Writing a Progressive Case to Enhance Student Learning

Abstract: Let's talk progressive cases! Case study is a well-worn technique for teaching management theory. Progressive cases allow students to dig into course topics in a more systematic and comprehensive way. In this session we will practice writing our own progressive case that provides a scaffolding technique to apply theory as you move through textbook chapters. We will first explain how and why we use a progressive case in both our Principles of Management and OB courses to improve theory application, student collaboration, and critical thinking. Next, in groups we will create a roadmap around which a progressive case can be built, with a group discussion on matching course topics to case development. Finally, we will develop our own progressive case idea. Participants will leave the session experiencing how to build a progressive case to illustrate the concepts they believe are most important.

Keywords: Case Analysis, Theory Application, Student Learning

Introduction: This session proposes to create an active learning environment in which participants will begin to build their own progressive case for their management course. This session is targeted at anyone who wishes to explore, build, and/or implement a more substantial, deeper case into their course, in which students can immerse themselves over several weeks or months. Participants should leave this session with the backbone for his or her own progressive case into which they could implement in any general management or organizational behavior course.

Theoretical Foundation:

Case analysis has been used for many years as a way to develop student knowledge and provide opportunities for students to apply their learning to real world problems or situations (Herreid & Schiller, 2013). Interestingly, Harvard Business School first began the use of case study method in 1920, within their graduate program, with the intention of preparing students to make decisions in the real world. At the time, as today, the intent was to enhance student learning through application (Breslin & Buchanan, 2008).

Pedagogically, the case method is often used as a way to improve engagement and critical thinking skills among students, with the idea that applying theoretical learning to a problem or situation will promote and encourage student discovery (McDade, 2000). There are several formats in which students can receive case study materials, from traditional written cases through newer tools such as video podcasts (Fernandez, Simo, & Sallan, 2009), and audio. Whatever the format, case study is known as a strong instrument for improving student learning—particularly for management education. In fact, it is well-known that case studies are intended to living in the space between theory and practice (Breslin & Buchanan, 2008), offering

students a way to bridge scaffold learning between textbook descriptions of theory and the real world.

According to Cliff and Wright (1996), there are several key components that help to make a case more effective, successfully inspiring student learning, including: a) a set of well-defined learning objectives, b) a well-designed and informative scenario, c) a set of uncomplicated and direct questions, and d) an emphasis on connection between the scenario and the learning. Progressive cases are built using the same principles noted by Cliff and Wright, however, with even greater depth. A progressive case study is allows students to develop their thinking around themes and issues of greater complexity and using multiple streams (Mikoski, Cady, & Zirschky, 2009). We will be exploring the progressive case method within this session, reviewing and practicing the art of developing one, real-time.

Learning Objectives: After attending this session, participants will be able to:

1. Identify key theories or topical areas in their course to scaffold into a progressive case.

2. Connect theories or topical areas of interest with segments or vignettes from their larger progressive case.

3. Map theories to case components.

Exercise Overview and Session Description:

In our 60 minute session, we will complete the work in four phases.

1) Description and examples (10 min): First, we will describe the cases that we use currently, talk through the idea generation process, and explain how progressive cases are written. We will provide participants with current and past examples or progressive cases

we have implemented, particularly from our Principles of Management and

Organizational Behavior courses (this phase will be presenter driven).

2) Concept/topic Generation and Planning (10 min): Next, in groups we will create a

roadmap around which a progressive case can be built. During this phase, we will

identify key components, concepts, and/or topical areas desired to be covered in the case

that we will be partially developing in phase 3 (this phase will be highly participant

driven).

3) Case Mapping (15 min): Next, we will map key components of our courses to portions

of a hypothetical case. During the session we will facilitate participants' development of

a topic-to-case map which will provide the backbone for their progressive case (this

component will be highly participant driven).

4) Case Building (15 min): Fourth, we will begin the development of our own progressive

case idea, using the map created in 3) above. The outcome of this phase is that

participants should leave the session experiencing how to frame a progressive case to

illustrate the concepts they believe are most important (this component will be highly

participant driven).

5) Conclusion and wrap-up (10 min): In our large group, we will discuss the cases that we

created and talk through other possible case examples. We will discuss the pros and cons

of using a progressive case and investigate other potential uses.

Throughout this session, participants will be active, working in small and large groups,

sharing ideas, and creating the design for their own progressive case, whether fictional or

based on a real-life organization. We intend to build a session in which participants will

create framework from which they can construct their own progressive case. Although we

will not complete a full progressive case, which is often many pages in length, we hope this

session can be a springboard that encourages participants to complete the case that we start

and implement it in their next class.

References

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