In Defense of the Lecture: Revisiting and Reassessing Its Place within Management Pedagogy

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Long the staple or go-to technique in management education, instruction via the lecture has fallen on hard times. Dismissed as professorially heavy-handed and lacking creativity, the lecture has yielded considerable ground to experiential, service, applied, and active learning techniques. In this essay, we question this shift away from the lecture toward the aforementioned trending instructional methods. In coming to the defense of the lecture, we explore the benefits afforded by the lecture for students and the professorate. Drawing on the maxim that what is old is new again, we contend that the lecture still deserves central billing in the management student experience. To do so not only enhances the occupational prestige of the faculty, but also enhances student learning and prepares students for career success in the professional management world. To close, we explore how the lecture format can best be preserved in management education and the modifications needed to realize its many benefits.

The lecture as a teaching method has been woven into the educational fabric for almost 600 years (Augustinien, 2004), yet its dominance in higher education, including management education, has waned over the last 20 years. Experiential, student-centered, or active learning approaches have surfaced as alternatives (Kisfalvi & Oliver, 2015). The movement toward teaching to foster “active learning” or “student engagement” is curious given the lack of or mixed empirical evidence supporting these methods (Dehler & Welsh, 2014; Kirschner, Sweller, & Clark, 2006; Lund Dean & Jolly, 2012; Mayer, 2004; Stewart, Houghton, & Rogers, 2012). In defense of the lecture, we assert that students, professors, and employers stand to gain from its continued use in management education.

**The lecture – losing ground**

Calls to embrace experiential learning and constructivism-based theoretical approaches, have been disparagingly described as driven by ideology versus empirical research (Kirschner et al., 2006; Lund Dean & Forray, 2015; Mayer, 2004). This characterization is understandable as research shows student-centered instructional approaches are not always reliably linked to improved student learning (Dehler & Welsh, 2014; Lund Dean & Jolly, 2012; Stewart et al., 2012). Perhaps then, the appropriate launch point is to ask how did we get here?

For years, the professor was the dominant force in the classroom and ceded little or no control to students (Churchill, 1982; McCroskey & Richmond, 1983). Professors were experts who shared their expertise with students via a lecture (Vella, 1992). Over the last 25 years, this dynamic has changed (Chory & Horan, 2018; Chory & Offstein, 2017a, 2017b, 2018; Offstein & Chory, 2017). We have begun to conceptualize management students not as students, per se, but as partners, protégés, customers, and consumers (Ferris, 2002; Franz, 1998). Given this student-centered approach, the lecture, often viewed as professor-dominated, seemed doomed to suffer.

Economic forces have also played a role in the lecture’s declining popularity. More than ever, colleges and universities depend on tuition dollars to operate, as state financial support has declined (Cross & Goldenberg, 2009; State Higher Education Executive Officers Association, 2019). Universities need to attract and retain students to ensure dependable revenue and they must do so in a more competitive landscape influenced by for-profit colleges/universities and online education (Surowiecki, 2015). Furthermore, institutions are vying for students from a smaller pool of college-
age individuals, as birth rates continue to decline (Shah, 2015).

All of these factors have led to the belief that the student experience matters. If students are satisfied and enjoy their college experience, they are more likely to stay, graduate, and recommend the institution to others. Perhaps the best evidence of this phenomenon is the use of student evaluations of instructors that capture student satisfaction, but not student learning (Billberry, 2014; Clayson, 2009). Taken to its extreme, this approach results in student learning taking a back seat to entertaining and satisfying students (Billberry, 2014; Ng & Forbes, 2009).

In this environ, project learning, experiential learning, and group instruction are encouraged, perhaps because students, particularly those most in danger of dropping out, prefer these methods (Clark, 1982). In addition, parents and prospective employers desire demonstrable results from students’ high cost education, compelling financially-minded administrators to push faculty to adopt experiential education approaches (Fawell, 2017). In the meantime, the traditional lecture format lags, and students, professors, and ultimately, employers, suffer.

We understand, however, it is not necessary to advance one modality, such as the lecture, by attacking or minimizing other pedagogical approaches, such as experiential methods. To be sure, some scholars suggest either integrating or sequenc- ing the lecture with other pedagogical methods to achieve better student learning experiences and outcomes (Barkley & Major, 2018; Grow, 1991, 1994). While we paint a picture of what that may look like and how that can be done, our initial focus is in this essay centers on the decline of the lecture. Toward that end and in defense of the lecture, we begin by discussing how and why management education students benefit from the lecture.

