

INTEGRATING STRUCTURED EXPERIENCES  
INTO A PERSONNEL SIMULATION

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One of the problems which faces the individual who wants to include simulations and/or experiential exercises into a course is that the exercises sometimes are desired or available for areas where the instructor already has sufficient material. In many traditional business courses, for example the Behavior and Organizational courses and the Personnel Management courses, there are extensive materials available which allow an instructor to teach the course in any number of different ways.

If the instructor has already chosen to use a major experiential exercise or simulation as the focus of a course, the problem is complicated further. There is little, if any, room to add what the instructor feels are good, worthwhile exercises to the already cramped schedule for classes. The problem is how to successfully integrate materials into an existing satisfactory course structure. This paper discusses this situation, emphasizing how experiential exercises are integrated into a major simulation.

THE SIMULATION

RAISE II: A Personnel Simulation is a project-based simulation designed to present participants with the opportunity to practically apply personnel skills to a job. From the initial analysis of a job and the writing of a job description, participants continually interact with the job and each other to complete the various parts of a personnel program. This can include any of the various functions of a personnel program, including equal employment, wage determination, training, employee evaluation, interviewing and/or recruitment and selection.

During the simulation the participant also assumes the role of a job applicant applying for one or more of the positions made available through the efforts of other personnel assistants employed by RAISE II. The job applicant may also be involved in the preparation of resumes, a career development program and correspondence important to the application task.

RAISE II is a simulation which allows the participant to practically apply classroom and textbook material on management and personnel administration to a unified realistic situation. Constructed in module form, RAISE II allows the instructor or training director to select the most relevant modules and use them in a variety of classroom situations and timed periods. The primary goal of RAISE II is to involve the participant in the application of personnel principles.

RAISE II has a further advantage because it is published by the author which has allowed the introduction of major changes in the materials without waiting for a complete reprinting of the book. Since the simulation's initial publication, four new modules were developed. This flexibility has sparked an interest in constant refinement and experimentation with different materials.

One of the major elements of RAISE II is that it does not involve extensive classroom time for completion of the various assignments. It is primarily a simulation which is on-going and involves the student in extensive work outside the classroom, while gaining experience and skills in how to complete the materials during class sessions. This has left a void in class periods where instructors have desired to use more of an experiential learning approach during the actual class time and still enable material to be covered which prepares the student for completion of the simulation materials outside of the class.

Experiential approaches to personnel management have been developed in the last several years. These have come from a variety of sources including behavior and organization materials, structured experiences published in readily useable forms and at least two complete experiential texts in Personnel Management. An examination of these texts show that the experiences provide for a complete experiential approach to personnel by having the student participate in a variety of actual personnel activities.

The use of a major integrating simulation like RAISE II in an introductory personnel course prevents, in many cases, the use of existing experiential materials. Some of the ideas contained in these books are valid, yet they do not apply and do not provide the student with enough time or sufficient skills to prepare the materials for RAISE II. This left the problem of how to integrate structured experiences for class time and for skill development in preparing the RAISE II project within the constraints of a major project-based simulation.

#### IDENTIFICATION OF MAJOR LEARNING TRACKS

An important step in integrating structured experiences into the project simulation was the identification of the major learning tracks of the course. It was decided that the goals of the course were to expose students to the major functions of personnel management within the legal, social and political environment. This was to be accomplished through the use of a text, lectures, the simulation and a series of small assignments and class exercises.

Student evaluation of the course as defined included several comments that the fourth track, the assignments and class participation did not relate to what they perceived as the two major elements of the course - the readings and exams, and the RAISE II project. It was, however, my desire to continue using

a series of small assignments to expose students to some aspects of personnel which could not be covered in either the readings or the RAISE II project.

It was determined that experiential exercises in personnel management could be developed which would accomplish one or two objectives. The first objective was to further prepare the student to complete the various modules of the project. The second was to give the student some experience in dealing with various elements of a personnel function which could not be simulated in the major project yet were perceived as related to the course materials.

### RAISE II EXERCISES

These goals were accomplished by developing RAISE II Exercises which would accomplish specific goals in different areas of personnel administration. The exercises were printed as part of the RAISE II manual. Assignments were scheduled so that they provided students with sufficient time for completing the exercise prior to class discussion or a lecture on the topic, or prior to the deadline for the completion of a module for RAISE II. At this time six RAISE II exercises have been developed and used in this new integrated structure.

The first of these exercises is entitled Developing a Recruitment and Selection Strategy. It was designed to familiarize participants with the basic components of a recruitment and selection strategy, to demonstrate how a classified advertisement is prepared, and to demonstrate how the various components of a selection strategy affects the decision process. In RAISE II students must write their own classified ads, post them and then interview applicants based on responses to that ad. This exercise, which includes actual resumes allows the student to see how this information can be processed as part of the selection procedure. The information is based on actual data in which an applicant is usually ranked rather poorly by the students. In actuality this applicant was hired because of the interview which occurred after the data was analyzed. When students discover this information, they find that their understanding of the selection process, the components and the importance placed on different selection procedures is enhanced.

