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Integrating Experiential HRIS Activities into an Introduction to Human Resources Management Course

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For a significant number of HR students, the thought of working using a Human Resources Information System (HRIS) as a management tool is inconsistent with their impressions of human resources. For these students, working in human resources is done primarily because of an interest in working with people, not spending a lot of time in front of a computer. However, by integrating HRIS with an introductory human resources management course, faculty can provide students with the opportunity to experiment with and become more familiar with HRIS (in this case it was PeopleSoft), and begin to understand how the collection of data can help make better informed decisions. This skill development is important for students studying HR in order to better prepare students for the increasing use of HRIS in mid-to-large size organizations.

The learning objectives of integrating HRIS into as introductory course are: 1) Discuss the how HR Management is becoming more data driven; 2) how to use HRIS to measure HR activities; 3) how to use HRIS to facilitate HR decision-making; 4) Identify legal issues related to the measurement of Human Resources.

In order to facilitate understanding of the functionality of HRIS system, students should first become familiar with basic navigation, terminology and data entry methods. Many HR textbooks are organized in a way that parallels the employee lifecycle: recruit, hire, determine pay and benefits, train, manage performance and manage career development and transition from the organization. By using a case that also parallels the employee lifecycle, and integrating HRIS exercises, students get a more hands-on classroom experience that more easily transfers to a work environment. Many organizations may work, but we used a fictitious restaurant. A restaurant was chosen because 1) most students have a basic awareness and understanding of the different positions in a restaurant and 2) there is enough HR activity (turnover, injuries, training opportunities, etc.) for students to better understand and relate to what HR professionals face on a regular basis.

Students are asked to review a job description and job specification for various positions in the fictitious restaurant - bussers, wait staff and management. Students can access that information on O*Net (http://online.onetcenter.org/ (http://online.onetcenter.org/)). Then they are asked to use the data from the job description/specification to create positions in the HRIS. This is the basis for all of the subsequent exercises in the course. Students start to see the value of a well-written job description/specification when they progress to the next activity - developing a recruiting process. In response to the recruiting plan, the student receives several resumes to screen and complete an initial assessment. At this point the student sees the importance of a well written job description; it facilitates reviewing applications and making decisions regarding applicant qualifications for the position. Some HRIS software has the capability to match applicants to the position, which can serve a "check" to see if student decisions are similar to the system rating. If the evaluations by the system and the students are very different, then that can be used as a discussion point. It is important to identify the source of the discrepancy - did the students identify skills that are not part of the job description? Do the ratings in the system need to be adjusted? Are students so determined to fill the position that they evaluate an applicant more favorably? Finally, the student is asked to actually hire some of the applicants, although, as in the real world, some positions can be left unfilled.

After the first set of exercises, students are familiar with the processes of developing job descriptions, recruiting, reviewing and evaluating applications, and hiring. Once there are employees entered into the system, students are provided with a standard new employee training plan and asked to evaluate and improve the plan, specifically, they are asked to determine what new course should be added to the curriculum. New course recommendations will vary depending on who needs the training (wait staff, management). Once the course is selected, students are asked to add the course in the HRIS, and then to enroll all of the new employees into the new employee training courses. This gives the students a chance to see what a training administrator does.

Giving students the chance to determine how much of a compensation increase they should give to their recently hired employees, and using a modest budget to work within, is probably one of the most enlightening activities for students. Many students perceive compensation from their own work experience, and are surprised to see the impact on a budget if an organization gives across the board raises, regardless of the amount. A similar response occurs when students are asked to recommend a new benefit plan/option based on current benefit plan practices in industry. In our restaurant case, we often ask students to have different compensation structures and benefit plans for management and employees. This often leads to discussions about fairness in compensation.

In the restaurant industry, accidents vary from cuts to slip and falls. We provide the accident data for the restaurant, and the specifics of the accident that will be entered into the HRIS. Students can look up their restaurant data at http://www.osha.gov (http://www.osha.gov) ., and compare it to industry data. They then will record the accident in the HRIS. The students then provide a plan for investigating what happened and make recommendations as to how to reduce the future occurrence of accidents.

We have the students develop a performance management system of their own. The students then complete performance appraisals on their employees and enter their ratings into the, make development suggestions, and recommend an appropriate pay increase. Sometimes we have the students terminate an employee because of unacceptable performance or because of a serious event, like theft, which leads to another series of activities in the HRIS.

There are numerous HRIS activities that could be integrated into an introductory HR class.

For example, many HRIS systems have affirmative action, employee/labor relation, and career development functionality. What are described here are the core activities that are used most frequently by the companies that hire our graduates. It is important to avoid the temptation of doing too many HRIS based activities; for example, we require students to write short reports explaining the rationale of their decisions at the end of each HRIS exercise. We want students to see HRIS as a tool to supplement their other HR knowledge and skills.

The purpose of integrating HRIS exercises into an introductory HR class is to give students the opportunity to practice what they are likely to experience in their HR careers. We have done it by using a fictitious restaurant as the basis for all of the exercises. Each activity builds on the previous one, and by the time the school term ends, students have hired, trained, given raises to, investigated accidents, and possibly even terminated employees. They've navigated through HR related websites. They've practiced data entry, and written short memos based in part from data available to them in the HRIS. This variety of activities increases the likelihood that they will learn and remember the information presented in the introductory HR course.

Suggested Resources

Human Resource Information Systems (Anticipated publication date: September 2009). Michael J. Kavanagh & Mohan Thite, Eds. Sage Publications: New York.

http://www.cresh.net/ (http://www.cresh.net/) : provides a technology platform to allow access to functional and technical PeopleSoft Enterprise applications, Hyperion business intelligence applications, as well as Microsoft applications Enterprise applications. CRESH. net works exclusively with higher education organizations.

http://www.dir.ca.gov/dosh/: The California Division of Occupational Safety and Health protects workers and the public from safety hazards and provides consultative assistance to employers

http://online.onetcenter.org/: The O*NET system is an excellent source of occupational information, providing comprehensive information on key attributes and characteristics of workers and occupations.

http://www.osha.gov/comp-links.html: A comprehensive resource for current OSHA standards and enforcement-related information. Students may also use other pages in this website to look up injury information for various industries.