**Students benefit from the lecture**

**Academic learning benefits**

**Active learning fallacies**

Active pedagogical approaches are encouraged not simply as a means to increase student recruitment, satisfaction, and retention, but as a way to engage students in active learning. The assumption is that learning occurs via students building their own knowledge, i.e., constructivism (Mayer, 2004), and students best do this through experience (Lund Dean & Forray, 2015). Active learning is often conflated with active teaching methods and behaviorally active students, which are assumed to result in students’ cognitive engagement, active learning, and long-term impact. Mayer (2004) refers to this conflation as the constructivist teaching fallacy. In reality, constructivist learning requires students be cognitively engaged. Group discussions, hands-on activities, and experiential projects do not necessarily induce the cognitive activity that defines active learning, nor are they necessary for constructivist learning to occur. In fact, active learning can happen via lectures or experiential methods, or a combination thereof (Barkley & Major, 2018; Mayer, 2004).

Characterizations of the lecture, including the use of PowerPoint slides and notes, as a “passive mode” of teaching (Stewart et al., 2012, p. 758) or “spoon-feeding” (Dehler & Welsh, 2014, p. 875) that views students as “passive recipients” (Kember, 1997, p. 265) and “dependent and powerless” (Dehler & Welsh, 2014, p. 887) exemplify the constructivist teaching fallacy. Labeling instruction via lectures as “teacher-centred/content-oriented” (Kember, 1997, p. 255) or “teacher transmission focused” (Åkerlind, 2004, p. 367) similarly mischaracterize the potential for active learning under the lecture format. These portrayals fail to consider the cognitive activity of students, including the potential for a high level of analyzing, integrating, and scrutinizing the material that is being delivered (Barkley & Major, 2018; Mayer, 2004). Contrary to the belief that the lecture fails to engage or challenge students (Dehler & Welsh, 2014; Stewart et al., 2012), many students find it demands their active participation (Barkley & Major, 2018; Peterson, Janicki, & Swing, 1980).

Active learning is characterized by cognitive activity on the part of the learner – thinking, scrutinizing, analyzing, and cognitively elaborating during information processing (Mayer, 2004). The Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM; Petty & Cacioppo, 1986) and the Heuristic Systematic Model (HSM; Eagly & Chaiken, 1993) refer to this as central and systematic processing, respectively. These models assert that a person’s mode of processing depends on his or her ability and motivation to process the given information. Highly able and motivated individuals are likely to centrally/systematically process incoming information, which leads their attitudes and beliefs to be more persistent, resistant, and predictive of behavior. In short, actively processing information leads to long-term learning and attitude change, which ultimately, impacts behavior.

We assert that active teaching and experiential methods may sometimes fail to meet expectations because students do not have the ability or motivation to actively cognitively participate in them. Lectures may be better suited to do this – especially with less able or underprepared students, students in introductory
courses, or students who experience communication apprehension. We address these contexts, in turn.

**Student ability and preparation**

A large proportion of our students are ill-prepared for college (Eagan et al., 2014; Rhoades, 2012; Schneider, 2012). They often lack basic skills such as critical thinking, writing, and problem solving (Eagan et al., 2014). About one-third of first-year students are in remedial classes; the proportion jumps as high as two-thirds in some segments (Rhoades, 2012). Specific to management education, Lund Dean and Fornaciari (2014) found students do not adhere to course structures or routines and assert they may lack the fundamentals needed to do so. Likewise, Dehler and Welsh (2014) concluded that their business students, even as seniors, were not prepared for a claims-to-knowledge pedagogy; the students were “overwhelmed” by the need to develop their own ideas (p. 884).

Given students’ difficulty with more active, self-directed pedagogies (Dehler & Welsh, 2014; Kirschner et al., 2006; Mayer, 2004), direct instruction via the lecture format may be more suitable. Like a lecture, direct instruction involves the instructor deciding on the learning intentions and success criteria; demonstrating through telling, explaining, or modeling; cuing students to appropriate learning strategies; and checking for understanding. It includes giving examples and advance organizers, structuring learning tasks, and supervising students’ time on tasks (Clark, 1982; Kirschner et al., 2006). In a synthesis of over 800 meta-analyses, Hattie (2009) found a .59 effect size for direct instruction on learning outcomes. In a separate meta-analysis, Alfieri, Brooks, Aldrich, and Tenenbaum (2011) found that explicit instruction and assisted discovery had a stronger effect on learning than other teaching modalities.

Direct instruction through a lecture may be especially appropriate with novice learners or those of lower ability because the structure and direction inherent in this approach lowers the information processing load (Clark, 1982; Kirschner et al., 2006; Schmidt, Loyens, van Gog, & Paas, 2007), which increases students’ ability to process information. As a consequence, they become more active information processors and more active learners.

