The Best of Times and the Worst of Times: Team Teaching Business Communication in Integrated Undergraduate and Graduate Courses

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Team Teaching Business Curricula

The use of team teaching, particularly in business college classrooms, has been increasing since its introduction in the mid-1950s. Much of the literature on business education reflects the fact that many business schools have incorporated team teaching into the curricula in an attempt to better prepare students for a more vertical, integrated business world (Fukami, et al., 1996; Gallos, 1996; Napier, Hang, Nai, Thang, & Tuan, 2002).

 The early team teaching format consisted of two or more faculty members from different disciplines presenting their particular field of knowledge and expertise within the context of the same course but in a separate and individual format (Wenger & Hornyak, 1999). Nonetheless, while there is more team teaching being done in business curricula, the pedagogy itself has not evolved significantly from these early formats. Most instructors participating in team taught classes still teach their topic autonomously, without attempting to integrate the material with the other disciplines taught in the class. This method is indentified by Wegner and Hornyak (1999) as the "sequential motif," which is characterized as sequential instruction with distinct boundaries between the disciplines.

While the sequential motif approach does allow students to learn from diverse perspectives and expertise, it does not offer students the learning opportunities inherent in more integrated team teaching methods. These learning opportunities include exposure to dialogue and discussion (both pedagogical and ideological) in addition to differing viewpoints and learning approaches and impromptu integration opportunities that often occur as an unplanned result of integration (Hamilton, McFarland, & Mirchandani, 2000; Napier, et al., 2002; Watkins, 1996; Wenger & Hornyak, 1999). More importantly, what is problematic about the sequential model is that it focuses on keeping functional competencies separate and distinct rather than addressing the need for the cross-functionality desired by business education stakeholders (Corsini, Crittenden, Keeley, Trompeter, & Viechnicki, 2000; Wheeler, 1998).

This article describes the authors' experiences in and observations of two models of team teaching involving business communication that have been implemented by The W.A. Franke College of Business (FCB) at Northern Arizona University. Issues and challenges in these team teaching models arising from faculty perceptions, establishing trust, resource allocation, grandstanding, and interpersonal issues are presented, followed by a discussion of how these issues have been addressed at the FCB.

Team-Taught Business Curricula at Northern Arizona University

BizBlock

BizBlock was first offered at the FCB in the Fall 2000 semester. The course integrates three required core business classes: principles of management, principles of marketing, and business communications. The course is taught by three business faculty instructors representing the three core disciplines. While students receive a separate grade for each three-credit-hour course, most of the assignments are designed to integrate concepts from all three courses, and the course grade reflects each student's ability to apply discipline specific knowledge to these integrated assignments.

The class meets two times a week in 4 ½ hour sessions and is offered in both the Fall and Spring semesters. BizBlock is taught using a limited number of traditional lectures (usually done during the beginning of the semester) and many facilitated consulting sessions to help student teams complete the integrated project: a professional business plan and presentation. Throughout the semester, the three faculty members remain in the classroom to identify integration opportunities, participate in discussions, and encourage class participation. Actual lecturing time is allocated among the instructors based on student and project needs. To reinforce the integrated nature of the course, the faculty team holds team office hours with individual students or teams.

MBA Program

The FCB MBA program is a small, personalized, and intensive 10-month program. It was redesigned over 10 years ago to create an innovative, integrated, team-based core curriculum characterized by multi-disciplinary classes taught by cross-disciplinary faculty teams. Although the curriculum and faculty have evolved over the years, the commitment to achieve integration through an interactive model of team teaching characterized by joint planning and instruction has remained strong despite scarce resources and tightening economic pressures. Currently, core courses include one co-taught by economics and marketing faculty, one co-taught by management and CIS faculty, one co-taught by accounting and finance faculty, and one co-taught by management and accounting faculty. Generally, both professors remain in the classroom to facilitate participation and learning by providing alternative viewpoints that generates lively debate and holistic problem solving by students.

Communication is not offered as a stand-alone course in the MBA program. Instead, instruction, feedback, and assessments are integrated with the core courses. These activities are managed by a communications faculty member who works with the faculty and generally provides coaching, feedback, and a grade on at least two oral communication assignments and two written assignments in each core class. In some cases the communications faculty member works with course faculty to design communication assignments and participates in the classroom.

