**Demonstrating the Power of Asking: Virtual Collaboration during class using a MIRO board**

* **Introduction**. Provide a brief introduction that establishes a need for this type of exercise and identifies the target usage. Include potential course applications and explain for whom the exercise is designed: early undergraduate, late undergraduate, graduate, etc.; traditional, non-traditional, cross-cultural, etc.).

This exercise brings the frequently given advice to “build your network” to live. Students experience firsthand the resources and information they have access to through their classmates, if they only ask.

This exercise works for late undergraduate and graduate students. Some work experience is helpful but not necessarily required. This exercise works very well in a course on Power and Influence in a section that discusses the benefits of developing social connections. It works also well in a Organizational Behavior course to illustrate the powerful benefits that can come from social connections with others.

* **Theoretical Foundation/Teaching Implications**. Briefly specify the relevant background literature that the exercise is based upon and how your session contributes to effective teaching and learning in the field of management.

This exercise is based on literature on social capital and the norm of reciprocity (Baker, 2010; Pfeffer 2010). The social network (the people we are connected to through work, family, volunteer work, etc.) is critical to career success. Through these connections we have the potential to access resources and information that we otherwise would not have (particularly if our social network is divers). However, more often than not, we do not realize how others could support us and how we could support others because we don’t know the resources and info those in our social network have access to, because we don’t ask.

This exercise provides two main take-aways for the students:

* 1. They realize the wealth of resources and information that is present even in a small group of people. This exercise shows clearly that even in a group of only 25 students, many requests one might have can be fulfilled by others in the group. This then helps students see the vast potential for mutual benefit that is out there through connections with others.
  2. Students also learn a framework to make good requests (Baker, 2020). This makes it more likely for them to make requests and tap into the social network they are building.
* **Learning Objectives**. Specify the learning objectives for the exercise by articulating the expected changes in knowledge, attitude, or skill that are associated with participation in the activity. What teaching topics are relevant to your session?

Objectives:

Students will be able to formulate effective requests.

Students will understand the power of the various resources and info within their class network that they didn’t previously realize.

Students will have a new appreciation for their ability to support others and their ability and motivation to make requests.

Students get enjoyment from being able to help others with their requests. This then makes them more likely to make requests in the future. They experience the power of asking.

* **Exercise Overview**. Provide an overview of the activity/exercise, including the logistics of running the exercise (e.g. timing, materials, class size), the flow of the exercise, variations or alternate applications, debriefing guidelines (e.g. questions to ask, how students generally respond). The goal is to give the reviewer enough information so that they understand what the activity is that you plan to present in your session.

Logistics:

* any class size
* students work in real time on an online MIRO board (see info on MIRO board in Appendix A). Students will be “in class” via zoom and also work in real time on a MIRO board.
* undergraduate – graduate
* 60+ minutes for about 30 students, longer for larger classes
* Students have completed the homework (instructions in Appendix B) and come prepared to make a personal and a professional request.

Steps:

* We discuss the power of social capital and the importance of building and growing their social network. This is critical to gain access to resources and information that can help advance career success.
* I introduce this exercise (making requests) a week before we actually conduct it during our virtual class time. I ask students to come up with two requests that they can make to their classmates. One is personal (e.g. Does anyone know someone who could teach me how to drive a stick shift car?); the other is professional (e.g. I am looking for an internship within the health care administration area, preferably at a major hospital, does anyone have any connections?).
* I send out info about the MIRO board a few days before we meet virtually for our session. I encourage students to play with the MIRO board and to practice putting up virtual sticky notes. I usually reserve a section of the MIRO board for this activity. The exercise requires only very basic skills to navigate the MIRO board, so a short practice session is usually all that is needed.
* During our class session (virtual): Each student makes a request at a time. I first start out with the professional requests. Once everyone got a chance to make a professional request, we continue on with personal requests. A student makes a request by writing their request on a virtual sticky note and placing it on the MIRO board. Then, anyone who can provide some info/help with the request just made writes their info/help on a different sticky note and adds it to the request that was just made.
* The activity concludes ones all requests have been made. I encourage everyone to follow up with those offers of help and to report back about these at the end of the semester.
* We then have a short debrief session. I have done this activity in several of my courses in Fall 2020. Students were astonished about the offers for help they received for personal and professional requests. Some where initially reluctant to make a request, thinking that nobody from their classmates could possible help them (they told me this after the session). However, once they noticed that their colleagues received offers of help they also didn’t want to miss out. Students realize that even though there might be only 25 students in class, everyone knows someone who knows someone etc. Most of the time we never find out if someone could help us, because we don’t think to ask. This exercise has proven to be a powerful, hands-on, and personal way to get the message across that building and maintaining a social network is helpful and fun. The students enjoyed it when they were able to provide some resources/info to a request from a class mate.

