

Petra Simulation: A Creative Pedagogy to Teach Human Resource Management for Graduate Students

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What is the Simulation About?

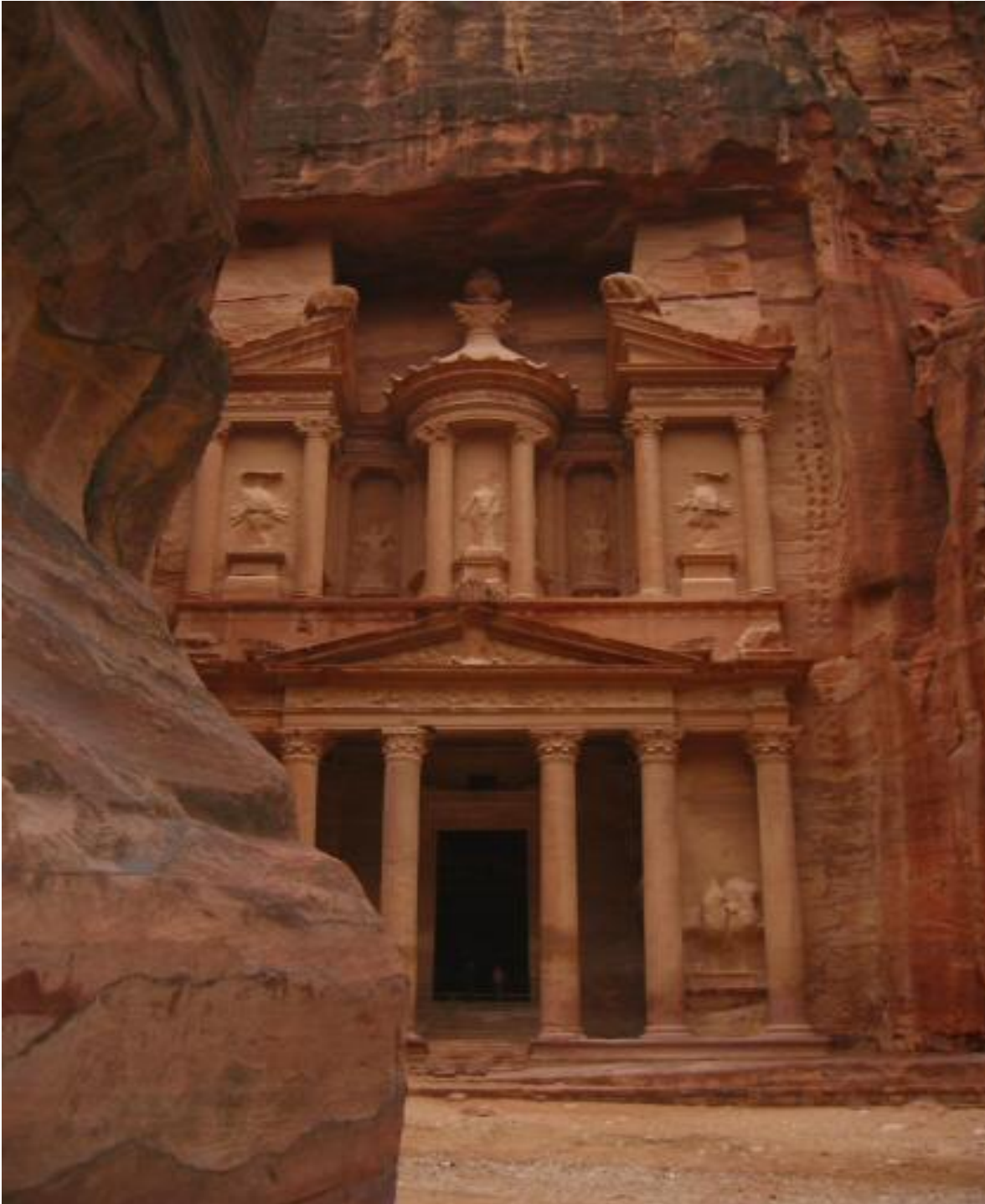
- The simulation aims to build a personnel system from ground up. Time is one semester... 25 students are involved.
- Six areas of HRM will be constructed in the personnel system:
 - (1) job classification
 - (2) recruitment, examination, and selection
 - (3) employee training and development
 - (4) performance appraisal, promotion, and discipline
 - (5) labor relations and collective bargaining; and
 - (6) equal employment opportunity and diversity.

