

What Will Happen If . . .

An Instructional Exercise for Learning about Role Plays

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Purpose: To provide a series of experiments with role plays. The participants are to create various good and bad examples of role plays in order to gain competency in predicting *What Will Happen If* certain design features are included.

Teams: Divide the group into two or four teams. Each team should have four to eight members. Each team should select its own leader.

Space: If space allows and the total group is more than sixteen people, divide into two separate experiences until the final debriefing. In other words, if there are enough people and enough spaces, Team A (4 to 8 people) plays opposite Team B (4 to 8 people), Team C plays opposite Team D, etc.

Equipment and Artifacts: The only materials needed are the three colored sheets of mini-instructions. Each team needs one set.

Playing Procedure: Each team leader is to read or distribute the following instructions to his or her team.

Each team assumes that it is a group of experimental scientists concerned about its ability to predict social role behavior. As such, the team will run three experiments (or four, if time allows). Follow these steps *after* completely reading the instructions.

- **First**, read the page of “Experimental Options” (see below). Decide on several of the experiments you wish to use.
- **Second**, select the “Situation” you wish to use for your first experiment (see below). Circle it.
- **Third**, select the “Role Specifications” (see below) that should be given to the role players and determine how many role players the other team will need to provide for your experiment.
- **Fourth**, select a “temporary facilitator” to run the role play and, read aloud the “Situation”, pass out the “Role Specifications,” and get the role play underway.
- **Fifth**, debrief the role play emphasizing the feelings of those playing the roles and the observations of the onlookers who did *not* know the nature of the experiment. The experimenting team should ask questions, but keep the experiment confidential until the latter part of the debriefing. Limit debriefing to about ten minutes.

Give the other team a turn as “experimental scientist,” debrief, then design another round of experiments, and another, as time allows. Take ten minutes to plan each “experiment.” Put emphasis on trying to predict how the role play will function.

Debrief the whole experience, both (or all) teams together. Consider the following questions:

1. What were the high points in the exercise?
2. What generalizations about design of role plays can be made? (Write a list on flip chart paper or other medium.)
3. What suggestions can be made about the worthwhile purposes of role plays? (Write another list.)

Experimental Options

1. *What Will Happen If* the role players don't have a factual or experiential basis to draw upon? Experiment: select a *situation* or *role specification* (or both) that are likely to be outside the knowledge of the role players.
2. *What Will Happen If* there are too many people assigned to the role play? Experiment: assign five or more roles even if you use some hand written ones on some of the blank squares.
3. *What Will Happen If* the situation is unclear? Experiment: select a situation that lacks any sense of direction or purpose.
4. *What Will Happen If* the roles assigned are too similar to the real-life roles of the players? Experiment: get an over-supply of likely role specifications ready and assign them to two or three volunteers as they seem to "fit" the people.
5. *What Will Happen If* the roles assigned are role reversals (contrasts) of the roles usually played in life? Experiment: get several role specifications ready and assign them to two or three volunteers as a *contrast* or reversal of their apparent roles. (Suggestion: gender related role pairs such as brother-sister, man-woman, husband-wife, father-mother, or even sex stereotypes such as traffic policeman, woman driver, work most easily for this experiment.)
6. *What Will Happen If* the situation lacks any dynamic toward resolution? Experiment: select a situation that is clear enough but that lacks any dynamic tension or need for resolution.
7. *What Will Happen If* you specify the moral or emotional tone for each of the roles assigned? Experiment: Add a mood specification to the role assignment.
8. *What Will Happen If* you over-specify or give too much introduction? Experiment: in the role specifications write out just what each role player is to do. Use lots of detail.

Situations

One car has just bumped into the other in a parking lot. Both drivers are in a hurry to get onto other appointments. They are aware they should wait for the police, but are even more concerned about not getting stuck with repair costs.

The parent has been awakened by the front door closing gently. The clock reads 2:30 a.m.. The promise to be in by 12:30 a.m. has been broken. The parent gets out of bed and asks, "Is that you?"

The reporter-on-street waits to interview an unwilling pedestrian. The topic of the interview is political and the pedestrian doesn't like to talk about politics, even at home. But the camera person has the camera rolling and the interviewer has moved in for the kill!

The motorcyclist says he was in the right-hand lane, turning right. The bus driver says the motorcyclist cut in front of the bus. The judge wants to get the case resolved quickly. The mayor is serving as the attorney for the bus company. A part-time opera singer is the attorney for the motorcyclist. The witness seems to have a very poor memory.

The auto repair technician has informed the owner that the engine repair will cost more than \$200. Neither the repair person nor the owner is happy about this report.

She says that he spends too much money on hunting and fishing. He replies that she doesn't know the value of money anymore: she is spending almost twice as much on food and clothes. So the fight is on. Neither wants to apologize, but they don't like to quarrel.

The needle-hole driller finds it difficult to explain what she/he does for a living. But the child asks a lot of "why" questions, and this time is no exception.

We want to practice feedback in this role play. Although the situation is tense, try to focus your remarks on what you hear the other person saying. Try to understand and to tell the other person why you agree or disagree with what you are hearing him or her say. The situation: The teacher has informed the superintendent that if he or she isn't supportive in the argument with the parent, the teacher will file a grievance through the union. The parent thinks the teacher has been "picking" on the child. (The child is not present for this discussion in the principal's office.)

Write your own role description. Be terse but specific.

Role Specifications

Fold and cut out as needed. Add details on the role assignment slip if you want to be more specific.

TEACHER	PARENT	CHILD
PRINCIPAL	SUPERINTENDENT	MAYOR
BUS DRIVER	BORSCHT MANUFACTURER	NEIGHBOR
OPERA SINGER	TELEVISION CAMERAPERSON	NEWS REPORTER
NEEDLE-HOLE DRILLER	AUTO REPAIRPERSON	AUTO OWNER
MOTORCYCLIST	WITNESS	JUDGE
HAPPY-GO LUCKY	SCHOLARLY	ANGRY
EAGER	EMBARRASSED	WEARY