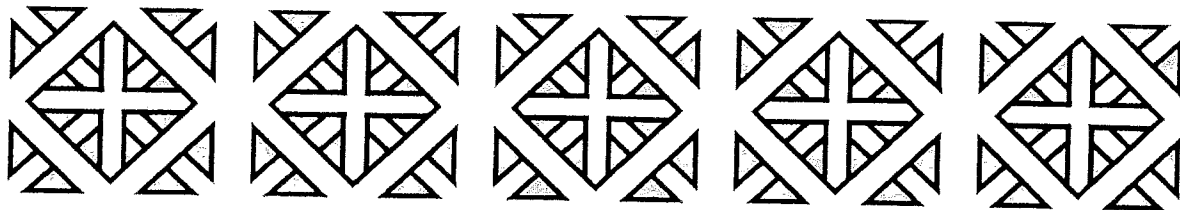


# Managing Teams With Diverse Compositions: Implications For Managers From Research on the Faultline Model

James L. Hall, *Santa Clara University*



## Introduction and Background

It is widely recognized that groups have become an important building block of organizational effectiveness (e.g., Gibson, Zellmer-Bruhn and Schwab, 2003), that organizations increasingly are relying on cross-functional work groups and project teams (Homan, Van Knippenberg, Van Kleef, and De Dreu, 2007), and that the composition of the workforce is increasingly diverse (Lau and Murnighan, 1998). More and more employees are likely to work with people who are demographically different from them (Chatopadhyay, Thuchowska, and Geogge, 2004).

Reviews of the literature have pointed out that the consequences of team diversity for team outcomes often were mixed (Jehn and Bezrukova, 2010; Li and Hambrick, 2005). For example, benefits have included creativity and competitive advantage (Pearsall, Ellis, and Evans, 2008), improved decision-making (Lau and Murnighan, 2005), and team learning (Polzer, Crisp, Jawenpaa and Kim, 2006). But negative outcomes were also cited, such as diminished communication and social integration (Lau and Murnighan, 1998), diminished interpersonal liking and psychological commitment (Lau and Murnighan, 2005), diminished team learning (Edmonson, 1999), increased turnover (Milliken and Martins, 1996), and decreased creativity and increased group-think (Pearsall et al., 2008).

Research on the faultline model helps to clarify the inconsistent, or mixed, consequences regarding team outcomes, and helps us to understand why, how, and when team-member diversity will lead to positive or negative team outcomes. A number of researchers have tested

the faultline model, and some have suggested implications. However, there has been no systematic review and summary of these implications for managers. Academic leaders (see Cummings, 2007) and researchers (see David and David, 2011 and Kelemen and Bansal, 2002) have expressed the concern that too often there is a gap, a disconnect, between academic research and practicing managers. This paper fills that gap, providing managers with practical suggestions for effectively managing teams with diverse compositions. It describes the basic propositions of the faultline model, and describes the practical implications for managers suggested by researchers who have tested the model.

## The Faultline Model

Following the lead of Watson, Kumar, and Michaelson (1993), who examined team outcomes over time for homogeneous and heterogeneous teams, and the lead of Milliken and Martins (1996), who began a search for “common threads,” Lau and Murnighan (1998) introduced the concept of faultlines: “Faultlines are hypothetical dividing lines that may split a (team) into subgroups based on one or more attributes” (1998: 328). The key characteristics of the faultline model, as set forth in the form of propositions by Lau and Murnighan (1998), are:

- Faultlines can be based on demographic (e.g., age, sex, race, nationality, occupation) or nondemographic (e.g., personality type) attributes.
- Faultlines become stronger as more attributes align themselves in the same way. For example, if a team had two subgroups, one

consisting of women (gender) over 60 years old (age) and a second consisting of men (gender) less than 30 years old (age), the team would be likely to have a stronger faultline than a team of just men or just women. This is because in the team of just men, or just women, the only diversity attribute is age, whereas in the first scenario there are two diversity attributes: gender and age.

