

# Experiential Learning Enters the Eighties, Volume 7, 1980

## AGENDA ITEMS--BOARD OF SUPERVISORS' MEETING--TOWN OF JORI

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### ABSTRACT

Undergraduate courses in social awareness are now part of the core requirements of many schools of business. While supporting texts, readings, and exercises are available in the field, most view the subject area from the business side. There is relatively little or no coverage that approaches this branch of learning from the government aspect. To partially fill this emptiness, thus providing some balance to enhance student understanding in this area, a hybrid critical incident and rote playing experiential practice has been designed. The exercise, consisting of 18 situations, is particularly intended for management students in a one-semester course which is built upon student participation as a significant underpinning of the learning process.

### INTRODUCTION

Undergraduate courses in "Business, Government, and Society" (i.e. Social Awareness, Business and Society, etc.) are now commonplace in Schools of Business and/or Management. While a variety of supporting exercises, such as case studies and role playing situations, do appear in a number of texts, there is a void in this area when it comes to ancillary teaching techniques which approach the subject from the government side.

In addition to the obvious benefits of the use of exercises in management learning, an approach that views the field from other than the business perspective provides the opportunity to: gain insight into the managerial issues which develop in the public sector and impact on business and society at large; self analyze the complexity of what are normally believed to be relatively simplistic business related problems in government; probe the nature of strategies and tactics used to affect influence and change in another setting; and, acquire understanding and intuitiveness in the difficulty of attempting to find reasonable solutions to unreasonable problems--questions whose answers necessarily will have serious implications.

This exercise is a hybrid critical incident and role playing mix. However, the situations are at the macro level and there is only one uninstructed group part. The lesson is designed to be used during the latter half of a one-semester three-credit course, in which student group participation forms an integral part of the structuring of the teaching method. The number of meetings devoted to the exercise is a function of the class and group sizes. However, working with student groups of five members, which has been found best, and a fifty-minute class period, each group should have a class session to deal with three situations. Part, or all, of the following period should be used for analysis and critique.

Eighteen situations are provided for this exercise. For class sizes less than thirty, either the number of situations treated per group can be increased (which is preferred) or some

situations simply not used. For class sizes greater than thirty, either the group size can be increased (which is preferred) or the number of situations with which each group deals decreased.

Following a prior explanation to the overall class at an earlier time, the situations are randomly selected at the start of each session, and the exercise started immediately. A meeting arrangement is used: the participating group sitting in front of the class and conducting their business. The group members know each other and are of equal status. But, usually an informal leader emerges and chairs the activities. The group does not know the other members of the class, sitting in their normal places, who are visitors observing the meeting.

### BACKGROUND

Jori is a typical New England town. While some difficult times were experienced by Jori when the woolen mills closed, the coming of new industry, a maturing tourist business, and a determined populace brought about a quick recuperation. In fact, not only was recovery achieved, but the Town is in the midst of a period of rapid industrial expansion and population growth.

With this quick development, especially when coupled with the fast pace of change and the accelerating expectations of people, both of which are generally characteristic of today's culture, the Town has been experiencing a number of bothersome Issues. While these situations are not acute, they are chronic. However, they are not viewed as troublesome, for their presence and nature is seen as an indication that the town of Jori is alive and active.

The governance of the Town is relatively simple, consisting, at the top, of a mayor and a board of supervisors. Both are elected and serve concurrent two- year terms. The mayor functions primarily as an administrator, implementing the policies established by the board of supervisors. The position requires a full-time effort. The board of supervisors serves basically in a managerial capacity, establishing governing principles. Service as a member of the board, while requiring considerable time and energy, is generally not perceived as, or seldom is, an only job. A town court system provides the third element, giving the Town the conventional three-track organizational structure and providing the traditional system of checks and balances.

The board meets on a regular and a need basis. While it deals with many profound and structured strategic issues, it also considers numerous tactical questions. These latter matters are normally unprogrammed in that they are usually treated as new business and generally handled as they arise. While many of these items are followed up at subsequent meetings, they are normally, because of simplicity or urgency, seldom tabled.

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## OPERATING NOTES

This exercise is that portion of the meeting of the Board of Supervisors of the town of Jori in which new business is introduced and handled. The new business is the situations selected at the start of the meeting.

The members of the Board are permitted if they so desire, during any incident, to assume any reasonable educational or occupational background that they want. However, once a choice is made, it cannot be modified in any way for the rest of the session.

The balance of the class students, who are observing the meeting, should make informal notes for use in the follow-up critique and discussion. Audio-visual taping of the session, if feasible, does much to enhance the worth of this exercise as a learning experience.

