

# **Simulations, Games and Experiential Learning Techniques:, Volume 1, 1974**

## **SIMULATION IN PERSONNEL ADMINISTRATION**

Richard W. Beatty, University of Colorado

The use of simulation in the University classroom appears particularly appropriate at this point in time as students seem to believe only what they have experienced rather than the tutelage and admonitions of their elders. In fact, if students do not have first hand experience they are unlikely to believe or accept a statement or a concept as real. Thus, since an introductory course in Personnel Administration (or industrial psychology) may be quite tedious and extremely technical in nature, especially considering the details of test validation, an experiential based pedagogy appears appropriate. Recognizing the failure of the lecture approach and the technical nature of the course, it was decided that a practice set of experiential exercises similar to those used in courses such as accounting would be developed for the introductory course in personnel administration. At present, no complete set of exercises in personnel administration is known to exist, although there are components of the personnel course which can be taught through existing exercises such as role playing simulations for personnel interviewing and labor relations. Beyond these, there seems to be very little use of experiential learning in personnel administration.

The use of simulations in personnel administration was initially stimulated by a total personnel system simulation developed several years ago by Otis Lipstreu at the University of Colorado. This publication was reproduced by offset process and sold through the Business Research Division of the University. Because the text was not nationally promoted it had limited distribution. Further, it served as a complete text for a course rather than complementing existing texts. The effort discussed here is an expansion of Lipstreu's work but with a focus upon developing a diverse set of exercises to demonstrate particular topics in the area of personnel administration rather than simulate a total personnel system within a specific organization. Thus this set of exercises is designed to have general applicability for differing personnel functions in varying organizations.

Notice also that the term personnel administration is used rather than personnel management. The intent is to focus on the administration of a personnel department and not the management of people (personnel). In addition, the exercises are designed to develop specific technical skills in the personnel area whereby a student, after being exposed to a course in personnel administration, can command a basic set of skills and perform effectively in entry-level personnel jobs. This is in response to a growing concern for students majoring in personnel to leave universities with specific skills that can be immediately demonstrated in a personnel department. If students have such skills they are able to move directly into personnel jobs without first working in other areas of the organization and entering the personnel department through another door. Thus, if we build basic skills, particularly in the area of test validation, we find personnel administrators far more receptive to hiring college graduates directly into personnel departments. Since these are skills which are needed directly upon entry what better way is there to teach them than through experiential learning?

# Simulations, Games and Experiential Learning Techniques:, Volume 1, 1974

## THE COURSE

Presently the course is divided into six sections, the first is a general introduction to the personnel administration function. The second concerns performance evaluation; the third, the selection of personnel; the fourth, the training and development of employees; the fifth, the motivation of the employees; and the sixth, a heterogeneous group of "maintenance" topics (e.g., industrial safety, job evaluation, turnover and absenteeism problems, organizational development, etc.).

For each topic in a one semester course (about thirty-two sessions) an attempt has been made to use experiential learning. The following is a description of the course and the exercises used. Not all of the exercises could be used in a semester, but the considerable number of exercises developed allows variation from class to class and individual assignments if necessary. Space does not permit a detailed description of the more than seventy exercises or a comprehensive discussion of how each of these is used.

### Introduction to Personnel Administration

In the introductory section there have been developed five exercises to be completed by students selected to play the role of the personnel administrator:

1. Finalist letter to candidate for personnel administrator  
position and request to be interviewed by group of six vice presidents.
2. A presentation to top management of the selected personnel administrator's design of a personnel system.
3. Personnel administrator's presentation of an overall man power strategy to top management.
4. Personnel administrator's preparation of demographic characteristics of the firm's work force and presentation to executive board.
5. Presentation to top management of revised organization structure and discussion with the company president on its implications.

These five exercises are conducted by having different students assume the role of the personnel administrator while other students assume the roles of vice presidents of finance, marketing, production, etc., and ask questions of the candidate and/or personnel administrator. Essentially this set of exercises is designed to help the student sell the personnel function to top management by being placed in a position in which they are asked to defend certain opinions, decisions, and actions.

