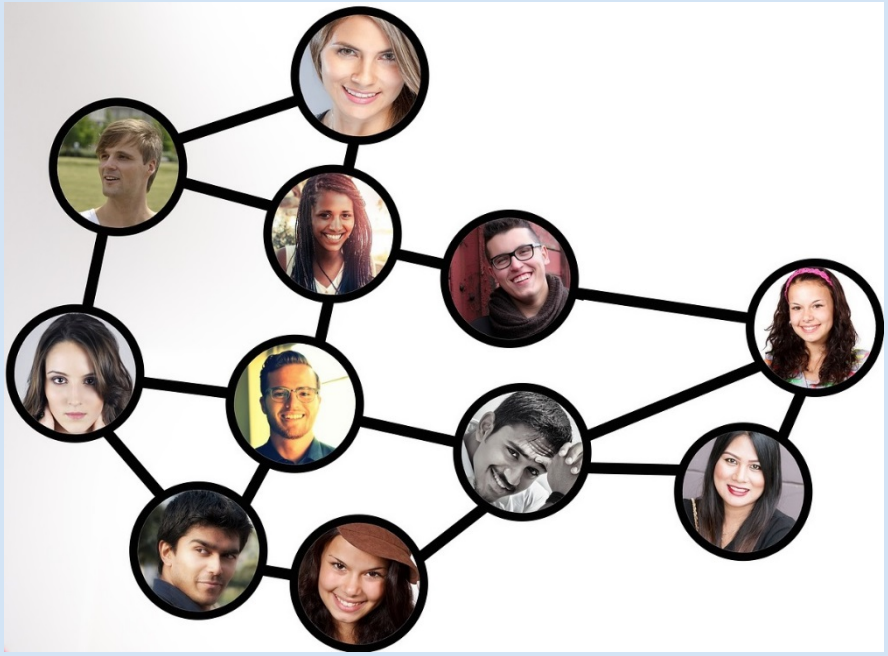
Assessing online group work

ALT-C 2016



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Background and aims

- Importance of online group work:
  - Develop teamwork skills
  - Learning with others
- The challenges:
  - For students
  - For educators
- Context:
  - Distance, part-time learning at the UK Open University
  - Group project in the module: *Communication and information technologies*
- Aims of the research:
  - Investigate the challenge of implementing an online group project
  - Gain perspectives of students and tutors
  - Design group projects which are engaging to students and fairly assessed

Today's presentation

- Introduction to the online group project:
  - Website development
  - Work in a wiki
  - How the project work is marked
- Research methods
- Findings
  - From students
  - From tutors
- Framework for assessing online group projects
  - Individual marks versus group marks
  - Product versus process

The module:
Communication and Information technologies

Key facts:

- 9-month part-time study
- Integrates a wide range of technical topics with generic skills development
- 60 credits at level 2
- 400-600 students per presentation
- The assignment for one of the five study blocks is a group project
- Students work in groups of 6-8 for the project

Block 3: *Creating & collaborating*

Online collaboration technologies and approaches

Large element of group work in the assessment

Creating a group website (40%)

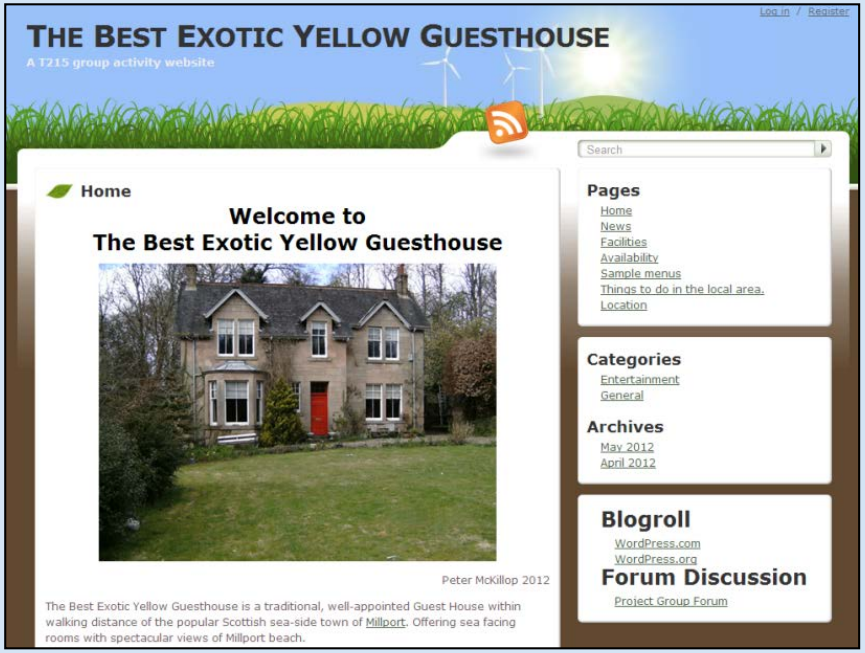
[Focus of the research presented here]

