

TEAM RE-SHUFFLE (THREE YEARS STUDY)

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Abstract:

This study introduces a team re-shuffle as a tool to enhance team learning, knowledge transfer, team communication and understanding of roles and interdependence of team members and their influence on the level of team performance. Team re-shuffle is a self-directed group based teaching method based on team members' interactions, gaining specific knowledge in the teams, re-formation of teams, transfer of specific knowledge to a newly formed team, and new team's dependency on working with acquired parts of gained specific knowledge. The paper explains process, subjects and impacts of team re-shuffle on students in strategic management courses on the basis of three years' research.

Keywords: team learning, management, team, competencies.

1. INTRODUCTION

This article builds on the body of knowledge related to the role of teams and teamwork in learner centred teaching strategies and reflects on new organizational realities, where companies are increasingly seeking job candidates who possess relevant teamwork knowledge, skills, and abilities in addition to more traditional job or task-related ones. (Chen, Donahue & Klimoski, 2004). According to O’Leary, Mortensen & Woolley (2011) “65 to 95 percent of knowledge workers across a wide range of industries in the United States and Europe are members of more than one project team at a time”. Although universities are implementing team-based learning and their curricula are focused on developing some level of teamwork knowledge, teamwork competencies and skills are rarely developed. (Chen, Donahue & Klimoski, 2004; Baldwin, Bedell & Johnson, 1997) Navarro (2008) also stated that today’s business schools curricula do not appear to be designed with experiential and integrative elements in their core. On the contrary, it is often the case, that traditional teaching settings do not provide for controlled development of teamwork skills and thus students often voice their frustration over cooperative structures (Michaelsen, Jones & Watson, 1993). Teamwork generally takes longer than individual work and places greater demands on students to coordinate schedule. Talented students may feel burdened by and therefore resist helping marginal performers. Although there has been a recent groundswell of interest in and support for cooperative learning initiatives, there is also anecdotal evidence to suggest that frustration with program counterparts or team members can lead to lower achievement and negative attitudes. (Baldwin, Bedell & Johnson, 1997).

This study introduces a team re-shuffle as a tool to enhance team learning, knowledge transfer, team communication and understanding of roles and interdependence of team members and their influence on the level of team performance. Team re-shuffle has been exercised with students studying Strategic Management as their major in the final year of their master studies at the Faculty of Economics and Management, Czech University of Life Sciences Prague (FEM CULS).

2. CONTEXT, OBJECTIVES AND METHODS

2.1. Role of teams in learning

Learner centred teaching strategies put emphasis on group work, self-directed study, and trial and error activity (Huddleston & Unwin, 1997). Learning in groups brings students together, so they can begin to learn how their own needs compare and contrast to others, they can develop shared strategies for advancing their learning and for overcoming problems, they can discuss ideas outside the workshop and enhance or increase their own and even team potential of creativity (Huddleston & Unwin, 1997). The specific way of learning in groups is teamwork where students are exposed to self-directed study, team discussions, presentations of their opinions, placing arguments, applying acquired skills and knowledge, and development of all managerial functions (planning, organizing, staffing, leading/directing, controlling).

Teams are often defined as a group of people linked in a common purpose. Teams are set up in order to perform tasks that are high in complexity and have many interdependent subtasks. Team are also defined as a group of people with a full set of complementary skills required to complete a task, job, or project (WebFinance, 2011). Belbin (2003) understands team as a congregation of individuals, each of whom has a role which is understood by other members.

(Belbin, 2003) O’Leary, Mortensen, & Wooley (2011) see team members as individuals who share “the responsibility and reward (or penalty) for the outcomes of the team’s work and recognize each other as members of the team”. Team members (WebFinance, 2011): 1) operate with a high degree of interdependence, 2) share authority and responsibility for self-management, 3) are accountable for the collective performance, and 4) work toward a common goal and shared rewards.

There are six major types of teams: informal, traditional, problem solving, leadership, self-directed, and virtual (Advameg, 2011). Informal teams are usually formed for social purposes. Traditional teams are the organizational groups commonly thought of as departments or functional areas, they do have leaders with legitimate power in the team, and team is expected to fulfil the given task. Problem solving teams are cross-functional and are formed when a problem cannot be solved within the standard organizational structure. Leadership teams are teams at top management levels used in developing goals and a strategic direction for the firm as a whole; their goal is to interact between different functions of organization (finance, marketing, production, development, human resources, etc.) and come up with a common strategy for the product. Self-directed work teams (TechTarget, 2011) resp. also called self-managing teams (About.com, 2011) are groups of people, who combine different skills and talents to work without the usual managerial supervision toward a common purpose or goal resp. groups of people who gradually assume responsibility for self-direction in all aspects of work. Virtual teams use collaborative software and conferencing systems to improve impossibility of the members to make face-to-face meetings. Each member is accountable for their tasks and there is minimal level of supervision.

