

Developments In Business Simulation & Experiential Exercises, Volume 20,1993

LORD OF THE FLIES: A "LIVE CASE" APPROACH TO LEADERSHIP

Maryanne Rouse, University of South Florida
Hamilton Stirling, University of South Florida, St. Petersburg

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this demonstration is to show how a "live" case, structured around the film Lord of the Flies, has been used in introductory management courses to integrate the trait, behavioral, and contingency theories of leadership while highlighting the constraints placed on individuals in leadership roles. The 90-minute film provides an unusually rich set of common experiences, which form the basis for class discussion. By observing the shifts in power and influence and in leadership and "followership" roles from the plane crash through ultimate rescue, students gain a deeper understanding of the complexities of leadership and the types of behaviors that are more or less effective in different positions and situations. This exercise is patterned on a "live" case developed around the film Twelve O'clock High, which has been used successfully in a variety of settings for more than a decade.

INTRODUCTION

The study of leadership as a process of influencing others to achieve organizational goals and objectives is an element of almost every undergraduate and graduate (MBA) "principles" or management process course and the focus of an increasing number of non-academic credit seminars and workshops. Because it provides students the opportunity to "discover" the various sources of power and authority that serve as the basis for exerting influence and reinforces the premise that there is no "one best way to lead," many instructors use a case/discussion approach to teaching leadership concepts and theories. The film Lord of the Flies serves as a "live" case providing the opportunity to assess successful and unsuccessful leadership styles in a complex environment characterized by a great deal more detail than the more usual one to two page "leadership style" case.

TIME, COST, AND GROUP SIZE

The entire film is approximately 90 minutes long; discussion requires 60-90 minutes for a total of 1 50 to 1 80 minutes. The exercise is ideal for undergraduate or graduate classes that meet in three hour blocks and, with an introductory lecture on leadership, works extremely well as a half-day leadership workshop or as part of a longer seminar or short-course. The exercise can also be modified for use in classes scheduled to meet for two 90-minute periods per week. (For the demonstration, the exercise will be edited down to 30 minutes.) It works well as a participative exercise with groups of up to 40; once group size exceeds 40, active participation/discussion is limited. The only equipment required are a VHS and monitor plus a copy of the videotape (available from video libraries or stores.) Because most schools will have a VHS player and monitor, cost is limited to video rental/purchase and the duplication of approximately five pages of handout material per participant.

THE EXERCISE

This experiential exercise uses a videotape (or 16mm version) of the film Lord of the Flies as the basis for class discussion of leadership: theories, behavior, group structure, sources of power and influence, the role of "followers," and organizational and situational constraints. The videotape or film is stopped at specific points during its 90-minute run time to allow discussion of observed behavior and to relate that behavior to three models of leadership and group dynamics: (1) the French and Raven behavioral model which defines influence in terms of power, the control an individual can exercise over others; (2) the Hersey and Blanchard situational leadership model which focuses on task oriented behavior, relationship-oriented behavior, and the "readiness level of the group; and (3) the Donnelly, Gibson, and Ivancevich integrative model of work groups. The integrative model of work groups is included because self-directed work groups have become an increasingly important element in implementing TOM initiatives.

At each pre-set "stop," students or workshop participants are asked to discuss what is happening in the film. Additional questions include "How did this situation develop?", "Which of the management/leadership models can be applied?", and "What will happen next? Why?" Answering these questions stimulates discussion about behavior of the leader(s) and group members and allows students/participants to "discover" that there is no one style of leadership that is the most effective in all situations.

Lord of the Flies works extremely well as an experiential exercise in leadership because (1) the goals are very apparent, (2) the time dimension is short, (3) the consequences are quite extreme (death), and (4) the punishment available is great (banishment). The effectiveness of the exercise can be enhanced by using a discussion of "mini-cases" to illustrate the models in the class before that in which the film is used.

CONCLUSION

Using a feature film intended for entertainment as a vehicle for simulating leadership situations and stimulating discussion of leadership concepts and theories provides a break from the usual lecture/discussion format of many introductory management courses as well as a change of pace for workshops and seminars. Because the film setting is a non-business environment, the exercise can be used equally effectively with non-business (education, social service, the professions) as with business oriented groups. Session attendees will receive copies of the authors' teaching note, models, and a student paper.

REFERENCES

- Donnelly, J., Gibson, J. & Ivancevich, J. (1981) Fundamentals of management 4 ed. Plano, TX: Business Publications, Inc.
- French J.R.P., & Raven, B. (1959) The bases of social power. In D. Cartwright (Ed.), Studies in Social Power. Ann Arbor: Institute for Social Research, University of Michigan
- Hersey, P., & Blanchard, K. (1988) Management of organizational behavior: utilizing human resources. 5 ed. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall