

Developments in Business Simulation & Experiential Exercises, Volume 14, 1987

PERSONAL POWER STRATEGIES: AN EXPERIENTIAL EXERCISES

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OBJECTIVES

The objectives of this exercise are to (1) provide participants with feedback from their peers about the degree of influence they have relative to others in their group, (2) to become more aware of what influence strategies they prefer to use, (3) to get a better understanding of what strategies they utilize well and which they should try to improve, and (4) increase their awareness of how they react to situations requiring that they use power for personal gain.

TIMING

The timing of each step of the exercise is as follows:

- Task #1: 15-30 minutes.
- Task #2: 10-15 minutes.
- Task #3: 30 minutes.
- Task #4: 10 minutes.
- Task #5: 35-40 minutes.

Class debriefing: 15-30 minutes.

PREPARATION

The instructor should review the French and Raven bases of power as well as other influence strategies. On the day of the exercise each participant should bring \$1.00 to class and be prepared to risk it. Members who don't want to "buy into" this learning experience can opt to be observers. This generally has not happened in our experience with the exercise. Make sure you have as many index cards (or better yet, "Hello" stickers) as you have participants.

STUDENT INSTRUCTIONS

Divide into groups of seven participants.

Task 1

Discuss the seven bases of power: legitimate, reward, coercive, referent, expert, information, and association. Through consensus, rank order these bases from most important to least important in terms of their effectiveness in influencing classroom behavior.

Task 2

Physically line up according to the degree of influence each person had in establishing the power base ranking in Task 1. Again rely on group consensus to determine a continuous order of influence from number 1, most influential, to number 7, least influential. Physically reposition and discuss the lineup until all are satisfied that it is the best possible representative ranking.

Assign each person a number corresponding to his or her place in the lineup. The most influential person becomes number 1, and so on. Write each person's number on a card or sticker and ask them to wear or display the number throughout the remainder of the task activity. Discuss why the rankings came out the way they did.

Task 3

Assign each person the number of votes that they now display (i.e., their place in the previous influence ranking). Collect \$1.00 from each participant and place the bills in a pile in the center of the group. Participants now decide how to divide up the total pot according to the following instructions.

_____ Your objective is to influence the group decision so as to win as much money for yourself as possible. You may use any personal influence strategies (e.g., coalition formation, holding out, charisma, rationale development, etc.) not outlawed in these instructions.

_____ At least two people (one-third of the group) cannot receive any money back at all. The pot can be divided among the remaining group members in any proportion decided upon, e.g., one member can receive it all, it can be evenly divided among the remaining two-thirds, or it can be distributed in unequal proportions.

_____ The money allocation decision is to be determined by the casting of votes. Each group member may cast the number of votes on his or her placecard or sticker (i.e., formal organizational power).

_____ The voting procedure is to be determined by the group, e.g., only one voting round placing your votes for the person(s) you want to receive money; several rounds of voting for the person you want to receive the money until only two people are left, etc.

_____ Do not attempt a hasty vote. Wait until all group members have had their say and indicate a readiness to vote.

_____ It is not legitimate to: (1) use any chance procedures such as matching coins or drawing straws, (2) simply give your votes to someone else and not participate in the decision, (3) agree to return the original \$1.00 contributions after the exercise, or (4) agree to buy everyone drinks after class. In other words) at least two people must never get their money back, and it is not possible to opt Out of the political process.

_____ If the group cannot decide on the money allocation within a thirty-minute time limit, the instructor gets all the money.

Task 4

Individually write down the answers to the following questions:

1. What were your feelings as you participated in this exercise?
2. From what power bases did you draw?
3. What influence strategies did you utilize?

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Task 5

Discuss your answers with others in your group. Give one another feedback regarding the effectiveness of individual behavior. Discuss why those winning the conflict were more successful. How might the outcome have been different in different circumstances? Finally, share what you learned about yourself regarding your feelings and your style of using power in conflict situations.

FURTHER TEACHING NOTES

Variations: Since the total exercise can take up to 2 hours and 30 minutes, it may be desirable to leave out certain segments, or shorten some so that certain aspects can be concentrated on. The following combinations are very good modules:

1. Do Tasks 1 and 2. Then go to Task 4, followed by a class debriefing. Time: 35-55 minutes.
2. In on-going task groups, skip Task #1, and begin with Task 2 by referring to decisions made in the task group.
3. Limit the time in any tasks phase or the debriefing to the minimum recommended.

Exercise Debriefing. This is a particularly sensitive exercise to debrief because some people have lost money, others have won it, but feel guilty, and several people will probably feel awkward just because they had to openly use power. It is important to share that these feelings are not unusual, and that it can be a positive learning experience for the entire class to share feelings openly and work them through during the following discussion. Some suggested questions are:

1. What were your feelings at the beginning of this exercise? During it? After it was over?
2. What are some parallels in real life to the exercise you just completed? Do you have the same feelings in those situations? How do you deal with them?
3. What did you learn about your self and the use of power from this exercise?