

EVALUATION OF AN EXPERIMENTAL COURSE
IN ORGANIZATIONAL BEHAVIOR FOR
MANAGERS OF JAPANESE BANKS

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INTRODUCTION

History

Almost seven years ago the graduate programs of the College of Business and Engineering at Bradley University developed an Experiential Course in Organizational Behavior. [5] The course consists of 51 hours of class room activity: (five evenings; three weekend sessions: Friday nights and all day Saturday). It focuses on the development of skills and knowledge in areas such as communication, leadership, decision making, team work, management of change, management of conflict, and power/authority relationships.

The course is designed to help the students, who are generally employed full time, learn in practical ways how to perform their jobs more effectively. It places a major share of the responsibility for learning on the student by active participation in case studies, group discussions, structured exercises, simulations, and ad hoc groups. The four instructors help the students to monitor their own behavior, assess the effectiveness of their own behavior, and develop behaviors that they think are more effective.

Approximately two years ago during a meeting of a professional association, one of the members of a Peoria, Illinois, based consulting firm, The Asia Group, was approached by an officer of a major New York City bank. The officer asked if The Asia Group might be interested in developing an experimental program that would provide personnel of several Japanese banks an opportunity to become familiar with American banks, corporations and life in American homes.

The Asia Group developed a proposal which gave the Japanese Bankers extensive contact with American life. One element of that program was the multidisciplinary course described above. The program was accepted and the nineteen Japanese bankers came to Peoria in the middle of the extremely cold winter of 1977.

Overall Program

The program created by The Asia Group provided the Japanese bankers with a wide variety of different learning

opportunities. They had opportunities to improve their conversational English. They were given exposure to the American Banking System, Financial Institutions, and Corporate Life. They were provided with surveys of American Traditions and History as well as the Social Problems in modern American business. They were also given contact with day-to-day life in American families, communities, and business. In short, the bankers spent four very full months learning about a wide spectrum of American Life.

The program used several learning formats. Though some lectures were presented, most of the learning took place in a wide variety of activity situations. Many of the courses used case, seminar, experiential, and discussion group formats. There were on-site visits to banks (from small town banks to the Federal Reserve), other forms of financial institutions, and businesses (from small business to giant multinationals). The bankers also traveled throughout the North American continent alone and in small groups. They were each assigned a host family who helped to introduce them to the American Family by experiencing it at close range. Most of the formats gave the participants an active learning experience.

Organizational Behavior Workshops

The specific events of the Organizational Behavior Course will be discussed in detail below. The course was slightly different from the one generally offered to the American students. The case portion was dropped and the course was extended to 64 exposure hours of theoretical and experiential learning. The course was designed to provide the Japanese bankers with knowledge of American customs and behavior and to give feedback on how their behavior was perceived by some Americans. It consisted of several simulation exercises in decision making, conflict resolution, effective meetings, leadership, management, and team building. In addition, theory was provided through films and lectures by the faculty. The course was taught by four instructors who circulated through the group sessions giving the participants a variety of viewpoints.

The workshops were designed to give the Japanese bankers many opportunities to interact with each other and with the staff in English. This gave the Japanese a chance, with the assistance of the staff, to monitor their own behavior and to receive insight into how those behaviors are perceived by the American staff. The focus was on the American way of managing and life in American organizations as complimentary to and contrasted with the Japanese style.

EVENTS OF THE WORKSHOP

The workshops were presented in three segments. Each segment was a self-contained unit, separated by several weeks.

Generally the sessions had eight hours of class room activity broken into two parts by breaks for meals.

First Workshop

The first workshop in late March consisted of three eight- hour days. The first started with an introduction to the staff and to the theoretical experiential mode. The goals of the course and the learning process were discussed in detail. The main focus of the session was on communication skills, team building, and decision making. The bankers evaluated their communication skills using the Communication Skill Scale [4]. The team building process was presented with a simulation that required the creation of a proposal for a new enterprise in America. The decision making exercise (of working toward a consensus) was an effort to prioritize a list of problems which faced the Japanese society and economy.

