

Mitigating the Impact of Social Loafing through the use of Team Charters and Team Evaluations

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Abstract

In many university courses students work in teams on class activities, papers and projects. Instructors often choose the team method as students will be expected to work in teams in many of their jobs. Team-based activities facilitate cooperative learning which occurs when individuals work together to accomplish a common goal. Collaboration amongst team members can occur in both face-to-face settings and in online environments. Teaching students the skills needed to collaborate in both environments helps prepare students for future jobs in which they may need to coordinate work efforts across different time and/or geographical settings. When students are part of a group, we often find that some students choose not to do their fair share of the work. Social loafing occurs when students are in a group and exert less effort than they would if they were working independently. In order to combat social loafing team charters and team evaluations were used in a marketing course. The instructor provided students with example team charters that have the workload equitably distributed for teams of three to four students. Students then create their own charter that discusses team norms (rules of behavior), assigns responsibilities to different sections of a project, and outlines sanctions for not meeting guidelines in the team charter. Team evaluations are also used in the class so that students can discuss throughout the semester how they perceive the performance level of team members. This paper will discuss the use of team charters and evaluations to level the impact of social loafing.

Keywords: Social Loafing, Team Charters, Team Evaluations, Teams, Collaboration, Cooperative Learning

1. Introduction

In many university courses students work in teams on class activities, papers and projects. Instructors often choose the team method as students will be expected to work in teams in many of their jobs. Students often complain of team work because they have had experience with members of the team slacking and not participating in their fair share of the work. Instructors and employers have known that social loafing occurs in team work for many years. Finding a solution to ameliorate the effects of social loafing has been the topic of many research articles. This work has found that team size, peer evaluations, self-efficacy, need for achievement, need for cognition, individual agreeableness, conscientiousness and identifiable can impact the effects of social loafing (Alnuaimi, Robert & Maruping, 2010; Jassawala, Sashittal & Malshe; 2009; Schippers, 2014; Simms & Nichols; 2014). Other research has examined the use of team charters to enhance the effectiveness of team performance (Aaron, McDowell & Herdmann, 2014; Hunsaker, Pavett & Hunsaker, 2011; Mathieu & Rapp, 2009). This paper will address the use of team charters and peer evaluations to level the impact of social loafing in team projects.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Teams, Cooperative Learning and Collaboration

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Team based activities promote cooperative learning. Cooperative learning occurs when individuals work together to accomplish a common goal (Bonwell & Eison, 1991; Bruffee, 1995; Dingel & Wei, 2014; Johnson, Johnson & Smith, 1991; Jones, 2019). Cooperative learning provides students with a structured process for working on activities (Johnson et al., 1991; Millis & Cotrel, 1998). By working in teams on a project, students are able to engage in critical thinking about course topics by participating in discussions with their peers (Bonwell & Eison, 1991; Johnson et al., 1991). Working in teams provides students with an essential skill needed for both education and in professional life (Jones, 2019).

Limiting team size has been found to increase the effectiveness of cooperative learning on teams (Alnuaimi et al., 2010; Simms & Nichols; 2014). Additionally, teams that work well together establish norms of behavior for how teams will communicate, agree upon when they will communicate, decide how frequently they should meet (either in person or online) and have processes in place for dealing with individuals who slack in their efforts or work (Brindley, Walti & Blaschke, 2009; Fleming, 2008; Hunsaker et al., 2011; Mathieu & Rapp, 2009; Millis & Cotrel, 1998; Strong & Anderson, 1990). Collaborative learning occurs when students interact to create an artifact or come up with a solution (Brindley et al., 2009; Bruffee, 1995; Fleming, 2008; Swan, 2001). Collaborative learning can occur in both face-to-face settings and in online environments. Teaching students the skills needed to collaborate in both environments helps prepare students for future jobs in which they may need to coordinate work efforts across different time and/or geographical settings (Alnuaimi et al., 2010; Campbell & Ellingson; 2008; Dingel & Wei, 2014; Fleming, 2008; Li 2001). Students need to learn to communicate through online or in-class discussions, platforms such as D2L, Blackboard or Moodle or through collaboration tools such as Google Docs (Perron, 2011). When students engage more in communication, their satisfaction levels are higher than those who did not engage (Swan, 2001).

