ABSTRACT

This study examines student perceptions of actual efforts of faculty in developing and administering student teams and the relationship to teamwork quality, team performance, individual learning and success. Literature and theories about teams in business schools is discussed. A model is presented to show the relationships among student team development and quality teamwork, with an attempt to show how these factors relate to team performance, and individual success. Based on these discussions, we will propose some hypotheses regarding the relationships under investigation. The methods section follows, where detailed descriptions will be offered about data collection and analysis.

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INTRODUCTION

Employers expect that graduates of business schools will have the necessary teamwork skills to succeed in the workforce (Bianey & Adams, 2004). Lejk, Wyvill, and Farrow (1996) observed that teamwork represents the second most important attribute looked for in prospective employees. Recently, a survey revealed that 96% of employers believe that improving a student’s ability to work effectively in a team should be an important goal for academicians (Hart Research Associates, 2014). As such, “The use of student teams for class projects is now a common pedagogical practice in many business schools” (Chen & Lou, 2004, p. 275). Team projects enhance individual members’ knowledge, skills, and abilities to work in teams, which is necessary to satisfy the demands of employers. Teamwork is relevant to the workplace across industries and students would benefit from experiential learning about teams.

The major business school-accrediting agency, AACSB International, the Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business, has stressed the importance of teamwork in Standard 9, Standard 10, and Standard 11 of the recently adopted accreditation criteria. Standard 9 states that bachelor’s degree programs and higher “would normally include learning experiences that address the following general skill areas ... Interpersonal relations and teamwork (able to work effectively with others and in team environments)” (AACSB International, 2013, pp. 30-32). Standard 10 states, “For any teaching/learning model employed, students have opportunities to work together on some learning tasks and learn from each other” (p. 33). Standard 11 requires that colleges show that expectations across educational programs
resulting in the same degree credentials are equivalent, regardless of delivery mode, location, or time to completion. Collectively, colleges will need to document the places in the curriculum where students are participating in team experiences; show that team experiences exist across program types and delivery modes, including on-line courses; document that the peer learning opportunities are of high quality and impact student learning; and document that students in all modes of delivery (face-to-face, online, hybrid, part-time, and full-time) have opportunities to learn team skills (Loughry, Ohland, & Woehr, 2014).

Despite workforce trends, employers’ expectations, and the fact that student teams are widely used in graduate and undergraduate programs of study in business schools, a gap exists between the mastery of teamwork skills expected and those demonstrated by graduates (Adams, 2003). Employers highlight teamwork as a key skill deficiency among college graduates entering the workforce. In a survey of employers and students, only 37% of employers believed colleges prepared recent graduates to work in teams and 83% of employers thought colleges should place more emphasis on developing teamwork and collaboration skills of students (Hart Research Associates, 2014).

The teamwork skill deficiency may be attributed to poor preparation and guidance from faculty (Hansen, 2006). Insufficient team training is often the cause of teams that perform poorly (Zemke, 1993). Rotfeld (1998) stated that "Group projects are many but few faculty assigning them give attention to improving student speaking, writing, or group interactions. The classes do not teach these things except by contagion and therein lies the real problem" (p. 6). Faculty in business schools may lack the necessary skills and knowledge to train students to work in teams. Instead many professors simply place students into teams to complete projects in order to create the appearance of teamwork and limit their workloads for large classes (Rotfeld, 1998). Barker and Franzak (1997) stated, "placing students into groups for class projects is not the same as developing teams, even when the term 'team' is applied" (p. 304). Yet, many instructors assign students to work in teams by default, not by design, for the purpose of meeting the expectations of their programs, accrediting organizations, workforce recruiters and employers. The lack of a specific design is often due to a lack of know-how and experience in developing teams. The purpose of this study is to explore student perceptions of actual practices of faculty in developing and administering student teams and the relationship to teamwork quality, team performance, and individual learning and success. Drawing on previous theories about teamwork, this study focuses on important contextual variables and processes on which professors might focus in developing and administering student teams.

