

Orientation to the GCSC Behavioral Laboratory

You are joining two organizations that will coexist in the same place and time, and will operate simultaneously.

First, you are joining the General Case Study Company (GCSC), a business that produces educational cases for customers who purchase under contract a specific number of products in specific subject areas. You will hold a position in GCSC, perform a job, and be paid for your services.

You are also joining an educational enterprise. In this exercise, you will learn new information and skills that you can take back to your “real world.” Here, you are the “customer” and your instructor is your supplier.

The management team of GCSC will be selected from among your colleagues – perhaps you will serve as a senior manager. Indeed, one of you will be the President of GCSC. As manager, you would be responsible for ensuring that production goals are met.

Your instructor is the manager of the educational enterprise. That person, who will facilitate the experience, is responsible for ensuring that learning goals are accomplished.

This method of learning is called a “behavioral learning laboratory,” which means that behavior is generated through your interactions with each other that are then examined and analyzed, viewed through the lens of conflict theory. Your behavior, as well as your thoughts and your feelings that are created in the laboratory, are the “raw data” to be “processed” for producing learning. The power of laboratory learning rests on the fact that the behavior we study is “here and now” data that we can examine together. In this laboratory, we can also experiment with different behavior to discover better ways to do things.

A unique aspect of the GCSC simulation is that both the “content” and the “process” of the exercise are the subject matter. That is, the subject matter of “conflict” is both the *content* of the case studies

that GCSC produces as well as the *process* among you that your instructor will help you study during the class sessions. So, conflict is both the “what” and the “how” of our learning experience.

Behavioral Learning Laboratory

	Content	Process	Leadership	Learning
GCSC	The “what” of GCSC’s work – the tasks and activities performed by “employees”	The “how” of GCSC’s work – the way in which those tasks are performed	Management personnel	Getting better at producing case studies
Class	The experiential “data” – behaviors, cognitions, and emotions experienced by students as employees	Applying concepts contained in the sourcebook to explain the data – “processing the laboratory”	Instructor	Getting better at understanding and managing organizational conflict

As an employee of GCSC, you are *not* role-playing. You are being yourself in a real, though temporary, organization. GCSC will create a product of real value, it has a real customer, and its members (including you) will be paid in real currency for their work. There is nothing artificial about GCSC or the behavior we use in doing our jobs in it.

At specified times in the schedule you will switch from being in GCSC to being in the educational enterprise. Your instructor will switch from being GCSC’s “Board of Directors” to being the instructor/facilitator; you will switch from being an employee to being a student/workshop participant. At these times, you will discuss the behavior that has unfolded before our eyes, using concepts from the theory of organizational conflict to enhance our understanding of what we have seen. This discussion is called “processing the laboratory.”

An interesting aspect of laboratory learning is that all participants do not learn the same things. You will learn what your life experience

has prepared *you* to learn about conflict at this time. And, your co-learners will learn what their individual and unique life experiences have prepared *them* to learn at this time. You may even choose *not* to learn by being closed and resistant to the experience. But because conflict and its management is a life-long challenge, you are urged to choose to learn by being inquisitive, attentive, and interested in what goes on around, and within, you during the laboratory. Dive boldly into the experience. Be an active participant, not a passive observer. Dare to experiment with your own behavior, and join in examining it along with your co-learners. While learning, you can have a lot of fun together!

On Running for President

You have noticed that the organization chart contained in the *GCSC Employee Handbook* lists several roles and job titles.

Each job, except Board of Directors, will be performed by a student – including President. The President will have the responsibility of staffing the organization by selecting other learners to fill the open positions by whatever means she/he feels is appropriate.

But first, the President must be selected. The instructor will facilitate a democratic process to enable the class as a whole to decide who should be President. You are encouraged to consider being a candidate.

Why? Because the President will undoubtedly learn more about organizational conflict and its resolution, and about management in general, than any other student. In the GCSC, students are *not* role-playing. As President, you will be managing a real organization of real workers, doing real work, being paid in real currency of real value. So, you will be handling real management challenges that have real relevance to your career in real life.

Concerned about your qualifications? Don't feel timid about being President simply because you have never been a manager, or have little business experience. In fact, being President of GCSC presents an opportunity for you to get real management experience before you become a manager, or to enhance your management skills in your real career, where your performance really matters. One of the most effective Presidents in the history of the GCSC simulation was a 45-year-old returning student who had "done nothing" but raise six children for the previous twenty years. Her inadequacy fears at the beginning of the class were replaced by well-deserved self-confidence at the end.

Take a chance! You have nothing to lose but a priceless opportunity!