**The “Aha!” of Student-Led Work Team Boosters**

**Abstract**

To help students to develop management skills, hands-on experience and practice is

essential. In our undergraduate OB courses, many students have not yet had the

opportunity to be a manager. One assignment that provides students with active learning

experience is student-led work team boosters. Students research, choose, prepare,

facilitate, and process an action-reflection activity with class members which provides them

with an "Aha!" understanding of the importance of the role of the manager in improving

employee performance and satisfaction.

**Keywords**

Active learning, experience, action-reflection

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**Introduction**

In our undergraduate Organizational Behavior courses, students usually gain at least a

basic grasp of the importance of the role of the manager to work with employees to improve

their performance and satisfaction on the job. Some of these undergraduate students have had

experience as a manager, while others have not. But head nodding and acknowledgement of

these concepts is not the same as truly “getting it” and internalizing them.

One of the best ways I have found to bring out their “Aha!” moment of understanding is

to make an assignment for each student to lead some sort of “work team booster” for the class

(usually for 10-15 minutes at the beginning of the class period). The ground rules for this

assignment are wide open. Students are encouraged to research and deliver some sort of activity

that they feel would help to boost employee morale, performance, teamwork, communication,

etc. The opportunities to do this are many and varied. Some students choose team-building,

problem-solving, icebreakers, communication, and other team-oriented activities. Others may

choose to provide a short training or motivation session. Others may provide a competitive game

or quiz. Often food or treats are part of the incentives or rewards for the session.

This opportunity to lead a group provides them with hands-on experience with an activity

that they may want to provide, as managers, to their employees in the future. This assignment

also provides practice with communicating to and leading a group, which some students have not

had much opportunity to do.

**Theoretical Foundation/Teaching Implications**

As the primary instructor for OB courses at our school, I try to incorporate experiential/

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active learning into every class session. I had an “Aha!” moment of my own when I realized that

rather than simply having students participate in class activities, they would benefit much more

from researching, choosing, preparing, facilitating, and processing these activities themselves.

Using the action-reflection experiential education model, students would not just describe an

activity, but would also observe while the activity was being attempted, then follow up with

reflective processing and guided questioning afterwards. This combination of action-reflection is

a basic principle of learning through experience., and often has a strong effect (Aha!) on

participants.

**Learning Objectives**

The primary learning objective for this session is for us as instructors to consider giving

up some control over our classes and allowing activities to unfold as students guide other

students through the process.

The primary learning objective for students is to gain an “Aha!” breakthrough to help

them to internalize the vital spark that can be introduced within their groups.

**Exercise Overview**

Those who attend this session will choose and then participate in a simple, short, no

props activity, then engage in reflective discussion afterwards.

**Session Description**

After initial introductions, what we will actually do in this session is preview a variety of

activities, then choose one for our group to do. We will then review guidelines for “reflective

processing” that are provided to each OB student. Participants will also receive a list of

activities and resources that have been used in two semesters of offering these student-led work

team boosters. Each student leader is asked to provide copies of their activity (or an electronic

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distribution) to everyone in the class.to enable everyone in the class to develop resources that

could be used in the future,

MGMT 3110 Example of WORK TEAM BOOSTER Assignment by Instructor

(short energizers, challenges, pep talks, treats, and/or recognition

to increase team performance and satisfaction)

Name of activity: Warp Speed

Props needed: Soft item, such as a nerf ball or stuffed animal

Space needed: Big enough area for entire group to stand in a circle

Group size limit: 30 or fewer is recommended

(less is better, but no less than 6-8 people)

Purpose of activity: Teamwork, team building, cooperation, problem-solving, fun

Copies: Bring enough hard copies of your Work Team Booster for everyone in the class, or distribute electronically

Description of activity

Ask the group to stand up and form a shoulder-to-shoulder circle. Give the soft item (stuffed animal) to a person in the circle, and ask them to toss it to someone else on the other side of the circle. This throw and catch action continues until everyone in the circle has thrown and caught the object, and it returns to the first person. Ask them to always pass it across the circle, and never hand it to a person next to them.

Emphasize that each person has to remember who they received the soft item from, and who they threw it to. To facilitate setting the throwing/receiving process, ask each person who has NOT YET received the item to hold both hands up in a receiving position.

Once this person-to-person sequence is established, announce that the name of the activity is Warp Speed, and ask them to pass the item through the established sequence in a faster time. After the initial time is established, ask them to see if they can reduce the time by working together more closely as a team. If the first time through is established at 28 seconds, and they eventually drop that time to 20 seconds, indicate that you think (considering their high level of group prowess) that 15 seconds is not out of the question. Amidst groans of “NO WAY,” and confident shouts of “GO FOR IT,” allow time for some spontaneous brainstorming. Suggest that they try one idea at a time.

The times will continue to drop, in fact well below what they would have thought was initially possible. Don’t be too strict with the “rules,” allowing just about any idea that the group feels good about using.

Variations

GROUP JUGGLING—(Need more soft items for this activity: almost as many as group members.) Get back in the original circle, and repeat the sequence, adding more and more objects in a metronome 1-2-3 throwing pattern until there are nearly as many items in motion as there are people. Whether this is actually accomplished is of little consequence. What’s important is the cooperation, fun, and satisfaction resulting from the various (usually chaotic) attempts.

Additional variation: ask each person to make a unique sound when they catch, and a different sound when they throw. The “symphony” of sound is beyond explanation.

Reflective Processing / Debriefing / Discussion after the activity

After the activity is over, take a few minutes to engage the group for feedback about this activity.

What did they experience?

What did they notice was happening within the group?

What positive outcomes came from this activity?

Is there any way that some of these outcomes can be applied in the workplace?

Finally, was it fun? All riiiiiiiight!

Do you have any suggestions to improve this activity or outcome?

Source where activity was found:

*Silver Bullets* by Project Adventure (Kendall-Hunt Publishing Company)