

VICARIOUS OBSERVATIONAL LEARNING THROUGH VISUAL MEDIA: THE 12 ANGRY MEN FILM AS AN ORGANIZATIONAL BEHAVIOR PRIMER

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ABSTRACT

The classic 1957 black and white film 12 Angry Men is used as a primer for an organizational behavior course, a mechanism that sets the stage for and reinforces the unfolding of the course over the duration of the semester. This use of film as visual media is placed in the context of vicarious observational learning theory. Adopting the framework of whole person experiential learning, the paper illustrates the use of the cognitive dimension through the use of course concepts, the emotional dimension through the dramatic elements of the film, and then behavioral skill preparation as the group dynamics illustrated in the movie are dissected and put into the mode of potential application in any group or team setting. An example of a 14-item course handout that is utilized by students as they view the film is provided and discussed.

INTRODUCTION

When the topic of experiential learning (EL) is addressed, especially by those less familiar with the EL approach, it is often thought of as EL being a function of direct learning experiences. Kolb's 1984 book *Experiential Learning: Experience as a Source of Learning and Development* became the landmark conceptualization of EL once the book was published. As a result, the Kolb EL Model has had hundreds of follow up studies and thousands of references made to it over the last 32 years. One of the elements of the four elements of the Kolb model is "concrete experience" and Kolb (1984: 38) states that "Learning is the process whereby knowledge is created through the transformation of experience." As Hoover and Giambatista (2009) observe "a survey of the Kolb (1984) index and list of references finds that the phrase 'vicarious' does not appear in the index; and, there is only one citation attributed to Albert Bandura, the guru of vicarious learning, and that cite involves 'the self-system.' It would thus appear that Kolb is only addressing direct experiential learning." Kolb's omission of vicarious experience in his model and the subsequent myriad repetitions of that omission over the decades following his seminal publication, have resulted in an underappreciation and even a neglect of the power of vicarious observational learning (VOL).

This is an unfortunate omission for several reasons. For one thing, many direct experience phenomena can also be experienced vicariously. Hoover, Giambatista and Luiba (2012) comment further on this point "In cases involving intricate patterns of behavior, such as language acquisition or surgery skills acquisition, observation often represents an indispensable aspect of learning that may allow the learner to avoid costly and unnecessary errors. For example, one would not want to teach skills such as surgery or flying an airplane solely through an individual's pattern of hit and miss experiences."

An additional benefit of vicarious observational learning is that it affords the learner the capacity to "see the forest for the trees". In situations where the learning challenge has a high cognitive load, for example, the burden of the cognitive load can overwhelm the learning process as a whole, making learning through direct experience in such a situation difficult and sometimes even improbable. However, lighter demands are placed on the vicarious observational learner, thus freeing him or her to take a position once removed from the direct experience and thus function as a potential learner that is more able to see both the forest and the trees. This concept boils down to creating psychological space for learning. The VOL learner has the capacity to be distal (affording the perspective of 'forest') while the direct experience learner has less psychological space, being more proximate to the learning experience (and thus having the perspective of 'trees').

This paper makes a case for the use of vicarious observational learning in the teaching of organizational behavior (OB) concepts and the acquisition of OB relevant skills utilizing visual media. The example used is the classic film *12 Angry Men*. This application is described as a primer for the OB course because it is one of the first EL exercises used in the class. While several OB concepts are brought to life through the use of the film, the process of debriefing the exercise also brings into play the whole person learning model that is the basis for the course conduct and the rationale for the use of EL exercises. Therefore, this visual media based exercise primes the students to be more able to handle both course content and course process as the semester progresses.

THE DEFINITION OF VICARIOUS OBSERVATIONAL LEARNING (VOL)

This section of the paper comes primarily from an ABSEL paper Hoover and Giambatista (2009), and the Hoover, Giambatista, Sorenson and Bommer (2010) research paper published in the *Academy of Management Learning and Education* (AMLE) journal. These definitions are introduced early in this paper in order to give the author and the reader a common vocabulary as the teaching of OB concepts and skills portion of the paper unfolds.

