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Experiential Learning Approaches to Principles of Management

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Abstract

This paper describes a lesson plan that can be used in an undergraduate course in principles of management. The lesson plan helps students learn the basic concepts of management and the functions performed by managers – planning, organizing, leading, and controlling. Through traditional lecture and classroom discussion, the students will better understand these concepts. This lesson plan also helps students recognize these functions through observation. Finally, to ensure that students have fully internalized each function of management, they will have the opportunity to apply the concepts through a group project. Upon completion of this lesson plan, the students should be prepared to engage the rest of the semester’s material as each function is covered in more detail.

Keywords: principles of management, pedagogy, experiential learning, active learning

The following lesson plan is intended to help students internalize the core functions of management in a Principles of Management course. The notion that managers need to plan, organize, lead, and control is an essential component in helping students understand the profession of management and to effectively perform these functions themselves. Once the framework for these functions is mastered, students can begin to explore the intricacies of each area throughout the rest of the semester. This lesson plan lays this foundation by helping students 1) understand what each function entails, 2) recognize each function through observation, and 3) apply the functions of management as they work on a project together.

The setting for this lesson plan is a traditional classroom for a 200-level principles of management course at a liberal arts college. Completion of this course is required for students to progress into the upper-level electives and as such most of the class is comprised of freshmen and sophomores. Students must be able to meet the objectives of this lesson plan and of the course to effectively navigate elective courses such as human resources, leadership, strategic selling, organizational behavior, and international business.

In many principles of management textbooks, the first chapter or two will provide an overview of the four functions of management. Each subsequent chapter or unit goes into each function of management in detail, and also covers the history of management and the ethics of managerial decisions. This lesson will take place towards the beginning of the semester, when the ideas of planning, organizing, leading, and controlling within management are still new concepts for the students. Covering this entire lesson plan will require four class periods covering 75 minutes each.
Objectives, Topics and Assessments

There are three objectives for this lesson plan, all of which address the four functions of management. At the completion of this lesson, students should be able to:

1. Understand the four functions of management
2. Recognize the four functions of management through observation
3. Apply the four functions of management in a project setting

While working towards these three objectives, students will explore how managers plan, organize, lead, and control the subset of each topic. In planning, managers must analyze the current situation and set a direction. In organization, managers will put people and resources where they would be the most effective. In leading, they must motivate individuals within the organization through positive influence. In controlling, managers monitor progress and make adjustments.

To effectively determine whether students meet these three objectives, three separate assessment tools will be used. The first assessment tool is a classroom discussion, whereby the students will offer examples or describe the functions they have experienced while the instructor facilitates the conversation. Through the students’ answers and contributions, the instructor should be able to determine if they are internalizing the information or if they require more clarification and coverage of the material. The second assessment method involves students writing an individual paper as they observe management in action. The third assessment method is a collective paper that reflects the students’ use of the four functions of management in a group project setting.

Learning Activities

The four functions of management are defined as planning, organizing, leading, and controlling. The following outline should guide the instructor through this introductory chapter on this material. For each function of management, I share a story or two about my experiences in the professional environment and can be a good example or bad example of implementing the four functions.

1) Definition of management – Working with both people and resources to effectively further the interests of the organization.

2) Planning helps you set a direction for the organization, and includes the following activities:
   a. Setting goals and outlining objectives to meet those goals
   b. Analyzing the current environment, both internal and external, and determining a strategy to navigate them both
   c. Determining which activities add value to the organization and which ones don’t
   d. Soliciting the input of the employees, suppliers, customers, and management team to create a strategic vision

3) Organizing helps you get the right people and resources in the right places and includes the following activities:
   a. Coordinating the human, financial, physical, and informational resources of the organization
   b. Creating conditions that allow these resources to be maximized towards organizational goals

4) Leading helps you motivate people and includes the following activities:
   a. Attracting new employees, customers, and suppliers to your business activities
   b. Inspiring people to higher performance through increased motivation
Controlling helps you understand if you are on track and includes the following activities:

a. Monitoring performance through quantitative control measures
b. Making necessary corrections when goals are not met

Assignments

For this lesson, there are two assignments that the students will turn in. The following discussion provides more detail on the purpose of each assignment and the rubrics used to assess students’ completion of the objective.