## **Simulations, Games and Experiential Learning Techniques:, Volume 1, 1974**

In performance evaluation there are six simulations beginning with a job analysis exercise. Students compare different methods of job analysis (functional language, job element, critical incidents, or Position Analysis Questionnaire) usually for a job with which they are familiar, such as the job of another student in the class who is currently employed. Once these job analyses are completed and comparisons are made, students are asked to design behaviorally anchored rating scales (or critical incident scales) based upon job analysis or attempt to determine the objectives of the job and use an MBO approach to performance evaluation. In addition, an in basket is also provided which asks students to react to a performance analysis plan which has been submitted by the president of the organization, a simulation constructed to provide students an experience in attempting to implement their performance evaluation plan, and finally to prepare job descriptions based on job objectives and required job behaviors. The set of exercises used in the performance evaluation section are below:

1. Conducting job analysis and comparison of alternative methods
2. Designing behaviorally anchored rating scales (BARS) for entry— level, supervisory, middle management, or executive jobs
3. Determining the objectives of jobs using Job Outcomes (NBO) for various job levels
4. The personnel administrator's reply to performance appraisal plan submitted by the company president
5. Obtaining employee reactions to performance appraisal plan designed by the personnel administrator
6. Preparing job descriptions based on job analysis, behaviorally anchored rating scales, and management-by-objectives data

### Selection

In the selection section of the personnel department there are numerous in baskets and exercises. Two of the selection exercises are recruitment strategies: recruitment needs and plans for meeting these needs. There are also in baskets concerning general selection strategy, design of a flow chart of a selection strategy, EEO selection policies, testing concerning development of equal testing policies, test reliability, statistical validity for tests, content validity for biographical data, and interviewing techniques. Other selection exercises concern the design of an interviewing guide plus the use of the interviewing guide for the selection of an employee. The selection exercises are as follows:

1. Analyzing the recruitment needs of the organization
2. Developing a recruitment strategy for the organization

## **Simulations, Games and Experiential Learning Techniques:, Volume 1, 1974**

3. Designing a selection strategy for entry-level, supervisory, middle management, or executive jobs
4. Designing a flow chart of the selection process for different types of jobs
5. Implementing EEO selection policies using content validity
6. Designing and implementing equal testing policies
7. Determining test reliability for all levels of jobs and all types of applicants
8. Validating tests using statistical validity
9. Designing an interviewing guide for all levels of jobs
10. Designing promotion interviews guides for all levels of jobs
11. Making selection decisions on entry-level, supervisory, middle management, and executive jobs
12. Preparation for litigation on a questionable selection/rejection decision

In the last selection exercise, students are asked to defend a hiring, rejection, termination, or promotion decision. This decision may have been based on information gathered from psychological tests, interviews, biographical data, or work samples. Students are put in the position of having to provide either the statistical validity or content validity for any one of these means of selection.

### **Training and Development**

In the training section there are eighteen exercises starting with reviewing and providing a rationale for an orientation program and the design of a supervisory checklist for orienting new employees. There are several exercises on training methods such as programmed learning, job instruction training, assessments of employee training needs, and the application of training methods to simple tasks such as learning to tie a necktie (or learning the words to the Star Spangled Banner). In evaluating training results, students find exercises concerning the methodology for evaluating training effects. There are also simulated exercises concerning the use of programmed learning for supervisory training, different alternatives for management development training, upgrading current managerial skills through certain training methods, critiques of coaching methods for management development, and various problem-solving situations.

When employee training and development is discussed students are always requested to not only justify the objectives of the training program, but also to discern the appropriate training method and justify its selection based upon psychological principles of learning. Further, it is required that students design a method of evaluating training

## **Simulations, Games and Experiential Learning Techniques:, Volume 1, 1974**

effectiveness and of demonstrating the payoff of training to the organization for every method and program selected. The training exercises follow:

