

Developments in Business Simulation & Experiential Exercises, Volume 9, 1982

PROBLEMS OF WOMEN IN MANAGEMENT: A ROLE PLAYING EXERCISE FOR A COURSE IN "CONTEMPORARY ORGANIZATIONAL PROBLEMS"

John W. Trinkaus, Baruch College, CUNY

Alvin L. Boone, Baruch College, CUNY

ABSTRACT

A role play exercise to provoke consideration of topical issues of women in entry level management positions is presented. Parts, intentionally cast in provocative style, are designed to stimulate controversy and thinking. Particular focus is directed toward interpersonal interfacing situations of both male-female and female-female groupings. Supporting background information and operating instructions are provided.

INTRODUCTION

Many schools of business include in their management curriculum a specialized skill-oriented course dealing with contemporary organizational issues. Such a course normally has a flexible structure as to content, in that the subject matter treated is a function of the managerial problems of the times. Too, the course format generally departs from the typical lecture and the development of concepts to one of a seminar with previously learned principles put into reinforcing practices.

While such a setting lends itself to the use of experiential techniques, most available exercises generally deal with more established and static mainstream subject matters. To partially fill this void, this role play which treats female-male interactions on a managerial level, was developed. It is designed for use in an undergraduate, senior-year course with students having some in-depth background learning in management concepts.

The general objectives of this role play are to: 1) Increase student sensitivity to the potential for conflict growing out of a changing mix of men and women in the managerial ranks; 2) Enhance understanding of both factual and perceptual problems resulting from varying work environment attitudes and biases; 3) Identify unique situational complexities and problems potentially inherent in settings where people with differing commitments strive to integrate fulfilling self accommodations with the needs of the situation; 4) Highlight strategies and tactics employed in the resolution of conflict; 5) Single out specific techniques and methodologies which may well be employed to establish more placid, tranquil, and uniform, people-oriented internal operating environments.

APPLICATION

This role play is designed for a class size of approximately 15 to 25 students. While the number of role-parts used at any one time may be varied, usage suggests that all class members be assigned roles. The nature of the exercise is such that active student participation by the entire class generally leads to better dynamics.

Three consecutive class periods, running 75 minutes each,

are normally used. The first generally introduces the overall issues of women in management and concludes with an introduction to the specific situation in the exercise. The second is the role-play itself. Due to the relatively large number of participants, coupled with the potential for the development of a sizeable number of interactions, rotation of assignments is normally not used. However, it is suggested that efforts be made, in the interest of both stimulating more thoughts by the participants and developing a fuller understanding of the intrinsic implications, to assign male parts to women and female parts to men. The third session is normally an open-ended, unstructured debriefing, terminating with a closed looping of the issues developed in the initial meeting. The role play exercise itself is simply an awareness stimulator, having a generic rather than a specific aim in this particular subject area. The front-end issues may be modified to suit the course objectives and the instructional situation.

No special equipment is needed for this role play. A normal class arrangement, or students sitting around a large conference table is entirely suitable. The only suggested change is that for the play itself, the student having the part of the Company CEO be seated in the location normally occupied by the instructor, and the instructor not be seated at the table. No special advance planning time is needed other than that required to gain familiarity with the exercise, and selecting the details of the feedback mechanism in terms of the strategies and tactics which should be employed.

Considerable attention is required of the instructor to keep the exercise on track. In particular, continuous monitoring is needed to: assure suitable participation by the players in terms of precluding under or over involvement; direct on-course development of the thoughts being nurtured; guard against dysfunctional side-tracking excursions and dead-ending diversions; bridge gaps and fill voids, when and if they should occur, so as to insure the continuity of the play. The role of the Company CEO, which is pivotal, should go to a dynamic and outgoing individual who is capable of generating group interest, maintaining the interchanges, and readily adapting to the situation as the exercises progress.

The play is not designated as an ice breaker, but rather as one to be employed to meet certain general goals in a specific learning experience. In addition to the intrinsic objective of the treatment of a contemporary management problem, the issue of the impact of women in management as a factor in the internal operating environment of the firm, there are related extrinsic issues as well. For example, this particular role playing exercise provides the opportunity to: 1. self analyze the complexity of a seemingly simplistic problem; 2. gain insight into the subjective emotional issues which develop in an interactive organizational structuring issue 3. analyze methods and techniques used to effect, influence, and change; and, 4. acquire insight into, and understanding of, the nature and difficulty of attempting to find reasonable solutions to unreasonable problems--

Developments in Business Simulation & Experiential Exercises, Volume 9, 1982

problems where win-win solutions may well come close to impossible.

