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Perception of Team Skills: A Comparison of Self and Peer Assessment

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Abstract:

Purpose - Teamwork is a primary competency needed from management graduates to be successful in the workplace. Organizations and employers are increasingly seeking graduates who are good in teamwork skills. The purpose of this paper is to bring out the differences in perception, if any, in terms of self and peer assessment, and how it can be utilized effectively for promoting the development of teamwork and other professional skills in management graduates.

Design/methodology/approach – To assess team working competencies in the present study, theory and concepts of team development was explicitly taught to the students as the conceptual framework. A group project was assigned to each team so that they constructively aligned and engaged in team processes to complete the task in hand. A short questionnaire was developed on a five point Likert Scale and administered to each member of the group team to anonymously assess their own and the skills of their team members.

Findings – There are substantial differences in self and peer evaluation of the perception of team working skills.

Practical implications – There are perceptual differences in the team working skills based on self and peer evaluation. Efforts need to be made to align the two to be successful managers.

Keywords: Team-working skills, perception, peer-evaluation, Interpersonal skills

1. INTRODUCTION

Teams are an essential part of modern corporate organizations. Survival in today's competitive setting makes it mandatory for companies to adopt and promote workplace that encourages teamwork. Several research studies have highlighted that teams provide numerous benefits. These include improved quality of decision making (Kerr & Tindale, 2004), nurturing innovation and creativity (Larson & LaFasto, 1989), and boost to organizational learning (Edmonson, Dillon, & Roloff, 2008). Strong synergy amongst team members facilitates in creating a constructive and effective team environment. However, ineffective teamwork can result in costly and disastrous decision making, which could translate into frustration and anxiety to the members of the team (Hackman, 1990; Lencioni, 2002). This in turn can escalate problems for the company by adversely impacting the bottom lines and also its business relationships.

Traditionally it was perceived that strong technical skills were the only skills necessary for career growth and advancement;

however, workplaces are increasingly showcasing that technical skills are not enough to keep individuals employed (James & James, 2004). The ability to work effectively in a team is one of the key competencies needed from management graduates to be successful in the workplace. There is a need for employees who are good in team-work. Recruiters are therefore, in search of graduates who score high on this. New recruits, in many instances, have been asked to quit their jobs because they are unable to work well with others.

The ability to assess one's own skills through self-reflection is important. However, we tend to overestimate our own skills when compared to the assessment by the team-mates. This could result in false self-confidence about own teamwork skills. Often it has been observed that there are differences in the degree of teamwork skills assessed by an individual himself/herself and those assessed by his/her peers. There have been numerous studies that have highlighted the significance of the use of self and peer assessment (Boud & Falchikov, 2007; Falchikov & Goldfinch, 2000).

The present study seeks to bring out the differences in perception, if any, in terms of self and peer assessment of team-work skills.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Effective teamwork can have a huge impact on organizational performance as it can facilitate in achieving incredible results. When individuals are part of a team, it suggests that the members would work in a mutually cooperative environment, sharing and complimenting the knowledge and skills as they work towards achievement of a common goal. It implies that they might be required to serve multiple roles as members of the team. Stevens and Campion (1994) have proposed certain knowledge, skills, and ability (KSA) to be important components of teamwork skills. These can be categorized into two broad categories and five subcategories.

The first broad category is interpersonal KSAs which suggests that the ability of individual members to maintain healthy relations within the team is very important for its effectiveness, since the extent of mutual interactions is increased manifolds in a team. It includes three sub-categories of conflict resolution, collaborative problem solving, and communication. Studies by numerous authors suggest that the ability to manage and resolve conflict is very important (Gladstein, 1984, Saavedra, Earley & Van Dyne, 1993). It includes the ability to encourage positive conflict and discourage negative conflict, to recognize sources of conflict and its possible resolution and to implement win-win negotiation strategy within a team. Collaborative problem solving involves the ability of team members to identify those situations in which participative problem solving needs to be done and also the skill to remove hurdles to its implementation. Communication includes the ability of team members to communicate openly, listen non-evaluatively, maximise consonance between verbal and non-verbal messages and also to identify communication networks.

The second broad category is self-management KSAs which involves performing essential management functions of planning, organizing, coordinating and balancing the amount of work amongst team members. It involves two subcategories: goal setting & performance management, and planning & task coordination. The Goal Setting and Performance Management KSA includes the ability to form mutually acceptable team goals which are specific and challenging. At the same time, it involves monitoring, evaluating, and giving feedback on individual and overall team performance. Finally, the Planning and Task Coordination KSA involves the ability of team members to coordinate and synchronize tasks amongst the teammates, keeping in mind the proper balancing of workload amongst the teammates.

The present study uses this framework to assess the team skills in terms of Conflict resolution skill, collaborative problem solving skill, communication skill, goal setting & performance management skill and planning & task coordination skill.

There have been numerous research studies which use multi-rater assessment of individual competence (Nowack & Mashihi, 2012; Toegel & Conger, 2003). When we use multi-rater assessment, we are able to gather a clearer picture of the skill and competence of the individual due to the inclusion of input from more than one source that enhance the possibility to compare self-perception and perceptions of others (Carlson, 1998).

There is a large degree of inconsistency in results of studies on the effectiveness of multi-rater assessment. (Toney, 1996; Shipper, 2004; Asumeng, 2013). One of the major reasons for this could be inflated and lenient ratings being awarded by peer evaluators (Roch & McNall, 2007; Hensel, Meijers, Leeden, & Kessels, 2010). At the same time, it is possible that multi-rater systems of assessment give a biased and generalized perceptions about skills of a person, instead of providing response on specific skill (Rosch, Anderson, & Jordan, 2012; Toegel & Conger, 2003). This might result in inflated ratings of a person by the peers on a specific skill as compared to the self-evaluation on the same when the person rates himself or herself (Rosch, Anderson & Jordan, 2012).

