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| ***One original post and two follow-ons: An online discussion board roundtable***  **submitted for the 2016 OBTC Teaching Conference for Management Educators** |

1. Title, Abstract & Keywords

With the growth in online classrooms, information exchange among online instructors is important. The basic online classroom design is similar: recorded lectures, students placed in groups and discussion boards very little is known about the pedagogical significance of the use of discussion boards in the classroom. This roundtable session seeks to explore and brainstorm with other online instructors as a means of gathering and sharing best practices in the online-discussion board space. Participants are encouraged to bring their discussion board guidelines and rubrics to the roundtable.

Key Words: Discussion Boards, Feedback, Discussion Groups, Online Classroom

1. Format

Activity or exercise

x Roundtable discussion (60 minute only)

General discussion session

2a) For activities and exercises only, is yours best suited for

A traditional classroom

An online class

Either

2b) For activities and exercises only, is yours best suited for

Undergraduate students

Graduate students

Either

1. Time Requested:

30 Minutes

x 60 Minutes (*Roundtables must select 60 minutes*)

90 Minutes

1. Planning Details:

In 2015, the roundtable room did not have white board or flip tablets for each table – it would be beneficial to have this available.

1. Teaching Implications:

Discussions add a critical dimension to the learning process and the learning experience, whether these discussions take place in a traditional classroom or online. The importance is integral to both learner achievement and learner satisfaction (Andresen, 2009). This is even more so when it comes to management education. One area of considerable interest is how to bring case teaching and the case method pedagogy to the asynchronous online classroom as it is the most predominant teaching method in most business schools (Lavelle, 2012). Discussion boards are the main pedagogical tool used for the case method online (Rollag, 2010). Yet, there is considerable concern about whether the tool may be successfully adapted to the asynchronous environment or whether its use in the asynchronous environment will have the same impact. Case teaching, case method pedagogy is not the only method used in the online discussion board space, some instructors posit questions related to course topics, others suggest the use of discussion boards to work on projects or papers to instill a sense of community. Therefore, gathering and sharing best practices in the online-discussion board space and the effective facilitation of asynchronous discussion forums is more important now than ever.

Our session contributes to management pedagogy in several ways. First, we seek to join together a growing group of scholars who are building platforms to support learning in the online classroom. Second, we explore the potential for discussion boards to mentor and guide students through critical analysis of cases and course topics as opposed to “busy work.” Third, we offer a holistic perspective of discussion boards beginning with a discussion of discussion purpose through student feedback. Fourth, our desire is to build off the roundtable session and formulate a series of best practices for the use of discussion boards in the online pedagogical space.

1. Session Description and Plan:

Research in the online space has pointed to the need for discussion boards (Andresen, 2009), but this work has offered very little in terms of best practices. Discussion board goals, design, structure, and measurement of participation varies instructor to instructor. The two facilitators were drawn to develop this session because of their different approach to discussion boards, and a strong desire to understand how others are developing its use. Using several brainstorming techniques, this session is designed to network with other online instructors to formulate a holistic perspective of discussion board including purpose, structure, and measurement.

After a brief set of introductions to the topic and individuals at the roundtable, all participants would be offered pen and post-it notes.

First, as an ice breaker, participants would be asked to identify one thing they “love” vs. one thing they “abhor” about discussion boards. These would be collected via a cluster technique. The cluster technique is an effective way to pull together like ideas. To begin, one participant shares their idea, and then all other related ideas are collected and the collection of ideas are clustered into a topical group. For example, an individual might say “I love when students bring in complementary websites.” All related ideas like “bring in other articles, blog posts, or journal tweets” would be collected and clustered as “Complementary materials.”

Once that initial clustering is complete, each of the three components of discussion boards – purpose, structure and measurement - will be introduced to set the parameters of the discussion

Ten minutes will be spent on introductions and best/worst discussion boards. .

***Purpose.***

Discussion boards may serve both tacit and overt purposes in the online classroom. While they may be touted as a means of connecting students to each other, they also provide a tool for the instructor to monitor participation from the students, or to observe student leadership. Pedagogically, in some classrooms, boards may be designed to discuss the weekly readings, or to build the case analyses. The different purposes for discussion boards will alter the structure.

Therefor using the cluster technique, alternate purposes for discussion boards in the online classroom would be gathered from roundtable participants.

