

# INTRODUCING EXPERIENTIAL EXERCISES TO INEXPERIENCED FACULTY MEMBERS

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## ABSTRACT

*This paper describes a simulation of a case study that was presented to a group of faculty members who had little or no previous experience with interactive learning techniques. A case study was created that covered topics of interest to faculty. Two groups were chosen to present the case, and each was subjected to a different style of interaction from the instructor. Participants were able to experience various aspects of interactive learning and see how different techniques can create different results from a common theme.*

## INTRODUCTION

The use of simulations and case studies is often concentrated within a few specific disciplines, typically in fields requiring the ability to solve unstructured problems such as business, law, and medicine. Some of the resistance to using cases is due to structural barriers in university education, and some is due to unfamiliarity with teaching techniques on part of the instructors. Business activities usually involve a significant amount of interaction between individuals, and this permits the modeling of situations so that students can experience the actions that lead to success and failure in a controlled environment. The challenge still remains to identify and utilize the characteristics found in other fields of study to create meaningful games and simulations.

Structural barriers to experiential exercises can arise due to the inherent nature of the material. In music classes, students who are learning to play Beethoven or Mozart are already simulating the professional portions of the lives of the composers. In science laboratories, a simulation occurs each time an experiment is conducted. Readings in a poetry class or debates in a philosophy class are traditional techniques. While there could be educational value in having students simulate portions of a famous person's life to come to a better understanding of the individual's underlying motivation, instructors who have had no

experience with experiential learning would likely lack the background to construct an effective exercise.

One key factor in expanding the use of experiential exercises beyond the business school is to introduce games and simulations to instructors in the other fields. There usually are not many opportunities to involve other faculty members in an interactive learning environment. The authors did, however, have such an opportunity made available to them. Their university routinely conducts faculty orientation activities during the week before the beginning of the fall term classes. This past year, the organizers of the activities asked for volunteers to demonstrate different teaching techniques, including experiential learning activities such as simulations and case studies.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

Many aspects of business education are readily adaptable to case study analysis due to the applied nature of the discipline, but case study analysis is not unique to business studies. Some disciplines use the term "case study" in a fairly restrictive sense to mean reading and writing about medical or psychological cases (Logsdon-Conradson, 2004). Other disciplines take a broader view of the term, and Graham and Cline (1980), Golich (2000), and Mostert (2007) have identified and discussed many aspects of case analysis in their areas from the viewpoint of both the instructor and the students and identified strengths and weaknesses with the method. At a broader level, Faria (2001, 2009) has reviewed the history of the development of simulations and games, and many of these observations are also applicable to the use of case studies in the classroom.

One common theme is that the case method has wide applicability and can be used in areas where it has not been used before. Menzel (2009) acknowledges that cases studies have been used in public administration classes for some time but calls for their greater use in teaching ethical reasoning and gives suggestions concerning how to implement the approach. The use of case studies as pedagogical tools has been proven. The challenge now is to

introduce the method to instructors who have never considered using it to teach their own specific material.

## THE CASE STUDY AND ITS STRUCTURE

The participants in the exercise came from various academic disciplines, so it was necessary to create a case study that would be applicable to all. The case “Middlestate University” (Appendix A) describes a faculty meeting at a fictional institution. The case is designed to present an unstructured problem to the audience for which there is no correct answer. The topics covered in the case include pay, job reassignment, promotion, tenure, and other topics that affect all faculty members. The scenario is one of a shrinking budget, so the adjustments being made were not “faculty-friendly”. Participants were asked to form themselves into groups of three or four, read and discuss the case, and then prepare to present the case.

The case was sized so that it could be read in about 10 minutes. The physical layout of the case as presented to the participants was designed to make it difficult for readers to make marginal notes. Margins, font size, and line spacing were all set so that the document took up four full pages, front and back, with no extra room at the top or bottom of any page. This provided a structural barrier for those who would want to jot their thoughts on the paper. Participants were given approximately ten minutes to read the case and digest the material and another five to ten minutes to discuss how they would present the case.

