

CHANGING THE WAY MANAGEMENT IS TAUGHT

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Abstract

There is a major change in the way management is taught at a major university in the Czech Republic. Authors capture these changes and try to explain the ways it is received by students and how it affects their motivation and their performance. Bandura has explained the situation early in 1977. There are however other factors that will be described to analyse the situation and realistic possibilities of change in management education. Edward Mandt observes that typical business schools fail to prepare the students properly (Wheeten, Cameron, 1984)

The goal is to analyse the situation in the specific field of management education at major university in the Czech Republic and to find out the affects it has on students' motivation and their performance.

Methods: Authors used qualitative research methods, mainly interviews and focus groups and questionnaires.

Findings: Authors have found specific organizational culture at the university which is described, specified the external and internal motivation of the students in regards to the grades and knowledge. Interesting finding was the lengths of preparation for final exam that is alarming.

Key words: management, education, teaching, motivation, innovation

JEL Code: I2, M53

Introduction

Management innovation can be defined as „*a difference in the form, quality, or state over time of the management activities in an organization, where the change is a novel or unprecedented departure from the past*“ (Hargrave & Van de Ven, 2006; Van de Ven & Poole, 1995). And why should we innovate management? Or in better words why should we change the ways we teach management to our students and professional community? The aim of this exploratory study was to identify issues of bad reputation that Management 101 course had, provide students perspective on the matter and propose a change in a way management is taught. This paper comprises of the two subsequent studies that were undergone as a pilot study for

identifying major areas for innovation in management education on undergraduate level. Main goal was to start with innovation on the go and to set up longitudinal study to measure qualitatively and quantitatively the impact on knowledge, abilities and motivation for studying the subject further as something meaningful. Unfortunately, since 2016 the results of quantitative part of the study were not statistically very significant.

After conducting the qualitative study on former management course, authors focused their attention to change how the management course is taught. Besides having lectures students have also seminars in a class with maximum of 25 students. During the class students are divided in 4-6 persons teams and work together on the project. Moreover the projects newly focus strongly at ethical part of business. Students attempt to use the newly acquired skills and tools to change the world (at least a small piece of it). In their teams of 4-6 people they work with volunteers and company partners to e.g. set up NGO in fight against overuse of plastic in society. In other case they collaborate with elementary schools to help them to start effective waste sorting. In different case there is a cooperation with the city council and the dirty or graffiti used walls are renewed in certain location with help of a hundred of volunteers. Sometimes it is about giving blood on a regional level or to arrange and organize a film festival for young film makers.

There are six basic rules:

- Change the world (however small piece of it it is)
- Use management tools
- Work with volunteers, partners, companies, etc., Do not do it just in your team.
- No politics
- No religion
- Behave ethically

It is a bold move where we are certain it will help to raise awareness about what management can be used for. Not only to thrive in corporations thinking just about oneself, but the idea of helping others, helping community, doing something meaningful. When prof. Mintzberg visited the university, that was something that he enjoyed talking about as well. This also gives us expectation of possible change in a good manner. But how to break this to students? Are they all ready for such a change? Will it help or dissuade and discourage students to work a lot more for the same type of degree? Will it motivate different students to be part of the change?

Before conducting quantitative study, teachers were facing several issues. There were few indications that students were not motivated to attend lectures, students didn't care much about their grades and they were also complaining about difficulty of the course. The cultural context is unique, the value of university degree is decreasing (students accepting inferior jobs, which

not correspond to their education, employers do not demand only degree, but practice, skills, languages and experience are important as well) and as universities are public the more and more students are applying for universities.

Authors decided to reveal the details so they made for students deep questionnaire. Data from 2 semesters were collected, first group consisted of 224 students and second of 284. Data were taken from central information system, only active students are counted. Authors collected 31 and 63 questionnaires. They consisted of 27 and 31 questions. The return of questionnaires was 18.5%. The main focus of the questionnaire is to reveal student's attitude to their studies, motivation, learning and grades. Another reason of the questionnaire was simply to get feedback for lectures and seminars. We wonder – what is a Business University here for if not for teaching for learning in the way that inspire students? And if it does not anymore, is it time to change the way we teach, to change the way we choose students, is it the time to render universities useless in the time of effective online education or is it something completely different?

