

Developments in Business Simulation & Experiential Exercises, Volume 16, 1989

HARRIED HARRY:
AN EXPERIENTIAL CAPSTONE FOR STUDENTS OF ORGANIZATIONAL BEHAVIOR

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ABSTRACT

This demonstration workshop is intended for instructors of organizational behavior (especially, but not exclusively, at the undergraduate level). Participants will learn a new, easy-to-administer exercise they can use as an experiential capstone for students of organizational behavior. The exercise enables students to integrate a wide range of concepts and appreciate the realities of organizational behavior.

After a brief introduction, attendees will be separated into small groups to participate as roleplayers in the exercise. Then, having experienced the exercise firsthand, participants will debrief and discuss ways of adapting it to meet their specific teaching needs and goals.

INTRODUCTION

Instructors are rarely hardpressed to find an experiential vehicle to supplement their textbook or lecture discussion of a particular concept of organizational behavior. An appropriate roleplay, simulation, or group exercise can be located effortlessly in the teacher's guide or companion manual to their text.

Less readily available, however, is a learning tool that integrates the wide gamut of topics covered in an OB course and requires students to use multiple levels, or lenses, of analysis -- individual, interpersonal, group, intergroup, and organizational. An integrative experiential learning experience is needed not only to review and synthesize course material, but to inject realism into the classroom (see Frost, Mitchell, & Nord, 1986; Mousavi, 1988). An effective "capstone" would enable students to experience various facets of organizational behavior, which for pedagogical simplification, are treated during the semester as relatively isolated theoretical concerns, as they intertwine to produce the complexity that is organizational reality. Unquestionably, the Looking Glass simulation (McCall & Lombardo, 1978) provides this rich capstone experience for participants; however, its preparation and administration require an extraordinary investment of staff time, making its implementation unwieldy, if not formidable, for most management educators.

Presented here is a roleplay that allows students to synthesize and apply the full spectrum of issues in organizational behavior, demands minimal preparation, and may be run in the amount of time normally allotted to just one or two university class periods. Additionally, this capstone can be appreciated even by students with minimal work experience, as it involves a field which most

people have basic familiarity (food services), and the issues are sufficiently realistic and provocative to ensure active participation by roleplayers. The author has successfully administered the exercise to undergraduate management students at Yale University and Hofstra University (as well as to participants in a management development program at The Port Authority of New York and New Jersey who had

earned masters degrees in public administration).

THE EXERCISE

Scenario

A manager resigns from a problem-ridden department. Each of four members of the department reads a different egocentric perspective of the situation; the manager's successor reads a more comprehensive, yet also subjective version (see scripts). After these five participants have studied their background information, they attend a staff meeting, at which their behaviors reflect their discrepant assumptions and interests. The exercise illustrates such concepts as individual perception and stereotyping, motivation, stress, job design, group and intergroup dynamics, leadership, power and politics, conflict, reward systems, careers, decision-making, communication, and organizational structure, and organizational change.

Process

1. Form groups of exactly five members. Ideally, groups should be physically separated to minimize interference (see Appendix for suggestions for preparation).
2. Give individuals 10 minutes to learn their parts.
3. Have groups interact for 20 to 30 minutes.
4. Regroup according to role, so that all those who played Phil/Phyllis are in one group, all Scott Frees make up another group, and so forth. For 10 minutes, have individuals share with counterparts their experiences playing the same role. What problems and frustrations did they encounter from the other role players? How did they attempt to deal with these problems and how successful were such attempts?
5. Return individuals to their original groups and distribute the discussion sheet. Have groups spend 20 minutes working through the questions.
6. Reconvene all participants for about 20 minutes to discuss learnings.
7. OPTIONAL: Have students submit a paper based upon their conceptual learnings or a journal piece based on self-learnings.

Variation

1. Form groups of six (minimum) to eight members and assign the parts of the five characters and the role of observer(s).

¹ Moreover, as Hackman (1984) posits, behavior may be better understood by considering tangled masses of factors than by trying to tease out single reasons.

Developments in Business Simulation & Experiential Exercises, Volume 16, 1989

2. Give individuals 10 minutes to learn their background information.
3. Allow groups to enact the role play for 20 to 30 minutes.
4. Give observers about 10 minutes to provide feedback on group behavior. Note: The observer role can be played as "informed" or "naive." The informed observer reads, in advance, the roles of all other participants; thus, he or she observes with a sense of how the group of individual members may function effectively or ineffectively and can give the group feedback on its handling of the situation. The naive observer, who receives no background material, raises what he or she believes are the salient features of the situation as enacted by the group and gives process feedback on the role players' interactions. If size permits, each group can have one informed observer and one naive observer.
5. Distribute the discussion sheet; have observers lead discussions in their respective groups for about 20 minutes.
- 6, & 7. As above.

