

## Debriefing Adventure Learning

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***Editors' Note:** This chapter (which should be read in conjunction with the same authors' *Debriefing the Debrief*, chapter 13 in this volume) addresses the special conditions which attach to efforts to debrief adventure learning. The same real-world authenticity that is the most attractive feature of adventure learning, they point out, introduces predictable problems – beginning but not ending with the mundane failure of negotiating groups to return to class at the same time, when the debrief has been scheduled. But it gets worse than that, in ways the authors cheerfully outline. The authors follow with a number of suggestions, which collectively should help students get the most out of the exercise – and help the teacher sleep better the night before the exercise.*

### Introduction

Negotiation adventure learning is a type of experiential learning that takes teaching negotiation out of the academic or executive training

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classroom and into real environments.<sup>1</sup> The Rethinking Negotiation Teaching project has experimented with adventure learning (Coben, Honeyman, and Press 2010), and stimulated scholarship on both its use as a negotiation teaching tool and reactions to that use (Cohn and Ebner 2010, Kamp 2010, Larson 2010, Manwaring, McAdoo, and Cheldelin 2010, Panga and Grecia-de Vera 2010, Press and Honeyman 2010). Student assessment in the context of adventure learning is discussed by Sharon Press and colleagues in Volume 3 in this series (2012). This chapter examines debriefing adventure negotiation exercises.

### Negotiation Adventure Learning

Adventure learning in negotiation is inspired by “adventure education,” which can be characterized as providing a learning opportunity that is experiential, authentic and real, is set outside the traditional classroom, has an element of real or perceived risk, and often relies on collaboration (Manwaring, McAdoo, and Cheldelin 2010). In negotiation teaching, it has been developed as a complement to role-play exercises. The prescribed scenarios, preselected facts, and designated interests of role-play exercises provide the advantage of a common framework for the simulated negotiation and allow instructors to design exercises to convey particular lessons. In contrast, adventure learning emphasizes real negotiations with “authenticity as a priority” (Coben, Honeyman, and Press 2010: 110). It typically involves sending teams into the community with missions that will stimulate negotiations, both amongst the group members and with others. Alternatively, instructors can find negotiation authenticity when students try to apply concepts learned in class to actually buying a car or dealing with a colleague at work. In addition to authenticity, adventure exercises provide an element of the unexpected that adds excitement to a course or training and creates opportunities for unanticipated lessons that flow from students’ experiences.

Manwaring, McAdoo, and Cheldelin (2010: 122) describe two different philosophies for adventure learning, which lead to different types of adventure learning assignments, namely “orientation” and “disorientation.”

In the orientation approach, participants are given direct, explicit instructions about what they should do and why. . . . In the disorientation approach . . . students are *not* explicitly told the nature and purposes of the activity in advance. Instead, they may be given incomplete, oblique, or misleading instructions, or no instructions at all.

At the Istanbul and Beijing conferences held as part of the Rethinking Negotiation Teaching project, small groups participated in negotiation adventure exercises that used both approaches. In Istanbul, the assignment with orientation took place in the Grand Bazaar or Spice Market. Groups were instructed to negotiate a purchase of food for the entire conference to share, negotiate for something else the group decided to buy, observe these and other negotiations, and interview sellers about their strategies. The disorientation assignment was designed to stimulate intra-group negotiations; groups selected and took photos that best represented various themes, such as the crossroads of the sacred and the secular, and the most dangerous thing observed during a walk through the city (Coben, Honeyman, and Press 2010). In Beijing, participants joined Chinese law students from a negotiation class to purchase and eat lunch, followed by a walk around the Peking University campus to find and photograph certain landmarks. Participants were also asked to reflect on negotiations that they encountered during their weekend in Beijing (Ebner, Coben, and Honeyman 2012; Honeyman, Coben, and Lee, *What Have We Learned*, in this volume).

One can easily see the importance of the debrief in the context of *disorientation* adventure learning, where some students may not understand or appreciate what they have learned until they participate in a debrief that highlights important elements of negotiation. However, the debrief for adventure learning activities *with orientation* is equally important if participants are to learn as much as possible from their experiences. Reports from both trainers and students suggest that debriefing, and careful planning for debriefing, is especially important with all adventure learning activities (Panga and Grecia-de Vera 2010; Press and Honeyman 2010). As with any debrief, this planning should enable the teacher to connect the content of the debrief to the goals of the exercise. It also should take account of the distinctive challenges of negotiation adventure learning.