Introduction

- History:
 - Martha Dede (2004) suggested that a simulation experience would help MPA students understand HRM.
 - Dede called her project "Freedonia."
 - Three university professors tried to replicate Dede's experiment. None of them was able to finish the process (some of them cited the difficulty involved in administering the experience).

■ Why “Petra” not “Freedonia?”

- Petra is an Arabic word for “Rock”
- Petra is an ancient city in Jordan
- Petra was the capital city for a prosperous Nabataean state (350 B.C.)
- The government of Petra developed a strong administration, which was responsible for building water dams, maintaining roads, and most importantly, administering a financial system; the Central Bank (Khaznah).
- Administrative historians tell us that Petra relied on
 - A strong public administration
 - An effective public personnel system



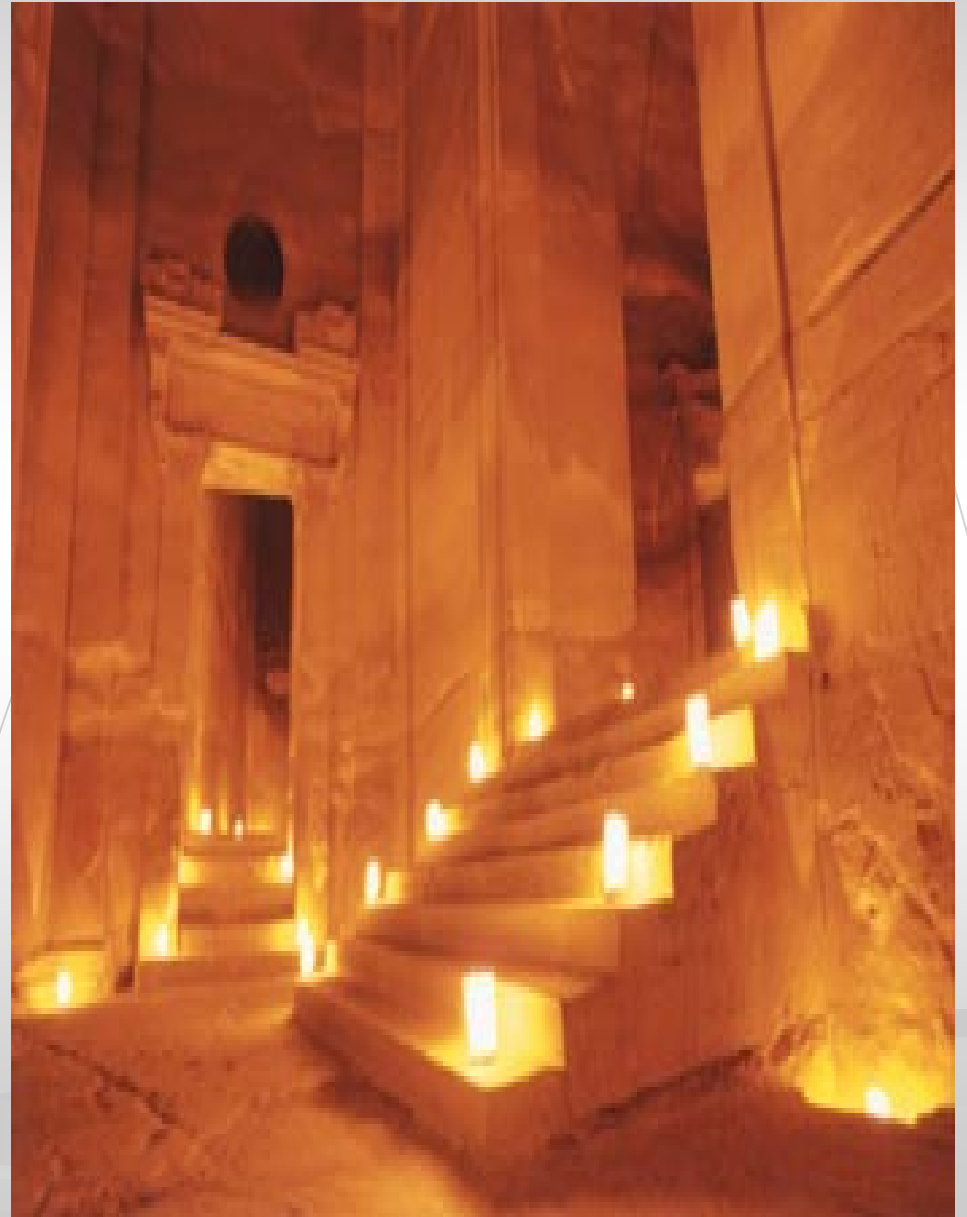
- The Central Bank, 300 B.C.





