



Teaching Conference for
Management Educators

OBTC 2017 at Providence College June 14th – 17th, 2017

Submission Template

SUBMISSION GUIDANCE

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Submission Template for the 2017 OBTC Teaching Conference for Management Educators

1) Title, Abstract & Keywords

Creating a Learning Community to Navigate the Changing Current of Social Isolation

One of the main changing currents to navigate is the increase in social isolation. Even as students are more “connected,” there is an increasing level of distractions to learning. It is harder to get students engaged at a time when interaction and engagement is critical. This session provides interactive exercises to build the skills and sense of community needed in preparing future leaders for the changing workplace.

Keywords: Learning Community, Social Isolation, Listening Skills, Mindfulness

2) Teaching Implications:

Based on his most recent book, *Thank You for Being Late: An Optimist's Guide to Thriving in the Age of Accelerations*, Thomas Friedman believes “the most prevalent disease in the country is social isolation. And yet we are more ‘connected’ than ever.” Sheryl Turkle reinforces that people are “alone together” making it necessary to “reclaim conversation.” To enhance learning, educators need to create a sense of community to help overcome social isolation. It is a challenge to maintain students’ focus and attention in this “noisy” environment when distractions are numerous.

When performance replaces learning as the main purpose of education, the environment can become filled with fear and resistance. To get students’ attention, professors often become entertainers or disciplinarians when the better role is to become an architect in creating spaces where students want to learn. This involves a shift in mindset from a focus on teaching to that of learning. How can we best structure classes so students learn what matters most?

This session describes how to design the space for community learning. It will focus on introducing interactive exercises that build a sense of community where students know each other better which leads to trust. Since it is hard to trust someone you do not know, some of the exercises will help students get to know each other better with an emphasis on active listening skills. The exercises are complementary because when we learn to listen to each other, we know each other at a deeper level and have a deeper sense of connectedness and trust for creating a learning community.

The theoretical foundation for this session is the literature on the growing social isolation, being mindful, building community, and improving listening skills. The literature indicates people are lonelier than in the past (See References). As we prepare students to be leaders in workplaces, they will need to create a sense of community within their

organizations. Our role as educators is to help students learn the skills in college that will help them perform and succeed when employed.

Creating a learning community does not happen automatically. As educators, we need to be aware of the value and then be intentional about allocating course time to making community happen. Once our consciousness is raised about this topic, it might be one of the most important roles we play to enhance learning in all subjects and all courses.

The learning objectives for this session include:

- Understanding the value of investing course time for creating a learning community.
- Recognizing the distractions to learning that exist in the “changing currents.”
- Focusing on the significance of developing active listening skills and practicing mindfulness for building a sense of community.
- Practicing these skills now because of the need that exists in current and future workplaces.

3) Session Description and Plan:

The goal of the session will be to introduce exercises and then practice. Ideally, this session would be at least 60 minutes to allow time for explanation and then demonstration/interaction.

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|-------------------------------------|------------|
| • Background/Theoretical Foundation | 10 minutes |
| • Brief Description of Activities | 10 |
| • Engagement/Interaction | 30 |
| • Debrief/Answer Questions | 10 |

If this session were allocated 90 minutes, more exercises could be shared and more interaction would take place.

4) Application to Conference theme:

“We create our world by what we choose to notice.” Margaret Wheatley - “A Simpler Way”

One of the primary changing currents and obstacles to learning is getting people to pay attention—to notice—given all of the “noise” that exists as a result of social media, technology, shortened attention spans, and numerous other distractions.

In order to learn, people need to listen to the instructor and to each other. Students need to be aware that what they choose to notice influences their world—work and life.

The purpose of this session is to share a variety of methods used in courses—Organizational Behavior, Leadership, and Diversity—to attract and sustain students’ attention and focus and to build a sense of community of trust. These are tried and

true methods that have been used successfully with both undergraduate and graduate students over many years.

As this current of distraction continues, these learning methods can be used to navigate the waves for smoother sailing!

5) Unique Contribution to OBTC:

I have not presented this proposal in the past and it is not under review. Some of the ideas to be shared were published in my leadership book a few years ago. But all of the exercises are ones I have been using for several years and I continue to use them, modify them as needed, and add more exercises to my repertoire (bag of tricks).

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