

Leeds United: A New Era?

TEACHING NOTES

The authors prepared this case solely as a basis for class discussion and not as an endorsement, a source of primary data, or an illustration of effective or ineffective management. Although based on real events and despite occasional references to actual companies, this case is fictitious and any resemblance to actual persons or entities is coincidental.

Teaching plan

The following is a teaching note that is intended to support teachers or presenters in the Leeds United case. These notes are thought to be used as preparation for the teacher and include recommendations on what to think about when discussing the case. The teaching note should provide the teacher with information on how to introduce the case, suggestions on what to think about and what to include when presenting the case as well as things to think about to make the case interesting and unpredictable. The teaching note also contains learning objectives that can be used to support the teacher in learning students the main perspectives of the case. In the end of this teaching note there is a board plan consisting of an example of how to take on the case and what might be the key takeaways that the teacher can have in mind when preparing for the case.

Case synopsis

In 2017, Leeds United Football Club decided to create a new crest to celebrate the club's 100-year anniversary. After a six-month consultation process with over 10,000 supporters and experts connected to the club heard, Leeds United introduced a new crest to herald a new era of the club. Depicting the 'Leeds Salute', the new crest was designed to symbolise the strength in unity between the fans, the players and the club. However, the club experienced an immediate backlash from the fan base after unveiling the crest. In addition to negative reactions on social media from supporters, a fan-made petition was started in an attempt to stop the club from changing the emblem. Three hours after the petition started, it already had more than 32,000 signatures and this number would increase to over 70,000 within the first 24 hours. As the board members had sincere intentions with the new crest, they now faced a difficult decision whether to withdraw or use the proposed redesign despite the reluctance of the fans. This leads to the case question:

Will you still vote to implement the new crest, or will you listen to the criticism and keep the old crest, and how would you explain your decision to the supporters?

Learning objectives

The case offers broad implications regarding corporate brand identity, heritage brands and corporate communication. It is important that the case audience achieves several learning objectives in these areas. One key aim of the teacher should be to present as well as lead the discussion and evaluation of the case in a way that the audience understands the linkages to underlying theories and models. Most importantly, the audience should be able to apply these concepts in comparable situations. Therefore, the subsequent section describes the academic concepts relevant to the case and showcases the learning objectives building on the theories.

Corporate Brand Identity

Corporate Brand Identity and Reputation Matrix (Urde & Greyser, 2016)

The following elaboration from Urde (2021) on brands is a perfect starting point to understand why the Leeds United Football Club fan base reacted so negatively to the proposed crest redesign:

“Fundamentally, a brand is a promise, and a strong brand is one with a clear positioning and an earned reputation for keeping its promise. A promise kept builds trust and helps an organization reach its goals and stay true to its purpose.” (Urde, 2021, p. 1)

The new crest and its respective communication created a new identity of Leeds United Football Club that was built on the fans. Even though fans have played a prominent role in establishing the club and have been at the heart of Leeds United ever since, this identity shift was not successful. Firstly, the crest did not resemble previous LUFC crests the fans were used to. Secondly, many supporters did not appreciate that the ‘Leeds Salute’ was depicted on the crest and argued that it made the crest look generic and inauthentic. While the club had sincere intentions with the new crest and included elements that play important roles in the club’s history in the design, Leeds United did not stay true to its core brand identity in the eyes of the fan base. Building on the citation above from Urde (2021), Leeds United supporters did not recognise the brand’s core in the redesign and felt that the club did not keep its promise.