## THE SIMULATION

Both authors have extensive experience with case studies, simulations, and games. In order to give participants an opportunity to see how the same case can be presented in different manners, it was decided to take a good cop/bad cop approach. Fortunately, the authors’ inherent personalities are such to make this a natural division of labor.

The first team to present was randomly selected by the good cop and allowed to present the case with little or no interruption. As they made their comments concerning the case and the problems presented, the instructor led them through a critical thinking exercise about their comments. When a major point was raised, like a freezing faculty salaries, the instructor encouraged them to develop alternative approaches to the problem. The atmosphere was one of mutual support aimed at problem identification, considering multiple alternatives, evaluating alternatives, and selecting an optimal solution to the problems at hand.

The second team was selected by having a supposedly random person pick a number between 1 and 10. It did not matter what the guess was, it was going to be wrong by 1, so that the team sitting next to her would be chosen. The team that was “selected” appeared to be composed of “quiet” people, so they provided the perfect foil for the bad cop. This team was allowed to speak about a minute or so

before being interrupted with a direct question from the instructor. The case is rich enough in detail that there were bound to be points of contention. The instructor placed himself in the role of the antagonist, and each time the team tried to answer a question or make a suggestion they were put on the defensive. This process continued for about ten minutes.

When the questioning was halted, both instructors began the debriefing session. Each focused on the technique that had been used in the questioning process. The contrast was made between making progress by “pulling” the conversation or by “pushing” it. Both the good cop and the bad cop approaches utilize the Socratic questioning style but each has its own advantages and disadvantages. The good cop approach is useful for encouraging novice critical thinkers to think out loud in front of others and to get groups to brainstorm without fear of negative judgment. The good cop approach suffers from the lack of negative critique of bad ideas and uncritical thinking. The bad cop approach is useful for developing the ability to think under pressure or in competitive situations. The bad cop approach suffers from the contradiction between simultaneous cooperation and competition within group and a resulting negative impact on those participants who are unable to resolve the contradiction.

There was insufficient time to demonstrate other approaches to case presentation during this exercise, but alternate methods can also create valuable learning experiences. The role playing approach allows individual or groups of participants to put themselves into the role of one of the stakeholder groups in the case and analyze the case from that perspective. A debate between participants about the relative merits of each alternative course of action will help the entire group learn about the costs and benefits of those alternatives. This case method is useful with novice groups but care must be taken to ensure that participants internalize the perspectives of opposition groups.

Another approach that could be used is the moderated discussion. In this case discussion method, the moderator asks the participants for their inputs and then invites other participants to agree, disagree, or critique the first participant’s ideas without interjecting comment on either. The moderator proceeds to let the participants comment and critique on each other’s ideas without directly challenging the ideas of any participant. This case method works well with participants who are proficient critical thinkers who are comfortable with group feedback.

## FEEDBACK

Twenty-six individuals signed the registration sheet, and twenty-three of them provided feedback. Twenty-one of the respondents rated the presentation either “Good” or “Excellent” and stated that they would recommend this type of training to others and that additional training would be beneficial. One respondent stated that the session was not appropriate for his/her discipline (art and design), and

another respondent would have preferred even more critical thinking content. The general comments reflected that not all participants felt that the case technique would be appropriate to their specific disciplines or would like to have cases designed for their discipline (education). One participant felt that the nature of the case was “too personal” for the participants.

These results indicate that while there may not be widespread understanding of the case method of teaching that instructors can see its value and would like to be able to use it in their own disciplines, when appropriate. It also seems that there is a need to educate instructors that the nature of case studies can lead to topics that may seem personal and for that reason need to be discussed. Dimensions like critical thinking can be treated at various levels in different cases. The overall nature of the feedback was quite positive, especially when considering the previous background of the participants.

