

# EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING THROUGH INTERACTIVE DRAMA: AN ALTERNATIVE TO STUDENT ROLE PLAYS

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*This article introduces interactive drama as an alternative to student role-plays. Interactive drama increases student engagement and explores complex issues in management. It features scenes from organizational life being performed live by trained actors before a student audience, stopping at pivotal points so the audience can interact with the actors. These sessions result in highly energized students wanting to participate in lively discussions. Because the vivid scenes are so memorable, the students are able later to connect them effectively to management theory or their own experiences in reflective journals or other written assessments. After describing why instructors should consider using interactive drama, the article explains how to use it in the management classroom and concludes by providing five detailed examples of interactive drama scenes.*

**Keywords:** *interactive drama; experiential learning; arts; active learning; role-play*

Recent efforts to improve higher education have focused on the learning process (Kolb & Kolb, 2005). Such investigations into the learning process have led to a significant change in education from the traditional, knowledge-transfer approach to a more interactive, experiential approach across a wide range of disciplines such as business and management, education, medicine and nursing, and psychology (Kolb & Kolb, 2006). A growing body of

empirical evidence (e.g., Cleave-Hogg & Morgan, 2002; Dyer & Schumann, 1993; Gopinah & Sawyer, 1999; McGlinn, 2003; Stienborg & Zaldivar, 1996) indicates the effectiveness of experiential learning in enhancing students' metacognitive abilities, their capacity to apply newly acquired skills and knowledge to real-life situations, and the ability to become self-directed learners (Kolb & Kolb, 2006). As efforts to improve higher education continue and evidence of experiential learning's effectiveness increases so does the need for innovative ways to incorporate an experiential approach into management courses.

Looking to art and arts education for idea stimulation is appropriate because arts have traditionally implemented a more experiential approach to learning in comparison to other fields such as management. Kolb and Kolb (2005) described traditional arts education as an experiential learning process of demonstration that emphasizes showing and integrating theory and practice; in contrast, traditional management education is described as a text-driven approach that emphasizes telling and theory. Unlike a traditional management classroom where most of the time is spent conveying information, much of the time in an arts classroom is spent on student expression of ideas and skills (Kolb & Kolb, 2005). The next section highlights thinking on arts in education.

## **The Arts and Experiential Education**

Historically, the arts (all media including drama, dance, visual arts, and music) have been especially powerful tools in education. Eisner (1992) suggested that art can provide valuable lessons for dealing with the ambiguous nature of a partially ordered world. For example, he asserted that "not all problems have single, correct answers. . . . Having fixed objectives and pursuing clear-cut methods for achieving them are not always the most rational ways of dealing with the world" (pp. 75-76). For Eisner, art can enhance imagination, present multiple perspectives, and enlarge personal interpretation; it nurtures capabilities that can open up new solutions and opportunities for action. Eisner suggested that through the use of the arts students can learn to be flexible and to value surprise, allowing them to be open to unexpected opportunities and to cope with "the vicissitudes of the unpredictable" (p. 76)—clearly valuable skills for modern managers.

Art's ability to engage its audience mentally, physically, and emotionally may be one of its most powerful uses in education. John Dewey (1934) spoke of art's capacity to create an experience and stated that art "does not operate in the dimension of corrective descriptive statement but in that of experience itself" (p. 85). Art draws people into and envelopes them in the

world created by the work. This capacity of art gives the educator who uses it immediate access to the power of experiential education.

Boud and Pascoe (1978) suggested that experiential education has the following characteristics: Each student is involved, the learning activity corresponds in some way to the world outside the classroom, and the learner has control over her or his learning experience. Experiential education involves students in ways lecture cannot. Dewey (1938), Lewin (1951), and Kolb (1984) suggested models for understanding experiential learning. Kolb's model, a learning cycle, includes the following elements: Learners have a concrete experience; they make observations and reflect on the experience; they formulate abstract concepts and generalizations; and finally they test the implications of new concepts in new situations. Experiential education lends itself well to Socratic-style inquiry because the students' reflection on their shared experience and their construction of knowledge is best accessed through a facilitated question-based discussion.

Experiential education also makes stress training possible (Driskell & Johnston, 1998). Research has shown that some skills do not transfer into stressful, real-world situations when they are taught under nonstressful conditions (Zakay & Wooller, 1984). Many of the situations managers face every day can be classified as stressful (e.g., providing feedback to poor performers, resolving conflicts between employees, etc.); thus, teaching methods that effectively simulate stress provide advantageous training for students.

Drama is especially suited to experiential education. It is a powerful mode that can draw students into an experience; it is a tool "to help move the management learning experience from the lecture platform into the interactive, participative, doing phases" (Mockler, 2002, p. 575). As more management educators adopt an experiential learning approach, the use of arts-based learning techniques increases, and drama is one teaching tool whose use is steadily growing (Nissley, 2002). The use of dramatic arts—stage performance (e.g., theater, role-playing) and screen performance (e.g., cinema, film)—have been used to teach a variety of topics (e.g., Champoux, 1999, 2000, 2001; Mockler, 2002; Nissley, 2002) including business ethics (Brown, 1994), decision making (Holtom, Mickel, & Boggs, 2003), organizational change (Varney & McFillen, 2000), negotiations (Weiss, 2003), organizational behavior (Golden-Biddle, 1993), whistle-blowing (Comer & Vega, 2006), environmental awareness (Tucker & Tromley, 2005), multi-stakeholder decision making (Egri, 1999), emotional intelligence (Morris, Urbanski, & Fuller, 2005), and general management (Crossan, 1998; Mockler, 2002; Monks, Barker, & Mhanachain, 2001; Moshavi, 2001).

Some creative ways the dramatic arts have been applied in management education include the use of improvisational theater techniques in the classroom (Huffaker & West, 2005; Moshavi, 2001), use of role-playing (e.g., Comer & Vega, 2006; Tucker & Tromley, 2005), and application of dramaturgy

to management course design (Leberman & Martin, 2005). Although these techniques are effective in promoting experiential learning, they do not facilitate (a) development of high levels of reality and (b) exploration of difficult, sensitive topics such as dealing with despicable people (e.g., sexual harassment perpetrator, racist).

