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Editor's Introduction

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Editor's Introduction

We know that experiential exercises can energize a classroom. We know that student learners absorb material more readily and retain it longer when they are *involved* in the production of their learning and actively engaged in understanding our management concepts. We know that experiential learning represents the future of pedagogy, in an age where our efforts to “deposit” information into the minds of our students compete with their distractions by technology and attention spans trained on 30-second television spots. But we also know how challenging it is to develop experiential exercises that work.

I had the pleasure to observe that challenge as Track Chair of the Eastern Academy of Management's Experiential Learning Association (ELA), which involved reading the descriptions of many experiential exercises and watching many taught by their authors at the conference. Every year, ELA receives 20 to 25 experiential exercises that are reviewed by a panel of professors in the field. Of the exercises that are presented at the conference, three are chosen as being the “best.” The best exercises are chosen because they “provide students with a meaningful learning experience that provides insight into key management concepts or practices,” are “entertaining,” “creative,” and have “the potential to make a solid impact in the classroom.” The three exercises so chosen are then led at the conference before a live audience of (mostly) peer instructors—a daunting performance, to say the least.

In 2005, the three best papers selected were “When Reality and Rules Collide: Understanding the Business Context of Ethical Decisions” by Kathleen Dechant, Timothy Golden, and Jack Veiga; “Nuts! An Experiential Exercise in Ethics and Decision-Making,” by Jeff Lenn; and “Pitching to the Home Shopping Network: An Exercise in Opportunity Assessment and Personal Selling” by Kim Eddleston, John Friar, and Edmund Clark. In order to be accepted into this Special Issue of OMJ, the authors had to submit their exercises with revisions based on reviews from the 2005 conference. Their submissions were then reviewed by at least two new reviewers, who offered suggestions for revision. All three submissions were accepted with some revisions. Congratulations should go to these authors for their persistence and responsiveness to the substantial feedback they received.

The theme of the 2005 EAM conference was “Managing Ethically in Times of Change,” and two of the three papers, the Dechant et al. and Lenn exercises, were explicitly focused on ethical issues. The Dechant et al. exercise focuses on an innovative use of an in-basket exercise to present managers with a series of ethical dilemmas that has the potential to foster excellent discussion among participants. They emphasize managers' personal codes of conduct as essential to overall organizational ethical decision making. The Lenn piece focuses on ethics in individual decision making, and discusses three real-life choices about purchasing a can of cashews. As Lenn points out, the exercise starts with a simple dilemma, but that dilemma points to several important issues, including students' values, how values translate into decision making, and how emotions and rationality consideration affect day-today decisions.

The Eddleston et al. exercise focuses on the student experience of marketing a product by having them create and “pitch” their idea to a mock Home Shopping Network for possible distribution. At the 2005 EAM conference, this exercise created terrific energy around how to sell innovative products, and discussed issues of marketing strategy, effective persuasion, and meeting customer needs.

It has been a pleasure reading these exercises and, better yet, watching them in action. I urge you to read them and consider them for your own classroom use.

Donald E. Gibson
Special Issue Editor