Decision-making pedagogy: creative solutions to real-world issues

Clint Relyea
Troy University

Charles Coco
Troy University

ABSTRACT

Classroom learning is often limited to the course objectives and academic goals, but students can add creative thinking processes when they are exposed to problems that are visible in the real world. As part of the creative thinking exercise, the classroom experience was transformed to allow students to develop decision-making abilities. The class provided students with creative ways to think and develop solutions to some of the leading problems faced by society. The objective was to make the students think in groups and collaborate to build awareness of the problems and develop solutions. These efforts are supposed to provide creative solutions that can be implemented in real-world scenarios, especially when it comes to making a transformative change. Several scholarly articles have been used to support the arguments over each solution, and gaps have been identified in applying proposed solutions. Working in teams and finding common ground over proposed solutions was one of the leading challenges of the decision-making pedagogy.

Keywords: pedagogy, creative solutions, decision-making, problem-solving

INTRODUCTION

Moving away from traditional teaching mechanisms is needed to build student creativity and confidence. Different challenging situations can be used as a learning experience for students in the real world. After analyzing the opportunity to change pedagogy, the lead author focused on raising student awareness of possible solutions to complicated problems. The best practice pedagogy was implemented in the principles of management class at a regional university. In the learning exercise, students were allowed to solve leading global problems by applying management principles. Decision-making refers to the manager's ability to recognize and understand problems, select appropriate pathways for solving problems, and capitalize on opportunities (Griffin, 2021, p. 16). Some of the problems selected for the coursework were world hunger, water pollution, human trafficking, mental health, homelessness, and addiction. Students were divided into groups of four students each, and then assigned one of the problems to address.

Once the groups were finalized, they were asked to solve their assigned problem using the P-O-L-C (Planning, Organizing, Leading, and Controlling) model. These four functions of the model are highly integrated, and their measures overlap with the routine activities of an organization (University of Minnesota, 2015). Applying the model and finding practical solutions proved to be challenging for most of the groups. As part of the learning pedagogy, students were encouraged to develop creative solutions for their problems. The objective was to make them think within their means and apply the knowledge to real situations. The following discussion explores how some of the groups used problem-solving pedagogy for raising awareness and improving overall decision-making.

DISCUSSION

The first problem targeted by one of the groups was world hunger. Food insecurity is expected to become an increasingly important issue. Finding a creative solution for the problem was a complicated task at the classroom level. However, the students came up with a small-scale solution, as they coordinated a food drive with the local pantry (Fontefrancesco, 2020, p. 312). Under their creative solution, students raised around 2,000 pounds of beans, rice, and other non-perishable food items. The food drive idea helped find a creative solution on a local level, and as part of their organizing role, the students decided to bag and distribute the food to families in need. Thus, the planning and organizing roles were executed effectively, and evidence was presented of the positive outcome of the creative solution. The solution students identified has been an ideal strategy for countering global hunger and food insecurity problems. Using food drives at global levels is a solution that would require wealthy nations to divert additional food from their warehouses to poor nations with food shortages or financial difficulties to pay for essential food supplies. Food drives have been identified in the UN Sustainable Development Goals as a means for sourcing and redistribution to poor nations (Fontefrancesco, 2020, p. 312). In addition, food drives are also associated with raising awareness of problems related to global hunger, such as urban poverty, famine relief, and unbalanced food access across the world. As a result, the leading and controlling aspects of the P-O-L-C Framework can be applied to the creative solution developed by the group.

The second problem targeted by another group of students was water pollution. The creative solution developed by the group was related to building social awareness of the

problem. The group decided to distribute bottled water at a local elementary school and interviewed the students on their need for clean water. The awareness exercise was supposed to work as an early life education experience for elementary school students. However, the effort provided highly poignant responses from elementary school students. One student stated that they needed clean water because they might become thirsty, which is among the leading concerns of individuals working on countering the water pollution problem (Antusch, 2022, pp. 1450-1451). Another concern raised by a student was their desire to go swimming, which is becoming apparent as contact with polluted water can lead to skin diseases and infections (Nielsen & Jiang, 2019, pp. 595-603). Using the P-O-L-C framework, the solution's objectives are associated with awareness development among elementary school students. The design is focused on awareness action where elementary school students are supposed to be questioned about fresh water and its need in their life. Leading action is associated with communication between students and groups, as they are supposed to encourage student action. Finally, controlling action is witnessed by focusing on awareness rather than sharing knowledge with elementary school students. Overall, the creative solution is not designed to solve the global water pollution problem among elementary school students. The focus is to make them think about the need for fresh water and feel concerned about the future when exposed to water pollution.

The third problem countered by a class group was human trafficking which has been one of the leading crimes across the world (Cockbain & Bowers, 2019, pp. 9-10). The group focused on education and awareness efforts as a creative response to the problem. As part of the education effort, the students met local law enforcement to gain access to data about human trafficking and the measures in place to minimize the problem. Once education about the problem was accomplished, the students developed a poster campaign to raise awareness. The poster campaign is needed to share learned knowledge and ensure people can use mechanisms to escape human trafficking. The solution developed by the group is entrenched in planning and organizing efforts, as the students have identified that they require more awareness before developing a solution. Once the problem is identified, they have worked on learning the mechanisms that can be used to escape the problem, primarily in terms of using law enforcement. The next aspect of their creative solution was to develop a communication effort, which included making a poster to educate people about the problem and help them escape it. Thus, a leading action was conducted by the group. Finally, controlling action included providing the power of knowledge to people and assisting them in fighting against the social menace of human trafficking. Ultimately, the solution lacks the human resource element needed for a control function, as the focus is on empowering people rather than pushing for action.

