

Case-Based Learning: Case Options

Based on Leidner, R. (1993) *Fast food, fast talk. Service work and routinization of everyday life*. Los Angeles, CA: University of California Press. The adaptation was also inspired by *Hell's Kitchen*, *Undercover Boss* and a presentation at 2014 ISPI Conference on MCDonalds employee training.

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Options:

["Traditional" or Complete Case Study](#)

[Partially Interactive Case Study with Instructions](#)

[Initial Case Study](#)

[Memo to Inform Based on Aggregated Student Questions](#)

“Traditional” or Complete Case Study

The Surf-N-Turf (SNT) fast food chain opened in the late 1990s in Seattle, WA and became an instant hit. In just over a decade, there were over 1,000 stores around the US. The company develops and introduces three to five new menu items a year to keep up with the public interest and stay competitive. To help train new and current employees, short videos on individual aspects of each job are created regularly. To keep up-to-date, franchisees have to buy 10 to 12 new videos a year. To ensure consistency across all stores, the company headquarters developed recipe books with simple job aides, as well policies and procedures that cover main aspects of operations. However, franchise owners may have additional rules for their stores.

Setting

Seven years ago, a new franchise opened in Indianapolis, IN, by Daniel Clark, a local businessman. The first two years showed much promise, with high profit and satisfied customers praising it on social media review sites, like Yelp. However, the numbers have plummeted since then. Among the main complaints were slow and unfriendly service, mixed up orders, and food not worth the money. Bad reviews popped up on Yelp, RipoffReport, and others. Employee turnover hit 200% in the last year. It was becoming more difficult to find new employees, in part due to bad employer reviews on Glassdoor and Vault, public sites where employees can review their employers. The trouble experienced by Daniel’s franchise started affecting the brand. The headquarters contacted Daniel, saying that if he fails to show positive changes in the next two months, they would have to drop him as a franchise. They also recommended engaging an HPT consultant to have an outsider look into the situation and help find solutions.

Meeting between Daniel Clark and HPT Consultant

Daniel: I am not sure why we had to work with you. I have already pinpointed the root cause for the problem - employee training. Obviously, the videos sent down from the headquarters are not good enough. That is why the quality of food and service has been suffering. Those videos are like five to 10 minutes long. What can be learned in 10 minutes? We tell our employees to come over 30 minutes before their shift starts to review training videos multiple times to remember them better. But they keep asking why they had to review training videos on their own time. My response was, “You want to work here, you need to know how to do that, get the skills you need down! It is your job and you should be interested in getting better at it.” Can you believe these kids? So

irresponsible! Please review those training videos and tell us how they can be improved so I can report it to the headquarters and get out of this trouble!

HPT Consultant: Mr. Clark, will it be OK with you if I also observe your employees working and meet with the crew and managers?

Daniel: Not sure why you want to waste your and my time doing that. I already told you what the issue is! But the headquarters told me to work with you, so go ahead. But please remember that I needed results yesterday! Corporate did not give me much time to turn it around!

Initial Observations:

The store employs five full-time managers and about 45 crew members, though the number of the crew fluctuates because of the frequent loss of employees and difficulty hiring new ones. The majority of crew members are high school and local college students. Crew has two main jobs: 1) manning the grill and other stations, like salad and baking; and 2) window (or counter) service. Typically, managers prefer that male workers work on the grill and females work at the window/counter. However, all employees are also responsible for equipment cleaning and setup, unloading trucks, and regular cleaning of the dining area and bathrooms. It seems like the slogan “If you can lean, you can clean” was strictly observed by the managers.

Conversations with Managers

Managers are responsible for scheduling. Managers need to actively balance between the lowest possible number of employees working at a time and keeping lines moving, since productivity by total number of employees ratio is a main criterion for assessing manager’s performance. Like with any fast food business, customers come in waves, with more people coming during rush hours. This makes scheduling more difficult. To make the process of scheduling easier, they are done in 30-min. segments. It is a common practice to let employees out earlier without pay if the store is not busy or have them stay for an extra hour or so if there is a rush. “I need to make a profit, right?” shared one of the managers. “After all, this is what Mr. Clark is asking from all of us. Since the early stages of the decline, he wanted us to plan much better. For example, we started making our crew squeeze in extra tasks that are not production, like sweeping, washing trays and floors, etc. He shared some math with us on how this small change can make significant profit, like \$7,000 a year. That’s big! Also, anybody can be effective with four window people during rush hours, he would say, but if we schedule three really good ones, they could do the job just as well! So it is up to us, managers, to prove that we can do our job by scheduling right! Then we could use this

money for something else, like training, or maybe a picnic for all managers at Mr. Clark's house.”

