

Do communication barriers in student teams impede creative behavior in the long run?—A time-lagged perspective



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ABSTRACT

Creativity has become a topic of ever-increasing interest in educational settings. Previous researchers have purported that creativity can be learned and taught through training programs; however the question remains as to how it can be kindled within an entrepreneurial educational context. Although several factors shaping team creativity have been examined before, communication barriers have received relatively less attention. Therefore, to add onto this research, we tested this interrelationship in this study including several intervening variables. Samples were collected from forty undergraduate students over a period of four and a half months in a time-lagged fashion. Confirmatory factor analysis and structural equation modeling were used to test the hypothesized conceptual model. Results revealed that communication barriers during the initial stages of teamwork affected knowledge sharing and expressive ties negatively. However, early leadership was able to overcome their deleterious effects. Therefore study findings emphasize that it is imperative for the leader to focus on team communication and convalesce it. It was also found that knowledge sharing and expressive ties facilitated team learning during the middle stages of teamwork. Furthermore, this study highlighted that team learning is a potential precursor to instigate creative minds in students. All the above-mentioned variables acted as crucial antecedents to team's creativity. We conclude that entrepreneurship programs do have a positive impact on student behavior and provide a suitable environment to stimulate creativity and team skills.

1. Introduction

Creativity has become a topic of ever-increasing interest in educational settings (Davies et al., 2013; Jeffrey & Craft, 2004). Researchers have purported that creativity can be learned and taught through training programs (Saracho, 2002), however the question remains as to how it can be stimulated within an entrepreneurial educational context. Moreover, there is a need for more empirical research on the dynamics related to the contextual factors responsible for entrepreneurial student's creative team behavior.

Teamwork in classroom creates more opportunities for students to participate in problem solving, decision-making and creative behavior. Few would disagree that a lack of comfort in communication creates barriers in teams, which impedes discussion and causes team members to feel subservient (Lunenburg, 2010). Research illustrates that an individual's inability to interact with others within a group impedes their knowledge sharing behavior (Ipe, 2003). It has also been observed that individuals with higher communication apprehension (CA) have lesser friends and smaller support networks (Blume & Baldwin, 2013). This affects the ties between team members such as 'expressive ties', which arise out of kinship and feelings of friendship (Zhong et al., 2012).

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Previous studies have emphasized that leadership plays a central role in teams through enabling dialogues and motivating students. A leader makes students feel involved and also contributes to maintaining an optimistic attitude among its team members (Tjosvold & Tjosvold, 1991). Therefore, we contend that leaders can assist students in overcoming communication barriers, which occur during the initial stages and can also inspire students to cooperate with each other, building stronger ties and demonstrating better knowledge sharing behavior (Bradshaw, Chebbi, & Oztel, 2015).

In testing the above interrelationships, we further drew on team learning as a mediating process for initiating creative behavior in students over a period of time. Past research shows that open sharing of knowledge and strong mutual ties stimulate team learning (Ancona & Chong, 1999). Slavin (2011) proposes that through cooperative learning, students work together and become responsible not only for their own learning but for each other’s learning as well. Through this study we attempt to add on to his theory and explore whether knowledge sharing and expressive ties, together act as antecedents for cooperative learning to convalesce team learning further.

Focusing specifically on cooperative learning, it ensures that all students actively involve themselves in learning. Such active students do not tend to engage in disruptive or off-task behavior. Therefore we contend that cooperative learning ensures that students are motivated to invest energy and effort in learning together and achieve up to their utmost creative potential. Even though past research has emphasized that creative team behavior within students is an outcome of team characteristics that support open interactions and friendly surroundings (Amabile, 1998), not much work has been done in the past to understand explicitly whether cooperative learning within student teams can instigate creative team behavior.

In the past all these variables have been studied in isolation using cross-sectional studies. Drawing inspiration from the theories such as Group Development Theory (Tuckman, 1965), Social Network Theory (Luo & Hassan, 2009) and Cooperative Learning (Slavin, 2011), we go one step further and explore these interrelationships in a time-lagged manner. To summarize, the purpose of this paper is to explore the interrelationships between communication barriers; knowledge sharing, expressive ties and their impact on team learning and team creativity (see Fig. 1). From a practical perspective, we focus on understanding the effect, if any, of communication barriers on knowledge sharing and expressive ties, and how they affect team learning. In addition, we study the moderating effects of leadership on communication barriers, knowledge sharing and expressive ties. We then focus on understanding whether and how team learning can initiate creative team behavior within students.

The contributions of this research are manifold. Firstly this study includes communication barriers as a critical team characteristic and how it impacts creativity over a period of time. Secondly, this research represents the first of the few empirical studies to investigate the moderation effects of leadership on other team variables. Thirdly, for the body of team creativity research to evolve further, we need to advance our understanding of how and why creative team behavior is evidenced in educational settings over time. Therefore, this study goes beyond existing research by investigating the above interrelationships as a precursor to creativity, not to forget, through the channel of entrepreneurship programs.

2. Theory and hypotheses

In this section, the overall research model has been presented by studying the literature of all the variables considered in this paper. The hypothesized model is depicted in Fig. 1.

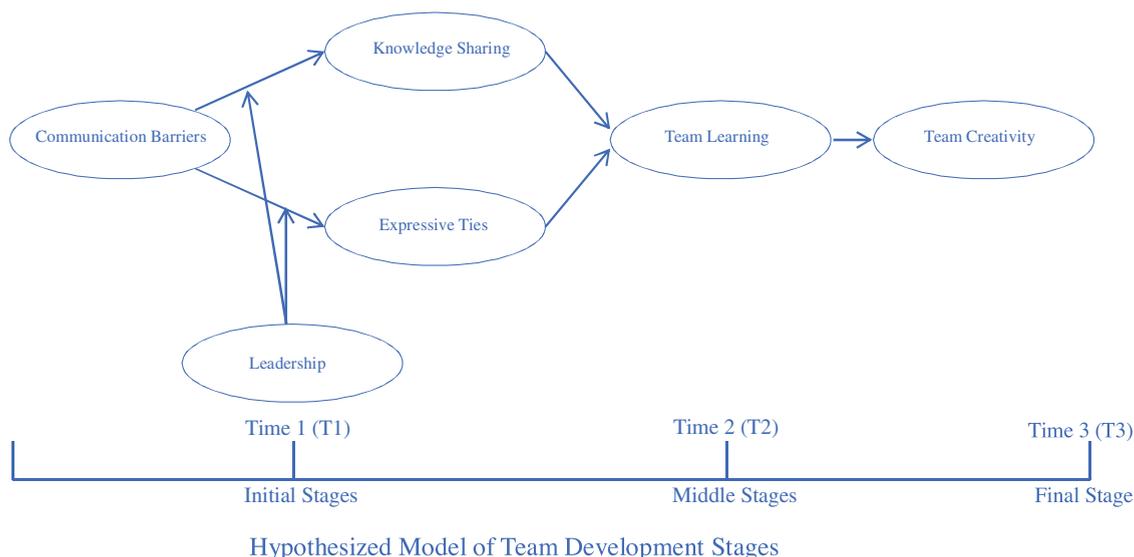


Fig. 1. Hypothesized Model of Team Development Stages.

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