

I PRO Team Ethics Assignment

Role-Play

Description of Exercise

Role-playing can be a powerful learning experience and can, if used correctly, help stimulate lively discussion and debate among students. In this exercise, students are asked to take the part of a character in a case study that portrays a realistic, difficult ethical situation. The goal of this exercise is that student will recall what they have learned through participating in this role play scenario and be able to apply what they learned to ethical problems they may encounter in their professional careers.¹

This exercise provides an active learning experience in a safe setting where ethical issues can be explored. Though students acting out the scenarios at first may be shy, they should be encouraged to participate as fully as possible in the role they are playing. The more authentically they engage in their role, the more both they and the audience will learn.

The class before the role-play is scheduled; the students should be divided into groups of two or three, with one student taking the role of the student, one taking the role of the supervisor (or project sponsor, employer, professor, etc.) and optionally, one as the observer. The observer role is there for anyone who is too uncomfortable to take part in acting out the scenario. His or her job is to take notes as they watch the other members of the group go through the role-play and to then provide comments back at the end of the process. Some care should be taken to try and assign students a role that they have no experience filling. So, if a student has had some experience being a supervisor in a summer job or as a leader in the I PRO team, he or she should probably be assigned the student role.

At the beginning of class, the students will get into their groups and each student will prepare for 5-10 minutes by reading over his or her part and the accompanying instructions. Each speaking role includes instructions that provide divergent perspectives on the same problem, or inside knowledge that the other person does not know about. The students should also prepare what questions they plan on asking the other person in the simulation, and should try to anticipate what questions the other person will ask.

After this, the students will get into their groups and spend 10-15 minutes role-playing their characters and improvising the dialogue. The scripts will include a description of the situation being discussed and a number of leading lines. After that, the students should ad-lib, while still staying in their roles. During this, the observer should record the issues and solutions raised by the speakers, note their communication behaviors (direct, attentive, assertive, etc.), identify aspects of the interaction that might be effective in a real situation, and suggest questions that should have been asked but were not.² After the role-play, the team will reconvene to discuss the scenario, and the underlying issues.

This exercise draws heavily from an NSF-funded project headed by Michael Loui, a computer science professor, and C.K. Gunsalus, the director of the National Center for Professional and Research Ethics at the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign. The project's goal was to develop and test a series of role-play scenarios covering central topics in responsible conduct of research, including: authorship, conflict of interest, peer review, interpersonal conflicts in mentoring, data management and whistleblowing, professional relations and whistleblowing, and compliance with regulations on human participants, animal subjects, and handling and disposing of hazardous materials.

¹ Brummel, Bradley J., C.K. Gunsalus, Kerri L. Anderson, and Michael C. Loui. 2010. "Development of Role-Play Scenarios for Teaching Responsible Conduct of Research." *Science and Engineering Ethics* 16(3): 574-5.

² Brummel, 576-77.

These scenarios can be easily adapted to relate directly to many IPRO project topics. Scenarios can either be re-written by the faculty advisor with help from Kelly Laas, or by a team of students. The main goals of the scenario should be that it should provide sufficient detail to challenge and engage students, that it should appeal to students' imaginations, and that it should contain an underlying ethical problem that needs to be addressed.³

For more information on this project, please see

<http://www.onlineethics.org/Topics/RespResearch/ResCases/RCRroleplays.aspx>

Student Competency Level

Beginning – Good for helping students develop moral awareness, imagination, and understanding

Time Commitment

1 hours working with faculty advisor/students to select or rewrite a scenario to be used.

10 minutes in the class before the scheduled activity, dividing students into teams, assigning roles.

1 hour for introduction, acting out scenarios, and for group discussion.

1 hour outside of class writing final summary on case, highlighting the key points discussed.

Tasks Involved

1. Faculty advisor /student representatives work with Kelly Laas in selecting a scenario to use, and, if needed rewriting the scenario to more closely reflect ethical issues to be covered.
2. The class period before the role-play, divide students up in groups of 2-3, assign roles of student, supervisor and observer (if third role needed).
3. On the day of class, after a few brief introductory remarks students spend some time reviewing and preparing for their role, according to the role-play notes given. The groups then go through role-play, and spend the last 30-40 minutes discussing the scenario as a team.
4. Final write-up by groups.

Potential Deliverables

The groups of 2-3 students will write a group position outlining what happened during the role-play scenario. Specifically, they should try and answer the following questions.

- 1) What could the supervisor have done to avoid or help solve this situation?
- 2) What might the student do in this situation?
- 3) Is there someone the student might go to for advice?
- 4) What issues are raised in this scenario?
- 5) What IIT policies or guidelines might apply?

This deliverable can be uploaded to I-Groups by the deadline set each semester by the IPRO Program.

³ Brown, K.M. 1994. "Using Role Plays to Integrate Ethics into the Business Curriculum: A Financial Management Example." *Journal of Business Ethics*. 13(2): 105-110.