## THE SITUATIONS<sup>1</sup>

1. Bugs and the Parks
2. The Railroad Spur
3. Garbage Disposal
4. Al and the Horses
5. The Jori Woods School
6. Storm Sewers and Clay Crawlers
7. Self-Service Gas Pumps
8. Cable TV
9. Voting Budgets
10. The Tree Spraying Project
11. Bundling Waste Paper
12. The Jori Town Pool
12. Nonresidents and the Golf Course
14. Fast Food Restaurants
15. Group Use of Town Facilities
16. Mandatory Home Insulation
17. Dog Walks
18. Garage and White Elephant Sales

### 1. Bugs and the Parks

The Recreation Commissioner is having bug problems with the town parks. It all started a few years ago when the United Countries Global Health Association (UCGHA) recommended the discontinuance of the use of CCS as a pesticide. Some very preliminary studies indicated that possibly the substance could be harmful to birds. Although Jori never had any problems with CCS, and it did keep its parks relatively bug free, the Parks Department switched to BBR, the recommended substitute.

The studies were probably correct, as since discontinuing the use of CCS the bird population of Jori significantly increased. However, the bugs in the parks have also increased since the less toxic BBR started to be used. The UCGHA anticipated that this might happen and recommended to those switching from CCS the importing of certain other bugs to control those bugs that might prove to be immune to BBR.

The imported bugs did their work well, but unfortunately seemed to be thriving on BBR in Jori's parks.

While these imported bugs are not harmful in any way, nor

do they pose any health problem or threat, many of the residents of Jori find them extremely objectionable. The only way to get rid of these new bugs is to revert to the use of CCS, which means Jori would be back to where it started, or import a third bug which might possibly eat the second bug and in turn could be destroyed by BBR. However, there are no guarantees that this latter sequence would indeed occur.

As all of this is getting to be expensive, as well as a little ridiculous, the Commissioner is not sure what to do next. The Commissioner certainly doesn't want anything used that will be potentially harmful to birds, but as a bottom line, there are bugs in the parks, admittedly harmless bugs but nevertheless bugs. Further, the increasing number of birds in Jori may well become a problem in the near future.

Also, since all this started a new organization has sprung up in Town, the Jori Society for the Maintenance of Animal Balance (JSMAB). They feel that in the interest of bugs and birds alike, the Jori Parks Department should cease and desist from doing anything. They say that over the long run, about a decade or two, nature, in its own way, will solve the problem.

In view of the growing complexity of this situation, the Recreation Commissioner has asked the Board of Supervisors for a policy reading on this matter.

### 2. The Railroad Spur

The town of Jori is having trouble expanding its mass transit facility, which is a spur of the large national railway system. In particular, the two-tracked branch has only one track in the vicinity of Jori, which is at the end of the line. This seriously restricts the amount of service which can be provided to Jori.

Jori's Hillside Heights Civic Association, and the Main Street Merchants' Organization, with the implicit blessing of the town of Jori, asked the railroad to consider extending the second track to the end of the line. As the distance involved is relatively short, and the potential for increased revenue is high, the railroad agreed.

After several months of negotiating, the Federal Environmental Preservation Department waived the requirement for the submission of detailed impact studies, and construction was ready to begin.

However, the day before work was scheduled to commence, a group called the Concerned Citizens for the Preservation of Jori Hollow, a small natural notch on the outskirts of town which would have to be widened to lay the second track, obtained an injunction in State Court against the start of construction. When the railroad proposed tunneling rather than cutting through the notch, the opposition was dropped and the injunction lifted. After questions about the safety of the tunnel were resolved, following an extensive study by an engineering consulting firm brought in by the civic association and the merchants' organization, it appears that construction is again ready to start.

As this project has already cost both groups considerable time and money, and not a foot of track has been laid thus far, they are wondering if they should not just abandon the whole idea. However, since they have already invested so much, they are reluctant to just give up and walk away. But, they are not sure that if they continue, they will not run into more costly delays, or even a complete stoppage.

<sup>1</sup> Due to space constraints, only the first six situations are included here. Those Interested should contact the author for the remaining situation descriptions.

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They have asked the Board of Supervisors to have the town of Jori take over the project.

### 3. Garbage Disposal

The Sanitation Commissioner is having trouble disposing of the Town's garbage. For a long time it was burned, but recently a group of local environmentalists complained that this was polluting the air, as indeed it was.

The Commissioner stopped the incinerating and directed that henceforth the garbage be buried in the Town's old abandoned sand pits. However, the State Water Commission quickly brought action in court, claiming such a procedure was potentially hazardous to underground well water supplies.

To avoid costly and time-consuming litigation, the Commissioner gave up the burying system and contracted with a neighboring town, Old Stage, to use their newly constructed pollution-free garbage disposal plant. Unfortunately, to move the garbage from Jori to the plant it had to be trucked down the main street of Old Stage. The Old Stage Chamber of Commerce was quick to object to this, and shortly after the contract was cancelled.

As the Commissioner felt that Jori could not afford the cost of constructing a plant similar to the one in Old Stage, a decision was made to dispose of the garbage by having it trucked to the coast, towed out to sea in barges, and dumped in the ocean. But, when the Blue Claw Crab Fishing Association learned of this, they went into Federal Court and obtained a "cease and desist" order, effective until such time as the town of Jori could demonstrate that the dumping was not hazardous to sea life--a vary formidable undertaking indeed.

