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Curriculum and Case Notes

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A THREE-DIMENSIONAL APPROACH TO LEARNING IN PUBLIC MANAGEMENT

Theresa A. Flynn, Jodi R. Sandfort, and Sally Coleman Selden

INTRODUCTION

Public policy and public administration programs commonly include an organizational theory or public management course in the core requirements for the professional degree.¹ While these courses can be titled many things—such as “Organizational Theory,” “Public Management,” “Organizations and Management,” and “Public Administration and Management”—they are presumably included in the core curriculum because of a belief that students need exposure to the basic theories and principles of organizational operation and management to function effectively as professionals. However, the approach to teaching such courses varies (Elmore, 1991; Lynn, 1996). As is true for many public policy courses, the debate continues about whether students should focus on the mastery of management and organizational concepts, models, and theories or aim to develop “practice principles” through critical analysis of cases and community projects (Lynn, 1996). The challenge instructors face, similar to which Dror (1983) articulated, is that the practice of public management is too complex and dynamic to be fully captured in the study of concepts, models, and theories. As a result, the boundary between what goes on within the traditional

¹ Among the top 20 public policy and public administration schools in the country, only two do not require courses in public management or organizational theory as part of their master’s degree requirements. In addition, NASPAA requires such courses as part of its accreditation guidelines.

academic classroom and what goes on in experience-based internships is blurring in the public management classroom (Elmore, 1991).

In the course described in this article, the blurring Elmore discusses occurs through the interactions of three components carefully designed to bring students into contact with the course topics in ways that make management and organizational theory more accessible and exciting. The first component involves activities we associate with the traditional academic classroom, with the instructor taking the lead. Students take responsibility for reading the assigned materials before class, and the instructor uses lecture, discussion, or exercises to facilitate learning. A team of students implements the second component. An application team is responsible for developing an exercise, identifying a case, or orchestrating a simulation that applies the organizational and management concepts discussed in the week's reading. Finally, the third component involves a student consulting project where another team of students spends time within an organization assisting in resolving a current problem. Recent consulting projects include assisting organizations in developing outcome measures, establishing plans for diversifying funding sources, addressing problems of internal communications, developing strategic plans, and redesigning organizational structures.

We have termed this approach "three-dimensional learning" because it requires students to assume three roles (student, trainer, and analyst) and move among them throughout the semester (Figure 1). The interactions among these three roles is the cement that holds the course together. For example, the application teams allow students to practice translating and applying the substantive course materials through interactive, participative class activities. One group, responsible for illustrating different theories of power, might construct several scenarios illustrating power inequity and have fellow students role play likely outcomes. The resulting class discussion might contrast the theories of power with the realities of office politics, gender conflict, and insubordination. In addition, the consulting team assignment

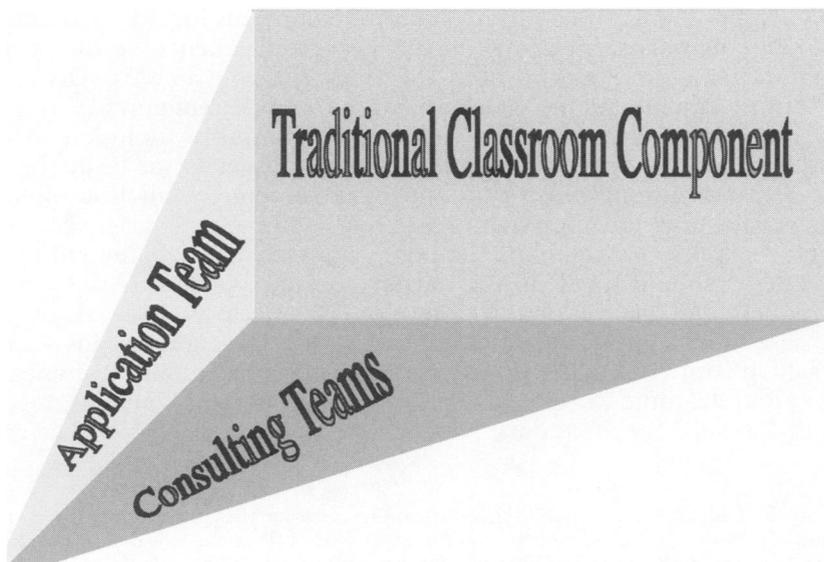


Figure 1. The three-dimensional approach to learning public management.

requires students to use class readings and lectures for guidance, as they struggle to assist organizations and managers confronting real-world problems. Finally, the consulting project creates plenty of raw material that both students and instructor bring into every class session; students are encouraged to consider how the organization's structure, culture, or environment can be analyzed using the theoretical frames discussed in class.