Innovative Strategies for Teaching HR to Non-Traditional Students

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Abstract
Over the past 25 years, there has been a dramatic increase of non-traditional adult learners in colleges/universities. These adult learners have unique needs in the classroom and teaching methods must be adapted to ensure their learning experience is positive. This article defines who adult learners are, how they are different from traditional learners, and some best practices/teaching methods to apply in a human resource classroom.

Introduction

The student population of colleges and universities in the United States has changed drastically over the past several years. Only sixteen percent of college students fit the traditional 18 to 22-year old profile, attend full-time, and live on campus (Kerry, Haidet, Schneider, Searle, Seidel, & Richards, 2000). There has been a dramatic increase of non-traditional students, adult learners over the age of 25, returning to college with the intention of acquiring new knowledge or skills and obtaining their bachelor or masters degree.
At the same time that colleges and universities are graduating their first Net Generation learners, most campuses are experiencing a large influx of non-traditional students. These non-traditional learners may come to the university later in life, attend full or part-time, hold full or part-time jobs, have dependants, maybe single parents, or may have started their education as 18 – 20 year olds and dropped out. The need for colleges and universities to cater to this range of students with different experiences and backgrounds has never been greater (Oblinger & Oblinger, 2005). The era of requiring only a high school diploma is gone, and a college degree will soon be a requirement for selection and advancement in many career fields and organizations.

The influx of adult learners brings a new set of challenges for professors because adult students learn differently and have needs that are distinctive from the traditional 18-22 year old college student. These mature learners often feel marginal and face diverse obstacles in colleges/universities designed around traditional student roles. Their increasing presence challenges colleges/universities to reexamine their responsiveness to nontraditional learners (Apps, 1988). This article will define who adult learners are, how they are different from traditional learners, and describe some best practices/teaching methods to use in a human resource classroom. We hope our suggestions will encourage and influence an entire range of institutions, groups, and individuals to develop ways of meeting the educational needs of adult learners in human resource programs.

Adult Learners

To be a successful educator of adult learners, one must understand their unique needs in the classroom. Knowles, Holton, and Swanson's (2005) basic concepts of andragogy, the art and science of teaching adults, have been the foundation for the theory behind how adults learn and how to teach effectively to a classroom of adult students. In contrast, pedagogy strictly denotes the art and science of teaching children. In practice, pedagogy has become synonymous with simply teaching with the age of the learners not be being a factor.
In the andragogy model, specific learning principles are discussed which provide a basis for understanding adult teaching and learning. The following principles are core to the adult learning model:

a) The need to know – the adult educator must make a case for learning. They need to know why certain information is important to know before they can readily master it. They may spend much time contemplating the reasons and consequences of learning or not learning the material before they invest their energies into the learning process.

b) The learner's self-concept – adults want to feel in control of their learning and possess a sense of autonomy in what is to be learned. Consequently, when this sense of autonomy and self-direction are threatened, the adult learner becomes resentful and resistant to the learning.
c) Role of learner's experience – adult learners come to class with a background of personal knowledge experiences which can enhance or conflict with the new information they are expected to learn. When this experience is respected, valued, and used as a resource, it can serve as a frame of reference for new learning.

d) Readiness to learn – adults become ready to learn when experiences in their lives present a need to know or a need to cope effectively in real-life situations.

e) Orientation to learning – adult students learn most effectively when they can see the relevance and application to their lives.

f) Motivation – adults generally have specific motives for seeking out an educational experience. These motives (p. 44)…. An instructor needs to understand what these motives are and use them to keep students actively pursuing the learning experience. (Knowles, Holton, & Swanson, 2005)

Addressing these core principles in the classroom will help educators create an effective teaching environment conducive for adult learning.

Challenges in teaching non-traditional students

Under the standard teaching model, it is assumed students will learn what they are told to learn. Adult learners, however, are accustomed to understanding why they should learn something. They want to know the reason they need to learn something or how it will be relevant to their lives. Teaching models must include a way of integrating life experiences into the learning.

Adult learners are highly motivated and are committed to learning. They have a clear vision of their career goals/plans. They analyze the course content, compare it to their prior experiences, and prefer to discuss how they will combine the two in their future work experience, whether it is in a teaching environment or supervisory role. However, they are often anxious about returning to school. They are willing to work hard, but they need assurance during homework and in-class tasks. They demand clearly defined expectations and will generally exceed them.

Non-traditional students learn by various methods, as well as being motivated by different forces to learn. Due to employment, scheduling and family issues, adult learners will often seek out higher education that is flexible in nature, such as evening or Internet based programs. These programs offer the learner greater control of time and place of learning. Adult learners tend to prefer exams that are designed to provide a culmination of learning and not just a testing of memory knowledge.

Adult learners bring to class with them all of their life experiences which sets them up as individuals. Professors of adult learners need to recognize this individualism and structure the class to accent it. Unlike children, they are eager to learn with the expectation of receiving knowledge to implement in their personal and professional lives. Even though these adult learners are influenced by outside motivational forces, they are mostly driven by internal desires. Adults need to know the reason for learning, experience mutual respect, establish trust with the professor, be recognized and accepted as an individual, and interact with the professor (McEwen & Wills, 2002).

Teaching methods and strategies

With advances in technology, company-specific case studies, and other methodologies available, it should not be surprising to hear that the use of traditional instructional methods, like lecture, are in decline. Professors must address the needs of non-traditional students by introducing newer, more contemporary teaching methods. Ultimately, the goal is to improve the core competencies of human resource professionals, and we as professors must be willing to adapt our teaching to produce the next generation of human resource leaders.

Returning to school as a non-traditional learner can be an intimidating experience; therefore, professor should provide timely, constructive feedback to assist the student in achieving their desired goals. Adults are self-directed learners and allowing them the opportunity to use their unique style will enhance the learning process. Professors must incorporate methods that address the learning styles of visual, auditory, and kinesthetic learners.

