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MDS/BAS 495 Undergraduate Capstone  
Projects

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## **Action Capstone: United Standby Travel Handbook**

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## **Section 1: Innovative Approach**

### **Bringing Together Perspectives**

“There is no one truth path to innovation” (Satell, 2017, para 6). To bring together perspective I made sure to foster collaboration between all stakeholders. I asked employee stakeholders what questions they would want answered about travels others had taken. I consulted with new employees on what kind of things discouraged them from using their travel benefits or what questions they would like addressed about standby travel. I asked management what they wanted to see out of the project. Did they want to increase goodwill? How could they utilize the project to help bridge the gap between management and employees?

### **Creating Innovative Approaches:**

The problem of low morale is a complex one. There is usually no one single reason why morale in a workplace is low. Bad management, low wages, and bad teamwork are just a few of the things that can contribute to a negative working environment. Utilizing integrative thinking, mind mapping, and research helped to identify one way I could work to improve morale at my station. Mind mapping helped to give direction and categorize the different problems I was hoping to solve while research helped to justify the need for the project. Lambert (2000) states that there is a link between work/life benefits and organizational citizenship behavior. This demonstrates the importance of providing benefits outside of financial compensation. It also helped to show that when employees can use work/life benefits it increases perceived organization support and improves morale (Lambert, 2000). Other sources were able to support contemporary ideas about businesses and their shift towards participation and teamwork within working environments. From *Airline performance as a function of employee satisfaction* there is a correlation between how employees perform and employee satisfaction (Busso, et al, 2001).

This would indicate that United and management would benefit from a project that would focus on increasing employee satisfaction.

## **Section 2: Emotional Intelligence**

### **Awareness of Self and Others**

Emotionally intelligence is the practice of resilience in the face of setbacks and demonstrating an understanding of others wants and needs (The School of Life, 2017). Using emotional intelligence helped me to gain insight and imagination into the needs of my stakeholders. I gave updates on the project and was open to suggestions on the kind of information my stakeholders would find most valuable in the handbook. This awareness of others and how my project would affect stakeholders helped to shape the development of the project as it progressed through feedback and adjustments.

### **Consideration of the Audience: Emotional Intelligence**

The project considered the emotional intelligence of the audience by its contributing nature. Employees were able to have a say in the creation of the project and were able to shape how the handbook could help meet their needs. The handbook submissions also made the opportunities for employees to travel and experience culture easier to enhance their own emotional intelligence. In the video *What is Emotional Intelligence* it says, “The central vehicle for the transfer of emotional intelligence is culture, from its highest to its most popular level. Culture is the field that can ritualize and consistently promote the absorption of emotional intelligence.” (The School of Life, 2017).

### **Value to Others: Emotional Intelligence**

Research gave substantive evidence that supported the value of the project to others. Research showed that improving work/life benefits, increasing teamwork, and creating

goodwill and organizational citizenship leads to improved working environments that my stakeholders could benefit from. For example, “Teamwork allows employees to take greater responsibility for decision making and allows team members to control more of the work process. This can lead to improved morale as employees gain more authority and ownership over the projects they are working on.” (Magloff, 2019).

### **Section 3: Creative Thinking**

#### **The Creative Framework**

Initially during the development of my proposal, I used things like freewriting and brainstorming to identify a project that I could do. These were both tools that I was able to use to encourage thinking within a creative framework. While I was working on the schedule for my project timeline, I began to think about what the handbook would be like, physically. I remember thinking that I didn’t want it to be a stuffy reference guide that people would not want to pick up and look at. I was trying to figure out a way to incorporate pictures so that it could inspire imagination and motivate others to use their travel benefits. Petrone (2018) says that “Creativity is problem-solving with relevance and novelty.” After some thought I decided that a Facebook group where people could share pictures, videos, and information would help supplement the project. The Facebook group would be more accessible to employee stakeholders, being online, and the group would foster more personal connections between employees and the project.

#### **Unique Approach/es to Project**

My approach was unique because it was intended to be more than just a binder that would sit on a break room counter. The creative thinking framework helped me to reframe my problem. The question was not how I can create a travel handbook but how can I improve morale. This reframing helped to address the human elements of low morale like community, teamwork, and

engagement. While I could not make changes to pay, policy, or add more benefits I was able to come up with a solution that would enhance benefits our company already provided. The creativity framework helped me to find a project that would change the dynamic of the workplace relationships, one that could foster goodwill, participation, teamwork, and pride in one's work to help solve morale.

