

Course Organization Using a Central Framework

Danny Cagnet

Senior Lecturer in Management
Indiana University Kelley School of Business, Indianapolis
801 W Michigan Street
Indianapolis, IN 46202
dcagnet@iu.edu

November 2022

Helping students develop deeper understanding, recognize patterns, and think critically is at the heart of what we do as instructors. In short, we can help organize our courses using a simple model or framework. With the use of repetition, we can improve learning and memory. I build my courses around a model and consistently draw students back to the model as we make connections and add new concepts. The model helps students connect to the current business reality and social context to create interest. The model/framework also focuses the interest on practical applications that move beyond knowledge acquisition.

Need and Development: Using a framework or model for course design will help new instructors by providing structure similar to an outline and will help more seasoned instructors who seek to continuously improve student experience. Evolving from nearly two decades of teaching, these models and central frameworks have helped to improve student recall and integration.

Implementation: Often a textbook or other subject-specific source provides a conceptual model that can serve as an outline for learning. In this description of using a model as a central framework, I provide concrete examples that I have used for course design. In these models, I find key components that I want to bring out in a class and make those the guiding modules in the course management system for the class, Canvas. This approach eases the time spent in course design and helps to organize content in a meaningful way.

Value: The framework supports foundations of learning and memory as well as repetition to aid recall. With focused effort, an instructor can use current events and application exercises to further benefit integration, supporting the likelihood of recall and use.

Student Response: I consistently see comments in my course evaluations expressing appreciation for the organization. Many will even comment on the conceptual frameworks, such as self-others-situation (SOS), noting that they will carry them as they enter the workforce. I also see the frameworks

This work is available from The Digital Teaching Repository, a peer-reviewed, online archive of instructional materials created by educators at IUPUI, IUPUC, and IU Fort Wayne (<https://scholarworks.iupui.edu/handle/1805/22346>).



“Course Organization Using a Central Framework” is licensed by Danny Cagnet under a [Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/).

highlighted in final projects where they are given the opportunity to discuss their learning in a one-page illustration. Oftentimes, the models are highlighted there as meaningful.

Limitations: With structure, the course design does lose some flexibility. I would be happy to explore adaptations of these models and frameworks.

Course organization using a central model

Introduction:

Course creation and organization can be a daunting task for those new to teaching. Using a model or central framework is a common way to help organize materials for student learning. While this writing describing the use of a concept model or central framework for course design is of most benefit to a new instructor, seasoned instructors may also consider the use of models, images, and/or frameworks for course redesign or for making a more concerted effort to sequence materials to maximize student engagement.

When adults learn, the deepest connections are made when a learning encounter is fused with a previous experience or prior knowledge. Repetition is a part of this learning process. Students visit and revisit prior learning to create an aggregate understanding. Once new material is learned, it can be associated with the previous knowledge and elaborated upon for movement into a longer-term memory storage. Pellegrino (as cited in Misseyanni et al., 2018) argues “students need assistance to organize knowledge using models and conceptual frameworks to help information retrieval” (p. 23). Helping students develop deeper understanding, recognize patterns, and think critically is at the heart of what we do as instructors. In short, we can help organize with a simple model and use appropriate levels of repetition to improve learning and memory.

In my opinion, one of the biggest mistakes an instructor can make is not creating encounters for students to make those connections and associations with previous knowledge. To create these associations, I structure my courses around a central framework or model. I consistently draw students back to the central model and help make connections as we add new concepts. The model helps me to connect to the current student reality and social context to create interest and at the same time focus the interest on practical applications that move beyond just knowledge acquisition. First, I provide three different examples of the way I have organized coursework using a central image or model. Then, I follow with a few suggestions for selecting and using a model, image, or central framework.

