Multiple person start-up:
What if we don't agree?

1. Introduction

In entrepreneurship, being able to cooperate -often with people from a totally different sector as yourself- is essential. Cooperation competences and skills are of massive importance. Because how do you act if different people share different opinions on a certain topic? How do you make sure everybody is moving in the same direction?

Probably you noticed when working in a group at school that group work often creates problems. This is something that you have to deal with, even in the future, when you have become an established entrepreneur.

This case describes the situation of the six students, Marieke, Ellis, French, Jelmer, Bertus and Esmee who have decided to set up their own business. After a promising start not all students seem to share the same idea's about how to run the company. What to do now?

After studying the case a class discussion follows.

2. Overview and analysis

Marieke, Ellis, Frank, Jelmer, Bertus and Esmee learned a lot about managing their own business during their training. In their third year, they have been given the opportunity to set up their own company as a group. Setting up a real company belonged to a special program on entrepreneurship that their school offered, and after completing the cource with an outstanding grade, they decided to continue with the company in real life.

In stead of a boring side job, the group intends to earn their pocket money with organising parties for kids. The business plan is ready, now it's only a matter of starting-up!

The students have regular after school meetings to plan the kids parties, talk about customer acquisition, purchase agreements, etc. During the school program on entrepreneurship the students already decided on a task division. The distribution of tasks and responsibilities is as follows:

• Marieke: Director & President
• Ellis: Administration & Finance
• Frank: Marketing and Communication (Esmee)

Marieke, Ellis and Frank are also responsible for the supervision and care of children during children's parties.

- Jelmer: Purchasing
- Bertus: Human Resources
- Esmee: Marketing & Communication (Frank)

Jelmer, Bertus and Esmee are also responsible for the entertainment (clown / magic tricks) of the children during the parties.

3. Status report

This Friday at 4 PM, the students got together for their fifth meeting. After the meeting everybody is supposed to finish their tasks over the weekend. So far, Ellis has been responsible for writing and distribution of the meeting minutes. She sent all the team members the minutes last Monday. President Marieke made and distributed the meeting agenda for this week last Wednesday.

Marieke opens the meeting and asks if anyone has anything they like to add to the agenda. Only Marieke, Ellis and Esmee brought the agenda to the meeting, the others did not. Same for the minutes for last meeting. Frank, Jelmer and Bertus state to have no additions to the agenda. Frank even claims to have never seen the agenda.

The last meeting minutes say that all team members would spend some time thinking about how the company can generate more customers. Marieke ask everyone what their thoughts are. Esmee suggests to make a flyer and distribute them in primary schools. The male part of the team doesn't agree at all with this idea. However, they don't have any ideas themselves...

4. Case problem

Marieke, Ellis and Esmee would like to turn this business into a huge success. Frank, Jelmer and Bertus like the image of being an entrepreneur and are interested in earning some pocket money. On the other side they never bring idea's to the company, often show up late and feel that running the company takes to much time and effort. There are other things you could be doing on a Friday afternoon, right?

Key question of this case study is: how to solve this problem?

1.   Synophis

After a promising start of this student company, the expectations of the different group members do not seem to match. In addition, there seems to be a difference between in the amount of input in and motivation for the company. How to solve this problem as a group?

2.   Educational 0bjectives

The development of this case study by students contributes to the acquisition of competences in the following areas:
• Collaborate
• Discuss
• Troubleshooting
• Assigning tasks and revising the tasks

3.   Discussion outline / questions

Where does the cooperation go wrong?
• Are the meeting minutes and agreements clear?
• Are everyone's expectations clearly expressed?
• Are the tasks well distributed, is everyone doing what they are good at and what they like to do?
• Is it clear to everyone what he/she needs to do?
• Is responsibility given to a person and not too much to the group as a whole?

How would you solve this problem?
• Could you proceed with the company in a different composition?
• Could you turn some company owners into employees (pay them a salary in stead of being a owner of the company)
• Could you assign task and responsibilities distribute differently?

4.   Tips for resolving the case problem

Improving cooperation
• Make clear agreements and minutes
• Make sure everyone knows his / her task and responsibility
• Make arrangements for things do not work out as you planned. What are the consequences?
• Always put the initiative back to the person who withdraws his/her responsibility.
• Be open about your expectations of the company to each other. How much time will everybody put into the company? How much revenue should be in order to be a success?
• Make people responsible!

Solving the problem
- Continue with the ladies only
- Adjust division of tasks
- Create a distribution based on commitment and effort: the more effort and time you put into the company, the more money you make.

5. Annexes and links
See annex 'Cooperation test'.

In deze samenwerkingstest komen studenten erachter wat hun sterke eigenschappen op het gebied van samenwerking zijn. Na het document individueel ingevuld te hebben volgt een discussie in groepjes.

Criteria	Cooperation level				Score
	1	**2**	**3**	**4**	
Active Listening **- listen** **- summarise**	I listen carefully to the input of the group members and summarize correctly what has been said.	I often listen to the input of the group members and summarize what has been said.	I sometimes listen to the input of group members together and do not summarize thoroughly what has been said.	I rarely hear what the group is talking about and can not summarize.	
Deal with criticism	I always adjust my behavior or work whenever criticism is justified. I do not feel personally attacked.	I regularly adjust my behavior or work when criticism is justified. I do feel personally attacked however.	I regularly adjust my behavior or work when criticism is justified. I do feel personally attacked all the time.	I rarely adjust my behavior or work when criticism is justified. I get angry or act as if I don't care.	
Participate in group work **-president** **-secretary** **-organisor** **-etc.**	I can execute all roles and task perfectly when it comes to group work.	I can execute some roles and task perfectly when it comes to group work.	I can execute some roles and task when it comes to group work. This sometimes succeeds.	I can execute only one roles and task when it comes to group work. This sometimes succeeds.	
Stick to appointments	Ik kom alle gemaakte afspraken na.	Ik kom meestal de gemaakte afspraken na.	Ik moet vaak aan afspraken herinnerd worden.	Ik kom mijn afspraken niet na.	
Stand up for yourself	I am not afraid to take a stand and defend it.	I am usually not afraid to take a stand and defend it.	I have difficulties taking a stand and defending it.	I only take a stand when I discussed it with my teammates.	

Teamwork - working atmosphere - take others into account	I enjoy working in a team and try to encourage good cooperation in the group.	I usually enjoy working in a team and i adjust to the atmosphere in the group.	I do not always enjoy working in a team and have difficulties with adjusting to the atmosphere in the group.	I don not enjoy working in a team and find it difficult to go along with the group.	
Taking responsibility s a m - for the group e - for you own n actions w e r	I feel very much responsible for the group-result and contribute to this result.	I often feel much responsible for the group-result and contribute to this result.	I only feel responsible for the group-result if someone addresses me directly to it.	I don't feel responsible for the group-result. When someone addresses me to it I react negatively.	
Taking initiative	I always take initiative	I usually take initiative, but sometimes need some direction	I often need guidance before I show initiative	I only do something if I am asked.	