

Successful TV-production teamwork in the classroom: A critical analysis

Wang, Huei Lan ✉

Department of Communication, Nan Hua University, Taiwan (hlwang@nhu.edu.tw)

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Abstract

How do teams overcome challenges and work more effectively, and how relevant are the answers to these questions in different classroom team environments? Teamwork research identifies several factors that determine success in the classroom. This study analyzes how these factors influence a TV production project in a university media class. Using qualitative methodology with in-depth interviews and small-group studies, this study constructs a hypothesis that focuses on the importance of goal setting, decision-making, leadership style, and team communication for each key function. The result is vital for both instructor and students to implement effective teamwork processes and to understand how to solve potential problems with this process. Classroom instructors can use this information to make accommodations in the design of assignments and the expected teamwork outcomes.

Keywords: teamwork; TV production; classroom design; management

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1. Introduction

All people are influenced by decision-making groups, such as national supreme courts, legislative committees, energy commissions, medical teams, national labor relations boards, teacher and college admission committees. Even if these groups are assisted by a computer, the computer was both designed and built by groups. Most people also work in groups when they enter the labor force. Many of them are task groups that exist to organize collective effort in pursuit of a parent organization's goals, while simultaneously satisfying the needs of their individual members. Like individuals, task groups differ from each other along many dimensions. Their goals may be clear or undefined, long-term or short-term, socially significant, and simple or challenging. Moreover, formation of or membership in a group does not guarantee its success. Member interaction is also a vital factor in determining the group's success.

To encourage favorable interactions, managers and group members often use the term “teamwork.” The concept of teamwork applies not only to occupational groups but also to other types of groups that entail collective action. In the classroom setting, teamwork can include a collaborative student project. In addition to the teacher’s instruction, learning occurs through interactions with the teacher and with other students during group activities. These activities can teach leadership, decision-making, and communication with team members. Collaborative projects help make students feel comfortable and are more likely to maximize their academic abilities than those who do not. Furthermore, in a diffuse pattern of classroom friendships in which every member is “most liked” by other members, students tend to have positive feelings toward themselves, to perceive the school situation favorably, and to make good use of their intellectual potential.

1.1 Background

During the past two decades, research about differences in teamwork across cultures has increased. This research has identified cultural variations in team processes, such as social loafing and conflict (Cox, Label, & McLeod, 1991; Earley, 1994; Oetzel, 1998), team leadership (Ayman & Chemers, 1983; Pillai & Meindl, 1998), goal setting (Earley & Erez, 1987, team beliefs about performance (Gibson, 1999), and employee receptivity to working in teams (Kirkman & Shapiro, 2001; Kirkman, Gibson, & Shapiro, 2001). These studies suggest important differences in teamwork, yet literature on group and team interaction lacks a comprehensive framework for understanding why these differences occur (Earley & Gibson, 2001).

Project teams also define their activity differently. Some limit their activity to project-related work, whereas others function like a family with broad activities that extend across several domains (McGrath, 1984). Likewise, some concepts of teamwork may include clearly differentiated roles, such as leaders and members, whereas others may be less structured (Cohen & Bailey, 1997). Finally, some define teamwork by using clear outcomes only, whereas others include implicit benefits (McGrath, 1984). To identify factors that determine the success or failure of teamwork, particularly among students, this study investigates goals, leadership qualities, decision-making, and team communication of a TV production project in a classroom setting to identify key factors that affect teamwork in the classroom.

1.2 Objectives

This study aims to understand how teamwork affects the success of a TV production project in a media class at a university. Additionally, the study aims to determine the function of factors like goal setting, decision making, leadership style, and team communication in the success of TV production work among media students; to define the relationship of these factors in creating a successful team; to examine the applicability of the *kaizen*

principle to promote teamwork; and to determine the level of task completion.

1.3 Statement of the Problem

The study focuses on the different factors affecting students' teamwork when given a classroom project in TV production. These factors are goal setting, decision making, leadership style, and team communication. It is important to look at the behaviors and attitudes of students in a group to measure the level of team interaction on specific tasks. Factors affecting student groups working on class teamwork projects are important parts of contemporary media studies about learning organizations. Similar factors also characterize successful (and unsuccessful) teamwork in other settings (Berge, 1998).

