

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

## THE CRIME FIGHTING TASK FORCE: AN EXERCISE IN ORGANIZATIONAL POLITICS

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### ABSTRACT

Few exercises have been developed that focus on political behavior in organizations. This paper describes an exercise that teaches participants about political tactics and their underlying hidden agendas. In the exercise, students are divided into two groups: members of a Crime Fighting Task Force and observers. The committee members discuss how to combat crime while the observers watch for political tactics and then meet to pool their observations. Ultimately the exercise is debriefed in terms of political tactics, hidden agendas, group decision making and the relationship between the three of these.

### INTRODUCTION

This paper presents an exercise designed for use in an Organizational Behavior course. The exercise takes approximately 75 minutes to complete and focuses on political tactics, hidden agendas, their interrelationships, and their combined effect on group decision making. Its objectives are:

- (1) to teach students about the nature of hidden agendas--their cause, purpose, and effects on group decision making
- (2) to familiarize students with various political tactics used by individuals while making group decisions and show their effect on the group decision making process
- (3) to give students practice in identifying political tactics and hidden agendas and to improve their observation skills
- (4) to show participants the interrelationships among hidden agendas, group decision making, and political tactics.

### BACKGROUND

The topic of organizational politics is receiving an ever-increasing amount of attention in Organizational Behavior textbooks and classes. It is often discussed in conjunction with the topics of conflict or power and influence. While textbooks define the concept somewhat differently, Kreitner and Kinicki (1992) define it in their OB textbook in the same way as Allen, Madison, Porter, Renwick, and Mayes (1979), "Organizational politics involves intentional acts of influence to enhance or protect the self-interests of individuals or groups (p. 368). Most books point out that the pursuit of one's self interest can serve organizational needs or work to the detriment of them. These "acts of influence" involve the use of political tactics, such as those shown in Appendix C.

To date, at least three exercises or questionnaires have been developed that focus on some aspect of organizational politics. Byrnes (1986) has developed a 10 item

questionnaire designed to measure one's own political "appreciation and tendencies." The questions are answered either true or false and they are self-scored. Pfeiffer and Jones (1974) present an exercise designed to teach participants about hidden agendas. In this exercise, members of a Community Action Agency Advisory Board conduct a meeting to revise its procedure for electing representatives to the Board. Unbeknown to the observers, each committee member is assigned a hidden agenda. Ultimately, the exercise is debriefed in terms of the effects hidden agendas have on group problem solving and the participation of individual members. McAfee and Herring (1990) have developed an exercise that focuses on the effects of hidden agendas on group decision making. In this exercise a committee meets to discuss how to solve drug abuse problems. Observers are misled into believing that the exercise focuses on rational group decision-making and group roles. They complete questionnaires based on this assumption. Later, observers are told about each committee member's hidden agenda and the exercise is debriefed.

The exercise presented here fills a gap in prior work by focusing on the relationships between hidden agenda, political tactics, and group decision making.

### CONDUCTING THE EXERCISE

Prior to the start of the exercise, six students are asked to volunteer to serve as members of the Crime Fighting Task Force. The remaining class members are asked to divide themselves into groups of four or five and serve as observers. Members of the Task Force are given copies of the exercise (Appendix A) along with an individually assigned role sheet (Appendix B). They are told to read all material but not to show role sheets to others. The observers are also asked to read the exercise. In addition, they are asked to read a description of political tactics (Appendix C).

The exercise begins by having the chair of the Crime Fighting Task Force announce that the committee has 25 minutes to decide how it should spend a \$425,000 one year grant to help solve the city of Jackson's crime problem. The committee could spend its money on more police officers, treatment/counseling centers for drug abusers, crime prevention training for homeowners and business owners, a first offenders' program, and/or consultants. The committee members then precede to discuss the pros and cons of each alternative. In so doing, each member (except the chair) is asked to use an assigned political tactic in order to influence the decision and thereby accomplish his or her own hidden agenda. However, while the observers know that they are to look for political tactics, they did not know which one each committee member will use or the underlying hidden agenda. After committee members finish their deliberations, and elect a representative to present their decision to City Council, observers meet in-groups of four or five to try to identify each committee member's political tactic(s). Each group of observers reports its conclusions to the class and the instructor records them on the blackboard. At this point, each committee member announces and explains

