

Fire Service Simulation

ABSTRACT

The Fire Service Simulation, run at Deakin University since 2002, is an experiential learning exercise involving a blend of online and face-to-face interactions simulating change management theories and models in action. Participants are enculturated into one of two fire services and then confronted with change events impacting on this culture.

KEYWORDS

Action learning, experiential learning, managing change, organisational culture

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DESCRIPTION

The Fire Service Simulation is a blended simulation of organisational change comprising an online component and a residential face-to-face component. The case explores topical issues confronting complex, inter-related organisations engaged with a militant left-wing trade union. For 4 weeks prior to their residential, participants work online in virtual syndicate groups taking roles in top level, middle level and operational management. A chain of command is established and managed through selective access between groups.



AUDIENCE/GROUP SIZE

- Approximately 60 participants, however this is scalable
- Assessable component of the *Managing Change* course in the MBA at Deakin University

LEARNING OPPORTUNITIES

This learning design aims to:

- Develop understanding of organisational change and its impact on human behaviour
- Stimulate convergence of student experience so that when they arrive at the residential students have a common experience of one organisation through which they can apply theoretic knowledge to the simulated environment
- Promote emotional involvement through personal engagement with a group forced to undergo change
- Provide opportunities for students to actively engage in learning.

RESOURCES

- Consultation with fire brigades and involvement from senior personnel
- LMS discussion boards with selective release and resources folder
- DVD with snapshots of video file establishing the issues and culture
- Student readings vary according to which fire brigade they have been assigned to and what level of management they represent

ASSESSMENT

The Fire Brigade Simulation contributes 20% towards the total assessment for the course. Work is assessed by the academic together with senior serving members of both fire brigades simulated in the exercise.

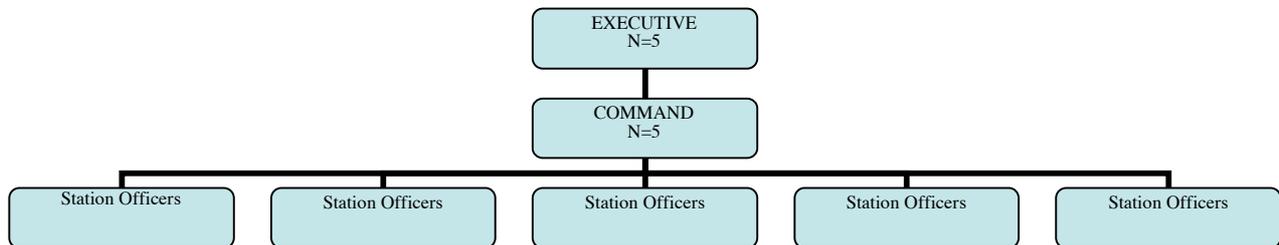
1. Fire service case initial presentation - Team presentation debriefing the online exercise
2. Fire Service change simulation – real-time response to a change event

Note: other activities and assessments for the course are drawn from this task.

TIME AND SETTING

Set in the present time exploring contemporary issues, the role play is currently run 2 or 3 times per year (once per trimester). The online interaction occurs over 4 weeks prior to the face to face meetings.

The Fire Services Simulation employs a controlled flow of information to replicate the chain of command in both the MFB and CFA brigades. This chain of command is represented in the diagram below:



PROCESS

Stage 1: Interaction within separate fire brigades

- Academic reading
- Viewing DVD to obtain a rich picture of the services
- Syndicates engage in online discussion aimed at preparing an expression of interest to take a senior role in the fire brigade of their choice
- In syndicates participate in a simulation involving research, online discussion, decision making and management.
- Formal f-2-f presentation debriefing the online exercise viewed only by their own brigade

Stage 2: Interaction between fire brigades

- Brigades are brought together and conduct a mutual audit of organisational culture
- On the basis of the way they manage this and the results of their audit and its presentation a change is engineered for example, the acquisition of one brigade by another. In such case, the acquired brigade loses its formal rank structure and is integrated by the acquiring brigade.
- Participants must manage this process of cultural integration.
- This exercise is debriefed and implications of the emotional experience of participants are discussed and applied to change models.

FACILITATOR ISSUES

- To keep the simulation dynamic the format and issues are modified from cohort to cohort
- During the online interactions only one facilitator is required to manage the game 'in role'
- Two facilitators are required for the residential component of the simulation
- The game is managed by the selective release of resources targeted at particular players and pressure points of the game. Participants are thereby directed towards a comprehension of the particular fire brigade they represent
- This simulation has the potential to evoke emotional responses and therefore sensitivity to the dynamics of the group is required. Debriefing is critical
- The dynamics of the simulation are impacted by the personalities of participants. The facilitator takes the role of enacting the decisions determined by the executive without interference in the dynamics.

REUSABILITY

This activity could be used in other universities where there is access to local fire brigades.

It could be used in other courses dealing with organisational strategy, communications, human resource management, public policy.

There is great potential for interdisciplinary applications with similar cases constructed in other types of organisations.

REFERENCES AND LINKS

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