The remainder of the paper is organized as follows. We will review literature about teams in business schools. Then we will discuss theories about faculty efforts to develop student teams and quality teamwork, with an attempt to show how these factors relate to team performance, and individual success. Based on these discussions, we will propose some hypotheses regarding the relationships between faculty development of student teams, quality teamwork, team performance, and individual learning and success. The methods section follows, where detailed descriptions will be offered about data collection and analysis. Data will eventually be collected, analyzed, and discussed. Overall, the goal is to determine the impact of faculty preparation of teams on team performance and individual outcomes in order to discuss implications, limitations, and future research.
LITERATURE REVIEW

Student Teamwork in Business Education

A team, by definition, is a social system involving multiple individuals, which is embedded in a specific context, such as an organization or classroom, whose members perceive themselves as such and are perceived by others as members, and who create synergies through coordination to accomplish a common task using complimentary skills for a period of time (Sagner, 2013). Teams should be distinguished from groups. Although the terms are used interchangeably, teams and groups are not the same (Adams, 2003). Groups are informally organized to enforce established norms within the group, whereas teams are formally organized to accomplish a specific task. The focus of a group may or may not be consistent with the mission of the organization, whereas the objective of a team should be consistent with a specific mission. There is greater synergy and accountability within teams, as opposed to groups and teams should be comprised of complimentary skill sets, as opposed to similar skill sets. Because of these differences, it is advantageous for faculty members to build teams in the classroom rather than groups.

Problems with Teamwork

Students often have negative perceptions about working in teams, which cause them to oppose teamwork. Hansen (2006) reviewed the literature and listed specific problems students experience when working in teams, including free-riding or social loafing (Ashraf, 2004; Joyce, 1999; Latane, Williams, & Harkins, 1979; McCorkle et al., 1999; Mello, 1993; Williams, Beard, & Rynner, 1991); inadequate rewards or poor grading schemes (Sheppard, 1995); behavioral or attitude problems (Pfaff & Huddleston, 2003; Sutton, 1995); inferior skills (Sutton, 1995); lack of leadership (Forman & Katsky, 1986); specialization of skills (Batra, Walvoord, & Krishnan, 1997); transaction cost issues (Yamane, 1996); and stifling of individual innovation or creativity (Batra et al., 1997). Teams in classrooms are often a collection of individuals assembled to divide the assigned task into smaller pieces to complete independently (Loughry et al., 2014). As a result of these problems, students do not develop necessary teamwork skills.

Benefits of Teamwork

Despite these problems, there are several benefits of teamwork. Hansen (2006) also reviewed the literature and listed the benefits students accrue as a result of working in teams. Students learn to collaborate with others (Boyer, Weiner, & Diamond, 1985; Hernandez, 2002; Williams et al., 1991); they gain experience working on complex problems (Goretsky, 1984; Henke, 1985); they have the opportunity to emulate the real-world work environment (Williams et al., 1991); and their communication skills are improved (Williams et al., 1991). In addition, students learn better interpersonal, social, and team skills (Johnson, Johnson, & Smith, 1998; Joyce, 1999; McCorkle et al., 1999; Williams et al., 1991), active learning abilities (Freeman, 1996; Johnson & Johnson, 1984; Williams et al., 1991), persistence when facing adversity (Johnson et al., 1998), increased knowledge and critical thinking capabilities (Boyer et al., 1985), higher motivation (Denton, 1994; Dommeyer, 1986; Johnson et al., 1998), positive interdependence (Joyce, 1999), a greater sense of achievement (Freeman, 1996; Johnson & Johnson, 1984; Johnson et al., 1998), a sense of meaningfulness (Robbins, 1994), and improved multicultural relations (McCain, 1996; Slavin, 1990). The number of benefits outweighs the number of problems of working in teams. It is important for faculty to improve the performance of student teams as well as the satisfaction of the students in those teams.
THEORETICAL DEVELOPMENT

Loughry et al. (2014) indicated that many instructors are integrating team activities into their classes and cited that 59.1% of instructors at 4-year institutions reported using small groups in all or most of their courses (The Chronicle of Higher Education Almanac Issue, 2009-2010). It is important to determine the success of this widespread use of teamwork in college classrooms. Instructors must intentionally develop the teamwork skills of students by incorporating sound team-based pedagogical design features into the classroom (Hansen, 2006) to ensure quality teamwork experiences, better team performance, and learning among individuals in teams (Hoegl & Gemuenden, 2001).

