

Organizational Behavior and Human Resources Teaching Moments from *The Apprentice*

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Abstract

The NBC reality show *The Apprentice* dramatically portrays small, diverse teams working in competitive environments to complete business tasks. We have used select scenes from the series to illustrate concepts in an undergraduate teambuilding/problem solving course. At the MBA level, we have tasked student groups with analyzing an entire season from eight organizational behavior perspectives. This paper describes how the show has been utilized in each of these contexts. The Appendices include a list of the episodes and incidents from Season 1 that are useful for discussing various management concepts, as well as the MBA-level project description and scoring rubric.

Key words: teamwork, interpersonal skills, negotiation, problem solving

Relevance to Conference Theme

The session presents one way to engage difference in teaching and learning. Participants in the show *The Apprentice* are quite diverse both demographically and also psychologically. It is these differences that influence the various situations seen on the show that help illustrate management concepts. Students are likely to identify with one or another of the show's participants and differences occurring in the classroom can be addressed by first identifying them in the show, then moving away from the show to identify similar differences experienced by the students. In addition, students' perspectives of the show's incidents are likely to differ substantially, depending upon the differences among themselves. These differing perspectives create an opportunity for rich discussion and debate.

Purpose

Showing videos in the classroom is a useful teaching tool in management education for a number of reasons, as several scholars have noted (e.g., Champoux, 2001; Comer, 2001; Comer & Cooper, 1998; Gallos, 1993; Ross, 1996; Serey, 1992). Integrating video into a comprehensive learning experience, along with print, lecture, and discussion, can allow for the exploration of complexities found in organizational behavior and foster the use of critical thinking skills (Bluestone, 2000; Liedtka, 2001; Hinck et al, 1995; Huczynski & Buchanan, 2004). In addition to intellectual engagement, videos such as TV shows and movies can facilitate active learning and emotional engagement, which increases knowledge retention (Hunt, 2001; Rubin & Hebert, 1998; Scherer & Baker, 1999). Aside from the ability to engage students and portray the complexities of organizational behavior, film also benefits students who have limited work experience because it conveys a feeling of reality (Champoux, 1999). This "realness" feeling can help illustrate the application of concepts and theory in a more stimulating way than the use of traditional methods such as written cases (Champoux, 1999; Huczynski & Buchanan, 2004). For these various reasons, the authors of this paper have frequently used movies in the classroom to illustrate organizational behavior and management concepts.

Still, however, many of the TV shows and movies that have been used to teach management have been fictional in nature (e.g., Harrington & Griffin, 1989; Hietapelto, Goltz, & Tyrell, 2002; Huczynski & Buchanan, 2004), which can lead students to believe the situations they are viewing are too contrived even though they simulate reality. For instance, although the movie, *Twelve Angry Men* is great for illustrating the dynamics of groups as well as decision making biases, clearly, it is a contrived situation that was developed for the purposes of drama and entertainment. For this reason, we prefer to also use movies that are based on actual events, such as *October Sky* and *Pirates of Silicon Valley*. The fact that the movies are based on actual events lends more credibility to the organizational behavior concepts being illustrated in class.

Yet most viewers realize that even movies based on real events have some creative license taken in them. In addition, interactions in these movies are generally smooth and flowing, without all the miscues, distractions, and little misbehaviors—the unending messiness that makes up most of everyday life. For certain organizational behavior topics, such as communication and conflict, it is exactly these miscues and distractions that are useful for illustrating concepts. Fortunately, even with the editing that occurs, reality TV shows capture many of these. Shows such as *Big Brother* and *Survivor* are full of misunderstandings and little misbehaviors that result in poor communication and conflict. These shows also can be used to illustrate a host of other Organizational Behavior topics such as leadership, power, motivation, and culture.

