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ENDNOTE ACTIVITY: A TOOL FOR INTEGRATION OF COURSE CONTENT AND
COMMUNICATION SKILL PRACTICE

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ABSTRACT

The Endnote Activity includes a written form and a discussion format that are designed to link, in a variety of ways, classroom materials with readings and relevant events outside the classroom. Effective communication skills are consistently identified in the literature as key components of managerial and organizational effectiveness. In addition, educators are constantly challenged to demonstrate the relevance and practicality of classroom activities with those experiences and situations students encounter outside the classroom. Activities that can address these areas offer particular value to students. The Endnote Activity is designed to enhance communication skills as well as relate course reading with materials students select on their own outside of the classroom, even extending to the possibility of integrating cross-disciplinary contributions. This paper explains the Endnote Activity including the Endnote form and accompanying presentation. The objectives of such an activity are explained as well as a discussion of how to use the activity in the classroom. Several problems and difficulties are explored and possible remedies identified. When modifications must be made for class size or length of class period, various adaptations are explored.

INTRODUCTION

Relevant literature in management education as well as literature addressing successful managerial behavior and organizational performance clearly indicate that communication skills are not only an essential variable for effectiveness (Luthans & Larsen, 1986), but these skills also comprise a

significant part of managerial time (Kotter, 1999). Further, teaching communication skills is an important part of management education (Porter & McKibbin, 1988). The importance of and interest in communication skills is heightened by an increasing emphasis on team behavior in organizations operating in a collaborative, interdependent world (Bassin, 1996; Linden, Wayne & Bradway, 1996). Of particular emphasis in team behavior is the key part played by eliciting input from and subsequent discussion of diverse ideas from all team members (Hart, 1996; Leavitt & Lipman-Blumen, 1995; Nahavandi & Aranda, 1994). To capitalize on the diversity available in a team, managers must understand the value other functions and disciplines can provide to the solution of problems in an increasingly complex world (Milter & Stinson, 1995; Coppola & Daniels, 1998). One method of continuously monitoring the environment in order to gain an awareness of potential threats to and opportunities for an organization to capitalize on is environmental scanning. Regularly surveying the environment by reading and conversing, for example, facilitates gathering information that assists in the discovery of relevant information for an organization (Steiner, 1979; Senge, Kleiner, Roberts, Ross, Roth & Smith, 1999). In addition, the importance of critical thinking skills can not be ignored (Brookfield, 1987). Sound thinking helps solve problems in an efficient and timely fashion. The ability to sort information, think clearly and solve problems might well be considered required competitive competencies (Milter & Stinson, 1995).

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ENDNOTE: THE ACTIVITY

Purpose

The Endnote Activity serves several purposes and can be designed to meet a variety of course objectives. In completing the Endnote form (See Appendix), students engage in generalizing their required course readings to related written material outside the classroom, thus realizing how their coursework generalizes and is made practical in the “real world.” Several different communication skills are addressed when students engage in the Endnote presentation part of this activity. The Endnote presentation requires students to make an oral presentation in the classroom and it necessitates practice in engaging others in a discussion that relates Endnote material with other course readings. In addition, completing this assignment gives students practice in environmental scanning activities.

Materials

The Endnote form is the only material needed for this experiential activity.

Procedure

At the beginning of the course, students are informed about the Endnote Activity and its relevance for learning in general and the course in particular. This assignment can be included in syllabus information. Instructions are given regarding how to complete the Endnote form, and students are told that Endnote forms will be collected at the conclusion of each class session. Further, students are informed that at least one time during the term, each person is expected to make an in-class presentation of an Endnote.

The Endnote presentations are designed to integrate the written materials that the student selects as relevant and related to the assigned readings for the current class session with those course readings. As such, the Endnote presentation is best conducted toward the

conclusion of each class period (hence the title of Endnote) so that the integration of materials from outside and inside the classroom can best be integrated.

The Endnote Form

Each week that course readings are assigned, classroom participants are responsible for submitting a completed Endnote form (See Appendix) and accompanying article. The form is to be completed regardless of whether or not an in-class presentation is made.

Students should be instructed about some of the helpful parameters for appropriate Endnote article selection. For example, the best Endnote articles are commonly from relatively current journals or newspapers. Depending on need, the instructor can put time period limitations here such as no publication dates farther back than 1 or 2 years. The professor should also explain that books or even book chapters are typically not appropriate Endnote sources because of their length and complexity for this assignment.

The Endnote class presentation

Students are told that at the end of each class session, one or more students will do an in-class Endnote presentation. Students can volunteer to present or be chosen at random by the professor. In-class presentation expectations related to such areas as length or how many presentations are expected for each student are modified depending upon variables such as class size and length of a class period.

During the presentation, the student gives the article title, its source and then reviews the remainder of the Endnote form including why the article was chosen, what current week readings relate, and a summary of the article. Upon completion of this information, based on the questions the student has designed, the presenter leads a classroom discussion of the article.

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To prepare for the Endnote presentation, students can be told they are responsible for “teaching” the class for a period of time. To accomplish this, the Endnote and accompanying article they bring to class utilize particular class material in a way that discusses and illustrates this material.

DISCUSSION

The Endnote experiential activity serves a variety of purposes in any class and is adaptable to any course content.

Several different skills are practiced when engaging in this Endnote Activity. The activity helps students generalize course readings and other materials to readings they encounter outside the classroom. This generalization increases the relevance as well as the practical value of required reading. The Endnote presentation helps students practice their oral presentation skills as well as their ability to initiate discussion and engage their peers in meaningful discourse. Critical thinking abilities are challenged not only when students engage in the selection of a relevant Endnote article, but also when they design questions about the article in order to facilitate discussion with their classroom peers. Finally, this Endnote Activity gives students practice in environmental scanning techniques, potentially even leading them to discover value in researching cross-disciplinary areas.

