

Abstract

We conduct and report results from a laboratory studies to test the effects of multi-team membership (MTM) on team performance. O’Leary, Mortensen, and Woolley (2011) proposed increasing MTM variety to have a direct and negative effect on team performance, but they also asserted its positive effects on team learning which in turn would improve team performance. We hypothesized that the negative effects would dominate and a team’s transactive memory system (TMS) would be one mechanism for these effects. To test our hypotheses, we developed an online game that simulates the decisions faced by team members in an MTM network. We conducted a 2x2 between-subjects study where we crossed variety of team membership with technological access to team member information. Results from our multi-membership analysis indicates an overall negative effect of variety on team performance. As predicted, TMS was positively related to performance, and mediated the effect of variety on performance. Contrary to predictions, technological access to team member information did not affect TMS, but did moderate the residual direct effect between MTM variety and a team’s performance, where information access surprisingly hurt the performance of low variety teams. Implications for research and practice are discussed.

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