

INTERNATIONAL CRITICAL INCIDENT CASE ASSIGNMENT

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Abstract

Writing an International Critical Incident Case has demonstrated efficacy to deepen student understanding of organizational behavior and cross-cultural communication in business courses. The assignment lends itself to a broad range of topics with specified outcomes. We have successfully used the assignment in required MBA Organizational Behavior courses. Student teams collect data and write a cross-cultural business case about a “critical incident” that happened to a person from a non-English speaking country. Importantly, students must interview a person from the other country and write the cultural case from that person’s point of view. Once the case is written, the student team performs an analysis of the case to surface the key organizational behavior issues, and finally leads a class discussion about the case. We provide instructors with student instructions and grading rubrics so the case project can be put to immediate use in their own courses.

Introduction

Searching for a challenging project that would expand organizational behavior concepts into a global context for an MBA required course on Human Behavior in Organizations, we developed a three-part International Critical Incident Case Assignment. Often students have not had exposure to organizational behavior concepts within another cultural context and need an opportunity to compare and contrast western OB topics with the values and business practices of another country. We have had success with increasing student awareness of other cultures. Secondary gains can also be found in students’ increased ability to work in teams to write, analyze, and present an original international critical incident case.

We developed the assignment because there is a scarcity of international cases in America related to the interpersonal, group, and organization culture levels of organizational behavior, especially ones that are from the perspective of people from non-English speaking countries. The problems and decisions that emerge from the international critical incident cases work well for learning about organizational behavior and management theory, even if the instructor's objectives are not specific to a global context.

In preparation for this assignment, students learn about case writing (Leenders, Mauffette-Leenders, & Erskine, 2007); forming and working within teams (Katzenbach & Smith, 2003); effective team characteristics; task and process issues (Hill, 2001); norms and roles (Schultz, Nolan, Cialdini, Goldstein, Griskevicius, 2007), and other topics that the instructor wants highlighted.

The Exercise Explained for Instructors – Overview

Purpose

To provide an in depth experience to learn and apply concepts in Organization Behavior in a global context.

Learning Outcomes

Upon completion of the assignment, students will be able to:

- describe the cultural characteristics of at least one non-English speaking country. (Comprehension Level)
- interpret organizational behavior concepts and apply these topics to a global setting. (Application Level)
- compare American cultural traits and values to another country. (Analysis Level)
- assess leadership and membership behaviors in teams. (Evaluation Level)

Assessment of Learning

This assignment connects to the AACSB's assurance of learning standards by aligning assignment learning with several Program Goals (also called Program Learning Outcomes) across different programs at the business school where we have used the assignment. For example, in the Bachelor of Science in Management program, Goal 4 is: "Graduates will have a global orientation." One of the associated learning objectives is: "Our students will be able to define and present key elements of another culture (other than the U.S.) and their role in business decision making." The assignment can be used to measure student learning for this goal. Similarly, the assignment can be used to measure student learning in the Master of Science in Organizational Development (MSOD) Goal 3, which states, "Students will increase their understanding of the global challenges that face organizations and increase their ability to ethically consult globally."

The assignment also enables faculty members to measure learning for this goal in the Master of Science in Management Leadership (MSML) program, which has as Goal 4: "Students will increase multicultural competencies." Finally, the assignment enables the measurement of communication and writing skills which are Program Learning Goals in the Full-time MBA and Fully-Employed MBA at the business school. While the metrics, rubrics, and standards might be different across programs and goals, the assignment provides a way for measuring learning that informs faculty and program leaders about student success in critical areas from global orientation to communication.

Group Size

A class of 20 – 30 students is ideal, but the assignment can also work in a larger class.

Team Size

4-6 members is ideal, but it can be done with partners or trios.

Time Required

This is a three part assignment requiring a minimum of six weeks of outside work to complete. Ten to fourteen weeks is ideal.

Preparation by Instructor

Prepare three short lectures to introduce the key components of the exercise to your class. Students apply the knowledge from the three lecturettes while executing the assignment. The lecturettes are described in detail below:

1. What Is a Case and what is a Critical Incident Case?
2. What is an Effective Team?
3. How to Analyze a Case?

The Critical Incident Assignment

This is the heart of the exercise, and it is composed of three parts. Part 1: Writing the International Case Narrative. Part 2: Analyzing the Case, and Part 3: Discussion Leadership in the Classroom. See Appendix A for student instructions and Appendices C and D for grading rubrics.

The Exercise Explained for Instructors – Detailed

The three short preparatory lectures are described followed by a detailed description of the Critical Incident Assignment. In order to understand what a critical incident case is, we first define what a case is and differentiate it from a critical incident case.

Lecturette 1 -- what is a case and what is a critical incident case?

What is a case? A case is a description of an *actual situation*, commonly involving a decision, a challenge, an opportunity, a problem or an issue *faced by a person* (or persons) in an organization (Lenders, Mauffette-Lenders, & Erskine, 2007). Cases have been popularized by the case method used in many colleges to prepare managers for operating companies. They

are products of carefully thought-out processes of investigation and analysis. Their content varies depending on the educational objectives. Normally they appear in print form. Field-based cases require a release (usually with sign-off from company), while those that are based on public knowledge using accessible documents, media, annual reports, court transcripts, etc., do not.

What is a critical incident case? A critical incident case is a description of an actual situation, commonly involving a decision, a challenge, an opportunity, a problem or an issue faced by a person (or persons) in an organization. However, it is focused on the decision maker's behavior and emotion with less detail about the context of the organization or business decision. It can be published, but for the purpose of classroom discussion (Tompkins, 2001), it does not follow in-depth case writing methods or research protocol (similar to Harvard Business cases or the *Journal of Case Research* cases).