### General Principles of Debriefing

In *Debriefing the Debrief* (Deason et al., in this volume), the authors set ambitious goals for the function of debriefing in traditional role-plays.

It should make the experiences of the learning activity come alive. It should connect those experiences to the content of the course and assist participants in putting theory into practice and constructing their own lessons. It should make the process feel personal and real, and increase the likelihood that the students will remember and use their new learning. It

should help students develop the habit of reflecting on their practice.

All of these goals are equally applicable to debriefing in the setting of adventure learning. Similarly, many of the principles that apply to debriefing a simulation role-play are also relevant to adventure learning. We emphasize that an effective debrief exhibits the following characteristics, which we reproduce here for convenience:

- Focuses on the process of interaction. Dialogue among the participants, and between the facilitator and participants, allows essential articulation of insights.
- Draws on the experience of the participants by eliciting reactions and encouraging reflection on the activity.
- Explicitly connects the exercise, which has been tailored for a specific purpose, to the course material. The facilitator needs to be able to weave participants' comments into this structure.
- Offers additional information from negotiation theory and experimental and field research. This helps tie the experience to reasons behind behaviors, interaction patterns, effectiveness of strategies, and quality of outcomes.
- Models behaviors that reinforce past lessons or preview future ones. This makes the debrief a link in the chain of activities in a course or workshop.
- Lasts long enough to be comprehensive and to underscore the importance of the activity.

## Special Considerations in Debriefing Negotiation Adventure Learning

In addition to these general principles, there are special considerations when debriefing an adventure learning negotiation exercise. This section explores their implications. We consider the nature of negotiation adventure learning goals, the sheer number of experiences and their complexity, special logistical challenges, possible resistance from participants, and ethical and cultural dimensions of adventure learning exercises.

First, the objectives of an adventure learning exercise, while related to negotiation theory and skills, may be more general and tied less directly to elucidating specific pre-planned points than in a typical role-play. For example, the goal may be any one (or more) of the following: to have students interact together "outside their comfort zones"; to experience a negotiation in which they had a real stake in the outcome (not "just" a simulation); and/or to put "theory into practice." In addition, the goals may not be articulated specifically to

the participants or even easily recognizable from the context, as in the case of an “oblique” or “disorienting” exercise designed to stimulate internal team negotiation and implicit learning (Coben, Honeyman, and Press 2010; Manwaring, McAdoo, and Cheldelin 2010; Press and Honeyman 2010).

The nature of the objectives in negotiation adventure learning, especially with a disorienting approach, puts a greater burden on the debriefing process to develop the learning points, because participants are less likely to be able to formulate the points on their own. Therefore, it is important that the instructor anticipate some clear and manageable lessons that will likely be raised by the negotiation adventure exercise. The facilitator needs to avoid the temptation of squeezing all the learning that can be gained from the richness of reality into a single debrief. Yet the facilitator also needs to be open to incorporating unanticipated lessons that may even draw on concepts or theories that have not yet been discussed in class. Clarity about goals and flexibility about specific lessons are necessary to effectively shape the debriefing discussion as it develops. A clear summary of take-home lessons at the end of the debrief is particularly important given the more “amorphous” nature of the adventure learning experience.

Second, participants’ adventure learning experiences tend to be more varied and far less predictable than in a traditional role-play. The same is true when students report on actual negotiations in their lives, which can be instructive even though all the students did not share the experience. The potential lessons from these experiences are, in turn, likely to be richer and reflect the complexity of real situations, which is so difficult to capture in role-plays. As a result, facilitators and participants alike may be surprised by unplanned insights.

This variety of experiences and potential insights suggest the wisdom of using an inductive approach to debriefing negotiation adventure learning. As described in *Debriefing the Debrief* (in this volume), an inductive approach builds lessons from participants’ responses, and encourages them to construct their own knowledge as opposed to starting with a set of pre-identified lessons. This requires the trainer to be comfortable with uncertainty and skilled at drawing out lessons from examples.

