

DESIGNING AND IMPLEMENTING A MANAGEMENT PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT WORKSHOP

ABSTRACT

Case studies are an effective way to encourage critical thinking, leadership, teamwork, communication, decision making, complex problem solving, and creativity in Management education. And they have additional benefits if used outside the traditional classroom setting including networking opportunities, transfer of learning, and professional development. This session outlines the inspiration, design, and implementation of an annual internal case competition for undergraduate business students. Now in its fifth year, we discuss challenges overcome, lessons learned, and future goals for such an event. Session participants will gain the technical information and confidence to facilitate one of the many variations this model allows.

KEYWORDS

case study; case competition; student engagement; professional development

INTRODUCTION AND TEACHING IMPLICATION

Case studies are commonplace in the Management classroom, and for good reason: they encourage skill building in leadership, teamwork, communication, decision making, complex problem solving, and creativity through critical thinking, reflection, integration of knowledge, and application of theory to practice (Foster & Carboni, 2008; Learned, 1991; Rendtorff, 2015; Vega, 2009). Despite it sounding simple, teaching Management students how to think effectively is the most critical and complex task of a Management educator (Smith, 2003), and exposure to case studies can assist with successfully accomplishing this. Yet as companies and state legislatures call for increased real-world training and ingenuity of graduates (IBM, 2012), we argue that the benefits of the case study method can be expanded to include experiences such as networking, greater transfer of learning, and résumé building if applied in a case competition format outside of the classroom. This places a greater emphasis on students taking responsibility for their learning (Corner, et.al., 2006), an accountability critical for students to recognize, as the network they build during their undergraduate years is invaluable to their ability to place themselves in their first job and advance through an organization. Financial constraints, lack of student availability outside formal class time, and other challenges, however, may make such events difficult, particularly for smaller universities.

Inspired by the advantages students would gain from participating in a case competition, we designed and implemented a Management Professional Development Workshop for traditional undergraduate business students. Now in its fifth year and including nearly one hundred student, faculty, and business executive participants, this Workshop provides students with Management content, guest speakers, networking opportunities, case competition experience, and overall professional development. Throughout the duration of its offering, we

have learned much about the most effective design and efficient delivery of such a large event. In this session, we not only share technical design, logistic, and facilitation tips so that others may facilitate a similar Workshop for their students, but we also discuss our inspirations, challenges faced, lessons learned, and future goals so that others' learning curve is advanced and confidence is strengthened.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

Students participated in the development of learning objectives for the initial design of the Workshop. This was beneficial because we could be sure that student expectations were being met. These learning objectives have remained the foundation for the Workshop each year since its inception:

1. build professionalism by expanding current managerial skillsets;
2. gain a better understanding of the impact of team functioning on success;
3. develop a capacity to think and act creatively through brainstorming and problem solving;
4. practice effective presentation skills, especially in the form of persuasion;
5. encounter and understand how to appropriately manage common and realistic workplace situations.

EXERCISE OVERVIEW

Because we are preparing to offer this Workshop for the fifth year, past offerings have varied in style, and we look forward to applying new ideas in the future. We have many details to share in the conference session, but here we will briefly outline the Workshop's most recent design, explain lessons of what was not efficient in past designs, and finally share expectations we have for the design of the Workshop in the future.

The Management Professional Development Workshop was offered for the fourth time in Fall 2017. It was designed in a day and one half format. Registration started approximately one month before the event and was open until one week before the event (since numbers were needed for budgeting and food orders). Students registered for this free event by simply turning in a form with their name and contact information. During registration, they were also given the opportunity to register as a team of four students or as an individual (in which case they would be placed on a team of four students). The event ran from Thursday at 4:00pm until Friday at 7:00pm.

The goals for Thursday were for students to (a) get to know the members of their team, (b) strengthen their Management knowledge, and (c) be introduced to the business case for the case competition. After being welcomed, students participated in ice breakers, and information was shared on the importance of team cohesiveness and its effects on team functioning. Next, students attended a number of sessions aimed at general professional development in critical thinking, leadership, teamwork, decision making, creativity, and business etiquette. Finally, the business case was extended to the teams along with a session on the most effective and efficient way to approach a large organizational problem such as what was presented to them. Teams were not required to work on the case overnight, but they were not prevented from doing so.

The case was written specifically for this event by a professor in our department. Teams were placed in the role of Management consultants with a specialty in the high-tech and engineering industries. They were introduced to a company that was seeking assistance with increasing its profits and improving other business outcomes. The case focused on a start-up company and issues it was facing as it attempted to scale including the management of a fluid and growing workforce, a fractured organizational structure, morale issues, and

product/market/fit challenges. The structure of the case allowed teams to take a number of directions in their solution design.