1 Theory, methodology and ethics

Observation and interviews were chosen to be the main methods used for this paper for the reason of triangulation. Becker & Geer (1957) have very direct view on whether to use interviews or participant observation in qualitative studies: “in working with interviews, we must necessarily infer a great many things we could have observed, had we only been in a position to do so. We add to the accuracy of our data when we substitute observable fact for inference”. Therefore both methods were used to ensure the validity of the data gathered. Farr (1984) states that there are two opposing dangers facing the unwary social scientist:

- believing he/she does not need to ask questions in order to establish the veracity of what can be observed and
- taking those accounts at face value.

The authors believe that bias is not the major concern in this case because they assume that students want the change as the change will benefit them greatly. Generally they assume that students' talk about the subject is meaningful, contextual and relational. In this study the combination of the views of realist and social constructionist are used. Authors can not distinguish themselves of being either personal or completely impersonal as they are in positions of lecturers at the university. They then take a position of Rosenblum (1987) that interview is „*a temporally circumscribed, explicitly instrumental exchange between relative*

strangers; an impersonal, asymmetric, question-answer session. Yet insofar as it is occasioned by the desire to illuminate areas inaccessible by less obtrusive means, an interview is likely to address private and perhaps emotionally charged topics. At one and the same moment then, the social science interview stands as both an exceedingly personal and equally impersonal event. “ How many interviews is enough was the main question before starting the research. The authors have consulted the literature and found this answer: „*That is, of course, a perennial question if not a great one. The answer, as with all things qualitative, is “it depends.” It depends on your resources, how important the question is to the research, and even to how many respondents are enough to satisfy committee members for a dissertation. For many qualitative studies one respondent is all you need – your person of interest. But in general the old 4 rule seems to hold that you keep asking as long as you are getting different answers, and that is a reminder that with our little samples we can’t establish frequencies but we should be able to find the RANGE of responses. Whatever the way the question is handled, the best answer is to report fully how it was resolved.*“ (Wolcott, 2011). As pointed out later in results, the answers of the interviewees were so similar in context that there was no need to continue and the final count of interviewees was 18. This paper is based on grounded theory. Method used for gathering the subjects was snowball sampling.

There was however other issue before starting the interviews - the students did not agree with the interviews to be recorded for fear of being punished later for speaking against the subject. Again, consulting the literature: “*Successful field research depends on the investigator’s trained abilities to look at people, listen to them, think and feel with them, talk with them rather than at them. It does not depend fundamentally on some impersonal apparatus, such as a camera or tape-recorder...*” (Polsky, 1998). The author of this paper thus made primarily notes from the interviews, not breaching the trust and ethics of the research by recording it clandestinely.

The aim of the quantitative questionnaire’s survey is to make longitudinal study and discover student’s attitudes to various topics. After having discovered attitudes and collection more data sets, relevant statistical methods will be used to describe dependences between several variables from questionnaire. For the first two groups of students mainly frequencies and crosstabs as statistical methods are used. The results of Chi square, crammer’s V and regression are still not significant. Authors expecting results after having more data set collected.

Observations and results

Author of the paper has sat nine observation sessions, each of them being 1,5 hours long (i.e. 13,5 hours) and consisting of observing students at lectures of Management 101 in the auditorium sitting at back of a theatre coming last as to minimize the possibility of being seen by students. The count of students present was between 40 and 150. Important information being that the presence at lectures is non – compulsory therefore students attending the lessons were supposed to be part of the group actually at least partly interested in the subject. Observation thus does not cover the group that was not interested in the subject at all and did not come to any or most of the lectures.