In addition there were extensive theory sessions consisting of lectures and discussions on Organizational Behavior in the U.S. and in Japan. The focus was on the American view of effective individual behavior within an organization with an emphasis on active involvement in the group. The lecture also discussed how this contributed to the creation of effective teams.

These sessions provided the bankers with:

1. An introduction to the U.S. Human Relation and Human Resource views of organizational behavior.
2. American view of their Decision Making Skills.
3. Feedback on their Team Building Skills.
4. Discussion with the American instructors on their Communication Skills.
5. Experience in expressing themselves in English on issues around Organizational Behavior.

Second Workshops

These sessions consisted of two eight-hour periods early in the month of April. The sessions started with a short review period, then moving on to values, leadership theory, and planning effective meetings. The first exercise was to develop, present, and evaluate their oral communication skills. The participants were to help each other through constructive feedback. The next exercise involved an examination of values based upon Rokeach's research [6]. The analysis also included values surrounding the family and the relationships between the sexes. The discussion sought to highlight differences between American and Japanese societies. The next topic was the Managerial Grid [1] using a pair of films and group discussions. The final exercise was the planning of an effective meeting in small groups. The focus was on the matching of People, Issues, and Process.

The session provided the bankers with:

1. Comparison of values between American and Japanese Cultures.
2. Feedback on their skills of planning meetings and developing new skills and options.
3. Alternate styles of leadership.
4. New ideas and skills in regard to Team Building.
5. More experience with the use of English in an organizational setting.

Third Workshop

The third workshop was held early in May and consisted of three eight-hour segments. Again the session started with a review of the course to date and a planning period for the remainder of the course. The first morning was only attended by half of the bankers and the instructors wanted to explore why this had occurred. Since the workshop was scheduled immediately before departure, it was found that the sessions were competing with last-minute U.S. travel; last-minute shopping and travel reservations; last-minute golf (which is very expensive and a luxury in Japan); and preparation for a departing party including skits, talks and songs in English which the bankers were presenting for the people and institutions of Peoria who had been hosts and hostesses during their four-month visit. Naturally, there was a lot of last-minute practice so the party and play would “come off” very well -- (which it did). As a footnote, it might be noted that the staff agrees that the third workshop session should have been scheduled earlier to avoid some of these very legitimate and understandable last-minute distractions. The focus of the session was on Organizations in Crisis, Motivation Theory, Problem Solving, and Decision Making Procedures.

The first discussion involved the theoretical presentation and discussion of the Behavior of Organizations in times of crisis. The discussions focused on how those ideas could help in understanding crises in their own organizations and departments and in the U.S. as well. The next exercise involved the discussion and skill training in the use of listening skills in the development of a dialogue. The focus was on active listening with the participants practicing with each other and the staff.

There was an extensive examination of motivation theory as perceived by American scholars with practical help in ways to motivate others. The lectures and discussions on motivation were augmented by a film on McClland’s ideas concerning the need for achievement. The bankers participated in experiential exercises that illustrated ideas from the film plus a discussion of the achievement-motivated team member.

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The next exercises evolved around the Carkhuff Model [3] of decision making using ones own values. The bankers worked individually on personal problems, using the model to decide how they would deal with problems they had to deal within their banks. This exercise involved group decisions. The course was closed with some recent views on American Managers and a review of the material presented in the course.

The session provided the bankers with:

1. Individual attention and individualized instruction.
2. Practical skill development in human relations and listening.
3. A better grasp of the dynamics that occur when Organizations are in Crises.
4. Some Motivation Theories.
5. One American approach to making complex decisions.
6. Additional feedback on their communication skills.
7. A general overview of the course.

EVALUATION OF THE COURSE

When evaluating the results of a complex course such as this it helps to have clear criteria. We believe Burns and Gentry [2] have provided an appropriate set; they suggest the following set of things to think about when judging a particular experiential method for teaching a given set of concepts:

1. Business concepts being taught.
2. Nature of the tasks.
3. Conduct of the exercises.
4. Student attributes.
5. Faculty attributes.

