Experiential Learning Programs: An Analysis and Review

by

Lakshmi Balachandra

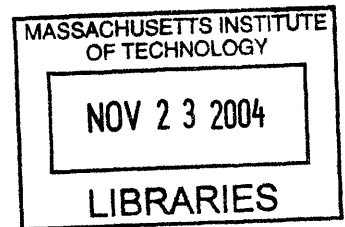B.A. Environmental Studies, University of Chicago, 1995

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Abstract

Experiential Learning programs have increasingly been included in corporate training programs. Today there is a wide range of experiential learning programs using a variety of methodologies. However, there is a surprising dearth of research on the effectiveness of such programs for learning in business.

This thesis reviews and analyzes one form of experiential learning – a program that utilizes outdoor activities for leadership and teamwork training – to understand the value proposition of such education for corporate clients. From this, a framework for implementing a successful experiential learning program was suggested and then analyzed by the design and delivery of a new, original experiential training program utilizing improvisational theater techniques. Finally, a method to evaluate experiential learning programs both before and after purchase is suggested.

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Acknowledgements

This thesis was really a business plan – for me, personally. I set out to explore this field as I believed it held so much promise. Over my varied professional life prior to MIT Sloan, I never found my calling. Experiential learning seemed like a way to meld my hobbies with my professional aspirations. More importantly, I hoped there would be a job in this field that I could pursue upon graduation.

As I leave MIT Sloan with my MBA, I believe I have found a field that has much to offer the more global field of business education. And in the process, I have also found a new passion – teaching. I will graduate in June, 2004 and then start my new career in the field of experiential learning by teaching a class on improvisation that will be offered in the Fall MBA leadership curriculum at MIT Sloan. In addition, I plan to do follow-up research in this field to further validate the valuable learning in business that experiential learning programs can provide.

I must first and foremost thank Lou Bergholz for his invaluable insight, experience and wisdom in the field of experiential learning, corporate training and education in general. I could not have written this thesis without his frank, candid words on the experiential learning industry.

I owe much of this research and my first employment upon graduation to Professor Dan Ariely. Without his sponsorship, my class Using Improvisation In Business would never have happened. His commitment to helping students find their own way is one of the

most amazing qualities to find in a tenured professor. The MIT Sloan student body is truly lucky to have such an individual amongst their faculty.

I profoundly thank Professor Wanda Orlikowski for agreeing to be my thesis advisor and for helping me through this process. It was always such a delight to spend time with her and learn from her vast research experience.

Special appreciation also goes to my parents R. and Sharada Balachandra for being patient with me (and my terrible moods) through this process; in particular, I have to thank my business professor father for his insight and support in this thesis research process.

Last but certainly not least, this thesis and my MBA experience could not have been survived without the love and support and constant care from my loving husband, Patrick Stern. As our first year of marriage coincided with my second year of business school and this thesis…I dedicate this thesis and the next fifty years to him.

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INTRODUCTION

In today's corporate world, there is a need for well-rounded managers. Managers today are valued for their abilities to act quickly and adapt to situations involving other cultures and environments. While today's business schools and current corporate training methods offer practical applications for future managers, these managers often lack training in the so-called 'soft-skills' needed in their inter-personal roles. As a result, there has been a great deal of interest in programs that train participants in these soft-skills that go beyond what is taught in traditional business education.

This new way of 'experiencing' or learning skills from fields not inherently related to business has been referred to as "Experiential Learning." To be called experiential, according to Brad Lee Thompson of Training Magazine, 'the learning must be participative, interactive, rich with feedback, adaptable to the changing needs of the learner and guided by clear expectations for the educational outcomes.'[1] Experiential learning, many say, is intuitively appreciable as most people learn best by *doing*, not by taking notes during a lecture. This idea was first delineated by David Kolb in his article, Management and the Learning Process, in the California Management Review.[2] In this analysis, Kolb explains how classroom and corporate education can be enhanced through various 'experiential' exercises, as learning styles differ from person to person.

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[1] Thompson, Brad Lee. "Training in the Great Outdoors" Training, May, 1991, p. 46.
[2] Kolb, David A. "Management and the Learning Process," California Management Review, Spring, 1976, Volume 18, No. 3, pp. 21-31.

The idea behind experiential learning in the corporate context is that once you participate in an experiential learning activity, and you master tasks that you thought impossible for you, obstacles in the workplace often pale in comparison.[3] This idea is certainly not new. The best definition for experiential learning however, probably could come from a fortune cookie: as Confucius once said, "I hear and I forget, I see and I remember, I do and I understand." This 'Aha!' moment, as it is referred to in experiential learning curriculum, only happens through an experiential mode of education.

Experiential Learning programs have been increasingly included in corporate training programs. Today there is a wide range of experiential learning programs in a variety of methodologies. One of the most famous of these is Outward Bound. Outward Bound was created in 1941 to teach a one-month course in seamanship and survival skills to British seamen and described its program as "an educational and training system for strengthening an individual both physically and spiritually." The school was named for the sailors' romantic description of themselves as "outward bound" as they left the safety of the harbor.[4] Initially Outward Bound was structured as a way to have individuals challenge themselves. In the past five years, the organization has re-focused its energies on corporate clients, creating custom-designed programs for individual companies.[5]

In addition to Outward Bound, there are numerous providers of corporate 'experiential learning' programs today. These programs expose participants to training not ordinarily

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[3] Gall, Adrienne. "You Can Take the Manager Out of the Woods, but…" Training and Development Journal, March 1987, p. 54.
[4] Thompson, Brad Lee. "Training in the Great Outdoors" Training, May, 1991, p. 47.
[5] Pla, Ruth Lee. "Outward Bound: Why Leaders Need to Get Physical," Management, September, 2002, p. 55.

offered in traditional business education or in corporate training sessions. Skills such as acting, directing, outdoor activities, comedy, cooking, etc. would be catalogued as "Experiential Learning" programs in today's corporate training directories.

While all programs vary in design, true experiential learning programs should take learners through four distinct phases: learners gain conceptual and theoretical knowledge, take part in a behavioral simulation, analyze the activity, and connect the theory and activity with prior on-the-job or life situations.[6] Although experiential learning has been delineated in this way from Confucius to Kolb, there remain numerous critics of such programs. Essentially, if learning from such programs was as easy, simple and effective as Confucius or Kolb described, shouldn't everyone incorporate these programs? Why don't more companies invest training dollars in these programs?

Often, critics of these programs claim that outdoor ropes courses, play-acting, or cooking are little more than 'expensive days at play.'[7] These programs are justifiably critiqued; there is no clear way to determine the results from implementing the experiential learning program. Also, as experiential learning programs are by and large aimed at developing soft skills – teamwork, leadership and group problem-solving – which at best, are extremely difficult to measure and, at worst, don't resonate with those seeking more immediate corporate results.[8] Last, but certainly not least, experiential learning programs

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[6] Brown, Donald and Don Harvey. An Experiential Approach to Organization Development, Sixth Edition. Prentiss Hall, 2000, p. 99.
[7] Schettler, Joel, "Learning By Doing." Training, April, 2002, p. 38.
[8] Ibid.

are expensive; according to Nancy Gansneder, a professor at the University of Virginia, "these programs can cost an arm and a leg."[9]

What this Thesis will Discuss

This thesis seeks to analyze experiential learning programs to understand the value proposition they present for corporate clients. In this thesis, I explore what one such experiential learning program offers its corporate clients, one that utilizes the skills from outdoor activities. Chapter 2 introduces this program and discusses its clients and their rationale for purchasing the experiential learning program. Chapter 3 is an assessment of two uses of this experiential learning program, as well as the purchase process of such programs. Chapter 4 discusses the results of this assessment and introduces a new framework for implementing a successful experiential learning program. In essence, this framework suggests that for a successful experiential learning program, three criteria must be met: customization, repetition, and delivery. In particular, the material should be properly customized for the organization. The material should be repeated so that it is not viewed as a one-time, social 'expensive day at play' event. And finally, it is important that the material is delivered in a fun, memorable manner.