Observations alone came up with rich data:

In every observation there was:

8 – 27 (being often 15 – 20% of the subjects present) subjects doing something else requiring their full attention (using photoshop, writing long e-mails, playing computer games, sleeping)

15 – 41 (being 30 – 40% of the subjects present) subjects performing tasks that slightly diverted their attention or diverted their attention fully but for a short time (checking Facebook, reading sms, answering a mobile phone, sharing idea with their peers)

9 – 25 (being 15 – 20% of the subjects present) subjects taking notes of what was said.

4 – 7 (being 7 – 9% of the subjects present) subjects performing additional tasks that were directly connected to the presentation (looking up difficult words, googling names mentioned, taking pictures of the canvas)

About 80% of the subjects came on time, another 15% within 10 minutes after the lectures have started. 5% came during the lecture, often 30 minutes or later.

About 95% of the subjects waited for the end of the lecture. About 5% left 10 – 30 min before the lecture has ended. Even when lecturer forgot about time and lectured 5 – 15 minutes longer, the percentage has not changed however the atmosphere has become very tense and it was obvious that students were not paying any attention to the lecture any more. There were obvious signs they wished to leave, e.g. loud packing of the books, taking on cloaks, sometimes even standing up but politely waiting for the lecturer to finish.

Remarkable fact about students are their grades. The local system has 4 grades (1-best, 2, 3 and 4-failed). Best grade obtained just 2.41 % of all students. 2 got 40.24 % and 3 49.5 % of students. 7.85 % of students failed the course. Data were taken from central information system.

During non-formal discussions students were complaining that course is difficult because almost no one gets best grade. For best grade students need at least 90% of points. Teachers feel that students don't make almost any effort to obtain better grades than "pass". The aim of questionnaire is to discover more details about this issue.

Although the research will continue and some responses have just 1 or 2 answers, the first results could indicate the future of the research. The total 94 of the first pilot questionnaires showed several interesting results.

Quite interesting were the results of a question: “How much time did you spend on learning for your semester exam?”

Tab. 1: Preparation

| | | responses | percentage |
|---|------------------|-----------|------------|
| 1 | No preparation | 5 | 5,38 |
| 2 | Around 1 hour | 7 | 7,53 |
| 3 | 2-4 hours | 24 | 25,81 |
| 4 | 5-8 hours | 29 | 31,18 |
| 5 | 9-12 hours | 17 | 18,28 |
| 6 | 13-19 hours | 6 | 6,45 |
| 7 | 20 or more hours | 5 | 5,38 |

Source: authors

There are really not many students who prepare for the exam more than 12 hours (just 11,83%). At first glance it has to be pretty easy course if 38,72% of students prepare four hours or less. So another logical question would be: “How would you evaluate the difficulty of this course?”

Tab. 2: Course difficulty

| | | responses | percentage |
|---|----------------|-----------|------------|
| 1 | Very easy | 1 | 1,06 |
| 2 | Easy | 29 | 30,85 |
| 3 | Adequate | 58 | 61,70 |
| 4 | Difficult | 4 | 4,26 |
| 5 | Very difficult | 2 | 2,13 |

Source: authors

As there were really not many best grades among students, this question brings us important opinions. There are no best grades because of difficult level of the course. 61.7% of students answered that the difficulty was adequate and 30.85% answered that the course was easy and only 4.26% that the course was difficult. Probably one of the most important questions for us was: “How would you describe your motivation for points/grade?”

Tab. 3: Motivation

| | | responses | percentage |
|---|--|-----------|------------|
| 1 | I don't care | 2 | 2,13 |
| 2 | Important is to pass the course not grade | 29 | 30,85 |
| 3 | I am satisfied with 2 or 3 | 41 | 43,62 |
| 4 | I am trying to get scholarship | 12 | 12,77 |
| 5 | I do my best | 10 | 10,64 |

Source: authors

For 23.33% of students, grades are important, for 43.62 % of students 2 or 3 is sufficient. But for 30,85% of them, the grades are not important (important is to pass the course).