## **Section 4: Your Innovative Solution**

### **Accomplishment of Capstone**

My process was first to free write and identify eight potential project ideas within my personal spheres of influence (social, professional, and personal). From there I narrowed down some of the mega ideas, using mind mapping to dig deeper into the root causes of the problems. Shortly after I identified my micro idea and started on research for the problem. After drafting the bones of my project, I decided on the more detailed processes the project needed to be a successful capstone. I would create a standby travel handbook, part how-to guide and part trip contribution, where employee stakeholders could submit their own trip experiences and expertise to share with the stakeholders at my workplace. I also decided to create a Facebook page to supplement the travel handbook. Potential outcomes included an improved workplace environment, greater work/life balance for employees, improved morale, and increased goodwill and satisfaction for our job.

The capstone was able to accomplish many of the goals outline during the proposal process. The how-to guide helped new employees address some apprehensions they had about flight privileges and provided knowledge they could use to take start traveling. The contribution section allowed employees to take ownership of the project and share their trip experiences and expertise to foster community.

### **Innovative Approach to the Problem/Project**

The handbook was specifically designed to highlight a benefit that only airline employees can take advantage of. The project also provided a unique opportunity to engage employee participation and strengthen team building and increase goodwill in the process. The project took into consideration added benefits such as increased organizational citizenship behavior and pride in one's work to increase job satisfaction. The addition of a Facebook page also added to the innovative approach because it acted as a visual supplement to further engage stakeholders with the project.

## **Section 5: Results**

### **Benefits to Stakeholders**

The project was a bit short of the contribution goal of 15 submissions however the handbook was completed and made available to employees on time, including the how-to-guide section created by myself. I was also able to complete the Facebook page where I added my own submissions with pictures and videos. Every employee that had a Facebook account was added into the group and the page has had 4 different submissions from employees sharing their recent trips (with pictures and videos) on the Facebook page.

The benefit for stakeholders is we now have a central reference guide for our travel experiences. There has also been a renewed excitement from employee stakeholders to use their travel benefits. I was able to get valuable feedback from the stakeholder's surveys. For example, one of the questions asked was "Are you more likely to use your travel benefits as a result of the handbook?" which got a 100 percent response of strongly agree. On top of surveys, I received positive verbal feedback and encouragement from both employee and management stakeholders. Other benefits include a greater sense of teamwork and community for

management and employees. The Facebook page has given employees a place to connect with each other outside of the formal work channels we currently use. Employees can share their travel experiences and life outside of work in a more personal and relaxed environment.

### **Impact on Stakeholders**

The impact of the project has been overwhelmingly positive. My station manager has been on board with the project the entire time, even approving funds to buy supplies for the handbook. I've had supervisors without any prompting from me post newsfeed updates on our workstation trading application and encourage employees to contribute to the handbook after its completion. With these kinds of examples, I think it is safe to say management is excited about the project and sees it as a valuable addition to our station and the employees. The overall community of management, employees, and United have felt a positive impact on team building and morale thanks to the excitement generated from the project.

### **Section 6: Conclusion**

The project has benefited all the stakeholders involved and with time I expect to see even more contributions as the handbook is intended to be a growing, living document. I've seen the intangible benefits of improved morale, teamwork, and goodwill as well as the tangible benefit of increased employee engagement since the start of the project. The survey feedback was especially helpful in helping me to determine how successful and valuable the project was to stakeholders and where there was room for improvement.

Some of the skills I've gained from the completion of the capstone project are creative thinking, emotional intelligence, and addressing stakeholder needs. Coming up with the Capstone project was a feat of its own and the time spent brainstorming, freewriting, and mind mapping helped to better prepare me to use creative thinking for innovative solutions in the



future. I think the project has also allowed me to become more emotionally intelligent by giving me experience in creating, developing, and executing a planned project. I worked closely with coworkers and management to address the needs/wants of stakeholders and in doing so I was able to help fill a knowledge gap in my workplace. Working through the project there were many times I needed to spark conversation and engage stakeholders to encourage contributions which gave me more opportunity to practice emotional intelligence. Putting together the How-to guide I had conversations with new employee stakeholders to understand what they were confused about or wanted to know about flight privileges. Seeing this section through their fresh eyes helped me to make this section more valuable for future oncoming employees and helped me to address the needs of stakeholders more efficiently.

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