**Development of Student Management Teams through Strategy**

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**Abstract**

Team development has become a competitive workplace strategy to propel organizations into the future. As a result, educators must strive to create real-life experiences inside the classroom to prepare students to actively engage and contribute to a team supporting organizational strategy. Although forming groups or teams in the classroom is a common practice, the authors have developed this into an innovative task by creating more ways to link the creation of Student Management Teams to critical workplace considerations such as culture, skills and values, and the strategic process. This exercise was created for use in an undergraduate capstone course in which students learn the process of strategy in the creation of their Student Management Team through the identification and evaluation of organizational assets, self-critique, and organization culture. This paper provides details to facilitate Student Management Teams through strategy with objectives, teaching notes, and debrief.

Keywords: Student Management Teams, groups, strategy, experiential exercise

**Development of Student Management Teams through Strategy**

Team development has become a competitive workplace strategy to propel organizations into the future. As a result, educators must strive to create real-life experiences inside the classroom to prepare students to actively engage and contribute to a team. As part of an undergraduate capstone course, students must utilize strategic management development tools to initiate and implement various problem-solving techniques as part of case study analysis of publicly traded organizations within a team setting. Moving beyond traditional approaches to forming teams in the classroom, the authors have developed the task of creating teams into an innovative, scaffolding exercise with stages that create more ways to link the creation of Student Management Teams (SMTs) to critical workplace considerations such as culture, skills and values through strategy. Generally defined, SMTs are groups of students who will regularly meet as part of coursework to collectively work with peers and the instructor to achieve and improve learning outcomes (Troisi, 2014).

The process of strategy consists of organizations analyzing and learning from their internal and external environments, establishing direction, creating strategies that are intended to move the organization in that direction, and implement those strategies in an effort to satisfy key stakeholders (Enz, 2010). Organizations must engage in the strategy process to evaluate performance, identify organizational priorities, and create their sustainable competitive advantage. As a result, it is critical for educators to mirror the development of workforce teams in the classroom to experience and set the strategy agenda to achieve learning outcomes. Creating such teams by strategy in which students are assembled anonymously, mitigates bias and loss of interaction that often can occur from self-forming groups. Additionally, the formation of SMTs by strategy creates a platform for students to engage in team diversity and establish team culture with the pursuit of a common goal.

In this scaffolding exercise, Student Management Teams (SMTs) are strategically created. The formation of SMTs through strategy permits students to engage in classroom activities, challenge their intellectual senses, and stimulate their critical thinking skills. Students feel more valued by providing personal contributions to the classroom environment and overall content of the course. Using strategy to form SMTs prohibits students from forming their own groups. According to Walker and Angelo (1998), this minimizes the effect of the group performance on grades, peer evaluations, and assigned group tasks that can be done alone by students. Considering advanced technology and communication, SMTs engage with peers to move from simple acquisition of facts to meaningful application of course content as part of classroom activities (Johnson, 2017). The goal with this scaffolding exercise is to move the evolution of teaching from “talking at” to “talking with” peers and the instructor to achieve desirable outcomes in and outside the classroom.

In the following sections of this paper, the authors provide an overview of the exercise as well as instructions for conducting and debriefing the exercise to achieve these advantages. Specifically, students learn the process of strategy in the creation of their team through the identification and evaluation of organizational assets, self-critique, and organization culture. This paper will provide the details on how to facilitate “Student Management Teams through Strategy” with objectives of the exercise, teaching notes, and a proposed session for the ELA meeting.

**Overview of the Exercise**

As part of course requirements and institutional objectives, students must utilize strategic management development tools to initiate and implement various problem-solving techniques as part of case study analysis of publicly traded organizations in a team setting as part of a final group project in the program capstone course. As part of the final group project, Student Management Teams (SMTs) are formed in which each team will have students representing the following positions:

* CEO (team leader); The CEO will be selected to manage all aspects of the project, or the group may select to become self- managing by the participants.
* CFO Chief Financial Officer; Responsible for detailed analysis on profitability and the competitive market as part of SWOT analysis.
* Legal & Research and Development Vice President; Focused on organizational Green Strategies and Philanthropy.
* Marketing Vice President; Targeting promotions, competition in the context of Porter’s four forces.
* Human Resources/Public Relations Vice President. Focuses on recruitment, retention, and talent development strategy.

Rather than allowing students to self-select their groups or employ other traditional methods such as random assignment or picking numbers, this exercise was developed to expose students to the process of strategy in the creation of teams through the identification and evaluation of organization assets, self-critique, and organization culture. This exercise can be used in a variety of courses in which an instructor is seeking an innovative way to form teams in the classroom as well as gain additional opportunities to integrate key theories such as leadership, change management, organizational culture and more.

By participating in stages of the exercise, students will (1) seek out and clearly articulate perceived organizational strengths and weaknesses; (2) Identify and self-reflect on critical organizational values, skills, and characteristics, and (3) develop team organizational culture, roles, and responsibilities.