Collaborative working in a wiki (50%)

[Previous research – some results included here]

Reporting and reflecting on the collaboration (10%)

Creating a group website



WordPress for the website:

- Groups develop a website for a given scenario & client e.g. a holiday company, a walking club
- They use WordPress, forums, wiki, web conferencing (optional)

Marks allocated for:

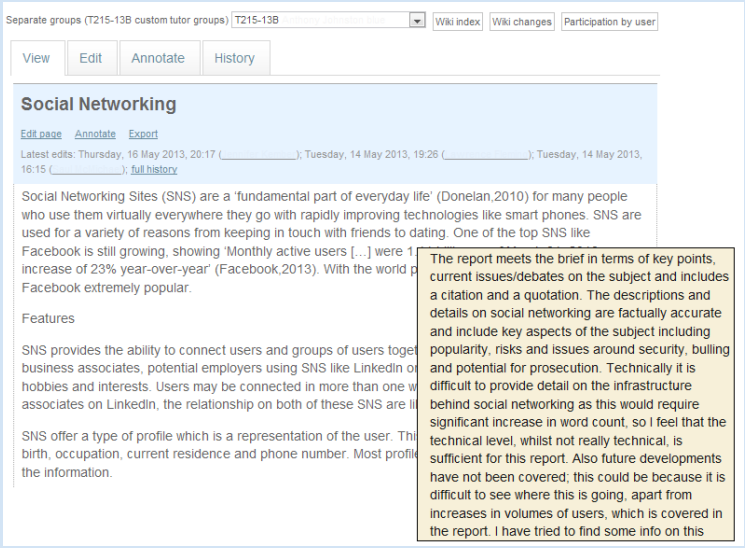
- product (the website); and process (collaboration)
- group as a whole; and individual contributions

Marked by viewing:

- the website and WordPress dashboard
- discussions in the forum
- documented decisions in the wiki

	Marks for product (website)	Marks for process (collaboration)
Individual marks	30%	30%
Group marks	20%	20%

Collaborative working in a wiki



Wikis for peer feedback:

- Each student writes a wiki page about an aspect of online communication and collaboration
- Each students gives/receives feedback to/from two group members; then improves their own page
- They use wiki, forums, web conferencing (optional)

Marks allocated for:

- product (wiki page); and process (giving/receiving feedback)
- group as a whole; and individual contributions

Marked by viewing:

- wiki page and feedback (copied into assignment)
- wiki history
- discussions in the forum
- documented decisions in the wiki

	Marks for product (wiki page)	Marks for process (peer feedback)
Individual marks	60%	30%
Group marks	0%	10%

Research methods

- Undertaken as two separate projects:

Website research:

Student data (qualitative):

- 27 students via six online focus groups
- Open ended questions to explore students' experiences:
- e.g. Did they find it rewarding? What were the frustrations? How did they feel about the assessment?
- Focus group data transcribed and coded.
- Emergent themes identified.

Tutor data (qualitative):

- 10 tutors in online discussion forums
- Open ended questions to explore tutors' experiences and views
- Coded using themes already identified.

Forms the basis of the following findings.

Wiki research:

Student data (qualitative and quantitative)

- 74 students via an online survey
- Closed questions with open comment boxes
- e.g. did the wiki provide all the features needed? Did group members contribute equally?
- Quantitative data analysed; qualitative data coded and analysed.

Tutor data (qualitative):

- 21 tutors in online discussion forums
- Open ended questions to explore tutors' experiences and views
- Coded and analysed.

Results previously published – fed into following findings where appropriate.

