

RECOMMENDED TEACHING METHOD FOR MINI CASES: QUICK IN-CLASS EXERCISES IN LEADERSHIP

TABLE OF CONTENTS

STEP ONE: INITIAL INTRODUCTION OF THE MINI-CASE AND SMALL-GROUP DISCUSSION (15 MINUTES)	1
STEP TWO: LARGE-GROUP DISCUSSION: MAKING THE DECISION (15 MINUTES)	1
STEP THREE: IMPLEMENTING THE DECISION (30 MINUTES: 10 MINUTES SMALL-GROUP DISCUSSION +20 MINUTES LARGE-GROUP DISCUSSION)	2
END OF CLASS AND MARKING	3
Sample Case and Standard Question Sheet Presented to Students (two-sided form).....	3
THE TWIST.....	6
PILOT TEST RESULTS	6

Mini-cases are to be processed in-class, over the course of an hour. There is no advance preparation required by the students. The teaching method has been effectively used for classes up to 75 students. After initial identification of the problem and solutions, the focus is on action plan implementation. The three-step in-class facilitation process is outlined below.

STEP ONE: INITIAL INTRODUCTION OF THE MINI-CASE AND SMALL-GROUP DISCUSSION (15 MINUTES)

At the beginning of the hour, each student is given a form which includes the text of the case and the questions asked. Students are asked to work in groups of two to three. After reading the case, the groups are asked to discuss the case questions leading to the action plan:

- Who are the key individuals or groups that have an important stake in this case? Why?
- What are your assumptions about the work culture (e.g. What can you infer given the industry or the size of the organization about how things are done)?
- What are the protagonist's options? Which option is the best one to use? Why?

Before the groups are ready to move on to the large-group discussion, they must all agree on what is the best option.

STEP TWO: LARGE-GROUP DISCUSSION: MAKING THE DECISION (15 MINUTES)

Now that your students have prepared for the case in small groups, have a group volunteer to share their answer to the first question. After the initial question is answered by one of the groups, have other groups feed into the discussion. To encourage feedback and discussion, write the answers to the question on the board so that the students understand that you are listening and that they can feed into the discussion. Proceed to the other questions in a similar fashion.

During this stage of the case, the instructor must get the class to decide on the one decision option that the entire class should pursue, so that one last question related to the right course of action may be assigned. Once the class has made the decision, they should be asked to work in small groups again.

STEP THREE: IMPLEMENTING THE DECISION (30 MINUTES: 10 MINUTES SMALL-GROUP DISCUSSION +20 MINUTES LARGE-GROUP DISCUSSION)

With all questions now answered and discussed in the large group, post the final step for discussion:

1. Implement the decision. Outline the steps your group would take to implement the decision in chronological order. Be sure also to pinpoint outstanding issues that need to be monitored and addressed.

After ten minutes of small-group discussion, the groups are then asked to present their action plan. Have the first group write their action plan in chronological order on the board. Now that an initial action plan has been established, go around the room to different groups and have each group contribute a new idea or revise an existing action. As the changes are discussed, write them on the white board at the front of class. This iterative process of having groups add/delete content from an action list is paramount to the learning activity. Initially, the first group may have a five-step action plan that is only partially well thought out. However, after an around-the-room discussion, this action plan will grow to include more items, and the items will also be more specific. The final product of the large-group discussion will lead to a comprehensive action plan that a student can use to deal with a difficult decision. This focus on the actions required in difficult situations is based on the Giving Voice to Values (Gentile, 2010) approach to ethical decision making.

Typically, what happens through this process is that students start with a rather simple action plan, but after discussion with the large group and the adding/deleting of items, the action plan becomes more detailed and complete. The students learn from each other and develop a more comprehensive plan to deal with a difficult decision.

END OF CLASS AND MARKING

At the end of class, each group of students are to hand in one worksheet, which identifies the names of students in the group. Those students who were present in class and a member of the group receive activity points.

Sample Case and Standard Question Sheet Presented to Students (two-sided form)

Course Title
Small Group Activity
2-3 Students

10 activity points

(Print names neatly)

(If we cannot read the names, we cannot give credit of 10 activity points)

In groups of 2-3 students read the situation below and answer the questions. Be prepared to share your work with the class. You must submit the worksheet completed in order to get credit.

PLACE CASE TO BE DISCUSSED HERE. THE FOLLOWING IS A SAMPLE CASE.

CUSTOMER DISSERVICE: A CHRONICALLY LATE EMPLOYEE CAUSES CASCADING PROBLEMS

You are an Air Canada customer service manager at Pearson Airport in Toronto, helping to support and manage the many customer service agents who assist passengers checking into flights. You are very pleased when Air Canada hires Laila Chung as a customer service agent. The daughter of a Tunisian mother and a Chinese father, Laila speaks not only English and French, but is also fluent in Mandarin and Arabic. After she satisfactorily completes the compulsory two weeks of training, you assign Laila to work at gates for flights departing to China and the Middle East. These flights are among the most demanding: planes are large and customer demands are plentiful. Staff must also double check all passports and visas. Laila is one of the few agents who can manage announcements in multiple languages and address issues for non-English-speaking customers.

