

INTEREL ACTION LEARNING FIELD NOTES

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This Action Learning Lab procedure was developed by Grant Bright for management training workshops at IBM Corporation in Tucson, Arizona.

Interel's Pyramid (PD-1) is used for the Action Task portion of the procedure.

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Introduction & Overview

This Action Learning procedure is designed to provide participants with insight into the differences between the typical hierarchical management style and the newer self-directed team approach.

This Action Task is conducted in two phases. The first phase demonstrates the management-directed style, the second phase models the self-directed team approach.

The Pyramid should be set up in advance, preferably in an area outside the classroom. This will allow the management team to have a "private" meeting prior to joining the rest of the operators of the Pyramid at the start of Phase One.

At the conclusion of each phase of the Action Task, a debriefing or discussion is conducted by the facilitator.

It is useful to allow some time between the two phases of the activity rather than conducting them back to back. For example, in a one day program on Leadership, the facilitator might want to conduct Phase One early in the day following a discussion of how organizations at the beginning of the Industrial Age patterned themselves after the military model. Then, later in the day after discussing the organizational implications of the shift from an industrial society to a knowledge-based society, Phase Two can be used to demonstrate the value of empowerment, participation, and self-directed teams.

Facilitation / Phase One

To initiate the first phase, ask each participant to randomly select an assignment slip from an envelope or box. Assignment slips are prepared prior to session by copying and cutting up the provided "Assignment Slip" sheet.

Ask the "CEO" to step to the front of the room to receive a copy of the "Instructions for Pyramid Activity- Phase One" and the "Organizational Chart."

Direct the CEO to hold a management meeting with those participants with "Functional Manager" or "Manager" assignments prior to joining the rest of the operators at the Pyramid. Inform them that the 30 minutes allowed for Phase One has now begun.

Ask all the participants with "Operator" assignments to follow you to the Pyramid. Give all of the "blind" operators a blindfold (a bandana does nicely) and ask them to put it on. Inform them that management will be arriving to give them more directions shortly.

If observers have been assigned, request that they maintain silence during the activity.

Return to the room where the managers are meeting. Tell them their staffs are at the work site awaiting instructions.

Observe what happens for the remainder of the 30 minutes.

At the end of the 30 minutes, ask everyone to return to the classroom for the debriefing.

Debriefing / Phase One

Assemble the participants and conduct a debriefing after the activity. You might start off by asking what happened and what seemed to prevent the group from completing the activity.

Ask how individuals felt during the exercise (be sure to give each of the various groups (e.g. blind operators, sighted operators, management) an opportunity to discuss how their role in the organization affected their point of view.

If you assigned some individuals to be "observers" during the activity, be sure to include their comments.

Then lead a discussion on what this activity teaches us about the traditional hierarchical organization and its associated management style in which all direction and information flow from the top.

Facilitation / Phase Two

Give the entire group a copy of "Instructions for Pyramid Activity- Phase Two" or displays the information on an overhead projector.

Tell them they have 20 minutes to complete the Phase Two activity.

Remind the group that an "operators training school" is available if they should want one.

(The facilitator should conduct the school when it is required. Simply show the operators how the device works by having them operate it, using the blue strings to move the grabber and black strings to open and close the grabber. This requires that the facilitator be very familiar with the operating instructions. The school will typically take 2-3 minutes. The time required to conduct the school is part of the 20 minute period.)

At the end of the 20 minutes, ask everyone to return to the classroom.

Debriefing / Phase Two

Assemble the participants and debrief following the activity.

You might start off by asking what happened and how the individual felt during the exercise. Draw out the differences between the first and second phase of the activity.

Lead a discussion on what this second activity demonstrates about a self direct team approach. If some individuals were "observers" during the activity, be sure to include their comments.

Instructions for Pyramid Activity/ Phase One

The Group Objective...

Using the blue and black strings to operate the grabber, move the individual reels to form one stack, 4 reels high, at the center of the pyramid.

The following resources are available to you...

Organization Chart

8 String Operators without blindfolds (sighted)

8 String Operators with blindfolds (blind)

6 Managers (4 department managers,
2 functional managers)

1 Pyramid with Grabber and operating strings

4 Reels

30 Minutes

Pyramid Grabber Operating Instructions...

Blue strings position the grabber, vertically and horizontally.

Black strings operate the grabber jaws (either opening or closing,) and can position the grabber.

Black strings that pass to the left of each leg (as seen looking toward the Pyramid center) open the grabber when pulled.

Black strings that pass to the right of each leg (as seen looking toward the Pyramid center) close the grabber when pulled.

Both black and blue strings can support the grabber above the floor. When the grabber is supported by the blue strings, jaws can operate.

When the grabber is supported and positioned by the black strings, jaws are locked.

Additional instructions...

Only management can talk. All "resource" personnel must remain silent throughout the activity.

Nobody may step inside the pyramid. "Inside" is defined as crossing over the cord that connects all four legs at floor level.

All sixteen people supplied as "resources" must be used to operate the strings attached to the pyramid. Those wearing blindfolds must remain blindfolded throughout the activity.

The facilitator may assess appropriate penalties for any violation of the above instructions.