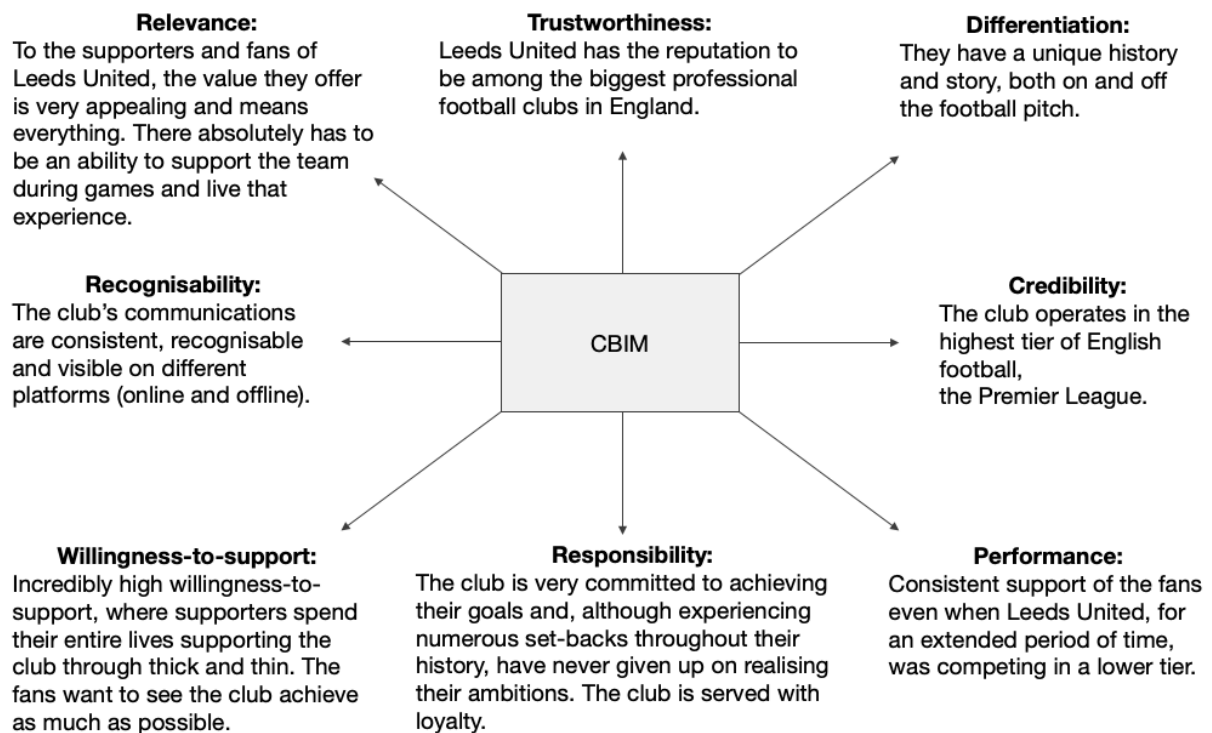
The Leeds United case demonstrates the importance of understanding the corporate brand identity. The Corporate Brand Identity Matrix (CBIM) by Urde (2013) is a key model underlying the case as it gives a structured overview of corporate brand identity and clarifies how to define as well as build a corporate brand identity (**Figure 1**). In a coherent brand, all nine elements that define a corporate brand’s identity are interrelated and influence each other. The CBIM depicts the brand core at the centre (e.g., brand promise and core values), reflecting all outer elements. The surrounding elements vice versa reflect the core. **Figure 1** presents the CBIM applied to the Leeds United Case.

Figure 1 Corporate Brand Identity Matrix (Urde, 2013) applied to the Leeds United Case

<i>External</i>	<p>Value proposition Fan engagement and customer loyalty. Customer experience on match day both home and away.</p>	<p>Relationships Fans are everything. They are the heart and soul of the club.</p>	<p>Position A unique football club driven by the community and fans as backbone.</p>
<i>External / Internal</i>	<p>Expression The club's emblem. White home kit. Playing attractive, attacking football.</p>	<p>Brand core Leeds United promise and core values: heritage, loyalty, unique and personal experience</p>	<p>Personality Love us or hate us. Equality, respect, passion.</p>
<i>Internal</i>	<p>Mission & Vision The club's mission is to win titles and championships. The club's vision is to be among the top clubs in England and Europe.</p>	<p>Culture Hard working, local community. Equality among employees and club staff.</p>	<p>Competences Incredible fan loyalty and engagement.</p>

To gain deeper understanding about how the fan base perceived the new crest proposal in the Leeds United case, it is helpful to look at the extended CBIM model, namely the Corporate Brand Identity and Reputation Matrix (CBIRM), see **figure 2**. The CBIRM is a managerial framework to structure and support the management of corporate brand identity and reputation in terms of defining, aligning and developing the corporate brand. The CBIRM links the inside-out perspective of managing corporate brand identity with the outside-in perspective of brand reputation management including communication. Thus, it also provides additional angles to better explain the Leeds United case.