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

the political tactic he or she was assigned; the tactic used is recorded next to the observers' list. The chair of the committee was purposefully not assigned a political tactic and reports this to the class. He or she was told to act in a rational, responsible manner and promote the organization's interests. Debriefing of the exercise begins by comparing the lists and checking for similarities. It is of particular interest to see which political tactic(s) observers believe the chair of the committee used, given the fact that the chair had no assigned tactic or hidden agenda. This is followed by a brief lecture on the different forms political tactics can take (Appendix C) and their effect of group decision-making and group member relations. At this point, the instructor asks the class: Why do you think each committee member used a political tactic and why do employees in industry use them? This question is followed by a discussion of hidden agendas and their relationship to political tactics. Each member of the Crime Fighting Task Force then announces his or her hidden agenda to the surprise of the observers. The observers can then understand why each committee member behaved the way he or she did during the meeting.

### CONCLUSION

The topic of organizational politics is becoming increasingly more important in Organizational Behavior courses. However, lecturing to students about its nature and importance is often not effective because many have not experienced it firsthand. This exercise is designed to vividly demonstrate the effects and nature of political tactics and hidden agendas. In actual work setting, hidden agendas remain just that--hidden. People aren't aware of them until a subsequent date, if ever. The same is true of political tactics. This exercise follows the same format. Students are led to believe that the purpose of the exercise is to study political tactics and its effect on group decision making. They observe the Crime Fighting Task Force in action believing that each group member is exhibiting one political tactic. Ultimately they are surprised and amused to learn that not only did each member (except the chair) use a political tactic, they did so because of a hidden agenda. They learn about hidden agendas, political tactics, their interrelationships and their effects on group decision making.

### APPENDIX A

#### City Description

Jackson has a population of 50,000 and is located in the midwestern United States. Surrounded by farms and small villages it is the county seat as well as the headquarters for a large chemical firm, an auto parts plant, a kitchen cabinet manufacturing firm, and a host of smaller companies. It has two high schools, 4 junior high schools, and 12 elementary schools. Approximately 650 students graduate annually from the two high schools combined. The city's crime problem has worsened in recent years. It is particularly bad in two sections of town, one on each side of the chemical firm. Several gangs have been vying for control of the drug trade. Two gang members have been seriously wounded from gunshots within the last month. The corner of Elm and Maple is known as the place to go if one wants to obtain drugs, buy guns, or purchase stolen goods.

The police have made over 30 arrests in the area within the past year but the problem continues. In addition, burglaries have increased by about 10% annually in the past few years and several hundred-car thefts now occur each year. Another serious problem is shoplifting. High school drop-outs with no regular means of income have been stealing regularly from area merchants.

At the same time, the visibility of drug selling (especially "crack" cocaine) has increased markedly. It is believed that there is a significant link between the increase in drug trafficking, and the level of crime involving theft, burglary, and robbery, etc. To combat these problems, the city set up three drug treatment/counseling centers two years ago. These were managed by a Director (Ellen Peters) and two Assistant Directors, namely Terry Welborn (a member of your committee) and Mike Fretter. Unfortunately, these centers do not appear to have improved the crime problem. An outside consultant hired by the city found that the success rate for rehabilitating substance abusers was five percent.

#### Situation

A group of six citizens has been appointed by the City Manager to serve on the Crime Fighting Task Force. This committee has received a \$425,000 one-year grant to help solve the city's crime problems. The grant stipulates that "grant funds must be spent in such a manner that crime will be reduced in the least amount of time." The city hopes to be able to fund the program in future years but that will depend upon the results of upcoming budget meetings. The purpose of the committee's meeting today is to determine how the \$425,000 should be spent and to elect someone to present the committee's decision to the City Council. The city manager has prepared cost estimates covering five potential programs. They are:

Program A: Establishment of more Drug Treatment/Counseling Centers and the improvement of present ones. These centers will treat drug addicts and alcoholics.

Estimated Costs:

\$180,000-\$220,000 per center depending upon the number of psychologists, social workers, substance abuse counselors, etc. hired.

Pilot program: \$60,000 to \$80,000.