**Course level**

It is rather ironic that during the time in which the lecture has fallen out of favor, but experiential, service, group, and active learning pedagogical approaches have surged, that employers are noting the lack of core skills among recent graduates (Strauss, 2016). This inverse relationship may best be explained by a recent personal discussion with colleagues. We recreate the musings from that discussion here:

*I’m seeing experiential approaches now in 100 level courses. If you can believe that, I am now seeing it in ORIE (orientation) coursework. I kind of understand it. If the kids aren’t engaged, satisfied, and happy early on in their educational journey, they are more apt to transfer or leave. But in a lecture, that’s where I learned core knowledge and critical skills that became the foundation for more advanced learning, like project learning. But if every faculty member is employing new, progressive, and popular experiential approaches to learning, even in the introductory courses, where do the basics get learned? I’ve found in my 400-level capstone course that students can’t work in teams because they lack the basic accounting, finance, marketing, and management skills or knowledge they should’ve gotten their sophomore year. They fail to even grasp key concepts. Instead, they had project, group, or experiential work then and never got the basic knowledge nailed down. I’m a fan of making management education exciting, but not at the expense of learning the core elements of our disciplines. Again, there’s a place for innovative and experiential pedagogies, but I don’t think it is in the 100 or 200 level courses. That’s where basic knowledge should be taught in a straightforward manner.*

We do not dispute the need or benefits of experiential, service, or student-centered learning, however, we do urge more care in the timing of these methods versus lectures. Research indicates more minimally guided instructional methods, such as problem-based learning, are only effective when students have background knowledge and prior structured experiences (Roblyer, Edwards, & Havriluk, 1997). In introductory management courses, direct instruction through a lecture is likely to be more effective (Clark, 1982; Kirschner et al., 2006; Schmidt et al., 2007). Although this sequencing may run counter to recruitment and retention efforts that aim to make early courses as entertaining or satisfying as possible, it may pay dividends in subsequent courses. The lecture is not only likely to benefit underprepared students and those in introductory courses, but students with certain traits, as well.

**Student communication apprehension**

Anxious students, particularly those high in communication apprehension (CA), tend to benefit from instructional through lectures. CA is the fear or anxiety associated with actual or anticipated communication. Individuals high in CA tend to experience discomfort in communication situations and avoid communication or withdraw from it when they can. When forced to
interact with others, their communication is often disrupted (McCroskey, 1984). In a study of almost 2,000 ($n = 1884$) first-year students, 18% were high in CA (McCroskey, Booth-Butterfield, & Payne, 1989). In a more recent study, over 20% of first-year students were high in trait CA and 37% were high in trait CA and/or one or more type of context-based CA (e.g., group discussions; Whalen, 2015).

High CA students prefer learning via organized lectures as opposed to collaborative and participative approaches that emphasize learning through teaching others (Bourhis & Stubbs, 1991; Dwyer, 1998). Not only do they prefer the lecture format, but their learning is not inhibited in lecture courses as it is in instructional contexts requiring communication. For instance, in lecture settings with no, little, or sporadic student communication components, student CA was not related to achievement or recall (Booth-Butterfield, 1988; McCroskey & Andersen, 1976). In contrast, high CAs performed poorer than low CAs in instructional settings in which higher engagement with instructors was required (Scott, Yates, & Wheless, 1975).

One explanation for the effectiveness of lectures for high CA students is that the anxiety they experience in more participative learning environments increases their cognitive load to the extent that active processing of information, and thus learning, is inhibited. High CA students facing academic tasks involving communication produce thoughts focused on their anxiety, pulling their cognitive resources away from instructional information they are required to process. As a result, in communication-heavy instructional contexts, high CAs are not able to actively attend to, process, understand, and remember material to the same extent that low CAs are (Booth-Butterfield, 1988). Lectures that require minimal student discussion are effective with high CA learners not only because they remove the anxiety-producing component, but because they help to structure material for students, thus lowering the cognitive load of the information to be processed even further. As a result, even more cognitive resources are made available to actively process the information (Clark, 1982; Peterson & Janicki, 1979).

**Professional career benefits**

In addition to increasing students’ academic learning, instruction via the lecture helps prepare students for successful careers in the management world. In defense of the lecture, we describe how it teaches students listening/attention skills, grit and persistence, accountability, and the importance of respecting status differences.

**Listening/attention skills**

Our technology-infused world promotes fragmented thinking and communication and a desire for simple solutions. It is associated with students’ inability to give their full attention to course structures and assignments and the lack of value they perceive in doing so (Lund Dean & Fornaciari, 2014). The structure of online education reinforces these tendencies. Students are drawn to the technologically-infused world (e.g., social media) and often prefer it for instruction. For example, over half of graduating business students reported having taken at least one online course (Berdan Lozano & Tilman, 2016). At times, students choose to take the online version of a course even when they live on-campus (Chory & Offstein, 2017b). As for-profit online institutions “glitz” up their online courses (Young, 2017, para. 2), traditional universities will be pressured to follow suit (to the extent possible), exacerbating the problem.

