

Bringing Group Decision Making to the Classroom: A Practitioner's Resource

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ABSTRACT: Group decision making is commonly discussed in communication and organizational behavior classes. Among other topics, discussions typically incorporate comparisons of brainstorming, interacting, nominal and delphi group decision making processes [1]. However, as practical approaches are frequently simplified to short exercises due to resource constraints, graduates often struggle to participate successfully in their first professional meetings. Simply observing formal decision making processes rarely brings satisfactory results: members need experience to be able to function at a high level.

Today we also note a specific paradigmatic turn in academic teaching, expressed in the formula “the shift from teaching to learning”[2], which emphasizes changing the focus from the approach based on the content transmission towards students’ activity and the role of the teacher as a facilitator, going from the behaviouristic to constructivist perspective. Student-centered approach requires designing classes that will help students to build and rebuild their knowledge structures through multidimensional activities, placing them in real or simulated situations [3,4]. Thus there is a need to establish a group decision making situation allowing students to participate and practice different roles during their studies.

Introducing formal decision making exercises in this context leads to the application of Kolb’s learning theory [5]. Accordingly, participants step through four major stages, starting with a simulated Board Meeting with pre-established Agenda to gain a) the concrete experience in formal decision making. Participants then progress to b) reflective observation via Minutes writing and discussions. Generalizing based on the experience helps understanding key issues and problems present in formal decision making, arriving to c) abstract conceptualization. By creating subsequent Board Meetings based on the outcome of the initial meeting, participants are immersed in d) active experimentation.

The above framework is operationalized by a particular template that allows students to simulate Board Meetings in small groups, using a simplified version of Robert’s Rules [6,7,8]. This template has been tested in various educational settings and positive feedback was received from both participants and prospective employers. This paper summarizes the template and outlines implementation options. Qualitative overview of findings are presented in terms of learning objectives and results.

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