

Developments in Business Simulation & Experiential Exercises, Volume 8, 1981

PREPARING STUDENT GROUPS TO PARTICIPATE IN EXPERIENTIAL GROUP PROJECTS: AN ORGANIZATIONAL DEVELOPMENT APPROACH

Robert D. Amason, Texas Tech University
David Finn, Texas Christian University

ABSTRACT

This paper presents a detailed outline of a group training session that the authors have used to prepare students for group projects in a senior marketing course. The authors argue that students who are instructed in group processes are much more satisfied with the group approach to experiential learning than those not so instructed.

INTRODUCTION

In a recent paper, Amason and Finn [1] pointed out that teachers who use experiential exercises that require group effort have available the potential to perform a much needed service to students. Specifically, they argued that when students are asked to perform in groups, they should not be left alone to simply experience problems in objective-setting and group problem-solving. Successful group performance requires leadership, cooperation, communication, emotional stability and self confidence on the part of group members. Group work does not, by itself, teach these characteristics. In fact, when these characteristics are missing, we typically witness students' disillusionment about one another and about the group approach to experiential learning. They frequently admit to frustrations and anger, and contend that their individual performances were of lower quality because of the group approach.

These problems and frustrations are not unique to classroom activities, but are the same as in any organization. Therefore, training and exercises that have been applied in Organizational Development approaches should also fit in these classroom situations.

This paper is an example of an Organizational Development method using the techniques of Transactional Analysis to train members of student groups to better understand and cope with problems of group communications and task achievement.

Although the level of complexity involved in the experiential exercise affects the time required to complete this training, we normally take about three hours of classroom time (two days on a Tuesday/Thursday schedule) for semester-long projects. The following paragraphs outline the steps and activities in the training.

APPROACH AND EXERCISES USED

After a day or two of Introduction to the course, the professor, the experiential project, etc., an hour to an hour-and-a-half is devoted to explaining the OD and TA terminology. Appendix A is a complete outline of a suggested lecture. If you decide to try this approach, we suggest that you read the reference material first. After this lecture, the students are given two handouts (Appendices B and C) containing suggestions for getting the most out of the exercise.

To summarize this introduction, we point out that TA is a tool to help one know one's self, to know how one relates to

others and to discover the dramatic course one is taking in life. By becoming aware of his ego states, one can distinguish between various sources of thoughts, feelings, and behavior patterns. By analyzing one's own transactions, one can gain a more conscious control of how he is operating with people and how they are responding to his stimuli. TA is a practical frame of reference from which one can evaluate old decisions and behavior and change what he decides is desirable.

Next (usually at the beginning of the next class), a series of stress exercises are performed by the class in order to get each individual to understand the need for communication, as well as to appreciate the barriers to effective communication. The first of these exercises (Appendix D) asks students to recall stressful scenes from the recent and from the more distant past. With the aid of a handout (Appendix E), they come to recognize their individual solutions for handling stress. The next stress exercise (Appendix F) involves following vague instructions from the teacher and then practicing similar activities on each other. This leads to an understanding of feelings they have when communication fails. They are asked to place the blame for these failures and to recognize that they have a choice of continuing the miscommunication or of fixing it. (Be sure that the students recognize different stress feelings in respondent vs. communicator roles and that they notice the difference in respondent stress with you as communicator vs. another student.)

The third and fourth stress exercises are meant to develop empathy. An individual student is put into a public, frustrating position (Appendix G) and then asked to talk about his/her feelings. After some discussion about that individual's probable feelings, the class separates into pairs whose members interview each other concerning individual goals vis-à-vis the course (Appendix H). Each member is instructed to report to the entire class in the other person's name. The "other" then reports on the accuracy of that first report.

By this time we hope that the students have a good understanding of the problems of communication and also understand many of their own feelings in potentially stressful situations. They are then ready to form groups, to set objectives, and to make contracts for their future input into solving a group task. Permanent groups are formed and given a simple task (Appendix I). The groups then separate into pairs of groups (A and B). Groups A discuss the task and work toward a solution while groups B observe the interaction and communication process. Groups B then report to groups A any potential problems and point to specific examples of "put downs," "discounts," and other transaction problems discussed in the first hour. Groups A then rotate to other B groups and become the observers for the next round. The result of these exercises is that the individuals learn of their strengths and weaknesses in group activities and are able to rate themselves on team membership skills. A handout facilitates this self-rating (Appendix J).

