

Developments In Business Simulation & Experiential Exercises, Volume 23, 1996

DILEMMA-DILEMMA: AN EXERCISE FOR TEACHING SIGNIFICANCE OF COMMUNICATION

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ABSTRACT

The significance of effective communication for managerial success and organizational performance is well documented in the organizational behavior and interpersonal communication literature. It is, however, difficult for a teacher to demonstrate such significance in a meaningful way to the students with the use of data and lecture alone. The exercise Dilemma-Dilemma is designed to create a lasting impression on students' minds about the importance of communication and its implications for interpersonal relationships. The exercise builds on the existing classic exercises such as Prisoner's Dilemma and World Bank Negotiations. Its superiority over the classic exercises lies in the fact that it relates the activity to a business scenario to which business students and practicing managers can relate more easily. In addition to providing the exercise and discussion questions, the paper also provides reactions of managers who have been participants in this exercise.

INTRODUCTION

Multiple studies over the years have reported that communication is the dominant function a manager performs (Luthans and Larsen, 1986). Communication is considered critical for avoiding failure and for successfully implementing change in an organization (Cameron, 1988). The interest and importance of communication has heightened further due to organizational and technological changes that have taken place in the last decade. Through the development of information technology, the speed and accuracy of communication has increased (Haney, 1992). However, more advanced technology has not always fostered increased effectiveness in interpersonal communication. This ineffective interpersonal aspect of communication prevents true understanding and creates additional problems relevant to personal relationships (Golen, 1990). According to Carol Hymowitz (1989), and Lewis, Goodman & Fandt (1995), a critical skill that managers will need in the 21st century for their own and their organizations' success is effective communication.

The challenge facing business teachers, corporate trainers and consultants is how to convince practicing and future managers of the significance and implications of effective communication. Intellectually, everyone seems to understand that poor communication can cause problems

(Schnake, Dumler, Cochran & Barnett, 1990). Usually, we all have a few funny stories from personal or work experiences that highlight the ill effects of miscommunication. However, anecdotal experiences, despite being entertaining, often lack a framework to systematically teach the theory of communication. Lectures and other similar techniques often do not make a long lasting impression. The value of experiential exercises is well understood by the members of ABSEL. Our teaching methods need to train students for their current or future employers (Cohen, 1995).

The purpose of this paper is to present an exercise that teachers, corporate trainers and consultants can use to highlight the significance of communication and related issues to their students. The authors have used the exercise in their training sessions with practicing managers and have received positive feedback. Included in this paper for the users' benefit are the following: (a) Background and foundation; (b) the exercise Dilemma-Dilemma including instructions, tally sheet, prediction sheet and questionnaire; (c) notes for facilitating the debriefing discussion; and (d) summary of feedback.

DILEMMA-DILEMMA: THE EXERCISE

Background and Foundation

This exercise was designed by the first author on the basis of two classic exercises found in Organizational Behavior books: Prisoner's Dilemma (Lau & Shani, 1992) and World Bank Negotiations (Ivancevich & Matteson, 1993). Experimentation with these exercises in graduate and undergraduate classes led us to believe that business students, despite liking the experience, have a hard time relating to the scenario around which these exercises are built. In the use of Prisoner's Dilemma, discussion often strayed to issues unrelated to business such as the structure of the American Justice System, the treatment of prisoners and the role of evidence and witnesses. Similarly in the World Bank Negotiations, many times students felt compelled to comment on the issues of armament, political relations of various countries and world peace. These issues, though worthy of discussion in a different context, distracted students' attention from the subject matter at hand-

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cation theory. Frequently, students failed to see a connection between the outcome of these exercises and the lessons for managers for improving the performance of their organizations.

Such frustrations led the author to design an exercise which accomplished the following: (a) Helped the students relate to the scenario more easily; (b) combined the strengths of the two exercises in running and facilitating the groups; and (c) consumed less time.

Purpose and Objective

The exercise is designed to highlight the significance of communication and its impact on group performance and group relations in an organization. The objective of the exercise is to understand the role of communication in organizations.

Participants

The exercise works best if there are more than eight members in the groups so that teams are no smaller than four members each. If the group is larger than 16 members, multiple teams are needed to run the exercise as explained in Appendix II.

