

STRATEGIES FOR EFFECTIVE TRAINING OF MBA STUDENTS

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Abstract

Teaching students of Master of Business Administration programme is challenging because of heterogeneity in the students admitted. The group usually consists of students who have specialized in disciplines such as Science, Mathematics, Commerce, Economics, Law and Engineering. This is not so in engineering Studies. Teaching such a heterogeneous group of students, with different entry- point backgrounds & behaviours , is a challenge. At the same time, the diversity among the learners can be considered as a unique advantage and used to facilitate peer learning by adopting teaching strategies which involve group work.

Related work

As observed by Rothwell (2008) and Keys & Zeff (2001) teaching Management courses effectively requires learning stages where in students can develop logical path of problem solving through preferred self learning techniques. This may lead to the learning insight to 'think global' for students and 'teach local' strategy for teachers familiarizing students to deal with local management situations. Rajagopal (2008) has developed many innovative and interactive teaching strategies and tried them out while teaching courses on Management at the Monterrey Institute of Technology and Higher Education in Mexico City campus. Levy and Hadar (2010) have

successfully tried out a new approach for teaching Web 2.0 concepts in a knowledge management course for MBA students, introducing the Web 2.0 potential within business context. Lan (2009) has carried out a research exploring how to teach innovation abilities in Financial management courses. Leigh (1998) has highlighted the appropriateness of six specific training methods for designing and delivering training for groups of students of Management courses.

Kumar (2000) has stated that the choice of training methods for a particular programme depends on a series of three comparisons. Viz.,

- Methods compared with training objectives;
- Methods compared with learning process and its stages; and
- Methods compared with available time, skills and facilities.

According to the constructivist learning approach, knowledge cannot be transmitted but has to be constructed by the individual. The students learn through personal experience rather than only by lectures or explanations (Skemp, 1971; Papert, 1980). Constructivism sees learning as an activity that takes place in a social context (Vygotsky. 1978). Resnik (1996) elucidates the term "distributed constructionism", which characterizes a learning process where the product of learning is built within a distributed

community. In this network-based environment, students take control over the learning by searching relevant information and learn through construction activities embedded with their community.

The rationale behind this approach is that the students can enhance their

learning by being exposed to “distributed cognition” (Salomon, 1994), hence getting involved in interactions with the surrounding environment, both with people and artifacts. Wegner (2000) elaborates on communities of practice where knowledge is evolving within a social learning system, where individuals experience their own learning in interplay with the socially defined competence.

Web 2.0 principles are in line with modern educational theories such as constructivism, connectionism and communities of practice and thus make Web 2.0 applications very attractive for teachers and learners (Ullrich et al., 2008). Wikis, blogs and social bookmarking are now commonly used in learning (Alexander, 2006). Ullrich et al. (2008) summarize the main principles of Web 2.0 and their implications on technology enhanced learning, generally indicating that the Web 2.0 is characterized by social learning and active participation, as advocated by constructivism. Moreover, they have empirically shown that Web 2.0 services indeed

stimulate and facilitate active participation.

Training Methods

Among the large number of training methods that are available, the following seven methods have been selected as appropriate strategies for training MBA students. The selection has taken into account the heterogeneous nature of MBA students and the socio-cultural milieu of India and the infrastructural facilities normally available in most of the colleges.

1. Lecture
2. Demonstration
3. Learner Teaching
4. Group exercises
5. Role play
6. Simulation (including games)
7. Case Study

The main dimensions of each of the seven methods are:

- Description
- Strengths
- Limitations
- Applications
- Degree of students’ participation and
- Group size

The correlations between these

dimensions are presented in Table1.

Table 1: Features of seven methods selected for training of MBA students

Method	Description	Strengths	Limitations	Applications	Degree of Students' participation	Group Size
1. Lecture	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Talk or Verbal presentation of a topic Very little feedback 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Trainer has a high degree of control over time and content Ideal for large groups Economical 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Interaction is minimum May result in monotony (or) boredom Low retention 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Most topics can be delivered through lecture Quick delivery of material. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Low 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Large (However, could be limited to 60)
2. Demonstration	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The trainer, by actual performance, shows the learner what to do and how to do it and explains why, when and where it is done. Learners' participation can be increased by providing them an opportunity to perform the skills under similar conditions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Stimulates interest Useful for practical training 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Takes a lot of time and effort for preparation Can be too fast for the learner to observe Good learner viewing is often a problem 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> For developing psychomotor skills For introducing new processes or systems 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Low/ High 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 10 - 20
3. Learner Teaching	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Each student or group of students make a short lesson presentation Teachers role is to assist each group 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Best method of learning any content is teaching it to others Kindles the interest of the learners 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Unsuitable for complex topics 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Develops presentation skills. Encourages initiatives Ensures accountability 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> High - for presenters Low for others 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Large (However could be limited to 60)

Table 1: Features of seven methods selected for training of MBA students (contd..)