Lecturette 2 – what is an effective team?

Learning about teams and team functioning is an important part of an organizational behavior class. It is also the primary vehicle used to work the Critical Incident assignment. Here we briefly describe primary concepts about teams: characteristics of an effective team, stages of team development, and why some teams fail. These can be easily augmented by other teaching materials on teams.

Characteristics of an effective team. Drawing from the work of Tuckman (1965) and Katzenbach (2003), the following are the salient points to present and discuss with students regarding effective teams. Such teams have a clear mission or purpose that is supported by effective communication. These attributes have demonstrated that “in unity there is strength.” Performance goals (e.g., quality, timeliness, etc.) that support the mission help workers know what is specifically expected of them. Goal achievement is supported through clearly defined roles and responsibilities. A primary foundation is established through operational norms that determine how people work together.

Worker skill levels need to be complementary to each other; a respect for diverse views helps to strengthen the team. Learning to deal with differences in points of view, and addressing possible conflicts in a constructive fashion, are hallmarks of an effective team. Further, such teams hold members mutually accountable for meeting due dates with quality deliverables.

Stages of group development. It is often beneficial to help student teams develop observation skills of their group's development. Tuckman's Four Stages of Group Development (1965) is a useful model that students readily understand. The four stages are:

Stage 1: Forming (relationships are established and tested)

Stage 2: Storming (conflict and polarization around interpersonal and structural issues arise)

Stage 3: Norming (cohesiveness develops, new standards evolve, and new roles are adopted. Personal opinions are expressed about task issues)

Stage 4: Performing (roles become flexible and group energy is channeled into the task)

Why teams fail. Not all teams are able to reach a stage of development where they are able to perform. Common reasons for team failure include lack of support from management and/or management's reluctance to relinquish power and control. Further, if team members refuse to cooperate, or are unable to cooperate with each other, whether due to lack of skill or lack of commitment to meeting deadlines with a quality deliverable, success is unlikely.

Lecturette 3 – how to analyze a case.

Cases are often smoothly analyzed using a three step process: reading the case, solving the case, and action planning for improvement. This reliable protocol can be introduced as a tutorial to guide students through the thought process necessary to successfully solve a case.

Reading the case: Students should start with a detailed reading of the case, and avoid reading and rereading it. Commonly, a successful reading follows seven steps:

Step 1: Read the first paragraph (or two or three) of the case and the last paragraph (or two or three) and stop to reflect.

Step 2: Ask students to answer five questions:

- *Who* is the decision maker? What is his/her position, title and responsibilities?
- *What* appears to be the issue (concern, problem, challenge or opportunity) and its significance for the organization?
- *Why* has the issue arisen and why is the decision maker involved now?
- *When* does the decision maker have to decide, resolve, act or dispose of this issue?
Is there an urgency?

Step 3: Quick look at the case exhibits.

Step 4: Quick review of case subtitles.

Step 5: Skim case body.

Step 6: Read assignment questions.

Step 7: Read the case and reflect on assignment questions.

Solving the case. The normal steps of case solving follow a process of defining the issues, analyzing the case data, generating alternatives, and selecting the preferred one.

Define the issues. First list the symptoms, the complaints or concerns the decision maker states in the case.

Analyze case data. Conduct the case analysis and identify the root cause, i.e., the real issue(s) that needs to be solved. In an Organizational Behavior class, it is important to be concerned with why the behavior is happening. First list facts from the case, sorted into appropriate categories (e.g., timeline or people or issues). Then search for root causes that created the symptoms in the case. Use 3 to 5 whys, i.e., you ask why, you get an answer, and then you ask why about that answer, and so forth. Use principles and concepts from course materials (cases, assessments, notes, articles) to explain the behavior in theoretical terms.

Generate alternatives. Write the problem or problems identified in your analysis and brainstorm to solve them. (It can be helpful to remind students that an attribute of good brainstorming is to not criticize ideas, just list them.) Examine alternatives and decide which

three to six best solve the issues identified in the analysis. List the pros and cons of each alternative.

Generate decision criteria. Determine priorities as if you were the decision maker. The decision criteria should be objectively and/or subjectively measurable. For example, “maintain” satisfaction, “increase” commitment, “ROI of 12%,” “reduce” turnover rate, etc.

Evaluate alternatives. Create a method for evaluating alternatives. For example, use a grid with alternatives on one axis and decision criteria on another axis. Rate each alternative with some point system, such as +1, 0, -1.

Select preferred alternatives. Choose the alternative(s) that best solves the problem(s) or issue(s) and explain how it will mitigate the cons and enhance the pros.

Action planning for improvement. One of the most important steps in solving a case is to develop an implementation plan that addresses the problem’s root cause found in the analysis. The best solutions involve the decision maker and offer concrete steps which need to be taken to move the situation forward. As the decision maker, consider these questions:

- What are the key steps that need to be done?
- What are the timelines for each step?
- Who will implement the plan?
- How will resistance be overcome?

It can be helpful to challenge students’ thinking by asking them to imagine various scenarios: the worst case, most likely case, and best case scenario should the action plan be implemented. Ask them:

- What steps can you take to reduce the chances of the worst case scenario occurring?
- If the worst case happens, is it disastrous enough to warrant not doing this alternative, or can you devise a reasonable response?

The Critical Incident Case Assignment

The instructor, once satisfied that students understand the content and how to apply the concepts of the three short lectures, should be ready to introduce the actual assignment. For easy reference, an assignment outline is provided below:

Assignment Outline

This project has three parts: Writing the International Case Narrative, Analyzing the Case, and Discussion Leadership in the Classroom; these are described in detail below.

