

Undermining My Authority - Becoming a Brand Manager

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 aim of this document is to support teachers or presenters in the *Undermining My Authority – Becoming a Brand Manager* case. These notes are intended for use by teachers as preparation, offering recommendations on considerations for discussing the case. The teaching note contains guidance on introducing the case, offering suggestions on content and presentation, along with ideas of making the class discussion interesting and fruitful. Furthermore, this teaching note contains learning objectives, and a board plan featuring an illustrative example of approaching the case, alongside potential key insights for the teacher to consider during case preparation.

Case Synopsis

In *Undermining My Authority – Becoming a Brand Manager*, Alex Thompson navigates the challenges of leading the marketing team at NovaTech Electronics, a consumer electronics company in California. Tasked with driving the brand's image and campaigns for innovative smart home devices, Alex faces resistance upon introducing digital marketing strategies to a team accustomed to traditional methods. The transition is complicated by Alex's younger age, and a brief, insufficient handover from the predecessor. This scenario is further strained by the company's board demanding significant market growth.

The core challenge emerges from Robert Smith, a team veteran who contests Alex's leadership and digital marketing push, influencing the team's morale and productivity negatively. Robert's preference for "tried and true" tactics and his resistance to change create division within the team, culminating in a heated confrontation that jeopardizes an upcoming campaign. This leads to the case question: **How would you react in Alex's position?**

Relevance

While the case at hand is fictional, it provides insight into realistic and multifaceted challenges that brand managers may encounter in their professional career. Often in case discussions, there is an assumption that one alone can make decisions that impact the brand, neglecting the intricate dynamics and diverse stakeholders involved in real-world scenarios. The case underscores the importance of understanding and navigating organizational culture. It illuminates the critical role of leadership and authority in guiding a brand's direction, as seen through Alex's struggle to establish credibility and gain the support of his team entrenched in traditional marketing methods. The conflict between Alex and Robert highlights the complexities of managing team dynamics and fostering a positive work environment, critical to brand success.

Through the lens of Alex’s challenges, students can gain insights into how aspects such as culture, leadership and group dynamics practically influence brand management. Overall, the case provides a rich learning experience, enabling students to analyze real-world scenarios and develop practical skills for addressing the myriad of issues that brand managers may encounter in their professional endeavors.

Learning Objectives

Case-based learning and teaching revolves around bridging theory and practice. To facilitate the integration of these elements for both teachers and students, this section elucidates the academic concepts relevant to the case and clarifies the corresponding learning objectives rooted in these theories. Overall, this case delves into and offers broad implications regarding corporate brand alignment, brand oriented leadership, change management, and transformational leadership. This section is structured into subsections aligned with these three key areas.

Corporate Culture

The case of Alex Thompson at NovaTech Electronics provides a rich context for exploring the nuances of corporate culture and its impact on organizational dynamics. As the newly appointed Brand Manager, Alex encounters resistance and skepticism from his team, particularly from Robert Smith, the veteran employee who applied for the same position. The case underscores the significance of corporate culture in shaping employee attitudes, behaviors, and interactions within the organization. Corporate culture is a highly complex phenomenon that is vital in creating a strong corporate brand. Roper and Fill (2012) highlight the difference between strong versus weak corporate cultures. Through the case, the class can discuss the implications that an unsupportive culture can have for managing a team, and how to navigate potential issues.

Vision-Culture-Image (VCI) Model Hatch & Schultz (2003)

Hatch and Schultz (2001) propose the *Vision-Culture-Image (VCI)* model as a tool for corporate branding strategy. Their research shows that the three elements of vision, culture and image (see **Table 1**) must be aligned to create a strong corporate brand and corporate identity (see **Figure 1**).

Table 1 Description of Vision-Culture-Image (VCI) model components

Vision	Culture	Image
“Top management’s aspirations for the company.”	“The organization’s values, behaviors, and attitudes - that is, the way employees all through the ranks feel about the company they are working for.”	“The outside world’s overall impression of the company. This includes all stakeholders - customers, shareholders, the media, the general public, and soon.”