- Faultlines based on demographic attributes are most likely to form at the beginning of the team's developmental process, because at that time demographic attributes are most likely to be visible to the team members.
- Faultlines that form early are likely to persist and contribute to subgroup norms, reinforcing the faultlines.
- The activation, or triggering, of the faultline is likely to depend on the team's task context. For example, if a team had two subgroups, one consisting of members with 20+ years of tenure, and another consisting of members with much less tenure, faultlines would likely be activated by such issues as seniority privileges.
- Potential faultlines are least likely in teams with little heterogeneity (homogeneous teams), are likely to be strongest in teams of moderate heterogeneity, and likely to be weak and fragmented in highly heterogeneous teams.

### Implications for Managers

The research on the faultline model has led to several suggestions for minimizing the effects of strong faultlines. This section reviews and integrates implications suggested by researchers who tested the faultline model, providing managers with a base for evidence-based practices (Rousseau and Barends, 2011). Google Scholar was used to search for such tests using three criteria to identify relevant studies: the studies had to be empirical, had to examine faultlines at the group or team level, and had to offer explicit suggestions for managers. Using these criteria, 19 studies were identified. To facilitate the use of these studies by managers, they were organized into seven categories. The categories are: 1) recognizing what activates, or triggers, a faultline; 2) developing a superordinate team identity; 3) analyzing the importance of beliefs, culture, and norms; 4) employing appropriate structures; 5) recognizing the effect of team autonomy; 6) indicating the appropriate use of intra-team communication; and 7) using appropriate leadership

styles. For an overview of the implications of each category, see Figure 1.

