

MIRUNA'S MANAGERIAL MOVES: A SNAKES AND LADDERS GAME

Céleste Grimard
ESG – Université du Québec à Montréal
grimard.celeste@uqam.ca

Miruna Bicoli
Executive MBA Alumnus, UQAM/A.S.E. Bucharest
miruna.levin@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

This management development game offers a fun yet insightful means of reinforcing learners' understanding of managerial work. It provides a context in which learners discuss and build on their ability to handle the day-to-day challenges of managers. In this game, players maneuver their way around snakes and ladders based, in part, on their ability to successfully respond to dilemmas in which Miruna, a tech manager, finds herself. During the debriefing process, learners draw connections between their work lives and the dilemmas in the game, how they played the game, as well as the existence of venomous snakes and career-boosting ladders in the workplace.

MANAGERIAL WORK

Life's full of tricky snakes and ladders. – Steven Morrissey

In his classic *Harvard Business Review* article, Katz (1955) presents three essential skill dimensions – technical, interpersonal, and conceptual – in a framework that illustrates their relevance for differing levels of management. Katz proposes that the higher up one is in the organizational hierarchy, the less need there is for technical skills and the more likely it is that conceptual skills are at the forefront, with interpersonal skills continuing to be important, especially in leveraging the talents of others to contribute to the organization. Understandably, individuals' progression from their role as *technicians* to *interpersonal* managers, and then to *strategic/conceptual* contributors to an organization is laden with challenges. The process of reframing one's role from that of being a technician or expert who is a member of a team to becoming the supervisor of this team who facilitates the work of experts and then a manager of these supervisors is inherently complex. It requires that managers step back from and let go of engaging in technical work, which, previously, was their primary source of esteem, identity, and contribution to the organization. This is no small task. Moreover, with the role of manager comes the need to look beyond the present-day needs of one's own team to those of the broader organization in both the present and the future.

Beyond simply *understanding* the broader organizational context, the critical challenge for managers becomes enacting their roles as sense makers and sense givers (Gioia & Chittipeddi, 1991) to their employee groups, something that requires a different set of skills from those they habitually relied upon in their role as employees (Brotheridge, 2005). Indeed, employees fully expect their managers to be both sense makers and sense givers. This expectation arises even though managers themselves may be grappling with their evolving interpretations of change based on rumors and bits of information, all grounded in their previous experiences and accumulated knowledge (Brotheridge, 2005). Managers are expected to skillfully switch between the past (which refers to what used to work for them, the history of their team, and retrospectively interpreting experiences), the present (what is needed and workable now, what is changing), and the future (envisioning the future and planning for the next steps). Managers serve as employees' window to the world beyond their team. In this capacity, a manager "alters or guides the manner in which his followers 'mind' the world by giving it a compelling 'face'" (Thayer, 1988, cited in Weick, 1995, pp. 9–10).

Additionally, managerial work is complex, fragmented, episodic, and challenging. As Rensis Likert observed in 1967 and which is still true today, managers are sandwiched between their superiors and colleagues and the employees on the teams they manage. All these groups place competing demands on managers' loyalty, attention, and efforts. Their membership in several groups characterizes their role as linking pins (Likert, 1967), which has the potential to generate conflict, stress, and uncertainty as they are stretched, pushed and pulled in multiple directions. For example, whereas managers' employee groups may see budget cuts and changes in operational processes as threatening, managers, who have privy to the reasoning behind such events, are able to understand their impact on organizational performance more easily.

Moreover, for his part, Mintzberg (1973, 2004) argues that managerial work is far more complex, messier (Quelch, 2005),

and hands-on than what traditional models such as the one proposed by Katz (1955) have presumed. Indeed, in their interview-based study of the ‘real world’ challenges of 185 managers ranging from a supervisor of a two-person outdoor maintenance crew to the vice-president of an insurance company, Brotheridge and Long (2007) found that, regardless of their level in the organization, managers were grappling with and “sweating bullets” about interpersonal issues to a much greater extent than strategic or technical issues. Their top interpersonal challenges were dealing with conflict and communicating with employees, finding qualified, reliable staff, employee performance issues (incompetence, employee mistakes, laziness, etc.), and what they referred to as employee attitude issues (i.e., motivating employees to perform). Across this sample of working managers, their immediate concerns took considerable precedence over those that fell on a more distant time horizon. Where this places them on Covey, Merrill, and Merrill’s (1995) urgent versus important decision matrix is unclear. However, given their responses, it appears that they do not spend much time engaging in the planning and long-term thinking of quadrant 2 (low urgency, high importance).

Taken together, the foregoing points to the complexity of the managerial role. In essence, as suggested by Neville (2020), management work can be viewed through two lenses: the performing lens and the thriving lens. When managers view their work through the “foundational, narrowing” performing lens, their focus is on the day-to-day getting the work done, i.e., employee performance and breaking down the barriers to “effective organization, coordination, and cooperation in firms.” The thriving lens, in contrast, takes a broader view of managerial work. When using this lens, managers look to “create organizations in which people can thrive, grow, learn, and carry out meaningful and fulfilling work.” Whereas managers appear to spend much of their time in the former, our challenge as management educators is to encourage managers to invest in the latter.

TABLE 1
Game Development Template

Generalities	
Name of Game	Miruna’s Managerial Moves
Game objective	Be the first to reach the final square (square 100) of the snakes and ladders game.
Number of players	3 to 5 players per game board (2 players and one game manager or 2 player dyads and one game manager)
Educational Aspects	
Theme	Managerial dilemmas
Purpose	Reinforce prior learning regarding how to manage employees
Instructional Objectives	a) review and test learners’ ability to apply course concepts b) recognize the need to work collectively to find solutions c) develop skill and confidence in solving managerial problems d) build self-insight into personal behavior
Basic concepts of the subject	Management work, managing your boss, working with colleagues, managing employees’ performance and other issues, managing your team, managing your own performance
Materials	
Snakes and Ladders board game	1 widely available Snakes and Ladders game board with 100 squares, 2 game pieces, and one dice
40 Dilemma cards	Each card includes a card identifier, a level of difficulty from 1 (easy) to 4 (expert), a dilemma, and several options for responding to that situation.
1 Dilemma Answer Key (DAK)	This contains the answer key for each of the situations in numbered order and is visible only to the Game Manager.
3 Instructions to Players sheets	An instruction sheet should be provided to each player/team and the game manager.
Game Rules	
*Refer to the “How to play” section of the Instructions to Players	
Criterion of Selection of the Winner	
The player/team whose game piece is first to land on square 100 wins. Alternatively, if all the dilemma cards have been played, then whoever is most advanced on the game board wins.	
Closure Activities	
Refer to the Debriefing section in the Guidelines for Instructors.	

Source: the structure of this table is an abbreviated version of Exhibit 4 in Certuche et al. (2019)

GAME DEVELOPMENT

Our role as management educators is to assist learners in appreciating and becoming more skilled in addressing the wide range of challenges that are part of managerial work. We conceived this game with that purpose in mind. This game reinforces and builds on the knowledge and skills that learners obtain in management courses in four ways. First, this game serves as both a review for learners and a test of their ability to apply course concepts since they must draw on what they learned in their management courses to resolve the game's dilemmas. Second, by working as a team to resolve dilemmas, they learn that they are not alone (as managers sometimes feel) and that, collectively, they may be better able to find appropriate solutions than in their individual silos. Third, since the dilemmas presented in the game reflect situations that managers are likely to encounter in the workplace, the game offers a problem-solving process to learners that may serve them well in the workplace. And, finally, through the debriefing process, the game offers learners an opportunity for self-reflection regarding their choices in playing the game. It is possible that how learners play the game parallels how they deal with challenges more generally. For example, the choice of difficult dilemma cards may signal a willingness to face challenging problems directly rather than avoiding them. Also, just as in the workplace, learners may experience discouragement and setbacks or feel a lack of control, or even stuck. How they handle these obstacles may reflect their levels of perseverance and resilience more generally.

