

Free-riding and Team Performance in Project Education

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Abstract

Recently, business education programmes have increasingly implemented project education into their curricula as a means of qualitatively improving student performances. This trend has changed the role of the students and the teachers. However, literature and practical experience have also shown negative side effects of working in teams, resulting in lower group performances. One of the most striking effects is that working in teams gives some group members the opportunity to free-ride. This paper describes an empirical research on free-riding. It focuses on:

- The influence of the teachers' new roles on free-riding
- The effects of free-riding on team performance and team characteristics

Based on the results presented in this paper, it becomes apparent that project education can be detrimental to team performance. The reason for this is that working in teams can lead to free-riding among some group members on the one hand; on the other hand, the non free-riders seem to lower their effort instead of compensating for the free-riders ('sucker-effect' hypothesis). These behaviours result in an overall lower team performance.

With regard to two tutor roles, which are described as the 'process guard' and the 'professional expert', free-riding seems less likely to occur when the tutor plays more the role of process guard. It is more likely to occur more likely when the tutor plays the role of expert. At the end of the paper practical recommendations on how to deal with free-riding are provided.