



Teaching Conference for Management Educators

**OBTC 2016 at Walsh University
June 8th – 11th, 2016**

Submission Template

SUBMISSION GUIDANCE

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**Submission Template for the
2016 OBTC Teaching Conference for Management Educators**

1) Title, Abstract & Keywords

In your abstract, please include a brief session description (not to exceed 100 words), and three to four keywords. If your proposal is accepted, this description will be printed in the conference program.

Title of Proposal: Preparing students for virtual teams - the use of virtual tools in the management classroom

Abstract:

Working virtually has become the norm and students need to learn how to use technology to work in geographically dispersed teams. The purpose of this session is to introduce three different technological platforms and specific assignments that we have used (in on-ground classes, but which also could be used in online teaching) that help students practice how to communicate with one another in both asynchronous and synchronous platforms. Participants will leave the session with both a greater understanding of several technology tools, but also specific activities that they can take back to their classrooms. Relevant materials will also be provided.

Keywords:

Virtual tools, communication, online

2) Format

- ☐ Activity or exercise
- ☐ 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

3) Time Requested:

☐ 30 Minutes

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

☒ 90 Minutes

The session can be run in either a 60 or 90-minute format. Timelines for each are shown later in this proposal.

4) Planning Details:

Each room contains a white board with markers, computer (PC) with DVD capability and computer projector. Does your session require any other equipment?

No other equipment required.

5) Teaching Implications:

What is the contribution of your session to management pedagogy/andragogy? Specifically, please include your learning objectives, and describe what management and/or teaching topics are relevant to your session, and why. Also, include theoretical, disciplinary, or theoretical foundations that will help reviewers understand how your ideas fit within the broader field of management.

Geographically dispersed teams are becoming a new norm in the workplace. According to Ferrazzi (2014), 79% of knowledge workers either frequently or regularly work in virtual teams. However, virtual teams frequently fall short of their goals (Govindarajan & Gupta, 2001) unless they are well-managed (Ferrazzi, 2014). Furthermore, research has shown that there's a negative relationship between degree of virtuality and communication, coordination, trust, and team performance (Gibson & Cohen, 2002). Because virtuality creates an environment in which there's greater uncertainty about others' motivation and efforts, one's ability to communicate effectively through technological media likely becomes a significant precursor to becoming an effective virtual worker, team member and leader (Geister, et al. 2006).

We as Management educators must provide students with valuable experiences that help them prepare for work environments in which virtual teams are becoming increasingly common. For example, by introducing a new virtual team exercise ("Tinsel Town") to our courses last year, which involved students collaborating online with students from other universities, our students were able to compare their virtual and face-to-face team experiences firsthand, and bring course concepts (e.g., leadership, trust, and social loafing) to life. However, it is difficult to know which tools to introduce because virtual

teams are still a relatively new development in the workplace and there are numerous tools from which to choose.

Some scholars argue that millennials' increased comfort with and acceptance of technology may allow them to see virtual teams as more commonplace than those from previous generations (Gilson, et al., 2015). Yet, in our experience, even though our millennial students are assumed to be "digital natives,"¹ and tech-savvy, their use of online technologies has been primarily for social and entertainment purposes. Even though they might be more comfortable with and accepting of technology (Gilson et al, 2015), they lack the experience of working with online tools in a professional environment with high levels of accountability. In the traditional classroom, team communication is often in real-time and face-to-face with e-mail and texting utilized to arrange team meetings or share documents. When we replace the real-time and/or face-to-face elements with asynchronous and/or virtual elements, students are faced with the novel communication constraint of not being able to meet face-to-face. This creates the challenge of having to communicate and present oneself based on the limitations inherent to virtual tools, such as synchronous, asynchronous, video, text, or a combination of different platforms. For example, students can no longer rely on visual cues if they are communicating with text only. Students might also need to be more precise and deliberate in how they communicate online because of technical infrastructure constraints, which might limit their ability to use synchronous video platforms (i.e. due to limited bandwidth). By enabling students to work within these types of constraints in class projects, they will be more prepared to work in virtual environments in organizations.

In today's education market, there are many tools that instructors can utilize to introduce virtual teamwork to the classroom experience. There are also tools included in many learning management systems (e.g. Blackboard or Moodle) that are often not used because instructors are unaware of *how* they might be used. In this session, we will introduce three different platforms along with related activities/assignments that provide students with opportunities to develop their virtual communication skills, thereby helping them become more effective virtual workers, team members, and managers in their future careers.

