

## 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.*

#### Red Solo Cup Challenge: What Happens when Organizations Scale UP

The Red Solo Cup Challenge is a kinesthetic exercise offering a rich metaphor to discuss issues organizations may face when they grow, or scale their operations up. In the world of entrepreneurship, a critical question for investors is a start-up's ability to be scalable, often a concept difficult for students to grasp. By using red solo cups to build towers with increasingly more complex requirements during two rounds of competition, students experience opportunities for planning, "talent to task", process improvement, teamwork, and leadership change. This exercise can be used in traditional undergraduate and adult entrepreneurship, organizational behavior, and leadership classroom settings.

### 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.*

**Contribution:** Success in management outside of the classroom is often dependent upon understanding and responding to the dynamics of change. As educators, we seek ways to create experiences that provide a dynamic opportunity to illustrate multiple theories as well as offer platforms for students to integrate theories. The Red Solo Cup Challenge creates that environment. With two rounds of competition there is an opportunity for students to improve upon a rather simple skill of stacking 28 cups with a second opportunity that is much more complex than the first, stacking 96 cups. Thus the team is forced to account for a dynamic change in their second round of planning.

The exercise twist where the top finishers of round one get to form new teams is a metaphor of the typical changing nature of teams with new members coming and going. The twist offers an opportunity to touch upon team formation, role definition and assigning talent to task.

As the exercise is set up in a competitive fashion, there is pressure to choose people with “talent” necessary for the activity, which often presents the new team leader with the quandary of staying true to the team that brought them to success or expanding with new talent which may be better for the changing times – exploring the “talent to task” dilemma.

Finally, the design of the exercise involves the platform to discuss socio-technical systems as the first round involves only 28 cups whereas the second round involves 91 cups. Success comes with planning that includes the “physical and the human” setup. In other words, it is tough to build a tower with 96 on a table top instead of the floor.

By incorporating the many twists and expectations of the Red Solo Cup Challenge, educators can create a dynamic environment that calls for integrative approaches to management.

#### **Objectives:**

- Gain understanding of the concept of scalability
- Experience need to adapt to changing situation due to growth
- Gain insight to the benefits of “talent to task” and value of diverse skills on team
- Gain experience in team process (planning, role definition, communication, etc.)

#### **Relevant Topics:**

Entrepreneurship – need to develop business plan which allows scalability

Organizational Behavior – teamwork, talent to task, planning, communication,

Leadership – delegation, communication, team formation

Socio-technical Design – relationship between people, task, system and physical

#### **Theoretical Foundations**

The experiential approach is based on the Kolb (1984) model of experiential learning.

Scalability in organizations scholarship often examines the processes and organizational designs that facilitate growth and adaptation to changing environmental factors to continue product development and sustainability. The scholarship has also examined the scalability of social enterprises to a state of sustainability (Bergen, 2001).

### **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.*

0:00-5:00: Overview of objectives for exercise with brief discussion of scalability and socio-technical design.

- 5:00-10:00: Teams are formed and a brief bonding experience occurs (create a team name). Give instructions, provide model of the finished product
- 10:00-15:00 **Round 1** – Each team builds a pyramid of red solo cups and then collapses it into one stack. If the pyramid falls the teams have to start over. The quickest teams are identified as finalists.
- 15:00-20:00 Debrief – touches on points of successful strategies, challenges, identify strengths as a group and experience so far (will maintain group in the modality of participants at this point).
- 20:00-30:00 **Round 2** - Finalist teams are asked to identify the person to represent them in the final round. Once the representatives are identified, they are moved to a new area. Then, as a twist, leaders can choose any member of the group (doesn't have to come from their original group) as a helper. Round 2 involves using three times as many cups to build and collapse the towers. The act of choosing new members is often exaggerated to provide teachable moments
- 30:00-45:00 **Debrief** – (small group or total class based on size)  
Typical teachable points include:
- Socio-tech design – how did it play out between rounds
  - Talent to task – how were roles determined in each round; how were new teams chosen – what impact did it have on former members?
  - Team role and communication strategies – what was difference between rounds?
  - How does exercise serve as a metaphor for the real world?
    - Scalability – start-up challenges
    - Organizational growth necessitates change
    - Talent to task
  - What applications can this exercise be used – subjects & settings

Exercise can be successful with any size of participants. Ideally it works well with 10-30 people. There are no computer needs. **Handout with instructions will be provided.**

#### 4) Application to Conference theme:

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

The Red Solo Cup Challenge offers participants an opportunity to experience how change impacts one's ability to plan, allocate roles, and communicate. The twist that occurs between rounds of building a tower of red solo cups might be a metaphor for organizational growth, either mandated or organic. Connection to the dynamics of scalability can easily be paralleled to how new projects (like new start-ups) need to consider how they will be scaled

in a changing environment.

When considered outside the organizational context and more in an individualized context, the exercise also connects with how change necessitates new strategies, new talent and a need to understand how success will be measured, As we all experience degrees of change in our political, economic and individual worlds, this exercise might offer a moment to pause and consider that navigating change towards positive growth can be deliberate, possible and attainable. Building towers in during changes and confusion of the exercise, reminds us that change can be fun!

**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 was proposed and accepted last year for OBTC 2016. Due to medical issues, I was not able to attend so I did not present it. The Red Solo Cup Challenge with the proposed twists has not been presented before.