SOME BACKGROUND INFORMATION

The Wick Electronics Company, located in a small rural community called Gramercyville, was founded in 1946 by Jay Wick. The Company, a privately held Corporation, has grown and prospered largely through the technical expertise and engineering skills of Jay. At present, it is a leader within its field and shows every indication of maintaining this position.

About two years ago, when Jay died suddenly of a massive heart attack his daughter, Elizabeth Wick, at the urging of the family, took over the running of the business. While this is a rather formidable job, as Wick Electronics is a rather sizeable organization when measured in most conventional terms, Elizabeth responded very well to this challenge. A significant degree of her success can probably be attributable to a major managerial reorganization of the Company. Building on the sound technology base, she significantly strengthened the structure and people components which resulted in the creation of an extremely sound organizational entity. The name of the Company was changed to New Wick Electronics and newly established policies activated.

One of these practices called for the entry of women into management positions. Up to this time all the managers were men; women employees were limited to rank and file positions. This condition was not the result of any deliberate bias on the part of Jay, but rather appears to be the result of the prevailing social work norms.

Over the past year or two a number of women have been placed into entry level management positions through promotion from within and outside recruiting. To most industry personnel observers, New Wick Electronics was making good progress in this affirmative action area, an opinion also shared by Ms. Wick. However, a delegation of women supervisors recently approached Ms. Wick requesting a meeting to discuss what they believed to be sex related inequities and sexual harassment on the job.

Rather than meeting with this special group, Ms. Wick decided to schedule an open meeting of all first line supervisors for Friday afternoon at 4 p.m. in the Company cafeteria. Attendance is optional, there is no agenda, and the whole thing is being kept extremely low keyed. While everyone pretty much knows why the meeting has been called and what will be discussed, Ms. Wick has scrupulously avoided assigning any theme to this gathering.

THE ROLES

A library of 25 roles is available for this exercise. These roles can be mixed and matched depending on the specific mission being pursued and the class setting. Twelve of the roles are women and twelve are men, and one is the company owner. Due to space limitations, only a sample of roles is reproduced here--six male and six female roles.

Role No. 1, Elizabeth Wick, President and Chairman of the Board

Your father, Jay Wick, founded the Wick Electronics Company in 1946. Following his graduation from the Gramercyville University of Technology, he was inducted into military service where he served as a first lieutenant, in

the U.S. Army Signal Corp.

About two years ago he died suddenly, and you were called upon to take over the family business. You have no particular technological knowledge or skills, but you do hold a B.B.A. degree in management from a very prestigious university. You didn't particularly want this job. At the time of your father's death you were looking forward to accepting a very promising management position at the Gramercyville Municipal Botanical Gardens.

Shortly after taking over the reins of your father's business, you changed the name of the Company to New Wick Electronics in order to highlight your reorganization of the Company. Although your father was a good engineer, he was a rather poor manager. When you assumed the post of Chief Executive Officer, you made a lot of structural and people changes. The excellent engineering staff which your father had attracted adjusted the technology accordingly, so that the resulting composite was almost a model organization.

One of your changes was the recruitment and placement of women in entry level management positions, and hopefully onto tracks to middle and upper level management jobs. Your father didn't have any women managers at all. It wasn't that your father was against women managers, it was that the norms of Gramercyville, the town in which the Company is located, frowned on women working in career level positions.

You thought that you were making smooth progress in bringing women into the management levels of the Company until a group of them approached you last week and requested the opportunity to meet with you about the quality of their work life at New Wick Electronics. They appeared to be rather upset.

Prudence seemed to suggest that you indeed meet with them. However, as you felt that the meeting should be low-keyed and informal, you extended an invitation for all your first-level managers, both women and men, to get together with you this Friday afternoon, about an hour before quitting time in the Company cafeteria. Attendance is voluntary and you have set no agenda, other than giving people an opportunity to speak their mind. While you will be chairing the meeting, other than seeing that it stays orderly, and that everyone who wants to speak has an equal opportunity to do so, you are going to try to avoid saying anything; in particular, you definitely want to avoid making commitments and taking sides if any controversies do arise.

