

Innovative Approaches to Management Education

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Abstract

The development of effective managers and good management practices begins with proper education and training. Innovative teaching strategies are needed in management education to more effectively engage students in the classroom. Several innovative strategies, such as the flipped classroom approach, are quickly gaining popularity in higher education. Such approaches can help students understand how to apply theoretical information regarding concepts such as conflict resolution, teamwork, and communication in real-world settings. Role play is one technique used in innovative teaching strategies, such as the flipped classroom method, that is essential for practicing proper application of concepts in the management classroom. This article will discuss the concepts of the flipped classroom and role-play, and their use in management education. The purpose of this article is to provide management educators with an overview of innovative strategies that can be utilized to enhance management education. This information will have implications for the management workforce in providing knowledge that can lead to the development of good management practices.

Keywords: Innovative Teaching, Flipped Classroom, Role-Play, Management Education

Introduction

In order to have good managers who understand how to develop good management practices, the structure of management education must be considered. Over the years, higher education has evolved. Within that evolution, the way in which students learn, and the methods by which professors teach, have been at the center of research. Research has shown that student learning styles differ, and teaching in the traditional lecture format is not always successful for student learning (Wright, Middleton, Greenfield, Williams, & Brazil, 2016). It is clear that all students do not learn the same way. In order for information to be absorbed, different teaching strategies should be incorporated in the classroom.

The flipped classroom approach is a teaching method that focuses on learner-centered instruction (Gillboy, Heinerichs & Pazzaglia, 2015). This method allows the student to be the center of their education (Aslan & Reigeluth, 2015). In other words, the student has the responsibility for learning and the teacher facilitates the learning (Aslan & Sinem, 2016).

Strategies for using the flipped classroom approach in management education can take form in a few different ways. One form is by creating teachable moments through lived experiences (Wright et al, 2016). Teachable moments offer insight into real-world application of concepts, which can provide management students the “know-how” to incorporate concepts learned in the classroom appropriately in their professional careers. Educators who create teachable moments do so by modeling behavior in the classroom through role playing. Role playing and other instructional tools have strategically been used in management education.

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There are an extensive amount of management education techniques. A common denominator in management education literature is that the way educators teach is changing. Decisions that educators make on instructional methods are more complex than ever (McIver, Fitzsimmons, & Flanagan, 2016). The student-centered approach provides educators with a new arsenal of instructional methods, including collaborative learning (Burns, Pierson, & Reddy, 2014), simulations, the flipped-classroom approach and service learning (McIver, Fitzsimmons, & Flanagan, 2016).

Innovative Techniques

Flipped Classroom Approach

Higher education, due to the high standards it holds, becomes pressured to improve student learning and effectiveness (O'Flaherty & Phillips, 2015). One way that this can be achieved is by adding innovative ways to enhance student learning. The flipped classroom approach is an innovative technique that has positively been reported in management education literature (O'Flaherty & Phillips, 2015). The flipped classroom approach has several descriptions, but a commonality among definitions is that the flipped classroom takes teacher led instruction and replaces it with students taking ownership of their learning (O'Flaherty & Phillips, 2015). Students prepare out of class by watching videos or completing homework on an assigned topic. The class time is used for interactive learning among students. The educator in the flipped classroom approach facilitates learning and is able to guide students and provide individual help if needed. The flipped classroom approach puts the responsibility on the student, which in turn requires the student not only to own their education but become a master of the material (O'Flaherty & Phillips, 2015).

The effectiveness of the flipped classroom approach is evident in the literature. The approach can be used in multiple settings and in different educational areas. Research on the flipped classroom approach is prevalent in management education. The success of the flipped classroom approach benefits management education. Characteristics of a good manager include being a problem-solver, a good listener, knowledgeable, and organized (Leonard, White, & Graves, 2009). The concept and theories prevalent in management education teach students how to be a successful manager through critical thinking and active learning. The flipped classroom approach technique mirrors the same concept (Kim et al, 2014).