Central Model/Framework Examples:

Principles of Marketing

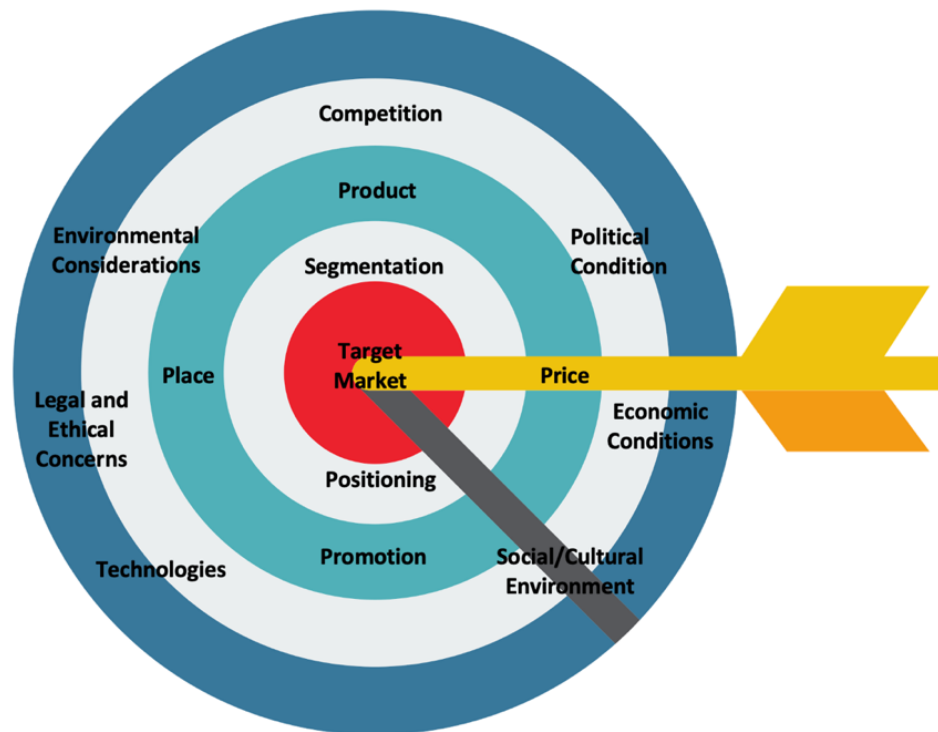
Introductory courses provide a great opportunity to lay a foundational understanding that can be built upon in later courses. For this course, I use an image of a target. The central point of the image is the target audience. The outer rings of the target encompass key concepts such as segmentation, targeting, positioning, product, pricing, promotional strategies, distribution strategies, marketing services and additional “Ps” to consider, and situational analysis (often referred to as CPESTLE analysis) just to name a few. I draw the image on the whiteboard every day. For the sake of this writing, I have created a visual example of the model, shown below.

This model is a visual representation of information—a concept map. Concept maps are particularly useful for a visual learner, though helpful for all learning types. This organization strategy helps the student to see the big picture and understand relationships amongst the concepts. Asking students

to replicate the diagram, elaborate on each concept represented, and list current, relevant examples is a simple way to encourage good study habits as well as a provide an assessment of student learning (The Learning Center).

On day one, I present a scenario to the students where I ask them to make assumptions about the influences upon my buying behavior. I might discuss a Christmas gift I purchased and ask them to describe why I chose that gift. I draw the model on the board and as they participate, I add their ideas by converting their statements into the key terms that we will discuss in the rest of the course. If they struggle, I prod with prompts such as “Describe the person who would use this product?” or “How do you think I heard about the product?”

We construct the model together that first day. With each class period, a new concept is highlighted on the image we created together. During each class period, I demonstrate how each new idea is related to the former concept by beginning with a brief review. I will often remind them of the example that we discussed on the first day to draw their minds back to those initial connections. There is a healthy level of repetition and connecting points as we are continually adding new ideas. I ask them to replicate the model on a final exam to capture the broad understanding of the integrated concepts. At this point in the term, students can define each term and articulate that the inner rings (Segmentation, Targeting, positioning, and the 4 Ps) represent areas that an organization has a level of control over. They also understand that the outer ring (CPESTLE) elements represent uncontrollable market conditions that must be considered when making decisions. Students are able to provide current examples that resonate with them to demonstrate meaningful connections to their experiences.



