

# MANAGING ORGANIZATIONS: EXPERIENTIAL MBA COURSE TEACHES ALTERNATIVES TO THE MACHINE MODEL

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## ABSTRACT

*The nineteenth-century industrial or “machine” model for managing organizations remains the dominant structure in America today. Productivity, worker satisfaction, and America’s place in a global economy suffer as an end result of using this structure – aside from the ethical issues associated with treating people as replaceable parts of a machine. This MBA program offers a course that teaches alternatives to the industrial model based on the work of Argyris, Herzberg, McGregor and others. The course concepts include how motivation differs from movement induced by rewards, and why factors that give satisfaction (such as achievement and recognition rather than material) are long-lasting, more fulfilling, and motivate people more. The course is set up so students personally experience the course concepts. Students work individually on self-analysis, reflection and experience. Students complete an in-depth personal motivation paper. In groups, they use a group project to experience first-hand how course concepts including theories of leadership, conflict management, and decision-making work in a real-life situation. Students plan and teach the class an approved experiential learning exercise of their choice. The exercise is of secondary importance to the primary focus of understanding and experiencing group processes. Desired outcomes for the course include developing awareness and learning the value of a new organizational structure based on course concepts – and learning how meeting the needs of the self and others benefit the individual and the organization. Students set their own learning goals on the first day, and this becomes an integral part of the course. We may conduct an experiential exercise relating to course concepts, depending on time and other constraints.*

## INTRODUCTION

The traditional university model assumes that the professor’s job is to transfer knowledge to the student in a top-down manner. The philosophy that inspired this course rejects that model and is instead grounded in the idea that

teachers and students are “co-producers of learning” (Murrell & Braxton, 2010). Equally important is that people need to understand why they do things themselves if they are to understand others. Since Organizational Behavior is concerned primarily with issues of human interaction, this is critical for people who will be managing organizations. This course is designed so that students experience the course concepts themselves. Additionally, they have a good deal of control over what they learn. The course is required for the MBA program, although students from other graduate programs often experience the course.

## COURSE LEARNING PHILOSOPHY

The professor in the traditional university model is not considered an equal party in the learning process. By his position of dominion over a class, there is an inherent inequality that makes the student feel like a subject. The philosophy of this course is that the student needs to have an active part in the learning process which involves experiencing the concepts as much as possible. The course mixes theory with application. There are scheduled class meetings like traditional courses, but otherwise the course design, specific material learned, and outcome is determined by the students (course concepts relate to management and organizational issues). The “class evolves from the needs and contributions of those engaged in the process” (Murrell & Braxton, 2010). The reason for this is to simulate a real-world organizational model with the class – complete with all the complexities of personalities, motivation, roles, and other variables that students will face in the real world. An in-depth paper on personal motivation early in the course forces students to face up to what their core motivations and beliefs are, and to analyze why they have those motives and beliefs. In some cultures, many people already have this kind of self-awareness by the time they are adults. For many who take this course, however, it will be the first time they have done a probing analysis of themselves. The course will be difficult for some – not so much in terms of workload or concept difficulty, but because it is often uncomfortable for people who have done little self-

reflection and little deep, probing, self-analysis to begin doing so as adults.

It has been extensively argued that managers need to be able to function under stress and under uncertain circumstances. Therefore, it is by design that the course provides these circumstances for the students to