6) Session Description and Plan:

What will you actually do in this session? If appropriate, please include a timeline estimating the activities will you facilitate: how long will they take, and how will

¹ <http://marcprensky.com/teaching-digital-natives-partnering-for-real-learning/>

participants be involved? Please remember that reviewers will be evaluating how well the time request matches the activities you'd like to do, and the extent you can reasonably accomplish the session's goals. Reviewers will also be looking for how you are engaging the participants in the session.

The proposed session is intended to be both informative and interactive, with presentations of the featured platforms as well as opportunities for group discussion and for participants to brainstorm ways that they could use these (and other similar) technologies in their own classrooms. Participants will be encouraged to ask questions, suggest ways to assign or utilize each virtual activity, and describe any additional virtual team activities that they have assigned in their courses. Discussion will also cover some of the challenges of using virtual tools and ways to address those challenges.

Featured platforms

Three types of tools will be featured in the session:

1. Basecamp (asynchronous platform)

Basecamp is an asynchronous communication platform that allows students to collaborate virtually. It is a website (currently free for professors and their students) that is comprised of discussion threads, file uploads, and required “to-dos” as specified by the professor. Students can easily be divided into teams, which makes it ideal to use in conjunction with virtual team activities. Specifically, we will show how Basecamp can be used as a collaboration platform for students conducting the “Tinsel Town” activity in virtual teams formed across multiple sections or universities.

2. Presenter's Podium (asynchronous video platform)

Presenter's Podium is a platform for students to record short video presentations, which are then evaluated anonymously (and asynchronously) by their peers. It can be assigned in both traditional and online courses as a tool for students to refine their online presentation skills and give constructive feedback to their peers. For online courses, it also creates a sense of community among the students by allowing them to see one another when they are evaluating their peers' video presentations. The creators and a user of this platform will describe possible ways that Presenter's Podium can be utilized to enhance management courses.

3. Blackboard Collaborate and Google Hangouts (synchronous platforms)

Blackboard Collaborate is one example of a synchronous collaboration platform that is available through a learning management system (LMS), while Google Hangouts is a no-cost synchronous collaboration platform. Both have advantages and challenges, and both have been used effectively as tools for student collaboration, and to teach virtual work skills. We will compare these two platforms, and discuss the ways that they can be used to teach an exercise that targets the development of virtual work skills. This exercise requires students to use a synchronous collaboration platform (such as Collaborate or Hangout) to create a short job design and hiring plan proposal for a new virtual team. The exercise is somewhat unique in that it requires students to apply concepts related to virtual work skills (in their development of the proposal), while also utilizing those skills themselves (as they are working virtually to complete the assignment).

Timeline

The session can be run in either a 60 or 90-minute length, as follows:

Activity	Duration for 90-minute program	Duration for 60-minute program
Introductions and brief discussion of tools/platforms already used by participants	10	5
Presentation and Q&A on Basecamp with Tinsel Town activity	20	12
Presentation and Q&A on Presenter's Podium tool and online presentation assignment	20	12
Presentation and Q&A on Blackboard Collaborate and Google Hangouts and virtual work skills activity/assignment	20	12
Brainstorming session and further discussion – how can participants use these tools in their own classes?	15	14
Wrap-up	5	5
TOTAL	90	60

7) Application to Conference theme:

How does your session fit with the overall OBTC theme of United in Service?

This session fits in with the overall OBTC theme of *United in Service*, in the sense that these virtual tools can potentially enable students to serve others in a broader context beyond their immediate communities. Technology can be used as a tool to unite geographically dispersed students for projects.

Additionally, the make-up of the panel reflects the uniting and collaboration of educators and software developers to serve students: Three of the presenters are educators (at three different institutions in the U.S. and Canada), and one of the presenters is an entrepreneur who developed one of the platforms being discussed in this session.

8) Unique Contribution to OBTC:

Have you presented the work in this proposal before? If so, how will it be different? Is this proposal under current review somewhere else? If so, please explain. How will your proposal be different for the OBTC conference?

This work has not been presented at OBTC. Two of the presenters have talked about how they have used two of the tools in specific contexts as part of prior presentations at other conferences such as TLC at AOM and the Atlantic Schools of Business conference. However, this proposed presentation, showing in a broader, comparative fashion how instructors can use these three different virtual tools in several ways to enhance their courses, has not been given previously.

References:

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- Ferrazzi, K. (2014). Getting Virtual Teams Right. *Harvard Business Review*, 92(12), 120-123.
- Gibson, C., and Cohen, S. (2002), Is There Anybody Out There? The Impact of Virtuality on Individual Psychological States and Team Enabling Conditions,” paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Academy of Management, Denver, CO).

- Gilson, L. L., Maynard, M. T., & Bergiel, E. B. 2013. Virtual Team Effectiveness: An Experiential Activity. *Small Group Research*, 44(4), 412-427.
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