Applying these ideas, I created my own experiential learning program where I could explore and test the framework developed in this thesis. Chapter 5 discusses the program I developed and implemented. It discusses how I used the three criteria to develop the program and how the program was received by its clientele. It presents a way in which to evaluate experiential learning programs by focusing on four required attributes:

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[9] Ibid.

reputation, customization, commitment to the client, and willingness to change or evaluate the program.

Finally in Chapter 6, I present my conclusions from this research. Specifically, I propose a new method to evaluate experiential learning programs both before and after purchase. While these findings are valuable considerations when implementing experiential learning programs, it is also important to note they may be disregarded when corporations are deciding to utilize learning programs. In essence, some of the unquantifiable or intangible benefits of an 'expensive day at play' may outweigh the need for experiential learning to be 'worth' the investment.

The number of providers and variety of styles of experiential learning in corporate training continues to grow. Due to the dramatic increase in options, experiential learning programs will require closer scrutiny by corporations in their purchase process. It will be increasingly important to utilize the insights developed in this research when selecting an experiential learning program.

CASE STUDY: THE WARREN CENTER AND OUTDOOR ACTIVITIES

Overview

'The Warren Center Conference Center and Inn is a full-service conference center located on over 200 acres of lakefront woodland' in Ashland, MA. [10] The facility itself is a 50 acre outdoor activity center. It offers a full range of services – from weddings and conferences to training activities. Corporations can rent out the entire facility for their own activities. The Warren Center offers its own training programs as well. Blue chip corporate clients often send the entire workforce here for their group activity/training activities.[11]

The Warren Center has a dedicated sales force of three individuals who offer both the Center's facilities and its training programs. They price their services based on the number of individuals they will need to facilitate that day. They also include the costs of designing the program, if the client requests these services.[12]

The activities offered by the Warren Center are focused on teambuilding. What differentiates the Warren Center from other teambuilding programs, is the use of outdoor 'experiential' games that utilize physical and/or engineering abilities. There are three primary games that the Warren Center facilitators use to illustrate group learning: 1) Islands in the Stream, 2) Balls in Buckets and 3) Raft Building. (For a description of these games, please see appendix B.)

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[10] www.warrencenter.com
[11] Conversation with Lou Bergholz, coordinator for the Warren Center, 2003.
[12] Ibid.

All three games utilize the outdoor setting – in particular the Raft Building exercise which takes place on the nearby pond. These games are not new in design; these games and other similar ones have been used by the Warren Center and other teambuilding programs for years. However, the Warren Center takes great care to tailor the programs to each institution's learning objectives and culture.[13]

Lou Bergholz, the coordinator for the Warren Center, customizes the design of each training program depending on the client's goals. Bergholz will spend several hours with each client to determine what type of learning is expected from the Warren Center outdoor activity based program.[14] Once an understanding is in place, he will work with the client to design an appropriate outdoor activity-based program that utilizes many of the 'games' and 'teamwork activities' that the Warren Center regularly uses.[15] The differentiator is in the debriefing following each group activity. Depending on what the client wants to address in these exercises, Bergholz will design a script for the facilitators to follow.[16]

MIT Sloan School of Management

The MIT Sloan School of Management utilizes a full suite of services offered by the Warren Center for the MBA orientation program. This includes renting the Center's

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[13] Ibid.
[14] Ibid.
[15] Ibid.
[16] Ibid.

facility, designing the program, hiring a large number of facilitators, training for these facilitators, training the Sloan student facilitators, and full catering services.[17]

The MIT Sloan School's MBA orientation is a two week program which includes a combination of lectures on Sloan school processes and "icebreaker" activities for the new students to get to know each other. The first week encompasses lectures and discussions on courses, ethics, and leadership. In the second week, the students are introduced to their core teams. These teams will be their teams for the entire semester, and they will do all of their first semester MBA work together.

Once the teams are announced, the students spend the first day on a fun, 'teambuilding' activity, by participating in a scavenger hunt around Boston. The next day, they are sent to the Warren Center for further team building activities. Each team is assigned its own facilitator to guide them throughout the day. They participate in three group activities that have been designed to illustrate the ups and downs they will face working as a team over the course of the semester. It is an all-day journey that begins at 7:00am with an hour long bus ride to the center and ends around 6:00pm. The students spend the entire day with their teammates, including sitting together for the bus rides and eating lunch together.

Bergholz has worked with the MIT Sloan School for the past three years. Prior to this, another sales representative from the Warren Center was the lead contact for the Sloan

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[17] Conversation with Catherine Gamon, Director of Student Affairs, MIT Sloan MBA Program, 2003.

School.[18] In all, the MIT Sloan School has utilized the Warren Center's training program for the past six years. Every year, the coordinator of the Warren Center works with MIT Sloan School Student Educational Services department to create a program that incorporates issues that are at the forefront of the MIT Sloan curriculum and concern. The idea is that while the students are going through the 'experiential learning' curriculum, they receive a further introduction to Sloan School expectations and procedures.[19]

To implement this day long experiential training program for approximately 350 students requires two days of full rental of the Warren Center facility, sixty professional facilitators, one head facilitator (Bergholz) representing the Warren Center, and catering (a cookout lunch) for everyone (350 students, 60 facilitators, and 60 second year MBA student "pilots" who assist with the training but are unpaid). This costs the school roughly $60,000, which is the largest single expense for the orientation program.[20]

After the program ends, there is a formal review of the entire orientation by the students. The surveys are used to re-evaluate the orientation program every year. Every year, the MIT Sloan Student Educational Services meets with faculty, and the Deans of the school to re-assess whether the Warren Center experiential program should be renewed. For the time being, it continues to be an integral component of the MBA orientation.[21]

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[18] Ibid.
[19] Conversation with Bergholz, Gamon, 2003.
[20] Conversation with Gamon, 2003.
[21] Ibid.

Company X

Company X is a large biotech firm located in Cambridge, MA. Company X started as a

high-flying early IPO company in 1996. By 1998, the stock was soaring and the firm had

doubled in number of employees. However, in 1999, the company experienced a product

failure. The company decided to switch gears and completely change its company's

operations. Essentially the company switched from being a product company to being a

service company and depending on one service to sell to clients. This, in turn meant

numerous layoffs.[22]

The Company decided to structure its layoffs in several rounds. This decision meant that

divisions knew they were to be cut, but they would not be let go for many months. This

also produced a huge culture shift in the Company.[23] Employees who had been through

the go-go years were now faced with impending dismissal.

To overcome this feeling of doom and eventual layoffs for numerous employees,

management decided to incorporate ways of improving the environment. They decided

to hire team-building and morale building programs in a sequential manner. Working

with the human resources department, they identified a number of outings or experiential

learning programs with a focus on team-building. One such program was the Warren

Center.[24]

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[22] Conversation with Human Resources Professional, Company X, 2004.
[23] Ibid.
[24] Ibid.

One member of the Company's human resources staff had gone through an Outward Bound program at her previous job. She had loved the experience and thought such a program would be useful for the Company, given its situation and current 'team-building' mandate. She contacted her old firm, and her friend suggested the Warren Center as a local option. She then set up a meeting with the Warren Center facilitator.