Figure 2 Corporate Brand Identity and Reputation Matrix (Urde & Greyser, 2016) applied to the Leeds United Case



After fully applying the CBIM and CBIRM models to the Leeds United case we are able to identify certain elements of the matrix that got affected by the proposed change in the club's emblem.

First of all, the most affected elements were that of expression and recognisability. Updating what until then had been the club's flagship symbol for twenty years not only changed how the rest of the football industry looked at Leeds United but also how their own fans looked at the club. Are all the different stakeholders able to identify with the new logo the same way they did before? Do people still recognise it as Leeds United?

Furthermore, in regard to both relationships and competences, fans felt neglected in the process of changing the crest and perceived themselves to be misinformed. The club prides itself for having a unique relationship with its fans and sees them as important for their corporate brand identity. Although the club's management felt the fans' voice was heard sufficiently, this assessment was not shared by the fans themselves.

Additionally, the position element was also troubled. Leeds United wants to be perceived as a community driven club but due to the lack of representation of the Yorkshire community in the newly designed emblem it could lose this important identity pillar for its brand positioning.

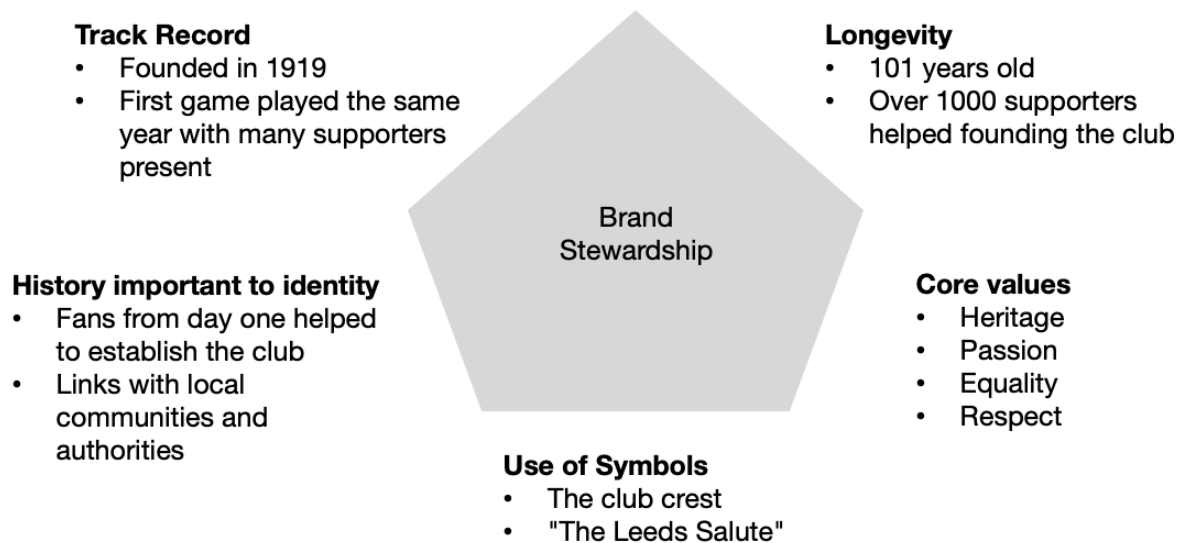
Moreover, a number of supporters felt that the club’s credibility was being tarnished by the unconventional design of the new crest. When comparing the proposed logo to that of other professional football clubs, both in England and abroad, it is clear to see how inventive it is, and some people could question if the club would be taken seriously.