Adventure negotiation assignments that lend themselves to student presentations, such as a photography exercise (see Coben, Honeyman, and Press 2010), combine the strengths of the inductive approach with a degree of structure in the debriefing. The presentation format gives groups leeway to distill and organize their own learning points through the process of preparing for their presenta-

tions. Then the instructor can use the presentations as raw material for a whole class discussion aimed at articulating lessons.

Along with the complexity and variety of adventure experiences, the instructor cannot observe the details of what went on, and thus, far more than in a typical role-play, must rely on student self-reports. But participants filter both their perception of the experience, and what they report, by such factors as their knowledge, frames (Donohue, Rogan, and Kaufman 2011), and level of familiarity with the situation. This means instructors are likely to hear only what *students* frame as important, and that may be mediated by what they think will make them look good. This informational challenge suggests modifying a purely inductive discussion with prepared questions, both to help shape what students regard as important and to stimulate reflection.

Third, there are also distinct logistical challenges to debriefing negotiation adventure learning. Debriefing with the whole group immediately after the experience is often impractical because small groups typically finish their exercises at different times and may be spread out over an entire city if an exercise sends them far afield (Coben, Honeyman, and Press 2010). Yet because of the diversity of experiences in adventure learning, there is much to be learned from a discussion that includes all the groups and thus draws on all the experiences. We offer some suggestions below for ways to combine whole group interactions, small group discussions, and other vehicles for debriefing. With a complex debriefing structure, and especially when parts of the debrief will occur after a time lag, it is helpful to equip students with some tools for storing observations. These could include techniques such as “stop, reflect, record” moments during the experience, assigning one person in each group the role of observer/reporter, preparing a group report at the end of the experience, or journaling.

In addition, allocating sufficient time is a crucial logistical consideration for debriefing negotiation adventure learning. While adequate time for debriefing is always at a premium, even more time may be needed than with a role-play. The inductive approach to debriefing that we recommend for adventure learning is time consuming, and the debrief needs to process the wide variety of experience to be expected with adventure learning. One technique that relieves some of this time pressure is to allocate at least part of the debriefing time to simultaneous small group discussions, which permit wide participation in a limited time period. Journaling used in conjunction with a later large-group discussion is another possibility; the instructor can focus on selected topics in the discussion while reassuring students that their full reflections will be read.<sup>2</sup>

Fourth, there may be resistance to the whole adventure learning agenda among some participants. Adventure learning exercises run a higher risk than role-plays of being perceived by some participants as “pointless.” Participants in the adventure learning activities at the Rethinking Negotiation Teaching conference held in Istanbul in 2010 reported problems with lack of motivation and an inability to connect the activity to clear learning objectives, which undermined some of the small group dynamics following the oblique exercise (see e.g., Panga and Grecia-de Vera 2010). One of this chapter’s authors observed a similar reaction when using an adventure learning photography assignment with executive groups in trainings focused on enhancing their negotiation skills. The exercise was not what they were expecting and they initially found it strange, unfamiliar, and uncomfortable.

In the executive training example, a clearly focused debrief was essential to help participants understand the usefulness and applicability of the exercise. When participants have doubts about adventure learning, the debrief needs to show how the activity relates to actual negotiation practice. In addition, as we urge in the context of role-plays, debriefs should help students process the emotional content of exercises (Nelken, Schneider, and Mahuad 2010), which may mean probing the causes of resistance.

Fifth, with some exercises, negotiation adventure learning may raise ethical or cultural issues that would not come up in a traditional role-play, and that will need debriefing along with the negotiation lessons. If, for example, students are asked to negotiate something for free, the debriefing should ask students to consider the consequences for the real individuals in the interaction.<sup>3</sup> When the exercise entails interacting with persons from a different culture, it may be appropriate for the debrief to touch on the perils of cognitive egocentrism – the commonly shared tendency to interpret an experience through the lens of our own culture. This can lead participants to mistakenly attribute to others the same values and priorities as their own, and to interpret interactions in terms of what they would mean in their own culture. Often, it will be appropriate for a debrief in this setting to discuss the possible effects of our cultural frames on participants’ interpretation of their experience.

