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OPERATION SUBURBIA

***A High Involvement Exercise
Designed to Build Understanding
Through Systems Thinking***

4 Group Set-up



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OBJECTIVES

1. To provide individuals an opportunity to experience working as part of a group (a system) which is part of a larger system.
2. To demonstrate forcefully the need for an atmosphere of trust and confidence if conflicts are to be resolved in the communications process.
3. To demonstrate the need for flexibility, listening skills, and effective leadership in communicating with others in a group problem solving situation.
4. To see the impact an individual can have on not only his small group or system but also on the larger, more complex system.
5. To explore how different motives, desires, and drivers can be integrated so the larger system and each of the groups “achieve” their core objectives.

KEY PROCESSES AND LEARNINGS TO OBSERVE

- C What organization and planning was done by each group at the beginning?
- C What were their strategies. How were the strategies developed?
- C What assumptions were made by each group about the task and about the other groups?
- C What were the consequences of the distrust both within groups and between groups.
- C Since each group begins with the same assets – it is important to note how:
 - C Leadership develops within the groups
 - C Decisions are made and Consensus is processed within the groups
 - C People are used as resources
 - C Individuals Participate
 - C Roles are defined and undertaken by members
 - C Subgroups are used, or not used



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ADVANCE PREPARATIONS

1. For this exercise, the group will be-organized into four (4) groups of 12 individuals each.. These groups represent a shopping center group, a land holding company, a construction company, and a manufacturing plant.
2. Four separate breakout locations should be provided, each large enough to accommodate a table and chairs for members and visitors.
3. Signs identifying the "office" of each Group (Company) should be placed on the door of small rooms.
4. Individuals should be pre-assigned to groups to assure an effective cross-section of the participants with an appropriate diversity of individual styles.
5. Materials should be pre-sorted into packets for each group as follows:
 - a. Copies for each group member detailing the group's objectives, assets, holdings, etc.
 - b. Deeds for present holdings.
 - c. Money, as indicated for each Company.
6. A Master Plot of the area, to be filled in during feedback to show the final holdings of each company. Another chart should show the cash held by each company at the start and at the finish.



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PROCEDURE AND CONTENT

1. Begin by informing each of the groups as follows:

"This morning we will have an exercise we call '**Operation Suburbia.**' For this operation, we will be organized into 4 separate groups. (Reveal pre-boarded lists.)

"Each group owns various pieces of land near a city. They each also desire to own different combinations of land from what they now own. As a group, you can buy, sell or trade among the other groups in any manner you wish.

"At present, there is no organization within each group. This will be part of your task., also--to organize in whatever way you feel is most desirable for your group and your objectives.

"There are some general ground rules for this exercise.

- a. All properties are of the same quality.
- b. All have equal access.
- c. Easements for utilities, etc., may be assumed.
- d. There are no swamps, mountains, slums, etc.
- e. You must buy or sell the entire plot.

"In dealing with the other groups you may set up whatever procedures you like. You can use a representative, a committee, president--whatever way you like.

"Instructions include a map of the area showing the plots you own, a statement of your holdings and other objectives, various amounts of money, and you deeds to your present lots.

"It is possible that some questions may arise on which you will need a ruling. In that case, I will act as arbitrator and try to settle these questions for you.

"Are there any questions before we begin?" (Answer any questions to clarify the instructions. Do not answer questions in the area of strategy or operations.)

2. Select a member from each group to act as a member of a special "learning"



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- taskforce. This taskforce will meet separately at the beginning of the exercise to:
- a. Build a process for identifying and capturing key learnings of their group during the exercise.
 - b. Create an understanding of their role as a participant in the group as well as a Learning "observer" during the exercise.
 - c. Build a process to share learnings across the groups at the end of the exercise.
3. Assign "office" locations of each group, insure that each group has their "packet" and allow them to begin.
 4. The Facilitator should move from group to group, making detailed notes, quotations, if possible as to what is happening.
 - a. Pay attention to how the groups are organized, how planning is accomplished, and how leadership roles are established.
 - b. Note what assumptions are made about the task, about the other companies, and about what "we ought to do," etc.
 - c. Try to keep up with the principal trends of the transactions as they develop.
 - d. Observe any suspicion, distrust, etc., and the effect these have on the operation and the transactions.
 - e. Observe the leadership with each group, consensus within the group, participation, roles taken by members, subgroups, decision making, defense or supportive communication, etc.
 5. Experience indicates that while some groups will solve this problem in 30-45 minutes, most groups will require 2 1/2 - 3 hours. If it is not solved in two hours, the Facilitator should interrupt and help them close the exercise. If it is necessary to have a rest -period during the exercise, keep the companies isolated from one another.

Discussion and Feedback

The volume of interaction in this exercise will produce data on all the dimensions noted in item 4 above. The facilitator should attempt to keep the focus on communications and as appropriate, those things which interfered with or facilitated effective communications.

1. The following questions may help spark and clarify learnings in open discussions at the end of the exercise.
 - a. "What things (conditions) do you feel helped communicate within your Company?"
 - i. Organization
 - ii. Mutual Interest
 - iii. Common Objective
 - iv. Trust
 - b. "What factors prevented real communications between Companies?"
 - i. Inflexibility
 - ii. Conflicting Goals
 - iii. Distrust
 - iv. Suspicion
2. Suggest first a review of how the individual companies organized for this job. Ask a representative of each company to comment on this.
3. Discuss how they went about planning for action.
4. Ask about any suspicion, distrust, etc., which seemed to arise.
5. Reporting observations about the various activities, and from time to time, asking the individual or group concerned to elaborate, explain, or validate these observations.
6. Explore the processes by which they accomplished the transactions or what kept them from accomplishing the task.