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Developing The Great Eight Competencies with Leaderless Group Discussion

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The Great Eight competencies are work behaviors that promote employee effectiveness in 21st-century organizations. These competencies include enterprising and performing, adapting and coping, organizing and executing, creating and conceptualizing, analyzing and interpreting, interacting and presenting, supporting and cooperating, and leading and deciding. This article proposes an alternative pedagogy, leaderless group discussion, for developing the Great Eight competencies in business students. An example and a roadmap are also provided that show how leaderless group discussion can be employed in the college classroom. Leaderless group discussion is surprisingly efficient in that all of the Great Eight competencies can be developed within the student at the same time with one exercise. Recommendations to help make leaderless group discussion practical for the business classroom are discussed.

Keywords: *Great Eight competencies; leaderless group discussion; leadership development*

Work competencies are broadly defined in the literature; they can include traits, motives, knowledge, abilities, and skilled behaviors (e.g., Boyatzis, Stubbs, & Taylor, 2002; Brockbank, Ulrich, & Beatty, 1999; McClelland, 1973). Bartram, Robertson, and Callinan (2002) proposed a more narrow interpretation of competencies, defining them as "sets of behaviours that are instrumental in the delivery of desired results or outcomes" (p. 7). Bartram and his colleagues arrived at 112 competencies of

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Table 1
Great Eight Competencies

Competency	Definition
Leading and deciding	Takes control and exercises leadership. Initiates action, gives direction, and takes responsibility.
Supporting and cooperating	Supports others and shows respect for them. Puts people first, working effectively with individuals and teams, clients, and staff. Behaves consistently with clear personal values that complement those of the firm.
Interacting and presenting	Communicates and networks effectively. Successfully persuades and influences others. Relates to others in confident, relaxed manner.
Analyzing and interpreting	Shows evidence of clear analytical thinking. Gets to the heart of complex problems and issues. Applies own expertise effectively. Quickly takes on new technology. Communicates well in writing.
Creating and conceptualizing	Works well in situations requiring openness to new ideas and experiences. Handles situations and problems with innovation and creativity. Thinks broadly and strategically. Supports and drives organizational change. Seeks out learning opportunities.
Adapting and coping	Adapts and responds well to change. Manages pressure effectively and copes well with setbacks.
Organization and execution	Plans ahead, works in systematic and organized way. Follows directions and procedures. Focuses on customer satisfaction and delivers a quality service or product to the agreed standards.
Enterprising and performance	Focuses on results and achieving personal work objectives. Works energetically and enthusiastically. Works best when work is related closely to results and impact of personal efforts is obvious. Shows understanding of business, commerce, and finance. Seeks opportunities for self-development and career advancement.

Source: Bartram (2005; competency titles and definitions are taken from SHL Universal Competency Framework™ Profiler and Designer Cards).

work performance, defined at the most detailed level (Bartram, 2005). After statistically clustering these 112 competencies, the underlying factors serve as the Great Eight competencies of work performance. As shown in Table 1, the Great Eight represent a broad assortment of relatively independent work behaviors relevant for today's professional workforce (Bartram, 2005). Work competencies, such as enterprising, adaptive, organized, creative, analytical, interacting, supportive, and decisive leadership, promote effectiveness in 21st-century organizations.

In a *Wall Street Journal* survey, corporate recruiters rated communication/ interpersonal skills, team skills, and analytical problem-solving skills the three most important attributes when assessing MBA candidates for their companies' job openings (Alsop, 2003). Ability to drive results and leadership potential were rated the fourth and sixth most critical qualities in the same survey. There appears to be a similarity between these recruiters' hiring criteria and six of the Great Eight competencies. Considering the relevance of the Great Eight to the corporate recruiting process, how can business educators develop these competencies in their management students, preparing them for the work that lies ahead? We think that leaderless group discussion (LGD) may be a good pedagogical answer. In this article, we provide a rationale for using LGD as a student development tool and a roadmap showing how it can be adopted in the college classroom.

LGD as a Student Development Tool

Before exploring the connection between the Great Eight and LGD, we first looked at a related line of research (i.e., the leadership skills literature) that considered the suitability of various pedagogical methods. Doh (2003) concluded that "leadership skills are best acquired as a part of a practical, experiential education program" (p. 65). In his view, traditional classroom education (e.g., lectures, classroom discussion, case analysis) can help students gain an understanding and familiarity with leadership but is insufficient for developing leadership skills. In addition, Boyatzis et al. (2002) said that the intrapersonal and interpersonal skills of MBA students cannot be developed well in a traditional MBA curriculum. Nontraditional activities, such as specialized leadership development workshops, off-campus volunteer projects, and involvement in on-campus student clubs, may be more compatible to the learning of the "softer" skill areas.

