**“Airplane of Responsibility: Effective Communication and Crucial Conversations” Exercise: Leaders Influencing Safe, Inclusive Environments Following the 2016 U.S. Presidential Election**

1. **ABSTRACT**

Since the 2016 U.S. Presidential Election, managers struggle in managing free speech, while creating safe, inclusive learning work environments; however, managing diversity is a necessary management skill. How have educational environments changed due to President-elect Trump’s declaration that political correctness is a “big problem [in U.S.]?” Students and employees have reported increased harassment based on ethnicity, race, sexual orientation, gender, religion, and political views. This interactive session will present the airplane of responsibility exercise integrating concepts relevant to managing psychologically-safe productive environments: communication, crucial conversation model, power and, organizational change. Learning effectiveness survey results from December 2016 will be shared.

*Keywords: inclusive learning environments; communication competency; crucial conversations; managing organizational change; free speech*

1. **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.*

**Management Pedagogy Contribution**

Managers must learn how to facilitate environments that are safe and inclusive in regards to valuing diverse perspectives and experiences. In the post-2016 U.S. Presidential Election climate, President-Elect Trump’s views that the “political correctness is a big problem in this country [the U.S.]” (Fox News, 2015) has begun to change how students, faculty, and staff perceive free speech in the classroom. President-Elect Trump has openly admitted to grabbing women’s private areas, dismissing this behavior as “locker talk.” In preparing leaders for future management and high-level administrative positions in both non-profit and for-profit organizations, educators must consider proactively how they plan to address issues of non-politically correct free speech in the classroom. The *Airplane of Responsibility* exercise provides an opportunity for educators to teach students how to effectively communicate and actively listen in an organizational climate that values diverse perspectives.

Per their 2016 Standards for Business Accreditation, the Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business (AACSB) values diversity in management education and ongoing quality improvement in engagement, innovation, and impact. This exercise supports ongoing learning in these areas: engagement by challenging students apply theory to practice in a way that challenges values; innovation by encouraging faculty to be creative and experiment with new approaches for learning. Standard 9 focuses on curriculum content that is appropriate for the degree, such as general skill areas in oral communication, identifying ethical issues and addressing them in socially responsible manners; analytical thinking; interpersonal relations, reflective thinking, and working effectively with others in diverse environments.

* + Integrating understanding the problem to solution
	+ Applicability in multiple contexts

***Goals & Learning Objectives:***

The goal of this activity was for students to learn challenges and potential solutions leaders face in create safe spaces for free speech, and dialogue that valued diverse perspectives by recognizing their power to influence others through rational persuasion techniques, as well as for learning about models of organizational change.

Learning objectives for this activity include:

1. To understand and discuss issues organizations face in managing free speech, valuing diversity, addressing incivility/bullying, and creating environments in which different perspectives are encouraged.
2. To learn how to manage communication, conflict, and organizational change.
3. To understand how to effectively communicate using the communication process and STATE model for crucial conversations;
4. To learn about models for organizational change
5. To understand how leaders have power to influence organizational change that values diverse perspective-taking.
6. To learn about different perspectives and experiences individuals had after the election.

***Evidence of Learning Effectiveness: Student Survey Results.***

A total of 52 undergraduate students participated in the exercise (24 female and 25 male) in December 2016. We evaluated the exercise using a 12-question survey based on learning objectives on which students rated the questions using a 5-point Likert scale 3 weeks following the end of the activity. Undergraduate students were provided an extra-credit assignment option to complete either this paper survey or another survey for two extra credit points toward their course grade on a scale of 1000 course points. Student participation was voluntary (response rate 92%). The survey was developed based on survey items was influenced by questions used by Smrt & Nelson, 2013). Congruent with other articles in *Journal of Management Education* (e.g., Manisaligil & Bilamoria, 2016)*,* I used a cut-off of 3.23 from 5.0 as successfully achieving learning objectives.

