Preface:

The Public Arena and Strategic Human Resource Management

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# Experiential Learning (EL) Exercises

# EL 1a: Reviewing some of the experiences with management or HR management

The experiences that you and others have had with management or human resource management provide a snapshot of the HRM system which is shaping you. You are asked to describe examples of experiences you have had with management or HRM. These experiences might relate to: (i) an interaction you had with a manager which affected you in a positive or not-so-positive way, (ii) an encounter you had with an HR manager which was positive or not-so-positive.

Describe as many experiences as come to mind. You should relay your experiences to other group members and then pick one or two which you want to report to the class.

* What are the dominant themes?
* Were the experiences mostly positive or negative experiences? If they were positive, what made them positive? If they were not positive, why were they not positive?
* What types of organizations are represented in the experiences you and your classmates have described?

## EL 1b: Reviewing some of the experiences you have had with public organizations

You are asked to describe examples of experiences you have had connecting to people in the public arena. These experiences might relate to people who work in the following strategic areas: (i) general public interest strategies such as education and health which benefit everyone, (ii) regulatory strategies in assuring public safety (police and fire), workplace safety, food and drug safety, and transportation, and (iii) non-market oriented strategies such as protecting the environment and long term interests of society.

Describe as many experiences as come to mind. You might be asked to meet with a group and relay your experiences and then report them to the class.

* What are the dominant themes?
* Were the experiences mostly positive or negative experiences? If they were positive, what made them positive? If they were not positive, why were they not positive?
* What types of organizations are represented in the experiences you and your classmates have described?

# EL 2: What is the ‘publicness’ of an organization?

There is an increasing number of organizational forms that defy easy categorization in the traditional dichotomy of public vs. private. Examples of this blurring are research and development cooperatives, government sponsored enterprises, defense contractors, and public corporations, privately funded hospitals, schools and universities. Barry Bozeman suggested that organizations might be placed on a dimension of publicness. As such, publicness is “the degree to which the organization is affected by political authority”[[1]](#endnote-1) and is public to the extent that it is constrained by political authority and private when constrained by economic authority.

Brainstorm a list of organizations, both public and private. Your instructor might begin the class by asking you to describe your experiences. You might be asked to meet with a group and relay your experiences and then report them to the class.

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Assessing ‘publicness’ of an organization  |  |

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| --- |
| For the following questions, on a separate piece of paper record the number that represents the publicness of an organization.  |
| **1** What is the degree the organization strategies and objectives are affected by political authorities and influence of decision-makers responding to political interests and needs?  |
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| Very Little; dealing with other political and public interests is not at all necessary in working in this organization |  | Medium; some dealing with interests is necessary. |  | Very much; dealing with other political and public interests is an essential and crucial part of what this organization does. |
| **2** To what extent is the organization private in being constrained by the economic activities in the market?  |
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| Very little; the economic activities of the market have no impact on our ability to do our work done. |  | Medium; freedom from the market |  | Very much; the organization’s activities are very constrained by the influence of the market. |

* Rate each organization you identified on the scale from low to high.
* Describe the characteristics of organizations constrained by political factors?
* Describe the characteristics of those constrained by economic factors?

# EL 3: Defining team norms and competencies

Most of us have experienced conflicts or disagreements when working with others in groups or teams. Often, these disagreements are concerned with different norms, expectations over appropriate ways of working together:

* She never arrived for team meetings on time and when she came, she didn’t have anything done.
* He was so convincing and persuasive that he got us to take on a project that we were really not interested in. He had worked with the organization before and, doing another project with them would be good experience. The frustration is that we carried him during the entire project, a project we had no interest in.
* During the first meetings, all we did was talk, talk, talk. Nothing got done. Then, we had a crisis and only a week to do the project.

This exercise is based on the assumption that the success of a team-like environment is based on the ability to develop positive norms and customs up front, before the project begins. It encourages you to define the effective and less effective behaviours in working together. Use these incidents to define norms and expectations for working well together in a team project in your class.

As a first step, think about experiences you have had working with others in groups on class projects or work experiences. Identify 1 example of your best experience and 1 example of a less positive experience.

Think of an example of a group experience that worked especially well. Describe this experience and why it worked well. What were expectations and norms illustrated? Based on this, what norms and expectations would be useful for our group?

**Example**

**Norms Illustrated**

**Norms useful for our group**

**Norms Illustrated**

**Norms useful for our group**

Think of an example of a group member who was especially helpful. Describe this person and why he or she was helpful. What were expectations and norms illustrated? Based on this, what norms and expectations would be useful for our group?

**Example**

**Norms Illustrated**

**Norms useful for our group**

Think of an example of a group member who was **not** especially helpful. Describe this person and why he or she was not especially helpful. What were expectations and norms not illustrated? Based on this, what norms and expectations would be useful for our group?

**Example**

**Norms Illustrated**

**Norms useful for our group**

After defining these experiences, identify 4-5 competencies your team will use. Each competency should be described by statements based on examples of behaviors that will work well and those that team members want to avoid. Then, identify actions that team members might practice when they observe others in their group not working within these competencies.

# References

1. Bozeman, B., (1987) *All organizations are public: Bridging public and private organization theories*. San Francisco; Jossey Bass, p. xi [↑](#endnote-ref-1)