

Chapter 31

The Application of the Learning Sciences to the Design of Business Education Cases

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ABSTRACT

Business education is education for practice and thus, requires a systematic and integrative approach that will guide students toward becoming reflective practitioners. Case-based education is an important tool that can provide the educational experiences that produce effective practitioners but only if its use is guided by a sound theoretical and research based framework. Research and theory from the learning sciences can guide case-based instructional practices. This chapter will provide a framework for the design of case-based instruction that incorporates teaching and learning affordances derived from the theory of situated learning and cognition. If the educational goal is to produce business practitioners with the skills and knowledge necessary to operate successfully in today's global business environment, business education needs to be prepared to incorporate theoretical perspectives derived from learning sciences research into case-based education.

INTRODUCTION

The world and the world of business has changed dramatically in the last quarter century. New technologies, new media, new industries and new professional practices have changed the way professionals in virtually all industries conduct business. But as recent news stories of scandals and blunders in so many spheres of modern society have demonstrated, our educational systems are not helping students develop the professional perspectives needed to cope effectively with the new business environment and are in need of re-evaluation and revision. The professional perspectives students are being taught are too reliant on technology and narrowly focused on analytical views of gain and objectification. To adequately prepare students to enter the technologically sophisticated, media-connected, culturally diverse, 21st century global workplace business management programs need to help students develop a professional

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perspective that is more ethical, reflective, integrative, situationally aware and able to create effective, evidence-based solutions to professional problems. Adult and professional graduate programs must help students develop a more sophisticated, civic-minded professional competence that allows them to effectively integrate skilled “know-how” and ethical professional judgement in real-world settings.

The basic premise of this chapter is that professional business practice must deliver a combination of knowledge, cognitive and hands-on skills and professional comportment and therefore has a unique nature that requires a unique pedagogical approach with a sound theoretical foundation. This chapter will provide a framework for developing and delivering case-based education that capitalizes on the type of contextualized learning that is critical for the development of reflective practitioners. As a number of educators (Benner, 1984; Noone, 2007; Berragan, 2013) have pointed out education for the professions requires education for practice. Curricula and instruction must be designed to deliver professional education in a contextualized fashion that links knowledge, skills and ethical, reflective practice behavior.

This chapter then, will discuss the need for a conceptual framework that will guide the design of a new case-based teaching model and will provide an overview of a relevant theoretical perspective, situated learning, that is derived from the learning sciences. Situated learning pedagogies, especially when combined with educational technology that extend classroom learning and provide a larger repertoire of learning activities can be used to design a case-based model that will be more effective in the education of reflective practitioners.

BACKGROUND

Over the years there have been a number of studies of management education (Pfeffer & Fong, 2002; Bennis & O’Toole, 2005; Mintzberg, 2005) resulting in a number of recommendations focused on improving learning outcomes. Datar, Garvin and Cullen (2010) for instance, in a study of MBA programs in Europe and the United States identified unmet needs of management education. Some that are relevant to the discussion in this chapter include:

- Leadership development, improved emotional intelligence, and the ability to motivate, delegate, and lead ethically.
- The need to integrate concepts through a multidisciplinary approach that permits students to solve problems.
- The need to pursue creative and innovative thinking.
- The need to balance practice, theory, and experience.

Studies that identify needed outcomes are helpful but as Avolio (2014) has pointed out we need to go beyond studies that focus on the outcomes of business education and produce more research on the types of teaching methods that can produce these desired learning outcomes. From this perspective business educators should address both the program content and architecture but also develop increasingly effective learning methodologies that enable students to successfully meet the challenges facing managers in the ever-changing global business environment. As in many educational disciplines teaching methods in business education have developed over the years based on pragmatic factors or from imitation and are rarely derived or informed by sound research or grounded in theory. Improving business education has

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