The Company hired the Warren Center and its facilitators for a day long team-building program, one that was very similar to the one offered by the Warren Center for the MIT Sloan orientation. There were team-building games, followed by a lunch, followed by more team-building activities. The Company paid approximately $100,000 for this day-long program.[25]

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[25] Ibid.

ANALYSIS OF THE RESULTS

Warren Center: Strengths

In general, all of the students who attend the Warren Center offer very positive reviews on the experience. Many students find each of the exercises well thought out and fun to execute. The Warren Center activities are each created with the Sloan core curriculum in mind. While the games are geared for 'generic' teambuilding, the debrief sessions *after* each game create a discussion that equates the game to life at Sloan. The second-year student 'pilots' – students who accompany the first year students to the Warren Center and act as mentors to each core team – offer additional applicable insights as to how these games illustrate aspects of life at Sloan. Debriefs after each game begin as a discussion about what they learned from playing the game. After this initial review, the facilitator draws a parallel to how this situation relates to normal business situations, or perhaps, a situation in school.

The facilitator then narrows the discussion to a review of how the 'Aha!' moments from the game relate specifically to a Sloan teamwork based situation. When this discussion begins, the facilitator will ask the second year pilot to contribute his or her actual experiences in a Sloan team where this type of situation occurred. Many of the students state that the best part of the day is hearing about these real-world experiences from the

second year pilots – so that they have a better picture of what their lives at Sloan will be like.[26]

The first year students also feel that the time at the Warren Center gives them a unique opportunity to get to know their new core teammates well. It affords them a way of relating to each other that would never occur in the classroom. The physicality of many of the illustrative games requires them to use skills perhaps never used in a school setting. Also, as the students spend the entire day solely in the company of their core teams, they have a much more concentrated time to get to know each other.[27] Once school begins, they face a rush of schoolwork and recruiting frenzy that gives them little time for socializing within their study group teams.

At the end of the day at the Warren Center, the team gathers with its second year pilot to create a 'Team Charter.' Many of the students interviewed felt that this was, in some ways, more important than the group exercises they had spent the day performing.[28] In this exercise, the team creates its operating 'norms' which are to be maintained throughout the semester. Ideally, everyone's goals are stated, and the team draws a charter or mission statement for how the team will function that incorporates each individual's goals for the semester in terms of schoolwork, extracurricular activities, recruiting, socializing and anything else they wish to accomplish in during their first semester at Sloan. In this exercise, many students felt they learned the true nature of their teammates. Many students felt that this mission statement, while incredibly beneficial to

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[26] Conversation with MIT Sloan MBA students, 2003.
[27] Ibid.
[28] Ibid.

have created and worthwhile for the future core semester experience, could not have been

done on campus. They credit the Warren Center facilitators and the games they were

involved with as the entire reason for the charter creation effectiveness.[29]

Similarly, many companies feel that having an experience 'offsite' at the Warren Center

is the primary reason its programs are so effective at building teamwork and creating

goodwill amongst employees. As Company X reported, the result from a day at the

Warren Center was immediately noticeable – everyone seemed a bit more relaxed and

acted more cohesively. Merely having the experience of spending the entire day,

performing tasks never done in the office, has somewhat of a "Survivor" aspect to it. The

participators felt that after spending the day together that they had shared something –

rather like the experience many feel after attending 'boot camp.'

Warren Center: Weaknesses

Although many students enjoy the day at the Warren Center, many feel that the

revelations or learning from the day are not applicable in most situations. Once the

semester is underway, many students say that the discussions and ideas shared about

teamwork, leadership and respect seem to be forgotten.[30] In some ways, the situations

encountered by the games are too far away from the actual experiences in school,

particularly in the core curriculum of business school. While the experience is fun and

the takeaways about team performance are considered valuable, there is no mechanism in

place to re-enforce or review these ideas over time. Over the course of the semester,

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[29] Conversation with MIT Sloan MBA students, 2003
[30] Ibid.

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many teams face problems with team dynamics. From free rider issues to grading complaints, there is a wide range of reasons why teams may fail. Although the Warren Center's curriculum addresses the fact that these issues may arise and such problems are commonplace, there is no follow-up way to address these issues. One repeated suggestion students have had is to repeat the entire Warren Center day mid-way through the core curriculum.[31]

Another problem with the use of the Warren Center program is the lack of commitment from the participants. Both Sloan students and Company X employees stated they felt that because the games are outside and have an element of fun, many people do not fully embrace the debriefing sessions. Many people think of the exercises as only fun and games and do not see parallels between these and their school or work activities.[32]

[31] Ibid.
[32] Conversation with MIT Sloan MBA students, 2003 and Company X employees, 2004.

Observations on the Case Study

As the examination of the Warren Center program has demonstrated, there are many

positive aspects associated with experiential learning curriculum. The Warren Center

offers ways to incorporate a curriculum that is not normally a part of the work or school

environment. It is based on a discipline that would not normally be used in a business

environment – acting and outdoor physical activity. Last, but certainly not least, such a

program is usually fun for the participants.

This issue of fun, however, raises the important question of whether these programs are

really helpful for training. The assessment measures in place for these programs are

rarely quantitative; therefore, any analysis of these programs (including this thesis) is

necessarily subjective.

In many experiential learning programs, there are no clearly defined objectives. With the

Warren Center, many students emphasized the fun aspect of the day there. Any business

learning objective is often de-emphasized in the favor of having fun and building

camaraderie. Many of the Warren Center's games are based on developed organizational

training techniques used widely among corporate training programs; each game has a

specific business training to be learned. In the Sloan MBA orientation, the training is

customized not only to specific business training but also to specific Sloan MBA training.

The Warren Center spends additional time considering how these games can be applied

to Sloan culture. Statements from the MBAs include:

"The games were really fun and I had a chance to get to know my teammates."

"I liked spending the day outside."

"Our facilitator was really strong; it was really interesting to see what the games meant after we finished them."

"It was really great to see how the games played out. I learned a lot about teamwork, and more specifically, my team."

The corporate experience at the Warren Center is similar to the MBA feedback in that many of the games are considered fun, but the business learning related to the day may be more obscured. Many felt the day at an offsite may be more beneficial for the team bonding it fosters. This is not as surprising as the primary objective of the Warren Center training center *is* to teach teamwork.[33] Comments from Company X's employees include:

"At first I had no interest in spending the day outside with my colleagues. It turned out a lot better than I imagined."

"It was a lot of fun; not sure if we'll keep up the lessons learned aspects back at the office."

"I got to know everyone a lot better after the day. Good way to spend a day."

"I felt a lot more team spirit from everyone."

"It was great to see people in new ways, really working together."

"Fun" is clearly a product of many of these programs. However, ascertaining the actual, tangible business learning from these programs was difficult. The interviews reveal a few dominant messages, but overall, the case study shows that there is wide variation in

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[33] www.warrencenter.com and conversation with Lou Bergholz, 2003.

the takeaways from these programs and these are difficult to quantify. Why, then, do

institutions decide to buy these programs if the end results are difficult to measure?

Purchase Process of Experiential Learning Programs

As illustrated in the previous discussion, the purchase process varies from client to client. This process, however, often determines how an experiential learning program will be designed and delivered. A closer examination of the purchase process reveals that experiential learning is based on relationships and overall experience rather than a measure of potential 'business learning' results.