Part 1. Writing the International Critical Incident Case Narrative

- A. How to identify a Critical Incident for the case
- B. Criteria for Selection
- C. Collecting the data
 - 1. Preparing questions and arranging the interview
 - 2. Conducting the interview
- D. Composing the Case Narrative
 - 1. Guidelines
 - 2. Industry
 - 3. The situation: Tell the story
 - 4. Methods Summary
 - 5. Reflections

Part 2. Analyzing the Case

- A. Guidelines
- B. Section 1 of the case analysis: Cultural Background
- C. Section 2 of the case analysis: Analysis
- D. Section 3 of the case analysis: Epilogue

Part 3. Discussion Leadership Activity

Part 1: Writing the International Critical Incident Case Narrative

How to identify a critical incident. Students identify people they know such as classmates, friends, relatives, etc. who live in another country and arrange an exploratory interview. Firstly, they explore potential critical incidents with contacts and select several that might work. It is important to identify a decision, challenge, opportunity, problem or issue faced by a person (or persons) in an organization that *created strong emotions*. In organizational behavior, the best cases have a strong emotional component for the decision maker. For example: anxiety, anger, fear, hurt, hope, confusion, excitement, joy, satisfaction, wonder. Students can also choose from several contexts and topics such as:

1. Individual (career, ethics, self-concept)
2. Interpersonal – two or three people (conflict, communications)
3. Group or team situation (motivation, goals, process, decision making)
4. Between groups/ business units (coordination, shared resources)

The best cases are ones that have a storyline with a beginning (something changed), middle (a time of wondering what to do because of the change), and an end (the decision was made – whether good, bad, or neutral).

Secondly, students need to ascertain whether their contact is willing to be interviewed and share his or her story for the purpose of classroom learning. We recommend that names be changed/disguised for people and the company. Disguises protect privacy and avoid the need for a signed release. If the student and contact wish to use actual names, then a signed release form should be used.

Criteria for selection. Students need to determine if their contact's story meets the following criteria for a good case.

1. The incident is indeed critical.
2. The incident occurred within the past five years.
3. The case can be written using the point of view of the foreign national person.
4. The incident happened in a country that another team has not already chosen.

5. The incident focuses on a single decision that a foreign national person had to make.

Collecting the data.

Preparing questions and arranging the interview. Students need to prepare for their interview/s by researching the basics about the non-English speaking country: demographic, geopolitical, economic, common business practices, etc. They also need to search library data bases for information about the company for which the interviewee works such as size, annual sales volume, product mix and market areas, number of employees, etc.

Conducting the interview. Students identify a list of open ended questions to surface the chronology of events, key players and their roles, people's surprises, feelings, etc. Here are several items we have found useful as guides that help students conduct successful interviews.

- a. Gather data through interviews whether they be in person face-to-face, via e-mail, fax, or telephone. Ask about background information so the full context of the case is discovered.
- b. Ask the interviewee to think of the other key players. Ask him/her to step back and put himself or herself in this person's place and try to describe the critical incident from the other person's point of view. If possible, interview other key players.
- c. Decide if any exhibits are needed to help clarify the case, such as simplified organizational charts, a diagram of the office, or a copy of a letter or memo.
- d. It is important to send a thank you note to the interviewee who has made it possible for this assignment to be completed.

Composing the Case Narrative. We have found that receiving papers that follow these guidelines has helped students grasp the fundamentals of the case quickly as well as assist instructors during their evaluation of student deliverables.

Guidelines.

- Length: 4-8 double-spaced pages
- Written in the past tense
- Written in third person (she/he not I/we/you), from the foreign national person's point of view
- Proper grammar
- Includes subheadings to help the reader follow the train of thought smoothly.

Industry. Ask students to create the proper context for their case by providing a brief description of the industry in which the narrative took place. For example, "a small manufacturing plant (160 employees) of high-end electronic equipment; union employees; with sales of \$120 million per year; company disguised/not disguised."

The situation. Tell the story. Students should describe the events, people and significant activities that occurred. Caution them that they should only tell the story up to the key decision point. They should not tell what the decision maker decided or what happened in the case narrative. For a successful case, the reader must be left "hanging" so the class will be judicious with its analysis when the case is presented to them in class. This makes for a well-focused and energetic discussion that creates keen interest.

Good practices. Case narratives are strongest when students maintain objectivity, confidentiality (as requested by the interviewee) and realism.

Objectivity. It is important for students to maintain an objective, respectful viewpoint when they describe the key players. Sometimes students misstep and say a person in the case is stupid, mean, or nasty. It is important that the person's behavior is described and shown through his/her own words and actions.

Confidentiality. As mentioned supra, students may disguise the case by changing people's names or other identifying information. They may choose to describe the company in generic terms (e.g., the company produces high-end electronic equipment), or make up a

name, such as Internet Computer Company. If real names are used then a Consent Form needs to be signed by the decision maker and/or a representative of the company. (See Appendix E for a sample.) The better cases use names that are congruent with the people from the country studied, e.g. Asian names for Asian cases.

Realism. It is important for students to be truthful and resist the temptation to make up people or events. All facts must be real.

Methods summary. Students briefly describe how they went about identifying the decision maker and developing their questions. This is augmented by a list of the sources and references from which they received information for the case (e.g., company documents, outside sources such as consulates, journal articles, etc.)

Epilogue. Class discussions predictably end with the question: What happened in real life? A brief paragraph that states what actually happened after the critical incident is essential for the integrity of the case.