2.2 Social Loafing

Social loafing was first identified in an unpublished study by Ringelmann in 1913 (as cited in Latane, Williams & Harkins, 1979) when studying the efforts that individuals made in a rope pulling task. Ringelmann found that when individuals exerted effort in a group, their efforts were less than when an individual pulled on rope independently. The term social loafing was coined in 1979 by Latane et al. in the *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*. Studies have found that social loafing occurs in many situations from science classes, to engineering, to business classes and to the work environment (Latané, et al., 1979; Perron, 2011; Schippers, 2014; Williams, Harkins & Latane, 1981; Simms & Nichols, 2014; Ying, Li, Jiang & Lin, 2014). Those who slack in their group work often expect others to make up for their lack of efforts (Jassawala et al., 2009). Some students will try to compensate for the lack of effort by social loafers (Jassawala et al, 2009). Schippers (2014) found that when individuals have a high level of conscientiousness and agreeableness, team members will “go the extra mile and compensate for social loafing team members, especially when the need to do so is high” (p. 2014). These two variables (agreeableness and conscientiousness) were also found to significantly lower levels of social loafing. Small team size is another factor that impacts social loafing (Alnuaimi et al., 2010; Latane et al., 1979; Simms & Nichols; 2014). Latane et al. (1979) found that when group size increases, social loafing significantly increased. Smaller group sizes of 2 to 4 students made social loafing less likely. Social loafers often believe that their lack of effort will not be punished if their contributions cannot be evaluated (George, 1992; Jassawala et al., 2009). One way to deal with social loafing is by ensuring that individual work is clearly identifiable (Jassawala et al, 2009; Williams et al., 1981). Perron (2011) discusses the need to have individual student work evaluated. Simms and Nichols (2014) also indicate the importance of examining individual efforts.

2.3 Team Charters

Schippers (2014) indicated that team projects/work should be designed in a manner to avoid possible social loafing. Johnson, Johnson & Smith (1991) discuss the importance of having individual and group accountability in team settings such that each individual has specific responsibilities assigned for a project. Many researchers have suggested that the use of team charters can enhance team performance (Aaron et al., 2014; Alnuaimi et. al, 2010; Courtright, McCormick, Mistry, & Wang, 2017; Hunsaker et al., 2011; Mathieu & Rapp, 2009). Team charters often include discussing the team’s purpose, individual strength and weaknesses, establishing behavioral norms, expectations for communication, assigning responsibilities, providing performance standards and examining how team members will be evaluated and signing the charter (Aaron et al., 2014; Hunsaker et al., 2011; Mathieu & Rapp, 2009). When an instructor places emphasis on the importance of team charters and guides teams in creating a high-quality charter,

teams have been found to have a better experience and outcome (Aaron et al., 2014; Courtright et al., 2017; Mathieu & Rapp, 2009)

2.4 Team Evaluation

Another factor that has been found to help decrease social loafing is the use of team/peer evaluations (Brooks & Ammons, 2003; Cestone, Levine Lane, 2008; Dingel & Wei, 2014; Levi & Cadiz, 1998; Peterson & Peterson, 2011; Sridharan, Muttakin & Mihret, 2018). When students are aware that peer evaluations may impact their grade, they are more motivated to complete the assigned portions of the work (Cestone et al., 2008). Essential to the use of team evaluations is ensuring that students understand what is on the evaluation and how it will be used to assess performance early in the semester (Brooks & Ammons, 2003; Cestone et al., 2008). Peer evaluations ensure that students are held accountable for their work (or lack thereof), decrease feelings of frustration, and result in more equitable distribution of work and grades (Brooks & Ammons, 2003; Dingel & Wei, 2014, p. 729). Team members can either be ranked (rank members from best to worst) or rated (scored on individual components) (Li, 2001; Peterson & Peterson, 2011). While ranked evaluations have been shown to more clearly differentiate between members in terms of performance, rating methods have been found to be more helpful in formative and summative evaluations (Li, 2001). Student evaluations can be used as a formative or a summative assessment tool (Brooks & Ammons, 2003; Cestone et al., 2008; Li, 2001; Sridharan et al., 2018). By using an evaluation tool earlier in the semester, students can change their behavior to improve their work (Brooks & Ammons, 2003). Using an assessment at the end of a project allows students to be held accountable for their behavior/work (Dingel & Wei, 2014). Assessments can be done anonymously or openly and transparently (Li, 2001). Anonymous evaluations tend to result in more honest answers from students, but ones that may also be harsher since their identity is unknown to teammates (Cestone et al., 2008; Peterson & Peterson, 2011; Sridharan, Muttakin & Mihret, 2018). When students provide evaluations directly to teammates, it gives a chance for teammates to improve on performance and gives the evaluator the opportunity to practice important work skills (Peterson & Peterson, 2011). However, a non-confidential evaluation often lends itself to inflated scores compared to confidential evaluations (Cestone et al., 2008). Research is mixed as to which method should be used.