As with many programs, the purchase process is often relational. Word of mouth recommendations from well respected clientele allowed for the expensive program of Warren Center to be sought out often based on the prior experience of its director leading Outward Bound programs.[34]

However, the review process of such program varies highly. With the Warren Center and MIT Sloan, there is a formal survey that is administered to all of the MBA students who participate in the program. This means that the Warren Center program is reviewed by the MIT Sloan administration every year. Due to the highly positive reviews by the students, the administration has been able to renew the Warren Center contract every year.[35] According to MIT Sloan, the MBA orientation program's material is continuously scrutinized and reviewed. Therefore, if the survey of the Warren Center experience does not produce positive feedback, the program would not be continued; especially since there are several faculty members who do not believe this type of

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[34] Conversation with Bergholz, 2003.
[35] Conversation with Catherine Gamon, 2003.

training has value in a business context.[36] However, due to the continued positive feedback from the participants, as well as the customized services offered by the Warren Center, the MBA office continues to value and purchase the Warren Center outdoor-based training.[37]

Company X felt that their purchase of the Warren Center training program was a big success. After various experiential learning programs the Company had tried (Warren Center, creativity consultants, golf outings), a survey was sent out to the participants asking for their feedback. Based on the feedback received, the Company stated that it would use the Warren Center program again in the future, but had no current plans to do so. It decided not to hire the Warren Center for its future experiential learning programs, but would not repeat the same experiential training right away.

Most of the Warren Center's corporate clients survey their employees to determine how the program was received.[38] If the Warren Center fails to 'get the client's message taught' the program is often considered a failure and the client will not purchase the program again. As with in Company X, outdoor-based training is often one of a portfolio of corporate training programs that are offered by clients to their employees. Therefore, once the Warren Center has been used, clients may not use this program again for several years, so that when the Warren Center is re-hired, its program will be considered 'fresh.'

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[36] Ibid.
[37] Conversation with Gamon, Margaret Andrews, Director of the MIT Sloan School of Management MBA program, 2003.
[38] Conversation with Bergholz, 2003.

The Warren Center illustrates that experiential learning programs are purchased based on word of mouth recommendations. However, there seems to be little these programs can offer by way of quantifiable, deliverable returns. Word of mouth is the most important mechanism in the manager's decision to employ one of these types of programs. Surveys conducted after the program has been delivered are the only way of measuring any return on investment in these training programs. Whether or not they actually deliver the 'training' that they were hired to do is indeterminate in most cases. Some respondents may feel that they learned a great deal, while others feel that the experience was just a good, fun way to spend time. The question then remains that if these programs based on experiences – like from 'outdoor activities' – are to be fun, can actual business learning be accomplished?

To accomplish this, programs must learn more about the business they are serving. The Warren Center devotes several meetings with its clients before delivery of its outdoor training program. In these meetings, the client explains what business learning it would like its participants to experience. The lead salesperson/facilitator of the Warren Center will spend time to learn the culture of the client organization. He or she will also spend time with the client to learn what specific issues they want to address with the Warren Center training. In these meetings, the lead facilitator will also draw some guidelines for the client as to what they can expect after the training session – that is – likely learning by the participants and also, what is likely *not* to have been disseminated by a day of outdoor activities. In this way, the Warren Center aligns expectations and results for itself and for its client.

In addition to this preparation work, the Warren Center takes information learned from the client and then devotes more time to training its facilitators about the client and its culture. In essence, the lead facilitator will prepare a training session for the trainers. In this session, they will review what the client hopes to achieve and also what the current issues of the company may be. Even though most of the Center's staff facilitators are well experienced, they are still trained in a clear step-by-step manner that illustrates the client's specific issues and goals. In the case of the MIT Sloan orientation training, the lead facilitator spends a day at the MIT Sloan School training the second year pilots on their roles during the Warren Center outing, even though every one of these pilots has experienced the training themselves during their own first year orientation.

Because of the customization involved and the high level of customer care, the Warren Center clients are all highly positive of their experiences with them.[39] Clients refer to the fact that the Warren Center captures their corporate culture and their individual issues through the tailored discussion following the routine outdoor activity games.[40] While the Warren Center training program participants may not always learn all of the business based curriculum they were intended to learn, the clients usually do not feel short changed. Although a common response by participants of outdoor based training is 'fun,' rather than the curriculum designed learning (teamwork, leadership, et al.), this is often not viewed as problematic by clients of the Warren Center.

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[39] Conversation with Gamon and Laura Wilcox, MIT Sloan School of Management Assistant Director Student Affairs, 2004.
[40] Ibid.

The Warren Center's level of customer care and customization differentiate it from other experiential learning programs.[41] The biggest difference of the Warren Center from other program providers is precisely the level of customization. The Warren Center gears each game into the context of the client's specific issues, while many training courses simply offer the same training materials regardless of the audience. This notion of customization is an interesting aspect of experiential learning that will be explored further in the next chapter.

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[41] Gamon, 20043.

EFFECTIVE EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING

After analyzing the case study of an experiential learning program in outdoor activities, it is clear that there is a wide range of both merits and misconceptions in the field. While many training courses portend to offer a wide range of business applications (public speaking, presence, improvisational skills, teamwork, leadership, and management) the delivery of these skills is often difficult to judge. While various methodologies are used by administrators of these programs, the feedback remains purely subjective. There is no way of objectively measuring the 'learning' from these programs. Questions like 'how do you know if it was the training material used or merely the fun participants had in this training course that contributed to creating a more congenial team?' or 'was the team more productive because of the insight individuals gained from a day of experiential learning, or was it due to some other factor?' or 'one individual is presenting more strongly now than before – is this due to the training program or due to the fact that he now has another year of presentation experience behind him?' are unanswerable merely from surveys of participant feedback.

Based on my analysis, overall, it seems that in order for an experiential learning program to be effective, three criteria need to be met:

1) The material relates to the client's needs and culture.

2) The delivery of the material is applicable to the client's skills and culture.

3) The program and its components are a fun experience for the participants.

In the outdoor-activity based training program, the Warren Center pursued each of these criteria to the fullest. If the client did not feel that each of these areas was met, the client might never purchase the Warren Center's program again. Therefore, addressing these criteria increased the likelihood that the program would meet the client's expectations and would be an effective training session.

Therefore, in order to be effective, an experiential learning program must strive to meet these criteria. What then are the ways in which experiential learning programs can meet these criteria and be effective? I suggest three dimensions are necessary: customization, repetition, and delivery.

1) Customization

One of the most important aspects of experiential learning is that the client feels that the facilitator understands the goals of the client while drafting materials and the method of delivery. The customization process is an important driver in client satisfaction of the program. It is generally agreed that the effectiveness of experiential learning depends on transferring metaphorical lessons to on-the-job applications.[42] As the MIT Sloan case illustrates, the administration feels that The Warren Center creates a meaningful learning program for orientation as the facilitators tailor the activities to Sloan culture. As Adrienne Gall, the managing editor of *Training & Development Journal* outlines, "to design a highly relevant program, providers must find out exactly what the work group or individual sees as its strengths and weaknesses and what kinds of problems must be

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[42] Thompson, Brad Lee. "Training in the Great Outdoors." Training, May, 1991, p. 49.

addressed."[43] The Warren Center does this well and even takes it one step further. The facilitators and the second year student pilots who are all part of the delivery of the training program for the new first year students undergo an extensive training session *themselves* on the culture and issues to address during the orientation delivery. In this way, the Warren Center creates a unique, valuable curriculum for the Sloan orientation that the school continues to purchase and has delivered to its new students for the past six years.