Reflection. We agree with David Kolb (1983) that personal reflection is an important step in learning. We like to ask that the epilogue be followed by a paragraph from each team member summarizing what he/she individually learned about organizational behavior from the character(s) in this case, as well as from writing the case as a member of a small group. We do not include this in the formal page count.

We have found that due to the length of the case (about 16 pages), it is helpful for the instructor to differentiate between the Case Narrative and Case Analysis by requiring students to write them in two unique formats for easy identification; one is double spaced and the other single. Table 1 summarizes the Case Narrative above and introduces the Case Analysis below.

**Table 1. Comparison Chart - Assignment Parameters
Case Narrative vs. Case Analysis**

Note: The points are the weighting we use for each section of the assignment, but instructors may wish to weight each part of the assignment differently.

Case Narrative—15 points	Case Analysis—15 points
<p><u>Format</u> (3 points)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Double spaced with page numbers <input type="checkbox"/> Written in the past tense, with subheadings <input type="checkbox"/> 4-8 pages long <input type="checkbox"/> Written in 3rd person, from the non-American, non-English speaking person's point of view who is doing business with an American. <input type="checkbox"/> It is truthful (no facts are made up) <input type="checkbox"/> Names may be changed, but should represent names typical of the country <p><u>Title page</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Descriptive title -Learning Team Names -Country name <p><u>Story Content</u> (7 points)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Someone is faced with an important decision; leaves the reader "hanging," wondering what to do and not knowing what decision was made <input type="checkbox"/> The class has enough cultural info and case facts that they can discuss what "should" be done <input type="checkbox"/> It is interesting to read <p><u>Addendum</u> (5 points)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Epilogue—what happened? <input type="checkbox"/> Research methodology used to collect material <input type="checkbox"/> Industry—1 or 2 sentence description of the industry within which the case occurred <input type="checkbox"/> Country—a paragraph that summarizes key attributes/values of the case country <input type="checkbox"/> Reflection from each member's point of view of what s/he personally learned (e.g. about OB topics, culture, teams, etc.) from writing and analyzing the case. (This part is not included in your page count) <p>Total 15/_____</p>	<p><u>Format</u> (2 points)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Single spaced with page numbers; double space between paragraphs <input type="checkbox"/> Written in the past tense with subheadings <input type="checkbox"/> 4-8 pages long <input type="checkbox"/> Title page—same but add <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Key topics addressed -Narrative Abstract—250-500 words that leaves the reader "hanging" about what happened. <p>1. Cultural Aspects (3 points)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Provide background on relevant issues and dynamics to aid in understanding the case situation, e.g. bribery in Country X; topical comparison of U.S. vs. Country X values or attributes; cultural dimensions, etc. (Not an exhaustive explanation of the culture) <p>2. Analysis (4 points)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Present the critical points of the case and provide theories and information that will add a level of intellectual analysis <input type="checkbox"/> Write succinctly and present a reasoned discussion of the facts and important cultural interpretation <input type="checkbox"/> Tell why the behavior occurred <input type="checkbox"/> Tell the actual decision that was made <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -include rationale for why the decision was selected -present pros and cons of various options and likely consequences <p>3. Q and A (2 points)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> 3 Questions with answers for each of the two topics, for a total of 6 Q & A altogether <p>4. References</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Complete citations <p>5. Evaluate the theories (4 points)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Tell which of class assigned readings are applicable to the case and which are not. Explain and provide rationale. <p>Total 15/_____</p>

Part 2: Analyzing the Case

Guidelines

- Single spaced (to readily identify it from the case narrative which is double spaced)
- Length: 4-8 double-spaced pages
- Written in the past tense
- Written in third person (she/he, not I/we/you)
- Proper grammar and editing—include subheadings
- *First page.* Should include, along with team member names:
 - Key topics.* (The two topics as well as any additional topics that will be covered, e.g., communications, conflict management, ethics, etc.)
 - Country name.*
 - Abstract.* A 250 to 500 word abstract of the case narrative to help the reader remember the case when examining the analysis.

Case analysis

Section 1 – cultural background. This section provides background information about the issues and dynamics that aids understanding the cultural context where the critical incident occurred. A chart that compares and contrasts the interviewee's country with American culture is required to clarify for the student authors the primary similarities and differences between the two cultures. Emphasis is placed on only relevant cultural issues related to the case. For example, Hofstede's (1983) descriptions can be used to show how power distance in management is viewed in Mexico versus Canada.

Section 2 – the analysis. The analysis needs to be based on principles of management and organizational behavior theory found in assigned textbooks, related readings, topic research and discussions in class. The writing needs to be succinct and lead the reader through a well-reasoned discussion of the case. It should answer the questions of *why* the behavior occurred and it should include an array of possible decisions (including a rationale for the decision and a discussion of likely consequences, both pro and con).

Section 3 – the decision. An array of alternatives that can solve the problem(s) need to be identified along with pros and cons of each alternative. Determining a measureable decision criteria aligned with the case is important. An implementation plan that puts the decision into action, and addresses the worst case scenario are significant portions of the critical thinking required in this exercise.

Part 3: Discussion Leadership in the Classroom

This portion of the assignment requires student teams to lead a discussion in the classroom about the case they wrote. Teams distribute the case narrative to the class about one week in advance so students have an opportunity to read and reflect on key aspects before coming to class. This in-class activity creates a rich experience as students become increasingly focused and energetic as the discussion is fueled by what might happen, what options should be considered and what the decision maker should do. Below is an overview of the agenda which guides the discussion.

Discussion leadership overview

Time required - about 60 minutes

Handouts.

1. Case narrative
2. Cultural support documents (e.g. Hofstede's cultural dimensions, an interesting article on business customs in selected country, etc.)