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| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Question | **To what extent did you consider this exercise: (1=strongly disagree; 5=strongly agree)** | M (N=48) |  SD (N=48) |
|  | To what extent did you consider this exercise “An engaging way to discuss issues organizations face in managing free speech, valuing diversity, addressing incivility/bullying, and creating environments in which different perspectives are encouraged.” | 4.38 | 0.82 |
|  | To what extent did you consider this exercise: “An engaging way to discuss how to manage communication, conflict, and organizational change.” | 4.49 | 0.78 |
|  | To what extent did you consider this exercise: “Useful for learning about issues organizations face in managing free speech, valuing diversity, addressing incivility/bullying, and creating environments in which different perspectives are encouraged.” | 4.40 | 0.90 |
|  | To what extent did you consider this exercise: “Useful in discussing how to manage communication, conflict, and organizational change.” | 4.15 | 0.93 |
|  | To what extent did you consider this exercise: “Helpful for learning about the communication process (e.g., components; interference): | 4.07 | 0.88 |
|  | To what extent did you consider this exercise: “Helpful for learning about how to have crucial conversations using the STATE model.” | 3.94 | 0.97 |
|  | To what extent did you consider this exercise: “Helpful for learning about functional and programmed conflict.” | 4.13 | 0.81 |
|  | To what extent did you consider this exercise: “Helpful for learning about models for organizational change.” | 4.11 | 0.84 |
|  | To what extent did you consider this exercise: “Helpful for learning about different perspectives and experiences individuals had after the election.” | 4.60 | 0.85 |
|  | To what extent did you consider this exercise: “Helpful for learning about the power to influence others through rational persuasion tactics.” | 3.94 | 1.07 |
|  | To what extent did you consider this exercise: “Relevant for organizational leaders operating in the current post-November 2016 presidential election context to understand issues impacting organizational climate.” | 4.51 | 0.85 |
|  | To what extent did you consider this exercise: “One that you would recommend to teach in future classes about power and influencing organizational change for creating safe, inclusive, learning work environments.” | 4.39 | 0.88 |

Note. N=48.

***Theoretical/Conceptual Foundation***

This exercise integrates the following organizational behavior theoretical concepts and models into an integrated teaching module that helps leaders learn how to understand and create psychologically safe, inclusive learning environments through which organizational members can be productive.

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| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Section # | Section | Section objectives.  | Time allotment: | Example of OB textbook chapter(Kinicki et al) |
| 1 | Communication Process, Conflict (STATE Crucial Conversations Model) | To learn what the communication process and communication competency areTo understand how noise impacts how messages are decoded by receivers.To learn the STATE model for crucial conversations.To learn a real-life example where instructor had to utilize the STATE model in context | 60 minutes | Chpt 9- CommunicationChpt 10- Managing conflict.Chpt 12- Power and Influence |
| 2  | Airplane of Responsibility: Construction and Discussion | To understand how the 2016 presidential election changed organizations in regards to issues of organizational climate, safety, inclusivity.To how discussing issues with which people disagree can impact the communication process.To practice effective communication techniques.To practice the STATE model. | 60 mins | Experiential exercise |
| 3 | Power and Managing Change | To learn organizational change models. | 75 minutes | Chpt 16 Managing Change |
| 4 | Airplane of Responsibility: Managing Change | To practice communication process by interpreting messages conveyed through a written medium (e.g., on the airplane)To practice applying organizational change models to determine if a sense of urgency has been created to motivate the change. | 75 minutes | Experiential exercise |

**Communication Process, Conflict, and the STATE Crucial Conversations Model**

This part of the teaching module focuses on teaching students about what communication competency is, the communication process, conflict, and using the STATE model for having crucial conversations that are psychologically safe.