The Warren Center facilitators have a stock of materials they can draw from to create their customized programs. Essentially, they have 'canned' activities that they take 'off the shelf' and customize according to the culture, issues and vocabulary of the client. In constructing a client program, the facilitators consider which activities can be tailored to express the client's goals the best.[44] Therefore, the customization process is another cost driver for the Warren Center. In designing a program, the Warren Center must consider the time of customization, the number of facilitators required, and the costs of renting the space for the day.

2) Repetition

Once the specific activities and the customized client specific message to be delivered are decided, the Warren Center then hopes to produce a reaction of 'Aha!' among its participants for each activity.[45] With these 'aha' moments, another factor emerges.

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[43] Gall, Adrienne, "You Can Take the Manager out of the Woods, but…" Training & Development Journal, March, 1987, p. 55.
[44] Bergholz, 2003.
[45] Bergholz, 2003.

While the applicability of each activity is important for the participants to understand in a contextual manner, the repetition of these exercises is the only way that true learning of the objectives can occur. While one day at the Warren Center may result in 'fun' as the takeaway, the deeper learning of the teamwork and leadership curriculum may not happen until the course is repeated.[46] Most providers agree that to obtain maximum carryover from the training, longer programs are essential.[47] As with MIT Sloan, the best learning from the Warren Center curriculum is seen from the second year MBA student pilots, students who return to the Warren Center to mentor the first year teams. With the second exposure to the curriculum a year later, the learning points are reiterated and are much clearer as the objective takeaway from the exercise. Experiencing the game initially may be more fun, but the second experience produces a lasting impression about the teamwork or leadership message designed to be illustrated in the game.

Thus, the notion of repeatability is another driver of effective experiential learning. While an experiential learning program may believe it can deliver certain learning objectives, these may not actually be realized with the first session. At the MIT Sloan School, the administration and faculty would like to repeat the Warren Center session again midway during the core curriculum first semester. However, they are unable to justify the expense for another entire day devoted to this training.[48]

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[46] Bergholz, Gamon, 2003.
[47] Gall, Adrienne, "You Can Take the Manager out of the Woods, but..." Training & Development Journal, March, 1987, p. 58.

[48] Gamon, 2003.

One goal of the Warren Center's facilitators is to have the client understand the repetitive aspect of experiential learning. This message is often lost, however. Most experiential learning programs are not inexpensive propositions. Therefore, the idea of spending a large amount a second time, to repeat the program - without proven results from the first purchase - is a difficult value proposition. The Warren Center would ideally like to see one of two client demands:

1) We just want our participants to have fun for a day.

Or

2) We want to deliver the following message about our company, and in order to do this, we (including the senior management) are going to invest in training for the next six to eighteen months.

In both of these scenarios, the Warren Center believes it creates lasting, happy, return clientele. Most of these types of clients understand that the learning from this sort of training does not happen overnight. In addition, like Company X, most of these clients use the Warren Center or outdoor activity based training as a component of a suite of training methodologies.[49] In this way, the Warren Center is another form of delivering one continuous message across the company, a message that can be repeated or slightly altered by another form of training, whether experiential or not. In this way, while change (or a new message) is difficult and is hard to do, many companies effectively transition into their new state by utilizing programs like outdoor activity based learning to their fullest capacity.

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[49] Company X, Bergholz, 2004.

Conversely, when a client is seeking a 'one-hit-wonder' (where the client believes that hiring and developing a customized experiential learning curriculum delivered by the Warren Center will change the culture of their firm), the Warren Center's reviews from the client are not satisfactory. Even if the client participants had fun, the business message is not delivered and so the client is not satisfied. This is in part due to the client having set its expectations far too high for a one-time training session. As a result, in this situation, the client is not considering the value of repetition and time for the experiential learning to be effective in its design and delivery of the business learning.[50]

3) Delivery

A final and key aspect of the success of an experiential learning program lies in another dimension. While there is no doubt that one key takeaway must be 'fun' for the participants, another is in the delivery of the learning material. In the Warren Center, the activities are all geared to be fun for the participants – nothing is *too* difficult or physically challenging. As such, the Warren Center measures itself on whether or not the participants in every program did have fun with the games. If they did not, the facilitators review them and discuss whether such games are worth repeating in future training sessions.[51] Many of these games have been used as training materials for over twenty years in various programs (Outward Bound and others); therefore, these games have been proven to contribute to learning about teamwork.[52] However, as the Warren Center seeks to customize its games to the distinct culture and learning message desired by the client, some games may be less effective at portraying business learning than

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[50] Bergholz, 2003.
[51] Bergholz, 2003.
[52] Ibid.

others. Therefore, the Center reexamines these activities to understand why the application may have fallen flat.[53]

Based on my personal experience in acting and improvisational theater, I believed that there were skills from theater based training that could be useful in business learning. To determine if my framework for effective experiential learning as I have outlined in this chapter, I decided to produce my own experiential learning program around theater training. In particular, improvisation training that incorporated the three values I have proposed in this thesis: customization, repetition and delivery. I wanted to see if these three dimensions when incorporated into a program would make a difference and produce effective experiential learning.

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[53] Bergholz, 2003.

Application of Framework

Prior to attending business school, I spent three years taking improvisation lessons with the Groundlings school in Los Angeles and performing comedy improvisation professionally with a comedy improvisation troupe in San Diego. I then used these improvisational skills all the time, often unknowingly, in every aspect of my professional career as an entrepreneur, an investment banker, and venture capitalist.

When business academics use the term 'improvisation' they are more likely to use it as a metaphor for business practices within an organization. There are countless articles on jazz improvisation and the organization.[54] Rosabeth Moss Kanter of Harvard Business School has written an article on "Strategy as Improvisational Theater" where she shows the skills learned from performing improvisation are similar to how businesses have adapted and changed to varying situations.[55]

The practical applications of learning the skills from performing improvisation are appearing in business school curriculum. There are several programs of improvisation as experiential learning that are now offered. The University of North Carolina Kenan-Flagler Business School offers a course entitled "Business Improvisation" which is taught by a local improvisation artist.[56] Similarly at Duke University's Fuqua School of Business, there is a weekend workshop seminar offered through the executive education

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[54] Organization Science, Volume 9, Number 5 September-October 1998 *[except for one article, the entire issue is focused on Jazz Improvising and Organizing]*
[55] Kanter, Rosabeth Moss. "Strategy as Improvisational Theater," MIT Sloan Management Review, Winter, 2002.
[56] www.kenan-flagler.unc.edu/assets/documents/MBAelectives_manage03-04.pdf

school entitled, "Improvisation in Business."[57] This class is taught by a UCLA professor of organizational behavior along with a professional improvisational artist.

Confident that improvisation could be used in an experiential learning context, I designed a course for MBA training that utilized improvisation. In this course, I utilized a notion that leadership in business requires a high degree of spontaneity. Leaders must act with little understanding or information of the situation at hand. This spontaneity of being in the moment, reading the situation, making a quick decision, and then proceeding accordingly has never been a skill set that managers thought they could learn. However, in the world of performing improvisational comedy, these skills have been studied, crafted and refined for over forty years. The skill of *reacting* is the only one that matters for an improvisational actor to be successful on stage. To be effective on stage, learning this skill is essential. Improvisation theater training has developed a methodology by which the skill of reacting to make quick decisions can be taught and learned by anyone. In the course, I pursued the idea that improvisation can be learned by anyone and can be effective for leadership development. The syllabus I developed is attached as Appendix B. In designing the course, I followed the framework developed from my research in this thesis:

1) Customization

As the Warren Center case study illustrated, customization of the learning material to the client is a key factor in customer satisfaction. With this in mind, I prepared customized examples and games that incorporated situations that MBAs face in school and in the

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[57] www.fuqua.duke.edu/businessimprovisation04.pdf

business world. The first session of the course would introduce the participants to the tools of improvisation. After that, the participants would use these tools in the MBA and leadership situations that I had prepared. These situations included interviewing for jobs, dealing with team meetings, and even addressing a corporate board.

