THE ROLE OF TEAMWORK IN SCHOOL LEADERSHIP

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Abstract

This paper addresses the essential role that teamwork plays in effective school leadership. In a context where education increasingly requires collaborative and coordinated approaches, teamwork emerges as a key mechanism for improving institutional quality, fostering the professional development of teaching staff, and enhancing organizational performance. Through a review of contemporary literature and an analysis of the factors that influence the functioning of teams in schools, the paper identifies the main benefits of teamwork, such as the effective distribution of responsibilities, the rapid resolution of problems, and improved staff morale. It also highlights common challenges, including hierarchical structures, lack of trust, a culture of individualism, and insufficient institutional support. Furthermore, the paper proposes strategies for fostering a collaborative climate within schools, including the clear distribution of roles, the development of interpersonal skills, and the establishment of a collegial culture. Effective leadership cannot be fully achieved without well-organized teamwork grounded in shared professional values.

Keywords: Teamwork, collaboration, leadership, organizational culture.

1. Introduction

In today's era of rapid social, technological, and educational developments, the challenges faced by educational institutions require collective approaches and close collaboration among all members of the school community.

The role of school leaders is no longer merely administrative or authoritative; rather, it has evolved into a leadership role that emphasizes the development of a shared vision, staff motivation, and a commitment to continuous professional development.

In this context, teamwork plays a vital role as one of the most effective mechanisms for increasing the efficiency of school management and improving the quality of teaching and learning. When implemented in a structured and sustainable manner, teamwork contributes to the development of healthy professional relationships, the distribution of responsibilities, and the collective resolution of problems affecting the daily life of the school.

However, many educational institutions face significant obstacles to the effective implementation of teamwork due to rigid hierarchical structures, a lack of interpersonal skills, professional individualism, or an underdeveloped culture of collaboration. In this context, an in-depth analysis of the factors that support or hinder teamwork in schools becomes essential.

This paper aims to explore the importance of teamwork in school leadership by examining its benefits, the challenges associated with it, as well as strategies for building functional and effective teams within educational institutions. Through a critical analysis of existing literature and practices, the paper seeks to encourage reflection and change in the way teamwork is conceptualized and implemented within the school environment.

2. Group Work and Team

Group work naturally involves a working team, which can be associated with the concept of group collaboration. Collaboration, on the other hand, can be defined as a continuous and impersonal process of social interaction involving two or more groups of people who consciously and willingly make an effort to achieve a specific goal, or part of a goal, while following certain rules or procedures.

When minds come together, they contribute to solving work-related problems and achieving organizational goals. Delarue argues that teamwork plays a significant role in organizational performance because it is a major source of encouragement, motivation, communication, and the exchange of ideas (Delarue, 2008).



Figure 1. *Advantages of Teamwork*

According to Ab. Aziz (1999), teamwork provides numerous benefits in terms of knowledge, skills, and expertise when dealing with problems or issues that arise.
Among its benefits are:

- A problem can be solved more quickly and effectively when it is addressed by individuals who possess skills in different areas.
- Proposals discussed within a team are more likely to be implemented successfully compared with recommendations made individually (Don. & Raman., 2019).

Teamwork, or effective group work, has been practiced for centuries. Today, this concept is increasingly applied in schools because, once the benefits of teamwork are recognized and promoted, a group of individuals can begin working together to achieve specific outcomes.
In achieving the objectives of a project, the school principal or director should engage all employees in working together as a cohesive workforce. This is because a strong workforce is essential for planning an institutional improvement program, from the initial stage of the planning process and its implementation to the monitoring of activities (Don. & Raman., 2019).