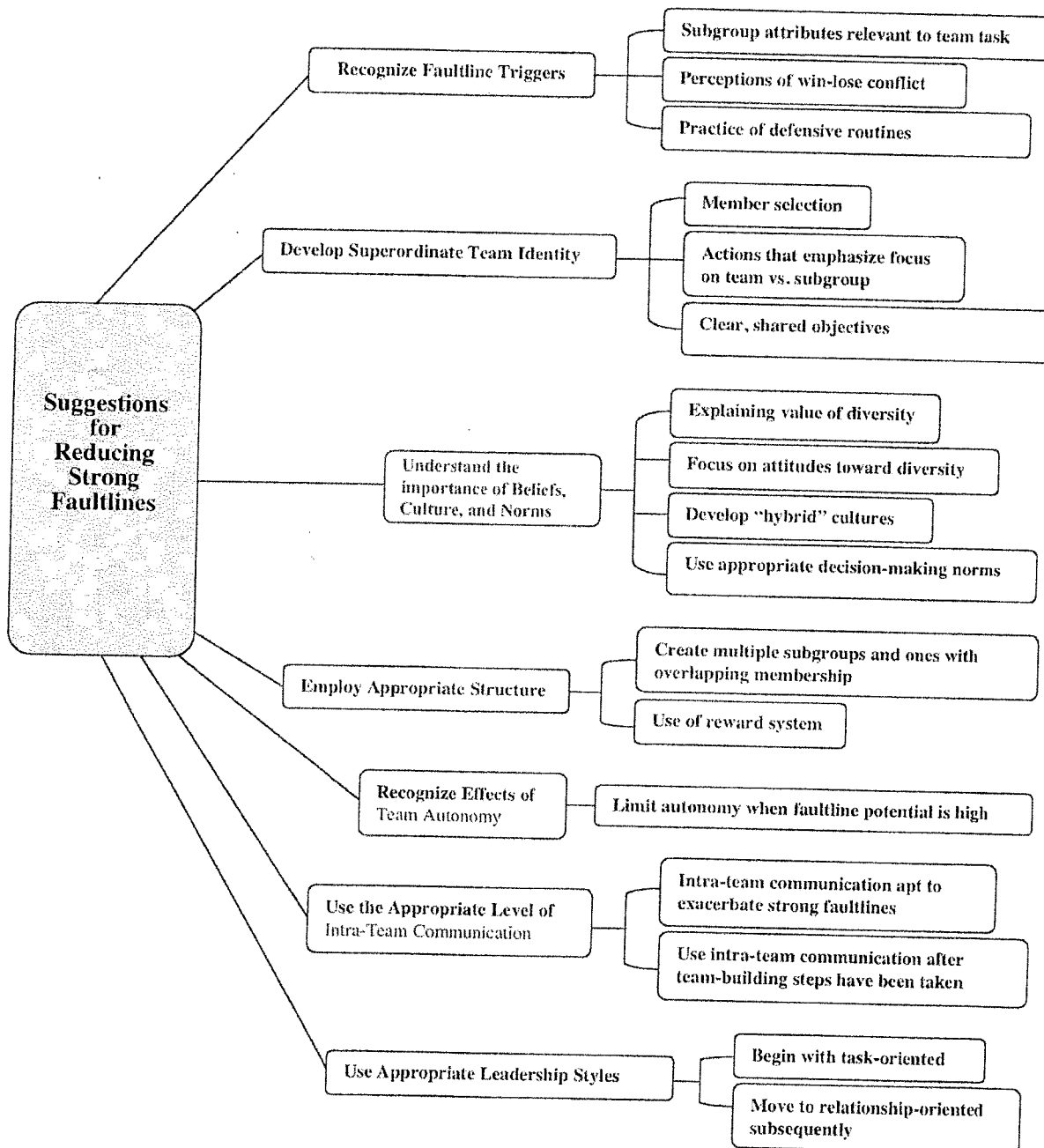
### Triggers that activate faultlines

An important message for managers that can be drawn from the tests of the faultline model is an understanding of what activates, or triggers, faultlines. Such an understanding can help managers avoid or minimize adverse faultline effects. Lau and Morninghan (1998) predicted that a faultline is likely to be activated when the subgroup attributes are relevant to the team's task. Therefore, managers must be aware that, depending on the task, a wide variety of attributes might activate a faultline. Tests of the model have confirmed this prediction. Dyck and Starke (1999) found that faultlines based on age can be activated by pension issues. Early and Mosakowski (2000) found nationality-activated faultlines in a task force when the task had an international context. Li and Hambrick (2005) studied factional groups, those in which members are representatives from a small number of social entities, e.g., bilateral task forces and joint-venture teams. Li and Hambrick (2005) suggest that the activation of faultlines, given subgroups, depends on 1) the subgroups' perceptions of win-lose conflict, and 2) the extent to which members' roles as delegates (the "representative effect") is explicit. They suggest the importance of emphasizing (joint) team performance *and* providing a reward system that reinforces team performance versus subgroup or individual performance.

Jehn and Bezrukova (2010) found that a perceived sense of entitlement could activate faultlines, pointing to the example of an MBA learning team where two members with high levels of entitlement polarized the team. They argued that "in a group when there are two individuals vying for power and control (i.e., entitled) in opposing faultline subgroups, this is the most likely configuration to activate the effects of dormant faultlines." (2010). Smith and Lindgren (2010) studied faultlines in groups of multinational crisis response teams. They found that the practice of defensive routines was likely to trigger faultlines. Examples of defensive routines include shirking responsibility, missing meetings, and removing sensitive issues from discussion. They state that faultline ruptures can be expected soon after a defensive routine is noticed by another subgroup.

The following two sections describe how to develop a superordinate team identity that can

Figure 1. Suggestions for Reducing Strong Faultlines



help overcome strong faultlines, and then identify variables (beliefs, culture, and norms) that can contribute to a superordinate team.

**Superordinate team identity**

One way to overcome strong faultlines is to create a superordinate team identity (Jehn and Bezrukova, 2010; Polzer et al., 2006). An important advantage of a superordinate team identity may

be that it “facilitates knowledge transfer by reducing the negative view of outgroup members and by making ingroup members receptive to the information shared by others” (Jehn and Bezrukova, 2010). Ocker, Zhang, Hiltz, and Ronson (2009) studied partially distributed teams, teams consisting of at least two geographically distinct sites, with multiple members at each site. They found that when shared identity and trust exist,

the perceived level of competency increases; consequently, faultlines are less likely to lead to adverse performance consequences.

To create a superordinate team identity, Pearsall et al. (2008) suggest that managers select members with strong ties in backgrounds and values; for example, recruiting a critical mass of engineers from the same university program. This technique would increase the identification of the members with the team, rather than with subgroups, in their initial stage of interaction. This is important because the model (Lau and Murnighan, 1998) predicts that demographic (surface-level) attributes will be most visible during initial interactions. Steps to create a team identity might include training, aggressive deadlines, and reward structures that keep the members focused on the team rather than on subgroups (Li and Hambrick, 2005). Van Knippenberg, Dawson, West, and Homan (2010) stress the advantage of clear and shared objectives. Beyond the shared focus, they also offer reference points for team self-regulation. These researchers also remind us that providing such objectives generally is seen as a key aspect of effective leadership.