Student learning outcomes. Upon completion of the assignment, students will be able to:

- describe the cultural characteristics of at least one non-English speaking country.
(Comprehension Level)

- interpret organizational behavior concepts and apply these topics to a global setting. (Application Level)
- compare American cultural traits and values to another country. (Analysis Level)
- assess leadership and membership behaviors in teams. (Evaluation Level)

Suggested class agenda and schedule.

- Introduce the case (10 minutes)
- Ask questions of the class to help them extract the important organizational behavior topics highlighted in the Critical Incident case. (20 minutes)
- Class generates solution options for your decision maker in the case and selects one, providing rationale. (20 minutes)
- Share the epilogue, and close with a personal statement from each team member about what was learned about OB. (10 minutes)

Conclusion

We have found this assignment to have a positive effect on student learning. Students learn about Organizational Behavior topics as well as cross-cultural issues – both of which are important for conducting business in the global marketplace. The assignment provides a direct link between “text book learning” and real world experiences through the interviews and data collection experience, and stretches students to move beyond stereotypical comfort zones by reaching out to a diverse set of people from a variety of cultures. The assignment also upgrades critical thinking skills through the case analysis and discussions in class. It provides a laboratory for learning about team functioning and team effectiveness, and develops facilitation skills when students lead the class through an analysis of their International Critical Incident case.



Teri C. Tompkins has consulted and conducted research in numerous organizations, and brings a unique perspective to her faculty duties, having managed diverse functions such as marketing, human resources, strategy, and operations in the corporate, small business, and not-for-profit markets. She is regularly invited to organizations as a keynote speaker or as an executive coach facilitating individual and organizational learning. As professor at Pepperdine University's Graziadio School of Business and Management, she teaches in the Executive MBA and fully-employed MBA programs. In research, she searches for new applications of behavioral science for innovative performance in leadership, teambuilding and organizations in the workplace. She is the author of two casebooks and the accompanying instructor's manuals published through Prentice Hall. She has served twice as the president of Western Casewriters Association.



Miriam Lacey is an authority on organization behavior and development, Dr. Lacey has been at the forefront of integrating behavioral science with principles of total quality management. She works with Fortune 500 companies such as Exxon, Boeing, Weyerhaeuser, Allergan, and Microsoft on the implementation of large-scale change for greater quality, productivity, and employee commitment. She has worked in human resources management and organization development in over 20 countries. Dr. Lacey has served on the boards of several manufacturing and sales companies in Europe and Asia, and as a senior examiner for the Malcolm Baldrige National Quality Award. She teaches exclusively in Executive Programs at Pepperdine University. Known for her wisdom regarding excellence in leadership, employee motivation and change management, she maintains a vibrant executive coaching practice.

Appendix A. Student Materials and Instructions

To the Students:

Purpose

This assignment focuses upon developing your perspective of cross cultural issues that arise during business interactions. You will have the opportunity to practice both your leadership and membership skills within a team. The International Critical Incident Case Assignment provides you with an opportunity to learn how people perceive data, form assumptions, and make decisions about with whom they wish to engage in business, based on their experiences and how they make sense of them within their own cultural contexts. It will broaden your view about doing business with people from other countries.

Learning Outcomes

You can expect to:

1. describe the cultural characteristics of at least one non-English speaking country;
2. interpret organizational behavior concepts and apply these topics to a global setting;
3. compare American cultural traits and values to another country;
4. assess leadership and membership behaviors in teams.

Overview

Your team will write a case about an International Critical Incident and lead the class through an analysis of the organizational behavior issues embedded within the case.

Advances in mass communication and transit have allowed organizations to expand into the world market, frequently by forming alliances and joint ventures, sometimes with customers and suppliers, other times in cooperation with companies that in the past may have been viewed as competition. The success or failure of these endeavors repeatedly rests on *issues of mutual trust and mutual understanding*. Writing the case will help underscore the necessity of establishing trust and understanding across cultures.

Each team will provide the class with a significant learning experience based on the case it writes regarding an International Critical Incident. This exploration culminates in your small group providing a learning experience called a Discussion Leadership Activity. This experience will ideally leave the class with a powerful view of the salient issues likely to surface while conducting business in this non-English speaking country.

Your team will want to dig below the surface of events and get to the core values and assumptions behind the behavior. Use your creativity to design an interactive, participative experience that will assist your classmates in sharing your understanding of the case issues. Concentrate on the *culture*, its values and imbedded assumptions that guide behavior for its subscribers. Include a brief (one or two paragraphs) historical-social-economic-religious summary to provide a context to enrich our understanding.

Identify the significant differences in cultural values and underlying assumptions between the U.S. and your case country. Certainly draw from the assigned readings in organizational behavior and cross cultural communication. For a deeper understanding you may wish to consult Hofstede (1983), Gannon (2001), Trompenaars (1998), consulates, trade organizations, U.S. government sources, etc. Feel free to add to the above as your research evolves. In addition to your readings, consider contacting companies directly that conduct business in the case country for valuable, real time interview data.

Project Outline

This project has three parts which are described in detail in the next sections.

Part 1 -- writing the international case narrative.

- A. How to identify a Critical Incident for the case
- B. Criteria for Selection
- C. Collecting the data
- D. Preparing your questions and arranging the interview
- E. Conducting the interview
- F. Composing the Case Narrative
 1. Guidelines
 2. Industry
 3. The situation: Tell the story
 4. Methods Summary
 5. Reflections

Part 2 -- analyzing the case.

- A. Guidelines
- B. Section 1 of the case analysis: Cultural Background
- C. Section 2 of the case analysis: Analysis
- D. Section 3 of the case analysis: Epilogue and Reflection

Part 3 – discussion leadership activity.