The second exercise, Test Selection and Validation, was designed to familiarize participants with the basic components of test selection, to demonstrate the usefulness of a scatter diagram and a correlation coefficient and to demonstrate the application of basic statistical techniques used in the validation of employment tests. In this exercise students are provided a company description and information concerning a job and must select from four available tests the test or tests they would use in a selection strategy. From this information they are given computer generated test results on a group of twenty employees along with performance rankings on these employees. They are then given the

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necessary information to process this data generating scatter diagrams and correlation coefficients. The resulting discussion allows them to justify their test selection and the validity of the tests which they chose. This prepares them directly for the RAISE II project in which they must select tests for the job they are working with in their project and this makes an analysis of the potential reliability and validity of the tests they chose.

The third exercise is entitled Job Evaluation and it is designed to familiarize participants with the basic components of a job evaluation strategy, to demonstrate the ranking, factor comparison and point methods of job evaluation and to familiarize participants with the advantages and disadvantages of various job evaluation techniques. In this exercise students compare five different jobs using three basic methods of job evaluation and answer a series of questions concerning the techniques used. This assignment directly assists them in their understanding of the process of job evaluation and allows them to practically experience the techniques of job evaluation. In a RAISE II project they must select a job evaluation technique and recommend it for the job and situation they are working with.

The fourth RAISE II exercise is entitled Help Wanted and it is designed to familiarize participants with the appeals of various job ads, to examine basic components present in most job ads and to introduce participants to the concept of a career development strategy. In this exercise students select want-ads which appeal to them in their local newspapers and they conduct an analysis of these ads based on the perceived needs and wants of the job and their own perceived needs and wants. This exercise allows the students to become familiar with the concepts used in writing classified advertisements and in the basic elements of their own goals for a potential career. It is used to briefly expose them to concepts of career planning and career development and to assist them in their preparation of writing classified ads.

The fifth exercise is entitled Lay-Off and Termination Exercise and was designed to expose participants to the concept of values in personnel decision making, to allow them to experience the concept of firing someone and to give them experience in making decisions concerning terminations of people based on their performance and personal factors. In this exercise students are given information concerning several employees, their job performance rankings and personal characteristics. From this they must develop a ranking of people to be laid off. Then one of the members of the group is told that they are the manager of the group and based on the performance of the group in the first part of the exercise, they must terminate one member of the group. This exercise then allows for discussion of the participant's feelings as to the termination process from both the management standpoint and from the standpoint of the person being terminated. This exercise is not related to any particular

module in RAISE II, however, it does relate to material discussed at several points in the class and has been evaluated as one of the best exercises used in the classes in recent semesters.

The sixth exercise is a two part role play entitled The Latest Visitor. The purpose of this exercise is to expose students to the conflicting information concerning equal employment regulations. In the first part, students analyze an in-basket of items pertaining to various affirmative action and equal employment concerns and in the second part, they take part in a role play where they attempt to define an affirmative action program for a company which is under some pressure from the Equal Employment Opportunities Commission. This exercise is used late in class as a concluding element which allows for them to evaluate their own project in terms of equal employment legislation and to summarize many of the principles of personnel which are covered by equal employment legislation.

### INTEGRATION OF THE EXERCISES

Several of the exercises were designed to have a clear relationship to the RAISE II Project. With these exercises it was easy to demonstrate the relationship to students and they willingly completed them because they were aware of the benefit successful completion of the exercises would have to the project. All of the exercises were clearly related to the general course content so that students understood principles covered in the text or in class lectures better after completing one of the class exercises. A third method of integrating the exercises was that the exercises were all labeled RAISE II Exercises. In attempting to integrate structured experiences into RAISE II, they were contained in the RAISE II Manual and were identified with many of the terms in RAISE II. In four of the six exercises the same company was used for the fictional setting. This provided acceptance by the students and more importantly, a unifying element. In some cases information generated from previous exercises was used as part of another exercise. Student reaction to this concept made for more enjoyment of the exercises as well as concentration on the learning goals of the exercises opposed to the extraneous information concerning the nature of the company, etc. The final element used to integrate these structured experiences into the major course simulation was the development of a class newsletter, Personnel Points, the newsletter approach, which is common to many computer based simulations, was developed to keep students informed of various components of the RAISE II project and the individual RAISE II exercises.

Approximately one newsletter was issued every week. Each news- letter contained some current news on Personnel taken from local newspapers or current business periodicals. It also contained information on exams or other class schedule items. Its primary focus, however, was information concerning the RAISE II project

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and the RAISE II exercises. Schedules were provided, tips on how to complete the project were included and references to additional sources of information were provided for various topics. The newsletter also included cartoons and/or humorous stories to make it a delightful and informative part of the class.

Student reaction to the newsletter was outstanding. In evaluating the program, students commented that the newsletter was informative, enjoyable to read and most importantly, that it provided them with essential information concerning project deadlines and information on how to complete various aspects of the projects. They found that the newsletter gave them this information in a printed form which they could take with them for the completion of class assignments and class participation which focused primarily on things that were not covered in the textbook.

### **CONCLUSIONS**

Structured experiences were integrated into a major simulation through the use of careful design techniques, the development of exercises which fit the particular goals of the simulation and through the use of a classroom newsletter. The advantages of this approach were that the exercises were perceived by the student as particularly relevant to both the project and the course and that the specific goals of particular modules could be reached through these specially designed structured experiences. The major disadvantage to this approach was the need to develop structured experiences when several excellent materials already existed. The approach used, however, does show that structured experiences can be integrated into a major simulation when these factors are taken into consideration.