Team members are often cross-trained to perform a number of roles. Unique teamwork knowledge, skills and abilities may be required to exhibit effective teamwork competencies in different team contexts. (Chen, Donahue & Klimoski, 2004) In their research, Cannon-Bowers, Tannenbaum, Salas, and Volpe (1995) divided team competencies into two types. The first, context-driven competencies, which are specific with the particular team and task and the second that are called transportable competencies, which can be generalized within different types of teams and tasks.

2.2. Team re-shuffle

Team re-shuffle was exercised with students with the aim to prevent some of the team dysfunctions. Team dysfunctions defined by Lencioni (2002) as: 1) absence of trust, 2) fear of conflict, 3) lack of commitment, 4) avoidance of accountability, and 5) inattention to results were subject to preliminary survey. This survey showed that students tend to take generally the same approach to the team formation, teamwork, and team performance. Students usually create teams on the knowledge of team members from teamwork during previously attended courses. The students’ interviews revealed that they work usually in the same team (or the team with minor alterations) for the whole period of their study. This might mean they found their specific team role and they develop this specific role but if it is true it will also mean that they fit themselves into the role in which they already perform well and do not practice skills specific for other roles. They do not enhance or expand their future working flexibility. They also skip practical exercising of team building stages or team life-cycles (according to e.g. Tuckman (1965) the stages are forming, storming, norming, performing, and adjournment).

With respect to teamwork students admitted during interviews: lack of group discussions, missing basics of assertive behaviour, and frequent occurrence of loafing, irresponsibility, and lack of interest in teamwork.

Based on interviews and observation during workshops, deeper evaluation of students' teamwork behaviour was made. Students teams in surveyed courses showed negative team behaviour in every of five dysfunctions of a team. Table 1 below shows the students responses categorised in each team dysfunction according to Lencioni (2002).

Table 1: Students responses categorised in each team dysfunction

Team dysfunction	Findings about students team behaviour
Absence of trust	They hesitate to ask for help; hesitate to offer help; they tap into one another's skills and experience; they waste their time and energy managing their behaviour just for effect.
Fear of conflict	They are avoiding the meetings, they do not provide constructive feedback, they do not show resentment to each other, during meetings they waste time with nowhere leading discussion and therefore they have boring meetings without any resume.
Lack of commitment	They do not clarify the team goals, priorities, direction. They fear failure.
Avoidance of accountability	They dislike members with different performance, opinions. They prefer ordinariness. They place most of work, duties and responsibilities on to one or two team member.
Inattention to results	Their team results are below average. They rarely show significant improvement in results of teamwork.

Jaques (1992) added to the absence of trust that without a climate of trust and co-operation, students will not feel like taking the risk of making mistakes and learning from them. To achieve this, the tutor would have to balance a concern for academic standards with a capacity to understand and deal with the workings of group processes as well as an attitude of generosity and praise for new solutions to old problems.

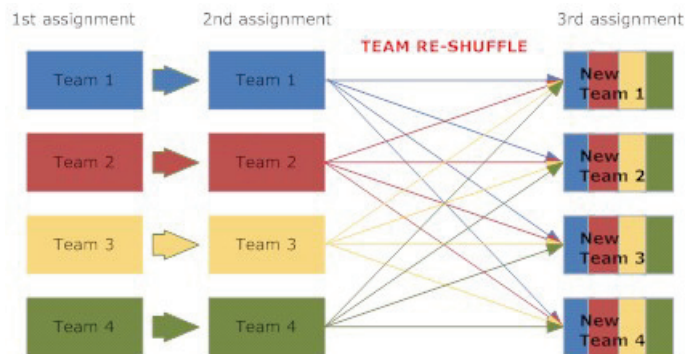
And Kidd (1973) describes three characteristics which have to be present in a group if effective learning is to take place: (1) A realisation by the members of the group that genuine growth stems from the creative power within the individual, and that learning, finally, is an individual matter. (2) The acceptance as a group standard that each member has the right to be different and to disagree. (3) Establishment of a group atmosphere that is free from narrow judgements on the part of the teacher or group members.