We have collaboratively developed this course, "Public Organizations and Management," which is a core course requirement in the Maxwell School's Master of Public Administration (MPA) program. The design grew out of the authors' differing disciplinary knowledge and practice experiences, which reflect the breadth of the organizational studies field: One member has a background in organizational theory, another has training in organizational behavior, and the third has training and experience in organizational design. We crafted the course to meet the needs of students with diverse backgrounds and prospects. Typically, 25 percent of new MPA students are pre-career students. While it is not unusual to have students in the classroom with significant prior work experience, most have only 2–5 years. About 15 percent of new Maxwell MPAs graduated from institutions outside of the United States. Upon graduation, MPA students assume a broad range of positions—about 21 percent going to work for the federal government, 16 percent for state and local government, 16 percent for nonprofit organizations, and 24 percent for consulting and private finance firms. Such diversity demanded that we develop a course that uses multiple techniques to help educate students who will be required to demonstrate a range of management skills in various settings.

CONCEPTUAL UNDERPINNINGS OF THE COURSE

Like many other educators, we are inspired by Donald Schön (Argyris and Schön, 1974; Schön, 1983, 1987; Schön and Rein, 1994) whose writings provide a model of how to encourage professional students to engage in reflective practice. This skill seems particularly important in a field like public management, in which appropriate actions are contingent upon particular circumstances. Increasingly, textbooks discuss the multiple "frames" (Bolman and Deal, 1991; Harrison and Shirom, 1999; Martin, 1992) and "metaphors" (Morgan, 1997) one can use to understand organizations. Similarly, management books (Quinn et al., 1996; Wheatley, 1999) stress the competing roles that individuals must employ given different circumstances. These books are quite different from traditional organizational theory or public management textbooks (for example, see Daft, 1998; Gordon, 1995; Gortner, Mahler, and Nicholson, 1997; Jones, 1995; Rainey, 1991) because they try to capture and illustrate the complexities of daily life in an organization. In this course, however, we do not use these new texts; instead, we try to show the complexity of organizational life through the three-dimensional learning environment. We provide a supportive classroom climate in which students can move between theory and experience, conceptual materials, and real-world applications (Schein, 1999). Our classes allow students to practice responding to the problems that confront managers in their day-to-day activities and to reflect upon these experiences (Schön, 1983; Senge, 1990).

This model capitalizes on active learning methods highlighted in previous articles appearing in this journal. Using cases for teaching (Husock, 1995), developing simulations (Leone, 1989; McBeth, 1998), and attending to classroom "architecture" (O'Hare, 1998) are all techniques we use throughout the semester. As others have suggested, this course uses the classroom itself as a case that illustrates the principles of management and governance (Feldman and Khademian, 1999; Gilmore and Schall,

1996). However, it contributes to public management education by introducing a model that uniquely integrates what many other people are doing well.

Specifically, we build on prior efforts by demonstrating how experiential learning techniques and a community consulting project can enhance traditional readings, cases, and simulations to promote more learning. As in case teaching methods, we intend this course to help students develop diagnostic capabilities. Confronting and investigating a current problem that faces an organization allows students to see first hand the importance of institutional and organizational context and reflect upon the implications of their analytical choices. Yet, like simulations and role plays, this course tries to overcome the personal detachment that can arise in case analysis (Leone, 1989) by allowing students to develop intimate knowledge about an organization and the persons working within it. While this can create situations where students may struggle to see beyond the specific project to the underlying theoretical issues, it is the instructor's role to make the translation between the specific and the general in class. Consulting projects, unlike cases and role plays, also enable the instructor to emphasize the importance of professional norms and responsibilities. Students get experience in team participation, appropriate dress and interactions, and real-world deadlines.