As a Brand Manager at NovaTech, it is Alex’s responsibility to protect the brand he is working for. To best do so, the corporate brand at large must also be considered. This both in terms of the value of the division Alex is directly responsible for, but also in regard to the efficiency of operating as a manager. With a weak corporate culture, as they currently have, Alex meets much resistance for his innovative ideas. While there can be argued for multiple gaps in the NovaTech corporate brand, the vision-culture gap can be argued as most apparent. Given that the NovaTech management chose Alex for the role of Brand Manager, as opposed to Robert, indicates that the management has a vision more in line with Alex’s approach. By choosing Alex, the Board can be argued to be striving for a more dynamic and innovative brand management, moving away from the approach currently used by the department. This vision can be assumed to not have been communicated or aligned with the corporate culture. This misalignment presents a significant obstacle for Alex in implementing his innovative ideas and aligning the division with the broader corporate brand.

Figure 1 Vision-Culture-Image (VCI) Model



The disconnect between the internal culture and external image of NovaTech further complicates the situation, indicating a vision-image gap. While NovaTech’s smart home devices are known for their quality, innovation, and user-friendliness, the prevailing culture within the organization does not reflect these values. The resistance faced by Alex and the perception of rigidity among the team members signify a gap between the desired brand image and the actual organizational culture. This misalignment could potentially erode the company's reputation and undermine its competitive advantage in the market.

To summarize, as Brand Manager, Alex shoulders the responsibility of protecting and enhancing NovaTech’s brand reputation. However, achieving this goal necessitates more than just implementing innovative ideas and strategies. It requires bridging the gaps between the company's vision, internal culture, and external image.

Alex must navigate the complexities of organizational dynamics, address resistance to change, and foster a culture of innovation and collaboration within his team. By aligning the three components of the VCI model, NovaTech can cultivate a cohesive and authentic corporate identity that resonates with both internal stakeholders and external audiences.

Change Management

Kotter's 8 Step Change Model Kotter (1995)

Kotter's 8-Step Change Model is a framework developed by Harvard Business School professor John Kotter to guide organizations through successful change initiatives (Kotter, 2007). Alex's initiative to introduce more digital methods in the team's strategy could be seen as a typical corporate change effort. Thus, Kotter's model can be used as an analytic tool to understand why Alex's attempt to make changes in the team is unsuccessful. In **Figure 2** Kotter's model is showcased.

Figure 2 Kotter's 8 Step Change Model (1995) summarized

1. **Create a Sense of Urgency:** Communicate the need for change and why it's urgent.
2. **Form a Powerful Coalition:** Build a team of influential individuals to lead the change effort.
3. **Create a Vision for Change:** Develop a clear vision of what the organization will look like after the change.
4. **Communicate the Vision:** Share the vision widely and consistently.
5. **Empower Others to Act on the Vision:** Identify and address barriers to change.
6. **Plan and Create Short-term Wins:** Implement quick, visible improvements to demonstrate progress.
7. **Build on the Change:** Use momentum from initial wins to tackle bigger challenges.
8. **Institutionalize New Approaches:** Embed changes into the organization's culture to ensure sustainability.

Many transformations fail, either because of (1) missing one or several of the steps, (2) doing the stages in the wrong order, or (3) underestimating the energy and time required in each step (Kotter, 2007). In this case, it could be argued that Alex fell victim to the first and the third errors. First, in terms of establishing a sense of urgency, Alex identified the need for a dynamic marketing strategy to compete in a highly saturated market. However, seemingly, the urgency was not effectively communicated to the team. Therefore, the team may have perceived the traditional methods as still effective, thus failing to see the necessity for change.

Secondly, concerning the establishment of a guiding coalition and crafting and communicating a vision for change (step 2-4 in **Figure 2**), it appears that Alex's efforts

were lacking. He failed to engage with NovaTech's executive leadership or to cultivate a coalition within his own team. Furthermore, in Alex's leadership, there was a notable absence of communication regarding the envisioned future state of the organization post-change. If any vision was articulated, it seemed to lack the capacity to captivate and motivate, which is a critical element and the ultimate purpose of a compelling vision (Urde, 2021).