The three parts explained.

Procedures are described below on how to complete the assignment. Following these will maximize your chance to succeed in this assignment.

Part 1. Writing the International Case Narrative

A. How to Identify a Critical Incident

1. Identify your contacts – who do you know that works in or has relatives/friends in another country?
2. Arrange an exploratory interview.
3. Explore potential critical incidents with contact(s) – and select several that might work

- a. Identify a decision, challenge, opportunity, problem or issue faced by a person (or persons) in an organization that *created strong emotions*. Potential Contexts and respective sample topics include:
 - Individual (career, ethics, self-concept)
 - Interpersonal – two or three people (conflict, communications)
 - Group or team situation (motivation, goals, process, decision making)
 - Between groups/ business units (coordination, shared resources)
 - b. The best cases are ones that have a storyline with a beginning (something changed), middle (a time of wondering what to do because of the change), and an end (the decision was made – whether good, bad, or neutral).
 - c. In organizational behavior, the best cases have a strong emotional component for the decision maker. Examples: anxiety, anger, fear, hurt, hope, confusion, excitement, joy, satisfaction, wonder.
4. Is the contact willing to be interviewed and share his/her story for the purposes of classroom learning? You can change names of the people and the company. If real names are used, then you will need to obtain a signed release (see Appendix E for a sample form).
 5. Review your notes of potential critical incidents and select the best case for your purpose/topic.

B. Criteria for Selection

1. The incident is indeed critical.
2. The incident occurred within the past five years.
3. The case can be written using the point of view of the foreign national person from the non-English speaking country.
4. The incident happened in a country that another team has not already chosen.
5. The incident focuses on a single decision that a foreign national person had to make.

C. Collecting the Data

1. Preparing your questions and arranging the interview.

- a. Prepare a foundation upon which to conduct your interview by researching the basics about the non-English speaking country: demographic, geopolitical, economic, common business practices, etc.
- b. Search the library data basis for information about the company for which your interviewee works. Know its size, number of employees, annual sales volume, product mix and market areas.
- c. Identify open ended questions to surface the chronology of events, key players and their roles, people's surprises, feelings, etc.

2. Conducting the interview.

- a. Interview the person face-to-face, via e-mail, fax, or telephone to gather the data about the case. Make sure to ask about background information.
- b. Ask your interviewee to think of the other key players. Ask him/her to step back and put himself or herself in this person's place and try to describe the

critical incident from the other person's point of view. If possible, interview other key players.

- c. Decide if you need to include any exhibits to help clarify the case, such as simplified organizational charts, a diagram of the office, or a copy of a letter or memo.
- d. Send a thank you note to your interviewee.

D. Composing the Case Narrative

1. Guidelines.

- a) Length: 4-8 double-spaced pages,
- b) Written in the past tense.
- c) Written in third person (she/he, not I/we/you), from the foreign national person's point of view.
- d) Proper grammar and editing.
- e) Subheadings help organize the case. Each case is unique. Select and name subheadings based on natural divisions in the case. Include at least four subheadings.

2. **Industry.** A brief one- or two-sentence description of the industry in which the narrative took place. For example, "small manufacturing plant (160 employees) of high-end electronic equipment; union employees; with sales of \$120 million per year; company disguised/not disguised."

3. **The situation: Write the story.** Describe the events, people and significant activities that occurred. Tell the story up to the key decision point. *Do not tell us what the decision maker decided or did.* Leave the case "hanging," so the class will be judicious with its analysis when you are talking to them about your case.

Objectivity. Use an objective viewpoint to describe the key players. In other words, do not say the other person is stupid, mean, or nasty, but show the person through his/her own words and actions.

Confidentiality. You may disguise the case by changing people's names or other identifying information, but you will need to disclose how you changed the case in your methodology section, (e.g., the company name was change from X to Y). You may choose to describe the company in generic terms (e.g., the company produces high-end electronic equipment). You can make up a name, such as Internet Computer Company, or you can use real names of people and the company. The names should be consistent with the names from people in that country. For example, do not substitute European names for Chinese names; you can pick Chinese names that are more easily read by your classmates.

Realism. Be truthful; don't make up people or events. You may not change the country in which it occurs. You may not make up any facts—all facts must be real.

4. **Methods Summary.** List the sources from which you received information for the case (who you interviewed, company documents, outside sources such as consulates, etc. Be sure to use complete citations for journal articles).
5. **Epilogue.** Create a paragraph that states what actually happened after the critical incident. There must be enough information in the case so that the epilogue makes sense. For example, if the decision maker solves the problem by contacting a key support person or organization, then somewhere in the case weave in the background about that option (without making it obvious it is the likely solution).
6. **Reflection.** Each person on your team should describe in one paragraph what he/she individually learned about organizational behavior from the character(s) in this case, and from writing the case as a member of your small group. This reflection is not included in the page count.

Note: The entire case is usually about 16 pages long. In order for your classmates to easily differentiate between the Case Narrative and Case Analysis, be sure to use two easy to identify formats unique to each. The Case Narrative is written double spaced and the Case Analysis is single spaced.

Part 2. Analyzing the Case

Guidelines:

- a) Single spaced (to readily identify it from the case narrative which is double spaced)
- b) Length: 4-8 pages
- c) Written in the past tense
- d) Written in third person (she/he, not I/we/you)
- e) Proper grammar and editing—include subheadings
- f) First page should include, along with your team member names:

Key topics. Identify the two topics you will focus on, and any additional topics you plan to cover. For example: communications; conflict management; ethics.

Country name.

