



**Submission Template for the
2017 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.

A Power and Decision Making Simulation: New Wrinkles on a Classic Exercise

This session will share an update to a classic management exercise, with new wrinkles and expanded content. “A Simple but Powerful Power Simulation” was introduced by Bolman and Deal (1979). New instructions create a simulated organization with top executives, managers, and line workers, and the top executive team is empowered to take actions and make changes, including decisions that are unwise and unfair. Detailed information will be provided to session participants regarding the setup and administration of the exercise. Suggestions for application and improvement will be discussed.

Keywords: power, organizations, simulation, exercise

2) 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.

The contribution of this session is to build upon a well-known exercise and provide a more detailed simulation of important, organizational issues. The learning objectives for this assignment are as follows: 1) to offer realistic insights into power and decision making in organizations, 2) to provide first-hand exposure to the consequences and worker reactions to poor and unfair decisions by organizational leaders, 3) to serve as the basis for a discussion about the responsibilities of leadership.

Below are a few examples of actions and outcomes observed the last two times the session leader ran this exercise in principles of management courses.

- The top executive team created a new level of middle managers and arbitrarily promoted first-line managers.
- Top executives failed to effectively empower and utilize lower managers.
- Employees were left in the dark, often not understanding why they were being asked to complete the tasks they were assigned.
- Individual managers and/or workers sought to advance their own interests at the expense of their peers.
- Top executives rewarded brown-nosers, creating the perception among employees that those kinds of behaviors were required to get ahead.
- Both factual information and rumors were spread by “organizational communication” (the instructor and one or more designated students).
- Managers and/or workers were demoted and fired by top executives.
- The opinions and concerns of employees were largely ignored.
- There was dissention within the top executive team, and by a 2-1 vote, they fired or demoted one of their members.

The article introducing the original exercise on which this expanded version is based:

Bolman, L., & Deal, T. E. (1979). A simple—but powerful—power simulation. *Journal of Management Education*, 4(3), 38-42.

3) 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.

A proposed timeline for the session is as follows:

- (3 minutes) Introduction and overview
- (17 minutes) Detailed description of the exercise, including an abbreviated, run-through with session participants
- (10 minutes) Questions, discussion, and suggestions for improvement

4) Application to Conference theme:

How does your session fit with the overall OBTC theme of *Navigating the Changing Currents*?

The exercise presented in this session explores a wide variety of contemporary management and leadership topics, and it can easily be customized and updated as individual instructors wish.

5) 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?

This work has not been presented anywhere else and is not currently under review.

Life in a Simulated Organization

Key portions of the exercise are shown on the following pages. The complete exercise, including all student materials and instructions for instructor setup will be provided to participants at the session.

Life in a Simulated Organization

The purpose of this simulation is to learn about organizations, and there will be three groups:

- Top Executives – the senior executive team
- Managers – may be all one level or may contain both middle managers and first-line supervisors (based on the wishes of top management)
- Workers – rank and file, non-management employees

The Groups' Tasks and Objectives

- **Top Executives:** Responsible for the overall effectiveness of the simulation and insuring that everyone learns something from this exercise. They may choose to provide positive examples of power and position, or they may elect to show what NOT to do as a leader.
- **Managers:** Assist the Top Executives in insuring that everyone learns from this exercise. Managers serve at the pleasure of the Top Executives and know they can be advanced, reassigned, or removed at any time. As managers they are supposed to promote effectiveness among the workers by implementing the wishes of the Top Executives and share information both up and down the organization. As with Top Executives, Managers may choose to provide either positive or negative examples of how people in their positions should act. Individually, Managers can decide whether to act in support of one another or to pursue their own selfish best interests.
- **Workers:** Seek to protect the interests as a group and to give us insights into how employees might react to various management actions and communications. Don't hesitate to "think outside of the box" in considering actions you may take, individually and/or collectively.