After one month on the job, you receive a complaint from two of the lead customer service agents. They report that Laila has been frequently arriving late at the gate, seriously compromising service, and frustrating her co-workers. Lateness is also a very serious breach of performance protocols: agents are repeatedly reminded that there is zero tolerance for lateness given that departure schedules are non-negotiable. You immediately sit down with Laila to discuss her lateness. She reports that she is experiencing difficulties at home, causing her to miss transport to the airport. You direct her to Air Canada's confidential Employee Assistance Program, but, at the same time, caution her that lateness cannot be tolerated. A month later, you follow up with the lead customer service agents who report that, while Laila's punctuality seemed to improve immediately after your discussion with her and she is praised for being a hard-working and valued employee when she is at work, she is once again frequently arriving late for her shifts. As Laila is approaching the end of her probationary period of three months, you decide you must act. If you wait any longer, Laila's performance issues can become a matter for union arbitration.

Who are the key individuals or groups that have an important stake in this case? Why?
What are your assumptions about the work culture (e.g. what can you infer given the industry or the size of the organization about how things are done)?
What are the protagonist's options? Which option is the best thing to do? Why?

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1. Implement the decision. Outline the steps your group would take to implement the decision in chronological order. Be sure to also pinpoint outstanding issues that need to be monitored and addressed.

Step	Description

THE TWIST

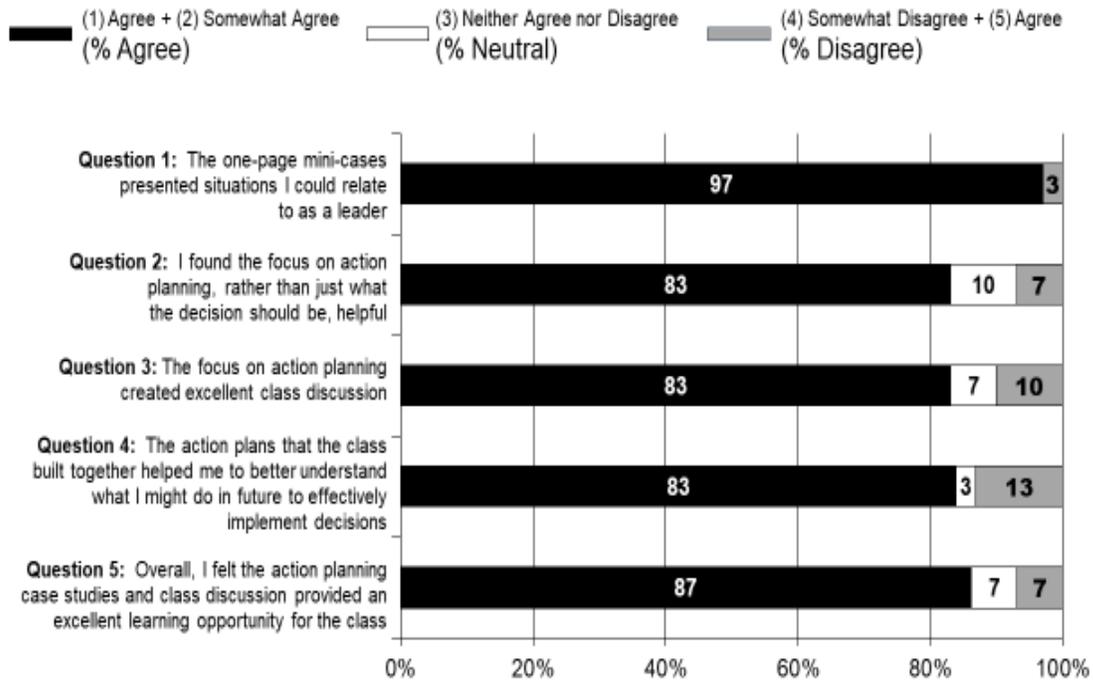
Many of the mini cases also have proposed “twists,” which are after-the-fact scenarios. Using the process outlined above, the instructor might ask students how their decision-making and action plan need to be amended to respond to the evolving scenario. The twist for the Customer Disservice, the case shown as an example above, is:

The Twist:

Two months after you have addressed the issue with Laila, Air Canada adds two new flights from Toronto to China, increasing the need for Mandarin speakers. There is an incident in which a number of Chinese passengers miss a flight because of an inability to clearly communicate. It was a costly incident for Air Canada as the stranded passengers had to be put up in hotels for two days. Air Canada management therefore is questioning your ability to manage your agents as the on-boarding of the two new flights was announced many months ago. Laila has also launched a complaint with Human Rights saying you were prejudiced against her.

PILOT TEST RESULTS

The mini-case teaching method was tested in winter 2015 in a class of 50+ students enrolled in a Hospitality and Tourism Ethics course. After employing a series of mini-case studies over the course of four weeks, feedback was solicited from students to help improve the case method. Overall, the variety of questions and discussion methods used demonstrated to the students the value of in-group decision making and that their initial instincts for decision making can be improved by soliciting input from others. Most importantly, it demonstrated a process for making and implementing difficult decisions. The following chart shows the response received from 30 out of 53 students (a 57% response rate) who responded to five scaled questions.



REFERENCE

Gentile, M.C. (2010). *Giving Voice to Values: How to Speak Your Mind When You Know What's Right*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.