In the following section, we introduce an innovative and effective arts-based tool—interactive drama—that features scenes being performed live by trained actors before a student audience, stopping at pivotal points so the audience can interact with the actors. Not only does interactive drama enhance experiential learning, it also addresses other experiential learning tools' limitations by creating high levels of reality and opportunities for exploration of complex and sensitive topics.

## **Interactive Drama**

Unlike traditional drama, interactive drama is a tool that promotes participation from the audience and fosters experiential learning. It has been used in higher education classrooms in a variety of disciplines and organizational training workshops in numerous fields such as business, law, health care, education, and social work. Interactive drama is a style of live theater wherein a scene is performed by trained actors and then stopped so the audience can interact. Interaction comes in a variety of forms including (a) students discussing the scene just witnessed, (b) students suggesting changes to the scene and then actors replaying it, and (c) students actually joining the scene as performers to try out alternative solutions. No matter the form of audience interaction employed, this method allows the audience to experience the situation or concept.

Interactive drama has been used successfully by a number of management educators (including the three authors and their colleagues at various universities). We (the three authors) have incorporated interactive drama in more than 550 classroom sessions with scenes performed for more than 17,000 students. It is a form of theater similar to but distinct from role-play. The primary difference between traditional role-play and interactive drama is the use of nonactors (i.e., students) versus trained actors. Nonactors are typically unable to achieve a high level of reality (i.e., they are students just playing a role for a short time); consequently, it is difficult for students to really buy into the scenario or experience. In addition, it is of questionable ethics to ask a student to play the bad guy—the despicable sexual harassment perpetrator or ugly racist.

On the contrary, it is a trained actor's job to research a character in depth, to play the villain or hero, and to possess the skills to be somebody they are not. Because trained actors are able to stay in character, create and maintain

the reality of a scene, and become the source of reality, the level of reality is enhanced. Students are pulled into the scene and experience the scenarios as if they are real, increasing buy-in and student participation. In sessions where students actually join the performance, they are able to work on such skills as verbal communication, negotiation, decision making, leadership, and teamwork. According to student feedback about interactive drama, students view the experience as real for them. For example, one of the authors of this article recently participated in an undergraduate nursing management exam review session using interactive drama. After the program, one student commented, "Our first patients next week will not be our first patients—you have been," and another said, "I know now why I am learning all of this technical stuff—I'm going to need it!" In her article on the use of interactive drama, Drew (1990) found similar results. She wrote about one of her students who said that interactive drama "brings information to a personal level" (p. 60).

Additional empirical evidence suggests interactive drama to be pedagogically sound. Songunro (2004) provided a compelling survey of the efficacy literature and the value of drama in educating leaders. Specifically, Songunro found evidence of interactive drama's effectiveness as a "fast and effective pedagogical technique for developing desired knowledge, skills, and attitudes" (p. 370) and noted that it provides the most "teachable moments" (p. 370) of any educational method assessed. Knowles, Kinchington, Erwin, and Peters (2001) found in a blind, randomized, controlled trial that medical students who had received interactive drama training around the role of a doctor interviewing patients with potentially embarrassing health conditions scored significantly higher on their communication skills and knowledge than did the control group who did not receive such training. Similarly, Littlefield, Hahn, and Meyer (1999) found that in the ambulatory clinic setting medical students who were trained using interactive drama demonstrated increased performance on patient history taking than did students in the control group; students in the control group learned this skill by observing doctor-patient interactions.

An excellent way to enhance learning experience for students in most management courses (undergraduate, graduate, and executive), interactive drama effectively illustrates the complexities of traditional management concepts (e.g., conflict and negotiation, power and politics, motivation, leadership, strategic decision making, entrepreneurship) as well as current challenges in the workplace (e.g., work-life issues, diversity issues, ethical dilemmas, environmental awareness). In addition, interactive drama is a memorable format that will encourage students to improve their managerial and interpersonal skills (e.g., motivating employees, interviewing techniques, resolving conflict).

In sum, students engaged in this creative learning setting experience the complexities of real-life scenarios in a safe environment. The sessions are

designed so students can critically examine issues, participate in in-depth discussions, learn from peers' perspectives, and reflect on their personal experiences.

In the following section, we shift the focus from why to use interactive drama to how to incorporate it into the management classroom. First we discuss the learning objectives effectively met by interactive drama. Then we explain in detail the three stages for implementing a classroom interactive drama session:

1. design and preparation (i.e., planning the lesson, finding actors, and establishing a comfortable class environment),
2. performance and discussion (in the classroom activities), and
3. postsession activities (i.e., reflective journals, written essays).

We identify key elements for success based on our experience in many types of classroom settings. Finally, we present five examples that illustrate the diverse ways students can learn management-related concepts through use of this tool.

## **Interactive Drama in the Management Classroom**

### **LEARNING OBJECTIVES**

There are several general learning objectives met effectively by interactive drama. These objectives include the following:

1. Increase student knowledge through observation of how theories discussed in class operate in real life.
2. Apply students' new knowledge to solve real problems.
3. Encounter diverse viewpoints and expand students' perspectives.
4. Develop and increase students' confidence in their ability to apply new-found knowledge.

In addition to these more general learning objectives, any given session should have topic-specific learning objectives.

### **DESIGN AND PREPARATION**

Designing and preparing for a session to achieve both general and specific learning objectives involves three elements: planning the lesson and drama scenes, finding and preparing actors, and creating a safe and comfortable classroom environment.

*Planning the lesson and drama scenes.* The planning steps involve choosing a topic and its related learning objectives, designing the scenes with embedded

learning objectives, and creating questions for a facilitated inquiry-style discussion. In choosing a topic, messier is better. It can be a topic that students have difficulty grasping or one that on the surface appears simple but in reality is complex (e.g., perceptual biases, sexual harassment, valuing diversity). Once a topic has been chosen, break it down into its constituent parts and develop your learning objectives.