While you personally recognize everyone at the meeting, as a matter of form, you ask everyone to introduce themselves by name and department.

Role No. 2 Dorothy Hill, Drafting Department

Tom, your boss, has made it quite clear to you that he thinks you pushing too hard and too fast for a promotion. You almost know by heart every step of Tom's career path at New Wick. He has recited his story to you over and over again each time you have talked with him about your own potential advancement at the Company. The bottom line is that it took him years to move up, so why do you think that you should be able to advance any faster than he did. 'First, you have to pay your dues,' Tom says over and over again. The scenario is always the same: the tale of the perils of Tom at Wick Electronics followed by the call to pay your dues. Dues! Dues! Dues!

Developments in Business Simulation & Experiential Exercises, Volume 9, 1982

Talking with Tom's boss, Phil, you feel will not do much good. You have learned from experience that Phil generally always backs his immediate subordinates. It's almost as if there is some informal mutual protection treaty in place. Loyalty and support is one thing, but the degree to which Phil and his troops carry it, you believe, is dysfunctional. Besides, you're pretty sure that Tom picked up this dues philosophy from Phil. At almost every meeting you have attended, at which Phil has also been in attendance, he has always been calling on someone, or some group, to pay their dues.

You completely reject the dues hypothesis. All you know is that you are hard working and good at what you do. You certainly deserve to move ahead. Just because Tom had to wait years for his promotion, paying his dues as he refers to it, doesn't mean that you have to wait too. Enough of this dues stuff! Ms. Wick called this meeting to get some of these issues out in the open. You intend to speak up.

Role No. 3. Bertha Schmidh, Plating Department

It's not true that you're always looking for a good argument. You might perhaps have the highest loss-of-patience threshold point of anyone at New Wick. But, when you're really honest with yourself you do have to admit that you certainly enjoy a good fight--particularly if you're one of the contestants. You get a lot of pleasure out of verbally mixing it up, be it on a one-to-one basis or in a group.

As far as this meeting, you have no particular ax to grind. But, you sure wouldn't mind if a good brawl develops. If it doesn't, perhaps you can help stir things up a little--nothing serious, just a good old fashioned hot debate. You don't see anything wrong with that. In fact, it might be very helpful. Don't doctors always say that it's not healthy for people to keep their feelings bottled up?

You would assume that if Ms. Wick had her druthers, she would prefer that you were not at this get-together. The two of you had a few encounters in the past, but nothing serious. You feel sure that she agrees that the nickname that your coworkers have blessed you with, "The Bomb", is most appropriate.

Now that you start to think about it, you're glad that you came to this meeting. Not only might you learn something new, but perhaps you can have some good clean fun. Besides, now that you have had a chance to look around the room, a lot of the people here tend to take themselves much too seriously. As far as you're concerned, New Wick has more than a normal share of pompous people--both female and male. You enjoy taking them down a peg or two, in a nice way, whenever the opportunity presents itself.

Role No. 4. Sheila Ruderman, Duplicating Department

You have a name--it's Sheila. If you told this to Bud, your boss, once you must have told him at least a thousand times. But, he still refers to you, in front of others, as "she". It's always she, she, she! It's never Sheila! Norris, he refers to as Morris; Al, he refers to as Al; Eli, he refers to as Eli. But you, are always "she". It's not that Bud forgets your name; he calls you Sheila when you are having a one-on-one conversation. But, for some reason when others are present, it's always she.

Enough is enough! You have had it! Your job at New Wick is nothing special. You figure that you can probably readily find something better. It's just a question of getting out and doing a little looking--and this may just be the push you need. You'll bring up the matter at this meeting, but if

appears that you're just wasting your breath and time, that's it. Next week you start looking.

Just thinking about it now is starting to get you all upset again. Bud is a pretty good supervisor and, other than this name game, you really don't have any complaints. But, you sure don't intend to sit idly by and keep being referred to as "she". If you're going to be a "she", then let your male coworkers be "hes". What's good for the goose is good for the gander!