The nature and extent of the involvement of the communications faculty ultimately depends on the course faculty. Therefore, although business communication is part of the team-taught MBA courses, it

is not wholly integrated. Nevertheless, this course design indirectly introduces an additional, but unequal, member to each faculty teaching team and creates both challenges and opportunities.

(See Appendix A for a comparison of business communication roles and responsibilities in BizBlock and the MBA program).

Team Teaching Issues

Faculty Perceptions

While it appears that students and employers benefit from the results of team-taught classes, integrated team teaching is challenging to implement and can be threatening to faculty. As Napier et al. (2002) point out "University professors typically revel in answering to no one but themselves … our teaching is solitary, fits our style, and allows little invasion" (p. 430). As a result of their graduate work, academic faculty see themselves as experts in their discipline and present this expertise by assuming the role of the classic "sage on the stage." Thus, as Young and Kram (1996) noted, "most academics have been socialized to regard their classroom as a sovereign territory over which they rule" (p. 507).

In addition to their desire to be in charge, faculty has been convinced that each element of content in their particular discipline is the most significant component of a student's body of knowledge. As such, one of the most significant obstacles encountered in the development of a BizBlock teaching team was realigning faculty perceptions regarding the importance of their specific discipline content relative to the integrated course deliverable (the business plan and presentation).

Going through this process of realigning faculty perceptions can be a somewhat painful experience, but it has proven to be powerful learning experience for the BizBlock teaching team in terms of enhancing their shared understanding of the course vision and mission and of establishing trust among the team members. MBA team-taught courses have shown that structuring an integrated course, specifically negotiating disciplinary and behavioral boundaries for the classroom, is time consuming and difficult but again can be the first step toward creating a shared understanding of team goals and a sense of trust.

Establishing Trust

Trust is a key component in creating an effective faculty teaching team and in delivering integrated curricula. The original BizBlock faculty team consisted of three instructors teaching their core disciplines: marketing, management, and business communication. These three individuals were markedly different in terms of personality, work styles, and life experiences. However, they did share a common characteristic: sufficient but not excessive egos. This characteristic has also been present in successful MBA teaching teams. It takes considerable confidence in one's teaching abilities and discipline-specific knowledge to be able to teach in front of peers. Yet it also takes an equally strong sense of self to be able to be set aside one's personal agenda and be a supportive, contributing part of a team. Having a faculty team who have confidence in themselves fosters confidence in each other which over time leads to a strong sense of trust.

Achieving and maintaining that sense of trust requires a belief in and commitment to a shared vision and to each other. According to Young and Kram (1996), team teaching requires "constantly listening for new opportunities to make connections, pose questions, or remaining silent. It means guessing what your teammates are thinking, especially when the unexpected occurs. It means staying flexible and communicating with your colleagues, in real time, before a live classroom audience" (p. 501).

However, as Francois de la Rochefoucauld once said, "The only thing constant in life is change." This observation is truly reflected in the evolution of BizBlock. During the last ten years, the configuration of the BizBlock teaching team has changed six times and reestablishing the degree of trust necessary for effective team teaching has consistently required time.

Allocating Resources

Anecdotally, more time is spent in organizing an integrated course, building trusting relationships, and planning the class. Developing, assessing, and redeveloping an integrated course requires far more resources, particularly in terms of time, than the same process applied to two (or more) separate courses. Team teaching, at least in terms of resource allocation, is often synergism in reverse.

 "To be successful, a cross-disciplinary course must be integrated on three levels: the primary assessment outcome (in BizBlock, this outcome would be the professional business plan and presentation), the lectures, and the syllabus. Such extensive integration requires commitment and shared vision on the part of the faculty" (Bowers & Scherpereel, 2008, p. 2).

In BizBlock, significant time is also spent determining how to most effectively use the teaching style of each team member and combining teaching styles to present common topics (for example, management and business communications teaching team development). Considerable preparation is needed in order to accommodate the class administrative elements (announcements, special instructions, and the joint return of assignments), to make time for occasional guest speakers, and to reschedule subject material that was not covered due to university cancelled classes.