In contrast to the student-controlled, frequently self-paced and asynchronous modes of instruction in online education, during a lecture the onus is on the student to listen carefully in-the-moment. In both academic and applied learning environments, attentive listening and accurate interpretation are essential (Charan, 2012; Daimler, 2016). Despite the sense within industry that listening skills are in short supply (Charan, 2012; Daimler, 2016; Stibitz, 2015), there are few pedagogical arenas in which students are required to practice this skill. Experiential, service, or team-based learning surely require some listening skills, however, none of these approaches demands the attentional discipline required of students during a lecture-based class. Although listening versus talking may be difficult in a culture in which social media promotes almost constant communication (Daimler, 2016), most, if not all, of our students will need to demonstrate listening skills to be successful in their given profession.

**Grit, follow-through skills**

Although important, learning from a lecture requires more than just listening. It requires students to interpret, to mentally prioritize essential learning points, and, most importantly, to stay focused and follow through – all of which are essential skills in academic and applied settings. Employers continue to raise concerns about the ability and willingness of recent graduates to put in the time and effort necessary for career advancement (Duckworth, 2016). Those who can focus, persist, and extract meaning from large quantities of information will possess a competitive advantage over those who cannot. In a related vein, lecture-based learning develops the student’s ability to pursue goals...
through perseverance, effort, and determination, a characteristic known as grit. Grit is correlated with a host of positive educational and career outcomes (Duckworth & Gross, 2014). This is not to suggest that a lecture should be boring. It is to suggest, however, that fewer bells and whistles and more instructional approaches requiring students’ sustained focus may be beneficial to them.

**Accountability**

Student accountability for their own performance is also developed under the lecture format. Research indicates over 25% of students blame external parties, including the instructor, for their poor academic performance (Jiang, Tripp, & Hong, 2017), sometimes citing their professors as unfair (Althoff Fridley, 2009; Chory, Horan, & Houser, 2017). Professors may inadvertently encourage these student attitudes through helicopter teaching: regularly reminding students of deadlines and extending them, being constantly available, and believing they are primarily responsible for student learning. Such teaching, though well-intentioned, does not prepare students to “independently tackle complex tasks in educational and workplace settings” (McAllum, 2016, p. 354).

In contrast, the traditional lecture approach requires students to take ownership of their learning. Unlike collaborative learning, team projects, or poorly designed experiential exercises that tend to be marked by ambiguity in assigning grades, social loafing, and student conflict, lecture style arrangements are relatively straightforward. Students must accept the success or failures of their own efforts, abilities, and performance. Just as students must learn to work in teams, students must also learn to be self-reliant and individually accountable. Lectures tend to reinforce and emphasize those skills. Many faculty members agree that we can create contexts that better enable our students to learn and we can guide them, but students are ultimately responsible for their own learning and success (Eagan et al., 2014; Lund Dean & Fornaciari, 2014; Päuler-Kuppinger & Jucks, 2017). We must hold students accountable for their performance using the parameters we have set. Their grades must reflect that we can create contexts that better enable our students to learn and we can guide them, but students are ultimately responsible for their own learning and success (Eagan et al., 2014; Lund Dean & Fornaciari, 2014; Päuler-Kuppinger & Jucks, 2017). We must hold students accountable for their performance using the parameters we have set. Their grades must reflect that performance (Lund Dean & Fornaciari, 2014), despite their protests. The lecture approach allows us to do just that.

**Respecting expertise and status differences**

We contend that in addition to teaching students reflection, patience, and personal responsibility, the lecture method also raises students’ awareness of the importance of respecting expertise and status differences. It also prepares them to work with people afforded various degrees of formal power. Students begin to learn workplace professionalism, decorum, and respect for rank through their classroom experiences (Chory & Offstein, 2018). Teaching through a lecture reminds students that professors hold expert knowledge and students are relatively inexpert, which some students fail to recognize (Althoff Fridley, 2009; Jiang et al., 2017). Perhaps most importantly, recognizing a professor’s expertise, competence, and qualifications results in greater student learning (e.g., see McCroskey, Valencic, & Richmond, 2004; Richmond, 1990).