Our evaluation which follows will consist of examining the five variables suggested by Burns and Gentry though other criteria could be used to complement it. The evaluation will seek to ascertain if the course was the appropriate medium for presenting the concepts of American business that we wished to convey.

Business Concepts Being Taught

The Organizational Behavior concepts being taught in this course are no longer challenged as a legitimate part of management training. Both academic and professional organizations (e.g. Harvard, M.I.T., Stanford, etc.; American Management Association, etc.) which have the responsibility for developing managers have inserted Behavioral Science components into their management training programs -- Decision Making, Motivation, Communication Skills, Personal and Organizational Value Systems, Team Building -- are all legitimate topics. These organizational behavioral concepts that were presented in these

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workshops have been recognized as a legitimate subject for experiential learning since the teaching method was developed. Thus the course passes the first criterion in this evaluation scheme. It might be noted that the bankers evaluation said the course broadened their perspectives on organizational behavior in the U.S. and in Japan.

Nature of the Tasks

The second criterion asks whether the tasks, simulations, exercises, or situations used are appropriate. In general, the answer is yes, but there were several minor problems. Some of the problems are typical of any experiential course, but seemed to be intensified by differences in culture and the language barrier.

A few of the bankers not familiar with the theoretical- experiential method, saw exercises such as the development of a company, consensus exercises, and some discussion groups as “games.” Their strong cultural need for things practical and useful and their lack of understanding and familiarity with simulation, etc. make their initial view of these elements of the course even stronger. A second minor problem arose because these same few participants tended to focus on the “content” of exercises and found it difficult to follow the “process” taking place during the exercises, and to discuss the process following the exercise. Analysis of the process was an essential element of the course.

The third minor problem involved the resistance on the part of a few of the Japanese bankers to our seeming unstructured, active learning, workshop format. Again, the seeming tendency of their culture to use very structured, impersonal, passive, and theory-oriented teaching methods could have contributed to increasing the normal resistance we usually encounter with some U.S. students involved in their first theoretical-experiential course.

These sorts of problems require fairly simple solutions. When presenting a course of this nature, and especially when dealing with a foreign culture and people who do not have a trained sense of English, you must be even more careful to ensure that the choice and the planning of the exercises are appropriate and that the participants understand the purpose of the exercise. The task in simulations and exercises should have relevancy to the participants’ own goals, their jobs, as well as the goals of the overall program. In the case of the Japanese bankers, the exercises chosen were generally practical and useful to their future careers. More care had been taken in planning the details and goals of all of the exercises. The details, particularly the stated goals of the exercises, were thought out with the unique problems of the particular audience in mind. However, the vagueness of the future applications of

learnings, caused some trouble with design. We will discuss this below.

Conduct of the Exercises

In general, the exercises were conducted in the appropriate manner. There were two minor, easily solved problems.

The first problem involved the pace of the course. We were forced to slow down the presentation of theory and exercise procedure because the language barrier made it necessary to allow the Japanese bankers more time to understand the things being said. All of the exercises were done in English to allow more practice with the language and to permit the faculty a chance to follow the group processes involved. This meant that the participants needed more time to carry out the exercises than had they used their native language. The language problem, combined with the Japanese business culture process of achieving “consensus”, resulted in a time management problem in those exercises where the groups were asked to reach consensus under rather severe time pressure.

This first problem was dealt with very easily: We Slowed Down. It became clear early in the course that we should opt for coverage of a few ideas in depth. A theoretical-experiential course should be organic enough to allow for a dynamic change in the course. The problem of language simply means one should plan a slower pace and then be ready to slow down even more.

We also had to insert time periods in which the bankers could discuss in Japanese. It became too frustrating and too much of a strain at times to spend long periods solving problems, planning, implementing, and evaluating projects only in English. Thus we had to have short clarification segments in dyads, triads, or small groups to be sure that everyone (especially some having more difficulty in English) were understanding the concepts and experiences which were being treated in the work sessions.

