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Introduction to the Teaching & Learning Section

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Teaching & Learning

Introduction to the Teaching & Learning Section

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The value that we attribute to something fundamentally changes how we perceive it (Brafman and Brafman, 2008) and our understanding of leadership and group behavior is a function of what we value in our organizations. A lot of journal space has been devoted to these ideas but there is room for more. This Teaching & Learning Section has much to offer on the subject of what we value in leadership and how we perceive the concept from different perspectives.

In this issue, there are two articles offering innovative classroom exercises and one research report that reflects on how ethics education is presented in leading business schools. It would be tempting to say that this article is only about ethics and has nothing to say about leadership but ... that would be wrong. In fact, leadership is the theme that ties these three articles together even though the titles do not suggest that connection.

“Revisiting The Behavioral Matrix for Leadership and Team Development” by Kathleen Kane makes the point that “effective leaders are developed through self-awareness, feedback, and willingness to grow ... based on self-discovery, reflection, and opportunities to experiment with new ways of relating to others.” In this piece, Kane suggests that the small group development of a matrix of leadership style, values, and behavior can lead to thoughtful self-assessment. Further, by reviewing the matrix development process of other groups, students enhance their understanding of differing styles and values. By doing this through felt experience, learning is deeper and sets the table for further group understanding. There are implications in this for greater appreciation of diversity, communication, symbol, and action. In short, the foundations of leadership.

The second experiential exercise presented in this issue is called “Jenny Jan’s Dilemma: Applying the Principles of Resource Dependence Theory to Vendor Selection Negotiations” by Pamela Schwalb, Rose Leavitt, John Barbuto, Michele Millard, and Robbe Peetz. This is an innovative and engaging activity that was named Best Experiential Exercise by the Experiential Learning Association at the 2010 Annual Conference of the Eastern Academy of Management. One of the greatest leadership challenges is the allocation of resources and one of the toughest places to do this is in managing aspects of resource dependency. The exercise “creates simulated negotiations between a fast-food sandwich shop and various supply vendors, where student actors representing these entities experience the dynamics between dependence and power.”

The role of power, the importance of creative problem solving, and the necessity of leadership in group planning are all variables that can be seen, debriefed, and learned in this activity. As in the Behavioral Matrix and the Images of Leadership project, reflection and self-assessment are the keys to powerful learning. “Jenny Jans” also creates awareness of leadership behaviors that emerge as groups find their resource-based power. How to reduce vulnerability, leverage advantage, and help group members find the right approach in negotiation are all part of the learning mix in this soundly built and highly involving exercise.

Finally, the section moves from experiential learning to traditional field research with a thoughtful and thought-provoking study by Bruce Warren, Susan Sampson, and Erin McFee. In their article, “Business Schools: Ethics, Assurance of Learning and the Future,” the authors review how business ethics are taught at seventy of the world’s top ranked business schools. This exhaustive and thorough research effort used interviews and a survey instrument focusing on ethics in the curriculum, modifications to the ethics curriculum, and how assessment of learning was or was not integrated into the process. As a testimony to the authors’ skill in eliciting frank

commentary, there are significant questions to go with the answers. We see that creative approaches are necessary to break down conceptual barriers to integrating ethics into management education. It also seems that assessment methodologies have changed from a simple question on end-of-semester course evaluations to objective, direct outcome assessments. A graduate student once mentioned that the ethics module in his management course was an exercise in “looking for loopholes.” Readers will have to judge for themselves if that cynical view holds true after reading this report on what is taught about ethical behavior and how the learning is measured.

Building on the ideas of several of this issue’s authors, it turns out that leadership education – like leadership itself – benefits from the felt experience. Perceptions of leadership create what we value but the articles presented in this issue of the Teaching & Learning Section also create new expectations for what we can accomplish in our management education classrooms. That is no small matter. To paraphrase Dan Ariely (2009), expectations change the nature of the experience and that is what innovative teaching is all about. I look forward to hearing from *OMJ* readers on their reactions to these exciting articles.

References

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