

AN
EXCONGINATIVE EXCURSUS
INTO THE
EXCITATORY AND EXHILARATIVE EFFECTS
OF AN
EXEAT FOR EXPERIENTIAL EDUCATION
EMANATING FROM EXTROVERTED EXECUTIVES

or

TURNING THEM ON TO MANAGEMENT
BY TURNING OUT TO MANAGERS
WITH VIDEO TAPE RECORDERS

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ABSTRACT

Executives in the business community, who are willing to discuss their experiences, help to provide realism in the education of management students during an excursion from the campus with a video tape recording system. The small group of students capture the essence of interviews with the executives, and produce a well edited short program for viewing in class. The class exposure in subsequent semesters stimulates a great deal of discussion because of the ability of students to relate to local business in a current time frame. All those concerned with the production and utilization of the program find it to be an exciting and exhilarating experience. This paper describes the technique and its many benefits, so as to stimulate replication and experimentation with it.

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Although the title of this paper is an extremely exuberant, exhorbitant and extravagant exhibition of wordplay, it fails as an explicit expression of the exoteric extent of the paper. Hopefully, however, it has attracted more audience than it has repelled.

Introduction

Really, the purpose of this paper is to explain an educational technique which students have recently lauded as exciting and exhilarating. The technique is one which allows students to go out from the campus (exeat) into the community, to learn from the experience of a conference with executives who are eager to discuss their experiences. But the novel twist of this technique is that only a few students make the trip, and they take along a video-camera and video-recorder.

The team of interviewers asks key questions of an executive, in his own organizational setting. They sit around his desk, or walk through his facility, with the portable video system capturing all the “data” of this real environment. The camera sees the facial expressions of the executive and it records all of his body language as well as his verbal utterances. The subtleties of the furnishings and the trappings of his facility are also gathered by the camera to deepen the reality of the experience.

After several such interviews with executives from competing companies within the subject industry, the students review the entire set of video- tapes. They excerpt all the things of interest from among the several

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interviews. Conflicting viewpoints held by various executives on the same question, are collected and placed in sequence on an edited tape. Rein forcing consensus on other key issues is also highlighted in the editing process. In short, the various comments made by the interviewers, which the students view as insightful, are retained, while the less illuminating portions of the taped discussion are eliminated.

The product of this review and edit phase is a twenty minute videotape, with appropriate titling and a brief introduction describing the industry and the locale. The finished tape can be packaged into a convenient cartridge or cassette depending on the type of playback equipment on which it is to be used. It can be used, of course, as a passive vehicle to provide viewers with a better understanding of the executive's role in an organization. Or, it can be better used as a stimulus to depth discussion, because it raises many questions in the process of exposing the key details of organizational operation.

Benefits to the Interviewers

Much of the benefit to the student interviewers stems from their feeling of excitement while engaging in the project. They regard the technique as a new and novel means to study the real business environment rather than merely reading about it. This also provides substantial excitation which stimulates more interest in the content of the course.

Benefits result also from the field activity itself, in the form of better insight to executives viewpoints. The interviewing students develop a rapport with the executives they interview and they find the several contacts in the business community to be very valuable. They discover that much of the theory dealt with

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in class does indeed have applicability in the business world, and their perspective of the theory and practice is enhanced.

But besides the direct benefits from field activity, the interviewers also develop their “video literacy”. They learn a great deal about technological communication. They lose their initial fear of the equipment involved and they gain a respect for the process in producing a video document. In addition, they recognize the role of mixed-media as a more effective communication device.

During the planning phase prior to interviewing, the students have an opportunity to experience the problems of scheduling, budgeting, and staffing the various functions which must be served. This kind of experiential learning is made to be more significant, as their instructor frequently points out the applicability of the theory to the practice during this phase.

Throughout successive phases, the student interviewers recognize the pervasiveness of interpersonal relations. They discover the importance of adequate communications and coordination to the success of their project. They realize that the technician personnel with whom they work will interact with them more responsively depending on the degree of motivation that they instill. Flexibility of plans is recognized as very necessary because of the problems of working with other people whose priorities may not be ordered identically. The necessity for compromise is often recognized in most meaningful ways, as the students strive to complete their project.

Benefits also develop for the interviewing students in the area of public relations. The value of community interaction is likely to become better understood, as the students find themselves practicing the art of diplomacy at various phases in the project.

Benefits to the Interviewees

The executives who consent to the interview are also likely to benefit very substantially. They too get the feeling of excitement as they participate in this fresh approach to provide students a better understanding of management.

Of course, the executives readily perceive the public relations value of their interaction with the interviewers and the eventual mass audience. The value of cooperating with a university project is also recognized.

Not insignificant is the executive's gratification that the usual procession of "student researchers which regularly confront him may be reduced. Instead of a whole class appearing for a plant tour, only

a few representatives need be accommodated. And instead of the annual plant visit, the resulting videotape will provide similar benefits to future students without the inconvenience such frequent visits produce.

At the culmination of the project, the interviewers are invited to a private showing of the final video program. At this point, they have the opportunity to discover a little more about each other. They gain valuable insight to their competitors' philosophy and views on key issues. They learn something about each others methods and attitudes. In addition, they may even recognize a value in forming an industry association so that they might all benefit from such an alliance.

Another benefit, not immediately recognized, is the challenge that is presented to each executive during the interview. They are forced to think out ideas, as a result of interview questions, which they may not have been aware of previously. The interviewee is challenged to describe his operation in terms which he may not have considered. In addition, a new kind of respect for today's students may develop, as the previous inaccurate images are overthrown.