The second problem concerned evaluation and feedback. In a course of this type, it is important that the participants interact with one another in terms of their behavior and the behavior of the groups of which they are members. In addition, they are held responsible for the success or failure of their interactions and must evaluate individual and group performance. Some students always find this difficult and so it was with some Japanese also. It is said that the Japanese culture inhibits its members from publicly criticizing others. They seemed generally willing to discuss the ineffective aspects of their own behavior but tended to avoid discussing the ineffective aspects of others. They tended to downplay their own accomplishments, but were quick to point out strong points

about the performance of their fellow group members and were very liberal with their praise. This meant that holding participants accountable for their own behavior required real skill and sensitivity on the part of the staff to insure that the bankers developed the skill of “critique” in terms of effective vs. ineffective organizational behavior.

Student Attributes

The Japanese Banker group was not our traditional graduate student population in several ways. We will consider three perspectives below.

(1) Student Self-Identity. In regard to self-identity, they were much more established professional businessmen on an extended trip than students. The first perspective that must receive some comment is that these Japanese Bankers studying Organizational Behavior were not the traditional graduate student in a formal program working for a degree that was quite crucial and vital for his/her professional existence. Thus, they were not the traditional student of either the American or Japanese University - whose life success might well hang on the balance of academic success. These bankers had successfully completed their academic requirements, were successfully established in their professional careers and in their communities. This U.S. trip was more of an extensive enriching and broadening type educational experience, similar to a traveling fellowship or sabbatical rather than simply graduate training. Also, the bankers could also be compared to our executives going away for an extended and advanced executive training seminar. This non-student identity, especially in such a course as Organizational Behavior, was important for understanding teacher-student relationships, class participation, etc. These executives were very competent, talented businessmen - even if in the English language they were quite limited. In all adult education, it is important to be aware of the self-identity of the student in the learning situation. Such consciousness by the teachers was even more important with this particular group of students.

(2) Language Problems. The second difference involves the bankers’ ability to learn the material presented in this course. Some of them lacked familiarity with the current trends of American Management Systems, though others said they were exposed to these ideas in their university days. The wide range of language proficiency compounded the difficulty with the cognitive concepts presented in the course. It was difficult to translate some of the concepts into the Japanese language and culture. Thus, the Japanese group required more written material to support verbal presentations. A large flip chart was used for each lecture and exercise presentation. It was important that the written handout material include thorough but clear instructions for exercises and theory. Generally, time should be taken to discuss the theory behind every exercise.

(3) Cultural Differences. One of the questions that our experience raises is the extent to which certain types of experiential management training is culturally bound. Many cultures, particularly the Japanese culture, have many different ideas about leadership, the way groups make decisions, the structure of groups, etc. This may make understanding our ideas more difficult.

Some of the bankers did not feel comfortable focusing on their own self (the Japanese like to use the term “character”) separate from their role or jobs, whereas others were eager for more self-knowledge. Some found discussing impersonal things like their role much easier than focusing on their own “here and now” behavior. In experiential learning, the awareness of self-effectiveness comes to the fore.

An additional issue involved the fact that the bankers came from a society that puts a strong emphasis on structured groups. Some found the Ad Hoc, fluid nature of the groups in this workshop format difficult to accept. Some found the constant change in group membership and the seeming lack of structure in these groups difficult to adjust to.

Finally, some of the Japanese bankers, as do some members of our own and other cultures, have very different views of what is effective behavior than those held by the American Human Relations or Human Resource Development movements. The democratic, individualistic, entrepreneurish value systems underlying some Human Relations and Human Resource Management Training might not be culturally reinforced as much in Japanese culture as in American culture. Even in this country, we find that such values are not equally reinforced in various American organizations.

FACULTY ATTRIBUTES

The course which we are analyzing was presented to the Japanese Bankers as an active skill-building program in Organizational Behavior. The basic thesis of the course was that organizational effectiveness is a function of personal, interpersonal, group, organizational, and cultural skills. Thus, there were individual sessions focusing on these various skill areas. The basic methodology was to have the bankers and staff monitor the behaviors; develop evaluative criteria; assess behavioral effectiveness in terms of these criteria; and then appropriately develop new personal, interpersonal, group, organizational, and cultural skills when appropriate.