To develop this game, we followed the design process presented by Certuche, Lopez, and Vasquez (2019), which is based on the methodology of Gómez (2010). This approach clearly defines the process of developing a game and, thus, ensures that steps are not missed. We have outlined these steps in Table 1 (an abbreviated version of Exhibit 4 in Certuche et al., 2019), which presents the essential elements of the game.

GUIDELINES FOR INSTRUCTORS

Purpose/audience of the game: This game is intended to reinforce learners' understanding of managerial work. More specifically, it can serve three sub-purposes:

1. End of course summary/capstone activity – Through the multiple readings, activities, and lectures of a senior undergraduate or MBA level management skills course, students learn a great deal about the nature and challenges of managerial work. This game invites students to apply what they have learned in their course. Students are presented with managerial dilemmas, and they base their resolution of these dilemmas on the concepts, readings, and strategies learned in their course. In this manner, the game can serve as a review of what they have learned in their course.
2. Pre-test and post-test of course learning – The game can be played at the start of a management course and then at the end of this course as a way of evaluating improvements in students' learning arising from the course. Optionally, details of students' participation in the game can be recorded (by an observer or video capture) to facilitate post-game analyses of differences. For example, perhaps a student who was initially cautious and uncertain in responding to dilemmas has become more confident in doing so at the end of a management course. (Two cautions: First, improvements in addressing dilemmas may be due to having prior experience in playing the game. Second, as suggested by a reviewer, instructors may wish to experiment to determine how best to allocate the time available between playing and debriefing the game. To quote the reviewer,
Which is worse? Playing the game without debriefing or debriefing without playing the game? The question could be answered by a study wherein one section of the class plays the game without debriefing and another gets a debriefing without playing the game. Numbers permitting, one might also include a section that plays the game with 10% of the time allocated to debriefing and a section that plays the game with 20% of the time allocated to debriefing. Which section of the class will score the highest in the final exam?
3. Element of a management development program – The game could be played in the context of a management development program in which inexperienced managers are introduced to important aspects of managerial work. In this case, experienced managers can play the role of Game Managers and serve as mentors to the players. Teaching and learning can occur on the spot as dilemmas are presented and discussed. Thus, rather than being a review of prior learning, the game could be an integral part of the learning process.

Preparation (before gameplay): There are several decisions and preparations required before the start of the game:

1. Consider the amount of time you have available for both the game and debriefing and how much time you wish to allocate to each. This is an important decision that should be made in accordance with your objectives for playing the game. There are trade-offs: when most of the time is invested in playing the game, learners address more dilemmas, which in itself is a good learning experience. However, when more time is invested in debriefing the game, students may develop a better understanding of their own tendencies as well as how to address managerial dilemmas more generally.
2. Ensure that there is one set of materials available for each group of three to five learners. It is possible to make your own snakes and ladders game boards using templates found online. One set of Dilemma cards, as presented below, must be printed per game board before starting the game. Also, you must obtain a copy of the Dilemma Answer Key from the first author of this article and print one copy per game board before starting the game.
3. If desired, before the game, you may wish to review the topics and situations addressed in the Dilemma cards as well as

the Dilemma Answer Key. If you consider certain topics to be particularly sensitive or unsuitable for your group of learners, for example, employee suicide (Dilemma card #4), you may exclude those cards from the game.

4. Determine how you will group learners given their numbers and nature.
5. Arrange tables and chairs so that the game board and other materials can be easily accessed by all players.
6. Determine whether you will provide a prize of some sort to winners, for example, chocolate bars, a bonus point added to their final grade, a faculty pen or pad of paper, a coffee outing with you, etc.

During gameplay:

1. Place learners in groups of three to five.
2. Explain that this game will provide learners with a chance to apply everything that they have learned about management throughout their course.
3. If you are offering a prize, announce that winners will receive a prize.
4. Provide materials to learners. Provide one "Instructions to Players" sheet per group or per learner, as desired.
5. Provide overall supervision to ensure that the game is progressing as expected.
6. If there is a specific time period within which learners must finish playing the game, announce this before the start of the game. For example, "You will have a maximum of 30 minutes to play the game."
7. At the end of this period, announce that "Time is up," and ask learners to stop playing and determine the winner.
8. You may provide a prize of some sort to the winners at this time, as desired.
9. Collect all the materials from the learners and ask them to remain in their groups.

Debriefing: Although playing the game in and of itself is instructive to learners, debriefing the game adds significant learning value. Should you choose to debrief the game, and this is highly recommended, here are some possible debriefing topics and questions.

1. **Being the Game Manager:** To the person who was the Game Manager, how did you feel about being assigned this role? Was there any symbolism in the fact that the person who rolled the lowest number became the Game Manager? What parallels can you draw between this and the work of a manager? [Some people may feel 'left out of the action' in this role. It is possible that some managers, especially those who are technical experts, feel that they are not in the heart of the action, i.e., that they are not exercising their professional skills. As a result, some managers may micromanage and insert themselves in employees' work, rather than trust employees to do their work. Alternatively, some people find that observing a game provides them with a broader vision of the lessons to be learned whereas others need to play the game to learn from it.]
2. **Selection of Dilemma cards:** When selecting dilemmas, what level of difficulty did you tend to choose? Did you avoid the difficult decisions because you weren't sure that you would get them right? Did you focus on the 'low hanging fruit'? What parallels can we make between this and managing? [Some managers simply avoid making difficult decisions and ignore them whenever possible or leave them for others to make. Eventually though, and sometimes because they have not been managing the small issues, they may be faced with larger issues that could have been avoided had they attended to the smaller issues when they arose. On the other hand, some managers purposefully focus on 'small issues' as a way of building their confidence, generating early successes, and making quick progress.]
3. **Guessing:** At times, were you just guessing the correct answer? Were you upset when the 'correct' answer didn't match your own answer? After a while, did you feel like giving up? Does this ever happen in real life? For example, is it possible that managers are unsure of what to do and, as such, simply use their best judgment and guess? [In real life, managers are not always 100% confident that they are making the best decisions. They are required to make their 'best guess' especially when they are pressed for time and in the presence of incomplete information and uncertainty about outcomes. They might unconsciously be accessing all their experiences and only, retrospectively, see that their decisions were solidly grounded on accumulated knowledge and experience. This is akin to what Malcolm Gladwell proposed in his book, *Blink*.]
4. **Being stuck:** Some players may never get beyond square one if they get nothing right – just as in real life. Did you feel stuck and unable to move at any point during the game? Were you never able to get out of the starting block? Or did you make progress at one point but then became stuck? What are the parallels between this and managing in real life? [Some new managers get stuck from the very beginning of taking on a role as a manager. They may be technical experts and are stymied by having to make managerial decisions. As such, they never get off the ground running. Others make some progress but feel discouraged along the way (possibly from the heavy weight of having to deal with challenges) and end up either progressing more slowly, if at all. They are plateaued and sometimes may even lose ground.]
5. **Relevance of dilemmas:** Some dilemmas are especially challenging and, thus, players advance further along the board if they get them right than they would for easier dilemmas. Correct answers for dilemmas may be awarded one to three free moves depending on their level of difficulty. How relevant/common/applicable to your situation did you find the dilemmas? How well do these dilemmas reflect the work of managers? Could you relate to them? [These dilemmas are, for the most part, actual events that managers have encountered.]