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The next series of exercises have the group members; first, compare lists of expectations (what I expect of the group, what I think the group expects of me) and discuss them (Appendix K), and then 'contract for any change necessary to assure the success of the group (Appendix L)

Finally, individuals are asked to make predictions about how well their group will perform the experiential project and to identify factors that will help or hinder group effectiveness (Appendix M). This total understanding of the group and its goals serves to reduce frustrations and to increase satisfaction with the group approach to experiential learning.

SUMMARY

The group problem-solving approach sometimes fails to work adequately because of improper group orientation and improper interactive skills on the part of students. This paper suggests how an Organizational Development intervention using Transactional Analysis can provide an awareness of student behavior and how that behavior might be changed and/or improved to provide better interactive skills needed in group work. The exercises used for awareness identification and improvement are presented. The exercises contribute greatly to the needs of the students by providing them an open forum to reduce conflict and get on with the task of the course. Based on observation, the exercises add to student interest, excitement, and satisfaction. Overall, the time seems to be well spent.

APPENDIX A

I. Establishing Personal Objectives for the Course

- A. Collect individual information sheets from students (name, desired grade. etc.). Fit to your needs.
- B. Conduct classroom discussion about what contributes to success on the entry job level.
Questions to ask:
 1. Do you want to succeed on your first job?
 2. How important do you think interpersonal relations are to the success on your first job?
 3. What do you think makes for good interpersonal relationships?
 4. Are you good at interpersonal relationships (directed at specific individuals)?
 5. Are you willing to improve interpersonal skills in this course?

Be flexible in conducting this discussion.

II. Establishment of an O.D. Model

- A. Define an O.D. Intervention

One of the major objectives of Organizational Development is to improve organizational performance by intervening in existing social systems. Attempted changes may be directed at individuals, dyads, groups, or other examples of social systems. Organizational Development starts with the premise that for a group to function effectively as a team, several important elements must exist:

1. the group has a reason for working together;
2. group members need each other's experience and ability;
3. group members need each other's commitment to arrive at the goals of the group;
4. group members are committed to the

realization that "two heads are better than one" In the decision process; and

5. group members realize that they are reporting the results of their efforts to, and being held accountable for their effort by, a higher authority.

Therefore, with the use of a group facilitator, a group has the opportunity to assess its strengths, as well as those areas that need improvement and growth. A higher understanding of each team member's role, purpose and functions results. In addition, more effective ways of working through interpersonal and task problems may be possible. The application of O.D. concepts provides an understanding of group dynamics, interdependence, and conflict resolution [4]

B. Model Ingredients

Facilitators work with groups to enhance the group's internal processes; to increase group's awareness of its options; to aid in group's and group members' understanding of the consequences of different behavior in terms of both their personal satisfaction and the group task performance.

Observer assigned to evaluate how members of the group are interacting. He/she notes what kind of discounts are given to the person speaking (to self and/or others). Discounts may be self, others, situation, problem, solution, and the instructor.

Individuals, as group members are asked to participate to the extent that their real confidence level and self-concept will allow, under the conditions that exist.

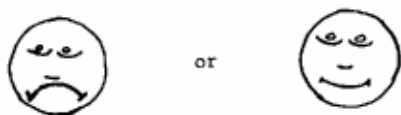
Transactional Analysis, as the technique used in O. D., originated with psychiatrist Eric Berne and was popularized by Thomas Harris in his book, I'm OK--You're OK [3]. Both authors posit that analyzing transactions (interactions) between people reveals hidden or repressed emotional influences on behavior. These emotional influences stem from past events and are always a subconscious part of us. For example, one may have a hostile attitude all authority figures (like college teachers) because the parents were very domineering. Transactional Analysis is offered as a practical way of understanding these connections, and of relating past emotional reactions to present experiences and behavior. In order to deal with these negative feelings, one must locate a point which allows for self observation. It is suggested that the transactions of every day require interactions and represent very observable behavior. The whole point of analyzing the transaction is to recognize and evaluate the underlying emotional influences of both the stimulus and the response. As a person practices TA and acquires more proficiency he or she learns to recognize the emotional forces which order behavior. As a result, a person can practice the needed self-discipline in acting against emotional forces that limit effective behavior -- and as a consequence, his or her interaction with the environment is improved [3,4].