3. Teacher Collaboration for School Improvement

Teachers' joint work is described and examined in the international literature using a variety of terms and concepts (Vangrieken, Dochy, Raes, & Kyndt, 2015). Collaboration, in general, is defined as "joint group interaction in all activities that are necessary to carry out a common task."
It refers to teachers who actually "do things together" (Kelchtermans, 2006) in relation to work-related tasks, involving all the activities necessary to accomplish a shared task or a professional goal.
When doing things together, it is important to negotiate, discuss, and jointly examine different perspectives. The concept of collaboration is often distinguished from cooperation, in which teachers divide their work and then combine it again into a whole in order to achieve a common goal. It is further distinguished from collegiality, which focuses more on the quality of relationships among teachers (Bovbjerg, 2006).

However, it is undeniable that not all individuals have the skills necessary to work effectively as part of a team. This is because some individuals may be less capable of working with others and may find it easier to work independently. Some of the weaknesses include:

- Being less sensitive to the diverse characteristics and personalities of the individuals they have to work with.
- Having weaker communication skills.
- Lacking leadership skills.
- Being unable to motivate others or act as a source of motivation.
- Being unable to delegate tasks effectively.
- Being inconsistent when dealing with problems.
- Having less valued or weaker interpersonal relationships.
- Being less capable of leading a meeting or discussion.
- Developing plans that lack creativity.
- Finding it difficult to reach an agreement with other team members (Bovbjerg, 2006).

3.1. Cultivating Teamwork in Schools

The effectiveness of teamwork is essential for organizational management; however, many schools do not pay sufficient attention to its importance. Several factors can be identified as contributing to the resistance to this change:

- **Hierarchical work patterns and structures within educational institutions.** As a result, individual performance becomes more important than group performance.
- **The concept of "professional autonomy"** has contributed to strengthening the notion of the importance of working independently, based primarily on a sense of individual responsibility.
- **Many organizations and educational institutions embrace individualism.**
- This culture is one of the main reasons why many aspects of teamwork fail to function effectively.

In addition to these factors, other barriers to cultivating teamwork include a lack of trust among colleagues, fear of negative evaluation, and insufficient time due to heavy administrative workloads. Furthermore, institutional leaders who fail to foster a culture of collaboration make it even more difficult to build functional teams within schools (Bovbjerg, 2006).