6. **Confidence in your ability:** How did your confidence improve or drop as you made your decisions? [Management is made of a series of moments and moves that influence – usually subtly – what happens next. Do you agree/disagree? Making good decisions tends to increase our confidence in our abilities as managers, whereas making wrong decisions can undermine our level of confidence. We may begin to question ourselves and, possibly, start choosing ‘safe’ responses to future decisions. We may become risk-averse or even avoid making decisions altogether. Keep in mind that “deep things are happening under the surface.” Part of the idea of the game is that it is in these ‘managerial moments’ where careers are made. Making the right moves – even small moves – along one’s career accumulates to become either progress in one’s career or hindrance from progress. Thus, careers represent the sum of small day-to-day decisions and choices that you make in areas that you may think are relatively insignificant in the moment, but that accumulate over time. One success builds on another. Success in handling smaller issues provides confidence and competence in handling larger issues. This “confidence” is personal, yes, but it is also reflected in the confidence that others have in you and your judgment. Thoughts?]

7. **Effect of landing on snakes or ladders:** If a player lands at the bottom square of a ladder, then they climb up to the top rung of that ladder. If a player lands at the top square of a snake, then they slide down to the bottom of that snake. How did you feel about this? Are there any parallels that you can make with the workplace? How did you feel: (a) when you landed on snakes and ladders? (b) when this happened to other players? Whether you landed on a snake or a ladder was outside of your control, which is sometimes what the workplace may feel like. Do you agree? [Everyone sees folks who “land on snakes” drop in ‘social position,’ and it is embarrassing. Both public shaming and adulation occur in the workplace. People generally want to be associated with winners but avoid losers. Although we might subscribe to the perspective that we “make our own luck” and that “it’s how we respond to challenges that matters,” it may be helpful to see that not everything is within our control, i.e., a certain randomness in events may occur.]

8. **Snakes and ladders:** What are the snakes and ladders that you have encountered in your work life? What did you do when they presented themselves to you? Have there been any surprising situations where ladders were disguised as snakes and vice versa? What is the best advice that you have for avoiding or dealing with snakes in organizations? How can one best locate ladders to boost one’s career? [Along your journey in the managerial game, just as in real life, you encounter snakes that push/drag you down to the pits as well as ladders that boost your careers. Sometimes, snakes or ladders ‘pop’ out of nowhere and influence whether people move ahead in their careers. Managers must be ready for their unpredictable appearance. Sometimes, “what goes up comes down” due to unfortunate circumstances such as office politics, power-grabbing colleagues (snakes), or a confluence of events outside your control. When others are offered ladders or we are faced with snakes, we may feel a sense of helplessness, injustice, or even a sense that others obtained a benefit inappropriately (through favoritism or political behavior). Alternatively, through the help of others (networking, mentorship, support, etc.), we are more likely to find ladders and make our way along them. Perhaps, you don’t realize that a path along a ladder exists until someone points it out to you. Or, maybe, your manager is being promoted, and she would like to move you into her position because she trusts you.]

9. **Optional rules:** What did you think of the optional rules that were available? Did you adopt any of them? For example, players who roll the number 6 received an extra turn: they were authorized to move their game piece six spaces and then go ahead and roll again (and move their game piece again). As long as they were rolling sixes, they continued moving and rolling. [The “rich get richer.” These are the ‘shakers and the movers.’ Those who are richly endowed with sixes have the privilege of continuing to roll a die.] Another rule indicated that, normally, just as in a workplace, two game pieces can be in the same square. Finally, another rule indicated that the last person to arrive at a square was able to move the current occupant to the previous square. [Two people can be up for promotion or can seem to be at the same point in their careers. But what if the fight is vicious/political, and the last person to arrive at a square downgrades the current occupant’s prestige? Sometimes, outshining the competition in the workplace too much can set someone back.]

10. **Deciding what to do (part 1):** How did you go about choosing your response to a dilemma? What were the “standard” types of response choices were presented? What are the “risks” associated with each of these response choices? Based on your experience, when do you think each response choice would be appropriate?

Response Choices	Risks	When appropriate
Tell HR	offloading responsibility, unable to exercise own managerial authority, might not get a solution that fits the team, may develop a reputation of being unable to handle 'normal' managerial situations (i.e., incompetent)	when the policy is inappropriate, when behavior jeopardizes the company or other staff, to hand off something that is really their responsibility
Tell your manager	same as above + may appear to be too dependent	when broader guidance is needed, if your manager wouldn't be happy if you made a decision without their involvement
Do nothing	may seem passive when courageous action is needed, may be seen as sweeping problems under the rug/too lightweight, may negatively influence operations, may reduce morale, may be viewed as incompetent by employees who expect action to be taken	when the issue isn't significant, when the issue will work itself out
Take a harsh stance	risk: seen as inappropriate, excessive, over-the-top, or authoritarian; may be harmful to your reputation if misapplied (this is the case for all misapplied response choices)	when operations are threatened, when an important rule is broken
Take a soft stance	may be seen as a pushover, may lower morale and productivity, may sweep the problem under the rug, and cause operational issues	when the intent was good, when there's a mix of positives and negatives, when you see hope for future improvement/learning
Find a collaborative solution	may be investing too much time in something that is actually clear cut, not every problem can be solved this way, may seem unable to make a difficult decision	when a solution can be found, when you see potential for the future

11. Deciding what to do (part 2): What are your general recommendations to managers regarding how to choose the best course of action?

1. Asking for help and advice is a solid option if you clearly do not know the answer. HR and your manager exist to support you and may have broader experience in the organization in similar situations. "Going it alone" can be seen as an egotistical move, i.e., lacking the humility needed to ask for help. At the same time, repeatedly and automatically seeking others' advice, especially when you are not bringing an analysis of the situation and potential solutions to the discussion, may suggest that you are unable to function independently.
2. Managing people is complex. There is no single ideal approach that will permit managers to resolve all issues: managers cannot simply apply a hammer to situations that require a screwdriver. They must do their own problem solving, consider the root cause of situations, examine factors in the organization and the people that may have generated the problem, identify a range of options (and not simply resort to their favorite response), and choose the response that is best for the organization, the team, and the employee.
3. Managers need to read the situation well and have the flexibility to use multiple approaches to respond to a situation. For example, they may choose a softened start-up and provide some space to make their approach work to avoid coming across as punitive. But they must also be willing to take immediate, direct action when necessary.
4. "Small becomes big." This expression means two things. First, managers need to be proactive and address little problems before they turn into big problems (which is what can happen if problems are ignored). Second, the day-to-day attention and actions of managers that might seem 'trivial' add up to influence the overall climate and productivity of their teams. Employees need managers who have their back, are consistent and challenge them to perform at high levels.

5. Managers need to act with courage. Sometimes, they need to ‘cut their losses’ and take the path of least resistance (by doing nothing or simply agreeing to everything to avoid conflict). However, managers who always do this lose the respect of those around them and become ineffective.
6. Managers must be politically astute. They must know how to:
 - a. play politics and use their influence (for issues that get blocked, while ensuring that they continue to respect the chain of command)
 - b. pick their battles (compromise may be needed to achieve the bigger goal)
 - c. advocate for their team (knowing when to do it and their responsibility to speak for their team)
12. **Summary observations and learning:** Any other observations? Are there any other parallels that you can draw between this game and real life? Is there anything that you would have done differently? Why? What did you learn about yourself and managing from playing this game? What lessons will you take home with you? What will you do differently as a manager given what you learned in the game?
13. **Quotations relating to snakes and ladders:** Here are a few quotations regarding snakes and ladders. To what extent do you believe these quotations are accurate, relate to your experiences, and/or serve as ‘lessons’? Are any contradictory? Explain. What other quotations about snakes or ladders have you heard?