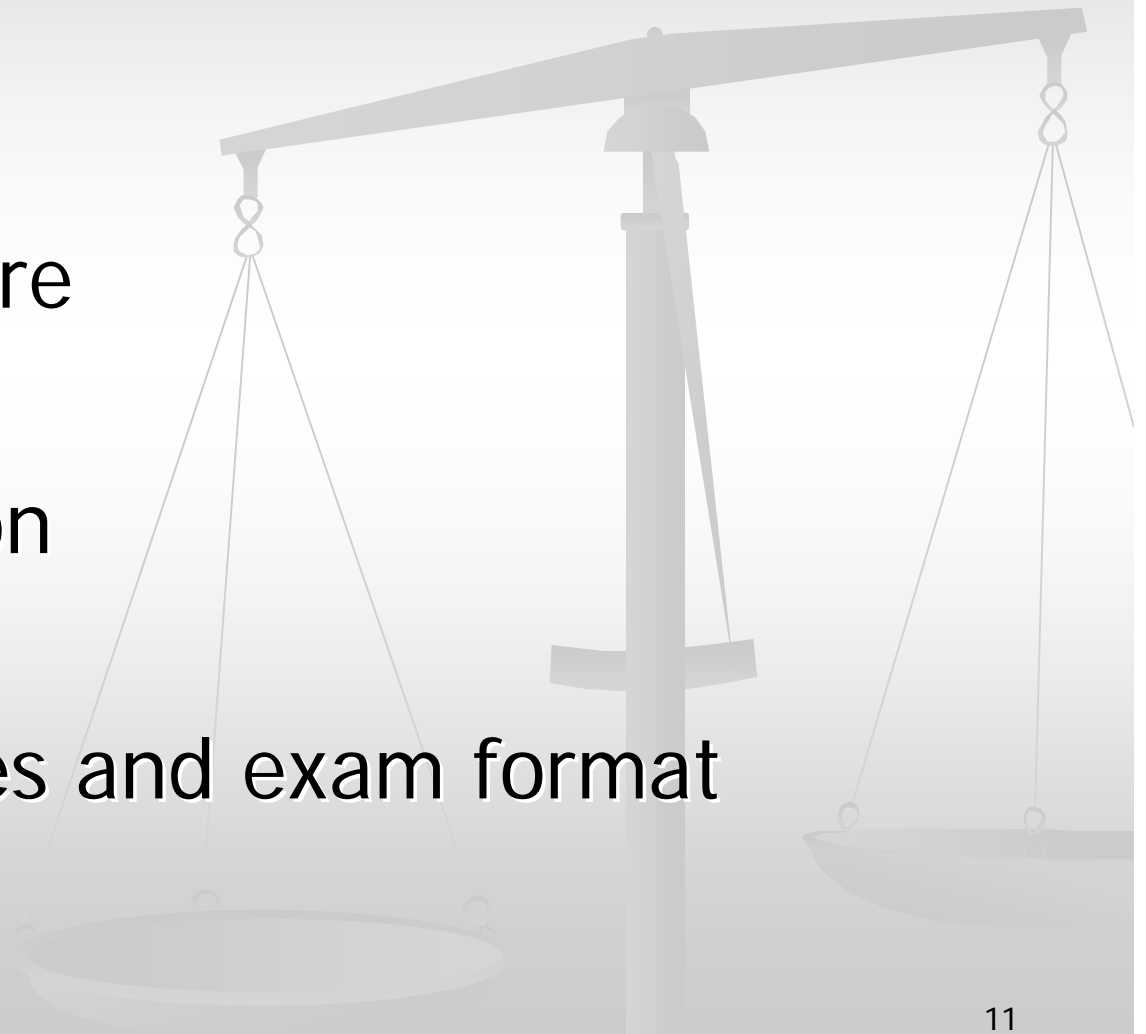






Description of the Project

- Semester-long
 - Group activities
 - Reading literature
 - Written work
 - Oral presentation
 - Discussion; and
- Traditional lectures and exam format