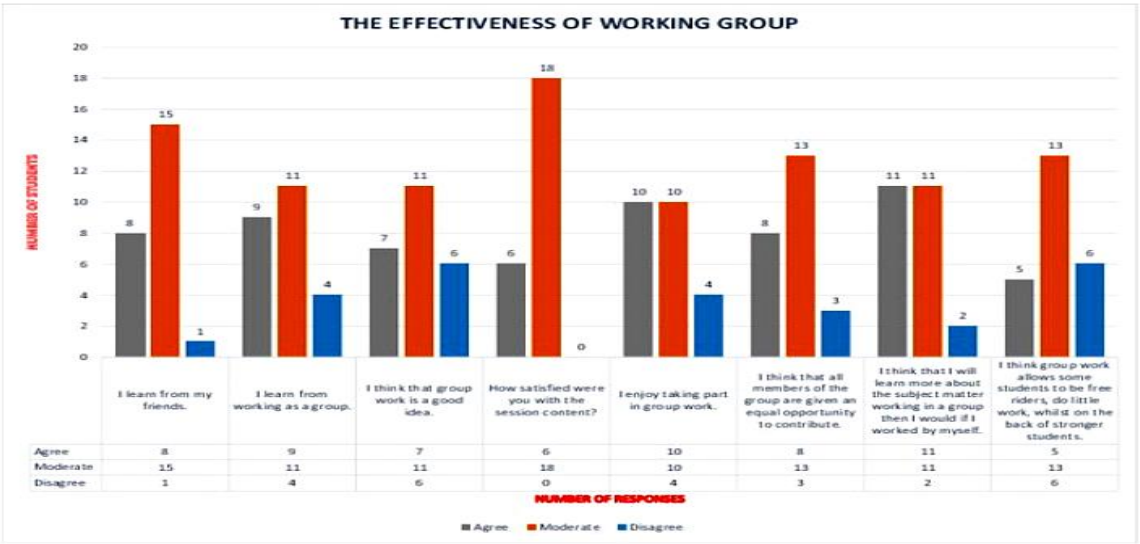


Figure 2: *Effectiveness of Group Work*

The chart presents students' perceptions of the effectiveness of group work, including eight different statements evaluated using the scale "Agree," "Moderate," and "Disagree." Most participants expressed positive attitudes toward group work, particularly regarding satisfaction with the session content and the benefits of learning from others, with 18 and 15 students, respectively, selecting the "Moderate" response.
However, concerns were raised about the possibility that some group members may not contribute equally, as 13 students agreed that group work allows "free riders" to benefit from the efforts of others. In addition, a small number of students believe that they would learn more effectively if they worked independently.
These findings suggest that, although group work is generally perceived positively, there is a need for more balanced and structured forms of collaboration to increase its effectiveness.

4. The Problem – Why Does Teamwork Not Work?

Group work assessments are well known for the extent to which they are disliked and avoided by students. Factors such as difficulties in forming groups, interpersonal conflicts within a team, different levels of commitment among team members, and the perceived unfairness of relying on another student for one's grade can make group work assignments potentially problematic.
One of the main reasons why team assignments, particularly team assessments, fail or have a limited impact is the general lack of support provided to students by academic staff in implementing them.
Based on the authors' experience with teamwork practices reported across the sector, the most common approach to team assessment appears to be assigning a team task, dividing students into teams, and then assessing the outcome produced by the team. This approach implicitly assumes that students will know how to facilitate the development of the task and will possess the interpersonal skills necessary for effective teamwork.
Above all, the key to success lies in providing effective support for the task and effective support for teams as they undertake that task. Four main factors contribute to successful teamwork:

- **Preparing students for teamwork** by educating them about the principles and practices of effective teamwork.
- **Encouraging the early distribution of roles and responsibilities** in order to promote positive group dynamics.
- **Providing support for the task and monitoring teams throughout the process** to identify and address any problems that may arise.
- **Ensuring effective assessment and feedback,** focusing not only on the final outcome but also on the process and the individual contributions of participants in the team activity (Francis, Pritchard, Prytherch, & Rutherford, 2024).

4.1 Preparing Students for Teamwork: Structured Strategies for Teamwork

The first step toward successful group work is the formation of the teams themselves. There is ongoing debate among educators about whether teams should be assigned by the instructor or whether students should be allowed to choose their own teams.
Both strategies have contrasting benefits and challenges. Self-selected groups often help avoid interpersonal conflicts; however, they may be exclusive toward minority groups and neurodiverse students. Groups formed by educators tend to be more equitable and more closely reflect professional working environments, but they can be more challenging to manage (Francis, Pritchard, Prytherch, & Rutherford, 2024).

4.2 The Importance of Clear Roles and Responsibilities

A fundamental element of successful teamwork is the establishment of clear roles and responsibilities. According to Steiner (Steiner, Stromwall, Brzuzy, & Gerdes), when students understand their specific roles within a team, it fosters accountability, helping to ensure that each member contributes effectively to the collective goal.
This clarity of purpose prevents the common problem of unequal participation, in which some students may contribute significantly more than others. Clearly defined roles also help manage team dynamics by reducing confusion and potential conflicts regarding task ownership and individual responsibilities.
Effective work allocation and task delegation are critical components of structured teamwork; however, they are also among the most common causes of dysfunction in team-based activities. By assigning specific tasks to individuals based on their strengths and interests, teams can maximize productivity and ensure that all members are actively engaged. Task allocation also allows students to take ownership of their assigned responsibilities, thereby increasing their motivation and commitment to the team's success (Francis, Pritchard, Prytherch, & Rutherford, 2024).
Co-operative Learning

- The task is divided into smaller parts, with each group member being assigned a specific component.
- Each individual works independently on their assigned subtask.
- Each member becomes an expert in a specific part of the topic.
- The group then reconvenes to share their findings and results.

