

## Teamwork in Business Education. The Perspective of Polish Students of Management Studies

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### Abstract

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The development of soft competences among students is one of the basic challenges that are faced by the process of education in higher education system in Poland. It is a result of postulates of the business world regarding competences of university graduates, which are also the subject of numerous sociological studies. The article presents the analysis of opinions of students of management studies about teamwork during classes. For this purpose the visual sociology method was applied (the use of memes) which was supplemented with a statistical analysis of the indications of respondents based on a five-point Likert scale. T-test determined that contents of particular memes differentiate answers of the respondents in two groups: 25% respondents of the highest number of assigned points, and 25% respondents of the lowest number of assigned points. The results of the research make it possible to state that respondents manifest an unequivocal attitude towards teamwork within the scope of issues presented by the memes, however, their greatest percentage (36%) agreed with their negative content.

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### 1. Introduction: development of education within business

The subject area of business education at universities is not a new problem. As early as in the beginning of the 20th century scientific studies appeared which indicated, above all, changing perception of entrepreneurs and their place in the society, and thus the emerging need for further and continuous education. The main problem which was shaped in this context seemed to be based on the

insufficient offer of training presented by institutionalised higher education and aimed at people who were vocationally active and performed managerial functions (Hansen, & Liles, 1965).

The problem with opening higher education system within the scope of business education to social expectations (as one of the potential educational purposes (Baciu, 2015)) remained valid even after a few decades. In the 1980s it was indicated that the offer of universities had to reflect changes in the social as well as economic dimension, which began to entail the necessity to collaborate with external surroundings of universities and modify the educational offer. The need for lifelong learning as well as realisation of continuous development of universities and rendered educational services was already signalled then. The problems related to internationalisation of the process of education and opening of universities to foreigners were also listed as challenges (Porter, & McKibbin, 1988). As it may be noticed, in time not only did the perspective of problems concerning business education grow bigger but also a group of interested parties of universities, which obviously had to result in the change of the expected role performed by universities.

The following years in the literature of the subject meant, above all, raising two matters in business education. The first one is connected with ensuring of appropriate quality of these services. Therefore the attempts to create tools for assessment of the quality of educational processes and conditions of their realisation were being made (Sadiq Sohail, & Shaikh, 2004). Sources of these intentions shall be looked for in the general trend of popularization of higher education around the world as well as in the increase in the number of students which accompanies it (Trank, & Rynes, 2003). These phenomena led to raising the issue of academic staff themselves who are supposed to educate young people within the scope of business. In this respect the issue of even greater focus of teaching academic staff on realisation of scientific studies at the expense of gaining practical experience in business was and still is being raised, which results in a lower level of attractiveness of classes from the point of view of development of practical skills (Bennis, & O'Toole, 2005). The quality of education, however, should be built not only on the basis of teaching practical skills and formal competences but also on instilling key social values, shaping prosocial behaviours and cultivating socially shared values (Datar, Garvin, & Cullen, 2011). It is therefore emphasized that parallelly to intellectual development of students their moral development must take place (Zlotkowski, 1996) that should embrace, above all, social, intercultural and ethical competences (Giacalone, 2004). Business education and experiences gained by students throughout its course must be therefore connected with such aspects as: socio-economic reality, its actual reflection in teaching and reflectiveness towards it, which should enable building of responsible attitude among students (Godfrey, Illes, & Berry, 2005).

The second issue in business education being raised nowadays in the literature is popularization and development of tools for distance education. Key problems related to this type of education are, above all, the issue of popularity of such form of classes as an additional offer within the framework of university education as well as potential benefits of education in such form only. This obviously leads to analyses concerning determination of target groups of such type of classes, their attractiveness regarding the customer value (value offered to students) (Komańda, 2015), and the need for ensuring indispensable formal conditions imposed by the provisions of law for the realisation of such type of classes (Komańda, Kajanová, 2013). Therefore tendencies and abilities of universities to harness online

learning as well as to determine the scope of educational offer in this respect (Ives, & Jarvenpaa, 2000). Not without importance in this respect are also studies which present results of researches on the issue of shaping and developing teamwork competences in virtual groups (Alavi, Wheeler, & Valacich, 1995) and learning with the use of online communication methods (Glava, & Baciu, 2015).

