

Using *American Experience - The Boys of '36* to Integrate Motivation, Leadership, and Teamwork

Douglas W. Lyon

Fort Lewis College, USA

Mika Kusar

Fort Lewis College, USA

Abstract. This classroom exercise uses the documentary *American Experience - The Boys of '36* to integrate management concepts involving motivation, leadership, group development, and teamwork concepts. For perspective, an explicit integration of the three topics is seldom addressed in most textbooks. This exercise is appropriate for both undergraduate and graduate classes in management principles, leadership, and organizational behavior. It can be completed in a 60 or 90-minute class. Student feedback is very positive.

Keywords: film, motivation, leadership, teamwork.

1. Introduction

The Public Broadcast Service (PBS) documentary, *American Experience - The Boys of '36*, is an excellent vehicle to integrate motivation, leadership, group development, and teamwork concepts in a Principles of Management class into a single, vivid, entertaining, and academically appropriate exercise. *American Experience - The Boys of '36* is a 53-minute PBS documentary about the United States men's rowing team in the 1936 Berlin Olympics. The film is available from a variety of outlets including Amazon.com and YouTube.com.

Learning Objectives

Upon successful completion of this exercise, students will be able to:

LO 1: Apply Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs Theory and McClelland's Theory of Needs to explain individual motivation.

LO 2: Compare and contrast leadership styles and explain the advantages and disadvantages of a given leadership style.

LO 3: Identify specific characteristics of Transformational Leaders and evaluate the impact of these characteristics on individuals and teams.

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LO 4: Identify the first four stages of group development. Assess the critical factors that lead to team effectiveness.

Theoretical Foundation

Films are a powerful teaching tool as students are given a break from traditional classroom activities. Rich story lines spark student curiosity and engagement and provide students with scenarios representing the full complexity and ambiguity of real-world situations (Golden-Biddle 1993; Roth 2001). Students are also more likely to recall the lessons and concepts they take away from these learning activities because of their heightened emotional state and level of engagement (Champoux 1999; Huczynski and Buchanan 2004).

The learning outcomes for this exercise involve Maslow's hierarchy of needs theory, McClelland's theory of needs, task-oriented and people-oriented leadership styles, Transformational Leadership Theory, Tuckman's five stage model for group development, and the concept of social loafing. A brief explanation of these theories and concepts is provided in Appendix A.

2. Exercise Overview

We present this exercise after we have taught individual units on motivation, leadership, and teamwork. We use it to illustrate the tight interrelationships between motivation, leadership, and teamwork. We review the high-level concepts presented in these three units and stress the need to take a holistic perspective when applying these concepts to organizational settings.

As prework, we provide students with the handout included in Appendix B which provides an overview of the exercise, its learning objectives, and an introduction to the documentary. The handout also includes an outline of the nine common crew positions, their responsibilities, and a list of the individuals who made up the 1936 American Olympic rowing team. We also outline the significance of team coach—Al Ulbrickson—and team mentor/boatman—George Pocock. Providing students with a list of these key characters and their respective positions helps students focus on the dynamics of the story rather than memorizing the key players.

Next, we show the film, pausing at certain points to pose the different questions in the order in which they appear, and facilitate discussion. These timestamps are included in the section below. Instructors may alternatively show the film in its entirety and then conduct a debrief. We conduct this over two 60-minute classes or one 90-minute class. In a 60-minute class with facilitated discussion, we end the first class after we have addressed question four. Should the instructor wish to use this exercise in an online setting, we suggest assigning students the film and discussion questions as an independent assignment.