

May 2, Threat, Error, and Resilience in High Hazard Settings Assignment

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People's habitual ways of thinking and reacting emotionally are an invisible part of disaster planning and, particularly, response. These invisible thought and feeling processes influence how successful disaster planners and responders, working in either physically and socially risky environments, are at achieving their goals.

When and why do intelligent, well-trained people in high-morale enterprises make mistakes that lead to catastrophic outcomes? How can they learn not to do so when the stakes are high? Developing less brittle, more resilient internal cognitive and emotional responses are key barriers or defenses (see Reason chapter for description of defenses) against unsafe outcomes in high-hazard situations. This assignment uses student's own difficult and challenging work conversations to excavate some of the layers of this process. The assignment starts with two premises: First, people can become emotional and tense when they have to act quickly in the face of potential threats to their own and other people's physical safety or to their reputation, identity, relationships (See the Staw, Sandelands and Dutton article for more detail). Second, each person's ingrained thinking, talking, and emotional responses are remarkably stable across different social and professional situations, especially when threat is involved.

For this assignment, we ask you to prepare a short (1-2 page) case related to a difficult or challenging situation in your work (or if no work examples come to mind) your personal life. The best cases address an issue with some emotional heat for the case writer that recur over and over. Follow the case template outlined in the Rudolph, Taylor, and Foldy article and the following instructions developed by Action Design, a consulting firm focusing on reflective practice (Action Design, 2000: http://www.actiondesign.com/resources/case_writing.htm). Write only the case, don't do the case analysis (we'll work on some cases in class.) When you are finished, please post your case. *Please bring 4 hard copies of your case to class.* (We will pick some cases to analyze together in small groups in class.)

As an historical note, this type of case analysis originated in the department of Urban Planning here at MIT with the work of Donald Schön, who was interested the tacit cognitive routines embedded in the work of urban planners.

The Action Design Case Guidelines:

Left-hand/right-hand column cases are a powerful and versatile learning technology. By writing a case describing an actual situation you focus your learning on what is most important and relevant to you. Reconstructing what you and others said in the right-hand column helps make the learning actionable. Reconstructing your thoughts and feelings in the left-hand column makes it possible to reflect on your reasoning and to see opportunities to reframe the situation.

This page describes how to write a left-hand/right-hand column case for use in an Action Design workshop. The quality of your case will have a major impact on what you learn. The best cases focus on moments that illustrate a key theme, issue, or recurring difficulty that you would like to learn to handle more effectively. It usually takes about an hour to write a case.

1. Think of an episode that illustrates a difficult or challenging issue in your work. Please choose something in which you were personally involved and which you would like to learn to handle as productively as possible. State what the challenge was (e.g., creating a cross-functional culture in a planning team; disagreeing with an authority figure).
2. Please describe the context briefly: who was there, the purpose of the encounter, what had just happened. Make up the names if you wish.
3. Describe what actually happened by reconstructing key moments in the conversation. Divide your paper into two columns as shown in the attached example. (A template is provided for you, below.)
4. On the right hand side of the page, write what you and others actually said. It is not important to remember the exact words spoken. Your best recollection will be fine. It is essential, however, that you write dialogue, as if from a play.
 - On the left hand side of the page, write down any thoughts and feelings that you had at the time and did not say.
5. Please note any concerns or puzzles that still linger about the incident. Write down also what help you would like from others when we discuss the case.

An Example

| <u>My Thoughts and Feelings</u> | <u>What We Said</u> |
|--|--|
| <p>Frank doesn't like to lose. More hyperbole; more pushing his own view. We've heard all this before. If he's right we're already dead.</p> <p>He's preying on Steve's (the CEO's) fears. Why doesn't he offer ideas about how we could make this work.</p> <p>Like hell I did.</p> | <p>Me: I don't understand why you have a problem with what I'm suggesting.</p> <p>Frank: Let me say it again. This will not work. We'll get into trouble sooner or later.</p> <p>Me: Yours is an argument for doing nothing. If we cannot fix this business, we might as well sell it.</p> <p>Frank: We've been through this before. We cannot afford the risk.</p> <p>Me: I'm not saying there's no risk; I'm saying that doing nothing is not the answer either. Your guys were there when we put the plan together and they didn't see it as that big a risk.</p> <p>Frank: You browbeat them. They said you wouldn't listen.</p> <p>(and so on. . .)</p> |

Format for left-hand/right-hand column case¹

(Respond to questions 1, 2, and 4 by inserting the cursor just after the “.” mark and typing. Respond to question 3 by inserting the cursor in one of the cells of the table and typing.)