Needless to say, such skill assessment and development is a demanding job for students and faculty when dealing with students from our own culture. This is even more true when dealing with students from another culture. Here we will reflect on some of the faculty learnings relative to the

Japanese Bankers Program.

We were pleasantly surprised to see the variety of personalities and behavioral patterns among the Japanese Bankers. The range seemed comparable to American groups, with the whole range of types represented: passive, assertive, aggressive, tough battler, objective thinker, friendly helper, helpful, reflective, etc. This learning again reinforced the belief that individuality is a strong component of behavior in every culture, and it is dangerous to stereotype and make general universal assumptions about any group of people. As a consequence of this variety of personalities and leadership styles, many individuals needed to develop radically different personal and professional skills. Some needed to talk up; some needed to quiet down; different behaviors were needed by different people to be more effective in their organizations. This parallels our experience with American students.

Taking into account the above observations it seems that the major difference between our American and Japanese students was not in personality types, but in two other dimensions. First of all, the Japanese Bankers were removed from almost all the reinforcements of their back-home culture; that is, language, customs, families, etc. At the same time, they were being exposed to another culture which involved a radically cold winter, a different language, different customs, etc. This was a very intensive as well as prolonged experience of four months.

In addition to this personal, interpersonal, organizational and cultural disruption - which they were experiencing - there was one underlying fact that was not immediately apparent to the faculty. This was that many of the bankers did not have a clear understanding of their bank's reason for sending them into this intense American experience. Some of the learning opportunities were obvious: increased knowledge of English, of American banking, of U.S. customs, of organizational behavior. However, when, where, and if they would use these skills - that is, the actual career plans in which these bankers would use these new skills - was not generally known by the participants. This uncertainty of application caused continuous puzzlement to the students and to the staff. We, as the staff, took for granted that each individual banker had negotiated and dialogued with his superiors the ultimate practical purposes for his involvement in this program.

If most of the bankers were to be functioning next year - or next week - in banks in the U.S.A., then learning how to interact effectively with Americans would certainly be valuable, if not crucial. If - as proved to be more true - the reason for attending the program was only that the students might have some limited exposure to some individual Americans in Japan, than a whole different sense of urgency

and depth of skill development would be indicated. It required some time in the course to appreciate the significance of this lack of clarity of purpose.

One thing the staff learned in working with the Japanese was that they see themselves and their work in a context - the context of a particular group, the context of a particular profession, etc. When they were asked to do a particular exercise, they immediately wanted to know “why?” What was the purpose? If we would say, “Plan a meeting and carry it out as effectively as possible,” they would want to know the content purpose of the meeting. If we said, “You choose the content, we are interested in how effectively you run the meeting,” they would say that this was not usually done in their organization. With this necessity of explicit purpose and context in mind, it became obvious to us that it was most important that these banking students have a very good idea of why they were in this American program. This uncertainty caused the staff and students some difficulty in prioritizing and developing appropriate personal, interpersonal, organizational and cultural skills without knowing when, where and how these skills were to be used. This might be true especially in regard to experiential behavior and organizational behavior, since such learning takes such customized and tailored application to individual student needs.

In line with this background, it seems that as a faculty we only cleared up some of our assumptions as the class evolved. We will look at some of our tentative assumptions and their consequences.

The first assumption was that the bankers wanted to be able to act more American, if they desired. We believed that they wanted to be able to function in an American bank and be somewhat comfortable with American management behaviors. In actual fact, they really wanted as more of a goal to simply understand ~ American managers act the way they do. A few of the bankers viewed the feedback that suggested a particular behavior would be inappropriate in American banks as attacks upon their culture.

The second assumption was that all bankers would return to America to be branch managers of their Japanese banks. We further assumed that, in this capacity, they would want to be able to manage Americans. The fact that many of them were not told they would return to this country, and that they might only have very limited contact with Americans in their home country, was something that demanded a continuous reassessment of our designs and learning experiences.

Our third assumption was that this group of bankers would be compulsive, with a high need for achievement as students. We expected them to attend all classes faithfully, read all

the materials, and be very active participants. The orientation sessions which were given to the staff certainly promoted this generalized conception of the Japanese students. This was reinforced by some of our own reading.