Rules

- **Top Executives:** Members are free to enter the space of either of the other groups and to communicate whatever they wish, whenever they wish. Top Executives also have the authority to make any change in the rules that they wish. Powers of Top Executives include – but are not limited to – promoting, demoting, firing, creating positions, eliminating positions, assigning tasks or any other change they wish, affecting both Managers and Workers.
- **Managers:** Members may enter the space of the Workers whenever they wish but must request permission to enter the Top Executive's space (which the Top Executives can refuse). The Managers' group may make any changes they wish regarding individuals in the Workers (including promotion, demotion, firing, etc.). However, to fire a worker, permission must be obtained from the Top Executives.
- **Workers:** Members may not disturb the Top Executives in any way at any time and may not even approach the Top Executives unless specifically invited to do so by the Executives. Workers do have the right to knock on the door of the Managers' Group and request permission to communicate with them (which can also be refused). To the extent Workers feel out of the loop or poorly treated, they may take any actions they deem necessary to protect their interests.

This simulation will terminate in approximately one hour, regardless of whether work is complete or not. Some tasks in this exercise may require the use of your smartphones. However, ***you must not use your phones for anything other than officially assigned tasks***, and if you are found to do so, you will be "fired" immediately and receive a "0" grade for the exercise.

Special Instructions for Top Executives

(Given privately to each group)

You are the senior executive team and have the most power of anyone in this simulation. You may take whatever actions you choose, but in doing so it is your responsibility to insure that everyone learns something about leadership, power, and organizations from this exercise. At times, you may choose to provide a positive example of leadership, but more often you will seek to provide important lessons about how NOT to run organizations.

Feel free to make ANY changes in the organization as you wish. You can reorganize, promote, demote, fire individuals, or make other personnel changes. Because there are three of you on the Top Executive team, any member of your team may also be demoted or fired by a simple majority vote of the other two Top Executives.

You will not be given precise instructions about what to do at each point. Instead, you will be given a series of ideas about actions you could take, and you may choose to implement some of those ideas and/or to come up with actions on your own.

Some Alternative Initial Actions:

- Organize the Managers group into two or more levels. (Don't explain the criteria at all OR say something to the effect, "we have promoted those managers in which we have the most confidence ...") If you implement levels of managers, issue Blue Badges to Middle-level managers.
- Give the Managers tasks to perform.
- Instruct the middle group to divide workers among themselves so that every lower employee has a manager.
- Have the Managers monitor and report on the progress of the Workers.
- Have the Managers pass down instructions to the workers that they workers are to complete some mindless task.
- For all tasks, place a time deadline on completion of the task – sometimes reasonable and sometimes not.

Examples of Task(s) for Workers:

- Count all of the fancy tiles in the front area of the main floor of this building.
- Prepare a report based on Google results. The task should require multiple Google searches so that it will take a good bit of time for an individual and/or require groups of workers to complete. (As an example, write the names, addresses, and phone numbers of all mechanics in Lexington, KY; the names, addresses, and phone numbers of surgeons in Louisville whose last names begin with letters from L to S; etc.)
- Count the number of ceiling tiles down one of the building's side hallways.
- Count the total number of photos of former Deans appear on the walls in BTC.
- Tasks are best if they don't require Workers and Managers to be very far away from the Executive Offices for very long at a time. Otherwise, it will be tough to monitor them.
- Consider not sharing any explanation as to WHY the task should be done, and if the Managers ask you, evade the question and don't give a concrete answer.

(Instructions for Top Executives continued)

Examples of Tasks That May Be Assigned to Managers (First-line and/or Middle Managers):

- Have managers complete Performance Evaluations on their direct reports. If you created two levels of Managers, have the higher group evaluate the first-line supervisors.
- Instruct Managers to observe who is taking initiative and to report back to Top Executives both the high and low initiative performers.

Other Possible Actions You May Consider Taking:

- First, take LOTS of actions. Sometimes you may just tell Managers that you have made the decision. Other times you may choose to distribute an Employee Newsletter.
- **To distribute an Employee Newsletter**, tell “Organizational Communication,” and both Workers and Managers will be informed of the information as you specify.
- Complete the “Performance Evaluation” for each Manager. Be fair or not.
- One Top Executive walks around among Workers and Managers, never saying anything to Workers. Then, go back and make decisions with Top Executives based on your snap judgments.
- Make promotions to those who don’t deserve it. In particular, if a Manager or Worker seems to be a butt kisser, “reward their loyalty” with a promotion.
- Announce the possibility of layoffs in the near future.
- Demote Workers or Managers. (You will find that firing should be a last resort because “fired” employees hang around the area, and the results are unpredictable. It is better to demote than fire, unless someone does something that requires firing.)
- Promote one or two Workers to first-line supervisor; promote one or two first-line supervisors to middle management.
- Hold “skip level meetings” in which one or more Top Executives meets with a few Workers, without any Managers present. Ask them blunt questions and get answers.

