



**OBTC 2015 at University of La Verne  
June 17<sup>th</sup> – 20<sup>th</sup>, 2015**

**Submission Template**

**SUBMISSION GUIDANCE**

- \* Remove all identifying properties from this document \**
- \* All files must be saved in PDF format \**
- \*Please include ALL supplementary text at the end of this document\**
- \*Only one document should be submitted\**

## Submission Template for the 2015 OBTC Teaching Conference for Management Educators

### 1) Title of Proposal:

Critically Thinking Through Reality: A Classic Exercise Infused with Real-World Scenarios

### 2) Abstract:

*Please include a brief session description (not to exceed 100 words). If your proposal is accepted, this description will be printed in the conference program.*

According to research, critical thinking skills are not receiving the attention it warrants in university classrooms and, consequently, may be negatively impacting employees' decision-making skills in the workplace. Some claim that universities should have a responsibility in developing students' critical thinking skills. In this very interactive session, participants will learn how to take a current engaging group activity and infuse it with real life scenarios to promote students' critical thinking skills that they can then transfer and utilize to their workplace.

### 3) Keywords:

*Use three or four keywords to describe your session.*

Critical Thinking, Decision-Making, Engagement

### 4) Format

- Activity or exercise
- Discussion roundtable (60 minute only)
- General discussion session

### 5) Time Requested:

- 30 Minutes
- 60 Minutes (*Roundtables must select 60 minutes*)
- 90 Minutes

## 6) Planning Details:

*Does your session have any special requirements for space or materials?*

I will need a room for participants to document responses on Post-it (self-sticking) Easel Pad, 25" x 30". In addition, a room where we can hang each participants post-it note on the wall for participants to evaluate.

## 7) Learning Objectives or Goals for the Session:

*What are 2-4 specific learning outcomes that participants will get from your session?*

- To understand the importance and impact of linking classroom exercises with real world scenarios
- How to think about infusing current classrooms activities with real world scenarios to elevate students 'critical thinking skills, and therefore better prepare the students for the workforce

## 8) Management or Teaching Topics:

*Describe what management and/or teaching topics are relevant to your session, and why Please include theoretical, disciplinary, or theoretical foundations that will help reviewers understand how your ideas fit within the broader field of management.*

Research indicates students have difficulty thinking effectively when complex problems are presented to them (National Commission on Excellence in Education 1983; Porter & McKibbin, 1988). Porter and McKibbin (1988) suggest students take a standard, rather rigid approach in the problem solving process. Moreover, decision making skills that are essential in the process can be influenced by biases rather than an approach guided by critical thinking. Effective critical thinking skills - “-consciously controlled reflective thought that draws on cognitive processes like perception, attention, and memory” (Smith, p.26) are crucial to becoming a successful manager and leader. Indeed, critical thinking is listed in University of Missouri–St. Louis’ 2008 and 2012 survey as a skill that is not sufficient in meeting job requirements now or in the future. In the same survey, respondents suggested universities could close this skill gap by including more real-world business experience (UMSL, 2014).

Engagement generating classroom activities, such as the *NASA Exercise: Survival on the Moon*; *Winter Survival Exercise*, and *Sinking Yacht Tragedy* are exercises that require students to make multiple decisions based on limited information. These activities are based on the premise that some sort of disaster has occurred and students are now forced to critically evaluate which people or items involved in the scenario are worth saving. While these scenarios encourage decision making and problem solving among participants, they do not necessarily facilitate effective, creative, and productive thinking. More importantly, the exercise does not clearly reveal a link between the activity and real-world situations. These decision-making exercises lack a “rigor-relevance dilemma” (Smith, 2003). In other words, the content and context of these exercises lack relevance to the workplace setting. Consequently, students have to take a huge mental leap to apply the knowledge gained from these exercises to organizational life. Fortifying these classic group activities with scenarios related to real world

managerial issues, answers the call for universities to take a responsibility to close the critical thinking skill gap with more real-world knowledge.