Role No. 5. Gloria Martinez, Process Methods Department

"Gloria, will you please deliver this." "Gloria, will you please go get that." "Gloria,--", "Gloria,---", it never seems to end! At times it appears that at this rate some day you may well become serious competition for the United States Postal Service of Western Union.

You don't object to some courier assignments now and then, that's part of the job. But, why does Mel, your supervisor always ask you to do it? What's the matter with your male peers, like Mike, Bob, and Irv? They are certainly strong, healthy, and able. When you talk to Mel about this, and you have on several occasions, he assures you that you are right and he will sure do something about it immediately. Unfortunately, he never does. When you remind him, he freely admits fault, apologizes, and assures you that starting tomorrow he will sincerely try to mend his ways--he never does.

It's not a big problem, or a real serious situation. However, it is beginning to wear on your well being. Your job at New Wick, on balance, is pretty good. Sure you feel that you are underpaid, overworked, and capable of handling much more responsibility than you now have. But, you are aware that you would probably have these same feelings on any job. You would like to stay with the Company, but sometimes this "go fetch" routine makes you wonder if it's worth the aggravation. However, as long as Ms. Wick called this meeting, you feel that you should bring up the problem. It may not do any good, but it probably wouldn't hurt. At least you should feel better after you have had your say.

Role No. 6. Olga Brannan, Purchasing Department

Being singled out as a woman didn't bother you at first but now it's starting to get to you. How long do you have to be at New Wick before you're viewed as an integral member of the team, rather than an outsider?

You thought that it was just a matter of the men getting used to your presence when at meetings, the male leader would open with "Gentlemen and Olga". But, they still do it. It's always "men", "guys", "fellows", or something like that, followed by, "and Olga". If there are other women present, they too are cited by name. But, if a woman is chairing the session, it doesn't happen. They all seem to use some generic term like "people". Why don't the men?

The resulting list for inter-office memos is another sore point. In the case of a male sending the memo, the men are simply listed by name. You, however, always have a "Ms." designation set out in front of your name--as do any other women addresses. But, if it's a woman sending out the memo there is simply an alphabetic listing of names with no designations whatsoever.

If the women can handle the fact that men are no different than them, within the context of the work setting, why can't the men? It doesn't appear to be such a dif-

Developments in Business Simulation & Experiential Exercises, Volume 9, 1982

ficult thing to ask. Yet, when you tried to do it informally you were unsuccessful; in fact, you may well have generated hostility. It is almost as if these practices were methods being used by the men to vent their personal stress resulting from the growth of the number of women in management at New Wick. But, this might not really be so. You're starting to get so uptight over this matter that you may well be jumping at false conclusions.

You are not happy about this annoyance and have decided to bring it up at this meeting. You feel, however, that you have to be very careful about what you say and how you say it, lest the whole thing backfire. What if Ms. Wick views this "annoyance" as being petty nonsense? She might think that you are being picky about these practices.

Role No. 7. Marie Lee, Product Engineering Department

You really have had no special problems at New Wick Electronics, but there is one prevailing practice which is starting to get under your skin. This get-together, you feel, may well be a good opportunity to open up and say something about it.

From time to time you, and other supervisors meet to discuss particular issues of common concern. These meetings are relatively informal and the composition of the group generally changes depending on the subject being considered. However, regardless of the nature of the meeting, or those in attendance, one of the men always recommends that minutes be kept and you seem to end up taking them. You have tried to get the jump on your male peers by being the one offering the suggestion but some how or other, you're not quite sure how, it almost always ends in agreement that minutes should indeed be kept and that you do it. If you manage to avoid the assignment it appears that it is always another woman, never a man, who winds up with the job.

You don't mind taking the minutes of the meetings, sometimes they are indeed very good to have. But you resent the fact that it is always you. And, if not you then it's one of the other women who has to do it. Women don't have any special abilities or qualifications as minute takers! Let the men take a turn too--fair is fair! You have decided to get this matter out in the open--and this meeting seems like a good place to bring it up!

Role No. 8. Ira Blumgarden, Components Engineering Dept.

You have always supported the proposition that the best qualified person [or the job should get that job. That's only good business sense. The bottom line, as far as you are concerned, is longevity and suitable profit for New Wick Electronics. As a member of the Company, as it goes, so you go. When it prospers, you prosper. When it hurts, you hurt.

