

# XB CLASSROOM AS LEARNING ORGANISATION

A role play simulation designed by Roger Putzel, St Michael's College, Winooski, Vermont

## ABSTRACT

*A 'business simulation' - with a difference.*

*In XB participants are responsible for producing an unusual 'product' -their own learning. They take up roles in one of 4 Departments that reproduce the action learning cycle: Doing, Responsibility, Observing, Understanding. They exercise current skills and acquire new knowledge and capabilities through cooperating in order to learn with - and from - each other. Chaos, conflict, mis-understandings are all experienced, until persistence gradually moves the class through the forming/storming/norming/performing stages (Tuckman) of group dynamics. The 'Senior Manager' (facilitator/teacher) provides a stable core around which activity circulates.*

## KEYWORDS

Action learning/research;  
Organisational behaviour theory;  
Deep learning; Reflective practice

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“The major cost in XB is the Act of Taking Responsibility Its associated problem is - Accountability. **XB asks us to take responsibility and accept accountability for our own learning and contribute to that of others.**” [extract from student assignment]

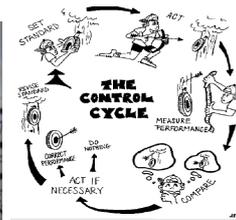
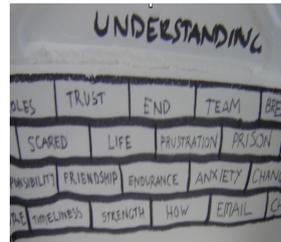


Figure 1 Images from the diversity of XB – we take on roles, explore the ‘maze’ of human organizations, gain understanding and attempt to apply the control cycle to all we do.

## AUDIENCE/GROUP SIZE

Groups from 12 to 36 work well. Less than 12 may encounter task overload, while more than 36 are better run as parallel “XB companies” each of approximately equal size. XB is used with engineers, adult educators, undergraduate business students and MBA students in the USA and Australia.

## LEARNING OPPORTUNITIES

Participants learn a great deal about themselves with a special focus on their performance in groups/teams. They have access to a very broad range of theories about human behaviour in organisational contexts. Specific choices, about acquisition, in-depth analysis and dissemination of relevant theoretical content, are the responsibility of each new “XB company” and are usually determined by participants/ immediate needs, goals and interests as the semester proceeds.

## TIME AND SETTING

XB is conducted as a semester long academic subject. In different contexts it occurs as block attendance or weekly mode, with major aspects of ‘in role’ participant interaction occurring online.

## RESOURCES

- Participants purchase the XB manual as a text book. The ‘Manual’ contains all necessary structure and theoretical resources.
- An online Learning Management System is essential, however it is useful to remember that XB has evolved over the years from use of very basic email to advanced LMS support.
- Room space must allow for both small and large group activity during all classes.

## LEARNING ACTIVITIES

The XB Manual introduces essential organisational behaviour theories around which participants cooperate to teach and learn - with and from each other. Participants choose their Departmental 'roles' based on skills and/or learning interest, and face the task of learning how to work together to convey its essential theoretical basics, while being bombarded by the efforts of the other three Departments to do the same.

Participants examine the Departments and the assigned tasks, then chose a role from within which to contribute to creating their "XB". The activity unfolds in accord with actions and decisions of individuals and Departments –face to face and online.

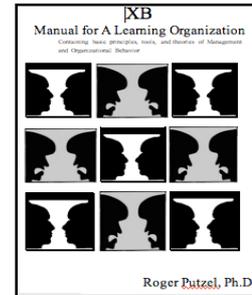


Figure 2 XB Manual

Weekly 'memos' (assessment tasks) act as regular reflection tools. Other tasks include development of a class 'vision/mission statement', affirmation of (and heated debate about) the XB Oath, peer assessment of weekly memos via the 'control cycle', and introduction, explanation of an extensive array of management and organisational behaviour theories, together with assessment of their applicability to class performance as an organisation.

**Each class prepares its own 'vision' or mission statement**

To work together through mistakes, chaos and mayhem to learn management and organisational behaviour.

**TO learn management by doing it  
TO learn organisational behaviour by observing what happens in the organisation  
TO build this XB organisation**

**Typical XB Mission statements**

Scheduled 'XB' class meetings, face to face or via chat facilities, address such issues as current performance standards, planning of course content and analysis of achievements. The final meeting reviews the overall achievements of 'this XB'. At the final meeting Australian participants present three dimensional metaphor representing their learning'. One participant noted in his commentary on his '3D' that *'our learning is the sum of our interactions and activities . . . XB is the harmony and disharmony of the theories and ideas encountered on our journey. It [provides] us with both knowledge and power.'*

### **The XB Oath**

**I belong to XB and will make this organisation work by cooperating and taking responsibility.  
I will apply concepts and theories frankly to events and people I observe.  
I will challenge my colleagues and myself to keep improving. I will do what I set out to do and enjoy it.**

## FACILITATOR EXPERIENCE

The 'Senior Manager' (teacher) models Theory Y (McGregor, 2003) leadership behaviour. While remaining 'in role' most of the time, the facilitator may at any time signal a shift to 'educator' and use this mode to draw attention to issues requiring action or reflective analysis.

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