2) Repetition

As the Warren Center illustrated, in order for the participants to feel as if they have learned from the experiential learning programs, the material should be repeated. One session is not enough for the learning objectives to be passed on. Therefore, with the improvisation experiential learning course, I set the learning goals simply – to learn the public speaking benefits from the tools of improvisation. In order to ensure that the participants had repetition of the concepts, the course occurred over a period of four days for three hour sessions. Last but certainly not least, the participants in the improvisation course would have numerous chances to perform the improvisation games that were presented. Each class session would be highly participatory.

3) Delivery

While there are benefits from improvisation and from acting, clearly the methodology of the *delivery* of these skills training matters. Not only should the material be relatable – to business topics and the MBA culture – but the experiential learning process should be *fun*. The participants should leave the course feeling that they learned a lot but also enjoyed learning the material. In this way, the material could not be delivered in a static, lecturing manner. To address this issue, I structured the course similar to the Warren

Center format: I introduced the topic on the first day for context, and then lectured very little. Like the Warren Center, each game and activity had a debriefing discussion where the learning would be related to the business experience. These debriefing sessions would be brief, so that the participants would have more time for the repetition aspect of the experiential learning process.

Results

In January of 2004, I taught "Dynamic Leadership: Using Improvisation in Business" as a two credit class at the MIT Sloan School of Management. Thirty-eight students enrolled in the program. The course followed the design outlined above based on the framework developed in this paper. In conversations with the participants, overall they felt the course was very strong. Comments from the participants in my course included:

"The course was very fun and very thought provoking"

"I really enjoyed the material – I would like to take more classes in improvisation"

"To be honest, I did not expect to learn as much as I did"

"I will be using these improvisation tools in all of my future interviews!"

"The class was very strong – although it would have been nice to have even more participation."

While students evaluations of my course indicated that my objectives had been met, in order to test the effectiveness of this experiential learning course design, I prepared a quantitative survey that addressed the values learned. To contrast my theory and application of these concepts with the existing programs, I administered a survey. The

survey and its results are included as Appendix C. There were many positive results. Overall, the answers were compelling. In specific skills, the class felt they learned a great deal. For example, over 90% felt the course helped them 'speak on the spot.' And over 95% of the class felt the course 'changed their behavior in a positive, confident manner.' In general, most of the class (at least 85% and higher) answered positively to both having a better understanding of leadership and having gained greater communication skills.

Leadership and communication skills were two areas in which I expected my improvisation training could be helpful; and, in fact they seem to be. One conclusion that can be drawn is that the leadership learning objective from acting or from improvisation is clearly present. What is more important to a successful experiential learning program is how the program is designed and delivered.

EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING PROGRAMS: LESSONS LEARNED

As I have explored through this thesis, experiential learning programs vary greatly by services provided and methodology. As I also explored in my experimental course, there are clear elements of experiential learning that should be incorporated in order to produce long-term learning.

This raises the issue of how to determine the merits of an experiential learning program -- without having hired it initially? In this thesis, I suggest that there are several key measures that should be considered before contracting with an experiential learning program. These can help determine if the program will have the best long term application.

Measures for Evaluating Experiential Learning Programs

1) Reputation

Clearly, above everything is reputation. As there are no standardized measures in the wide range of experiential learning programs (and there is no clear industry established), word of mouth and reputation precede most other sales techniques an experiential learning program might utilize. While a word of mouth recommendation may not necessarily mean the same results from one customer to the next, it remains the best initial qualifier for program selection in a wide, diverse industry of providers. As analyzed in this thesis, the quality of program is not dependent on the word-of-mouth

recommendation. As the techniques in these programs are highly subjective, it is always likely that one person may find the learning and experience invaluable while another may think it is a waste of time.

2) Customization

Reputation should never be the sole qualifier for implementation of an experiential learning program. Although used initially, after reputation, the dimensions developed in this thesis for effective experiential learning programs should be reviewed. Will the program's facilitators design a course that is customized to the institution's culture and goals? The better customized a program, the greater the probability of its success. Along with the customization is the issue of delivery. Will this program be structured in such a way that the participants feel like it was worth their time? And, will this experiential learning program be enjoyable?

3) Commitment by Client

As we have explored in this thesis, the client institution should be ready to commit to this type of training over a period of time, as it may not be possible to deliver the expected objectives in one experience. Similarly, the experiential learning program should recognize the role of repetition to gain its learning objectives. When developing an experiential learning program, the program provider should typically be ready and able to deliver the program again, with the understanding that learning only comes over time.

4) Willingness to Evaluate & Change the Program

Once an experiential learning program is in place, the client should not just accept any program that is delivered. An institution must also make sure to properly evaluate a program it puts into practice. As we saw in this analysis, the Warren Center consistently responded to its clients' post-training program assessment surveys by adapting and modifying the program.

CONCLUSIONS

Experiential learning programs as corporate and academic training tools are growing in number and cover a wide diversity of topics. As we have explored in this thesis, programs that teach skills from theater and improvisation techniques as well as outdoor ropes courses are now being taught as 'training' for the business world. One of the most recent entries for this market is even gourmet cooking lessons as forums for business teaching.[58] The trends that enable these experiential learning programs to grow and diversify in this manner are clearly here to stay.

What, therefore, are the market drivers for this type of training, if as we have explored, there are no quantifiable means of measuring the efficacy of these programs? In general, as we learned from Company X and MIT Sloan, these programs are often used as a way to instill goodwill among the employees. By hiring these programs, a corporation is showing 'it cares' about the welfare of its people. Taking everyone out for a day of outdoor activities may instill a greater understanding of teamwork in some individuals. However, in general, this action will largely result in employees feeling acknowledged by management. This may be akin to the Hawthorne effect – referring to the famous Hawthorne experiments conducted in the 1950's – where a minor change in the work environment led the workers to feel that management had acknowledged them, and their productivity increased as a result.[59]

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[58] Wall Street Journal, 2004
[59] http://www.envisionsoftware.com/articles/Hawthorne_Effect.html

Nevertheless, this does not provide a complete explanation for why these *structured* experiential learning programs continue to grow in the corporate training spectrum. Corporate purchasers and then, following their lead, academic institutions must believe that there are, in fact, learnings that can be transferred from these experiential learning programs. As I have shown in this thesis, the feedback mechanisms can never tell the entire story of results from these programs. But, as we have seen from the case studies in this thesis, this may not be what actually matters. As Company X faced a difficult employee environment, the Company sought to deliver positive experiences. It sent a clear message to its employees that it was making an effort to help its employees' morale - that it *cared* about improving the environment at the firm.

This understanding is clearly the driver for *any* 'offsite' meeting – whether it is a day at the golf course or a day of improvisation training. Having employees feel valued is important for employee retention and perhaps for overall workplace harmony. In general, experiential learning programs can offer a way of showcasing an institution's commitment to its employees.

The question remains - why bother hiring a 'learning' program when the institution can have its participants merely spend the day on the golf course? With any experiential learning program, there are learning objectives that can and should be gained by participating in the program. Whether or not the participants actually learn these objectives is questionable, but the premise for these experiential learning programs is to improve business skills.