The fact that until recently there were no women in management, is not your fault--nor old-man Wick's fault may he rest in peace. Gramercyville is an old fashioned town and has always cherished the belief that men work for the home and women work in the home. As a responsible member of the community, the Company has an implicit obligation to support this norm.

But now that things have changed, it is only right and just that qualified women be in management positions at New Wick. To give them preferential treatment, relative to advancement is another matter. However, when there is an opening to move up, the nod should be given to the most qualified person, regardless of sex. Why should you, or some other qualified man be passed over just because you are a male?

It wasn't your fault that women were not hired for

managerial positions in the past, so why should you have to now bear the burden? New Wick has been chartered by society as an entity for the specific transformation of raw materials into finished goods. It was not created to be a social adjustment organization. Besides, if we now start pushing men off the advancement ladder to make room for women, will we in the future have to go back and reverse the process? If we start such a cycle, how and when will it ever end?

There are a lot of new women around and they might well try to push for preferential treatment. This meeting, you feel is a good opportunity to open your mouth and "head them off at the pass", if they are indeed planning to attack. Ms. Wick should know, strongly but politely, how the men feel, and you intend to tell her.

Role No. 9. Otto Parks, Quality Control Department

You get along fine with your women peers. There are no special problems. You treat them as equal coworkers, and they treat you the same. You're not sure if there is any real need for this meeting at all. As far as you can see, things are working out OK.

However, there is a little something that is bothering you. It's really trivial, but as long as everyone is going together to talk things out, you might as well mention it. Besides, while it may not annoy you, it might be bothering other people who, for one reason or another, don't want to say anything.

It simply has to do with the women you work with and their constant need for reassurance. At least one pat on the back per day apparently is needed to get them through their work shift. Without it, they seem to get moody or hostile.

You do a good job and you're sure that your boss knows it. He doesn't have to keep telling you how great you are each day. It's understood. He certainly has enough on his mind and things to do, without having to bother with mental therapy for you every day. To expect such personal attention is really asking for too much. New Wick is a place of business, not a confidence building center. It doesn't make much sense for your boss to have to provide this special service to his women supervisors each day.

It's not a big thing. If this is what they need, so be it. However, you do believe that you should at least mention it, not in a belligerent or complaining manner, but rather in a friendly and helpful way. Who knows, by your saying something, the group may be able to talk it out and the whole practice may die here and now. For all you know, you may be the only one who has observed it and is really aware that this is happening.

Role No. 10. Dennis Lee, Advertising Department

You really don't know why you came to this meeting. Listening to women complain is about the last thing in the world that you need. You hear it from them all day long. All they seem to want to do is argue with you. No matter what you say to them becomes a problem. Even a simple "good morning" can sometimes easily lead to a fight. Talk about people with chips on their shoulders? These women managers at New Wick sure take the prize! Nasty and vicious would probably be too mild to describe their attitude.

They don't seem to want to do anything. The least little chore anyone asks them to do seems to turn into a

Developments in Business Simulation & Experiential Exercises, Volume 9, 1982

sexist issue. You have had more threats made against you in the form of "the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission is going to get you for that," than you can ever remember. While there was never any follow-thru, the threats, both explicit and implicit, sure make what was once a nice job into a real drag.

You think things would sure settle down real fast if women weren't being treated as a "government protected breed". Just about everyone, except you, is afraid to say anything to them. If your boss, Jack would only open his mouth for once and put them in their place, there probably wouldn't be any problem. But, he's like all the rest--afraid of his shadow. He sure doesn't hesitate to step on you hard when he thinks you're out of line.

You'll sit quietly and let these women have their say. They may well have some legitimate complaints. But, if they start on this bit about how they are so oppressed, you are sure going to open up on them. You have just about had all you can take of this women's rights stuff. You can retire anytime you want to and go live with your son and his family in Phoenix, so you can speak freely. Come to think of it, maybe this retirement thing is what got Jack's tongue--he still has about another four years to put in.

Role No. 11. Anthony Smaldone, Plating Department

As far as you're concerned, it's about time that the all male composition of the management at New Wick changed. You never did support the provincial attitude of the citizens of Gramercyville that there was no finer career for a female than wife, mother, and homemaker.