The demands of employers for well-trained human resource professionals have produced an emphasis on strategic business planning in the curriculum of HR programs (Hayton, Cohen, Hume, Kaufman, & Taylor, 2005). The Society of Human Resource Management (SHRM) provided a framework for HR programs and curriculum in the HR Body of Knowledge. They identify key competencies such as business acumen that are required of HR professionals. We have responded by integrating these ideals into our curriculum. To teach these principles, we present the basic concepts and then ask our students to apply them.

Adults are competency-based learners, meaning that they want to learn a skill or acquire knowledge that they can apply pragmatically to their immediate circumstances. Life or work-related situations present a more appropriate framework for adult learning than academic or theoretical approaches. We use a variety of methods and strategies in our courses to create an effective teaching environment that is conducive for adult learners. While there are multiple methods and strategies that you can use to increase the likelihood that adult learners will be successful, we will highlight the ones that have been the most successful in our program:

Learning Space

As educators of adult learners, we have a responsibility to the student and the environment in which they learn. In order to assist learners, we must look at the learning space as the third teacher (Bentham, 2008). Attention should be paid to the presence and appropriateness of artwork and pictures, color of the walls, lighting, and the arrangement of the furniture. An aesthetically pleasing and welcoming learning space can contribute to the learner's comfort, attention, and interest in the course material. In our primary classroom, we have selected posters that portray HR professionals in action, charts that illustrate HR concepts and ideals, and a global map so students can gain a perspective of where countries of interest are located. They add color to the room and can also be used as teaching tools.

Wikis

Adult learners who have returned to the classroom after years of absence are apprehensive about their ability to perform at the college level. In group projects, they often want to know how they will be graded. To help alleviate some of these fears, we use wikis. A wiki is a great way to create and manage workgroups in a collaborative web environment. Fundamentally, they are writing spaces with new pages springing from other pages like a concept map or flowchart. They allow multiple users to contribute to and edit the same document, providing a document history that allows instructors to see the contributions of each student. Grades can be assigned based on individual contributions and the final product

Wikis give the students ownership, which is very important when teaching adult learners. It allows them to post projects and assignments, delete or edit information of another student to make it better, and complete the project by maintaining schedules and timelines. As the instructor, you can restrict the wiki, permitting only members of the class to delete or edit information.

Voices

Adult learners are practical, focusing on the aspects of a lesson most useful to them in their work. They may not be interested in knowledge for its own sake; therefore, as instructors, we must tell participants explicitly how the lesson will be useful to them on the job. In several of our courses, we use the concept of "voice" to challenge students to actively seek out alternative meanings, perspectives, experiences, and values. Students will select a "voice" other than their own and assume responsibility as advocates for their voices for the entire semester. Assuming a voice other than their own provides adult learners with a rich understanding of the perspectives of others and challenges them to become vulnerable and examine their own thoughts and actions they may not have previously acknowledged.

Good Practices Audit

In our work-life integration class, we focus on the relationship between employee's work lives and their family lives. This course involves the comparison of domestic and international policies from the United States, Canada, Australia, and a few European countries. Emphasis is placed on changes in work-life policies as influenced by legislation and union strategies. Students complete an in-depth analysis of the work-life initiatives in both an international country and those offered by one of the "best companies to work for" listed by Fortune Magazine. Through this audit, adult learners identify problems that may impede them in the workplace. They are asked to propose responses and possible resolutions to the problems identified.

Case studies

Case studies are real or simulated stories that are written as dilemmas, giving a personal history of an individual, institution, or business faced with a problem that must be solved. This teaching tool is used to show the application of a theory or concept to real situations.

Dependent on the goal they are meant to fulfill, cases can be fact-driven and deductive where there is one plausible answer, or they can be context driven where multiple solutions are acceptable.

Case studies develop students' skills in group learning, speaking, and critical thinking, and since many of the best cases are based on contemporary—and often contentious—issues that students encounter in the news, the use of cases in the classroom makes the content relevant

One manner in which we use case studies is to require students to write their own case. This is particularly effective with our adult learners who have accumulated a foundation of life experiences and knowledge. Through this approach, they connect learning to their knowledge/experience base, providing relevancy and applicability.

Problem-Based Learning

In problem-based learning (PBL), students will learn a useful method that helps them investigate and solve most workplace problems they will encounter. By assisting students in the development of critical thinking and reasoning skills, this approach supports the principles of adult learning. It fosters individual, self-directed learning skills and builds an internal motivation to learn and question.

We use this method to introduce the ADDIE model in our courses because it presents the students with a problem, directs them to identify and explore learning needs, involves the selection of the most likely intervention, and requires the development of a plan for implementation. This method also reflects the growing use of teams/groups in the workplace and more broadly, organizational decision-making.

Critical Incident Questionnaires (CIQ)

Critical reflection has value and importance when teaching adult learners. They desire to add their perspective on what topics should be covered in a course. Instructors can engage adult learners through the use of critical incident questionnaires such as the muddiest point, most helpful action, etc. These are forms of classroom assessment to help the instructor identify areas that were the most helpful in understanding or the most confusing points in the reading or class content.

With the muddiest point, students are asked to write down the most confusing or problematic concept from a given lesson or reading assignment. The instructor collects them, identifies key themes that need to be clarified, and decides how much time in a future class period might be devoted to clarifying that problem (Angelo & Cross, 1993).

Video

Many of our students, like a lot of adult learners, work full-time, have families, and face many other challenges that infringe on their time. To accommodate their needs, we offer most of our classes in the evening, a more convenient time for them. However, students often miss class. We record all of our class sessions and a web link is provided so students can watch the class at a later date. This provides a resource to our students who miss class due to work and family responsibilities, but it is also available for those who wish to use it as a review mechanism.

Evaluation

Conti's (2004) Principles of Adult Learning Scale (PALS), a 44-item survey, can be used by adult educators to identify to what extent they adhere to the concepts put forth by adult learning theorists such as Cohen (1995), Elias & Merriam (1996), Knowles (1977), and Lindeman (1926). In doing so, the adult educator will know the frequency with which they practice teaching/learning principles that are described in the adult learning literature. If these principles are addressed by the instructor, the learning environment will be successful.

