TEAM LEADER SELECTION – DOES IT MATTER?

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ABSTRACT

There is substantial research on teams, from composition and performance issues to managing team projects and dealing with team feuds. There is also copious research on team leaders; their characteristics, styles, and behavior, and inventories for leader selection. However, the literature is quiet regarding the selection process of the team leader, ipso facto. This interactive session will focus on the selection process for the team leader. The session participants will gain 'hands-on' experience (in the form of experiential exercises) in working under different leadership selection options. The exercise will be debriefed and the session leaders will review the literature germane to the subject. Finally, the session will invite the participants to assist in the design and implementation of a quasi-experimental model which they will then be asked to take back to their own universities for testing.

BASIC INFORMATION

Objective: The primary objective of this interactive session is to explore the issue of the leader selection process for teams. This workshop will provide participants with the opportunity to experience different selection processes and to assist in the development of a model or framework that can be used in their classrooms.

Target Audience: This session would be of interest to anyone who uses teams. It should be particularly interesting to those who have been nettled by the issue of whether to choose the student leader for the group or let the leader emerge through the group process. Further, if the instructor appoints the leader, should that leader be "trained" and/or should he or she receive extra credit for serving in that role?

Time: The workshop will take approximately 1 hour to 1.5 hours.

Number of Participants: A minimum of 8 participants would be needed with a maximum of 24.

THEORETICAL GROUNDING

There is a plethora of research on various aspects of team building and team leadership (we will use the term *team* throughout this paper to refer to 2 or more people working cooperatively toward a common goal). Some of the early research involved cooperative learning techniques (Johnson & Johnson, 1975), which described individualistic, competitive, and cooperative learning situations. These studies showed clearly the benefits of teams in terms of performance and effectiveness. In fact, based on this and several studies that followed, teams have become the norm in both corporate and classroom settings. Subsequent research looked at numerous team issues including; team structure or composition (Johnson & Johnson, 1984), how to manage team projects (Verderber & Serey, 1996), how to cope with team problems (Jalajas & Sutton, 1984), the importance of leader trust on team satisfaction (Butler, et.al., 1999) and even the use of reflective journals to improve team performance (Loo & Thorpe, 2002).

There is also considerable research on team leaders. For example Wheatley, Armstrong, and Maddox (1989) looked at how leadership styles, team cohesiveness, and the locus of control impacted team performance. Team leader behavior, as perceived by subordinate team members, was explored by Miles and Mangold (2002). Kovacj (2002) used two inventory instruments to see if star leaders could be predicted and Thacker and Yost (2002) compared student leaders to workplace leaders. Empowered teams and their performance were studied by Jones (1996) and Perry et al. (1999). The development of autonomous

or self-managed teams led to research on the characteristics and personalities of the emergent leader (Taggar, et. al., 1999 and Wolff, et. al., 2002).

However, very little seems to be known about the process of selecting the team leader. Alpin and Cosier (1978) speak about the need for students to have a true managerial experience. They propose a structured system that allows all team members to serve as leaders. They recommend the rotation of the leadership role among all team members. While their study suggests that the rotation system was beneficial to the students they did not attempt to determine if it improved team performance. Nor did they investigate whether student leaders should be "trained" or given extra credit for their services. The important question of leadership 'emergence' was not dealt with in this study. Another longitudinal study by Boss (2000) looked at the impact of leaderless versus leader-led teams on team building. Although this study did find that the leader-led team showed improvement in team functioning; only 7 teams participated in the study and it did not measure performance.

The dearth of literature on the topic of leader selection has led the authors to develop a workshop to explore this issue. It is the intention of the authors that the participants leave with a better understanding of the leader selection process and that the workshop will help spawn some solid research in this important area.

PEDAGOGICAL IMPLICATIONS AND OUTCOMES

Participants can expect to leave the session with a better understanding and appreciation for the importance of the team leader selection process. The session will have the participants working in teams under different leadership selection processes. A selection process model for use in the classroom will be the end result of the session.

Methodology: Participants will be divided into two teams. Each team can have from 4-9 participants. The first team will serve as the *appointed* leader team (A-team) and the second team will serve as the *rotating* leader team (R-team). Any additional participants will either act as observers or compose additional teams depending on the number. Each group will be given the same objective and identical materials to accomplish their goal. The only difference will be the selection of the team leader. Upon completion of the task, a debriefing session will look at the different methods and hopefully define a process that can be used in future research.

Debriefing: After the exercise is completed (approximately 20-25 minutes), the workshop facilitators will conduct a debriefing session. Part of the debriefing will include a review of the literature and the construction of a model or framework where salient independent, moderating, mediating and dependent variables are outlined and specified. The workshop facilitators hope to gain a workable framework from the session which they, as well as volunteer participants, can use to test various aspects of the model in their own pedagogical settings. Results of such experiments will be presented at future ABSEL conferences.

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