

Understanding Team Member Autonomy and Team Collaboration: A Qualitative Study

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Abstract : This study aims to explore how research assistants who work in project teams experience team member autonomy and how they reconcile team member autonomy with team collaboration. The study utilizes snowball sampling. 20 research assistants who work the faculties of education in Marmara University and Yıldız Technical University have been interviewed. The analysis of data involves a content analysis MAXQDAPlus 11 which is a qualitative data analysis software is used as the data analysis tool. According to the findings of this study, emerging themes include team norm formation, team coordination management, the role of individual tasks in team collaboration, leadership distribution. According to the findings, interviewees experience team norm formation process in terms of processes, which pertain to task fulfillment, and processes, which pertain to the regulation of team dynamics. Team norm formation process instills a sense of responsibility amongst individual team members. Apart from that, the interviewees' responses indicate that the realization of the obligation to work in a team contributes to the team norm formation process. The participants indicate that individual expectations are taken into consideration during the coordination of the team. The supervisor of the project team also has a crucial role in maintaining team collaboration. Coordination problems arise when an individual team member does not relate his/her academic field with the research topic of the project team. The findings indicate that the leadership distribution in the project teams involves two leadership processes: leadership distribution which is based on the processes that focus on individual team members and leadership distribution which is based on the processes that focus on team interaction. Apart from that, individual tasks serve as a facilitator of collaboration amongst team members. Interviewees also indicate that individual tasks also facilitate the expression of individuality.

Keywords : project teams in higher education, research assistant teams, team collaboration, team member autonomy

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