The following definition of vicarious observational learning, integrates the concept of whole person learning (Rogers, 1980) and an early ABSEL definition of experiential learning (Hoover, 1974; Hoover and Whitehead, 1976). The definition of whole person learning was further refined in Hoover et al (2010) --- by viewing vicarious observational learning as a process:

Vicarious observational learning exists when a personally responsible participant (s) cognitively, emotionally, and behaviorally *processes* knowledge, skills and/or attitudes through processes of observation

in a learning situation characterized by a high level of active involvement despite the absence of direct, personalized consequences

As an educational approach, vicarious experiential learning through the application of the vicarious observational model may be viewed as follows:

Vicarious experiential learning pedagogy may be viewed as a methodology of education whereby the structure of individual or group experiences are contrived to develop learning and perceptual capacities, to develop and reinforce cognitions, to impact on emotions and attitudes, and, importantly, to function in developing capacities to behave consistently with the insights of these processes and experiences by designing learning systems conducive to observation of behaviors and by conscious processes of providing positive models for imitation.

The essential premise of the VOL approach is that learning does not have to be processed as direct experiential learning for it to have an impact on the learner. Furthermore, this impact is not only efficacious relative to short-term learning goals, but also for learning resulting in lasting transformative change. In addition, that lasting change has the same impact potential any component of whole person directed EL --- whole person learning with cognitive, emotional, behavioral and even spiritual change (Hoover et al, 2010; Hoover, 2007).

VOL AND SOCIAL LEARNING THEORY

Albert Bandura's social learning theory makes a significant contribution to the concept of vicarious observational learning. Bandura (1977: 86) states, "People do not rely on enactive experience as the sole source of information about their capabilities. Efficacy appraisals are partly influenced by vicarious experiences mediated through modeled attainments. So modeling serves as another effective tool for promoting a sense of personal efficacy." Social learning theory proposes that people learn from others through observation and modeling (Bandura, 1969). In other words, people learn new knowledge and skills not only from directly experiencing them but also from their observation of others' experience and interactions. Reflecting the power of the theory of behaviorism (Skinner, 1938), Bandura (1965:234) claimed, "Observation of rewarding consequences generally enhances similar performance, whereas witnessing punishing outcomes has an inhibiting effect on behavior".

The social learning theory put forth by Bandura (1986) describes four stages of learning: attention, retention, production, and motivation:

1. Attention --- Learners need to be engaged to the level that they pay attention to the learning opportunity. In the case of the design of VOL learning systems, it is therefore of paramount importance that the vicarious experience is enacted on the "main stage" and is front and center. Note: watching a film, if the film is compelling, meets this requirement.
2. Retention --- In this stage, the learner retains the knowledge and skills acquired in the attention stage, and then repeats the knowledge and skills they have learned by means of mental rehearsal. This mental rehearsal aspect of VOL is

one of the areas wherein VOL has the capacity to be superior to learning by means of direct experience. Similar to the "forest and trees" example given earlier relative to cognitive overload potential, a direct experiential learner can be so immersed in the affairs and pressures of the direct experience moment, that time and/or opportunity for mental rehearsal may not be readily available. The VOL learner, being one step removed from the perils of immersion in the moment, has a better chance of creating the psychological learning space necessary to accomplish mental rehearsal. Note: watching a film, if one identifies with the protagonists, meets this requirement as the observer anticipates the actions of the film character, mentally rehearsing the character's next set of anticipated actions.

3. Production and Motivation stages --- In the production stage and the motivation stage, if the VOL experience has done its job, the learner is now ready to implement the knowledge and skills they have acquired by replicating and then maintaining the behaviors they observed.

VOL AND ANDRAGOGY

Andragogy, defined as learning systems designed for adults, has been put forth as an alternative model to pedagogy, with pedagogy being described as learning system design more appropriate for children (Forest & Peterson, 2006). The key claim of the andragogy approach is that adults are different from children in that they need to know why they need to learn something before learning it. It is also assumed that adults, as opposed to children, have an enhanced self-concept that compels them to be more responsible for their learning since they have a greater volume and quality of experience.

It is useful to examine andragogy and the motivation of adult learners from the perspective of intrinsic versus extrinsic motivation (Deci & Ryan, 1985). Pedagogical approaches to education still prevail in modern education system designs. Pedagogical approaches, that seem to assume that students are immature and irresponsible, still dominate many aspects of our approach to educational settings. Examples include taking roll in class so that students are made to attend, and testing and grading practices that use fear of failure to insure that students read assigned materials and process class content. Note that in pedagogical models the class content is sourced in the instructor since the student is assumed incapable of pursuing his or her own self-generated learning goals. Therefore, it is possible to assert that education, whether it is sourced in an institution, in a curriculum, or in a teacher --- is extrinsically sourced, and is therefore something that is done to the student as a childlike learner. In contrast, adult-based learning such as transformational learning--- ideally whole person learning with intellectual, emotional, behavioral and perhaps spiritual change --- is something that can be sourced intrinsically, and is therefore something that an adult can do for his or her self.

