

Sorting Hats and the Management Classroom: How Diversity in Individuals and Teams Is Examined Using the Harry Potter Hogwarts Houses

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Abstract: This manuscript reports the use of a popular simulation in conjunction with the Hogwarts Houses of Gryffindor, Hufflepuff, Ravenclaw, and Slytherin in our management classes. We had two main goals: 1) to help students better understand individual differences and values, and how those differences may manifest as behaviors; 2) to investigate this dynamic in both homogenous and diverse teams - including management considerations such as decision-making skills and communication. The article outlines the exercise and provides examples of how instructors can use this in management classes. Sample debriefing questions and student feedback is also provided.

Keywords: individual differences, values, diversity, team decision-making; student experience, innovative teaching.

1. Introduction

In her Harry Potter series, J.K. Rowling describes the fantastical adventures of a young boy as he enters a world of magic and enrolls in a wizard school, the “Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry.” The young wizards are “sorted” into one of four “Houses” – Gryffindor, Hufflepuff, Ravenclaw, or Slytherin – each having unique identifying characteristics, values, and traits. The author provides an online quiz, testing their personalities, and sorting them into the Houses of Hogwarts (see wizardingworld.com). Scholars have considered the individual differences of each house as empirically established personality traits

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(e.g., Crysel, Cook, Schember, & Webster 2015; Jakob, Garcia-Garzon, Jarke, & Dablander 2019), sharing overlaps with constructs such as the Big Five (McCrae & John 1992) and the Dark Triad (Jones & Paulhus 2013), as well as providing House members with a sense of belonging (Reina 2014).

To encourage student engagement (e.g., Mercer, Harris, & Swab 2022; Plump & Meisel 2020), we investigated how the series could be used to highlight individual differences and team dynamics within the management classroom. We use a popular survival simulation exercise as our specific activity in class, but with the use of Harry Potter, provide a unique context for our students in which to teach team diversity and decision-making. The learning objectives are:

1. Analyze individual differences (and similarities), values, and the behaviors that may arise from varying personality characteristics as revealed by the simulation.
2. Evaluate the impact of diversity among individuals on team dynamics and decision making.

2. Theoretical Foundation

Individual differences or traits are typically viewed as “psychological or biological characteristics that exhibit four essential properties” – they are measurable, vary across individuals, portray temporal and situational stability, and can predict attitudes, decisions, behaviors, and outcomes (Antonakis 2011, p. 270). They impact motivation (Kanfer & Ackerman 2002); and both individual (Thoresen, Bradley, Bliese, & Thoresen 2004), and team job performance (Neuman, Wagner, & Christiansen 1999).

Values are viewed as concepts one holds important to varying degrees (Schwartz, 2012). Value Theory (Schwartz 1992, 2006) suggests six main tenants: values are beliefs linked to affect; values motivate action, values transcend specific actions and situations, values serve as standards and criteria, values are ordered by importance, and values govern the relative importance of actions and behavior. Across those tenets, value theory outlines ten broad values, distinguished from each other by the motivation underlying each: self-direction, stimulation, hedonism, achievement, power, security, conformity, tradition, benevolence, and universalism.

Two prior studies have considered the relationship between the results of the Wizarding World Quiz and measures of personality, including values. Crysel *et al.* (2015) examined whether group-based traits (see Table 1) accurately reflected actual personality trait differences, finding support that individuals who self-selected into Hufflepuff, one of the four houses often characterized by their friendly nature, rated themselves higher in agreeableness. Participants who self-selected into Ravenclaw, characterized primarily by intelligence, rated

themselves higher in cognition, and those who self-selected into Slytherin, often characterized by cunning or competitiveness, rated themselves higher across all three Dark Triad traits (i.e., Narcissism, Machiavellianism, and Psychopathy). Significantly, this didn't hold true for Gryffindor, with the authors opining that bravery (i.e., the predominant House trait for Gryffindor), was not, or potentially could not be, directly captured using the TIPI (Gosling, Rentfrow, & Swan 2003). Further, results suggested that participants wanted to be sorted into the houses that the Sorting Hat quiz suggested, indicating support for narrative collection (Gabriel & Young 2011). Jakob *et al.* (2019) replicated the findings of the earlier study with a larger sample, although yielding small effect sizes. They further found partial support to suggest that the Sorting Hat sorts not on traits, as suggested by Crysel and colleagues (2015), but by values (when one considers the theory of Basic Human Values [Schwartz & Boehnke 2004]), hence our inclusion of the same within our exercise.

Accordingly, use of the Hogwarts Houses is gaining traction within academic literature. Multiple categories of diversity influence individual, group, team and organizational performance (Van Knippenberg & Schippers 2007). Diversity is not limited to traits and values or observed attributes, but also includes invisible characteristics such as differences in family background, education, learning style, creativity, or decision-making skills (Nafukho, Wawire, & Lam 2011). Therefore, in discussing individual differences and diversity among team members, we define diversity as “any dimension that can be used to differentiate groups and people from one another” (Giovannini 2004, p. 22). Individual differences and decision-making ability are a longstanding area of scholarly exploration, yielding inconsistent and contradictory results (Appelt, Milch, Handgraaf, & Weber 2001). For example, across a study of 51 four-person teams, LePine *et al.* (1997) found that hierarchical decision-making within the team was highest when there was homogeneity in the level of cognitive ability and conscientiousness between leader and members, while weaker team members were more likely to be ignored if they were low in conscientiousness, but not so if they were high in cognitive ability.

History is replete with examples of how diverse personalities and values have played a role in shaping team performance and decision-making processes, and it is crucial for students to be cognizant of the impact that diverse (and similar) team membership can bring. In presenting the exercise below, our aim was to find an innovative way to analyze the impact of team dynamics from a diversity and individual difference viewpoint to today's student.

Table 1: Distinctiveness of each House based on Crystel *et al.* 2015

Hogwarts House	Color	Values
Gryffindor	Red	Bravery, helping others, and chivalry.
Hufflepuff	Yellow	Hard work, patience, loyalty, and fair play.
Ravenclaw	Blue	Intelligence, knowledge, planning ahead, and wit.
Slytherin	Green	Ambition, cunningness, heritage, and resourcefulness.

3. The Activity

Step 1: The Sorting Hat (5-10 minutes)

- During the first class of the semester, students submitted answers to five questions.. After submission, the instructor can choose to let the students know they picked their specific Harry Potter house, or reveal these results after the full activity. The list of questions asked and the characteristics of each house the answers were based upon can be found in Appendix A.
- Prior to the next step, the instructor analyzes the responses, putting the individuals into teams, based on their chosen house (here, there were 3 classes totaling approximately 120 students, 4-5 students per team, with a variety of both diverse and homogeneous teams). We chose these steps due to (1) Crystel *et al.* (2015) empirically testing these differences, and (2) to ensure students were unable to self-select their house based on labels or bias, but rather, just with the given pros and cons, thereby hiding the purpose.

Step 2: Simulation Introduction (5 minutes)

- Present students with a decision-making scenario in which they will form and present their own opinions as well as interact with their teams. Although we chose the specific survival simulation game discussed, we encourage instructors to use any chosen scenario regarding team decision-making with the use of the Harry Potter elements. The link with instructions for the activity we used can be found in Appendix B.

Step 3: Individual Phase (5-10 minutes)

- The students' objective is to write down what they would do in the scenario as individuals. The worksheet to be used for the chosen