

TEAM STRUCTURE AND TRUST: IMPLICATIONS FOR MARKETING EDUCATION

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ABSTRACT

The unforgiving competitive environment is now forcing organizations to create value not just from tangible assets but more so from the intangible resources of the firm. Insofar as marketing educators are expected to prepare students to succeed as tomorrow's knowledge workers, understanding underlying factors that enable and constrain collaboration has direct implications for constructing complex team projects.

A robust body of literature recognizes that achieving work group collaboration can unleash creativity and innovation. The knowledge work people do today requires a high degree of interdependence with others – some kind of teamwork. Although the topical area of collaboration has received considerable attention across various academic disciplines, a review of the literature reveals continued levels of uncertainty about how to harness the full potential of student teams.

This study examined one well-researched factor, work group interdependence structure, as well as one that has received less systematic attention, trust. Standard experimental design features were incorporated with an innovative simulation technique. University students described an actual work group situation similar to the randomly assigned scenario and then responded to a set of outcome measures.

Drawing from social interdependence theory, this study identified parallels between team collaboration in the classroom and workplace. Consistent with

previous research, results indicate that team structure significantly affected both cooperation and competition. When structured to promote positive goal interdependence, participants exhibited cooperative interaction patterns. Conversely, negative interdependence resulted in competitive interaction patterns.

Further, the development of collective efficacy within a team depends on a cognitively shared form of trust. Trust as a group level construct has direct implications for marketing education. From a social psychological perspective, interpersonal trust is so thoroughly grounded in human relationships that the most carefully designed work team or organization will crumble without it.

Taken together, the findings in this study suggest there is still considerable room for marketing educators to design teams that promote positive interdependence and collective trust. Effective collaboration in complex project assignments relies on the development of certain social and cognitive interpersonal processes. Providing informal opportunities for students to interact face-to-face is essential to build the level of trust that fosters teamwork. Mutual trust between members of a work group is critical to a free exchange of information and knowledge. The resultant student team model is intimately tied to collaboration.

References Available on Request