Next, choose the most important components of the topic and design scenes around them, embedding your learning objectives in the scenes themselves. You may want to adopt scenes from case studies or real-life situations (see Appendix B for examples). When designing scenes, characters should emerge with enough depth to be believable. The flow and sequence of scenes should also be crafted in advance to ensure learning objectives are achieved. If you have already found your actors, we recommend meeting with them during the scene design phase; actors have many creative suggestions for scene design, flow, and character development. (Be sure they are aware of your learning objectives.)

Because interactive drama is useful for exploring the nature of a topic, it is more effective to enact several scenes that illuminate various aspects of the topic than just two scenes that show the wrong way and the right way. For example, if the topic is about communication and how to deliver a difficult message (e.g., laying off an employee), it is effective to have several scenes where the manager (actor) delivers the news in different ways, emphasizing different styles or modes of communication. Because a person's response in real life cannot be preplanned, students become aware that a successful outcome depends on understanding and managing the multiple dimensions of communication as opposed to trying to memorize the right way to do it.

Designing scenes is itself an art, which unfortunately means recipes for scene design will not work (even for those who do it regularly). However, there are some guidelines that can help the scene-design process along:

1. Interaction is the crux of scene design. All concepts are ultimately played out in the physical universe between people. In standard improvisational acting terms, the acronym CROW (characters, relationship, objective, where) directs scene design. Wirth's (1994) influential book provides clear and concise definitions of each element:

*Character:* Character covers who the people are, what they do, and what types of personalities they have. Give them names, occupations, physicalities—all the things that make up a character.

*Relationship:* The relationship affects how each character behaves in his or her dealings with the other characters and the environment.

*Objective:* The objective introduces action into the narrative by defining what the characters want. By trying to fulfill these desires, the characters become active.

*Where:* The where is the location or the environment in which the scene takes place (pp. 53-54).

2. Another factor in scene design is to determine what prior events and interactions must be witnessed by the audience to make the pivotal interaction understandable, real, rich, and compelling. For example, a scene on delivering bad news could be built around a manager firing an employee. Managers and employees are not in a vacuum, however, so a previous set-up scene could be made between the employee and a friend, with the employee telling his or her friend how great it is to have the job because his or her child has health issues and having a job with benefits is of vital importance. Another set-up scene (depending on the learning objectives) could be one in which the audience finds out that there is an element of friendship or mentorship in the manager-employee relationship, which complicates the situation.
3. Another element of the scene design is the pedagogical question of what type of student interaction is desired. As mentioned above, student interaction can come in a variety of forms with varying levels of involvement (students discussing the scene, students modifying the scene, or students actually acting in the scene). If the students are willing and there is space in the timeline, it can be an extraordinary learning opportunity for them to step into the scene as characters and implement their own suggestions. This way, they experience their own solutions (successful or not) instead of just talking about them.

After the scenes are designed, revisit your learning objectives and develop facilitation questions for the discussion. General questions such as “What happened here?” can be used to open the discussion. More incisive questions probing the dimensions of the topic (e.g., employee motivations, diverse perspectives, cultural norms, unstated assumptions) should follow. It is sometimes useful to provide a lens through which to view a scene. For example, when exploring employee empowerment, prior to the performance students may be instructed to focus on the characters’ feelings of competency and self-determination or a job’s meaningfulness and impact, which are then discussed after the performance. Remember, however, that providing a lens might narrow students’ different perspectives or inhibit their novel interpretations.

*Find and prepare the actors.* The more highly trained the actors are in improvisational acting techniques, the more realistic and powerful the scenes will be. Professional actors can be hired at a modest fee from local casting agencies, actor bulletin boards, or local professional theater troupes. Amateur actors can be found through community theaters or from university schools of drama. Over the past 9 years at six different universities, we have used all these methods successfully; at one university, one of the authors even started an interactive drama group comprised of student actors.



Finding the actors is the most challenging task we have encountered, but it has led to rewarding interdisciplinary collaboration between faculty and students as well as connections in the broader community. The quality of the acting can have an impact on the quality of the session, of course. In our experience, the more mature the students are (e.g., executive master's of business administration students), the more valuable professional actors become. Although the initial time investment may be significant, we have found the actors enjoy the experience and come back to our classrooms semester after semester.

To produce scenes with a high level of realism, actors need to know their characters—the relationships among them, what they want, their circumstances—in addition to the session's learning objectives. If your scenes are adopted from a case study, familiarize the actors with the case. Encourage them to create rich, complex characters with backgrounds and personalities. One-dimensional characters can only act one way (angry, euphoric, etc.), whereas real people are multidimensional and will change depending on the situation. Also, make sure the actors know that some improvisation will be necessary for a successful session.

*Create a safe, comfortable classroom environment.* Creating a safe classroom environment where students feel comfortable expressing themselves is key to overcoming any reluctance they may have in participating in an interactive undertaking. In some instances, starting the class session with warm-up exercises can raise the level of safety and comfort for student self-expression. Warm-up activities can include dyadic debates, small group discussions, or any other activity that gets students sharing ideas freely. To further encourage student participation, educators should acknowledge that the exercise might be uncomfortable but that it is better to practice in this environment where the stakes are lower than in the real workplace.

## THE PERFORMANCE AND DISCUSSION

Although there are many ways the in-class session can unfold, the general sequence has three basic parts: scene and character development, management situation, and facilitated discussion and debrief. The entire interactive drama experience can take between 45 and 75 min. To see a complete example of a procedural justice case about sexual harassment adapted for interactive drama application, see Appendix A.

*Scene and character development.* In Act 1, the actors draw the students in by developing a rich scene—one that is believable, likely to be encountered by the students in the future, and sufficiently broad to allow an array of possible behaviors. The first act should present information about the characters,

their relationships, and the setting. The instructor or facilitator can then ask students if clarification regarding the context is needed. In some instances, the facilitator or the actors may choose to defer responding to a specific question until after Act 2's performance, where it may be answered.

