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The True Teamwork

FEATURED TOPIC

It is imperative to find better ways of helping students successfully master what are not only the constituent elements of teamwork but, arguably, also representative outcomes of a liberal education

AS CRUCIAL STAKEHOLDERS in higher education, employers have long requested, demanded, and implored that colleges and universities help students develop the team skills needed to address challenges posed by innovation. Employers seek college graduates who, in the face of persistent ambiguity and within increasingly complex environments, are able to collaborate with people with a broad diversity of backgrounds, cultural origins, attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors. In response, colleges and universities nationwide have offered public assurances that, upon graduation, students possess those skills.

Why then do graduates still lack real team skills? Haven't they been provided with opportunities to deepen their self-knowledge, appreciation for diversity, and knowledge of different cultures? Haven't they been given opportunities to work together in classes? What's the problem?

Traditional curricula provide learning experiences that place the responsibility on students to capture the salient points, catalog those points, retrieve and apply them at an appropriate moment; students learn, synthesize, and apply. A student may, for example, take an introductory course that focuses on gaining self-knowledge and, near the end of his or her studies, another course on or involving collaborative methods, consensus building, group dynamics, small-group processes, or teamwork. These topics may be explored either theoretically or through a practical project and either with or without intentional processing to extract and reinforce the learning that takes place. The student may also have undertaken leadership roles in the cocurriculum. But the key question raised by this traditional approach is

Annual Meeting

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Model

Blending the Liberal Arts and International Business Education

Student Benefits from the True Teamwork Model

Gain Meaningful Self-knowledge

- Explore dimensions of their personality through an affirming process using the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI) and Goleman's Emotional Intelligence (EI) model
- Value diversity by exploring cultural heritage and thereby establishing a platform to genuinely value and better understand the nuances and complexities of different cultures
- Explore behaviors and attitudes that frequently are associated with friction and misunderstandings between people from different cultures via Hofstede's Cultural Dimensions

Gain Understanding of Others

- Share, with respect for personal comfort zones, within a discussion group, insights from the MBTI and the Emotional Intelligence model
- Share insights about cultural heritages and the cultural dimensions

Learn Meaningful Collaboration

- Learn the expected stages of team development and progression via Tuckman's model
- Practice meaningful collaboration via teamwork by combining individual competencies to tackle complex, new tasks

whether the responsibility for making connections should rest predominately, let alone exclusively, with students.

It is not uncommon for the elements of teamwork to be developed separately across the student's curricular and cocurricular experiences. Courses involving one or more of these elements are taught by different instructors from different disciplines and domains. This segmentation in time, teachers, disciplines, and domains jeopardizes the cohesion of learning. It is, therefore, imperative to find better ways of helping students successfully master what are not only the constituent elements of teamwork but, arguably, also representative outcomes of a liberal education: deeper, richer understanding of oneself as an individual; perception, knowledge, and understanding of others who are different from oneself; and the ability to engage in meaningful and effective collaboration to solve complex problems. Can these outcomes be "blended" together and presented as facets of a cohesive whole—and if so, how?

In some cases, the architecture of academic programs has been specifically designed either to bridge professional studies and the liberal arts or to enable students to make connections across learning experiences and academic domains. These purposes are often accomplished through a discipline distribution approach to course planning that mandates a percentage of courses be taken outside of the major. But how much more powerful would it be if students saw and participated with faculty in blending purposes from across domains? By drawing from concepts typically present in introductory-level courses, faculty can model for students the process of making connections between seemingly disparate domains of knowledge. In other words, content can be blended to enhance student learning. Most faculty members view themselves as specialists and are likely to resist teaching outside their particular domains. Yet we expect our students to make connections across their learning to apply concepts from several different domains to solve problems. We claim, indeed we hope, that liberally educated graduates do this intentionally. In order to help students learn to make connections, we, as faculty, need to step a bit outside of our comfort zones of specialization and demonstrate the power of an interdisciplinary or multidimensional approach to problem solving.

Decision making, for example, involves the use of oral and written communication skills to receive information and disseminate decisions to those affected; recognition of patterns from past experience to determine the appropriate methodology to apply in a given situation; utilization of cost-benefit analysis to value alternative courses of action; and drawing upon behavioral knowledge to gain "buy in" for the decision. Blending these into one cohesive learning experience enables students to combine skills and abilities developed through coursework in the humanities, fine arts, natural sciences, and social sciences as well as through professional studies. Faculty can orchestrate blended learning opportunities via materials selected from an array of academic domains, assignments, and class discussions. Wouldn't

such faculty modeling and student blending be a more effective educational approach than expecting students on their own to recall, select, and properly utilize the necessary elements of their liberal education—elements that were introduced by different instructors, from different academic domains, and at different moments in time?

The True Teamwork Model

By blending concepts from psychology, anthropology, management, and philosophy, we have developed the True Teamwork Model. The model represents a cohesive teaching and learning strategy designed to enable students to develop teamwork skills through a three-pronged approach: knowing self, understanding others, and collaborating to solve complex problems (see sidebar). The self-guided format of the model ensures that its use by students does not compete with time for in-class content delivery by faculty. The True Teamwork Model can readily be replicated or adapted to emphasize any of the three elements, and it is transferable across programs of study.

Students expect the college experience to provide them with opportunities to find out more about who they are—their authentic identity, what they value, what they want to do with their lives. They seek self-knowledge. Using the True Teamwork Model, students explore such questions as: Why do I tend to procrastinate? Why can't I study in the café with my friends and learn the material like they do? Why do I always need media playing when I study? Why can't I speak up in class? Why do I tend to do what my friends want, when I do not really want to? Why do I always jump to conclusions? The self-questioning model helps students learn how personal traits constitute an identity as well as how they can create blind spots that impede decision making.

