



**OBTC 2017 at Providence College
June 14th – 17th, 2017**

Submission Template

SUBMISSION GUIDANCE

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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.

Ping? Pong! Exercising the Sudden Search for Significance

Key words: Design, experiential, student-led, agile

Abstract

Teachable moments arise in the flow of classroom-based learning so potentially meaningful that you wish you had a planned exercise to elevate the intensity and viscosity of this naturally occurring experiential learning. Solution. Have a supply of Ping-Pong balls handy. Invite the class to invent on the spot how to make a vivid moment for visualizing the significance of an otherwise tacit organizational behavior. What might this behavior be? Any sort chosen by the teacher, even on the spur of the moment. It works. Testing this claim, participants will make sudden, revelatory meaning with Ping-Pong balls. Simple. Handy. Unforgettable.

Teaching Implications:

I admire intricate, involved, and involving exercises; having developed some over many years in the craft; appreciatively co-designing others with colleagues whose more orderly minds generated exercise elaborations to be marveled. My role in those collaborations was often to imagine and create “the hook” – the originative idea which I knew somewhat intuitively will draw learners in, through, and out the other end of the exercise with at least one profound memory of how this event became a story line in their lives. I believe we OB teachers have this sort of intuition aplenty; that we can also anticipate when to set a conceptual hook as the action of a lesson unfolds. If only we had more to enhance its significance than words and pictures on the whiteboard – something to be found worthy of note by the learner right on the spot.

We do. Ping Pong balls. Handy, adaptable props, transformed by willingness to risk a flop to earn a lasting hit. It comes in the propitious moment when a pivotal idea about the subject of the day suddenly calls for a pop up exercise; a moment that feels like just the right time to say:

“Together, let’s make this notion mean something to each of us right here, right now.”

Then, put them in small teams and give them Ping Pong balls.

Ping Pong balls?

Reflecting the theoretical or practice context in which it is applied, meaning can be instantly made on and with these little universally available, inexpensive, and mobile plastic orbs. Other handy props could do, but I find these light, tactual items can be deftly combined, possibly marked with colorful images, with enticing ease and endless possibilities for revealing conceptual significance while practicing imaginative teamwork to find it.

The game of Ping-Pong is, itself, batting a ball back and forth, is a metaphor for formative conversation. Even the hyphenated name Ping-Pong brings to mind the process of contemplation. “Ping” is like a radar signal – a blip indicating a new arrival on the studied landscape. “Ping” is like the sound of a bell ringing in one’s mind as a new idea is born. “Ping” also means to establish communications with someone.

Ah, but ping does not, itself, make a game. Yet, there must be a “pong”: a return, a rejoinder, and an agreement. “Ping” – out goes the question in a search for significance. “Pong” - back comes possibility, correction, even rejection. “Pong is the pro to the con; the yang to the

yin. The question of how to display a main concept is batted about in one's mind, then among learners, ping to pong, back and forth until significance is found, formed, framed for action and made into a vivid memory. Additionally, making up ways to hook their minds to a central OB concept is an exercise in how teams work.

2)

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.

Here are thumbnail views of two recent times, when we “ping-ponged” with good effect. In the course Organizing and Managing for Quality, we were examining if and how organization/team culture influences how employees call up the purpose of their work on the fly. This was the first time using a Ping-Pong ball came to my mind. The day before this class I was unsettled about how this key value would come through. There on my shelf was a Ping-Pong paddle and ball I had used to demonstrate agility. “Ping”. How cool would it be if teams could signify the course's culture on or by one of these balls? “Pong”. It worked. Four teams, using colored marking pens, independently fashioned symbolic representations of the

prime values of the course on the surface of a single ball. Then, a spokesperson told its story, as the ball was carefully passed from hand to hand. The power of co-created symbolism registered in what most wrote in the after-action debriefing.

Then there was a more spontaneous moment to bring out the Ping-Pong balls. With very little notice, I agreed recently to do another quick session for some EDGE freshmen to accentuate the importance of teamwork in their courses, I grabbed my box of Ping-Pong balls took a chance, the one I am proposing, for sudden significance to be found by improvising. It worked. They formed in circles of three and asked that I feed them one ball at a time. They would pass them along – each to the next – while I fed them in. In moments, they had more balls in motion than they could easily handle. They called time out. They talked over how to coordinate so that no balls were dropped (a telling analog), yet they could still ask for more to manage (competing to excel).

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.

There are moments when the point to be made is so fundamental to the exposition or argument that we need something simple, quick, yet powerful in its live handling that it anchors what follows. This session is not just about using Ping-Pong balls. It is about being ready with anything handy as a hook upon which students themselves may create suddenly significant exercise using their spontaneous ideas. Participants will leave the session “hooked” on at least one idea they can put into action as the situation arises. The final take-away – count on your creative mind to convert any common object into an almost magical touchstone for the significance of an organizational behavior.

This session can work in 30 or 60 minutes. The purpose is for fellow exercise designers to tap into our intuitive impulses to quick fashion ways to use any combination of Ping-Pong balls to reify a concept or keystone theme we are most likely to come upon in one of the aforementioned teachable moments. (5-10 minutes) I will set up trios to “Ping” ideas for how they could use these in some aspect of a course being taught presently. And, to “Pong” back with suggested embellishments or variations using one or more Ping-Pong balls. (10-15 minutes) Each trio will elect one that “bounced” up from the rest to produce a preliminary “mock-up” of this micro-exercise

with the ball(s). (20-30 minutes) A round robin follows. Each trio offers a look at what they think could be used to invite learners to search for and represent significance.

4) Application to Conference theme:

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

These changing currents run through our OB courses as well. The addition of ways to prompt learners to reify the meaning of a potent notion of how to manage sudden change by suddenly changing their standard classroom behavior may offer a fresh challenge to those who routinely offer the more elaborate, pre-sent experiences.

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?

I offered the gist of this session for OBTC '16. I would have run, but illness prevented me from traveling to Ohio. Over time since, this notion to simplify experiences so that they may be crafted and staged on short notice, and by the learners themselves has served me well. I think it modestly opens a new horizon in OB learning.