Ladders
It’s better to be at the bottom of the ladder you want to climb than halfway up one you don’t. – The Office
You cannot climb the ladder of success dressed in the costume of failure. – Zig Ziglar
Create a ladder of values and priorities in your life, reminding yourself of what really matters to you. – Robert Greene
Management is efficiency in climbing the ladder of success; leadership determines whether the ladder is leaning against the right wall. If the ladder is not leaning against the right wall, every step we take just gets us to the wrong place faster. – Stephen Covey
Be a lamp, or a lifeboat, or a ladder. – Rumi
Some people are at the top of the ladder, some are in the middle, still more are at the bottom, and a whole lot more don't even know there is a ladder. – Robert H. Schuller
Courage is the ladder on which all the other virtues mount. – Clare Boothe Luce
Snakes
I'm like a snake sleeping on a rock. I won't bother you unless you poke a stick at me. – Harlan Ellison
If you see a snake, just kill it - don't appoint a committee on snakes. – Ross Perot
There's a snake lurking in the grass. – Virgil
Just as a snake sheds its skin, we must shed our past over and over again. – Gautama Buddha
Snakes don't hiss anymore, they call you babe, bro or friend. – PrimeWayOfLife
I'd rather eat crumbs with bums than steak with snakes. – SuccessDiaries
Life is a game with snakes on every level. – ThinkPozitive
Watch the snakes cause they watching you. – J. Cole
A dog will look down when he's done wrong but a snake will look you right in the eye. – Source unknown

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MIRUNA'S MANAGERIAL MOVES: A SNAKES AND LADDERS GAME

~ Instructions to Players ~

Background

Miruna is a young manager in her 30s who started managing teams at a very young age without proper support or guidance or supervisory or managerial experience. Miruna works in the high-tech industry, an industry that is developing quickly and where more and more young people are being punted in managerial positions without having the experience or the knowledge to fulfill their roles properly. As with many high-tech companies, the companies for which Miruna worked were growing at a fast pace and hiring employees with little to no experience. This fast pace added layers of complexity and urgency to decisions since there was not enough time available to properly implement and assimilate any changes before the next ones had to be put in place. In effect, these high-tech companies were ignoring the long-term impact of unmanaged and unassimilated change.

Like many new managers, Miruna thought that she could manage without help from others, but the more she learned, the more she realized how much she simply did not know. While managing teams of people from various domains, she invested lots of energy and effort to provide solutions to difficult situations as well as day-to-day challenges. Throughout her years working for several companies, Miruna was forced to make decisions quickly. At times, her decisions were supported by highly experienced senior managers, and at times she had to face the challenges alone, relying purely on her instincts and lessons learned from past mistakes. Yes, as a young manager without training, Miruna learned from her own mistakes, as well as from observing others and finding mentors who would help her grow.

In this game, Miruna is looking for guidance for her decisions in areas such as:

- Understanding a manager's role and taking initiative and risks to change things as needed
- Managing employee stars (innovators) and guardians (steady performers)
- Managing the effects of a flat organizational structure vs. bureaucracy
- Contributing to organizational culture and innovation (hiring the same kind of people/getting the same kind of culture)
- Motivating oneself, money as a motivator, salary secrecy
- Creating meaningful work for her team
- Making intelligent mistakes, being adaptable, and continuous learning
- Managing performance and discipline
- Mentoring and helping employees succeed
- Preparing her successor
- Engaging in politics and avoiding influence missteps
- Giving and taking
- Leading her team
- Dealing with conflict and bullying
- Being fair (interpersonal, processes, and decisions)
- Being ethical
- Dealing with stress

Miruna is facing some difficult situations, and she needs all the help she can get. The dilemmas that she faces are not always easy, and even with the easy ones, she believes that an additional set of eyes and ears will help her take the right path. Can you put yourself in her shoes? Are you up for this challenge?

How to win:

Can you make all the right moves on your journey to the top of the managerial game? Your goal is to rise to the top of your game and reach the final square (100) first. If all the dilemma cards have been played, then whoever's game piece is most advanced on the game board wins the race to the top of the managerial heap. You make the right moves by choosing the right answers for a series of managerial dilemmas that Miruna is facing. Wrong 'moves' (answers) set you back. Just as in real life, along your journey in this managerial game, you encounter snakes and ladders. Whereas snakes push/drag you down to the pits, ladders are a shortcut for getting to the top. Sounds easy? Beware: ladders that enable people to move on ahead in their careers pop out of nowhere. However, sometimes, what goes up must come down due to unfortunate circumstances such as office politics and power-grabbing colleagues (aka snakes).

Number of players and role of Game Manager:

3 to 5 players per game board as follows:

Option 1: 2 players and 1 Game Manager (3 people)

Option 2: 2 teams of 2 and 1 Game Manager (5 people)

The Game Manager does not play the game. Instead, the Game Manager:

1. Ensures that the rules of the game are followed.
2. Organizes the dilemma cards in piles according to their level of difficulty.
3. Maintains control of and hands out the dilemma cards as needed.
4. After a player has selected an answer for a situation, determines whether that answer was correct or not using the Dilemma Answer Key.
5. Ensures that the correct moves are made on the gameboard.
6. Manages the discussion (ensuring that it does not derail and adjudicating any disagreements that may occur).
7. The Game Manager has the final say in all decisions.

Materials:

1. 1 Snakes and Ladders game including 1 game board, 2 game pieces, and one dice.
2. 40 dilemma cards: Each dilemma card includes a card identifier, a level of difficulty from 1 (easy) to 4 (expert), a dilemma, and several options for responding to that situation.
3. Dilemma Answer Key: This contains the answer key for each of the situations in numbered order (visible only to the Game Manager). If a player chooses a highly inappropriate answer, their game piece moves back 1 to 3 squares; if they choose a 'not so bad' but still incorrect answer, their game piece stays where it is; if they choose the correct answer, their game piece moves forward several squares based on the dilemma's level of difficulty.

Time required:

Although an ordinary game of Snakes and Ladders can take only about 15 minutes, this version may take between 30 to 60 minutes depending on how much discussion occurs during the game. In addition, debriefing the game may require up to an additional 30 to 60 minutes or more. The total time required for the game can vary between 60 and 130 minutes.

How to play:

Overview: Using a "snakes and ladders" game board and a collection of managerial dilemmas, game players advance along a numbered route from 1 to 100 by selecting the most appropriate response to each dilemma. Some dilemmas are especially challenging and, thus, players advance further along the board than for easy dilemmas (if they get them right). Correct answers for dilemmas may be awarded moves of 1 to 3 squares along the board depending on their level of difficulty.

1. Getting started:
 - a. Every player/team rolls a die to determine who plays first and who will be the Game Manager.
 - b. The player/team that rolls the highest number goes first.
 - c. The player with the lowest number becomes the Game Manager.
 - d. Review how to play the game and use a majority vote to determine which optional rules, if any, will be adopted.
 - e. Except for the Game Manager, each player/team chooses their game piece and places it on square 1 of the game board. (The die is not used in the remainder of the game and may be put away.)
2. Movement on the game board:
 - a. If players have agreed to Optional Rule 8 (random dilemma selection), the Game Manager shuffles the Dilemma cards so that players are exposed to dilemmas randomly. [In real life, this is what will happen: they can not select the difficulty of the dilemma in front of them.]
 - b. The Game Manager gives the highest roller a Dilemma card, which they read aloud and for which they choose the answer that they believe is Miruna's best course of action while giving their rationale for their answer.
 - c. If players have agreed to incorporate Optional Rule 7, opponents must provide their answer and rationale at this point.
 - d. The Game Manager reads the 'correct' answer using the Dilemma Answer Key.
 - e. The player moves their game piece based on the degree of correctness of their answer.
 - f. If a game piece lands at the bottom square of a ladder, then it climbs up to the top rung of that ladder.
 - g. If a game piece lands at the top square of a snake (its head), then it slides down to the bottom/tail end of that snake.
 - h. This ends round 1. The remaining rounds are played in the same manner with play being alternated between the two players/teams.
3. How the game ends: The player/team whose game piece is first to land on square 100 wins. Alternatively, if all the Dilemma cards have been used, then whoever is most advanced on the game board wins.

