

An Experiential Process for Developing a Meaningful Group Service Project Mission While Simultaneously Learning Deeply From the Process

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Abstract: This session will engage participants in a condensed version of the group decision-making process that I use to guide students through choosing a meaningful service mission that the whole class will ultimately work together to carry out as a vehicle for learning deeply about organizing and managing. Participants will actively undertake the first several steps of the collaborative decision-making process; then I will describe the latter steps that can't realistically be done within this session. Together we will reflect on how to facilitate students' learning deeply about collaborative decision-making and mission establishment throughout the full process.

Keywords: Group Decision-Making; Mission Development; Active Learning

Contribution of the session to management pedagogy/andragogy: This session will showcase a process that my teaching colleagues and I have developed and fine-tuned over many years for deeply engaging students in a service project mission-decision making process. The experience of engaging in this process then serves as the raw data for students to reflect upon in order to learn deeply about many different aspects of decision-making and mission establishment.

Learning Objectives: My hope is that participants will not only learn about the process that my colleagues and I have developed for guiding group-based service mission decisions, but also will share their ideas about how to improve both the process and guided reflection on the process.

Theoretical Foundations: Although I will guide the participants through part of this decision-making process (so they can experience what it feels like to go through the early parts of the process), in my course the process extends over a four-week period. During that time, students read about and discuss in class core management principles (efficiency, effectiveness, and community) and multiple theories and concepts relevant to their decision-making processes (sense of community and community responsibility, stakeholder theory, mission and strategy development, rational decision-making, groupthink, advocacy- vs. inquiry-based decision-making, effective critical opposition, power sources, group development and effective teams, and leadership). At multiple

points over the four-week period I facilitate reflection on the decision-making process they are going through using different theoretical / conceptual lenses that they have recently read about / discussed in class. In the session, we will discuss how to help students interpret their experience through these multiple lenses.

Session Description:

- a) **5 minutes: Introduction:** I'll start the session with a very brief overview of its purpose and then quickly move to the first step in the service mission decision making process.
- b) **20 minutes: Painstorming:** I'll ask the participants to each create a list of the Social Justice / Human Rights / Animal Rights / Environmental Issues they care most deeply about and want to change. (*What injustices burn you up? Keep you from sleeping? Make your heart ache? What do you think needs to change to make the world a better place? What are you passionate about wanting to change?*) After a few minutes of individual list-creation, I will ask several of them to read aloud their lists so we can get a sense of the range of issues painstormed. Then I'll group them into small groups of 3-5 (depending on number of participants) and ask them to generate potential project ideas that could help them to address one or more of the issues on their group's painstorming list (*Give a particular issue from your list, What could 26+ people DO to help stop the pain?*) After a few minutes of this idea generation, I'll have them share a few of their ideas with the whole group, and have them discuss their experience of this process. Next I'll explain how I'd have done this part of the process with students, as this activity would be given more time in the classroom. I'll also explain the homework assignment that I'd give my students to do that involves further work on developing service project ideas, including possible connections to business project ideas. (*Is there a product that could help me solve one or more of the problems that my service ideas are intended to address? Or one that I could sell to generate sufficient income to help me create solutions that address the problem?*)
- c) **20 minutes: Developing Criteria for Choosing among Possible Service Projects:** I'll explain that students would come into this class having developed a list of at least five possible service project ideas that address those issues they painstormed. They would post all their ideas on white boards around the room and work in small teams to do more brainstorming building on each other's ideas. Then I give them the difficult managerial challenge of figuring out how to responsibly go from their long list of ideas down to ONE service idea that they can embrace as their service mission by the decision day which is less than four weeks away at that point. The first step in deciding among all their ideas is to develop a list of CRITERIA for choosing among

project ideas. I'll have the participants brainstorm criteria using a nominal group technique – first brainstorming individually, then sharing all the ideas they wrote down, and finally building on the list that emerges. This is the first step in service project selection criteria development. I'll then explain the ways in which we keep returning to these criteria / refining and rethinking them throughout the rest of the decision-making process. We'll discuss the participants' reactions to engaging in the criteria-development process and their ideas for other ways of doing this step.

- d) **40 minutes:** The other steps in the process can't actually be carried out in the session. Instead, I will describe to the participants the remaining steps used in the process and how I facilitate debriefing the steps using various different conceptual / theoretical lenses. I will encourage questions and open discussion about participants' reactions, experiences, and ideas for different / better ways to accomplish various parts of the process throughout my description of the remaining process steps:
- i. Locating Possible Service Partners and Negotiating Possible Missions.
 - ii. Evaluating Project Ideas Against Agreed Upon Criteria; Generating list of the Class' Values and Norms; Revising Criteria
 - iii. Negative Multi-Voting and Debriefing
 - iv. Open Critical Opposition and Response
 - v. Positive Multi-Voting
 - vi. Coalition Creation (move from teams formed to do all the previous steps – looking into a lot of ideas to teams that come together around ONE idea that they will research / develop deeply)
 - vii. Market Research (Surveys and Stakeholder Panel)
 - viii. Coalition Worksheets (a vehicle for compiling research results, etc.)
 - ix. Coalition Worksheet Discussions & Straw Votes
 - x. Debates and Service Mission Decisions
 - xi. Very brief overview of what happens in my class AFTER these decisions are made (organizing themselves, planning out their projects, carrying out their projects, reporting on their projects).
- e) **5 minutes: Wrap-up:** What are our key take aways today? Discuss

Application to Conference theme: I believe that my proposed session is a strong fit with the *United in Service* theme. Session participants will engage in and learn about a complex decision-making process that they can use to unite whole classes of students together in choosing well-developed service project missions for their classes to pursue as a basis for learning about organizing and managing.