Transcript: Group Work: “The Rowing Eight”

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I've put a lot of time and thought into selling group work to students. One thing that I will really say for Deakin, and I've worked in lots of different unis at different times, but they are fair dinkum about allowing you to do this flexibly and well, and you won't encounter this everywhere by any means, so that's a big plus. Something which I do is, I try and construct quite large groups—about the size of a rowing eight is ideal. They are randomly selected, including on and off-campus students. And right at the start, I tell them that in a randomly selected group of eight or nine or possibly ten people, you are going to get at least one and possibly two ‘slackers’, you’ll have a few control freaks—you’ll have some issues to work out over both the goal and the method of getting there. That is the point. Learning to deal with that aspect of a randomly selected group. Which is what you’ll encounter in the workplace. That is the skill we are hoping you'll develop in a safe place where the consequences of failure are huge. And being upfront like that and selling that right at the beginning has worked very well. I’ve been delighted with how well people have responded. And there is always, in a group of 20, I've had twenty groups and ... [pauses and thinks] the term has just gone ... there’ll always be one that implodes. You deal with it, it’s a management issue, it’s not impossible. And even those groups teach some valuable life lessons for the people who participated even if they don't realise it at the time.