Concerning the stage of empowering others to act on the vision, Alex's efforts could also be said to be inadequate. While he acknowledges that Robert is obstructing progress, he has not yet devised a strategy to address him as a barrier. As for the remaining stages (steps 6-8 in **Figure 2**), Alex has not yet reached that phase in the process, and therefore this part of Kotter's models could be deemed inapplicable.

In summary, Alex's change initiative could be said to be unsuccessful due to a combination of factors, including resistance from key team members, ineffective communication, lack of support from a guiding coalition, and failure to address barriers to change. Understanding these dynamics through Kotter's 8-Step Change Model provides valuable insights into the challenges encountered in implementing organizational transformations.

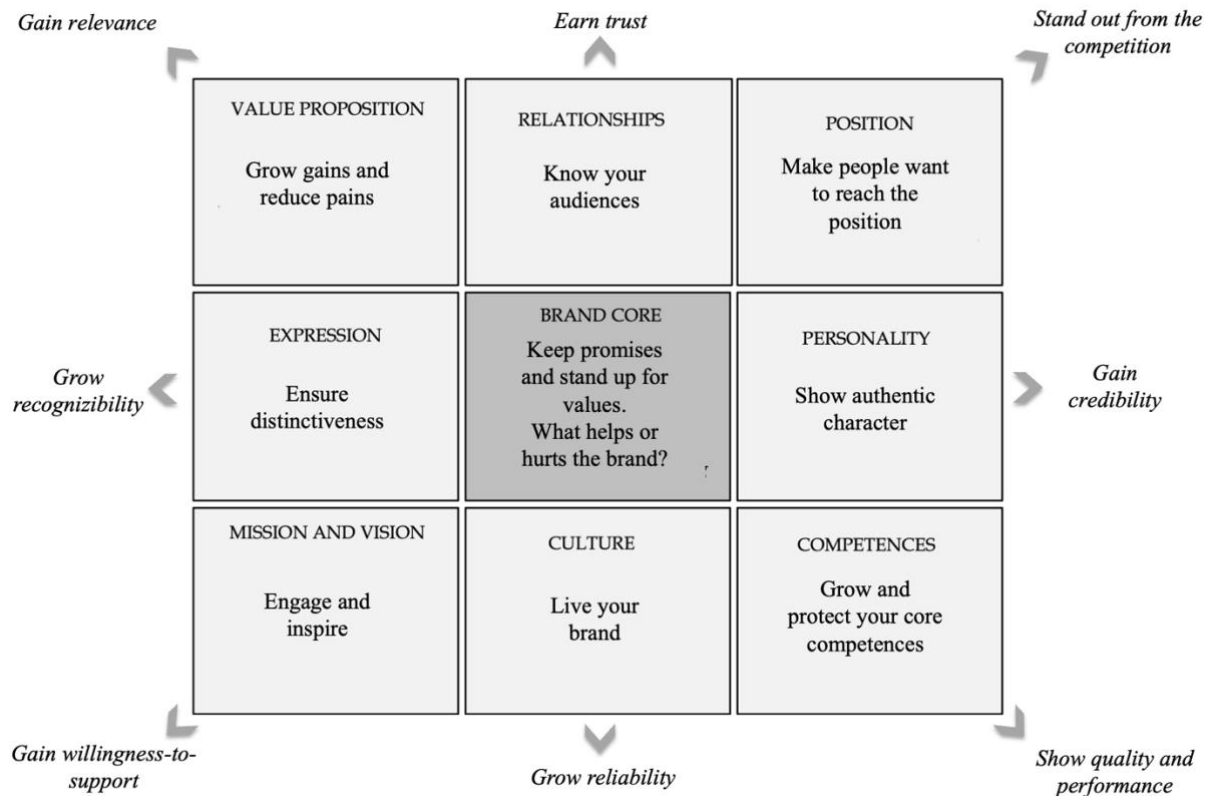
Brand-Oriented Leadership in Practice

The Brand Leadership Matrix Urde (2024)

Brand orientation refers to an approach in which the processes of the organization revolve around the creation, development and protection of brand identity (Urde, 1999, p. 7). In essence, brand-oriented organizations see the vision and mission of their brand as the hub of their strategy and allow the entire organization to be managed from the perspective of the brand and what it stands for (Koch, 2017). The Brand Orientation Leadership Matrix (see **Figure 3**) is an extension of the Urde's (2021) Corporate Brand Identity Matrix, and it is a tool for practicing brand-orientation in organizations.

