

Developments in Business Simulation & Experiential Exercises, Volume 16, 1989

“COMMITMENTS” - THE DOCUDRAMA AS EDUCATIONAL VIDEO

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ABSTRACT

The fact that the time and resources of corporate education departments are often viewed with envy by educators involved in other, more traditional education systems. Some contend that it is the availability of unlimited resources that allows corporate educators to explore alternative educational delivery models, like the docudrama, which is the subject of this manuscript. Realistically, the resources available to corporate education departments are not unlimited nor are resources the sole reason that corporate education is recognized by many as an emerging legitimate partner of traditional education in the pursuit of learning.

The value of the docudrama to the ABSEL conferees, then, is not that of an videotape to duplicate, but rather a concept to stimulate their imaginations and test their capacity to transfer the approach used in its formulation to their own individual situations.

OVERVIEW

The docudrama, “Commitments,” is a demonstration of the will and capacity of a group of educators to reconstruct reality in order to be more reflective and responsive to the learning requirements of their students. Corporate education departments that are involved in the transformation of the organizations they serve have gone far beyond training. They are also engaged in pedagogical research, program and teacher evaluation, and the development of alternative learning models. Ernest L. Boyer, in the foreword to *Corporate Classrooms* by Nell Eurich, speculates on how ironic it would be if “...significant new insights about how we learn would come, not from the academy, but from industry and business.” Eurich (1985).

Conferees, in this same spirit, can make their own effective videos, using any model which includes the development of learning objectives, preparation of storylines, format type and summative evaluation, and on-site filming. These efforts may not result in a docudrama as professionally produced as “Commitments,” but can still accomplish the same purposes - stimulating self-assessment raising the awareness of the participants, and promoting discussion of human resource issues that are key determinants in business success. It is also possible to use short commercially produced vignettes that illustrate a desirable learning object and by combining it with a learning program, accomplish the same purpose. It should be noted, however, that it is imperative to check the copyright laws that may impact the use of taped segments, however short, from commercial television programs.

INTRODUCTION

“Commitments” is a docudrama that portrays the obstacles and opportunities that are typically found in most workplaces in Corporate America today. The docudrama was developed by the Corporate Education Department responsible for providing core education for the 40,000 employees of a major insurance and financial services company. The docudrama is a series of six 30 minute tapes that portrays the work and personal life of a group of characters typically found in the workplace. The setting for the docudrama is an actual field office of the insurance company. A field office was selected as the appropriate site because in the “real world”, ever-present production pressures magnify obstacles and minimize opportunities. These conditions allow for concentrated coverage on a complex set of issues that are happening all at once.

“Commitments” is used to stimulate discussions in education programs on Company orientation, supervision, management principles, diversity, and leadership. The series focuses on six major human resource issues:

1. Enhancing communication and other interpersonal skills
2. Generating and coping with change
3. Managing a diverse workforce
4. Developing leadership
5. Balancing people and productivity
6. Maximizing human resource potential

Although the docudramas, in themselves, are interesting and entertaining, their proper use is in conjunction with a learning program. The learning program is a unique and complete statement of goals and objectives, facilitation and evaluation guides, etc. that is developed in conjunction with the learning objectives for each course in which the docudramas are included.

RESEARCH DESIGN

The research design was focused on formative rather than summative evaluation. Formative evaluation was chosen to be coupled with the development stage of the project because it is the proper methodology to use during the production and planning stage when the improvement of the product is paramount. Summative evaluation, which is directed to the evaluation of the finished product, was used to determine if the simulation and the learning program were accomplishing the predetermined goals of the docudrama. The formative evaluation used feedback from a film questionnaire, test presentations, focus groups, opinion or impression surveys, continuous monitoring and other techniques that are less formal than those associated with summative evaluation.

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DEVELOPMENT PROCESS

The docudrama, "Commitments," is the result of a major investment of time and resources. The Docudrama Development Team consisted of the Corporate Education Department management, an adult learning theory consultant, a program evaluation consultant, an organization theory consultant, writers, department and Company program providers and end-users. The team developed a model influenced by the Children's Television Workshop approach, most notably associated with the creation of Sesame Street, by first agreeing on learning objectives and then building the storylines. These written storylines were then presented to a producer and the series of tapes were filmed. A previously established evaluative process, which included review by various groups, especially program providers and end-users, was applied.

The evaluations focused on remaining true to the learning objectives and a realistic portrayal of the conditions and situations in a field office. The ideal state was to be in an area of portrayal that lay somewhere between specificity and generality. The situations had to be realistic enough for employees to be able to relate to what they were seeing but not so specific that they needed to be a field office worker to appreciate the dynamics of the storyline.

The Videotapes

This development led to the production of six tapes portraying issues that were determined to be major human resource concerns of the Company. A brief description of each of the series follows:

Videotape *1: "A Promise to Keep"

Major issue: Balancing People and Productivity - the perennial business dilemma of coping with the dual objectives of increasing productivity and developing employees.

Videotape *2: "Priorities"

Major issue: interpersonal Communications - the responsibility for good communication and interpersonal skills rests with all employees.

Videotape *3: "Presumptions"

Major Issues: Maximizing Human Resource Potential / Managing a Diverse Workforce.