Observations:

* I have done this activity several times in my classes since last Spring (when we had to move everything online). I had used this activity in class before, with students physically in the same space, putting sticky notes on walls. It was such a powerful exercise in person and I was looking for a way to replicate this activity virtually. At a workshop I attended last summer, I learned about MIRO boards (info in Appendix A). I was hooked. MIRO boards are an amazing tool to collaborate in real time. It turned out to be perfect for this activity.
* Some students are initially reluctant to make requests. They are not used to asking and have told me later that they never thought that anyone from their classmates could help them anyway. Well, once students make requests and receive offers of help, those few “holdouts” always jump in because they don’t want to miss out. There is generally a huge surprise at the quality of offers of help students receive. They later told me that they never thought that anyone from their classmates could help them anyway.
* A nice “side effect” from this activity is also a closer class community. Because of the nature of the requests, students learn more about each other. This then seemed to also help with more open discussions later on in the semester.
* The best part about using a MIRO board for this activity: It stays on forever. This means students can follow up with those that offered them help. They can also make new requests, etc. In essence, there is a “paper trail” for all the requests and offers made. In the physical class room, once we leave, those sticky notes end up in the trash. They can live on the MIRO board for ever, or as long as I leave the MIRO board up. As an instructor, I have unlimited number of boards and there is no “expiration date”.
* **Session Description.** Provide an overview of what you will actually do in the MOBTS conference session. Include a timeline for the session and how participants will be involved. Remember, reviewers are looking for participant engagement in these sessions.
  1. I will explain the reason for this exercise (to help students realize the vast range of resources and information they have access to through their class mates if they only ask) (5 minutes).
  2. I will then go through an abbreviated version of the exercise so participants can experience what students go through. I will briefly go through the homework part (info below) and several participants will create requests, either personal or professional. Everyone in this session will have access to a MIRO board (I will send out a link closer to the conference). I will ask a volunteer to write their request on the MIRO board. Anyone among the participants who can help with this request in any way will let everyone know by posting a virtual sticky note with an offer of help. Instructions will be provided on the MIRO board (a copy of instructions is added in Appendix C). (45 minutes).

We probably will have time for 4 or 5 attendees to make a request. Depending on how many people attend the session, I do expect that each one of those requests will receive an offer of help (either information, resources, etc.).

* 1. Discussion of my experience with this activity in my graduate Power and Influence courses (10 minutes, including Q&A).

References

Baker, Wayne. Achieving Success Through Social Capital. Jossey-Bass. 2000.

Baker, Wayne. All You Have to Do IS Ask. How to Master the Most Important Skill for Success. Currency. 2020.

Pfeffer, Jeffrey. Power: Why Some People Have it and Others Don’t. Harper Business. 2010.

Appendix A:

**What is MIRO?**

“Miro is a cloud-based collaboration tool….. The solution features a digital whiteboard that can be used for research, ideation, building customer journeys and user story maps, wireframing and a range of other collaborative activities. Boards can be created using pre-loaded templates and can be converted into a presentation or saved as a PDF.

Miro also comes with an integrated library of icons, wireframes and other content. Users can upload files, images and documents from their computer or Google Drive”. (https://www.softwareadvice.com/collaboration/miro-profile/)

Miro is a cloud-based collaboration tool that is mostly used in small to midsize businesses. Educators will receive a free account and it is then free for students to use. I used only a small fraction of the total capabilities of this tool. The opportunities to use it in classes are endless. For more information: miro.com.

Appendix B:

Note: I assign this “homework” about a week before we meet synchronously for our class.

**Homework** (this information is also posted on the MIRO board)

1. Please watch out for an announcement about logging into a MIRO board. It is free. We will use this platform to hold our “reciprocity ring” next week during class. It will be posted by this weekend.
2. Think about 2 requests you would like to make from your classmates. One personal and one professional.

From: Wayne Baker (2020, p.) – All you have to do is ask

Consider and complete these five sentence starters. If you get stuck on one, just move to the next.

1. I am currently working on….. and I could use help to……
2. One of my urgent tasks is to……and I need to………
3. I am struggling to …..and I would benefit from…..
4. One of the biggest challenges in my life is to…… and I need advice on….
5. My biggest hope is to…. and I need…..

**Determine your need:**

Information

Advice

Recommendation

Referral

Participation

Physical Resources

Etc.

**Smart Requests:** Based on Wayne Baker (2020, p.) effective requests should have the following characteristics:

**Specific:** details trigger people’s memory of what and who they know in a way that a general request does not.

**Meaningful:** When others know *why* you are making the request, they are more motivated to respond.

**Action-oriented:** a request is a call to action, not a goal.

**Realistic:** request can be big or small, but realistic (e.g. 2 tickets to Emeril –longshot but realistic, vs. 2 tickets to the moon).

**Time-bound**: requests need a due-date. People prefer a deadline because it allows them to evaluate whether or not they will be able to follow through by the date.

Appendix C:

**Instructions for making requests and offering help with requests.** (this information is also posted on the MIRO board)

1. Making a request: click on one of the sticky notes from the top row. Click edit, and enter your name and your specific request.
2. Offering help with a request: On the sticky notes below the request, click on it, click on the three dots, click on edit. Now enter the help you can offer and your name so the person who made the request can follow up with you.