III. An Overview of Transactional Analysis -- Types of Analysis

Structural Analysis is the analysis of individual personality. Structural analysis is a method of analyzing one's thoughts, feelings and behavior based on phenomena of ego states. TA recognizes three ego states:

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Parent ego state contains attitudes and behavior incorporated from external sources, especially parents and other authority sources. The parent ego state is taught and/or copied behavior that is nurturing and/or punishing as we relate to others. It may be highly subjective. The ego state may be pictured as follows:



Adult ego state is oriented to current reality and the objective of gathering information. The adult ego state of one's personality is like a computer. It is rational with a born need to make sense out of the world. It is based on thought with inputs coming from the parent and child ego states and the real world. This is usually objective. The ego state may be pictured as follows:



Child ego states contain all impulses that come naturally to an infant. The ego state is highly emotional. The positive emotion such as creativity, curiosity, discovery and delight are recorded in this ego state. So are negative emotions such as feelings of helplessness, fear, frustration, and anger. Often, fears outweigh joy. Many of these emotions are adopted while others are natural. Regardless, the reactions to these emotions are the reason certain positions are taken about one's self and others.



Transactional Analysis is what people do and say to one another -- these transactions are classified as follows:

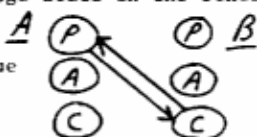
An ulterior transaction always involves more than two ego states. A complementary transaction disguises a socially questionable transaction which has as its objective an ulterior motive. This type of a transaction serves as the basis of psychological games. It is often repetitive, superficially rational, with a concealed motive or "gimmick".

Example:

- A. Would you come up to my office so we can go over your last quiz? (Boy, would I like to get you alone!)

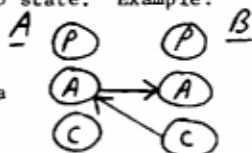
A complementary transaction occurs when a message, sent from a specific ego state, gets a predicted response from a specific ego state in the other person. Example:

- A. This assignment is due tomorrow.
B. Yes, teacher.

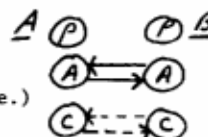


A crossed transaction occurs when an unexpected response is made from another person's ego state to a stimulus from any ego state. Example:

- A. What time is it?
B. How should I know! Don't you ever wear a watch?



- B. I would be more than happy to. (If he understands me better, maybe he will give me a better grade.)



Game analysis is the analysis of ulterior transactions leading to a pay-off -- a psychological game is a set **series** of transactions by which a person habitually tries to manipulate others to gain a pay-off. The payoff can be either positive or negative with the goal of proving something about you or others, to maintain a life position, avoid intimacy, structure time, and advance over script. Examples of games are: Kick me; uproar; raps; etc.

Script Analysis is the analysis of specific life dramas that persons compulsively play out. A script is related to early discussion about the value of one's self and the world that underlies and influences a person's every thought and action. These psychological positions taken by a child about one's self and about how others fit into four basic patterns:

I'm OK -- You're OK is a mentally healthy position. If realistic, a person with this position about himself or others can solve problems constructively, communicate better and secure the trust and confidence needed to function in life.

I'm OK -- You're Not OK is the position of the person who feels victimized or persecuted. This person blames others for his misfortunes in life.

I'm Not OK -- You're OK is a common position of the person who feels powerless when he compares himself with others.

I'm Not OK -- You're Not OK is a position of those who lose interest in living.

APPENDIX B

SUGGESTIONS FOR GETTING THE MOST OUT OF THIS EXPERIENCE

Try to learn the most you can from every experience.

Learn and remember the process of the OD model and TA. During each session be aware of how each concept and skill ties into the process.

Don't be afraid to share yourself. You may want to participate actively, but have certain reservations, or you may be a little "up tight" about certain exercises, or feel you just don't know how to go about participating. That's O.K.; go ahead and participate anyway.

Don't get discouraged by your reservations and doubts because:

1. They are feelings you have. Own them!
2. This is as good a place as any to work with them.
3. Some 'tension feelings are built into the experience to help you have them, and this is an excellent situation in which to practice accepting the "timid feelings and working with them.

Get your worries and doubts out in the open and share them with the other members of the group; they too, will have reservations and theirs may overlap with yours.

Don't be afraid to interact. Do ask questions. React. Respond. Just be sure you aren't pushing.

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Respect the level of self-disclosure each group member decides is appropriate for him. This is not an encounter group or sensitivity training experience. We are not looking for deep-seated feelings, motivations, or childhood troubles and trauma. Rather, we are interested in drawing out another person only to the extent he feels comfortable sharing himself with the group.

Relax. As you begin each session, tune in to your own feelings. Get comfortable and begin thinking about your expectations for that group meeting.

Practice. Think about the skills of TA between sessions. Use your skills in daily relationships. Attempt to respond to feelings with empathy in non-habitual ways. As with any other skill, practice helps. Practice 'tuning into your feelings, sharing your feelings, tuning into others, and responding with empathy outside the group. You may be surprised at the response you get.