In this case, the identity core of NovaTech could be said to, as explicitly mentioned in the written case, consist of the values quality, innovation and user-friendliness. Their position, as mentioned in the case, is to be a leader within the market for smart home devices. The marketing department's competences, however, seem to not match the identity core. The team was accustomed to traditional marketing and branding approaches, and they lacked insights into digital and innovative marketing tools and techniques. Moreover, the culture of the team does not seem to align with the brand core. When mismatches appear in the Corporate Brand Identity Matrix, this is an issue that calls for management's interpretation Urde's (2021). For the matrix to be stable, the connections among the identity elements should be strong. If weak links are identified, they should be examined, and management should explore how they could be strengthened. This is where the Brand Orientation Leadership Matrix can be applied.

Figure 3 The Brand Orientation Leadership Matrix (Urde, 2024)



Recognizing the inconsistencies between (1) brand core and competences, and (2) brand core and culture, if exploring how these could be strengthened, the Brand Orientation Leadership Matrix offers guidance. The matrix states that competences should be grown and protected, and this should be done in line with the brand core. In this case, when it comes to the first inconsistency, it means that Alex could consider equipping his team with competences in line with becoming more innovative, which could be achieved through for instance a learning program. A learning program could also help with the second inconsistency, because it could enable his employees to experience what the company wants to achieve in terms of their brand (i.e. live the brand).

Transformational Leadership

Transformational leadership is a style of leadership where the leader works with teams to identify need change, creating a vision to guide the change through inspiration and executing the change in tandem with committed members of the group (Bass & Riggio, 2006). It's about elevating morale, transforming the organizational culture and modifying systems in a way that furthers the organization's goals. This style of leadership fosters and environment if trust, encourages the pursuit of a shared vision, and promotes the development of leadership potential in others (Bass & Riggio, 2006).

Applying the principles of transformational leadership to the challenges faced by Alex in his role as Brand Manager at NovaTech Electronics can offer a strategic pathway to overcome resistance and foster a cohesive, innovative team dynamic. Transformational leadership, with its four components – idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individual consideration – and its emphasis on inspiring and motivating employees towards the greater good of the organization (Bass & Riggio, 2006), aligns well with the obstacles Alex encounters, particularly in dealing with resistance to change and the undermining of his authority.

Alex's struggle to establish respect and authority among his team members, especially given the presence of a challenging figure like Robert Smith, underscores the need for a leadership approach that transcends traditional transactional methods. Transformational leadership, through its component of idealized influence, suggests that Alex could work on becoming a role model for his team. By demonstrating commitment to the company's goals, ethical conduct, and showing confidence in the face of adversity, Alex can earn the admiration, respect, and trust of his team. This involves not only leading by example but also clearly communicating his vision for the brand and embodying the values he wishes to see in his team (Bass & Riggio, 2006).

The resistance to new digital marketing strategies and the division within the team highlight the necessity for inspirational motivation. Alex needs to articulate a compelling vision of the future that excites and inspires his team members. This involves setting high expectations but also demonstrating optimism and enthusiasm for the journey ahead (Bass & Riggio, 2006). By doing so, Alex can transform the team's outlook, making them feel invested in the brand's success and more open to adopting new, innovative approaches.

Given the team's initial hesitancy towards digital transformation and innovative marketing strategies, intellectual stimulation is crucial. Alex should encourage creativity and innovation by challenging existing assumptions and encouraging team members to think outside the box. This means fostering an environment where new ideas are welcomed, and mistakes are viewed as learning opportunities rather than failures (Bass & Riggio, 2006). By stimulating his team's intellectual efforts, Alex can facilitate a shift towards more dynamic and effective marketing strategies that align with current market demands.