Team Dynamics and Leadership

Similarly, I design this junior-level course with a foundational understanding that leadership decision making needs to encompass the key ideas of self-awareness, other-awareness, and situational-awareness (SOS). The idea that leadership is an understanding of self, others and the situation is pulled from a sentence taken from Andrew J. Dubrin's text, *Leadership: Research Findings, Practice, and Skills*.

This relational framework helps to divide the course neatly into three learning modules. Each section results in an assessment and the final ensures all the "dots are connected." The visual, a triangle, is simple, but anchors the course concepts in such a way to demonstrate their integration.

We begin the course with a deep dive into an understanding of self, including identity, conflict styles, MBTI preferences, and emotional intelligence. Then, we move into the "relationship with others" or concepts that build upon those "self" concepts just learned. In this portion, we explore how to understand concepts of diversity and how to be interculturally flexible communicators. We explore leadership styles, team dynamics, and motivation here too. In the final "situation" module, we delve into the importance of understanding the situation by discussing the importance of a situational analysis, situational leadership, and change theories. To guide the students back to the model and concepts, I show the model at the beginning of every PPT slideshow, and we briefly discuss what we have recently studied and how it connects to what we are currently studying. By the time students leave the course, they can articulate each of the SOS elements and their interconnectedness as well as the impact on managerial decision-making.

Furthermore, students employ metacognition as they work on a leadership philosophy reflective writing that connects the SOS pieces with their future career. With metacognition, students think about their own thinking strategies (Centre for Innovation and Excellence in Learning). The identity/self-awareness and social awareness or "other" awareness concepts are drawn upon most in this reflective writing. Students are asked to consider influences upon their identity and interpersonal strategies that have been central to the ways they relate to others. They are asked to consider the collection of strategies they have learned in this course for understanding self and others and contemplate their leadership philosophy as professionals soon to enter the workplace. In short, they become *aware* of the factors that have influenced their relational learning, *know* a collection of strategies to use as they continue to learn how to work with others, and *choose* strategies that are appropriate for them and their context (Centre for Innovation and Excellence in Learning).

Leadership Seminar

This concept can also easily be used in discussion-oriented, upper division seminar courses as well. I co-teach this course with another instructor, and we share the load based on our strengths. Here, we have chosen the book, *Leadership Reinvented* by Hamza Khan, which highlights four key qualities needed for contemporary leaders—Servitude, Innovation, Diversity, and Empathy (SIDE). These key qualities act as an outline for the course content. My colleague and I may "move on" to another SIDE element, but we always tie them together and remind the students of how they are interrelated and used collectively for success. Here is an example of the course outline:

Week One

Welcome Activity and Course Introduction
Leadership Reinvented Introduction

Block One: Leading Today

Leadership Reinvented: Context Discussion
Change Leadership: Lecture and Discussion
Crisis Leadership: Case study
Leadership Reinvented: Guest Speaker
Leadership Reinvented: Guest Speaker

Block Three: Diversity

Diversity: Lecture and Discussion
Diversity: In-Class Activity
Diversity: Case Study
Diversity: Guest Speaker
Diversity: Guest Speaker

Block Two: Servitude and Empathy

Empathy: Lecture and Discussion
Empathy: Case Study
Servitude: Lecture and Discussion
Servitude: In-Class Activity
Servitude: Guest Speaker
Empathy: Guest Speaker

Block Four: Innovation

Innovation: Lecture and Discussion
Innovation: In-Class Activity
Innovation: Case Study
Innovation: Guest Speaker
Innovation: Guest Speaker

Brief suggestions for selecting and using a model, image, and/or framework:

Selection

The course learning objectives are central to my decision-making process when selecting a framework or visual for organization. I consider the learning goals carefully as well as consider workplace terminology students will likely encounter in the workplace. As result, I primarily consider two key sources.

First, I will consult the course textbook to see if there is a model proposed. The primary benefit with this choice is consistency of materials which further supports repetition and likelihood for recall. Also, a selected text and the content may guide the organization as noted above in the final, Leadership Seminar, example. The acronym SIDE lends itself as both a memory aid and module-based organization for Canvas and assessment schedule.

