Abstract
This case study examines longitudinal data from an online MBA program’s project management course to understand and describe the lived experience of a virtual student team that exhibited difficulty delivering a term project. Testing a theoretical model proposed by Lohle and Terrell (2016), the study affirms that unless students actively contact their instructor to escalate feedback and concerns about progress it is difficult to assess student contribution on virtual team projects. The instructor also actively solicited feedback and facilitated closure to compensate for a lack of student accountability. This prompted a research question asking whether requiring an online instructor’s constant oversight and engagement is an optimal strategy for effective project delivery on virtual student teams.

Main Arguments
Research Method
The primary researcher conducted a qualitative case study analysis that explored the lived experience of one challenged student team engaged in a virtual team project during an online project management course.

Participant Sample, Duration, Assignment
The course learning management system (LMS) used in this study contains longitudinal data covering multiple team projects. The experience of one troubled project team consisting of three students was chosen because this team escalated more frequently than the others, required the most instructor intervention and was the only team that agreed to adjust their final project grade according to their contribution. Their progress was evaluated for the duration of one semester.

Methodology
This case study builds upon findings by Lohle and Terrell (2016) where feedback from online students who engaged in virtual team projects was used to generate a grounded theory to help online instructors facilitate such projects. The researchers analyzed feedback from thirty-four students taking a project management course in an online M.B.A. program. Students were assigned to self-managed work teams in delivering a research paper and asked to discuss their experiences while coming together over the first three weeks of this eight week course. Their feedback generated this theoretical model:

Reference

Conclusion
Figure 2. Number of Communication Occurrences by Date.
This graph shows two peaks, one that spikes and decreases midway through the project and a sustained plateau of heightened activity from early May through the end of the project.

Since intense activity on this project occurred at midpoint and then later for an extended period it seems apparent this team never came together to resolve its issues.

Figure 3. Count of Margin Notes’ References to Accountability, Communications and Scheduling.
Evaluating Lohle and Terrell’s (2016) theoretical model using this analysis, while the team experienced communication and scheduling issues accountability issues outstripped both by a wide margin. Team members were preoccupied with fostering accountability in others while avoiding their own accountability. Since the team under study exhibited constant rancor and an inability to meet their commitments it is apparent their trust evaporated.

Unfortunately, this team’s tenacious lack of accountability ruined team trust. While this does not necessarily call the theoretical model into question, it suggests additional longitudinal studies are advisable to further understand the aspects of the model that are applicable for teams in various stages of success or duress. It would also be instructive to review the experience of a successful team from the same LMS data for comparison.