Teaching Like a Luddite: Advocating for a Technology-free Classroom

Abstract

In this session, the facilitators present their (hopefully) compelling argument for taking a step back from the technology infused classrooms that are prevalent across collegiate management programs. Technology is clearly part and parcel of the management education landscape both in practice and research; for instance, a current call for papers in a special issue of the Journal of Management Education focuses on technology as a tool, topic and differentiator in management education. The facilitators of this session encourage attendees to consider reverting to a simpler time, and provide students with a simple, yet effective technology-free, experientially-focused classroom.

Keywords: Technology-free, Simplicity, Luddite

**Introduction**

Management education has seen a proliferation of technological innovation, much of which is in response to perceived industry and higher education accreditation demands. As Allen et al., (2022) suggest in their recent call for papers for a special issue of the Journal of Management Education, “technologies enabling disruptions (TED) will shift the classroom experience.” Whether it’s the management classroom use of TikTok or other social media (e.g., Middleton, 2022), mobile app games (e.g., Trinh, 2022) virtual and/or augmented reality (e.g., Netland et al., 2020), simulations (e.g., Pierce, 2022), artificial intelligence (e.g. Goralski & Tan, 2020) or other online tools (e.g., Bonner, et al., 2022; Wang & Chia, 2022; Kriz, 2022), the trend is clear in recent management education research is clear: Technology is King!

We believe that the reliance on, and expectation of management educators’ use of technology in the classroom can have negative effects. As such, we advocate for management educators to harken back to a simpler time and teach like a Luddite. A Luddite is defined as “one who is opposed to especially technological change” (m-w.com, n.d.), a term derived from the historical group of 19th Century workers who sabotaged and destroyed machinery they perceived to be a threat to their livelihoods. While we won’t go as far as to recommend sabotaging technology in your workplaces, in this roundtable discussion, we support faculty exploring non-technological alternatives to experiential education.

**Theoretical Foundation/Teaching Implications**

We acknowledge that there is ample support for using various forms of technology in the classroom. As a rationale for continuing to introduce new technology in their classrooms, many management educators point to practitioner demand (e.g., Edelson et al., 2018), and/or the age-old critique that management education is disconnected between what is taught and what practitioners do (e.g., Stewart, 1984). We don’t necessarily disagree with these viewpoints, but feel that there is a dark side to technological innovations in the classroom that hasn’t really been acknowledged as faculty flock to new technological toys. Technology enhances many learning opportunities and allows for student comfort but can also be a tool that is too heavily relied on and can potentially affect student problem-solving skills (Carstens et al., 2021)

Research on the use of technology in education recognizes that technology, while necessary for some learning is not always necessary for all instruction, and that it is being overused (Barragree et al., 2020). Others note that the excessive use of technology in the classroom has led to a deterioration of writing skills (Waila, et al., 2021) – the same skills that are up to 35 times more in-demand than any other skills (Lindzon, 2020). The overuse of technology can lead to negative health effects for students, as well as impair student learning (Storm, 2021).

Among the most common disadvantages linked to the use of technology in education, are: privacy problems, discerning reliable and relevant information, the time required for the preparation of educational materials, the negative impact on academic performance of the students, the lack of resources for its implementation in the classrooms and the infoxication (Cano-Vázquez, et al., 2022). Furthermore, the propagation of information and communication-technologies in the classroom can lead to technology-induced anxiety, known as technostress especially when faculty don’t have the technical support and/or professional development to use these tools effectively (cf., Boyer-Davis, 2020; 2018). Research has demonstrated that more training for teachers and students are necessary to better implement technology in the classroom (Carstens, et al., 2021).

We don’t feel that the challenges of technology use in the classroom need be limited to the technology-based disruptors and innovations. PowerPoint, for instance has been an extremely popular tool in management classrooms for the past 2+ decades, but like any other tool, its benefits in the classroom depends on discerning use. Paux (2002) implores educators to use particular care to blunt PowerPoint’s tendency to produce a disembodied, decontextualized learning environment. Students can experience sensory overload and split attention when instructors read slides with bullet points and complex graphs during a lecture (Strauss, et al., 2011), and Vallance & Towndrow (2007) noted that users may not appreciate that PowerPoint invites and seduces educators to reshape knowledge in particular ways to the detriment of analytical thinking and interpretive understanding. Students taught using PowerPoint had lower grades in final examinations and less learning had occurred (Sugahara & Boland, 2006).

Even student use of technology during class has deleterious effects. Hall, et al. (2020) note that students’ classroom laptop use distracts their peers and negatively affects the learning of their neighbors. Encouraging all students to avoid technological distractions and to pay attention in class, especially at times when technology is not beings used in direct support of classroom activities, not only promotes student learning, but also enhances student engagement (Hall et al., 2020).

**Session Description**

During this roundtable discussion session, the facilitators will first introduce themselves, and get to know the attendees. Following this brief introduction, we will move to a discussion of the challenges in using technology and when it is appropriate to abandon technology in favor of the simplistic, Luddite approach for which we advocate. We’ll then brainstorm with attendees about appropriate, technology-free alternatives for experiential learning activities in management classrooms. Our full timeline for this session is provided below:

***Timeline***

0.00-0.05 Introductions of facilitators and attendees

0.05-0.20 Interactive discussion (small groups possible, depending on number of attendees) about technological challenges in the management classroom

0.20-0.45 Brainstorming (again, small group breakouts possible depending on number of attendees) about alternatives to existing experiential learning activities that currently use technology, and replacing these with low/no-tech substitutions.

0.45-1.00 Debrief with participants

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