

'Speed dating' – As An Innovative Learning Method

Overview

Summary

One of the Honours Classes for the Human Resource Management degree is HR402 'Perspectives on Work and Employment'. Professor Taylor took over co-ordination of the class for academic year 2014-5. As the class content and modes of assessment had not changed for several years, it was decided to undertake a thorough revision. While maintaining the theoretical emphasis that had characterised the module and was an undoubted strength, innovation involved a lecture programme more focused on the application of theory to the empirical domain. For example, in the first section of the course on the theme of 'The Global and the Local', lectures on globalisation and the varieties of capitalism were accompanied by case study examples of Transnational Corporations' (TNCs') activities and HR and employment relations policies and practices in a number of different countries.

Another example of this inter-relationship of theory and practice forms the subject of this particular 'Sharing Effective Practice' case study. In the last section of the class on 'Trade Unions and Employee Representation', change consisted first of a reconfiguration of the lecture programme, and second of innovation in respect of the related assignment. A formal lecture on 'Trade Unions and Representation' was followed by a session entitled 'What Do Trade Union Reps Actually Do?'. At this session, six trade union officers and reps were invited to attend. The idea was that each of the reps/officers sit at a desk and students in turn, for a set time, sit opposite the rep and ask questions of them. Students then visit another table and so on. On the basis of the notes taken, students were obliged to complete a report which answered that general question. This report constituted the final assessed assignment of the class.

Context

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Themes

Themes

Rationale

The rationales for this initiative were as follows:-

- Consistent with the overall aim of the class, to seek to apply theoretical knowledge - based on an understanding of the relevant literature - to appropriate concrete 'real world' examples;
- To facilitate active learning, encouraging students to undertake a novel investigation based upon questions asked of relevant stakeholders;
- To develop an innovatory form of assignment, complementary to the other assignments used in the class (group report and presentation, essay, final exam);
- To develop student centred learning.

Successes

The student evaluation forms provide strong evidence of the success of the class and, in particular, the validity and appropriateness of the overall objective of the class. To give one example, 96% of students agreed/strongly agreed with the statement 'I would recommend this course to others'.

A sample of the relevant comments from the students indicates students' appreciation of the pedagogical approach, with a number of specific comments expressing support for the session and assignment in question.

- *I enjoyed the enthusiasm from Phil, it was also good to have a variation of guest lecturers to help keep me engaged.*
- *It was kept interesting with different people, talks and tasks instead of just boring lectures.*
- *Phil, he is enthusiastic about the class and helpful with all assignments. His lectures are very structured and easy to relate to. The group union rep meeting was very insightful.*
- *The combination of theory and guest lectures with practice. The materials provided throughout were fantastic and invaluable.*
- *Lecturer was very enthusiastic. Plenty of practical examples were applied to the theory.*
- *Informative trade union panel.*
- *Informative and comprehensive understanding of current employment trends.*
- *Enjoyed the group work and speed dating.*

Lessons Learnt

The importance of trial and error and being able to make adjustments according to students' needs during the session. In this case, it was necessary to shift from the speed dating format to a more conventional question and answer panel so that students were able to learn from the interaction between reps/officers and their fellow students.

Challenges

Perhaps the biggest challenge was re-assuring students in advance that this exercise would stretch them positively but would not prove over-demanding of them. This trepidation was exacerbated by the fact that this was an assessed assignment. Once the session was under way students' fears were allayed. Thus, it was important for the lecturer to clearly communicate in advance what the session and the assignment would consist of.

Scalability

There were 32 students in the class, There were no scalability issues although it was necessary, as indicated above, to switch to a more conventional panel format whilst maximising the level of student participation.

Suggestions for Transferability

There is no question that the introduction of the 'real world' into the classroom is of enormous benefit for students. The testimony of informed stakeholders with a wealth of experience is an invaluable learning resource, particularly when it is allied to the onus being placed upon students to inquire and investigate.

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No files shared here yet.