



**OBTC 2015 at University of La Verne
June 17th – 20th, 2015**

Submission Template

SUBMISSION GUIDANCE

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- * 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:

Sparking Change with Symbols, Stories and Rituals: Mobilizing People with the Symbolic Frame

2) Abstract:

In this activity session, small groups of participants each receive a different vignette that summarizes an organizational problem of considerable severity that emphasizes the actions of individuals or groups. Each vignette specifies the role the group is to assume within the scenario (e.g. consultants, organizational leadership, external or internal stakeholder). The activity calls for each group to develop and present a solution involving at least one symbol, one story, and one ritual (as conceptually presented in course readings) that might mobilize people to change their behavior in response to organizational needs described within the vignette.

3) Keywords:

Leadership, change, communication, culture, motivation

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:

This activity is easily accomplished in a typical classroom environment. It is helpful for there to be space in the front of the room for presentations to be delivered, and groups will need to be able to gather together either standing or seated to work on solutions. Only one or two groups will likely present their solution as part of the demonstration of this activity.

7) Learning Objectives or Goals for the Session:

- a. *Students understand both the distinctions between and the interactions among key components or organizational culture identified within Bolman and Deal's symbolic frame (symbols, rituals, and stories)*
- b. *Students can identify multiple factors that may contribute to resistance or failure given an organizational context calling for organizational change*
- c. *Students gain competency in contributing to a creative decision-making process within a self-managed team*

8) Management or Teaching Topics:

Each of the vignettes that participants must consider involves significant breakdowns in organizational performance or highly undesirable community outcomes that may be addressed by appropriate changes in the behavior of organizational (or community) members. This may in turn be attached to numerous management topics including organizational leadership, organizational culture and change, and personnel motivation.

- a. Organizational Leadership: The competent leader's use of symbols, rituals, and stories to affect or mobilize organizational culture for the purpose of accomplishing goals is an abundant theme within the literature. Students may readily identify and discuss associated insight or tactics after merely accomplishing assigned readings or participating in guided discussion in class. However, students attain a higher level of competency through synthesizing their own approaches to applying symbolic leadership. Discussion of presented solutions tends to touch on
 1. A leader's use of pre-existing cultural artifacts or creation of same
 2. Alignment and identification of followers with missions and objectives
 3. Constructive framing of organizational action and history so as to influence members to develop both efficacy and shared sense of purpose.
- b. Organizational Change: In digesting the situation presented by a vignette and crafting a response within the requirements of the activity, participants are challenged to
 1. Identify key organizational threats within the vignette
 2. Identify some set of behaviors that may be associated with those problems
 3. Deploy understanding of how symbols, rituals, and stories work within the context of building and sustaining change given a simplified, narrow set of issues to address.
- c. Personnel Motivation: Participants receive the opportunity to discuss the personnel implications of a rather frequent source of stress and strain within organizations, intervention for the sake of achieving change. Some related issues that tend to come up during this activity include
 1. Connection of motivational aspects like job/role importance, autonomy, and purpose with the symbols, rituals, and stories a group of people adopts or applies in framing both collective and individual action.
 2. Facilitating appropriate identification of personnel with more ideal states associated with change rather than having personnel identify ineffectively with failures change is addressing.

9) Session Description and Plan:

- a. Introduce session (3 minutes)
 1. Inform attendees that this is an activity that follows readings, lecture, and/or discussion of symbols, rituals, and stories as important aspects of organizational culture, leadership effectiveness, or organizational change.
 2. Inform attendees that they will be put into groups and that each group will receive a handout that describes a situation being faced by real or hypothetical organization or other larger group of people.
 3. Inform attendees that the handouts they will receive include details about the role or point of view they are to adopt in addressing the challenge that is presented after the description of the situation.
 4. Finally, inform all attendees that, in all cases, groups will be asked to provide solutions that apply at least one symbol, one ritual, and one story.
- b. Launch activity (2 minutes)
 1. Create multiple groups of 3-5 people in order to yield 3-5 groups.
 2. Inform all groups that they will have 10 minutes to consider the vignette they are about to receive and to produce a potential solution
 3. Provide each group with a different vignette to work with.
- c. Groups discuss options and develop solutions (10 minutes)
- d. Select/volunteer groups present solutions, all attendees discuss strengths, weaknesses, contingencies (15 minutes)

10) For Activities and Exercises:

Please see sample vignettes attached.

11) Implications for Teaching or for Teachers:

This activity session provides instructors with a useful tool for immersing students within the process of applying important organizational cultural elements of studies in leadership, organizational communication, and organizational change.

This activity is easily deployed as a segment of a class meeting to improve student focus on applicable material discussed. This activity may also be extended to address more detailed analysis of proposed solutions to the problems offered by the vignettes. A session of merely 30 minutes was deemed more adequate for demonstrating this activity than the longer 60-minute option, but applying the activity within the classroom easily requires more time.

The only resources required are the handouts describing situations for groups to address. Several examples I have used in my classes are attached, but instructors may easily develop their own vignettes using real or fictitious situations.