Finally, the diverse experience levels and backgrounds within Alex's team, from seasoned professionals to new hires, call for individual consideration. Alex can act as a mentor or coach, recognizing and addressing the unique needs and aspirations of each team member. By fostering a supportive climate that values individual contributions and promotes personal growth, Alex can build a more cohesive and motivated team. Effective listening and two-way communication are essential here, as they help to create a sense of belonging and commitment among team members (Bass & Riggio, 2006).

In applying transformational leadership principles, Alex can effectively navigate the complexities of leading a resistant team through a period of significant change. By becoming a role model, inspiring, and motivating his team, stimulating their creativity and addressing their individual needs, Alex can transform the team’s dynamics, enhance productivity, and ultimately contribute to securing NovaTech’s leading position in the market.

Key Learning Objectives

The core learning goals of this case are detailed in **Table 2**, drawing from Anderson and Krathwohl’s (2001) taxonomy of educational objectives, an evolution of Bloom’s (1956) taxonomy. These objectives, each denoted by an action verb, are structured hierarchically from fundamental to advanced levels of complexity. Furthermore, within **Table 2**, these objectives are tailored to suit the specific context of this case.

Table 2 Key Learning Objectives

Objective	Meaning	In context
<i>Remember</i>	Recognizing or recalling knowledge from memory. Using memory is to produce or retrieve definitions, facts, or lists, or to recite previously learned information.	Recalling the background information about NovaTech and the team dynamics, and the situation of Alex as the leader of the team.
<i>Understand</i>	Constructing meaning from different types of functions be they written or graphic messages or activities like interpreting, exemplifying, classifying, summarizing, or explaining.	Making sense of the written case. Understanding that the situation is difficult, understanding the meaning of the organizational chart etc.
<i>Apply</i>	Using learned material, or implementing material in new and concrete situations through products like models, presentations, or simulations.	Being able to apply prior everyday theory or theories of change management, leadership or corporate brand alignment to the case.
<i>Analyze</i>	Breaking materials or concepts into parts, determining how the parts relate to one another or how they interrelate, or how the parts relate to an overall structure or purpose.	Being able to break down the information provided in the case or ideas in a structured way to be able to answer the case question.
<i>Evaluate</i>	Making judgments based on criteria and standards through checking and critiquing.	Being able to evaluate the alternatives concerning how Alex should react through checking and critiquing

<i>Create</i>	Putting elements together to form a coherent or functional whole; reorganizing elements into a new pattern or structure through generating, planning, or producing	Producing an idea of how Alex should react, planning his short and/or long-term actions.
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Discussion Questions

A primary aim for the teacher, to ensure bridging of theory and practice, should involve guiding the discussion and assessment of the case in a manner that ensures the audience comprehends the connections to underlying theories and models. To facilitate this, having a main question supported by assisting question is recommended. The class is expected to reflect on the main question and, from there, generate well-grounded answers and recommendations for a case solution. The assisting questions are to be used to provide guidance and directions for the discussion and to facilitate an engagement in the discussion.

Main Question

- How would you react in Alex's position?

Assisting Questions

- What are the main issues in this situation?
- What strategies can Alex employ to make his change effort successful?
- Do you see any inconsistencies if analyzing the situation through the corporate brand identity matrix?
- Do you think there is a reason that Alex was chosen rather than Robert?
- Is there anything Alex could improve from a leadership perspective?
- Do you think there are any misalignments between vision, culture and image? How does this affect the corporate identity?
- How could Alex apply brand-oriented leadership practices in this situation?

Teaching Suggestions

In this section, recommendations for both the teacher and the presenter regarding preparing and delivering the case are offered. The objective is to gain a deep understanding of the case, facilitate meaningful discussions, and effectively achieve the case's goals and learning objectives.

Pre-Presentation Phase

Prior to the case discussion, teachers are advised to immerse themselves thoroughly in the case material. Achieving a deep understanding of the case's intricacies requires diligent study of all its components—the written case, the case expert commentary, the accompanying teaching notes, and any visual presentations. This comprehensive review should commence well in advance of the case discussion to allow sufficient time for the teacher to absorb the material fully and identify key learning objectives. Engaging with these materials is not just recommended; it is essential for the development of a nuanced understanding and the effective transmission of knowledge to students.

Before the initiation of the case discussion, teachers must ensure that students are adequately prepared with the necessary foundational knowledge. To facilitate this, teachers should distribute case materials in advance, ideally 24 hours before the case discussion, to provide students ample time for a comprehensive review.

Finally, teachers should plan the management of classroom interactions. This involves strategizing on how to encourage participation, handle diverse viewpoints, and synthesize contributions to reinforce learning objectives. A methodical approach to recording key points and student insights can further enrich the learning experience.

By adhering to this pre-preparation phase, teachers will be well-equipped to deliver a dynamic and impactful case discussion, fostering a rich learning environment that encourages critical thinking and practical application of concepts.

Presentation Phase

When conducting a case study live in a classroom environment, fostering an open atmosphere is crucial to encourage active participation from all attendees. Creating a welcoming environment where individuals feel at ease expressing their thoughts is central. To facilitate this, initiating the session with an icebreaker question can be highly effective in alleviating any nervousness among participants. For example, the teacher may pose a simple query such as, "Can anyone in here think of the name of a consumer electronics company?" This allows for initial engagement and sets a comfortable tone for the discussion. Following a few responses from the audience, the teacher can smoothly transition into the presentation by introducing the case study centered around a fictional consumer electronics company named NovaTech.

During this introductory phase of the presentation, the teacher should also clarify the setup of the session. This involves explaining that the case depicts a made-up scenario and outlining the structure of the session. Participants should be informed that their suggestions and analyses will be compared with those of three expert commentators towards the conclusion of the session.

Discussion Phase

The discussion phase holds significant value as it allows participants to evaluate a fictional situation that could potentially manifest into reality for many individuals in the future. The discussion begins with asking the main question and allowing the conversation to begin. The class should put themselves in Alex's shoes, trying to find a course of action for how to solve the issues.

Firstly, the class should establish exactly what the issue consists of, in order to best be able to find a suitable plan of action. The whiteboard can here be used to define the problem, and later for writing down suggestions. During the discussion, the whiteboard should be used to document key points, insights, and potential actions suggested during the discussion. It is important that the teacher moderates the discussion, trying to involve everyone and making all opinions welcome. Furthermore, the teacher must attempt to stay objective and not attempt to lead the discussion into a specific decision. The provided assisting questions can be used to deepen the discussion.

When the time for discussion is up, the teacher should summarize the different potential actions that have been brought up. Then, a decision should be reached. Depending on how the discussion has gone, this can be through a vote or mutual decision. Given the nuanced nature of the case, decision-making may not be as straightforward as a simple yes or no. Instead, it should reflect a general stance on the issue and propose a recommended course of action.

Conclusion Phase

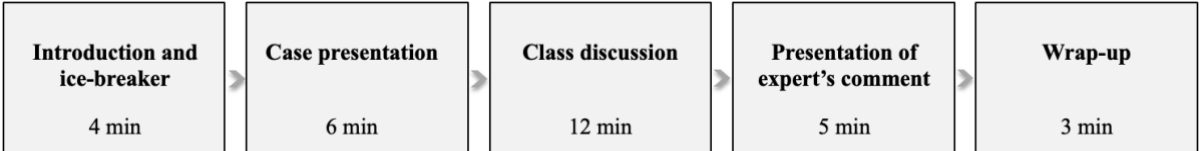
After the class has proposed a course of action, the discussion moves into the conclusion phase. Here, the teacher presents the case commentaries from three professionals. When presenting these commentaries, potential differences and similarities with the class decision should be commented upon. After the cases have been presented, the class is encouraged to comment on the case and give any reflections they might have. To end the presentation, the teacher should summarize the key learnings and insights given from the case. Finally, the class is thanked for their participation.