Brands with a history

Elements of brand heritage: Brand stewardship (Urde, Greyser & Balmer, 2007)

Given that Leeds United is a brand with a rich history that is central to its brand identity, it is relevant to back up the case with theory on heritage brands. Urde, Greyser & Balmer (2007) see a brand’s heritage as a dimension of its identity. To be considered a heritage brand, it is not enough to simply have history, but the brand has to actively emphasise its history as a key part of its identity and thus use it as a corporate asset. A heritage brand consciously bases its value proposition and positioning on its heritage (Urde, Greyser & Balmer, 2007), see **figure 3** to see it applied to Leeds United.

Figure 3 Brand Stewardship (Urde, Greyser & Balmer, 2007) applied to Leeds United Case



Using these five elements we can conclude how Leeds United indeed is a heritage brand. The track record and longevity of the club are visible in the fact that it has been one of England’s most prominent football clubs for over one hundred years and is still continuing to be so. The first game of Leeds United was played in 1919 and even today the club is still competing at the highest level of professional football by playing in the Premier League. Its core value of being a community-based club, where the supporters are at the heart of everything, was already visible when over one thousand supporters helped establish Leeds United FC after its predecessor, Leeds City, had to be dissolved due to financial problems. It illustrates the passion the supporters had, and still have, for their club and why it is still considered to be one of the club’s core values after more than a century. Through usage of symbols such as the Leeds United

crest, illustrating the Yorkshire rose and the letters LUF C which stand for Leeds United Football Club, the existing link between the club and the local community is illustrated. Another symbol, “Leeds Salute”, is a unique way in which Leeds supporters often greet each other. This has been done since the middle of the twentieth century and is used by supporters, players, directors, employees, and so on. It connects all parts and all the different stakeholders of the organisation. It symbolises the community value that Leeds United has as a club.

Corporate communication as strategic stakeholder activity

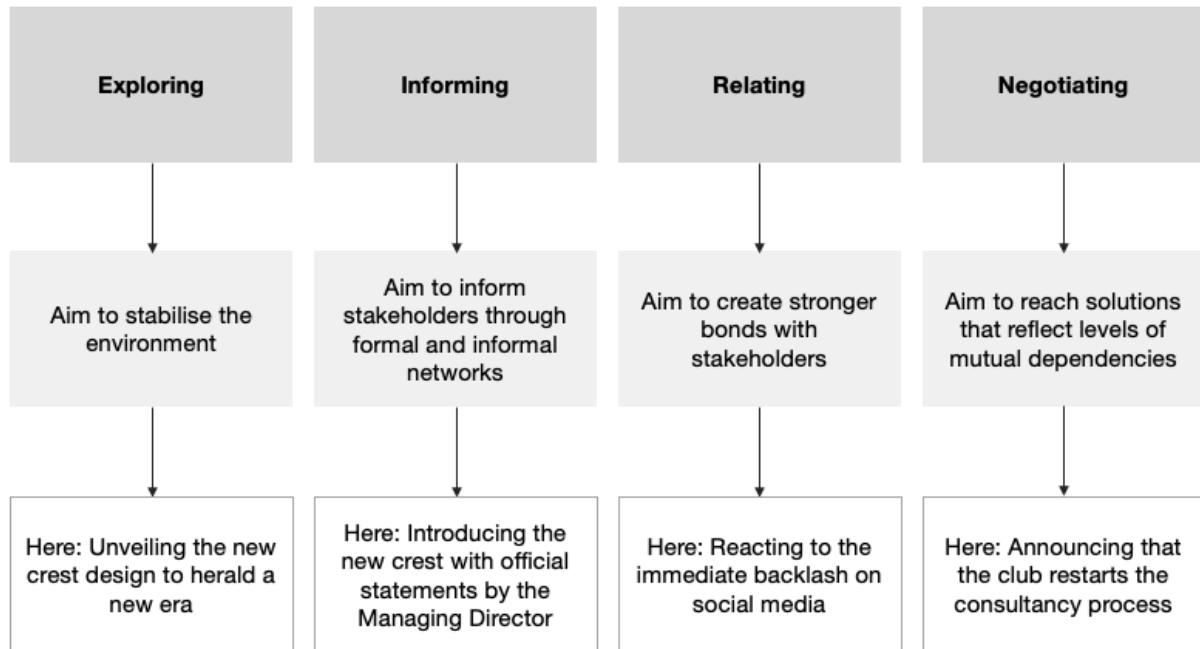
Apart from the mentioned brand management models, corporate communication is another key theory underlying the Leeds United Case. Roper & Fill (2012) explain that corporate communication is strongly linked to corporate strategy and reputation. Corporate communication provides organisations with the opportunity to develop corporate brands as well as to foster their reputation. More precisely, corporate communication has two key functions. Firstly, to influence how stakeholders perceive the organisation and shape its reputation. And secondly, to inform, influence and navigate corporate strategy. The authors suggest using corporate communication as strategic stakeholder activity to reduce stakeholder uncertainty and to nurture stakeholder relationships (Roper & Fill, 2012).

