

Teaching Note Addendum

USING ALVAREZ A, B, AND C TO TEACH OTHER FOCUS: BECOMING OTHER-FOCUSED

Synopsis

This addendum to the *Alvarez* case (UVA-OB-0660) is designed to help instructors teach students how to become other-focused in difficult work situations. It is intended to be used as part of a course module on *Lift: Becoming a Positive Force in Any Situation* (Ryan W. Quinn & Robert E. Quinn, 2009, Berrett-Koehler, San Francisco), which can be included in courses on leadership, change management, or power and politics. This class is designed to be the fourth class in a six-class module on *Lift*, but instructors can use it as a separate class as well.

This addendum is not meant to replace the content in the original teaching note. Instructors should read the full teaching note to prepare for this class. This addendum is only designed to address changes in the teaching plan that adapt the case discussion to teaching *Lift* in courses on leadership, change management, or power and politics.

The seventh and eighth chapters of *Lift*, which can be given to students as assigned readings for this class, explain the human tendency in many situations to focus on ourselves and to see others as objects—objects that either help us achieve our goals or that impede us from achieving those goals. They also explain how people can become other-focused—empathizing with others as human beings rather than seeing them as objects—feeling with their feelings and being concerned for their wants, needs, thoughts, and desires. They also explain how we influence others when we experience this state.

Reading Assignment

The reading assignment for this class is:

1. Alvarez (A) (UVA-OB-0660)
2. “Seeing Others as Objects” and “Becoming Other-Focused” – chapters seven and eight from Quinn, R. W. & Quinn, R. E. (2009). *Lift: Becoming a Positive Force in Any Situation*. San Francisco: Berrett-Koehler.

Objectives

1. To help students learn how to become other focused in organizations that incent self-interested behavior.
2. To help students see how using the four Lift questions can improve their leadership ability, their change management, or their power and influence.

Assignment Questions

The recommended assignment questions are:

1. How easy or difficult is it for you to empathize with Stone? If you can empathize with Stone easily, what makes it easy? If you have trouble empathizing with Stone, what makes it hard?
2. How easy or difficult is it for you to empathize with Alvarez? If you can empathize with Alvarez easily, what makes it easy? If you have trouble empathizing with Alvarez, what makes it hard?
3. Come up with a strategy for what you would do if you were Pinto.

A fourth assignment question should also be included, depending on whether this lesson is being taught as part of a course on change management, leadership, or power and influence. Recommended questions for these courses follow.

Leadership: “How does Pinto’s ability to empathize with others affect his leadership? How will your ability to empathize influence your own leadership?”

Change Management: “How does Pinto’s ability to empathize with others affect his ability to lead the changes that are occurring at Canalven? How will your ability to empathize influence your ability to lead change?”

Power and Influence: “How does Pinto’s ability to empathize with others affect the power and influence he wields in Canalven? How will your ability to empathize affect your own power and influence?”

Timeline Allocation Plan

A possible timeline for an 85-minute version of this class follows:

5 mins.	Introduction
20 mins.	Empathizing with the people in Canalven
20 mins.	Dealing with Alvarez
20 mins.	Pinto’s decision and Alvarez’s identity
15 mins.	Implications for leadership, change management, or power and influence
5 mins.	Summary and bridge to the next class

Class Overview

The class discussion for this case can follow a simple trajectory of (1) trying to empathize with the people in the case, (2) deciding what to do, (3) using the topic of identity as a way of re-visiting how to empathize when it is hard to do so, and (4) exploring the implications of empathy for leadership, change management, or power and influence.

Empathy

The general flow of this portion of the class is to help students see what makes empathy easy or hard in organizations, and what they can do about that. Instructors can do this by asking a few simple questions about each of the characters in the case.

