If I were to re- attend this organisational course, I would carry out certain aspects differently to how I went about it this time. The first difference would be ensuring I entered the course with a more open mind. This would allow me to feel more at ease and less uptight about documenting my goals and personal opinions on the reflection papers at the end of each session. The following difference I would make is similarly, to not be hesitant and uncertain about being part of an unfamiliar group. This inhibited my initial performance in the groupwork stages and thereby effected my groupwork experience. I have learnt to be confident in order to grow and progress towards my set goals. Moreover, if I were to repeat this course, I would ensure more effort and time is put into my reflection sheets; especially the ones from the first few lectures. By doing so, it would have been easier to reflect on all the lectures effectively.

Final feedback session



Student to student feedback; provided as part of reflective essay



Maya Angelou (1928-2014)

Dare to connect!