Developing Students as Process Consultants:
Cross-course Student Team Facilitation as "Service" and "Praxis" Learning

Abstract
Developing abilities to reflect on / intervene in group dynamics is a longstanding goal in OB (Lewin, 1946). However, praxis development may be hampered when students are asked to practice in their teams, where action may overwhelm reflection. How can courses provide adequate social and emotional distance so students can reflect and develop intervention skills?

I'll discuss an experiential undergraduate course that engages students as consultants / facilitators for student teams in other courses. I'll note some advantages and issues surrounding the course as delivered in 2018-2019. Then we'll engage in roundtable discussions to explore possibilities for your own courses.

Time Requested:
60 Minutes (*Roundtable*)

Introduction.

This session has the purpose of creating reflective conversations about the development of process consultation / facilitation as a focus of "service" and "praxis" learning in our courses. Learning objectives include:
- Awareness of the potential for process consultation / facilitation learning as a service and the potential to develop student praxis in those skills.
- Understanding of key components in designing the course structure.
- Analysis and potential application of process consultation / facilitation service learning to one's own courses.

The questions "How might we structure a process consultation / facilitation service learning course that develops reflective inquiry as a way to improve one's own managerial praxis?" and "What potential issues might arise during the course?" will be discussed during the roundtable.

The target audience is faculty interested in using experiential service learning in their classrooms to develop facilitation and process consulting skills among their students.

Theoretical Foundation

Experiential service learning has come to be widely used in a variety of university settings (Andrews, 2007; Butin, 2005). Typically, in management education, students engage in service to a non- or for-profit organization by applying concepts and theories related to course they are taking. For example, students involved in a strategy course might provide strategy consulting to an organization (Robinson, et al, 2010) or those involved in a project management course might manage a project for an organization (Larson & Drexler, 2010). While facilitation / consulting (as part of learning organization development) has been cited as potentially having significant benefit when taught in part as a service learning project (Thomas & Landau, 2002), there appears to be infrequent applications at the undergraduate university level.

There are several benefits (Bureau, et al, 2014) to service learning, and some particular benefits in the context of a course in organization development. First, the application of concepts and skills outside of the classroom make the learning more "real", with potentially significant consequences. Students perceive the application of theoretical knowledge to real life cases as more valuable than mere ability to recite facts. Second, the establishment of relationships through working together with others, particularly in the context of providing a valued service, provides social benefits, both to students and to the university sponsoring the learning. Third, most closely connected to service learning of organizational development consulting / facilitation, it provides a greater ability to reflect on personal praxis. As Zlotkowski (1999, p. 99) writes:

> "Service learning practitioners place special emphasis on reflection as the key to making community service yield real learning...What is distinctive about reflection in a service learning context is its multi-layered quality: what students reflect on results not just in greater technical mastery (i.e. course content) but also in an expanded appreciation of the contextual and social significance of the discipline in question and, most broadly of all, in 'an enhanced sense of civic responsibility."

This is particularly true with OD consulting / facilitation, since a central aspect of practice in this area is developing ones' self as an instrument of change. The cognitions, attitudes, and beliefs of the consultant / facilitator with respect to others' actions and interventions chosen has a significant impact on her/his effectiveness. The ability to reflect deeply and honestly on one's own motivations and behaviors is key to individual learning and development.

In the rush of activities and competing demands it can be difficult to maintain congruence between espoused and enacted values, or even be aware of incongruence between them (Simons, 1999). It is far easier to recognize incongruence in others than to see it in ourselves. Acting as consultants can help students gain new insights into

group dynamics, as can assignments to foster reflection on their own actions and those of other student consultants.

Teaching Approach and Implications

This session will provide a brief description of my recent experience with an undergraduate Senior-level course entitled "Organization Development and Personal Praxis" (ODPP). This course was developed after our department's Advisory Board recommended further emphasis on leadership, group facilitation, and reflective practice. A major component of the course is a service learning project where students acted as process consultants / facilitators to teams of students in other courses. The intent was to not only develop the abilities of students in the ODPP course, but also to enhance and institutionalize learning by encouraging interaction and student-student knowledge transmission from Seniors to Juniors pursuing management degrees.

The first several weeks of ODPP were spent familiarizing students with process consultation and facilitation. The "Skilled Facilitator Handbook" was the primary text used for the course, and students were introduced to topics such as the Ladder of Inference, the Frame-Advocate-Illustrate-Inquire process, and the Mutual Learning vs. Unilateral Control (Model-I vs. Model II) governing values. Example cases and short quizzes asking students "what they would say" were presented to provide context and give practice.

The ODPP course required several outcomes from the students.

First, the ODPP students were required to find a "client" team of students in another course, and to give them an overview of process consultation and the value it could bring to the client. The ODPP students were required to create a contract that would be signed by the "client" student team and the professor teaching the class where the "client" students were working. This written agreement had to be signed by all parties before the ODPP consultants could begin working with the team. The contract had to include the "Ground Rules for Effective Teams" from the "Skilled Facilitator Handbook" as well as a three-minute/one-hour clause, which meant that the clients could fire the consultants and only three minutes would be allowed for the consultants to argue their case. After the firing, however, the clients agreed to spend one hour describing the reason for dismissing the consultants.

Second, the ODPP consultants were required to design and document interventions with the clients using a learning cycle called "PAIR", with the following steps:

Plan an intervention by stating the reason for the intervention, the objective, and the type and depth of intervention desired. This included describing what was observed that indicated that an intervention was needed and what would indicate

a successful intervention. The specific sentences planned to be used in the intervention were to be written down.

Act, and capture what was said using either a recording device or an observer to take detailed notes on what specifically was said. A transcription or reasonably accurate rendition of the intervention was to be documented, which could be used to develop a Left-Hand Column description of what occurred. The purpose of this was to capture any between espoused and actual behaviors.

Inquire into the perceptions of others regarding the intervention. Did the clients find it effective or not? What did other ODPP members think? What about members of the consulting team?

Reflect on what was learned and how their practice might be improved.

Each consulting team was required to intervene in their clients at least about every other week. During class meetings ODPP students described problems encountered by the teams they were working with, proposed and practiced interventions for those problems, and received feedback on the interventions. Typical problems addressed included both task-oriented issues, like not using project management tools or schedules to keep track of activities, and maintenance issues, such as managing poor performers, self-censorship of negative feedback, and the inability to reach decisions effectively.

After presenting and clarifying the structure of the ODPP, most of the session will be spent in roundtables reflecting on and discussing questions such as "How might aspects of this be integrated in our curricula? What issues or weaknesses might prevent implementation or arise during it?" This session will contribute to effective teaching and learning in the field of management by promoting reflection and reassessment of the approaches we faculty use to provoke learning. It promotes "Teaching agents for positive change" by giving students learning and practice implementing skills and abilities they will need to develop the organizations and individuals they will lead.

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