In his classic work on teaching as scholarship, Boyer (1990) contends that “teaching begins with what the teacher knows. Those who teach must, above all, be well informed, and steeped in the knowledge of their fields” (p. 23). In a lecture format, professors set the intellectual priorities. In a flipped classroom or a student-centered experience, scholars no longer exclusively determine course content. Rather, it becomes a negotiated classroom experience (Ramsey & Fitzgibbons, 2005). Put differently, students possess more agency in determining and driving management education priorities (Kisfalvi & Oliver, 2015; Ramsey & Fitzgibbons, 2005). The unintended consequence is that this negotiated agenda may not be relevant to industry or management scholarship. Indeed, we are not alone in suggesting this possibility:

The dilemma for instructors concerns how far they should allow students’ interests, experience and desires to determine the direction of the class discussion. If they allow students’ interests to prevail, the students may be satisfied, but the instructors may leave that class frustrated, given that a number of their key points will probably not have been covered (Kisfalvi & Oliver, 2015, p. 717).

Embracing the lecture means the professorate is not disproportionately reacting or adjusting to students’ desires. Just the opposite, students need to remain pedagogically and intellectually flexible and nimble as they adjust to the professorial lecture (see Kolb & Kolb, 2005). Perhaps, the pendulum has shifted too far in the direction of accommodating students (Chory & Horan, 2018; McAllum, 2016). Perhaps it is time for students to [re]learn adaptability to a professor’s pedagogical choices.

Students’ ability to recognize their status and expertise relative to the professor will also benefit them post-graduation as they encounter situations in the workplace in which legitimate/formal power operates. By virtue of one’s assigned position in the organizational hierarchy, (s)he is entitled, according to cultural norms, to expect at
least begrudging compliance with requests. Indeed, the capacity to accommodate another’s wishes, to follow the orders of those we think are less competent than we are, and to occasionally accept feedback we disagree with are skills needed for success in the workplace. We may be able to help students hone these skills by requiring them to follow our lead, beginning with the lecture.

Recognizing differences in expertise also helps students develop the critical skill of discriminating among information sources (Stronge, 2018). Students come to realize that their professors are more credible on certain topics than are other sources. Research on instructor expert power and credibility shows that learning increases as a result (Richmond, 1990; Richmond & McCroskey, 1984; Richmond, McCroskey, Kearney, & Plax, 1987), and students experience greater empowerment, motivation, and satisfaction (McCroskey et al., 2004; Schrodt et al., 2009; Tibbles, Richmond, McCroskey, & Weber, 2008). Not only do students learn more from instructors whose expertise they recognize, but they tend to rate these instructors higher on evaluations (McCroskey et al., 2004; Schrodt et al., 2008), believe they are fairer (Paulsel, Chory-Assad, & Dunleavy, 2005), and see them as better teachers (Richmond et al., 1987).

Finally, and importantly, we do not suggest students should blindly accept everything an instructor says. Students should be encouraged to ask for clarifications, contribute perspectives, and engage in healthy and respectful challenge. We also do not believe the professorate should lord power over students. Rather, we argue that formal power and status are part of organizational life and that students may learn to accept and appropriately challenge authority through the lecture format. Their learning is also likely to benefit from affording instructors the respect to which their expertise entitles them.

**Professors benefit from the lecture**

In defense of the lecture, we contend that professors also benefit from teaching in the lecture format. Professors’ preferences for teaching practices, desire for pedagogical change, and the role of their professional identity in pedagogical initiatives are vastly under-researched and under-represented in pedagogical discussions (Brownell & Tanner, 2012; Chory & Offstein, 2017b; Huang, 2017; Rhoades, 2012). We begin to rectify this situation by offering a few arguments supporting the benefits accrued to professors through the preservation of the lecture.

**Many of us are skilled at lectures**

Most tenure-track professors were trained in research universities that did not emphasize teaching (Chory & Offstein, 2017b; Rhoades, 2012). Most of us learned to teach by observing our own professors, often during lectures (Adams, 2000; Brownell & Tanner, 2012). As a result, we are not trained or practiced in more student-centered methods. Some of us also enjoy teaching through lectures and are quite successful at it. Enjoying one’s work can motivate and satisfy professors, especially in today’s academic work environment of diminishing external rewards.

**Lectures are efficient**

Teaching development, including changing one’s instructional methods, is also time-, labor-, and resource-intensive, though rarely incentivized (Brownell & Tanner, 2012; Jääskelä, Häkkinen, & Rasku-Puttonen, 2017; Stewart et al., 2012). It is next-to-impossible for many professors experiencing job enlargement, increased invisible work, and the accompanying stress (Chory & Offstein, 2017b; Jääskelä et al., 2017; Schultd & Totten, 2008; Winter & Sarros, 2002). Likewise, record-keeping, student contact hours, mandated trainings, and other administrative tasks in the name of professionalization and accountability have increased (Adams, 2000; Chory & Offstein, 2017b; Sprague, 1992a, 1992b; Winter & Sarros, 2002). Continuing to teach via the lecture reduces or at least controls instructors’ stress caused by job enlargement because it is a method many are accustomed to, skilled at, and practiced in.