Traditional pedagogy may not be suited for developing some of the Great Eight competencies in students, just as it has not been suited for leadership and interpersonal skills. Of the more traditional teaching methods, case discussion may correspond best to the Great Eight; but, because students have ample opportunity to prepare their case solutions ahead of time, this method may have some limitations. Though there is no substitute for well-thought-out decisions, a managers' role sometimes demands rapid decision making to solve newly emerging problems (Mintzberg, 1973). Three of the Great Eight competencies imply quick thinking behavior. Decisive leading, adapting to change, and analyzing and interpreting suggest accuracy and speed, getting quickly to the heart of complex problems.

Another traditional pedagogy, informal small group exercises, may have some functionality in developing the Great Eight. A significant drawback to informal groups is that students typically receive little feedback on their behavior and performance in these small-group sessions. Role-plays, a teaching method that has students taking on prescribed roles, may be effective in developing some of the Great Eight competencies but not others. For example, students can become more supportive and cooperative with practice; role-plays may be useful in developing this particular competency. However, competencies such as "analyzing and interpreting" and "creating and conceptualizing" cannot be easily confined to a role-play. Unless the roles are broadly defined, freewheeling and "out of the box" thinking—which are needed to solve nonroutine problems—may not occur in the role-play.

As an alternative to these traditional methods, we are proposing the use of LGD to develop business students' Great Eight competencies in the academic setting. As the name implies, LGD's can have as many as 6 to 10 participants attempting to solve a "work-related" problem without a leader (Bass, 1950; Thornton, 1992; Thornton & Rupp, 2006). Multiple assessors observe and evaluate the behavior and performance of each LGD participant. LGD's, along with in-baskets, oral presentations, interviews, standardized testing, and writing assignments, have served as exercises in an organization's assessment-center (AC) program to identify employees with promotion potential. AC's originated during World War II to select military officers and have since been used by larger businesses and governmental units to assess the promotion potential of their internal candidates.

Early research demonstrated the effectiveness of AC's in predicting promotion rates in business organizations. Hinrichs (1978) reported that employee ratings in AC exercises were significantly correlated with the organizational level of these employees 8 years later. In a recent meta-analysis of AC validity, Arthur, Day, McNelly, and Edens (2003) found that the mean estimated true validity is .36 for AC ratings predicting job performance, promotion rate, and future salary. In a study focused solely on the validity of leaderless groups, LGD's were found to be an effective predictor of job performance, even with an 8-year gap between the LGD exercise and ratings of job performance (Shechtman, 1992).

AC's and LGD's have also surfaced in the academic setting. Some business schools use them to evaluate student learning outcomes (Bartels, Bommer, & Rubin, 2000; Riggio, Mayes, & Schleicher, 2003; Waldman & Korbar, 2004). AC's have provided these schools with a systematic way of evaluating whether their students are learning, keeping in line with the Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business's (AACSB, 2006)

Assurance of Learning standards. Both Smith and Forbes (2001) and McEvoy et al. (2005) reported that the effectiveness of new competency-based curricula was evaluated with AC methodology, which included LGD's.

Besides program evaluation, AC's are, at times, included as pedagogy in business schools to develop student skills. Hunt and Weintraub (2004) reported the use of half-day AC exercises to develop the interpersonal skills of undergraduate business students. The purpose of this program was not really to improve the students' interpersonal skills but to develop the coaching skills of MBA's who served as coaches to these students. Extejt, Forbes, and Smith (1996) reported that AC activities have good potential for preparing the naïve undergraduate management students for the real business world. Waldman and Korbar (2004) found that AC exercises conducted in an upper-level undergraduate course are the best predictors of the participant's postgraduate promotion rate, after controlling for undergraduate GPA and the Big Five personality measures (i.e., agreeableness, extroversion, conscientiousness, emotional stability, and openness to new experiences). Extejt et al. attributed the success of AC's in higher education to the intense feedback provided to each student immediately after the exercises.

Of the AC exercises employed in Waldman and Korbar's (2004) study conducted in the university setting, LGD fared the best. That is, student performance ratings in LGD's were the study's best overall predictor of future workplace promotions ($r = .38$, $p < .01$) and future salary ($r = .37$, $p < .01$). As a result, Waldman and Korbar highly recommended its use as a student development tool in college classrooms. Boyatzis et al. (2002) made a similar claim for the effectiveness of nontraditional pedagogy such as LGD's. In support of this thinking, Waldman and Korbar said,

> Leaderless group discussion activity could be incorporated into courses dealing with various content areas (e.g., management, marketing, operations, etc.). This would give students the opportunity to practice the interpersonal competencies represented by the leaderless group discussion in the context of their real-time, content-based coursework. It would also allow for feedback on those competencies from both instructors and peer classmates. (p. 164)