Overall, experiential learning programs offer new opportunities for corporate training that may not have been considered before. It is clear that there is a need for well-rounded managers. It is also clear, that in today's evolving business world, managers need skills that cannot be taught solely within the confines of lectures and classrooms. In business, 'experience' on a resume is always highly valued; therefore, it is not surprising that 'experiential learning' is becoming highly valued as well as a way for managers to learn the skills they need to succeed in business.

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List of Interviewees:

MIT Sloan School of Management MBA Students:
Tahsin Alam
Bryan Buljat
Marina Cigarini
Christopher Gryzchynski
Brian Hennessey
Ben Holzman
Josh Jensen
Salim Jones
Rahul Kamath
Alice Kim
DK Kim
Yann Kwok
Shenkiat Lim
Josh Mahon
Derick McGee
Mel Munoz
Boris Ondercin
Manuel Osorio
Kim Picciola
Venky Rao
Matt Richards
Dan Riskin
Marjorie Rosenthal
Erin Sellman
Bryna Shiau
Christopher Taylor
Sara Weiss
Gerry Wilson

MIT Sloan School of Management Professors and Administrators:

Deborah Ancona
Howard Anderson
Margaret Andrews
Dan Ariely
Mary Barth
Gabrial Bitran
Lori Breslow
Marilyn Cronin
Christina Einstein
Roberto Fernandez
Catherine Gamon
David Kreps

Shauna Lafauci
Wanda Orlikowski
Georgia Perakis
Dawn Peters
Richard Schmalensee
Peter Senge
Paul Osterman
Laura Wilcox
Tara Williamson
JoAnne Yates
Ken Zolot

Company X:
Two associates in Human Resources
Three employees

Experiential Learning Program Providers:
Lou Bergholz, Warren Center
Chet Harding, Improv Asylum

Appendix A: Warren Center Activities for MIT Sloan School MBA Orientation

1) Balls in Buckets

Each team is given a bucket and a set of balls. Three teams participate in this activity.

All three buckets are behind a corded off area. The teams are told that they have to get as

many balls in the bucket as they can in one minute. The balls must bounce once before

landing in the bucket. Only the balls assigned to each bucket can be counted as part of

the score for each round. Once the bucket is full, only then may the balls be emptied.

Balls must be thrown from behind the line and the bucket must stay in the position in

which it was initially. There are four rounds of this game. By the second round, if the

teams have not realized it themselves, the facilitator points out that the goal of the game

is *total* points for the entire group, not points per team. This game highlights how easily

the rules are broken so that the group can beat past records; the analogy to business and

beating previous financial performance is discussed.

2) Raft Building

This event occurs on the beach of the pond on the Warren Center campus. In this

exercise, each team has a designated set of equipment: four 2x4 boards, three barrels,

three sets of cord, and three life preservers. The goal of the exercise is that each team has

twenty minutes to build a raft, use the raft to take a team 'flag' (that they must design and

assemble as well at another station on the beach) to a raft approximately 30' feet away

from shore, and then disassemble the constructed raft so that the materials are as they

were initially all within twenty minutes. There are additional challenges that can gain the

team additional points. The overall goal of the game is for all the teams to work together
so that the entire group wins as many points as possible.

3) Islands in the Stream

In this activity, the team selects two people to be blind (they are blindfolded) and two
people to be mute. The other people will have the ability to speak and see. Once the
people have been assigned roles, they are led over to three squares that are taped off on
the ground approximately three feet from one another in a row. The first square has two
chairs and numerous word puzzles on clipboards. The second square has two planks.
The third square has three balls and a bucket. The mute people go to the second square,
and the blind people go to the third square. The other people go to the first square with
the games and chairs. The facilitator tells the first square to read the instructions on the
puzzles – these instructions tell them to do all the puzzles on the clipboards. The
facilitator tells the second square mute people that they are trying to get to the first square
and that they must use the planks. The mute people must also help to get the third square
(the blind people) to the first square. The facilitator tells the blind people that they first
need to get the balls into the bucket outside the square (they cannot reach it) before they
move. Their goal is also to get to the first square. The facilitator tells everyone that if
they step outside their square, they will enter the stream. The 'stream' takes everyone
down to the third square. This game illustrates first square people as "management" that
is too busy doing their difficult work to notice what is happening below them
downstream. The second square shows "middle managers" as people who cannot
communicate well to upper management or their employees. Finally, the third square

represents "workers" who cannot see how to get their job accomplished without help from upper management. The stream represents how when managers do not want to step outside their department and help those below them as they might jeopardize losing their position and moving 'downstream' within the organization.

Dynamic Leadership
Using Improvisation in Business

15.974
IAP 2004: 2 credits, pass/fail
4 Day Class: Mon Jan 26 – Thurs Jan 29 1-4pm
E51 - 315

Instructor:	**Professor:**
Lakshmi Balachandra	Dan Ariely
Email: Lakshmi@sloan.mit.edu	Email: ariely@mit.edu
Phone: 617-499-0024	

Overview
Improvisation can be a powerful tool for business leaders to learn how to speak with confidence, adapt to unexpected situations, and generate change and creativity within teams. This class is for students of all backgrounds and will be a series of hands-on sessions covering the basics of improvisation and applying these basics towards leadership learning. The first two sessions will be an overview of performing improvisation with introductory exercises. The final two sessions will be a synthesis of the improvisation techniques as students will apply them to real business leader contexts and workplace scenarios.

Day 1

Part 1: Introduction and Overview

This course is designed to teach MBAs the improvisation skills that business leaders today cannot do without. Over the 4 days, we will first learn the fundamentals of improvisation and then apply them to business leader contexts.

Introduction to Improv: What is it? History and Methods

Overview of this course:
- Day 1 and 2 - Learn basics of Improvisation – How To's
- Day 3 and 4 - Apply improvisation to leadership contexts

Objectives
- We are not trying to be funny...
- Understand and experience leadership as *reacting*

- Learn what we are like in leadership situations
  - What works
  - What is less effective
  - Personal warning signals?

- Learning lab: take risks - ! Only people that take risks can become true leaders.
  - Lose your sensitivity – our goal is to openly share feedback
  - Openly share feedback – including for me!

- You may want to bring a notebook to record feedback you receive.

Warm-up games, introduction and overview of the "10 Rules of Improv" that we will follow throughout the 4 days…

Part 2: Introduction to Improv Games
- Review of "10 Rules of Improv"
- Warm-Ups (Ice Breakers)
- Beginner games for word play and speaking situations
- Break-out sessions into partners for beginning character studies

Day 2

Today's class will be a continuation of Day 1 where we will further expand on our understanding of the basics of improvisation. We will develop more complicated game structures which we will then use in business applications in the subsequent workshops.

Part 1: Beginner games continued
- Warm-ups
- Introduce new games – character studies continued
- Review games from yesterday with entire group

Part 2: Discussion and planning for Day 3
- What have you learned about yourself – pitfalls, goals, etc.
- Start making lists of situations you would like to explore
- Start making lists of business leaders/characteristics you would like to explore

HOMEWORK for class 3:
- Write a joke or prepare a joke that you already know to share with the class tomorrow
- Begin thinking of business or professional situations which you have been in where you experienced a 'wish I had said that' or 'I didn't handle that as well as I could have' or 'that could have gone better' – where were they? Write down one or two for class. You

can also consider writing about other business experiences that you anticipate facing after graduation.

Day 3

In today's class we will begin exploring ways of utilizing our new improv skills in a leadership context. In part 1 of today's class we will try some real workplace scenarios that recent MBA graduates may experience in leadership roles on the job. In part 2, we will explore improv as a creativity generator and begin to discuss how to become stronger public speakers – as exemplary public speaking is a key skill that business leaders must master. As excellent public speakers know, part of this skill is learning to read your audience. Leaders use this skill to 'win people over.' We will also learn how this skill can be applied to get the most out of any networking situation you may come across.