This exercise is divided into three stages: (1) identification of organizational strengths and weaknesses; (2) self-value identification and team assembly; and (3) team roles development. Each stage requires a minimum of 45 minutes of class time. The structure of this exercise facilitated in stages allows the instructor to customize each stage to make connections specific to course curriculum and relevant topics or have the option to facilitate stages independently. In the capstone course described above, this complete exercise takes place during lectures discussing organizational assets such as human capital and growth strategy across three class meetings. The recommended team size is 6 members with a maximum of 30 total students, for a total of 5 groups.

**Instructions for Facilitating the Exercise**

The development of Student Management Teams takes place in three stages as a result of the total time required to run the stages that comprise the complete exercise. Any or all stages can be used to improve an instructor’s ability to form working teams in the classroom. Accordingly, each stage will be discussed below.

**Stage One (45 minutes)**

Stage one includes the identification of organizational strengths and weaknesses**.** Prior to this stage, students should be instructed to search through magazines or other relative resources to identify three pictures that they believe demonstrate organizational strengths and one picture that represents an organizational weakness. The instructor should provide an example and share a picture to facilitate a discussion on what students *see*. This will help the instructor to discuss perception and differences in perspectives. This is important as students not only have to identify pictures and their perceived value to the organization, but be prepared to justify and support their selections during stage one. As a result, at the start of this stage, students should come prepared with a total of four pictures (one weakness and three strengths). At the start of the stage, inform students they will participate in three rounds.

*Round 1 (12 minutes).* Instruct students to pair up with a peer and to share their pictures and discuss selected organizational strengths and weaknesses. Students in their pair must remove three of the weakest perceived strengths. Students must debate their selections with their peer and ultimately select the strongest strength to maintain (each pair will eliminate three strengths). Additionally, students must remove one weakness. While students engage in discussion, the instructor should circulate the pairs and where appropriate challenge perspectives and selections. This will help students to critically reflect on their choices.

*Round 2 (16 minutes).* As part of round two, instruct students to self-assemble into larger groups (based on a class size of 30, 5 equal groups). Ask students to share and discuss their remaining strengths and weaknesses within the group. Groups once again are challenged to select the two strongest strengths and one greatest weakness of the group. During the larger group discussions, the instructor should circulate to each group and challenge perspectives and asked groups to support their arguments for pictures selected. As appropriate the instructor should play the role of “Devil's Advocate” and challenge strengths as weaknesses and weaknesses as strengths. The timing of this round also presents the group with added pressure to facilitate a discussion and make appropriate selections for which students are unaware of the potential impact of their decisions.

*Round 3 (17 minutes).* To debrief stage one, each group should share with the larger class their selections and solicit any feedback from other groups. Standard questions to ask to solicit feedback may include: *Do you agree that this is a strength or weakness, why?; In the group, did you struggle to narrow down the top organizational strengths or weaknesses, why?; Is there anyone in the group that does not agree with the selection, why?*

In the debrief for this particular capstone course, the instructor links this stage to evaluating policy and strategy organizational characteristics of internal resources and internal/external markets focused on the power of perception and intangible and tangible resources facilitating a brief reference to the value of human capital. Accordingly, positive and negative perceptions vs realities were discussed as well as examples of intangible and tangible human capital resources.

Once each group has shared their selections, inform each group, based on their selections, the greatest weakness has now become their greatest strength and their greatest strengths are now their greatest weaknesses. Additionally, as part of the final capstone group project, students will focus specifically on these areas and the positioning of strategy based on the strengths and weaknesses. Each student strengths and weaknesses should be collected to be distributed in the final stage (note that this information was collected as the final project teams are created through this process, ending in stage three. The teams that students assembled into as part of this stage are not the permanent group).

**Stage Two (45 minutes)**

Stage two focuses on self-value identification and the assembly of the team. For this session to be most valuable, the instructor should discuss leadership skills and organizational workforce values and characteristics prior to the session. Additionally, the instructor should encourage students to critically reflect on their most distinguishable values and skills that make them competitive in the market. For this stage, the following materials are needed: copied and cut out descriptive words (please see Appendix A; no descriptive words should be repeated and there should be more descriptive words as compared to total number of students) and a PowerPoint with descriptive words. Descriptive words include several workforce, leadership, entrepreneurial values, characteristics, and skills that are in high demand in teams and the workforce. The descriptive words can be modified to meet the needs of the course.

Prior to the arrival of students, the instructor should lay out the cut descriptive words on a desk/table in the classroom. As students entered the classroom, each student is instructed to select a descriptive word that best describes his or her value. Ask students to not share their selection with peers. Based on the available time of the class, the instructor may wish to complete a brief lecture before engaging in the activity.

*Round 1 (10 minutes).* To start this stage, the instructor must ask for 5 volunteers (this was the total number of groups that were allowed based on size of the class; class size of 30 students, 5 equal groups). Volunteers are instructed to stand in unique spots in the classroom. The instructor announces that these volunteers are now CEOs of the final group project. Instruct each CEO to share his or her descriptive word selected with the class and to create a 60 second mission/vision of what each CEO espouses to focus on (this is used to build individual group culture) and present to the class. While the CEOs are preparing, the instructor should bring up the PowerPoint with the descriptive words and remove the CEOs as well as any words not selected.