Why do LGD's have such good potential for developing the Great Eight competencies in business students? LGD participants are typically rated by multiple assessors on dimensions such as oral communications, persuasiveness, interpersonal sensitivity, energy, leadership, problem analysis and decision making, risk taking, planning and organizing, tolerance for stress, and adaptability (Gatewood & Field, 2001; Heneman & Judge, 2006; Thornton, 1992; Thornton & Rupp, 2006). These LGD dimensions are similar to the Great Eight competencies in Table 1. Though persuasiveness is not shown on the Great Eight list, it is identified as one of Bartram's (2005) 112 detailed subcompetencies, falling directly under the "interacting and presenting" competency. From this point forward, we include the persuasiveness behavior with the interacting and presenting competency because of its strong connection to LGD's.

So far, we have discovered that the LGD method has good predictive validity (i.e., good predictor of future promotions and salaries) and suitable content validity because of its overlapping content with the Great Eight domains. LGD is a nontraditional pedagogy that may help with the development of the Great Eight in business management students. It can develop student behaviors, such as leadership, teamwork, persuasiveness, problem analysis, creativity, and enterprising, which are compatible to the hiring requirements of the modern business organization facing ambiguity and rapid changes both inside and outside of its boundaries. LGD's are paradoxically efficient in that all of the Great Eight competencies can be developed within the student at the same time, with one exercise.

LGD's in Business Education

Variations of the LGD method have been tried in college classrooms. Each variation has its own shortcomings, and most fall short as a bona fide LGD. For example, Lewicki, Bowen, Hall, and Hall's (1988) city council activity has small student groups deciding how donated land should be used to better the quality of living in a particular municipality. The leader of each student group reports that group's preferred solution to the whole class. Similarly, Quinn, Faerman, Thompson, and McGrath's (1990) sexual harassment activity has the students working in small groups to decide the outcome of a harassment complaint. Follow-up discussion questions are provided so that the group members can critique the quality of their own interactions.

What the Lewicki et al. (1988) and Quinn et al. (1990) exercises lack is the intense behavioral feedback provided in a bona fide LGD exercise. Students can exhibit a number of dysfunctional behaviors in these sessions (e.g., loafing, rudeness, poor listening skills) without hearing or reading about it. To some extent, Whetten and Cameron (1991) addressed this weakness by having student observers provide a commentary on the group's effectiveness in a number of areas such as decision making, communication, and leadership. This approach allows for feedback on the group's interaction but not on the individual participant's behavior. Giving objective, detailed, and specific performance feedback to each individual participant is not planned. Even the quantity and quality of the feedback provided to the group by these student observers seems inadequate. Student observers may lack the training to provide this group feedback.

LGD activities have appeared in other experiential management books and teaching supplements (Bernardin & Russell, 1993; DeCenzo & Robbins, 1994; Nkomo, Fottler, & McAfee, 2000). All have common weaknesses. The focus of these LGD's is on learning the subject matter; improving one's communication and interpersonal skills seem secondary. There appears to be no systematic plan for developing key managerial competencies, such as the Great Eight, in these LGD exercises. The main fault is that there is typically little to no individualized performance feedback given by trained assessors.

Unlike previous practices, we propose a more balanced use of LGD in the business classroom. Students learn a discipline's theories and concepts while discovering their personal strengths and weaknesses in an LGD problem-solving group. Instead of providing feedback at the group level, our approach emphasizes individualized feedback given by a credible source, the professor. Faculty members have the assessment experience. As a coach, the faculty can give each student accurate feedback on how well they performed on the Great Eight competencies, correcting deficiencies when necessary. Peers are also called on to give their observations of participant behavior. Past uses of LGD in the business classroom have not emphasized the LGD dimensions, such as persuasiveness, leadership, and interpersonal sensitivity. Our approach focuses on the Great Eight competencies that give students a model of prototypical behaviors to exhibit in a LGD. With this as a context, our classroom experience with LGD's is discussed next.

Running the LGD Exercise

LGD exercises are incorporated into an upper-level hybrid MBA course, co-taught once a week by a human resources management (HRM) professor and a communications professor. The class meets 3 hours each week (with a 15-minute break) for 14 weeks. For the past two semesters, 11 students and 18 students were enrolled in this course, respectively. Our college's flex-MBA program enrolls only part-time students who work full-time in their organizations. The goal of this hybrid course is to develop the students' communications skills and to enhance their understanding of HRM and organizational behavior (OB) so that they can work more effectively in a middle- to upper-management role. Students are expected to have completed the foundation courses in the MBA curriculum, including an introductory OB course, prior to enrolling in this hybrid course. HRM is not covered in any of the eight foundation courses. Besides their participation in LGD exercises, students in this hybrid course give oral presentations, facilitate problem-solving meetings, provide coaching to one another, and learn about selection interviewing. The theme of each LGD, oral presentation, and group facilitation meeting involves a different HRM/OB topic. Hence, learning occurs on two fronts: communication skills and HRM/OB content. A maximum of 9 in-class hours is devoted to LGD's. Six of these hours are practice time and are scheduled in the second and third weeks of the semester; the last 2 to 3 hours of LGD are graded and occur on the last night of the semester.