Optional rules:

1. Play in teams of two so that two teams of two compete against each other. Members of a team can confer with each other to determine the correct answer. This might make the game an even better learning experience because there might be more discussion regarding the 'correct' or 'wrong' answer.
2. Everyone gets a head start by being able to roll a die and move their game piece however many spaces are indicated on that die.
3. Women and minorities and others who have experienced systemic discrimination start first (as a way of redressing past discrimination) and/or get the head start indicated in #2.
4. Players who roll the number 6 get an extra turn: they move their game piece six spaces and then go ahead and roll again (and move their game piece again). As long as they are rolling sixes, they continue moving and rolling.
5. Normally, just as in a workplace, two game pieces can be in the same square. As an option, the last person to arrive at a square can move the current occupant to the previous square.
6. To win, a player's game piece must land exactly on the last square. Too many points, and the game piece springs back. For example, if two squares are remaining, and the player correctly answered a question that is worth three points, then their game piece advances two squares and springs back one square.
7. For each dilemma, if the active player's opponent considers their choice to be incorrect, they may, after the player has made their choice, offer their answer and rationale. Once the Game Manager has provided the answer to the Dilemma, their game piece is moved accordingly.
8. Normally, the Game Manager places Dilemma cards in piles according to difficulty. The players can then choose the level of difficulty of the Dilemma card that they want to handle. However, players/teams may decide to address dilemmas randomly rather than choosing the difficulty level of the dilemma that they face.
9. The 'opposing' players/teams may choose to cooperate and help each other progress along the path towards square 100. For example, the teams can help each other select appropriate solutions to the scenarios. The game ends only when both players/teams have reached square 100, and everyone is declared a winner.

Resources/Further Reading:

Below are some potentially helpful readings for understanding the issues involved in addressing the various dilemmas.

Organizational structure and change

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Organizational culture

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3. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ouwcIR3ia3o> (The Competing Values Framework)
4. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IeBznTEi_2I (Who Moved my Cheese)

Motivation and rewards (ourselves and our team)

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3. Wrzesniewski, A., Berg, J.M. & Dutton, J.E. (2010). Turn the job you have into the job you want. *Harvard Business Review* 86(6), 114-117.
4. Berg, J. M., Dutton, J. E., & Wrzesniewski, A. (2013). Job crafting and meaningful work. *Purpose and meaning in the workplace*, 81-104. In Dik, B. J., Byrne, Z. S., & Steger, M. F. *Purpose and meaning in the workplace*. American Psychological Association.
5. Roberts, L. M., Spreitzer, G., Dutton, J., Quinn, R., Heaphy, E., & Barker, B. (2005). How to play to your strengths. *Harvard Business Review*, 83(1), 74-80.
6. Schwartz, T., & McCarthy, C. (2007). Manage your energy, not your time. *Harvard Business Review*, 85(10), 63.
7. https://www.ted.com/talks/scott_dinsmore_how_to_find_work_you_love (How to Find Work You Love)
8. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qFOMLzPt_4E (The Mexican Fisherman)
9. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=C_igfnctYjA (Job Crafting)

Performance management, failure, and learning

1. Morris, A., Grimard, C., Cooper, D., & Sherman, C. (2019). Recognizing and Rewarding Intelligent Failure. *The Routledge Companion to Management and Workplace Spirituality*.
2. Buckingham, M. & Goodall, A. (2015). Reinventing performance management. *Harvard Business Review*, 93(4), 40-50.
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6. <https://hbr.org/video/5561200070001/the-setup-to-fail-syndrome> (The Set-Up to Fail Syndrome)

Influence, politics, and leadership

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2. Grant, A. (2013). *Give and Take*. New York: Viking, 1-26 (ch. 1)
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Civility and bullying

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3. Bowes-Sperry, L., & O'Leary-Kelly, A. M. (2005). To act or not to act: The dilemma faced by sexual harassment observers. *Academy of Management Review*, 30(2), 288-306.
4. Gallo, A. (2016). How to manage a toxic employee. *Harvard Business Review*.
5. Porath, C. (2016). An antidote to incivility. *Harvard Business Review*, 94(4), 22.
6. Su, A. J. (2016) How to handle a colleague who's a jerk when the boss isn't around. *Harvard Business Review*.
7. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gS2GBq5IKAU> (The No-Asshole Rule)
8. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YmRKIZEXVQM> (How I Survived Workplace Bullying)
9. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eYLb7WUtYt8> (How to Start Changing an Unhealthy Work Environment)

Ethics

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2. Jennings, M. (2006). *The seven signs of ethical collapse: How to spot moral meltdowns in companies... Before it's too late*. Macmillan.
3. Maremont, M., & DeGeorge, G. (1995). Blind ambition: How the pursuit of results got out of hand at Bausch & Lomb. *Business Week*, 3447, 78-92.
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DILEMMA CARDS

(Print these pages and cut them so that each dilemma is on its own page.)

DILEMMA 1 – Level of difficulty 1

Miruna was an established professional who developed a good sense of what needed to be done over time. She didn't wait for her manager to tell her what to do. Instead, she took the initiative to resolve issues as they arose or, at the very least, to analyze problems and present solutions to her manager. As a result, Miruna became an independent employee to whom her manager simply delegated work. She didn't need any direction or external motivation whatsoever, and she thought that her manager's style was ideal. After a few years, Miruna was given her own team to manage. What managerial style is she most likely to employ with this team?

- A. Be very directive, but not supportive.
- B. Provide lots of technical and procedural guidance and support.
- C. Provide support but trust her employees to know what they're doing.
- D. Trust her employees to know what they're doing and be self-motivated, just as she is.
- E. Insist that they communicate with her only by email.

DILEMMA 2 – Level of difficulty 4

For some time, Miruna has been managing Charlie, an employee who is a top performer, an overachiever whom she trusts and knows that he will quickly and appropriately do anything she gives to him to do. As time goes by, she realizes that Charlie is not a good team player, and, in fact, he can be quite offensive to his peers. Miruna observes that Charlie does not do these things maliciously and that his attitude is coming from an inability to read and connect to other people's emotions and relate to them. As she is trying to figure out what to do, Miruna also finds out – unofficially – that Charlie may be on the autism spectrum. What should Miruna do?

- A. Directly and firmly tell Charlie that his behavior is not acceptable and put him on an improvement plan to change his behavior.
- B. Discuss this with Charlie's peers, gently explain the potential medical situation, and ask for their understanding.
- C. Ask the HR department for their guidance regarding the appropriate handling of this situation.
- D. Isolate Charlie from other employees with the purpose of benefitting from Charlie's contribution but reducing the potential for conflict OR eventually letting Charlie go.
- E. Inform the HR department but, at the same time, start a coaching program with Charlie to try to change his behavior.

DILEMMA 3 – Level of difficulty 2

Miruna has a direct report, Candace, with whom she gets along very well on both a professional and personal level. They often go to lunch together and have started to form a friendship. Other employees have noticed their close relationship, and rumors are emerging. Miruna is torn between maintaining a friendship that she knows is not affecting her ability to manage Candace's performance and addressing other employees' perceptions. What can she do?