Levi and Cadiz (1998) suggest that behaviorally anchored rating scales offer a clearer form of assessing student work. Behavioral scales focus on specific tasks related to an assignment (such as completing a specific portion of a project or participating in a discussion). Specifically, Levi and Cadiz (1998) assessed “making commitments to do task assignments, completing tasks on time, doing fair share of work and producing high quality of work” (p. 4). They also examined “social behaviors including behaving in a cooperative manner, actively participating in a team, promoting a climate of trust and mutual respect and handling conflicts in an open and constructive fashion” (p. 4). Each behavior was assessed on a 5-point scale from never to always. Levi and Cadiz found that the evaluation tool “did not eliminate social loafing”, but did allow students to “have a sense that they were treated fairly” (p. 8)

3. Implementing a Team Charter and Team Evaluations

3.1 Developing a Team

Students introduce themselves on the first day of class by discussing their major, strengths and weaknesses and what project they are interested in working on (Courtright et al, 2017). This allows other students to find team members with similar interests and those who can balance their own strengths and weaknesses.

3.2 Team Charter Example

The instructor introduces the concept of team charters on the first day of a marketing class. Students are given two weeks to form teams, and in the third week team members work on their team charter to allocate work load. An example charter is provided for students and the team charter is discussed several times during the first few weeks of the class. Team members complete a team charter which describes group members' responsibilities for creating an Integrated Marketing Communications Plan (IMC Plan). The key to the charter is for students to assign responsibilities to team members for the project and to set deadlines. The schedule and deadlines are provided for students with dates from the current semester. In order to keep work equitable, each member of a team must contribute to the research section of the paper and each member must contribute to the creative component of the paper. The charter includes team norms (rules of behavior), discussion postings, portions of the paper and possible sanctions for team members for not meeting deadlines or fulfilling responsibilities outlined in the charter. Students are provided with examples of norms and sanctions, but they may edit these for their own teams. For instance, for

norms, students might indicate texting/calling should be done between the hours of 8:00 a.m. and 10:00 p.m. For sanctions, students usually address penalties that may incur if a student is late with his/her portion of the project.

Classroom policies and schedules override any deadlines or sanctions that may be contrary to the syllabus. The students submit their charter for review by the professor and need to edit the paper until the charter is of high quality. Teams may edit their charters as needed during the semester to reflect agreed upon changes. Any edited charter also needs to be approved by the professor.

3.2.1 Team Norms/Ground Rules

Team Norms/Ground Rules are the "how" of team life. They specify the behaviors agreed to by team members and, set policies for communication, and provide the means for holding team members accountable for following agreed upon guidelines for behavior (Aaron et. al., 2014; Brooks & Ammons, 2003; Mathieu & Rapp, 2009). Teams often find it helpful to establish one or more norms to address each of the questions below: How often will team members be expected to check into the group's discussion area?

1. Will team members hold synchronous team meetings? If so, how often and in what form (in-person, conference call, chat room, etc.) will such meetings be? If teams agree to hold synchronous team meetings, how will they treat attendance at team meetings? How many meetings can a team member miss?
2. How will teams measure the quality of individual members' contributions?
3. What "ground rules" will teams establish around the issue of the "tone" of postings in the team's discussion area? How will teams enforce this?