To make sure that the LGD dimensions and Great Eight competencies were relevant to the current (or future) work of our MBA students, we collected the performance appraisal (PA) forms used to evaluate the middle- to upper-level managers' performance in the 30 largest employing organizations located near the college. (The average number of full-time employees working *locally* at these 30 firms is 2,497, *SD* = 4174; as reported in the 2004 *Rochester Business Journal* ("The Lists," 2004), the larger firms on this list come from the following industries: imaging, document technology, food distribution, health care, payroll processing, eye health care products, communications, and banking.) If the LGD dimensions and Great Eight competencies are relevant to the professional work of our MBAs in their current (future) roles as higher level managers, then these dimensions and competencies should appear on their companies' PA forms. In this informal study, we found that there is good overlap in the content of the 30 PA forms with both the LGD dimensions and the Great Eight, justifying the use of LGD's in our hybrid MBA course. We then proceeded with the development of specially made LGD exercises for our MBA students.

Step 1: Prepare the LGD's. In line with Thornton and Mueller-Hanson's (2004) instructions on how to create appropriate LGD exercises, we developed eight LGD's for this course. One of the LGD's is presented in the appendix; the others are available from the authors by request.

Following Waldman and Korbar's (2004) suggestion for adopting discipline-specific LGD's in the classroom, each LGD focused on a different HRM or OB theme. Each LGD was pilot-tested with three business faculty to make sure that they provided an appropriate challenge for our MBA students. To provide this challenge, the main theme in each LGD originated from the findings reported in a scholarly peer-review article appearing in a prominent management or applied psychology journal. As shown in the appendix, the sample LGD reflects Kacmar, Andrews, Van Rooy, Steilberg, and Cerrone's (2006) model showing the causes and effects of employee turnover in the fast-food industry.

Step 2: Introduce LGD's to students. The goal of this 45-minute LGD introduction is to (a) discuss the meaning of the Great Eight competencies, (b) present the LGD rating form, (c) learn the history of AC's and LGD, (d) experience an introductory LGD case, and (e) develop a common understanding among the students of what effective performance is in a LGD exercise. Each of these topics is discussed next.

With the professor leading, the students briefly discuss the LGD dimensions and Great Eight competencies. (Students are asked to carefully review the Great Eight competencies in Table 1 prior to class.) The rating form used by the professor(s), peer assessors, and self-appraisers to evaluate the student's behavior and performance in the LGD's is distributed and discussed briefly. This rating form, which has evaluative anchors (*exceptional*, *average*, and *below average*), mirrors Bartram's (2005) Great Eight competencies. Consideration should be given to differentially weighting the Great Eight competencies on this rating form. For example, we give analyzing and interpreting, creating and conceptualizing, interacting and presenting (persuasiveness), and organizing and executing more weight than the other competencies, when the ratings are combined into a total score, because these competencies are probably more valuable to an organization's decision making. Arthur et al.'s (2003) findings indicating the importance of some AC dimensions (e.g., problem solving, influencing others) over others (e.g., drive, consideration) in accounting for performance variance appear to justify such a weighting system.

The students read the history and description of AC's and LGD's prior to class. In class, the students experience an introductory LGD that describes the possible use of an AC in the fictitious DePere Health System. Their assignment is to (a) develop a list of reasons for adopting an AC procedure in the DePere Health System; (b) develop a list of reasons why an AC program should not be adopted at DePere; (c) determine what other information that you need to make a sound decision on whether an AC should be adopted at DePere; (d) assume for the moment that an AC is to be adopted, then develop a list of recommendations to insure that it is properly installed at DePere; and (e) decide whether an AC program should or should not be adopted. This introductory LGD case is, in part, based on

Carissimi's (1982) article that described AC's in the health care industry. Three professors reviewed the DePere case to make sure that it provides students with a good introduction to AC's and, more specifically, to the LGD process. This experiential introductory case takes approximately 25 to 30 minutes to complete. After the discussion, students read examples of effective Great Eight performance relating to the DePere case. A common frame of reference as to why each example reflects effective performance on a particular competency is developed to maximize the students' understanding of the Great Eight. The best answers as to whether an AC should or should not be adopted at DePere come from the AC literature. As stated, persuasiveness is an important aspect of the presenting and interacting competency. Because of its ambiguity, it is given more attention in this introduction, making sure that students understand how persuasiveness can be effectively demonstrated. Most of the persuasiveness examples come from Cialdini's research (e.g., Cialdini & Sagarin, 2005).