In this three-dimensional model, professor and students share responsibility for learning. The instructor develops and oversees course content, provides lectures, assesses student performance, and supports diagnostic activities. Students develop creative application activities to illustrate the substantive concepts covered in the professor's lectures. In the consulting project, students have an independent relationship with their organizational client and, thus, hold authority and knowledge about that particular case. As a result, the professor functions as a coach and consultant rather than the sole purveyor of knowledge (Eraut, 1994). In many ways, her role is more like that of a "senior partner" in a consulting firm. She commits considerable time developing and working with student teams outside the classroom to ensure they have the necessary guidance to make products substantive and useful to the client. She asks probing questions of the consulting teams, challenges the assumptions of the students, offers resources that may prove useful to the client, and reviews the final product before the client sees it. She does all of this without undermining the students' credibility with the client.

The First Dimension: Traditional Classroom Requirements

On its face, this course covers topics included in a conventional organizations and management class that integrates research of organizational behavior (OB) and organizational theory (OT) (see Table 1 for a list of course topics). We supplement the core text, Richard Hall's (1999) *Organizations: Structures, Processes, and Outcomes*,² with readings that focus on public and nonprofit organizations, innovative applications of theoretical concepts, and interesting management tools and techniques. In addition, Edgar Schein's (1999) *Process Consultation Revisited: Building the Helping Relationship* provides an essential framework to the consulting project and acts as a useful reference for students as they are working with clients.³

Aside from these readings, the course has other traditional elements. Students attend class three hours each week throughout the semester. We use class time to convey,

² Hall's book provides an accessible and thorough treatment of organizational studies that does not mask the complexity of the field. It is used as a foundation—to bring all students up to the same level—upon which all substantive course material is built.

³ Faculty interested in the diagnostic process might also want to consult Harrison and Shirom (1999).

Table 1. Topics covered in the course, "Public Organizations and Management."

Week 1:	Introduction
Week 2:	Why Are Organizations Significant?
Week 3:	Approaches to Diagnosing Organizational Concerns
Week 4:	Motivation & Diversity
Week 5:	Power and Conflict
Week 6:	Group Processes
Week 7:	Structure and Design
Week 8:	Technology
Week 9:	Culture
Week 10:	Learning Organizations & Systems Thinking
Week 11:	Environment
Week 12:	Inter-organizational Relations and Communication
Week 13:	Effectiveness & Performance
Week 14:	Team Presentations
Week 15:	Team Presentations & Synthesis

A reading list that accompanies these topics may be requested from the authors.

among other things, information through lectures and discussion. Each student is required to complete a research paper (which we will discuss in more detail later) and a take-home final exam. Each of these course elements is fairly conventional and similar to other graduate courses. Yet, each is colored by a fundamental connection to the other two core dimensions of the class: application and practice. What follows are a description of how these two dimensions operate, and a section describing how the three dimensions become inseparable as the course unfolds.

The Second Dimension: Application Teams

The application component of the three-dimensional model is designed to provide student teams with expertise in the content areas explored in this course. We refer to these as application teams, because within them students practice moving from theory to application within their content area. Students do this by developing, presenting, and debriefing a 30- to 45-minute exercise, simulation, or case that illustrates the substantive theme of the week as presented in the syllabus (see Table 1).

The application teams consist of three to six students (depending on the size of the class), established at the beginning of the semester. Each team is assigned a different week in which to demonstrate an application to the class. For example, as shown in Table 2, Ana, Alexandra, and Ananya⁴ are assigned to present in week 4, which focuses on the topics of motivation and diversity within organizations. In preparation for their week, application team members consult with the instructor, do additional research, and use what they have learned to design an activity demonstrating key concepts from the week's readings. Some of that research involves exploring cases, experiential learning activities, or simulations that will help their peers better understand the concept. In addition to making information available about what application teams have done in previous terms, we have found it useful to provide

⁴ We have made up student names in this article to represent the diversity of our students.

Table 2. Student assignments to application teams.

Week	Application Team		
Week 4: Motivation & Diversity	Ana	Alexander	Ananya
Week 5: Power & Conflict	Jacob	Norm	Jim
Week 7: Structure & Design	Chang Hee	Kenesha	Maura
Week 8: Technology	Rita	Raul	Tom
Week 9: Culture	Tanya	Hou-Cheng	Kyle
Week 10: Learning & Systems Thinking	Madhu	Polly	Kim
Week 11: Environment	LaMar	Salvatore	Maria

several other resources.⁵ Application activities, especially case studies and examples, are expected to be relevant to public or private nonprofit organizations, rather the private sector, where cases are much more plentiful but not always appropriate.