* + *Communication process.* The communication process considers the exchange of information between the sender and receiver, through which each individual determines the meaning of the message. The sender encodes the message by translating that message using language that the receiver can understand. Then the sender chooses a medium The receiver decodes the message by interpreting and making meaning from the message received. The receiver sends feedback to the sender in the form of how the message was interpreted. However, “noise”, referring to others’ input, distractions from the external impacts how effectively that message is interpreted, including inaccurate data, sound from the external environment, physical distance, non-verbal communication, cultural differences.
	+ *Conflict and Crucial Conversations.* In contrast to dysfunctional conflict that opposes an organization’s best interests, functional conflict is constructive, focused on issues, rather than people, and involves mutual-respect and collaborative problem-solving. Individuals tend to avoid conflict for many reasons, including out of fear of being rejected for their ideas. However, the more individuals from different groups and backgrounds interact, the less intergroup conflict they experience, particularly in regards to cross-cultural group interactions (Kinicki & Fugate, 2016).
		- Psychologically-safe climates are those in which leaders are inclusive, affirming, celebrating, and reinforcing that differences among organizational members are valued. Individuals are encouraged to take interpersonal risks without fear of being humiliated or punished for their views. Thus, when individuals feel psychologically-safe, they are more willing to share ideas and views that can help an organization be more efficient, innovative, and productive.
		- Crucial conversations. Crucial conversations take place among two or more people when opinions differ on issues in which both sides have something that can be lost or gained in the process; thus, emotions are high (Patterson, 2002). The STATE technique (Kinicki & Fugate, 2016) for crucial conversations involves:
			* **Share** your version of facts, starting with the facts that will cause the least debate, and that are most helpful for the relationships.
			* **Tell** your story about what happened, and how you ended in the situation in which you are currently.
			* **Ask** for others to share their facts and stories; engage in mutual information-sharing dialogue about your experiences.
			* **Talk** tentatively, being aware that the STATE model involves sharing your story, and understanding others’.
			* **Encourage** others to share their views, even if they differ from you.

**Power and Managing Change.**

Power is the potential to influence others to act or believe a certain way (French & Raven, 1959; Raven, 1965, 1992, 1993, 2008). Leaders can empower others by sharing their power with them to improve employee performance because they control resources others value in an interdependent relationship (Galinsky, Rucker, & Magee, 2015). Through psychological empowerment, individuals gain a greater sense that their they are valued for their own unique contributions. Leaders aspiring to create safe, inclusive learning and work environments that value diverse-perspective taking must first understand thy have the power to help the organization understand why the organization may not be safe, inclusive. How is the organizational climate divisive or experiencing conflict? Do individuals feel their ideas are not valued? Are organizational members capable of sharing conflicting perspectives with each other in a way that inspires diverse perspective-taking or shared ideas? Once they can understand these issues, they can then understand the behaviors, attitudes, and values that are causing the divisiveness. Then, they can teach, educate members with new ideas, directions, behaviors, or processes that can help resolve this problem.

**Organizational Change Models**

Two change models that are traditionally taught in organizational behavior classes consist of Lewin’s three-stage model of planned change (Burnes, 2004) and Kotter’s 8 steps for leading organizational change (Kotter, 1996). Lewin’s three-stage change model refers to the unfreezing, changing, refreezing. Three stages are unfreezing, changing, and change. In the unfreezing stage, leaders must create a motivation for change, replace hold behaviors with new ones: changing stage involving unlearning old behaviors and learning new behaviors and information for a new direction; and, refreezing, involving reinforcing the changes that were implemented in the prior stage. Kotter’s eight steps for leading organizational change. Each step is followed in sequence: establishing a sense of urgency; creating the guiding coalition; developing a vision and strategy; communicating the change vision; empowering the broad-based action; generating short-term wins; consolidating gains to produce more change; and making them part of the institutional culture (Kinicki & Fugate, 2016). However, individuals will resist change because of a few of the unknown, loss of job status, or peer pressure. Leaders must be able to help develop trust among organizational members.

1. **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.*

The focus of the session will be on having participants experience the Airplane of Responsibility Exercise: Construction and Discussion (Part A), while the presenter will briefly summarize (not lecture) and explain how theoretical concepts were integrated or taught in connection to the exercise. Although questions and concepts will be taken throughout the session; some time is allotted to the end of the session for additional questions. Estimated timeline for session: 60 minutes.