Issue: Maximizing Human Resource Potential - the contemporary economic realities make it critical to get the most out of the persons that compose our organizations.

issue: Managing a Diverse Workforce - the recognition that the workforce has become increasing diverse in race, sex, age, etc.

Videotape *4: "Eye of the Storm"

Major Issues: Maximizing Human Resource Potential /

Multiple Reward Systems.

Issue: Maximizing Human Resource Potential
- encouraging and demonstrating increased responsibility and accountability

issue: Multiple Reward System -utilization of a reward system that incorporates collaboration and other incentives

Videotape *5: "Caught in the Middle"

Major issue: Generating and Coping with Change - change is a fact of life today and the need to cope with change is a concern for the manager and the employee.

Videotape *6: "Changes"

Major issues: Leadership and the Role of Authority

issue: Leadership - what are the attributes of leaders?

issue: Role of Authority - managers relying on involvement instead of position to lead employees.

The Educational Program

The Docudrama Development Team always thought of the videotapes as stimuli for learning but not as a replacement for an education program. Thus, after the first videotapes were produced, evaluated and approved, the team turned to the adult learning consultant, program providers and end-users to produce, evaluate and approve the most appropriate education program.

Their goal was to produce a structure that would provide a consistent approach in the design of a variety of programs, each consisting of different audiences and learning objectives. The following list of assumptions was produced by the adult learning consultant:

1. The docudrama is a statement of organizational values.
2. The films alone are only a catalyst for learning - they must be accompanied by an education program in order to effect learning.
3. The education program will be guided by a range of theories about adult development and adult learning.
4. The docudrama is far more than an HRD training program; it is an organizational change effort and must be guided by organizational change theory.
5. In order for lasting individual and organizational change to occur, the educational program must make ranges to the work site to facilitate transfer of training.
6. In order for lasting change to occur, there must be consistency between the message in the docudrama and other HRD education.
7. In order for lasting change to occur, there must be consistency between the docudrama message and human resource development practices.

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8. Formative research will be as critical to the design of the educational program as it has been to the television production.
 9. Innovation will be as critical to the design of the educational program as it has been to the television production.
 10. There needs to be cumulative sequencing within the educational program for maximum impact. A special curricular design will promote returning to themes to greater depth as we move from more basic (e.g. communication) to more complicated (e.g. leadership) issue areas which require integration.
 11. The entire organization is addressed in three levels:
 - a) Policy Makers - Content to be focused on policy changes consistent with desired change; method includes high level discussion of docudrama goals, brief introduction of film, action points vs. policy changes.
 - b) Heads of Major Units - View films, articulate belief system, relate to local objectives and incentives from issues I list (choose own focus), action plan to promote specific commitment to specific change.
 - c) Target Group (several ongoing levels) - View films, articulate belief systems, respond to objectives and incentives from above and create action plan: attitudinal and skill development training (vary with issues selected) to maintain change - with emphasis on role plays arising directly out of the dramas.
5. A synopsis of each videotape, containing the issues and relevant questions designed to address the learning objectives of the tapes,
 6. A checklist for each tape, listing the behaviors that the actors were directed to exhibit to portray the learning objectives of the lesson.

The Commitments' tapes have found widespread use in both the Corporate Education Department and the operating divisions in the Company. Facilitators, only after receiving training on the use of the tapes and learning program, have included the tapes into their education and training programs. In a variety of ways, in the longer management or supervisor programs the entire series is used, in shorter programs, certain tapes or even parts of certain tapes are used to illustrate a point or stimulate discussion around a particular theme.

Managers and corporate educators from the private and public sector, who have seen the tapes or vignettes from them, are impressed with the universality of the themes and state that, except for the setting, their organizations are encountering and attempting to deal with the same issues contained in the "Commitments" tapes.

The production of six tapes is a major undertaking, both in time and expense. The actors and actresses involved in the project were all professionals, some easily recognized from a television series or commercials. However, the approach that led to the development of the tapes and the eventual use of them is accessible to all. The concept, fortified with some creativity, can result in a new dimension to a company's corporate education teaching methods.

WORKSHOP PRESENTATION

I am prepared to present one of the "Commitments" series (or some part of it) during the conference. I have the permission of the Corporate Education Department, responsible for its development, to share the concept, handouts, selected representative material and more detail of the development methodology that the Corporate Education Department followed. I am also prepared to facilitate a short demonstration lesson to the ABSEL conferees. Since each tape is 30 minutes long, using a complete tape as the basis for a demonstration would result in a one hour presentation. A model workshop would appear as follows:

ACTIVITY / TIME

1. An organization chart of the characters in the docudramas.
 2. A list of hints for facilitators in the discussion method of facilitation.
 3. An audience profile form and instructions for determining the characteristics of the audience for any particular presentation.
 4. A checklist of characteristics of good questions and how to use questions to guide discussions.
1. Introduction of the learning model - 15 minutes
 2. Introduction of the learning objectives - 5 minutes
 3. Showing one complete videotape - 30 minutes
 4. Summary - 5 minutes
 5. Question and Answers - 20 minutes

Total Presentation time is 1 hour

OUTCOMES

The product that resulted from the effort described above was a series of videotapes, determined to be appropriate for stimulating learning and the structure of an education program that could be adapted by facilitators to ensure that their effort resulted in maximum learning. The team also commissioned a series of facilitation aids which were included in the "Commitments" program. They are:

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