

# Delicate Dining

## CONTACT:

Assoc.Prof. Sandra Jones, RMIT  
[sandra.jones@rmit.edu.au](mailto:sandra.jones@rmit.edu.au)

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Employment relations; Negotiation; Occupational Health and Safety; Real-world activities; Work-integrated-learning

## ABSTRACT

Participants adopt various roles to engage in discussion and negotiate employment conditions associated with employment within a restaurant complex with multiple outlets.

## DESCRIPTION

The role-play activities are set within a Virtual Situated Learning Environment (VSLE) that presents as a typical company website. In such a format the VSLE provides opportunities for:

- part-time practitioner students to operate within a common environment to assist them to reflect on their practice without fear of retribution
- full-time undergraduate students to participate in virtual real-world activities in a 'safe' environment

In both cases the VSLE enables role-play activities to improve the exchange of both explicit and tacit knowledge and to encourage self-learning through reflection and analysis.

Various scenarios have been produced to include contemporary activities in which a number of participants engage. Players include:

- An Owner
- Several Lessees ( of various outlets)
- Waitresses
- Bar staff
- Chefs
- Kitchen staff

Students become 'virtual employees' in the VSLE for the whole of the course with different scenarios introduced over the time of the course covering a broad range of employment relations issues covering wage and working conditions, health and safety, sexual harassment, introduction of technology, training. Students can be asked to change roles over the course in order to experience similar challenges from different perspectives.

## AUDIENCE/GROUP SIZE

The role-play activity can be conducted over any time period between 1 week and several months. It is usually in groups of around 6. The role-play has been used for over 20 years, having been converted from face-to-face to a digital mode in 2001.

## LEARNING OPPORTUNITIES

The learning design aims to:

- engage participants in real-world activities and challenges to test theory-in-practice
- encourage analysis and reflection on various responses to different challenges
- encourage analysis and reflection on actions

Feedback from participants in each iteration has been extremely positive, particularly in regard to the ability of participants to reflect on the complexities involved and the amount of legal as well as practical information required, the various interpretations that can occur that impact on communication and the importance of understanding the various roles people adopt in practice despite the training they receive in 'best practice' negotiations

## TIME AND SETTING

The VSLE and associated role-plays can underpin a number of courses ranging from negotiation skills; management/leadership; employment relations; occupational health and safety; small business accounting. The role-play is a useful means to bring together representatives from a number of departments and disciplines.

The role-play activities can occur over varying periods of time and are accessible from any location. This caters for the time pressures upon the increasing number of peripatetic students, with global work or family demands.

## RESOURCES

- The Virtual Situated Learning Environment (VSLE) has been designed and produced as a distributable web media package with instructional support and a series of role-play scenarios. It has an open file format that

is sharable on all common Web servicing platforms and is thus capable of linking to a flexible suite of communication and community web environments

- Particular scenarios facing the various participants
- Online discussion group facilities

Company  
Org Structure  
Management  
Employment  
Work Org.  
I.R.  
H.R.



## PROCESS

The role-play negotiation is conducted using asynchronous discussion in the university Learning Hub. Role players can be part of a number of Discussion groups (for example as a group of employees in one outlet, a group of employees (for example waitresses) across outlets, a group of union members or a group of Lessees. The Discussion forums allow for anonymous or identified postings.

Common information is provided in the VSLE, with individual role-play scenarios emailed to individuals. Participants know each other as fellow students (and work colleagues if held within an organisation). However they are not aware of the various role-play scenarios and individual player characteristics, although some information is shared but from different perspectives. The role-play characters have a title and role but are able to extrapolate from the outline the tactics for negotiation they will adopt.

Each character is asked to use a specific theory when embarking on the role-play. The scenarios are open ended with sufficient flexibility to produce any outcome. Participants are asked to explore different approaches to what they would normally adopt in responding to challenge activities and observe and reflect on people's reactions.

Participants are asked to post the final outcome for their group at a certain finishing time. The on-line negotiation is followed by a face-to-face intensive session to debrief the role-play. The face-to-face session is an important part of the reflective process during which significant further learning occurs.

## ASSESSMENT

Assessment of the participants' contribution to the role-play is two-fold. First, how effectively the participant adheres to the theory or model of negotiation they were assigned. Second, how clearly the participant is able to identify their learning from the role-play through their reflections in a learning journal.

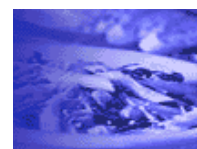
Although it is possible to identify the number of postings made by each participant and the dates of their contribution, such numerical assessment measures are not used as it is more important to place emphasis on the quality rather than the quantity of the contribution.

## FACILITATOR ISSUES

The main roles of the facilitator are to assist the commencement of the negotiation and to undertake period checks of the discussion to ensure no illegal or discriminatory postings are being made and that equity principles are being maintained. The requirement for the groups to post their final negotiated outcome reduces the burden on the facilitator of reading all postings. The role of the facilitator is central in the face-to-face session to assist analysis and reflection and debrief the participants from their role as the real-life nature of the role-play means that participants tend to adopt the persona realistically and may take interactions seriously.

## REUSABILITY

The role-play is adaptable for use in a variety of settings with a broad spectrum of disciplines. Scenarios and role descriptions are word files. The role-play can be used in educational settings or for company/industry specific educational purposes.



## References and Links

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