However, in spite of these advantages of most reality shows, we are back to the question of whether shows such as *Big Brother* and *Survivor* feel real enough. Sure, real interactions are being filmed, but the situations are fairly contrived and not that related to the business world. For this reason, we have been using the show *The Apprentice* to illustrate course concepts. Although the situation is contrived as well, the tasks on the show, such as negotiating prices or creating promotions, are often very real, with real organizations benefitting or not benefitting from the behaviors of the apprentices. In addition, these tasks are very clearly relevant to the business world.

Teaching Suggestions

We have successfully used *The Apprentice* as a teaching tool in both undergraduate and graduate settings. At the undergraduate level, clips are used to illustrate concepts central to a team building/problem solving course (this course is described in Goltz, Hietapelto, Reinsch, & Tyrell, 2008). Appendix 1 provides a listing of the scenes from Season 1 that we've found most applicable to this type of course.

Students seem to enjoy "revisiting" *The Apprentice* periodically throughout the semester, so we incorporate a clip or two into class periods that focus on a related topic. Before showing any clip, it is helpful to briefly orient students to the scene they are about to watch in terms of the challenge for that episode (sales, advertising, etc.). These challenges are different with every episode. Sometimes we find it interesting to drop the students into a scene with only the briefest of introductions and afterward ask them what they noticed that might relate to small group dynamics or problem solving. This approach invites the students to take the lead on shaping the discussion, and often reveals perspectives that are different from the instructor's. Other times we will use a scene in the middle of a class period, after some new vocabulary or concept has been introduced. Then the objective, after viewing a clip, is for students to demonstrate the ability to identify class concepts in action. Both approaches work well. Usually the clips help to energize and refocus the class, so the choice of approach might be dictated by what is needed at the time.

Topics of discussion that stem from the series are similar with MBA students. At the MBA level, we expect students to be able to take the lead on identifying scenes from the series that connect with organizational behavior and management concepts. With this in mind, we ask student groups to analyze an entire season of the show using the following eight OB topic areas: Selection/Training, Individual differences/Diversity, Motivation/Performance, Communication, Group Dynamics/Conflict/Negotiation, Decision Making/Problem Solving, Power/Politics/Leadership, and Culture. Each group chooses a separate season for analysis, and the entire semester is allocated for completing the project. In addition to an in-depth written analysis, groups deliver a mid-semester and end-of-semester presentation. Each presentation covers four of the eight topic areas. The mid-semester presentation provides an opportunity for both the instructor and the other students in the course to provide formative feedback that will help improve the second presentation. Our assignment description and the rubric used to score the projects are both provided in Appendix 2.

Conclusion

In summary, the TV show, *The Apprentice* can be valuable for illustrating course concepts in team building, problem solving and other organizational behaviors. It shows real situations with all the miscues, distractions, and little misbehaviors that are typically found in interpersonal processes such as communication and conflict. Although the situation is somewhat contrived, the tasks on the show, such as negotiating prices or creating promotions, are often very real, with real consequences, such as organizations either benefitting or not benefitting. In addition, these tasks are very clearly relevant to the business world.

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Appendix 1
Selected Episodes from *The Apprentice*

Please note that all episodes listed below are from Season 1.

Episode	Chapter	Duration (m:ss)	Incident	Possible Discussion Topics
1, “Meet the Billionaire”	2	1:40	Men's and women's teams gather to begin lemonade stand task (focus on women's team in particular)	Tuckman's stages of team development (women forming and storming in particular), designated versus emergent leaders (e.g., who's really leading women?)
1, “Meet the Billionaire”	Beginning of Ch. 2; beginning of Ch. 3; all of Ch. 4		Ch. 2—task given; Ch. 3—women win; Ch. 4—panel interviews David, Sam, & Troy, fires David	Selection methods: work-sample, unstructured stress and panel interview; selection criteria (leadership, making money, taking risks) reliability, validity, biasedness of methods (e.g. panel weighting criteria slightly differently).
2, “Sex, Lies, & Altitude”	End of Ch. 2	0:50	Sam sleeping through task	Confrontation of unproductive members, destructive nonconformity, contract enforcement
3, “Respect”	Ch. 2; Ch. 3	6:22 (to commercial break, 9:00 to end of negotiation for gold)	Negotiation styles, Sam's as project manager	Negotiation techniques, communication, divide and conquer approach to team tasks, control of information, leadership
4, “Ethics, Shmethics”	Ch. 3	0:54	Desperate to increase sales for Planet Hollywood, the men's team resorts to selling autographed merchandise – a decision not all members agree with	Ethics, deserters, nonconformity, decision making
5, “Trading Places”	Ch. 1 and Ch. 2	8:35	Flea market task, teams were reformed by classic “picking of teams” by the	Good example of problem solving process: information gathering, idea generation,