## **2. Soft competences and didactic process at Polish institutions of higher education**

The emphasis on building a relation between universities and economy is in contemporary Poland one of the main reasons for changes of legal regulations concerning the functioning of institutions of higher education and the scope of educational process offered by universities. Unfortunately, in spite of all the effort employers on the Polish market still express a lot of criticism aimed at level and scope of competences of Polish university graduates. It is spoken up that graduates virtually do not possess practical skills and the so called soft competences which, in their opinion, are essential for efficient functioning in all kinds of work groups (Polska Konfederacja Pracodawców Prywatnych Lewiatan, 2011). This criticism of publicistic character is confirmed in scientific studies concerning studying of employers' opinion, the results of which clearly point out the expectation of passing on students knowledge directly from business practice, and therefore depriving theoretical knowledge of its dominant status in the educational process. What is more, in the opinion of employers, a perfect graduate should not only possess well-developed soft competences but also have a good command of foreign languages and be computer literate (Budnikowski, Dabrowski, Gąsior, & Macioł, 2012).

It is worth mentioning that the need for graduates to have soft competences, which is so highlighted by employers, is to be understood as features of character and human personality which should be easy to shape and strengthened if necessary. This points out at the fact that educational process should not only shape a certain set of these competences but also enable to develop the ability to modify them in all their dimensions. As it is indicated, the dimensions of soft competences concern personal skills (which are related to issues of self-motivation and organisation of work) as well as interpersonal skills (which, in turn, are connected with such issues as motivating others, leading, communicating and managing a team) (Wronowska, 2015). Postulates of Polish employers therefore concern also the suggested directions of changes within the educational process and functioning of institutions of higher education. They call for popularisation of such forms of education as practical exercises, games, simulations, or cases in order to develop logical and analytical thinking, creativity, good organisation as well as self-reliance and responsibility of students. They also call for realisation of trainings for students within the scope of soft competences at universities (Turlej, 2009).

Regulations concerning higher education in Poland demand, for the purpose of building closer relations between universities and the business world, establishment of the so called orientation boards for the faculties which include representatives of social and economic organisations that are expected to have custody of relevance and legitimacy of the curriculum of studies. Academic Career Centres, that is intra-university institutions which patronise the realisation of compulsory vocational practices by students and study professional careers of university graduates, are also being established. However, from the perspective of the didactic process itself the most interesting seems to be the realisation of

challenges of the Bologna system, especially the existing relationship between National Frameworks of Qualifications for the system of higher education in Poland with the accepted European Frameworks of Qualifications. The area of qualification of "social competences" is extremely interesting. It is a Polish equivalent of "proven ability to use" and is defined as: "the ability to shape one's own development and autonomic and responsible participation in vocational and social life while taking into consideration ethical context of one's own conduct" (Marciniak, Chmielecka, Kraśniewski, & Saryusz-Wolski, 2013). The wording of particular social competences listed within the framework of qualifications for the area of social sciences which includes business education in a broad sense points out that they are to a large extent convergent with or even identical to soft competences. What is worth emphasizing, it seems that an additional requirement for documenting by an academic teacher the level of knowledge, skills as well as social competences acquired by students within the framework of the subject lectured contributes to the increase in popularity of using teamwork methods within the realisation of didactic classes. However, the question arises to what extent popularisation of these methods in the didactic process is interesting for and accepted by Polish students. Legitimacy of these doubts comes from the results of sociological reports which indicate that Poles rather reluctantly engage in common action to the benefit of the community, the consequence of which is that, with reference to professional activity, there is also lack of teamwork culture (Czapiński, & Panek, 2015).

### 3. Methodology

The aim of this work was to study the intensity of feelings of the respondents towards teamwork realised during students' classes within the scope of business education. Therefore the respondents were students of management department at University of Economics in Katowice. Altogether 100 persons participated in the research. In the research in order to receive respondents' opinions a visual sociology method was applied. This was about using memes commenting on the issue of teamwork which were available on the Internet.