One week before the application team's activity, students from the team meet with the instructor to finalize it. On the day of class, the application team provides the instructor with a brief memo summarizing the activity selected to conduct with the class (including clean copies of any handouts or overheads) and the key learning points the team hopes to achieve. Students facilitate their application activity and then conduct a brief class discussion to emphasize the key learning points. Following class, the instructor spends a few minutes debriefing the application team's performance with team members.

Table 2 provides an overview of the topics we have used for application teams and an example of how a class of 21 might be grouped across the seven application team topics. The following examples are actual applications that students have designed and conducted.

- **Motivation and Diversity:** Alexandra, Ananya, and Ana designed a scavenger hunt for their fellow students to conduct in two groups. The class was unaware that the two groups received different instructions. For each item found, Team 1's list specified a reward, as well as an overall reward for finding more than nine items. Team 2's list offered no rewards for locating items. As a result, Team 1 structured their hunt based on the perceived value of the rewards and completed the game well within the time limit. Team 2 took a more random approach to their search for items and was far less successful in accomplishing the goal. The application team debriefed how each team's experience differed, examined each team's approach to the task, and connected this experience to theories of employee motivation.
- **Technology:** Rita, Raul, and Tom wanted to emphasize that organizational technology was more than computer hardware and software. They developed an exercise that illustrated the significance of using different organizational processes to accomplish the same task—making a sandwich. First, the team selected a single member of the class, gave the person specific instructions about how to make a sandwich, and asked the person to make as many

⁵ For example, see Golembiewski, Stevenson, and White, 1997; Huddleston, 1996; Lerner and Wanat, 1993; as well as the Electronic Hallway (<http://www.hallway.org>) and the Case Program at the Kennedy School of Government (<http://www.ksgcase.harvard.edu>).

sandwiches as possible in five minutes. Next, to improve efficiency, the team created an assembly line of students to make sandwiches and asked them to make as many sandwiches as possible within the same time. Finally, the team instituted technology that allowed a group of students to custom-make sandwiches, again within five minutes. The intent of this exercise was to illustrate the importance and implications of technology and its interaction with structure and employee motivation; it also fed a hungry class that met over the lunch hour.

- **Learning and Systems Thinking:** Madhu, Polly, and Kim created an application that facilitated the redesign of Syracuse University (SU) into more of a learning organization. Using a series of carefully framed open-ended questions, the application team guided their classmates through the key characteristics of a learning organization. Then, students performed a gap analysis and offered recommendations that would move SU closer to a learning organization. The application team debriefed the major differences between the two organizational models (SU's current culture and a learning organization), as well as the barriers that prevent organizations from adopting learning organization characteristics.

Participation in application teams offers students multiple benefits, including the development of attention to the vital human and social factors that affect organizational (i.e., classroom) functioning. They must “debrief” the experience, which requires simplifying, looking for patterns, generalizing, and drawing conclusions based on their observations during the activity (Kolb, 1984). This is a skill deemed increasingly critical in modern work environments (Nadler and Hibino, 1994). In addition, students become familiar with a wide variety of teaching tools—cases, experiential learning techniques, lectures, role plays, and simulations. They become aware of the pedagogical challenges in using these active learning techniques which, hopefully, makes them more discerning consumers in their other courses. Finally, the use of application activities benefits other students who are not a part of the application team by providing experiences and time for critical reflection (Kelly, 1997). In sum, application groups allow students to practice analyzing organizations within the safety of the classroom. They also draw upon their application team expertise in the conduct of their consulting placement team, the third dimension.

The Third Dimension: Consulting Teams

Central to the course design is the semester-long consulting project in which students apply theories and tools discussed in class to a problem currently facing a local nonprofit or governmental organization. Drawing upon diagnostic strategies covered in the required book by Schein (1999), as well as in class discussions, students interview organizational stakeholders, examine organizational documents, complete a thorough analysis of an organizational problem, and develop concrete strategies for intervention. This experience allows students to grapple with the relevance and applicability of course materials, to master project management skills, and to apply a process consultation model to help client organizations develop plans for organizational change and improvement.

