

Development In Business Simulation & Experiential Exercises, Volume 18, 1991

COLLECTIVE BARGAINING SIMULATION: AN EXERCISE BASED ON A FAMILIAR THEME

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ABSTRACT

Most labor relations simulations of collective bargaining use a factory setting as the basis for the exercise. Frequently the students lose interest in pursuing the simulation. This is because they do not have an understanding about the work relationships of strange job titles and descriptions. Additionally, many "contracts" are either too comprehensive or too simplistic. The simulation suggested here is based on a food market setting which utilizes familiar job descriptions and incorporates a labor-management agreement contract specifically designed for the simulation exercise.

Prerequisites for Good Simulations

The major goal of any teaching simulation is to achieve a high degree of realism. Coupled with this goal is the need for the students to relate to the exercise in a way that allows them to behave as in a real world environment. Many simulations and exercises fail to achieve these goals.

Proposed Simulation

Class members are divided into labor union and management teams. Each team member is provided with a labor/management agreement, which requires renegotiating. Additionally, background material is provided which relates important details about the company and the union. Instructions are included which describe the parameters of the negotiations and the requirements for each team's assignments. Evaluation sheets are used to give peer critique of each member's quality of participation and preparation. These evaluations give each student a comprehensive feedback on their efforts. The new simulation incorporates three basic ingredients into its structure. The firm is an independent Super-market dealing with an unaffiliated

union. The contract is designed to include only essential items in its coverage. Yet, it contains a number of vague clauses to provide opportunity for the participants to enhance the contract language. Specific inequities have been included which will give some degree of locus to the subsequent bargaining. Special emphasis has been given so that each participant will have the total responsibility to negotiate some aspect of the contract issues. In this way members of each team gain experience being in both a position of responsibility and accountability as well as being subordinate to the lead negotiator.

Discussion

The use of a complete but simplistic labor agreement provides locus to the original "demands" which are generated by the labor union team. The teams are successful in finding most of the weak clauses, which are in, the existing agreement and are able to hone in on these as topics for subsequent bargaining. Thus, an implied non-directive approach to the bargaining assignment maintains the students' creativity and flexibility while obtaining emphasis on major issues which, are likely candidates any true bargaining situation.

Conclusion

One of the major pitfalls of any classroom simulation is the potential that the students will not be able to fully immerse themselves into the simulation scenario. Every effort should be made to provide an environment, which will both challenge the students and allow them to become involved in a desire to succeed. The creation of this labor negotiation simulation allows the student to bargain realistically about issues with which they are familiar