

THE MANAGEMENT RACE: OB CLASS INFRASTRUCTURE

Abstract: During this session, I will present my Organizational behavior (OB) classroom infrastructure, called The Management Race. The Management Race is a semester-long, team-based simulation that mimics *The Amazing Race* show and forces student teams to compete in a series of activities, while applying OB concepts. I will provide the conference participants with the opportunity to hear about my classroom infrastructure and also to engage in a discussion of some of the activities used in The Management Race.

Key Words: Experiential learning, Organizational behavior, Team-based activities

INTRODUCTION

As an avid supporter of experiential learning, I use activities for each class and every chapter that I teach. Yet, over the years, I have noticed that keeping students engaged for over 14 weeks without end goal is a difficult task. Indeed, halfway through the semester, I would notice that most students would simply go through the motions and not fully submerge into the process of active learning. This realization prompted my quest for finding a new pedagogical approach to keep the engagement over the entire course of the semester, while delivering content in an experiential way.

In the spirit of full disclosure, the idea came to me as I was watching a show on CBS Network, called *The Amazing Race* (The Amazing Race, n.d.). On the show, twelve two-member teams travel around the world and at every destination, they compete in a series of challenging tasks. The last team to finish their final task in each leg of the race is eliminated and the team that accomplishes first the final task of the last leg of the race, wins the entire race (and one million dollars). In essence, *The Amazing Race* has the end goal component built-in as well as mini tasks along the way. This set-up was what I was looking for in my OB classroom infrastructure and my OB *Management Race* classroom set-up was born.

THE MANAGEMENT RACE CLASSROOM SET-UP

Over the course of the semester, students are part of The Management Race. Like the TV show, The Management Race brings into the OB class the adventure of travel and competition. The class is divided into small racing teams (constant for the entire duration of the semester) that must research specific points, assess a case, complete a task, cope with simulated road hazards (small additional tasks “on the way”), and keep a personal diary of the trip during their journey. Each of the activities for the class meeting (aka “leg of the race”) focuses on specific theory,

concept, and/or model (see Appendix). At the end of each leg, teams have a debriefing session where the task and the theory are discussed and connected. Unlike the show, however, I do not eliminate teams. I simply award one bonus point to the winning team for each task. If tasks place certain team(s) in an impoverished condition, as part of the activity, then all participating students in the class receive a point. At the end of the semester, the team with the most points is pronounced a winner of the race and receives additional 1-5 bonus points.

Prior to coming to class, I encourage students to familiarize themselves with the content in each chapter. Students soon realize that that request is key to their success in winning the tasks for the day. On lecture day, I briefly introduce the major models and theories associated with each chapter and present students with their task(s). Each meeting wraps up with a debrief, that ties theory to the goals and implications of the task(s) as well as a record of awarded bonus points. Students are also reminded to complete their diary entries for the day at their earliest convenience, so that their impressions of the tasks are still fresh. If time is of essence, instructors could choose to pre-record their lectures and upload them onto their LMS prior to running the activities for the day.

I initially designed the infrastructure for a class of 40 students with the intent to engage the audience in semester-long, hands-on learning and application of OB-related material. Over the last couple of semesters, however, I have realized that 1) the set-up can be successfully executed in class sizes ranging anywhere from 10 to 40 students and 2) the set-up successfully facilitates the learning in a variety of classes. I have discovered that the ideal class size ranges between 16 and 40 students, divided into 2 to 5 teams of 8 students per team. In my experience, forcing students to accomplish tasks with a time limitation for extra credit, adds an additional motivation and excitement about the set-up.

I have used this infrastructure to facilitate learning, with both homogenous and mixed culture groups at undergraduate- and traditional MBA levels. The set-up is appropriate to use in both face-to-face and synchronous online modalities.

IMPLICATIONS AND TEACHING OBJECTIVES

The setup demonstrates innovation in teaching

The Management Race represents a novel approach to engaging students for an entire semester because it:

- Mimics the real life of an organization, with daily battles (here, winning the leg of that day's race) and long-term /strategic considerations (here, developing/strengthening one's critical thinking, communication, knowledge, and teamwork skills);
- Creates fruitful suspense (something not as evident in a traditional lecturing approach) because of the time limit and competition. I speculate that suspense, combined with subsequent differing outcomes and behaviors, contributes to students' curiosity about why the tasks unfold the way they do.
- Combines concreteness and visibility with theoretical insight. Because the tasks use physical artifacts and spatially separated teams, the set-up is both visual and concrete, which facilitates attention. Furthermore, the nature of the tasks affects students' behaviors, skills, thought processes, etc. In turn, students create mental categories for the different rounds, stages, approaches, which they subsequently associate with the categories of the formal theory (presented or deducted during the debriefing).

The setup connects to course learning goals or advance program learning goals

The learning objectives of the OB class are based directly on the goals and the objectives for the Business Administration program. Specifically,

Goal 1: Students will be knowledgeable about the business disciplines. More specifically, students will develop an understanding of topics, such as Personality and Attitudes, Motivation, Groups and Teams, Leadership, Ethics, Power and Politics, Organizational Design, Culture, and Decision making.

Goal 2: Students will be effective communicators.

Goal 3: Students will be effective team members.

Goal 4: Students will be knowledgeable about global business practice and managing a diverse workforce.

Goal 5: Students will be knowledgeable about ethical principles and their application.

Goal 6: Students will apply critical thinking skills to business situations.