The findings from interviews and observation show the students do not use all the conditions and possibilities of teamwork as a learning method.

The team re-shuffle was introduced as a self-directed learning method based on team members' interactions, gaining specific knowledge in the teams, re-formation of teams, transfer of specific knowledge to a newly formed team, and new team's dependency on working with acquired parts of gained specific knowledge. The new formation of teams – team re-shuffle – ensures that each member of a new team has some part of specific knowledge which is crucial for fulfilment of team task. Students are then forced to cooperate

within each other if they want to accomplish the task. The students' distribution in teams before and after Team Re-shuffle is shown in figure 1.

Figure 1: Distribution of students before and after Team Re-shuffle



Transfer of different parts of specific knowledge in to new teams by individuals and its re-composition from transferred parts is didactically the most important point of team re-shuffle method. The final task cannot be accomplished without the help and cooperation of each of the members of newly formed teams.

The logic of several assignments combined with team re-shuffle was as follows: (1) Four teams work on the first assignment (strategic analysis of the external environment; all teams are assigned the same industry for analysis). (2) Second assignment builds on the analysis carried on within the first assignment; teams select one of the four major competitors within the industry and conduct the internal analysis of the selected business. (3) For the third assignment – formulation of competitive strategy for a selected business – the teams are re-shuffled (see Figure 1). Re-shuffled teams work on the third assignment with the use of knowledge brought into the team by team members, working in different teams on assignment one and two.

Re-shuffled teams continue their work with the use of: 1) knowledge about external environment coming from the first team assignment and 2) knowledge about the internal environment from four different companies within the same industry.

The knowledge of external environment comes from different sources (different teams made same analysis but with different approaches, depth, and synthesis, so the members of new assembled teams have to go through the discussion to the mutual results about the conditions in the external environment.

The knowledge of the internal environment is partial as each member of team knows just an internal environment of the company analysed in the previous team. Here the team re-shuffle method contributes to the enhancement of interdependency within team members, their need of communication, and cooperation and thus it should boost students involvement in course, give a new impulse for work in teams, decrease loafing behaviour, and the method has an impact on the development of students' managerial functions.

2.3. Objectives and methods

Main objective of this comparative study is to assess the impact of the team re-shuffle on team learning. Team learning outcome was measured through the self- assessment of the change in the level of students' competencies.

To identify what competencies are developed during the Strategic Management course competency approach was applied. Boyatzis (1982) defined competencies as a human ability to behave in a way to meet job requirements in parameters given by the organisation's environment and thus to achieve the required results. In a previous study (Švec, Königová, & Tichá, 2008), consistently with Boyatzis (1982), individual competencies were determined to the area of personal development as set of knowledge, skills, abilities, and behaviour which the person, with respect to the given position, task or preset outcome, must possess. The same approach is used in presented study.

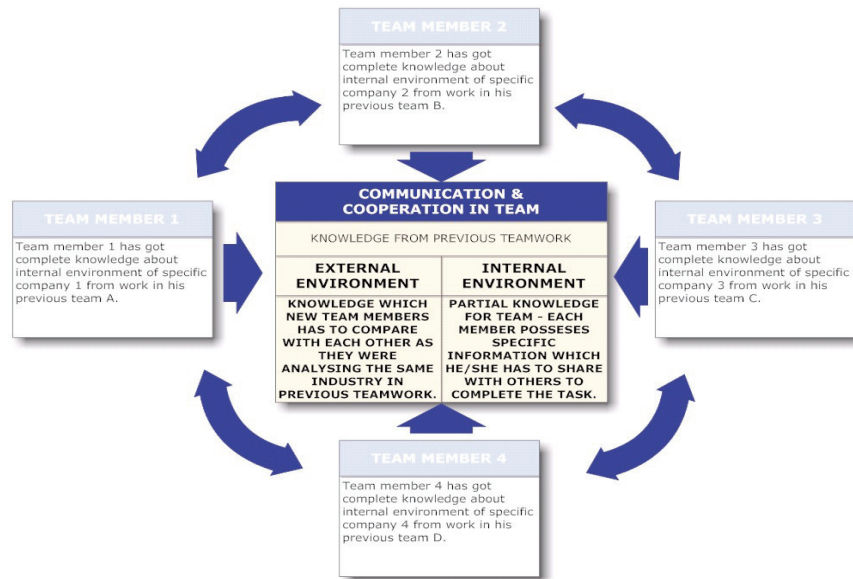
The competencies affected in management courses taught at FEM CULS Prague were identified and elaborated on basis of PMI Competency Model (Philip Morris International) and 14 specific sets of knowledge, skills and abilities (Stevens, Campion, 1994) with the use of team discussions and creative method of analogy. Stevens and Campion (1994) capture 14 sets of competencies to the 5 dimensions: (1) *Conflict Resolution* (e.g. to recognize and encourage desirable, but discourage undesirable, team conflict); (2) *Collaborative Problem Solving* (e.g. to recognize the obstacles to collaborative group problem solving and implement appropriate corrective actions); (3) *Communication* (e.g. to listen non-evaluative and to appropriately use active listening techniques); (4) *Goal Setting and Performance Management* (e.g., to help establish specific, challenging, and accepted team goals); (5) *Planning and Task Coordination* (e.g., to coordinate and synchronize activities, information, and task interdependencies between team members).