In this interactive session, participants will first be introduced or re-introduced to the classic decision making group activity (*Sinking Yacht Tragedy*). Next, I will demonstrate a modified version that employs a real life scenario (deciding which employees to be downsized) that promotes critical thinking skills by employing the students to consider multiple details and perspectives in their decision. This session will emphasize a more comprehensive approach to linking organizational behavior concepts and theories with the realities that occur in the workplace.

I believe that this session will appeal to OBTS participants for several reasons:

- This is a highly interactive session where participants will be introduced to several activities (classic and modified scenarios) that are ready to be used in the classroom and can be a useful tool in a professor's instructional arsenal
- Introduces an innovative way to emphasize and apply decision making and critical thinking skills that more seamlessly transfer from the classroom to the work environment
- Professors interested in pursuing avenues to increase engagement in the classroom may be inspired to modify other classic classroom activities

## 9) Session Description and Plan:

*What will you actually do in this session? What activities will you facilitate, how long will they take, and how will participants be involved? Reviewers will be evaluating how well the time request matches the activities you'd like to do, and the extent you can reasonably accomplish the session's goals. Reviewers will also be looking for how you are engaging the participants in the session. Include a timeline for your session.*

- **5 – minutes: Overview**
  - Explain the purpose of the session and why it is important to management pedagogy
  - Randomly place participants in groups
- **15 – minutes Exercise #1: Sinking Yacht (see Appendix A)**
  - Each group will determine the 8 Individuals that warrant a placement in the lifeboat
  - Discussion will center around the decision process
    - What was the primary driver for your decisions
    - How did you decide, i.e., consensus, etc.
    - Was the decisions difficult to make, why
- **20 – minutes Exercise #2: Downsizing (see Appendix B)**
  - Each group will determine the 4 employees to eliminate. Discussion will center around the decision process
    - What was the primary driver for your decisions
    - How did you decide, i.e., consensus, etc. (decision making process)
    - Was the decisions difficult to make, why (relationships, employee personalities, etc)

- What are possible consequences of your decisions, (i.e., impact on employees, leadership, teamwork, etc.)
  - What roles do morals and ethics play in your decision or should it
  - Can you think of alternative options to the downsizing issue
- **10 – minutes Debrief:**
  - Ask participants to compare and contrast the difference between the two exercises
  - What else can we do as instructors to increase critical thinking and decision making skills of our students with engaging exercises that lack a clear link to the workplace
  - How can we further enhance the link between theory and application with exercises
    - Have students to share examples they have experienced or observed in workplaces
- **5 – minutes Misc.:**
  - If time allows, I will share with participants how I utilize the students' decisions to conduct additional exercises that focus on creativity and influence tactics.

## **10) For Activities and Exercises:**

*Attach any materials needed to run the activity and debriefing questions. Evidence for effectiveness may also be included.*

**(see attachments)**

## **11) Implications for Teaching or for Teachers:**

*What is the contribution of your session?*

The contribution of this session is to bridge the gap between classroom academic activities and real world situations. The implications are:

- Provides instructors with a method to synthesize real world interactions with OB theories and concepts
- Elevates both the instructors and students critical thinking skills as information is shared between students and instructors and their work experiences
- Creates a different level or type of relationship between students and instructors when students realize that instructors are not teaching solely from a theoretical perspective but proactively demonstrates the link between theory and reality

## **12) Application to Conference theme:**

How does your session fit with the overall OBTC theme of Learning in Community?

I think this session fits with the overall OBTC theme of Learning in a Community in a couple of ways:

- “Creating an active learning community where students connect their learning to the subject, themselves, and their fellow learners”
  - This session allows participants (students) to share their experiences on the subject with fellow students. For example, how have you seen this situation

(downsizing) handled in your workplace? Do you think it could have been managed differently?

