

Using Dilemmas in Leadership Training

Objective: To enhance the problem-solving skills of decision-makers through the presentation of dilemmas requiring moral judgment.

Participants: There is no limit on the number of participants, although the discussion groups should be limited to four people.

Materials: Handout with dilemma situations (see below).

Setting: This exercise can be conducted in any setting where there is space for small group discussion.

Time: Individual reading and reflection should take a maximum of 15 minutes. Small group discussion should be set at approximately 20 minutes. Debriefing should be approximately 10 minutes. In total, one hour should be set aside for completion of this exercise.

Procedures:

Step 1: The facilitator will provide each participant with a copy of the dilemma.

Step 2: The participant will be given a maximum of 15 minutes to read and reflect on the dilemma. He/she will make a decision about what is right in this decision and why.

Step 3: The facilitator will ask the participants to form groups of four persons.

Step 4: The groups will be instructed by the facilitator to discuss their answers within the group.

Step 5: After approximately 20 minutes of discussion, the facilitator will stop the groups.

Step 6: The facilitator will lead a debriefing session using questions such as the following:

- To what extent were the dilemmas realistic? Are they something you might encounter?
- What have you learned about yourself from this exercise?
- Does this exercise suggest how you might handle similar dilemmas in the future?
- What has the interaction with your small groups taught you about how you manage real-life situations?

The Dilemmas

Dilemma: The Dismissal

One of your former employees who worked with the company for more than 15 years, was strongly opposed to the recent changes that took place in the company. After training him for three months, he still was not able to learn the new knowledge and skills required for his job. You dismissed him in spite of the fact that he had a young family to take care of.

Questions for small group discussion:

1. Do you agree with the manager's action? Why? Why not?
2. What other ways could be used to manage this situation?
3. What could be done in the future to avoid the problems inherent in this dilemma?

Dilemma: The Library Teacher

The library teacher in your school is having problems with a mother of one of the students. This teacher is not qualified to work with children, but she is adept at keeping the library in good order. The mother is unhappy with the library program. The teacher and the mother have a history of personal disagreements outside the school setting. After repeated efforts to improve the library program have failed, you call the teacher and the parent together for a meeting to discuss the problem. The meeting ends up in further disagreement and the parent threatens to take the matter to the board.

Questions for small group discussion:

1. Did the administrator use good judgment in the meeting between the parent and the teacher?
2. How could the administrator have helped the parent and teacher come to some agreement?
3. What other actions could have been taken to resolve the conflict?
4. What actions should the administrator take now?

Dilemma: The Problem Student

A student who is previously been suspended from school is caught vandalizing your homeroom. You immediately take the student to the principal. You call the student's parents and ask them to come to the school to pick up their expelled child. As the administrator sees it, the child is a 'lost cause' and this last problem confirms his opinion.

Questions for small group discussion:

1. If you were the administrator how would you deal with this situation? Would you follow a sequence of decision steps? (Be specific)
2. Who would you involve in the decision or action both inside and outside the school.
3. How would you deal with future occurrences of this type?
4. Is this decision right, wrong or . . .? Try to defend each position. If you feel the administrator is right then give supporting statements for that position; if the decision or action was wrong then state specifics that defend your opinion.

Dilemma: Black Market

An administrative staff person working for an international relief agency is discovered exchanging US currency on the black market of a poor African country where he is presently assigned. This person has exchanged this money on the black market because it seems that everybody does it and because the agency funds that he is exchanging will now assist more needy people due to the exchange differential. However, the agency has a policy against exchanging agency funds through channels that are legally prohibited by the local government. Consequently, a top executive in the main office of the agency fires the employee. The executive bases his decision on the basis that a serious breach of corporate policy has occurred, and since the employee was aware of this policy, an example should be set.

Questions for small group discussion:

1. How would you judge the decision of the employee in Africa?
2. How would you judge the decision of the executive?
3. Did the executive act responsibly? Correctly? Why? Why not?