Logos are one of the many elements that organisations use to communicate in a symbolic way. These visual symbols generate meaningful associations that help the stakeholder to recognise the brand’s values and purpose (Roper & Fill, 2012). One can imagine that changing such a visual artefact can have a noticeable influence on stakeholders. While introducing the new centenary crest and communicating next actions and decisions, the club performed the four tasks of corporate communication (**Figure 4**) identified by van Woerkum & Aarts (cited in Roper & Fill, 2012).

As the new proposed centenary crest was first unveiled and introduced by the Managing Director, the club’s communication strategy had an emotional core positioning theme (Roper & Fill, 2012). The club used strong emotional language in their official statements. Apart from visually presenting the crest that puts the fans at the heart of the club, the message was that the club wants to ‘herald a new era for the club’. The Managing Director used emotional themes with the main aim to create involvement and affiliation among the supporters. In **figure 4**, this is depicted under ‘exploring’ and ‘informing’. However, the fans and supporters did not react to the message as expected. An immediate backlash on social media caused the club to revise and adapt its communication strategy. As **figure 4** shows, it could be observed that the club then focussed on the ‘relating’ task. From the official statements of the Managing Director, it can be extracted that the communication strategy focused less on the emotional core positioning theme and instead included explanations on a rather rational level that argue for the crest redesign in order to help regain the supporter’s buy-in. Furthermore, with the announcement that supporters can hand-in their own crest design proposals, the club created stronger bonds with the fan base. Leeds United Football Club stayed on the described path of their communication as they announced that consultancy programme will be restarted (see ‘negotiating’ in **figure 4**). Ultimately, the club used an adaptation of the proposed new crest and communicated it as a special edition crest for the centenary season. Interestingly, after the centenary season

ended, the club changed its crest to one of their old ones. It is noteworthy that the club decided to not communicate the crest change nor the reintroduction of an old crest at all.

Figure 4 Four tasks of corporate communication applied (Roper & Fill, 2012, adapted from van Woerkum & Aarts, 2008) to the Leeds United case



Key learning objectives

Table 1 presents an overview of key learnings the case audience should achieve building on Bloom’s Taxonomy (Bloom, 1956). The table connects measurable action verbs that relate to the audience’s level of understanding with key learning objectives and sets them into context of the case.

