**Make it Memorable - Experiential OB Activities That Work!**

**Abstract**

How do we liven up the Organizational Behavior (OB) classroom and make the in-class experience exciting and memorable? How do we keep our students engaged? In this session, the author will share his most impactful experiential activities, including some original ideas as well as some adopted from prior MOBTS conferences and refined over several years of teaching OB. The session will then shift to small group discussions based on common OB levels of analysis (i.e., Individual, Group, and Organization), in which attendees can share their best practices. All relevant materials will be provided.

**Keywords**

Organizational Behavior, In-class Activity, Experiential Learning, Student Engagement, Student Participation, Videos

**Introduction**

I have attended MOBTS conferences for the last few years, and have been fortunate to learn from some of the best and brightest management educators. As a result, I’ve successfully incorporated a number of experiential activities into the classroom. Of course, I’ve also developed some ideas of my own, especially in regards to teaching Organizational Behavior (OB). The goal of this session is to provide management educators with additional ways to liven up the classroom by incorporating experiential learning activities. Thus, this session will help attendees expand their OB teaching toolkit.

To accomplish this, I plan to share some of my favorite and most successful in-class, experiential activities for teaching OB (see Appendix A). In fact, I plan to share a collection of activities, videos, and websites/images that cover specific concepts from every commonly-found chapter of OB! Of course, the emphasis of the session will be on experiential in-class activities since, based on my experience, these are what make attending class fun and memorable for students. Collectively, I’ve found that these activities have led to positive student evaluations and more importantly, student learning and engagement.

As excited as I am to share my best activities, I am just as eager to exchange ideas with session attendees. Therefore, after I present a few of my own in-class activities, the rest of the session will be devoted to small group discussions in which attendees can share some of their favorites. My goal is for every attendee (including myself!) to leave with at least one new idea for an OB-related experiential activity. Accordingly, this session is intended for new educators but will also be useful for experienced educators looking to try something new in the OB classroom. Although some activities are suitable for online, they are designed for traditional, face-to-face OB classes for graduate or undergraduate students.

**Theoretical Foundation & Teaching Implications**

Organizational Behavior is a topic taught in most business programs (Blood, 1994). In fact, at my particular institution, it is a required course, as I’m sure it is at many other business schools. As a new educator responsible for teaching OB, it was (and continues to be) a daunting challenge to convey the wide-ranging material while trying to engage students and make the in-class experience more memorable.

Ultimately, this challenge involves carefully picking and choosing what to focus on, which activities to use, and how to implement them most effectively. Articles featured in *Management Teaching Review* are especially useful for this endeavor. Of such activities, those that feature experiential learning are often considered the most effective. Indeed, there are many articles supporting the use of experiential learning activities in the classroom (Kolb, 2014; Kosnik, et al., 2013). A hallmark of such activities not only involve active student participation, but also enable students to experience OB concepts unfold within the classroom. Accordingly, research suggests that by using such activities, students tend to display greater engagement, knowledge transfer, and learning (Clancy, et al., 2021; Kolb & Kolb, 2005; Smart & Csapo, 2007; Van Eynde & Spencer, 1988).

**Learning Objectives**

This session describes the author’s use of various experiential activities to cover a variety of topics spanning nearly every chapter of most OB textbooks. As such, the associated learning objectives are rather broad. By participating in the activities, students will be able to:

* Recognize various OB concepts and theories in action (e.g., reinforcement, job satisfaction, bias, teamwork, communication, leadership, negotiation)
* Debate issues related to motivation and emotion
* Understand how each OB chapter is relevant to their own personal lives

**Activity Overview**

Although I have many activities to present, as well as a few videos, websites, and images to share, to fit within the allotted time frame, I will focus on two activities that I anticipate attendees will be excited to learn about: “Top 5 Job Satisfaction Factors” (Attitudes) and “Gandhi Experiment” (Perception & Decision-making; see Appendix A).

*Logistics (Job Satisfaction)*

This activity is intended to take approximately 15-20 minutes and fits best into the class after defining job satisfaction. The only materials necessary are a handout or PPT slides and dry-erase board. I have used it in classes with 10-30 students.

*Flow*

As originally proposed in the Robbins and Judge textbook (2009), students are presented with a list of factors commonly related to job satisfaction (see below) and are asked, “Which of these factors do you think will bring you the most job satisfaction? Pick your own personal top-5 that you simply have to have. Be honest with yourself.”

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Autonomy & independence | Fringe benefits (vacation, sick leave, dental, medical, stock options, etc.) |
| Geographic location (including commute) | Work based on personal interests (meaningfulness) |
| Travel opportunities | Flexible work schedule |
| Type of industry or organization | Relationships with coworkers |
| Career advancement/ mobility | Work/life balance |
| Job security | Challenging work |
| Opportunity for training and personal development | Variety of job tasks |
| Compensation/pay | Seeing results of your work |
| Prestige and status | Other? |

Using think-pair-share, students write down their top-5 answers and then get into groups of 3-5 to determine the group’s top-5 based on the factors that appear most often on each other’s sheets. After discussion, each group then rank-orders their picks and writes them on the board.

