

Cascading Teaching Model for Teaching Leadership in Large Online Class

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Abstract: Teaching over 350 students leadership skills in an online environment encouraged faculty to experiment with a cascading model in which students form teams, then take turns being the team leader. The team leaders attend a live lab with the instructor and then CASCADE the learning back to their teams by facilitating a recorded, virtual meeting. The faculty collaborated with a PhD. student from the School of Education to study this instructional strategy for teaching leadership in a large online class. This research will be presented along with a demonstration and discussion of the teaching model.

3 Keywords: large-class, methodology, virtual-teams

Introduction:

Teaching over 350 students leadership skills in an online environment encouraged faculty to experiment with a cascading model for some of the course content delivery. This cascading model is being used in a required online course for full-time residential undergraduate business students in their junior year and has simultaneously been studied by a PhD student to capture and evaluate all aspects of the model. This exercise can be used in other large online courses to address the issue of a high instructor to student ratio. It can also be used in other leadership courses in order to give students an authentic context to practice leadership skills.

Methodology behind the exercise:*Authentic Context*

This class exercise is grounded in both theory and best practices. According to Herrington and Oliver (1995), situated learning theory suggests that for learning to be effective it must be situated within an “authentic context that reflects the way the knowledge will be used in real-life”. The authors identified nine critical characteristics of situated learning and this class exercise fits within each of those characteristics. Herrington and Oliver suggest that situated learning environments:

1. “Provide authentic context that reflect the way the knowledge will be used in real life;
2. Provide authentic activities;
3. Provide access to expert performances and the modeling of processes;
4. Provide multiple roles and perspectives;
5. Support collaborative construction of knowledge;
6. Provide coaching and scaffolding at critical times;
7. Promote reflection to enable abstractions to be formed;

8. Promote articulation to enable tacit knowledge to be made explicit;
9. Provide for integrated assessment of learning within the tasks” (p.255).

This exercise is designed to provide students with authentic, collaborative and reflective experiences to help them develop and improve their leadership skills.

Team Meeting Skills

Students are often ill prepared to lead (or participate) in effective meetings. Students may have attended many team meetings during their academic career but have NOT by their junior year learned teaming best practices such as agendas, after-action reviews, facilitation tips, nor have they learned virtual teaming which has unique challenges.

The need for skills to successfully work remotely is on the rise. Neil Patel wrote for Forbes that, "The remote work sector has grown by 79% over the past ten years, and it's still on the rise. Millions of workers are now 100% remote, completely sidestepping the traditional commute, the claustrophobic cubicle, and the 'cake in the breakroom' phenomenon." It's an undeniable fact that students will work virtually with teammates, clients, and customers at least some of the time. Despite the inevitability of working virtually, people are rarely prepared to work virtually and virtual teams often fall short of meeting their goals (Ferazzi, 2014). Due to the increasing use of virtual teams in business organizations, setting-up virtual teams in the context of online business education has become an instructional practice, to allow students to gain professional skills that could be difficult to teach (Goold, Augar, & Farmer, 2006). Online business students in particular were found to appreciate virtual teams learning experiences, as such experiences afford them to develop—increasingly important and globally needed—virtual team skills (Kim, Liu and Bonk, 2005).

Learning Objectives

The learning objectives for this exercise are:

Conduct, participate in, and evaluate virtual meetings- students are asked to apply the knowledge they have learned regarding how to lead a virtual meeting and practice the skill of leading, participating and evaluating virtual team meetings. They will create agendas, facilitate a team discussion and reflect on the team meeting by conducting an after-action review.

Practice leadership skills- the cascading model gives every student an opportunity to practice his or her leadership skills by being the virtual team meeting leader once during the semester.

Exercise Overview

In this exercise, students in a large online class (over 350 students) are placed into teams and they take turns being the team leader. The team leaders attend a live virtual lab meeting with the instructor and then CASCADE the learning back to their teams by facilitating a recorded, virtual meeting. Students are taught best practices of leading a virtual meeting and are asked to employ these practices and facilitate activities and communicate content taught in the instructor-led meeting. At the end of the meeting, students are asked to complete and submit an after-action review where they answer the following questions: 1. What did we do well in this meeting? 2. What could we do differently to have an even more productive and efficient meeting next time? 3. Who will do what by when (IF the team agreed to any post-meeting follow up actions.)

Each student has the opportunity to lead one virtual meeting throughout the semester. The student team meetings are recorded and assessed by either the instructor or a graduate assistant. Based on the size of the class, some instructors offer two different instructor-led lab meetings on the same day to make the session more manageable and offer scheduling options for the students.

Session Description

Overview of the context of the course and exercise (10 minutes)

Demonstration of the cascading model using video clips from instructor-led labs and student-led team meetings (10 minutes)

Discussion of research finding about the cascading experiment (15 minutes)

Group activity where participants are asked to brainstorm improvements to the model and other applications of the model (15 minutes)

Q & A (10 minutes)

References

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