**Table 1.** Comparison of memes used in the research and presentation of their content

<b>Meme no</b>	<b>Content of the comment</b>	<b>URL address</b>
1	Teamwork: two are working, the rest is pretending to be thinking	<a href="http://demotywatory.pl/uploads/1255102589_by_matmik16_600.jpg">http://demotywatory.pl/uploads/1255102589_by_matmik16_600.jpg</a>
2	Working in a team: one is writing, the rest is coping it	<a href="http://demotywatory.pl/uploads/201101/1294237463_by_Caprios_600.jpg">http://demotywatory.pl/uploads/201101/1294237463_by_Caprios_600.jpg</a>
3	Teamwork: sometimes you have to do all the dirty job yourself	<a href="http://d.demotywatory.net/1795.jpg">http://d.demotywatory.net/1795.jpg</a>
4	Working in a team: time when you carefreely look at those who care	<a href="http://img8.demotywatoryfb.pl/uploads/201201/1326369558_by_Acura_600.jpg">http://img8.demotywatoryfb.pl/uploads/201201/1326369558_by_Acura_600.jpg</a>
5	Teamwork: the possibility to blame others in the group	<a href="http://demotywatory.pl/uploads/1258581500_by_Chelsea606_600.jpg">http://demotywatory.pl/uploads/1258581500_by_Chelsea606_600.jpg</a>

Presenting memes to the respondents as well as asking them to express their attitude towards their content was supposed, above all, to facilitate the expression of opinions about issues which are to be regarded as involved in the socio-psychological context. Therefore it was all to stir in students

expressing their opinion memories and feelings related to them (Pain, 2012). The respondents were asked to mark on a five-point Likert scale their attitude towards contents presented by each meme. Therefore, marking number 5 on a scale signified absolute agreement with the content of the situational comment included in the meme, marking number 1 meant total disagreement. Whereas marking number 3 indicated that the respondent was not able to express their attitude in case of a particular issue.

#### **4. Results**

For the realisation of further stages of data processing it was necessary to count the number of points gained by each of the respondents and create two comparative groups. In the so called "upper" group there were 25% respondents of the highest number of assigned points, whereas in the so called "lower" group - 25% respondents of the lowest number of assigned points. Subsequently, the analysis of the assumed unidimensionality was conducted, i.e. it was determined whether all the claims (the contents of the memes in this respect) belonged to the same analysed dimension (Mazurek-Łopacińska, 2005). For the realisation of this purpose a t-test was used which determines the significance of differences between the means gained in particular groups.

**Table 2.** Value and significance of the t-test

Item	t-test value	Level of significance (p)
Meme 1	7.077	.000
Meme 2	11.438	.000
Meme 3	5.192	.000
Meme 4	7.947	.000
Meme 5	11.619	.000

The calculated level of significance with the assumed level of trustfulness 99.9% amounts to  $p < 0.001$ , therefore the hypothesis can be made that contents of particular memes differentiate answers of the respondents. Simultaneously, values of the test for particular memes are above the lower value of the t-test which is 3.7455 assigned for the assumed level of significance (0.001) and levels of freedom (24).

Another stage of the analysis was to determine the level of reliability by means of Cronbach's Alpha coefficient. It amounts to 0.668. At the same time, as it resulted from the results obtained, deleting any of the items would not cause its value to increase. The obtained Cronbach's Alpha value cannot therefore be considered satisfactory. The appropriate value of this coefficient are values above 0.7. However, it may be assumed that due to the explorative character of the research (related to the recognition of the phenomenon) its value above 0.6 may serve as the basis for compiling and presenting the results of the research (Dyduch, 2015).

The obtained values of the mean, median and mode for the particular variables (i.e. memes) are shown in table 3.

**Table 3.** Values of selected descriptive statistics

Meme no	1	2	3	4	5
Median	4	3	4	3	2
Mode	4	4	4	2	1

In order to interpret the attitude of the respondents towards teamwork during students' classes it was decided that normalisation of the obtained results should be conducted with the use of the sten (Rubacha, 2008). This enabled to assign respondents on account of the points gained (i.e. raw value) to a matching sten. The normalisation procedure is presented in table 4.