For all team-taught courses, resource allocation becomes an issue when the team composition changes. It takes time to recruit and hire faculty who are both willing and able to team teach. As noted by Wenger and Hornyak (1999), team changes introduce a significant learning curve in terms of coordination, efficiency, and classroom effectiveness. As stated earlier, it takes additional time and effort to build the trust needed to deliver the content efficiently and effectively.

From an institutional perspective, the time used by faculty in preparing and delivering an integrated team-taught class represents a troublesome opportunity cost. Time devoted to team teaching is time that could be used for research or other service opportunities. For many business schools, the AACSB publication requirements are of utmost importance and faculty is responsible for helping the institution meet those requirements. It is also problematic that oftentimes the faculty most interested in and amenable to team teaching are younger, newly hired, and untenured faculty. This is a problem because

these are the same faculty members who must produce published work in order to achieve tenure, and team teaching takes up the time tenure track faculty could be using for research and publishing.

On the other hand, team teaching can create research and publishing opportunities (Corcos, Durchslag, Morriss & Wagner, 1997; Helms, Alvis & Willis, 2005; Leavitt, 2006). Specifically, team teachers have the opportunity to "learn new approaches that will enhance their teaching and writing" (Leavitt, 2006, p. 4) in part by co-authoring papers related to their team teaching experiences.

What is also institutionally problematic are the costs associated with team teaching. While there are numerous intangible benefits to students as a result of being in a team-taught class, in the case of BizBlock, having three faculty members in the same class for four hours only teaching one course is not cost effective from an administrative perspective. Having two faculty members, one or both of whom are tenured professors, and a communications faculty member allocated to one class (although the communications faculty member is not regularly in the classroom) as is done in the MBA program is also not cost effective from an administrative perspective.

Grandstanding

As discussed earlier in this paper, faculty often views their particular discipline as superior to other disciplines offered. This perspective can lead to a significant issue of power in a team-taught class. Young and Kram (1996) noted that power differences "are particularly influential within cross disciplinary teaching teams" (p. 503) like those used in BizBlock. Occasionally, one of the disciplines identifies itself as more vital to student learning than the other disciplines included in the team-taught class. This position will often manifest itself in an overt or covert domination of the course content, and as a result the perceived value of the other discipline content is undermined.

The issue of diminished discipline status is particularly salient for the communication instructor in an integrated course. Experientially, business communications is often perceived as merely providing a mechanism (a written and/or oral deliverable) to apply and link the academic theories and information presented in marketing, management, finance, or accounting. In BizBlock and the MBA program, the focus of business communication is on form rather than content, and as such there is always the possibility it will be perceived by students (and sometimes the other faculty team members) as less important. If this is actually the perception held by another BizBlock instructor, this perception can be implicitly or explicitly communicated to the students.

The perception of the diminished discipline status of communication is even more of an issue when, as in the MBA program, the communication discipline is separate from the curriculum (no separate course grade is given) but integrated into it. The issue is that students tend to focus on learning the substantial amounts of information they are receiving in their major disciplines and do not see much advantage in putting in the time and hard work to become better writers and speakers.

While being relegated to a diminished status in the class might not be an issue for some faculty, the academic reward structures are not consistent with a diminished status. Academic reward systems are

usually strongly correlated to student evaluations that assess individual instructor performance. Using individual instructor evaluations in a team teaching environment sets up a situation identified by Young and Kram (1996) where "faculty team members can undermine colleagues, consciously or unconsciously, by grandstanding to student interests, by undercutting a colleague's credibility, or by approaching classroom popularity as a "winner-takes-all" game" (pp. 506-507). It is entirely possible that student evaluations will reflect the message conveyed to them by a grandstanding faculty member.

Interpersonal Issues

Grandstanding and trust issues can often be an outgrowth of interpersonal conflict among the members of a teaching team as a result of personality differences. While such differences can be complementary, very different personalities or very similar personalities can impede and even block the development of a functional, high-performing team.

Tuckman's (1965) model of group development proposes that teams form in a series of stages and that it is necessary to go through each stage in order to reach the point where the team works well together. While the first stage, *forming*, is relatively easy to work through, the next stage, *storming*, can be so difficult the team is unable to move to the next stage. The storming stage is marked by conflict as team members attempt to determine their role and position within the team. For people (such as faculty) for whom a strong personality characteristic is to be dominant, any role other than leader is not acceptable. Two people on the same team with the same need to assume a particular role on the team translates into a prolonged storming stage.