Research on the website collaboration

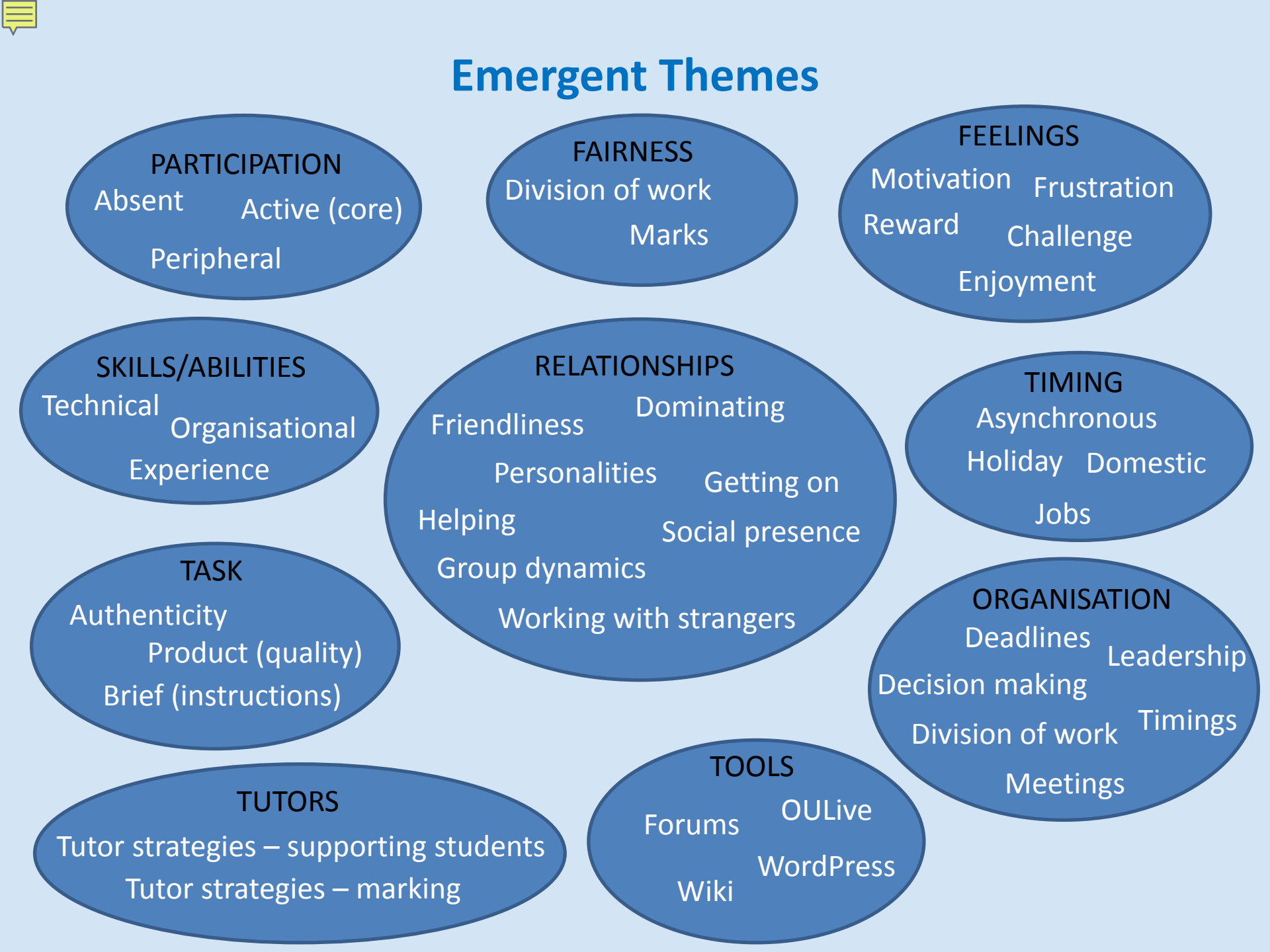
Three key elements were considered for the website research:

- *The collaboration*
  - how students interact and work together

- *The task*
  - what students are required to do/produce

- *The assessment*
  - how students' work is graded

Emergent Themes



Main findings - *The collaboration*

Students

- For the majority, the group project was an enjoyable experience.
- The collaboration was the most challenging element of the project, but also the most rewarding.
- Some, but not all groups had leaders.
- Collaboration was a cause of anxiety for some students.
- Evidence of cooperation rather than collaboration.

Tutors

- Agreed that the majority of students enjoyed the group work.
- Agreed that the collaboration, rather than the task, was the biggest challenge for students but also the most rewarding aspect.
- Felt that in most groups an ‘unofficial’ leader emerged.
- Tutors’ own challenges were mainly related to assessing the collaboration.