Employee Feedback

A management consultant hired by your company has distributed a set of questions to Workers, and they have been forming their responses but have not turned them in yet. The Workers were asked to complete their responses in two, equal-size groups of Workers. You might choose to have one member of your Top Executive go talk with Workers and ask them to submit their responses to you. Once you have their responses, take actions based on the results as you see fit.

Think of how to “teach” the class the most valuable lessons you can about leadership, power, and organizations through the actions you take.

RED Badges	Top Executives
BLUE Badges	Middle Managers
GREEN Badges	First-line Supervisors
BLACK Badges	Workers

Special Instructions for Managers

(Given privately to each group)

You are one or two levels of managers with responsibilities between top executives and workers. You may be all one level of management or may be composed of both middle managers and first-line supervisors, based on the wishes of top management.” Your best interests are served by trying to keep both your superiors and subordinates happy, so at least go through the motions of looking like you want to please everyone. However, in this simulation you also must decide what approach will be most instructive to the class as a whole to learn important lessons about leadership, power, and organizations. You can promote, fire individuals, or make other personnel changes to the Lower Group, and by a majority vote you may even demote or fire members of your own group (the Middle Group).

Because you are managers, you may choose to exercise your authority and make changes that affect Workers if you wish. You might do so unilaterally based on your authority, or you might elect to ask the Top Executive group for permission. It is your choice which approach to take. You may choose to reorganize, promote, demote, fire individuals, or make other personnel changes.

You will not be given precise instructions about what to do at each point. Instead, you will be given a series of ideas about actions you could take, and you may choose to implement some of those ideas and/or to come up with actions on your own.

Some Alternative Actions:

- Consider promoting one or two members of the Worker group, rewarding them for being the biggest kiss-ups among the Workers.
- Initiate firing procedures for anyone who causes problems (in the Worker group or your own group). However, the Top Executives must approve of all firings, so if you want to fire someone, tell that person and also inform the Top Executives and seek permission to fire.
- Complete the “Performance Evaluation” for each member of the Worker group. Be fair or not.
- Observe who the “go-getters” are among your workers. Reward the go-getters and penalize/punish those who don’t display effort.
- Get to know members of your team.
- Assign tasks without asking what the Workers think of the task or your instructions.
- OR Assign tasks but seek Worker input and involvement in deciding how the tasks should be done.

Think of how to “teach” the class the most valuable lessons you can about leadership, power, and organizations through the actions you take.

RED Badges	Top Executives
BLUE Badges	Middle Managers
GREEN Badges	First-line Supervisors
BLACK Badges	Workers

Special Instructions for Workers

(Given privately to each group)

You are “line employees.” Respond to other levels of your organization according to how you are treated. If others are open, respectful, and include you in their decisions, respond appropriately. However, if others don't give you information, fail to show you respect, or don't involve you in decision making, take action as you see fit. You have strength in numbers, and don't be afraid to use it.

You may take actions as you see fit – either to help your group of workers as a whole or to benefit YOU personally. Take any of the actions below and/or other ideas of your own.

Possible group actions:

- Conduct a work slow down
- Form a protest
- Go on strike

Possible individual actions:

- Kiss up to members of the Managers group (and/or to the Top Executive if you get the chance)

Recently, a management consultant visited your company and gave Workers a list of questions (found on the back of this page). While waiting for work instructions from the Managers and/or Top Executives, separate into two equal-sized groups of Workers and answer the questions on the consultant's sheet. Write the name of every member of your group on the sheet. This is NOT an official work assignment, so if you are assigned tasks by your supervisors or managers, you should discontinue work on this task until you have time. ***You may add or change your answers to any of the consultant's questions as you see fit during the exercise.***

RED Badges	Top Executives
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GREEN Badges	First-line Supervisors
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