Learning-by-Doing Teamwork KSA: The Role of Strategic Management Simulation

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ABSTRACT

The objective of this paper is to evaluate the effectiveness of strategic management simulations as a learning-by-doing tool so that university students can learn to work in a team, that is, they can enhance their knowledge, skills, and abilities (KSA) for effective teamwork. The authors have carried out an analysis of the effect of strategic management simulation on the teamwork KSA with a group of undergraduates studying in the School of Business. The results show that teamwork KSA can improve and that the initial knowledge of teamwork KSA, at the individual level, is the only factor which conditions the students’ learning. Initial knowledge of the teamwork KSA and the spread of this knowledge within the team are not a determinant influence on the learning-by-doing of the individual. Neither are features such as intelligence, personality, attitude to teamwork and teamwork self-efficacy, both in terms of the individual as well as the team.

Keywords: Learning-by-Doing, Skills and Abilities, Strategic Decisions, Strategic Management Simulation, Team Stock of Knowledge, Teamwork

1. INTRODUCTION

Frequently, strategic decisions need to be taken by a team. For this, students’ training requires not only the transmission of knowledge of strategy, but also an emphasis on teaching team decision-making. It is important to know how to coordinate a team for a specific task and, it is also necessary for each student to have the knowledge, skills and abilities (hereafter KSA) which favor or facilitate the making of strategic team decisions in any situation (Mohammed, Mathieu, & Bartlett, 2002; Stevens & Campion, 1994, 1999). In spite of the fact that for many years the effectiveness of a team has been associated with the learning of a task (Cannon-Bowers, Tannenbaum, Salas, & Volpe, 1995), nowadays the necessity for individuals to be able to work in teams has been clearly shown, independently of the task to be performed and of the firm in which it is developed (Cannon & Edmonson, 2001; Chen,
Donahue, & Klimoski, 2004). Stevens and Campion (1994), after a far-reaching revision of the characteristics necessary for teamwork, identify the knowledge, skills and abilities (teamwork KSA) which convert a student into an effective member for working in any team. This teamwork KSA is denominated generalizable and transportable (Cannon-Bowers et al., 1995), and refer, exclusively, to teamwork. The teamwork KSA identified by Stevens and Campion (1994) have a double nature: they are interpersonal and self-manageable.

The former refer to the knowledge, skills and abilities for: (1) Conflict Resolution KSA (i.e., the ability to recognize and encourage desirable, but discourage undesirable team conflict; to recognize the type and source of conflict and implement an appropriate resolution strategy; and to use integrative, rather than distributive, approaches to negotiation); (2) Collaborative Problem Solving KSA (i.e., the ability to match the proper degree of participation to the problem; and to recognize obstacles to collaborative problem solving and implement appropriate corrective actions); (3) Communication KSA (i.e., the ability to recognize and utilize decentralized networks to enhance communication; to communicate openly and supportively; to listen non-evaluatively and use active listening techniques; to match one’s own nonverbal and verbal messages and to recognize and interpret the nonverbal messages of others; and to engage in small talk and ritual greetings). The latter refer to the knowledge, skills and abilities for: (4) Goal Setting and Performance Management KSA (i.e., the ability to help establish specific, challenging, and accepted team goals; and to monitor, evaluate, and provide feedback on performance); and (5) Planning and Task Coordination KSA (i.e., the ability to coordinate and synchronize activities, information, and tasks between team members; and to help establish task and role assignments for individual team members and ensure proper balancing of workloads) (Stevens & Campion, 1994, p. 505).

If a future manager possesses teamwork KSA before joining the job market, he will be able to contribute his knowledge more efficiently (Turner & Makhija, 2006). The question that immediately arises is, if this student does not innately possess teamwork KSA for the taking of strategic decisions, will s/he be able to acquire them? In other words, there arises the question of whether people can develop teamwork KSA, even though they do not possess them innately. Chen et al. (2004), Ellis, Bell, Ployhart, Hollenbeck, and Ilgen (2005), or Prichard, Stratford, and Bizo (2006) supply the answer demonstrating that it is possible for students to improve their teamwork KSA with specific training programs aimed at teaching teamwork. The present article goes one step further and analyzes whether or not the use of innovative training techniques, such as strategic management simulations, encourages the learning of teamwork KSA for strategic decision making.

The recent research of Zantow, Knowlton, and Sharp (2005) and of Boone, Van Olffen, and Witteloostuijn (2005) clearly show the benefits of encouraging “virtual learning-by-doing” for the taking of strategic decisions. Specifically, they consider that, among the different experimental techniques, strategic management simulation could have a very positive impact on teamwork results with regard to the taking of strategic decisions. However, they also recognize that it is necessary to continue to deepen our understanding of the effects of this type of learning, based on these types of practices, with new, empirical studies.

Thus, the objective of our work will be to evaluate the impact of strategic management simulation on the acquisition of teamwork KSA for the students of a team when they have to make strategic decisions. Likewise, we want to evaluate the influence of prior knowledge of the teamwork KSA, both of the student as well as of their team. Finally, we control whether the specific features (personality, intelligence, self-efficacy perception and attitude in the team) of the student and their team have an influence on the learning process of teamwork KSA.

The remainder of this article presents, first, the suitability of business management
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