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Benefits to Successive Audiences

The students who view the final product are “turned-on” by the excitement of a fresh new classroom device. They are inspired by the produce of their peers, and the exhilaration yields several benefits.

The quality of the “video field trip” provides them a great deal of insight, even though it is through the surrogate interviewer. Each student’s perspective is keener as a result of video interaction with the world of the practicing manager. The opportunity to perceive situations in which the classroom theory is applicable to the real situation, is a very important benefit.

Of course, the viewing student discerns a higher level of relevance than he otherwise would. He relates to the “downtown reality” of his own community. He recognizes the familiar faces of people he has seen, perhaps in retail outlets being depicted. He can readily accept the timeliness of the current scene, rather than the seeming past of textbooks or stock films.

One of the most substantial benefits at the viewing phase, stems from the “laboratory” opportunity. In a live field trip, it is virtually impossible to “stop action” and analyze a particular situation or comment. But when the real-time constraint is removed, as it is in the classroom, the video-tape replay can be stopped for depth discussion. As subtleties are explored in this way, a great deal of depth learning can take place.

Benefits to the Instructor

Considerable excitement is also recognized even by an otherwise blase instructor. Engaging in and promoting innovative teaching is an exhilarating sensation. And it can provide the excitement for other benefits as well.

For example, the instructor’s enthusiasm which becomes evident creates a stimulus for students. This in turn, adds to the initial enthusiasm of

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the instructor, as he recognizes that he is performing more effectively. Being regarded generally as a “good teacher” is encouraging as well as gratifying.

The instructor also gains benefits from exposure to the current business community. He gets new insight to the current real world subtleties and can contrast them to the theoretics of his otherwise ivory tower. He might even gain some new consulting clients, thus providing even more “currency.”

The opportunity to promote good relations with the business community as an emissary of the local business college is another important benefit. Having the local businessmen aware of the innovative work going on at the campus might even stimulate more contribution to the development fund.

Certainly it is beneficial to be recognized within the university community for development of better teaching technique. The technical support staff provides considerable ego inflation to the faculty member who is wise enough to utilize their television technology. The administrative establishment also appreciates the good work done by an innovative teacher. Sometimes the general faculty will even honor the innovator for his achievements, if they do not feel threatened by his performance. But in any event, he is more likely to read a paper before a scholarly academy of his peers.

Benefits to the Institution

Excitation also extends to the institution and generates benefits for the entire structure. Other faculty are encouraged to replicate or seek other kinds of innovation. Budget allocations tend to increase in support of those organizational units where good things seem to happen. Additional staff positions are more likely to be added where noteworthy productivity

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is apparent. All of these expansions are beneficial to the growth and well being of the entire institution.

Other benefits to the institution relate to the fuller utilization of technical support resources. The educational media activity is better utilized as its staff and equipment are drawn into the production and utilization of new video programs. As these services are used more, the quality of what they offer improves. And as demand for these good services expands, the scope of support improves so that even better quality products can evolve.

Certainly the institution enjoys the benefit of better relations with the business community in which it resides. It is quickly viewed as more responsive to the needs of the community by adopting a focus on practical education. The business community begins to feel that it is aiding in higher education, and therefore relates as part of the university mechanism. Town-gown affairs are likely to be better as a result of involving the business community, in a meaningful way, with the achievement of university goals.

Even on the national level, the institution can enjoy more widespread recognition among other universities. It can attract more financial support from grants and contracts as its image of progress extends geographically. Also important is the ability to attract better faculty and better students, as the reputation for relevant education emanates. Compared to all of these potential benefits, the costs associated with support for this kind of teaching innovation is trivial.

Production and Utilization Costs

The investment in equipment necessary to produce video-tape programs of this sort is not extraordinary. Highly sophisticated equipment is not

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needed because a high level of professionalism is not warranted. A documentary type of program such as this can tolerate considerable imperfection without detracting from the acceptability or the value of the final product. A relatively inexpensive black and white portable system is perfectly adequate for field recording. A somewhat better system for editing is helpful but not absolutely necessary. Equipment of the sort typically found in most universities is entirely suitable.

The operating supplies required are even less significant. Raw video tape is fairly inexpensive and can be reused many times. Although a few hours of field taping might be needed, once this is edited into a finished program, it can be reused for a subsequent field taping.

Labor required for production is largely the effort of students as part of the course involvement. Typically, students will spend considerable time on this “video-term paper”, but they do it by their own choice, as an option they select. Faculty time required for advice and guidance is not extraordinary, and it is similarly a labor of love as a result of the contagious enthusiasm. Most significant is the technician labor required to do a creditable job of assembly editing once the students identify the portions and sequencing to be put together. But in limiting the program to about twenty minutes keeps the number of electronic cuts and splices to a reasonable level.

It is clear that even the direct value of the finished program is many times more than the out-of-pocket costs incurred in its production.

Variations on the Theme

Several different kinds of video programs have been (and are being) produced. One dealt with the mountaineering and ski supply industry, and afforded an opportunity for a very high level of interest from students.

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Another program exposed the merits and methods of transcendental meditation as a management tool. Other programs deal with the honesty and integrity of franchised automobile dealers, the establishment and operation of restaurants, the management of fashion retailing outlets, and the operation and management of construction engineering projects. In each case, enormous amounts of highly interesting information is covered.

Many other formats and fields are feasible under this concept of video-term papers produced by students. Replication and extension of the technique should be paralleled by structured experiments to gather appropriate data to validate and verify the intuitive findings to date. I encourage you to embark on such research so that we might also uncover the exact nature of the benefits and then become more efficient in reaching them.