*Management situation.* In Act 2, the actors illuminate one or more specific management challenges. During the performance, the actors stop at critical moments to interact with the audience. They might solicit student suggestions for resolving the dilemma and then try out these suggestions, or they might ask a student volunteer to enact the suggestions, or perhaps they will conduct a split.

During a split, students are divided into two groups. One group goes with one actor (or a team of actors) to a separate room or hallway while the other group remains in the classroom with the other actor(s). Each group then diagnoses the management issues, determines what is known and unknown, analyzes all available information, and formulates its strategy for the upcoming interaction that will be played out by the actor(s). The students and actors reconvene and the performance continues with the actors bringing the students' recommendations to life. At this point, instead of relying on the structure that was prepared beforehand, the actors use improvisation techniques to enact the students' collective advice. We call this *structured improvisation*. Although there is no script, the actors know the trajectory of the scene and have learning-objective milestones along the way. The approach is based on student suggestions, but the actors' implementation of that advice is filtered through the characters they have previously developed—they remain consistent to the person they are playing. We call this *No Fairy-dust Allowed*. In other words, the upset employee cannot instantly have a 180-degree turnaround and start being joyous and kind, but he or she might move some small distance toward reconciliation. This provides a level of realism that is not likely with nonactor role-play.

After this amended version of Act 2, students and actors divide into the same groups for a second split. At this point, the instructor may choose to provide new, unique information to each group ("secrets"). The groups then explore all new information, analyze what happened in Act 2, and develop a strategy for resolving the issues in the final act. In Act 3, the actors again portray the student recommendations using improvisational techniques bringing resolution (or not) to the issue(s). By the time Act 3 is underway, the students can hardly remain in their seats. They are anxious for the actors to implement their recommendations and to see the issue(s) resolved to their satisfaction. Instead of listening to a discussion of how to make a difficult decision, they experience the process. They gain a deeper understanding of the topic because the nonverbal communication, emotional intensity, and personal applicability are so vivid.

*Facilitated discussion and debriefing.* After the interactive drama session, students frequently are emotionally aroused and are driven to express themselves. It is essential to conduct a thorough in-class discussion and debrief at the end of the session. Much of the learning occurs when students are confronted with opinions and interpretations from their peers that vary dramatically from their own—even when all have witnessed the exact same scenes. Led by the instructor or a facilitator, a discussion can be guided by the preplanned general and more specific questions (see Appendix A for sample questions); however, the discussion leader should be flexible and try to adapt to the students' experiences. During the debriefing, the instructor should summarize the session in addition to highlighting the session's learning objectives.

Besides being an exciting learning experience that effectively illustrates the complexities of management topics, interactive drama allows multiple interpretations of the scenes. Because students observed the same scenes but experienced them differently, the class is perfectly primed for a discussion about why there are discrepancies in how the issues were perceived. Some of the most insightful comments come as students from different backgrounds or cultures share their application of different standards to the same problem. A thread that runs consistently through our experiences with interactive drama is the high level of student participation it generates. Not only are the usual suspects more involved but we have found the quieter students are also more likely to participate.

Discussions of abstract concepts like emotional intelligence take on greater meaning because students have a shared, concrete experience about which they can reflect, make observations, and (ultimately) generalizations. Introducing splits or student actors into the scenes allows them to test the implications of the new concepts, thus completing Kolb's (1984) learning cycle.

#### **POSTSESSION ACTIVITIES**

There are many other ways to allow students to express what they have learned from the interactive drama experience outside of the class discussion. Reflective journals, essay questions, and case write-ups are a few of the methods we have used (see Appendix A for an example). Learning objectives need to be reflected in these activities. Such assignments further demonstrate students' learning and the effectiveness of interactive drama.

#### **KEY ELEMENTS FOR SUCCESS**

In the following discussion, we identify five key elements of a well-planned interactive drama session and the value of this creative arts-based teaching tool.

*Design each scene based on learning objectives.* The dramatic scenes should be based on specific learning objectives (e.g., to demonstrate the causes and effects of perceived compensation inequities in a team setting). A scene should not, however, make a point: This leads to heavy-handed, dull, and condescending “art.” Rather, a scene should raise questions and present true dilemmas and ambiguities; if the scenes have clear-cut right and wrong answers, deep inquiries into the topic are not likely (Brookfield, 1999). A scene should illuminate multiple aspects or perspectives of the core topic, thus providing fertile ground for rich classroom discussions.

*Use trained actors—the more highly trained the better.* Well-trained actors in well-designed scenes can reliably pull their audiences into their fictional reality, which produces a vivid experience for the students. Trained actors can endow objects, locations, and people with fictional attributes with such power that the endowed status becomes real for the nonactors in the scene and for the audience. In a recent training for undergraduate students, one of the students playing a reporter noted that the scene (an apartment fire) became real for him after only about three questions. As the actors stayed in character, the hubbub in the background from the concurrent dramatic scenes occurring in the same room turned into the sound of emergency workers handling the apartment fire.

Other benefits of using trained actors include their wide range of emotional expression and their ability to monitor the state of being of their student scene partner and tone down the intensity of expression if it becomes overwhelming to the student. Although being attentive to one’s scene partner is common for improvisational actors, a higher level of awareness is required for working with nonactor scene partners; so specialized training for the actor is suggested.

*Design the scenes in a way to minimize the acting needed from the students.* Actors are trained to create fictional realities for audiences; management students are not. Management students are trained to manage. The interactive drama scenes should be designed to have each party do what it does best. The actors create a small “bubble of reality” around themselves and the students who are in the scene with them. The students should not be given a reason to reach through (and break) the bubble, such as being asked by the actor for an object that they do not have. If asked for such a thing, the students will be forced to pretend and will be reminded that there is another reality outside the bubble.

