Decision Quality Practicum
Sample Course Syllabus

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This is an experiential workshop that provides participants with practical experience in applying the process and tools of decision consulting. Participants work in teams on a comprehensive case exercise to frame a decision, interview experts, analyze alternative strategies, and conduct dialogues with decision-makers. Teams are coached by experienced decision consultants in a high-feedback environment.

Team Exercise: Framing the Strategic Direction
Participants are divided into teams and begin to develop an initial frame for the case exercise using a decision hierarchy. Teams also create a strategy table to clearly define the choices within the scope of the project, as they have defined it.

Team Exercise: Creative Alternatives
Teams think creatively and broadly about other strategies to create maximum value in the case. Although they may have already constructed an initial set of alternatives, teams can often create better strategies by working through some creativity exercises (e.g., brainstorming, role-playing, or “backcasting”) and some structured techniques such as examining corporate challenges and real options.

Decision Dialogue: Frame and Alternatives
Teams prepare for and meet with instructors playing the roles of decision-makers. They discuss their progress on the project to date and receive feedback on the scope and strategic directions they have chosen. The objectives of this session are threefold: for participants to practice clearly communicating what they have learned so far, for them to listen well to the needs and advice of the decision-makers, and for the instructors to guide the teams in a direction consistent with the information and analysis tools to be provided later in the course. At the conclusion of the dialogue, instructors provide feedback on what went well in the dialogue and what they would have done differently.

Model Structure, Spreadsheet, and Information
We distribute Excel spreadsheets to each participant, which encompass the alternatives identified in the decision dialogue on frame and alternatives. We review the model structure and information with the teams to prepare them to use the spreadsheets to evaluate the alternatives.

Team Exercise: Base Case and Sensitivity Analysis
Teams use the spreadsheets for base case analysis and developing insight into the primary drivers of value and risk. The teams also produce a tornado diagram (using software provided) to help identify the uncertainties that merit careful assessment and analysis.
Team Exercise: Probability Assessment
A critically important skill in decision analysis is assessing information that is both meaningful and reliable. In this session, teams interview subject matter experts who have the content knowledge needed for the case, obtaining probabilities and ranges as appropriate.

Decision Tree Software
We describe the merits and drawbacks of the two most practical approaches for probabilistic analysis: Monte Carlo simulation and decision trees. We demonstrate the decision tree software that will be used for subsequent analysis in the course.

Team Exercise: Probabilistic Analysis
Teams begin by producing an expected net present value (NPV) and probability distributions on the NPV for each strategic alternative. From this initial analysis and sensitivity analysis, the teams identify the primary drivers of value and risk in the case. At this point, they may discover better alternatives, or “hybrid” strategies. These are hybrids in the sense that they are combinations of the best features of the initial set of alternatives. Teams analyze the hybrid strategies, again producing expected values, probability distributions, and deeper understanding of the merits of each strategy. They also use waterfall diagrams to illustrate the sources of value for each strategic alternative.

Team Exercise: Synthesis Results and Prepare Presentation
One of the more challenging tasks in decision consulting is synthesizing what was learned through information gathering and analysis – gaining clarity about the best course of action – and then planning how to communicate this to decision-makers. Teams discuss insights, plan how to communicate them, and prepare materials to present to decision-makers.

Decision Dialogue: Analysis Results and Decision
Teams meet with instructors playing the roles of decision-makers to conduct a final dialogue regarding their analysis results. At the conclusion of the dialogue, instructors provide feedback on the quality and clarity of the presentation and dialogue.

Applying This in Your Organization
We review the results of each team's experience. We then discuss the benefits and challenges of using the decision process in organizations, relating faculty and participant experiences and ideas on what works and what does not.