### **Beliefs, culture, and norms**

Homan, Van Knippenberg, Van Kleef, and DeDreu (2007) differentiated between informational diversity (differences in information, ideas, etc. brought by members to the team) and information elaboration (the effective exchange of information). In particular, they found that team members were more likely to use their diverse resources (information elaboration) when team members believed in the value of diversity. Consequently, the researchers suggest that managers need to explain the value of diversity, especially for more complex tasks, pointing out how task performance can benefit from it. Ely and Thomas's (2001) research cited three reasons organizations give for increasing their cultural diversity: 1) the integration and learning perspective (a variety of insights and skills enhances team decision making); 2) the access and legitimacy perspective (a better fit with markets); and 3) the discrimination and fairness perspective (a belief in a moral imperative). The researchers found that only the first perspective, which helped team members negotiate expectations, norms, and assumptions about work, positively affected the team's work and work process. The second perspective was only marginally helpful, and the third tended to exacerbate

differences and foreclosed opportunities for learning.

Dyck and Starke (1999) also found that adverse faultline effects could be decreased if minority group views were recognized and appreciated early in the decision-making process. However, managers need to recognize that strongly held stereotypes may stand in the way of pro-diversity beliefs. Furthermore, Homan et al. (2007) suggest that managers may need to manage any feelings about diversity. They argue that most training programs may need to expand beyond the usual goal of making people aware of their stereotypes and changing their feelings and ideas about those groups "to include a focus on beliefs about, and attitudes toward, diversity itself" (2007). Similarly, Menard-Warwick (2009) discussed the need for teams to work toward interculturality – "an awareness and a respect of differences, as well as the socio-affective capacity to see oneself through the eyes of others" (2009). She stressed that managers should provide opportunities for listening and comprehending and for members to respond to expressed differences rather than simply presenting pre-existing views.

Reinforcing these points, Homan, Hollenback, Humphrey, Van Knippenberg, Ilgen, and Van Kleef (2008) found that members' "openness to experience" (part of the 5-factor model of personality) can moderate the adverse effects of strong faultlines. Furthermore, the researchers suggest that if members score low on openness to experience, it becomes especially important for managers to espouse pro-diversity beliefs. Nevertheless, Homan et al. (2008) point out a potential downside to creating a superordinate team identity, specifically, that such a team might decrease the positive effects of the open-to-experience dimension. They argue that when teams are potentially better off when elaborating on their diverse perspectives, creating a strong superordinate team identity alone may not be the best decision. They suggest an alternative of initiating a dual identity, focusing on a superordinate identity as well as on subgroup identities. (However, they leave open the question of whether, or when, to focus on one or the other.) In a similar vein, Barkema and Shvyrkov (2007), who studied top management teams, point out that, over time, the visibility of demographic attributes may decline but an increase in team identity can lead to inertia and groupthink.

Early and Mosakowski (2000) found that the development of hybrid culture facilitated posi-

tive team outcomes and minimized dysfunctional conflict between subgroups. A hybrid culture was defined as “an emergent and simplified set of rules, norms, expectations, and roles that team members share and enact” (2000). The researchers described three mechanisms that helped create the hybrid cultures that drew the subgroups together, thereby creating a superordinate team identity. First, managers encouraged norms that discouraged fixed seating patterns during meetings, rather than accepting the predisposition of subgroups to sit together. Second, managers were attentive to the language used by members, reinforcing terms such as “us” when it referred to the entire team, and discouraging terms such as “their” when used in reference to another subgroup. Third, managers encouraged norms that encouraged members to listen to all ideas, and discouraged any predisposition of members to exclusively support fellow subgroup members’ ideas.