Instructors can begin the discussion by asking the students to raise their hands if they found it hard to empathize with Stone. The instructor can then ask these students what makes it hard for them to empathize with Stone, and record their answers on the board. Their answers may include criticisms of Stone, such as his “whining” to management instead of dealing with Alvarez constructively, his “arrogance” about insisting that he build the machine the way he thought was right instead of listening to others’ experiences, and so forth. When people find it hard to empathize with others, it is often because they have had experiences with people who have acted in similar ways to them, which they have found to be hurtful or offensive. If, in response to feeling hurt or offended, these people betrayed themselves, then they are likely to have blamed others for this hurt or offense. And if they see similar offenses in Stone, they are likely to apply the same blaming labels to Stone. Therefore, as the instructor records these answers on the board, it is useful to pay attention to words that indicate blame in subtle or obvious ways, and to make sure that these words are recorded. Do not point these out yet, just make sure that they are included. Some (or many) of the responses may not include blaming words, and that is fine. Just make sure to record the blaming words that are uttered.

Instructors should then repeat the same questions for Alvarez, asking those who had trouble empathizing with Alvarez why. Record the answers in the same way.

During these initial questions about the difficulty of empathizing with people, students may pick up on some of the sub-text of the conversation, even though some of them may not be able to articulate what they are picking up on. As a result, there may be jokes about the personal implications of some people’s answers. At this point, as long as it is appropriate, the instructor can play along and have fun with what students say. However, if some students are more able to articulate the sub-text of what is going on in this section, the instructor may want to remain serious, jumping ahead in this lesson plan to discuss issues of self-betrayal.

After recording students’ answers about why it is hard to empathize with Stone and Alvarez, the instructor can then ask students who found it easy to empathize with each and why. These answers will probably center on similarities between the students and the characters from the case. For Stone, some of these similarities may include things like having been hired to do things a new way in a place where many of the old workers did not want to change, working in a foreign environment, struggling to implement new technologies, feeling disrespected, or struggling to work with a “problem” employee. Some students may be eager to tell stories about employees they had to work with who engaged in eccentric practices (comparable to Alvarez etching his name on machines he repairs). For Alvarez, some of these similarities may include experiences in which people in positions of authority dismiss their skills, experience working in

factories and plants as a manual laborer (or close relationships with family and friends who have worked in such conditions), or pride in one's abilities.

Many students often have trouble empathizing with Alvarez's insistence on etching his name on the machines he has repaired. If students have trouble empathizing with this it might be useful to ask them if they have ever felt any impulses to make sure that they get credit for things that they do. The instructor can then ask them why they cared: Why did they think it was important to get credit? Why not just do what is best for the organization and let it go? As students wrestle with this question, one answer to ask them to consider (if they do not come up with it on their own) is if one reason why we feel a need to make sure we get credit for what we do is because we feel insecure. Did they feel insecure? Might Alvarez feel insecure in some way?

A discussion of insecurity should not leave out Stone. It may be useful to point out that "most of all, Stone was irate about what he called 'Alvarez's mania' for printing the yellow lettering on every piece of equipment he built." Of all the things to be irate about, why would this make Stone the most irate of all? Could it be that Stone is just as insecure as Alvarez?

Another way to get at the insecurity (as well as defensiveness, tension, suspicion, and other self-focused characteristics) that Stone and Alvarez feel is to talk about self-betrayal. An instructor can bring this up by asking why was it so much harder for the people who had trouble empathizing with Stone or Alvarez than it was for the people who found it easy. As the instructor discusses this question with the students, it is useful to point out the words that suggest blame, and to remind students about their reading from the night before, which explains that blame is a sign of self-betrayal.

As instructors help students discover self-betrayal in Stone and Alvarez, they need to be sensitive, because the instructor may be implicitly help students to see their own self-betrayal at the same time. If students found it difficult to empathize, then their reasons for finding it difficult to empathize may have been personal, may come from their own self-betrays, and may surface painful feelings. Instructors should not single students out. Students may volunteer information, and this can be a powerful experience for the class, but information offered by the students about their personal lives should probably be voluntary, and application of principles from the books to students' lives should be made carefully and sensitively.

