

EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING ASSOCIATION SPECIAL ISSUE Best Experiential Exercises from the Eastern Academy of Management, 2006

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Editor's Introduction

In this issue we present a set of three experiential exercises that were nominated as “Best” in class by reviewers for the Eastern Academy of Management (EAM) conference, held in Saratoga Springs, NY, in May 2006. We received 26 submissions of experiential exercises to this conference, accepted 19 for presentation, and among those 19, selected these three as the best in terms of their “potential to make a solid impact in the classroom,” and to “provide students with a meaningful learning experience.”

As those of you who have attended the “Best Experiential Exercise” sessions at EAM well know, the competition can be intense. Presenters do not just discuss how they would implement their exercises in the abstract. They *actively present their exercise*, enlisting the conference attendees as actual participants in the exercise. Then, three judges (unknown to the presenters) choose the best of these three nominated exercises. In the session for 2006, approximately 35 participants played charades, built newspaper towers, and delved into ethical and gender issues while involved in the following three exercises.

In 2006, the three best papers selected were “Individual Incentives versus Team Performance: Lessons from a Game of Charades,” by Shawn E. Peacock, Patricia Denise Lopez, and Marlon F. Sukal; “The Group Creativity Exercise: Getting MBAs to Work and Think Effectively in Groups,” by David E. Desplaces, Steven Congden, and Power Boothe; and “Discovering the Enemy Within: An Exercise in Unintended Thought,” by Carolyn I. Chavez and Yiling Ge. In order to be accepted into this special edition of OMJ, the authors had to submit their exercises with revisions based on reviews from the 2006 conference. Their submissions were then reviewed by at least two new reviewers, who offered further suggestions for revision. All three submissions were accepted into this special edition with some revisions; I must offer my congratulations to the authors for persisting through this lengthy process.

The theme of the 2006 EAM conference was “Management Scholarship, Teaching, and Learning in the 21st Century,” aimed at examining how our management teaching must respond to the changing needs and demands of the new century. The Peacock et al. paper, chosen by the judges

as the best of the three, draws on a familiar exercise, charades, and uses this game as a starting point for addressing critical issues in reward system design. The exercise forces participants to confront contradictory rewards aimed at both individuals and teams. At the conference, a packed

room of observers watched as teams showed off their movie and nonverbal gesture reading knowledge to “win” the contest. Our reviewers were also impressed by this exercise; they commented that it is “fun, simple, and competitive,” attributes that “make for success in the undergraduate classroom.”

The Desplaces exercise addressed group creativity by having teams engage in building “towers” from piles of newspapers. While newspapers did not seem like promising building materials when participants first engaged in the exercise, within minutes, towers of newsprint began to rise toward the ceiling, held together by nothing more than masking tape and a prayer. In their teaching notes, Desplaces et al. offer a strong connection between a creativity model (Leonard & Swap, 1999) and the actions teams go through in creating their newspaper towers. The exercise provided a live experience of creativity, as well as a vivid concluding “product” of the creative (or for some teams, not so creative) process.

The third exercise, on “Discovering the Enemy Within,” draws on a classic story of ethical decision-making (the “Alligator River Story”) to confront students with issues of hidden stereotypes and judgments that become revealed in the execution of the exercise. Simply by changing the names of main characters in the story, Chavez and Ge show that significant changes in perception occur; specifically, when women versus men are seen to engage in possibly unethical behavior, participants judge women’s behavior as significantly more negative than when men engage in identical unethical behavior. Chavez and Ge offer a rich literature as context for their exercise, describing how our hidden attitudes can drive behaviors, and unless we understand these underlying attitudes, we cannot understand our sometimes prejudicial, harmful behavior.

As you can see, these experiential exercises provide multi-varied perspectives on organizational life, and draw participants (and hopefully, your students) into deeper learning through active participation. I urge you to read these exercises actively, with an eye to thinking about how they can become a part of *your* classroom experience.