Table 1 – Team Charter Example of Norms

- No texting or calling between 9 pm and 8 am (unless it's an emergency).
- Check into email and discussion board at least 4 times a week on different days.
- Each member will be respectful in their communications.
- All team members agree to check student email and discussion boards and respond to needed items every 48 hours at minimum.
- No question is a dumb question; if you are unsure about something, ask it.
- Each team member is responsible for completing their tasks by the agreed upon due date.
- If a team member feels they have too much work it is their responsibility to bring it up to the entire group in a timely manner. Group will determine if the work should be redistributed.
- If a person has a conflict with doing a discussion the member must contact the team before the due date to post to the group work area as indicated below.
- All team members will review the document and request any changes by the designated due date via comments to post or a Word file with tracked changes uploaded to post by designated due date. If there are any problems with turning in work or with communication, we agree to discuss the situation in a respectful manner and contact instructor if needed.

3.2.2 Team Schedule and List of Responsibilities

Teams are provided with sample team charters for groups of 3 or 4 students. The team charter workload is divided equitably, so students just need to do a search and replace on the fictitious names in the charter. Each semester, some teams deviate from the examples and assign unequitable workloads. The instructor reviews the charters and each group needs to make any changes that the instructor indicates. If the teams redistribute work during the course of the semester, they submit a new team charter.

Table 2 – Excerpts from a Team Charter

DISCUSSIONS – Each person is responsible for responding to the group.

Week 6: PRINT MEDIA (magazines and newspapers) – SMILEY

- **SMILEY** will post the initial answer to group discussion board by 7:00 p.m. 9/30. If **SMILEY** doesn't post by 11:00 p.m., then **HAPPY** will post to the group discussion board by noon on 10/1.
- Group members should give feedback on the weekly post by 11:00 p.m. 10/1
- **SMILEY** will post the final answers to the weekly discussion board by 7:00 p.m. on 10/2.

IMC CAMPAIGN

I. **Situation Analysis** - The following sections are included in the situation analysis: industry analysis, company background, product/brand information, customer analysis and a SWOT analysis.

- Introduction - SMILEY
- Company Background (approximately 1-2 paragraphs, 1/2 page). **HAPPY**
- Product/Brand Information (approximately 2 paragraphs of writing, 1/2 page) **HAPPY**
- Customer/Buyer Analysis (approximately 2-3 paragraphs of writing, 1/2 page to 1 page) **HAPPY**
- Industry & Competition (2-3 paragraphs, 1 1/2 -2 pages) **SMILEY**
- SWOT Table and Discussion (Table 1/2 page - 1 page, discussion 1-2 pages) **FELIZ**

II. Promotional Program Situational Analysis

Current/Past Promotion Programs (approximately 1 – 1 1/2 pages) PETUNIA.

Assess weaknesses of the current campaign – (1/2 page) PETUNIA

Sections 1 and 2 should have a maximum of 8 double spaced pages not including the title page or references. You need 10 references for sections I and II.

Each person will have assigned parts of sections I and II completed by 10/11 so that the team has time to submit it to turnitin and review. HAPPY will compile the sections, submit the paper to the Part 1 dropbox by 10/12 and upload results to the team by noon on 10/13. The team will edit as needed.

III. Positioning Strategy and Big Idea

- Positioning Strategy and the Big Idea (1/2 – 1 page) – **HAPPY**
- Creative Brief (1 page) - **HAPPY**

IV. Promotional Mix (6-8 pages)

- Advertising Media – **SMILEY**
 - TV -Smiley
 - Radio -Smiley
 - Print - Smiley
- Support and Outdoor Media –**HAPPY**
- Sales Promotion — **PETUNIA**
- Direct Marketing – **PETUNIA**
- Internet/Interactive –**FELIZ**
- Public Relations – **PETUNIA**
- Personal Selling (if needed – do not include for convenience products) – **PETUNIA**

All group members should have their sections of the paper completed by 11/12 and upload to the teams' discussion area. FELIZ will then compile all of the work into one document with appropriate headings, footings, etc.

FELIZ will then submit the paper to the IMC plan TURNITIN dropbox by so that Turnitin results can be reviewed. Do NOT submit the references. **FELIZ** should post the findings to the team's discussion area by 11:00 p.m. 11/13.

Team members will edit the paper as needed. **FELIZ** will submit the final edited paper to the drop box before 7:00 p.m. 11/18.