One way an instructor can manage this conversation deftly is by being prepared with stories of his or her own self-betrays, how they were discovered, the initial pain of discovery, and the freedom and positive experiences that came from getting past them.

Dealing with Alvarez

A personal transformation from being unable to empathize with a person to empathizing with that person can have a number of significant consequences. Therefore, the discussion about empathizing with Stone and Alvarez may change students' opinions about what they would do if they were Pinto. To transition from a discussion of empathy to a discussion about what Pinto should do, the instructor can say, "Part of your assignment last night was to come up with a strategy for what you would do if you were Pinto. Based on our discussion from the last 20 minutes, is there anyone here who would change their strategy?"

If hands do not go up immediately, it may be useful to wait 20 or 30 seconds to give students a chance to think about it. If hands do go up, the instructor can ask students who raise their hands

1. What was your strategy coming in to class?
2. What would you change about your strategy?
3. Why?

Students who have changed their strategy will probably talk about how they were going to pursue a strategy that favored Stone or Pinto, that now they understand both people better, and that they want to come up with a strategy that will lead to a more balanced outcome. The instructor can then ask the whole class what that strategy should be.

Another way to get the class to talk about a strategy that is empathic is to ask, “If Stone and Alvarez are both competent people who are capable of creating value for Canalven, but their insecurities are preventing them from being able to create that value together, what could Pinto do to help them overcome their insecurities and learn how to collaborate?”

The question of how do you get people to collaborate precludes other possibilities, such as accommodating Alvarez, trying to force Alvarez to behave differently, avoiding the conflict, or just firing Alvarez. Some students may try to take one of these approaches anyway. The instructor should acknowledge these as legitimate possibilities, and even admit that in the end, one of the may be necessary. However, before resorting to one of these other options, the students ought to try to come up with one or more strategies for collaboration.

A strategy for collaboration should include both outcome and process. For example, outcomes may include some combination of the following ideas or others ideas entirely: creating a stencil that includes everyone who helped build or repair a machine and not just Alvarez; eliminating the stencil entirely, but creating an award of lifetime service for Alvarez and an ongoing “employee of the month award”; an arrangement in which Alvarez, Stone, and other key machine personnel are required to have a joint planning meeting before any major build or repair; engineering training for Alvarez; enrolling Alvarez to be responsible to create solutions for the things he grumbles about instead of just saying negative things about management; and so forth.

Processes for getting to outcomes like these should probably include both compassion and respect for the insecurities of the two men, and also a strong hand about what is and is not acceptable. For example, Pinto could approach each man individually, tell each one the many ways in which he values them, tell them specific ways in which he intends to support them in doing excellent work at Canalven (career development, training, awards, etc.), and tell them that he also feels the same way about the other man. Because he feels strongly about both men, and even stronger about the success of Canalven, he expects both of them to work together, he expects each to quit doing the following, specific, things, and he expects to begin doing the following, specific things. The consequences for not doing these things will be as dire as the benefits of doing them are desirable.

A conversation like this with each man would not be a solution, but would be the means of getting them to the same table to come up with a collaborative solution and contributing effectively. Pinto can also either mediate himself or enlist the aid of a mediator to help find a collaborative solution. If the men cooperate and work to come up with a collaborative solution,

then the company moves forward with their collaborative solution in place. If one or both of them persist in old behaviors, then the one who does so suffers the consequences outlined in the previous conversations. This is, of course, not the only process toward a collaborative solution, but it is the beginning of a feasible one.

Wise students may also note the importance of Pinto being empathetic throughout this process. This would require him to explore the possibilities that he, or the company, might be partially responsible for the problems that exist now. If this is the case, he should do his part to change his own behaviors, or any aberrant company policies as well.