Managers are very proud of the incentive system they created for employees. “Employee of the Week” is entitled to one free meal instead of a 50% discount enjoyed by everybody else. “Employee of the Quarter” can get two tickets to a movie theater or a CD with a local group's performance. Contests were also organized around highest sales totals or the highest number of specialty items sold in any given hour, where employees would get a special award note, like ‘The Best of the Crew!’ Managers shared that some employees can be motivated by the chance of getting a promotion to a crew trainer and crew chief, with a slight pay increase, who have additional responsibilities like showing new employees their jobs and making sure that all crew members follow their Station Checklist (a highly detailed checklist on how to put together a menu item, in what sequence order to assemble them, arm motions to salt fries, and so on). The best workers and if there are openings could be promoted to salaried managers.

When asked what they thought the issues were that caused overall poor performance of the store, they said that employee morale and motivation were particularly low. They suggested that it was mainly because most employees are students, so they were not old enough to understand what it meant to work or they just would not care. Managers were not sure how to motivate employees to pay more attention to what they are doing and work more diligently. Window crew was the face of the company, but they rarely smiled, engaged customers, or made upsales (e.g., offering large instead of medium fries).

Conversations with Crew Members

While crew members were considered part-time, their schedules could vary from 15 to over 40 hours a week. Those who wanted to get more hours had to compete by proving that they were deserving by consistently going above and beyond at their work. Cutting down hours or creating very inconvenient schedule was a common strategy for managers to show their displeasure or to get rid of undesirable employees. Scheduling was a sensitive topic for employees. Its uncertainty was stressful, since it would not take into account needs that employees may have outside of their job, like school, child care, or transportation. The changes in schedule may happen during the same work day. Varying schedule also means that it is impossible for employees to predict how much money they could make over a given week, or hold another job. If employees could not come in for some reason, they had to find their own replacement.

Several crew members who started just a couple of weeks ago shared their experiences. They started the training by reviewing the videos that told them about the company and followed by comments from a local crew trainer. Unlike the smiling and happy person on the video, the crew trainer was very brusque and on edge. He quickly told them that they were too young (average age was 22) to have good work ethics and told them that they needed to sign a polygraph consent form. Next, he went on talking about easy things that could get them fired. Finally, he scheduled everyone for job-training.

First, they were sent to get “trained on fries.” A female employee shared that she was told to watch another videotape with very detailed instructions for each step of making fries. Once she got to the floor, the manager sent her to the fry station to start working, since it was lunch time and the lines were growing. She made a lot of mistakes at first, so a crew trainer came in to help. “You’d think that it’s easy, right? But it was hard,” the crew member shared. “There was an infographic of the process, but it was on the side of the cabinet and seemed to be always blocked by somebody else.” The trainer’s approach was to do on his own first and then explain what he did.

After an hour or so, she had a sandwich assembly training that also started with a video of the procedures of putting together sandwiches and how to operate automated ketchup and mustard dispensers. “Those are really cool! You place a bun underneath and a dollop of ketchup or mustard falls off. But you have to place it just right! It took me a lot of tries to know exactly where to put it. But even now, I still ‘misfire.’ Then you have to put a specific number of pickles, tomatoes, etc. The numbers would depend on the sandwich. There were infographs with recipes, but they were hard to read in a hurry. And since we were timed, I would often just hope that I was close enough.”

Finally, at the end of the day, she had a window training, which also started with a video, followed by a written test. If they passed the written test, they could start working with a cash register right away. This crew member said that she felt so stupid for days in a row, because she was too slow when trying to operate the actual cash register. The buttons had abbreviations the meaning of which was not clear, so she would try to figure them out while customers rattled off orders. Finally, one of the managers stepped in and started punching in orders for her, while telling her to take money and start putting orders together. Whenever she would come back, there would be several orders she needed to get payment for and not clear which customers to ask. “Even two weeks later, it is still hard! When I went to a fast food restaurant before, I would often say, ‘Hold this,’ ‘Add that.’ But I hated every customer who did it to me! Customizing the order like that throws off the whole system! Not like I can push a customize button, you know like

when you order a pizza online or something. You should see the look on customers' and manager's faces! I felt so stupid, I just wanted to go home! And when a customer would start yelling at me, managers would just take their side! I know that customer comes first, but a lot of the time it was not even my fault! I would gladly work on the grill instead of dealing with customers!"