Scripts

Phil/Phyllis Shoes

You, Phil/Phyllis Shoes, have worked for fifteen years at Goodway, a metropolitan organization that employs roughly three thousand individuals. Just minutes ago, you learned of your lateral reassignment as manager of the Dining Services Department within the Employee Services Division. Now you will oversee all the food service operations of the organization. Specifically, you will coordinate the activities of your group of immediate subordinates, the supervisors of the individual dining operations at Goodway (see Figure 1).

Your recent appointment follows the overnight resignation of Harry Carry, the former division manager. Actually, Harry's decision to leave Goodway comes as no surprise to you. Harry and you have been friends for years, and Harry often confided in you about his situation at work. Consequently, you know quite a bit of history about the department you are about to head.

Harry and you spoke often of his assistant manager, Scott Free. According to Harry, young Scott is a real sharpie, but he has not seemed to pull his weight during his two months in the position. Still, Harry's brother-in-law, Scott's father, is certain that Scott will "deliver" if given sufficient opportunity. Harry was especially concerned about Scott's lack of initiative; he complained often to you that Scott had never once come up with any productive plans for the department. Harry worried about Scott's work habits (or lack thereof), and about the supervisors' attitudes toward him as "the lazy kid in the plush office" (see Figure 2). Harry had asked Scott not to disclose their relationship, for the others would surely resent Scott's non-meritbased appointment. But Harry realized that it was only a matter of time before the cat was out of the bag, and he dreaded the consequences he would have to face. Actually, Harry only agreed to hire his nephew out of obligation to his brother-in-law. Who had lent him a large sum of money some years back.

Harry Carry mentioned often how, over the last couple of years, he had felt his managerial grip weaken. Hoping to reinforce the leadership of his division, Harry had decided to appoint another person to a position comparable to Scott's.

Harry believed that Sally Forth, who had worked diligently in Dining Services for nearly three years, had the necessary skills and attitudes for the job. However, Sally had worked several years as a cleaning woman in Goodway's Maintenance Division before she completed her education and a promotion landed her in Harry's division. Harry, aware that his other subordinates might not take Sally's new position seriously. In light of her work history, could not decide how to announce Sally's promotion.

Harried Harry had other concerns: First, Scott has already established quite a reputation as a womanizer. The department currently employs three secretaries; Abby Rhode is the manager's secretary, and Sandy Lane and Anna Graham are supposed to share the rest of the staff's clerical work. However, Scott recently took it upon himself to name Sandy his "personal assistant," leaving Anna feeling so overloaded and outraged she threatened to quit unless Harry rectified the situation.

Salary was another troublesome topic for Harry. Goodway has allotted a fixed amount of funding for the Dining Services Department for the current period (which lasts three more months). Therefore, either Sally will have to receive a much lesser salary than Scott while holding an equivalent position, or Scott, or Harry, or others will have to take a cut in pay for those next few months. But the money issue goes even deeper. Because the organization sees Employee Services as one of its low priority staff functions, the salaries for supervisors in Harry's department are unusually low for Goodway. As a result, a high turnover rate prevails among new supervisors. All too commonly, the most capable employees in Goodway's three dining units -- the employee cafeteria, the executive dining room, and the snack shop -- receive promotions to help run these units, but transfer within a year (after acquiring valuable supervisory experience) into higher-paying positions elsewhere in the organization. Dining Services has been jokingly nicknamed Goodway's "Feeder."

Your new subordinates do not yet know about Harry's sudden resignation or your appointment as their manager. You must now explain, as they are expecting Harry to preside over the bi-weekly staff meeting, which is scheduled to begin momentarily,

Scott Free

You, Scott Free, have worked just two months at Goodway, a metropolitan organization employing about three thousand individuals. As Assistant Department Manager of Dining Services, within the Employee Services Division, you were hired to help the manager oversee the three food service operations of the organization -- the employee cafeteria, executive dining room, and snack shop -- and to coordinate the activities of your group of immediate subordinates, the respective supervisors of these operations (see Figure 1).