The goals for Friday were for students to (a) build and present their case solution and (b) network with business executives. In the morning, teams were paired with a faculty mentor and given time to craft their case solution. Midday, students attended a business formal networking lunch with local business executives, the Dean of the College, and the President of the University (who was the keynote speaker). These participants were distributed among tables so that students could interact with the executives as well as discuss internships and job opportunities. In the afternoon, teams formally presented their case solutions to the business executives who served as judges for the case competition. This time served as an excellent chance for students to demonstrate their knowledge, skills, and abilities, and be recognized by the business executives as potential hires. The case competition rounds were carefully structured such that when a team was not presenting, it was observing other teams give their presentations, a model that enhanced the overall learning experience. After the presentations, a panel discussion took place during which the business executives provided feedback to the students. The event concluded with an informal awards dinner.

This Workshop format has developed from more humble origins, and the earlier three versions of the Workshop provided us with many lessons learned. The business case and case competition have always been the foundation of the Workshop, as they allow us to satisfy our learning objectives. But the design and execution have been altered to improve the student experience. For example, in the first two years of the Workshop, an outside facilitator was brought in for the event. There were advantages to this model, including the fact that students enjoyed the professional development sessions being led by a consultant and not by the professors.

they worked with regularly in classes. This model, however, is more expensive, and we chose to have the professional development sessions led by our own faculty due to budget constraints. We have also tried a variety of days and times for the Workshop: all day Friday and half day Saturday; all day Friday only; Thursday evening and all day Friday). We have found that the Thursday evening and all day Friday format is the best balance of allowing meaningful time to develop the case solution while being respectful of student personal and professional schedules. Finally, each year we have increased the involvement of business executives, and we find that the more students can interact with these executives, the better their experience.

Looking forward to the fifth offering of the Workshop, we have identified additional changes that will improve the event and address feedback from participants. First, we recognize a need for a systematic approach to corporate sponsorship. While our design of the Workshop is an affordable endeavor, it does cost a few thousand dollars to execute properly, especially if we want to expand our network of judges and speakers. Second, we plan to construct a website to handle not only the student registration for the event but also serve as an advertising and recruitment means for those corporate sponsors and business executives who want to volunteer and support the event. Third, feedback from previous years has suggested that the experience for freshmen students is quite different from that of senior students. In response to this, our goal is to provide different professional development sessions for students based on their progress toward their degree. Fourth, we seek to incorporate more interaction between the teams and business executives in terms of the business case (Sachau & Naas, 2010). These future goals will be discussed in more detail during the conference session.

SESSION DESCRIPTION

Session participants will gain a full understanding of not only the importance of offering a Workshop experience for students, but also the information necessary to immediately implement such an event. The 60 minutes we are requesting for this session are organized as follows:

- The *10 minute Introduction* will be an open discussion of how participants currently offer their students chances for real-world application. The discussion will be directed such that the realization that more structured and psychologically safe opportunities are needed outside the classroom. This not only has academic benefits, but also increased student and community (i.e. business executives) engagement.
- The *15 minute Explanation of the Workshop* will allow presenters to share the Workshop design and answer technical questions from the session participants. Not only will presenters focus on the information and materials needed to implement such a Workshop, but we will also explain the “behind the scenes” logistics of planning and facilitating such an event efficiently.
- The *three 10 minute rounds (30 minutes total) of Think-Pair-Share* will allow session participants to consider how they can adapt this concept to their own academic community. In the first round, we will encourage participants to consider how they can adapt our model to fit their own academic environment. In the second round, we will consider the first round as a “false start” in the design thinking process, and offer participants the opportunity to improve upon their initial Workshop adaptation. Finally, in the last round, we will discuss the challenges of different adaptations and brainstorm solutions for efficiency and effectiveness.

- The *5 minute Conclusion* will allow the presenters to summarize main ideas from the Think-Pair-Share rounds and address remaining questions.

CONCLUSION

It is critical students be offered opportunities for real-world application of their business knowledge, and given the agreed-upon success of the case study method, it makes sense that expanding this to engage students outside the classroom is a good option to achieve the skill building needed to ready students for the workplace. The Management Professional Development Workshop incorporates Management content with problem solving and professional networking to achieve beneficial outcomes. We look forward to sharing the technical information as well as building others' confidence in offering a similar event at their own institution.

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