Table 1 Key Learning Objectives

Key learning objectives		
Remembering	...how the change of a heritage brand’s symbol can affect stakeholders	Here: Reactions of supporters to the proposed crest redesign and their willingness to be proactive to save the perceived brand core
Understanding	...the corporate brand management models and communication theories underlying the case	Here: CBIM, CBIRM, corporate communication strategies

<i>Applying</i>	...key corporate brand management models to understand and solve problems with different possible solutions and implications that impact corporate reputation	Here: Corporate brand identity, brand positioning, rebranding strategy, stakeholder management theory, communication strategy
<i>Evaluating</i>	...the management of a challenging incident and the efficiency of the respective communication strategy, both short- and long-term	Here: The football club's handling of the backlash from the fan base, reaction to the petition and restart of consultancy programme
<i>Creating</i>	...rebranding and communication strategy under consideration of the brand's core identity and different stakeholders	Here: Final decision making based on understanding of the stakeholders' relationship to the core brand

Discussion questions

To have a good discussion as well as to focus on the case at hand, the proposed main question is to be used as a starting point for the discussion. The class is expected to reflect upon the main question during the discussion and based on that, be able to provide well-founded answers and suggestions for case solutions. Furthermore, in order for the teacher to steer the discussion in the intended direction and inspire the class members to actively argue about the main question, the teacher can use assisting questions which are presented below.

Main question

Will you still vote to implement the new crest, or will you listen to the criticism and keep the old crest, and how would you explain your decision to the supporters?

Assisting questions

- Do you think the club has done their research? Is six months and 10,000 people enough?
- What would you have done differently in the research and consultancy phase?
- What would you have thought as a board member after receiving the criticism when the announcement was made?
- When would you make your first public announcement after the supporters' criticism?
- What attitude towards the supporters would you have when communicating your decision about either keeping the crest or changing it?
- Do you think the board acted too soon/too late when reacting to the supporters' feedback, and how would you have communicated your reaction?

Teaching suggestions

The following section provides suggestions for both the teacher and the presenter on preparing and presenting the case. The aim is to profoundly understand the case, lead a good discussion as well as accomplish the case's goals and learning objectives.

Pre-presentation phase

The teacher should provide the class with preparation material ahead of the case. For this case, the preparation material consists of the written case containing the background and description of the incident. This preparation material should be provided no later than 24 hours before the case presentation and should also be distributed at the start of the case presentation to ensure that the class has all the necessary information.

The case requires some planning in advance in order to provide a well organised structure and discussion. The case is designed so that it is possible for one teacher to present the case and be the sole responsible for all of its parts. However, if there is more than one teacher, a plan should be made that contains an overview of different responsibilities ahead of the presentation.

Ahead of the presentation the teacher should do their research of the case by reading and understanding the written case. The next step is to read the management decision to enable a deeper understanding of the case and collect information for the discussion in class. Afterwards, the teacher is advised to read the teaching notes which are provided to understand the case's purpose and be able to implement the suggestions given by the case writers. After reading the teaching notes the teacher should then make a plan in order to adequately structure the presentation and the discussion. The plan should contain how to structure the case, what information to include and in what order, how to spend the time provided as well as making a plan for how to lead the discussion.

To enable a good understanding, the teacher might also have to prepare some suitable visual presentation. These visuals can consist of PowerPoint presentations, videos, pictures, physical objects, and so on that can enhance the case's understanding. There should also be a plan concerning how to structure the answers given in class. This could be done by writing the proposed answers on, for example, a whiteboard.

Introduction phase

When introducing the presentation and the case it might, depending on the atmosphere in the room, be beneficial to "break the ice". The teacher can for example ask the audience if anyone has been to a football game lately. As mentioned, this is done to break any possible tension or nervousness that might exist in the room and it also introduces the topic of the case in a smooth way by creating a relaxed conversation with the audience.

After a while, the teacher can then ask the class if anyone in the room has ever heard of the football club Leeds United before reading the prepared material. This way the teacher makes a smooth transition from casual talk to the real case. By asking this question, the teacher also gains useful insights regarding the prior knowledge of the class in regard to Leeds United. After having received this information, the teacher can proceed accordingly to the prepared presentation plan made in the pre-presentation phase.