Part 1: Workplace Scenarios and 'Being the Leader'
- Warm-Ups and review of beginner games
- Review of "10 Rules"
- Using students generated lists (characteristics, scenarios, goals) a few games with these scenarios, characters and contexts.

Part 2: Public Speaking & Networking Scenarios Advanced
- New games to explore 'speaking on the spot' and 'to be an expert'
- Same games played only with suggested skill or topic. Once more with key attributes/scenarios to explore (i.e. welcome audience vs. hostile audience)
- Networking Scenarios "The Dating Game"
  - o Learning to read body language
  - o Winning people over
  - o How to 'react' – various welcome vs. unwelcome characters and how to read them and handle them appropriately
- Stand-up Comedy 101
  - o The art of telling a joke
  - o When and where to use?

Day 4

Today's class will attempt to synthesize improv techniques to help create future CEOs. We will explore many aspects of CEO skillsets in an improv setting by experiencing different leadership scenarios: sales for new business, pitching to investors, motivating their employees, speaking on panels, guest speaking at conferences, networking at meetings or impromptu moments, running board meetings, pitching new releases/company updates for PR...the list goes on and on. We will explore a handful of these scenarios and understand how *reacting* may be the most useful tool for future CEOs to master leadership.

Part 1: Who you are as a CEO

- Warm-ups: include beginner games that encompass character studies
- CEO Situational 'Games' Introduction

Part 2: How to improve/define 'You as a CEO'
- Review of games
- Begin games again – now with new 'leader desired attributes' and exploring different reactions…
- Why do we do this? An analysis and discussion – closing with how to maintain these new improvisation skills in school and beyond!

Interested in additional reading on Improvisation? Check out the following:

Improvisation for the Theater by Viola Spolin
Improv by Keith Johnstone
Something Wonderful Right Away by Jeffrey Sweet

Appendix C: Dynamic Leadership Course Survey & Results

RESEARCH SURVEY

Please answer the following questions on 15.974 Dynamic Leadership: Using Improvisation in Business

On a scale of -5 to +5, with -5 as definitely NO and +5 as definitely YES and 0 as NEITHER yes nor no:

1) This class helped me build my confidence when addressing an audience.
-5 -4 -3 -2 -1 0 +1 +2 +3 +4 +5

2) This class helped me to think spontaneously to answer difficult questions on the spot.
-5 -4 -3 -2 -1 0 +1 +2 +3 +4 +5

3) This class helped me to create interesting presentation material.
-5 -4 -3 -2 -1 0 +1 +2 +3 +4 +5

4) This class helped me understand how I react in leadership situations
-5 -4 -3 -2 -1 0 +1 +2 +3 +4 +5

5) This class taught me more about myself as a leader
-5 -4 -3 -2 -1 0 +1 +2 +3 +4 +5

6) This class helped me lead more effective meetings
-5 -4 -3 -2 -1 0 +1 +2 +3 +4 +5

7) This class has taught me to think on my feet and react to any situation with confidence
-5 -4 -3 -2 -1 0 +1 +2 +3 +4 +5

8) This class has untapped greater creativity within myself
-5 -4 -3 -2 -1 0 +1 +2 +3 +4 +5

9) This class has made me a great public speaker
-5 -4 -3 -2 -1 0 +1 +2 +3 +4 +5

10) This class has improved my interview skills
-5 -4 -3 -2 -1 0 +1 +2 +3 +4 +5

11) This class helped me interact with employees
-5 -4 -3 -2 -1 0 +1 +2 +3 +4 +5

12) This class helped me interact with my superiors
-5 -4 -3 -2 -1 0 +1 +2 +3 +4 +5

13) This class helped me to get the job/career I want
-5 -4 -3 -2 -1 0 +1 +2 +3 +4 +5

14) The concepts from this class are ones that I will continue to use
-5 -4 -3 -2 -1 0 +1 +2 +3 +4 +5

15) This class helped me untap my creative skills
-5 -4 -3 -2 -1 0 +1 +2 +3 +4 +5

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16) This class helped me to speak on the spot — -5 -4 -3 -2 -1 0 +1 +2 +3 +4 +5

17) This class helped me learn how I am in leadership roles — -5 -4 -3 -2 -1 0 +1 +2 +3 +4 +5

18) This class helped me change my behavior in a positive, confident manner — -5 -4 -3 -2 -1 0 +1 +2 +3 +4 +5

19) This class was a lot of fun — -5 -4 -3 -2 -1 0 +1 +2 +3 +4 +5

20) This class helped me be a better teacher — -5 -4 -3 -2 -1 0 +1 +2 +3 +4 +5

21) This class helped me be a better communicator — -5 -4 -3 -2 -1 0 +1 +2 +3 +4 +5

22) This class incorporated the Sloan culture. — -5 -4 -3 -2 -1 0 +1 +2 +3 +4 +5

23) This class incorporated real business situations. — -5 -4 -3 -2 -1 0 +1 +2 +3 +4 +5

23) This class was more helpful than the Communications for Managers class — -5 -4 -3 -2 -1 0 +1 +2 +3 +4 +5

24) This class was more helpful than the Organizational Processes class — -5 -4 -3 -2 -1 0 +1 +2 +3 +4 +5

25) This class was more helpful than any other leadership class I have taken. — -5 -4 -3 -2 -1 0 +1 +2 +3 +4 +5

26) This class was more helpful than any presentation/communication class I have ever taken. — -5 -4 -3 -2 -1 0 +1 +2 +3 +4 +5

27) This class more helpful than any other business school class I have taken. — -5 -4 -3 -2 -1 0 +1 +2 +3 +4 +5

28) This class was more fun than any other business school class I have taken. — -5 -4 -3 -2 -1 0 +1 +2 +3 +4 +5

29) In retrospect, I am happy I took this class — -5 -4 -3 -2 -1 0 +1 +2 +3 +4 +5

30) I would recommend this class to other people — -5 -4 -3 -2 -1 0 +1 +2 +3 +4 +5

31) I would recommend this instructor to other people — -5 -4 -3 -2 -1 0 +1 +2 +3 +4 +5

31) Please fill in below any additional comments you may have on the effectiveness of this course:

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Comments

	Comments
a	The use of video/personal examples - get more business stuff up front to get involved.
b	Awesome!
c	Needs to be LONGER.
d	
e	Great course! Very different from other b-school classes.
f	
g	
h	
i	Good as a course - great as a pilot.
j	
k	
l	
m	
n	
o	
p	
q	
r	
s	Yay!
t	Great job, I really enjoyed the class.
u	
v	
w	
x	
y	Please keep this class going!
z	More practice. Excellent teacher! Lakshmi is a natural.
aa	Great job Lakshmi!
bb	Wish you spent more time on individual expert improvs.
cc	Good because practical. Avoid warm-up
dd	
ee	
ff	Lakshmi was great!!

TOTALS: 98 105 51 111 89 85 116 84 42 73 69 85 128 93 115 90 99 148 80 111 92 107 76 8 32 45 -29 92 142 141 152

tal poss: 160 160 160 160 160 160 160 160 160 160 160 160 160 160 160 160 160 160 160 160 160 160 160 160 160 160 160 160 160 160 160

Avg: 3 3 2 3 3 3 4 3 1 2 2 3 4 3 3 3 3 5 3 3 3 3 2 0 1 1 -1 3 4 4 5