Method	Description	Strengths	Limitations	Applications	Degree of Students' participation	Group Size
4. Group Exercises	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Require a small group of learners to undertake an activity together. Content of the activity is not important; what is important is how the group undertook the activity; approached the problems identified and the results achieved. Experiential learning occurs This is an inductive process, proceeding from observation to generalization 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Highly participative Learners are highly motivated 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Process skills learning can be obscured by the output of the activity. High level of trainer's competencies are required to review and help transfer of learning. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Problem solving Planning Competing Attitudinal change Team building activities Developing inter-personal skills 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Medium 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 7 maximum

Table 1: Features of seven methods selected for training of MBA students (contd..)

Method	Description	Strengths	Limitations	Applications	Degree of Students' participation	Group Size
5. Role play	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Learners are presented with a work situation and asked to place themselves in the position of the parties involved (the role) and then act out the way in which the circumstances might reach an appropriate conclusion (the play) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provides a 'living' example Can create a great deal of interest Only method where emotions become the predominant feature Active participation by role players 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Role players learn more than observers Observers will be passive until the exercise is discussed Success depends upon the imagination of the player Can become frivolous as the attitude change may be short lived 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Development of inter-personal skills For counseling 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> High 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 6-8

Table 1: Features of seven methods selected for training of MBA students (contd...)

Method	Description	Strengths	Limitations	Applications	Degree of Students' participation	Group Size
6. Simulation (including Business games and Management games)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The representations of essential characteristics of a system by means of a simpler one (example: business games) • Simulation is different from role play as there is no need for actual object for manipulation and practice • In a simulated situation, the learners can practice a skill in a safer environment until they perfect it. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Enables the learner to practice the skill in a safer environment under the guidance of the trainer • Demonstrates inter-dependence of the functions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Not run in 'real' time so unrealistic • Some resistance felt to playing 'Games'. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Process training • Sales and marketing • Team building 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Medium / High 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Varies

Method	Description	Strengths	Limitations	Applications	Degree of Students' participation	Group Size
7. Case Study	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A real or fictional situation is presented to a group of learners for their analysis. The learners are asked to identify the problems and arrive at possible solutions. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provides concrete subjects for discussion Risk free exercise Participants experiences can be brought into use and shared with others Provides opportunities for active participation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Time consuming to prepare If not contemporary (or) topical, loses credibility 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Decision making (e.g. Disciplinary cases and Grievance handling) Problem solving Develops analytical skills Promotes teamwork 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> High 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 10 maximum

Integrating Applications of ICT in Traditional Training Methods

Information and Communication Technology (ICT) has become one of the basic building blocks of modern society with in a very short time. Many countries now regard understanding ICT and mastering the basic concepts and skills of ICT as part of the core of education. ICTs are considered as a medium when they are used to support teaching and learning.

Contemporary computer technologies, such as the Internet, allow new types of teaching and learning experiences to flourish. Many new technologies are interactive, making it easier to create environments in which learners can learn by doing, receive feedback, and continually refine their understanding and build new knowledge. Access to the Internet gives unprecedented opportunities in terms of the availability of research material and information in general.

E-Learning is the latest buzz word in the education field today which comes under

the umbrella of ICT. This greatly enhances the way the education is imparted to the individual. Computer Based Learning (CBL) packages involve text, simple graphics and interaction. The concept of multimedia learning is also not a new one. Video disc technology was used in the late 1980's to provide "point to click" access to video material using a special player with some question and answer sessions. These were quickly replaced by multimedia CDROM in the early 1990's which provided text, graphics, animation, sound, video, multiple interaction types and assessment in a rich media environment. The widespread adoption of the www in the mid 1990s opened up new medium and new opportunities for teaching and learning using internet based protocols. This development in particular has brought e-Learning into the main stream.

Traditional training methods can be enriched using ICTs. Guidelines for integrating ICT into the seven training methods described in this paper are presented in Table 2.