When employees were asked for reasons for such poor overall performance, they got defensive saying that it was not their fault. "They want too much from us for too little money and very hard work conditions! We can't even check our work schedule while clocked in! As one of the managers said, 'Check your schedule on your own time. That isn't what you are paid for! And what they call incentives... After being here for two weeks, I can't even look at fast food any more, so I'm not interested in a free meal! An album of some local group? Not like I can insert it into my smartphone to listen! And the movie tickets they talk so much about! It is to a second-run movie theater!"

Partially Interactive Case Study with Instructions

Initial Case Study

Instructions: This part to be presented to students during the initial week. Students are to start gap analysis and come up with questions to diverse stakeholders who may or may not be part of the info below to further investigate the problem.

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minutes? We tell our employees to come over 30 minutes before their shift starts to review training videos multiple times to remember them better. But they keep asking why they had to review training videos on their own time. My response was, “You want to work here, you need to know how to do that, get the skills you need down! It is your job and you should be interested in getting better at it.” Can you believe these kids? So irresponsible! Please review those training videos and tell us how they can be improved so I can report it to the headquarters and get out of this trouble!

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Initial Observations:

The store employs five full-time managers and about 45 crew members (average age 22), though the number of the crew fluctuates because of the frequent loss of employees and difficulty hiring new ones. The majority of crew members are high school and local college students. Crew has two main jobs: 1) manning the grill and other stations, like salad and baking; and 2) window (or counter) service. Typically, managers prefer that male workers work on the grill and females work at the window/counter. However, all employees are also responsible for equipment cleaning and setup, unloading trucks, and regular cleaning of the dining area and bathrooms. It seems like the slogan “If you can lean, you can clean” was strictly observed by the managers.

Managers: Managers are responsible for scheduling. Managers need to actively balance between the lowest possible number of employees working at a time and keeping lines moving, since productivity by total number of employees ratio is a main criterion for assessing manager’s performance. Like with any fast food business, customers come in waves, with more people coming during rush hours. This makes scheduling more difficult. To make the process of scheduling easier, they are done in 30-min. segments. It is a common practice to let employees out earlier without pay if the store is not busy or have them stay for an extra hour or so if there is a rush.

Managers are very proud of the incentive system they created for employees:

- “Employee of the Week” would get a free meal

- “Employee of the Quarter” would get two tickets to the movie theater or a record album of a local group

Contests were also organized around highest sales totals or the highest number of specialty items sold in any given hour, where employees would get a special award note, like ‘The Best of the Crew!’ Yet, managers believed that employees are not motivated to do their best while at work.

Employees: While crew members were considered part-time, their schedules could vary from 15 to over 40 hours a week. Those who wanted to get more hours had to compete by proving that they were deserving by consistently going above and beyond at their work. The changes in schedule may happen during the same work day. If employees could not come in for some reason, they had to find their own replacement.

New employee training starts with an overall video about the chain, followed by the introductions from the trainer on how to get fired easily and a consent for the polygraph test. Then trainees are assigned to a station for half a day. The training starts with a video specific to the station. Employees are put to work at the station immediately after reviewing the training, which causes a lot of confusion. Managers have a tendency to step in to take over the station, while assigning trainees other duties. There are station checklists available at the station as well, but those proved to be challenging. The process and training varies from station to station.

Most of the employees are disgruntled by the work conditions and incentives.

Memo to Inform Based on Aggregated Student Questions

Instructions: Once student questions are gathered and aggregated, a combined response to be sent prior to the solution development assignment. Students may need to make assumptions for some information.

