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Designing an Online Training Program: A Pilot Experiential Learning Exercise

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Abstract. Experiential learning activities are becoming increasingly popular in management courses. Acknowledging the need for in-class experiential activities in the field of management in general and organizational development and human resources management in particular, this teaching article introduces a pilot training design activity we developed for our students in our Occupational Health and Safety course as a part of the undergraduate Human Resources Management curriculum at a Canadian university. Students are invited to design and deliver a training program on technostress reduction for remote workers. They used the instructional systems design framework. We collected data from real-life remote workers using the Kirkpatrick's training evaluation outcomes. We presented the results of the training evaluation component as an in-class demonstration. In this teaching article, we provide details about our pilot in-class experiential activity and share the corresponding materials.

Keywords: training design, instructional systems design, organizational development, technostress, remote work.

1. Introduction

Training is an essential tool for organizations and a core competency in many fields including organizational behavior, management, and human resources. Estimates show that organizations can spend up to $200 billion on training and development annually (e.g., Bunch 2007). While some of these programs can be outsourced by organizations, a great majority of them are designed and delivered by organizational members such as in-house technical experts or organizational development personnel (e.g., Cohen *et al.* 2001; Crumpton 2011; Kumar *et al.* 2017). There could be multiple reasons to offer in-house training such as the idiosyncratic context and needs of an organization, availability of in-house expertise, or cost effectiveness (Kelloway *et al.* 2021). Therefore, from technical personnel to management, individuals from a wide range of backgrounds may be required to design and deliver a training module at some point in their work lives.

In the following experiential education exercise, we provided our students, who are registered in an online undergraduate course on occupational health and safety, a practical opportunity to design, deliver, and evaluate a training program

under our guidance. The objective of this course is to introduce fundamental knowledge on how organizations can keep their employees healthy and safe. Training is an essential tool for organizational development, which is a core competency in organizational behavior education. In relation to this matter, our course objectives included the design, delivery, and evaluation of technostress reduction training.

Subsequently, the objective of the experiential activity presented in this paper is to have students experiment with training design and delivery under limited instruction and reflect on their decisions, processes, and outcomes. As discussed above, we argue that an experiential training development activity was important in this course because training is a complex, practical, and necessary skill in the context of organizational development. Engaging in a hands-on activity would not only allow students to experience possible practical problems that are overlooked in theoretical discussions, but also encourage them to devise solutions based on their learning. Furthermore, data collection is an essential element of training evaluation. Analyzing the data collected in the results of the training module developed by the students could also give them personalized feedback on what worked in their program and why. Ultimately, such individualized feedback could facilitate a rich self-reflection and discussion session.

The training module students developed focused on the topic of technostress (Tarafdar *et al.* 2015) for remote workers. Among the different training development and evaluation frameworks, students focused on the Instructional Systems Design framework (Molenda 2009) which focuses on both design and evaluation aspects of training, popularity in practice, and alignment with the course content. In the next section, we will briefly introduce the topics of technostress and the Instructional Systems Design model. Then, we will present our experiential learning activity. Technostress is an emerging topic in modern organizations and is an increasing concern for employees across a wide range of occupations and industries. Thus, we believe that the experiential learning activity, instructions we give to students, and the materials we provide can be easily used to teach them about training (or organizational interventions in general), design, evaluation, and stress management in organizational behavior and human resources courses.

2. Background

Technostress and Remote Workers

Technostress, defined as a specific form of stress experienced by employees as a result of using technology for work (Tarafdar *et al.* 2015), is a modern occupational hazard faced by employees across different industries, including instructors who teach online courses. Research has suggested that technostress creators are the stressors associated with technostress (Tarafdar *et al.* 2007).