Name: Yumiko Nakagawa

1. The challenge or theme illustrated by this episode:
Isolation.

2. Brief statement of context:

It happened during the program we (foreign policy think tank in Hawaii) organized. We took conference participants (25 Taiwanese government and military officers and 10 American conference participants) to Pearl Harbor. I was the only Japanese among the group. I was feeling very uncomfortable watching the video clip of Pearl Harbor attack by Japanese forces and participating tour of Arizona memorial. People were talking about how evil and sneaky Japanese people were. The video clip was very biased and I felt frustrated for such an unfair portrayal of history.

During the dinner, when we were at “Polynesian show,” I was offended how American industry vandalized indigenous culture. That time, my supervisor and other co-workers along with some Taiwanese made fun of Pearl Harbor Attack. After the dinner, when my supervisor came up to me, angry comment came out from my mouth.

3. The conversation

(After each statement by one person, use the **tab** key to go to the next row of cells for the next person’s statement. When you reach the last row of pre-formatted cells, using the **tab** key will create a new row. Putting each statement in its own cell will improve the formatting when the case is printed.)

My Thoughts and Feelings

What about economic sanction posed upon Japan? What about the fact that US government knew about the Pearl Harbor attack plan before hand?
Such a biased view!!
They must be making fun of Japanese.

No body understands my feeling.
People don’t understand us.

What We Said

Video clip: Japanese were sneaky, evil, and cruel.

Taiwanese: stopped talking to me.
Americans and Taiwanese: laughing about something (which I don’t know about what)

(at the dinner)
Supervisor: [some joke about Pearl Harbor and Japanese, which,

¹ Developed by Action Design, Inc. Go to [Action Design.com](http://ActionDesign.com) for more details on productive conversations and reflective practice.

What a heck! This is not true Hawaii I know. This is mere commercialized illusion. I felt sick. Americans – they are living in the small fictitious world which they reconstructed without respect to others!

Why does not he understand my feeling? He does not know anything! How can he call himself a Japan expert? Stupid Haoli man!

surprisingly I cannot recall any more] And everybody laughed at the joke. Polynesian show: [portrayed Hawaiian culture without respect. Hawaiian women portrayed as brown body with little cloth, Hawaiian men simply portrayed as muscle .]

(after the dinner)

Supervisor: Did you have a good time?

Me: No. I hate Americans.

Supervisor stopped smiling, went cold and walked away without a word.

4. Lingering concerns, puzzles, or questions:

- It is very surprising how I cannot remember the exact joke my supervisor made, which at that time I felt it isolated me from the rest of group with such a resentment. I still remember how frustrated and angry I was that whole day with Pearl Harbor tour and Polynesian Show. But I cannot remember what exactly he said, they said.

- I became very aggressive after the dinner, when I felt my supervisor, whom I wanted to be on “my side” came out as a person on “their side.” I held my anger and frustration until one person came up to me as a rep of the other side.

- Now that I think of it, their distance from me was my distance from them as well. I felt isolated, but I guess I was also keeping a distance from them as well. Also, recalling the feeling and thoughts, I realized that there were lots of assumptions on my side about their intention and so on.

- During the Pearl Harbor visit, I felt that my country and my people were being disgraced, but did not know how to explain our view. I was frustrated by the fact that the people from the group, whom I thought to be a part of, started to avoid me.

- I did not know how to present my extremely minority view which contradicted with seems-to-be unfair view of the majority.

When you are finished, please post your case. **Please bring 4 hard copies of your case to class.**