Conversely, team members whose personalities are markedly dissimilar will also have problems in the storming stage. Part of the storming stage is establishing a relationship among the team members, an awareness and eventual acceptance of each member's strengths and weaknesses. Occasionally, the personalities are so different that reaching such an understanding of each other is nearly impossible.

Interpersonal conflict on a team may also be a function of age, gender, or ethnic differences. In addition, the level or years of teaching experience can lead to both conflict and power struggles. These differences are often reflected in distinct and sometimes opposing teaching styles and acceptable classroom norms and behaviors. In BizBlock, there was always an unequal representation of age, gender, and years of experience. Some BizBlock teams had two males and one female, while others were composed of two females and one male. In addition, the age difference was as much as 25 years on one team. Years of experience didn't seem to have as profound an effect as did age and gender differences. While this effect would not necessarily be viewed as conflict, nor did it lead to significant interpersonal issues, there does appear to be a difference in classroom dynamics when the teaching team is predominately male or predominately female.

The MBA program has had many differently configured teams over the last 10 years including teams with age, gender, personality, and ethnic differences. While these pairings have sometimes posed challenges in teaching styles, they have also benefited students by modeling the diversity of teams they will encounter in the workplace. Overall, personality differences seemed to lead to conflict more often

than age, gender, or ethnicity. Personal incompatibility, such as pairing a rigid individual with a flexible one, seemed to result in less successful teams, primarily because it led to ineffective and even counterproductive communication, which in turn impeded the development of a trusting relationship.

Addressing the Issues

Faculty Perceptions

BizBlock. As stated earlier, coming to terms with the notion that one is not the most important person in the room and that one's particular field of expertise is not the most essential knowledge base is difficult, if not impossible, for many faculty. In BizBlock, the process that was the most helpful in convincing faculty that less is more (in terms of time spent on stage and chapters covered) was the development of an integrated assessment outcome and syllabus (Bowers & Scherpereel, 2008). The creation of the integrated assessment outcome, which in BizBlock was a professional business plan and presentation, required all three instructors to truly reflect on what components, theories, or processes in their discipline were the most necessary in terms of writing an in-depth business plan in just 15 weeks. Once the assessment outcome was agreed upon, it became necessary to build an integrated syllabus that would allow each instructor the time to cover those topics they had determined were most important to the goal of producing a business plan. Again, this process helped the faculty understand that although they would not be on stage all the time, their time on stage was essential to student learning.

MBA Program. The MBA program is comprised of several teaching teams. All have to follow (with differing degrees of intensity) the same process as BizBlock to minimize friction between team members as they decide what material is most important to convey to the students, how best to convey it, and the time required to convey it. The process requires constant negotiation, compromise, and communication. The most successful teams consult before classes, work together with the communications faculty member to determine appropriate writing and oral communication assignments, and consult regularly to discuss what happened, what went right or wrong, and how to improve in the future. This process seems to dampen tendencies toward enforcing both discipline dominance and personal dominance by creating faculty buy-in. As the communication faculty member provides underlying support focusing on form issues, there is a high level of consciousness of the need to defer to course faculty and so perception problems do not arise.

Establishing Trust

BizBlock. In many ways, the time spent working on creating and revisiting the outcome assessment and the syllabus was a powerful first step in establishing trust in each reiteration of the BizBlock team. This process served to solidify and enhance the team's sense of mission and vision and allowed team members to see and appreciate each other's discipline specific knowledge and the contribution that knowledge would make to the course effectiveness.

As mentioned earlier, all three faculty members remain in the classroom throughout each class session. While the rationale for doing so was to model team behavior and take advantage of spontaneous integration opportunities, having teaching partners in the room can foster a sense of security. This confidence is only really achieved, however, after the team has become comfortable with each other's teaching style and class decorum, and achieving this level of comfort inevitably takes time. Nonetheless, once the team learns they can depend on certain predictable conduct by each member, and that conduct is considered positive, trust is then established. It is important to note here that a teaching team must present a united front because trust can be diminished if one team member contradicts or does not support another team member or the rest of the team in front of students.