Reflection Paper on Undercover Boss. This individual paper will be a reflection on the Undercover Boss video and will assess the students’ ability to recognize a professional manager using the four functions of management. Within Bloom’s taxonomy of learning, this assignment will assess the students’ ability to analyze as they must distinguish between each function being utilized.

Collective Paper on Airplane Project. Students should be assigned into groups of four to five and have them elect a “manager” of the group. The task of the group is to build a paper airplane and then document how they planned, organized, lead, and controlled throughout the project. The students are given specifications that they must meet when designing and building the airplane, which take it beyond a simple folding of a single sheet of paper. The airplanes must be constructed using two sheets of paper and must contain four non-paper items. Each team has a $1,500 budget and needs to purchase these non-paper items from the CEO (which is the professor). They do this by submitting a purchase requisition form, found in Appendix A. These details are outlined in the instructional sheet handed out to the students which can be found in Appendix B.

As they progress through the project, they should document how they use the four functions. Upon completion of the airplane, they will turn in a management report for which the entire team will receive a team grade (up to 15 points). In addition, each student will provide a peer grade to each member of the team up to 5 points, making this entire project worth 20 points.

The purpose of this project is to allow the students to practice and apply what they have learned and understood about the four functions of management. The elected manager for each group has the ultimate decision rights on the project and is responsible for submitting the report. In regards to planning, they typically report the process they used to research designs and how they decided which non-paper items to use. They must also plan for their $1,500 budget as they order items. Some teams will even report the goals they created and a strategic vision for their airplane. The organizational function is usually described in how they choose the roles for the team. One person is selected to research designs, someone with experience in building airplanes is assigned to actually construct their plane, and someone has to type up the report. The leading function is usually described in terms of how the manager allowed people to provide input and most teams select a democratic method in this regard. Finally, the control function is utilized by most teams in how they conduct their test runs of the airplane and how they make adjustments. As the professor, sometimes when they order items, I will specifically short change them and see if they notice. Some teams report they check their inventory and realize they did not get everything they ordered. This is another example of the control function. These descriptions are what I usually see on the management reports, but by no means do I limit what they need to do with their project. I allow the manager to set the tone and direction.

Finally, what really drives the students in my experience has been the competition. Each airplane is submitted to the CEO and checked out to make sure they have met all of the specifications. Then we have
Experiential Learning Approaches to Principles of Management

a competition to see which airplane flies the farthest. You can decide to offer extra credit for winning team or simply let their drive for competition create the atmosphere. I have done this both ways and found extra credit does not drive them as much as the simple spirit of competition.

Appendix A

Purchase Requisition Form

Appendix B

Paper Airplane Project Instructional Handout

Airplanes by Paper, LLC

The CEO of the organization, Bobby Lloyd, has decided that the current product line is not meeting customer demands. As such, he has placed a challenge before the engineering teams, to design a paper airplane with the following specifications:

1. Each airplane must be constructed of at least 2 pieces of paper.
2. Each airplane must also contain 4 non-paper items.
3. Each airplane must be completed by 5:40 PM on Friday. At 5:40 PM we will have a test run of the airplanes.

As a manager of your engineering team, you must get your team to build this paper airplane, keeping in mind all 4 management functions. You have absolute control over what happens in your team. Your decision is the final word if there is any dispute.

COMPANY POLICIES

A few company policies by which you need to abide:

1. Each engineering team must placed an order for inventory. Fill out the order sheet and submit with payment to supplier.
2. For safety reasons, the company has created a policy that only one person can be inside the work space at a time.
3. Each team is encouraged to make test runs for their prototype(s). There is no limit to the number of people in this area.

You need to submit the following:

1. A final model submitted for competition (to take place in the following class period).
2. A managers report, outlining how they utilized each of the four functions.
3. Designation of who will launch the airplane for the actual competition.