Time Plan

Below is a suggested time allocation plan for the case presentation, as depicted in **Figure 4**. The entire presentation is anticipated to last approximately 30 minutes. The initial segment, lasting around 4 minutes, is designated for an introduction and ice-breaker activity, fostering audience engagement and setting a welcoming atmosphere. Following this, the teacher should dedicate roughly 6 minutes to presenting the case, culminating in the introduction of the main question. Subsequently, a 12-minute discussion period ensues, during which students actively engage with the case, exchanging ideas and perspectives. After the discussion, approximately 5 minutes are allotted for the teacher to present expert comments, offering additional insights. The remaining 3 minutes serve as a wrap-up session or as

a buffer, allowing for reflection on the expert's remarks or addressing any final queries. This structured approach ensures a balanced distribution of time across different segments, facilitating a comprehensive exploration of the case within the allotted timeframe.

Figure 4 Time plan

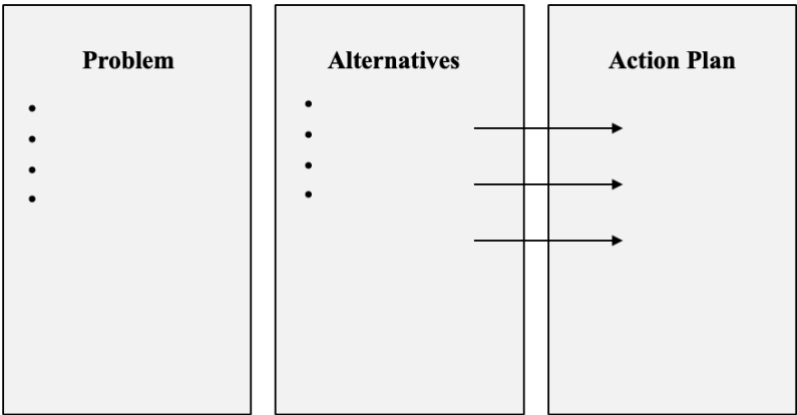


Board Plan

The board plan serves as a visual guide (see **Figure 5**), mapping out the topics of discussion and a clearer understanding of the conversation. It is advisable that a designated member of the presenting team actively takes notes and significant insights on a whiteboard as the discussion unfolds. For the case of *Undermining my Authority – Becoming a Brand Manager*, the board plan will feature sections dedicated to identifying the problem, exploring alternatives, and formulating an action plan.

As the discussion progresses, drawing upon the notes captured on the board, participants will synthesize the information to formulate their final recommendations. Concluding the discussion, a vote will be held to determine the most suitable action plan moving forward.

Figure 5 Board plan



Reflection

Crafting this case has proven to be a stimulating and fulfilling endeavor, albeit not without its share of hurdles. One significant challenge revolved around securing expert insights for the case. Despite reaching out well in advance – two weeks prior to

the deadline – we encountered difficulty in engaging individuals willing to contribute their expertise. We contacted representatives from Orkla, P&G, Intrum, and VOG, explaining the minimal time commitment required, but regrettably, encountered limited success. Whether due to stringent company communication policies or time constraints, we were somewhat surprised by the response. Ultimately, we narrowly succeeded in procuring the input of the three experts essential to enriching our case.

The concept of structuring the case as a fictional scenario complemented by expert commentary originated from discussions with our course professor, Mats Urde. Mats' invaluable guidance profoundly influenced the development of this case. Furthermore, he suggested incorporating video recordings of expert insights, although this format failed to garner enthusiasm among the contacts we approached. Nevertheless, incorporating such videos could have enhanced the case's appeal to students, indicating the importance of initiating contact with potential contributors well in advance of the deadline.

Another challenge we encountered as case writers stemmed from our lack of experience in two key areas. Firstly, as individuals without prior managerial or brand management roles, we faced difficulty in crafting the Learning Objectives section of the teaching note, uncertain of which theories would best align with the case content. Secondly, lacking prior teaching experience presented challenges in determining the case's design and relevant content for both the case itself and the accompanying teaching note.

The process of drafting the written case itself proved to be the most straightforward aspect of its construction. We drew heavily from Mats Urde's *Undermining my Authority – Becoming a Manager case*, part of the First Time Manager Case Collection at the University of Applied Sciences Munich, adapting it to center around a brand manager protagonist. This tailored approach ensures the case's relevance to students studying Corporate Brand Management or aspiring to roles in brand management

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