These five dimensions are further classified into interpersonal and self-management knowledge, skills and abilities. The first three dimensions being interpersonal and the last two dimensions as self-management knowledge, skills and abilities. (Stevens & Campion, 1994; Chen, Donahue & Klimoski, 2004)

In order to start with comparison, the suitable courses were determined, in order to meet the criteria of comparability, and questionnaires were distributed to master students of Business Administration in their final year of study at FEM CULS Prague. Questionnaires were administrated and collected online. As the courses are taught in the Czech language, the questionnaires were administrated in the Czech language as well.

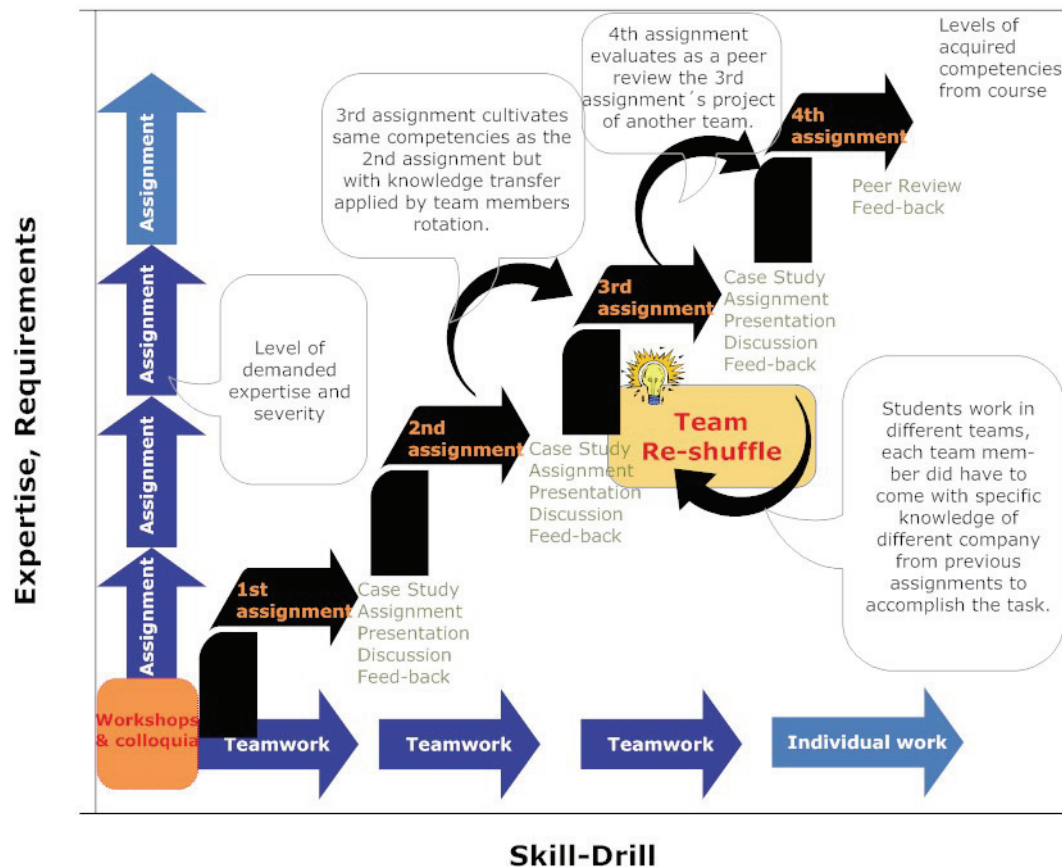
Three independent samples were used for the comparative study. Two samples came from courses where team re-shuffle method was exercised and one sample came from course where teams were not re-shuffled. The other aspects of courses did remain the same. Equal number of team assignments (3) and one individual assignment in same chronological order, with same didactic intentions, and with the same lecturers. Process of courses is seen in figure 2 with the team re-shuffle method as marked change in courses.