## CONCLUSION

Case studies have been used for many years in the business disciplines and have demonstrated the robust nature of this teaching technique. Students are challenged and allowed to fail without suffering real world consequences for that failure. Subject material can be introduced in context, and critical thinking skills can be sharpened either through supportive or adversarial methods. Case studies are truly a powerful form of experiential learning within a protective environment.

There appears to be room to expand the scope of case studies beyond the business colleges. Instructors from many disciplines who had the opportunity to become involved first hand in a case study were able to recognize the value of the technique and expressed interest in learning more. The opportunity exists to expand the family of instructors who use experiential learning techniques. It only remains for us to reach out and help others develop those cases and exercises in the other academic disciplines.

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## Appendix A

### Middlestate University

It is August, and classes at Middlestate University begin next week. The faculty has returned and is in the process of preparing syllabi and class notes and attending departmental and college meetings. There is a buzz of curiosity, however, since a mandatory special university-wide meeting has been called for this afternoon. No one is sure what the topic will be, but the word is that it will affect everyone, and not necessarily in a good way.

#### University Background

Middlestate University is a state-funded institution of approximately 10,000 students located in the center of the country. The university is composed of a College of Business (~2,000 students), a College of Education (~2,500 students), a College of Liberal and Fine Arts (~3,000 students), and a College of Science (~2,500 students). Each college also awards masters level degrees in their specific areas, but there is no separately organized graduate college. The university is one of three major schools in the state and primarily provides educational opportunities for first generation college students

The faculty consists of about 400 full-time, tenured and tenure track faculty and 150 part-time contract instructors. Graduate students are used as teaching assistants in some large section classes, and advanced graduate students are sometimes allowed to teach remedial classes. All efforts are taken to assure that the undergraduate students receive instruction by full-time faculty as much as possible. There are also approximately 200 classified service personnel to perform custodial, maintenance, and secretarial duties. There are about 30 administrators with titles such as President, Vice-President, Provost, Registrar, Director, and Dean.

The university receives the majority of its funding from state sources and tuition and fees. Approximately 60% of the operating funds come from state government, and 40% comes from student tuition and fees. There is a small amount of funding from contract research sources, but this amount is not considered in the annual budgeting process. Since the students are primarily first generation and may not have extensive financial resources, all efforts are made to keep tuition and fees as low as possible to make education more affordable.

There is a small endowment that provides some funding, but due to its size and uncertain performance it is not counted on as a continuous funding source; funds received from the endowment are used for one-time projects, like classroom upgrades, and faculty and student enrichment activities. Distribution of endowment funds is

overseen by a committee composed of both faculty and administration members.

#### Local Community

Middlestate University is located in Midvale, which is near the geographic midpoint of the state. Midvale has a population of around 45,000, not counting the student population of the university. Midvale is 50 miles from the state capital, which is also the nearest metropolitan area (population ~100,000). The climate is moderate with short winters and moderate snowfall. Summers can be warm, but spring and fall are usually quite pleasant. Outdoor recreation is popular, and there are many activities that can be supported by the system of local and state parks in the region. Cultural events are staged by both the local community and the university.

The local economy is based on agriculture. The surrounding area is composed of farms that raise primarily corn and soybeans. There are also commercial feedlots that raise cattle and hogs and a small dairy industry. During the season, many of the farmers raise vegetables that are sold in local farmers' markets, but truck farming is not a major local source of income. Midvale's business community is geared toward serving the needs of the agricultural industry. There is one enclosed mall and several strip malls in addition to the downtown business district. There is a considerable economic impact from the student body during the school year. It is estimated that monies spent by university students account for approximately 25% of local business earnings.

Midvale is the county seat and hosts the county courthouse and other local, state, and federal offices. These offices make business and legal activities more convenient, but they do not provide a significant source of income for the community. There are no major sources of conflict between the various levels of government. Local government activities depend on the elected officials, but in general these individuals are reasonably competent.