Instructors have less time to not only learn and prepare novel, experimental instructional practices, but to introduce them in class. Accreditation standards requiring specific types of student learning assessments and some level of standardization limit what instructors can do during class time. Given these conditions, it is hardly surprising that a primary barrier to implementing active teaching/learning approaches is their inefficiency and the lack of class time (Åkerlind, 2004; Kirschner et al., 2006; Patrick, Howell, & Wischusen, 2016). Despite accrediting bodies’ endorsement of such methods, lectures may be more efficient in terms of accomplishing many of the tasks required for successful accreditation.

**Lectures maintain occupational prestige**

Another argument proposed in defense of the lecture is that it helps us maintain our status as a scholarly
profession. The professorial role is in danger of being de-professionalized by the teaching, helping, and accountability agendas (Chory & Offstein, 2017b). It is moving toward a helping or administrative/technical profession. Helping professions such as teaching, nursing, and counseling are seen as low status work, in part because they are considered “women’s work” akin to care-taking (Bruno, para. 13; Magnusson, 2009, p. 88; McDowell, 2015, p. 273). Teaching’s low status in our culture is also signified by the lower salaries and less respect teachers receive compared to many other professions (Brownell & Tanner, 2012; Bruno, 2018).

College students’ attitudes toward professors reflect this view; they are less likely than they were in the past to view instructors as scholars of higher status entitled to respect (Chory & Offstein, 2017b; Miretzky & Stevens, 2012). Some students believe they know more than their professors and expect professors to give way to their views (Jiang et al., 2017). Others view instructors as friends (Chory & Offstein, 2017b, 2018). Similarly, professors are painted as surrogate parents who are encouraged to care about students as individuals (Billsberry, 2014; Chory & Offstein, 2017a, 2017b; Offstein & Chory, 2017). The shift from college as an intellectual institution to a caretaking one is also reflected in the growing number of student support professionals (Rhoades, 2012). In addition, the student-as-consumer model casts professors as service providers and entertainers, and is linked to students believing professors work for them (Chory & Horan, 2018; Chory & Offstein, 2018). Such entitlement-related beliefs lead to professor burnout, another hallmark of helping professions (Jiang et al., 2017).

The status of the professorate is also being threatened by the aforementioned clerical duties, untrained individuals being hired to teach, and increased standardization of curricula which is often designed by others (e.g., off-the-shelf online programs). The curriculum issue, in particular, detracts from teaching’s scholarly aspect and limits professors’ freedom to determine how to teach their disciplines (Sprague, 1992b), a core value for many professors (Adams, 2000). As a result of this deskilling, professors are cast as technicians who are more easily replaced.

The lecture is the primary means by which professors have traditionally communicated their expertise (Kisfalvi & Oliver, 2015; Vella, 1992). Oftentimes during a lecture, a professor expounds on textbook material as only a scholar can. Preparing lecture notes and developing in-class presentations also provide professors the opportunity to learn and explore new areas (Åkerlind, 2004; Boyer, 1990), a primary source of professor satisfaction and motivation (Adams, 2000). This learning also enhances research, which many recognize as providing more valued rewards than teaching (Eagan et al., 2014; Jääskelä et al., 2017; Shavelson, 2017).

We assert that when the lecture format is deemphasized, the notion of faculty-as-expert declines. This could mean the rise of academic generalists at the expense of scholarly specialists, potentially threatening students’ ability to compete in a knowledge-based economy. Likewise, student-centered approaches requiring students to learn by doing portray faculty as facilitators (Welker, 1991) versus experts. Professors are expected to guide students to help clarify positions and to foster learning. Experiential learning approaches may also require faculty to act as project managers, especially if students collaborate or interact with external stakeholders (e.g., local businesses) on projects (Lester, Tomkovick, Wells, Flunker, & Kickul, 2005). To manage risk to these constituencies, particularly liability risks, conscientious faculty oversight may be needed.

Lectures may garner higher student evaluations of instruction

In addition to preserving faculty’s status as scholars and experts, teaching in a lecture format may benefit professors’ careers through higher student evaluations of instruction (SEI). SEIs are the primary means of assessing teaching, and as such, they are heavily relied upon in tenure and promotion decisions (Billsberry, 2014; Offstein & Chory, 2017; Rhoades, 2012). SEIs tend to measure student enjoyment and satisfaction versus learning (Clayson, 2009). In fact, students often report they enjoy the instructional methods from which they learn less (Clark, 1982). As SEI scores are being weighed more heavily in personnel decisions, professors are incentivized to garner high scores, regardless of the learning such scores reflect (Chory & Horan, 2018; Chory & Offstein, 2017a, 2017b; Clayson, 2009; Offstein & Chory, 2017).