Discussion phase

The discussion phase should start with the teacher reminding the class that they should now take on one of the roles of the Leeds United board members. This is to illustrate that the discussion is about to begin, and that class should get in “action mode”. The next step is to once again repeat the main question of the case that can be found in the written case. Before initiating the discussion, the teacher should ask the class if they understand the case and the question and if there is a need for any further clarifications before moving on to the discussion.

The teacher should then assume the role of the case mediator who is supposed to facilitate and guide the discussion among the case participants. The teacher should remain impartial and should be open to every opinion and point of view made by the audience. To enable a free-flowing discussion, the teacher can use the assisting questions listed above to keep the discussion going if necessary.

During the discussion, the teacher can use the whiteboard, or other tools decided on in the pre-presentation phase, in order to structure the answers given in an organised way. The teacher should also make sure that every group or participant can have their say, this can imply that an agreement is made that participants for example raise their hands before speaking, or by dividing up the room in x number of groups and having one group at a time give their answers. It is important that the teacher makes sure that everyone gets heard in order to get a good discussion, diverse opinions and an engaged audience. At the end of the discussion, the teacher can summarise what has been said by indicating the biggest talking points and suggestions made by the participants.

Conclusion phase

When the time planned for the discussion phase is over the teacher should end the discussion and move on to the conclusion phase. In this phase, the teacher should present the management decision made in the real case. The teacher could present the management decision using the same tools as when presenting the case. The teacher could, if possible, refer to similarities and differences between the real case solvers and the discussion in class when presenting the management decision.

After presenting the management decision, the presenter could ask the class for their opinions on it in order to deepen the discussion and to enhance the learning objectives. At the very end of the presentation, the teacher could summarise the biggest

key learnings and discussion points made by the participants. The teacher should then end the presentation by thanking the participants for the insightful discussion.

Time plan

The following is a suggestion to the presenter on how to divide the time between the different parts, also see **figure 5**. The total time of the case presentation is estimated to last for about 30 minutes. The first 4 minutes should be assigned to have some small talk with the audience and ask, for example, a football related question. The teacher should then spend approximately 3 minutes to present the background and history of Leeds United. The presenter should then make a smooth transition into the presentation of the incident and present the case, this should take approximately 4 minutes. Then the class should go into action mode and perform the discussion, this should last approximately 12 minutes and includes time for clarifications of the case if necessary. The teacher should then after the discussion present the management decision and possibly compare with the discussion made by the class, the time for this is approximately 5 minutes. The last 5 minutes are assigned to possibly have a short discussion in class about the management decision and for the teacher to conclude the case and say a few words to end the session.

Figure 5 Time plan



Board plan

When planning an in-class case presentation it is important for the presenter to clearly understand key points that should be developed during the discussion phase. Therefore, we advise the presenter to develop a preliminary board plan beforehand under consideration of the key learning objectives the case audience should achieve. This board plan serves as a tool for the presenter and audience to keep a clear overview of topics and thoughts that the case audience generates and discusses. **Table 2** provides a framework for a board plan and illustrates how it could look like. Please note that this board plan is only exemplary and depends on the direction the discussion is steering towards. After having discussed the case, the case audience should be able to provide a well-founded recommendation on the case's final management decision.

Table 2 Example of filled-in board plan

Key tasks and challenges	Alternatives	Actions
<p>Unveiling the redesigned centenary crest to herald a new era dedicated to the supporters</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Unveil the crest accompanied by a story that tells how the design was created and why • Unveil the crest and let it speak for itself 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Choose different channels (e.g., social media, official statement, etc.) to unveil the crest • Choose communication that speaks emotionally to the supporters
<p>Reacting to the immediate backlash from the fan base on social media and the petition requiring the retraction of the new crest</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Taking the feedback seriously given that Leeds United sees the supporters as the heart of their identity and react accordingly • Considering the fact that crest changes are common in football and even though people often are resistant to change, change often proves to be successful 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Retract the centenary crest • Rely on expert opinions from the consultancy process and use the crest anyways • Compromise and design a different centenary crest: let supporters be co-creators
<p>Making a final decision on the implementation of the crest</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Listen to supporters' feedback, don't implement the new crest and go back to an old crest • Trust on the extensive consultancy programme and use the new crest design • Compromise and use centenary crest only as special edition • Compromise and create another design with fans as co-creators 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consider and reasonably weigh the needs of different stakeholders to make a decision • Prepare a statement that announces final decision • Choose an appropriate communication strategy for the announcement that involves and engages the supporters to regain their full buy-in

