

Teams Time Machine:

Past, Present, and Future of Teams in Management Education

Abstract

The use of teams in management education has flourished in response to the needs of businesses for employees to possess teamwork skills. This session will briefly discuss progress in use of and publication about teams. Next, we will open the floor for discussions about past use of teams (participant experiences with teams, perceptions of trends), and future expectations about teams (changes, challenges, and new instructor roles) in management education. Finally, we will encourage participants to share best practices and team exercises used in the present that may be useful in the future, given the possibilities discussed in the session.

Keywords: Student teams, Management education trends, Future of teams

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Introduction

It seems to be common knowledge that business expectations and management education has changed to include more emphasis on teams than in the past – in fact, an astounding amount of articles about teams begin with that very information. Hence, the progression of the use of teams in management education is a fitting topic for this year's MOBTC theme on *Reflective Reinvention: Harnessing Our Heritage to Reshape Management Education*. The purpose of this session is to engage conference participants in a discussion about how the use of teams in management education has changed (both as a field and as individual instructors) and what the future of teams might be in management education in our classrooms, curriculums, and campuses. The intended outcomes of the session are: (1) to generate an understanding of how far the field of management has come in terms of using teams for educational purposes, (2) to brainstorm ideas about the changing needs of businesses and students and suggestions for ways to proactively meet these challenges, and (3) provide an opportunity for participants to share best practices and team activities that may stand the test of time. The target audience for this session is anyone who currently uses teams in the classroom and who plans to continue to use teams as an effective pedagogy method throughout their career.

Theoretical Foundation/Teaching Implications

In reviewing literature on the use of teams in management education, several trends are evident. First, earlier papers reviewed focused on whether teams were effective and how they were being used, particularly for case studies and business simulations. Keys & Wolfe (1988)

noted that experiential activities were becoming more popular in a variety of programs. In the following decades, research on teams has proliferated and more articles are being published on the use of teams for education. For example, a cursory search on the *Journal of Management Education* website for articles with “team” in the abstract shows an increasing trend from 1976 to the 21-st century (see Figure 1). As we have learned more about teams, research has broadened to cover a wider variety of topics, including various pedagogical styles, selection of members for teams, assessment of and incentivizing team performance, appropriate projects and assignments for teamwork, the use of technology and preparation of students for work in virtual teams, and team leadership, among other topics. Instructional methods have also changed over the years from lecturing to more experiential activities such as student teams and group projects (Michaelsen, Knight, & Fink, 2002). Articles now give instructors guidance on utilizing teams for project-based learning, student consulting projects, team testing, semester-long projects, and peer assessment.

Second, many authors have cited (and have continued to cite over the decades) the increased use of teams in organizations and the necessity of training business students to work in teams (and all of the interpersonal skills that entails, such as conflict management, collaboration, team leadership, information sharing, and motivation among others). However, even in 1988, Keys and Wolfe indicated that there was a gap between what organizations claimed their managers needed (i.e., training leadership, motivation (Bures & Banks, 1985), team building, and influence skills (Alpander, 1986)) and the topics being covered in management programs (e.g., Kerr, Hill, & Broedling, 1986). The literature on teams in education has continued to note the importance of interpersonal skills (especially teamwork) for success as organizations’ uses of teams increases (e.g., American Management Association, 2012; Chen, Donahue, & Klimoski,

2004; Laurillard, 1993, Wankel & DeFillippi, 2003). However, the disconnect between what newly-graduated employees need for their professional jobs and what is taught in many management programs continues to exist (Rubin & Dierdorff, 2009).

Given the clear importance of interpersonal skills like teamwork for success in today's organizations, and given the growth in our understanding of how to effectively use student teams for a variety of learning objectives, it is useful not only to see where the field has been in the past, but also to explore thoughts on where it may go in the future. If we believe that working in teams will continue to be a significant part of organizational life for many of our management students, it will benefit instructors in the field to consider how we may need to adapt our current practices for future students. In this session, we aim to create discussion around topics relevant to the trends in the use of teams in education, including differences in uses across undergraduate and graduate courses, various methods and best practices of implementing and supporting student teams, how the education and work landscape may change over the course of the next decade, and how we can be responsive to those changes.

As instructors, we (the authors submitting this proposal) have a variety of experiences with students teams in the following areas: facilitating MBA group decision making tasks, leveraging group decision making tasks for Executive MBA leadership assessment, and utilizing student teams in computer simulations (as instructors, coaches, and observers/venture capitalists), semester-long project teams, classroom discussions and activities, role-play simulations, team testing (quizzes and case studies), and smaller student projects around a topic or company. Between the two of us, we also have experiences in teaching a variety of courses (management, strategy, HR, leadership, ethics, statistics, research methods, communication, and psychology) and settings (undergraduate, MBA, large state schools, small private liberal arts

institutions) and are interested in addressing the question of teams in education from those perspectives. In addition to seeing how the teams literature has changed, we have also seen the ways our own experiences with teams have changed over our relatively short academic careers (we each have approximately 6-7 years of teaching experiences), including the ways we choose to utilize teams, design team projects, and help students develop teamwork skills. However, because our experiences are limited in years, we desire lively discussion from more tenured faculty and those who have experience across a variety of content areas, types of institutions, and countries.

By reviewing what has been done in the past and considering what the future may hold, we can develop ideas for adapting to changes in the external environment, business trends, technology advances, and student issues which should enhance our abilities to adapt team assignments and pedagogies in ways that leverage the skill development of our students (and ourselves).