Materials

All the related materials for the exercise are provided in Appendixes I through VIII. One Tally Sheet (Appendix III) is used to track the scores of each pair of teams. It adds fun to the game to have teams predict the opponent's decision using the Prediction Sheet (Appendix IV) before the last round.

Design and Procedure

The exercise is begun with brief written instructions (Appendix II) which are also explained verbally. The instructions are kept simple for several reasons:

1. Simplicity keeps the participants' interest focused.
2. The efficiency of the exercise is improved because it does not take as long to get started.
3. Intended misconceptions are created. Dilemma-Dilemma is a competitive game, and team interest is important. Intentional misconceptions are necessary to drive home the points about barriers to effective communication, as well as the roles of the sender and receiver in effective communication.
4. Unnecessary confusion is avoided.

Scoring

The Tally Sheet (Appendix III) is used for scoring. The scores range from + \$126 million to -\$126 million. The scores will vary depending upon the group participants. For example, in one training session each of four teams consistently pursued a lose/lose proposition and completed the exercise with a negative score.

DISCUSSION

Running time for the exercise is 45-60 minutes. Debriefing requires approximately 30 minutes. The value of the exercise lies in how well it is debriefed upon conclusion. Group discussion is facilitated using the questions in Appendixes V and VI. During discussion, we develop common definitions of key terms. We also build upon participant responses to discuss the roles of sender and receiver as well as the affect of perception on message reception. Using Appendix VII, we discuss how misunderstandings arise due to problems in developing, transmitting, receiving and interpreting the message. We also discuss the role of communication in interpersonal relationships and use the framework provided in Appendix VIII (Whetten and Cameron, 1995) to tie everything together.

CONCLUSION

Initial participant feedback suggests that the exercise is effective in achieving its stated objective. In our training session, the exercise appeared to be better received by the middle-level managers than by first-level supervisors. Participant feedback is provided in Table 1. They were asked, "How would you rate the game Dilemma-Dilemma," and they responded on a five-point scale.

**TABLE 1
PARTICIPANTS' EVALUATION OF THE GAME**

Scale	Number of Responses
1 Very ineffective	0
2 Ineffective	1
3 Somewhat effective	6
4 Effective	11
5 Very Effective	8

Other comments by participants included: "The exercise was good, and the summary of the exercise brought ideas together." "Excellent--very effective message." "The game was fun and frustrating. The comments on the purpose should not be rushed. The game is very helpful to see the points." "The simple Dilemma-Dilemma exercise showed the importance of listening skills."

The exercise appears rather complex, cumbersome

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and confusing on paper, but is relatively simple to run. Experiencing it firsthand should convince the ABSEL members of its merit, applicability and usability. Since the exercise was designed during the past summer, our only experience has been with practicing managers in our consulting practice. We believe, if practicing managers found the activity of use, then students are likely to find it of merit as well. This exercise should be of interest to all ABSEL members, whether they are educators in academic institutions or in the business world.

APPENDIX I COVER SHEET FROM THE EXERCISE DILEMMA-DILEMMA

DILEMA-DILEMMA



Source: Pittenger, 1995

APPENDIX II INSTRUCTIONS FOR THE EXERCISE DILEMMA-DILEMMA

Introduction:

Dilemma-Dilemma is an intergroup activity. The purpose of this activity is to learn about conflict, communication, group behavior and related issues. In the course of the exercise, money will be won or lost by the teams. THE OBJECTIVE IS TO MAXIMIZE YOUR GAINS.

Instructions:

1. The group will be subdivided into gold and purple teams, each consisting of no more than eight members. If there are multiple gold and purple teams, each gold team will be paired with a purple team.

NO UNREGULATED COMMUNICATION BETWEEN TEAMS IS ALLOWED.

2. The teams represent parties trying to land a contract for the sale of their services and goods.

3. Each team has the choice of making a high or a low bid. Each team's gain or loss will depend on its own choice and the choice of the other team as explained in the payoff table (below).

4. There are 10 rounds in the exercise. See the tally sheet for greater details.

5. In the first ten minutes, each team must plan its strategy and choose:

A representative (to meet with the representative of the other team after rounds 3, 8 and 9).

A decision recorder (to note the team's decision and to convey it to the facilitator).

A recorder (to track the team's performance).