The Management Race set-up addresses all of these goals. Specifically, each week, student teams (Goal 2; Goal 3) compete in accomplishing tasks (Goal 6) related to ethics, culture, etc. (Goal 1; Goal 4; Goal 5; see timeline in the Appendix). At the end of each leg, as well as at the end of the semester, students describe their impressions of the tasks on individual (Goal 2) and team levels (Goal 3).

The setup allows measuring students' learning

- Performance. Each leg of the race earns students, who are present and engaged, points that are added in the overall grade calculation.
- Individual Game Legs' Diary. Students have to write a diary, for each leg of the race. Specifically, for each class meeting/leg, students will draft a 200-300 word journal entry into their diary that presents their opinion or synthesis on the topic and material that has been learned and applied. The typical format of the questions to guide students' journal entries include prompts like:

Share your thoughts on how what you've learned today relates to your life. How can you use the information from today? Anything surprising from today's activities?

- Team Presentation. At the end of the semester, each team must prepare a presentation that addresses the following:
 - What have they learned as a team?
 - What were each team member's most eye-opening moments?

The setup has a meaningful impact on a number of students and community members

Providing a comprehensive infrastructure to on-going experiential activities, allows students to address process losses and develop productive team norms. Furthermore, when students are exposed to tasks with high skill variety, significance, feedback, and autonomy (as is the case with this simulation), they inevitably develop a sense of responsibility and meaningfulness of the tasks. Given that I teach about 120 students a semester, I believe that this set-up develops a sense of meaningfulness and responsibility for a large number of students.

In addition to positively affecting students, this class infrastructure aims at having an impact on the professional community. Specifically, the presentation will hopefully stimulate other faculty to either implement the set-up in their classrooms or inspire the former to create their own.

Furthermore, the Management Race approach targets improving students' critical thinking, communication, learning, and teamwork skills, which, in turn, would benefit future employers.

SESSION DESCRIPTION

To present the Management Race infrastructure to MOBTS participants, I propose a session length of 75 minutes with the following presentation schedule:

Time (min)	Topic	Discussion Points and Activities
5	Welcome	Introduce session, learning objectives, and participant expectations.
30	Experiential Exercise	Engage session attendees in an experiential exercise used in The Management Race.
20	Management Race Explanation	Explain The Management Race infrastructure.
20	Management Race feedback	Attendees will engage in a discussion about the presented infrastructure and provide possible alternative ideas for different exercises.
75	Total	

APPENDIX: MANAGEMENT RACE’S TIMELINE OF ACTIVITIES

Following is a detailed course schedule (excluding test dates, holidays and semester breaks), depicting dates and topics to be covered (class meets once a week):

Date	Topic	Activity
Day 1	Course Orientation, Introduction to Organizational Behavior	Introduction to the OB field and class; Introduction to The Management Race
Day 2	Personality	Students are divided into teams, based on their MBTI profile. Each team contains a mix of member personalities. Teams are presented with Task 1. Focus: different personality approaches to problem solving. Teams are presented with Task 2 (Puzzle). Focus: Generational Cohorts and Values.
Day 3	Decision Making	Teams are presented with Task 1 (Puzzle). Focus: Cultural impact in decision-making. Teams are presented with a Road-Block Task (Short video analysis). Focus: Bias in decision- making Teams are presented with Task 2 (Blue and red tile structure). Focus: The role of perception in decision-making

Date	Topic	The Management Race class set-up Activity
Day 4	Ethics	<p>Teams are presented with Task 1 (Puzzle). Focus: Familiarizing with definitions and concepts.</p> <p>Teams are presented with Task 2 (Case Analysis). Focus: Ethical decision-making approaches.</p>
Day 5	Motivation	<p>Teams are presented with Task 1 (Scavenger hunt). Focus: Hierarchy of needs.</p> <p>Teams are presented with Task 2 (Card sorting). Focus: Hygiene theory of motivation.</p>
Day 6	Job Satisfaction	<p>Teams are presented with a Task (Tinker Toy structure). Focus: Job Characteristics Model.</p>
Day 7	Leadership	<p>Teams are presented with Task 1 (Card sorting). Focus: Differences between managers and leaders.</p> <p>Teams are presented with Task 2 (Short video analysis). Focus: Different approaches to leadership (Trait, Behavioral, Contingency and Inspirational Schools).</p>
Day 8	Teams	<p>Teams are presented with Task 1 (Puzzle). Focus: Models of group development and dynamics.</p> <p>Teams are presented with Task 2 (Short video analysis). Focus: Group dysfunctions and biases.</p>

Date	Topic	Activity
Day 9	Power	<p>Teams are presented with Task 1 (Role play). Focus: Influence Tactics.</p> <p>Teams are presented with Task 2 (Short video analysis). Focus: Identifying power bases and influence tactics.</p>
Day 10	Communication	<p>Teams are presented with a Task (“Hollow Square”). Focus: Importance of communication; organizational issues related to communication.</p>
Day 11	Organizational Culture	<p>Teams are presented with Task 1 (Role play). Focus: Understanding foreign cultures (Geert Hofstede’s Model).</p> <p>Teams are presented with Task 2 (Case analysis). Focus: Understanding organizational culture.</p>
Day 12	Organization Structure	<p>Teams are presented with Task 1 (Case analysis). Focus: Elements of formal structures; Matrix structure.</p> <p>Teams are presented with Task 2 (Kahoot!. Game). Focus: Bureaucratic structure.</p>
Day 13	Team Presentations Individual Diaries Due	<p>What have we learned as a team? What were each team member’s most eye-opening moments?</p>

References

The Amazing Race. (n.d.). Retrieved from https://www.cbs.com/shows/amazing_race/