

IS IT HERE TO STAY?

A ROUNDTABLE DISCUSSION OF THE INTER-GROUP INTERACTION

Peter Markulis, SUNY at Geneseo
Dolly Malik, SUNY at Geneseo
Barbara Howard, SUNY at Geneseo
Daniel Strang, SUNY at Geneseo

ABSTRACT

This session will be a roundtable discussion on Inter-Group Interactions – a cooperative learning technique that requires teams of students from one class to work with teams from another class to accomplish a common goal. The authors will present a brief overview of the concept and provide the participants with some of their experiences with Inter-Group Interactions. The remainder of the session will be an open discussion of the possibilities and pitfalls of the Inter-Group Interaction as a pedagogical method.

INTRODUCTION

Teamwork has become common place in the business world. The ability to work well with others and be able to adapt to diverse groups is critical to success. Cooperative learning techniques provide students with an excellent opportunity to venture into the teamwork mode. The idea of students working together, to complete a single task, relying on others, and receiving the same grade can be implemented in a number of ways. One of the more effective methods is the Inter-Group Interaction (IGI). The IGI requires students to work within teams and between teams. It consists of two (or more) groups interacting with each other to achieve a common objective. A fundamental purpose of the IGI is to encourage cooperation across different but related disciplines. While the authors feel that this is an effective experiential methodology, it is not always easy to implement. The logistics of coordinating two groups from different academic disciplines is quite difficult. The project requires a considerable time commitment by the instructors, careful planning, continual feedback to the

students and a thorough debriefing at the conclusion. This may make it sound like the costs must surely outweigh the benefits, but we don't agree. The students are exposed to the functional interdependence of business units, management skills are developed, the students learn to think creatively, and the process of management is enhanced. No other exercise incorporates all of these aspects in such an effective manner. There is evidence in the literature that a few of our colleagues have experimented with IGI type activities. Others would like to but are often constrained by the perceived difficulties associated with this type of experience. The purpose of this session is to broaden the usage of the IGI through a discussion of the experiences of those who have successfully implemented an IGI and to benefit from the thoughts and ideas of our colleagues on this topic.

SESSION OVERVIEW

The session will consist of two parts – a brief presentation and an open discussion. The authors will present a brief overview of the Inter-Group Interaction concept. They will discuss the framework developed, the advantages and disadvantages of the IGI, and some of their specific experiences. Student reaction and evaluation issues will also be introduced.

The presenters will then lead a discussion which will focus on the Inter-Group Interaction as a viable component to the business school curriculum. Session participants who have utilized an IGI or would like to do so, will be invited to share their experiences, make suggestions, raise concerns, ask advice and/or ridicule the concept.