Step 3: Conduct LGD's for practice. After the introductory DePere case, the students practice more LGD cases during the next class and a half. Students are told that performance in the practice sessions will not be formally graded. All practice LGD's are videotaped; those videotapes that are not replayed in class are uploaded on the Blackboard Learning System™ for easy retrieval and observation on the student's home computer. In the semester with 11 students, all 11 formed one LGD group. Though 11 is just 1 more participant than Bass's (1950) maximum number, the students encountered few problems with the size of the group. Based on this experience with 11 students, we would now like to give recommendations for running one large LGD group.

The students are given 5 minutes to read the practice LGD in the appendix, gather their thoughts, and formulate their position. They are given no prior information on the theme of the LGD. To make sure that some participants do not have prior experience with a LGD topic, which may give them an advantage, the students could be surveyed at the beginning of the semester. This survey could ask about the students' work experience on many HRM and OB topics, including the ones in the LGD's. Having backup LGD's may be necessary in case some students have a good working knowledge about certain LGD topics. The discussion time allowed for a LGD is set at 25 minutes. After the students finish the LGD, the HRM professor provides the solution. The solution of the sample LGD is included in the appendix. Students read the short solution. The HRM professor also comments on the different contributions made by the students, indicating examples of effective performance on the various competencies. After reading the solution and hearing the HRM professor's remarks about the case and student contributions, the written summary and the LGD case are collected so that they can be used again in future semesters. Segments of the 25-minute videotaped discussion are then replayed. When watching the videotape, students are asked to assess their own performance, using the LGD rating form. Because our LGD's are based on empirical studies, we can say that there is a best solution. Hence, students are asked to gauge the quality of their proposed solutions relative to the HRM professor's solution, to assess their performance on the "analyzing and interpreting" and "creating and conceptualizing" competencies. To show the kinds of solutions proposed by our MBA students, we took some of their comments in previous MBA courses and included them in the appendix. The ordering of these student solutions in the appendix reflects when they were presented.

Prior to the second LGD practice case, students have the opportunity to ask questions or make comments about their experiences with LGD thus far. The discussion time for LGD 2 is set at 25 minutes. After the students complete their work on LGD 2, the HRM professor comments on the students' contributions and provides a solution. Students are then instructed to observe the videotape of LGD 2 on their own time. The video is uploaded on the Blackboard Learning System™ for easy retrieval. As a part of this homework assignment, they are told to assess their own performance using the rating form. They are also asked to write a two-page narrative critique of their performance and indicate ways that their LGD performance could be improved in future LGD exercises. This required, two-page self-critique is to be based on the results of both the first and second practice nights.

Both professors provide each student with written feedback on their first night's LGD performance at the next class meeting. More specifically, the communications professor briefly summarizes each student's strengths and weaknesses on the following dimensions: leading and deciding, supporting and cooperating, interacting and presenting (persuading), and adapting and coping. The HRM professor briefly summarizes the student's strengths and weaknesses on the other four dimensions: analyzing and interpreting, creating and conceptualizing, organizing and executing, and enterprising and performing. This brief description of each student's strengths and weaknesses is written in the Comments section on the rating form. Numerical ratings are not provided for the two practice sessions. The instructor's review of the videotape to record all of the participants' strengths and weaknesses can take as long as 1 hour for each LGD.

On the second practice night, the 11-student group experiences three more LGD cases. Most of the procedures used on the first practice night are employed in this second practice session. The videotape of the three LGD's is not replayed on the second practice night. Students observe the tape on their own time.

In the semester with 18 students in the course, the 18 were divided into two LGD groups on the first practice night. Based on this experience, we would now like to put forth some recommendations for running two LGD groups. The composition of both groups is balanced for gender and work experience. Both groups experience the introductory DePere case together. Afterward, each subgroup practices a different LGD case on the first practice night. While the one group of students participates in the LGD, each member of the second group observes and evaluates the performance of a particular student in the LGD. Peer observers read both the LGD case and the HR professor's best solution to the LGD *before* the LGD discussion begins. In this way, peers can better determine the quality of the student's contributions, providing the participant with more accurate feedback on the "analyzing and interpreting" and "creating and conceptualizing" competencies. Using the coaching techniques provided in an earlier class in the semester (for a description of an alternative coaching model, see Weintraub, Hunt, Brown, Bosse, & Schiffman, 1998), each student coach first assesses the assigned LGD participant's performance and then provides the follow-up one-on-one coaching. Coaches explain their evaluations and then establish a dialogue exploring ways to improve the participant's future performance on the Great Eight competencies. As mentioned, peer coaches are not asked to assign numerical ratings in the two practice sessions, only qualitative feedback.

