

# Developments in Business Simulation & Experiential Exercises, Volume 14, 1987

## AN INNOVATIVE APPROACH TO AN OLD CLASS - THE CREATIVE INTERACTION

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### ABSTRACT

This article discusses a new technique (Creative Interaction) for the application of organizational development methods to adult learning in the classroom or at a training facility. The technique is experimental and seeks to utilize an experiential approach in order to reinforce organizational behavior learning among adult students. Several examples of the use of the creative interaction (CI) technique are given in the article.

### INTRODUCTION

It appears that the reformulation and subsequent active implementation of OD intervention, developmental, and training techniques is a pattern which has not been widely followed or utilized in the academic and business communities. On only a few occasions have professors or trainers attempted to modify standardized OD approaches or textbook situations so that either adult student learning or the training process might be intensified and manipulated for greater individual and collective effectiveness. This lack of creativity or flexibility has appeared to hinder the further development of OD as a valuable interactive vehicle for both classroom and professional training use. In addition, this lack of experimentation with the various OD methodologies has placed limits, which are neither intended nor realistic, on the organizational applicability of OD. Unfortunately, this has created a professional training or classroom situation in which the faculty member or trainer faces highly structured requirements, rather than an open situation with the ability to be "free-wheeling" or developmental. Therefore, one of the basic premises advanced in this article is that faculty members and OD practitioners need to be more thoughtful in preparation and more creative in approach to the classroom teaching, consulting, or training situation in which they intend to perform.

### A REFORMULATION

One OD technique which lends itself to a reformulation in order to reinforce classroom teaching and training is the experiential method. By combining the experiential method with an experimental model or method, greater flexibility may be obtained in order to address both the individual and collective needs of the students or trainees in a variety of interactive situations.

The creative interaction (CI) method is one in which the professor or trainer offers the students or trainees an opportunity to "write their own book", thereby addressing issues and behaviors of interest and value to the students or trainees. In addition, this method affords the participants a chance to utilize their own learning and experience, and to integrate both academic criteria and pragmatic, work-related viewpoints. For the professor or trainer, this situation greatly enhances the classroom resource base because the students, once interested and committed, are able to generate creative thought and a large array of physical supporting "props" to embellish their activities.

The general aim of the CI approach is to promote understanding by experience, but in an environment which is in contrast to the formal, structured approach normally encountered in the academic or training setting. The CI method, while retaining the basic concept of experimentalism (not having a singular learning base of instructor or textbook alone, but of allowing activism by the other participants) does not provide the structured exercises associated with the experiential method. Instead, the participants are charged with the task of preparing their own behavioral situation, based on interpersonal interactions, according to a script developed by a team of participants. Ideally, the CI involves the other participants in the classroom or training setting in order to maximize involvement and effectiveness. In addition to developing the group skills of the experiential method, the teams of participants are presented with a task which demands the integration of traditional management functions such as planning, organizing, staffing, and leading, etc.

As with the experiential method, the CI is designed primarily for an adult education application. When one considers the greater level of maturity of the adult learner (students or trainees), the CI is an excellent vehicle to effectively challenge them. In addition, these students generally possess a much higher work experience quotient, and tend to have a far greater functional! pragmatic perspective than younger audiences. For the professor or trainer this situation is an opportunity to combine both experimental and experiential learning into an effective methodology.

The use of creative interactions by faculty members or professional training instructors poses an element of professional risk. Not all faculty members or trainers are suited

## Developments in Business Simulation & Experiential Exercises, Volume 14, 1987

educationally, emotionally, or personally for use of the CI technique, and therefore, they must factor for the risk involved in CI use. In addition, perhaps some faculty members or trainers would like to try the CI method or technique, but of necessity need to enter the method at a low to moderate level of risk. The following diagram summarizes the risk involved.

CI Risk of Implementation Variable			
	Low	Moderate	High
<u>CI Characteristics</u>	humorous facetious low intensity	interactive facilitative combine behavior and structure	confrontive intense high conflict

The next section of this article demonstrates the value of the CI method by citing actual cases from business classes where the technique was used<sup>1</sup>. Three cases will be discussed in details and other examples will be briefly addressed. The placement of each case on the above diagrammed risk of implementation scale will be noted.

### Case 10 (High Risk of Implementation)

One particular group of five mature male graduate MBA students was assigned to produce a CI around the general behavioral theme of anxiety and how anxiety might affect small group behavior and further, how it might affect organizational performance. After appropriate consultations with the professor, this task group arranged to invite the MBA class to an afternoon barbeque and beer party at a suburban residence. Good food and good brew was the order of the day. The MBA class, knowing of the anxiety task assignment for the group, continued to wonder how that task assignment would be completed. Approximately two hours into the social activity of the group's endeavors, one of the group's members scurried into the toilet, and shortly thereafter the doors to the residence were suddenly filled with eight armed narcotics agents executing a "raid" who proceeded to "line-up" all present for a complete "shake-down"! Needless to say anxiety was clearly evident. Reactions abounded and emotions flowed. As the "shake-down" continued, searches, identification, citing of legal rights, and the "line-up" of all present produced varied results. Concern over how such unfortunate publicity would affect one's job, career, or family was evident in many cases. The chastising continued and so did the anxiety behavior patterns.

After 45 minutes of very fruitful endeavor, one member of the task assignment group sat down on the couch and said, "I think we've all had enough anxiety." Whereupon the "shake-downs" desisted and the narcotics agents proceeded to "wind it up". The task group then introduced the narcotics squad chief who indicated that he felt very fortunate to have had such a marvelous training opportunity for his agents. The MBA class members were almost overwhelmed. The task assignment group using its contacts and resources had set

them up for a complete "drug bust", and in so doing, very handily completed their "anxiety assignment" in a very fashionable manner.

