**Experiential Learning: The Power of Case Research in the Teaching of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion**

**Abstract**

A case study presents an account of what happened to a business or industry over several years. It chronicles the events that managers had to deal with, such as changes in the competitive environment, and charts the managers' response, which usually involved changing the business- or corporate-level strategy or changing practices.

In addition to the fact that cases illustrate what students had learned, one of the primary objectives of this session is to immerse students in difficulties managers experience when dealing with diversity, equity, and inclusion are very important.

Thruthe use ofcases, this session focuses on the impact of research-based cases on the teaching and learning of the subjects of diversity, equity, and inclusion at work.

**Keywords:** Diversity and inclusion, experiential learning in diversity and inclusion, and teaching diversity and inclusion.

**The Case Study as an Experiential Learning Method**

As case study chronicles the events that managers had to deal with, and illustrates what students had learned. In reality, the case study method is training by solving specific cases (Yakovleva &Yakovlev, 2014).

Yakovleva and Yakovlev (2014), suggested, “The essence of this method is a collective analysis of a situation… In the process of reviewing the cases, students gain the skills of teamwork, independent modeling of the solution, independent reasoning, and defending their opinion (p. 77). In reality, students will be exposed to problems/challenges that they probably have not had the opportunity to experience firsthand.

Among the many advantages the case study has, it usually integrates theory and practice, develops critical thinking skills, builds tolerance for ambiguity and incompleteness, develops shared learning skills, provides an opportunity for original thought, and develops students writing skills.

While a key criticism of a case study is the lacking of generalizability as its focus is narrow (e.g. Yin, 1994; Tellis, 1997), Zainal (2007) asserted that a case study is considered to be a robust research method especially when a holistic, in-depth investigation is required.

According to Tellis (1997: P.4), “In comparison to that of experimental or quasi-experimental research. The requirements and inflexibility of the latter forms of research make case studies the only viable alternative in some instances. It is a fact that case studies do not need to have a minimum number of cases or to randomly ‘select’ cases. The researcher is called upon to work with the situation that presents itself in each case”.

**Students’ Satisfaction**

I have been using these cases for the past five years in my graduate course in Human Resource Management. My students positively reacted to these cases did research, and applied the learned theory to the cases’ answers and presentations through a group project. Students’ overall improved learning was 90% when responding to a case assessment survey. Please see below the case outcome assessment.

**Figure 1: Knowledge and Skill Level Survey.**

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Case Title:** | | |
| **Rate your knowledge and skill level** | **Before the session**  Please circle from 1 low to 5 high | **After the session**  Please circle from 1 low to 5 high |
| Understand the challenges that face diversity in the workplace and the specific group in the case. | 1 2 3 4 5 | 1 2 3 4 5 |
| Understand cultural diversity, pluralism, and HR challenges in the workplace. | 1 2 3 4 5 | 1 2 3 4 5 |
| Understand, explain, and design an effective organizational program that goes beyond EEOC | 1 2 3 4 5 | 1 2 3 4 5 |
| Understand and explain the importance of having a diversity program at work. | 1 2 3 4 5 | 1 2 3 4 5 |
| Analyze of legal and application of ethical frameworks in HR management. | 1 2 3 4 5 | 1 2 3 4 5 |

**Professional Development Workshop “PDW” Format**

It is a 60 to 90 minutes Professional Development Workshop “PDW”. Intending to reduce the impact of unconscious bias, diversity, equity, and inclusion at work training aims to improve cross-cultural sensitivity, to foster more harmonious working relationships among an organization’s members.

In this interactive learning session, I will use two of the below-described cases that I ask session attendees to work in teams of about 5 each, read the case, discuss, and answer one of the below 2 cases questions.

**Session’s Outcome Assessment**

To assess attendees improved learning, a survey will be given to participants to assess their learning improvement regarding the specific diversity, equity, and inclusion cases. Please see the afore posted knowledge and skill level (Figure 1).

1. **The Coin Has Two Faces: Differences That Matter!** (Ghazzawi & Paladini, 2016)

**Source:** Ghazzawi, I. & Palaldini, M. (2016). The Coin Has Two Faces: Differences That Matter! *Journal of the International Academy for Case Studies*, 22 (1), 61-76.

1. **A Turban and a Kirpan: A Turban and a Kirpan: The Story of a Sikh in America** (Ghazzawi & Sharma, 2017).

**Source:** Ghazzawi, I. and Sharma T. (2017). A Turban and a Kirpan: A Turban and a Kirpan: The Story of a Sikh in America. *Journal of Case Research and Inquiry* “JCRI”, Vol. 3, 126-145.

**The Coin Has Two Faces: Differences That Matter!**

**Case Synopsis**

In 1992 seven-year-old Hussain Abdullah Osman, his parents, and four siblings left their war-torn homeland Somalia, to live in a refugee camp in Kenya. In December 2006, Hussain resettled with his family in Grand Island, Nebraska, to work for a meatpacking company, JBS SA. JBS hired Hussain soon after the US Immigration and Customs Enforcement Agency (ICE) raided its plant and several other meatpacking plants in different states. ICE agents arrested hundreds of undocumented Latino immigrants who were working there illegally.

The aforementioned raid resulted in the deportation of many workers and caused other undocumented workers, not present during the raid, to leave town. Management of the JBS Grand Island plant moved quickly and recruited Somali refugees who resided legally in the U.S. from locations such as Minneapolis, MN, and Columbus, OH to work at its meatpacking plant.

In September 2008, Muslim workers (mostly Somalis) at the JBS SA plant in Nebraska walked out to demand time for prayer and dinner during their holy month of Ramadan. The union representatives and the company’s management agreed to accommodate a prayer time at sunset by moving a scheduled break up by 15 minutes. However, the Latino immigrant workers led counter-protests and walked out the next day complaining that the Muslims were being favored. After two days of tension and work disruption, the company reversed its course regarding the break time and fired Somali workers and others who walked out in protest. The United Food and Commercial Workers UFCW, Local 22, filed a grievance and encouraged fired workers to return and talk to union representatives.

Many of the new Somali workers were observant Muslims who wanted to practice the traditional religious prayer schedule. Despite a different outward appearance, the objections by the non-Muslim workers and managers at the plant were not religious-based but were largely due to economic reasons.

The recruitment and hiring of Somali refugees at JBS solved the problem of hiring undocumented immigrants and having to risk the possibility of additional ICE raids. The Somalis were good workers, but the observation of Ramadan and its requisite prayer breaks caused consternation between the Somalis and the Latino workers at the plant; that created an obvious division in the plant. The real trouble between the Latino workers and the Somali workers was not based on differing religious beliefs as much as it was based on increased workloads created by the Somalis leaving the line to pray.

It was the last Monday of September 2008 and both management and the United Food and Commercial Workers Representatives at JBS of Grand Island were concerned about the tensions at the plant and wanted to find a good solution that would not only accommodate the Somali workers but also help build a sustainable diversity plan, while effectively managing its operations.

**Intended Courses**

This decision/research case is intended for courses in diversity, interfaith, human resources management, and culture and gender issues in management. It is intended for the application of concepts learned in the classroom and designed to complement knowledge derived from concepts in human resources management and culture/interfaith issues in management. Details provided in this case easily help the instructor use the case to add more relevant questions to the chosen subject.

In other words, it seeks to provide an applied, hands-on format for students to increase their understanding of the topics via review, research, and analysis of JBS, its management and hiring practices, pluralism, and cultural diversity issues in the workplace. Answers to the questions in the case will derive from what students learned from theories and concepts.

**Learning Objectives**

After this case, the student will be able to:

1. Understand the challenges that face diversity in the workplace.
2. Understand cultural diversity, pluralism, and HR challenges in the workplace in general, and in the meatpacking industry, in particular.
3. Understand, explain, and design an effective organizational program that goes beyond EEOC compliance guidelines that could serve as a source of the company’s competitive advantage.
4. Understand and explain the importance of having a diversity program at work.

**Theoretical Framework of the Case**

A diverse workforce poses unique challenges to organizations. While employees with different backgrounds bring a gamut of cultural values to the workplace, conflicts, misunderstandings, and stress may increase. Embracing employees’ differences can be a major challenge to organizations.

            The core pedagogical objective of this decision case research is to help provide an applied, hands-on format for students to increase their understanding and appreciation of the ethnic diversity and beliefs of others. It also advocates organizational pluralism, where employees feel they are fully integrated rather than isolated and ignored.

**Case Research Methodology**

The case is based on primary data (i.e., interviews) and published secondary data (i.e. articles and other published materials).

**Discussions Questions**

1. Define diversity and the concept of workplace diversity. How is diversity a strategic business imperative for organizations in general, and JBS in particular? Explain the importance of these concepts at JBS.
2. Who are the stakeholders in this case? How was each stakeholder harmed or benefited when the union representatives and company’s management met with Somali workers and agreed to accommodate a prayer time at sunset by moving a scheduled break up 15 minutes?
3. What is pluralism? Why is pluralism important to the issues at JBS?
4. How could JBS Grand Island’s management and union representatives have avoided these issues?

**A Turban and a Kirpan: A Turban and a Kirpan: The Story of a Sikh in America.**

**Case Synopsis**

Jagjeet Singh, a long-haul truck driver, and a devoted Sikh was driving from Mississippi to

Texas to pick up a chicken delivery when was pulled over by police officers in Pike County,

Mississippi for driving with a flat tire. He was subjected to a series of degrading remarks

and events because of his minority religion and race. Mr. Singh wore a turban and carried a

*kirpan*, a small spiritual sword as an article of faith. Officers contended that the *kirpan* was a

weapon and demanded that Mr. Singh turn it over. As he tried to explain that it is a sacred

religious article; he was laughed at and was arrested for refusing to obey a command by not

turning over his *kirpan*, seen as an illegal weapon by the arresting officers. When he returned to

Mississippi on March 26, 2013, for his court date in Pike County, four Highway Patrol officers

approached him and told him that Judge Aubrey Rimes had ordered them to eject Mr. Singh

from the courtroom because he did not like Mr. Singh's turban. Moreover, they told Mr. Singh

that Judge Rimes would punish him if he failed to remove his headdress. Not agreeing to the officer’s request regarding the turban, Judge Rimes went further and referred to the turban that Mr. Singh wore as a "rag" and asked him in exact words to, “remove that rag”. Accordingly, Mr. Singh was forced to wait several hours as he refused to remove the turban before he was allowed in the courtroom to plead guilty and pay a fine. As stated in the case, all Sikhs, Mr. Singh believes that “the turban is an inseparable part of his Sikh religious identity… a man cannot be considered a Sikh if he does not wear the turban (please refer to Exhibit 2 for images of a turban) and that unwrapping his turban and exposing his "naked" head in public is sacrilegious and shameful (Atwood, 2013: Para 5). Accordingly, he refused to obey an order based on his religious beliefs and knew that would be consequences.

The U.S. Department of Justice investigated the case and offered to close its investigation

if Pike County revised its nondiscrimination policy and implement sensitivity training. Accordingly, the Pike County Board of Supervisors met to discuss the case and address the training adequacy of the officers and the judge in dealing with the public they serve as the public became more diverse.

The case is most appropriate for courses in human resources management and possibly other courses that focus on diversity, interpersonal communication, and conflict resolution.

**Intended Courses and Level**

This incident is appropriate for use in both introductory and advanced courses in human resource management and in other courses that focus on diversity, interfaith, culture, interpersonal communication, and conflict resolution. It is intended for the application of concepts learned in the classroom and designed to complement knowledge derived from concepts in human resource management, multiculturalism, and diversity challenges to HR management. This case can help the instructor to add more relevant questions to a chosen subject by viewing the details provided.

In other words, it seeks to provide an applied, hands-on format for students to increase their understanding of the topics via review, research, and analysis of this unfamiliar situation, its stakeholders, the legal environment of human resource management, pluralism, and cultural diversity issues in the workplace. This case is intended for undergraduate or graduate courses. Answers to the questions in the case will derive from what students learned from theories and concepts.

**Learning Objectives**

After this case, the student will be able to:

1. Analyze of legal and application of ethical frameworks in HR management.
2. Describe and illustrate how you would go about identifying training requirements.
3. Define and explain the subject of religious freedom and equal protection under the law.
4. Be able to identify and understand anti-discrimination legislation.

**Theoretical Framework of the Case**

As some managers or employees in today's organizations work hard and do their jobs right, they still go down as a result of one’s ethics lapse. Justice and ethical treatment in the workplace is one of the most serious ethical issues. It is important to know that every HR action a manager takes, from interviewing applicants to selection, training, appraising, and compensating them, has implications to how justice and ethical treatment of others. Accordingly, the theoretical focus of this case is the legal and ethical aspects of HR. The case lends itself to the application/ analysis of (a) EEO laws and (b) Normative and Moral judgment and Ethics. The case mostly focused on the [Civil Rights Act of 1964](http://civilrights.findlaw.com/enforcing-your-civil-rights/civil-rights-act-of-1964-entire.html) that Prohibits employment discrimination based on race, color, religion, sex, and national origin. Additionally, it is equally focused on ethical behavior through the concepts of “normative judgment”, which implies that our decision is right or wrong, fair or unfair and its implications to society’s well beings (i.e. morality).

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