Conclusion

There are clear indications that educational institutions are beginning to meet the needs of the non-traditional learner, and the growth and development of andragogy as an alternative model of instruction in higher education has helped to facilitate the learning process of non-traditional learners. As professors of adult learners, we have applied the principles of andragogy in developing the alternative methods and strategies described in this article. We believe those methods and strategies are very effective in meeting the needs of the adult learners, specifically in human resource courses.

Adult learners are characterized by a diverse nature and need to be an active participant in their learning journey. Recognition and respect for their individualism is vital, and professors need to facilitate and support this individualism. By addressing the needs of adult learners, professors can maximize learning effectiveness. We would like to recommend that you take time to experiment with some of these teaching strategies, reflect on the learning experience of your students, and pass them on to other adult educators.

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Live Case Options For Human Resource Management Classes

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Abstract
Live case studies involve students working with a real life organization to solve real life business problems. Organizations visit a classroom to give students information they need. Based on the authors' experiences in human resource classes, live cases provide students opportunities to apply their human resource knowledge in developing handbooks, pay structures, training manuals, safety and security procedures, pay survey reports and job descriptions. Students gain experience, connections, and knowledge while professors gain meaningful education, possible future consulting contracts, potential publishable data, and sharpened skills

According to Burns (1990), live case studies involve students working with a real life organization to solve real life business problems. Organizations visit a classroom to give students information that allows students to produce a product or make a decision. This highly experiential learning technique also allows students to visit the organization to acquire more information

Purpose

Human resource management professors can use live cases to provide real human resource products such as employee handbooks and pay structures for real organizations. Classic human resource topics such as strategic planning, workforce development, compensation and benefits, risk management, human resource development, and employee and labor relations may be covered in live cases. To encourage human resource live cases, this paper summarizes some strengths and weaknesses of live cases and provides examples of human resource live cases. Most examples come from the authors' experiences with about 360 such cases in the last twenty years at a medium- sized western university.

Literature Review

Advantages of Live Cases

Live cases can have many advantages for students based on surveys. Business professors (Kaupins and Coco, 2003), management professors (Kaupins, 1998), and corporate trainers (Kaupins, 1997) have rated live cases as one of the most effective training techniques in terms of knowledge acquisition and retention, participant acceptance, and involvement of learners. Hafer (1984) studied student attitudes of live cases versus lectures and found that live cases were better with respect to depth of knowledge, requiring self-motivation, and the chance to individualize learning.

Other literature focuses on live case experiences. Kolb (1984) mentions that such experiential approaches to learning accommodate students with different learning styles better than traditional didactic methodologies. Munger and Gutowski (2007) suggest the stakes in live cases are raised because the output is for a real-world client. McCain and Lincoln (1982) state live cases for students include higher self-esteem, potential future employment contacts, and more self-confidence. Kennedy, Lawton, and Walker (2001) believe live cases enhance students' creativity, problem solving and critical thinking skills. Other participants can benefit from live cases. For the professor, live cases can provide meaningful education, possible future consulting contracts, potential publishable data, and sharpened skills (Burns, 1990). For clients, they can obtain low cost or free research, improve their image, improve their decision-making with alternative perspectives, and potentially obtain future employees (Reuters.com, 2008). For the university, it can potentially obtain satisfied client alumni, a good community image, and donations from satisfied clients (McCain and Lincoln, 1982; De Los Santos and Jensen, 1985).

Disadvantages of Live Cases

Live cases can be challenging for students. Clients might demand an extraordinary amount of time on the project. Clients might not be cooperative in answering correspondence. Students' skill levels might not be up to par with what clients demand. Students might not receive all the information they need to make quality judgments (Murray, 1991).

Other participants can have a difficult time too. For the professor, much time can be spent obtaining clients and negotiating the exact assignment for the students. The assignment might not perfectly meet course objectives. There is potential liability if students reveal confidential information or have other inappropriate behavior with the client (McCain and Lincoln, 1982). For the clients, they might not receive quality work from the students. They might not have sufficient time to answer all of the students' questions during the semester. There are still costs in developing reports that students may request. For the university, there is a risk of a lower image if the students' work is not up to par. Inappropriate live cases could lead to a failure of providing adequate education (Burns, 1990, Kaupins and Coco, 2003).

Examples of Live Cases

Several articles provide examples of live cases. Most are not in human resource management. Ethical dilemmas (McWilliams, 2006), business plans (Learned, 1991; Markulis, 1985), marketing plans (Kennedy, Lawton, and Walker, 2001, Godar, 2000, Goretsky, 1984; McCain and Lincoln, 1982), organization behavior projects (Congram and

LaFarge, 1995), and plant management (Reilly, 1998, Godar, 2000) are live case examples o utside of human resource management.

The one clear example of a human resource live case involves writing employee handbooks. Kaupins (2000) summarized how students can write them for real companies in a live case format. Clients come to class to participate in a question and answer session with the students. Questions come from a comprehensive outline of employee handbooks covering the background of the organization, selection policies, discipline, work rules, compensation and benefits, security, performance appraisal, training and development, safety, and miscellaneous notes. An advantage for students and faculty of writing handbooks in a human resource class is that such handbooks cover the gamut of human resources—from employee selection, compensation, benefits, risk management, training, and so on. A significant disadvantage is that some handbooks can be relatively short (10-20 pages) and others can be long (more than 50 pages). Equity and fairness among student groups doing different live cases in a class need to be balanced.

Authors' Experiences

While there have been several live case examples in non-HR areas and one HR example in the literature, we wish to add to the literature by providing more examples of HR live cases. The authors have completed over 360 live cases in their human resource management classes over the last 20 years. All of the projects described in this paper have been completed. Each professor handles about 5 to 10 clients per human resource management class each semester.

The formats for all of the live cases have some similarities. Before the semester begins, the authors find clients through sources such as newspapers, Small Business Development Centers, and student referrals. Clients receive notice that the product (written employee handbooks, training programs, pay structures, etc.) is free and they should visit the HR classroom at least twice in the semester to meet with a group of students who will complete the project.

