

**TEACHING MANAGEMENT PRACTICALLY: INCORPORATING STUDENTS'  
FAMILY EXPERIENCES INTO MANAGEMENT TEACHING**

**ABSTRACT**

Most first-year students have little or no organizational past. It makes it difficult for them to discuss what managers do, why organizations behave the way they do, the challenges facing executive leadership, etc. This environment exposes first-year students to material they don't understand or do not perceive as relevant. This is not productive education. In this paper, I discuss why and how educators need to help undergraduate business students gain an understanding of organizational life through their family experiences. After all, what students experience in their families and how their families operate is not much different from how organizations operate.

**KEYWORDS**

Applying management learning, family experiences, knowing-doing

## INTRODUCTION

The function of education is to teach one to think intensively and to think critically.

Intelligence plus character – that is the goal of true education.

- Dr Martin Luther King, Jr. (cited by Walsh, 2015; Wilkinson, 2022)

What concerned me were the questions students asked (early in my career) when I introduced them to various discussion topics, such as motivation, leadership, teamwork, culture, organizational structure, and ethics. Students often requested *correct* answers to the questions I had prepared to discuss. It is like asking for an answer to a mathematical problem with a definite solution. “Why are we unable to obtain a correct answer?” a few students wondered each semester. One of the most significant challenges students face is demonstrating their reasoning to formulate answers and not focusing on “the” solution. As a result of their struggles, they either despise learning management or are more focused on passing the course than learning from it. Both issues are problematic in this instance.

I find this to be cruel; students have to force themselves to attend the class; they must sit through the workshop and gain little from it; they are instructed on the content but do not learn how to (or actually) apply the content (see Holt, 2020). Students learn the “whats” (the content) and the “whys” (the rationale behind the content being taught), but they do not receive much exposure to the “hows” (the fundamental techniques and when to apply them). Sometimes, educators share their work experiences and different case studies to assist students in understanding situations in different organizations. It is clear to students what they should do in a particular case-study-led situation (shared in class), but they do not comprehend how and when they should choose which part of their education to engage in different events they encounter in life. The problem is that they know what to do (through examples of case studies) but do not know when to do it (different experiences and events

than what the case studies introduced to them) (see Dean, Wright, & Forray, 2020). The gap between knowing and doing requires attention (Kolb & Kolb, 2005).

The purpose of this session is to discuss the challenges associated with teaching course content and how using students' experiences assists students in learning that content. Moreover, this session will focus on how educators can use the experiences of students' families as tools or mechanisms to engage them in understanding *how and when* to apply what they learn in class to real-life experiences that students encounter daily. Real-time application of course content will assist students in identifying the "when" and "how" aspects of implementing the (what and why) course material. This discussion will explore student-centered *real-life* experiential learning.

#### **THEORETICAL FOUNDATION/TEACHING IMPLICATIONS**

Most anecdotal evidence suggests that managers cannot apply conceptual knowledge to context despite having sufficient information on what constitutes effective management (Baldwin, Pierce, Joines, & Farouk, 2011). In a study by Baldwin et al. (2011), 21,319 managers and 2644 students were included. They found little to no difference in demonstrated managerial knowledge across various management experiences. This paper aims to bring this discussion of developing effective managers back to where it started; first-year undergraduate students (possible future managers) with little or no organizational past.

It is becoming increasingly critical for organizations to hire candidates with high levels of teamwork knowledge, skills, and abilities (KSAs) (Chen, Donahue, & Klimoski, 2004; Stevens, Campion, 1994). However, it is not just knowledge and skills necessary for exceptional performance. A willingness to use one's talents is also necessary (Boyatzis, Stubbs, & Taylor, 2002). The unconscious motives and traits of an individual, along with their values and philosophy, seem to be the driving factors behind their behavior. According

to Boyatzis, Stubbs, and Taylor (2022), the three components of capability (i.e., knowledge, competence, and motivational drivers) provide us with a better understanding of a person's abilities (i.e., knowledge), their capability to perform specific tasks (i.e., competency), as well as their reasons for performing those tasks (i.e., values, motives, and dispositions).

Successfully educating the course content would need to incorporate attitudes, values, and subjective qualities into its content to accommodate the complexity of the individuals involved in the system (Waldrop, 1993). For example, evidence-based management has been widely advocated in management studies (Morrell & Learmonth, 2015). A wide range of organizational problems can be addressed using evidence-based approaches. However, a certain narrowness has developed, which may hamper our ability to grasp the diversity of management problems and limit our ability to address many real-life organizational challenges in the future (Morrell & Learmonth, 2015).

Having had the opportunity to help students understand that learning about organizations is not much different from learning about themselves and their families, I find it critical for education. Students without prior work experience can only make sense of what they study at university through reflection. The discussion of family experiences becomes more natural when considering that reflections are limited to the past. For me, the course content is not a problem. However, for students with little to no work experience at the undergraduate level, learning from them alone may not be as straightforward as it seems. Educators may not be able to assist them in reflecting or bridging their knowing-doing unless we can assist students in making connections between theoretical concepts and their own experiences. I am reminded of an ancient Chinese proverb that states, "I hear, and I forget. I see, and I remember. I do, and I understand." It is the third part of the proverb that we educators need to ensure happens in class; *I do, and I understand*.