Mental health was another problem that was the focus of the decision-making and solution-building effort. This group worked on building awareness and action plans for people struggling with mental health issues. Students worked on a mental health awareness project within their community, which focused on overcoming skepticism about discussing mental health problems in public (Sharma, 2021, pp. 84-87). In addition, knowledge sharing was done as part of a creative solution, as posters related to different services available in the community for tackling mental health were shared. A plan of action was developed in the form of a campaign called 'post it' note on the campus. Under the campaign, peers struggling with mental health issues were asked to share their feelings related to final exams. Overall, the collective effort of encouraging people to talk and share their feelings is a standard measure taken in society, as mental health should not be taken for granted. The plan for countering mental health

issues includes the P-O-L-C framework in its full use, as the group has realized the potential of every aspect of the framework in their creative solution and decision-making. The plan uses education and awareness to generate a call to action where students are encouraged to discuss their mental health issues with professionals. Education and awareness can help students realize that they are not alone in struggling with mental health issues and must take action to save themselves. Call to action is part of organizing and leading, as students act with 'post it' decisions and share their issues with professionals. The plan of action can have positive outcomes for people if implemented worldwide, as many people would be encouraged to work on their problems. In the end, the students have identified the core issues with the problem and formulated a plan of action that provide positive results.

Another group considered the homelessness crisis impacting many large cities in the United States (Nichols & Mays, 2021, pp. S57-S60). The students assigned to this problem focused on awareness efforts, as they might have realized that the problem was too comprehensive in size and scope for them to solve. Thus, the group decided to spend several days at a Humanity Build site to perform volunteering for people experiencing homelessness. Volunteer work allowed students to engage with homeless people and understand the reasons for growing homelessness. These efforts helped to conclude that the problem is linked to factors that many homeless people could not predict. These problems were common for people from major cities, as they had witnessed a remarkable rise in living expenses beyond their income (Reeson, 2023, pp. 88-90). The P-O-L-C framework in the case of solving homelessness has not been executed to its whole level. Volunteering and awareness of the source of the problem are part of the planning and organizing actions. Once knowledge development was achieved, the group failed to introduce a leading action or control measure to help their plan succeed. Thus, the solution lacks a strategic nature, as it is limited to learning about the problem and overlooks the need to bring categorical change. When considering the plan's applicability to solving the homelessness problem, it is clear that it would be limited in the learning activity. In the future, the group should understand the need for a more detailed plan of action.

Lastly, a group worked on the social problem of addiction and its menace to society. A growing number of people have become addicted to opioids and other harmful drugs, and the economic output and wealth loss are unprecedented (McElrath, 2017, pp. 334-336). This group focused on awareness measures and knowledge-sharing action for a creative solution. For instance, they met with public health officials to gain knowledge about the problem and use it to create a poster campaign that helps people realize the risks of addiction. In addition, leading action was taken by holding a panel discussion on the social problem, which the peers well attended. Classmates raised several questions about the problem and the possibility of solving it. In the end, the measures helped to chart a path for action, but it was not included in the solution development. The P-O-L-C framework has been used by the group, which covers all aspects in its entirety. The planning and organizing action stand out, as they learned about the problem from public health officials. The awareness action was needed to develop a plan of action, leading to a poster campaign. The focus is to educate people, and the group concentrated on leading action that helps their audience understand the problem's severity. Another action is controlling, which was performed by the use of a panel discussion. Controlling is needed to ensure people in the community understand the problem, and a plan of action is needed to save them from getting addicted. When employing the same plan for countering the addiction problem, it is possible that all these measures would require implementation at community levels to achieve high success.

CONCLUSION

Creative thinking and decision-making pedagogy have helped highlight possible solutions to some of the leading social problems of today. Through these efforts, students developed awareness of many of these current issues and offered several creative solutions. The use of the P-O-L-C framework was critical to understand the effectiveness of each solution, as gaps were visible in many cases due to one aspect of the framework being overlooked. Finally, an interesting observation from one student in the class was that challenging social problems, such as these, could be solved in a planned manner if everyone took one action to solve them.
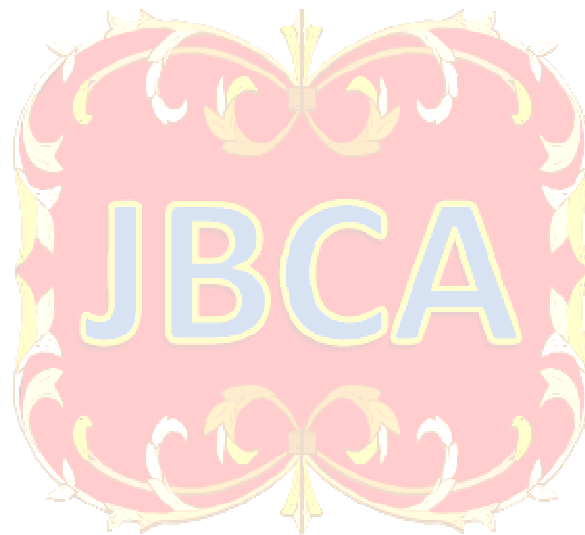
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