			project managers	solution selection and implementation; two teams spend very different amounts of time considering options before acting; effects of team roster changes on team productivity; decision making by consensus (pros and cons)
7, “Dupe-lex”	Ch. 2	0:53	Amy is disgusted with Omarosa for calling a “meeting for meeting’s sake” to review a list of tasks that the team is already performing	Effective meetings *throughout this episode Tammy is critical, stubborn, refuses to compromise, and disloyal...lots of scenes would need to be strung together to portray this
7, “Dupe-lex”	Ch. 2	0:45	Omarosa displays hitchhiker behavior after a bump on the head, using it as an excuse to avoid physical work but then plays basketball with a group of neighborhood kids	Hitchhikers, manipulative people
7, “Dupe-lex”	Ch. 3	1:09	Trump pulls Heidi aside to discuss her mother’s health in private	Dealing with personal issues in private (management skill)
8, “Ice Escapades”	Ch. 2	1:58	Omarosa and Amy work as a team to sell water, Omarosa violates the agreed upon sales strategy	Handling contradictions in a public venue, differing perceptions of success, role violations
9, “DNA, Heads, and the Undead Kitty”	Ch. 2	1:53	Conflict over lunch break	Conflict (sources and response types), team goals versus personal needs
10, “Wheeling & Dealing”	Ch. 1	1:05	The remaining candidates react to Omarosa being fired	Conflict and team performance, cohesion
10, “Wheeling & Dealing”	Ch. 1	2:25	Katrina tells Bill she feels used, expresses concern that her ideas are not taken seriously because she is a woman	Gender issues within mixed teams *It may be interesting to connect this scene to the negotiation tactics used in Episode 3

				where the women used their sexuality to secure low prices...this is a recurring strategy with the women across various episodes. At one point Trump tells them to tone it down some.
14, "Down to the Wire"	Ch. 3	2:23	In this episode only Bill and Kwame remain as candidates. Trump calls back 6 former players to be "employees" of Bill's and Kwame's (3 apiece). A dramatic shift in enthusiasm and commitment to the task is evident.	Managing one's former peers *Earlier scenes in this episode could be used to discuss interview techniques (if that is taught in one of the management courses)
14, "Down to the Wire"	End of Ch. 3, beginning of Ch. 4	5:35	Omarosa receives an important phone call requiring immediate attention while at dinner. She ignores the urgency in favor of enjoying dinner and ends up lying the next day when the consequences of her choice surface. Kwame chooses to not confront her directly.	Self-centered behavior, lying, avoidance.
15, "Season Finale"	Ch. 3	2:07	Kwame delegates the task of organizing a "meet and greet" with Jessica Simpson to Heidi with Troy as her aide (Heidi feels a lack of trust since Troy is involved, and is resistant to accept the task because she's inexperienced in such events)	Delegation (especially to members who resist accepting responsibility), trust, empowerment
15, "Season Finale"	Ch. 4	1:20	Kwame's team fails to clearly communicate their changing capacity needs to the event staff of the Taj Mahal	Communication in dynamic situations

Appendix 2

BA5700 Final Project (100 points)