*Round 2 (5 minutes).* Each CEO presents their vision/mission to the class.

*Round 3 (5 minutes).* Next, instruct the CEOs to select four descriptive words that they believe are the most critical to forming a high performing team and are essential to an organization to be successful. The instructor can either write the CEO selections on a whiteboard, highlight in the PowerPoint using a different color to represent each CEO, or provide each CEO with a piece of flip chart paper/marker to make selections. The instructor will grant each CEO at least 1 of their requests. As selections are granted to each CEO, students that selected that descriptive word should identify themselves and join their CEO.

*Round 4 (25 minutes).* Allow CEOs and their teams to select round for round. At any point that teams select the same descriptive word, the CEOs, with support of their team, must enter into a debate as to why their team would be the best selection and why the descriptive word is of value. Once each side offers their argument, the student with the descriptive word selects their team. Additionally, toward the end of the selection process when 3-4 students are left to be selected, in order for a CEO to make the next selection, the instructor can ask a quiz question. Whichever CEO/team answers correctly, this team is awarded the ability to pick their selection. This stage continues until all students are assigned to a team. Inform teams that at another session, each group will have additional time to discuss group roles and responsibilities.

**Stage Three (45 minutes)**

Stage three concludes the exercise “Teams through Strategy” in which each team focuses on developing each team member’s roles and responsibilities. As introduced at the beginning of this paper, each team has the following roles available. The instructor should review the roles and responsibilities with the larger group prior to having the teams assemble.

1. CEO (team leader)
2. CFO Chief Financial Officer
3. Legal & Research and Development Vice President
4. Marketing Vice President
5. Human Resources/Public Relations Vice President

Instruct students to assemble into their teams and discuss the roles and responsibilities within the group. Students should elaborate beyond what the instructor provides based on what they have learned in the class and in the case of this particular course, requirements for completing case analysis. The instructor can reiterate that the CEO has the ability to appoint positions and responsibilities or the team can discuss and self-select roles. The teams also have to develop team expectations for the group project and specific terms to “fire” a team member. Once the teams determined their organizational structure and termination policy, the instructor should re-distribute each student’s prior strength and weakness to add as a focus of the group. Teams should be instructed to outline a plan on how to incorporate and focus on strengths and weaknesses going into the project. As a homework assignment, each group should electronically submit their organizational structure and termination policy (this becomes a similar document to a learning contract).

**Summary**

This exercise and its stages do not have to conclude at the end of stage three. As part of the capstone course, team develop, work, and activities continued throughout the course and built upon each lesson of curriculum covered. Additionally, for topics of strategic leadership and thinking preferences, teams were assembled so students could begin to understand these differences within their relatable context of their team.

**Student Reactions**

This exercise has been facilitated across four course semesters. Students have commented on the creativeness of assembling into teams throughout the course and a more innovative practice than counting off numbers or being randomly assigned by the instructor. Additionally, students have enjoyed learning more about specific members of their team through the entirety of the course and alternative lessons. Additional comments from instructors observing the exercise stages were collected and include: “This exercise allowed students to learn how diverse the workforce really is, why opposites attract, and how to work well with people” and “Great way to select teams, very real-world based, workforce, and job related in how many different and unique people there are and brought together rather than always gravitating to their comfort zone.”

**For the Experiential Learning Association Exercise**

This scaffolding exercise can be abbreviated to be demonstrated in a 30 minute session as part of the ELA meetings. As such, ELA attendees will participate in stage two and will be provided with descriptive words and select a word that most aligns to their self-perceived value upon entering the session (3 minutes). A brief overview of the three stages of forming “Student Management Teams through Strategy” will be provided with examples from stage one and three (8 minutes). As part of stage two, CEOs will be selected, share their vision/mission of their team (a select number of CEOs only based on time) and select descriptive words to form their teams (10 minutes). ELA participants will be selected for a team (9 minutes) until the larger ELA group gets to experience at least one debate at which time the exercise will conclude. With any remaining time, additional debrief and variation of the activity will be provided.

**References**

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**Appendix A**

Descriptive Words

This appendix provides descriptive words used in Stage 2 of this exercise. This appendix should be copied and cut out for use in the classroom.

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| Punctual | Engage in Debate | Prioritizing tasks | Time management | Advanced Writing Skills | Project Manager |
| Creating and keeping deadlines | Setting Goals | Conflict Resolution | Resource Management | Individual Contributor | Research |
| Developer | Supportive | Bilingual | Team leader | Think outside-the box | Take Charge |
| Cultural Aware | Reliable | Coordinate Efforts | Advanced Communication Skills | Team player | Decision Maker |
| Leader | Organized | Planner | Advanced Writing Skills | Traditional | Delegator |
| Negotiator | Detail Oriented | Analyze Data | Problem Solver | Business Intelligence | Setting Goals |
| Innovator | Big Picture | Dependable | Critical Thinker | Attentive Listener | Multi-Tasker |
| Creative | Risk Taker | Consistent | Entrepreneur | Influence | Persuasion |