

[RE]IMAGINE EDUCATION

A weekly Design·AI newsletter

HUMAN-CENTRIC GENERATIVE AI FOR TEAMWORK

*Dr. Nachamma Sockalingam (OSP)
Assistant Director*

Working on projects? How might we use Generative AI (GenAI) for better teamwork?

Design thinking and project-based learning depend on **teamwork**, yet teamwork does not succeed simply because people are placed in a group. Students, staff, and faculty often face the same challenge: **how do we communicate clearly, share responsibility, and carry work forward together?** In fast-moving projects, goals can become blurred, decisions can be forgotten, and contributions can become invisible.

GenAI tools such as ChatGPT offer a timely opportunity to rethink how teams plan, document, synthesise, and follow through. Used well, GenAI can help teams create project plans, meeting records, action trackers, summaries, and clearer updates. **But this is not just a story about technology. It is a story about how we collaborate, how we listen, and how we hold ourselves accountable.** AI can support the process, but people still decide what matters, and what should be done responsibly.

Read on to **explore how we can use human-centric GenAI for better teamwork.**



Dr. Nachamma
Sockalingam

Assistant Director,
Office of Strategic
Planning

This newsletter is produced with ChatGPT and other AI tools as super-collaborators. The authors contribute the core ideas, drafts, strategic framing, pedagogical insights, and design direction, while AI supports by refining, formatting, and creative articulation. (CC BY-NC-ND 4.0).

Editor of Newsletter:

Dr. Nachamma Sockalingam, Office of Strategic Planning

Contact us at nachamma@sutd.edu.sg to share your Design·AI stories



Challenges in project-based learning

1. Visualise this:

A team of five students begins a design thinking project on improving student well-being on campus. Everyone is enthusiastic. They divide tasks quickly: two students will conduct interviews, one will review literature, one will analyse survey responses, and one will prepare slides.

At first, the project feels productive. Messages are flying across group chats. Notes are being added to shared documents. Ideas are emerging.

But by Week 3, the cracks begin to show.

The interview questions are not aligned with the research goal. The literature review is interesting but not connected to the user findings. One student assumes the team is designing a prototype, while another thinks they are still defining the problem. Meeting decisions are discussed but not recorded. Tasks are assigned casually, but no one tracks whether they are completed. By the time the presentation approaches, the team has a lot of activity but no clear story.

This is a common challenge in project-based learning: teams do not fail because they lack effort. They struggle because communication does not close the loop.

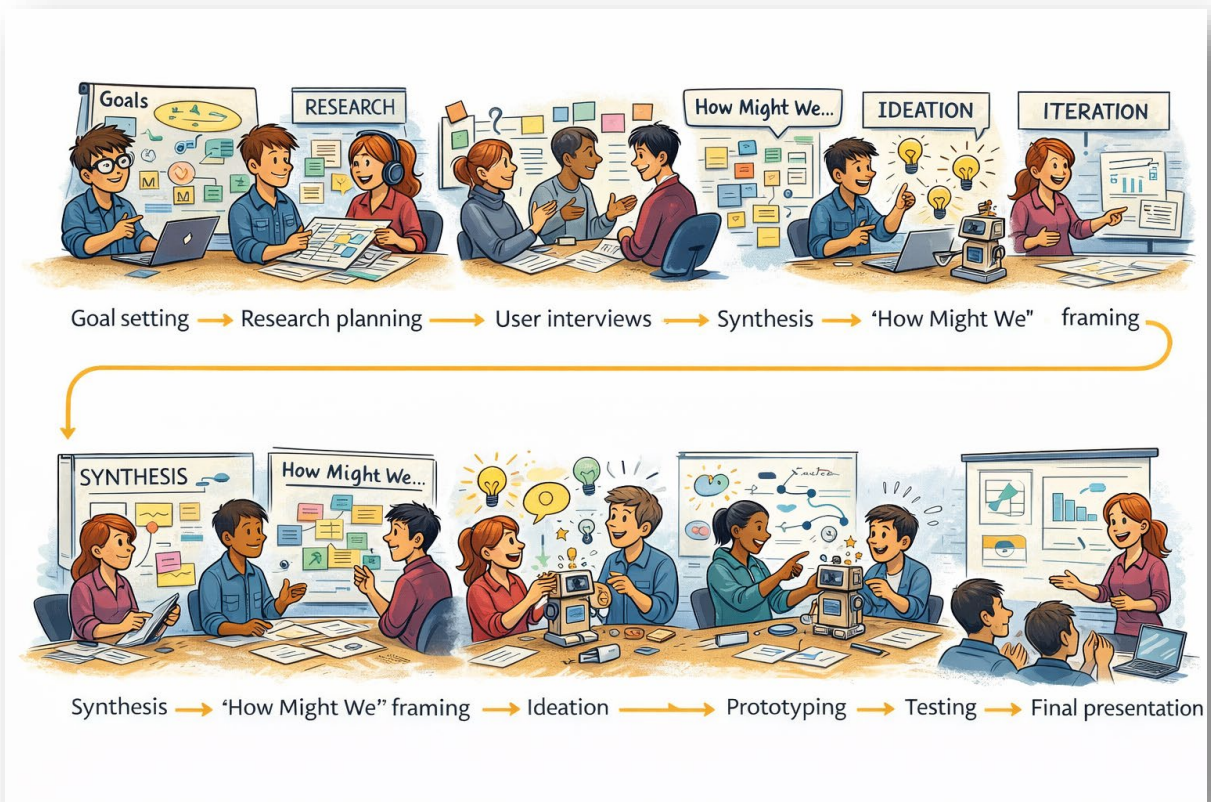
2. How Might We Use GenAI for Teamwork?

