

Title:

In the news: Connecting course material to the real world

Abstract:

“Do these *things* really happen in the real world?” Perhaps, this question may sound familiar. In this session, participants will uncover one way to connect course material to the “real world,” using current events in the local community, across the country, and around the globe. As shown in this session, the exercise can be adapted and used in a variety of business courses, face-to-face and online, and with undergraduate and graduate students. Participants will gain insights on the exercise and its different versions and practice creating a sample exercise to use in their courses. Instructional materials will also be provided.

Keywords:

Classroom exercise, interactive dialogue, current events

“Do these *things* really happen in the real world?” or “How will I use *this* in the real world?” or “Can you give me an example of when I might use this method or apply this framework?” Most of us, at some point in our teaching career, have encountered these types of questions from our students on more than one occasion.

In this session, I share an exercise that I’ve successfully used in three different management courses during the last several years. The exercise described below has provided me (and hopefully, you) with one way to illustrate the potential applications of course material. More specifically, the exercise offers a meaningful way for students to reflect on the course material and to connect it to the “real world,” using current events in the local community, across the country, and around the globe. The exercise is versatile; it can be adapted and used in a variety of business courses. In fact, it takes on a slightly different format and name in each of my courses. In my Leadership and Change in Organizations undergraduate, face-to-face course, a student-pair prepares a short presentation, introduces a current event and explains how it relates to a course concept, and leads the class in a short discussion; the presentation exercise is titled, “Leadership in the News Vignette.” Similarly, in my Ethical Leadership graduate, face-to-face course, a team of four or five students prepare a short presentation, introduce a current event and explain how it relates to a course concept, and lead the class in a short discussion; the presentation exercise is titled, “Ten-Minute Ethical Challenge.” In my Management and Organization undergraduate, face-to-face course, I introduce a current news story, and in a rather straight-forward format, I ask the class to connect the issue in the story to a course concept; the class exercise is titled, “Management in the News Vignette.” In the online version of this course (Management and Organization), the students exchange posts and replies about current events in a discussion forum; the online exercise is titled, “Management in the News” Discussion Forum.

Through this exercise, in its varied forms, the students are encouraged to regularly attend to the news and to notice how much leadership concepts, ethical decision-making issues, and management topics, respectively, are often covered.

Theoretical Foundation/Teaching Implications

The creation and implementation of the exercise in my courses was inspired by the “Two-Minute Challenge” (2MC), developed at the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign by C. K. Gunsalus (National Center for Professional & Research Ethics, 2018). The 2MC is “designed to present realistic dilemmas in research ethics, along with a structured decision-making framework for responding” (par. 1). Although the exercise I’ve created does not necessarily involve an “ethical” dilemma (except in my Ethical Leadership course) and it does not necessarily involve a structured decision-making framework, it provides students with “exposure to potential issues in small doses” (par. 6), namely some issue involving an individual(s) or organization that is currently in the news media. The exercise also brings the course material to life, connecting it to the “real world.”

The exercise contributes to effective teaching and learning in the field of management. More specifically, the exercise draws on the 2MC pedagogical framework of “promot[ing] experiential, interactive learning, engaging learners in realistic situations that they may encounter” (par. 6). Relatedly, the goal of this approach, and the exercise in general, “is to foster deeper thoughts about resolving dilemmas...” (par. 7) or challenges facing an individual(s) or organization.

Learning Objectives

The exercise serves to facilitate one or more of the learning objectives in each of my courses. In my Leadership and Change in Organizations course, the news vignette provides

students with a forum to discuss examples of leadership in organizations, and especially examples of organizations undergoing change in the world around us. Similarly, in my Ethical Leadership course, the ethical challenge provides students with a forum for discussion, namely the common ethical issues that arise for individuals, managers, and organizations that involve value conflicts. In both the Leadership and Change in Organizations course and the Ethical Leadership course, by way of this exercise, students strengthen their communication skills as well as their critical thinking and problem-solving skills—two sets of career readiness competencies (Kinicki & Williams, 2020). In my Management and Organization face-to-face course, the news vignette illustrates a concept within one of the management functions of planning, organizing, leading, or controlling and provides students with an opportunity to connect an issue in the news to that concept. Through this exercise, students strengthen their concept knowledge, another career readiness competency (Kinicki & Williams, 2020). In the online course (Management and Organization), students also strengthen their communication skills and their critical thinking and problem-solving skills, again two sets of career readiness competencies (Kinicki & Williams, 2020).

Exercise Overview

In my Leadership and Change in Organizations course with 30-40 undergraduate students, as well as my Ethical Leadership course with 40-50 graduate students, I facilitate one or two sample exercises for the classes at the beginning of the semester (see Appendix A for sample topics that I used to demonstrate the exercise last year). Then, I release the class presentation schedule. In my Leadership and Change in Organizations course, the students choose a partner and the pairs sign up for a presentation day. In my Ethical Leadership course, the students are already in assigned teams, so the teams sign up for a presentation day. The

students choose a topic or issue in the current news media related to the course subject (e.g., “Amazon Finally Reacts to the Climate Emergency: Too Little, Too Late?”, *Forbes*, Sep. 21, 2019; “General Electric’s Strive for Change,” *The Wall Street Journal*, Oct. 7, 2019). Then, the students prepare a brief presentation outlining the topic or issue and how it relates to the course. The students submit their slides 24 hours prior to their presentation for me to review. If there is a question or concern, I will notify the students and they will correct the slides. In class, the students deliver a short presentation on the news story, explain its application to the course, and present a question for the class to consider that further prompts a discussion connecting the story in the news to a course concept (in approximately two minutes). The class discusses the question in small groups (for approximately four minutes), and the presenters lead the class in a short debrief (for approximately four minutes). From start to finish, the exercise spans approximately 10 minutes. More often than not, though, the students can discuss the news stories for much longer since so frequently, the students admittedly reveal that they do not necessarily openly discuss these topics elsewhere in their coursework. Depending on the schedule for the day, I may allow the discussion to continue a few minutes longer or at the very least, find a way to further incorporate the news story into that day’s lesson.

After using the exercise in those two courses for several semesters, I adopted a new version of the exercise for my Management and Organization face-to-face course with 140-175 students. I now begin most classes with a short presentation on a news story, and then present a multiple-choice question relating the news event to the course readings assigned for that day. In this large-enrollment course, all students have a clicker, so using the classroom response system, students cast their “vote” to answer the question. I then reveal the correct

answer, explain the connection between the news story and the course concept, and answer any clarifying questions (see Appendix B for a sample topic and question set that I used last year). The exercise functions as a “warm-up” activity and spans approximately five to seven minutes.

I later adopted another version of the exercise for my Management and Organization online course with approximately 30-60 students. Similar to my Leadership and Change in Organizations course and Ethical Leadership course, I share a sample exercise with the class at the beginning of the semester (see Appendix C for a sample online post and reply that I used to demonstrate the exercise last year). Depending on class size, the class is divided into groups of approximately 15 students and assigned to a “discussion forum group.” The students will each identify two management topics in the recent news media that relate to our course (e.g., “Retail Chiefs Dismiss AI Job Threat, Promise More Training,” *The New York Times*, May 16, 2019; “Amazon to Invest in Deliveroo, a Rival to Uber in Food Delivery,” *The New York Times*, May 17, 2019). During the first week of the assignment, each student will submit two separate posts to their discussion forum group: summarizing two news stories in their own words and posting two questions for their classmates’ consideration. No news story topic may be used more than once in a group, so students are advised to double check that their stories are not already featured in the discussion forum. During the second week of the assignment, each student will reply (by commenting) to two classmates’ original posts. The students should reply to a classmate’s discussion question, preferably to one that has not already been answered. The students must provide a rationale for their responses, and they are strongly encouraged to use material from the course (e.g., course readings) to support their replies.

Session Description

The MOBTS conference session will begin with a “warm-up,” briefly introducing a news story and presenting a prompt for the audience to discuss with a partner or in small groups, depending on the room set-up. Then, I will lead the session participants in a short debrief, asking for three or four participants to share a highlight from their group’s discussion. After the warm-up, I will reveal to the session participants that *this* is the exercise. Using a PowerPoint presentation, I will provide a detailed overview of the exercise used in my Leadership and Change in Organizations course and Ethical Leadership course, much like the exercise they just completed. I will also provide a detailed overview of the exercises I use in my Management and Organization course, face-to-face and online. For the purposes of the conference session, I will only demonstrate the exercise version I use in my face-to-face course, i.e., I will introduce a news story, present a multiple-choice question related to a general management topic, and ask the participants to vote on an answer by show of hands.

After I’ve demonstrated two versions of the exercise, underscoring the versatility of the exercise for different management topics, class sizes, and formats, I will ask the session participants to work with a partner or in small groups, again depending on the room set-up, to create a sample exercise; ideally, one that they could use in their classes to demonstrate the exercise. Participants will be encouraged to use their laptops/tablets or phones to search for a news story, relevant to their courses. After the session participants prepare their sample exercise—an oral presentation and discussion question, an oral presentation and multiple-choice question, or a written summary of a news story and discussion forum question—I will ask two groups to share their exercises with the larger group. In doing so, the session participants will see two more demonstrations of the exercise. I will also provide commentary at the end of each

demonstration. Finally, at the conclusion of the session, I will distribute the assignment guidelines and evaluation criteria that I use to assess students' completion of the exercise in my courses, with the exception of my large-enrollment, face-to-face course, as it is not a graded exercise. See Appendices D and E for the guidelines and evaluation criteria.

Timeline

With 60 minutes dedicated to the conference session, the following outline shows how I will allocate time to each segment: *10 minutes*: Warm-up exercise; *20 minutes*: Overview of the exercise versions, including another demonstration; *10 minutes*: Create a sample exercise; *20 minutes*: Show and share sample exercises.

References

- Kinicki, A., & Williams, B. K. (2020). *Management*, Ninth Edition. New York, NY: McGraw-Hill Education, pp. 32-33.
- National Center for Professional & Research Ethics (2018). The Illinois two-minute challenge approach. Retrieved online at <https://ethicscenter.csl.illinois.edu/wp-content/uploads/2018/02/2MC-Approach-for-Ethics.pdf>

Appendix A

Samples from Leadership and Change in Organizations course and Ethical Leadership course

“Leadership in the News Vignette”

Introduction to news story: “McDonald’s Pushes Antiharassment Training at U.S. Restaurants,” *The Wall Street Journal* and *cnn.com*, Aug. 28, 2019

Connections to course content: Leading under duress; and managing stakeholders

Discussion question: As the McDonald’s U.S. head, what knowledge areas and skills might you employ to lead your employees, to achieve a safe and respectful workplace?

“Ten-Minute Ethical Challenge”

Introduction to news story: “Actresses Huffman, Loughlin Among 50 Charged in U.S. College Fraud Scheme,” *Reuters*, Mar. 12, 2019

Connections to course content: Ethical issues, e.g., equality, fairness and justice, honesty and integrity, power, status, success, wealth; and individual differences influence ethical judgement, e.g., cognitive moral development, locus of control, moral disengagement

Discussion question: This is a true and developing story. How could the parents (and some of their students), test administrators, coaches, and the firm’s associates engage in unethical behavior without feeling bad about it? And, perhaps, some of them did feel bad about it—how could this still happen?

Appendix B

Sample from Management and Organization face-to-face course

“Management in the News Vignette”

Introduction to news story: “H&M to Halt Buying Brazilian Leather Tied to Amazon Fires,”
cbsnews.com, Sep. 6, 2019

Clicker question: H&M and other brands are taking steps to care for the environment outside of what is required for their business. What level of CSR do these actions illustrate?

- A. Benevolent CSR
- B. **Ethical CSR**
- C. Legal CSR
- D. Economic CSR

Appendix C

Sample from Management and Organization online course

“Management in the News” Discussion Forum

Post from Student A:

Summary of news story: Tesla recently announced that it will offer its own insurance program in an effort to offer a lower-cost product to its drivers. The CEO explained that this program aims to use vehicle-performance data and driver data to take into consideration the “safety benefits of the cars’ Autopilot driver-assistance system” (Scism, 2019, par. 3). If drivers do not drive in a safe way, captured by the company’s tracking data, the drivers’ insurance rates will increase. Tesla plans to launch this insurance offering in June.

Discussion question: Drawing on our readings in Chapter 2, what are the ethical implications of Tesla’s proposed insurance program offering?