The success of the consulting project is partly derived from the nature of the problem under study and the client's level of commitment and involvement in the project. To these ends, we carefully screen proposals and determine any potential client's commitment. The process of identifying and screening potential client organizations begins at least six weeks prior to the start of the course. In our initial contact letter to

potential clients, we explain that students will be in direct contact with them an estimated 15 hours throughout the semester. We ask interested organizations to submit a one-page proposal outlining the issue(s) the team will address and the desired products. After the initial screen, we follow up with potential clients to determine their level of commitment and to clarify any questions about the proposal. Each instructor is responsible for identifying site placements, facilitating discussion in class around the projects, and providing substantive feedback on the initial presentation and draft report. (See Table 3 for list of communication and feedback documents.) Each also plays the role of a “senior consultant,” communicating with the client when needed, serving as a resource for the team, and supervising data collection.

Student assignments to organizational consulting teams are partially dependent upon their application team assignments and partially dependent on their experiences and expertise (e.g., quantitative analysis, project management, and survey design skills). The objective is to develop consulting teams of approximately eight students that draw one student from each of the application teams: motivation and diversity, power and conflict, structure and design, technology, culture, learning and systems thinking, and environment (Table 4). The consulting team is expected to develop a contract with the client, write a progress memo outlining the initial problem definition and proposed method of study, give a professional presentation to both the class and client, and write a final report. One week before the end of the semester, the instructor reviews the team’s written report and provides feedback for revising the final report. The 25- to 30-page report is expected to be a professional analysis of the situation and should include: an executive summary; a description of the nature and causes of

Table 3. Communication and feedback documents.*

Documents	Purpose
Letter of invitation to participate in program	To identify possible projects
Letter confirming acceptance of proposal	To communicate our commitment to the proposed project
Evaluation of presentation	To provide substantive and stylist feedback to teams
Peer evaluations of diagnostic team members	To evaluate performance of team members
Survey of students about site placement	To identify students’ experiences with their clients, to identify any problems the team encountered working with their clients, and to identify possible ways to improve future diagnostic placements
Survey of client	To evaluate client’s satisfaction with the process, deliverables, and students
Letter of appreciation	To express our gratitude for providing the students a good learning experience

*Available from instructors upon request.

Table 4. Student assignment to application team and diagnostic organization.

		Diagnostic Organization		
		ARC (Assn. for Retarded Citizens)	Department of Corrections	Town of Camillus, Supervisor's Office
Week/ Application Team Topics	Week 4: Motivation & Diversity	Ana	Alexander	Ananya
	Week 5: Power & Conflict	Jacob	Norm	Jim
	Week 7: Structure & Design	Chang Hee	Kenesha	Maura
	Week 8: Technology	Rita	Raul	Tom
	Week 9: Culture	Tanya	Hou-Cheng	Kyle
	Week 10: Learning & Systems Thinking	Madhu	Polly	Kim
	Week 11: Environment	LaMar	Salvatore	Maria

the problem identified by the client; a description of the student's design, methods, and data collection procedures; an overview of the findings; and suggestions for addressing the problem.

For example, in the fall of 1999, consulting teams worked on the following projects that provided different products to their clients:

- **Project 1:** The Association for Retarded Citizens (ARC) sought assistance in determining ways to reduce high turnover in its Community Resident Services division. The team's research design was essentially twofold. First, it carefully analyzed turnover data for the past 2 years, looking for factors associated with turnover. Second, it surveyed employees within the division about their work responsibilities, level of managerial support, job stress, and why colleagues leave their jobs at ARC. The team employed different descriptive and multivariate techniques to analyze its data. The report provided several recommendations around each of the identified problems, including job satisfaction, stress management, communications, compensation (including benefits), and scheduling.
- **Project 2:** When the Department of Corrections requested our help, it was nearing completion of a facility that allowed for a new model of direct inmate supervision. In light of these changes, the Department of Corrections asked the team to help develop new staff performance appraisal tools consistent with the new work roles required of staff. The team worked closely with an internal working group to design and execute the study. The team reviewed organizational reports, toured the facilities, shadowed supervisors and correctional officers to observe their work responsibilities, interviewed supervisors, and conducted focus groups with correction officers. Their final report included two performance appraisal instruments, an appraisal summary form, a post-performance appraisal interview form, and a performance observation report. For each of

the tools, the team developed explicit guidelines and directives.