MBA Program. Studies support that open communication plays a critical role in developing and maintaining interpersonal trust (Thomas, Zolin, & Hartman, 2009). It is therefore also key to establishing the strong collaborative relationships necessary in team teaching. In the MBA Program, open and continual communication throughout course planning and implementation has been essential to developing trust in teaching teams, in large part because it enables each member to see the competence, skills, and knowledge that the other members bring to the table. Trust grows as each team member understands and experiences how the other members' work contributes to positive outcomes of the team's objectives. On the other hand, trust deteriorates quickly if members feel they do not consistently receive important and accurate information from other team members. For example, trust deteriorates if members of a teaching team give students different instructions about assignments (either in class or via instructor e-mails) that are not copied to all team members.

Allocating Resources

BizBlock. The issue of resource allocation inherent in team teaching is probably not completely solvable. It would be most institutionally cost effective to hire the lowest-paid faculty (which would generally be non-tenure track lecturers or instructors) to teach integrated courses and to assign high enrollment capacity to that course. Yet it is fairly intuitive that this approach would probably not provide the highest quality learning experience for the students. BizBlock attempts to be somewhat cost effective by having at least one and sometimes two tenured or tenure track Ph.D. faculty members and fill the rest of the team with non- tenure track lecturers. The class enrollment in BizBlock is capped at 70 students primarily because of space constraints. However, this is still the largest class enrollment in the FCB.

The same faculty team has been in place for two years, which translates into less (but not a lot less) time spent on preparing the syllabus and reviewing the outcome assessment. This is the first year in the last three years that the business plan template used in the class has not been fairly extensively revamped and revised. Because the same faculty team has spent the last five semesters working on the business plan template there is a general consensus that the template is now more than adequate. More efficient use of time occurs the longer the same team remains in place. The time saved can then be used to do the research and publishing demanded of non-tenured faculty and faculty who must remain academically qualified.

MBA Program. Faculty resources allocated to the MBA program are substantial. The MBA core currently includes four interdisciplinary team-taught courses offered within a 10-month period. All course faculty are tenured or tenure track, while the communications faculty member is a non-tenure track lecturer. Class size is small, ranging from fewer than 20 students to a maximum of 40 students (the program's current capacity). As in BizBlock, MBA faculty teams have been fairly stable so the time spent by most faculty in planning and coordinating these courses is used efficiently.

However, concerns about cost-effectiveness remain high, and whether the benefits of team teaching outweigh the costs is questioned by some. Although students generally express high satisfaction with these courses, there is a paucity of evidence suggesting that students learn more or better as a result of this learning model. Nevertheless, integrated team teaching is strongly supported by researchers in business education as well as the AACSB (Helms, et al., 2005; Dumas, Blodgett, Carlson, Pant & Venka, 2000; Heinfeldt & Wolf, 1998; Mason, 1992). Overall, the advantages of interdisciplinary team teaching touted by these and other researchers are deemed by administration to outweigh the costs of the integrated courses. Another justification for the allocation of substantial faculty resources is that the administration sees the interdisciplinary team-taught, silo-free program design that integrates business communication as a core competency that differentiates the FCB MBA program from others that retain the functional silo perspective. As such, the program design is highlighted in marketing materials and is considered a strong selling point for the program. Forman (2008) stated that because of the high costs, integrated team teaching must be "highly valued by the institution . . . in terms of its core differentiation from competing schools" (p. 212). That is the case with the FCB MBA Program.

Grandstanding

BizBlock. While the creation of a balanced syllabus addresses the issue of grandstanding, it only does so in theory. In order to make sure the syllabus is followed, one BizBlock instructor is assigned the task of creating a daily agenda to cover each topic or activity listed on the syllabus. This agenda not only includes the topics but the order in which the topics will be presented and the amount of time each instructor will have for their lecture. Again, having this agenda is not an absolute safeguard against grandstanding. With one BizBlock team, a kitchen timer was used to make sure no one used more lecture time than was allotted.

Another safeguard against grandstanding in BizBlock is the use of team office hours. All three faculty members are present during these office hours, and this allows a more balanced approach to answering student questions. In high-functioning BizBlock teams, these office hours help students see how the three disciplines work together and that each faculty member can make suggestions and provide insight outside their discipline.