Many students are already using GenAI tools such as ChatGPT to brainstorm ideas, summarise notes, improve writing, or prepare presentations. These are useful starting points. But in design thinking and project-based learning, one of the most powerful uses of GenAI is often overlooked: **project planning**.

Team projects do not usually fail because students have no ideas. More often, they struggle because **the work is not clearly planned**. The team may not have a shared view of the project timeline, key milestones, responsibilities, dependencies, or deadlines.

Everyone may be working hard, but not always in the same direction. This is where GenAI can support the team at the beginning of the project, not just at the end. Instead of asking ChatGPT only to produce content, students can ask it to help them **design the project workflow**.

It can help the team break a large project into phases, identify what needs to happen first, estimate the sequence of activities, assign roles, and create a Gantt chart-style plan. This **gives the team a bird's-eye view of the whole project before they begin**. For example, in a design thinking project, GenAI can help students map the work across stages such as:



A useful prompt students can try is:

“We are a team of five students working on a six-week design thinking project about improving student well-being on campus. Help us create a project plan in the form of a Gantt chart. Include project phases, key tasks, task owners, start and end weeks, dependencies, expected outputs, and checkpoints. Please also identify possible risks, such as delays in user interviews or unclear prototype scope, and suggest how we can manage them. Present the project plan as a Gantt chart-style table with columns for Week 1 to Week 6. Use rows for major tasks and mark when each task should happen. Include owners, deliverables, and review points.”

Project Task	Owner	Week 1	Week 2	Week 3	Week 4	Week 5	Week 6	Output
Define project goal and success criteria	Whole team	X						Project brief
Plan user research	Research leads	X						Interview guide
Conduct interviews	Team members		X					Interview notes
Synthesise findings	Whole team		X	X				Themes and insights
Frame “How Might We” question	Whole team			X				HMW statement
Ideate possible solutions	Whole team			X				Idea shortlist
Build prototype	Prototype leads				X			Prototype draft
Test prototype	Testing leads				X	X		User feedback
Iterate solution	Whole team					X		Improved prototype
Prepare final presentation	Presentation leads					X	X	Final slides and pitch

Planning in project-based learning

By seeing these stages laid out clearly, the team can ask better questions:

- Are we spending enough time understanding the problem?
- Have we left space for testing and iteration?
- Who is responsible for each stage?
- Which tasks depend on others being completed first?
- Where are the risky points in our timeline?

The value of this is not that GenAI creates a perfect plan. The value is that it gives the team something visible to discuss, critique, and improve. Students can then adjust the timeline based on their actual course requirements, workload, team size, and deadlines.

Used this way, GenAI becomes a **project manager for thinking**. It helps teams zoom out, see the whole journey, and plan their collaboration more intentionally. It supports not only what the team produces, but how the team works together.

The key shift is this: students should not wait until the project becomes messy before turning to **GenAI**. **They can use it from the beginning to set direction, create structure, distribute responsibilities, and build in checkpoints for accountability.**

3. Clear Communication: From Conversation to Documentation

Once the project plan is in place, **the next challenge is keeping communication clear and documented.** In student teams, there may be many conversations across chats, meetings, shared documents, and quick informal updates. However, unless these conversations are captured clearly, teams may lose track of what was decided, who is responsible, and what needs to happen next.

This is where **GenAI can help with the management of communication.** ChatGPT can turn scattered discussions into structured records, helping teams maintain a shared understanding throughout the project. For example, after a team meeting, students can use this prompt: “Turn these meeting notes into a clear project communication record. Organise them into: key points discussed, decisions made, unresolved questions, action items, owners, deadlines, and next follow-up.”

This helps the team move from “we talked about it” to “we know what was agreed.”

GenAI can also help teams **prepare clearer messages** before they communicate with others:

“Rewrite this project update so it is clear, concise, and easy for my teammates to act on. Highlight the main decision, required action, deadline, and any open questions.”

The goal is not to make communication overly formal. **The goal is to make it visible, traceable, and actionable.** Every important conversation should leave behind a simple record: What was discussed? What was decided? Who owns the next step? When will we check back?

Used this way, **GenAI becomes a communication manager.** It helps teams document decisions, reduce misunderstanding, and ensure that important ideas do not disappear into long chat threads or forgotten meeting notes.

