**Eastern Academy of Management Conference**

**Experiential Learning Activity Proposal**

**January 23, 2017**

**Title:** Building Collaboration and Resolving Conflict through “Gridwork”

**Abstract/ Gridwork Description:**

Gridwork is an experiential team learning activity used with new MBA students participating in a residential MBA week-long course designed to orient students to the MBA program and lay the groundwork for key MBA topics covered in the program. Gridwork requires collaboration and resolving conflict as teams compete against each other in order to be the first team to: 1) Build a grid using a template, and; 2) Discover the correct pre-determined path through the grid. In addition to being a fun, icebreaker, the activity servers as an advance organizer for key concepts including teams, communication, collaboration, and conflict resolution which will be introduced during the debrief session of the activity and then during the residency course. Not only do students gain knowledge of themselves and each other during the activity, the instructor gains valuable insight into the behavioral styles of class participants. The de-briefing of the students’ lessons learned, provides content for class discussions throughout the following week long residency. Student’s often report the Gridwork activity as a key highlight during their week long MBA learning experience.

**Gridwork Learning Objectives:**

At the completion of the exercise, students will be able to:

* Relate their behavior during Gridwork to key management concepts discussed throughout the residency MBA orientation course;
* Recognize their own, and their colleagues, behavioral styles;
* List basic principles of teamwork;
* Discuss characteristics of collaboration; and,
* Identify different conflict styles.

**How Gridwork relates to the study of management and facilitates student learning:**

New MBA students in the study of management typically are introduced to foundational concepts, theories and models including communication, collaboration, teams and conflict resolution during their first MBA course. Gridwork provides a way for students to experience different learning modalities, including kinesthetic, visual and auditory. Gridwork also allows students to relate to foundational concepts, theories and models as instructors draws on the learning experience in subsequent lectures. For example, take Maslow’s element of “Trust.” One could ask, “Did your level of trust of fellow team members increase or decrease during the activity?” A follow up question, “Why is trust important to teams?” could lead to a discussion on Lencioni’s, “Dysfunction of Teams.”

As students seek to find the pre-determined path, they must collaborate and communicate with each other. Student learning would be facilitated as students debrief what was successful and what was not successful in regards to their collaboration methods and strategy during the activity. Aspects of successful collaboration could be listed as students describe how they collaborated during the Gridwork activity. This list could be the basis of a discussion to take place later in the course when the subject of teams is covered in depth. Student learning would further be facilitated as a debriefing and teaching on communication styles occurred during the course. For example, some MBA programs give student’s behavioral assessments, such as DISC, to facilitate learning about one’s communication, decision making and leadership styles. Students could identify what type of communication style they used during the Gridwork activity: In the case of DISC, directive, talkative, supportive or cautious.

Gridwork involves two teams working through the grid at the same time. Inevitably, the teams run into each other about midway through the activity. Teams must decide how to overcome this conflict. This conflict scenario provides an opportunity to discuss the 5 major types of approaches for handling conflict (Competition, Collaboration, Avoidance, Accommodation and Compromise) based on Blake and Mourton’s Managerial Grid Model and modified by an many other scholars.

**Instructions for presenting and debriefing the exercise**:

The Gridwork activity is divided into three parts: Pre-activity, Part One and Part Two.

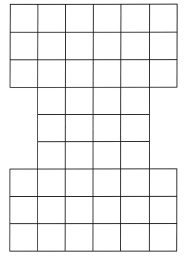
**Pre-activity:** **Establishing the Teams**

1. Divide the students into two opposing teams of no more than nine students per team.
2. Assign one student per team to be the observer of team dynamics and team communication for Part One. Assign another student the observer role for Part Two.
3. Assign one student per team to be the path facilitator for Part One.
4. Without letting the team hear you, ask the observers for both Part One and Part Two to observe how the team organizes and sets out a strategy for the activity. Ask them to observe communication, collaboration and conflict in the team.
5. Without letting the teams hear or see the grid with the pre-determined path, give the path facilitator a copy of the path. Ask them not to let anyone see the path.

**Part One: Building the Grid**

Following are instructions to relay to students for Part One of the Gridwork activity:

1. The purpose of Part One: Building the Grid is to be the first team to complete the grid.
2. Use the grid template shown in figure 1, to replicate the diagram with masking tape.
3. You are competing with an opposing team, so do your best to come up with the most expedient strategy for laying down the grid.



**Figure 1. Grid Template**

After all the grids have been created gather the participants together for the following debrief.

**Part One: Debrief**

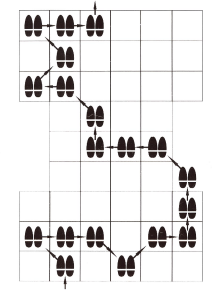
Ask the observer the following questions. Participants can chime in, too.

1. How did the team organize themselves and strategize to lay down the chart?
2. How did the team members communicate?
3. How did team members collaborate?
4. Did you notice any conflict?
5. How was the conflict resolved?

**Part Two: Discovering the correct pre-determined path through the grid.**

Following are instructions to relay to students for discovering the correct pre-determined path through the grid.

1. The purpose of Part Two is to be the first team to discover the correct pre-determined path through the grid. The winner is the first team to walk the correct path which includes the final step outside the grid.
2. Two teams will be on the same path, but going in different directions.
3. Each team will have only one person at a time in the grid.
4. Team members take turns going through the grid.
5. A path facilitator will help teams determine if the path they are taking is correct or incorrect by saying “yes” for correct steps, and “no” for incorrect steps. The first person steps into the grid. If the first step is correct, the person continues to the next block. Their turn is up when they step into an incorrect block and are told, “no.” At that point, they go to the end of the line and the next person steps into the grid to try to find the correct path.
6. The team may coach the individual who is moving through the grid. However, the team must be outside the grid and may only communicate verbally. Do not write notes, draw maps or use any objects as markers.
7. The movement through the grid is through blocks that are next to each other. The movement can be forward, backwards, sideways, and diagonal. There is only one backwards step and there is only one step outside the grid.



**Figure 2. Grid with Pre-determined Path**

After all the teams have successfully walked thorough the grid, gather the participants together for  
 the following debrief.

**Part Two: Debrief**

Ask the observer the following questions. Participants can chime in, too.

1. How did the team organize themselves and strategize to find the correct path?
2. How did the team members communicate?
3. How did team members collaborate?
4. Did you notice any conflict?
5. How was the conflict resolved?

**A summary of student reaction:**

Overall, students react very positively to Gridwork. Students say that they especially enjoy the inter-activity and that it is fun to get up and get moving as part of learning. Some students like the competitive aspect of the activity. Students report that it helped them to feel at ease and get to know other colleagues in a non-threatening manner. Students say that it is easier to grasp key management concepts after having experienced the concept.

**How the exercise will be demonstrated during a 30 minute session at the ELA Conference:**

This exercise will be demonstrated in an interactive format as follows:

7 minutes: Introduce self, the rationale and objectives of the Gridwork activity.

10 minutes: Divide the group into teams and have participants experience as much of Part Two  
 of the activity in the allotted time. Note: I will lay out the grids prior to the session.

6 minutes: Bring the group back together for a debrief using the same questions presented  
 in the activity instructions.

7 minutes: Facilitate a group discussion on how participants could use Gridwork in their  
 management course, including what business concepts, theories and models they   
 would utilize.

**References:**

Blake, R. R., & Mouton, J. S. (1964). The managerial grid. Houston, TX: Gulf.

DISC, Target Training International.

Lencioni, P.M. (2002). The Five Dysfunctions of a Team. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.