

Exploring the Successes, Failures, and Strategies of Incorporating Scaffolding Learning  
in Management and Leadership Education

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Sam M. Koudsia and Michael J. Kirchner

Purdue University Fort Wayne

Abstract

Scaffolding is a teaching technique educators utilize where they progressively offer decreasing support as learners gain mastery or understanding of content. Research shows many benefits to scaffolding; however, we as management and leadership educators, may not consistently utilize and apply scaffolding in order to reap its benefits. This session will introduce and allow for application of two scaffolding examples in management and leadership courses while also opening discussion regarding how our MOBTS colleagues have both succeeded and struggled to integrate scaffolding in their classes. Attendees will leave inspired to be more intentional when integrating scaffolding in management and leadership education.

*Keywords:* scaffolding, management and leadership education, collaborative learning

## **Exploring the Successes, Failures, and Strategies of Incorporating Scaffolding Learning in Management and Leadership Education**

Scaffolding learning is a pedagogical technique in which instructors break up the learning into chunks and offer additional learning tools as guidance for learners. As learner comprehension increases, instructors provide diminishing support as learners master new material (University of San Diego Professional and Continuing Education, n.d.). A challenge exists when it comes to effectively incorporate scaffolding learning strategies in management and leadership courses. For example, an effective scaffolding technique may require a large time investment and resources, an educator may not have, due to how long it takes to learn how to effectively use scaffolding. However, it is important for educators to invest the time in order to fully understand scaffolding learning due to its applicational benefits in the classroom, especially in management and leadership courses. Further, having a good understanding of scaffolding learning helps educators assess its usefulness (The LibreTexts, n.d.). More specifically, certain challenges exist for scaffolding learning and the application of this strategy in the classroom, may include but is not limited to:

- very time consuming to develop and implement
- lack of sufficient personnel
- potential for misjudging the zone of proximal development
- successful execution requires identifying the ‘sweet spot’ or area that is just beyond but not too far beyond the students’ abilities
- inadequately modeling the desired behaviors, strategies or activities because the teacher has not fully considered the individual student’s needs, predilections,

interests, and abilities (such as not showing a student how to “double click” on an icon when using a computer)

- full benefits not seen unless instructors are properly trained
- requires instructors to progressively relinquish control
- a lack of specific examples and tips for integration in teacher’s editions of textbooks (para. 2)

On the other hand, benefits and application of scaffolding learning are abundant in the classroom. For example, scaffolding learning provides the opportunity for students to focus on one phase or chunk at a time and may offer the chance to foster deeper understanding as more time is invested on one phase or chunk at a time. As described previously with regard to scaffolding learning, as educators provide additional learning tools as guidance for learners, educators can thus embrace teaching as a valuable opportunity to inspire students by providing explanations and illustrations via PowerPoint slides, calculations via Excel templates, and activities via Word documents (Alber, 2011; Jajairam, 2012). Further, scaffolding learning can divide challenging project into more doable pieces, which can be later combined into one comprehensive project.

For example, using one of the author’s class assignments, students are required to implement a change initiative as their final project. During the assignment, students lead an organizational change through performing research, identifying anticipated impacts of their change strategy, and subsequently implementing the plan to benefit an organization. Afterwards, students write up a paper documenting what they have done and reflecting on their experience. The objective of the project is to initiate the change at the organization and then apply a theory of

change management, such as Kotter's or Lewin's change management models, in order to implement and retain the change. The project is divided into three phases:

Phase one consists of two deliverables: (a) a proposed plan, where the students write up a description of their proposal and include details of their plan and (b) a verbal synopsis regarding the proposed plan. Phase two entails a verbal progress report with regard to how the change is progressing. Phase three includes two deliverables: (a) a final report outlining the results of the project and (b) a corresponding reflection of what students have learned, as well as takeaways, recommendations, and conclusions. Additionally, students complete a verbal synopsis regarding the final report and reflection.

Another classroom example includes dividing a research-plan-canvas project into separate research briefs and later on combining those research briefs into one document that makes up the project. The project consists of 13 sections: 1) research problem/question, 2) phenomenon, 3) setting/context, 4) literature, 5) motivation, 6) target audience and outputs, 7) team, 8) paradigm and assumptions, 9) theory, 10) research design, 11) limitations and challenges, 12) resources and skills, and 13) contributions. Students complete a few sections at a time before eventually combining the research briefs into one document. By dividing the project into sections, the assignment becomes more manageable for learners and may enhance the learning by letting the learners focus on a few sections at a time. Scaffolding learning can reduce students' stress with the project, allow them to focus on one phase at a time, and possibly obtain deeper understanding. For instance, The LibreTexts (n.d.) listed the benefits of scaffolding as follows:

Possible early identifier of giftedness; provides individualized instruction; greater assurance of the learner acquiring the desired skill, knowledge or ability; provides

differentiated instruction; delivers efficiency – Since the work is structured, focused, and glitches have been reduced or eliminated prior to initiation, time on task is increased and efficiency in completing the activity is increased; creates momentum – Through the structure provided by scaffolding, students spend less time searching and more time on learning and discovering resulting in quicker learning; engages the learner; motivates the learner to learn; [and] minimizes the level of frustration for the learner. (para 3)

Additionally, as instructors, we can provide on-going guidance and support to ensure aspects of the assignment are correctly aligning. Implementing adaptable, interactive, and engaging teaching practices ultimately invites learners to participate in the learning process (Jaijairam, 2012; Kiili, 2005; Ribera et al., 2012; Ruel, n.d.). Student participation in the learning process and student contribution to the creation of the learning environment, under the premise of active instruction, may lead to deeper learning. Further, “Technology can be a wonderful tool to help simplify the scaffolding process for educators” (Grand Canyon University, 2023, para. 27). For example, lecture videos can be created ahead of class and posted online for the learners to preview and prepare (Grand Canyon University, 2023). This paper will also introduce collaborative learning for encouraging the learners, improving their participation, and enhancing the learning process in order to make the learning more meaningful and support scaffolding learning; collaborative learning can be used concurrently with scaffolding learning. Making the learning more meaningful involves connecting new information with a learner’s stored information. The new information becomes relational to the old information, making it easier to recollect afterward. For example, this may include teaching learners how to input learned material (*Meaningful Learning*, n.d.).

Collaborative learning is a learning technique where educators assign students into groups; collaborative learning is relevant to scaffolding because it encourages the learners to collaborate in order to solve problems; the goal is for students to ask questions, learn from their peers, and build up their knowledge. It is also effective to use real-world problems; students will take more ownership when they feel connected to certain concepts or cases. Furthermore, it is beneficial to assign roles within groups; students are more likely to participate if they know what is expected of them; participation in collaborative learning is also relevant to scaffolding. Integrating collaborative learning will aid in further development of learners' understanding and skills (George Washington University Graduate School of Education and Human Development, 2020).

Continuing with the topic of collaboration, according to Kezar and Lester (2009), collaboration in learning is important as the learners are encouraged to collaborate in order to enhance the learning experience, understand the concepts in different lenses, strengthen knowledge, exchange innovative ideas, and locate effective learning techniques. The preceding factors are essential for scaffolding since they support both learners and learning. Additionally, the fundamental work of Kezar and Lester (2009) indicated that "learning leads to an understanding of the nature of collaboration and development of the skills necessary to practice it" (p. 195). Collaborative learning is a practical and student-based pedagogical strategy that encourages students to form groups and work together with their peers to solve a given problem or a case. Collaborative learning helps learners to strengthen social skills, learn from their peers, build trust, become more engaged, and increase confidence (Chioran, 2017).

**Session Description**

We will begin the session with an introduction to current research on scaffolding learning and discuss why the term and application of scaffolding is useful for management and leadership educators. The discussion will then move toward an examination of two actual classroom examples we have used for scaffolding learning in leadership courses. More specifically, we will introduce our process for designing the assignments using scaffolding technique and address both successes and challenges in implementation. Additionally, we will share an additional methodology used in the classroom in order to engage students in the scaffolding process. Subsequently, we will facilitate a roundtable discussion by inviting attendees to share examples of how they have (a) successfully implemented scaffolding in their classes, (b) failed or struggled with the process, and (c) experienced significant learning through experience with scaffolding technique in their classes. The roundtable will conclude with a compiled list of best practices attendees will be able to leave with regarding how they can redesign assignments with more intentional use of scaffolding.

The 60-minute roundtable discussion will be divided into three parts—

**Discussion of Applicable Research (10 minutes):**

- We will define and discuss scaffolding learning with attendees and share our applicable research

**Scaffolding Learning/Classroom Application (30 minutes):**

- We will go through two actual classroom examples of scaffolding learning and discuss the importance of this learning technique
- Participants will share what they do in the classroom with regard to scaffolding learning

**Debrief and Further Discussion (20 minutes):**

- We will discuss an additional methodology used in the classroom to enhance learning
- Participants will be invited to share their own strategies and discuss how our classroom strategies could apply in their classroom
- Session takeaways will be reviewed

**Learning Objectives**

1. Participants will understand scaffolding learning and its effect on enhancing learning;
2. Participants will be exposed to two actual classroom examples of scaffolding learning;
3. Participants will be familiar with classroom strategies to enhance learning; and
4. Participants will be introduced to research that examined scaffolding learning and an additional learning methodology.



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