On their first visit, clients visit with a group of three to six students. The group provides the client with questions needed to complete the live case project. The first session with the client may last from one to two hours. Students may contact the client any time after the first session through e-mail, personal meetings or other methods. A follow-up session a few months later has the students share the first draft of their project with the client. The project is completed at the end of the semester when the students turn in hard copies and e-mail copies to the professor. The client receives the students' materials after the professor reviews the work. The professor either makes changes or suggests modifications in the students' work.

Recruiting Sources for Finding HR Clients

Our clients have included small businesses, nonprofits, large unionized businesses, and public sector organizations. Below is a list of recruiting sources that have provided the most clients:

Contact the local newspaper and ask the publisher to “advertise” free HR services through the human resource management class. This technique has lead to 8-15 clients per semester in a city with about 200,000.

Contact the Small Business Development Center (SBDC). This method has netted about 2-3 per semester. The SBDC has provided a steady stream of clients over the years by advertising the program on its website.

Work with the university’s service learning program. If your university has a substantial service learning program, such program would be a great source for non-profit clients (Godar, 2000). Anywhere from one to five clients have come from the Service Learning Program each semester.

Make connections with friends, students, former clients, and relatives. Personal referrals can come especially if you advertise that the service is free. One to five clients have come from connections each semester.

Solicit clients through the school’s website. This method has netted one to two clients over the years.

Options for HR Projects

Once clients are obtained, numerous live cases in human resource management can be completed through the development of specific products such as employee handbooks and pay structures. Below is a list of some live case assignments that have been given.

Employee Handbooks

About 90 percent of our live case human resource projects have been involved with writing employee handbooks. Much of the assignment is similar to the format described in Kaupins’ (2000) publication.

Volunteer Handbook

Appendix A provides all the assignment materials associated with creating a handbook for nonprofit volunteers including the basic assignment, the rough outline of a volunteer handbook, and detailed instructions on how to format such handbook. Students may revise existing handbooks or create them from scratch.

When the client comes to class, students use the rough outline of the handbook to ask questions of the client. The rough outline consists of eight handbook sections: background of the organization, selection, work rules and discipline, security, performance appraisal, training and development, safety, and miscellaneous issues.

Pay Structures

Another project for human resource management students is to create a pay structure for the client. Pay structures often involve establishing compensation goals, writing job descriptions, finding and analyzing comparable pay surveys, evaluating the worth of jobs, and slotting jobs into pay grades. Students may be required to do some or all of these tasks. Appendix B provides all of the assignment materials associated with the pay structure project---minus the job descriptions, pay survey information, and job evaluation instrument provided by the client.

Other Products

We also have provided clients with training manuals, orientation checklists, job descriptions, pay survey reports, job evaluations, safety manuals, security manuals, independent contractor handbooks, performance appraisal forms, and human resource websites. Considering human resource functions such as strategic management, compensation and benefits, employee and labor relations, training and development, workforce management, and risk management, some other products can be grievance reports, wellness manuals, training checklists, replacement charts, and vulnerability analysis.. Students also can provide companies with input on human resource decisions such as what type of incentive programs are best and how could another staff member be hired in the face of lower budgets

What We Learned From These Live Cases

Beyond what was stated in the literature review, the authors learned to be flexible in negotiating the parameters of the live case and flexible in working with the client during the semester. Though there are certain standards that we set, we enhance the clients' experience with the students by listening to their needs. For example, we have an outline by which students can write a volunteer handbook. If the client wishes to change the outline, changes can be permitted as long as we (the professors) know about it before grading the work. During the semester, clients' needs may change. Instead of writing a volunteer handbook, they now want to only focus on safety and security. As long as there is a mutual agreement between the client, students, and professor in the middle of the semester, such problem can be worked out.

We also learned that it is important to teach students how to write volunteer handbooks and develop pay structures through practice before they do it for the clients. Just lecturing about them is not enough. Students need to write sample handbook pages and develop sample pay structures before they do the real thing.

Conclusion

Completing human resource live cases can be rewarding for the students, clients, professors, and universities. Students can particularly gain from having some real life experiences with organizations. Live cases can be obtained from advertising in the local newspaper, contacts through Small Business Development Centers, former students and clients, acquaintances, and university departments such as service learning and internships. Human resource live cases can include writing employee handbooks, training manuals, volunteer handbooks, orientation checklists, job descriptions, pay survey reports, job evaluations, pay structures, and related papers. Students also can provide companies with input on human resource decisions such as what type of incentive programs are best, should you hire highly qualified staff or provide extensive training to lower qualified staff

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The Role of Vignettes in Teaching HR Law to Undergraduates

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Abstract

In Fall 2009, the J. Mack Robinson College of Business of Georgia State University will require that all undergraduates pass two critical thinking through writing (CTW) courses in their major. Employment law is the required course for students pursuing a Bachelor of Business Administration degree with a concentration in human resource management (HRM). The purpose of this paper is to discuss the need for improving the critical thinking of future managers and HR professionals and describe the use of vignettes to measure higher order thinking.

In Fall 2009, the J. Mack Robinson College of Business of Georgia State University will require that all undergraduates pass two critical thinking through writing (CTW) courses in their major. Employment law is the required CTW course for students pursuing a Bachelor of Business Administration degree with a concentration in human resource management (HRM). The choice of law was based in part on growing evidence that HR decision-makers are unduly influenced by exaggerated fears of litigation. Roehling and Wright (2006) described this as "legal-centric versus organizational sensible" decision-making. The purpose of this paper is to discuss the need for improving the critical thinking of HR professionals and describe the use of vignettes to measure higher order thinking.

Critical Thinking

HR professionals are criticized for favoring simplistic solutions in lieu of valid, empirically tested practices and simplistic problem solving (Claus & Collison, 2005; Langbert, 2005; Lawler, 2007). Smith (2003) recently lamented the dismal critical thinking skills of many business school undergraduates. To address these concerns, business schools are expanding efforts to improve critical thinking, defined as "use of cognitive skills or strategies that increase the probability of a desirable outcome" (Halpern, 1999, p. 70).