I. General Information: Groups will analyze a season of *The Apprentice* using the following eight OB topic areas: Selection/Training, Individual differences/Diversity, Motivation/Performance, Communication, Group Dynamics/Conflict/Negotiation, Decision Making/Problem Solving, Power/Politics/Leadership, Culture. (Each group will have a separate season—groups must sign up for the season they want.) *Apply course and text terms and concepts in your analysis.* You should work on this assignment throughout the semester. *Do not simply assign a set of topics or episodes to each group member. All group members are required to be involved in the analysis, paper writing, presentations, and feedback process.*

II. The Case Analyses:

Procedure:

1. Watch the episodes. It may be a good idea to take notes of key incidents and behaviors in each episode in order to be able to find them quickly when analyzing later.
2. Reflect on ideas that have occurred to you as you studied class topics. Next, go to your text and notes and review the terms, concepts, research, and theories related to the topics listed above. Decide which of these terms, concepts, research, and theories are most relevant for understanding what happened in the *Apprentice* episodes.
3. Paper: Write a 20-25 page (minimum) analysis of the season's episodes case using the terms, concepts, research, and theories from the text and class. Make sure you adequately cover all eight topics. During ninth week, turn in your analysis of the topics of Selection/Training, Individual differences/Diversity, Motivation/Performance, and Communication to obtain instructor and class feedback. Use instructor and class comments on the analysis to improve your final paper.
4. Presentations: Create two presentations for class, one for 9th week and one for 14th week. The 9th week presentation should cover the topics of Selection/Training, Individual differences/Diversity, Motivation/Performance, and Communication; the 14th week presentation should cover the remaining topics. After your first presentation, use the videotape of the presentation, class feedback, and instructor feedback to review the presentation and make improvements to the second presentation. (It is recommended that you work with the communications coach in this process.)
5. Feedback Process: Following the presentations 9th week, collaborate as a group to provide feedback to each of the other groups. Do the same for the group papers. (Presentations and papers will be posted on Blackboard for you to review.) Use the rubrics found at the end of this assignment to provide feedback. In addition, write out specific comments that explain your ratings. Turn in your feedback to the instructor, who will grade it and distribute it to the other groups.

Grading Criteria:

1. **Presentations, Paper:** Analyses will be graded on the extent to which you have used these *terms, concepts, research, and theories* appropriately to analyze and better understand the case. In other words, papers and presentations should not merely repeat material in the text. Instead, course concepts should be *applied to analyze* the situation. Analyses will be graded on the extent to which you show *an understanding* (i.e., beyond superficial) of terms, concepts, research and theories used in the analysis. In other words, points will be taken off for any inaccuracies in your use of course terms and concepts. The first two rubrics at the end of to this assignment description will be used to help the grading process. (80 points total—10 points per topic area)

2. **Feedback Process:** Groups will be graded on the constructiveness of the comments they provided to other groups. Comments need to be helpful, specific and well-articulated, and relevant to the assignment guidelines and grading criteria. (20 points)

3. **Group Work:** Since group work is an important element of this assignment (see directions), *deductions will be made* for any evidence of lack of effective group coordination in the analysis, presentation, and write-up of the paper.

4. **Clear, Professional Communication:** Clear, professional communication is also an expectation in this assignment. Thus, *deductions will be made* for minimally acceptable or unacceptable communication in papers and presentations (see third rubric below).

Rubric for knowledge of fundamental terms, concepts, theories, and research in Organizational Behavior