Second, I suggest consulting professional organizations that provide tools and resources. The Society for Human Resource Management (SHRM), for example, provides a number of models and images that are relevant and useful for my training and development course. The primary benefit of this option is that the students may well encounter these images, models, and frameworks again in their human resources career.

Uses

As I review my learning objectives and contemplate the use of a specific model, image, or framework for organization, I simultaneously consider possible strategies for student engagement, including assessment activities. While there are many ways to customize and many possible uses, here are just a few ways that I have engaged students with a framework:

1. **Canvas Module and Schedule:** I use the model to guide the organization of the Canvas modules and help dictate the material for exams. I prefer to chunk the most related ideas together, such as the “self” concepts described above, for exams. This Canvas usage is particularly evident in the Leadership Seminar organization noted above. Each key idea acts as a module section heading and guides the course schedule.
2. **Integration:** An important objective noted in my syllabi, includes the importance of integration. It is important not only for students to “connect dots” with in the current class but also understand the connecting points to other disciplines. The marketing course, noted above, is an example of this. The CPESTLE or situational analysis is helpful not only for marketing efforts but for supply chain and other managerial decision-making considerations. When I choose a model or image, I am zeroing in on ideas for ways to help students integrate within and beyond my classroom.
3. **Application:** As a new concept is introduced, I am sure to highlight how it connects to past learning and future experiences students will likely have. I also make an effort to engage students by asking them to consider examples of the concepts in their world. In the leadership seminar course mentioned above, students are asked to find a relevant, current example of the SIDE element we are focusing on. They bring a news article, blog, internship experience, job experience, or current trend for discussion.
4. **Assessment:** I use the model or framework to guide the creation of my assessment activity. As noted, exams center upon smaller portions of material and capture helpful data points of learning throughout the course. Reflection activities and assignments also provide touchpoints along the way that help me to gauge integration and application as we go. While those matter, I place a great deal of importance on a final activity that asks the student to reflect upon the totality of their learning, integrate the materials, and apply concepts to a project-based learning activity. I have asked students to design a “one-pager” or infographic demonstrating the key concepts in their own way, to apply the materials from the model to a complex case—sometimes real world, or to write a personal reflection or philosophy paper just to name a few. Students understand the model and the application of concepts found there will need to be reflected clearly in their work in addition to their creative and thoughtful application of those key concepts.

Conclusion:

In conclusion, repetition and integration are important for learning connections that aid memory and recall. A central model, framework, or visual is a great way to organize course content and thoughtfully draw attention to context, complexity, and connection. My experience demonstrates that using a central model to organize course content is beneficial for both the instructor and student. First, I use the models to encourage critical thinking and enhance learner sensitivity toward constantly changing social, contextual, and organizational situations. I have witnessed enhanced student inquiry and motivation. Second, I intentionally integrate the concepts into course capstone projects to encourage integration and enhance learner considerations of the complexity of decision-making. Finally, I build assessments and exams to follow each module further enhancing the learner’s ability to make connections between course content and organizational contexts they will soon encounter.

References:

Centre for Innovation and Excellence in Learning (n.d.). *Ten Metacognitive Teaching Strategies*. Vancouver Island University.

https://ciel.viu.ca/sites/default/files/ten_metacognitive_teaching_strategies.docx

Misseyanni, A., Lytras, M. D., Papadopoulou, P. & Marouli, C. (2018). *Active Learning Strategies in Higher Education: Teaching for Leadership, Innovation, and Creativity: Vol. First edition*. Emerald Publishing Limited.

The Learning Center, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. (n.d.). *Concept Maps*.

[https://learningcenter.unc.edu/tips-and-tools/using-concept-](https://learningcenter.unc.edu/tips-and-tools/using-concept-maps/#:~:text=What%20are%20concept%20maps%3F,benefit%20any%20type%20of%20learner.)

[maps/#:~:text=What%20are%20concept%20maps%3F,benefit%20any%20type%20of%20learner.](https://learningcenter.unc.edu/tips-and-tools/using-concept-maps/#:~:text=What%20are%20concept%20maps%3F,benefit%20any%20type%20of%20learner.)