1. Replying to an orientation program suggested by the company president
2. Developing the rationale for company orientation program to be presented to the president
3. Designing a supervisor's checklist for orienting new employees
4. Information on programmed learning and its applicability as requested by the company president
5. Evaluating a job instruction training program designed by first—level supervisors
6. Preparing an employee training program for clerical workers
7. Presenting a proposal for an executive development training program to the president
8. The personnel administrator as an effective teacher (teaching people to tie a necktie, words to the Star Spangled Banner, America the Beautiful or a school song).
9. Designing methods of evaluating (entry-level, supervisory, middle management, or executive) training programs
10. Evaluating methods of training clerical employees
11. Reacting to programmed learning for supervisory training as proposed by the supervisors
12. Designing an internal management development training program
13. Upgrading management through an external training program
14. Critiquing the coaching method of management development as proposed by the company president
15. Teaching managers to solve problems (using simple word and number games)
16. Designing the supervisory handbook
17. Critiquing a management development proposal submitted by an outside consulting firm
18. Making a speech to the local personnel club on the use of effective training

## **Simulations, Games and Experiential Learning Techniques:, Volume 1, 1974**

What the personnel department can do to improve the motivation of employees is approached by having students attempt to determine whether the job under consideration is either intrinsically or extrinsically motivating or both. Students are encouraged to develop techniques whereby they may survey employees and analyze the motivational factors in jobs. They are also asked to design motivational systems for certain jobs within an organization which require largely extrinsic feedback systems to enable employees to be motivated. The simulations include designing systems for merit increases using financial rewards and improving job satisfaction through surveying and evaluating employee attitudes. Other exercises concern the applicability of job enrichment, the usefulness of a company bowling team, and the design of promotion and transfer systems. Further exercises include designing discipline systems, and changing work procedures using the Job Description Index and job factor questionnaires. Finally, students are requested to present an overall motivational system to be used by the organization for all levels of jobs. Below is a list of exercises on motivational problems faced by the personnel administrator:

1. Designing a system for merit increases
2. Effectively using financial rewards
3. Designing a survey of employee attitudes
4. Evaluating a survey of employee attitudes and planning appropriate action
5. Responding to a request for a company bowling team
6. Determining the applicability of job enrichment
7. Designing promotion and transfer systems
8. Designing discipline systems
9. Redesigning work procedures
10. Using the Job Description Index as a means of measuring job satisfaction
11. Using job factor questionnaires
12. Responding to requests concerning the environment of a work group
13. Determining the need for total motivational system

### **Maintenance**

In the final section of the course, employee maintenance systems, there are several in baskets which have been developed; these have alternative uses to be used at the discretion of the instructor.

## **Simulations, Games and Experiential Learning Techniques:, Volume 1, 1974**

Students are given situations such as industrial safety issues and asked to resolve problems with OSHA representatives (actual representatives or other students). They may also be handed a series of position classifications and an organization's current salary structure and requested to devise a system of job evaluation. They may be presented with a proposed merger situation and asked to prepare a means by which the personnel department can facilitate the merger of the acquired organization's employees into the overall personnel system. A list of maintenance system exercises follows:

1. Preparing a rationale for wage and salary strategy to be presented to the president
2. Designing a job evaluation system and presenting it to employees
3. Designing and evaluating a system of cost-of-living increases
4. Responding to the president's request for the secrecy of salary levels
5. Using management consultants
6. The personnel administrator's role in resolving interpersonal conflict
7. Developing zero-defect programs as requested by the president
8. Using employee advisory councils on grievances and other matters
9. Responding to the community's demand for a statement on the company's social responsibility
10. Designing employee house organs, etc.
11. Designing safety systems in compliance with OSHA
12. Designing grievance systems
13. Preparing for a visit by OSHA
14. Defending against charges by OSHA
15. Anticipating unionization and planning actions
16. The impact of unionization upon the company
17. The company takeover--an O.D. merger exercise
18. Resolving absenteeism and turnover problems

All of the exercises have been specifically designed for this course. Eventually it may evolve that the entire course could be taught

## **Simulations, Games and Experiential Learning Techniques:, Volume 1, 1974**

by a series of exercises with the instructor making necessary resources available and providing minimum guidelines. Obviously, not all of the exercises discussed here can be used in one semester and each instructor must choose the ones appropriate for a particular topic's learning objectives. But the use of experiential learning has stimulated a significant increase in the interest of students and the instructor in the personnel administration course.