The effect of implementing group learning, community service projects, problem-based learning, and similar approaches on instructors’ SEI scores is unclear. Some students, especially those lower in ability or less prepared to succeed in traditional formats, prefer this method of instruction because they believe it will be easier. They also report enjoying the method more (Clark, 1982). In addition, free riders (students who shirk their responsibilities to the team and rely on other team members to achieve goals) prefer this method. Furthermore, students’ short attention spans may mean they welcome these more active learning
approaches. As a result, professors who engage in more student-centered teaching may receive higher SEI scores.

On the other hand, the overreliance on SEIs may work against professors changing from lecturing to more student-centered methods. First, the majority of professors still teach primarily via the lecture (Eagan et al., 2014). If their SEIs have been acceptable or outstanding using this method, what incentive is there to change? Second, students are accustomed to the lecture format and many have come to expect it (Päuler-Kuppinger & Jucks, 2017; Stes, Coertjens, & Van Petegem, 2013). Moving away from this approach may meet with student resistance (Brownell & Tanner, 2012; Patrick et al., 2016). Many college students are unmotivated (Humphreys, 2012), experience frustration with minimally guided instruction (Kirschner et al., 2006), and are challenged by the time commitments and independent out-of-class work required by problem-based or service learning (Schmidt et al., 2007). The SEIs of professors who implement such approaches may suffer.

Third, questions of fairness arise when using experiential and group learning activities (Ashworth et al., 1997; Ko, 2014). Some students are reluctant to participate in such activities, which can interfere with their team members’ learning (Chavez, Ferris, & Gibson, 2011). Professors must also work to ensure the quality of the instructional experience is consistent across students (Stewart et al., 2012). They must manage the needs and rights of conscientious or high ability students, as well as prevent free-riders or lower ability students from detracting from learning (Wilson & Gerber, 2008). Student perceptions of fairness, known as classroom justice (Chory-Assad, 2002), influence student evaluations of and behavior toward instructors, as well as their learning (Chory et al., 2017; Chory-Assad, 2002; Chory-Assad & Paulsel, 2004; Horan, Chory, & Goodboy, 2010; Howell & Buck, 2012; Tata, 1999). The relationships among instructional methods, learning, and SEI scores must be disentangled to better understand how professors may benefit or suffer from teaching via more experiential approaches. Empirical research is clearly needed.

Where to from here? A big-tent mentality

As we consider various pedagogies, it is important to embrace the potential of both experiential and lecture approaches. An essay, by its very nature, demands that participants agree to a tent large enough to house the best of lecture and learning (Chavez, Ferris, & Gibson, 2002) and Grow (2002). The relationships among instructional methods, learning, and SEI scores must be disentangled to better understand how professors may benefit or suffer from teaching via more experiential approaches. Empirical research is clearly needed.

There is room for various pedagogies. Below, we discuss two models that seek to capitalize on the strengths of both experiential learning and lecture-based methods.

The first is Grow’s (1991, 1994) Staged Self-Directed Learning (SSDL) model. Grow contends that students vary in their readiness for certain types of teaching based on their ability to learn the given material or to do the given task and in their motivation to do so. Grow maintains that the path to self-directed learning begins with teaching methods like the lecture (Stage 1). As students enter Stage 2, they progress from dependency to interest and demonstrate an enhanced readiness to learn. They tend to respond well to personal interactions with instructors. Here the lecture may be more interactive in nature, with students’ interests tied to the material. As students enter Stage 3, they see themselves as partners in their education. Critical thinking skills emerge. At this juncture, experiential and active learning approaches would be most appropriate as students can develop their own self-concepts, hone their ability to work and learn from others, and incorporate their experiences into the learning process (e.g., internships or field studies). While some lecture may be appropriate at Stage 3, the instruction should be heavily weighted towards experiential techniques. At Stage 4, experiential learning is the dominant logic as students are fully able and willing to learn and are more readily self-directed. They can engage in learning that requires management of time and projects; self and peer critique is a hallmark of Stage 4 learning. Grow’s model suggests that that undergraduate management education may be best served by a sequential and/or portfolio type approach in which both the lecture and experiential learning play a role. It emphasizes that timing matters and expecting experiential learning to occur before students are ready may not be realistic.