### **Structures for Debriefing Negotiation Adventure Learning**

As techniques for debriefing adventure learning develop, one promising approach that responds to many of these challenges is to structure multiple layers of debriefing, using individual reporting and small group processes as well as whole-group discussion. In addition

to the need for a nuanced reflection to sort out one's own experience, there is much to learn from the different experiences of other groups. In order to give everyone a chance to participate and to develop all these perspectives, debriefing may need to be accomplished in stages, spread over time.

In the experiments with adventure learning at the Beijing conference (see Ebner, Coben, and Honeyman 2012; Honeyman, Coben, and Lee, *What Have We Learned*, in this volume), and at the earlier conference in Istanbul (see Coben, Honeyman, and Press 2010), small groups debriefed the experience prior to a whole-group interaction. In Beijing, participants were also asked to fill out individual reporting sheets. Multiple forms of debriefing can also be used and adapted in other teaching settings. In executive trainings, one of the authors uses small group discussions prior to a full group debrief to fill the gap while waiting for the other groups to complete their exercises. In Sandra Cheldelin's graduate level course, students submitted reflection papers on their experience and debriefed both within their adventure learning groups and as a whole class (Manwaring, McAdoo, and Cheldelin 2010).

It is too soon to suggest an ideal structure, and indeed the best format for debriefing may vary with the type of adventure assignment. In Istanbul, the small group debriefing seemed to work better for the exercise that was clearly oriented toward negotiation than for the oblique exercise. For the former, participants were remixed so the groups reflected a variety of experiences, and each group was led by a facilitator. For the latter, participants stayed in the same group and did not have a facilitator. But the perceived success of the debriefing may have had more to do with the nature of the adventure – oriented or disoriented – than with the structure of the group.

In Beijing, the assignment encouraged some debriefing within the participant group at the end of the exercise. The following day, small groups for debriefing were formed based on who was seated at a particular table. The students who had participated in the exercise were not present; the debriefing groups did not correspond to the groups that had participated in the activity; and there were no assigned facilitators. Due to the size of the overall group and time constraints, the large group debriefing was limited to short reports consisting of one point from each small group. Reactions among participants to this debriefing varied; satisfaction was perhaps linked to the quality of the discussion in the small group, where most of the discussion took place.

The wisdom of using multiple levels of debriefing has been borne out in Cheldelin's classroom. She reported that very few of the stu-

dents' reflection papers discussed the oblique negotiation activity (based on a photography assignment). She suggested that they were sufficiently "disoriented" that they did not *recognize* the negotiations that occurred, either when they happened or in their reflections. But later, when the groups presented their photographs to the class as a whole, their presentations focused on their intra-group negotiations. Thus by that stage of the debriefing process, because of either the multiple opportunities for reflection or the leavening effect of time, they had become aware of these negotiations, and focused productively on them in retrospect (Manwaring, McAdoo, and Cheldelin 2010).

## Conclusion

Given the growing enthusiasm for adventure learning and the corresponding increase in its use, it is critical that instructors consider how to debrief the adventure learning experience appropriately and effectively. Facilitators must pay attention to all of the considerations involved in conducting debriefs of more traditional role-play simulations and in-class group activities, which are relevant as well for adventure negotiation debriefing. In addition, instructors must prepare for the challenges unique to adventure learning. As negotiation teachers continue to develop adventure learning exercises, they also need to experiment with modes of debriefing. We urge them to devote as much thought and energy to planning the debrief as they do to planning the exercise itself.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> We intend our comments to apply to debriefing negotiation adventure learning in both academic settings and executive training programs. The terms "teacher," "trainer," "instructor," and "facilitator" are used interchangeably.

<sup>2</sup> Another strategy for dealing with time limits is to use a more deductive approach: explain up front what the exercise was supposed to illustrate and then put the burden on the participants to select for discussion the observations that they think are most related to the goals of the adventure. There is a risk that the students may not be the best judges of relevance, but without such self-screening there is a risk that the group will try to discuss too many different experiences and will miss key lessons.

<sup>3</sup> For instance, should the person be told that the students are engaged in a learning exercise? When? Should they be compensated in any way for their pains? Are there limits to what students may ask of others in their quest to learn about negotiation?

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