- A. Change her interaction with Candace immediately and keep the relationship purely professional.
- B. Nothing. Continue the relationship since her management ability is not affected and she can maintain fair performance management. The gossiping will slowly go away once everyone sees that she is a fair manager.
- C. Gather the employees who started the rumors and give them a verbal warning: starting rumors and creating a toxic environment is against company policy.
- D. Fire Candace because a professional relationship is no longer possible.
- E. Ask the HR department to intervene and put an end to the gossiping and continue her relationship with Candace.

DILEMMA 4 – Level of difficulty 4

Miruna is managing three teams for a total of 35 people. The teams are diverse: some people are extremely extroverted and outgoing, while others like to keep to themselves. One day, one of the introverted team members, Al, does not show up for work. Miruna calls Al, but there is no answer. She then calls Al's emergency contact, trying to understand what is happening. The emergency contact does not know why Al is absent from work. However, as hours pass by, Miruna finds out that Al committed suicide the night before. How should she communicate this to the teams?

- A. Miruna should inform HR, who in turn should inform the teams. Getting involved would blur the lines between personal and professional matters.
- B. The teams should not be informed at all since this is not work-related and might cause them unnecessary trauma. Some team members might never find out otherwise.
- C. Miruna should contact HR and, along with HR and a trained professional (group grievance therapist), announce Al's suicide to the teams. Miruna should put group therapy at employees' disposal to help them deal with the trauma and hold follow-up meetings with HR and the therapist, even if this might bring personal issues to the surface and affect the teams on other levels.
- D. Miruna should gather and inform only the employees who were close friends with Al. She should ask them to keep the information confidential so that it doesn't affect other team members.
- E. Miruna should do nothing: she should allow the teams to find out about the incident on their own and then monitor and intervene if needed.

DILEMMA 5 – Level of difficulty 4

Miruna is managing teams that are working 24-7 on three shifts. She finds out that Jack, an employee who always requests night shifts, is acting strange and making other team members feel uncomfortable. Jack has moments when he doesn't make any sense and has sudden bursts of anger. Although he isn't directly threatening any of his colleagues, Jack is surely disturbing them during working hours. While discussing the situation with Jack's direct supervisor, Miruna learns that he has some mental health issues and that he is on medications that affect his mood. What should she do?

- A. Fire Jack. Obviously, he is not fit for work.
- B. Tell the other employees about Jack's mental health issues and ask them to be understanding.
- C. Do nothing.
- D. Tell Jack's supervisor that his medications are not working and recommend that they be changed.
- E. Tell HR to handle the situation.
- F. Help Jack's supervisor plan an 'intervention' with Jack to help him see that he needs help and how much the supervisor and the team care about him.
- G. Move Jack to day shifts with direct supervision to monitor the situation closely. The situation is not clear enough to take immediate action on Jack's employment status.

DILEMMA 6– Level of difficulty 4

At a company event where employees from all offices are participating, Miruna observes some managers engaging in ethically questionable actions. In particular, Miruna sees one of her peer managers, Alicia, consume illegal drugs with one of her employees, Devon, at a table near the back of the room. What should Miruna do?

- A. Call the police and, possibly, before they arrive, surreptitiously start video taping their behaviors.
- B. Inform her boss of Alicia's behavior. Make it his problem.
- C. Go up to Alicia and Devon and, privately, tell them that what they are doing is setting a bad example for other employees and insist that they stop.
- D. Do nothing. It's not her business.
- E. Join in. It must be okay if her peer manager is doing it.
- F. Document the behavior (ideally in collaboration with another manager) and send a report to HR for their information and/or action.

DILEMMA 7– Level of difficulty 1

One of Miruna's direct reports, John, who, previously, was a very competent worker has started performing poorly. After talking to John to try to understand what is happening, Miruna finds out that John is interested in changing his career path. How can she handle this situation?

- A. She should fire John so that he can pursue another career.
- B. She should firmly advise John to not let his performance suffer in his current job (or else 'bad things' will happen).
- C. She should do nothing. It's not her responsibility.
- D. She should send John to HR so that they can advise him about career opportunities within the organization.
- E. Miruna should have an open discussion with John and find out what career path interests him and help him develop in that direction.

DILEMMA 8– Level of difficulty 3

Miruna manages a local office that is part of a multinational company with integrated IT systems and security protocols. It is the time of year when the employee performance evaluation process and salary increases/bonuses attributions are undertaken. Miruna's IT Manager, Paul, tells her that he is outraged that other employees whose performance is poorer than his (in his estimation) are receiving higher bonuses than him. Through this discussion, Miruna begins to suspect that Paul discovered this information by – wrongly – opening a confidential file from the HR manager's email inbox. Paul verbally confirms this to Miruna. How should she handle the situation?

- A. Tell HR to handle it.
- B. Fire Paul on the spot, not allowing him to return to his desk.
- C. Tell Paul that this was inappropriate and that he should never do this again if he wants to keep his job.
- D. Ask Paul to find out what her peer managers are being paid.
- E. Do nothing. It's not a big deal after all.
- F. Give Paul a higher bonus.
- G. Discuss the matter with the HR department and higher-level IT managers.

DILEMMA 9– Level of difficulty 2

Miruna's direct report, Vince, manages a team. During Vince's day-to-day work, Miruna observes that Vince and Melinda, one of his employees, are 'close,' however, nothing inappropriate appears to be happening. She discusses this with Vince, and he assures her that an inappropriate relationship is not occurring. However, after a few months, Vince approaches Miruna and informs her that indeed a personal relationship has started between him and Melinda. How can Miruna handle this?

- A. Tell HR to handle it.
- B. Do nothing. If the relationship is not having an impact on performance, it is irrelevant.
- C. Fire Vince for inappropriate workplace behavior.
- D. Determine if the workplace has a policy that prohibits workplace romance. If it does, Miruna should inform Vince that this personal relationship needs to end since it violates the policy.
- E. Regardless of the policy in place, Miruna should separate the two employees (move one to another department), since the relationship can affect how the team perceives Vince's authority and fairness.
- F. Ask for personal (juicy) details.

DILEMMA 10– Level of difficulty 2

Miruna has been reporting to a new manager, Roslyn. Roslyn is not a specialist in Miruna's field, and, alas, she is completely uninterested in what Miruna is doing. Miruna sends Roslyn emails in which she describes the KPIs (key performance indicators) that her team has reached, she presents the positive feedback she received from clients, and she discusses future projects and plans. Unfortunately, nothing seems to be important enough for Roslyn to respond to Miruna's emails. Where does Miruna find her motivation to keep going? What should Miruna do?

- A. Do nothing. Roslyn, a new manager, must be busy. Besides, she should be thankful that Roslyn trusts her enough to not interfere with her work.
- B. Quit. She should read the writing on the wall: she will not have a satisfying work life with Roslyn.
- C. Do an end run and contact Roslyn's boss about this person's lack of responsiveness.
- D. Focus on growing her team and get the motivation not from Roslyn, but from the team that she is managing.
- E. Go to Roslyn's office and set up a time to meet. Perhaps she prefers to communicate in person.
- F. Ask HR to intervene.

DILEMMA 11– Level of difficulty 3

Earlier today, HR sent Miruna her employees' performance evaluation numbers from the previous years and informed her that she must have no more than three employees in the top category of "exceeds expectations." However, Miruna has five employees who are exceeding performance expectations. HR seems very focused on maintaining the numbers given by the benchmark system for end-of-the-year evaluations. What should Miruna do?

- A. Comply: give exceptional ratings to three of her employees; tell the other two that this is simply an HR thing.
- B. Give exceptional ratings to all five employees, arguing with HR that to do otherwise would be morally wrong.
- C. Ask her boss to resolve the problem for her.
- D. Talk to all five employees about the problem and see what solution they might envision.
- E. Talk with her peer managers about this and solicit their written support for her position that HR's policy is inappropriate.
- F. Send an email to HR cc'ing the entire organization in which she says that this policy is draconian.
- G. Stack rank all her employees making fine distinctions in their performance levels and select the three employees who will receive the top evaluations.