The city is served by a system of state highways. The interstate highway passes approximately eight miles from the city center, and the mall and other businesses have located themselves along the corridor to the interstate. The city is served by the railroad, but there are no major waterways. Most of the local streets and roads are in good condition, but there is a continual need for maintenance due to the stresses brought about by seasonal temperature changes. Police, fire protection, and emergency services are adequate.

## Economic Conditions

The general economic conditions are weak. The national economy has fallen into a recession due to financial and housing conditions. The federal government is attempting to provide a stimulus program, but the cost is in the trillions of dollars. Many believe that this amount of new public debt will further depress the economy for many years. It is unlikely that an economic turnaround will occur in the near future.

The local economy has had a difficult time as well. National problems have affected the stock market to the point where many individuals have seen substantial portions of their savings and retirement accounts disappear which has reduced disposable income and postponed many projected retirement dates. The commodities markets have fared little better. Prices for agricultural commodities, such as corn, soybeans, beef, and pork, are quite low relative to the last several years. Many farmers who planned their production based on past experience have found that they can barely earn enough to cover the costs of their operations. While most farmers will make enough to survive, there will be little disposable income this season and possibly next.

The decrease in economic activity has translated in lower sales for merchants both locally and state wide. Tax revenues are down, and the state legislature has had a difficult time with this year's budget. Some programs, such as health care, are effective mandates and cannot be reduced. Other programs that have a certain amount of discretionary spending have had funding reduced. Higher education was fortunate in that there were no across-the-board reductions, but there were no increases either. State funding for higher education has been frozen for all institutions and will likely remain at its current level for the foreseeable future.

It is estimated that the economic stimulus programs from the federal government will result in an overall price inflation of 3% per year for at least the next five years. It is unlikely that federal programs will be available for higher education grants to offset these cost increases. The freeze of state funding means that educational institutions will need to find other sources of revenue or increase tuition and fees to cover increasing costs.

## Today's Meeting

The auditorium is full. The house lights are down. All the university administrators and the college deans are seated on the stage. The Provost gets up to speak.

"Good afternoon, and thank you all for coming to this very important meeting. I would like to say that it is my great pleasure to be able to talk to you today. I would like to say that, but it would be a lie. I truly dislike having to speak with you today or any other day on this topic, but there is no choice. The only thing I am sure of is that no one in this auditorium will leave here happier than when he

or she came in, myself included. We need to talk about money."

"First of all, I must say that we all know that all of us are underpaid. Those who have chosen to devote their careers to the students at Middlestate University have done so at a financial cost. What we do here for our students is extremely important. We give first generation kids the chance to break out and see the greater world. Those of us who have chosen to spend our career here at Middlestate have sacrificed part of our financial future to help these young people find their own futures. It is my greatest professional and personal pride to say that we are colleagues, and that we have all chosen this course in our careers. I am honored to work with you."

"We are a family, and I am forced to say that like many families we have fallen on hard times. We no longer have the money to do things the way we have done in the past. The winds of change have caught us, and we are being swept to a place we have never been before. Call it a tornado or a hurricane or a typhoon; we are not in Kansas any longer, and we have to change the way we live if we are going to survive. You have all seen how the changes in the economy have changed your personal lives; now those same changes are going to affect our professional lives. That is simply the way things are."

"I am here to discuss changes that will be made to the conditions of employment at Middlestate University. Yes, that means tenure and raises and all those things that deal with the amount of money you will receive for working here. But before I go into those details, I want to make it clear that it is not only the faculty who will have to make changes. You can see before you on the stage the senior administrative staff for the entire university. As of today, we have all agreed to freeze our salaries for five years. No raises. Period. After that time, if funds are available, our raises will be limited to cost-of-living increases. Different jobs will have different base salaries, but those salaries are fixed. It will be possible for someone to receive a salary increase when changing jobs, but once in a job we have agreed to receive only cost-of-living increases."

