ENHANCING LEARNING AND EMPLOYEE DEVELOPMENT THROUGH THE ASSESSMENT OF LEARNING PEDAGOGY PREFERENCES ACROSS SELECTED DIMENSIONS OF CULTURE: A PRELIMINARY INVESTIGATION

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ABSTRACT

The current issues of organizational learning and diversity provide a unique environment for the study of the integration of experiential and cooperative learning methodologies into existing curriculum. Integration of appropriate pedagogy into structured learning processes is a requirement for transfer of learning to the world of work. The resistance to pedagogical changes and the utilization of new instructional techniques by faculty is partially due to the lack of information on appropriate strategies to facilitate this process especially across cultures. This paper presents a preliminary reporting of specific item learning outcome results on a pedagogy preference questionnaire.

INTRODUCTION

Learning is the key to individual success and corporate survival in today's business world (Senge, 1990). Rapid and continuous changes in the work environment require constant learning on the part of individuals and organizations (Wexley & Latham, 1991). The ability to learn is becoming a condition of employment (Wick & Leon, 1993). Coupled with this phenomenon is the need to capitalize on the demographic changes taking place within the work force. Diverse backgrounds result in differences in learning styles and preferences due to culture, age, gender or differently-baled issues (Change, 1996).

Successful learning experiences depend on the ability of faculty, facilitators and learners to structure experiences which maximizing acquisition and expansion of knowledge and skills (Gardener. 1993). Despite the considerable attention given to learning methodologies the need exists to identify preferences and outcomes within a diverse population.

This paper is an initial reporting of specific item results on a limited sample of the data generated from the Learning Pedagogy Preference Questionnaire (LPG) developed by the authors of this study. Before reporting on the study, it is essential to develop a common definition of learning. While many definitions can be found in the literature, for the purposes of this study learning will be defined as the process whereby new skills, knowledge, ability and attitudes are created through the transformation of experience (Kola, 1984). Experiential learning refers to learning, growth and change facilitated by an integrated process that begins in the present followed by a collection of information and then observation about the experience. These observations are assimilated with previous knowledge into concepts, which serve as guides for actions in creating new experiences and new knowledge (Ibid.).

LEARNING AND CULTURE

Role patterns and value systems within cultures are carried forward from the early schooling environment to the workplace learning environment (Hoisted, 1986). The individualism/collectivism continuum as the focus of dozens of studies conducted in and across various cultures and societies during the past fifteen years will provide the first construct as a departure from the initial descriptive data. In importance to researching teaching methods, Hoisted (1986) has proposed that culture impacts through the teacher student relationship/interaction creating learning situations that are deeply "rooted in the culture" (1986). This is framed within the following propositions:

1. differences in social positions
2. differences in the relevance of curriculum

3. differences in profiles of cognitive abilities
4. differences in expected patterns of teacher/ student and student/ student interactions.

Couching the above in the constructs of Culture's Consequences (1980), Hoisted derives recommendations for teaching methods in terms of (1) INDIVIDUALIST-COLLECTIVIST; (2) high-low POWER, and (3) strong-weak UNCERTAINTY AVOIDANCE cultures. These relationships are correlated in the Table 1.

TABLE 1
CULTURE DIMENSIONS AND TEACHING METHODS

COLLECTIVE CULTURES
- individuals will only speak up in small groups
- large classes should be split up into small groups
- not competitive, or confrontational but harmonious and collaborative

HIGH POWER METHODS
- teacher-centered methods
- students expect teacher to initiate
- teacher is never contradicted
- older teachers more effective

STRONG UNCERTAINTY AVOIDANCE CULTURES
- students feel comfortable in structured situations
- teacher has all the answers
- teacher interprets intellectual disagreement as personal disloyalty

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Hypothesis number one is concerned with the relationship between teaching methods and their effectiveness in Collective cultures. Hypothesis number two addresses the construct of Power Distance and hypothesis number three strong Uncertainty Avoidance.

Hypothesis 1: Students from collective cultures will prefer more group oriented teaching methods.

Hypothesis 2: Students from high power cultures will prefer more teacher-centered teaching methods.

Hypothesis 3: Students from strong uncertainty avoidance cultures will prefer more structured, teacher defined teaching methods.