- “Understanding our role as authentic teachers, deeply connecting who we are with our students and what we teach”
  - As stated earlier in this proposal, I think teachers who proactively demonstrate the importance of linking theory with real world will take their connection/relationships with students to a different level. From my experience, students appreciate teachers who are passionate about what they teach and how it can facilitate them being more effective in their work environment as managers and/or employees

### **13) Unique Contribution to OBTC:**

*Have you presented the work in this proposal before? If so, how will it be different? Is this proposal under current review somewhere else? If so, please explain. How will your proposal be different for the OBTC conference?*

No, I have not presented the work in this proposal before. Yes, a similar proposal to this is under review at the Academy of Management Teaching and Learning Conference (TLC@AOM). The TLC@AOM conference is scheduled after the OBTS conference. The AOM proposal differs in that it has a very different scenario and the proposal is written to a broader spectrum of disciplines. This (OBTS) proposal focuses specifically on OB topics and concepts, i.e., decision-making process, employee relationships, personalities, morals, ethics, creativity, etc. In addition, I will share in this session, how instructors can extend this one exercise to other OB topics by using students’ decisions to create ancillary exercises that will require them to use their creative, communication, and influence tactic skills. This is not included in the TLC@AOM conference proposal.

### **14) References and/or Additional Materials:**

- National Commission on Excellence in Education. 1983. *A Nation at Risk: The imperative for educational reform*. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Education
- Porter, L. W., & McGibbon, L. E. (1988). *Management education and development: Drift or thrust into the twenty-first century*. New York: McGraw-Hill.
- University of Missouri–St. Louis (UMSL) (2014),
- Smith, G.F. 2003. Beyond critical thinking and decision making: Teaching business students to think. *Journal of Management Education*. 27(1), 24 – 51.
- University of Missouri–St. Louis (UMSL). 2014. *Skill gaps: The ill-prepared workforce*. Retrieved January 12, 2015 from <http://www.umsl.edu/divisions/business/Resources/Skills%20Gap%20report.html>

## APPENDIX A

### Sinking Yacht Exercise

Fourteen people are on a yacht that has developed a leak during a storm. They are at least five days from shore (Atlantic Ocean) – they think. There is only one lifeboat, and it will accommodate only eight people. Agree to which 8 of 14 people get to go on the lifeboat to be saved. You must also list those saved in order of importance – because if they run out of food and water the “less important people” will have to be dumped overboard.

1. **Captain**- new, experience in Pacific Ocean, 350lbs
2. **Deck hand** – bridge & navigation responsibilities on yacht, 15 yrs experience mostly in the Atlantic Ocean
3. **Pregnant woman** – due in few weeks, 4<sup>th</sup> child
4. **Pregnant woman’s husband** – sole financial support for his family
5. **Priest** – excommunicated
6. **Ex-convict** – tax evasion (male), alcoholic, has his cell phone with one bar battery life and flask of whiskey
7. **Male doctor** – chiropractor
8. **Female doctor** – OBGYN owns a clinic known for performing abortions
9. **Survivalist** – male, White, known racist
10. **Yacht’s Cook** – African American female, single parent, 4 children
11. **Bill Gates** - co-founder of Microsoft, the world’s largest PC software company
12. **University professor** – chemical oceanographer, Asian male, limited English
13. **Retired commercial fisherman** - familiar with area, elderly and sickly – diabetes, high blood pressure, high cholesterol
14. **College student** – female, 2<sup>nd</sup> semester junior majoring in astronomy, wheel chair bound

## APPENDIX B

### Employee Merit Raise Allocation Exercise

You are the manager of a marketing department of a large company. You have been informed that due to the unstable environment and recent economic downturn, the company will need make huge budget cuts in order to survive. Therefore, you have been asked to eliminate four employees' positions in your department. The downsizing will occur in 3 – 4 phases depending on the economic environment. Therefore, you must determine of the four employees which one will be released first, second, etc. Following is the list of your employees. First select the four employees and then rank the employees starting with the employee that will be released first. Be prepared to articulate your reasoning for your decisions.