Conversations with Managers

Scheduling:

Managers need to actively balance between the lowest possible number of employees working at a time and keeping lines moving, since productivity by total number of employees ratio is a main criterion for assessing manager's performance. Like with any fast food business, customers come in waves, with more people coming during rush hours. This makes scheduling more difficult. To make the process of scheduling easier, they are done in 30-min. segments across three shifts. It is a common practice to let employees out earlier without pay if the store is not busy or have them stay for an extra hour or so if there is a rush. "I need to make a profit, right?" shared one of the managers. "After all, this is what Mr. Clark is asking from all of us. Since the early stages of the decline, he wanted us to plan much better. For example, we started making our crew squeeze in extra tasks that are not production, like sweeping, washing trays and floors, etc. He shared some math with us on how this small change can make significant profit, like \$7,000 a year. That's big! Also, anybody can be effective with four window people during rush hours, he would say, but if we schedule three really good ones, they could do the job just as well! So it is up to us, managers, to prove that we can do our job by scheduling right! Then we could use this money for something else, like training, or maybe a BBQ outing for all managers at Mr. Clark's house."

Incentives:

Managers are very proud of the incentive system they created for employees. "Employee of the Week" is entitled to one free meal instead of a 50% discount enjoyed by everybody else. "Employee of the Quarter" can get two tickets to a movie theater or a record album of a local group. Contests were also organized around highest sales totals or the highest number of specialty items sold in any given hour, where employees would get a special award note, like 'The Best of the Crew!' When asked what they use to determine, they responded that they would come to discuss at a managers' meeting

and each manager can nominate employees they particularly liked. “It’s not about a rubric...We are managers, we sense people who work here. We have good employees and bad ones. So if we feel an employee deserves to be rewarded, they are. But there is only a handful who actually deserve.” No additional incentives specific to those working on the grill are given.

Managers shared that some employees can be motivated by the chance of getting a promotion to a crew trainer and crew chief, with a slight pay increase, who have additional responsibilities like showing new employees their jobs and making sure that all crew members follow their Station Checklist (a highly detailed checklist on how to put together a menu item, in what sequence order to assemble them, arm motions to salt fries, and so on). The best workers and if there are openings could be promoted to salaried managers.

When asked why mainly men worked the grill, managers shrugged. “It’s something that Mr. Clark started. It seems to work better that way for everybody.”

Overall Performance:

When asked what they thought the issues were that caused overall poor performance of the store, they said that employee morale and motivation were particularly low. They suggested that it was mainly because most employees were students, so they were not old enough to understand what it meant to work or they just would not care. Managers were not sure how to motivate employees to pay more attention to what they are doing and work more diligently. Window crew was the face of the company, but they rarely smiled, engaged customers, or made upsales (e.g., offering large instead of medium fries), even though they all went through a training program and should know its importance. One of the managers who was a crew member before the promotion mentioned in passing that the ordering system is not the easiest to follow, but other managers negated that saying that it more talks about the abilities of their employees.

Employee Training and Feedback:

The videos used in the training cover a wide range of topics: onboarding, recipe and equipment training, diversity, team work, etc. While some videos are a must, e.g., recipe training, others may be used based on the problems that arise (e.g., team diversity and collaboration). Managers shared that just like Mr. Clark, they do not believe that videos are helpful. Therefore, in addition to them, they do on the job training, which certainly helps, but only when employees pay attention and really want to learn. “And coming in earlier to view videos would go a long way with the company! It shows that they care and want to be better! What is it called nowadays? Lifelong learning? As Mr. Clark says, if you want to gain new skills and get promotion, you have to invest on your own and not wait for somebody else to pay you to do that”

Performance feedback is provided to struggling employees whenever managers are on the floor. If they do not get better, this workplace is not a good fit. Occasionally, food preparation is checked against the Station Checklist, especially, when training new employees. “However, they are adults, so they have to make sure that they follow the company guidelines without constant supervision. It is not high school after all!” shared one of the managers.

Questions regarding metrics (e.g., rate of problematic orders, order to delivery time, etc.) were answered in very general terms, “we have to focus on putting out fires.”

Conversations with Crew Members

Scheduling:

While crew members were considered part-time, their schedules could vary from 15 to over 40 hours a week. Those who wanted to get more hours had to compete by proving that they were deserving by consistently going above and beyond at their work. Cutting down hours or creating very inconvenient schedule was a common strategy for managers to show their displeasure or to get rid of undesirable employees. Scheduling was a sensitive topic for employees. Its uncertainty was stressful, since it would not take into account needs that employees may have outside of their job, like school, child care, or transportation. Varying schedule also means that it is impossible for employees to

predict how much money they could make over a given week, or hold another job. If employees could not come in for some reason, they had to find their own replacement.