If there is time as students begin to propose ideas for collaborative solutions, another useful exercise can be a role play. If a student recommends that Pinto should follow a particular conversational strategy with Alvarez, for example, the instructor could ask the student to play the role of Pinto in a role play (with the instructor or with another student) to try out the idea. This is useful because it helps the students see how hard these conversations are and also because it gives them real-time feedback that helps them to refine and improve their ideas.

Identity

As students begin to coalesce around some ideas about what Pinto should do with Stone and Alvarez, the instructor can say, "Let's see what actually happened." At this point, the instructor should either hand out the B and C cases, or summarize them in a slide for the students. Usually, the students have a strong reaction. With regards to the firing of Alvarez, students tend to take sides, thinking it was an example of failed leadership and a lost opportunity, or thinking it was probably inevitable and perhaps necessary. The death of Alvarez a year later also elicits a strong reaction. Among younger students there is often some laughter and disbelief, while others seriously consider the possibility of an indirect connection between the firing and the death. Older students often take the death more seriously: executives often want to spend a fair amount of time discussing the topic.

The death of Alvarez provides an opportunity for the instructor to raise a discussion about the role of personal identity in organizational life. If students express some degree of belief that his death may be related to being fired, the instructor can ask the students why that would be the case. Why was Alvarez's job so important to him?

If students do not come up with the concept of identity, or self, on their own, the instructor can introduce it by asking a question like, "How important do you think Alvarez's work was to his personal definition of who he was?" and "Why might that be?" Answers might include the length of time Alvarez worked at Canalven, the possibility that Canalven may be the reason he was working in Venezuela instead of Columbia, the pride he felt in being so good at building and fixing machines, his need to stencil his name on the machines he built, and so forth.

The instructor can then ask the students how attached they have been to their work, or how much of their own identities tend to get tied up in their work. The instructor can also give the students other examples of people getting their identities wrapped up in their work. One good example that can be made into a slide follows:

Mark Youngblood¹ was an entrepreneur whose company had failed. He founded it. He spent everything he had on it and went into debt before he finally had to give up. He wrote:

With it went everything that defined who I was to the world. I could no longer say that I “was” my job, because I had none. I couldn’t rely on my wealth to create a sense of worth and identity, for I had no money and loads of debt. I could not look to social standing because a failed entrepreneur has no social standing. And the failure of my love relationship, a month earlier, ensured that I could not find myself through the love of another. I had nothing, therefore I was nothing. ... When I looked in the mirror, I did not know who I was. For me, the [death of my identity] and subsequent "rebirth" was a wonderfully and powerfully transformative event. I experienced a sort of "awakening" in which I realized in a flash of insight that "I" was not my ego or the external trappings of my life. "I" was still all that had ever been, my true self. Nothing that was real and certain had changed, just superficial aspects of my environment.

After sharing this experience, instructors can ask students to speculate as to why Youngblood was able to recover from the loss of his identity while Alvarez, perhaps, was not, and what their answers mean for their own lives and careers. One possibility worth considering is that identities built upon empathic relations with others may be more stable and generative than identities built upon the rationalizations of self-betrayal.

Course Topics

The final segment of the conversation about Alvarez should tie the discussion back into the overall course topic using the questions from the student’s reading assignment. Some possible discussion points follow each question.

How does the ability to empathize with others affect one’s leadership? Students will probably consider at least two answers to this question. On one hand, students will see that people are much more willing to follow a leader who empathizes with them and cares for them than a leader who does not. And they may also see that empathic leaders are more likely to come up with innovative, collaborative solutions. On the other hand, students may also fear that empathic leaders are more likely to get used or manipulated by their followers, that empathic leaders will not be able to make the tough decisions necessary in business, that empathy for people like Alvarez can leave other workers who don’t have Alvarez’s issues disgruntled, or that empathy can distract them from getting the work done.

¹ Youngblood, M. D. (1997) *Life at the Edge of Chaos: Creating the Quantum Organization*, p. 208. Flower Mound, TX: Perceval Publishing.