Legal-Centric Decision Making

Legal-centric decision making is rote thinking (Smith, 2003). Numerous accounts of frivolous claims against innocent employers have spurred an exaggerated sense of vulnerability (Bisom-Rapp, 1999; Roehling & Wright, 2006). An unreasonable fear of litigation undermines the creation and implementation of valid HR interventions and encourages the zealous preoccupation with documentation (Schultz, 2003). Legal-centric decision making lacks consideration of important organizational factors such as productivity,

fairness, and reputation. In fact, many efforts to avoid litigation may actually encourage it (Roehling & Wright, 2006). Examples include negligent hiring resulting from the failure to use valid ability tests based on a fear of adverse impact or fraudulent misrepresentation resulting from work references that omit "material facts" based on fear of defamation.
To valid blame for failure, some HR professionals yield to attorneys or consultants who recommend strategically illogical practices (Roehling & Wright, 2006). This reinforces the view that HR is inept, unimaginative, and unskilled (Hammonds, 2005). Moreover, attorneys are trained to prevent litigation, not develop strategic HR systems (Bisom-Rapp, 1999; Grossman, 2003; Roehling & Wright, 2006; Schultz, 2003).

Organizational Sensible Decision Making

Understanding HR law is essential for today's business school undergraduates. Line managers as well as HR professionals often make HR decisions that risk litigation. Even if legal advice is readily available, decision makers must understand HR law sufficiently to know when to ask for advice. Generally, business law classes are taught from the viewpoint of lawyers (Lampe, 2006), but management students must learn to think like effective managers (Allen, 2007). It is important to consider all forms of risk, not just legal. For example, "zero tolerance" sexual harassment policies may "scare people into compliance" (Risser, 1999), but at the cost of reinforcing stereotypes and perpetuating sexual segregation (Schultz, 2003). It is not necessary to sacrifice efficiency and effectiveness to avoid lawsuits. To the contrary, validity offers the best protection against litigation. Numerous factors influence the successful design and implementation of HR policy. Thus, it is essential to teach strategic decision-making (Smith, 2003). This includes sensitivity to the organization's mission, values, strategies, goals, HRM practices, performance, and reputation (Roehling & Wright, 2006).

Vignettes

Students can get lost in the minutiae of long cases (Macfarlane, 2003; Shugan, 2006) or underestimate the importance of context. Also described as case incidents (Wright, 1996), scenarios (Victor, 1990), critical incident vignettes (Macfarlane, 2003), or minicases (Davis, 2007), vignettes (Victor, 1990) are based on actual legal findings. They are written from the perspective of the management professional rather than an attorney (Lampe, 2006) which students perceive as more relevant to the "real world" (Macfarlane, 2002). This enhances transfer of learning by depicting situations that are similar to the actual work environment, providing a variety of situations, inculcating theory and concepts, and facilitating practice (Baldwin & Ford, 1988).

Vignettes encourage organizationally sensible decision making, save grading time, facilitate exposure to more situations, enhance student interest, and reward class participation. They can be used for a variety of instructional activities such as short response questions, small group discussion, on-line exam, and multiple-choice quiz (Hobson & Schafermeyer, 1994; Smith, 2003; Victor, 1999).

Figure 1 is a vignette I use to assess students' understanding of the difference between invalid and illegal selection. Figure 2 is the rubric I developed to grade assignments and provide student feedback. Figure 3 includes multiple-choice and short-answer items used as five-minute quizzes.

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Vignette

Engineering Inc is a full-service product development company. It provides the design of plastic, consumer, industrial, and scientific products as well as engineering consulting services to companies regardless of size. It specializes in the development of fluid handling products process and products that are machined or stamped. The company has 250 employees including 30 engineers (26 are Georgia Tech graduates). Engineering Inc. was founded by Adam Fargo in 1946. His children Adam Jr. and Katrina, both Georgia Tech graduates, now run the company. Katrina is the only female engineer with the company. Many employees are fans of Georgia Tech football and basketball. Top performers are rewarded with game tickets and many company functions center on Georgia Tech activities.

Engineering Inc. recently replaced its project manager, Juan Ramirez, who resigned to start his own business. Juan, aged 40, graduated from Georgia Tech with a BS in industrial engineering and a 2.9 GPA. He passed his Principles and Practice of Engineering (PE) exam on the third try. Juan was very well liked by his managers and subordinates. His tailgate parties were legendary and he was known for his great sense of humor. Engineering Inc. posted the following advertisement with the American Society of Mechanical Engineers (ASME) and JacketNet Jobs, a career resource exclusively for Georgia Tech alumni and a service of the Georgia Tech Alumni Association

<u>General Summary of Advertisement</u>

Provide engineering management and technical expertise for comprehensive installations of filling, sterilizer and packaging systems from initial concept through detail design, installation, system commissioning, and startup. These systems will generally be for soup/sauce type products in steel cans, glass or plastic containers, both traditional and non-traditional shapes. The job requires physical and mental strength and stamina; resourcefulness, flexibility and initiative; methodical, efficient thought processes; cool, *mature judgment; and the ability to perform steadily under stress.*

Education and Experience: BS Engineering (Mechanical Engineering preferred), five years experience as a project engineer, prefer broad experience with design and installation of filling, sterilizing & packaging systems. Plastic and non-traditional packaging experience is a plus.

Applicants

Mary Jones, 35-year-old, has a BS in mechanical engineering from MIT and recently graduated from GSU with an MBA. She has been a successful project manager for 7 years with an international firm that specializes in packaging systems. She read about the job on the ASME website. Morris Hasterd, 45-year-old, has worked for the Georgia Department of Transportation since graduating from Georgia Tech in 1988 with a BS in industrial engineering (2.9 GPA). Morris and Adam Jr. have been friends since their first year at Tech. Adam convinced Morris to apply for the job.

While Mary is the most qualified of 25 applicants, Morris got the job. Mary blames her gender and plans to sue Engineering, Inc. What theory of discrimination is Mary claiming? How would she establish a prima facie case? What must Engineering Inc. show to prove the charges are without merit? Do you believe Mary will be successful? Why?