PowerPoint Presentation Due 7:00 p.m. 11/18 (these are required dates – do not change the dates) PETUNIA, HAPPY, SMILEY and FELIZ

Group members will be responsible for completing slides that are relevant to their sections of the paper.

Group members should have their portion submitted by noon 11/14 to the group discussion area.

PETUNIA will then compile all of the slides together into a cohesive presentation by 11/15. This presentation should be submitted to the group discussion board.

All group members will then be able to review the presentation.

PETUNIA will submit the PowerPoint to the drop box and weekly discussion area by 7 p.m. on 11/18.

Team Sanctions

Teams discuss how they will deal with team members who are not contributing equitably and/or not complying with the charter. For example, what if someone doesn't contribute to a team's discussion posting - what

are the consequences? What will the team do if a member doesn't turn in a section of the paper by the assigned deadline? What will the team do if a team member does not contribute to group discussions?

Table 3 – Example of Team Sanctions

<p>Communication</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Group members will review the group evaluation form twice during the semester to discuss group expectations. Members who are not performing up to expectations will receive lower scores on the evaluation forms. • Team members are responsible for attending online group meetings on time. If a member is unable to attend, they must give the other members a phone call or email within 24 hours of the start of the meeting; a review of the meeting will be posted in discussion with list of attendees and action items. If notice is not given an email will be sent to the person and the instructor, a message will also be posted in the discussion area. • If a second occurrence happens the group member will be “fired” from the group. An email will be sent to the student and instructor and a message will be posted in the discussion area. <p>DISCUSSIONS</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • If a member does not post the weekly discussion or has a conflict with doing a discussion the member needs to contact the group at least 3 days before the discussion answer is due to the weekly discussion area to arrange for another member to answer the discussion question and post it to the group’s discussion area. • Each member must give substantive feedback in the group discussion area on a weekly post at least 24 hours before the answer is due to the weekly discussion area (preferably earlier as indicated below). • If a member does not give substantive feedback to the team before a weekly discussion answer is posted to the weekly discussion board, the person will receive a 0. • If the person assigned to the discussion does not post the answer to the team discussion area and does not contact the team the person will receive 0 points for the week. <p>IMC CAMPAIGN</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • If the group member is late on submitting their assignment and has not informed the other members at least 24 hours prior to the due date they will be given a written email warning from the group. If the assignment is still submitted within 24 hours after the due date the member will not lose points. • If the member doesn’t have the assignment to the group within 24 hours after the due date, they will lose points on the paper as reflected on team evaluations. This will be communicated to the professor through group evaluations. • If the member is more than 48 hours late on his/her portions of the IMC plan without consent of the group s/he will be fired from the group and the instructor will be contacted. <p>If a group member submits low quality work, work without research or gives minimal feedback the individual will receive a lower grade as indicated on the team evaluation form.</p>

3.2.3 Team Evaluation Example

As part of the formative process, students review each other on the evaluation tool at mid-semester on discussion contributions and work on the project. This allows students to get feedback and improve their performance in the class. Each student also has the opportunity at the end of the semester to anonymously evaluate every team member's contribution to weekly postings and to the IMC plan. The group evaluation impacts a person's final grade on the IMC plan. If a team indicates a person is not contributing, not communicating or creating a hostile environment, submitting poor quality work, the professor will use the charter to examine a person’s input to the IMC plan and adjust the grade accordingly. Team scores are averaged before applying a weight to the final grade (Li, 2001; Peterson & Peterson, 2011). Additionally, if major discrepancies exist in the quality of writing or research in sections of the paper, individuals may be graded separately (independent of the evaluations) and will be assessed on their designated portions of the paper.

