Proposal

The spirit of this proposal is, first, to discuss briefly the mystery we have witnessed regarding nearly all of my students who, by the time they reach the capstone course in Strategic Management or Organizational Behavior, are, on the one hand, expected to have some, high level of ability to think critically about myriad areas and, on the other hand, are typically not willing to do so and instead vociferously clamor for "structure and guidance." Having collectively taught these particular courses for several semesters, we experience similar feedback from the majority of our students every semester. Pretty generally, they all want some form of guidance, even when the project specifically asks them to come up with an answer by themselves and even when they are told "there is no right answer."

We have cogitated on this mystery for some time, and we conclude that it is we professors and instructors in academia who have ultimately let our students down; for, from the very start of college, term papers, projects, even take home exams—every assignment handed to students comes with a strict guideline and structure by which they must abide in order to receive a "good grade." These days, we even give them a rubric in most cases so that they know exactly what they must do at each grade level. In other words, students are given little leeway to think critically about anything in their grade-based assignments and thus are primed throughout their college stay never to think outside the box and to do precisely what the rubric and guidelines tell them to do in order to receive a grade.

To counter this problem, many professors offer in-class activities such as debates, open-ended discussions, and various experiential activities that invoke critical thinking. Exams, too, can be offered in a format that compels critical thinking if they are in essay format, for example, and ask students to align disparate ideas through logical extrapolation and reason. Term papers can be designed to ask specifically that students engage in critical thinking, namely by offering very little structure and guidance.

Following is the second part of our proposal which is bifurcated by presenters Bahareh Javadizadeh and Hank Strevel. Both presenters will propose their own idea regarding how to motivate critical thinking in the classroom.

Problem-based learning is a wide-known instructional approach that has been used in numerous fields for over 30 years. This method helps any sorts of learner to reconsider what s/he knows, search for what s/he doesn't know and then apply the obtained knowledge in order to find a solution to a defined problem (Ertmer, 2015). Teachers in organizational behavior class can use this method to help students learn how to think critically about the theories they read in their book, or learn in the class and apply them in their real problems. Using this approach can enable students to develop necessary skills to find solutions for a personal or work related problem.

The following proposal is based on a class project that I defined for my students from the beginning of the semester in my OB class. All of my students enjoyed this exercise and wrote positive feedbacks in the anonymous class evaluation. They expressed how this method encouraged students to think outside the box and use the newly learned skills. Using a problem-based learning (PBL) approach which follows six steps, I developed a customized PBL method for this class. The title of six steps were: problem identification, problem-based research,

solution plans, personal SWOT, adjusting the solution plan, and reflection. The main purpose of this assignment was to help students become actively involved in learning rather than passively participating in the class through traditional ways of teaching.

Students were required to give thoughtful answers to discussion questions each week during the semester which added up to a total of 13 discussions. 6 of these discussions were distinguished by a star in the schedule. They were informed from the beginning of the class that these stared discussions cannot be missed and in case they fail to submit them, they need to submit it with the next week's discussion with a -10 present penalty for the late submission. They were also required to put all 6 steps together, make necessary changes and submit it as one piece in the final week of the semester. The six steps are as follows:

Step 1 (Discussion 3*)

Intro & Class Activity: Think about your most important concern at work, school, or in your personal life. It could be any concern that you have been struggling with recently or simply bothered you at work, school, or home, and write two to three paragraphs describing the problem in details. Next, think about any Organizational Behavior concepts that can be possibly related to the described problem. It is highly recommended to choose a work-related problem as your OB problem; however, because not all of you are employed at the moment, I also accept problems you encounter at school or that deal with issues in your personal life. This is your effort to make a change in your work, or personal life. So, I encourage you to look at this project as something you need to do for your own sake rather than a meaningless assignment for a class that is probably going to be forgotten in the next few years. **(8-minute Mark)**

Step 2 (Discussion 6)

All of you have identified a problem to address in discussion 3*. Now it's time for the second part of your project. In this part, you are required to find at least three articles (from any reliable source) that can help you find solutions to your problem. Submit annotated bibliographies in addition to a short description paragraph for each one of your sources. Remember that you are working on the problems that you have chosen, and have specific meaning to you. Therefore, I expect you to do your best in this part. **This portion will not be included at OBTC, other than to explain what would happen in Step 2.**

Step 3 (Discussion 8*)

Now, it's time to develop a step-by-step action plan to address your problem. Feel free to answer in a bulleted format. You need to have a due date for each step that you developed. The main reason that I ask you to add a deadlines for your solution plan is to make yourself stick to the plan and prevent you from falling into the "I will start from the next Monday" trap. **This portion will not be included at OBTC, other than to explain what would happen in Step 3.**

Step 4 (Discussion 9*)

Class Activity—Students work independently.

