What Is the Best Way to Structure a Blended Learning Course in Management?

Abstract: This roundtable discussion focuses on how to best structure a blended learning management course. To begin the discussion, the presenters would share their preferred structure for a blended learning course, and then would encourage participants to discuss questions such as the following: Which activities are best suited for the online environment in a management course and which are better taught in the classroom? What is the role of the online portion of the class? What is the role of the in-classroom portion? How should a blended learning course in management differ from a blended learning course in other disciplines?

Keywords: blended learning, hybrid learning, course design

Introduction

An instructor of a blended learning course must answer a number of critical pedagogical questions before the course can be successfully implemented. For example, which activities are best suited for the online environment and which are better taught in the classroom? What work should the students conduct online ahead of the in-class sessions? How much guidance and instruction should professors provide on these assignments? Should the online assignments/activities prepare students for the in-class discussions and activities that follow, or should they serve as a continuation of what occurs in the classroom? How does a blended learning course in management and/or organizational behavior differ from a blended learning course in other disciplines? How exactly should time be used in the classroom when students do meet in person?

The intended outcome of the discussion will be to address these and other related questions as they pertain to courses in management and organizational behavior. We anticipate the audience for this discussion would consist of those who teach blended learning courses and those who do not but have an interest in doing so.

Theoretical Foundation/Teaching Implications

Our preferred structure for a blended learning course is based on our interpretation of the flipped classroom model, which has been widely discussed in the literature (for example, Roehl, Reddy, & Shannon, 2013; Kim, Kim, Khera, & Getman, 2014; Hwang, Lai, & Wang, 2015). In other words, we use the online environment to expose students to course concepts before they come to class, where they will apply the concepts through in-class activities.

We have tried to follow many of the best practices of blended learning including identifying the course objectives and identifying which assessments and activities are best suited for the online space and which are best addressed in the classroom (McGee & Reis, 2012; Stein & Graham, 2014). For example, face-to-face sessions excel in the areas of offering advice, brainstorming, and enhancing community, among other areas (Macdonald, 2006). Online discussions are most valuable when they promote actual discussion rather than focus entirely on completion (Alberts, Murray, & Stephenson, 2010). We believe the requirements we use in our blended learning structure accomplish this legitimate discussion. (See Appendix A.)

In all, research has shown that one of the most important factors in successfully teaching a blended learning course is "blending" the online and in-class components of the course (Kim, Bonk, & Oh, 2008; Hall & Mooney, 2010). This roundtable discussion would allow participants to share best practices on how this blending may occur most effectively.

Session Description

This roundtable discussion topic could pair well with other roundtable topics related to online/blended learning at this year's MOBTS conference. Rather than discuss the purpose or justification for blended learning—these arguments have long been analyzed in the literature— this roundtable discussion would attempt to answer how the strengths of both the in-classroom model and the online learning models can be maximized in courses on management and organizational behavior. We expect this topic to generate significant conversation and sharing of ideas as participants reveal what has worked and not worked for them.

We would begin the discussion by sharing our own preferred structure for our blended learning courses (see Appendix A). This would include an explanation of how we settled on this

structure, along with its pros and cons. We would then invite participants to comment on our structure and to share their own preferred structures for their blended learning courses. Lively and engaging debate may result from any aspect of our structure, including the assignment of a quiz on assigned readings, the nature of the weekly online assignment, specific requirements for participating in the discussion board, and "blending" the online and in-classroom components of the course.

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Appendix A: Our Preferred Structure for a Blended Learning Course

The structure below is designed for a Tuesday/Thursday class that meets for 75 minutes:

Monday:

The "initial post" to the discussion board due. The initial post relates to the topics the students will discuss in the upcoming in-class session. An initial post must contain at least 250 words, one relevant citation from the assigned chapters in the textbook, and one citation from a credible outside source of their choosing.

Tuesday:

Students do not meet in class Tuesday. Rather, the discussion board replaces in-class time. On Tuesday, students form responses two of their classmates' initial posts on the discussion board. Each classmate response must be at least 150 words long, must contain a new citation from the textbook (one they did not previously use in their own initial post), and must contain a question directed to their classmate that furthers discussion. As course instructors, we participate actively in the discussion board, posing our own questions to students. We try to respond to 1/3 of the students each week, tracking when we last responded, so each student hears from us personally on the discussion board every 3-4 weeks. Most of our discussion board posts are questions aimed to further discussion with some insights and comments interspersed.

Wednesday:

Students respond to all questions they received on the discussion board from other classmates and from their professor. Also on Wednesday, students complete an online assignment related to the chapter(s) they have read in the textbook that week. This assignment is designed to help them process the course concepts and encourages further study of the textbook.

Thursday:

Students and the professor meet in person in the classroom. Students begin class by completing an in-class quiz on the assigned chapter(s). By the time they take the quiz, they have spent at least 3 days absorbing the content of the chapter(s) to complete the discussion board and the

online assignment. The remainder of class time Thursday is devoted to instruction. The emphasis

of Thursday's in-classroom time is the immediate application of course material through such

techniques as role plays, small-group discussions, solving problems on the whiteboards, personal

journal writing, and collaborating in pairs.

The Next Week:

The process repeats itself with a new discussion board topic related to the following week's

content (Monday), classmate responses (Tuesday), online assignment (Wednesday), and in-

classroom quiz (Thursday).