Sawyer, Houlette, and Yeagley (2006) recommended specific decision-making norms. They examined the moderating effect of cross-cutting (structuring teams such that some attributes, e.g., similar functional background, are found in each subgroup) on adverse faultline effects. Their research incorporated earlier work on hidden profiles and the common knowledge effect. These concepts state that available information is often not effectively shared in team decision making. They found that cross-cutting was effective as a technique to reduce adverse faultline effects when team members did not make pre-discussion decisions. Therefore, managers are urged to establish appropriate norms for team members, i.e., norms stipulating that team members refrain from informal discussions about the problem. Implementing this norm can result in decisions that take advantage of cross-cutting.

Li and Hambrick (2005), in an interesting aside, suggest that a tendency to attribute failures of interdepartmental task forces (as well as failures of inter-organizational collaborative efforts) to culture clash may be unwise. They point out that often large scale collaborative efforts “are played out (between)...small groups of people from two sides who are trying to hammer out joint products” (2005). If these groups experience behavioral disintegration due to faultlines, then the overall collaborative effort will be at risk.

The following four sections are contingency-based, that is, they examine factors that affect faultlines differently at different times or in different contexts.

### **Structural factors**

Thatcher, Jehn, and Zanutto (2003) suggest that managers of teams with strong faultlines try to minimize the effects by creating multiple subgroups, when feasible, and also overlapping memberships among the subgroups. (The faultline model predicts that faultlines will be weak when the level of heterogeneity is high.) Similarly, Polzer et al. (2006), who compared co-located teams with geographically distributed teams, recommended that managers could avoid creating teams with strong faultlines (due to overlapping demographic and location attributes) by adding members with demographic similarities that cut across locations. It would seem apparent that this advice is especially relevant for managers of global virtual teams.

Several studies (e.g., Homan et al., 2008; Polzer et al., 2006) recommend that managers look at the reward structure as a useful tool for creating a superordinate team identity. These studies remind managers that a reward system that focuses on subgroups, rather than on the entire team, will strengthen faultlines. The following section on team autonomy, focusing on task design, is closely linked to this section on structure.

### **Team autonomy**

One approach frequently recommended to increase the motivational level of a team is to ensure that enriching design characteristics—skill variety, task identity, task significance, feedback, and autonomy (Hackman, 1987)—are present. However, Rico, Molleman, Sanchez-Manzanares, and Van der Vegt (2007) found that faultline issues were most critical under conditions of high team autonomy. Team autonomy was defined as “the freedom of a team to make decisions about goals (what), work methods (how), planning issues (when), and the distribution of work among team members (who)” (2007). These researchers found that high team-task autonomy exacerbated the adverse effects of faultlines because the latter interfered with the quality of communication and collaboration among team members and subgroups required when teams had autonomy. However, with weak faultlines, autonomy did lead to better decisions. It seems clear, therefore, that managers need to reconsider a common design approach—the job enrichment design—for creating a highly motivated team. If there is a high probability that strong faultlines will emerge, managers need to decrease the amount of autonomy granted to a

team. (For a tool that can help managers make this prediction, see the section on leadership style.)

### **Intra-team communication**

Lau and Murnighan (2005) found that intra-team communication focused on the task helped weak faultline teams but created no value for strong faultline teams. They concluded that managers of strong faultline teams should not encourage communication across subgroups unless the presence of other variables, such as a truly common enemy or decidedly integrative tasks, minimize the effects of the faultline. Similarly, Polzer et al. (2006) found that strong faultlines are more likely to exist when subgroups are not co-located. They noted that managers who strive to maintain structures to support full team communication must be aware of the danger that doing so will exacerbate subgroup faultlines if face-to-face meetings are used. As an alternative to such meetings, they suggest the use of electronic communication, regardless of location.

However, the computational analysis done by Flache and Mas (2008) revealed that the timing of the communication may affect the extent to which faultlines will adversely affect the team. They found that negative effects were less likely if subgroups were separated initially, compared with having all team members interact from the outset. They suggest that managers use the intervening period for team-building steps, such as an emphasis on common goals and team learning. They also suggest that managers consider the timing of issues addressed by the team, advising that managers manipulate the sequence in which certain issues are addressed so that, in a first phase, only issues on which all members can agree on are discussed. This increases the probability that positive interpersonal relationships will emerge.