1. Introduction (5 minutes)
2. Communication Process, Conflict, and STATE model for Crucial Conversations
3. Part A. Airplane of Responsibility: Construction and Discussion (30 minutes)
4. Power and Managing Change (5 minutes)
	1. Part B. Airplane of Responsibility: Managing Change
5. Learning Effectiveness Evidence. (10 minutes)
	1. Presenter will explain how students were tested on information learned from the participation in this exercise
	2. Presenter will share the student survey results about learning effectiveness.
6. Questions and Answers (10 minutes)

**IV. APPLICATION TO CONFERENCE THEME: *NAVIGATING THE CHANGING CURRENTS***

Navigating the changing currents challenges educators to consider how our educational climates are changing. Are we going to adapt to the changes? Ignore the changes? Be reactive or proactive? Many managers are facing unprecedented challenges to how they address issues of hate-speech in a world in which political correctness has been declared to be a problem in a free democracy. For example, Wall Street Journalist James Taranto (WSJ, 2016) described how Grubhub’s stock dropped 4% following a public statement against Trump’s perceived hate speech made by Grubhub’s CEO. Less than one week following the election. Matt Maloney, CEO of Grubhub, emailed his employees stating “I absolutely reject the nationalist, anti-immigrant and hateful politics of Donald Trump and will work to shield our community from this movement as best as I can. As we all try to understand what this vote means to us, I want to affirm to anyone on our team that is scared or feels personally exposed, that I and everyone else here at Grubhub will fight for your dignity and your right to make a better life for yourself and your family here in the United States. If you do not agree with this statement, then please reply to this email with your resignation because you have no place here.”

As educators, we must be open to considering then how our classrooms must change to acknowledge how managers must learn how to lead effectively in a world in which all speech is welcomed and encouraged, including that perceived as hateful. Without being comfortable and ready to lead in this new environment, managers will make decisions and speak in a way that may cost the company. It is not a judgement to acknowledge that political correctness has been delegitimized because of a new president, but rather it is simply accepting our currents have changed and our navigation methods must adapt. This airplane exercise embraces this new direction, rather than judging or ignoring the discomfort associated with what this may mean to our classrooms. As educators, we have a responsibility to help students understand how life experiences vary based on our diverse backgrounds. This diversity is a strength for businesses, but only if managers can help organizational members dialogue about diverse perspectives in an open, respectful, and psychologically-safe manner.

During the August 7, 2015, first Republican Primary debate, President-elect Trump said, “I think the big problem this country has is being politically correct. I’ve been challenged by so many people and I don’t, frankly, have time for total political correctness. And to be honest with you, this country doesn’t have time, either.” Since the November 2016 presidential election, for-profit and non-profit organizations have faced challenges in managing free speech. In a survey[[1]](#footnote-1) of over 10,000 Kindergarten through 12th grade educators, 90% of educators reported negative incidents in the school climate; 80% of educators reported that students are concerned about their well-being and that of their families. On college campuses, *both conservative and liberal students, faculty, and administrators* have reported feeling harassed and unable to share their perspectives in educational learning environments that require discussing different perspectives on issues that impact employee success and performance. Companies have also reported employee harassment, motivating employers to develop solutions about how to manage free speech and facilitate safe effective working environments. Between November 9, 2016 and November 14, 2016, approximately 400 reports of intimidation and harassment have occurred based on ethnicity, religion, race, sexual orientation, gender, hate group recruitment, political views (e.g., voting for or against Trump or Hillary). [Harassment and vandalism locations: K-12 schools=99; businesses=76; universities=67; private property=40; moving vehicles=38].[[2]](#footnote-2) According to the National Labor Relations Board, discussion of political activity and views is considered protected free speech.[[3]](#footnote-3)

**V. 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. Not the proposal is not currently under review somewhere else; however, a manuscript is in progress to submit this exercise to a management educational journal soon.

Because the proposal has not been presented anywhere before, it is different for this conference.

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2. Southern Poverty Law Center (2016). More than 400 incidents of hateful harassment and intimidation since the election. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. SHRM (2016). Political debates in the workplace: Where to draw the line [↑](#footnote-ref-3)