Portions of both group's LGD videotapes are also replayed in this first LGD class, allowing each student an opportunity to appraise his or her own behavior and performance. As a part of a homework assignment, students are told to assess their own performance, using the rating form. They are also asked to write a two-page self-critique of their performance. This required self-critique is to be based on the first and second nights of LGD practice.

On the second night of LGD practice, each subgroup practices two LGD's. LGD participants receive peer feedback only. This peer-feedback process may need to be shortened because four LGD's are scheduled on this second practice night. The required self-critique of the second practice session is based on the student's observation of the videotape via the Blackboard Learning System™ on their own time.

Step 4: Development of other communication skills. The student's coaching skills are developed in the first class of the semester. More specifically, DeNisi and Kluger's (2000) performance feedback recommendations (e.g., current employee performance should be compared to employee's past performance instead of the performance of other employees) and Whetten and Cameron's (2002) eight attributes of supportive communication (e.g., use problem-oriented communication instead of person-oriented) are covered in this first class. Students practice these coaching skills in the first class, providing feedback to another student on his or her introductory impromptu speech. Students also use these coaching skills at different times in the course. In the semester with two LGD subgroups, they coach each other in the LGD practice sessions. The two LGD practice sessions are held in the second and third weeks of the semester.

Then the student's group-facilitation skills are developed in weeks 4 through 7. Each student is assigned a different HRM or OB case to facilitate. After learning a number of helpful group-facilitation techniques in the fourth class of the semester, each student leads the others in a discussion and resolution of the case in weeks 5 through 7. After student discussion of each case, the HRM professor provides the answer to the case. The communications professor provides each student facilitator with a critique of their group-facilitation performance. The students also make a couple of impromptu speeches and a formal oral presentation in weeks 10 through 13. As mentioned, each oral presentation focuses on a different HRM or OB topic. The communications professor coaches the delivery skills of the student; the HRM professor critiques the content of the formal oral presentation. The presentation and group-facilitation segments in this course are designed to help with the development of the students' Great Eight competencies, preparing them for the graded LGD's on the final night. Making oral presentations primarily strengthens the student's interacting and presenting competency, whereas facilitating a group process develops a number of competencies, such as leading and deciding, adaptation and coping, and organization and execution.

Step 5: Conduct the graded LGD's. After developing the students' presentation and group-facilitation skills, three LGD cases are conducted in the class with 11 students on the final night of the semester. The three graded LGD's are viewed as an oral final examination in this course. Their performance in these LGD exercises constitutes 15% of their course grade. After student discussion of each LGD, the HRM professor again provides the solution. The three LGD's are videotaped so that the student can later observe and critique his or her own performance. This self-evaluation assignment is optional. Using the assessment procedures described previously, the communications professor and the HRM professor later provide (through e-mail) each student with quick feedback on their performance in the last three LGD's.

For the larger 18-student class, new LGD subgroups are formed. The two groups are again balanced for gender and experience. Each 9-person LGD subgroup is given an hour to solve two LGD cases. The HRM professor provides the solution after each case. The two groups are scheduled in back-to-back sessions, meaning that only one group is present in the classroom at one time. Hence, the same two LGD cases can be used for both groups.

Conclusion

Waldman and Korbar's (2004) research suggests that LGD may be a promising pedagogy for student development purposes. Along with Waldman and Korbar, we believe in the efficacy of LGD's to develop important competencies in university students. This method appears to be particularly suited for developing the business student's Great Eight competencies. Because LGD can develop all of the Great Eight in students at the same time, it may offer business educators an advantage that other pedagogies do not.

Although our classroom experience supports the use of LGD's, its value is still uncertain without empirical evidence. Future research should attempt to provide this evidence. For instance, LGD's could be contrasted with other teaching pedagogy in a controlled experiment to determine which has the largest effects on the development of the Great Eight. The extent to which intense practice in LGD exercises in multiple courses improves performance on the analyzing and interpreting competency over time, after controlling for the effects of the SAT or GMAT scores, is worth investigating.

A similar question could be asked about the interacting and presenting (persuading) and leading and deciding competencies. It seems that extroverted students should fare better on these competencies than would introverts. In an early study, Gebel (1954) reported that more outgoing, extroverted individuals performed better in a LGD than did the more passive, introverted persons. Waldman and Korbar's (2004) research showed that overall student performance in an LGD exercise correlated with the student's level of extroversion

($r = .25$); but LGD performance in their study was not assessed over time, casting doubt as to whether an introvert's performance on certain competencies can improve. Whether extensive practice in LGD's helps to develop the interacting and presenting (persuading) and the leading and deciding competencies in the introvert remains to be seen. Besides the development of the Great Eight competencies, the LGD process also imparts discipline-specific knowledge (Waldman & Korbar, 2004). Another direction for research is to assess the amount of discipline-specific learning that occurs in LGD exercises versus more traditional pedagogy, such as lecture or case discussion.