After you've defined your solution plan, the next step is to understand more about yourself and your external environment. This is where the SWOT analysis is helpful. It stands for:

S = Strengths (internal)

W = Weaknesses (internal)

O = Opportunities (external)

T = Threats (external)

This process captures information about your internal strengths and weaknesses as well as external opportunities and threats. Key to completing your SWOT analysis is to treat your solution plan as a business and yourself as a competitive product. You can simply fill the blanks in this table following the instructions:

Strengths: 1 2 3 . . .	Weaknesses: 1 2 3 . . .
Opportunities 1 2 3 . . .	Threats: 1 2 3 . . .

Strengths

A personal strength is an asset to you as a product and can be used as a way to differentiate yourself from others.

Ask these questions from yourself:

What are you good at?

What do you like to do?

What do people say you are good at?

Examples of strengths: Strong project management skills, experience and training in presenting to large audiences, proven successful sales abilities.

Weaknesses

A personal weakness is a liability or an area of opportunity for growth. These are characteristics you could improve. You can ask the following questions from yourself:

What are your potential liabilities?

What are your skills you need to reach the goals you want?

What are the things you need to improve?

What are the tasks you avoid doing?

What are your negative work habits?

Examples: Disorganized, uncomfortable speaking in front of groups, tendency to procrastinate, poor listener.

Opportunities & Threats

When thinking about your opportunities and threats, I always find it easier to begin with the "threats." As objectively as possible, judge your threats and determine possible ways to overcome them.

Threats

Threats are external factors that may work against you. Example: New technology that you do not know, Student X is much better than me at presenting in front of groups and so on.

Opportunity

Opportunities are the trends you can take advantage of. Opportunities are external to you but are things you may be able to take advantage of. Examples: seek out opportunities to present in front of audiences, Take a speech class or join a program (such as Toastmasters) and so on.

NOTE: The purpose of the personal SWOT analysis is to identify actions you can take to best meet the requirements of your solution plan. Using the personal SWOT analysis exercise will help you sharpen your strengths, improve your weaknesses, identify opportunities for development and neutralize or overcome your threats. (18-minute Mark)

Classroom Discussion:

In the previous discussion, you learnt about your strengths and weaknesses, the threats and opportunities. Students are asked to volunteer their answers in a round robin session which will help those students who were not as creative or needed help coming up with a viable SWOT. **(26-minute Mark)**

Step 5 (Discussion 10*)

Now is the time to revise you solution plan based on what you learnt from your SWOT matrix. Decide which strategies in your solution plan will help you take the most advantages of your strength and the opportunities in the environment and defeat your weaknesses and the threats. Comment on each strategy you choose or omit. Add new strategies if necessary. **This portion will not be included at OBTC, other than to explain what would happen in Step 5.**

Step 6: (Discussion 11*)

In one page or less describe how you feel about doing these assignments. Explain what you learnt about yourself and what challenges you faced while developing your problem definition, solution plan and drawing your SWOT analysis. If you decided to use this method again in the future, what changes will you make to your project. Debriefing follows. **(30-minute Mark)**

Intro:
       Indeed, my students seem to be able to communicate their opinions and background in classroom discussions quite well, but when it comes to relatively new topics such as business ethics, for instance, the room tends to grow quiet. To be fair, students are able to give reasonable answers to the question of ethics given specific examples such as Abu-Ghraib, Enron, and the Russian doping programme. However, when students are asked to give a cogent answer to the questions, "How do you know what 'good' and 'bad' is?" or "From where do your ethics come?," the common rebuttal from students is that they require more structure in order to answer that question in 2-3, single-spaced pages—which is the required length of their "Philosophy of Ethics" portion of their portfolio due at the end of every semester. It is here where I begin class—with a question, followed by a discussion of what students think about human nature. For instance, do they believe in free will? Determinism? Are humans inherently good only be corrupted later? Or is it the converse?
       I used to start out with a common question first like, "why do we stop at stop signs?," but I have found that although students generally give the "correct" answer, they are not able to think critically very well about where that answer stems. So, now, I start the discussion off with a series of questions (in conjunction with those ones already mentioned) about morals and ethics—are they different? If so, how? Do they come from different origins? What are these origins? Do they change over time? I get a variety of answers, and have found that the "religious folks" are quite unlikely to speak up and that the "seculars" have never really given the question of ethics or morality and their origins much thought. On occasion, you will be pleasantly surprised that someone has read the "script" in one of their classes and can give definitive, yet incomplete, answers.
       Once you've had this discussion for several minutes, the students are now primed to think

critically about the stop sign question so that when you ask it, you will more likely entice students to speak up. Some students will inevitably give the "society told me so" mantra, whereas others, if they were willing to speak up, might say that "God tells us to give unto Caesar what is Caesar's" which translates into we must follow Man's laws (this is the morality alone— that is, not ethics—argument) or that rather than society, it is God who dictates what is right or wrong and because stopping at stop signs can save lives, it is both morally and ethically correct to do so. You will almost never get this latter answer. Nearly always, however, there will be someone who gives the "society told me so" answer which is pretty easy to falsify with an illustration of Nazi Germany, Jim Crow Law in the USA, and until recently Chinese policy to kill baby girls because of the belief by Chinese society that "boys are better than girls."

