Improving Management Learning by Case Instruction

This session will focus on applying best practices to case-based management undergraduate courses. It concerns the use of various session-lengths, supplemental exercises and activity types, and other material content to management courses. It also addresses the primary challenges of teaching with cases to undergraduate students and the nature of “management” as a discipline that undergraduates can properly prepare for and expect employment opportunities from *because* of case-based instruction.

Keywords: *Case-based instruction; skill development; experiential learning*

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This roundtable will focus on brainstorming the best topics and course structures for teaching management by the case method when working with undergraduate students and the possibility of keeping the courses leveled across different session-length modalities (50min, 75min, 150min). The challenge often exists that case method instruction is used primarily for graduate education because of its dependence on student engagement, pre-work expectations, perceived ambiguity in assessment, and course consistency. However, the real work and professional world for which students are being prepared is full of such demands rather than disengagement, no work, certainty around every corner, and immutability.

As the etymological root for management originates with the deft handling and guidance of a wild animal, it makes little sense to assume that *that* has been taught through definitions and projects that are far tamer (at best, lame at worst). Cases offer a capacity to jostle students’ learning cruises with disruptive vignettes of real-life uncertainty open to debatable outcomes requiring justification. Students cannot merely note that *The model on* *Page 228 explains why this is true*. Instead, they must embrace dilemmas and showcase a rational calculus for resolving them against other – perhaps reasonably acceptable – approaches.

This roundtable will operate on the assumption that by including cases and accompanying engagement activities in our instruction of management courses, we improve students’ readiness for experiencing and excelling in “moments of judgment.” However, it will request participant discussion of the best ways to incorporate this pedagogy for management courses in particular – and the kinds of engagement exercises that support both cases and management discipline and skill learning outcomes. Such learning outcomes could present a massive harvest for a business world struggling for integrity and a new generation of learners struggling to manage uncertainty. Thus, we will consider what would be the best topics in various undergraduate management courses (General, Infosys, Risk, HR, etc.) for introducing more case instruction, which kinds of activities will best support learning content and practice (e.g. role play, voting/soliciting opinions, memo/email/policy writing, small group/task force, etc.). The roundtable will not function as a workshop on case instruction, though sharing of best-practices will likely emerge.

Minutes 0-6 – Opener – Living Introduction

This introduction will be something like a performance that puts participants in the mode of experiencing the strength of the case-based pedagogy and motiving the purpose of the round table, which is to further strengthen their value when applied. I will use my own case-based instruction experience as the example “case class” we are working to improve (content and flexibility).

6-20 – The Obstacle

This section has three steps. First, tables will – in a case-like manner – have participants identify/brainstorm the various challenges and obstacles they face when preparing for, running, and reporting out on case-based instruction. Second, the tables will then report out to the session group their identified points – referencing the similar and dissimilar challenges highlighted across groups. Third, the large group will rank the challenges until we get a list that mirrors the number of tables we have (or half, depending on the attendance).

20-30 – The Survey

This section will include group problem-solving and reporting. Each table group is asked to become a task force focused on a different, ranked, challenge. The tables will spend time identifying how to avoid or alleviate the pressure or unwanted circumstances that their challenge brings. If there is a 2:1 ratio of table groups to top-ranked issues, then the mirrored-issue groups will provide something of a creativity and/or integrity check on our problem-solving processes.

31-50 – The Production

This final major section requires participants to reflect on the ideas shared and point out the feasibility of applying learning. It is something like the double-loop to our session. We aim to have individuals identify at least one improvement for their case-based instructional experiences that they could capture from the session for immediate implementation. I will ask participants to, individually, craft prototypes/templates of the kind of improvement (e.g. activity, schedule, content progression, etc.) at tables with individuals of the same interest. These groups will then be asked to offer up one example to share with the rest of the session participants.

51-60 – The Reflection

The primary value of teaching/conveying the management discipline through case-based instruction and the session’s learning outcomes will be reaffirmed as we close. Gratitude for participation and engagement will be given, and the opportunity to share contact information and tools takes place.