Malcolm Knowles (1973:44) put forth the term andragogy in 1973 stating, "The culture does not nurture the development of the abilities required for self-direction, while the need to be increasingly self-directing continues to develop originally". He believed pedagogy - "the art and science of teaching children" is not suitable for adults and pointed out adult learners as a neglected species (Knowles, 1973). Knowles (1973) original work assumed andragogy to be based on four main assumptions: changes in self-concept, the role of experience, readiness to learn, and orientation to learn. In a more recent work, these four assumptions were updated to six factors including: 1) the need to know, 2) the learner's self-concept, 3)

the role of experience, 4) readiness to learn, 5) orientation to learning, and 6) motivation (Knowles, Holton III, & Swanson, 1998).

The content of this paper focuses on the efficacy of utilizing VOL processes for adult learning by showing and discussing a film (*12 Angry Men*) in an organizational behavior class. Upon reflection when writing this paper, I realized that the decision to do this had been based upon a set of andragogical assumptions that I had not made explicit for myself. Following the six components of the Knowles 1998 model, here are examples of VOL and andragogy:

1. The need to know --- while it is true that I assumed that the student needed to know the OB concepts and skills that could be learned from the film (described later in this paper), I also knew that the students had expressed a desire to learn them as well. This is because I start the OB class with a covenant for learning the student makes to him/herself, and these covenants stated a desire to learn useful OB concepts and skills.
2. The learner's self-concept --- I state my personal teaching philosophy at the beginning of each class that the student's self-concept is their own business. My course syllabus contains the following statement --- "The personal opinions of the instructor on a given issue are irrelevant to your grade."
3. The role of experience --- The students in the OB class are expected to draw their own individualized set of conclusions relative to the experiences that have in this experientially driven OB class. That, of course, includes vicarious experiences as well as direct experiences.
4. Readiness to learn --- If I am going to treat my students as adults, then I am also assuming that they need to know why they need to learn something before learning it.
5. Orientation to learning --- It is also assumed that adults have an enhanced self-concept that compels them to be responsible for their learning.
6. Motivation --- Intrinsic motivational forces drive adult learning, and adult learners require only basic extrinsic motivational elements to sustain learning efforts. Sufficient extrinsic rewards need to exist to yield enrollment. However, once the enrollment threshold has been passed, intrinsic motivational factors come more and more into play. Is it fun? Does it match my passions? Am I committed to high performance outcomes? Etc.

I once overheard an administrator say that if a professor is showing a film in their class then they are not doing their job because they are not teaching the class. The pedagogical assumptions in such a statement are obvious, and the six points made above will not be repeated to make that case more obvious to the reader. The point that will be made here is that VOL through the use of a film such as *12 Angry Men* 1) taps into the power of learning through processes of vicarious observation, 2) utilizes the principles of social learning theory, and 3) has the benefit of reaping the transformational learning potential of andragogy in the classroom learning environment.

WHY THE FILM *12 ANGRY MEN* IS AN IDEAL VOL VEHICLE

A Word about the Film *12 Angry Men* --- *12 Angry Men* is considered to be one of the classics of American cinema. The American Film Institute's ranking of the 100 best American movies has *12 Angry Men* at number 87 on the list (the top 5

are *Citizen Cane*, *Casablanca*, *The Godfather*, *Gone with the Wind* and *Lawrence of Arabia*). The film received three Oscar nominations in 1957, including Best Picture (it lost to *The Bridge on the River Kwai*). The movie unfolds in a jury room, with a very sparse set of a table and 12 chairs. The power of the movie comes from the excellent and suspenseful script and the performances of some of the top movie actors of the day. The lead character is played by Henry Fonda. Some of the supporting actors are Lee J. Cobb, Ed Begley, Jack Klugman, E.G. Marshall and Jack Warden. The film rivets the viewer's attention as the jury vote changes from 11 "guilty" and 1 "not guilty" voting holdout at the start of the deliberations, until the final scene where the vote has switched to 11 innocent votes and only 1 person voting "guilty". Many group dynamics, interpersonal interactions, motivational predispositions and logic and reasoning examples are highlighted and behaviorally demonstrated as the drama unfolds.

ADDITIONAL FILM ELEMENTS CONDUCTIVE TO VOL.

The film begins in a courtroom, but 99% of the film is shot in one small, cramped jury room with a closed and locked door. This results in no distractions in the film due to scene changes, characters coming or going (none do), etc. The cinematography in the film is stellar, with tight shots of character faces, often from differing angles, but all in the cramped room. Finally, the film is shot in a grainy black and white style. All of these factors combine such that the viewer is left processing only the behaviors of the characters, with their motivations, reasoning and emotional displays becoming more obvious as the film unfolds.