From a practical perspective, LGD's offer both advantages and disadvantages that must be recognized. Notwithstanding the strength of faculty feedback, one MBA reported in his semester-end course evaluation: "Almost every behavior was graded—constantly under the microscope—leads to a focus on grade achievement instead of learning." To mitigate this concern, peer feedback could be emphasized more in the LGD practice classes. Peers could be provided coaching training similar to ours or the training detailed in Weintraub et al. (1998) on how to provide constructive feedback. In this way, the role of students might be expanded to a coaching role, helping their fellow students to recognize their strengths and weaknesses in the LGD exercises, without the threat that comes from constant faculty evaluation. Formalizing this coaching role with in-class training and education provides students with another communication skill for future managerial jobs.

Note that the faculty role changes with the use of LGD's. Faculty serve as feedback providers, coaching students instead of providing right answers and designing lectures. This coaching role can be taxing, depending on the number of students and faculty interest. Other than producing LGD cases, the faculty's workload is heavy toward the end of the LGD process. Observing and rating student performance in multiple LGD videotapes is a different kind of challenge for the instructor as it demands meticulous follow-up assessment. These demands may be another reason for switching some of the coaching responsibilities to the students. The value of self-evaluation (i.e., students observing their own LGD performance in the videotape) should not be underestimated, considering that it provides the student with a baseline of performance in the practice LGD's and a visual record of change, from the baseline to the graded LGD's.

Although LGD's may appear to have limited application because of the small student numbers participating in each exercise, we have illustrated how two LGD groups can be used in a course. We could also see three LGD groups operating with shortened cases and two student observers providing feedback to each LGD participant. Incorporating LGD's in undergraduate capstone courses, which typically have smaller enrollments, and upper-level MBA courses may be more doable. As to the practicality of having two faculty teaching 20 students, one of the two could come from the adjunct ranks. Teaming a full-time faculty with an adjunct from the business world may strengthen the credibility of the students' learning experience. We want to stress that team-teaching is not a requisite for LGD. LGD can be employed in courses taught with only one professor. Often faculty outside of the communications area have experience assessing the softer skills that occur in oral presentations; thus, evaluating competencies, such as supporting and cooperating and persuasiveness may not pose a big hurdle for these professors.

Positioning informal LGD's in as many single-taught courses in the business curriculum as possible might be a way of strengthening the desirable qualities of the school's graduates. Having eight randomly chosen students solve a discipline-specific LGD problem in front of the entire class should be a Great Eight competency builder. These informal LGD's need to last only 10 to 12 minutes; afterward, the teacher could privately give each student quick feedback on how to improve on one or two of the Great Eight. Participating in these informal LGD's in a number of courses will refine the student's competencies over time. As to the practicality of this suggestion, 39% of AACSB schools reported that their business school's average class size is 30 or fewer (results from AACSB's 2005–2006 Business School Questionnaire with 486 member schools responding). Thus, LGD may be an especially good fit for these smaller schools.

To conclude, LGD appears to be a viable pedagogy for developing students' Great Eight competencies in the college classroom. Learning to think critically, creatively, and quickly; translating these ideas into problem solutions; and then articulating these solutions in a persuasive manner while expressing proper care for the ideas of others are, in a nutshell, the LGD experience. Not only are the Great Eight developed through the LGD process, but the students also learn discipline-specific knowledge when resolving each LGD case. Much of what occurs in an LGD exercise mirrors the competencies needed in today's organizations. LGD's are elegant in that a student's Great Eight competencies can be developed concurrently in a LGD exercise, offering an efficacy and unexpected economy to this educational forum.

Appendix
Sample LGD Case

Practice LGD: Burger Haven Restaurants—recommended time: 25 minutes

Burger Haven's top management team (which includes you) wants to better understand the firm's voluntary turnover problem. After making sense of the problem, Burger Haven's CEO wants you and the team to come up with some good recommendations for Burger Haven's 183 corporate-owned restaurants.

Voluntary turnover is the rate at which workers voluntarily leave the organization. The current turnover rate of hourly employees across the 183 stores is 138% annually. The average number of hourly employees per store has remained at 50 over the past 5 years. The current average voluntary turnover rate of the Burger Haven restaurant management team is 47% annually. The average number of managers per store is 4. Both the 138% and the 47% figures are up significantly from previous years. Burger Haven's restaurant hours typically run from 6 a.m. to 10 p.m., 7 days a week.