So far, your job has fallen short of your expectations. After graduating cum laude with a Bachelors in Business Administration, you had anticipated that working in a managerial capacity in a large organization would provide challenging experiences. However, your boss, Department Manager Harry Carry, grants you no responsibility. His actions suggest that he trusts you only enough to tend to routine administrative activities. For example, your biggest responsibility of the week was

Developments in Business Simulation & Experiential Exercises, Volume 16, 1989

to reserve the conference room for this morning's staff meeting. Your dream is to make a major impact on the way the Dining Services Department is run, but as Harry won't even share important information with you, your sole comfort comes from burying yourself in management journals after you've dealt with the daily crop of paperwork. Even if Harry were to give you more of a say in managing the department, you sense that many of your subordinates, who have risen through the ranks of Goodway, resent your entry into the organization in a high-status position with a private office (see Figure 2).

To make matters worse, Sandy Lane, one of the department's secretaries, learned that your father persuaded your Uncle Harry (his brother-in-law) to give you the job. Ever since her discovery, Sandy has been blackmailing you; she forced you to designate her your personal secretary and severely diminish her workload. Sandy is supposed to share with Anna Graham, another secretary, the work of the entire staff less Harry. Waiting now for the staff meeting to begin, you feel guilty that Sandy's adjusted workload has upset the department; however, you fear she will tell your subordinates of your relationship to Harry if you dare not comply with her.

Sally Forth

You, Sally Forth, are a member of the Dining Services Department of the Employee Services Division at Goodway, a metropolitan organization employing about three thousand individuals. The organization has always acknowledged your diligence and competence; indeed, you have made great professional strides at Goodway. After working several years as a nightshift cleaning person in the organization's maintenance Division while you completed your education, you found a job in Dining Services. In just three years, you have risen from kitchen aide to senior supervisor of the executive dining room, one of Goodway's three food service operations (see Figure 1).

Moreover, just last week, your manager, Harry Carry, said he had decided to promote you to co-assistant division manager. Harry assured you that your skills and experience qualified you for the position. Upon receiving the news, you immediately felt extremely honored and could hardly wait to start making plans for your new position. After you were over the initial thrill, however, you began to see a potential downside to the job. You would have to work closely with Scott Free, the present assistant division manager. Scott is fresh out of college and low in experience about the food services industry. Actually, you wouldn't mind teaching him about the business. However, as you've heard that Scott is *far* from being the go-getter you are, you're somewhat concerned that you'll have to do his job as well as yours. You've often wondered how Scott got the job in the first place. Perhaps he won Harry Carry over with the same charm he used on his secretary, Sandy Lane, with whom he seems to be personally, as well as professionally, involved.

Still, after a great deal of thought, you have decided that it would be foolish not to accept the position. Working with Scott is a small price to pay for advancement and challenge. You can hardly wait for Harry to issue an announcement to the department. You expect him to break the news at this morning's staff meeting, which begins momentarily. If he doesn't, you are certain you won't be able to keep your secret any longer.

Abby Rhode

You, Abby Rhode, work at Goodway, a metropolitan organization employing roughly three thousand individuals. You are the secretary of Harry Carry, Manager of the Dining Services Department within the Employee Services Division (see Figure 1).

As the manager's secretary your responsibilities include supervising the other secretaries in the department -- Sandy Lane and Anna Graham. Sandy and Anna used to provide effective support services for Dining Services' management personnel. Last month, however, Scott Free, the assistant manager of the department, officially designated Sandy his secretary. Anna, exhausted from three grueling weeks of struggling to tackle her greatly increased workload, complained to you that it is neither feasible nor equitable for her to continue working under the present arrangement. You sympathized immediately with Anna and promised to try to convince Scott that Sandy must resume her original responsibilities. But before you had a chance to meet with Scott, Anna approached Harry and threatened to quit unless he remedied the situation. As you side with Anna and would hate to see someone of her caliber leave, you plan to raise the issue of Sandy's job description at this morning's staff meeting, which will begin in a moment.

Gerry Mander

For nearly six years, you have worked at Goodway, a metropolitan organization that employs about three thousand individuals. About eight months ago, your glowing record as a dependable and quick-thinking employee in the Dining Services Department of the Employee Services Division earned you a promotion to first-line supervisor in one of Goodway's food service operations (see Figure 1).

Your new position provides challenging responsibilities. By modeling a competent and experienced superior, you are learning the best way to run a food service operation. Nevertheless, you have considered leaving your job. The salaries for supervisory personnel within your department are extremely low for Goodway. You certainly would not be the first supervisor to transfer into a more lucrative position elsewhere in the organization. From all reports, your manager, Harry Carry, doesn't think enough of his own people to fight for them to stay.