Students have several common difficulties in mastering the Endnote form and its accompanying presentation. Initially, students will frequently say they could not find an appropriate Endnote. This indicates they could not relate required course readings to any reading they could find outside the classroom. As they increase their skills in this activity, most eventually develop the ability to take any article and relate it to what they are reading for the class. At first, they try to locate an article that relates to classroom topics, and finally, they learn how to select any article of interest and

find a way to relate coursework to the content of that article. Discussion and guidance from the professor can lead the development of this skill.

Initially, students are also inclined to select articles that relate to past classroom topics (instead of the current class) because they are familiar with discussion of that material. Less frequently, students will peruse the syllabus or their textbooks and select an article that relates to future readings. Having the Endnote form relate to the current class is important because doing so helps insure students read the material for class. In addition, since classmates are also expected to have read the material in preparation for the current class session, they are more inclined to participate in the Endnote presentation discussion.

Constructing appropriate discussion questions is another common developmental process for this activity. Frequently, the questions relate too heavily to the article. For example, a student selected an article on HMO's to relate to readings on the diagnostic stage of planned change in organizations. The questions this student planned were the following: Why did this HMO fail? Was the leadership for this HMO appropriate? Is health care in this country in trouble? Because their classroom peers have not read the article, they will have difficulty discussing questions related to it. Less common, though happening at times, is that a student will simply ask questions about the text readings for the class, and once the Endnote article is summarized, it is neglected altogether in any further discussion. An example of this difficulty for the HMO article previously mentioned, a student would plan to ask the following: Is diagnosis necessary? Why is diagnosis important? What are some common problems when doing diagnosis? One final problem with question construction is when students plan questions that are interesting or challenging, and are loosely related to their Endnote article and to course content, but can be responded to without having read the course material for the week.

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For example: Can change happen in the medical field?

When the instructor takes time to give examples of these difficulties as well as examples of well-constructed questions, students have fewer problems. Once again, using the HMO article as an example, some appropriate questions might include: How is the diagnosis a doctor does similar to the diagnosis an organizational development consultant does? What similar problems that doctors and HMO's have that OD practitioners also face when doing diagnosis?

The role of the Internet and the Endnote Activity is intriguing. When students are allowed to select Endnote material from the Internet, their pool of potential Endnote sources is enhanced, and they can learn a variety of computer skills in the process. In addition, the professor can discuss with students such issues as the implication of determining validity of Internet information and credibility of Internet sources.

Collecting Endnote forms and accompanying articles serves a variety of purposes. The professor can see what sources students are using, what they are reading, and how they are integrating classroom readings with outside materials. As a side benefit, the professor has one vehicle to stay current with relevant articles not otherwise examined. Having students hand in their articles can also be an important way to verify authenticity.

Professors can vary expectations in article and or source selection in a variety of ways. For example, students can be encouraged, if not required, to utilize a certain number of different sources during the semester. As a way of encouraging cross-disciplinary reading where appropriate, students can be expected to bring in a certain number of Endnote articles from disciplines that differ from that of the class or their major.

This Endnote Activity can be ungraded or it can be graded in a variety of ways depending upon course expectations or structure. If the individual Endnotes themselves are ungraded, the instructor can simply require students to submit a certain number of Endnotes as part of course requirements, with some consequence if these are not submitted. If graded, the Endnotes can be evaluated on a weekly basis or as a collection at the end of the course. The Endnote presentation can be graded separately when appropriate, with evaluation variables similar to those used in any oral presentation, including organization, clarity, discussion facilitation, etc. Evaluation of the Endnote Activity will vary depending upon instructor preferences and the purposes for which the activity is being done. For example, a grade can be given for the written component of the activity including evaluation of the relevance of the article to course readings, clarity of the summary, and on the quality of question construction. Grades can be assigned using the evaluation criteria of any other written course assignments.

Several possible modifications are available to adapt the Endnote Activity to situations where time or class size limitations make individual Endnote presentations impossible. One modification for a class size that prohibits individual presentations is to form groups. Based on groupings done by professor who collects and reviews the articles ahead of time, groups of students can present a synthesis of their articles to the larger class. Another modification is to break students into small groups and have individual students make their Endnote presentation to the smaller group. In this way, several students can be making presentations simultaneously.

CONCLUSION

Communication skills, including making presentations, engaging others in meaningful discourse, and eliciting ideas and opinions from a diverse group of people are unquestionably important skills in the world of business.

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Environmental scanning ability is of growing importance in a complex and global marketplace. In addition, students desire to see the practical application of their learning. The Endnote Activity assures practice in these vital areas of communication and environmental scanning as well as affording students with an opportunity to generalize their coursework to materials outside of the classroom. Any educational experiences students have in the classroom that enhance these skills and illustrate the utility of what they are learning in the classroom serve to increase student learning and benefit the organizations in which they are or will be employed.

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APPENDIX

ENDNOTE FORMAT

YOUR NAME: _____ DATE: _____

TITLE OF ARTICLE: _____

SOURCE: _____

THE ARTICLE RELATES TO THE FOLLOWING READINGS/CLASS DISCUSSION:

HOW I BELIEVE THIS ENDNOTE RELATES TO THE ABOVE READINGS/CLASS DISCUSSION IS:

SUMMARY OF ENDNOTE: _____

CHALLENGING/CONTROVERSIAL QUESTIONS (related to this endnote) TO ASK THE CLASS SO I CAN STIMULATE DISCUSSION ABOUT ITS CONTENTS:

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____