Abstract: A 250 to 500 word abstract of your case narrative to help the reader remember the case when examining the analysis. Be sure to leave out the decision maker's solution.

Note: The analysis has three sections which are explained below.

Section 1 of Case Analysis -- Cultural Background.

Use this section to provide background information about the issues and dynamics that would aid understanding the cultural context where the critical incident occurred. Importantly, provide a chart that compares and contrasts your interviewee's country with American culture. Do not give a complete description of the culture – only relevant cultural issues related to the

case. For example, use Hofstede's dimensions such as power distance to show how management is viewed in Mexico versus Canada. It can be helpful to give some political or social background on the country, e.g., political unrest or developing country with little resources, which limits the alternatives.

Section 2 of Case Analysis -- The Analysis.

Base your analysis on principles of management and organizational behavior theory from your assigned textbooks and related readings, as well as your team's topic research and discussions in class. Focus on the critical points of the case that apply to the major topics you are analyzing. Write succinctly and lead the reader through a well-reasoned recounting of the case. It should answer the questions of *why* the behavior occurred and it should include an array of possible decisions (including a rationale for the decision and a discussion of likely consequences both pro and con).

Section 3 of Case Analysis -- The Decision.

Identify alternatives that can solve the problem(s) and present your reasoning about the pros and cons of each alternative. Evaluate alternatives against measurable decision criteria that are appropriate for the case. Devise an implementation plan that puts your decision into action and addresses the worst case scenario.

Part 3. Discussion Leadership of the International Case

Your team should provide a learning experience for the entire class by leading a discussion of your International Critical Incident. Here are guidelines and suggestions for conducting this session which have been used to good effect in the past. If creatively you have ideas you believe will provide a stronger experience for the class, please feel free to use them.

Time required. (About 60 minutes)

Pre-reading for the class. Send out the Case Narrative one week before your scheduled time with the class.

Handouts in class.

1. Case narrative abstract
2. Cultural support documents (e.g. Hofstede's cultural dimensions, your cultural comparative chart on your country and the USA, interesting article on business customs in your country, etc.)

Student learning outcomes

Upon completion of the assignment, you can expect to:

1. describe the cultural characteristics of at least one non-English speaking country.
2. interpret organizational behavior concepts and apply these topics to a global setting.
3. compare American cultural traits and values to another country.
4. assess leadership and membership behaviors in teams.

Suggested class agenda and schedule

- Introduce the case (10 minutes)
- Ask questions of the class to help extract the important organizational behavior topics highlighted in the Critical Incident case. (20 minutes)
- Class generates solution options for your decision maker in the case and selects one, providing a rationale. (20 minutes).
- Share the epilogue, and close with a personal statement from each team member about what s/he personally learned (e.g. about OB topics, culture, teams, etc.) from writing and analyzing the case. (10 minutes)

Appendix B. Case Narrative Grading Rubric

CRITICAL INCIDENT CASE WRITING		
Exceeds Expectations	Meets Expectations	Below Expectations
<p><input type="checkbox"/> There are several viable alternatives for the decision maker</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> ALL facts and background material are meaningful for the analysis of the case</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Readers identify with the decision maker – they can empathize with the emotion s/he is feeling</p>	<p><input type="checkbox"/> There is a clear decision maker</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> The decision maker is faced with a meaningful decision</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Background information sufficiently supports the case</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> There is an emotional component to the case</p>	<p><input type="checkbox"/> It is unclear who the decision maker is in the case</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> The decision lacks focus or importance</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> There is insufficient background information</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> The case facts are not sufficient for students to make a decision or understand why or how the real decision maker made the decision s/he did in the epilogue</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> The background information overwhelms the story with minutiae</p>
COMMENTS		
ORGANIZATION AND CLARITY		
Exceeds Expectations	Meets Expectations	Below Expectations
<p><input type="checkbox"/> The story flows easily</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Grammar and editing are flawless</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> The story is compelling</p>	<p><input type="checkbox"/> The story is occasionally confusing</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Grammar meets college level expectations</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> The facts are woven into the story</p>	<p><input type="checkbox"/> The story is often confusing</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Numerous grammar and editing problems</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Facts are organized in categories (e.g., all key players in one subheading) rather than introduced in the storyline</p>
COMMENTS		
REQUIRED ELEMENTS		
Exceeds Expectations	Meets Expectations	Below Expectations
<p><input type="checkbox"/> All required elements are present and add value to the case because of clarity and preparation.</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Reflections show meaningful changes in perspective or behavior</p>	<p><input type="checkbox"/> All required elements are present</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Formatting follows specifications</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Characters are described with behaviors and quotes</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Reflection demonstrated self- and team-awareness</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Written in past tense with one exception</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Written in third person</p>	<p><input type="checkbox"/> Some required elements are missing</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Formatting does not follow all specifications</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Characters are described pejoratively without sufficient facts to support the inference</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Reflection was missing or poorly developed</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Not written in past tense, or partially written in past tense with several or more exceptions</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Not written in third person</p>
COMMENTS		

