

Title: First, Do No Harm: Does the Field of OB Need a Qualification System to Safeguard the Use of Teaching Interventions?

Abstract: A foundational principle of many clinical professions is to ensure that whatever the intervention or procedure, the recipient's well-being is the practitioner's primary consideration. In OB and management education, examples abound of potentially beneficial yet risky teaching practices. However, we pay little systematic attention to these possible risks. We instead leave things up to individual instructors to figure out. The net collective effect is that we often unwittingly put students at risk. This proposed roundtable will explore whether our teaching discipline would benefit from a user qualification system for teaching practices that safeguard their use and benefit students.

Key words: teaching ethics, instructor qualification, student safeguards

Introduction

This proposed roundtable discussion will focus on exploring the question of whether the teaching discipline of organizational behavior and management would benefit from a professional qualification system designed to ensure, via self-governance, that instructional techniques, activities or interventions find their way only into the hands of instructors who are appropriately prepared and qualified to deploy them.

The goal of the discussion will be to survey the perspectives of those attending and to brainstorm their input with regard to the following questions:

1. Does the need exist within our field for a user qualification system to safeguard the deployment of teaching practices, activities and interventions?
2. If such a need exists, what might be the costs and benefits of creating and maintaining such a system?

With those who attend, I plan to explore the implications of developing a possible User Qualification System for our field similar to those used by other professions, such as the classification scheme deployed by the American Psychological Association to govern the use of professional psychological assessments and inventories (see more details on this below).

Theoretical Foundation/Teaching Implications

The foundational principle of all medical ethics and the Hippocratic Oath is: "First, do no harm," which in practice will always mean that whatever the intervention or procedure, the patient's well-being must be the physician's primary consideration. Other professions, typically those with a clinical orientation to them (e.g., psychologists, therapists, social workers, etc.), also have a similar ethical component in their codes of ethics. For example, this credo of minimizing potential harm underlies the American Psychological Association's (APA) development and

deployment of its User Qualification System to govern the use of psychological assessments and inventories (Joint Committee on Standards for Educational & Psychological Testing, 1999).

Under its system, the APA classifies all psychological assessments and inventories into one of three qualification levels (i.e., Levels A, B or C), and assessment developers must screen and qualify potential users based on the user's demonstrated capacity to meet the required qualifications, as follows: Level A usually requires no special qualification (e.g., a typing skills test); Level B usually requires a specialized or advanced degree with coursework covering psychological measurement, assessment, and interpretation of normed results (e.g., a basic cognitive abilities test); and Level C usually requires all the components of Level B plus additional advanced training and experience in the relevant area of assessment or with the specific inventory or test in question (e.g., the *Minnesota Multiphasic Personality Inventory*).

On the face of it, I trust that virtually all—if not all—my colleagues who teach in the discipline of organizational behavior and management would readily agree with the requirement to do no harm to students. Yet, examples abound of learning activities that have been developed to help students learn important concepts and principles that nonetheless have in them the risk of opening students up to emotional pain or even possible psychological harm.

My premise for this roundtable discussion is that while potentially risky instructional activities or interventions can be powerful tools for student learning, the management of their potential risks in a wise and professionally responsible manner is not something we give much attention to as a discipline—rather, we tend to leave it up to each instructor to figure out in a multitude of one-off decisions. Unfortunately, relying on individual instructors to exercise their own professional judgment in deciding whether or not to adopt and use a new or existing

instructional technique or intervention is an inadequate safeguard against student harm because as humans we all err in that "we do not know what we do not know."

The net effect is that we all, as a collective profession, often unwittingly allow our students to be put at risk. It therefore seems warranted that we explore the possibility of creating and maintaining a discipline-wide qualification system to help our profession ensure that instructional techniques, activities or interventions find their way exclusively into the hands of instructors who are appropriately prepared and qualified to deploy them. The goal of this roundtable is to bring this exploration.

Session Description and Timeline

First 10 minutes: I will begin the roundtable discussion with a brief overview of the conceptual foundation and teaching implications outlined above, with a short description of how some other professions have developed and maintain their User Qualification Systems.

Remaining 50 minutes: I will facilitate an open-ended and exploratory discussion focused on brainstorming answers to the following two questions:

1. Does the need exist within the field of OB and management education for a qualification system to safeguard the use of teaching practices and interventions?
2. If such a need exists, what might the costs and benefits be of creating and maintaining such a system?

If successful, we will initiate a rewarding preliminary exploration into the implications of moving toward a self-governance system of user qualification for the deployment of instructional techniques, activities and interventions in a manner that safeguards their use for the benefit and education of our students.

References

Joint Committee on Standards for Educational & Psychological Testing, American Educational Research Association, American Psychological Association, National Council on Measurement in Education. (1999). *Standards for educational and psychological testing*. American Educational Research Association.