Subjects

The subjects were Japanese managers attending a Japanese corporate training institution in the United States. These are "fast-tract" individuals targeted for international careers. The program is an intensive, post-baccalaureate level certificate program, which focuses on American business principles and methods. The course work focuses on business and intercultural management in addition to business English communication. While the primary perspective is U.S. business management, regional and global business and related cultural issues are incorporated into the curriculum. Also, in each course throughout the program, students are required to use computers for experiential and simulation

course work spreadsheets, word processing, Internet research and presentations as assigned.

This program also provides students with intercultural exchange opportunities that include living with American families while attending the institute, and interning with American business firms or organizations in the United States after completing the course work. Seventy-five per cent of this population was female with the median age being 22 and over 90% between 21 - 23 years of age. Over ninety per cent had completed more than sixteen years of education. The authors acknowledge that this select population may be unique and is a limited representation.

Measures

Participants were asked to rank six (6) learning outcomes on a scale from one (1) being the most effective to ten (10) being the least effective. The six learning outcomes were: knowledge acquisition, knowledge recall, changing attitudes, problem-solving skills, interpersonal skills, and participant acceptance (like/dislike of the method).

Twenty-nine (29) learning pedagogues were listed to be assessed against the above criteria. The twenty-nine pedagogues were as follows: case study, case incident, whole group discussion, small group discussion, inter-group discussion, lecture, simulation/games, film/Video, role play, group exercise, interviews/observations, field project, guest lecturer, self-assessment, report writing, individual presentation, group presentation, readings, programmed instruction, interactive television, behavioral modeling, in-basket exercise, computer simulation, computer programmed instruction, e-mail interactions, file transfer protocol interactions, computer-collaborative distance projects, video-conferencing, and multimedia. Additional information was gathered in the following categories: preferred group size, academic major, ethnic group with which the participant identified, years of education, highest degree, age, and gender.

Response Results

TABLE 2
MEAN OUTCOME RESULTS OF MEASURES

		Knowledge Acquisition		Interpersonal Skills		Participant Acceptance	
		Mean	Rank Score	Mean	Rank Score	Mean	Rank Score
Case Study		3.83	9	4.47	12	3.47	8
Case Incident		4.	11	4.73	18	3.90	9
Whole Group		4.56	16	4.68	13	4.81	18
Small Group		3.16	1	2.81	1	2.77	1
Inter-Group		3.8	8	3.1	4	3.4	5
Lecture		3.9	10	6.27	25	5.52	25
Simulations/Games		3.6	6	3.47	8	3.17	2
Film/Video		4.1	12	6.03	24	4.9	20
Role Playing		3.83	7	3.3	5	3.57	7
Group Exercises		3.6	6	3.03	3	3.28	3
Interviews		3.33	3	3.	2	3.17.	2
Field Projects		3.52	5	3.78	7	3.59	8
Guest Lectures		3.9	10	5.27	19	4.77	17
Self-Assessment		4.57	17	4.77	15	4.77	17
Report Writing		3.83	9	5.87	23	5.03	22
Individual Presentations		3.36	2	4.68	14	4.85	15
Group Presentations		3.42	4	3.	2	3.39.	4
Readings		4.23	14	6.27	25	5.42	24
Program Instruction		4.96	21	5.78	22	5.22	23
Interactive TV		4.	11	4.2	10	4.4	14
Behavior Modeling		4.15	13	3.85	8	4.15	12
In-Basket		5.8	22	4.6	13	4.65	14
Computer Simulation		4.15	13	5.41	26	3.96	10
Programmed Instruction		4.37	15	5.46	21	4.51	13
E-mail		4.86	19	4.68	14	3.71	9
Ftp		4.	18	5.1	18	5.	21
Distance Projects		5.21	21	4.42	11	4.84	19
Video-Conferencing		4.44	14	4.26	9	4.13	11
Multimedia		3.83		4.96	17	4.7	16

Three outcome response areas are reported in this preliminary study. The learning outcomes reported are: "knowledge acquisition," Interpersonal skills," and "participant acceptance." These outcomes basically differentiate between cognitive and behavioral learning. The results also illustrate the dogma of current higher education commitment and concern related to "participant acceptance" of the methodology.