Reference

Scism, L. (2019, May 7). Tesla plans to sell owners cheaper car insurance. *The Wall Street Journal*. Retrieved from <https://www.wsj.com/articles/tesla-plans-to-sell-owners-cheaper-car-insurance-11557221400>.

Reply from Student B:

Thank you for your post, and for raising this important question. Although it is too early to tell if there are ‘real’ ethical implications to Tesla’s proposed insurance program, it surely raises some ‘red flags’ based on our recent class readings.

In addition to the summary that you provided here, I further reviewed the online article that you referenced. The author also raised a question around the issue of having a car insurance provider “track” every move that you make in your car. Perhaps, the “tracking system” would serve to hold drivers more accountable for their day-to-day actions, and from a utilitarian view, wouldn’t this course of action provide the greatest good for the greatest number of people (Lussier, 2019)? At the same time, though, some drivers may believe that they have a right to privacy, using the rights view (Lussier, 2019) and therefore, might argue against the functionality of the new insurance program offering. So, in short, and to answer your question, I believe that stakeholders should be raising these same questions, in response to the potential ethical implications that exist for the drivers.

Reference

Lussier, R. N. (2019). *Management Fundamentals*, Eighth Edition. Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications.

Appendix D

Guidelines and Evaluation Criteria for Presentation

Note: The following guidelines and evaluation criteria outline the “Leadership in the News Vignette” Presentation used in my Leadership and Change in Organizations course. Similar guidelines and evaluation criteria are used with the “Ten-Minute Ethical Challenge” in my Ethical Leadership course.

“Leadership in the News Vignette”

I would like you to be motivated to regularly attend to the news (from legitimate print or online sources such as *The Wall Street Journal*, *The New York Times*, *Business Week*, *Fortune*, and *Forbes*) and to notice how much leadership and change are often covered.

With a partner, you will identify a leadership or change topic in the news media that occurred between [*insert date*] and now, and prepare a short presentation outlining the leadership or change issue and how it is related to the course material. Then, you will lead the class in a brief discussion. The leadership or change topic should relate to that week’s lessons, if possible.

Step 1: Sign up for a presentation session.

Step 2: Choose a leadership or change topic in the news media that occurred between [*insert date*] and now.

Step 3: Prepare a brief presentation outlining the topic or issue and how it is related to course material. Please consider the following structure for the slide deck presentation:

- *Slide 1: Title of news story, photo (optional) with source, name of presenter(s)*
- *Slide 2: Brief summary of news story*
- *Slide 3: Brief explanation of connection to course material*
- *Slide 4: Discussion question*
- *Slide 5: Name of the news source, date of the news story, and URL to the news story*

Step 4: Submit your slide deck to me at least 24 hours prior to your presentation. This way, if I have a question or concern related to your topic or your slide deck, I will notify you via the “assignment comments” on Canvas and request that you modify the topic and/or slides accordingly. Note: Late submission (less than 24 hours prior to your presentation session) will result in a 10% penalty on your assignment grade.

Step 5: In class, you will deliver a short presentation on the news story, explain its connection to the course, and present a question for the class to consider that further prompts a discussion connecting the story in the news to the course material. The presentation period should take approximately two to four minutes. *Dress is business casual.*

Step 6: While the class discusses the question in small break-out groups, you should move about the room to interact with the groups. The break-out period should take no more than four minutes.

Step 7: After the break-out discussion, you will lead the class in a short debrief. Be prepared to share your response to the question that you presented to the class after the debrief. The class debrief should take no more than four minutes, including your take on the question.

Evaluation Rubric for “Leadership in the News Vignette” Presentation

	Excellent	Good	Fair	Poor
News Story <i>Up to 40 pts</i>	Articulates a summary of the news story that is clear and concise. (40 pts)	Articulates a summary of the news story that is mostly clear and concise. (35 pts)	Articulates a summary of the news story that is somewhat clear and concise. (30 pts)	Does not articulate a summary of the news story. (0-25 pts)
Course Material <i>Up to 40 pts</i>	Clearly articulates a connection between the news story and the course material that is relevant and accurate. (40 pts)	Articulates a connection between the news story and the course material that is mostly relevant and/or mostly accurate. (35 pts)	Articulates a connection between the news story and the course material that is somewhat irrelevant and/or inaccurate. (30 pts)	Does not articulate a connection between the news story and the course material. (0-25 pts)
Delivery <i>Up to 20 pts</i>	Delivers a professional presentation. (20 pts)	Delivers a mostly professional presentation. (18 pts)	Delivers a somewhat professional presentation. (16 pts)	Does not deliver a professional presentation. (0-14 pts)
TOTAL <i>Up to 100 pts</i>				