Further, through the use of the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI), students gain an understanding of the range of human personality types and extend their discussion of diversity beyond race, religion, and ethnicity (Hirsch

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As part of the Liberal Education and America's Promise (LEAP) initiative, an initial series of eleven videos was created to shine a spotlight on effective educational programs and practices developed by LEAP partner campuses. During the 2008 annual meeting, these campus videos, along with interviews and presentations from the ongoing meeting itself, were broadcast on television screens throughout the conference site and in hotel rooms as well as online. Excerpts from the annual meeting broadcasts and the full content of the eleven campus videos are now available online as video podcasts.

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and Kummerow 1998). Similarly, Goleman's (1995) Emotional Intelligence model can be used to explore emotional or social forms of intelligence. A person might be a brilliant theoretical thinker, for example, and yet, without the social awareness required to anticipate the needs of a particular audience, he or she may be unable to communicate effectively. By adding such an exploration to student research projects, or by incorporating it into group discussions, faculty can help students learn to value people in new ways.

The self-guided process also includes an exploration of cultural heritage, an area that can be eye-opening for students. In out-of-class small-group discussions, students learn about other cultures as they share what they learned about themselves and their own cultures. At first, one of our students responded flippantly to this assignment. "I'm just an American," she said. Yet in exploring her own cultural heritage, she came to see herself as Polish-American. She discovered that she had relatives who died at Auschwitz; her parents had never discussed this with her. Through the assignment, she deepened and enriched her sense of her own identity. She learned about what it means to be Jewish, Polish, and American—and so too did the other students in her discussion group.

Enriching the understanding of others is a natural extension of the students' personal exploration. Indeed a key advantage of the True Teamwork model is that, even as it enables students to deepen their own self-knowledge, it also provides opportunities for students to learn about others. Through group discussion, students share among themselves what they learn about their own personalities and cultural heritage. The knowledge gained by listening to peers share their "stories" tends to move the concept of gaining insights into others from the "nice-to-know" category to the "need-to-know," especially when the students will later collaborate on a project.

To further emphasize cultural diversity, the True Teamwork Model draws from anthropology to incorporate Hofstede's (1981) Cultural Dimensions framework, which enables students to gain insights into the key behavioral or attitudinal dimensions that are associated with friction and misunderstanding between people from different cultures. These insights complement those gained from the MBTI. Students discover the similarities between the personality conflicts that may arise in personal and professional relationships, on the one hand, and the conflicts caused by differences in the expression of cultural dimensions, on the other.

When we face challenging or complex situations, we often do so with clear expectations. The incoming student is given an overview of the academic program across the four years of college; the expectant mother is given an overview of the stages of gestation; the patient is given an overview of the stages of recovery. Typically, however, students charged with "teamwork" are not given an overview of the collaborative process. To counteract that the True Teamwork Model draws from educational

psychology to incorporate Tuckman's model of team development, which helps students understand teamwork as a process that requires attention and intentionality. Tuckman (1992) presents stages of team development that involve becoming familiar with one another, establishing a common understanding of acceptable and unacceptable behaviors, "fighting" through inevitable tensions and conflicts, and streamlining efficiencies as meaningful and mindful collaborations become the norm. The learning achieved through the MBTI, the Emotional Intelligence model, and the Cultural Dimensions framework can usefully be applied through Tuckman's model.

The True Teamwork Model teaches teamwork, not group work

Applying the model

A "lab" environment is needed to enable students to process and apply these concepts. Individual faculty members must determine how best to assess students' self-knowledge, abilities to make insights into others, and progress from an assembly of individuals to a true team. The faculty member creates the "lab" experience by designing the project or series of tasks associated with the specific content of his or her course. In an international marketing class, for example, the "lab" experience might involve the identification of a need present in an emerging economy, the creation of a new product to meet the need, and the development of a marketing plan. This complex and multifaceted task would require knowledge about developing countries and emerging economies as well as about political, economic, sociocultural, technological, legal-regulatory, and competitive environments. Successful completion of the task would of necessity require teamwork.

As determined by the faculty member, and depending upon the goals of the course, students' abilities in analyzing and improving their team skills, interpersonal dynamics, project management, and decision making can be enhanced by requiring reflective thinking. Donald Schon (1983), a philosopher by training, adapted the concept of reflective thinking into a pragmatic skill. Through what Schon calls "reflection-in-action," business professionals can enhance their decision-making skills as situations actually occur. Reflective journals or blogs give students an opportunity to "reflect-do-rethink-do again." Distancing to rethink trains their cognitive skills in reflective thinking and bringing those skills to bear at decisive moments. When read and responded to, journals can increase student accountability to the team process. So too can peer and self evaluations.

Conclusion

We undertook to teach teamwork in response to the needs of employers, but we learned how to teach it effectively in response to the learning needs of our students. Teamwork is not a single construct. Rather, it is a three-layered learning outcome: knowing self, understanding others, and collaborating to solve complex problems. Students cannot successfully develop the skills and abilities required for true teamwork when the three components are treated in isolation across the curriculum and cocurriculum.

The True Teamwork Model teaches teamwork, not group work, and it can be utilized in the liberal arts as well as in professional studies. It gives faculty the opportunity to demonstrate, or model, how to make connections across the curriculum. The model's "blended" approach can be used in any course intended to help students gain self-knowledge, understand others, and collaborate. In addition to teaching team skills, the True Teamwork Model also provides students with an example of how to connect and blend the knowledge gained from their liberal education. □

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