Table 4 – Team Evaluation

<p>For each person in your team for your IMC plan including yourself, use the following rating scale (1 to 5) to rate each group member on the attributes below.</p> <p>5 = Consistently: The person you are evaluating performed as described consistently and dependably throughout the entire course.</p> <p>4 = Most of the time: The person you are evaluating performed as described most of the time; could generally be counted on to contribute as described.</p> <p>3 = Half of the time: The person you are evaluating performed as described about half of the time, at other times s/he did not contributed dependably as described.</p> <p>2 = Rarely: The person you are evaluating performed as described on an occasional basis (less than half of the time, but more than “rarely.” Dependability was sporadic.</p> <p>1 = Rarely: The person you are evaluating rarely performed as described. The team could not rely on this person to contribute as described.</p> <p>Followed the expectations and "ground rules" outlined in the team's charter.</p> <p>Established and maintained rapport with other Team members.</p> <p>Posted assignments to the Team discussion area by the deadlines in the Course Schedule.</p> <p>Work submitted was high quality, in line with an upper level course expectation.</p> <p>Provided feedback to team members' assignments in a timely manner</p> <p>Offered feedback that was substantive in nature; demonstrated critical thinking.</p> <p>Offered feedback in a constructive, helpful manner.</p> <p>Demonstrated the ability to accept constructive criticism in a positive manner.</p> <p>Showed respect toward other team members.</p> <p>Considering the entire team experience, carried her/his “fair share” of the work.</p>

3.3 Dealing with a Crisis

Hunsaker, Pavett & Hunsaker (2011) discuss the importance of dealing with a major disruption on a team. Students are provided with information on how to deal with a situation where there is a crisis for a team member.

Table 5 Dealing with an Emergency on a Team

<p>If there is a medical emergency (or death of an immediate family member) on your team, and if you have proper documentation (described earlier) immediately prior to a paper being due:</p> <p>Part 1 of the Paper:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • For Part 1 your team may choose to work on your section of the paper, submit the paper by the due date and assign you more responsibilities for the final paper. • Your teammates may submit their sections and the instructor would grade them separately (for both Part 1). Then we would adjust the deadline for the person in the emergency situation based on documentation. <p>Final Paper</p> <p>If there is an emergency situation at the end of the semester immediately before the final paper is due,</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ The person experiencing the emergency most likely will need to submit his/her portion of the paper separately and the deadline may be extended (which might result in an Incomplete for the course). ○ Other members of the team will need to have their portions of the paper submitted by the due date.

3.4 Removing a team member

Students are encouraged to communicate immediately within the team and to the instructor of any problems that arise. It is essential in a marketing class that students learn to work in groups in both face-to-face and online environments, especially for an IMC plan as this reflects how ad agencies work. If members of a team are not contributing, it is recommended that group members contact the person immediately to discuss the lack of contribution and copy the instructor (Hunsaker et al., 2011). Several times a year, students do get fired for their lack of work. Students may also be removed from a group if the instructor notices an individual not contributing to a group, submitting poor quality work, not contributing, not meeting deadlines, not communicating or creating a hostile

environment. The student then must complete the project independently meeting all deadlines on the schedule. If any team chooses to remove a member, this must be done in writing at least 7 days before a paper is due and 3 days before a discussion is due. Communication should occur on D2L and an email needs to be sent to the instructor detailing the reasons for the removal.

- Groups can fire/remove a team member for not contributing to an assignment, being disruptive, not communicating, not producing quality work or meeting deadlines. This must be demonstrated to the professor.
- All group members must agree to the firing/removing of a group member.
- A group member can be reinstated at any time with consensus from the entire group.
- If a group member is fired/removed, the group member forfeits/receives a zero on all future group work. The group member must then complete the paper individually. If an individual fires a team, the team forfeits/receives a zero on all future work done by the individual.
- An individual can fire a group if s/he feels the other members are not contributing, producing quality work or meeting deadlines. This must be demonstrated to the professor. The individual must then complete all discussions and the IMC plan individually.

4. Conclusion

Being able to work well in a team is a necessary skill that students need to develop while at college. In teams, students often deal with slackers, or those who don't pull their weight. Social loafing is a reality and is the source of much frustration for students and instructors. Instructors do have tools available to mitigate the effects of social loafing. Team charters have been found to hold students accountable for their portion of a project. Furthermore, formative and summative peer evaluations provide students with critical feedback and can decrease student frustration with social loafers. Both charters and evaluations make it easier for the instructor to deal with problems because both charters and evaluations can be referenced when giving student feedback. Furthermore, the use of charters and evaluations establish an objective criterion to hold students as group members accountable. Such objectivity establishes standards for group members to follow and avoid social loafing.

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