The names of the characters are never mentioned in the film, and the jury members remain anonymous. Jury member numbers are mentioned briefly at the beginning of the film, but are never referred to again. There is no need to set characters backgrounds as is required in most films because the characters only have one reason for being there --- jury duty --- and only one role to perform --- a vote of "guilty" or "not guilty". The result, again, is that the viewer is left with no clues as to character motivation other than observing the behaviors exhibited by those characters. This greatly facilitates looking at the behaviors and analyzing them from an OB class perspective. This then becomes a classic case of organizational behavior in situ.

Finally, there are no extraneous plot or movie action factors that pollute the observation process. No external events unfold that have an impact on what transpires in the jury room. In addition, the rules and processes that are "part and parcel" of a jury deliberation are a known construct to the viewer. All events unfold within that non-changing framework, again putting the behaviors of the role players in the foreground and keeping them there.

USING THE 14-ITEM CONCEPTS AND LEARNING MODULES WORKSHEET

During the first two weeks of the semester, the *12 Angry Men* film is shown in the organizational behavior course as a vicarious observational learning exercise. Its purpose is 1) to introduce important OB concepts that are displayed in the character actions and interactions in the film, and 2) to act as a primer for the rest of the OB course that follows. Students are coached in the benefits of being astute observers of human

behavior as a general matter of being a student of organizational behavior. The film viewing gives them a practice run at doing that.

Before the film is shown, a 2-page, 14-item document entitled “12 Angry Men Concepts and Learning Modules Worksheet” is given to each student (see Appendix A for a sample of this document). It is explained that the document will be covered in class, item by item, before viewing the film, in order to better prepare the students to be effective behavioral pattern observers, and to “pre-load” a basic intellectual understanding of the OB concepts that the film will present for observer consumption. The whole person experiential learning model (Hoover et al, 2010) has been presented in the class prior to this class; therefore, students are also coached to look for emotional elements and behavioral elements in the film that match the intellectual identification of the OB concepts covered in the Worksheet. The goal here is to come as close to possible to attaining whole person vicarious experiential learning while viewing the film. After a brief explanation of the setting of the film in a closed jury room, the film is started.

SOME EXAMPLES OF ORGANIZATIONAL BEHAVIOR CONCEPTS AND SKILLS SOURCED IN UTILIZING THE VISUAL MEDIA FILM 12 ANGRY MEN

The debrief phase of this vicarious observational learning exercise differs slightly for each class because different groups of people identify different elements of the character actions and interactions that they want to discuss. However, by following the *12 Angry Men* Concepts and Learning Modules Worksheet, the primary OB concepts found in the film can always be covered. To facilitate an illustration of these concepts and how they are presented in the film, this section of the paper will be in a listing format. Where appropriate the question number from the Worksheet will be identified if the reader wishes to refer to the Worksheet in Appendix A while reading this section. However, this section will be written as if the Worksheet was not accessible. The items are presented here are more or less in the order they appear in the film, and not according to their relative importance as OB concepts.

1. On the concept of contextual awareness --- How does the judge set the tone for what unfolds in the jury room by the manner in which he gives the jury their instructions? What is the effect of the door being locked?
2. On the concept of emotions --- Is it possible to be human and without emotions? (Question 1)
3. On the concept of a group vs. a collection of individuals vs. being a team --- Does the nature of the collection of people in the jury room change over the course of the film?
4. On social pressure and peer pressures --- What are the characteristics of social pressures and how powerful are these forces? (Question 2). What is the effect of the 11 votes “guilty” and 1 vote “not guilty” at the start of the deliberations? What is the difference between a show of hands vote and a secret ballot vote in terms of social pressure?
5. Groupthink, mindguards and group tyrannies --- What examples of these concepts manifest in the film? (Question 3)
6. Process vs. content in OB --- What is the difference between content and process in a group dynamics situation? How does one go about managing content? Managing

process? What examples of content and process management manifest in the film? Is the Henry Fonda character a process manager, a content manager, or both? (Questions 4 and 5)