Figure 2: Process of Team Re-shuffle – the knowledge distribution



There were four assignments in the course as it is seen in figure 3. Questionnaires were distributed at the beginning as well as at the end of semester to find out whether the team re-shuffle brings different results in students learning and development. Significance of statistical difference was tested with the use of nonparametric tests (Wilcoxon test).

Figure 3: Traditional course and course with re-shuffled teams



3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

As a result of identification and elaboration process, and according to Belz & Siegrist (2001), Koontz & Weihrich (1993), Tepper (1996), Kubeš, Spillerová, & Kurnický, (2004), Armstrong & Stephens (2008), Dacey & Lennon (2000), and Hroník (2006) group of 25 competencies has been created and classified to six sets of competencies as shown in figure 4 and table 2. All sets competencies are precisely defined and described in five behaviour levels, so students could determine their current level of competency development in questionnaire.

Figure 4: Identified sets of competencies

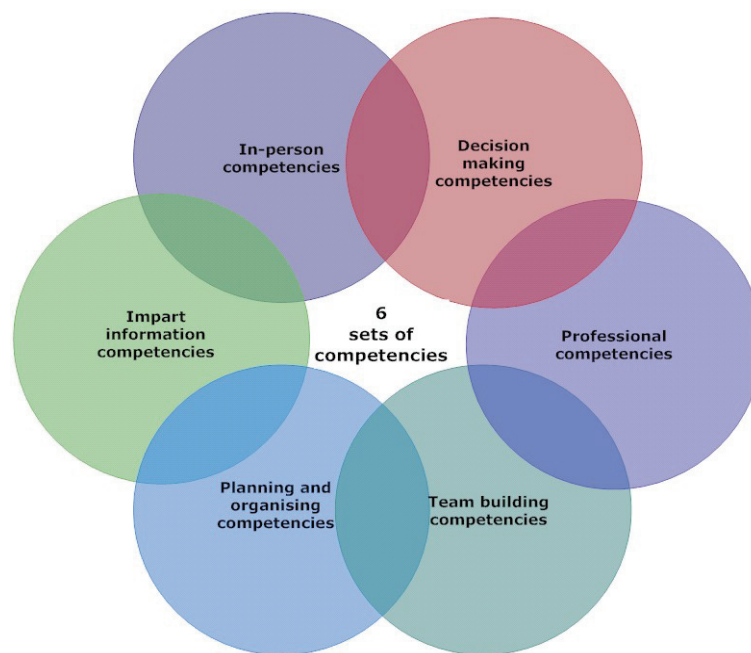


Table 2: 6 Competency Sets

Competency Sets	Content Competencies
Planning and organising	Planning; Organizational skills; Delegation
Impart information	Transfer of information (information giving); Presentation of opinions; Written communication;
In-person competencies	Learning by doing; Managerial courage; Time management; Creativity; Perspective; Self-knowledge;
Decision making	Problem solving; Quality decision making; Early decision; Cope with uncertainties; Critical thinking
Professional	Business issues knowledge; Management knowledge; Techniques of strategic management;
Team building	Co-creation of an effective team; Building relationships with colleagues; Dispute settlement; Focus on results; Issue instructions;

In total, 811 questionnaires were collected over three academic years – 2009/2010, 2010/2011 and 2011/2012. In order to meet the objective of the study, four independent samples of students were used.

First three samples come from the Strategic Management course taught at FEM CULS Prague during academic years 2009/2010, 2010/2011 and 2011/2012. The fourth sample is used as control one. This sample comes from the same Strategic management course (academic year 2010/2011) but with the group of students where no team re-shuffle was used. Table 3 shows the numbers of respondents in each sample.

Table 3: Number of respondents in samples

Characteristics	Sample 09/10	Sample 10/11	Sample 11/12	Control Sample
Number of respondents	79	116	550	68

The students in all four samples come from the Czech Republic (809) only 2 students were classified as exchange students; it means students who are foreigners in their current country of residence. The age of respondents ranged from 23 years to 28 years, with 24 years as the average age of respondents.

Results in Applying Team Re-Shuffle are still in process and will be in the final paper.

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