



## Collaborative Instructor Team Approaches on a Market Positioning Project for a Non-Profit SME Retailer: Understanding from the Social Capital Theory

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**Background.** *Product Development in the Fashion Industry* is a junior-level undergraduate course taught every semester in a large Midwestern university. Each class has an enrollment around 35 students and the class is categorized as a small-size course, which enables an instructor to offer hands-on learning modules and projects. Due to the size of the undergraduate student population in our institution, there are multiple sections of the course each semester; thus, it is not unusual that two or more instructors are involved to offer the course using one consolidated syllabus, course outline, and course projects. Therefore, collaborative team approach is quite necessary and useful regarding overall course planning process such as establishing course learning objectives and policies, outlining the course milestones and contents, developing course projects and rubrics, and developing and proctoring tests and examinations. Due to the nature of the size of the student enrollment, a collaborative approach on teaching of a course with multiple sections is imperative in order to 1) align the course objectives, projects, and deadline, and in turn 2) offer the equivalent course learning experience.

**Purpose.** Social capital theory is developed in sociology and political science (Portes, 1998). In a book, *Bowling alone: The collapse and revival of American community*, Putnam (2001) explained how the individuals in the U.S. have become progressively disconnected from one another and how social structures have disintegrated. He (2001) emphasized the strong ties among social members are the engine in creating a healthy and safe society. He stated that social capital is a producer of civic engagement and a broad societal measure of communal health.

Using the social capital theory (Portes, 1998), we are to elaborate how instructors collaboratively create, implement, and evaluate a project, *Market Positioning for a Non-Profit SME Retailer*, and to corroborate our team approach on this multi-section lecture course. Through sharing our effort in collaborative instructor team approach with the members of the ITAA, we aim not only to share the structure and deliverables of the project, but also to offer understanding of key dynamics of the instructor's professional community by highlighting the individuals' interactions with one another based on social capital theory.

**Project Description.** The objective of the project was to research and compile a retailer's profile, demographic, psychographic and life stage profiles for a non-profit SME retailer which is affiliated with the school. After completion, recommendations should be made on how to implement an actionable positioning strategy. For this project, we allowed the students to form their own team of 4-5 individuals with diverse capacity and skill sets. Then, we asked students to begin their research for the retailer. The first step is to produce a market research report that includes a comprehensive overview of the target customer and a competitive analysis. We required the student teams to prepare a PowerPoint presentation and turn a print-

out deck of the slides. Students were required to include charts, graphs, and other visual aids as appropriate. We gave a couple of constraints to foster their editing skills as team such as a limit on number of slides, number of minutes for oral presentation, and file size.

**Deliverables of the Project.** The outcomes of the project include: a) Analysis of the market and target customer including demographic and lifestyle characteristics, b) a brief short and long range forecast for the market and the target customer, c) assessment of four competitors including stores, wholesale brands and private brands, d) product positioning strategy where students identified and highlighted unique facets of the retailer that differentiating itself from its competition. The oral presentation was delivered as a representative individual of the group or the entire group to the class. Informal critiques from both fellow students and instructors were shared with the group after their presentations.

**Understanding the Approach from the Social Capital Theory.** Besides this project introduced in the present abstract, we shared the general instructional experiences, and specific issues and challenges throughout the semester. Through the collaborative team process, we generated a great deal of social capital (Portes, 1998; Putnam, 2001). The theory defines social capital as the resources and expertise that individuals can access through their ties with others within social networks that facilitate certain actions including change or resistance to change (Coleman, 1990; Lin, 2001; Portes, 1998). Social capital exists in the social networks, where members form their formal or informal social ties, whether they are weak or strong ties (Cross & Parker, 2004). The social capital embodied in these connections makes for efficient relationships, including more efficient communication and aligned action (Coleman, 1990; Lin, 2001). Strong ties provide social cohesion and weak ties provide new resources organizations need. Through creating a mutually respectful environment where sharing instructional ideas and strategies are encouraged and providing validations of the good instructional practices we implemented. We also reciprocated the moral support to one another and generated collective resources for the instructor team, which resulted in increased productivity amongst the team members. Our endeavor in team work added the support to the previous findings of Penuel, Riel, Krause and Frank (2009) who reported that teachers' professional interactions are fundamentals to create social capital.

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