Get to know the others in your group. On one level, the group is a chance for you to meet others, to learn to feel comfortable in a group, perhaps how to make friends more easily. You can facilitate the process by taking the time to meet others. Change chairs, sit next to different people, initiate a conversation before the meeting or when you see someone outside the group setting.

Be on time and ready to go. Others are depending on you and need your support. Come with an attitude of expectancy, being as open as possible to what may happen.

APPENDIX C

DISCUSSION GUIDELINES

When Listening

1. You are to hear each other out. Concentrate on understanding the feelings of the person who is talking.
2. Listen with acceptance, openness, and positive interest. Withhold judgment or advice.
3. Please check back with the other person until he feels that you understand his point of view and feelings.
4. Encourage others to attend to their feelings and report them with the group, but don't pry or prod.
5. Always listen with care and concern.

When Reporting

1. Be honest with yourself -- tune in to your own feelings so that you can share them with the group.
2. Be specific and personal.
3. Aim your comments toward the whole group, not just one person.
4. You may be confident that others will listen to you, try to understand you, accept what you have to say and respect it as true for you.
5. Try to focus your sharing of feeling on the here and now". Tune in to what is happening to YOU, NOW and stay with those feelings.
6. Be willing to experiment with new forms of expressions, so you can receive constructive feedback from others.

In the group, subjects and ideas are only vehicles we use to practice the art of listening to feelings and persons. What we experience from each other is more important than what we learn about subjects and ideas.

APPENDIX D

REMEMBERING EXPERIENCING STRESS

Objective: Because group work provides a high level of stress among the participants, this series of exercises has been developed to experience stress from one's past and present. Some suggestions on how to improve dealing with stress are offered.

Material needed: Pencil and a sheet of paper (Students should complete Appendix E before instructor begins.)

Can you think back to a stressful family scene between the ages of 5 and 8 years? (Have students jot down answers to the following questions.)

1. Close eyes and try to picture it.
2. What was happening?
3. What were your feelings?
4. What were you told?
5. Where did you go or what did you do to deal with the stressful situation?

Note to instructor: Explain;

Stressful scene→Role→Feelings→Behavior (conflict)

Think back to a stressful scene in high school. (same questions)

Think back to a very recent stressful scene. (same questions)

Visualize group organization effort. Ask students to jot down answers to these questions:

1. Can you identify the role you will play?
2. Do you visualize a stressful situation?
3. How will you deal with it?
4. Is your way of dealing with it different from the ways you dealt with it in the past?
5. Are you aware of how you are dealing with stress?
6. What are you feeling?
7. What does it mean when you don't feel?
8. Do you want to do things differently? Do you want to feel?

Note to Instructor: When asking questions, avoid Yes and No answers; avoid cross examination. Ask such questions as:

1. what else would you like to say?
2. Is there something else you would like to share?
3. I feel you are struggling.

APPENDIX E

STRESS EPISODES

Rank 5 to 8 years old	Stress Events	Have/Have not		
		Then (5-8)	Later (12-18)	Now
___	Hearing parental arguments	___	___	___
___	Birth of a brother or sister	___	___	___
___	Having an operation	___	___	___
___	Getting an inoculation	___	___	___
___	Seeing and hearing parents argue	___	___	___
___	Fighting with sibling	___	___	___
___	Being held back a grade	___	___	___
___	Losing a parent by death	___	___	___
___	Moving to a new school	___	___	___
___	"Wetting" in class	___	___	___
___	Being caught stealing	___	___	___
___	Losing a parent by divorce	___	___	___
___	Getting caught lying	___	___	___
___	Being ridiculed in class	___	___	___
___	Parents being sick	___	___	___

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APPENDIX F

GEOMETRIC SYMBOLS

Objective: To experience giving and receiving verbal instructions with the resulting feelings from performance.

Materials needed: paper and pencil

Draw (Instructor should read):

1. Draw a circle.
2. Draw 4 vertical lines at top of circle.
3. Attach a concave arc on left and right sides of circle.
4. Inside top 1/3 of circle, draw two very small circles that are parallel and spaced apart.
5. Over each small circle, draw a concave arc.
6. In the middle of the circle, place two points side by side but spaced apart.
7. Above, but between these two points draw a short vertical line.
8. In the bottom 1/3 of circle place a convex arc.
9. Result is the figure above -- who was wrong?



Pair up, one be a communicator, one a respondent.