Main findings - *The task*

Students

- Most students were proud of their final product and would like to showcase it.
- The tools (both wiki and website) were fairly intuitive and easy to use.
- More technically experienced students were frustrated with the task – the limitations of the tools.
- More technically experienced students felt the task was not 'authentic' enough, and wanted to include other content (e.g. twitter feeds).

Tutors

- Agreed that the students were proud of what they achieved.
- Agreed that more technically experienced students complained about the task.
- Felt that the task was authentic.
- Said that less technically experienced students learnt new skills, but often let others do the work.

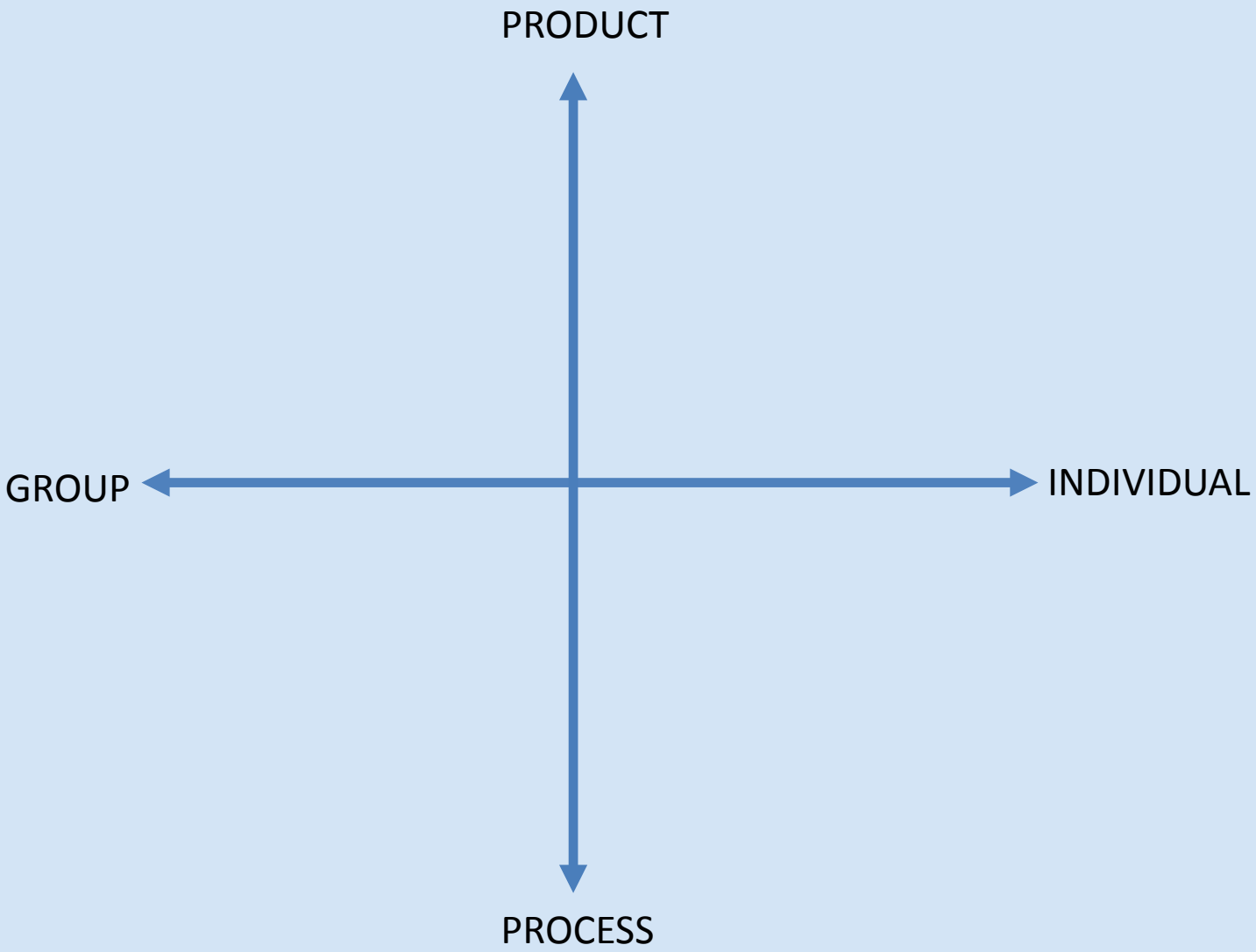
Main findings - *The assessment*

Students

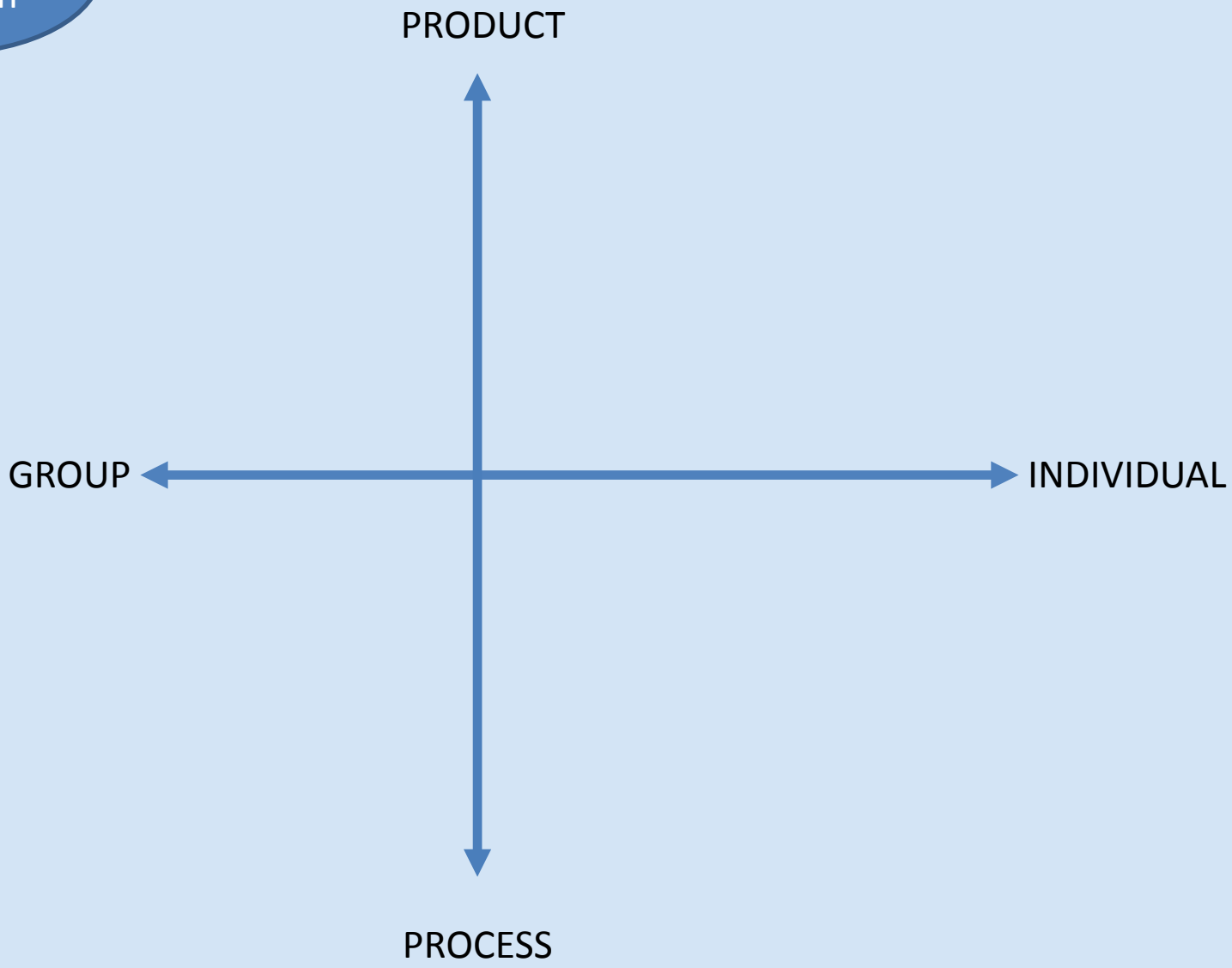
- Even balance of opinions on whether work was divided fairly in groups.
- Some students felt they were 'carrying' others.
- Even balance of opinions on whether the group marks were fair.
- Felt individual input was recognised, but would have liked to know what marks others in their group were awarded.
- Some students were worried/anxious about group marks.