Figure 3
Sample Multiple-Choice and Short-Answer Questions Related to Vignett

1. Which organization should Mary contact to file her discrimination complaint?
   A. EEOC B. FBI
   C. FDA D. Atlanta Bar Association to find a good attorney

2. Based on the information provided, which theory of discrimination is Mary claim
   A. Disparate treatment B. Ad
   C. Halo effect D. BF

3. Which of the following is the best defense of **Engineering Inc** against Mary's claims?
   A. Business Necessity B. BFO
   C. Validity D. None of the above

4. From the time Mary was rejected, how long does she have to file her complaint?

A. 90 days B. 180 days
C. 12 months D. 24 months

5. When filing her complaint, what must Mary do **first** to establish a prima facie case?

A. Show comparative statistics B. Show she is a member of a protected group
C. Show a BFOQ D. Show she is qualified.

6. Which of the following best explains why Mary was rejects

A. "Perfect candidate" stereotype B. "Like me" stereotype
C. Gender role stereotype D. BFOQ stereotype

7. The following is a **knowledge** statement taken from the job summary posted on JacketNet

Sufficient knowledge of engineering principles. Tasks 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6,

Which of the following best describes this knowledge statement?

A. Does meet the requirements of a **measureable knowledge statement for this job**

B. Does **not** meet the requirements of a **measurable** knowledge statement for this job.

Explain your answer

8. The following description of **abilities** is taken from the job summary posted on JacketNet

The job requires physical and mental strength and stamina; resourcefulness, flexibility and initiative; methodical, efficient thought processes; cool, mature judgment; and the ability to perform steadily under stress

Which of the following best describes this description of abilities?

A. Does provide sufficient information to develop content valid measures

B. Does **not** provides sufficient information to develop content valid measures

Explain your answer:

Utilizing Real-life Research Projects to Build HR Skills

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Abstract

This paper explains the benefits of using research projects that require undergraduate students to conduct primary research through employee surveys. The noted benefits for students include increased confidence that ultimately leads to more transferrable skills of critical thinking, problem-solving, and adaptability. As noted in the project evaluations, students have gained several tangible skills that help prepare them for their future careers.

Introduction

In today's work environment human resource professionals are increasing their presence in the 'c-suite' and making a bigger impact throughout their organizations (Welbourne, 2006; Parus, 2003; Capepelli, 2006). The skills and abilities of HR leaders demand an understanding of the workplace environment in order to make appropriate decisions.

As such, hiring managers have stated the most common sought-after-skills for new entrants into the workforce include adaptability, critical thinking, problem solving, communication, and application of technology (Miller, 2008). More specifically when recruiters visit campuses to interview college graduates, often times the recruiter asks candidates about their work, school, volunteer community service, and/or club experiences. At the heart of this inquiry, recruiters are looking for tangible ways for the candidates to demonstrate specific skills that will make them successful in their careers.

As educators of current business students, we believe that we have an obligation to help develop skills that will help business students succeed in their careers. One of the ways we have found success in this endeavor is by assigning a research project that incorporates primary research rather than traditional, secondary research (See Appendices A & B for more specifics on our project assignment). This paper highlights the value our students have found in this exercise and what lessons they have learned that help them build the necessary skills for today's workplace.

The theoretical framework we have applied in these research assignments is based on self-efficacy literature. *Self-efficacy*, or commonly stated as a person's confidence, has received a long history of empirical work from several scholars, most notably Bandura . Bandura's generally accepted definition of self-efficacy considers the specific task at hand, which is different from the more general self-efficacy that is associated with a person's overall confidence. According to Bandura, self-efficacy has three dimensions. First, m*agnitude* applies to the level of difficulty associated with a specific task. Levels of task difficulty and complexity represent different degrees of challenge for successful task performance. Second, *strength* refers to the conviction a person has at the level of difficulty. In other words, the higher the strength of self-efficacy, the higher likelihood of successful performance. *Generality* is the third dimension of self-efficacy and refers to how one's confidence with a certain task is generalized across similar situations. For example, if someone is an organized person and it helps them succeed in managing a project, this organizational skill could also be used to build confidence in future project management tasks. On the other hand, if someone is confident with a specific project management software package, he/she would be less confident in using a different software package if another project is assigned to that person. Thus, "software" confidence in this scenario does not generalize to all projects because each of the software packages is unique. Similar to this differentiation, the types of research assignments that we have used in our classes has focused on developing skills that are more generalize-able than specific; thereby developing a skill that can transfer with the students in their future work experiences.

To further understand Bandura's self-efficacy definition and ensuing research, he suggests efficacious judgments are made from four sources of information , which include enactive mastery experiences, vicarious experiences, verbal persuasion, and physiological arousal. *Enactive mastery experiences* are said to be the most prominent sources for self-efficacy judgments and refer to the insights about one's capabilities with a task. As a source of information, enactive mastery experiences are seen as most influential because their effects are strong and more generalize-able (Bandura, 1997). In the context of our research assignments, students have increased their enactive mastery experiences of employee surveys—a common activity performed by most human resource departments in today's organizations (See Appendix C).

Vicarious experiences are a second important source of information for developing self-efficacy beliefs. These experiences occur when a person has the opportunity to observe another person succeeding at a specific task. Through observation and practicing ways of doing a task, new skills can be learned effectively. Although weaker than mastery experiences, vicarious learning can still be an effective source of information that influences self-efficacy beliefs . Applying this approach to the research assignments, our students have been able to gain confidence in collecting employee surveys and analyzing the results. By observing not only us as faculty and mentors for such projects, but also observing their classmates' analysis of the data, students have benefited from several sources of expertise to draw conclusions and make recommendations from the "real-life" data set they have collected (See Appendix C).

A third source of information for building self-efficacy is verbal persuasion. As a form of social influence, verbal persuasion focuses on increasing the person's perception of ability rather than increasing the actual skill adeptness. These forms of persuasion can be experienced through suggestions, exhortations, or self-instruction. Obviously, the best source of verbal persuasion comes from people who are highly respected . Applying the verbal persuasion technique to our student projects, it is clear our students have benefited from verbal persuasion because of the feedback they receive on their final presentations at the end of the semester. The feedback comes from multiple sources. For example the written report they submit at the end of the semester is graded with comments and suggestions on how to improve their conclusions. Additionally, the students make formal presentations to the rest of the class that offers feedback from the professor as well as other students. In some cases, the students are also asked to make a presentation to companies who have volunteered their employees as survey participants. By having an audience of company executives, the students benefit from real-life feedback that is not just an academic exercise (See Appendix C).