Besides the voluntary turnover issue, Burger Haven's top managers will be looking at some alarming statistics across their 183 stores. Two years ago, the average wait time, which is the period of time from when a customer orders to the delivery of food, increased from 3 minutes and 3 seconds to 3 minutes and 53 seconds. This year's wait time is just about 4 minutes. Another concern for top management is the 5% rise in the value of food waste.

Eight years ago, Burger Haven instituted a semi-annual employee satisfaction survey. The results of the last four surveys indicate that the job satisfaction and morale of hourly employees has remained constant, whereas the level of job satisfaction and morale of managers has dropped significantly during this time period. This drop seems to be consistent across most items, with biggest decrease appearing in the pay and benefits areas.

In the past 2 years, Burger Haven's gross annual revenues and profits at its 183 restaurants have fallen short of the CEO's expectations. Revenues and profits are strong in some Burger Haven restaurants but weak in others. Though it is expected that the restaurant's location will affect the store's profitability, the CEO can't help but think that there may be other explanations for the performance variations between restaurants.

Sample Solutions Proposed By Mba Students

- "The turnover percentages may not be that bad—especially in comparison to other fast-food restaurants. It would be helpful to see industry turnover statistics."

(continued)

Appendix (continued)

- "A study should be conducted to determine what the difference is between the strong performing stores and weak performing stores. Identify the best practices at the various locations."
- "Sometimes, turnover cannot be controlled. If employees must drive 20 minutes to their jobs at one location and other employees walk a block at another location, this may account for turnover differences between restaurants."
- "There appears to be a cause-and-effect relationship between the variables in this case. Managerial and employee turnover seem to cause inefficient response times to the customer as well as more waste of food products; the slower customer response times and the food waste then reduces profits due to increased costs or lower revenues."

HRM PROFESSOR'S SOLUTION

Holtom, Mitchell, Lee, and Inderrieden (2005) provided a summary of the more traditional thinking about employee turnover. There is functional and dysfunctional turnover. Are you losing high-performing employees or low-performing employees? This question can be answered by looking at the performance evaluations of the exiting employees. If the majority of exiting employees falls in the superior-performance range, then it would seem that the organization has a problem. There is also avoidable and unavoidable turnover to consider. What percentage of your outstanding performers is leaving for reasons outside the firm's control? This would be unavoidable turnover and would probably be viewed as less problematic than avoidable turnover.

Historically, organizations focused on employee job satisfaction or dissatisfaction as the root cause of voluntary turnover. Satisfied employees were likely to stay, and dissatisfied employees would tend to leave. Recent meta-analysis results (Griffeth, Hom, & Gaertner, 2000) suggest that the relationship between employee job satisfaction and voluntary turnover is statistically significant but relatively weak. Apparently, job satisfaction or dissatisfaction does not really explain why employees stay or leave the organization. If employee job satisfaction or dissatisfaction cannot explain employee turnover, then what does?

Holtom et al. (2005) provided a different explanation for how voluntary turnover works in organizations. They suggested that major shocks or jarring events may initiate the quitting process. A shock can be positive or negative. The more recent literature indicates that better performers are more likely to quit the organization because of a jarring shock than job dissatisfaction.

Kacmar et al.'s (2006) research of 262 Burger King restaurants validated a model showing the linkages between voluntary turnover and organizational outcomes. They found that management turnover in the Burger King restaurants led to hourly worker (crew) turnover. Greater crew turnover and management turnover then led to longer wait times for customers (lower efficiency because of worker

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Appendix (continued)

inexperience). Longer wait times for customers then led to reduced sales and then reduced profits for the restaurants. Kacmar et al. also predicted employee turnover and management turnover would lead to an increase in food waste, resulting in lower profitability. Their Burger King results did not fully support the food-waste prediction. They found that employee turnover did lead to increased food waste, but increased food waste unexpectedly did not lead to lower profitability.

Applying Holtom et al.'s (2005) unfolding shock model and Kacmar et al.'s (2006) results to the Burger Haven case, it seems that crew members in the Burger Haven restaurants were reasonably satisfied with their jobs, but the jarring shock of seeing their manager quit caused them to reconsider and quit. A loyalty developed between crew members and their manager. In sum, it seems that preserving this relationship between an effective manager and high-performing crew members is critical to the financial success of Burger Haven. Considering Kacmar et al.'s findings, Burger Haven should primarily focus on lowering the management turnover rate. Discovering why the turnover rate is high for managers (with probing survey questions or focus group sessions) would be a good start, followed up with the implementation of HR strategies that are targeted at reducing the managerial turnover rate. Reducing managerial turnover should lead to lower crew member turnover, which then leads to less inefficiency (i.e., faster wait times) and, ultimately, to higher Burger Haven revenues and profits.

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