

Teamwork in faculty members' research activities: Difficulties and solutions

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Abstract

The aim of this study was to analyze difficulties and solutions of teamwork in faculty members' research activities. This applied research used qualitative method as the research strategy. The data collection tool was semi-structured interview. For this study, four comprehensive universities in Tehran including University of Tehran, Shahid Beheshti University, Kharazmi University and Tarbiat Modares University were selected. In each university, one faculty was randomly selected for every 20 faculties. Then, within each faculty, all departments were considered. Finally, among the departments, faculty members were purposefully selected and considered as participants in the research (45 faculty members up to theoretical saturation). Open coding and theme analysis methods used to analyze data. To ensure the validity of the research, while trying to control the bias and prejudice of the researcher, some participants reviewed the extracted categories. Also, one of the colleagues was asked to review the findings. To calculate the reliability, test-retest reliability method and agreement for two raters method were used. The results showed that there was a difference between the natures of disciplines for teamwork. There was not any difference between universities regarding team-work implementation. In addition, to choose an activity to do the work as a team, the nature of that work is decisive and among the research activities listed in Article 3 of the Regulation, no order and priority can be considered for the implementation of teamwork. Finally, teamwork difficulties can be divided into five categories: related to individual, related to the team and team factors, within the organization and within the university, related to the higher education system, and general context and national factors.

Keywords: Research activities, higher education, faculty members, university, teamwork, Iran.



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Introduction

In today's knowledge-based society, we see that organizations and institutions believe in team and teamwork as a specific strategy. Universities as a knowledge-based society also have paid attention to this important issue. One of the functions of the higher education system is to train people who have critical and creative thinking and have the ability to address and solve problems instead of accumulating information and knowledge that will quickly become obsolete. Therefore, universities should pay attention to scientific cooperation and teamwork as a special strategy in their activities and their organizational culture. So, in the last two decades, the literature related to the team and the use of work teams has increased significantly. In fact, teamwork is a recognizable set of behaviors, perceptions, attitudes that team members share while doing work and teams should be organized as a part of organizational units. However, when we look at the context of higher education and at educational and research departments, the effects of teamwork are not well felt. In other words, there is limited evidence about the use of teamwork in organizations and universities.

On the other hand, we regularly see emphasis placed on scientific cooperation and teamwork in academic and research activities in some upstream documents, including Comprehensive Scientific Map of Iran, Islamic-Iranian model of progress, and the horizon of IRAN 1404. Therefore, the question arises: how do universities as organizations of the future, include the spirit and skills of teamwork in their research activities? Also, it is necessary for university leaders to be able to lead university work teams in a global economy with great diversity, and the current challenges of the link between university and the industry regarding the university graduates and their recruitment in the industry do not become the new challenge of the lack of teamwork skills in tomorrow's workforce. Accordingly, it is vital to examine the state of teamwork in the research activities of the faculty members of the universities. The aim of this study is to analyze difficulties and solutions of teamwork in faculty members' research activities. In this regard, the following specific goals were considered:

- Identifying the current status of teamwork in research activities of faculty members,
- Identifying the difficulties of teamwork in research activities of faculty members,
- Identifying strategies for developing teamwork in research activities of faculty members,

Research Questions

The research questions were:

1. What is the current status of teamwork in research activities of faculty members?
2. From the academics' viewpoints, what are the difficulties regarding teamwork in research activities of faculty members?
3. What strategies will lead to development of teamwork in research activities of faculty members?

Methodology

This applied research used qualitative method (thematic analysis) as the research strategy. In this research, the theoretical literature and background of the subject have been initially examined. In the next step, the interview questions have been prepared in line with the goals of the project. The data collection tool was semi-structured interview. For this study, four comprehensive universities of Tehran (including: University of Tehran, University of Shahid Beheshti, University of Kharazmi and University of Tarbiat Modares) were selected. In each university, one Faculty was randomly selected. Then, within each Faculty, all departments were taken into consideration. Finally, among the departments, faculty members were purposefully selected and considered as participants in the research (45 faculty members up to the theoretical saturation). The participants were experiential and theoretical experts in higher education. Interviews in each faculty continued until theoretical saturation.