MBA Program. While the MBA teaching teams also create balanced syllabi which minimizes grandstanding issues, most do not regularly collaborate on a daily agenda beyond what is in each syllabus as most syllabi are quite detailed and one faculty member is usually made responsible for the agenda or primary content for each class period. In addition, team office hours are the exception rather than the rule. Most MBA teams over the past 10 years have been stable for 3 or more years, and team

members are selected (and self-selected) in part because they are flexible, open to change, and willing to re-evaluate their pedagogical priorities in a new environment. Due to these factors and intensive, cooperative planning, grandstanding has not been a major issue for most MBA teaching teams.

Interpersonal Issues

BizBlock. BizBlock is truly a team-oriented course. The course is taught by a faculty team and the primary outcome assessment is completed by student teams. The student teams are put together by the faculty based primarily on the results of a work styles profile the students complete the first day of class. These profiles look at four distinct work styles and the faculty team constructs the teams in such a way that all four work styles are represented on each team.

In addition, the faculty also completes the profile. These profiles have been remarkably accurate and interestingly enough, no faculty team has had members with the same profile. While such profiles are not personality assessments, they do reflect some salient personality characteristics such extroversion and task orientation. Overall, knowing the results of each other's profile has helped the BizBlock team more quickly understand each other. The information in these profiles has also helped the team assign roles and responsibilities. For example, the most extroverted team member is in charge of greeting and introducing guest speakers.

While personality differences can be complementary, such differences can still affect team development when the team does not share a common vision and high levels of commitment. For one BizBlock team, the interpersonal issues were insurmountable and the team never really processed through the storming phase. In the end, the solution was a reconfiguration of the team.

MBA Program. Formal work style profiles are typically not done to match MBA teaching partners. Instead, an effort is made to attract faculty who are "most likely to succeed" or in other words, those who have characteristics important to a successful interdisciplinary teaching team. Those characteristics were described by Forman (2008) as "excellent listening and 'translation' skills, that is, the ability to explain key concepts of their disciplines and show application to cross-disciplinary assignments; curiosity about other disciplines; appreciation for the expertise and talents of others; lack of interfering egos; and interest in experimenting with new teaching approaches to keep assignments vital and responsive to changing student needs" (p. 7). Although it has been challenging to find and retain such people in the program, overall such searches have been quite successful. In addition, to mitigate personality conflicts it is optimal to find "volunteers," or faculty who self-select into team teaching.

Of course, some teams have not progressed through the storming stage and become cohesive. Over the longer term some such teams have been reconfigured, but over the shorter term some teams have chosen to avoid conflict by reverting to an approximation of the sequential motif approach to team teaching.

Conclusions

FCB faculty who are part of an interdisciplinary teaching team have reported increased collegiality and ability to develop research colleagues. They have also expressed a sense of security and support in being part of a high-functioning teaching team. It has been the authors' experience that being a faculty member of a teaching team strongly committed to the same goals and to each other's success means having someone they can depend on for support, advice, and feedback. It also means having someone they can call on in class for an insightful, knowledgeable answer.

Student evaluation feedback and anecdotal comments from students in FCB team-taught courses have described vicariously learning about positive team behavior by watching the faculty teaching team. In addition, these students have told both FCB faculty and administration that team teaching done in an integrative manner has allowed them the opportunity to gain a deeper understanding of cross functionality, to make connections, and to apply information learned in one discipline to the practice of another discipline.

However, developing and maintaining an effective teaching team is a process that requires addressing numerous complex issues and problems. It is important that a teaching team carefully considers shared expectations and that those members take time to reflectively think about their role in and responsibilities to the team and team goals in order to avoid the self-interest and personal agendas that can undermine successful team teaching.

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APPENDIX A

Comparison of Business Communication Roles and Responsibilities in BizBlock and MBA Program

	Business Communication instructor is part of the formal faculty teaching team	Business Communication confers a course grade and three hours academic credit	Business Communication instructor is full-time faculty member	Business Communication instructor teaches other courses	Business Communication instructor is in the classroom with the faculty team during their lectures	Business Communication Instructor title
BizBlock	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Senior Lecturer
MBA	No	No	Yes	Yes	Occasionally	Coordinator/ Lecturer