*Debriefing Guidelines*

Once all groups have finished writing on the board, ask the class, “Do you detect any patterns? Which factors appear most frequently?” There are usuallly a few factors that appear within some or all of the group’s choices, so this should keep the class busy for a few minutes as they scan the board to review all answers. Without fail, every single semester pay/compensation is one of the most frequently chosen factors related to job satisfaction. I then typically ask something cheeky like, “So who wants to know the RIGHT answer?” I proceed with an explanation of how studies have shown that the top factors most commonly associated with job satisfaction are:

* The Work Itself (i.e., meaningfulness, has the strongest correlation with overall satisfaction)
* Social Component (i.e., relationships with coworkers or other constituents)
* Advancement/Achievement

In other words, people tend to prefer jobs that they find personally meaningful, in which they have friends or social connections, and have the opportunity to advance/grow. I then mention that pay, in fact, is not correlated with job satisfaction once an individual reaches a (subjective) level of comfortable living (Short, 2014). This usually surprises the students, many of whom are in business school in order to make money (probably to pay off their student loans!). This leads to the big takeaway that when one is in college, making money is understandably the priority, often regardless of the job. But it’s important to remind students that as they get older, it becomes more about the job itself rather than the money. Ideally, the intrinsic and extrinsic rewards go hand-in-hand. But if not, as the old saying goes, “Do what you love, and you’ll never work a day in your life.”

*Logistics (Gandhi)*

This activity is intended to take approximately 10-15 minutes and fits best after reviewing all decision-making errors and biases. The only material necessary is a dry-erase board. I have used it in classes with 10-30 students.

*Flow*

The setup for this activity is simple, as it’s an in-class recreation of an experiment conducted by Strack and Mussweiler (1997). Ask for 10 volunteers and divide them evenly into Groups 1 and 2. Ask Group 2 to leave the room and head a short way down the hall so they can’t hear what’s being said in the classroom. After they leave, tell Group 1 to take out a pen and piece of paper, and ask if they are familiar with Mahatma Gandhi, the famous civil rights leader from India. Then tell them they have 10 seconds to respond to the following statements:

* Gandhi died after the age of 9. Please write down how old Gandhi was when he died.

Make sure to repeat it a few times so that it soaks in. Announce when 10 seconds are up and tell the students to put their pens down. Tell the class not to talk as you ask for Group 2 to re-enter the room and take their seats. Repeat the first portion of the instructions, but this time for Group 2, change the statements to the following:

* Gandhi died before the age of 140. Please write down how old Gandhi was when he died.

Once Group 2 has finished writing, create two columns on the board and write down all of Group 1’s answers vs Group 2. If you’re lucky, some “clever” student in Group 1 will have written something ridiculous like “9,” while someone in Group 2 may have written “140.” That is totally fine – all guesses are valid.

*Debriefing Guidelines*

If the experiment worked as it should, Group 1 guesses should be lower than those of Group 2. In fact, in all of my years replicating this experiment, Group 1 has consistently guessed lower than Group 2. Before proceeding further, make sure Group 2 is up-to-speed by explaining what was said while they waited outside. Then ask the class, “Why are Group 1’s guesses lower than Group 2?” Those who are paying attention will quickly respond that it’s because I gave each group different information. Respond with, “Why should that matter? Both groups were given clues that were obviously wrong. Gandhi was certainly not a 9-year-old child when he died, nor was he the oldest person who ever lived! So why did the two groups guess so differently?” Students are often stumped at this point, so I then shift to the actual results of the experiment. They are:

* Group 1: average age guessed = 50
* Group 2: average age guessed = 67
* Actual/correct answer = 78

I then ask, “Which bias is most likely to explain the difference in group guesses?” Students will eventually guess correctly that it’s the anchoring bias. I then inform them that, “Whether we like it or not, our minds keep referring back to that initial number and it biases our decision-making abilities. It tethers or anchors us to a certain point or range of values.” Students are usually most impressed with the experiment but a little bothered by the results and how their idea of free will (i.e., control over their own decision-making) has now been threatened. Ultimately, seeing this bias in action leads students to a greater appreciation and awareness of biases and the effect they can have on our decision-making.

**Session Description**

*Overview*

After welcoming everyone and introducing myself, I will describe some experiential activities that I have either developed or learned at prior MOBTS conferences that, based on my experience, are the most effective at engaging students and demonstrating OB concepts/theories in class. These activities will be organized and presented based on common OB chapter topics (See Appendix A). Despite the amount I have to present, to ensure I do not attempt to cover too much material, I will limit my time to 30 minutes and quickly summarize certain activities (in a rapid, Experiential Fire format) and cover the two aforementioned activities in-depth. Or I may allow the attendees to choose which topics/activities I present in-detail. Regardless, all of my demonstrations on how to implement these activities will rely heavily upon attendee participation.