Criterion	A-Above average/ Sophisticated	B-Acceptable/ Competent	C-Minimally acceptable	D-Not acceptable
Knowledge of Environment, Change, and Culture, Communication	Knowledge is fairly complete and thorough. Understanding is clearly at an analytical/conceptual level.	Knows most terms, concepts, theories, research. Beginning to understand at a conceptual level.	Knows some terms, concepts, theories, research. Understanding fairly basic and superficial.	Knows few terms, concepts, theories, research and understanding is superficial.
Knowledge of Group Dynamics, Conflict, Negotiation, Decision Making, Power, Politics, and Leadership	Knowledge is fairly complete and thorough. Understanding is clearly at an analytical/conceptual level.	Knows most terms, concepts, theories, research. Beginning to understand at a conceptual level.	Knows some terms, concepts, theories, research. Understanding fairly basic and superficial.	Knows few terms, concepts, theories, research and understanding is superficial.
Knowledge of Individual Differences, Selection, Training, Motivation, Performance Appraisal	Knowledge is fairly complete and thorough. Understanding is clearly at an analytical/conceptual level.	Knows most terms, concepts, theories, research. Beginning to understand at a conceptual level.	Knows some terms, concepts, theories, research. Understanding fairly basic and superficial.	Knows few terms, concepts, theories, research and understanding is superficial.

Rubric for display of analytical and decision making skills:

Criterion	A-Above average/ Sophisticated	B-Acceptable/ Competent	C-Minimally acceptable/ Uneven quality	D-Not acceptable
Assignment Content	Broad range of disciplinary knowledge;	Applies appropriate disciplinary knowledge	Uneven application of disciplinary knowledge	Significant gaps in disciplinary knowledge
Analysis	Comprehensive, no issues omitted	Includes most important issues	Overlooks/omits some issues	Omits most important issues
Recommendations/ Decision Making	Clearly defines and resolves problem Various and innovative alternatives considered Detailed, possible implementation	Generally defines and resolves issues Reasonable consideration of alternatives Possible to implement	Problem definition very basic Resolves only some issues Few alternatives considered Implementation questionable	Problem definition confusing or unclear; Does not resolve even major issues Only one alternative considered Impossible to implement
Argument/ Persuasion	Interestingly and clearly advanced Original and creative	Clearly advanced Demonstrates thought	May be good but only implied Conventional or generic	Ambiguous or absent, generic or trite Superficial or incomplete
Support	Valid and sufficient support provided Informative, updated sources Citation format correct	Some gaps or weak support Common citations correct, uncommon missing/incorrect	Some support, but weak or not clearly relevant Common citations incorrect	Poor support or connections not shown No citations

Rubric for clear, professional communication of Analyses:

Criterion	A-Above average/ Sophisticated	B-Acceptable/ Competent	C-Minimally acceptable/ Uneven quality	D-Not acceptable
Coherence, Logic, and Understandability	Establishes and follows an appropriate pattern Coherent and unified Transitions provided as needed Consistently clear and comprehensible	Follows a pattern Usually coherent and unified Transitions provided as needed Generally clear and comprehensible	Generally follows a pattern; some gaps Some incoherent or not unified Transitions sometimes missing Mostly clear and comprehensible	Unapparent pattern or hard to follow Incoherent or lacking unity Several needed transitions missing Confusing, unclear or incomprehensible
Word Choice, Sentence Style, Spelling, Punctuation and Grammar	Correct and varied sentences Precise, correct, creative word choice Correct/acceptable	Correct sentences, with some variety Correct word choice Very few spelling, punctuation,	Correct, but elementary sentences Some debatable word choices Some spelling,	Frequent misuse of words Misspellings, punctuation, grammar mistakes confuse meaning

	spelling, punctuation, grammar	grammar mistakes	punctuation, and grammar mistakes	
Design/Layout/ Graphics	Visually coherent design provides appropriate emphasis Creative and helpful design and graphics	Visually coherent design provides appropriate emphasis	Understands visually coherent design, lacks appropriate emphasis	Little understanding/ application of design principles
Presentation/ Appearance (for presentations only)	Professional appearance Smooth and practiced Good eye contact Elicited/handled questions very well Creative & appropriate use of media	Professional appearance Practiced but uneven Some eye contact Elicited/handled most questions very well Appropriate use of media	Unprofessional appearance Practiced but uneven Minimal eye contact Neither elicited nor handled questions well Some modification of media template	T-shirt, shorts, hat and/or sandals Unpracticed Read from script, never looked up Could not respond to basic questions Media template only or no visual aids used