- **Project 3:** The town supervisor of the town of Camillus was concerned about how to motivate employees, especially given the town's fiscal constraints. The team conducted a survey of employees about their job likes, job dislikes, motivational values, and work environment. In addition, the team interviewed all department heads to identify what motivational tools they currently utilized to motivate employees. The team primarily used descriptive statistics to analyze its data. Based on the survey and interview data, the report assessed the town's strengths and opportunities for improvement as an employer. The team suggested that the town supervisor identify different tools to recognize employee performance, conduct site visits, administer performance appraisals town-wide, adopt an employee suggestion program, and address understaffing in certain departments.

An important objective of the consulting project is that students experience the challenges and rewards of working in a group formed around a clearly defined task. To assist students in this process, the instructor devotes one class session to group process, team building, and establishing group member roles. In addition, each team meets with the instructor bi-weekly to be debriefed on its progress. Because the project depends on the contribution of each team member, a substantial component of the team's grade is determined by team members' evaluations of each other.⁶ Specifically, team members evaluate each other on four dimensions: task orientation, subject matter expertise, client relations, and team relations. The remaining 60 percent of the grade is based upon the instructor's assessment of the group presentation and written report.

The consulting project has several advantages for the students. It is a participative activity with a product that students can later review and learn from. Such participative activity, according to Rockler (1988), leads to greater involvement, motivation, and learning. Brown and Matson (1985) report that adult learners invest time in available experiences to the extent they perceive them as relevant to their needs and goals. We believe this project makes the course relevant to students who intend to work an array of organizational settings in the public, nonprofit, and for-profit sectors. In course evaluations, students routinely comment on the benefit of working with a real organization. As one student said, "Working with a client has prepared me for the 'real world' in ways that I don't even know of yet. The project was beneficial and a great learning experience."

The consulting project also offers positive benefits to clients. As mentioned above, consulting teams provide their clients a final report that captures their analysis and recommendations. In 1999, 11 of the 16 clients working with consulting teams responded to our survey. We asked client organizations to assess the team's final report, the team's overall performance, and the organization's understanding and involvement in the project. In 1999, clients were extremely satisfied with the consulting team's final reports (4.5/5.0 scale) and the team's overall performance (4.2/5.0). On average, client organizations indicated that they were in direct contact with teams approximately 17 hours. All but one organization was willing to recommend the consulting team to other community groups.

⁶ This idea was shared by Michael O'Hare at an APPAM conference session on teaching; the authors adopted it because of its usefulness in this type of peer-directed project.

Taking Form: The Three Dimensions Come Together

The Organizations and Management course is designed such that each dimension is inextricably connected with the other elements. While we acknowledge the strength of each component individually, the gestalt of this three-dimensional design results in a powerful experience of shared learning that touches students, faculty, and the local community.

As we describe in previous sections, consulting teams consist of students from a cross-section of application teams (Table 4). By using a matrix structure to organize the class, both application and consulting teams benefit. Application teams are exposed to a variety of organizational issues. Consulting team members, each of whom has developed expertise across selected organizational content, add value in different ways to the consulting team, so that leadership is shared and multiple perspectives are brought to understanding the organizational problem. To illustrate, consider Ana, represented in Table 4. Through her application team, Ana has mastered the materials on motivation and diversity. At the same time, her consulting placement is with ARC, an organization dealing with problems related to high employee turnover. Ana is able to add value in consulting discussions because she can provide a wealth of practical and theoretical information about the role that motivation plays in an employee's decision to leave. In addition, she may have access to surveys or other consulting tools from which her client organization could benefit.

Contributing to the development of such subject matter expertise is the 10-page research paper required at week 6 in the semester. This paper is a manifestation of the matrix upon which the class is organized; all students research their application content areas and use that theoretical base to better understand their placement organizations. For example, Raul is writing his research paper on organizational technology and applying those theories to his placement with the Department of Corrections (Table 4). In his paper, Raul draws upon the required readings as well as external sources to present a summary of organizational technology theory. When applying theory to the Department of Corrections, he will develop hypotheses about what he might expect to see in the field. He may also identify relevant questions to ask his client about work processes or desirable outputs. Ideally, Raul will begin to understand that effective performance appraisal tools are an integral part of the overall technology at the Department of Corrections. Thus, by the sixth week of the semester, students have spent considerable time exploring their diagnostic organization (on paper, initially) through diverse theoretical lenses. This provides the consulting team with a framework for generating meaningful diagnostic questions and data collection instruments.