*Allow the students to feel some stress, especially if a scene involves one or more students.* Part of the job of the actors is to create stress on the students so that they have limited time to question and be self-conscious about their

own performance. The increased level of arousal helps students step more fully into the fictional reality of the scenes. Additionally, when students are involved in the scenes, peer engagement intensifies as well because audience members want to coach those in the hot seat (the “arm-chair quarterback” syndrome).

*Facilitate a discussion that is closely tied to the scene and is inquiry based.* The discussion around each scene should be designed to bring out the multiple aspects of the topic that have been embedded in the scene. It should be designed to explore the topic. A true inquiry—a real exploration—of a topic results in students grappling with the topic both emotionally and cognitively. Additionally, because the interactive scenes have produced an experience for the students, the inquiry can allow students to convey how the scene personally affected them.

Through that grappling emerges a multidimensional understanding. Knowles, Holton, and Swanson (1998), writing on Postman and Weingartner’s (1969) list of behaviors exhibited by teachers using the inquiry method, stated,

Generally, [the teacher] does not accept a single statement as an answer to a question. In fact, he has a persisting aversion to anyone, any syllabus, any test that offers The Right Answer. Not because answers and solutions are unwelcome—indeed, he is trying to help students be more efficient problem solvers—but because he knows how often The Right Answer serves only to terminate further thought. (p. 99)

## EFFECTIVENESS

Discussed below, interactive drama is effective in creating both desirable learning spaces and memorable class sessions for students. In addition, evidence suggests that interactive drama achieves its general learning objectives such as increasing student knowledge and students’ confidence to apply it, encountering diverse viewpoints, and expanding student perspectives.

According to Kolb and Kolb (2005, 2006), experiential learning can be enhanced through the creation of learning spaces that promote growth-producing experiences for learners. Interactive drama sessions fulfill most of educational principles that Kolb and Kolb identified as contributing factors to the creation of learning spaces. Interactive drama creates “respect for learners and their experience” and “begins learning with the learner’s experience of the subject matter” (p. 207). Interactive drama sessions are designed to create and hold “a hospitable space for learning.” Through facilitated discussion, interactive drama makes space for “conversational learning” (p. 207). By incorporating students’ suggestions into the replaying of scenes and encouraging students to join the performance, space for

“development of expertise” is created. Both the facilitated discussion and postsession activities such as reflective journals make space for both “acting and reflecting” and “feeling and thinking” (p. 208).

In addition to the findings discussed in the Introduction, empirical evidence suggests that students remember and value this arts-based learning tool (Holtom et al., 2003). One of the authors of this article asks students at the end of each term to rate the value of the activities he uses in his classroom. These include interactive drama, videos, guest speakers, case studies, and exercises. Students always rate the interactive drama at or near the top of the list: 78% of the students ( $N = 135$ ) in the last four terms rated it as the best activity and 100% rated it in the top three. Moreover, the interactive drama session was recently mentioned by students called back several years after graduation for a focus group as one of the most memorable occasions in their student career. Interactive drama sessions have similarly been mentioned in senior exit interviews.

Qualitative data suggest that interactive drama has potential to achieve the following learning objectives: (a) to encounter diverse viewpoints and expand students' perspectives and (b) to develop increased students' confidence in their ability to apply new-found knowledge.

One participant recently stated, “Until today, I thought I knew nothing. While I know that I am still a student and have a ways to go, today I can claim for myself all that I have learned up until now.” Lewis, Brain, Cushing, Hall, and Zakrzewska (2000) described the same result from interactive drama training on communication skills around HIV/AIDS with dental students. Furthermore, students encounter diverse viewpoints and expand their perspective. One student noted, “The eloquence of other students who disagreed with some of my statements was surprising—they were passionate and well-spoken. It got me thinking.”

Quantitative evidence suggests that interactive drama is able to increase student knowledge through observation of how theories discussed in class operate in real life—one of the main learning objectives. Specifically, one of the authors found that the mean test scores of classes that incorporated interactive drama were higher compared to those classes that were not exposed to interactive drama. Three different undergraduate business courses (two organizational behavior required courses and one elective course on motivation that met two times a week) with approximately 30 to 35 students per class were taught without using interactive drama. The following semester, the same three courses with 30 to 35 students per class were taught exactly in the same manner; the only difference was the incorporation of interactive drama into one or two 90-minute class sessions. The interactive drama scenes explored concepts and topics that students would be tested on at a later date. (Please note that the interactive drama sessions did not explore all topics included in the exam.) In all three cases, the mean test scores were

**TABLE 1**  
**Comparison of Mean Scores and Letter Grades**

	<i>Mean Test Scores</i>		
	<i>Without Interactive Drama (Semester 1)</i>	<i>With Interactive Drama (Semester 2)</i>	<i>Changes in Score Percentages and Letter Grades</i>
Course 1 (Organizational Behavior)	79%	86%	7% increase C+ → B
Course 2 (Organizational Behavior)	80%	87%	7% increase B- → B+
Course 3 (Motivation)	85%	93%	8% increase B → A

higher, resulting in higher grades (see Table 1). We tried to control for other possible explanations by using the same professor, same lectures and activities, same material and text, and same exact multiple-choice exams. The results should be interpreted with caution because a control group (a course without interactive drama) was not included in the same semesters when interactive drama was incorporated into the courses.

## Final Thoughts

Although still in its infancy, there is no doubt that the application of arts in management education is gaining more attention (Nissley, 2002). This article contributes to this interest by sharing our experiences with interactive drama—an art-based tool that facilitates experiential learning—and by providing an alternative to student role-plays.

We strongly encourage management educators to start those creative ideas flowing and to contact local theater companies, their school's drama department, or local community theaters. The results in the classroom are worth it!