Program B: Crime Prevention Training for home/business owners (individuals would be trained and sent out to homes and businesses to teach crime prevention techniques)

Estimated Costs:

Instructors: \$38,000 per instructor (including overhead)  
Pamphlets: \$1.00 each  
Display Booths: \$2,500 each  
Pilot Project: \$55,000-\$75,000

Program C: Police Officers (additional police that would arrest criminals of all types)

Estimated Costs:

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

Police officers: \$39,000 per officer  
(including overhead)

Pilot project: \$75,000-\$95,000

Program D: First Offenders' Program (counseling for first time criminals. The purpose of this program is to reduce the number of repeat offenders)

Estimated Costs:

Counselors: \$42,000 per counselor  
(including overhead)

Program E: Consultants (The purpose of hiring consultants would be to get expert advise as to how crime can best be stopped and how the money should be spent)

Estimated cost: \$30,000 to \$55,000 depending upon tasks to be performed. This will take 2 months.

### Committee Members

The City Manager has appointed the following individuals to serve on the committee:

1. Lynn Hoagland - Lynn retired 3 months ago after serving as a Colonel in the U. S. army for 30 years. He/she will be running for city council in 14 months. Lynn is 55 years old and graduated from college, majoring in military history. Lynn worked with drug offenders for over 15 years in the army.
2. Terry Welborn - Terry is the 49-year-old principal of one of the two area high schools. He/she has a Master's degree in education and taught science for over 20 years prior to being promoted to Assistant Principal and then Principal two years ago. Terry has worked closely with high school delinquents over the past eight years.
3. Bobby Washington - Bobby is the president and owner of Washington Farms, the biggest agri-business firm in the county. He/she raises approximately 800 hogs and has over 2100 acres in cropland. Bobby is active politically but has never run for political office. He/she is well known in the community as both a wheeler-dealer and problem solver.
4. BJ Mitchell - BJ is the 35-year-old manager of the clothing department in the largest department store in town. He/she has been a member of a numerous civic and church committees for the past 5 years. BJ has counseled run away teenagers at Safe House. He/she attended one of the local high schools and received a two-year community college degree.
5. Pat Ruebens - Pat is the 46-year-old owner of an office supply store. He/she graduated from college five years ago and has served on numerous civic organizations such as the American Red Cross and the United Fund. Pat also coaches little league sports and has assisted one of the high school's basketball teams.

6. Billie Wiggins (Chair) - Billy is Director of Patient Services at the local hospital. He/she has had a distinguished career and has served as Chair of numerous hospital and civic committees. Billy has been asked to chair this committee (Crime Fighting Task Force) by the City Manager but will not be a voting member. Billie will work with city officials to see to it that the committee's recommendations, as modified by the City Council, are implemented.

### Instructions to Committee Members

You are to begin by reading this exercise along with the "Committee Member Description" assigned to you. This latter information is to be read by you and you alone. Keep it out of others' sight.

After every member of the Crime Fighting Task Force has finished reading, the task force will assemble in a designated section of the classroom. The meeting will then begin, led by Billie Wiggins (Chair). The committee's task is to determine how to spend the \$425,000 budgeted to it and to elect someone to present the committee's recommendations to the City Council. Remember that you can spend all of the funds on one of the five projects or you can divide it among them, i.e., spend some on Project A, B, C, D, and E.

### Instructions to Observers

You are to begin by reading this exercise. Then, you are to read Appendix C and learn the characteristics of each of the political tactics described. During the meeting of the Crime Fighting Task Force, you are to determine which political tactic(s) is (are) exhibited by each committee member. After the committee has finished with its deliberations, you are to meet with the other members of your group to draw up a consensus list that shows the same thing. The instructor will ask one member of your group to present your list, and the reasoning behind it, to the class.

## APPENDIX B

### Committee Member Description

Billie Wiggins (Chair) - You are the committee chair and it is your job to assist the committee in arriving at the best possible decision - the one that will be most effective in resolving the city's crime problem. You are to behave rationally and responsibly and always remember to do what is best for the city. You are to begin the meeting by introducing each member and explaining the purpose of the meeting. Be sure to describe each of the five alternative uses of the \$425,000 grant. You are to conduct an orderly meeting and help the committee arrive at a consensus. You are to assist the committee in defining the problem, developing alternatives, weighing the pros and cons of each alternative and making the most rational decision. Keep in mind that you are not a dictator but rather a facilitator, and you have no voting rights. Do not tell anyone the contents of your role until specifically asked to do so by the instructor!

