Innovation in Classroom as Organization

Abstract:

Like any pedagogical approach, continuous improvement is necessary to maintain relevancy. Classroom as Organization (CAO) has been around for almost 50 years and a number of structures have been introduced. This session is designed to discuss innovations to the CAO approach that will help ensure that students are gaining the needed skills through the experience. Innovations by the author will be provide and participants will be asked to share their innovations. Time will be provided to brainstorm additional innovations and identify skills that are needed that have not been integrated into the CAO structure. Both those who are currently using CAO and those curious about CAO will benefit from this session.

Keywords:

Classroom as Organization

Introduction

Classroom as Organization (CAO) is a pedagogical approach that puts students in the driver seat of learning through a highly experiential structured approach to the classroom becoming an organization. Recently, a teaching methods book on CAO was published outlining the history of CAO, key principles, and provides an example structure (Thomas, Chappell, Bright, 2020). Thomas et al. (2020) identify published structures, propose a way to describe the different types of structures that have been used. They note that some of the structures have an internal focus, deep learning of participants, while others have an external focus, delivery of a product, service, or event. Thomas et al. (2020) also identifies three types of CAO structures, interdependent organizational, small group based also called leadered group design.

Creating a CAO structure from scratch can be a daunting task. Building on those structures that have been used in the past while considering the context and learning outcomes of the specific course being taught is a much more doable. Thomas et al (2020), provide excellent guidelines for this process and present a structure that can be used. Having using the presented structure over multiple semesters, I have made numerous revisions to that structure attempting to incorporate opportunities for students to develop skills and get exposure to business and management concepts.

I am sure that others, like me, have modified published CAO structures. It is these unpublished innovations that will be the focus of this discussion. Participants will be able to share the innovations they have made and identify additional skills, knowledge, or experience that they would like to include but have not. Through the collective process we will be able to develop innovative approaches to continue to build on the existing CAO structures. Those curious about CAO are also encourage to attend and learn more.

Theoretical Foundation/Teaching Implications

As there is increasing demand for soft skills that are transferable across industry, management educators must adapt. We need to help our students develop these skills and the capacity to apply existing skills to new situations. Lecture is not going to get the job done. Experiential learning activities has a long history of bringing to life the knowledge and skills of management. The CAO approach is highly experiential (Chappell and Thomas 2019) where the role of students and instructors are different than a traditional classroom. Students become members of the organization who take on roles and are responsible for tasks that will help the organization be successful. Student make decisions for the organization and experience the consequences of those decisions (Doherty, 1998). Instructors become coaches that are responsible for facilitating the learning (Bright, Turesky, Putzel & Stang, 2012). While instructors are ultimately responsible for evaluation (grades) the member of the organization (students) take an active role in evaluating, providing feedback and revising assessment criteria (Cohen, 1976) and when necessary the structure of the organization.

The CAO approach is not a simulation rather it is a process of creating a real organization with the goal of the organization being learning (Cohen, 1976). Thomas et al (2020) describe this type of structure as an internally focused structure while those CAO structures that also have a specific output (Doherty, 1998) are described as external focused CAO structures. Regardless of the structure and highly experiential approach, the intent is not to remove theory and content learning from the classroom, rather the classroom becomes an organization in which the students can experience, observe, and apply theory and content directly to their experience (O’Brien & Buono, ND).

The key to the success of the CAO approach is provide the right structure for the organization to meet the learning goals. The complexity of having each student assume a role in class creates a barrier to entry for instructors who have only approached their classroom as a sage on the stage lecturer where they are in “control” (Chappell and Thomas 2019). Most experiential learning activities the instructor remains the one in “control” of the process and debrief. In CAO the instructor sets the structure and then relinquishes “control” to the organization. In the classroom instructors must now use competencies of a facilitator and manager not just effective as lecturer (Cohen, 1976).