Besides, you wonder whether you can continue to rise up through the ranks if you remain in Dining Services. About six months after you became supervisor, a kid named Scott Free entered the department in the high-and-mighty position of assistant to the manager. You assume Scott is incompetent, for he seems to do nothing but sit in his spacious office (see Figure 2). Rumor has it that Scott can usually be found with his face buried in an X-rated magazine. Your peers (the other supervisors), as well as your boss, a senior supervisor, share your resentment toward manager Harry Carry for hiring Scott -- a college graduate who knows nothing about the purchasing, preparation, or serving of food - instead of promoting a talented individual from the department.

In a moment, you will be representing your unit at the staff meeting. (You are sitting in for your superior, who is attending a conference on innovations in institutional food.) You are eager to see Harry and Scott in action.

Developments in Business Simulation & Experiential Exercises, Volume 16, 1989

DISCUSSION

Flow were these concepts manifested in your group? List examples.

- | | |
|-------------------------|-------------------|
| * individual perception | * rewards and |
| * stereotyping | reward systems |
| * motivation | * careers |
| * job stress | * decision-making |
| * job design | * communication |
| * group dynamics | * organizational |
| * intergroup dynamics | structure |
| * leadership | * organizational |
| | change |

To what extent is it possible to attribute behavior in organizations to one factor or another? Is it feasible to try to pick out the unique contribution of each factor -- or does it make more sense to consider the combined effect of all relevant factors? Why?

APPENDIX

Room set-up: If groups are too close, eavesdropping as well as accidental intrusions may occur. Therefore, strive to maximize each group's space. If possible, schedule class at a time when you can put each group of roleplayers in a separate room. Otherwise, hold class in the largest room available.

Role assignment: Decide carefully how best to assign the roles to your students. First, some consideration must be given to gender-related issues. Note that the parts of Sally Forth and Abby Rhode must be filled by females, and the part of Scott Free, by a male. Phil/Phyllis Shoes and Gerry Mander (and any observer part) may be played by male or female. You may choose either to strive for a gender balance in each group of roleplayers, or, in the classwide discussion, make a point of bringing out any differences among groups stemming from male/female ratios (see Kanter, 1977; Zimmerman & West, 1975).

Additionally, you may want to assign the role of Phil/Phyllis with special attention. This role of leadership may be overwhelming for an unassertive individual. (Indeed, in one group I observed, a frustrated Phil handed over his script to the more extraverted observer in his group!) On the other hand, students may rise to the occasion, and even relish the opportunity to experiment with new behaviors in the context of an experiential exercise; therefore, take care not to thwart students in the name of protecting them. (Rosenthal, 1971, has documented how teacher's low expectations of students can limit student's development in the classroom.)

Materials: Attach to every script the organization chart and the diagram of the office layout.

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FIGURE 1
ORGANIZATION CHART

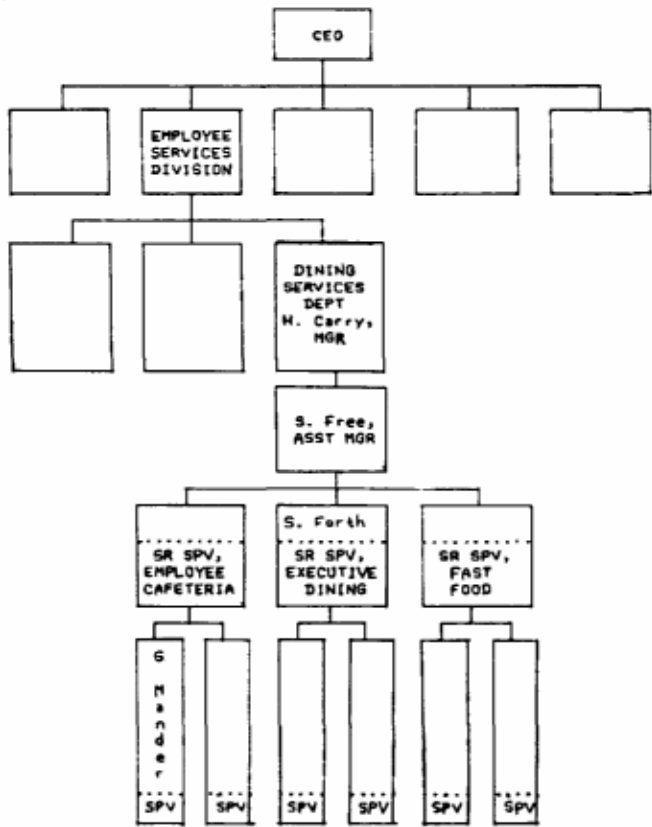


FIGURE 2
LAYOUT OF THE DEPARTMENT

