

[Home](#)[Topics](#)[Index](#)[Authors](#)[Journals](#)[Conferences](#)[Organizations](#)[News](#)[Reviewers](#)[Editors](#)[About us](#)[Contact](#)

Topics Overview	(259)
Strategy	(24)
Quality	(7)
Pedagogy	(76)
Educational Principles	(11)
Readiness	(7)
Communication	(14)
Assessment	(9)
Learning Design	(26)
Learning Ware	(9)
Technology	(46)
Human Computer Interaction	(37)
Organisation	(10)
Resource Management	(9)
Competence Development	(15)
Culture	(31)

[Overview](#) › [Pedagogy](#) › [Communication](#) › **[Collaborative Learning](#)**[Lawless, Naomi; Allan, John](#) (2004)**Understanding and reducing stress in collaborative e-Learning***Electronic Journal of e-Learning*, Vol. 2, No. 1, February 2004, pp. 121–127[Google this publication](#) · [ScholarGoogle this publication](#) · Export to: [BibTeX](#), [Endnote/RIS](#)**Review by:** [Strell, Monika](#) (2005-09-16)

This article examines the important issue of stress in collaborative e-learning, and how it can be eliminated or minimised through appropriate design and support.

The authors explore these issues mainly based on evidence from students in an Open University Business School (OUBS) course, and they also link their findings to previous research and similar concerns in other areas, like on-line collaboration in and across businesses and teleworking.

Results from the ‘current research’ refer to a range of issues that are of relevance for stress amongst e-learners engaged in collaborative activities. They can be grouped into three categories: technology and stress; the organisation; and the individual. The technology dimension refers to issues at the provider and user end, including technical problems as well as lack of skills. Organisational issues are linked to the ‘culture’ of a provider organisation (what are the expectations, which tone prevails) as well as the tutor support provided. The individual dimension addresses the personal working and behavioural preferences that learners bring to the online environment, as well as the experiences they encounter throughout a course. These include expectations, how they perceive and manage the pace of asynchronous working as well as time pressures, how groups work together and which group roles exist.

After presenting the evidence, illustrated by quotes, the authors progress to discuss stress within an online learning context, in a first step outlining important variations related to the cause of the stress. They distinguish ‘Asynchronous Anxiety’, ‘Technostress’ – both found in previous research and the OU’s current evidence, and ‘e-team stress’ – experienced by OUBS students when they felt pressured not to let down the other members of their online/virtual team. In a second step suggestions for how to remove or reduce the factors that cause stress for some individuals are outlined. These include offering adequate technical support, creating rules for online working and providing transparency about workload and working patterns and – at the individual level – helping

individuals to get an accurate understanding of their own online group-working preferences and those of others.

The article concludes with information about follow-up research, as well as results from some of the new measures that were put into place following the initial findings, aiming to reduce stress levels amongst students. These included modifications consisting of 'fun' collaborative exercises early on in a course, leading to a significant drop in stress in the small-scale test.

This is a short but important article that addresses a key issue for all those designing and delivering e-learning, whether collaborative or not. It will be of special interest to those who are confronted with issues of under-performance, learner drop-out and worrying attrition rates. Assuming dissatisfaction and stress as crucial causes for these phenomena is easy – pinpointing what exactly causes the stress is more demanding, but is also the first important step to addressing those issues and finding solutions. The article offers useful data and ideas for this purpose, and it should be interesting to see what further research the OU comes up with.

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