However, several past studies have suggested profound benefits with a multi-rater approach when such an approach is implemented for educational and development purpose (Drew, 2009; Ghorpade, 2000). They provide inputs for personal development in desired areas of skill development (Toegel & Conger, 2003).

3. RESEARCH QUESTION

The present study seeks to determine the differences between self-evaluation and the peer evaluation of team members that have worked together in a trimester-long teams, evaluating their team-working skills. It involves an assessment of conflict resolution skill, collaborative problem solving skill, communication skill, goal setting & performance management skill and planning & task coordination skill. Therefore, the study seeks to analyse the following research question: To what extent do teammate assessments of team-working skills differ from individual's self-assessments?

4. METHODOLOGY

To assess team working competencies in the present study, theory and concepts of team development was explicitly taught to the students as the conceptual framework in the course on Organizational Behavior to the first trimester students of PGDM-International Business programme. Organizational Behavior is a compulsory core course taught at management institutes to the first year students. A group project was assigned to each team so that they constructively aligned and engaged in team processes to complete the task in hand. There were twenty student teams of six members each. A short questionnaire was developed on a five point Likert Scale and administered to each member of the group team to

anonymously assess their own and the skills of their team members. The teamworking skills have been assessed in terms of the conflict resolution skill, collaborative problem solving skill, communication skill, goal setting & performance management skill and planning & task coordination skill. The self and peer assessment involved the teams of students assessing their team-working skills and that of their group members, after working closely to complete the various tasks related to the various dimensions of the project assigned.

5. DATA ANALYSIS

To determine the differences between self and teammate

assessments of team-working skills, we first calculated means for each student’s teammate scale scores. The teammate assessments for each student were averaged to create a mean peer-evaluation score for each student. The means and variances of self and peer-evaluated team-working skill scores were calculated. Z test for two samples was calculated.

6. RESULTS

• **Self vs. Teammate Score Differences**

The means and variance score of each variable can be found in Table 1. Students rated their own team-working skills higher than the peer teammates assessment of these skills for them.

TABLE 1 : Self and Teammate Team-working Skills Means and Variance

	Self-Evaluation		Peer - evaluation		z value
	Mean	Variance	Mean	Variance	
Team working skills					
Conflict resolution skill	4.42	0.51	3.52	0.28	7.97
Collaborative problem solving skill	4.48	0.45	3.53	0.25	8.98
Communication skill	4.04	0.76	3.38	0.23	5.22
Goal setting & perf- management skill	4.13	0.74	3.3	0.33	6.3
Planning & Task Coordination Skill	4.26	0.46	3.26	0.37	8.59

Two sample z-test was conducted on self-evaluation and corresponding peer- evaluation scores. The z-critical value is 1.96 at $\alpha=1.96$. The results obtained yielded significant z values on all the items. This suggests that the self-evaluation scores on conflict resolution skill, collaborative problem solving skill, communication skill, goal setting & performance management skill and planning & task coordination skill are significantly higher than the peer-evaluation of the same. The teammate assessments for each student were averaged to create a mean peer-evaluation score.

7. DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

The present research was intended to determine the degree of difference between self and peer evaluation by team-mates on perception of team working skills. The results obtained suggest that students’ own perceptions of their level of skill surpassed that of their teammates’ perceptions. These findings contradict the earlier research which reported that peer ratings could be higher than the self-evaluation because peer evaluators tend to rate leniently (Roch & McNall, 2007).

The findings of the study suggest that in the context of growing emphasis on the development of team-working skills as essential requirement of employability, various group based assignments can be provided to student teams, feedback and peer-evaluation scores from teammates can be obtained, this

could be averaged for confidentiality. The data thus obtained can provide the information needed for developing the team-working skills of future managers. This would enhance their industry-readiness and boost their chances of recruitment. Similarly, other transferable soft-skills, eg. Leadership , attitude, adaptability, interpersonal skills etc. could be assessed and developed by adopting similar methodology.

Teamwork skills is an important parameter for recruiters. Judging candidates on this skill can be more accurate if multi-rater evaluation is adopted by them in the selection process. Therefore, team based assignments could be provided to the teams. Feedback and peer- evaluation scores could help assess the skill levels of the various candidates more accurately.

In assessing the team-working skills of an individual, it is often difficult for a manager to fairly judge them since the team dynamics is very strong and overt expression of these soft skills can be camouflaged by an individual. Therefore, assessing the levels of such soft skills should be assigned to the team members themselves since they have the most relevant information on it.

There has been an increasing focus on teamwork in organizations. The individual development plans of employees can utilize the feedback provided from the teammates on the various dimensions and level of skills for employee

development and performance reviews. Regular feedback and longitudinal assessments could potentially be very effective in promoting productivity by enhanced soft skills. It would promote honest assessment and provide required feedback to facilitate ongoing professional skill development. The supervisor could then move into providing coaching and mentoring role.

8. LIMITATIONS AND SCOPE FOR FURTHER RESEARCH:

The present study was conducted in on a small sample, first-year management students in a B-school. The results can be generalized to a greater extent if we use a more diverse and larger population. In the present study, students evaluated team-mates after a single project. Repeated evaluation by the members of the team over similar such assignments can provide more conclusive assessments and feedback on the skills assessed. Peers' ratings of each student could then suggest whether the team-work skills of students are improving and to what extent. Further, the results of the study can be enhanced by incorporating qualitative assessment of team-work skills by teammates.

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