Instructions for Pyramid Activity / Phase Two

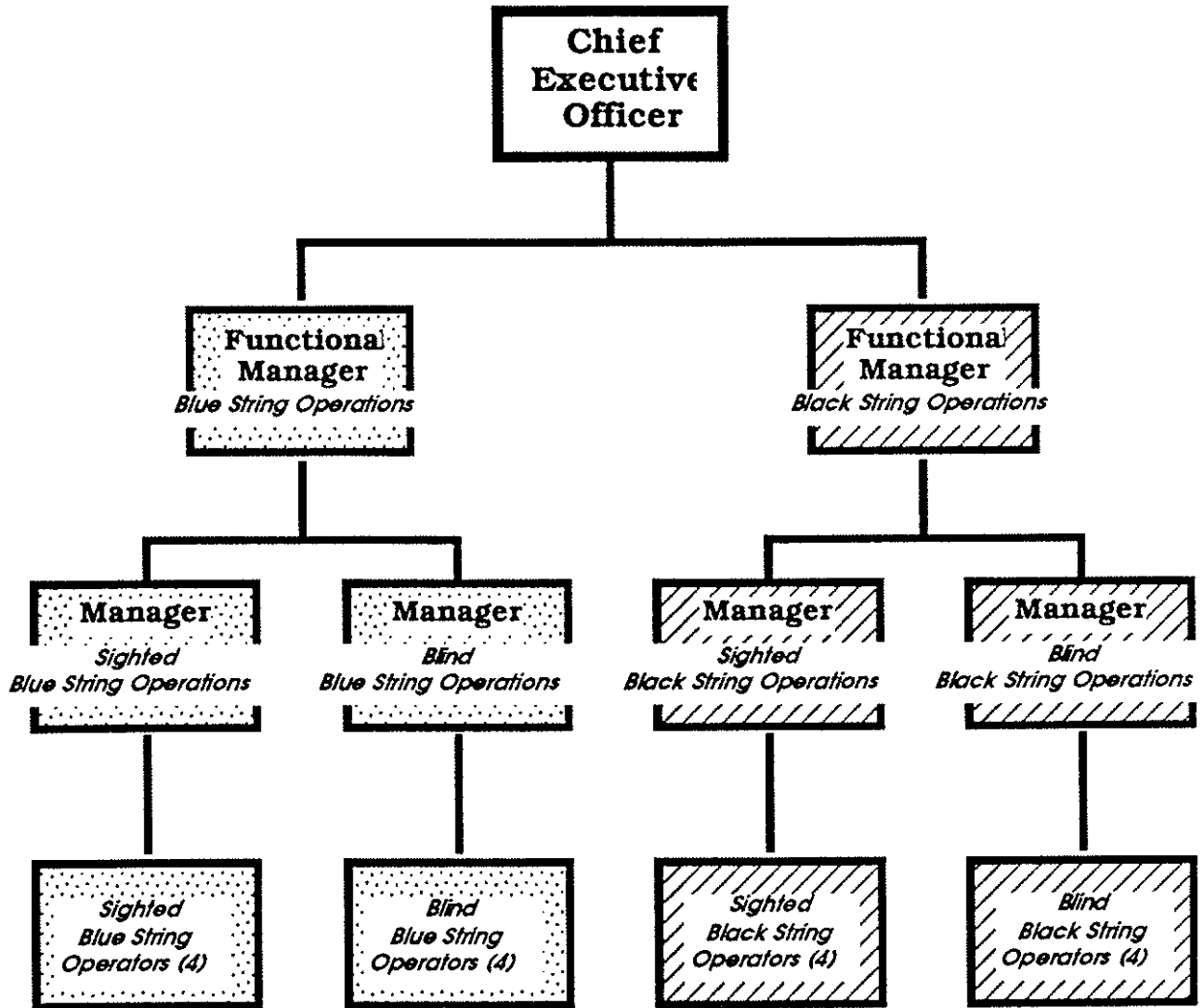
Group Objective...

Using the blue and black strings to operate the grabber device, move each of the reels that are stacked in the center to one of the four marked locations on the floor.

The following resources are available to you:

- All members of the group
- 1 pyramid device with grabber and control strings
- 4 stacked reels
- An operators training school (for individuals who will be manipulating the strings)
- 20 minutes

Organizational Chart



Note: Number of operators/managers can vary according to group size.
Some individuals may be assigned the role of observer.

Assignment Slips

Cut up and place in envelope or box



Functional Manager <i>Blue String Operations</i>	Chief Executive Officer	Functional Manager <i>Black String Operations</i>	
Manager <i>Sighted Blue String Operations</i>	Manager <i>Blind Blue String Operations</i>	Manager <i>Sighted Black String Operations</i>	Manager <i>Blind Black String Operations</i>
<i>Sighted Blue String Operator</i>	<i>Blind Blue String Operator</i>	<i>Sighted Black String Operator</i>	<i>Blind Black String Operator</i>
<i>Sighted Blue String Operator</i>	<i>Blind Blue String Operator</i>	<i>Sighted Black String Operator</i>	<i>Blind Black String Operator</i>
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<i>Sighted Blue String Operator</i>	<i>Blind Blue String Operator</i>	<i>Sighted Black String Operator</i>	<i>Blind Black String Operator</i>
Observer	Observer	Observer	Observer