PAYOFF TABLE			
CHOICE		PAYOFF (in Millions)	
GOLD	PURPLE	GOLD	PURPLE
High	High	+3	+3
High	Low	-6	+6
Low	High	+6	-6
Low	Low	-3	-3

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APPENDIX III THE TALLY SHEET FOR THE EXERCISE DILEMMA-DILEMMA

Instructions: For 10 consecutive rounds, both teams will chose either high or low. The score for each team in a round is determined by the choices of both teams, according to the payoff schedule.

Round	Minutes	Scoresheet			
		Choice		Score	
		Gold Team	Purple Team	Gold Team	Purple Team
1	1.5				
2	1.5				
3	1.5				
4*	2 (reps)				
	1.5 (teams)				
5	1.5				
6	1.5				
7	1.5				
8	1.5				
9**	2 (reps)				
	1.5 (teams)				
10**	2 (reps)				
	1.5 (teams)				
Total Score:		Gold:		Purple:	

*Payoff points are doubled for this round.

**Payoff points are squared for this round (any minus signs are retained).

APPENDIX IV THE PREDICTION SHEET FOR THE EXERCISE DILEMMA-DILEMMA

Dilemma-Dilemma Round 10
Prediction Sheet

PREDICTING TEAM	OTHER TEAM	
	Prediction	Actual
Gold		
Purple		

**APPENDIX V
THE QUESTIONNAIRE FOR THE EXERCISE DILEMMA-DILEMMA**

1. Select one word that describes how you feel about the other team: _____.

2. Select one word that describes how you feel about your team: _____.

3. To what extent are you satisfied with your team's strategy:

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
↓						↓
Highly Dissatisfied						Highly Satisfied

4. To what extent do you believe the other team is trustworthy?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
↓						↓
Highly Untrustworthy						Highly Trustworthy

5. To what extent are you satisfied with the performance of your representative?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
↓						↓
Highly Dissatisfied						Highly Satisfied

6. To what extent was there consensus in your team regarding its moves?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
↓						↓
Very Little						A Great Deal

7. To what extent do you trust the other members of your team?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
↓						↓
Very Little						A Great Deal

**APPENDIX VI
DISCUSSION QUESTIONS FOR THE EXERCISE
DILEMMA-DILEMMA**

1. What occurred during the exercise?
2. What contributed to the relationships among groups?
3. How could the relationships have been more effective?
4. Was there conflict, competition and mistrust between the teams and why?

**APPENDIX VII
TEACHING MATERIAL TO SUPPORT THE
EXERCISE DILEMMA-DILEMMA**

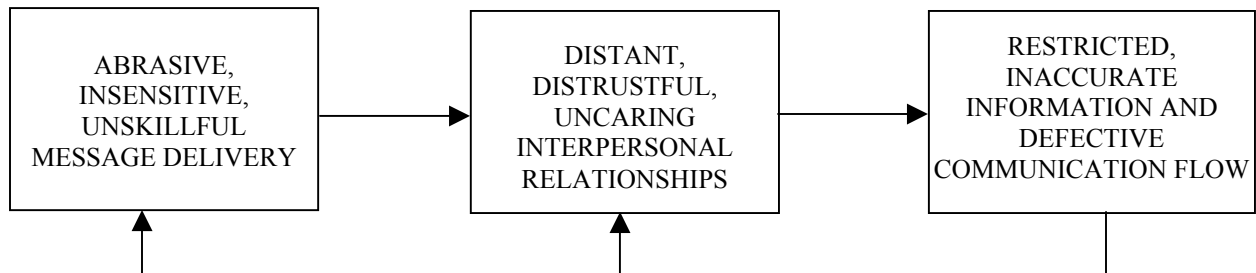
HOW MISUNDERSTANDINGS ARISE

1. Problems in developing the message.
2. Problems in transmitting the message.
3. Problems in receiving the message.
4. Problems in interpreting the message.

Source: Thill and Bovée, 1993.

APPENDIX VIII
ADDITIONAL TEACHING MATERIAL TO SUPPORT
THE EXERCISE DILEMMA-DILEMMA

RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN UNSKILLFUL COMMUNICATION
AND INTERPERSONAL RELATIONSHIPS



Source: Whetten & Cameron, 1995.

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