In the category of **KNOWLEDGE ACQUISITION** the highest effectiveness scores were correlated with "small group discussions," "individual and group presentations," "interviews/observations," and "field projects." Lectures, predictably, in the middle of the distribution. The lowest rankings were reported in the categories of "In-basket," "computer collaborative distant project" and "e-mail interactions." This may be due to limited or no experience with these more recent and innovative methodologies.

In the category of **INTERPERSONAL SKILLS,** group methods again scored very high whether "small group" or " inter-group discussion and "group exercises." The lowest ratings were in the following categories of more common and frequent use in higher education and favored methodologies of traditional trainers: lectures, programmed instruction, readings, films, videos, and written reports.

Often whether in an educational institution with regular academic students in degree programs or in management training programs, effectiveness is not an objective outcome measure but a subjective, affective response, which establishes the foundation of the importance of the third dimension of this analysis, **PARTICIPANT ACCEPTANCE.** Once again the group methods ranked exceedingly well with "small group discussion," "group exercises" and "group presentations" scoring very high. The methodologies of "simulation and games" and "field interviews/observations" were also ranked at a very high level "Simulations and games" also ranked high on the **PARTICIPANT ACCEPTANCE** scale. Note that each of these pedagogues are oriented toward the popular active learning concept with the more passive "reading," "lectures." and "program instruction" receiving the lowest rating.

DISCUSSION

The research subjects in this study were young, educated, male and female Japanese students in a management development institute. Their culture has been described as very high Collectivist, very strong Uncertainty Avoidance, and a moderate to high Power Distance culture in the Hofstede terminology so familiar to business research and faculty today. The question of the research is a basic one in cross-cultural studies, are teaching methods culturally dependent or are they independent of culture?

The results discussed above support the latter. One would expect the group centered approaches to be supportive of the culturally dependent hypothesis but this culture dependency was not seen in terms of Power Distance, and strong Uncertainty Avoidance methods such as Lecture, Program Instruction, and directed learning methodologies. Given that the active learning methods received the higher ranking, the more popular were actually relatively Low in terms of teacher power and also low in Uncertainty Avoidance. These are interesting and of possible importance especially to institutions of higher education and management development in Asia or institutions with large Asian student populations. Both authors have spent considerable time with Asian managers and students and have observed just the opposite in many of their classrooms and training settings which can best be described as large, impersonal, highly structured, power centered and relying on lectures. Interestingly, these responses were similar to what we would expect from our highly Individualistic, low Power Distance, low Uncertainty Avoidance culture students in the United States.

Faculty

Lack of faculty training and support often limits the opportunities for develop beyond the replication of traditional lecture

from generation to generation. Instructional and resource support of faculty who are teaching through multiple modalities is critical to the integration of appropriate interactive methodologies. Most faculty have not integrated experiential methodologies and technology into their course materials due to an absence of this type of support. Innovative approaches to learning require faculty to make major changes in their usual pedagogy and presentation style which will produce anxiety and various levels of stress.

The key to success lies in recruiting and encouraging faculty who are open to learning and excited about new pedagogical approaches and the use of experiential methods. Incentives to encourage change and creativity can be as simple as providing training and instructional support to faculty. Experiential learning materials are more readily available than in the past and easy to rearrange and update at virtually no cost. Faculty who have integrated multiple methodologies and technology into their curriculum have reported that the initial anxieties were quickly replaced by the challenge and a renewed interest in teaching as well as an excitement about the potential new outcomes.

Students

Additional efforts need to be made to prepare students for diverse learning experiences in the classroom. A need exists to teach "learning how to learn" to both faculty and students in coping with new instructional environments. Special attention must be given, through training and monitoring, to identify and satisfy the needs of students and faculty in adapting to the constraints and opportunities presented through the use of diverse instructional methodologies.

CONCLUSION

The purpose of this paper was a preliminary exploration of the process of identifying learning preferences and the efficacy of various instructional pedagogues. Capitalizing on the opportunities and advantages presented through the integration of multiple pedagogues and

education technologies the specific and individual learning needs of all parties can be satisfied. Failure to take into account the special concerns of faculty and students in adapting to the differences in the new learning environment will ultimately undermine the vary rationale for developing such methodologies.

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