

ESPRIT DE CORPS IN CLASSROOM GROUP PROJECTS: HOW TO CREATE AND BENEFIT FROM IT

Thomas E. Boyt, University of Nevada, 4505 Maryland Parkway, P.O. Box 456010,
Las Vegas, NV 89154-6010; (702) 895-3989.

Robert F. Lusch, University of Oklahoma, 307 W. Brooks, Norman, OK 73019-0450;
(405) 325-5890.

Drue Schuler, University of Oklahoma, 307 W. Brooks, Norman, OK 73019-0450; (405) 325-5893.

ABSTRACT

Groups have become a predominant way of organizing students for various projects in a multitude of marketing classes. Often groups are formed haphazardly with little concern for what makes groups productive. One of the factors that separates high performing from low performing groups is esprit de corps. Esprit de corps is defined as *a set of enthusiastically shared feelings, beliefs, and values about group membership and performance, and may manifest itself as a strong desire to achieve a common goal even in the face of hostility*. In order to form groups with a high potential for developing esprit de corps the instructor needs to know the antecedents and consequences of esprit de corps in groups.

Improved group and individual performance in the face of hostility is one of the major benefits of esprit de corps. Consequently, it is not surprising that the desired consequence of esprit de corps in groups formed in the classroom is improved performance. If improved performance is the desired result of esprit formulation, how can you as an instructor create esprit in your group projects?

The antecedents of esprit de corps are task complexity, task importance, communication between groups and within groups, external pressure, size of the team, common background, common skills, common experiences, and group training. These must be in place for esprit de corps to exist. Once esprit de corps is present within a group, it is important to foster esprit if its inherent benefits are to be realized. To foster esprit de corps you must provide the group with time, resources, identification, and reward/recognition. Resources must be made available to

the group such as access to computers, telephones, meeting facilities, focus group rooms and telemedia equipment. The groups should be identifiable. They may wear special name tags, or shirts. They may be identifiable by where they sit in the classroom. Groups must be rewarded. Of course a grade is the reward they seek but other rewards can be used throughout the semester to foster esprit de corps. Trophies and certificates can be awarded at various stages of the project.

Groups with esprit de corps are more productive. In order for esprit de corps to exist the instructor must understand what the antecedents are and then once esprit de corps is present how to foster it.