Table 2: Guidelines for Integration of ICT in the Traditional Training methods

S. No	Training Method	Traditional Approach	ICT Based Approach
1.	Lecture	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Too much of responsibilities for the teacher in the classroom • Mostly one way communication from the teacher to students • Chalkboard Explanations <p>Tools:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Chalkboard or whiteboard • Pointer / Laser Pointer • Charts / Flip Charts • Overhead projector • Lecture notes / Hand out 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Customized learning resources are developed by the learners and teachers jointly • Learner's expectation towards independence • Bonding relationship <p>Tools:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Computer • Internet • Interactive Whiteboards • Audio-Visual techniques • Digital Libraries • Laser Pointer

Table 2: Guidelines for Integration of ICT in the Traditional Training methods (contd..)

S. No	Training Method	Traditional Approach	ICT Based Approach
2.	Demonstration	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The act of showing how to do something or how something operates • Basic means for teaching psychomotor skills • Practice every step • Check all equipment and accessories • Allow students to ask questions and clarify any misunderstandings 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A model performance of presentation that is live, filmed or electronically operated. • Learning skill faster and more effective by use of web. • Scope for replay for better comprehension.
3.	Learner Teaching	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Best method of learning any content is teaching the content to others. • The teacher's role is to assist individual / each group. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • By assigning each learner or group of learners content from the curriculum and making them responsible for preparing a short lesson presentation by using multimedia tools.
4.	Group Exercises	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Trainer talks with the group, not to the group • Trainer presents a topic; Ideas are discussed in an orderly exchange and are controlled or guided • Gain knowledge from other members, modify their ideas, or develop new ones 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Discussion groups, Audio–Video chat, blogs, face book. • Allows interaction between instructor and learners. • Characterized by learner –to-learner interaction with none playing the role of expert or teacher; the trainer poses the questions or issues and may monitor but does not mediate or lecture.(Small-group dynamics, T-group)
5.	Role Play	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A scenario in which students portray characters to simulate real world interpersonal communications • Using role-playing techniques students participate actively in learning activities, as they express their feelings, ideas, and arguments, trying to convince others of their viewpoint, and, thus, they create and develop self-efficacy beliefs. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Useful to train and reinforce the affective domain • Virtual environments are a safe place for developing immersive role-playing scenarios • The concept of role-playing is usually related to massively multi-user online games and simulations.

Table 2: Guidelines for Integration of ICT in the Traditional Training methods (contd...)

S. No	Training Method	Traditional Approach	ICT Based Approach
6.	Case study	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Description of a real incident or problem • Trainer introduces the case study <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Student participation - Reviewing case study - Analyzing situation and facts • Discussing the case study <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Review lessons learned - Strategize solutions for use on future problems / incidents 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Serve as a valuable supplement, providing students with opportunities to experience and respond to complex practical issues in a variety of professional settings by using networks. • In the process, students reflect on relevant theories and techniques obtained from various websites, as they attempt to understand a real problem, develop a response, and consider the potential consequences. (Social Networking, online encyclopedia, wikis.)
7.	Simulations (including Business games and Management games)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Scope for learners to experience a real – life situation. • Simulated object enables the learners to practice a skill in a safer environment until they perfect it. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Simulations feature a combination of text, graphics and animations using dialogue and inquiry to guide the student through a situation. • Digital simulations provide originality by ensuring safety. • It can also develop higher-order abilities like analysis and synthesis. • The recent advancements in computer capabilities offer significant opportunities for simulation. Virtual-reality simulations now enable people to see, hear, and feel simulated event.

Selecting a Training Method

There are a variety of training methods available to choose from and selecting the most appropriate one can make a substantial difference to the reception of the content of the curriculum and the length of time it is retained after the training is completed.

There is not just one way of delivering the content of the curriculum. As there might be many routes to the same destination, there can be a number of different strategies which fulfill the training objectives. No one strategy is the right for all situations, but a particular strategy might be more effective when all the variables in a given situation are considered.

The following variables will influence the selection of training method:

1. Objectives of the topic / lesson
2. Time available
3. Size of the group
4. Learners level of understanding (Entering behavior and previous experience)
5. Resources/Equipment/Facilities needed (Vs. Resources Available)
6. Degree of learners participation required
7. Degree of interaction [(i) Between Trainer and Learner, and (ii) Among Learners] required.

The same training method (however good it may be) should not be used for the entire duration of a lesson/session. Using a variety of methods not only avoids boredom, but also increases the groups' attention span.

A training strategy will be effective if it ensures the achievement of objectives of the lesson by the learners; the strategy will be efficient if it optimizes the use of resources. Hence teachers of MBA programme should not merely lecture, but use a combination of strategies to enable the learners to accomplish the objectives of the curriculum effectively and efficiently

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