

Can't We Pick Our Own Groups? The Influence of Group Selection Method on Group Dynamics and Outcomes

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ABSTRACT

In today's business world the ability to work efficiently and effectively with others in a group is mandatory to a business student's success. Many employers rank "ability to work with a group" as one of the most important attributes for hiring business school graduates. Therefore it is important for instructors to understand the factors that influence group dynamics and outcomes.

The objective of this research was to test whether the method of group member assignment (i.e., random or self-selected) impacts the nature of group dynamics and group outcomes. The study was conducted in four marketing courses (Consumer Behavior, Marketing Research, Sales Force Management, Strategic Marketing Management) across sixteen sections. Each course included a significant group project. The two treatment conditions, random or self-selected assignment to groups, were randomly assigned to the sixteen sections. At the end of the semester, surveys were administered in each of the classes. The surveys assessed a variety of group dynamic factors including group cohesion, conflict and conflict resolution, amount of communication, attitudes, trust and group performance. Surveys were collected from 583 respondents, 337 respondents in the random condition and 246 in the self-selection condition.

Compared to self-selected groups, students in the groups that were randomly assigned were not as effective at establishing an environment of teamwork for the group. The students in the self-selected groups had better communication with each other, were more enthusiastic, took more interest in each other, were more likely to make new friends, and were more confident in other team members' abilities than the randomly assigned groups. Students in the self-selected groups were also more likely than students in the randomly assigned groups to enjoy working with the each other, take pride in their work, resolve conflict effectively, be proud of the work produced, and were more comfortable asking others in their group for help. Overall, the study results indicated that self-selected groups are better at creating teams that value teamwork and

care about the dynamics of the group. Thus, if one critical learning goal of the group process is to develop teamwork skills and empathy towards other group members, self-selection appears to be the desired approach.

On the other hand, students in the randomly assigned group condition reported being more efficient and task oriented than students in the self-selected condition. The randomly assigned groups performed better at time management within the group process, indicating that this type of group assignment can develop skills such as the effective use of time.

Interestingly, although both types of groups appear to have different strengths, students in both types of groups had nearly identical ratings of the quality of the work the group produced. It appears that all groups were able to overcome any process challenges they may have faced to create outcomes that were generally favorable.

Given these results, it seems that instructors can feel comfortable using either of the group selection methods. However, there may be some qualitative reasons for choosing the self-selection approach. Self-selected groups may simulate "real world" work groups more effectively than randomly assigned groups by combining a mixture of people who know each other to varying degrees ranging from very well to not at all. Self-selected groups are typically easier to manage and generate fewer complaints from students. Finally, if allowing students to self-select their groups means a greater degree of enthusiasm, pride in their work, and slightly increased comfort in working with others in a group, they may be better able to face the challenges of group work and get the task done.