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Experiential Learning Association special issue: best experiential exercises from the Eastern Academy of Management, 2008

Donald E. Gibson
Fairfield University

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Experiential Learning Association special issue: best experiential exercises from the Eastern Academy of Management, 2008

Donald E Gibson

Fairfield University, Fairfield, USA

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It is widely known by denizens of the Eastern Academy of Management (EAM) annual conferences that the most fun can be had at the Experiential Learning Association's (ELA) sessions. Unlike the academic sessions – certainly worthy in their own quest to display cutting-edge advances in theoretical and empirical work in management – the ELA sessions insist that presenters *involve* participants in their presentation; it is not enough to describe or analyze an exercise, it must be lived and felt. In this issue we present two experiential exercises that were nominated as “Best” in class by reviewers for the 45th EAM conference, held in Washington, DC, May 14–17, 2008. We received 21 submissions of experiential exercises to this conference, accepted 19 for presentation, and among those 19, selected these two 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” according to the criteria provided to the Best Experiential Exercise reviewers. The theme of the 2008 EAM conference was “The Power of One, The Power of Many,” emphasizing the degree to which, in organizations as in our world one person, who is able to tap into the needs and desires and ethical outlook of many, can have surprising influence.

As those of you who have attended the “Best Experiential Exercise” sessions at EAM well know, the competition can be intense. As noted, presenters do not just discuss how they would implement their exercises in the abstract; they actively enlist conference attendees as full exercise participants. Then, three judges (present in the room but unknown to the presenters) choose the best of the nominated exercises. In the session for 2008, approximately 35 participants participated in the Best Experiential Exercise session.

In 2008, the two best exercises selected were, “Demonstrating the Challenges of Behaving with Emotional Intelligence in a Team Setting: An On-line/On-ground Experiential Exercise” by William P. Ferris; and “Aquarius Advertising Revisited: A Case Becomes an Experience” by Krstin Backhaus. It is important to note that these best exercises are chosen *both* on the basis of the exercise as presented at the conference *and* on the effectiveness of the paper



that describes the exercise. Properly providing the theoretical context for an exercise is as essential as having participants involved in the activity. To be accepted into this special edition of *OMJ*, the authors had to submit their exercises with revisions based on reviews from the 2008 conference. Their submissions were then reviewed by at least two *new* reviewers unfamiliar with the work, who offered further suggestions for revision. I offer my congratulations to the authors for patiently persisting through this lengthy process.

The Ferris paper, chosen by the judges as the best, has two ambitious goals: to engage students in a vivid illustration of emotional intelligence concepts and behaviors, and to do this in both online and in-class formats. Stressing that our teaching now often represents a hybrid of online and in-class engagement, Ferris argues that these two modes can illustrate different aspects of emotional intelligence. In fact, as he shows, perceptions of emotionally intelligent behavior may *differ* depending on whether it is viewed in-person or online. Using web-camera technology and online feedback techniques, Ferris shows how hybrid classrooms can actually add a new dimension to the learning experience, and are specifically appropriate for

examining the relatively new phenomenon of emotional intelligence. Bolstering Ferris' argument is a careful outline of how emotional intelligence has developed in the academic and practitioner literature.

The Backhaus exercise draws on a familiar organization theory case and breathes new life into traditional case analysis by having students play the roles of the key actors in the case. Rather than merely talking about structural contingency theory – the notion that an organization's structure tends to reflect the environmental demands – this exercise has students actually live it, and in the process, potentially develop their own structures and communication linkages. Students come to understand the critical outcomes of effective *vs* ineffective communication and the dramatic impact that authority structures and roles have on communication patterns.

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.