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## Review

## Towards a contextualized model of team learning processes and outcomes

Selma Van der Haar<sup>a,\*</sup>, Mien Segers<sup>a,1</sup>, Karen A. Jehn<sup>b,2</sup><sup>a</sup> Maastricht University School of Business and Economics, Tongersestraat 53, 6211 LM Maastricht, The Netherlands<sup>b</sup> Melbourne Business School, 200 Leicester Street, Carlton, Victoria 3053, Australia

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## ABSTRACT

Existing review studies on team learning present integrated models, suggesting general applicability to any team. However, such models neglect the influence of the team type and its developmental stages. These context-specific characteristics may create variety in team learning processes and outcomes among teams. In this theoretical contribution, we revisit the most recent generic team learning model developed by Decuyper, Dochy, and Van den Bossche (2010). Taking this model as a starting point, we present a context-specific model for ad hoc multidisciplinary emergency management teams. The developed model can fuel future research on team learning in teams with comparable characteristics. It supports the development of tools to evaluate them and offers the rationale for training programs aiming to increase the quality of their interventions.

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## Contents

1. Introduction	2
2. A reflection on the generic integrative systematic model for team learning	3
2.1. Summary of the model	3
2.2. Reflections on the model from a temporal perspective	4
3. Revisiting the generic team learning model: emergency management command and control teams	5
3.1. Emergency management command and control teams: the on-scene-command-team (OSCT)	5
3.2. Developing a contextualized team learning model: team learning processes and outcomes in the on-scene-command-team	6
3.2.1. Team learning outcomes in action and transition phases	7
3.2.2. Team learning processes in action phases: team activity and boundary crossing	7
3.2.3. Team learning processes in transition phases: sharing, co-construction, constructive conflict, team reflexivity, storage and retrieval	8
4. Directions for research and practice	9
References	10

\* Corresponding author. Tel.: +31 (0) 43 3884830; fax: +31 (0) 43 3884801.

E-mail addresses: [s.vanderhaar@maastrichtuniversity.nl](mailto:s.vanderhaar@maastrichtuniversity.nl) (S. Van der Haar), [m.segers@maastrichtuniversity.nl](mailto:m.segers@maastrichtuniversity.nl) (M. Segers), [k.jehn@mbs.edu](mailto:k.jehn@mbs.edu) (K.A. Jehn).<sup>1</sup> Tel.: +31 (0) 43 3884830; fax: +31 (0) 43 3884801.<sup>2</sup> Tel.: +61 3 9349 8400; fax: +61 3 9349 8404.

## 1. Introduction

In the past years, a vast amount of studies have aimed to offer insights into team learning (e.g. Decuyper et al., 2010; Edmondson, Dillon, & Roloff, 2007; Ellis, Hollenbeck, Ilgen, Porter, West, & Moon, 2003; Jehn & Rupert, 2007; Knapp, 2010; Kozlowski & Ilgen, 2006; London, Polzer, & Omoregie, 2005; Wilson, Goodman, & Cronin, 2007). The number of publications on team learning has expanded since 1990 (1990–1999: 178 references, 2000–2007: 214 references; Decuyper et al., 2010). In general, team learning is defined as “a compilation of team-level processes that circularly generate change or improvement for teams, team members, organizations, etc.” (Decuyper et al., 2010, p. 128). It is a dynamic behavioral process of interaction and exchange among team members (Kozlowski & Ilgen, 2006). Through these processes individuals acquire, share, and combine knowledge in order to adapt and improve (Edmondson, 1999). As a compilation, team learning consists of changing combinations of different types of processes. Working circularly means that these processes lead to certain outcomes which in turn influence these processes. Team learning differs from individual learning in that the ability to acquire knowledge and skills is collectively shared by team members and the team learning outcome is collectively available and used (Ellis et al., 2003; Jehn & Rupert, 2007).

Team learning is distinct from teamwork, which is a set of interrelated thoughts, actions and feelings of each individual team member that are needed if the team is to really function as a team (Salas, Sims, & Burke, 2005). Teamwork is about cooperative interactions that facilitate dealing with task objectives and realizing coordinated, adaptive performance. During this cooperation, team members use knowledge. It is a resource that helps to understand how team members are able to combine their (individual) knowledge to improve team effectiveness (Kozlowski & Ilgen, 2006). One could say that team learning refers to teams as a learning unit while teamwork refers to teams as a working unit (Decuyper et al., 2010). A team can be defined as “a collection of individuals who are interdependent in their tasks, who share responsibility for outcomes, who see themselves and who are seen by others as an intact social entity embedded in one or more larger social systems” (Cohen & Bailey, 1997, p. 241). Teams interact dynamically, interdependently and adaptively and have a specific role or function to perform and a limited life span of membership (Salas, Dickinson, Converse, & Tannenbaum, 1992).

Different review studies integrated the team learning research findings by combining various perspectives on the phenomenon into a coherent whole (e.g. Edmondson, Dillon, & Roloff, 2007; Knapp, 2010; Wilson, Goodman, & Cronin, 2007). Most recently, Decuyper et al. (2010) developed an integrated team learning model including team learning processes, their antecedents and their outcomes (Fig. 1). In their search for variables that are central to team learning, they thoroughly reviewed relevant team learning studies conducted within different disciplines and addressing different team types and settings, except virtual teams. This interdisciplinary integration of research findings is highly valuable, since the increasing specialization, the split into innumerable disciplines and sub-disciplines and the consequent diversity in the study of team learning raises questions about the extent to which we are truly executing scientific research that builds up a cumulative body of knowledge.

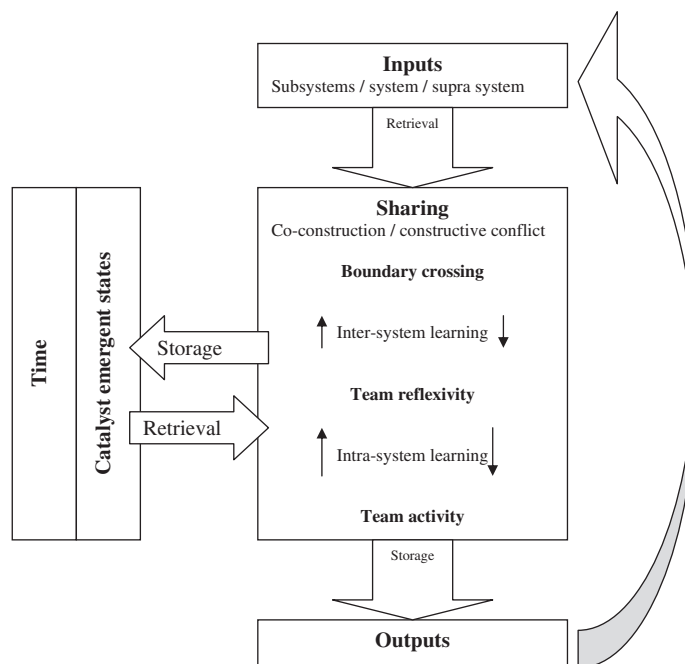


Fig. 1. Integrative systematic model for team learning (Decuyper et al., 2010).

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