12) Application to Conference theme:

This exercise connects with this year's theme of Learning in Community in multiple ways. Firstly, this is clearly a group exercise that makes use of community learning on multiple levels (both within assigned groups and the class as a whole during presentation and debrief). Furthermore, the overarching topic of this exercise is how communities of people may be influenced through symbolic communication that may rely considerably on the collective adopting new points of reference, language, or meanings. Both the effects under examination and our approach to learning in this activity affirm that we are not only learning together but also learning from each other.

13) Unique Contribution to OBTC:

I created this activity on my way to teach three years ago when I was uncomfortable with what I had planned to do that day. I have used this activity (or some variation of it) successfully in nearly every class since then. Prior to now, I have never written up or presented this work for any conference or journal, although I have shared it with a handful of colleagues for use in their classes when asked for help. To my knowledge, this has never been presented at a conference. Given the extraordinary work I have seen at every OBTC, I cannot claim that my exercise is utterly unique or unmatched in its approach to the issues brought into play. I do believe that this is a solid, valuable exercise that can be of great use within management course at either the undergraduate or graduate level.

14) References and/or Additional Materials:

Bolman, Lee G., and Terrence E. Deal. Reframing organizations: Artistry, choice, and leadership. John Wiley & Sons, 2013. pp. 243-285.

Bolman, Lee G., and Terrence E. Deal. "Reframing leadership." Business leadership (2008): 35-49.

Levi, Daniel. Group dynamics for teams. Sage, 2013. pp. 221-241,261-283.

McShane, Steven Lattimore, and Mary Ann Young Von Glinow. Organizational behavior: Emerging knowledge and practice for the real world 6th Edition. Boston: McGraw-Hill Irwin, 2013. pp. 404-430.

Mumby, Dennis K. Organizational communication: a critical approach. Sage Publications, 2013. pp. 133-154.

Attachments: Sample Symbolic Frame Vignettes (Cases 1-5)

Case 1: Death by Elder Worm

Your team works for a small non-profit organization that hopes to prevent the extinction of a remote tribe called the Nevergonians. The threat to the tribe derives from a practice that, while long-standing with this tribe, has begun to threaten the tribe's health and well-being.

The tribe is increasingly afflicted with a sometimes fatal neurological disorder that has been connected with the ancient practice of consuming a certain worm that is easily found in tidal marsh lands near the ocean shore. Tribal members add an "elder worm" to each bowl of food at meal time. This worm is believed by the tribe to return the spirits of departed ancestors to the tribe to give it strength and prosperity.

It is believed by scientists in the developed world that these worms, once harmless to the people, have now become a source of concentrated toxins. This is likely due to illegal industrial waste dumping that goes on unabated within the currents that visit the island.

Your team must recommend a symbolic frame intensive approach that can be applied while other more structural approaches are being pursued. Your plan should have a chance of being successfully executed or advocated for by your organization given limited resources with the primary purpose of saving lives.

Case 2: Consequential Foods

The Consequential Foods Corporation has been experiencing an increasing number of food contamination incidents (e.g. salmonella, e-coli, rotavirus) that are threatening the business's future.

For quite some time, signs have been visibly posted around the processing areas indicating specific procedures to be followed. Employees have also been receiving quarterly training sessions with a professional facilitator designed to maintain awareness and keep personnel informed about the latest industry standards.

Your team's task is to propose a more effective symbolic frame approach to reducing or eliminating instances of food contamination through greater employee compliance with effective food safety procedures.

Note that all proposed action is to be carried out within the Consequential Foods organization.

Case 3: Silverman Baggs Group, Inc.

Your consulting team has been hired to make recommendations to a major financial firm regarding how it can turn its image around.

The very large investment bank Silverman Baggs (SB) is enduring a firestorm of contempt in the aftermath of a public scandal involving high profile government investigation of securities fraud allegations. To make matters worse, and a furious former VP of the firm has written an editorial piece for a widely-read newspaper claiming that SB indulges a highly dishonest culture within the firm.

At this point SB has been the butt of jokes in comedy routines and music videos for a number of weeks, but prosecution of primary guilty parties has preserved some chance that the firm can bounce back.

Your team is expected to make initial recommendations to the Silverman Baggs leadership for specific symbolic frame actions that should be taken in order for the firm to regain its position as a highly respected institution worthy of the trust it relies upon.

Case 4: Reducing Homelessness

Any significant amount of time spent traveling within a major US city reveals that there are many among us who dwell on sidewalks, beneath highway overpasses, and in other locations that do not provide acceptable conditions of health and safety.

You and your teammates have been asked to form a special task force to provide recommendations to the Mayor of such a city as part of a broad effort to alleviate the problem of homelessness. Provide the best recommendations that you can for using the symbolic frame to assist the Mayor in her plans.

Case 5: Improving the TSA

The American Transportation Security Administration (TSA) is actively seeking advice regarding how to improve their operations at airports.

Your team's objective is to provide your best recommendations for how the TSA can apply the symbolic frame to maintain or improve effectiveness at airports while improving both its image with travelers and the level of compliance with security guidelines.