



OBTC 2016 at Walsh University
June 8th – 11th, 2016

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 2016 OBTC Teaching Conference for Management Educators

1) Title, Abstract & Keywords

In your abstract, please include a brief session description (not to exceed 100 words), and three to four keywords. If your proposal is accepted, this description will be printed in the conference program.

Title: Learning in the Matrix: Enter, Suspend, Reflect, Re-Engage.

Abstract: In the 1999 film *The Matrix*, Neo enters into a world where he must repeatedly review and reassess what he has encountered, including a training simulation that involves continually entering into a confrontation and then exiting to reflect upon the events. Our workshop illustrates this technique – temporary suspension of an exercise to provide an objective vantage point on one’s own performance, and the opportunity to observe and reflect on what has occurred and how best to proceed. This can facilitate learners’ self-awareness and reflection in the learning process, and equip them with important transferable skills for navigating future situations.

Keywords:

Reflection; Reflection-in-Action; Self-Awareness; Simulations; Group discussion; Facilitation

2) Format

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

2a) For activities and exercises only, is yours best suited for

- A traditional classroom
- An online class
- Either

2b) For activities and exercises only, is yours best suited for

- Undergraduate students
- Graduate students
- Either

3) Time Requested:

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

4) Planning Details:

Each room contains a white board with markers, computer (PC) with DVD capability and computer projector. Does your session require any other equipment?

We do not require any equipment other than what is listed above (specifically, whiteboard and computer/projector).

5) Teaching Implications:

What is the contribution of your session to management pedagogy/andragogy? Specifically, please include your learning objectives, and describe what management and/or teaching topics are relevant to your session, and why. Also, include theoretical, disciplinary, or theoretical foundations that will help reviewers understand how your ideas fit within the broader field of management.

In the 1999 film *The Matrix*, the lead character Neo (Keanu Reeves) is faced with the concept of entering into another world—*The Matrix*—and exiting repeatedly to review and reassess what he has encountered. This entering and exiting cycle occurs throughout the film, including scenes of a training simulation in which Neo enters into a combat-like training scenario that involves continually entering into the confrontation and then exiting to reflect upon the events. Importantly, Neo is guided by a teacher-figure, Morpheus (Laurence Fishburn), who stops and starts the simulation, and induces the learner to observe his own actions and reflect upon what has happened.

Entering means that you are beginning to do something, such as practicing a form, playing a role, or working through a simulation exercise. Temporary suspension of this process—in other words, exiting or pausing the engagement—provides an objective vantage point on one's own performance, and the opportunity to observe and reflect on what has occurred and how best to proceed (*reflection-in-action*; e.g., Yanow & Tsoukas, 2009).

The concept of “entering” is, in fact, an ancient principle found in martial arts teachings, and also in fields such as drama and dance. In the Japanese practice of Aikido, for instance, they refer to *irimi* (ee-ree-mee), which is similar to “entering into the engagement” or “entering straight into the technique” (e.g., Matrasko, 1999). This same principle is used in drama or theatre, such that actors will perform a scene in character, exit back into “themselves” to reflect and receive feedback, and then re-enter into the role in a way that is enhanced by the preceding objective discussion.

We highlight this type of approach—grounded in principles of entering and exiting—when using teaching techniques such as simulations or other group exercises, in order to facilitate learners' heightened self-awareness and reflection in the learning process. However, as we later note, these principles also equip the learner with important transferable skills for navigating future situations and enhancing self- and other-awareness in any number of contexts.

Reflection on Action versus *Reflection-in-Action*

When it is used, reflection typically occurs after the fact. But we argue that interrupting events to encourage reflection using a stop-start (enter-exit) approach has many advantages, such as: highlighting key learning moments in real time that might otherwise 'blend' into the overall experience or be forgotten; diffusing tension or alleviating confusion in learners; and—importantly—allowing a guided space for self-observation of one's own actions, and a foundation from which to form strategies on how to continue.

As Yanow and Tsoukas (2009) describe, reflective practice exists on a continuum from 'reflection-on-action' (after the fact, retrospective consideration) to 'reflection-in-action' (reflecting in the moment). They assert that reflecting while engaged in action, and simultaneously reshaping one's behavior and interactions with others, becomes very important in organizational life—particularly when time is short and events are occurring quickly. Such skills are critical for learning, but also for practice across organizational contexts and vocations: from managers who must make decisions and solve problems in a "whirl of activity" (Yanow & Tsoukas, 2009: 1341) to firefighters who must make up to 80% of their decisions in under a minute (Klein, 1998).