7. Prejudice and information screening and filtering --- How does prejudice affect content? Affect process? What examples of prejudice manifest in the film? (racial prejudice, prejudice against youth, prejudice against social class) How does the Henry Fonda character address these prejudices? (Question 6)
8. Contextual uncertainty in communications--- What is the difference between communicating with a sense of certainty by saying “He is guilty”, and Fonda’s statements like “I don’t know”? (Question 7)
9. Reasoned discourse in communications --- What is the difference between defensive reaction generating and inflexible statements like “It doesn’t matter what you say. I am not going to change my mind”, and Fonda’s statements such as “I am not trying to change your mind” and “I am just asking questions”? (Question 8)
10. Consequences of blaming and finger pointing behaviors --- How do you feel when someone is pointing a finger at you or blaming you for a failure? (Questions 9 and 10). Note: this section is also a good kick off point for transactional analysis discussions of Parent to Child transactions.
11. Empathy --- How is empathy used by Fonda and by other characters to enhance communications and to move the group agenda forward? (Question 11).
12. Emotions as tempered and emotional intelligence --- Can emotions be tempered, or are we at the mercy of our feelings of the moment? As a human being, can you keep yourself from feeling emotions? If not, what is the role that can be played by the emotional intelligence dimension of self-regulation? (Question 14).

Many more examples could be listed here. In fact, one of the enjoyable aspects of doing this particular type of experiential learning exercise is that the debriefs are never entirely the same. Repeat viewings of the film and the subsequent discussions that ensue almost always uncover new observations and previously undiscovered insights.

CONCLUSION

The benefits of experiential learning should not be ascribed just to experiential learning exercises sourced in direct experience. The power and potential of vicarious observational learning in an experiential learning exercise are considerable, and remain relatively untapped. The exemplar for the approach presented here is the use of visual media, the film *12 Angry Men*, in an organizational behavior class. It is hoped that the reader will see the innovative potential of utilizing VOL in many settings beyond organizational behavior topics.

It should be noted that the call here is not to replace direct experience learning with vicarious experience learning. Rather, the two should be seen as going hand-in-hand, complementing and reinforcing one another. In this regard, it should be noted that one of the principal findings of Hoover et al (2012) was that there were distinct advantages in sequencing opportunities in experiential learning. Hoover and his colleagues determined that optimal understanding of concepts and optimal acquisition of behavioral skills accompanied with emotional regulation, came when well designed VOL experiences were followed with complementary and supplementary direct experiences. This allowed the skill to be practiced vicariously without

consequences, and then for the skill to be practiced through direct experience with direct consequences. Such hybrid combinations could offer new arenas of development in the field of experiential learning.

In closing, while the example detailed here occurred in a face-to-face classroom setting, the implications for the innovative use of this technique in on-line courses and for distance learning scenarios should be obvious. It is just as easy for one group in one physical location to watch a film as it is for multiple groups in multiple settings and locations to do so.

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APPENDIX A:
12 ANGRY MEN CONCEPTS AND LEARNING MODULES WORKSHEET

1. Would “12 Emotional Humans” be a more appropriate title? Is such emotion from humans a normal set of circumstances? If yes, then what do we do about it? Study organizational behavior?
2. The power of social pressures (positive rewards, e.g., being in the “in-group”; and negative rewards, e.g. turning your back on a person). Can social pressures yield both positive and negative category results? Is the power of social pressure, easily seen in youth, masked and underestimated as to the extent it manifests in adults?
3. Are there examples of groupthink seen here? Are mindguards in play? Are group tyrannies and pressures to conform in play here?
4. Setting the table for process (e.g., a secret ballot takes social pressure off the table).
5. Setting the table for content (e.g., I just want to talk.”)
6. How does prejudice affect content? How does prejudice affect process? In these scenes we see examples of prejudice as to race, social status and condition of youth. What are other forms of prejudice that might arise in an assemblage of emotional humans?
7. The power of contextual uncertainty (powered by fierce humility)(e.g., Q: “Is he guilty?”---A: “I don’t know”.)
8. He power of reasoned discourse (helps to take defensiveness off of the table)(e.g., “I am not trying to change your mind” and I am just asking questions”.)
9. Hat are the dynamics set into play with blaming behaviors? A bland, unquestioning acceptance of criticism or defensiveness?
10. Are blaming dynamics and the “pointing finger” (and Parent to Child exchanges) the opposite of reasoned discourse?
11. Does the Fonda character use empathy? Examples?
12. Does the Fonda character Argue for Self last? Is this an extended 33/33/33 skit/role play of sorts?
13. Reflect on this list:
 - a. Why --- the reason to do it
 - b. Who --- the players
 - c. What --- the content
 - d. How --- the process
 - e. When and Where --- the logistics
14. Can emotions be tempered? If so, how? --- Are there more OB concepts this film brings to life?