## Appendix A

### Procedural Justice and Sexual Harassment Interactive Drama Example

#### Design and Preparation

##### CHOOSING A TOPIC AND LEARNING OBJECTIVES

A common topic in management education is organizational justice. As discussed in standard texts (e.g., *Organizational Behavior* by Schermerhorn,

Hunt, & Osborn, 1997), organizational justice has three primary components: procedural, distributive, and interactional. For this example, we shall choose procedural justice as the topic for learning. (Concepts of ethics and power could also be integrated into this session.) Schermerhorn, Hunt, and Osborn (1997) defined *procedural justice* as “the degree to which rules and procedures specified by policies are properly followed in all cases under which they are applied” (p. 14). These authors used the example of a sexual harassment case in which procedural justice calls for required hearings to be held for every case submitted for administrative review. They state that common rationalizations to justify actual or potential misconduct include the following (based on Gellerman, 1986): (a) pretending the behavior is not really unethical or illegal, (b) excusing the behavior by saying it is really in the organization’s or your best interest, (c) assuming the behavior is okay because no one else is expected to find out about it, and (d) presuming your superiors will support and protect you if anything should go wrong.

The learning objectives for this experiential exercise are for students to be able to

1. identify the situational and personal factors that contribute to the sexual harassment,
2. differentiate between types and degrees of sexual harassment, and
3. determine whether a sexual harassment review should take place under the circumstances.

### SCENE DESIGN AND FLOW

After developing the scene and characters in Act 1 (i.e., office setting, male and female coworkers, boss), the actors could enact examples of varying degrees of sexual harassment in Act 2. Then, in subsequent acts, the characters could represent the aftermath based on the four potential rationalizations provided above. For example, the first justification can be explored through a scene in which a female actor, wearing conservative attire, plays an office interaction with a well-respected male coworker.<sup>1</sup> The scene is then replayed but beforehand (quite shockingly to the students) she removes her sweater to uncover much more revealing attire. The male coworker reacts to her differently, in a more sexual way. The first level of the discussion centers on dress codes and appropriate office attire. The next level of the discussion is an exploration into sexual harassment. The final level of discussion involves the main topic, which is procedural justice: Should a sexual harassment review be undertaken under these circumstances?

The flow of the session involves sequencing and making sure that the student comfort level is conducive for learning. For topics as sensitive as sexual harassment, it is recommended that the educator set up the rules of engagement before the scenes begin. Setting up a discussion protocol serves



to keep the discussion respectful and can provide space for unpopular opinions to be aired. For example, if any students are thinking, “She deserved the sexual harassment because of the clothes she was wearing,” even that unpopular idea should be discussed so that the notion of personal responsibility can be addressed (from the viewpoint of both the victim and perpetrator). A deep inquiry includes both popular and unpopular opinions.

### **FACILITATION QUESTIONS AND DEBRIEFING**

The inquiry-style discussions following each scene are tightly linked to both the scenes and their embedded learning objectives. The scenes, if well executed, are designed to have the students experience the situation (most often through empathizing with one or more of the characters); therefore, the discussion can include questions relating to students’ own involvement in the scene even if it is a scene in which they personally did not physically participate. Potential facilitation questions include the following:

- a. What happened here?
- b. How would you feel if you were in this situation?
- c. What would you do if you were in this situation?
- d. Did the interactions in Act 1 rise to the level of sexual harassment using the hostile work environment (*quid pro quo*) standard?
- e. What factors contributed to the harassment?
- f. What factors complicate reporting the harassment?
- g. What did you learn about yourself? What did you learn about others?
- h. What are the legal implications of these actions?
- i. If unethical conduct occurred, what motivated it? How could unethical conduct have been avoided? What were the likely consequences of being unethical?
- j. Were procedurally just principles applied? Why? Why not? What factors inhibit a procedurally just response?

### **FINDING AND PREPARING THE ACTORS**

In this case, finding male and female actors will be advantageous though not required. In most cases, however, it is advisable to choose the most common situation (e.g., while sexual harassment of males does happen, the vast majority is perpetrated against females). In advance of the class session, you would discuss the topic, scene design, and learning objectives with the actors in addition to eliciting their thoughts and feedback.

### **CREATING A SAFE, COMFORTABLE CLASSROOM ENVIRONMENT**

It is ideal to create a classroom environment wherein students are comfortable participating. If the class has not been together very long or has not engaged in many interactive activities, start the session with a short warm-up. Something as simple as getting students into groups of two to five people to discuss one question about the topic can get them comfortable.

## **The Performance and Discussion (in the Classroom)**

### **SCENE AND CHARACTER DEVELOPMENT**

Information about the characters, their relationships, and the setting should be presented in Act 1. Procedural justice issues can arise most anywhere. In this case, we suggest an office setting. Because some organizations have stronger justice infrastructures (e.g., federal government vs. start-up business), such situational factors need to be addressed in Act 1.

After introducing all of the characters in Act 1, the actors should do deep character work, (i.e., develop rich histories of their characters with reasons for being the way they are). For example, the male actor should be comfortable with his predatory behavior. The female actor should prepare a character biography that motivates her reactions to the unwanted advances (i.e., does she react with anger, fear, or calmness?).

### **MANAGEMENT SITUATION**

In Act 2, the “alleged incident” takes place. One way of enriching the scenes is to vary the role of the perpetrator. In the case where he is a peer, it is more likely that a hostile work environment would be created. Alternatively, he could be her boss. In this case there would be a higher probability that the incident would meet the *quid pro quo* standard. Other ways of introducing management complexity into the situation include the presence of videotape (e.g., the incident takes place in a retail firm that makes extensive use of video surveillance in its stores), witnesses, or prior incidents. In doing a split where a group of students works with the male actor and the other students work with the female actor, secrets might include the fact that the actors were previously involved romantically or that the man spent time in jail many years prior.

### **FACILITATED DISCUSSION AND DEBRIEFING**

Using the questions outlined in advance, the instructor or facilitator can draw first on the energy and emotion the students are feeling. Then, with this momentum, the facilitator can move into a discussion of the procedurally just response. Other pertinent topics such as ethics or power could also be included in the discussion.