Open coding and content analysis methods were used to analyze data and information. To ensure the validity of the research, while trying to control the bias and prejudice of the researcher, some participants reviewed the extracted categories. Also, one of the colleagues was asked to review the findings. To calculate the reliability, Test-Retest reliability method and Agreement for Two Raters method were used.

Findings

The current situation of Teamwork in the research activities of faculty members

For this research objective, a semi-structured interview has been conducted. Based on the results of the conducted interviews, some faculty members believe that they use teamwork in their research activities. These members welcomed team work and were doing it or had team work in this regard before. But others believe that despite having the experience of doing team work, team work is not supported much by the rules and regulations of higher

education. In addition, some people do not have any desire for team work in research activities because of their previous unsuccessful experiences of team work.

The difficulties of teamwork in the research activities of faculty members

What is obtained from the analysis of the interviews is as follows: the challenges of teamwork are divided into five general categories. (1) Part of the challenges, which are placed in the first category, is related to the individual and the faculty member. (2) In the second category, there are general categories related to difficulties and obstacles pertaining to the team and team factors. (3) In the third category of the difficulties of teamwork in the research activities of faculty members there are intra-organizational and intra-university difficulties and obstacles. (4) In the fourth category of difficulties there are difficulties and obstacles related to the higher education system (extra-academic factors). (5) Finally, in the fifth category of difficulties, there is the general context and national factors.

The results showed that there was a difference between the natures of disciplines for teamwork. There was not any difference between universities regarding team work. The nature of the work is decisive for choosing an activity to work as a team.

Conclusions

According to the results, teamwork difficulties can be divided into five categories: related to individual, related to the team and team factors, within the organization and within the university, related to the higher education system, and general context and national factors. So, in order to develop teamwork, some strategies should be utilized regarding to the team members, the team, the environment and context of the university, higher education institution and society. Nowadays, the institutions of higher education have the necessary independence in many ways and also, there are knowledge-oriented and thoughtful people at universities and it seems that academic and individual factors are more important than other factors and play a key role both in the dimension of difficulties and in the dimension of teamwork development solutions.

Considering the nature of the conducted research, also, the investigation of the current situation of teamwork in the research activities of university faculty members and finally, the opinions of university experts regarding teamwork in research activities, the following recommendations are drawn:

- It is suggested that the regulations for the promotion of faculty members be re-examined and revised with a supportive

approach to teamwork in the research activities of faculty members. And more points be considered for research team activities. It is recommended that the support of team research activities should be emphasized by the managers.

- Based on the findings of the research and the difficulties and obstacles related to individual factors, it is suggested that incentives for teamwork should be set. It is recommended to increase faculty members' motivation and positive attitude in this regard.
- In order to resolve the difficulties related to the factors within the university, it is recommended that the topic of teamwork in research activities and its development be included in the strategic plans and vision of each university. Also, a committee at the university be responsible for checking the degree of realization of each of the objectives.
- Since the current status of team research work in the studied universities was weak and the interdisciplinary and intergroup interactions were very low; it is recommended that university administrators consider programs to engage groups as much as possible, such as holding joint meetings with group members, as well as presenting intergroup team programs and joint projects.
- Due to the impact of the nature of disciplines on team research work, it is advisable to consider the nature of the humanities and purely disciplines in policies and regulations. It is recommended to avoid uniformity of these majors with technical fields of engineering, agriculture and food industry.
- Regarding the difficulties related to team research skills and characteristics of faculty members, as well as the difficulties and obstacles related to the team (team factors), it is recommended to hold workshops such as team building and teamwork, managing effective teams, holding joint and friendly meetings; to eliminate this obstacle.
- Based on the findings, it is recommended that the cultural deputy of each university prepare a professional ethics charter for faculty members and create a team research culture at the university. Also, the University Monitoring and Evaluation Unit

play a more serious role in observing professional ethics in teamwork.

- It is recommended that the appointment order of university presidents emphasize the structuring and culture of teamwork in research activities. Also, in evaluating the performance of university presidents, this issue be considered.