Chapter 1
Designing Online MBA Programs to Promote Transformative Learning and Knowledge Creation through Project-Based Learning Using the Job Characteristics Model

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ABSTRACT

Institutions of higher education are experiencing radical shifts as a result of advances in technology and communication along with increasing demands for online learning. The online learning environment creates a new learning space for students and instructors where new pedagogy and technology tools can be used to facilitate critical thinking and application of learning. Presented in this chapter is a design for online MBA programs to promote transformative learning and knowledge creation through project-based learning using the job characteristics model. Project-based learning activities enhance skill variety, task identity, task significance, autonomy, and feedback thereby strengthening meaningfulness of learning activities and enhancing student motivation, satisfaction, and performance. While engaged in project-based learning activities, online MBA students have the freedom to proactively self-initiate changes in task, relationship, and cognitive boundaries thus nurturing an environment for job crafting. Online MBA Programs are most effective when business students apply learning to real work experiences.

INTRODUCTION

Institutions of higher education are steeped in tradition with deeply held beliefs about what it means to educate people. Heinemann and Estep (2012) state, "Online education challenges widely held assumptions and casts the traditional skills associated with teaching in a different light" (p.

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3). Online learning environments create a new gathering place for students and instructors. Instead of meeting together in a traditional classroom setting, online learning programs create a virtual space where students engage with course content, instructors, and peers within a computer-supported collaborative learning setting (Zhu, 2012). To ensure student success, innovative teaching pedagogy and new frameworks for designing quality online business programs are needed.

The learning environment has a significant impact on student outcomes such as satisfaction, performance, and knowledge construction (Zhu, 2012). The online learning classroom is not only a unique social context (Kearsely, 2000) but also represents a unique work environment for business students. Student motivation, satisfaction, and performance in the online learning environment depend upon the learning context, course materials, and online tools (Endres, Chowdhury, Frye, & Hurtbis, 2009). Researchers also report the necessity for collaborative social interactions within online courses in order to foster a sense of community (Rovai, 2002).

It is well understood that program and course design factors affect student satisfaction (Swan, 2001), student learning (Whetten, 2007), and relevance to management practice (Dehler & Edmonds, 2006; Thomas, 1998). There may be as many different instructional design models as there are instructional designers (Salifus, 2015). A systematic pattern for program development and assessment is the ADDIE approach (Analyze, Design, Develop, Implement, and Evaluate), which is a life cycle model commonly used as an institutionally adopted instructional design system (Gustafson & Branch, 2007; Molenda, 2003). The ADDIE model provides overarching orderliness to the instructional design process while allowing the theoretical orientation of subject matter experts to guide the selection of activities within each consecutive step (Egan, 2009; Molenda, 2003). It is equally important for college and university administrators to provide the necessary support and resources for campus wide adoption of standardized practices for online program development while retaining flexibility for the creative and innovative advancement of pedagogy and technology tool integration within disciplines such as business schools.

MBA Programs are most effective when business students apply new learning to real work experiences and build upon existing frames of reference, known as constructivism. Constructivism is an epistemological concept that explains how people construct meaning (Walker, 2002). Fisher and Baird (2005) state, "a constructivist-based course design has a positive influence on student retention, motivation, and perceived cognitive learning" (p. 89). The theoretical framework presented in this chapter is based upon constructivism for online MBA program development that is learner-centered, collaborative, project-based, and inquiry focused (Jonassen, Davidson, Collins, Campbell, & Haag, 1995; H. Huang, 2002). The framework draws from job design and job crafting theories, which serve as guiding principles for instructional design. The job characteristics model of work motivation provides the boundaries within which job crafters flourish. In the organizational environment, effective job design has been linked with employee motivation (Cullinane, Bosak, Flood, & Demerouti, 2013), satisfaction (Ali & Zia-ur-Rehman, 2014), and performance (Springer, 2011). The job characteristics model, developed by Hackman and Oldham (1976, 1980), is grounded in theories related to the intrinsic processes of motivation (Leonard, Beauvais, & Scholl, 1999) and describes how job design influences personal and work outcomes. There are five job characteristics in the job characteristics model including skill variety, task identity, task significance, autonomy, and feedback.

As the organizational environment continually changes and technology advances, jobs are also changing. Self-managing individuals and virtual teams require the use of technology to enhance performance and facilitate social interactions in the