DILEMMA 12– Level of difficulty 2

Miruna witnesses Grant, a supervisor from another team, bullying one of his employees, Sam, and making fun of him while on break, in front of other employees. Grant reports to Miruna’s peer manager, George, with whom she doesn’t have a good relationship since they do not share the same values as managers. What should Miruna do?

- A. Inform HR (in writing and in person) about what she has observed.
- B. Tell George’s manager.
- C. Write an email to George about Grant’s inappropriate behavior (and consider cc’ing or bc’ing his manager).
- D. Intervene directly with Grant, informing him of the inappropriateness of his behavior while it is taking place.
- E. Do nothing since this is not interfering with the performance of her own team.
- F. Talk to Sam and see how he feels about the entire situation.

DILEMMA 13– Level of difficulty 2

Miruna has two strong managers, Mitch and Roger, who will have to manage the same team since the team size is too big for just one manager. Although Mitch has a very strong personality, Roger is more quiet but attentive and sensitive to employees’ feelings and behavior. In fact, they are complete opposites. How can Miruna make them work as a team and connect?

- A. Do nothing. Let them figure out how to work well together.
- B. Tell HR about the situation. Possibly, ask HR to send these two managers to a workshop on collaboration.
- C. Meet with Mitch and Roger and order them to get along under the penalty of both being fired if they can’t work it out.
- D. Split the team, assigning a group of employees to each manager.
- E. Meet with Mitch and Roger and discuss how responsibilities can be divided in a way that takes advantage of their strengths and preferences.
- F. Coach Mitch and Roger as a team and find common ground that will bring them closer.

DILEMMA 14– Level of difficulty 1

Miruna recruited and hired five new employees at the same time. She started training all of them at once, presenting the same information and having them go through the same process. Miruna observed that she has one very fast learner, three average learners who are following the ‘normal’ learning curve, and one slower learner, Claire. Claire is very dedicated and eager to put in the extra work needed to get up to speed. What should Miruna do about Claire?

- A. Tell HR about Claire and let them decide what to do.
- B. Fire Claire. She will never measure up to the quality of the other new recruits. Admit that she made a mistake in the hiring process.
- C. Do nothing. Take a wait-and-see attitude. Claire may catch up on her own.
- D. Invest extra time and attention with Claire, also asking the other recruits to help Claire get up to speed.
- E. Talk to Claire and tell her that she is slow and has to speed up her learning curve pronto or she will be fired.
- F. Talk about the situation during the training session with all the trainees as a way of creating competition between the trainees and encouraging the slower ones (such as Claire) to speed up through to peer pressure.

DILEMMA 15– Level of difficulty 1

Miruna is interviewing for her dream job as a Senior Manager for a big team in the field in which she has been trained and specialized in for over seven years. During the interview, she hears statements such as: “We are one big family here!” “We want someone who will always be available and ready to step in,” “We expect you to jump right in and learn everything on your own.” What does this tell her about the organizational culture of this company?

- A. Not much. She should contact HR and ask them what the organization’s culture is.
- B. It’s irrelevant. Organizational culture isn’t a big deal.
- C. She’s going to be pressured to be the organization’s matriarch, taking care of everything and everyone.
- D. This is a bureaucratic organization, as rule-bound as Miruna’s spider plant is root-bound.
- E. This is a dog-eat-dog workplace in a competitive environment.
- F. This organization has an amazing culture, where everyone helps each other, and they are being treated as family members.

DILEMMA 16– Level of difficulty 1

Miruna is managing several teams. Each team supervisor seems to have completely different behaviors and needs. What management style should she apply?

- A. In the interests of consistency and getting the work done, she should be directive with all of them. Let them know who's boss!
- B. She should leave them alone, telling them to come to her if they have any questions or issues. Don't baby them!
- C. She should ask HR for their help in figuring out how she should manage. After all, HR knows everything!
- D. She should ask her manager for their opinion. That's her manager's job, after all!
- E. She should emphasize being charismatic, being sure to share her vision and values. Everyone loves a charismatic leader, right?
- F. She should not pay conscious attention to her management style. Rather, she should let it evolve 'organically.'
- G. She should meet with each team supervisor to understand their needs and the style that would be effective given their competencies and motivation for given tasks.

DILEMMA 17– Level of difficulty 3

Miruna has two teams, each working on a different project. One team is performing well, following the same path as always, with very minor mistakes in the process of achieving their goals. Their goals are identical to those of their previous project and seem to be achievable with no increase or decrease in KPIs (key performance indicators). The second team is trying a new approach with their project that is completely different from anything that has ever been tried. They are promising to test some theories about increasing productivity and ROI (return on investment). Although the first team is reaching its target, the KPIs of the second team have decreased due to the time spent on fine-tuning the process. Which team should Miruna consider to be the successful team? Why?

- A. It's hard to say. Miruna should ask HR for their opinion.
- B. It's hard to say. Miruna should ask her boss for their opinion.
- C. The first team. They are reaching their targets, after all.
- D. The second team. They are innovating and, eventually, their performance might surpass that of the first team.
- E. Neither team is remarkable. Miruna should start the disciplinary process to light a fire under them.
- F. Miruna should ask the teams to compete with each other. The reward: they get to keep their jobs.

DILEMMA 18– Level of difficulty 2

Miruna's boss, Alex, is well known for being aggressive in his attitude. Alex is a disruptor who often bypasses her and talks directly with her team, giving them tasks to perform. How should Miruna approach the situation?

- A. Immediately tell HR that this is happening. Be sure to cite specific incidents. Consider filing a formal complaint.
- B. Tell Alex's boss about Alex's inappropriate behavior and ask them to fix the problem for her.
- C. Quit – or at least look for another job. You can't win with a boss like this.
- D. Talk with her peer managers about their mutual boss, seeking support and solutions.
- E. Meet with Alex, discuss how his behavior is undermining her authority with her team, and ask that he work through her if he has tasks that he would like her employees to do.
- F. Do nothing: Alex has authority over her and doesn't need her permission to talk to her team.
- G. Tell her team to NOT listen to Alex and, instead, just listen to what she says, given that she is their direct boss.

DILEMMA 19– Level of difficulty 3

Miruna manages teams for whom she is a technical expert as well as specialists who are not in her field. During the performance evaluation process, she observes that the salary of some of the senior specialists is very close to her salary. What should she do?

- A. Complain to HR, saying that this is inappropriate (due to a lack of internal equity).
- B. Ask her boss to redress this unbalanced situation.
- C. Discuss her situation with her peer managers and ask them about their salaries.
- D. Do nothing. She shouldn't rock the boat because she might be the one who falls out.
- E. Reflect on the complexity of compensation decisions and how external salary equity or scarcity of talent may sometimes trump internal equity.
- F. Quit her job: obviously, the company does not value her sufficiently.
- G. Reduce the specialists' salaries and tie this decision to a performance "motive."
- H. Start to be less committed to her work and perform at a lower level (to re-establish equity).

DILEMMA 20– Level of difficulty 2

Miruna is working with a project-based team in an organization that relies on a flat structure. For one of the projects, Miruna thinks that the team does not have an “overachiever group mentality.” In fact, because other members seem relaxed regarding the fast-approaching deadline, she believes that she is pulling the entire weight of the team. What can Miruna do in this situation?