1. Communicator conceives of a geometric figure and issues instructions to respondent.
2. Respondent listens, asks for clarification, and records what he understands to be instructions.
3. Reverse roles.
4. Questions:
 - A. Were you feeling stress?
 - B. Where was it greatest? (giving or receiving)

Stress → Role → Feelings → Behavior

- C. What were you feeling?
as respondent?
as communicator?
what if drawing isn't correct?
whose fault is it?
what are your feelings? (If I am aware of my feelings, I have a choice to continue or do something about it -- do something different)

APPENDIX G

TRIVIA

Objective: To get the students to experience being "left out" or discounted by group members.

Materials needed: None

Select a student at random, ask him/her to stand and then ask the following questions:

1. What's the most important thing you can say about yourself?
2. Stand and tell it -- talk about yourself.
3. (Instructor interrupts by talking to someone about trivia) Ask person to continue -- say, "Don't let me interrupt, please continue."
4. How do you feel? What are you feeling? Let the student and others discuss how it feels to be ignored. (Caution -- this sometimes creates anger. A warm explanation of the objective is necessary.)

APPENDIX H

EMPATHY

Objective: To have the students experience others' feelings.

Materials needed: None

Instructions:

Pair off.

Interview each other by asking:

1. What have you learned in this course so far?
2. What do you want to learn by the time the course is finished?
3. What are you going to do to make sure that you learn what you want to learn by the end?

Listen very carefully -- no notes please. Put yourself into the other person's shoes, try to understand what is being said. Now, report to the class in the other person's name. Ask interviewee whether the report is accurate. Was there empathy?

APPENDIX I

TEAM DEVELOPMENT EXERCISE

Objective: To begin to get the feel for working in groups using the OD model.

Materials needed: None

- A. Organize class into groups.
- B. Task is to plan a fund-raising activity to purchase marketing periodicals for the reading room.
- C. Separate into pairs of groups.
- D. Designate one group of each pair as task discussors (group A) and the other group as observers (group B)
- E. Discussion group in circle, observers in circle around them.
- F. Observers determine contribution, discounts and dysfunctional behavior.
- C. Groups reverse, members rotate by individuals.

APPENDIX J

SELF RATING ON TEAM MEMBERSHIP SKILLS

Rate yourself on a scale of one to five on each of the skill areas listed below, using the following rating scores: (put on blackboard)

1. considerably below average
2. somewhat below average
3. about average
4. somewhat above average
5. considerable above average

Communication, Planning, Organizing, Coaching, Persuasion and Negotiation

APPENDIX K

EXPECTATION EXERCISE (with observers)

Groups pair off -- one discussing the assigned activities, the other observing. Instructor circulating.

- A. Form into permanent groups.
- B. Each member is to make two lists, no more than 6 items each. One list contains your most important expectations regarding your other team members' behavior toward you. The other list contains what you think the

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group expects of you.

C. Compare lists and discuss.

D. Questions by the instructor:

1. Were you surprised?
2. Do you need to negotiate your expectations?
3. What does working as a member of a team mean to you?
4. What do you want to get for yourself from the present group?
5. What do you want your fellow group members to do when you make a contribution or discovery or perform dysfunctional behavior?
6. What road blocks do you see?
7. Will you ask them to do "that" flow? (Say the name of the people and tell the what you want) By not taking action, or saying any- thing, you are buying that behavior. It's your responsibility to challenge - I can't read your mind!

E. Questions to observers:

1. Did group members get what they wanted?
2. Did they sabotage others, themselves?
3. What were the discounts, contributions, dysfunctional behaviors?
4. Did you learn anything?

APPENDIX L

CONTRACTS TO CHANGE

Objective: to provide the student the opportunity to Identify behavior that needs to change with an opportunity to commit to that change.

Talking to the whole class:

- A. Following these previous exercises, jot down the weaknesses you think you have as it relates to group behavior.
- B. Ask yourself what do I need to change; what do I want to change; what am I willing to change?
- C. Write a plan to change.
- D. Keep a record of results.
- E. It's OK if you do not want to change behavior or find new behavior.
- F. How is present behavior likely to affect group productivity?

APPENDIX M

ANALYSIS OF TEAM

Objective: to allow the team members to come together, assess the training, role behavior, team effectiveness and goals of the group.

Instructor should meet with each group for 10-15 minutes and ask:

- A. How well do you think the team will function!
- B. What factors lead to your effectiveness or lack. of effectiveness? Road blocks?
- C. What roles do different members of your team answer with regard to:
 1. tasks - getting job done
 2. process - harmony?
- D. What specific behaviors do you see helping the group?
- E. What specific behaviors do you see hindering the group?

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