Concerns like these are all legitimate and should be discussed. For example, getting manipulated or failing to make tough decisions may be real possibilities for empathic people if they are not also purpose-centered, internally-directed, and externally-open. Leaders need to be clear about their purposes and values, and need to pay attention to feedback that may indicate manipulation. If they are, they can take a stance like the one described above for Pinto, which was both empathic and tough.

The concern about leaving other employees disgruntled is also a legitimate concern, and one of the reasons why the question for becoming other-focused is “How do *others* feel about this situation?” Pinto, for example, should also consider how other employees will feel about his decisions as he makes those decisions, and adapt accordingly.

Finally, the concern about time is a common one, and is addressed at the end of chapter eight in *Lift*.

How did Pinto’s apparent inability to empathize with Alvarez affect his ability to lead the changes that are occurring at Canalven? How might the ability to empathize with others affect your ability to lead change? Changes at Canalven include Venezuelan ownership, stiffening international competition, new process lines being added, with more complex machinery, requiring more engineers. As more engineers get hired into a company with a policy of promoting from within whenever possible, it is understandable that tensions will flare up. This is true of most organizational changes—conflict is common and often even recurring. The ability to manage conflict becomes critical. And the ability to turn conflict into opportunities for collaborative innovations can be what distinguishes successful change leaders.

As instructors discuss these points with students, it might be useful to ask them about their own experience with empathy—or the lack thereof—during change processes. Was there a difference in how change leaders managed conflict when they were empathic and when they were not? Did change leaders communicate changes differently or more often when they were empathic? Did leaders handle resistance to change differently when they were empathic and when they were not? As students tease out each of these differences, they see more and more the important of empathy in the change process.

How might Pinto’s ability to exercise power and influence in Canalven be different if he had empathized with Alvarez? How will your ability to empathize with others affect your own power and influence? One way to answer this question may be for students to focus on sources of power. The source of power that Pinto relies on when firing Alvarez is the formal authority abdicated to him by others, and the legal authority to fire. What Pinto does not do is exercise power independent of authority. If Pinto had felt empathy for Alvarez and Stone, he may still have used his formal authority to establish conditions and consequences for his employees, but he might have also drawn on his relationships with Pinto, Alvarez, and others, he might have used his knowledge of Canalven and the industry to help him persuade Alvarez and Stone, he might have used his reputation or his “charisma”—assuming the attributions about Pinto’s charisma were correct. Further, Pinto’s empathy itself might have been a source of power. If Alvarez and Stone felt Pinto’s empathy for him, they might have been more willing to

respond to his requests because of the concern they felt from him and the trust that would instill in them. All of these other sources of power were lost.

The power that Pinto exercised in the B case was prohibitive power: he prevented Alvarez from causing more problems by terminating Alvarez's contract. We do not know, however, what kind of facilitative power Pinto might have been able to exercise if he had been able to enroll Alvarez and Stone into a more collaborative work relationship. If he had, part of this facilitative power might have been found in the work that Alvarez and Stone might have done by working together. More important than this, though, might have been the relationships that Pinto could have created in the process. As he re-arranged the organization to facilitate collaboration between incoming engineers with long-time employees with extensive practical know-how, he could have earned more respect and implicit authority for his ability to create work arrangements that were meaningful to everyone involved.

To see the power inherent in facilitative approaches, it might be useful to ask students if they have any examples from their own work experience about managers who were able to turn conflict into collaborative solutions. What did that do for their power in the organization? If the students have trouble coming up with their own examples, the instructor can ask this question with regards to the stories of Hugh and Sameer from chapter eight of *Lift*.

Summary and Conclusion

This class is designed to help students learn how to become other-focused in difficult organizational circumstances, and to see how an other-focused state affects their leadership, change management, or power and influence. The transformative power of empathy has a practical impact on how people feel, how they act and interact, the kinds of identities they create for themselves, and their influence in an organization. The next class focuses on helping students open themselves up to feedback so that they can learn and adapt in real time.