The board plan consists of three main aspects: key tasks and challenges, alternatives and actions. Building on the in-class discussion, the board can be filled in step-by-step during the presentation by the presenter (or members of the case audience if the presenter prefers that). The first step is to gather the key tasks that, in this case, Leeds United Football Club faced. Based on the presenter's questions, the case audience then can discuss alternative options on how to overcome that task or challenge. This is followed by thinking the options through and creating action steps which are captured in the last column.

When these steps are implemented, the case audience has a detailed overview of an action-oriented roadmap of the case. This not only helps the case audience to recall all mentioned points but also supports building a comprehensive understanding of the case. Thus, taking all gathered ideas and information into consideration, the case audience is able to give profound recommendations on the case such as specific actions and the final decision.

Reflection

Writing a case has been a very interesting and fun assignment, but it has not been without its challenges. Thoughts about different options regarding the case started when the case writing group prepared for the supervision in the beginning of the course BUSN35 Corporate Brand Management and Reputation at Lund University. The supervision was held by the professor of the course, Mats Urde, where the main objective of the session was to discuss the three case options the writing group had. After the supervision the group received good insights and gathered suggestions from the professor about how to structure the case and move forward.

The writing group had thus early on in the writing process decided to have the case on Leeds United's possible crest change. A more challenging aspect was to come up with the angle of the case and to find a good case question to base the writing process on. However, after discussing different alternatives the group agreed on a question and the writing process was initiated. A challenge when writing the case was to remain objective and to remain open to all possible case solutions. As the final management decision had already taken place in real-life when this case was written, it was important to not be biased by personal opinions or direct the case towards a certain outcome considering the writing groups' knowledge of the real decision.

Another difficulty existed in the fact that the writing group had to shift between several roles within the case. The teacher's perspective had to be taken into consideration to assure that the case would be able to be presented in a class setting. It was also necessary in order to find theories as well as to think about how to structure and present the case. Furthermore, the student perspective had to be taken into account seeing that the case has the purpose of being presented in a class consisting of students attending the course Corporate Brand Management and Reputation at Lund University. The case is intended to be a learning opportunity for the students in class and therefore their perspective had to be taken into consideration to ensure that the design of the case, as well as the content, suited the students. The other role that had to be taken on was that of the case writers. This role was the one perceived by the writing group to be the most challenging given that there was no previous experience within this field among the members of the group. Said role also required to be unbiased and to allow for different perspectives and solutions to make an appearance. It was also a challenge not to solve the case but instead to cover as many details as possible so that others are able to solve it. To enable a well-grounded case the writing group had to combine all three roles and shift between them continuously.

References

- Bloom, B.S. (1956). Taxonomy of educational objectives; the classification of educational goals. New York, Longmans, Green.
- Roper, S., & Fill, C. (2012). Corporate Reputation: Brand and Communication, Essex: Pearson Education Limited.
- Urde, M. (2013). The Corporate Brand Identity Matrix, *Journal of Brand Management*, vol. 20, no. 9, pp.742-761.
- Urde, M. (2021). The Matrix - How to Find and Use Your Corporate Brand's Core Identity, *Unpublished Work in Progress*.
- Urde, M. & Greyser, S. A. (2016). The Corporate Brand Identity and Reputation Matrix - The Case of the Nobel Prize, *Journal of Brand Management*, vol. 23, no. 1, pp.89-117.
- Urde, M., Greyser, S. A. & Balmer, J. M. T. (2007). Corporate Brands with a Heritage, *Journal of Brand Management*, vol. 15, no. 1, pp.4-19.