The Commissioner doesn't know what to do now with the garbage. As an interim measure, a local cannier is being paid a good price to take the garbage and "lose" it. As this is both a costly and potential hazardous fix, the Commissioner has asked the Board of Supervisors to evolve a more suitable solution.

### 4. Al and the Horses

The town of Jori, like any other organization, has its share of personnel problems. This one concerns itself with the people working in the Town garage-- especially Al, one of the mechanics, who has been taking and placing bets on the horses.

The shop foreperson has been aware of this practice, which has been going on for some time, but hasn't said anything. In fact, the foreperson thought that it was rather a good idea. First, it would keep out the bookies. Second, if there was any delay at the Off Track Betting Office (OTB) at lunchtime, only Al would be late getting back to work. Third, it was sort of a service to the rest of the workers, which really wasn't costing the Town much of anything. Fourth, patronizing OTB was rather civic-minded, as all the profits went to the Town.

But, Al wasn't placing any bets at all at OTB, on any place else. He was simply pocketing the money and paying off himself if there were any winners.

This was all working fine until last Friday, when a very long-shot in the last race at Aquamont, on which most of the people in the shop had placed large bets, came in as the winner. Al never showed up at work Monday, nor did he call in--he just disappeared.

It didn't take the people in the shop too long to get suspicious, make inquiries, and to find out that Al had never placed any bet of theirs at all at OTB.

Understandably they are rather upset and extremely anxious to find Al. When the shop foreperson refused to give them Al's home address, they went in mass to the Transportation Commissioner and demanded the information, on they would strike.

A walkout would be a serious problem for the town of Jori as the snow plows have not as yet been serviced and the National Weather Bureau has just issued an early winter storm alert, with accumulations of up to 21 inches of snow possible.

As the Transportation Commissioner is not sure what to do, he has referred the matter to the Board of Supervisors.

### 5. The Jori Woods School

Due to declining student enrollment, the Jori Woods Elementary School was closed at the end of the school year. The remaining students and faculty were easily absorbed into the nearby Main Street School.

The Superintendent of Schools had just about decided to have the building and land sold to the Tivel Corporation. Tivel planned to demolish the school building, clean the land, and build a tract of retirement homes for senior citizens. The Superintendent liked the idea as the money received from the sale would immediately lower the school tax, and the services subsequently required by the occupants of the homes would be minimal.

However, when word got around that Tivel might acquire the closed Jori Woods Elementary School, a number of "no" groups appeared. As there were no zoning restrictions involved, one of the groups feels that, in the interest of stimulating economic growth in Jori, the building should be sold to someone interested in converting it into an office building on a factory suitable for light manufacturing. Another feels that culture is what should be stimulated, and that the Town should use the school for the establishment of a center for the performing and allied arts. The Main Street Merchants' Organization would like to see garden apartments go up, the Police Boys Club a conversion to a youth center, the Jori Woods Civic Association a park, and the Jori Community College an extension center.

As these groups are appearing faster than the Superintendent can deal with them, a need is being felt for some structuring guidance. The Superintendent has turned to the Board of Supervisors for this help.

### 6. Storm Sewers and Clay Crawlers

Support for the installation of a storm sewer system along Post Avenue was almost unanimous. Other than some relatively minor questioning of whether the return on the expenditure would be greater if the funding was spent on the draining of Synder's Swamp as a possible shopping center site, there was little opposition.

The project got off to a good start and was well ahead of schedule. However, all work stopped abruptly, about three months ago, when the trench crew, finishing up the last of the road evacuation work, uncovered an extensive colony of clay crawlers--small ant-like

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bugs which have not been seen in the area for decades.

As the clay crawlers are on the State's endangered species list, all work was halted and the Conservation Department notified. The Conservation Department had an immediate formal hold placed on the project pending a complete inquiry. Since that time a number of scientific groups, both public and private, have been in conducting extensive studies of the colony. While no conclusions have been reached, it seems that it is not going to be possible to relocate the clay crawlers. Further, it appears that if the sewer system goes through, the colony will be destroyed and the crawlers will die.

The residents of Post Avenue are outraged by the delay. Not only is the road in front of their homes dug up, but large sections of unsightly sewer pipe are standing upright all along Post Avenue, where they had been placed in anticipation of early use. Also, as Post Avenue is a major traffic artery, the Jori Automobile Club is extremely upset as travel along Post Avenue, because of the unfinished construction, remains slow and hazardous. Too, the Town's schools will be opening soon and Post Avenue is on many of the school bus routes.

### CONCLUSIONS

This exercise is not an "icebreaker" for a new class. Rather, it is intended for use by a group that has suitably moved into the subject area. Too, while specific instructions cannot be provided to the instructor as to the best accompanying administrative techniques for the play, an informal stone of situational guidelines should be acquired with usage. As to the questions of exactly what the instructor should be doing as the exercise is unfolding, and how the exercise should be graded, again these are matters which generally find answers as experience is gathered in the use of the experiential learning method. However, with proper motivation of the participants and sufficient instruction in the role-play method, this exercise should prove interesting and rewarding for both students and instructors alike.