Questions involving these examples as illustrations generally lead students who pay tribute to society to question that tribute and their subsequent blind obeisance—which is the point of this exercise. I want students to question how they know that some act, law, or belief is "correct," "ethical," or "moral" because, even if students never come to terms about where their ethics stem, just thinking about it will give them some insight moving forward as they transition from college to "real life." I also strongly believe that ethics of any kind are not nearly emphasized as much as they ought to be in college.

Format: Entire Class

Questions to class: From where do ethics come? Another way of asking is the following: How do you determine what is "good" and what is "bad?" **(8-minute Mark)**

Classroom discussion period should last about five minutes before having students break up into small groups to discuss this question in more depth. Students are instructed to come up with a scenario (examples will be given in class to prime them) and to discuss it in terms of this question. **(13-minute Mark)**

After about 5 minutes of animated discussion, I ask students to work independently and to write a couple of paragraphs about their own thoughts regarding this question. I have found that students who may otherwise not feel engaged in the verbal discussion are happy to have the opportunity to express themselves in a different venue notwithstanding. This portion of the classroom activity should take no more than 5 minutes. **(18-minute Mark)**

Format: Entire Class

Bring it back to class: After students have had time to discuss (and to write) the above question in more detail, in conjunction with a specific scenario, a bit of a round robin ensues so that students from each group are able to voice their group's consensus (if one exists—if differences of opinion exist within a single group, students are permitted to voice them). Permitting students to voice their group's discussions with the entire class allows for further discussion and meaningful debate. This period should take about 8 minutes, depending on class size and number of groups. **(26-minute Mark)**

Debriefing to students follows: If anything, making decisions in the real world is many times more difficult than it is in college where "second chances" are common and failing is often

softened by a series of safety nets. Even failing an ethical decision such as "to plagiarize or not to plagiarize" is easier to overcome in college than it is in the real world. Professors generally do not seek the maximum penalty for cases of plagiarism but, rather, usually strongly censure the student for plagiarizing by giving him or her a "zero" on the assignment. On the other hand, if you're caught cheating in the real world, it's over. There are no second chances. You are simply fired, and good luck getting another job with that kind of track record. Rather than advocate a stronger punishment for cheating in college, it is my personal belief that the reason why so many business people fall into "ethics traps" so easily is because no one forced them to think about the veritable, "soul searching" question of ethics while they were students. **(30-minute Mark)**

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:

To Think Or to Blindly Follow: What Are We Actually Teaching Students in the Classroom?

Abstract:

Our bifurcated strategy to engage students meaningfully is intended to entice students to think critically about themselves and, in particular, how they can relate what they know about themselves to the real world. When students perform a simple SWOT analysis regarding their own strengths, weaknesses, threats, and opportunities, they begin to engage in what the Greeks called *aletheia*, which is the unveiling of truth. In turn, *aletheia* can stimulate increased awareness about their need to be more aware in the first place. This fact becomes increasingly important when faced with inevitable ethical decisions that require thoughtful, meaningful, and decisive action.

Keywords:
Critical Thinking, Ethics, Problem-Based Learning

2) 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.

See #4 below on "Application to Conference Theme.

3) 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 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.

Both sections (one by Bahareh and one by Hank) will take 60 minutes. Please see above proposal (both sections) for timeline and class activities.

4) Application to Conference Theme:

How does your session fit with the overall OBTC theme of *Navigating the Changing Currents*?

Challenging our students while also trying to navigate the muddy waters created by student-based teaching evaluations that seem to incentivize bad teaching practices like "teaching to the test," for instance, is made more daunting in the wake of the high likelihood that students are not really learning how to think critically about extremely important topics like business ethics or ethics in general while they are in college. We teach Business Management classes ranging from Human Resources Management, Organizational Behavior, and the capstone course in Strategic Management, and, in all classes, we have found that our students—though exceedingly bright with great potential—either cannot or are unwilling to think critically about topics like leadership, ethics, or money. Koehn (2005) advocated in the *Business Ethics Quarterly* that regulation along will not stop bad ethical behavior. Rather, we professors and instructors must evaluate anew our pedagogical strategy to get students thinking about business ethics before they ever graduate. In a similar vein, my colleague, Bahareh, strongly avers that thinking critically at all, about numerous subjects, will help prime students to think critically about important issues like ethics. I agree.

5) 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?

N/A