A second set of behavioral reactions then set in among the MBA class members. Anger and frustration, coupled with some still un-settled emotions, were evident. The task assignment group offered their "condolences", and then proceeded to conduct a "post mortem" of their task and the action/reaction situation of the class. Lively general discussion followed from all quarters, and several hours later (when all the food and beer were consumed) class members began fading away, most admitting they had a lesson in anxiety which would not soon be forgotten.

### Case Two (Medium Risk of Implementation)

Case number two using the CI technique or method involved a group of five evening MBA students who were deliberately structured about a central inter-group problem by the faculty member. The group consisted of an aggressive female MBA student three "regular" white male MBA students (age 30+) and a former Vietnamese army officer recently immigrated to the United States who had some difficulty with the English language and American cultural patterns. On three major occasions and several minor ones, the American sub-group, either collectively or acting through its own appointed leader, the aggressive female MBA student (twice), approached the professor about transferring the Vietnamese student to another group, in particular, the class group that had three foreign students in it. The professor remained steadfast - find a place for the Vietnamese student and give him a participative role in the CI format. After a variety of small group behaviors and interactions, the group settled upon a CI which portrayed a family dinner in a restaurant at which the family's only son who was in college (and for whom the mother and father had firm intentions and expectations) was announcing his intention to leave college and "try-out" on the professional tennis players' circuit. The CI was interactive, and adequately covered the behaviors the group sought to demonstrate; but of most interest was the role of the Vietnamese student who portrayed the family's deaf and dumb grandfather who carried out his role through his physical emotions, and in the end was the only one who was a supportive "kindred spirit" to the tennis playing son because they were able to communicate by physical emotions and not words. This particular CI was moderate in risk for the group and their fellow MBA students, but never the less was an effective example of the CI method or technique.

### Case Three Low Risk of - Implementation

Case number three using the CI method was intended by its group to be a humorous (almost facetious) experience for the MBA class involved. It was staged by invitation with participants and fellow students taken

<sup>1</sup> The authors have both been principally engaged in evening or mature level MBA teaching for many years. Out of a series of courses, professional training, and consulting experiences, the authors have found the methods described to be very effective.

## Developments in Business Simulation & Experiential Exercises, Volume 14, 1987

on a tour of Washington, D.C. scenes via chartered bus ending at the gorilla cage of the National Zoo, where a CI was conducted, mocking and analyzing human behaviors and conduct through an appropriate baboon, orangutan, gorilla, monkey, etc., set of comparisons. Some striking similarities were noted and adequately addressed and expressed. The risk element in this CI was low, with little conflict or confrontation between the group and the class, and it followed the "a good time was had by all" pattern.

### Other Cases

Some other cases which used the CI method or technique were as follows:

- a. Richard Nixon Goes to Heaven - a humorous low-risk CI depicting a confrontation at Heaven's Gates as Richard Nixon reviews his behavior while seeking admission.
- b. The Sex-Change Operation - a moderate risk CI starting in a serious vein depicting an intense hospital medical team conducting a serious new surgical procedure and ending in pandemonium when the patient jumped off the table, revealing he was a 35 pound, white turkey.
- c. The Four Penny Opera - a CI of moderate risk that centered about the intense behavioral conflicts associated with theatrical productions integrating freedom and creativity in the arts with hard-nosed business costs.
- d. The Hi-Jacking - a high risk confrontive CI in which the group arranged an aircraft hijacking which involved the MBA class members in a situation transcending more toward reality than simulation.

All cases involving use of the CI technique or method were so constructed as to allow for maximum student creativity and student resource development. This allowed excellent "room to maneuver" and produced effective and interesting results.

### COMMENTS

The cases which have been previously discussed contain most elements that the authors wish to use to demonstrate the possible positive reinforcement that variants of this OD methodology can have in classroom and training use. The cases combined experience and experiment. They broadened the class resource base and obviously produced interested and committed students who were able to be creative in thought. In addition, the CI method demonstrated that varied and creative learning is possible to construct out of a flexible classroom or training situation. Finally, the use of such flexible classroom or training methods as the CI offers a new direction or new thrust for OD technologies and methods. Given the desire to experiment, a faculty member or professional trainer/facilitator can not only engender valuable learning but find professional satisfaction as well.

Some cautions in the use of these OD variants such as CI's are appropriate. For example, the CI method can not be utilized "cold". Students need to be informed and the professor's intentions made known. If the student is uncomfortable or "opts-out", he or she should be placed in another class or training section using more traditional methods. In addition, the faculty member or trainer should have considerable familiarity with the techniques and ideas of improvisatory theatre. Perhaps another well-grounded caution would be for the faculty member or trainer to discuss

his methods and intentions with his superiors in order to meet the "no surprises rule". Lastly, expectations should be conservatively set. More than likely, in the average class, few dramatic or startling CI's will come forth. However, this should not discourage the use of this technique because it still offers valuable learning.

In addition, it is possible to create "variations in the variant" if you will, by using additional methods and ideas. For example, consider the cases which were discussed and then think of the possibility of video-taping the event for subsequent replay to give all participants a look at their actual behaviors and anxieties. Such additional innovations could add to the learning experience and further reinforce it.

The authors have used the CI technique on numerous occasions in classroom and training work, and this technique has produced over 20 good case examples of experimental and experiential learning.

### SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

If OD is to be further integrated into the mainstream of both the academic community and the practical business world, new thrusts, new techniques, and new directions are required. It has been the purpose of this article to help further OD integration by sharing the authors' ideas and experiences concerning a variant of the OD methodology, the CI method. The use of this OD variant produces flexibility in the classroom and training situation and engenders effective learning. This OD variant, coupled with others which are developing, will help mold OD into a larger conceptual and practical field.