Learning Objectives



- 1- Curricular objectives:
 - Learning about HRM topics and becoming competent in theoretical aspects of the course
 - Discussing, analyzing, and thinking critically
- 2- Professional objectives:
 - Training and learning professional skills; problem solving, professional writing, working with others, and public speaking
 - Enhancing human interdependence by requiring students to discuss their work and critique others' work
 - Emphasizing topical interdependence; incorporating six components of HRM and encouraging students to think about them as a comprehensive system

Theory

Two major theories are relevant to the present simulation;

(1) - Lev Vygotsky's cognitive theory: In cognitive development theory, there are two levels of learning;

(a) A lower level where people learn by themselves

(b) A higher level where people need assistance of others to learn

The area between these two levels is the "zone of proximal development;" the difference between current level of knowledge and the potential level of development that people can gain by:

(a)- maintaining social interaction and collaborative problem-solving, and

(b)- various cultural mediators, such as life experiences, classroom activities, and the media.

(2)- Learning transfer:

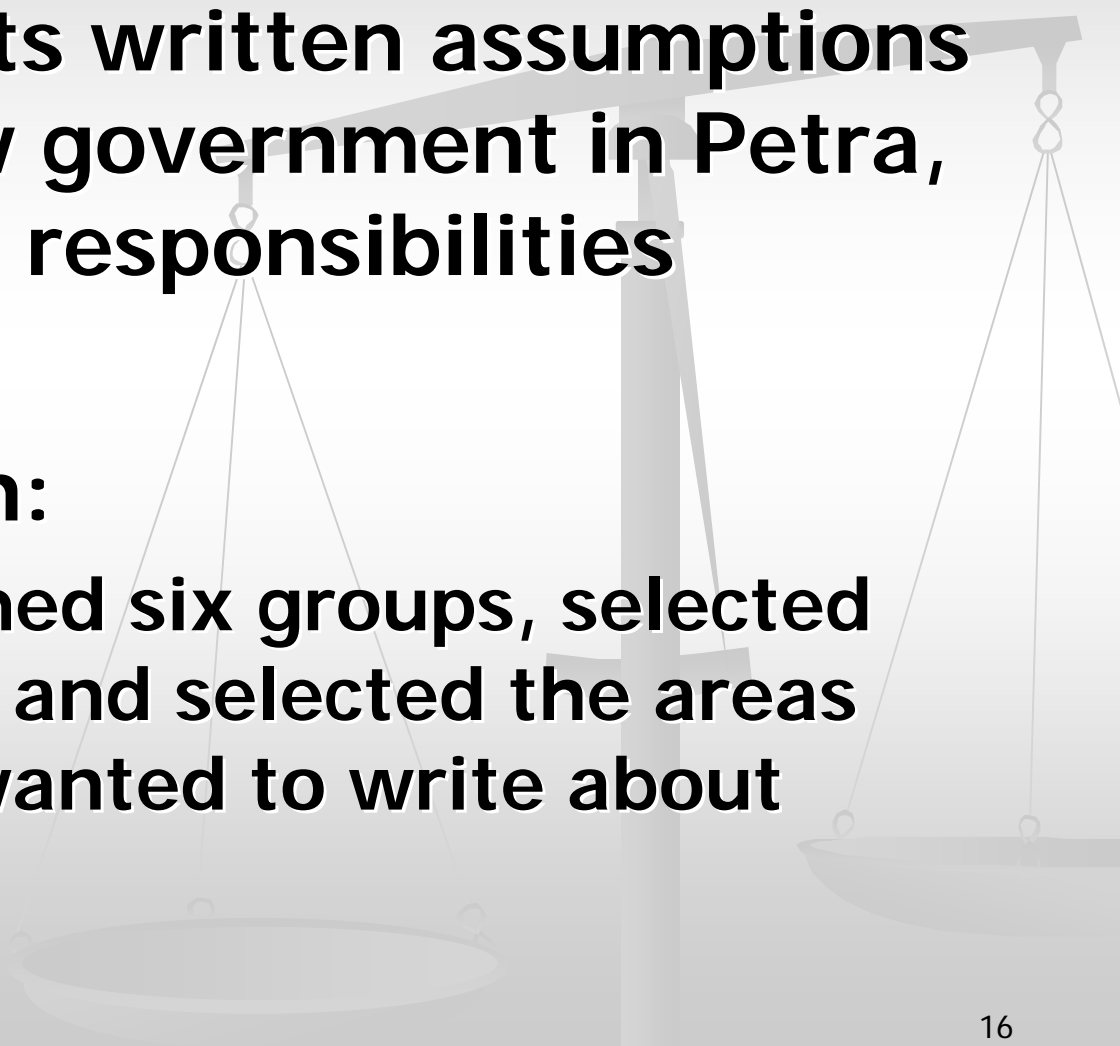
Best learning occurs when people learn skills and apply what they have learned (transfer learning)

When students are involved in interactive learning activities (e.g., Petra simulation), they become closer to transferring skills, such as writing skills, team work, and critical thinking.