"There will be no new administrative positions created for at least five years. Any excess administrative work will be delegated to existing administration personnel and senior, tenured, full professors in the faculty. Faculty members will be able to count these activities as service for the purposes of annual review. Senior faculty who have chosen to make their careers at Middlestate are valuable resources of institutional knowledge, so it is appropriate that they become more actively involved in administrative duties. None of us can have the luxury of a cloistered existence. We are trying to survive as an institution, and all of our talents must be dedicated to that goal."

"The service personnel present a different problem. Due to the nature of market forces, some of our service personnel are actually working at wages below the poverty level. As a public institution, that is unacceptable. There is

a moral responsibility we all have to our other family members, and we cannot beggar our brothers and sisters for our own benefit. All service personnel who have wages above the poverty level have agreed to have wages frozen for three years; cost-of-living increases will begin in the fourth year. Those individuals who have wages below the poverty level will receive annual increases at the cost of living plus 5% until their wages are above the poverty level. At that time they will fall into the same salary adjustment pattern as those already above the poverty level. Let me be clear on this. Without these people who clean up after us and make the paper move, we would not be able to function as a university. We all owe each other the opportunity to earn a basic living. On this matter there will be no further discussion.”

“And now to the faculty, you who are sitting before me. We in the administration have been studying this problem for a long time. It has been kept at the administrative level to keep unfounded rumors from creating confusion, but now it is time to open the discussion in a fair and frank method. We have been looking at all the data from our past and projections concerning our future both as a university and a part of the state budgetary system. Our conclusion is that because of the nature of the economy, we can expect no increase in state funding for the foreseeable future. We are also limited by what we can expect from our students in the way of tuition and fees. We have done research concerning just how much we can raise prices before students will choose to go elsewhere. We have found a projected point of maximum revenue, and it is our intention to operate at that point. Yet despite these measures that the administration and service staff have already agreed to, there are still budgetary shortfalls.”

“There is another critical factor in any future plans, and that is the future itself. The very nature of education at all levels is changing rapidly. Technology has changed how we teach our classes, and these changes will only become greater in the future. We now see on-line, for-profit schools drawing away potential students due to the ‘convenience’ of their degree programs. This trend will continue, and there is no way to go back to the good old days. We must adapt to those changes, or we will fail as an institution.”

“The most costly budget item is faculty salaries. Rather than suggest wholesale cuts in faculty or faculty furloughs, we have examined the structure of the faculty and faculty compensation procedures at schools that are financially successful. It is the consensus of the administration that if Middlestate University is going to continue to exist, we must change to meet this brave new world. Just as major companies like General Motors have had to revise their practices, so must we, and we do not have the ability to declare bankruptcy in order to reorganize. We must make the hard decisions ourselves.”

“The first step in the process will be to cap the number of tenured faculty members to 50% of the teaching faculty. We currently have 63% of the faculty tenured. This means that for the time being no new tenure positions will be

offered. Once retirements and transfers have reduced the number of tenured positions, we will again begin the tenuring process. Those of you who are untenured and expecting to get tenure soon will simply have to wait. Once we begin to grant tenure again, your length of service will be a factor in the tenure decision. Our overall target is 50% tenured faculty, 20% untenured faculty, 20% part-time instructors, and 10% graduate teaching assistants.”

“Untenured faculty will be given three-year, renewable contracts. Renewal will be subject to satisfactory performance. Failure to perform at a satisfactory level in any one year will result in a one-year terminal contract with a reduction in pay of 10% from the previous year. This institution cannot afford to pay for services not delivered.”

“The performance requirement will also apply to tenured faculty. Should a tenured faculty member fail to demonstrate satisfactory performance in any two of five consecutive years, tenure will be forfeited. Such an individual would be given a three-year contract and serve under the same conditions as untenured faculty members.”