1.4 Significance of the Study

This research aims at providing a critical understanding of factors affecting successful implementation of TV-production work for media students in the classroom. It focuses on observations and direct assessment of the factors represented in the model. This study can help organizational scientists to determine the social implications of boom and bust phases in industry, as dictated by teamwork. This study also benefits future researchers in the fields of mass communication, education, and human resource management, particularly in the television industry, since it depicts the future of organizational teamwork and its varying effects on many sectors of society.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Definition of Team and TV-Production Team

A team is a group of individuals working together to achieve a common goal through collaborative decision-making (Johnson & Johnson, 1996; Larsen et al., 1996; Rice, 1996; Senge et al., 1994; Sharan & Sharan, 1992). There is an increasing interest in the value of working in groups to facilitate individual learning (Olivera & Straus, 2004). Individual learning is often indicated as a desired outcome of working in groups (Borredon, Deffayet, Baker, & Kolb, 2011). Under the right conditions, the lessons learned while working in groups can translate into individual performance improvements (Littlepage, Robison, & Reddington, 1997). However, group experiences can also frustrate participants and hinder their ability to learn (Hollingshead, 1998). Teamwork is designed to encourage flexibility, versatility, quick thinking, and multi-tasking. It motivates workers by rotating job assignments and by involving each team member in the decisions about how those assignments are rotated (Morrison, 1998).

In a TV-production team, time constraints and on-air programming can create stressful work atmospheres. Failure of any team member to do his job properly can lead to disaster. It is vital that team members demonstrate concern, honesty, and flexibility. Timing and practice beforehand are keys to avoid mistakes. Katzenbach and Smith (1993) advocate for integrating teamwork and performance to promote success in organizations. Indeed, they suggest that teams are natural ways of integrating performance and learning.

2.2 Collaborative Learning in the Classroom

An effective TV-production classroom also combines performance with learning. Students must learn how to make a program and how to function effectively as a team. Class projects offer opportunities for improving collaboration, decision-making, communication, and leadership skills, as well as enhancing creativity and interpersonal relationships. Collaboration is effective when used with, but not limited to, case studies, research projects, and interactive computer assignments. Through the courses, collaborative learning emphasizes group efforts among instructors and students (Hiltz, 1995). Schrage (1990) noted that the process of creation among two or more individuals with complementary skills creates a "shared understanding that none had previously

possessed or could have come to on their own.” Whether in the classroom or at the TV station, collaboration helps to redefine the traditional roles, responsibilities, authority, and power structure of the organization. Thus, TV production classes should promote mutual success through helping, sharing, assisting, explaining, and encouraging.

Participatory studies conducted by Chambers (1990) have shown that people can improve themselves, although they are usually misunderstood as passive. The researcher argues that this perception of passivity is embedded in the concept of power relations. In the classroom, the effectiveness of group work depends on how the group is organized, what the tasks are, who participates, and how the group is held accountable. Thus, teachers must consider the purposes in designing group work and address potential problems to promote success (Blumenfeld et al., 1996).

2.3 Decision Making by Team, Not by Instructor

Decision making is an integral part of the myriad factors that can affect the outcome of a common goal. Certainly, critical assessment of one’s decisions is important. If the team makes the wrong decision, at a minimum, the team’s effectiveness could be negatively impacted or a career-ending disaster could occur. However, proper use of the team’s diverse skill sets and good decision-making can lead to a successful outcome. Specifically, consensus decision-making offers all team members a chance to voice their opinions, and compromise encourages team member to agree with and commit to the outcome (Robbins & Finley, 1996). Although Robbins and Finley (1996) argue that there is no “right” or “wrong” way to decide an issue, it is crucial that the team decides in advance what decision-making methods will be used.

In the classroom, the instructor acts as manager and facilitator and leads students towards a specific learning goal. Especially in higher education, a flexible decision-making methodology should be applied that combines multiple ways to make decisions and reach consensus. Students tend to resist instructors who force everything upon them; most students prefer to make their own decisions. This is especially true for TV-production work, which requires a high degree of personal creativity and initiative. This is a rewarding process for team members, as they develop original ideas rather than following orders from a superior. This approach also enhances their learning acquisition. The instructor, acting as manager and inspector, should serve as a guide for students and not as an inference or impediment to their TV-production learning process.

2.4 Leadership Style and Selection

Adair (1984) suggests that the tasks of leaders involve selection, decision-making, problem-solving, creative thinking, communicating (including effective speaking, listening, and writing), managing meetings, and deciding action. Heifetz and Lawrie (2001) also argue that an important task of leaders is to regulate stress, or to turn up the heat while also enabling steam to escape. To achieve a common goal, leaders can adapt their mode of leadership from “participative” to “autocratic,” depending upon the situation (Garrahan & Stewart, 1992). Leaders must also adapt their leadership styles to fit their teams. If a team does not have a formally identified leader, then the probability that a leader will emerge increases as the team size increases (Shaw, 1981). The issue then becomes whether the emergent leader can lead effectively. Thus, leader selection is perhaps the most critical of all planning decisions and requires careful consideration (Trent, 2003).