Participants would be asked, in one word, to designate the purpose(s) of discussion boards in their online classroom. Complimentary ideas would be gathered into clusters for discussion. (5 -7 minutes)

Participants would be asked to define, in a phrase, what the preferred purpose would be. (3 minutes)

***Structure***

The purpose of the discussion board will likely alter the design and structure of a discussion board. That is, weekly discussions with questions may suggest that there are guidelines and rules associated with posts/responses, while a simple purpose of connection may suggest that rules and restrictions on posting are somewhat lax. Thus, instructors using the discussion board may find that they while some instructors offer rules and guidelines for posting, others may believe that structure discourages the free-flow of discussion inhibiting the classroom-like experience.

The purpose of the boards will also guide the role of the instructor. Mazzolini and Maddison (2003, 2007) found that the role an instructor should undertake in an asynchronous discussion board (sage, guide, or ghost) depends on what the instructor wishes to accomplish. It is suggested that the ultimate goal of the design and appropriate management of discussion board forum is to create an online learning environment that will achieve high levels of learning (Andresen, 2009).

A final area to consider in the structure of the boards is the composition of the discussion group. Composition of student discussion groups for discussion board activities has been found to impact the discussions. For example, individual differences research suggests that females participate in the discussion more than males, and have higher levels of satisfaction using online learning discussion board (Ching & Hsu, 2015). Therefore, it is important to include a discussion of team composition in our roundtable.

To include all the areas of discussion board structure which are of interest, participants will be asked to describe their classroom through the following questions:

* Questions vs. free-flow? (Open discussion: 3 minutes)
* Original posts vs. follow on? (Open discussion: 3 minutes)
* Teams vs. Full class? If teams, random, crafted, or self-selected? (Open discussion: 3-5 minutes)
* Discussion is about case? Discussion is about deliverable? Discussion is about reading? (Open discussion: 3 minutes)
* Role of instructor - sage vs. guide vs. ghost? (5 minutes)

***Measurement***

Finally, the means by which discussion board participation is measured may also vary due to purpose, by structure of the boards, by course topic (Andresen, 2009). Active participation may be interpreted differently dependent on the discussion board purpose. For example, one instructor may measure with an eye for following the structural guidelines of number of posts, another may measure active participation by monitoring coursework integration, or student initiative in developing a discussion.

Using a mixture of techniques, participants in the roundtable will be asked to brainstorm on the following.

* How often should a discussion board be graded? (Show of hands: 1 minute)
* Graded at team or individual input level or both? (Show of hands: 1 minute)
* What are the parameters of measurement? (Brainstorm: 3 minutes)
* What does active participation mean to you? (Brainstorm: 5 minutes)
* What does quality participation mean to you? (Brainstorm: 5 minutes)

We propose the use of both open discussion and brainstorming to elicit discussion board practices and wishes from across the roundtable participants and engage them in the conversation. As each topic is introduced, participants would be discuss, and/or encouraged to write their comments on post-its. All discussion will be collected onto a white board. These brainstorming techniques are used to encourage the maximum number of responses from the participants and to begin to highlight similarities within the different larger topics of purpose (emulate classroom discussion, monitor participation, encourage critical thinking); structure (e.g. number of responses, questions vs. case analysis, instructor driven/student driven, and so forth) and measurement (number of measurements, type of feedback, group vs. individual, and so forth).

After the session, notes will be typed up and shared to a dropbox® for participants who so desire.

1. Application to Conference theme:

Management education, and teaching and learning in general, by their very nature, keep changing. In recent years both anecdotal and research evidence have indicated a noticeable move from lecture-based activities towards more student-centered learning. Additionally, online education is experiencing exponential growth phase becoming one of the most talked about and fastest growing sectors in higher education and corporate training today. The use of discussion boards as a pedagogical tool is an increasingly popular form of teaching online and has an important role in developing skills and knowledge in students as well as connecting them in the online space. Thus this roundtable session opens many avenues to *unite us in service.*

* Understanding best practices and sharing information about discussion boards allows us *to support ourselves and our colleagues*.
* This discussion gives us permission to move beyond traditional uses of discussion boards and think creatively, helping to build a classroom climate *where students support each other towards a common goal and move beyond the classroom to apply their understanding of course topics to multiple industry types and organizational settings.*
* Finally, this discussion *continues to build and unite the community of instructors teaching in the online space.*

There is no better theme under which to discuss the issues raised in this proposal than *United in Service.*

1. Unique Contribution to OBTC:

This is a unique contribution to OBTC and to the field. One of the facilitators is currently working with a team of researchers to explore the online discussion board and its use in the pedagogical space. This roundtable discussion extends that work by exploring the practices from across a number of instructors, as well as preferences for the online discussion board space.

**References**

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