Section 8 CAT: Classroom Opinion Polls

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Background and Set-up

I am an Employer Liaison with a community college assisting mature workers to connect with employers through job development services. Prior to using my services, participants are involved in two weeks of workshops to teach them about effective job search techniques. Facilitating workshops is not a part of my role however I can occasionally develop and deliver a workshop that I can demonstrate will provide added benefit to participants in finding or maintaining employment.

After learning more about learning transfer in EDAE 668 last semester, I became aware that our program participants were not applying what they learned about networking and as such, learning transfer had not occurred. I took the opportunity to use a CAT in section 8 to investigate how new participants viewed networking including their comfort, confidence and intention to engage in networking activities.

I received permission to approach the group of 10 participants after they completed the session on networking. I told participants that I was conducting a Classroom Opinion Poll that would take a few minutes. I stressed that there are no right or wrong answers, to be very honest, and that they should not put their names on them as they are anonymous.

After reviewing what will be taught and reflecting on discussions I have had with previous participants, I developed questions that would address issues that I had observed in the past. I asked them to respond to 7 statements indicating if they 1) Strongly Disagree, 2) Disagree, 3) Agree, 4) Strongly Agree, to the following:

1) Networking is an essential activity in finding work.

2) People are receptive to networking.

3) Networking is an effective job search strategy.

4) I know how to approach networking contacts.

5) I feel comfortable networking.

6) I am confident that I can network.

7) I intend to network as a part of my job search activities.

Why CAT 28 Classroom Opinion Polls

I have been puzzled and concerned about why program participants have not been accessing the hidden job market though networking. Feedback and evaluation forms from previous workshops have been favorable and indicate that participants intended to network. My thought was either that they did not feel that networking was effective, or that they lacked confidence in their ability to network, or they were too uncomfortable. As such, I utilized CAT 28, Classroom Opinion Polls. "By uncovering student opinions on specific issues, faculty can better gauge where and how to begin teaching about these issues – and what the roadblocks are likely to be" (Angelo & Cross, 1993, p. 258). Although our text suggests that this CAT is utilized prior to a course being taught, I proceeded to use it after in order to identify issues and design a follow-up workshop to address them. It is also my hope that this information will increase self-awareness for learners by helping them to bring their attitudes and concerns to the surface so that they can "…be taught to take control of their learning environment through monitoring, anxiety reduction, self-regulation, and similar strategies" (Angelo & Cross, 1993, p. 256).

Results

All ten participants agreed that networking is essential (5 agree, 5 strongly agree), that people are receptive to it (6 agree, 4 strongly agree), that it is effective (4 agree, 6 strongly agree), and that they intend to network (7 agree, 3 strongly agree). This came as a complete surprise as conversations with previous groups indicated that they might disagree with these statements. The question then becomes, will their opinions change in a few weeks or months from now? The greatest surprise was that all 10 agree (5 strongly) that they are confident that they can network. Perhaps this group will not have a problem networking as previous groups have. However, there are issues of concern as 4 out of 10 participants disagreed on knowing how to approach networking contacts and 4 out of 10 did not feel comfortable networking. It is human nature to avoid that which makes us uncomfortable and as such it could be that discomfort is causing participants who had good intentions, to avoid, refrain and eventually lose confidence in their ability to network.

What worked, what didn't

I feel that the assessment was successful using the measure from our text that it "confirmed an assumption about your students' learning or provides you with a new insight into an ongoing problem, or gives you enough information so that you can ask a more focused question the next time around" (Angelo & Cross, 1993, p. 62). Prior to the CAT, I had suspected that belief in effectiveness, confidence, knowledge on how to approach people, and comfort levels were issues that stopped people from networking. My perception was correct for two issues as how to approach and comfort proved to be

a problem for 40% of the participants in this session. I have new insight on the issues and realize that comfort level is likely one of the biggest concerns to address. In my follow-up research, I found that lack of comfort can stop people from doing what they intended to do and "instead avoid, blame, deny, and fantasize" (Sills, 2004, p. 42).

What didn't work, or more correctly what I have yet to find out, is what would make them more comfortable? What is causing their discomfort? Should I break down the tasks involved in networking and conduct a course related self-confidence survey (CAT 32) to determine what areas are most uncomfortable? Will their opinions change?

What I would change the next time

Ideally, I would like to conduct this assessment prior to having them take the New Horizons Job Search workshops. My concern with having this right after they have taken a workshop on networking is that they are pumped because of the workshop and have great intentions but may not follow through. I also want to discover their initial biases and perceptions as they "can distort or block the instructional method" (Angelo & Cross, 1993, p. 258). I intended to administer this CAT prior to the next session, however, it has been cancelled and new dates have not been determined.

CAT 28 was very helpful in that I will modify the design of the Networking Your Way to Work workshop that I was working on. I know that I can spend less time discussing why they need to network and more time on how to approach networks. I will also design and deliver a workshop to help them with the stress and discomfort of networking. The first place that I would like to start is by asking them how can they increase their comfort level and how can we assist them?

References

Angelo, T., & Cross, K. P. (1993). *Classroom assessment techniques.* (2nd ed).
SanFransisco: Jossey-Bass.

Sills, J. (2004). *The comfort trap.* New York: Penguin Group