**Table 4.** Normalisation of results - the sten scale

Raw values (points gained by respondents)	Number of respondents who gained a particular number of points (n)	Number of studied sample after deducting the number from the line above (k)	Unit of the normalisation scale assigned to a particular sten ( $k \cdot 1/N$ where N-number of the studied sample)	Sten
25 (maximum)	3	100	1	10
24	4	97	0.97	9
23	1	93	0.93	8
22	5	92	0.92	8
21	3	87	0.87	8
20	8	84	0.84	7
19	6	76	0.76	7
18	6	70	0.7	7
17	11	64	0.64	6
16	13	53	0.53	6
15	10	40	0.4	5
14	9	30	0.3	4
13	6	21	0.21	4
12	8	15	0.15	3
11	2	7	0.07	3
10	2	5	0.05	2
9	1	3	0.03	2
8	0	2	0.02	-
7	2	2	0.02	1
6	0	0	0	-
5 (minimum)	0	0	0	-

## 5. Discussion

The conducted normalisation of the results of points gained by the respondents enabled to unambiguously refer to the issue of determining the attitude of the researched persons to the content represented by the memes. For this purpose an interpretation principle of the sten scale turned out to be helpful. Stens in the range 1-4 were considered too low, 5 and 6 - average, and stens in the range 7 and 10 - high (Rubacha, 2008).

**Table 5.** Results of the analysis - the sten scale and its numbers

Sten	Number of respondents	Cumulative number of respondents	Percentage share in the researched population	Cumulative percentage share in the researched population
10	3	3	3%	3%
9	4	7	4%	7%
8	9	16	9%	16%
7	20	36	20%	36%
6	24	60	24%	60%
5	10	70	10%	70%
4	15	85	15%	85%
3	10	95	10%	95%
2	3	98	3%	98%
1	2	100	2%	100%

It may be stated that 36% respondents altogether (stems in the range 7-10) indicate high acceptance of the contents represented by the memes. 34% respondents (stems 5 and 6) may be described as people who could not take a stance on the content of the memes. Whereas 30% respondents (stems in the range 1-4) indicate disapproval of the contents presented throughout the course of the study. Taking into consideration the fact that the content of the presented memes was of a negative character, the most numerous group of respondents (stems 7, 8, 9, 10) may be regarded as a group of people who manifests an unfavourable attitude towards teamwork during the course of realisation of students' classes within the aspects shown in the research.

The values of medians should also be noticed, above all, the modes in the indications of the respondents for particular memes. For the first three the value of modes indicates acceptance of the contents of the memes (therefore it is an expression of a negative attitude towards teamwork), whereas for memes 4 and 5 it expresses lack of positive attitude towards the contents represented by the memes (therefore they may be interpreted as lack of negative attitude towards the represented matters regarding teamwork). The reason for such state of affairs may be looked for in the fact that the first two memes commented on teamwork in general, whereas the third meme required identification of the respondent with the presented situation but in a way that reflected well on this person and badly on the group. Whereas the last two memes (4 and 5) showed a potential respondent in the negative light.

## **6. Conclusion**

Careful interpretation of the results obtained enables to state that the researched students do not manifest an unambiguous attitude towards teamwork within the scope of situations represented by the memes. Such result may be the consequence of the fact that in the applied research method one may find certain significant limitations. Firstly, the selection of respondents was not random, which means that the research results obtained can be under no circumstances generalised on a broader population of Polish students of management faculty. Secondly, the group of respondents assigned to stems 5 and 6 should be looked at carefully as they are those who were classified as the ones who neither accepted nor rejected the contents of the memes. This group contains as many as 34% of all the respondents.



The explanation of this state of affairs may be twofold. On the one hand, the psychological mechanism mentioned before which consists in concern over critical self-assessment could have influence on the number of points gained by the respondents and in consequence on an assignment to a particular stem (it concerns the last two memes). On the other hand, the five-point Likert scale could also contribute to the fact that the respondents could be more susceptible to choose the answer "it is hard for me to tell", to which 3 points were assigned. It enabled them to avoid expressing opinion on a given problem commented by the meme.

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