On the TV-production team, the producer is the keystone of the production unit. The producer oversees all team members and is responsible for budgeting, decision-making, program planning, and production. For TV-production work in the classroom, the instructor is not usually a member of the team, but instead acts as facilitator, monitoring the performance of all students in the class and assigning appropriate students as team leaders. In this way, the producer and instructor have many functions in common, such as defining the team vision, offering rewards to the members, and evaluating the team’s success (Berge, 1998).

Classroom teams do not usually have designated leaders, and team members may not have leadership skills

or a desire to lead. When the selection of a suitable leader is important for a team, all team members can focus on the team's mission and the leadership characteristics required for success. A leader who lacks these characteristics detracts from the team's ability to fulfill its assigned mission. Stogdill (1974) finds that, compared to other team members, leaders are usually taller with higher IQs, and they are more sociable, talkative, determined, and self-confident. However, personal characteristics alone do not predict whether a person will become a leader; it also depends on the situation at hand. For example, different leadership styles are better suited for the battle field (Robertson, 1987).

2.5 Team Communication

Defining team roles is crucial for synergistic team performances. In particular, the "balanced team" concept has received a lot of attention. When team member roles supplement each another, a balanced team is formed. The underlying rationale is that successful teams should include complementary characteristics to match the mission of the team (Leung et al., 2003). In examining team effectiveness, the major implication for education is the need to match rules with people's roles, abilities, personalities, and work methods (Morrison, 1998). This requires team members to play their roles dynamically to supplant the roles and the functions of the missing member. For effective and practical TV-production teamwork in the classroom, relationships among students and between the students and teacher are important factors that affect the outcome effectiveness and learning process. Each student plays a role as a TV production team member, and each role depends on their abilities to meet the performance goals. This role playing illustrates how production teams must gain expertise and practice their skills to minimize mistakes and prevent disastrous outcomes.

In the TV-production classroom, students must build good relationships with one another, which mean treating each other with respect. This facilitates an effective outcome. As Senge (1990) noted, in this setting, students are "seeing relationships rather than linear cause-effect chains" and "seeing process of change rather than snapshots." Team members must value each other's abilities, and misunderstandings should be minimized. By respecting and understanding each other, the team can achieve its objectives (Robbins & Finley, 1996). Conflict can occur during this classroom learning process as a result of competition between teams and individuals. Conflict also occurs if the workload is divided unfairly but the outcome (grade) is shared equally. Once team members are dissatisfied, the outcome is negatively affected.

As previously mentioned, many factors affect goal setting, decision-making, leadership styles, team communication, and interpersonal relationships. Moreover, these factors differ in the classroom versus business setting. To survey these factors fully, a case study is described to show what obstacles are problematic and how they affect the student's teamwork in a TV-production project. These projects illustrate how teamwork is implemented in the classroom and how the students' view teamwork on their project.

2.6 Synthesis

Masaaki Imai (1986) established the Kaizen Institute to help Western companies introduce *kaizen* concepts, systems, and tools. According to Imai, *kaizen* means to have ongoing improvement that involves everybody but does not require significant spending. Companies have made great strides in improving product quality, and much of that is attributable to their implementation of *kaizen* principles, which incorporate total quality management and efficiency in all undertakings. Imai (1997) also defines *gemba* as the place where action occurs. It usually refers to manufacturing activities in a factory as well as the place where employees have direct contact with customers in the service sectors. *Gemba* can also be a hotel dining room, a car dealer's service department, or a doctor's examination room. However, it is not a manager's desk. Imai notes that managers often avoid *gemba* because these places may expose their ignorance.

3. Methodology

This study uses the qualitative research method to analyse in-depth individual interviews of small groups,

group discussions of 6–7 participants, student diaries, and journal entries, which guide and support the construction of a hypothesis. Regardless of venue or medium, qualitative research is always based on open-ended queries.

3.1 Sample and Sampling Procedure

This study was conducted at the communications department of a university in south Taiwan. The department comprises 200 students, and second-year students can take a class in which they participate in projects designed to teach TV production skills. This study investigated three of these projects: a music video or commercial production project, a feature news story, and a technical skills project. The study sample comprises 54 students whom the teacher assigned to a project team. The teacher acted as facilitator and manager and was responsible for assisting, consulting, advising, and inspecting.