Another means of understanding how the three-dimensional design comes together is to consider it from the perspective of a student during an average week. For example, let's look at Raul's experience as he starts the eighth week of the semester. Last week, his application group demonstrated the concepts associated with technology by making sandwiches in class (see "The Second Dimension: Application Teams," Technology). This week, though, most of his attention is directed toward his consulting project with the Department of Corrections. He will be shadowing a corrections officer for four hours. He is somewhat nervous about doing participant observation, but he spent an hour today with his team and professor talking about the method. During his shadowing, Raul realizes that he can apply the framework proposed in the week's class reading about culture to better understand the department. He observes the numerous symbols around the corrections facility and begins to have a sense of the culture of the Department of Corrections. In that week's class, the culture application team's activity gives him a moment to reflect on his experience; perhaps the

Department of Corrections' existing culture would be a barrier to implementing the new organizational structure and subsequent performance appraisal. Raul shares his observations in the class session and asks the instructor what tactics organizations use to overcome cultural barriers to change. The ensuing discussion is useful to his group and the rest of the students. As this example shows, the design of the course has direct impact on Raul's course responsibilities, and, hopefully, on his learning and motivation as well. Raul's experience, in turn, becomes raw material that he can incorporate into class discussions.

While the design of this course is complex and demanding of students, our experience teaching it has convinced us that it is a strong model for developing in students an understanding of organizational dynamics and for building skills necessary for effective management in the twenty-first century.⁷ This occurs in part because the model accommodates different learning styles. Although research shows that individuals have different learning preferences (Whitkin and Moore, 1975), the size and structure of professional graduate school courses preclude an individualized response to each student. Given these constraints, one approach is to diversify instruction styles to enable more students to learn effectively (McCarthy, 1980). In the three-dimensional model discussed here, students encounter substantive theories in many different formats—through readings, lectures, discussion, group work, and experience.

Students also learn from contact with the instructor both within and outside of the classroom. The model requires that the instructor consult regularly with student teams outside the classroom to ensure the consulting teams' skills match their organizational assignments. For example, one team was asked by its client to develop and administer an employee survey about work motivation. Since the team had little experience doing survey research, the instructor worked in concert with the group to design and pretest the instrument. Another team was asked by a nonprofit organization to develop performance measures needed for its United Way application. As the project progressed, the students encountered a number of difficulties developing performance measures that met the client's needs. The students, at the request of the instructor, worked with another faculty member who had considerable experience constructing performance metrics for nonprofit organizations. As these two examples suggest, both the instructor and students take the consulting assignment seriously. As a partner in the consulting project, the instructor has to assess the team's strengths and weaknesses and be willing to provide additional support and training to a team, depending on its needs. Moreover, the instructor must direct students to other resources when he or she lacks the knowledge or expertise to assist.

Research has shown that students learn more from active learning than from passive absorption (Bonwell and Eison, 1991; Dinham, 1996). Rather than using textbooks that highlight the different analytical frames or multiple management roles, we try to convey these concepts actively or experientially, through the application team, the consulting project, and the myriad ways in which the three dimensions of the course reinforce each other every week. Using this approach, we try to model for students how to negotiate the complicated world of organizational reality (Elmore, 1991). At the end of the course, students have a toolkit containing a variety of models, theories, and frameworks, as well as experience in applying these concepts, investigating an organizational concern, and rendering advice based on analysis. Ultimately, this experience highlights the importance of professionalism and produces students with

⁷ While we have taught this course to classes ranging in size from 12 to 45 students, we have found the ideal class size between 20 and 25 students. This size provides enough students to cover all of the application topics and adequately staff the consulting projects while still allowing vibrant class discussions and a manageable workload for the instructor overseeing the various projects.

a more realistic understanding of management and organizational environments. By giving them experience in reflective practice, bolstered by course readings, classroom lectures, and discussions (Schön, 1983, 1987), we hope to energize a new generation of public policy analysts and managers about the potential of organizational management. We share our experience here to energize our colleagues as well.

Since this product was a true collaboration, authors' names are listed alphabetically. We would like to thank the MPA students who took "Public Organizations and Management" from 1998 to 2000; without their participation, there would be little to discuss in this article. We would also like to extend our appreciation to Carol Dwyer for her assistance in implementing this class and to Jeffrey L. Brudney and Scott Allard for their feedback.

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