The final source of information for self-efficacy is physiological arousal. This arousal comes from the person's sense of control or vulnerability in a given situation. For example, for some individuals a stressful task may cause them to doubt their abilities and therefore lower their self-efficacy beliefs. On the other hand, other individuals may "rise to the occasion" under stressful situations and perform the task more effectively. Relating the *physiological arousal* dimension of self-efficacy theory to our research projects, it is easy to conclude our students build their confidence as an employee survey expert by having to step out of their comfort zones. As one of our expectations with the research projects, our students must locate potential survey participants who are currently working. This part of the assignment takes the students out of their comfort zones because most have never been asked to seek input from employees and managers in this manner. Although some of the survey participants might be from our students' current employment settings, in many cases they need more surveys completed which forces them to talk to working professionals through other means (See Appendix C).

Increased Confidence = Transferability

As highlighted above, the increased benefits of building students' confidence is very evident from their feedback after completing the semester project. Even more interesting to us however, as well as to today's hiring managers, is the ability to transfer this experience to the "real world" once our students graduate and begin their careers. Recall that a major reason for us to explore this type of project was to address recruiters' interest in the most sought-after-skills for new entrants, e.g. adaptability, critical thinking, problem solving, communication, and application of technology (Miller, 2008). By providing the opportunity for our students to conduct primary research, rather than traditional secondary research, we have created an opportunity for the students to build the skills that recruiters are seeking. Students have had to adapt their approach toward soliciting participation in their surveys. For some students the participants requested hard-copies of the surveys while other participants requested the online link to surveymonkey.com to complete their surveys. Additionally, one can see from some of the student responses on the feedback (see Appendix C), that they had to be open to what the data told them. In some cases the findings of the study supported their intuition and other times the data refuted their *a priori* perceptions. As the students experienced the role of an HR professional, they realized that having an open mind going into an employee survey project is in the best interest of all stakeholders, e.g. the organization, managers, and employees.

With regard to critical thinking, problem solving skills, and communication skills our research project presents the opportunity for students to build these important skills as well. Because of the expectation to present their findings to a wide audience, including managers of companies, students began to feel the added pressure of doing a more thorough job. Their findings were not just an assignment for their professor but also for practicing managers of companies that could be future employers. This resulted in a higher quality product in their analysis and their presentations.

The final "most sought-after skill" (Miller, 2008) is the application of technology. In our projects, students were encouraged to use the electronic method of collecting employee surveys. This allowed the students a broader reach for soliciting their surveys as well as the opportunity to see the many advantages of collecting information electronically rather than with the traditional pencil and paper method. Once the surveys were collected, students were expected to do basic statistical analyses of the data through Microsoft Excel, at a minimum, but also with a statistical software package such as SPSS. These skill-building analyses offered students a chance to use software packages that they were not familiar with. Ultimately our students gained a complete understanding of survey design, data collection, data analysis, and data reporting.

Conclusions

Although other projects lend themselves to helping students hone important skills for the workplace, we have found this real-world project to be a very rewarding approach for everyone—from us as faculty, to our students, to future employers of our students. We know that being an educator requires a continuous review of our methods and student assignments but for the moment, we believe we have found an approach that works very well.

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"Arroz con Pollo": DVD Performance of a Play to Demonstrate Contemporary Human Resource Management Issues.

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California State University Stanislaus

Rob Page
Southern Connecticut State University

Crystal Jack
Jackson Rancheria Casino

Abstract
This DVD is a live performance of the play "Arroz con Pollo" as performed at the Ruby Theatre in Hollywood, CA, December 5-21, 2008. The play was written by Edward Hernandez, Ph.D and focuses on the dilemmas of downsizing, corporate greed, and corporate climbing during an economic crisis. This play was a co-production of ROI Theatrical and the STAN/SHRM, an affiliate of the National Society for Human Resource Management. This play was designed as a teaching tool for instructors. The play is set in the current economic crisis with bailouts and mass layoffs.

Classroom Discussion questions:

- Did Nathan exhaust all possibilities?
- What is lesson learned from the parable "The Three Birds"?
- Why did Emily choose to add names to the list of workers to be laid off?
- What does the dish Arroz con Pollo symbolize?
- What laws would a company need to consider when faced with the dilemmas as seen in the play?
- What would you do if you were in the same position as Nathan?
- Who is responsible for the fatal ending? Victor? The Corporation? Nathan?

To receive a physical copy of the DVD play you must print out a copy of the receipt for purchasing your personal copy of this journal issue. Send your copy of the received to: Edward Hernandez, Ph.D, College of Business Administration, California State University Stanislaus, 1 University Circle, Turlock, CA 95382. You will receive your copy of the DVD in the mail. Only one DVD per purchase.

This DVD is authorized for classroom performance only.

Upcoming Events

Western & Business Management Association International Conference
Lake Tahoe, California
October 10-11, 2009
www.hrmgt.com/wbm.html
profess2000@hrmgt.com for more information

2009 Annual Meeting of the Academy of Management
http://meeting.aomonline.org/2009
Chicago, Illinois, U.S.A.
August 7-11, 2009
Conference Theme: Green Management Matters

Asia Academy of Management
(http://www.cuhk.edu.hk/baf/asia-aom)
December 14 - 16, 2008 Taipei, Taiwan

Iberoamerican Academy of Management
(http://www.iberoacademy.org/) TBA ~ (http://www.shsu.edu/) mgt_swam"
February 24 - 28, 2009 Oklahoma City, OK

Western Academy of Management
(http://www.wamonline.org/)
March 18 - 21, 2009 Midway, Utah

Eastern Academy of Management
(http://www.eaom.org)
May 13 - 19, 2009 Hartford, CT

Midwest Academy of Management
(http://www.midwestacademy.org)
October 22 - 24, 2009 Chicago, IL

Southern Management Association
(http://www.southernmanagement.org)
November 11 - 14, 2009 Asheville, NC

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