We think one of the facts which was not sufficiently developed was the difference between the Japanese university student and the practicing professional businessman who is beyond student life. There seems to be one set of behavior which applies to the student and another to the acting professional who goes on for advanced professional enrichment. It was not found that the practicing professional which we were teaching lived up to the stereotype which we had originally held, at least tentatively, in regard to Japanese students. As the cold winter turned to spring, the absentee rate in all classes began to rise. The managers began to travel more, play golf more, spend class time to deal with personal matters, and plan social activities for themselves. They also indicated that our scheduling of workshop activities on evenings and weekends was not popular. In general these Japanese banking students were more like our well-established professionals who are away from home for professional development, than the night-class graduate student still trying to make the grade. There is always the temptation to think of participants using a university campus as students, and the program directors to think of themselves as basically teachers when working in that environment. However, in the case of the Bankers, it seems that a business - consultant framework would be more appropriate for this educational endeavor.

The fourth assumption made was that the bankers needed skills for immediate use. We understood that they would be immediately placed in American management roles. Many of the young executives still have some years of maturation before they would be middle-level managers. Thus, the managerial skills would not be immediately used.

Finally, there was an assumption that the goals of the students and their sponsoring banks were homogeneous and understood by each of the members. We discovered quickly that each of the 19 participating banks had somewhat unique goals for the program, and some of them did not have a very clear reason of why they had been chosen. It became apparent that some of the bankers were not aware of the goals of their superiors, and some even had goals that were divergent. The heterogeneous set of goals was to be expected. Rarely does a group of students have homogeneous goals. However, as we met this within the Japanese students, it surprised us - then confused us - and finally caused us to rethink some of our exercises and simulations.

There are many learnings that came to the faculty from this first encounter with the Japanese Bankers Program. We

would all agree that the formal purpose of each banker for being in this program and country be well spelled-out. It seems advisable also that the students should be broken into sub-groups based on their goals and the actual situation in which they would apply and practice the skills that were going to be developed. If there were groups that were going to immediately move into American functions, they should develop the personal, interpersonal, organizational and cultural skills needed to function effectively in this country. If some are only developing a knowledge of general American customs and language to use in the traditional Japanese bank and only occasionally in an interaction with an American, then we think the program should be developed quite differently for this particular group.

SUMMARY

The workshops discussed in the paper were designed to give the Japanese Banker participants many opportunities to interact with each other and with the staff in English. This gave the Japanese bankers a chance, with the assistance of the staff, to monitor their own behavior and to receive insight into how those behaviors are perceived by the American staff. The focus was on the American way of managing and life in American organizations as complementary to and contrasted with the Japanese style.

When evaluating the results of a complex course such as this it helps to have clear criteria. We believe Burns and Gentry (1977) have provided an appropriate set; they suggest the following set of things to think about when judging a particular experiential method for teaching a given set of concepts:

1. Business concepts being taught
2. Nature of the tasks
3. Conduct of the exercises
4. Student attributes
5. Faculty attributes

Our evaluation consisted of examining the five variables suggested by Burns and Gentry [2]. The evaluation seeks to ascertain if the course was the appropriate medium for presenting the concepts of American business that we wished to convey.

The evaluation indicates that as in any experimental learning experience, there are things that could be done better. Many of the difficulties in this course were really normal to any experiential course but others occurred because of the nature of the student group.

Most of the problems discussed can be solved by some

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very simple, straightforward things:

1. Go slowly. Gear the pace of the course to the student's ability to understand.
2. Be very clear and thorough in giving oral directions and explanations.
3. Provide an adequate supply of written and oral backup material.
4. Use small groups.

There were some more complex problems which cannot be solved so easily. We do suggest that as far as possible:

1. Each Japanese bank and banker clearly negotiate the personal professional objectives for each person's participation in the program.
2. Each Japanese bank and banker have at least a tentative career plan on when, how and where the learnings from the course will be applied.
3. The assumptions of the faculty concerning #1 and #2 should be thoroughly dialogued with each individual banker early in and throughout the course.

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