In my most recent adaptation of the CAO structure used in our Management and Organizational Behavior course I wanted to help students make connections between the individual, group, and organizational levels of the organization. I chose to use an organization score card with a simple red/yellow/green evaluation. I identified processes and performance metrics for the scorecard and assigned one or more to a team. Teams were required to identify how the metric would be evaluated. Data for assessment had to be collected at the individual and group levels to make the organizational level assessment. For example, individual attendance led to an organization’s scorecard metric performance. The resources provided to students in the syllabus, with sample scorecard items, is provided in Appendix A.

The scorecard process resulted in many teachable moments that benefited the organization in many ways including the intention to make connections between individual, group, and organization level. The innovation was not perfect and will need further refinement. This innovation, along with others, is key to keeping CAO relevant to current student needs. Sharing successes and failures among those using the approach is incredibly valuable. We can build on each other’s successes and find ways to support those whose innovations fell short of expectations.

Session Description

This roundtable will be structured into the following four sections.

1. Introductions (10 minutes)

Participants will briefly introduce themselves and their experience with CAO.

1. Innovation Sharing (20 minutes)

I will share my scorecard innovation and invite others to share innovations they have found to be successful (or not).

1. Innovation Brainstorming (20 minutes)

I will open the floor to brainstorm knowledge or skill areas that individual have not successful been able to integrate into CAO and then consider possible innovations.

1. Summary and Next Steps (10 minutes)

The session will conclude with a summary of the discussion and identification of next steps to keep the innovation conversation going.

References

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**Appendix A**

Except from Syllabus: Scorecard portion of the Resource section

**Scorecard**

The Scorecard in our organization is designed to see how individual and group performance combine to create organizational level performance. If individuals are performing at a top level then so should the organization.

There are two categories of metrics on our Scorecard. The first is process metrics. These look to evaluate a process that needs to be established and executed in the organization. The second is performance metrics. These need to evaluate the completeness and quality of the performance across the whole organization.

We will be using a simple red/yellow/green process to complete our scorecard on a weekly basis. The red/yellow/green is an indication of the level of attention the organization needs to give to the item (see chart below). The goal is not to make everything green as fast as possible. In fact, some items my move from green to yellow. The goal is to accurately evaluate each area so that the organization becomes aware of what needs attention.

Additional guidance for how to evaluate processes and performance metrics using red/yellow/green are listed below.

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | Degree of attention required | Process | Performance |
| Red | Requires immediate attention | There is no process in place and/or there is no process operational | There is insufficient data, performance is creating negative results in the organization |
| Yellow | Needs continued attention | The process is in place and starting to take place or needs improvements | Performance is keeping the organization going and needs improvement |
| Green | Need less attention | Running efficiently and effectively in the organization | Performance is superior or the trajectory is great |

Each team is responsible for establishing and communicating the standard (in rubric or other form) for the metric(s) that the team has been assigned. A standard should be set for red, yellow, and, green. Similar to the rubric development, this standard will be discussed with the organization for feedback and then approved by the Senior Manager. The standard is then clearly communicated to the organization and tracked on a weekly basis. Teams are encouraged to refine and improve metrics as the semester progresses even if that means a metric will move from green to yellow or red.

Some initial elements that should be considered when establishing the standard for each metric are provided below. This should not be interpreted as an all-inclusive list.

Selected Metrics

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Topic** | **Elements to consider for establishing metrics** |
| Process Metrics |
| Memo Process | Established process; efficiency of process, compliance with process; |
| Performance Metrics |
| Meetings Performance | Quality of meetings; sufficient number of meetings; |
| Management Eval Performance | Senior manager’s evaluation of overall commitment to and function of the organization; |

Weekly the Organizational Performance Team will facilitate a discussion about the status of the scorecard which should include:

1. A scorecard that shows red/yellow/green for each topic. The chart should include all weeks so trends can be observed.
2. The red/yellow/green status for each topic will be discussed and verified by the organization.
3. The responsible team will identify what actions need to be taken to improve the status.
4. Occasional review and adjustments of standards for topics that are green.