That there are now women in management, even if it's only at the entry level, you believe, is a step in the right direction. However, you're not at all certain if it is for real or only tokenism. Ms. Wick's intentions you feel, are sincere. But, all of her middle and top management people do come from the old guard. Too, she has to live in town and associate with its people, very few of whom are newcomers to the community. Hence, there might well be a big difference between what she would like to do and what she can do.

Be that as it may, you intend to do whatever you can to help women move ahead in management at New Wick. All other things being equal, they certainly should be given preference over men for everything--training, choice assignments, advancement, or whatever. It may seem harsh and unfair at first, but the sooner that women are fully integrated into all levels of the workforce the quicker issues like this will be put behind us.

However, your peers and bosses at New Wick seem to have other ideas. Sure, they talk a good line about equal rights for women, but what they do in their own individual shops is something different. As you see it the women are not even getting anything close to an equal break much less help to compensate for past injustices. You have talked to the other men about this without much success. In fact, most of them seem to feel that there is something wrong with your feeling the way you do.

If you speak up at this meeting you're not going to make any friends--in fact, you may make a lot of enemies. But, no matter, you believe in your convictions and fully intend to voice them at this meeting.

Role No. 12. Ezra Clemence, Chussie Wiring Department

If there is one thing Julia keeps talking about it's equality. Julia, one of the four shop supervisors who reports to you, seems to think about nothing else. It has been this way since shortly after you promoted her about a year ago. When she worked on the line she never mentioned it. There she did an outstanding job, never complained, and was a team player.

She still is a valuable employee at New Wick, but this steady stream of equality stuff is starting to bug both you and her three male companion supervisors.

It's not that you and the others are against equality; it's only that you are a little confused by Julia's notion of equality. To you, and the others, equality is equality is equality. But, to Julia equality seems to be a variable which changes with the situation. However, when a supervisor was needed for the temporary night shift, which had to be put into place to get out a special rush order, she begged off saying that it wouldn't be safe for women to travel to and from the plant after dark. Too, the weekend when everyone, including you, had to pitch in to move the department across the floor; she excused herself again saying women can't lift heavy things. "That's man's work," according to Julia. Yet, she insists, meticulously, that everyone have an equal turn with the less desirable routine assignments in the department. Perhaps what bothered you the most was Julia's strong objections to your suggestion of asking Linda, who you were considering sending to school for six months to learn the operation and maintenance of your new widget fabricator, if she was planning on having a family soon. "That's not legal. You wouldn't ask that of any man," Julia would say. So you didn't ask--Linda spent six months at school--and then she left on maternity leave two months later. E- quality is fine, but women like Julia, can't have it both ways. They have to take the good with the bad--it's a package deal. Ms. Wick, you feel, recognizes this but you do intend to bring it up at the meeting. Perhaps Julia, and others like her, can get straightened out here and now. Equal yet special, is playing havoc with the morale of your male supervisors and probably significantly adversely affecting productivity. And, it's beginning to drive you nutty!

POSTSCRIPT

The instructor should be familiar with fundamental Equal Employment Opportunity Commission guidelines (EEOC) relative to practices pertaining to women in industry. While expert knowledge is not required, there should be present, as a minimum, informed awareness as to the intent and scope of the workings of the Commission. It is to be recognized however, that the purpose of this exercise is not to foster knowledge as to the particulars of the workings of this or other regulating agencies. Rather it is to develop a sensitivity to the subject area, encourage thinking about its managerial overtones and implications, and stimulate thought as to how learned basic concepts may well be best applied, singularly or in concert, to result in effective and efficient practices.

To those who desire to expand the use of this exercise, the authors suggest consideration of a case such as Ms. Esta Lee Graycloud, accusing her employer, Mr. Ira Juan Washington, of sexual harassment because he yelled at her for not telling him that she would be leaving on maternity leave next month. It seems that Ms. Graycloud did not inform Mr. Washington of her pending leave three months ago when he signed her up for and sent her to a 90 day full-time training program, at a cost of \$20,000, so that she would be able to assume direction for the two million dollars worth of office information processing equipment that is scheduled for delivery and installation in three weeks.

Such a situation would provide for a good introduction into an understanding of the concepts of, and differences between, sexual harassment and sexual discrimination.