4. Making Sense of Information: From Data to Shared Insight

In design thinking and project-based learning, **teams often collect a lot of information:** interview notes, survey responses, observations, articles, photos, feedback, and sketches. The challenge is not only gathering data, but making sense of it together.

This is where **GenAI can support synthesis.** ChatGPT can help teams organise raw information into themes, patterns, tensions, user needs, and possible design opportunities. It can also help students notice gaps in their evidence or identify when their conclusions are too broad.

A useful prompt is:

“Here are our interview notes and observation notes. Help us identify recurring themes, user pain points, needs, contradictions, and possible design opportunities. Do not invent information. Only use what is supported by the notes.”

Teams can also **use GenAI to move from findings to design direction:**

“Based on these findings, suggest possible ‘How Might We’ questions. For each question, explain which user need or pain point it is based on.”

This helps students avoid jumping too quickly from data to solution. Instead, they can trace a clearer path:

What did we observe? → What does it mean? → What problem are we framing? → What might we design?

Used this way, **GenAI becomes a sensemaking partner.** It does not replace the team’s judgment, but it helps organise messy information so that the team can discuss it more clearly, challenge assumptions, and build shared insight before moving into ideation.



Using GenAI as a partner in Design Thinking

5. Closing the Loop: Accountability and Responsibility

Good teamwork does not end when a task is assigned. It ends when the task is completed, shared back with the team, and used to move the project forward. This is what it means to **close the loop**.

In many student projects, **tasks are discussed but not tracked**. A teammate may say, “I’ll handle the interviews,” or “I’ll update the slides,” but the team may not confirm the deadline, expected output, or follow-up. Over time, this creates confusion. Some tasks are repeated, some are forgotten, and some are only discovered to be incomplete near the final deadline.

GenAI can help teams create **simple systems for accountability**. After each meeting, students can ask ChatGPT to turn their discussion into an action tracker.

Useful prompt:

“Based on these meeting notes, create an action tracker with task, owner, deadline, expected output, current status, and next follow-up. Also identify any task that has no clear owner, deadline, or deliverable.”

Task	Owner	Deadline	Expected Output	Status	Follow-up
Draft interview questions	Aisha	12 May	Interview guide	In progress	Team review
Analyse survey responses	Daniel	14 May	Summary of themes	Not started	Check progress
Update prototype storyboard	Mei	15 May	Revised storyboard	Completed	Prepare for testing



Clarity in teamwork

Responsibility is about the specific task: *Who owns this piece of work?*

Accountability is about the follow-through and outcome: *Was it completed, communicated, acknowledged, and integrated into the team project?*

6. Better Communication, Better Teamwork with GenAI in a Nutshell

In design thinking and project-based learning, **teamwork is not just about dividing tasks**. It is about **setting shared goals, communicating clearly, making sense of information together, and closing the loop responsibly**.

GenAI can support this process by helping teams plan the project, document decisions, organise findings, track responsibilities, and prepare clearer updates or presentations. But the human work remains essential.

Students still need to listen, question, verify, acknowledge one another, and take ownership of the final outcome. Used thoughtfully, ChatGPT does not replace teamwork. It helps make teamwork more visible, structured, and fair.

GenAI gives teams a way to see where they are going, what has been decided, who is doing what, and what still needs attention. A good team does not simply communicate more. It communicates with clarity, care, and follow-through.

But here is a secret ingredient. Even though GenAI can help us become more efficient and have the mindset for the new age, the **heart of teamwork is still human**. ChatGPT can suggest a plan, summarise a meeting, or organise responsibilities, **but it cannot decide what kind of teammate we choose to be. That choice rests with each individual.**

In the end, **teamwork reflects our values**: whether we communicate honestly, acknowledge others fairly, follow through on commitments, and act with care when challenges arise. This connects strongly with SUTD's values — **collaboration, integrity, excellence, innovation, and service to society**. GenAI may support the process, but it is our values that shape the quality of the collaboration.

The promise of GenAI in teamwork is not that it does the project for us, but that it helps us become better collaborators: clearer in our goals, fairer in our responsibilities, more accountable in our actions, and more intentional in living out our values together.

CORE VALUES

Leadership – Integrity – Passion – Collaboration – Creativity

SUTD Values: Not just words but what we put into practice

Human-centric teamwork means using GenAI not to replace people, but to strengthen how we listen, contribute, acknowledge, and follow through. In SUTD's project-based learning culture, this reflects our values of collaboration, integrity, excellence, innovation, and service to society.

Used well, GenAI can help teams become clearer, fairer, more accountable, and more creative in turning ideas into impact. Used poorly, it may produce polished outputs while hiding confusion, weak ownership, and unequal teamwork.

So here is our design challenge: How might we build GenAI teammates, project agents, meeting buddies, feedback coaches, or accountability trackers that help teams work better together?

Try it, test it, share it — and let's grow a community of GenAI practices for better communication, better projects, and better teamwork.