3.2 Conduct of the Study

The first project also consisted of 16 groups of 3–4 students who acted out roles in a typical television news magazine program consisting of general interest topics, follow-ups, and human-interest stories. The team also included a reporter who researched, wrote, and reported the story and a cameraman's assistant who provided technical support. The second project consisted of 16 groups of 3–4 students, each of whom was assigned a staff role on a typical music video or commercial program. These program require teamwork and a leader to decide on the program's content and running order and one student is also assigned the role of leader. The third project involved technical skill roles related to TV studio work. Eighteen students were divided into 3 groups. The production studio team emphasized collaborative teamwork (see Table 1 for the background of the participants).

Three leaders and three team members from each project participated in interviews and focus groups to assess several questions. For example, what did students think they learned about teamwork? What evidence can they provide for these claims? What did teachers think they taught about teamwork? How much did students improve their skills through working with peers? What did they learn about the benefits of teamwork? What factors predict success and failure for TV production, particularly regarding teamwork? Focus group and a variety of interview types were conducted after the semester end when all three project were completed. Approximately 40 minutes of interviews were recorded in the university conference meeting room without the instructor. In addition to interviews and focus group discussion, discussion sheet and class observations were used to collect data about different viewpoints.

Table 1

Ages of university students enrolled in TV Production class

Name	Age	Class	Occupation
Mark	19	TV Production	Students
Vivian	19	TV Production	Students
Jane	20	TV Production	Students
John	19	TV Production	Students
Jack	20	TV Production	Students
Mary	20	TV Production	Students
Kelly	21	TV Production	Students

4. Analysis

This section discusses the factors that contribute to a successful TV-production project in which successful teamwork facilitated group learning. As students worked together to achieve specific goals, they tested their leadership, communication, and decision-making abilities. Based on observations of student work and student interviews, curriculum design factors had the most significant effects on teamwork. These factors include setting clear learning goals, developing solid decision-making skills and effective leadership styles and, of course,

ensuring good team communication.

4.1 Factors that affect Student Performance

In education, performance is impacted by the motivation to learn rather than by a specific monetary or business benefit. In this case, team members can be classified as those who are eager to perform and those who are lax. These diverse expectations can generate conflicts within the group that negatively affect interpersonal communications, as indicated in Vivian's hostile disposition towards a male team member: *"It is not fair, He never contributes to the team effort/project ...is given the same grade....he never attend meeting"* (Vivian, focus group, performance, contribution, 3/15/2013).

On the other hand, Jack's response exemplifies a lax team member: *"I am not purposely late for meeting ... I don't know how to work with a team ... it is too much trouble to corporate with so many people"* (Jack, focus group, performance, contribution, 3/15/2013). This kind of team member cannot inspire the team to achieve superior results, but instead holds them back. This negative denotation of the production work among the teams results from a failure in the group's internal collaboration. Moreover, there is a lack of *kaizen* principles, particularly in goal setting. The absence of communication regarding the individual member goals is a significant factor in the responses of the group members. Jack's lack of desire to succeed negatively affects him and the entire production team down.

"I think clear goals and effective communication is very important for our team, especially big group for team ... the third projects is a mess ... too many people give too many comments" (Jane, focus group, performance, communication, 3/15/2013). Students as Janet that aware how crucial for set a clear goal and effective communication. As Jane and other students noted, the results of the study show that setting clear goals and effective communication have a significant effect on the motivation of students to perform well especially such a large group. In the first two tasks, where the group sizes were small, more active members were frustrated by less active members. However, it was easier to develop and maintain informal relationships in these groups and thus easier to address communication problems.

In the third task, where the group included 18 members, communication was hard to maintain and it was frustrating for the leader to address problems. Other members were less frustrated, however, because they limited themselves to their tasks and were less concerned about the activities of other members. Unlike the first two projects where the three members had to rely on each other, cliques formed within this third project. Members gravitated toward other members with whom they felt comfortable, as described by John: *"I prefer to be in a group with my good friend, we understand each other, of course, good leader offer good ideas or working hard improves our performance ... and meet deadline"* (John, focus group, performance, communication/leadership, 3/15/2013). In this situation, the leader must deal with a complicated communication network in which time management, scheduling, and decision-making becomes necessary to complete a task. Thus, the *kaizen* principle is more applicable to large groups rather than small ones. Students with large groups are more organized, leadership more effective in the larger group that wasn't apparent in the smaller group. Due to students with clear role and goal on each position, large group with strong power and regulation to convince group people to obey.