### Committee Member Description

BJ Mitchell - You are the manager of the clothing department in the city's largest store. In addition you have counseled run-away teenagers for five years. You would like the committee to spend most, if not all, of its money on first offenders' program

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

(Program D). Don't tell the others, but, if all \$425,000 were spent, at least eight counselors/social workers would need to be hired and one of your cousins, who recently completed college but has little hope of finding a job, would undoubtedly be hired by the city. It is important to you that your cousin get a job. You want to argue that a first offender's program is better than any of the other alternatives because they educate people who are most likely to commit further criminal acts --past criminals. In presenting your arguments, you are to use the political tactic of "Using outside Experts." (see Appendix C) Thus, you will want to cite studies and experts that agree with you. For example, tell the committee that Dr. Susan Barnes, a world-wide authority and a Professor of Criminal Justice at UCLA has stated that 86% of the crimes committed in the US are committed by repeat offenders. Based on a review of many studies, she has concluded that first offender programs are more effective than any other method for crime reduction. Also a report published by the U. S. Government Attorney General's office entitled, "A Statistical Analysis of Crime in America," concludes that first offender programs have the best cost/benefit ratio of any crime fighting technique. Bernard Crowley, who is perhaps the leading authority on crime in Los Angeles, reported on the TV program, NIGHT LINE, that the Los Angeles riots probably would not have happened had the city spent its money on a first offender's program. (Note: none of this expert information is true, but don't tell the committee this.) Do not tell anyone the contents of your role until specifically asked to do so by the instructor!

### Committee Member Description

Terry Welborn - You are one of two assistant directors of the City's Drug Treatment/ Counseling Centers program. Don't tell others, but, in two years your boss, the present Director, will be retiring and you would like her position. To get it, you will need to beat out the other assistant director. In order to do this, you would like the committee to implement Program A - Establishment of Drug Treatment/Counseling Centers - and spend most of its money on them. You will be happy to supervise the new centers since by doing so your empire will increase, as will your chances of being promoted. During the exercise, you are to use the political tactic of "blaming and attacking" (see Appendix C). As the exercise states, the city's present treatment/ counseling centers appear to be a failure. Even though it may be largely your fault, blame and attack your boss (Ellen Peters), the present Director. Argue that she is incompetent and has no training and that is why the centers are failures. State that if this grant money is allocated to more Drug Treatment/ Counseling Centers, you know how to spend it effectively and will be sure that the present Director stays away from the grant money. If any of the other committee members criticize the present Drug Treatment/ Counseling Centers, defend them by blaming Ellen Peters. Do not tell anyone the contents of your role until specifically asked to do so by the instructor!

### Committee Member Description

Lynn Hoagland - You are a retired army officer and are running for city council in the elections being held in 14 months. You are trying desperately to win in what you know will be a tough race. You feel your chance of winning will be the greatest if the committee decides to spend all or almost all of the funds on Program C (hiring additional police to arrest criminals). You realize that the citizens

really want the crime problem eliminated at the corner of Elm and Maple and they want the hoodlums put behind bars. By spending money on more police and having them make arrests you can claim that "your committee" has solved the city's crime problem. That certainly will help you get elected. You must push hard for Program C. During the discussion you are to use the "Manipulating Rules" political tactic (see Appendix C.) So, in presenting your view, keep reminding the committee members that the grant states, that "grant funds must be spent in such a manner that crime will be reduced in the least amount of time." Argue that hiring more police will reduce crime in the least amount of time since there will be fewer criminals around, at least in the short run. Remind the committee that the city's present treatment/ counseling centers have proven to be failures so it is pointless to spend more money on them. Do not tell anyone the contents of your role until specifically asked to do so by the instructor!

### Committee Member Description

Bobby Washington - You are a wealthy farmer and own 2100 acres and 800 hogs. You really wanted to serve on this committee and used your political connections to get appointed. Don't tell the others, but you have a rather straightforward reason for wanting to serve-you have over 100 acres planted in marijuana and don't want to get caught. Your goal in serving on this committee is to get the chair of the committee, Billie Wiggins, to like you. Therefore, you are going to use the political tactic of "Praising others-ingratiation" (See Appendix C). You will want to praise the chair frequently on how he or she is conducting the meeting or anything else he or she does. You know that the chair will have considerable power in determining how the grant money is spent once the meeting is over. If you can get the chair to like you, you will be able to exert considerable influence over him or her in the future, thereby insuring that your marijuana plants will be safe. During the committee discussion be sure that no money is spent on Program C or A - hiring more police officers or setting up more drug treatment/counseling centers -for obvious reasons. Remind the committee that the city's present drug treatment/counseling centers have proven to be failures so it is pointless to spend more money on them. You would like to hire consultants, conduct numerous pilot studies - or anything that Billie Wiggins seems to favor (but not Program C). Hiring consultants is particularly desirable since they will slow the process down and allow you more time to exert your influence with Billie Wiggins. Do not tell anyone the contents of your role until specifically asked to do so by the instructor!