### **Leadership style**

Task forces and project teams may be especially subject to faultline effects, according to Gratton, Voigt, and Erikson (2007). They found that the team leader's choice of role, or style, significantly affected a team's ability to bridge faultlines. For example, following one team with a subgroup of female marketing specialists and another subgroup of male technical engineers, the researchers found that the team leader's choice of, and transition between, task- and relations-oriented styles made an important difference.

Faultlines were more effectively bridged if the team leader began with a task-oriented style by setting targets and scheduling work. (This finding is consistent with that of Rico, et. al. (2007) regarding team autonomy.) In this early stage, team members learned about one another's skills and competencies, consequently decreasing any focus on demographic attributes. Although a task-oriented style is appropriate early in the life of a team, the team leader needs to know when to switch to a relations-oriented style (emphasizing the team's culture and the relationships among the members). Gratton et al. (2007) argue that such a switch needs to occur as deep-level (e.g., personality) attributes begin to emerge; for example, when subgroups defined by Type A and Type B personalities begin to form.

These researchers also stress that managers need to be able to predict the probability of strong faultlines emerging in their teams. To help managers do this, Gratton et al. (2007) provide a short survey consisting of four categories, including both surface-level and deep-level attributes. The four categories are: 1) the number of nationalities; 2) the current age, education, and gender of the members; 3) the current business locations; and 4) the values and aspirations of the members.

### **Summary**

Research on the faultline model helps us to understand why, how, and when team-member diversity will lead to positive or negative team outcomes. Drawing on a review of tests of the faultline model, we described a set of implications for managers who lead teams with membership diversity. These implications have been integrated into seven categories to facilitate their use by managers. By describing these implications and categorizing and sequencing them in a logical way, the gap between research and practicing managers has been bridged, providing practical advice for managers whose teams have diverse compositions.

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*Dr. Hall, who teaches managerial competencies and team effectiveness, has also conducted managerial training programs for profit and nonprofit corporations. His publications have focused on motivation, performance appraisals, and team effectiveness.*

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### **Group Presentation Project:**

Each group will be assigned chapters within the text that will be covered for a review on the exam, prior to the day of the exam. It is the responsibility of the group members to present a review for the class on the material that was covered. Each student will be graded for their participation within the group as well as the final presentation. The project and the presentation may consist of a game, a written handout, and something specific to the material that was covered within the chapters. \*\*\*It is important to work together on this assignment as you will be graded as a unit based on your project and presentation\*\*\*

### **Management Paper:**

For this assignment, you will be creating a fictitious business and developing a problem that needs to be resolved within the business. You are the manager and need to use what you have learned through this class to solve the problem that you have identified. This paper will be 6-8 pgs. In length APA Style. You must include at least 5-7 references within your paper. The paper will outline the following:

- \*A brief history of the business
- \*A summary of the problem (ex. Coffee being imported from Central America is too expensive and the company needs to save money. Can they import from Brazil at a cheaper rate?)
- \*Prepare a SWOT Analysis on how the company can benefit from addressing the problem
- \*Develop a solution to the problem
- \*Layout a step by step direction on how management would implement the solution that was presented. (ex. Will management need to address cultural differences, or language issues?)
  1. How will management provide leadership, motivation, and the management of information when completing the solution to the problem.
- \*Conclusion. Your conclusion must encompass a brief summary of the problem, the solution and how you feel management would do addressing the problem. (7-10 sentences.)

### **Case Study Articles:**

Throughout the course you will be assigned articles that will need to be analyzed and summarized based upon your knowledge of the material. These articles will be passed out during class time in order to give you ample time to review and analyze the material. Your summary will be 2-3 pgs. in length APA style. Your summary must address the issue, the problem, and the solution that the case study provided. You must also provide your opinion on the case study, and determine if there is anything you personally would have done differently. (due dates will be announced throughout the term)

### **Final Project Oral Presentation:**

Based upon your final paper, you will be presenting a 5-7 presentation on the paper that you did. Your oral presentation must include a visual aide (ie. Power point presentation, a video, a handout etc.) You must present the problem, the analysis, and the solution. \*\*\*Please note that you will be graded on your attire as well for the oral presentation. I am looking for business casual dress. Ex. Men a collared shirt, and nice slacks, and ladies nice blouse, skirt, or slacks. \*\*\*