4.2 Decision-Making Based on who is Dominant

For the music video/commercial project, students first developed the basic storyline. Everyone have different ideas, during this stage, many students tried to avoid arguments by submitting to the group's dominant person. For example, idea is different, few students don't want arguing with leader, but they complain behind. The reason is because students doesn't want to accuse other people if he doesn't have a good communication skill, also in Chinese culture, people in the group is afraid to express opinion strongly since it might be ruin personal relationship. It is more related it on culture difference. As Mark commented, he was *"really fed up with arguing ... the decision maker is always the dominant person"* (Mark, focus group, performance,

communication/leadership, 3/15/2013). Compromise then becomes the way to achieve consensus in the decision-making process. However, although Mark still accomplished his assignment, the project reflected the dominant person's character more than the team's character.

Under the above circumstances, leaders of teams are made. Leaders emerge both because they assert themselves and they intimidate others. For the students involved this project, the students informally elected a leader and voluntarily accepts this leadership role. The leader thus accepts the responsibility for the team, but in practice has only informal, it is because it's a classroom exercise and not a real-world example. It can be beneficial in that it minimizes pressure on the team and can thus result in creative brainstorming and teamwork when conflict becomes difficult to resolve. As one respondent named John stated:

"Less people in the studio work group make it easier to reach consensus ... everyone got their option and comments strongly sometimes and was able to share... I really get fed up when somebody just only insists on their idea" (Kelly, focus group, performance, communication/leadership, 3/15/2013)

Larger groups require more compromise, and their leaders have less power. In the classroom setting, where the subject and learning process are new, the leader also faces a lack of abilities and experience in the team. Students gain ability through practice rather than from the lesson itself.

The responses of the respondent groups illustrate the importance of team communication in the production process. Communication facilitates compromise and resolves conflict. The responses also indicate that the disposition of the group can be defined by those who seek power and those who are content to follow a leader. As roles in the team are uncovered, its efficiency increases.

Based on the findings from these three projects, several factors can hinder communication by creating imbalances on the team. For example, differing abilities and talents on the team, poorly defined work goals, and lack of experience can hinder communication. Additionally, the classroom groups struggled with the concept of how to measure team performance clearly and fairly.

5. Conclusion

This study investigates how factors such as goal setting, decision-making, leadership style, and team communication contribute to the success of a classroom TV-production project. A class project on TV production focuses on student learning rather than corporate profit, particularly regarding changes in the group size since groups are smaller in a classroom. To reach a learning goal, the instructor must design a fair level of work and responsibility for every member and students must have clear goals. As Blumenfeld et al. (1996) notes, teachers must consider the goals in designing group work and address potential problems if group work is to be successful; instilling the terms of teamwork is also vital for students' successful teamwork. Teamwork in education involves teaching practical skills and teaching how to learn from others.

Another factor to consider is decision-making. Team must decide in advance what decision-making methods will be used, especially for TV-production work, since this type of work requires a high degree of personal creativity and initiative. The size of the group also changes the decision-making dynamics and thus it is important for members to agree on how future decisions will be implemented and to avoid the perception of domineering leadership. This can also help assure group members that their opinions are important for the success of the group tasks.

The instructor also has an important role in decision-making. When the instructor serves as a guide for students (and not as an interference or impediment to their TV-production learning process), students successfully navigate the decision-making process and reach a compromise with all team members, including dominant members. This consensus is necessary for team cohesion and for sensible and correct decision making,

as shown in many theoretical approaches to this topic (Wickens,1987; Robbins and Finley, 1996).

The high correlation among factors affecting TV-production means that ultimate success or failure of the project is based on how seamlessly these factors interact with one another. To have solid team cohesion, the team must have a suitable leader. The leader needs to feel a genuine sense of responsibility for each student-member on their TV-production team; they must also sincerely believe in the team's goal. It is important for instructors to identify a suitable leader and to instill and cultivate leadership skills and knowledge. To develop suitable leaders in this field and to achieve the educational mission of teaching teamwork, instructors must consider how to educate students to enhance their production skills and properly define the roles of production work.

Team communication and relationship-building are also important factors for team effectiveness. As stated the *Kaizen Leader Training Manual*, cooperation within the team is crucial for its success. For TV-production, the production team must cooperate with each other before going on air. Creating a television program can sometimes be stressful because of strict deadlines. Treating team members professionally and respectfully is the best way to avoid disaster and have an effective and successful result. This common sense applies equally in education as it does in business. As Robbins and Finley (1996) noted, treating fellow team with respect and understanding is the best way to move the team forward to meet its objectives. It is very important for the instructor to educate students on these key points. To improve TV-production teamwork in the classroom, it is vital for both instructor and students to understand the practice of teamwork, the factors accounting for its effectiveness, and problem-solving processes. Classroom instructors must note these differences and make accommodations either in the design of the assignments or the expected teamwork outcomes.

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