### Committee Member Description

Pat Ruebens - You are the owner of one of three office supply stores in Jackson. Your goal during this meeting is to get the committee to elect you to present its final recommendations to the City Council. In order to get elected, you want to use the political tactic of Building a Favorable Image (Appendix C). Therefore, be sure to sit slightly forward in your chair and appear very interested in the committee's discussion. At various times during the discussion, be sure to mention that you know the mayor of the city, Jill Weber, very well. In addition, mention that you know the city treasurer (Drew Wallace), the city police chief (Mark Lands), and that you, being a storeowner, are an expert on the shoplifting problem. Try to impress the other committee members with your expertise and with your influence (you drive a Corvette, are a member of the exclusive Jackson Country Club, live in a mansion,

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

have a 60 foot yacht, and take exotic trips to New Zealand, etc.. Drop names whenever it is appropriate. Also mention how successful your business is and how successful you were at raising money for the Red Cross. Work any and all of these points into the committee's discussion whenever it is appropriate, but don't be obnoxious about it. Keep in mind that your goal is to get elected. You really don't care how the grant money is spent so agree, at least in part, with the recommendations of everyone else on the committee. You don't want to antagonize anyone or they won't vote for you. Don't tell others, but the reason you want to get elected is to get better acquainted with the members of City Council and the Mayor. Each year these people determine the vendor for the city's office supplies. In the past, they have awarded the contract to a competitor. If you can impress these people, it will help you to get the city's contract. Your firm could make a bundle of money on the contract and so will you. Do not tell anyone the contents of your role until specifically asked to do so by the instructor!

strategy interpret them in such a way as to advance their own personal interests. A manager might refuse an adversary's request on the grounds that it is against company policy, but granting an identical request from an ally on the grounds that it is a "special circumstance" or that the rule does not apply in this particular case.

Praising others- Ingratiation some people try to increase their power by praising others. This is good old fashion "apple polishing." If one can get on the good side of another person, this can lead to the achievement of one's personal goals.

Controlling the Meeting's Agenda One can increase one's power by controlling a meeting's agenda. The items that get placed on the agenda can be manipulated as can the agenda's order. The items at the beginning of an agenda are typically discussed more thoroughly than those at the end.

### APPENDIX C

#### SOME COMMONLY USED POLITICAL TACTICS

**Building a Favorable Image** this strategy involves engaging in activities designed to create and maintain a good image. It involves dressing appropriately, drawing attention to one's successes, name dropping, being enthusiastic about the organization, adhering to group norms, and having an air of confidence about one's abilities.

**Presenting Selective Information** People can use information selectively to further their own goals. This includes withholding unfavorable information from others, presenting information that supports one's view, interpreting information in a way that is favorable to oneself, and overwhelming people with technical information they don't understand.

**Blaming and Attacking** People can further their own interests by blaming someone else for their own failures. Individuals who are skillful at this technique make sure that they will not be blamed when something goes wrong and that they will get credit when something goes right.

**Using Outside Experts** outside experts can usually be found to support almost any position one wants to take. Therefore, people can influence decision outcomes by quoting the right outside expert or providing a forum for that individual to express an opinion. Jury trials are notorious for the use of experts as a way to influence the jury.

**Forming Coalitions or Alliances** When one or more individuals realize that they do not have sufficient power to control the decision making process, they can increase their power by joining together with others. Usually coalitions are formed outside of formal meetings. People reach agreements by huddling together in small groups. Often the people in a coalition can get their way because they are strong enough as a group to impose their will on others.

**Using Compromise** This strategy involves giving in on an unimportant issue in order to gain an ally who will be on your side when an issue of importance to you arises at a later date.

**Manipulating Rules** Most rules can be interpreted in a number of different ways. People who use this