

A COURSE WITH A TWIST

● By **TERRY BROWNE**, AFP Graphic Designer.



● Participants in the OAFP Management Skills Workshop 'going around the twist'.

"Jessica Bailey is not at work today, she has been absent for three out of the past four Mondays and the rest of your staff is getting tired of carrying the extra workload caused by her absences."

SO begins the exercise called 'The Maze', a tortuous emotional roller-coaster ride as you, Jessica's supervisor, have to tread warily through a personnel management minefield.

The Maze is the concluding syndicate exercise to a recently developed Management Skills workshop for Office of the AFP clerical administrative staff in the Class 5 to 8 range. It is the result of a training needs survey conducted in 1984 which identified a clear requirement for management and supervisory skills training.

Because the AFP at the time was still a relatively new organisation, its public servants had not had any real access to in-house training. The problem for the new Staff Development Unit was to design a program which would provide an introduction to management skills and also benefit staff who received at least supervision training elsewhere during their career.

The first of the current workshops was held in October 1985. Since then, well over 100 public servants and some 20 police officers have taken part.



● John Engelmann faces course members during a workshop segment.

I attended the third course of the series and found the five days a welcome pause in a heavy work schedule. But a holiday it was not!

The main theme of the workshops is communication and dealing with people. We worked in small groups on problems and case studies of the type which we are likely to encounter to reflect on our own interaction with our staff and how we might improve this. Key topics included leadership, motivation, supervision, communication and conflict.

Emphasis in all the workshops is on practice rather than theory, so we were encouraged to complete a personal action plan to improve our administrative and interpersonal skills.

The time spent on the course can be likened to the half-time break in a grand final — a pause to evaluate past performance, to correct faults and develop a new game plan.

The informal atmosphere, I found, created a forum for uninhibited comment about the functioning of the AFP and the OAFP. Members of 'both sides' attended the course and found common ground in finding fault with the system.

But then came the twist. The challenge was issued: as middle managers of the organisation, what were we doing to overcome the problems that we were complaining about.

It was pointed out that middle management is a key level in any administration and that individuals can make a difference. A series of syndicate exercises and briefings reinforced this idea.



● Members of Course 3 decide Jessica's future.

Lively discussions on how to fix the 'system' continued through to the end-of-course function, and I think most course members left with a new sense of purpose more ready to face the daily challenges of administration.

At the very least, to paraphrase one member, I can now put a face to the voice at the other end of the phone when I've got a complaint to make.

The consultant to the program, John Engelmann, and Staff Development Officer Audrey Wilson, are currently working on the design of the Phase 2 workshop which will build on the skills gained in the basic workshops and concentrate on the aspects of management which time constraints made it impossible to include initially. Phase 2 is scheduled to begin in November.

In the meantime, if you are given the opportunity to attend the workshops, my advice is don't miss out. Jessica Bailey's fate depends on it!