Many studies have been conducted on the effectiveness of the flipped classroom approach. O'Flaherty & Phillips (2015) found the approach contributes to the effectiveness of student learning. Others found the approach replaced the traditional lectures with active student-learning that provided well-balanced critical thinking, and improved information retention (Sajid et al, 2016). Emphasis on the use of the flipped classroom and role-play with particular management concepts such as conflict resolution, teamwork, and communication skills should be further explored.

Role Play in the Classroom

One technique educators use in the flipped classroom approach is role playing. Role play has widely been used in the classroom setting for years (DeNeve & Heppner, 1997), but it is becoming more commonly used in different settings and in different educational fields (Gillboy et al, 2015). The pressure and high standards of higher education has challenged the way instructors teach and active learning techniques are becoming more common.

The purpose of role playing in a flipped classroom is to take the information learned before class and then act out the concepts during class. The role play technique allows students to practice what they learned so they have a better understanding of the material and concepts (DeNeve & Heppner, 1997). Applying real-world situations through role play has positively shown that students remember the material even after graduation (DeNeve & Heppner, 1997). Literature explores the potential of role play in higher education. One study confirmed that the active learning approach of using role play in the classroom enhanced active-listening skills, social awareness, and problem solving, as well as fostered team work (Rao & Stupans, 2012). In a study conducted by Rao & Stupans (2012), role play scenarios were tested in 3 different classrooms. Each course was given a typology of role play. Role-switch, acting, and almost real-life were the typologies used. The findings indicated that the typology of role play was just as important as the kind of course where the role play was used (Rao & Stupans, 2012). Once learning objectives are formulated, then role play typology can be decided. Answering the question, "What is the purpose of role playing in this class?", will help develop the guidelines of role play for that specific course. Consistently throughout the literature on role play in the classroom, learner-centeredness and the flipped classroom are commonly found terms.

The concept of role play and mimicking real-world scenarios as a technique in the classroom has positively shown to engage students, as well as help them understand the core concepts and objectives in the classroom (Lofstrom, 2016). Implementing innovative techniques in higher education is becoming the norm. The flipped classroom approach and role-playing in the classroom are techniques that can be used to enhance student learning in management education.

The Flipped Classroom in Management Education

Management skills are difficult to learn without practical application. This is one reason why management educators should consider the flipped classroom approach. There are several central concepts in management education that benefit from using innovative techniques in order to enhance students' ability to translate skills to real-world settings

Conflict Resolution

Conflict resolution skills are extremely important in management. Techniques such as role play can be used in a flipped classroom to give students the opportunity to practice their application of skills. One strategy is to utilize scenarios that commonly occur in the workplace and have students role play how they would handle each situation. This allows educators the opportunity to observe student skills, and to provide guidance and feedback in the safety and security of the classroom.

Team Dynamics

Teamwork is becoming increasingly prevalent in the workplace. Thus, management students need to understand team dynamics in order to be able to effectively supervise teams. Team projects can be incorporated into a flipped classroom approach in order to give students the real-world experience of working together as a team to achieve a common goal. It also gives students the opportunity to practice supervisory skills. One possible model is to give each student in the team a supervisory role (i.e. CEO, CIO, CFO, etc.) so that each student has authority over part of the project. This will allow students a real-world experience of managing and supervising others.

Communication and Presentation Skills

All managers must have good communication and presentation skills to be successful. Although presentations are common throughout education in many disciplines, students who are studying to work in management need a greater emphasis on communication and presentation skills. Through the flipped classroom approach, educators can assign students different topics to present so that each student has to effectively manage how to convey information to others in an informative way.

Discussion

While the flipped classroom approach has exploded as an instructional strategy, its use with particular concepts in the field of management education should be further explored. Role play is a flipped classroom technique that is helpful in allowing students to practice application of various management concepts. Conflict resolution, team dynamics, communication, and presentation skills are all critical to management but difficult to learn from traditional lecture alone. Flipped classroom methods are vital in allowing students to gain experience in learning how to apply management techniques in real world settings. Utilizing innovative approaches in management education can provide a path for developing more effective managers.

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