Whereas Grow suggests moving away from the lecture toward experiential methods as students progress, Barkley and Major (2018) suggest blending lecture and experiential/active learning techniques. They suggest that lectures can be enhanced by adopting experiential techniques and experiential learning can benefit from adopting some of the lecture’s structure. They argue for an interactive lecture whereby instructors ask students questions, guide their notetaking, initiate small-group work and discussion in between short lectures, embrace technology (e.g., use clickers during a lecture to get real-time student input), and use reflection assignments after the lecture. Barkley and Major’s “interactive lecturing” (p. 2) and Grow’s SSDL model exemplify the big-tent orientation that exists within management education – a tent large enough to house the best of both lectures and experiential learning approaches.
Discussion, recommendations, and conclusion

For any teaching method to result in student learning, it must be successfully executed. What then makes for an effective lecturer? Bain (2004) found that strong lecturers begin by creating critical learning environments in which students and professors engage in challenging and provocative questioning, albeit in a psychologically safe climate (Barkley & Major, 2018; Edmondson, 1999). Within this context, effective lecturers simplify the complex, use a conversational style, maintain eye contact, account for class and room size and room layout, and speak loud enough for all to hear. Effective lecturers also pause to allow students time to think, and they adopt a warm language style (Bain, 2004). Many of the best lecturers are also strong storytellers. Consistent with hybrid approaches, expert lecturers engage students in an experiential way through interactive questioning and paying close attention to nonverbal cues (Bain, 2004; Barkley & Major, 2018).

Effective lecturing is a skill that can be learned and improved upon over time (Bain, 2004; Barkley & Major, 2018) through faculty mentorship and training programs. Barkley and Major’s (2018) work suggests content for such training. They recommend instructors communicate clear learning goals for the given lecture, focus on larger themes (as opposed to details), and use abridged pre-lecture assignments to spark student interest. Providing students with a partial outline is also suggested as a means to improve student performance and engagement (Barkley & Major, 2018; Raver & Maydosz, 2010). Drawing on the organizational consulting and human performance literature, videoing and reviewing one’s lectures may also help pinpoint areas of needed improvement that can be addressed with a skilled trainer.

Although student-centered teaching development programs are not always successful in improving teaching (Stes et al., 2013), other research shows that instructor training and professional development do impact teaching. Namely, Boman (2013) found that instructor training increased teaching self-efficacy (e.g., ability to spark student interest through a lecture) and positive attitudes toward teaching and decreased public speaking apprehension. In addition, training appeared to increase the frequency with which instructors performed effective teaching behaviors (e.g., speaking in a dramatic or expressive manner). Their teaching effectiveness, as assessed by trained observers, also improved (Boman, 2013). Especially encouraging, Condon (2016) found that faculty who engage in professional development do, in fact, implement what they have learned into the classroom, usually for years after training. Finally, public speaking training of clergy, who in many ways resemble instructors (see Horan & Raposo, 2013) resulted in improved delivery and organization of sermons (Carrell, 2009).

Of course, training’s impact on teaching is only important if it affects student learning, and evidence suggests that it does. For instance, instructors who received no training in classroom communication more frequently engaged in teaching practices that detracted from learning than did instructors who were trained. Students of the trained teachers reported higher affective learning than did students of untrained teachers (McCroskey, Richmond, Plax, & Kearney, 1985). Instructor participation in a community of practice was also associated with improved assessments of student learning (Teeter et al., 2011). Furthermore, church attendees who listened to a sermon by clergy trained in public speaking versus clergy who were not trained reported a stronger likelihood of reflecting on the sermon, thus increasing its potential to change their beliefs, attitudes, and behaviors (Carrell, 2009). Finally, and most convincingly, Condon’s (2016) review of a multi-year study reveals that training faculty in teaching leads to more effective teaching practices, resulting in improved student learning in a number of areas.

The aforementioned research indicates that trained instructors tend to incorporate their training into their classroom teaching, which results in improved student learning. Unfortunately, to our knowledge, there is little to no research specifically addressing whether training management instructors in lecturing techniques improves management student learning. We encourage scholars to more fully investigate this topic.

Finally, discussions surrounding changes in faculty’s instructional methods spark questions regarding faculty roles and preparation to perform the roles into which they are being cast (e.g., business-classroom liaisons). Should future faculty be trained in these roles during doctoral training, as Boyer (1990) advocated, or does that duty fall to the hiring institution? Moreover, by whom and with whom should that training occur? Questions like these abound as the notion of the professorate is reevaluated.

Conclusion

Critical thinking demands we challenge orthodoxy. Indeed, healthy challenge led management educators to question the efficacy of the lecture in the first place. Given the momentum gained by alternative teaching approaches over the last 30 years, maybe it is time to reconsider the contributions of the lecture.
As we continue to reflect as a field on the purpose of higher education institutions in society and management education’s role, in particular, we would do well to recognize that when employed at the right time and in the right environs, the lecture can be an effective and satisfying means by which professors teach and students learn. We believe it is time for management education to revisit the lecture and strategically locate it within the larger pedagogical portfolio that includes experiential, service, team-based, and other active learning approaches. Not in defense of the lecture, but instead, in praise of the lecture, we hope this essay advances the conversation on the lecture’s rightful place in management education. The lecture, indeed, deserves some champions.

**Disclosure statement**

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

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