Session Description

1. Introduction (3 minutes)
 - a. Session purpose
 - b. Ourselves and experiences with teams
2. Briefly present findings on teams in management education trends (3 minutes)
 - a. Volume of published work
 - b. Topics of publications (e.g., selection, assessment, project design, social loafing, instructor's role)
 - c. Methods of use in education (from cases and simulations to more use in classroom, team testing, experiential activities)

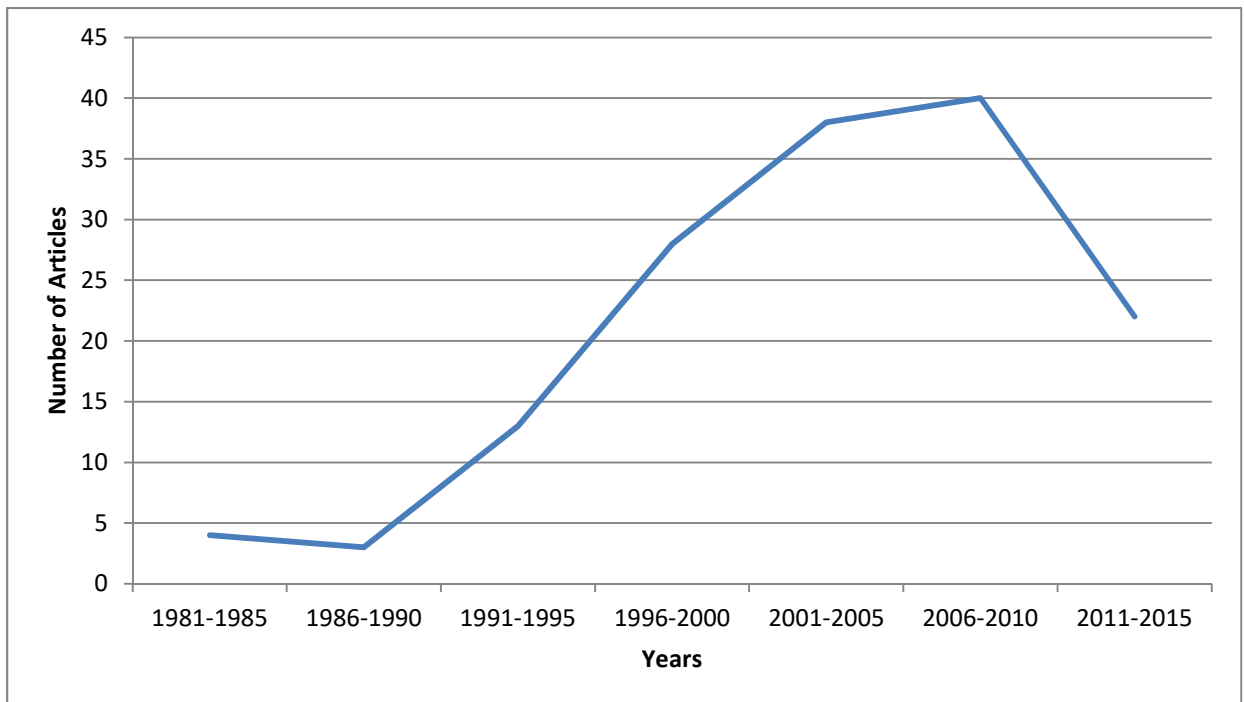
- d. How well does the history we presented represent changes you've seen in your experiences? In what ways? What have we missed?
3. Lead discussion among participants using some of the following questions (40 minutes)
- **If this ends up being a large session, we may split participants into groups with members of various amounts of teaching experience)*
- a. Changes
 - i. Are we (management educators) doing anything with teams that you would not have imagined when you started teaching?
 - ii. Have the tasks/methods you use for student teams changed in your career?
 - iii. How has technology changed what you do with your student teams? Is technology necessary for effective group work or an attractive nuisance?
 - b. Ideas about the Future – In the Classroom
 - i. What does the future look like for teams in management educations? Are there new ways to help students develop these skills? New courses to design? New ways to create, monitor, support, and assess student teams?
 - 1. Methods: cross-disciplinary teams/courses; AI for reminders or to prod critical thinking or to play the devil's advocate
 - 2. Topics: Global, virtual, diversity/inclusion, need to practice team-based ethical decision making and ethical leadership
 - ii. How can we address future challenges for student teams? Some trends that may affect teams include increased interaction with cell phones and social media, increased need to prepare for uncertainty in the workplace, student

perceptions of what is “necessary” for business education, changes in technology, student diversity, and student mental health issues.

- c. Ideas about the Future – Campus and Curriculum
 - i. If teamwork skills are important for business majors, aren’t they important for students in all majors who will work in organizations?
 - 1. Do management departments have any responsibility for helping students in other majors learn teamwork skills?
 - 2. Or for helping faculty in other departments become better at planning and implementing team projects?
 - ii. How can we find the time to teach teamwork skills in courses that aren’t primarily about teams where other content must be covered? How can we be sure students are getting the training they need, especially if the curriculum doesn’t include courses in teams or some large introductory level business course where skill-building could be included?
- 4. Encourage exchange of best practices/team activities that endure over time (10 minutes)
- 5. Wrap up session with recap of major themes (4 minutes)

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Note: Articles about team teaching were removed from this count. In 2006, JME published a special issue on teams in management education.

Figure 1. Journal of Management Education articles with “team” in the abstract.