Online Collaboration Boards: Results of an Experiential Exercise

Abstract

An experiential exercise implemented prior to and during COVID-19 exposed students to informal project management tools and evaluated students' knowledge and retention of course content, as well as students' perceptions of the tools, team engagement, and participation. Students completed a pre-test prior to a class lecture on project management methodology and Kanban collaboration boards. A post-test assessed acquired knowledge from using the online collaboration board and changes to team participation and engagement due to using this tool. Session attendees will be introduced to the exercise, results of the pre/post-test, and advice for implementing online collaboration boards in future group projects.

Key words: Experiential exercise, Online collaboration boards, Student remote group projects

Introduction

According to Ritter et al. (2017), it is increasingly the human resources that can give an employer a competitive advantage. Soft skills, such as communication, problem-solving, and teamwork, are the skills employers value and are seeking in the hiring process. Group projects help develop collaboration and teamwork skills with an experiential learning approach (Ritter et al., 2017). Yet, these projects are oftentimes dreaded by students. They are perceived to be difficult assignments which require more time and effort than individual assignments.

Faculty in three business disciplines recognized the importance of developing collaboration skills and created an exercise to guide students in the development of their groups. Using free online collaboration boards and applying a project management methodology, students developed a new approach to working in teams. The need for remote collaboration has become more noticeably crucial during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Theoretical Foundation/Teaching Implications

Teamwork/collaboration, communication, and problem-solving are three of the career-ready competencies identified by the National Association of Colleges and Employers in the 2020 Job Outlook study (NACE, 2019). These competencies serve as a guideline for institutions of higher education to help prepare college graduates for a successful transition into the workplace. Using an agile framework such as scrum, places a focus on collaboration, individuals, and soft skills (Rush & Connolly, 2020). Collaboration and communication are essential to an agile team and this exercise was designed to engage students in using scrum sprints and online collaboration tools to further their soft skills development.

In a classroom setting, scrum sprints and online collaboration boards can provide a good framework for sharing, updating, and monitoring task completion in a group project. The structure of using a pre-test, lecture, project, and post-test format to introduce the use of scrum sprints and online collaboration boards aims to increase the acceptance and use of a valuable technical tool and methodology for group project management.

Learning Objectives

-Students will be introduced to project management methodology

-Students will learn how informal project management methodology can be used to organize a group project

-Students will utilize online collaboration boards as a framework to share, update, and identify completed tasks for the group project

-Students will analyze and reflect on their experiences using online collaboration boards and identify how using this framework could be beneficial in future projects

Exercise Overview

Using feedback from a prior MOBTS conference presentation, faculty developed a pre-test, lecture, project, and post-test format for this exercise (Weisenborn & Jones, 2018). Students in four upper-division business courses completed a pre-test survey prior to the exercise. The survey focused on defining terminology (i.e. scrum sprint, Kanban board) and describing how each student envisioned their group would organize tasks, assign tasks, and complete tasks.

The following class period focused on the introduction of project management methodology and the use of online collaboration boards. Students watched as the instructor

demonstrated the use of an existing board and creation of a new board using the free online tool, Trello. A class discussion followed to identify other technologies used (or seen in advertisements) for group collaboration and communication. In recent semesters, classroom discussions have also included COVID-19 workplace adjustments as a reason for utilizing such tools.

At this point, groups were formed and given a step-by-step guide for creating their own online collaboration board. Over the next several weeks, groups use Trello for sharing, updating, and monitoring task completion in their group project. Discussions throughout the span of the project can focus on a variety of related topics: developing individual accountability, giving or receiving feedback, and problem-solving in a group setting.

After finishing the project, each student completed a post-test to assess their retention of project management methodology concepts and terminology. Students are prompted to reflect on their use of Trello and if using the online collaboration board helped or hindered collaboration during their project and if using the online collaboration board reduced conflict with team members. Additional class discussions followed to identify future use of online collaboration boards.

Session Description

Presenters will provide session attendees with a brief overview of:

- Informal project management tools and free online collaboration boards

- The classroom exercise utilized in multiple business courses

- Results of the pre/post-test assessment in four business courses

Session attendees will engage in the session by:

- Discussing implementation of the exercise in their courses

- Determining how a similar framework could be followed in the workplace (with focus on COVID-19 and post-COVID-19 changes in workplace collaboration)

- Forming small groups to explore and set-up individual, free online collaboration board accounts

- Providing feedback for improvement or ways to adapt the current exercise to increase workplace readiness of students

References

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