Appendix C. Case Analysis Grading Rubric

CULTURAL BACKGROUND		
Exceeds Expectations	Meets Expectations	Below Expectations
___ All elements were addressed with clarity, precision, and insightfulness ___ Cultural background material was relevant and useful in the analysis.	___ All required elements were addressed ___ Comparison chart is presented ___ Background material is relevant ___ Some additional material such as economics or history is included	___ One or more required elements were missing ___ Comparison chart was missing or poorly constructed ___ Additional background material loosely linked or not at all linked to the case issues
COMMENTS		
THE ANALYSIS		
Exceeds Expectations	Meets Expectations	Below Expectations
___ All elements were addressed with clarity, precision, and insightfulness ___ The Analysis was insightfully made, linking examples and inferences succinctly	___ All required elements were addressed ___ Issues; identified potential causes ___ Reasonably explained why the behavior occurred in most circumstances	___ One or more required elements were missing ___ Symptoms were primarily identified rather than the issues ___ Analysis was poorly argued or supported
COMMENTS		
THE DECISION		
Exceeds Expectations	Meets Expectations	Below Expectations
___ All elements were addressed with clarity, precision, and insightfulness ___ Decision was exceptionally justified and supported. ___ All alternatives were well argued and were creative or appropriate solutions to the problem ___ A strong contingency plan to mitigate or avoid "worst case" scenario was presented	___ All required elements were addressed ___ Alternatives identified pros and cons ___ Decision criteria were measurable and appropriate, and justified ___ Implementation plan reasonably addressed the worst case scenario	___ One or more required elements were missing ___ Alternatives were not clear and/or pros and cons weren't explored well ___ Decision criteria were not clear – just a noun with no ability to measure direction ___ Implementation plan was poorly thought through and lacked a plan for dealing with worst case scenario
COMMENTS		
CLARITY AND STRUCTURE		
Exceeds Expectations	Meets Expectations	Below Expectations
___ Well written, a pleasure to read ___ Well argued, each idea supported with conceptual material and examples	___ Grammar and writing at college level ___ Accurate formatting and editing ___ Effectively links facts and inferences	___ Grammar and writing below college level ___ Some formatting inaccurate or poorly edited ___ Illogical arguments: facts & inferences not well linked
COMMENTS		

Appendix D. Leading the Class Discussion Grading Rubric

STUDENT PREPARATION AND MATERIALS FOR USE IN CLASS		
Exceeds Expectations	Meets Expectations	Below Expectations
<p>___ The class is given copies of the Case Narrative without an Epilogue that is succinct and easy to read</p> <p>___ Support documents are dense and succinct; they provide deeper understanding of cultural attributes</p> <p>___ The comparison chart of foreign country and American attributes shows areas of probable comfort and conflict with examples</p>	<p>___ The class is given copies of the Case Narrative without an Epilogue</p> <p>___ Support documents are current, attractive and provided in summary form</p> <p>___ There is a comparison chart that shows the do's and don'ts of the two cultures.</p> <p>___ Students are sent an interesting article on doing business in your chosen country</p>	<p>___ The class is given copies of the Case Narrative that contains the Epilogue</p> <p>___ Minimal support documentation is provided. There is little evidence that outside sources were researched</p> <p>___ The cultural comparison chart is inaccurate and/or probable areas of comfort and conflict are not shown</p> <p>___ Information, such as an article on doing business in the foreign country is outdated and/or difficult to understand</p>
COMMENTS		
LEADING THE DISCUSSION		
Exceeds Expectations	Meets Expectations	Below Expectations
<p>___ The basics of the case were brought out so that the class was engaged and enthusiastic to learn more</p> <p>___ The class analyzed the case and applied the learnings to themselves</p> <p>___ Class members recognized the issues that would arise for them if they were to do business in this country and thought of ways to ameliorate poor effects</p> <p>___ Numerous direct links were made to assigned readings and earlier class discussions; outside research added value</p>	<p>___ The basics of the case were brought out so that the class understood the situation</p> <p>___ You prompted the class to analyze the case and discover the important OB topics</p> <p>___ Class understanding of global issues in management and organization behavior was increased—particularly those of their home country vs. the foreign country</p> <p>___ 4 or 5 direct links were made to assigned readings, earlier class discussions, and outside research</p>	<p>___ The class became confused about the story and/or the players</p> <p>___ Important OB topic/s were overlooked during the class analysis</p> <p>___ 3 or fewer direct links were made to assigned readings and earlier class discussions.</p> <p>___ Students lost interest during the discussion</p> <p>___ Students understood the basic cultural attributes of the foreign country but did not apply them diligently to themselves and/or their own understanding of global cross cultural issues</p> <p>___ Outside research was minimal and links to the important OB issues were unclear</p>
COMMENTS		
REQUIRED ELEMENTS AND DISCUSSION MANAGEMENT SKILLS		
Exceeds Expectations	Meets Expectations	Below Expectations
<p>___ Time used was valued added</p> <p>___ Transitions among portions of your session were smooth with obvious linkage</p> <p>___ Team members demonstrated facility, spontaneity and enthusiasm with the material, rarely using notes</p> <p>___ Class participation was designed into the session so that students were engaged and curious, asking cogent, meaningful questions</p>	<p>___ Time was managed within guidelines</p> <p>___ Session design worked well and flowed</p> <p>___ The presentation, discussion and participation was shared equally among your team's members</p> <p>___ Your team members demonstrated good facility with the material using minimal notes</p> <p>___ Class participation was designed into the session so that students were engaged and curious</p>	<p>___ Your session ran overtime or stopped under time when more was needed</p> <p>___ Session design was disjointed</p> <p>___ One or more of your team members had less "up front time," and less substantive material to be in charge of than other team members</p> <p>___ One of more of your team members routinely read from notes</p> <p>___ Class participation was disorganized; class members strayed from the topic, lost interest, talked among themselves about other topics, or were off task, etc.</p>
COMMENTS		

Appendix E. Publication Release Form

Case Study: _____
(Insert name of company in space above)

Permission is granted to (insert your name) to include the material in the (insert company name) case for publication and dissemination on a worldwide basis. The case is to be used solely as a basis for class discussion rather than as an example of effective or ineffective handling of an administrative decision.

Your name

Authorizing signature

Title

Date

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