Upon completion of these debriefs, the session will shift to small group discussion sorted by topic (i.e., Introductions, Individual, Group, and Organization). The purpose of these groups will be for attendees to learn from each other and exchange their own best practices related to teaching OB. There will also be sufficient time for attendees to rotate between groups, if they choose. I will then conclude by answering attendee questions and providing a sign-up sheet to share all resources.

*Timeline*

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| **Activity** | **Duration of  75-minute session** |
| Welcome & introductions | 5 |
| Interactive demonstration of select experiential OB activities | 30 |
| Small group discussions (Introductions, Individual, Group, Organization) | 35 |
| Closing comments and email exchange/sign-up | 5 |
| **TOTAL** | **75** |

**Appendix A. List of Organizational Behavior Chapters/Topics and Related Experiential Activities and Videos/Wesbites.**

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| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Chapter** | **Activity/Video/Website** | **Topic** | **Source** |
| Class Introductions | Optical Illusions | Perception | * <https://logoblink.com/img/2011/11/young-woman-old-woman-illusion.gif> * [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Spinning\_ Dancer\_Optical\_Illusion\_(2040\_frames).ogv](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Spinning_Dancer_Optical_Illusion_(2040_frames).ogv) * <https://nymag.com/intelligencer/2016/05/todays-viral-optical-illusion-a-brick-wall-really.html> |
| Introduction to OB | How to Get Promoted | Relevance of OB topics to real-world | Mullane, 2018 |
| Chap 1 – What is OB? | Blue Eyes, Brown Eyes Video | Diversity, Discrimination | [https://www.pbs.org/wgbh/frontline/ documentary/class-divided/](https://www.pbs.org/wgbh/frontline/documentary/class-divided/) |
| Chap 2 – Foundations of OB | Hot & Cold | Positive vs Negative Reinforcement | Robbins & Judge, 2009, p. 67 |
| Chap 3 – Attitudes | Top 5 Job Satisfaction Factors | Job Satisfaction | Robbins & Judge, 2009, p. 94 |
| **Chapter** | **Activity/Video/Website** | **Topic** | **Source** |
| Chap 4 – Personality & Values | “Three Identical Strangers” Trailer | Nature vs Nurture | <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uM5TQ4f7ycw> |
| Chap 5 – Perception & Decision Making | Gandhi Experiment | Anchoring Bias | Strack & Mussweiler, 1997 |
| Chap 6-7 – Motivation | Debate | Praise as a Motivator | Robbins & Judge, 2009, p. 240 |
| Chap 8 – Emotions & Moods | Debate | Organizational Display Rules | Robbins & Judge, 2009, p. 273 |
| Chap 9 – Foundations of Group Behavior | Brain Games & Stanford Prison Experiment | Conformity, Roles, Status | * <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=X6kWygqR0L8> * <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sZwfNs1pqG0> |
| Chap 10 – Work Teams | IDEO Video & Cup Stacking | Components of Effective Teams & Teamwork | * <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=M66ZU2PCIcM> * McNamara, 2016 |
| Chap 11 - Communication | Five Farmers Exercise | -- | Unknown |
| Chap 12-13 – Leadership | Role Play | Transactional vs Transformational Leadership | Hamdani & Valcea, 2016 |

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| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Chapter** | **Activity/Video/Website** | **Topic** | **Source** |
| Chap 14 – Power & Politics | Milgram Experiment, Strip Search Phone Call Scam, and Schick Xtreme Razor Commercial | Five Bases of Power, Impression Management | * <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=y9l_puxcrlM> * <http://www.gina-perry.com/2012/09/16/modern-milgram-mcdonalds-strip-search-prankster/> * [https://](https://www.ispot.tv/ad/7F3E/schick-xtreme-3-interview)[www.ispot.tv/ad/7F3E/schick-xtreme-3-interview](http://www.ispot.tv/ad/7F3E/schick-xtreme-3-interview) |
| Chap 15 – Conflict & Negotiation | “Arm Wrestle” &  Renting Apt Role Play | Conflict Resolution, Negotiation | * Unknown * Cannon et al., 2016 |
| Chap 16 – Org. Structure | Zipcar Video | Decentralization, Responsiveness | <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XfheAAlVBH0> |
| Chap 17 – Org. Culture | Alpha vs Omega Case Study & Terry Tate Office Linebacker | -- | * Unknown * <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RzToNo7A-94> |
| Chap 19 – Org. Change | 4- vs 5-Day Workweek | -- | Author’s original idea |

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