Transferability of learning could occur by ensuring that people are motivated to learn (e.g. efficacy), have ability to apply what they have learned (utility), and they receive support from colleagues and supervisors (rewards).

Scenarios, Assumptions, and Project Design

- Petra project has been modified from the first version of it, Freedonia (Dede, 2004)
- The modification aimed to avoid some of the obstacles that confronted Dede and solve problems she reported
- In the second week of the semester (second meeting),
 - I introduced students to the Petra project and ideas.
 - I explained themes and objectives of the project.
 - I distributed a written scenario, which explained the hypothetical environment that surrounded the city of Petra for which we try to develop a civil service system

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- **I gave students written assumptions about the new government in Petra, structure, and responsibilities**
 - **Project Design:**
 - **Students formed six groups, selected team leaders, and selected the areas (units) they wanted to write about**

Semester Activities

Lectures, exams, presentations:

- Introduction, summary of the project, and assigning topics
- History of the civil service system in the U.S.
- Legal issues and court cases
- Discussion of practical cases
- Meanings and implications of human resources theories
- The relationship between students' individual topics and the rest of human resource functions
- Discussion of problems that public personnel systems face in the U.S.
- Oral presentations
- Assessment

The Final Product

- During the first eight weeks, students learned about (a) HRM theories, and (b) the environment of public personnel systems in the U.S.
- Most of the rest of the semester was reserved for students' presentations on one area of the HRM.
- The last two meetings were reserved for students' presentations of their personnel systems they developed, as well as assessment.
- Students were instructed to make their comments brief, and their questions specific
- The entire class was engaged in evaluating the final product playing the role of the Petra City Council. Presenters were expected to convince the council that their "new" personnel systems were viable and well-designed to handle the new assignments of the government of the City of Petra.

Evaluation

The instructor developed qualitative and quantitative methods of evaluation:

- The qualitative methods included one-on-one and group discussions and continuous discussion of the strengths, weaknesses, and dynamics of the project.
- The quantitative evaluation included a questionnaire which asked students to anonymously respond to several statements that cover important aspects of the Petra project.

Characteristics of Students' Performance Based on Quality of Their Final Product

High-functioning groups:

- Have clear levels of coordination among members
- Team leaders could easily get work done in timely fashion
- Students consulted one the other before making a final statement in response to a question by the city council
- Motivated students were able to maintain similar levels of motivation throughout the semester
- Students asked many questions about each instruction
- Students tend to incorporate fun in their work; used story telling.
- Students were capable and eager to help other members in the group to do their part of the work. In some cases, they helped others from different groups
- Students have copies of all handouts, summaries, textbooks, and notes with them in all meetings

Characteristics of Students' Performance Based on Quality of Their Final Product ... cont.

Lower-functioning groups

- Leadership was hesitant or incapable of motivating some members to work harder
- Students asked few direct questions to the instructor about how to do things. Instead they relied heavily on WebCt Vista to communicate. They also asked other students to explain things to them. I would call this "lack of academic self-confidence"
- Students used limited professional terminology
- Students relied on team leaders
- Students complained many times about many things; offered no alternatives.
- Students were late in submitting their works.

Outcomes and Recommendations

Based on the qualitative and quantitative evaluation, the Petra simulation project has accomplished its goals.

In order to make the simulation part of the regular MPA teaching of HRM, the following must be taken in consideration:

- (1)- Some students feel bored and irritated because of the intensity of discussions. Time and length of the session must be reconsidered (a summer session can be suitable).
- (2) Some students from non-administrative backgrounds are hesitant to learn advanced HRM theories, thus they find it difficult to apply theories to real situations.
- (3) Some group leaders abuse their role (symbolic authority) by isolating some members of the group or they mobilize other members to disturb the class (maybe rotating leadership or eliminating it would be a viable alternative).
- (4) In order to ensure cooperation and commitment, a full description of the project should be included in the course syllabus.