This rubric is adapted from “Appendix C.2. Rubric for Oral Exams” in Ambrose, S. A., Bridges, M. W., Lovett, M. C., DiPietro, M., & Norman, M. K. (2010). *How learning works: 7 Research-based principles for smart teaching*. Jossey-Bass.

Appendix E

Guidelines and Evaluation Criteria for Discussion Forum

Note: The following guidelines and evaluation criteria outline the “Management in the News” Discussion Forum used in my Management and Organization online course.

“Management in the News” Discussion Forum

I would like you to be motivated to regularly attend to the news (from legitimate print or online sources such as *The Wall Street Journal*, *The New York Times*, *Business Week*, *Fortune*, *Forbes*) and to notice how much management is often covered.

This assignment has two parts, with two dates—one for each part of the assignment.

Part 1: You will identify two management topics in the news media that occurred between [insert date] and now that relate to our management course. After you choose your first news story topic, you will submit a post, addressing the following parameters for the assignment (also referred to as “Criteria” in the evaluation rubric):

- Briefly summarize the news story in your own words, i.e., do not simply cut, copy, and paste content from the news story. Note: No news story topic may be used more than once, so double check that your news story is not already featured in your discussion forum. The sooner you complete this assignment, the more likely you will have your choice of options. Choices are first-come, first-served.
- Post a question for your classmates to respond to next week. Avoid asking questions that simply require “yes/no” responses.
- Include all references or works cited.

Then, after you choose your second news story, you will submit a separate post, again adhering to the above parameters for the assignment.

Part 2: You will reply (by commenting) to two classmates’ original posts during the second week. First, you will respond to one classmate’s post, addressing the following parameters for the assignment (also referred to as “Criteria” in the evaluation rubric):

- Reply to your classmate’s discussion question, preferably to one that has not already been answered.
- Regardless of how you choose to reply, you must provide a rationale for your response, and I strongly encourage you to use material from the course to support your reply.
- Include all references or works cited, if applicable.

Then, you will respond to another classmate’s post, again adhering to the above parameters for the assignment. Note: You are not required to reply to more than two posts but should another student’s reply to an original post interest you, please go ahead and respond.

Evaluation Rubric for “Management in the News” Discussion Forum

	Excellent	Good	Fair	Poor
Criteria for Post #1 <i>Up to 25 pts</i>	You meet the parameters of the assignment: summary, discussion question, references or work cited. (25 pts)	You meet most of the parameters of the assignment. (20 pts)	You meet some of the parameters of the assignment. (15 pts)	You do not meet the parameters of the assignment. (0-10pts)
Criteria for Post #2 <i>Up to 25 pts</i>	You meet the parameters of the assignment: summary, discussion question, references or work cited. (25 pts)	You meet most of the parameters of the assignment. (20 pts)	You meet some of the parameters of the assignment. (15 pts)	You do not meet the parameters of the assignment. (0-10pts)
Criteria for Reply #1 <i>Up to 25 pts</i>	You meet the parameters of the assignment: reply, rationale for response, references or work cited (if applicable). (25 pts)	You meet most of the parameters of the assignment. (20 pts)	You meet some of the parameters of the assignment. (15 pts)	You do not meet the parameters of the assignment. (0-10pts)
Criteria for Reply #2 <i>Up to 25 pts</i>	You meet the parameters of the assignment: reply, rationale for response, references or work cited (if applicable). (25 pts)	You meet most of the parameters of the assignment. (20 pts)	You meet some of the parameters of the assignment. (15 pts)	You do not meet the parameters of the assignment. (0-10pts)
TOTAL <i>Up to 100 pts</i>				

This rubric is adapted from “Appendix C.3. Rubric for Papers” in Ambrose, S. A., Bridges, M. W., Lovett, M. C., DiPietro, M., & Norman, M. K. (2010). *How learning works: 7 Research-based principles for smart teaching*. Jossey-Bass.