This study helps to provide first insight to student's motivation and the way how they prepare for the exams. Next data sets will reveal more information about these issues and help to conduct next steps of innovation in management course. The pilot results from the first two groups are a bit alarming, students are not motivated for grades, they don't give much time for preparation for the test and they don't consider the course difficult although they are not receiving best grades. Anyway, further research is needed. This is new challenge to which teachers have to face up.

Interviews

There were eighteen semi structured interviews conducted lasting about 30 minutes each. Three interviews lasted more than 60% of the time longer. Five interviews were much shorter, about 15 minutes. In total it interviews themselves took 536 minutes, i.e. about 9 hours. Depth of the data gathered from each of the subjects were however very similar proposing that shorter interviews were the one where subjects were better prepared for the interview and did not have to think to much before telling their story and answering the probing questions.

There was a dissatisfaction with the subject with 100% of all interviewees. 15 of the subjects had no or very little against the lecturers themselves. 3 subjects did not like the personality of one of the teachers (being too ardent – others however defended the teacher as being inspiring).

Main reasons mentioned by the most (75% and more):

- Badly written book – it is huge, black, without nearly any pictures or examples, small font, nearly no paragraphs. Specific words that were used: wall of text, black bible that everyone knows exists but no one reads, black brick, only half of the book relevant to the subject

- Mid – term test – one minute for a question is too little. Test is more the game of chance. Specific words used (it is like a roulette)
- Final test – game of chance, some questions are not clear
- Expressed unmet need of more practical examples of the theory presented

Other reasons mentioned at least by 30% of the subjects:

- „I did not read the book at all, did not even buy it, and still passed – why is it necessary to push us to read it? It was mentioned several times that we will not pass if we don not learn from the book“
- Lectures were interesting but it had nothing to do with the test. In specific words „Either teach what is in the test, or change the test“
- „Lectures were boring, came once, did not come any more“
- „It is strange that we jump from theme to theme (decision making, entrepreneurship, organizing, etc.)“

Reasons mentioned by one or two subjects being rich data source:

- „If I do not come to the lectures, do not learn for the test and still pass with A, something is wrong with the education here“
- „All I have to know to the subject I can learn at www.vsebolec.cz. You can even find there all the test questions and prepare for the exam by taking mock exams students created. Therefore a lot of my peers do not come to school at all, they go to work and pass most of the tests in this fashion.“

Possibilities for change identified by subject:

- If you provided real-life situations, it could be inspiring to read the theory as well.
- Smaller groups 20-25 people are needed. You cannot teach management just in teaching theatre.
- Why don't you invite people from the businesses you teach about – you know – as you came from your business to teach us – that is inspiring, you know.
- Write new book (or translate or whatever). You cannot expect us to read “this” kind of book (pointing at current literature). Write a textbook, a good one.
- I don't know – maybe be tougher with tests, I mean a lot of people get to this school that just does not belong here – I lose motivation when having to deal with two of them in five-people team. You just have enough. Do not let them in.

Conclusion

The main focus of this study was to establish the main issues students experience (or think they experience) to start changing the way management is taught. On the basis of the results of the formal complaints and questionnaires, first steps are being taken to ensure both the high quality of education and the students' inspiration of visiting the lectures. Also there is a new book being written that will be the main source for students. However this study has uncovered also deeper issues that needs to be answered by larger study – culture of not attending lectures and still being able to pass the subjects, stealing the questions of the various of tests and preparing for the tests without understanding the topic, all – in – all trying to „smuggle“ oneself through the university without acquiring the knowledge. This study thus will continue on the larger scale in this direction and also different study will longitudinally measure the change in Management 101 programme.

In the retrospect the authors do not state that all the possible reasons for the course to be unliked were uncovered, however the reaction of interviewees to the results of the study and the proposed changes were positive which might lead to conclusion that major flaws were detected or deduced from the participant observation and the interviews carried.

We wonder – what is a Business University here for if not for teaching for learning in the way that inspire students? And if it does not anymore, is it time to change the way we teach, to change the way we choose students, is it the time to render universities useless in the time of effective online education or is it something else?

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