Tutors

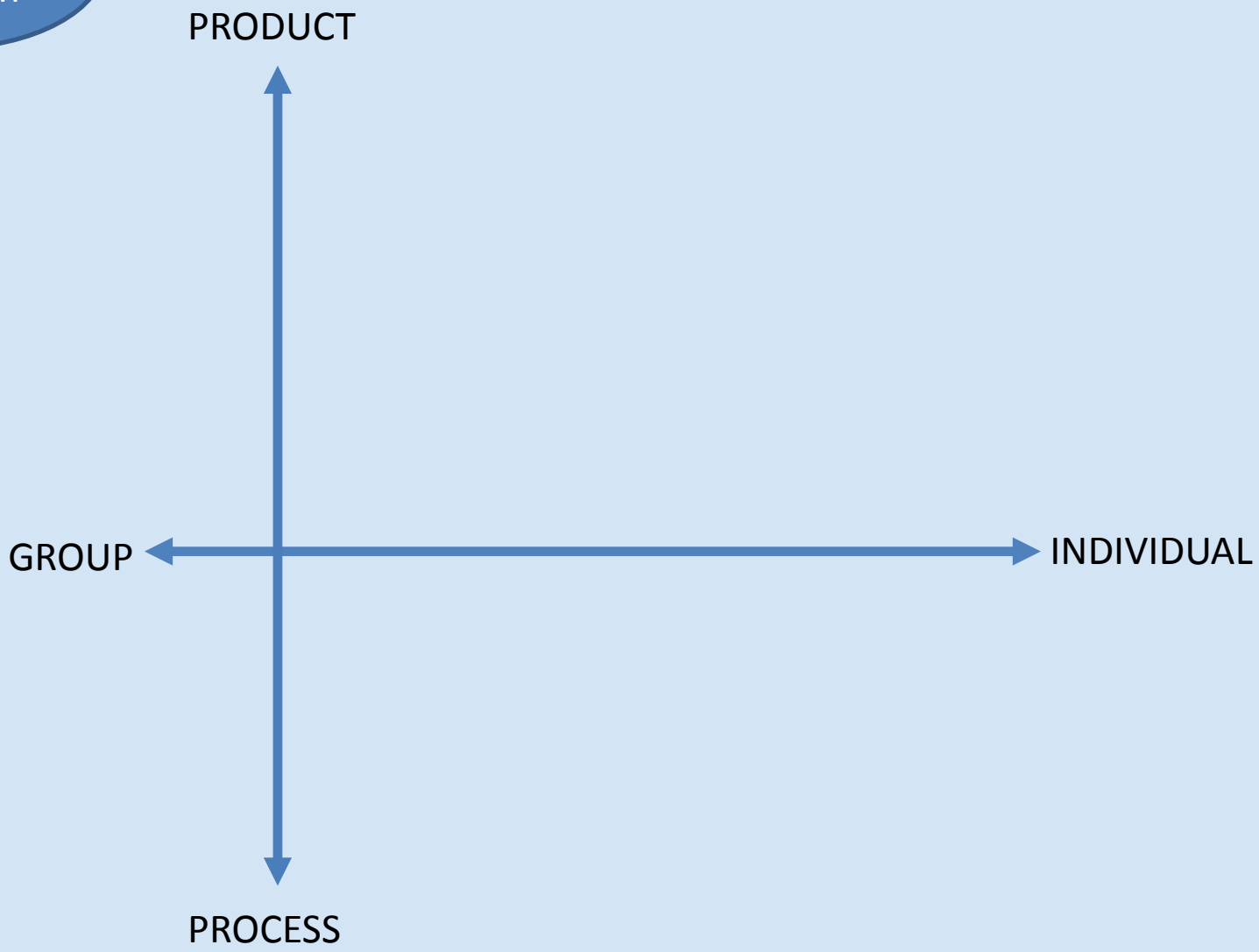
- Felt that work was not divided fairly in groups.
- Agreed that some students 'carry' others.
- Did not like allocating group marks, despite the bias towards individual marks.
- Found marking group work time consuming and difficult.
- Marking strategies involved keeping on top of forum postings, and making notes on group dynamics.


PRODUCT
GROUP
INDIVIDUAL
PROCESS

Website question



Wiki question



PRODUCT

- How important are the technical (vs. group working) skills?
- Opportunity to showcase products.

- Relatively easy to mark.
- Tutors unhappy about awarding group marks (for product).

- How to challenge ALL students?
- Freedom to undertake more complex technical tasks – more authentic?

- Can be relatively easy to mark.
- Difficult to differentiate between students at both ends of the scale.

GROUP

INDIVIDUAL

- Assigning a group leader - more authentic? How would this affect marking?

- Time consuming for tutors to mark.
- Monitoring group dynamics.
- Tutors unhappy about awarding group marks (for process).

- How to support students who struggle and how to reduce anxiety?

- Time consuming for tutors to mark.
- How to effectively monitor an individual's input and mark accurately?

PROCESS

Thank you

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