Collaborative Learning

- The group does not divide the task; instead, all members work together on every part of it.
- They discuss and analyze each aspect of the task collectively.
- They develop a shared understanding of the problem.
- They combine their efforts and perspectives to arrive at richer and more comprehensive solutions.

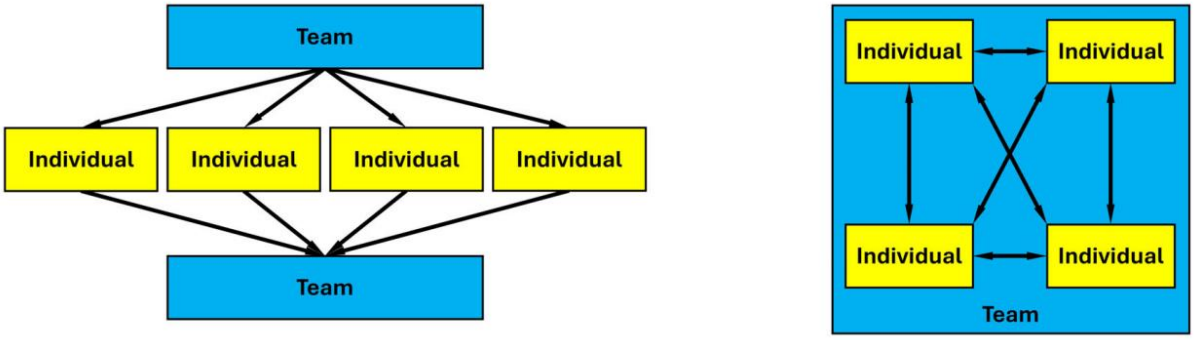


Figure 3. Illustration of Cooperative and Collaborative Learning

4.3 Technological Integration

The integration of collaborative technologies and online workspaces can significantly enhance the effectiveness of teamwork. Moccozet, Tardy, Opprecht, and Leonard (2013) emphasize that these tools facilitate communication and improve coordination among team members, enabling seamless collaboration regardless of their physical location.

Platforms such as Google Docs and Microsoft Teams provide shared workspaces where students can work together in real time, share resources, and track their progress.
Various technological tools can be used to ensure a fair and accurate assessment of individual contributions. Wikis, blogs, and meeting logs are particularly useful in this regard. Wikis enable the collaborative creation of documents in which every change is tracked, making it easy to identify who has contributed what.
Blogs can serve as reflective journals in which students document their progress and individual contributions. Meeting logs can record attendance and participation in team meetings, providing a clear record of each member's involvement. These tools enhance transparency and help identify and address issues related to free-riding or unequal participation (Moccozet, Tardy, Opprecht, & Leonard, 2013).

5. Conclusions

In conclusion, this paper establishes that teamwork is a key component of effective school leadership. It not only contributes to improving the quality of teaching and learning but also strengthens professional relationships, promotes the fair distribution of responsibilities, and fosters a shared work culture. Modern school leadership cannot be conceived without a functional teamwork structure.
However, the implementation of teamwork faces numerous obstacles, including a lack of interpersonal skills, rigid hierarchical structures, a culture of individualism, and insufficient ongoing support from institutional leaders. In this context, it becomes clear that teamwork is not merely a working method but a management philosophy that requires sustained development and continuous attention.

6. Recommendations

1. Developing a culture of collaboration in schools by promoting shared professional values and creating a safe environment for collaboration.
2. Providing training for teachers and school leaders in interpersonal skills, conflict resolution, and teamwork management.
3. Clearly defining roles and responsibilities within teams to improve efficiency and prevent inequalities in individual contributions.
4. Using technological tools to facilitate and strengthen communication and coordination in teamwork, as well as to enable a more transparent assessment of individual contributions.
5. Providing continuous support for teams from institutional leaders by monitoring progress and offering assistance in addressing challenges encountered throughout the collaborative process.
6. Encouraging reflection and self-assessment to promote continuous improvement in the way teamwork is carried out.

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