Developing Effective Teams

Faculty members often assign teamwork without preparing students to function in teams (Tombaugh & Mayfield, 2014). This is sometimes due to the fact that instructors are not equipped with the knowledge to prepare students to work in teams. Instructors need more training and resources about effective pedagogical designs for teamwork. Burbach, Matkin, Gambrell, and Harding (2010) discussed the importance of preparing faculty in the effective use of student teams in classrooms. A sample of instructors participated in a year-long program of instruction in the effective use of teams. The results of their activities and efforts, as demonstrated through results of pre-test scores and post-test scores of 359 students, indicated significant improvement in students’ teamwork knowledge, skills, and abilities. A review of the literature revealed 10 suggestions for faculty to develop student teams (Hansen, 2006). Faculty should explain the importance or relevance of teamwork, dedicate time to teaching teamwork skills prior to assigning teamwork, conduct team building exercises, pay attention to prescribed methods of team formation, assign a reasonable workload with clear assignment goals and instructions, require teams to have specific or assigned roles through the use of a team charter, allocate some class time for team meetings, allow the opportunity for multiple feedback points for monitoring typical team problems, require individuals to keep records of their personal contributions, and use detailed peer evaluations as part of grading.

Quality Teamwork

If instructors employ practices to develop student teams, the quality of teamwork in classrooms should increase. The quality of teamwork depends on communication, coordination, member contributions, mutual support, member effort, and cohesion (Hoegl & Gemuenden, 2001). Hoegl and Gemuenden (2001) describe the facets of collaborative team process through a construct they developed, teamwork quality (TWC). Specifically, communication, the most important aspect of teamwork, provides a means for exchange of information and it should be frequent, formal direct, and open. Coordination should be structured and synchronized to allow team members to develop and agree on common tasks and goals without overlaps or gaps. There should be a balance of member contributions to ensure that every team member contributes his or her task-relevant knowledge and expertise to the team. Team members should support each other in carrying out their tasks. Team members should know and agree on work norms to ensure that all members exert sufficient effort. There should be cohesion within the team such that team members desire to be a part of the team.
Team Performance

Effective team performance in classrooms is an important outcome to determine if teams meet established assignment objectives. Team performance can be described in terms of effectiveness and efficiency (Hoegl & Gemuenden, 2001). Effectiveness refers to the degree to which the team meets expectations regarding the quality of work and mastery of course content. The team's efficiency is described by factors such as the adherence to schedules or assignment submission deadlines. Team performance could include objective as well as subjective aspects of the assignment.

Team Member Personal Success

Team assignments should increase student learning in the area of teamwork, it should increase the desire of students to work in teams in the future, and it should have an effect on students' the knowledge, skills and abilities to work in teams (Hoegl & Gemuenden, 2001). In other words, student satisfaction and student learning should be the result of working in teams. Satisfaction with working in teams leads to increased motivation for participating in future team projects. Also, collaborating with other people should provide the opportunity for learning new skills for personal development and future teamwork.

HYPOTHESES

Overall, this study argues that faculty efforts to development student teams are positively related to quality teamwork and quality teamwork is positively related to outcomes for teams and individuals. Figure 1 depicts the described relationships. This framework constitutes an input-process-outcome model of team effectiveness (Gladstein, 1984), as apposed to a process-outcome model (Hoegl & Gemuenden, 2001). The framework has been updated and adapted from Hoegl and Gemeunden’s (2001) model to include Hansen’s (2006) suggestions to faculty for developing student teams. We believe that faculty development of teams is an antecedent of quality teamwork.

Figure 1: Model of Team Development, Quality, and Success
The specific hypotheses of the study are as follows:

H1: Faculty Development of Teams is positively related to Quality Teamwork.

H2: Quality Teamwork is related to Team Performance.

H3: Quality Teamwork is related to Individual Success

METHODOLOGY

This study will use an online survey to collect data from graduate students at multiple locations of a university located in the Texas. The students are enrolled in an MBA program that offers classes in a blended format: 51% online and 49% face-to-face. As measurements are available in the literature, adapted scales will be used to measure faculty preparation of student teams, quality teamwork, team performance, and individual learning and success. Students will answer questions about their teamwork experiences for a team project in a capstone class of the MBA program. The team project involves an online business strategy simulation exercise. The sample will consist of approximately 60 teams across the multiple locations. After data collection, common method bias will be addressed. A CFA will be conducted to test reliability and validity of the constructs. Structural equation modeling will be used to test the relationships proposed in the study. Results will be discussed.
REFERENCES


Horn, Rose

Developing Student Teams in Business Education