Thus, students' development occurs on two "levels" – deeper learning of the material, context, or problem at hand and—importantly—building transferable strategies and skills for dealing with future situations.

Learning in the Matrix: Our Experience

In our own approach, we describe the enter-exit process to students in advance—that is, prior to entering the simulation—so that they understand they will be interrupted at certain points (but they do not know when this will occur). We do not have a set "schedule" for when the suspension/exit points will happen, as it should be a responsive process depending on the learners' actions and reactions. It is not, admittedly, a highly technical process—that is, we believe that even less experienced instructors could successfully implement this method, as it is generally low risk with high benefits.

When the students are asked to suspend their role-play or engagement in the simulation, we typically use a phrase like "let's pause for a moment" and immediately prompt them with something like "What is happening now? What are your observations?" We do not let the discussion continue for more than a few minutes at a time, lest the students' engagement in the simulation become too distant. After a quick and pointed conversation, they are thrust back into the role-play, and the simulation continues. We repeat this at key intervals, and also have a longer debrief and analysis discussion at the conclusion of the exercise.

The Role of the Teacher

As in *The Matrix*, the teacher plays a pivotal role in guiding the learner through the entering and suspension processes. The teacher can identify key moments and points between

discrete concepts where reflection-in-action and self-observation can be engaged for deeper learning. S/he should remain largely a neutral observer during the 'scene' (i.e., when the student is in *The Matrix*), but then interject when a "learning opportunity" occurs. At this point, like Morpheus, the teacher can guide a swift and directed discussion.

The teacher can also identify points at which the students seem 'stalled' or struggling, or periods of tension—in these moments, an interruption may help students reorient and restore confidence. In martial and performing arts, this is exhibited through focused observation by the instructor until a moment where a cease of action is called for.

The teacher should ensure safety (psychological and physical, depending on the scenario), and that the exercise can proceed forward effectively. Creating the conditions for psychological is important so that students feel comfortable trying, and possibly failing, knowing that they will be better prepared for the next encounter. The students must also trust the teacher enough to "follow" the cues to stop, listen, observe, and re-engage.

Contribution to Management Pedagogy/Andragogy

We highlight the contributions above, but the core points include:

- Pausing, exiting, and suspension as foundational practices in learning martial and performing arts, integrated into management education;
- Applying "reflection-in-action," a critical management skill, to students' development process;
- Offering instructors a unique and purposeful way of enhancing the use of simulations as a teaching technique.

6) Session Description and Plan:

What will you actually do in this session? If appropriate, please include a timeline estimating the activities will you facilitate: how long will they take, and how will participants be involved? Please remember that 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.

We will introduce and describe the concept/idea to session participants, illustrating with concrete examples from our experiences using this method to facilitate simulations and other group discussion contexts. We have used the Enter/Exit approach with undergraduate and MBA students, as well as non-academic groups. We will also illustrate the principles with brief film clips that show the process in action, and "translate" these examples into the Management education classroom. Finally, we will have an open dialogue wherein we invite participants to share any similar (or contrasting) approaches they have used in their own teaching, as a way of critiquing and improving the methodology, expanding the repertoire of attendees' teaching "toolkit" (including our own), and collaborating toward best practices.

7) Application to Conference theme:

How does your session fit with the overall OBTC theme of *United in Service*?

The proposed session has a connection to the conference theme, as our own application of “Learning in the Matrix” principles occurred in (and will be illustrated through) a community-based experiential learning course. The use of the Enter/Exit technique in this context enhanced students’ ability to reflect upon, and gain new understanding of, group decision making in nonprofit organizations as they prepared to enter these roles in service-learning placements. The principles we illustrate are therefore generalizable to almost any learning context that is characterized by experiential or high-fidelity exercises. Moreover this type of teaching tool can assist all instructors in the field of management to improve learning for students which aligns directly with the theme of this conference.

8) 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?

We have not presented this work before.

REFERENCES

Klein, G. (1998). *Sources of power*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.

Matrasko, C. (1999). Irimi and Tenkan. *Aikido World Web Journal*. <http://www.aikido-world.com/articles/irimi-tenkan.htm>

Yanow, D., & Tsoukas, H. (2009). What is reflection-in-action? A phenomenological account. *Journal of Management Studies*, 46, 1339-1364.