Employee Training, Performance, & Feedback:

Several crew members who started just a couple of weeks ago shared their experiences. They started the training by reviewing the videos that told them about the company and followed by comments from a local crew trainer. Unlike the smiling and happy person on the video, the crew trainer was very brusque and on edge. He quickly told them that they were too young (average age was 22) to have good work ethics and told them that they needed to sign a polygraph consent form. Next, he went on talking about easy things that could get them fired. Finally, he scheduled everyone for job-training.

First, they were sent to get “trained on fries.” A female employee shared that she was told to watch another videotape with very detailed instructions for each step of making fries. “Those were really good and easy to follow! I wish I could watch them on the floor as needed.” Once she got to the floor, the manager sent her to the fry station to start working, since it was lunch time and the lines were growing. She made a lot of mistakes at first, so a crew trainer came in to help. “You’d think that it’s easy, right? But it was hard,” the crew member shared. “There was an infographic of the process, but it was on the side of the cabinet and seemed to be always blocked by somebody else.” The trainer’s approach was to do on his own first and then explain what he did. “However, what he did was not necessarily how it was shown in the video. So confusing!”

After an hour or so, she had a sandwich assembly training that also started with a video of the procedures of putting together sandwich and how to operate automated ketchup and mustard dispensers. “Those are really cool! You place a bun underneath and a dollop of ketchup or mustard falls off. But you have to guess to be able place it just right! It took me a lot of tries to know exactly where to put it. But even now, I still ‘misfire.’ Then you have to put a specific number of pickles, tomatoes, etc. The numbers would depend on the sandwich. There were infographics with recipes, but they were hard to read in a hurry. And since we were timed, I would often just hope that I was close enough.”

Finally, at the end of the day, she had a window training, which also started with a video, followed by a written test. If they passed the written test, they could start working with a cash register right away. This crew member said that she felt so stupid for days in a row, because she was too slow when trying to operate the actual cash register. The buttons had abbreviations that were not clear, so she would try to figure them out while customers rattled off orders. Finally, one of the managers stepped in and started punching in orders for her, while telling her to take money and start putting orders together. Whenever she would come back, there would be several orders she needed to get payment for and not clear which customers to ask. “Even two weeks later, it is still hard! When I went to fast food restaurant before, I would often say, ‘Hold this,’ ‘Add that.’ But I hated every customer who did it to me! Customizing the order like that throws off the whole system! Not like I can push a customize button, you know like when you order a pizza online or something. You should see the look on customers’ and manager’s faces! I felt so stupid, I just wanted to go home! And when a customer would start yelling at me, managers would just take their side! I know that customer comes first, but a lot of the time it was not even my fault! I would gladly work on the grill instead of dealing with customers!”

One of the employees, an 18-yo young man, who has been on the crew longer than others (app. 5 mo) shared, “Truly, I am ashamed to say that I work here. I know I do not always do my best, but I feel like I am in a survival mode most of the days. The owner is a ... hmm... let’s put it mildly ‘not nice,’ and managers do not really care about us for the most part. If you ask me why I still work here, it is because it is close to where I live and go to school, so at least I do not have to waste time driving. But not sure how long I can do this.”

Morale & Incentives:

When employees were asked for reasons for such poor overall performance, they got defensive saying that it was not their fault. “They want too much from us for too little money and very hard work conditions! We can’t even check our work schedule while clocked in! As one of the managers said, ‘Check your schedule on your own time. That isn’t what you are paid for! And what they call incentives... After being here for two weeks, I can’t even look at fast food anymore, so I’m not interested in a free meal! An

album of some local group that are probably friends and family of Mr. Clark, who are looking for cheap promo? Not like I can insert it into my smartphone to listen and not that I would care! And the movie tickets they talk so much about! It is to a second run movie theater in some scary neighborhood!” When asked what they would prefer instead, several crew members chimed in, “It would be cool to have something meaningful or what we even want. But what we would like even more is that there were more respect. We are adults and we are constantly scolded. Mr. Clark does not show up here a lot, but when he does, we have to go to a crew meeting and all we hear is how bad and irresponsible we are. Do they think we want to have bad service? No! We want to be proud of what we do!”