### **Postsession Activities**

In this specific case, there are a variety of approaches that might be appropriate for extending and assessing student learning. One approach we

have used is to require students to write in reflective journals. The facilitation questions could also be used to direct their writing. Alternatively, we have provided brief background information on a management topic and then asked students to evaluate in an essay one of the scenes they observed. Following is an example of such an essay assignment.

## **Procedural Justice Essay**

### **INSTRUCTIONS**

1. Read the following discussion of procedural justice.
2. Describe one of the scenes you observed in the interactive drama session.
3. Evaluate whether the incident was addressed in a procedurally just manner.

### **OVERVIEW OF PROCEDURAL JUSTICE<sup>2</sup>**

Procedural justice is concerned with making and implementing decisions according to fair processes. People feel affirmed if the procedures that are adopted treat them with respect and dignity, making it easier to accept even outcomes they do not like. But what makes procedures fair?

First, there is an emphasis on consistency. Fair procedures should guarantee that like cases are treated alike. Any distinctions should reflect genuine aspects of personal identity rather than extraneous features of the differentiating mechanism itself.

Second, those carrying out the procedures must be impartial and neutral. Unbiased decision makers must carry out the procedures to reach a fair and accurate conclusion. Those involved should believe that the intentions of third-party authorities are benevolent, that they want to treat people fairly and take the viewpoint and needs of interested parties into account. If people trust the third party, they are more likely to view the decision-making process as fair.

Third, those directly affected by the decisions should have a voice and representation in the process. Having representation affirms the status of group members and inspires trust in the decision-making system. This is especially important for weaker parties whose voices often go unheard.

Finally, the processes that are implemented should be transparent. Decisions should be reached through open procedures, without secrecy or deception.

## **Appendix B**

### **Four Additional Examples of Management Topics and Scenes**

#### **Example 1: Corporate Culture**

##### **LEARNING OBJECTIVES**

1. Help students clearly identify differences between espoused values and enacted values.
2. Allow students to gain critical insights into the acculturation process.

**ACT 1 (TOTAL TIME IS 10 TO 15 MIN.)**

[Becky enters the employee break room.] It is her first day on the job. She is so excited because it is the first real job she has ever had. She is impressed with the Founding Values Statement on the wall near the time clock. Cezar is the first person to greet her. After introducing himself, Cezar notes, “Yeah, it says, ‘We value honesty and integrity in everything we do,’ but that doesn’t apply at the end of the time period. If your boss is tight on his labor budget, he’s gonna ask you to clock out an hour before your shift ends though he’ll expect you to continue to work. It is totally unfair. But that is how you get ahead in this organization. Make your numbers.”

*First break.* (Total time is 10 to 15 min.) Ask the students,

1. What should Becky do?
2. Should she inquire of other employees about this practice or wait and see?

**ACT 2 (TOTAL TIME IS 5 TO 10 MIN.)**

[Becky has been on the job for 2 weeks and is having lunch with a coworker, Jeanine.] Things have been going well for Becky and she is feeling optimistic about her prospects at the company. She asks Jeanine about the promotion process. From all the recruiting materials, it sounds like women and minorities are treated fairly in this company. As Jeanine starts to list all of the people promoted in the past 2 years, she notes that there have been a number of women promoted but they are not great role models. Jeanine continues, “Two, in particular, were known for making their people work off the clock. Management saw they made their numbers and that is what got them promoted.”

**ACT 3 (TOTAL TIME IS 5 TO 10 MIN.)**

[About 1 week later, Becky is invited to join in a focus group with the Vice President of Human Resources and a number of other new employees. The topic is promoting diversity and nurturing new talent.] When the Vice President of Human Resources starts reciting all of the favorable statistics about women being promoted, Becky wonders if she should inquire about disconnect she is seeing between what the company says publicly and what seems to be rewarded.

*Debrief.*

1. What happened here? How would you feel if you were in this situation?
2. What would you do if you were in this situation?
3. What are the potential career implications of speaking up in such a forum?
4. Do corporate reputations occasionally differ from the internal realities? What are some examples?

5. What are the symbols and artifacts that represent this organization's culture? What are the values? What are the underlying assumptions?
6. What can employees do to create more functional norms in their organizations?

## **Example 2: Executive Decision Making and Crisis Communication**

### **LEARNING OBJECTIVES**

1. Portray the multiple stakeholders and issues that might be considered in an executive decision-making situation.
2. Explore the challenges companies face when they seek to manage their reputations in times of crisis.

### **ACT 1 (TOTAL TIME IS 10 TO 15 MIN.)**

[The Vice President of Talent & Learning (VP) is in a meeting with the Chief Operating Officer (CEO).] They are discussing the staffing needs for the coming two quarters in light of the explosive growth they anticipate due to the launch of a new service. As they conclude the meeting, the VP's administrative assistant flashes her boss their secret sign for "crisis."

The VP, Christina, invites her assistant, Tina, into her office. Tina explains that a reporter from the Wall Street Times has just called to speak with the VP about differences between the educational record of the CEO posted on their Web site bio and the records at the three universities he supposedly attended. Although the CEO did graduate from the first university, there was no record of him graduating with any of the honors the bio claims. Furthermore, although the CEO evidently attended a certificate-granting seminar at the second university, he did not receive a degree there. Finally, there is no record of any involvement on the part of the CEO at the third university except for a number of large contributions to the athletic fund there.

*First break.* (Total time is 10 to 15 min.)

1. What should Christina do? Should she ignore the issue?
2. Should she discuss it with the CEO directly or the Chief Operating Officer (COO)—her friend and mentor?

### **ACT 2 (TOTAL TIME IS 10 TO 15 MIN.)**

[Christina and the COO are talking behind closed doors.] Tim, the COO, is surprised at Christina's news. He wonders if she has independently verified the reporter's claims. He speculates that a competitor may have set the reporter up to distract the company at this critical time. The competitor fears the company's new service and would love to derail the launch slated to

begin in 3 weeks. Though relatively new to the company, the CEO has had a major positive impact in almost every area of the company.