“The key to fairness is to have an unbiased annual appraisal system that aligns accomplishments with the needs of the institution. To that end, a new annual faculty evaluation will be introduced. Faculty members will be judged on their performance in four areas, traditional classroom teaching, teaching via electronic means, research, and service. Everyone will need to show satisfactory performance in all four areas. This means that senior faculty members who have previously chosen not to become involved with internet and other forms of electronic teaching will need to do so, and there will be programs offered to help make this transition. The reason for this is that the senior faculty members are so valuable that we feel the university’s on-line program will benefit from their expertise. Our future success depends in no small part in our ability to attract students to our on-line programs, and we need the strongest teaching faculty possible to be successful.”

“In order to assure that all faculty members are judged by the same standards, the review of the annual reports will be taken over by the university administration. Departments, divisions, and colleges will only be responsible to see that the appropriate reports are submitted in a timely manner. This will reduce the burden on individual faculty members and make sure that no personal biases can skew the appraisal process.”

“All salaries will be capped for four years. After that time, those faculty members who demonstrate satisfactory performance will receive annual cost of living increases. Faculty members who exhibit exemplary performance in all four areas of appraisal will receive the cost of living increase plus 3%. Individuals who do not demonstrate satisfactory performance will receive no salary increase the following year.”

“The current average class size is 25 students per class. If the faculty chooses to increase the average class load to 30 students per class, it will be possible to reduce the total

faculty by 10% and require that faculty salaries only be frozen for three years. It will still be necessary to achieve the target faculty distribution, and the administration will work with those affected by the cuts to further their careers at other institutions or in the private sector. This will be a hard decision for the faculty to make, and the administration will do everything possible to support the faculty's decision."

"Another aspect of the entire salary package is the benefits program. Currently the benefits provided amount to an average of 22% of annual monetary wages. For those who already have medical coverage from another source or who are not concerned with retirement benefits, we are offering the following option. Should you choose to 'opt out' of the benefits package, your base salary will be increased by 11%. New hires will also be offered two contracts, one with and one without benefits, so that they will also have this option. This cannot be done as a shopping list of benefits; you are either in or out of the entire package. The choice is yours."

"We also need to make a concerted effort to increase the funding we receive from outside contracts and grants. Due to the individualized nature of the various activities, it is not possible to make specific commitments, but the administration will be very generous to those who can bring in this type of funding. We will cut our overhead percentage to half of its current level so that the faculty members can receive these additional funds."

"Some of the proposed actions are interrelated. There is a second approach to dealing with the problem of the underpaid service personnel. It is possible to immediately raise the wages of all below-poverty-level personnel to the current wage level as specified by the federal government. To do so would require that all faculty members, regardless of position, accept a salary freeze for five years. Should the faculty choose to adopt this policy, there will be no objection from the administration. A third possible course of action would be to reduce the custodial staff by 30%. This would require that administrators and faculty become responsible for the cleanliness of their own workspaces and perform basic duties like trash removal. By reducing the custodial staff, we will immediately be able to raise all wages to the poverty level, and it would require that faculty salaries only be frozen for three years."

"I am not Harry Potter; there is no magic. There are only hard decisions that need to be made in the very near future if we as an institution are going to survive. The administration has worked diligently to define the parameters of the situation, and we have identified possible courses of action. But these decisions do not rest with the administration. The faculty is the university, and any changes made will need to have the full backing of the faculty."

"I know that these changes may sound draconian, but I assure you that this is the fairest way we have been able to create a program that will benefit both high quality educators and the institution. These are not changes of

convenience, they are changes mandated by the changing environment in higher education. The administration has and will continue to operate in a fair and evenhanded manner in all respects to the faculty and the new appraisal system. I know that there are questions concerning these changes, and we would like to hear your comments concerning the future of Middlestate University."

The auditorium is silent. The lights are raised, and microphones are being positioned. It is now your opportunity to speak.