

**LEARNING MANAGEMENT BY PRACTICING MANAGEMENT:
A REPORT OF SIGNIFICANT STUDENT SERVICE IN 1997**

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ABSTRACT

Learning by doing is the heart of experiential learning. Learning by doing allows the student to explore and understand at a much deeper level. This paper describes an approach to learning management by experiencing management, both in and out of the classroom. Students can learn about management by listening to lectures in a classroom. They can learn better by participating in classroom discussions. Some argue that even better learning can result from experiencing management. However, learning can be maximized by combining the process of personally experiencing management and then fully debriefing that personal experience. This paper discusses an assignment that provides this maximized learning experience. Additionally, the experiential learning reported in this paper includes interacting with the larger community through providing volunteer service. Students are invited to work as teams, to select a volunteer service project that they find valuable and to participate in that project. The paper then gives examples of projects completed in 1997. Finally, the paper explores the positive outcomes available to the students, to their interactive teams, and to their community that result from this experiential learning in the field of management.

THE STUDENT PROJECTS

Many authors have suggested that one of the solutions to the problem of creating better learning in the classroom is through the use of interactive teams. A substantial volume of literature supports the value of team learning and peer teaching. This active participation in the learning process can be the key in turning a passive formal lecture into active student involvement, resulting in maximized student learning. Many authors argue convincingly

that active learning maximizes student achievement in the classroom including Smith (1988), Kazenbach and Smith, (1993), Magney (1996), and McKenna (1995). These authors join their voices with others in a chorus extolling the value of team participation and collaborative learning.

One step further than using interactive student teams in the classroom is to invite those student teams to work together out of the classroom, and away from the University, working together in the community to accomplish what the team members consider to be significant results. This is the essence of the assignment given this year to several classes of management students, both at the undergraduate and graduate levels. In each of the five classes reported, the assignment was the same: as a team to conduct significant projects that would make a contribution to the community. The first assignment was to generate eighteen meaningful projects, to do some preliminary explorations of these eighteen proposals and then to select the most promising two or three projects (depending on the other assignments for the specific class). This first phase of the project assignments helps the student teams to begin working together successfully. It requires creativity, interaction, communication and decision making, and team members have a chance to get to know each other. Because the team generates the alternatives and selects the projects, they assume ownership of the projects. This ownership effectively leads to higher commitment and motivation, and higher end performance of the projects. During the process of successfully completing this series of projects, each team experiences in a very real way the challenges and the opportunities of management that we are discussing in class. The teams are asked to

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submit a report for each project, including both an analysis of what was accomplished and an analysis of the management process that the team experienced. This report typically includes a discussion of planning, leadership, motivation, decision making, problem solving, production technology, conflict management, communication patterns, and other topics of management. The discussions of management topics in the classroom gain added relevance through application to the ongoing projects. As might be expected, occasionally the theory in the text does not correspond with the perceived experience of the teams and this leads to interesting and valuable classroom discussion. The following is a partial list of the projects developed and carried out by teams in 1997:

- Organizing and conducting a Desert Tortoise rescue operation, laying over 1200 feet of fence with the Nature Conservatory
- Volunteering to serve at the Las Vegas Kite Festival and Easter Egg hunt for over three thousand participants
- Making 400 Easter tray favors for the patients at the University Hospital
- Volunteering at the Nevada S.P.C.A. animal shelter, taking care of dogs and cats
- Taking seventeen children from Child Haven to Grand Slam Canyon amusement park
- Visiting and entertaining residents of the Joe Canola Retirement Center
- Providing a picnic and games for children with Big Brothers and Big Sisters
- Teaching soccer for the Inner City Games.
- Participating in the Aid for AIDS Walk, raising \$130 for AIDS patients
- Organizing an Easter Egg hunt for forty children in AFAN, (children with AIDS)
- Taking 24 children from Child Haven to the Dolphin Habitat at the Mirage Hotel
- Organizing 52 school children in writing letters to pen pals in Hawaii
- Collecting and donating clothing to the Women's Shelter (Safe Nest) and the Salvation Army hospital
- Cleaning up the Las Vegas wetlands.

The student evaluations and comments at the end of the semester regularly include praise and support for this "realistic" team project. Often students report that this is the best assignment of their academic career. Many report that while other group assignments were difficult and often dysfunctional, this experience was highly successful and meaningful. Also, many students report that this is their first experience with self-directed volunteer work and that they are now determined to continue with similar volunteer activities.

In conclusion, this assignment results in several significant outcomes. The community is well served in potentially hundreds of different ways. Furthermore, as the student teams decide how they prefer to serve, a better rapport is developed between the university and its external community. Most importantly, the students are well served through the successful completion and analysis of real-life team and management experiences. Powerful lessons are learned in leadership, communication, decision-making, conflict management, problem solving, planning, organizing, time management, and other areas. The combination of these results unite to support the students frequent recommendations to continue to give these assignments and to continue to recommend these assignments to other professors.

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