**Shock the System: Questioning the management curriculum and use of experiential learning**

**Introduction**

MOBTS has established itself as the leading conference for management educators to not only share, but also to celebrate experiential learning activities for the classroom. Nearly 50 years of sessions have proven to be popular for all levels of faculty to *collaborate and innovate*, from doctoral students through to faculty emeriti. The culture of MOBTS even reflects the very experiential nature of the sessions, encouraging facilitators and attendees alike to eschew their suits and ties in favor of shorts and t-shirts.

Yet, despite our (the facilitators for this session) love for the conference, and the culture that makes it the antithesis of the “Academy” in general, we have some reservations about “drinking the Kool-Aid” without first double-checking the expiration date of the drink. In this session, we invite attendees to question both the components of the traditional management curriculum, and the potential overreliance on experiential learning techniques at the expense of better student learning outcomes – or even whether using experiential learning is a crutch to cover up the weaknesses in the management curriculum.

**Theoretical Foundation/Teaching Implications**

A cursory look through introduction to management textbooks sees a sampling of “tried and true” management theories, which while intuitive, haven’t stood the empirical test of time. For instance, motivation theories such as Maslow’s hierarchy and Vroom’s Expectancy Theory are often brought up as intuitive ways to understand motivation, while only occasionally getting a passing mention that subsequent studies have not provided support for these theories as depicted. When examining personality, the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI) is frequently presented, despite a mountain of empirical evidence demonstrating that the MBTI is not a psychometrically valid or reliable tool (e.g., Boyle, 1995; Lorr, 1991; Pittenger, 1993, 2005; Barbuto, 1997). Furthermore, even if the provided examples have value as historical artifacts of the development of management thought, we question whether the appropriate andragogy is to use such content as the basis for experiential learning and practical advice.

Critique of management education isn’t new, “*Management education has often been criticized for the disconnect between academic theory and practitioners’ reality (Stewart, 1984)... Instructors may use experiential learning techniques to address these criticisms*” (Edelson et al., 2019, p. 201). When it comes to experiential learning in general, there is a plethora of evidence that varied experiential learning techniques have positive impacts on student learning outcomes (e.g., Coker, Heiser, Taylor, and Book, 2017) However, we’re also reticent to endorse “beating that bongo drum” as a way to teach content few have ever questioned, such as “what decision making is.” We are not aiming to discredit our profession, nor suggest that conference attendees insist every subject must be taught in an experiential manner, but we fear that experiential learning techniques are overused, and that the shadow side of experiential learning, as explored in a series of articles in our society’s *Journal of Management Education* (e.g., Wright, Hibbert, Strong, and Edwards, 2018; Clancy and Vince, 2019) isn’t always accounted for.

Similar to our critique of the management curriculum, we aren’t suggesting throwing out the baby with the bath water and removing experiential learning from our teaching repertoire. As Lund Dean, Wright, and Forray (In Press) note, “*We frame business schools’ experiential pedagogy advocacy as an explicit moral duty (Hosmer, 1995), arguing that a dilemma exists in encouraging experiential teaching approaches without knowing how faculty use them and what student safeguards are in place*.” We want to collaboratively work with attendees to examine where it is most effectively used, and where other teaching techniques, including the dreaded “lecture” are more appropriate.

**Session Description**

In this session, we aim to encourage attendees to channel their inner devil’s advocacy and question the appropriateness of the topics they teach, especially in an introduction to management course, because this type of course is often the first (and for non-management majors, the only) exposure students have to management education. Topics we plan to introduce include, but aren’t limited to the following:

* Are the topics we (collectively) teach valid?
* Are better-tested or more applicable theories, why haven’t we – the experts in the room – replaced these?
* Are the textbooks the problem?
* Should we focus more on problem-based learning as opposed to a technical, terminology-focused approach?
* Are we using old content and old methods to teach “new” students?

We recognize that it is easy to cherry-pick from a century of management education, but we want to encourage attendees (and our field in general) to do what we ask our students to do – think critically – and improve the management curriculum. As noted, we don’t want to limit our attendees critical thought process, and welcome additional topics to those provided above.

We plan to open with a short (5 minute) introduction of our “problems” with the management curriculum before moving on to engage attendees in a discussion of what aspects of the traditional management curriculum should be removed, and what might replace them. We then plan on a discussion of where experiential learning techniques might be best implemented to enhance learning outcomes, and what types of experiential learning techniques are appropriate.

We hope that this conversation will not be a one-off. Ideally, interested attendees and the facilitators will collaborate on a project that advances the current state of our curriculum, such as a dynamic, continually updated online introduction to management guide that could be used as a text or supplementary resource for such courses.

Given the critical approach to our topic, we also expect at least one attendee to hate us by the end of the session.

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