Nonaka & Takeuchi (1996) indicate that human ideas are developed much earlier in life, and human actions are based on those ideas (Argyris, 2002a, 2002b). As a result, students have difficulty unlearning what they have already learned, complicating the learning process of new information. The act of learning is ultimately the act of unlearning; the act of unlearning is also the act of learning (Kolb & Kolb, 2005). The ability to apply knowledge and exercise judgment is essential for students to succeed in the unpredictable business environments they will encounter during their careers (Merritt, 2001). There is, however, the possibility of disengagement, *disinspiration*, and *unmotivation* to learn if the discussions are either too theoretical or abstract from student experience (Auster & Wylie, 2006). We accumulate information in our brains over our lives based on inherited characteristics, specific experiences, and the environment in which we live (Kolb & Kolb, 2005; ). Therefore, students must reflect on *their* experiences and encounters to develop a sense of identity (see Cunliffe, 2002). If they cannot relate what *they* hear in class to *their* own experiences, *they* will not be able to gain knowledge from what is said in class and from the experiences of others. It remains true that students can only view what you tell them through their own experience (don't we all fit this category?), which is influenced by their background. The likelihood of students engaging their minds and emotions will increase when they are provided with experiences that are relevant to their lives. By gaining insight into their family experiences through reflection, students may be able to bridge the perceived gap between what they are learning in class and what they are experiencing (daily).

According to Piaget and Vygotsky's theories of cognitive constructivism, people learn and understand by applying their prior knowledge and beliefs (Kolb & Kolb, 2005). To this end, education should emphasize the importance of allowing students to draw from their personal experiences as a learning tool, regardless of whether they perceive a direct

correlation between their undergraduate business studies and life experiences. Suppose students' experiences are not integrated into the discussion. In that case, they will be unable to challenge their preconceived notions about how they perceive and value their experiences and how they view other social groups other than their own and those to which they relate (Dipadova-Stocks, 2005). If educators fail to cultivate awareness, graduates may be unable to comprehend the consequences of their decisions on others (Christensen & Carlile, 2009). As part of understanding the student's perception of their actions impact on those around them, it is crucial to begin at their source - their families and friends - and then connect what the student learns through reflection on their experiences with the organization's expectations of their employees. In addition, whether educators wish to discuss what forms of organization are most effective, why managers are driven to achieve goals, or why leaders motivate their followers, family experiences provide first-hand information on these topics.

For example, in my classroom, I discuss with my students who make decisions at home; does your father make all the decisions? Do your parents make decisions after discussing them among themselves, or do they ask for your input, or do you and your parents collectively decide on the outcome after an open discussion around the dinner table? When students are asked such questions, they are eager to respond and narrate incidents that illustrate why a particular approach was adopted and whether they agreed with their parents. After all, it is through their first-hand experience. They have lived it, felt it. They don't need to think and manufacture their answers to fit the course content. Through this process, I can bridge their family experiences and feelings to how organizations operate (e.g., top-down and bottom-up approaches; autonomy; tall or flat structure) and why employees are sometimes unhappy with their managers and occasionally satisfied. Without the former, learning would be equivalent to learning with open eyes and closed ears. Although you can see the lips

moving, you cannot hear the words being said. Considering this, how can we encourage students to reflect on their learning? To develop a reflective mindset? Students engaging in reflection daily? In what ways can tacit knowledge be acquired? All these questions are important for establishing student-centered learning. It is possible to learn about reflection and its role in learning by reflecting on family and friends (linking theory with practice; Sims & Lindholm, 1993). Students perform the learning in real-time and do not wait to exercise their learning when employed. Through this process, educators can assist students in understanding how their (students') experiences and understanding of those experiences (through reflection) can be applied to the organization, connecting their family experiences to the activities of organizations and creating a reflection space for students.

### **CONCLUDING REMARKS**

It is important for educators to develop tools and exercises that allow students to discuss constructively their life experiences, including how decisions are made at home by students or for them, by their parents; what areas of learning they would like to do or learn if they have autonomy; why they require or do not require autonomy and so on. This will allow students to understand the taught management concepts better. Educators are responsible for connecting those lived experiences with organizational experiences through examples, case studies, and course content information. Using this approach (family experiences-based class discussions), I find it possible to narrow the gap between knowledge (knowing) and action (doing) that is ever-widening and make management education practical and enriching.

### **SESSION DESCRIPTION**

In this session, educators will discuss the use of student-family experiences in teaching business and management-related topics in class for not more than 45 minutes. During this session, educators will discuss their teaching struggles related to the application

of information they have been exposed to. This discussion will also examine family experiences' role in acquiring or unlearning existing knowledge. Here, educators will discuss how their family experiences can relate to their student's learning in the classroom.

Participants will be asked to share an experience they have had in class in which they have had difficulty teaching their students different topics. This will be followed by a constructive debate about what other educators are doing or could be doing. Engaging members and involving them in the discussion would provide an opportunity for engagement and active participation.

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