*Second break.* (Total time is 5 to 10 min.)

1. How much time does Christina have?
2. Should she raise this issue with the Board of Directors?

### ACT 3 (TOTAL TIME IS 10 TO 15 MIN.)

[Christina is addressing the Board of Directors.] One week has passed. Two weeks remain before the scheduled new service launch. The campaign is built around the phrase “Building Trust, One Client at a Time.” Christina has been able to confirm the reporter’s claims at the first two universities. Unfortunately, getting information from the third university has been very difficult. She is having a hard time persuading the reporter not to take the story public. He would hate for someone else to get his story.

*Debrief.*

1. How did the organization get to this place?
2. What should the Board do in this situation?
3. What obligations does the firm have to customers, suppliers, and employees?
4. What should be communicated? Who should do it? When?

## Example 3: Discrimination in the Workplace

### LEARNING OBJECTIVES

1. Sensitize students to the subtle ways that discrimination operates.
2. Help students recognize the ways they can act to discourage discrimination.

### ACT 1 (TOTAL TIME IS 10 TO 15 MIN.)

[Consuelo is at home having an animated telephone discussion with her mother.] Consuelo has been with the company for nearly 10 years. In that time, she has distinguished herself in many ways. Customers love her. Coworkers prefer to work with her than with other colleagues. Superiors rave about her. She feels like the timing is finally right for her to be promoted to the director level. She has more experience and better performance than the two other internal candidates (Doug and Tim) being considered. Although in the past it has seemed that being a part of the old boys network was the only way to become a director, the new CEO has publicly gone on record as wanting to increase the diversity of top management.

*First split.* (Total time is 15 to 20 min.)

1. What can Consuelo do to make sure her application is reviewed fairly and that she is carefully considered for the promotion?
2. How important is it to cultivate contacts among peers and superiors (mentors)?

**ACT 2 (TOTAL TIME IS 10 TO 15 MIN.)**

[Consuelo is having lunch with the vice president over her division.] Consuelo explains to the vice president, “I am sorry if I am missing something here that might be obvious to others, but I don’t really understand why you are asking so many questions about my commitment to the company. I have given my heart and soul to the company over the past 10 years. I have made numerous sacrifices to always perform at a high level.” The vice president does his best to make it clear that her contributions are appreciated, but hinted that a lot of the meetings where important decisions get made happen after hours and on the golf course. Having children—and, thus, after-work commitments—and not playing golf were two factors that might make it difficult for her to be promoted. Consuelo wanted to cry but instead smiled and said that she understood and appreciated the information.

*Second split.* (Total time is 5 to 10 min.) While paying a traffic ticket online, Consuelo noticed that Doug had recently received a ticket for driving while under the influence of alcohol—and in a corporate car no less. She wondered if this was the ammunition she needed to get an interview with the new CEO to explain how things really worked in the organization.

1. What should she do at this point?
2. What are her options?

**ACT 3 (TOTAL TIME IS 10 TO 15 MIN.)**

Consuelo goes to her mentor to try to make sense of her vice president’s comments. She was sure that they meant that the executive group was planning to promote Doug, who was a fraternity brother of the president.

*Debrief.*

1. What are the possible outcomes of Consuelo’s meeting with the CEO?
2. Who would benefit most from her open and candid conversation?
3. Who has a responsibility to nurture and mentor people in an organization?
4. How can mentors help a person in Consuelo’s situation?
5. What are the costs to an organization that discriminates in hiring and promotion?

## Example 4: Ethics in Negotiation

### LEARNING OBJECTIVES

1. Highlight interpersonal conflicts which arise in difficult negotiations.
2. Identify the tensions inherent in making ethical decisions under time constraints and with potential for personal adverse impact.

### ACT 1 (TOTAL TIME IS 10 TO 15 MIN.)

[Clients are meeting with their attorneys for the first time. All students observe the two independent conversations.] After meeting at a social function in the year 2020, Mike and Tom entered into a month-long relationship. Mike knew before he met Tom that he had ILS, a lethal disease transmitted through intercourse, but he failed to disclose this potentially deadly information during the relationship. When the relationship ended, Mike told Tom of his disease, causing Tom extreme emotional distress. Tom has decided to sue Mike for future medical expenses as well as pain and suffering.

*First split.* (Total time is 15 to 20 min.) Class divides into two groups and meets with their respective attorney to plot the negotiation and decision-making strategies and tactics.

### ACT 2 (TOTAL TIME IS 5 TO 10 MIN.)

Two attorneys meet before the trial in an attempt to create a settlement that will keep them from going to court. Both sides have compelling reasons to settle. On the basis of student suggestions from the first split, the attorneys raise basic issues and agree to meet again to finalize the terms.

*Second split.* (Total time is 15 to 20 min.)

Secrets: Although the parties agreed to settle out of court, each has failed to divulge a crucial fact to the other party: Tom found through lab tests that he does not have ILS, and Mike recently inherited a large sum of money.

With the help of the students, the attorneys determine which facts (including secrets) to disclose to the other side.

### ACT 3 (TOTAL TIME IS 5 TO 10 MIN.)

Two attorneys meet in a final attempt to settle the dispute before going to court. The attorneys enact the student suggestions. The two sides may or may not agree before going to court.



*Debrief.* (Total time is 15 to 20 min.)

1. What did you learn about yourself and others?
2. What is the impact of watching someone else negotiate instead of being involved yourself?
3. Was your team's approach ethical? Were the ends fair? Were the means fair?
4. Did you use an absolute or relative standard in determining what was right?
5. Were the attorneys truthful? If not, how did they distort or withhold the truth?
6. If unethical conduct occurred, what motivated it? How could unethical conduct have been avoided? What were the likely consequences of being unethical?

## Notes

1. A previous scene is used to establish the reputation of the male employee and have the audience like him.

2. By Michelle Maiese, who is a graduate student of philosophy at the University of Colorado–Boulder and a part of the research staff at the Conflict Research Consortium.

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