1. **Michael** is a White male with a bachelor's degree from a local university. His level of performance in your department is average. He just celebrated his 5<sup>th</sup> year with the company. Your children attend the same private school and your spouses are very good friends. As a matter of fact, your families have outings about twice a month such as going to the movies, skating rink, family restaurants, etc. You also attend the same church. In addition, it is not a secret that you and Michael have established a norm of going out to eat lunch at least twice a week.
2. **Sheneka** is a Black female with a high school degree who has multiple sclerosis. She has been with the company for over 20 years. For the last five years, she has been bound to a wheel chair. She is a single parent of three children all under the age of twelve. The three children have different fathers and she is only receiving child support from one of the fathers. Her oldest child also have multiple sclerosis. Sheneka's performance is barely average. Her ability to perform at a higher level is probably influenced by the amount of time she spends on Facebook during work hours. This behavior has not gone unnoticed by other employees in the department, but you, as a manager, have not taken steps to reprimand her behavior.
3. **Melissa** is a White female with a bachelor's degree from an Ivy League university. She is married to a successful executive and has two children. Her level of performance is below average. Melissa is highly connected with upper management in your company since her husband's company is one of your largest customers. She is known to take more than an hour for lunch which usually happens when she goes to lunch with your boss. And she is not above bragging about attending soirees and country club events with upper management's wives. Her unsolicited remarks about her strong social capital and her lack of adherence to department policies (i.e., 45 minute lunches) are impacting other employees' morale and motivation. She seems to know that her political position in the company rubs



people the wrong way, so as to make amends for her behavior, she brings in donuts every Friday for the entire department, of course, she is always 30+ minutes late.

4. **Sheri** is a forty-seven year old unmarried high-school educated White female with no children. She has been with the company for over 25 years. During her tenure with the company, she has worked in many departments acquiring quite of few skill sets and making important internal connections. These connections have been advantageous for your department in the past few months when your department failed to meet the deadline for a couple of deliverables. Sheri is a fountain of knowledge but she tends to hoard her knowledge hoping it will give her a competitive advantage over her co-workers. In addition, it seems like she uses her knowledge as a source of power – expert power. Instead of using this power to benefit the department, she selfishly uses it to solely benefit her. While her performance is outstanding, her failure to transfer essential knowledge has impacted the efficiency and productivity of her teammates and the department as a whole.
5. **Jeremy** is a Black male who has a bachelor’s degree and who has been with the company for 15 years. His personnel file indicates that there was an allegation of sexual harassment filed against him 10 years ago, although a formal investigation was unable to establish fault. His previous boss mentioned to you that Jeremy is a recovering alcoholic but is in treatment. His level of performance over the last 5 years has been very good, but you have been noticing some recent inconsistencies with the quality of his work.
6. **Penny** is a White female with bachelor’s degree. She has only been with the company for 3 years, but it is obvious that her performance is far superior to the rest of her colleagues. Penny volunteers for difficult projects, works nights and weekends, and is conscientiousness about the quality of her work. Penny has received raises each year she has been with the company and the rest of her co-workers complain that she is only doing this additional work to progress quickly up the corporate ladder. Additionally, co-workers with families argue that they cannot maintain work-life balance working the kind of hours Penny volunteers to work. Penny’s hard work has caught the attention of upper management and you are concerned that if you continue to reward her performance that she may be promoted soon, leaving you without her output. Lastly, Penny has told you that she has received offers to go work for your competitors. She indicated that a substantial pay increase may keep her from leaving the organization.
7. **Frank** is a Hispanic male with a bachelor’s degree. He is a new hire with a degree that is in high demand. He has been with the company for about five years and was recently placed in your department two years ago to support a previous organizational strategy. Specifically, he specializes in a skill set that is very valuable to company and people with this skill set are very hard to find in the

current market. However technically talented Frank is, there have been complaints that Frank is not a team player and that he is very difficult to work with on projects. Some of his co-workers have said that Frank is disrespectful and rude. You believe that Frank may just be socially awkward and not skilled in communicating with others in a team. In his previous performance reviews with you, he has received outstanding in areas relating to his skill sets, initiatives, and completion of projects. However, you have only given him average in areas pertaining to team work and communication.

8. **Anna** is a 55 year old white female with a high school degree. She has been with the company for 10 years with the last two years under your supervision. Although Anna does not have an advanced degree, she is a hard worker who is motivated to perform well and is very loyal to her department and to the organization. In general, you would rate her performance as average. You suspect that she would flourish if you mentored her and sent her to get trained on skills that she is currently not performing as well as she could. Unfortunately, you have been busy with other managerial duties and have not put forth the effort necessary to help Anna excel in her current position and develop her for promotions.