

# PURPOSEFUL HAZE: A TEAM PROJECT IN ORGANIZATIONAL BEHAVIOR

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## ABSTRACT

*This paper describes a team project that is used as an experiential exercise in an undergraduate organizational behavior course. The project involves teams of 4-5 students creating an original product that reflects their comprehensive understanding of the course content. In order to reflect a more realistic workplace scenario, the project instructions are deliberately vague, and students are warned that the grading process is inherently subjective. At the end of the course, the teams present their project and share their lessons learned from working as a team. The specifics of this experiential exercise as well as the instructor's lessons learned will be presented along with project examples and anecdotal feedback from the students. Implications for teaching teamwork and creative confidence in a business or management curriculum are discussed.*

## INTRODUCTION

This paper describes a team project that is used in a 3000-level undergraduate course in organizational behavior. For business students, the course is either required or is offered as an elective, depending upon the major. The course is also an elective for numerous other majors. Consequently, having students from criminal justice, healthcare administration, international studies, management of information systems, psychology, software engineering, and sports management in the course along with business students is typical.

The purposes of the project are for students to (1) further develop leadership and teamwork skills by applying course concepts, such as change management, communication, conflict resolution, creativity, decision making, emotional intelligence, leadership, motivation, power, and stress management, to an ill-defined problem; (2) improve or increase their general self-efficacy and expand their creative confidence; and (3) develop a deeper understanding of the course concepts through this experience such that long-term retention is feasible.

The purpose of this paper is to describe the hazy team project, including the instructions/specifications, grading rubric, and overall process. The instructor's lessons learned will be presented as well along with project examples and anecdotal feedback from the students. Implications for teaching teamwork and creative confidence in a business or management curriculum will be discussed.

## KEY TERMS

Hoover (1974) defined experiential learning as "...when a personally responsible participant(s) cognitively, affectively, and behaviorally processes knowledge, skills, and/or attitudes in a learning situation characterized by a high level of active involvement" (p. 35). Creative confidence is defined as "the nat-

ural ability to come up with new ideas and the courage to try them out" (Kelley & Kelley, 2012, p. 115). Wood and Bandura (1989) defined self-efficacy as "people's beliefs in their capabilities to mobilize the motivation, cognitive resources, and courses of action needed to exercise control over events in their lives" (p. 364).

## PURPOSEFUL HAZE – THE PROJECT

*"I've never had a professor not tell me exactly what to do before."*

*Accounting Major, Senior, Magna Cum Laude*

The lack of a checklist or specific parameters generates a variety of reactions from students. Some of them find the open-ended nature of the project to be disconcerting, particularly those who are accustomed to quantitative course deliverables. Others are more comfortable with the ambiguity and find the experience to be liberating. Completing the project facilitates a dynamic experiential learning experience as the students learn more about course concepts in a way that is meaningful to them. The comprehension of the concepts is richer, and by helping each other explore and manipulate the content, they achieve higher levels of learning. Ultimately, this experiential learning exercise incorporates self-efficacy and creative confidence into an ordinary teamwork project in order to help students become more comfortable and confident when dealing with imprecise, ambiguous problems like those they will face in the workplace.

## LESSONS LEARNED

In its original form, the project was designed to be an individual project, but I have used it as a team project for 2 years now. There are pros and cons with both approaches. As an individual project, students are more directly accountable for their ideas and must push themselves to think outside of the proverbial box. They also have to present their product to the class individually, which is traumatic for some but very good for their development. They have the potential to gain a greater sense of creative confidence; however, the experience of innovating in a team and the safety net of presenting as a team are missing. Under ideal circumstances, the teams of students go through several iterations in their product design in order to generate a product that is better than any single student could make on his/her own. Additionally, with the individual project, mastery of the teaming content has to be assessed using another assignment. Completing this project as a team allows opportunities for the full array of course content to be applied in the team experience while also accomplishing the goals related to creative confidence and self-efficacy. Students apply what they have learned in a realistic context as the team dynamics are not contrived and are similar to teaming in the workplace.

Timing is a big concern when using this project. Some teams will get started right away while others procrastinate. I have learned to require the teams to have consultations with me a few weeks after the teams are formed and again a couple of weeks prior to the due date. The students evaluate one another's performance on the project, which accounts for 20% of the project grade. During the first year of using this project, I did not weight the peer portion as heavily, and I did not conduct team consultations. I learned that some teams might wait until

the project's due date to share with me that a team member had not contributed anything to the project. I also learned that some teams were taking one person's idea and dividing the work up evenly rather than building upon the idea until the scope reflected a team effort. Consulting with the teams at important times is critical to the teams meeting expectations.

A couple of projects are depicted in Exhibit 1. Additional examples, along with student feedback, will be presented at the conference.

### EXHIBIT 1



### REFERENCES

Hoover, J. D. (1974) Experiential learning: Conceptualization and definition. *Developments in Business Simulation & Experiential Exercises, 1*, 31-35.  
 Kelley, T., & Kelley, D. (2012). Reclaim your creative confidence. *Harvard Business Review, 90*(12), 115-118.

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