- A. Ask HR to intervene.
- B. Tell her boss that the workload is lopsided and ask her boss to intervene.
- C. Do nothing. Complete this project as best as possible under the existing circumstances. In the future, she must ensure that roles and responsibilities (and accountabilities) are clearly defined.
- D. Schedule a team meeting and tell others to pull their weight or she’ll inform HR about their poor performance. Also, she can take the lead and assign tasks and accountabilities.
- E. Schedule a team meeting to review progress on the project and divvy up the remaining work.
- F. Go on a sick leave and “allow” the team to feel the effects of her absence. That’ll teach them!

DILEMMA 21– Level of difficulty 1

An employee from another manager's team, Sandy, has been spending time with Miruna, bringing her issues that she faces and asking for advice. The issues are never related to her manager or any work conflict but are more related to general management discussions, how to approach different situations, and what to do with more challenging cases. How should Miruna deal with this?

- A. Tell HR that she is mentoring Sandy, her peer manager’s employee and that her peer manager is not doing their job.
- B. Tell her boss what is happening and ask for their advice.
- C. Tell her peer manager what is happening, insinuating that there may be something lacking in her management style.
- D. Do nothing. Continue to offer informal mentoring to Sandy while being careful not to overstep her boundaries.
- E. Tell Sandy to stop approaching her and, instead, talk to her own manager or take a university course.
- F. Ask Sandy questions about her direct manager’s style and why she is discussing these issues with her.

DILEMMA 22 – Level of difficulty 3

During one of Miruna’s daily meetings with her team, a team member, Denis, raises his voice at Miruna and uses harsh language in expressing his dissatisfaction with one of his assigned tasks. What should Miruna do?

- A. Tell HR about this inappropriate behavior.
- B. Ask her boss and/or her peers for advice about how to handle this inappropriate behavior.
- C. Do nothing. Ignore the behavior. This is normal behavior. Denis was just blowing off steam.
- D. Fire Denis for insubordination (making an example for other employees who might dare to cross her).
- E. As soon as the behavior occurs, tell Denis that his behavior is inappropriate, and that respectful behavior is expected of everyone. Ask Denis to meet with you after the meeting to discuss his concerns.
- F. Agree with Denis and reassign the task.
- G. Put Denis in his place in front of everyone by raising her voice to speak over Denis and making sure that everyone knows who is in charge.

DILEMMA 23– Level of difficulty 2

Miruna’s best-performing employee, Colette, furiously tells her that she knows that the salary of her peer, Gale, is higher than hers. Whereas Colette started working in the company 1.5 years ago, her peer, Gale, who is doing the same work has been with the company from the beginning, gradually growing in the current position over the past 7 years. What should Miruna tell the employee?

- A. “Go see HR about this (or I can).”
- B. “I’ll ask my boss and peers about this.”
- C. “Let’s have a team meeting to discuss this.”
- D. “Hey, there’s nothing I can do about this. It’s the system. Just be glad you have a job.”
- E. “This person has been with the organization for 7 years, and salaries are in part determined by length of service and partly by position and performance. Moreover, please remember that the company has a salary secrecy policy and salaries are not to be discussed with peers.”
- F. “Take every second Friday off. That should restore equity and make you feel better.”
- G. “You have just violated our corporate policy of salary secrecy. You’re fired.”
- H. “I will make sure you are getting a raise that will put you over the peer’s salary.”

DILEMMA 24– Level of difficulty 1

Miruna has a team that is performing well. However, she sees that motivation levels are slowly declining since the employees are following a standard process and not much change has happened lately. Miruna feels that the employees are lacking challenges and have stopped learning. What should Miruna do?

- A. Ask HR for their advice.
- B. Talk with her boss or peers about how to handle this situation.
- C. Do nothing. It will soon pass.
- D. Meet with the team and threaten dismissal if their attitude doesn't change.
- E. Adopt a directive leadership style, planning work and intervening more often in the work of the team.
- F. Meet with the team to discuss how to boost motivation.
- G. To break the routine, plan tasks in a way that enables her employees to feel challenged and interested in their work.

DILEMMA 25– Level of difficulty 3

The company has been going through a phase of cost reduction due to seasonality that hit revenue harder than expected. The company will soon enter a transformation phase during which teams will feel intensive pressure. Crisis processes will begin in several operations within the company, including Miruna's front line department. HR asks Miruna if she can reduce her team size, which currently includes four team leaders. HR argues that, in the last performance evaluations, they saw that only two leaders were absolute stars who consistently overachieved. Miruna recognizes that these two leaders can help her keep and improve quality and efficiency if the status quo is maintained. However, she also knows that the other two team leaders are outstanding in crises and can quickly adapt to change, which helps her reduce the stress on the team and deliver results on time. What should she do?

- A. Explain to HR that all four team leaders are needed given their distinctive contributions.
- B. Ask her boss and peers for their opinion.
- C. Tell her four team leaders about the situation and ask them to collectively decide who goes and who stays.
- D. As a compromise, get rid of one team leader from each 'group.'
- E. Resign since this situation will likely be too stressful for her.
- F. Make sure from now on they all have stellar performance evaluations.
- G. Tell HR that she cannot make this decision, and they will have to inform the employees that they are fired.

DILEMMA 26– Level of difficulty 2

Due to increases in team size, Miruna has started the recruitment process for a team trainer. Typically, Miruna's company has been hiring only young employees who are fresh out of university with little to no experience. The two-year-old company is in full expansion, doubling its personnel every year. Miruna has three finalists for her position: a) Abe, a young and energetic fellow who would be a perfect fit for her team, but lacks experience; b) Ben, who is 10 years older than the average age in her team, with plenty of experience working in the bureaucratic corporate world; and c) Cal, a member of Miruna's team who is very young and inexperienced. What should Miruna do?

- A. Hire Abe.
- B. Hire Ben.
- C. Hire Cal.
- D. Keep searching.
- E. Ask her best friend if she would like the job.

DILEMMA 27– Level of difficulty 3

Miruna needs additional personnel for her team, but she knows that they are going to be difficult to obtain since she's been trying to work on this with her direct manager for a few months. Miruna's manager was not able to get the green light for her to hire someone. Miruna has all the numbers to support her request, but she is still getting 'push back.' Miruna has a very good and close relationship with the Human Resources Business Partner (HRBP) for her project, and she also knows (very well) the right-hand person of the HRBP who is handling the global growth of the company. The requests to increase her team size are being made from the project HRBP to the global growth HRBP. Miruna's manager would definitely not like it if she would bypass him. To whom should she talk regarding her request?

- A. Her project HRBP contact
- B. Her global HRBP contact
- C. Her manager
- D. All three of the above
- E. No one (let it sit till it becomes critical)

DILEMMA 28– Level of difficulty 2

Miruna feels ready to move to the next level of her career. She knows that a promotion is coming, but it will bring pressure to the team. She has two strong people under her, Charlie and Betty, but both lack some important skills and knowledge. What should Miruna's plan be?

- A. Hire someone from outside the company with all the needed skills.
- B. Start coaching both of the team members to see who the better fit would be.
- C. Start coaching Charlie, the person who has all the critical skills that are needed, hoping that he will catch up fast on the knowledge part.
- D. Ask her manager to give her a transition period where she would do both jobs until she finds a good fit to take on her role.
- E. Not accept the promotion at this point because doing so would put her team and the company's results at risk.
- F. Leave the decision in her manager's hands.
- G. Leave the decision in HR's hands.

DILEMMA 29– Level of difficulty 1

In the process of being promoted to a new position, Miruna immediately sees areas that she will have to manage that are completely out of her comfort zone. Aside from the fact that she is taking over a department that has been struggling for a long time, this department also handles a domain that she is not familiar with. What should Miruna do?

- A. Refuse the promotion.
- B. Take the promotion and try to learn on the job as best she can.
- C. Ask her manager if she can have a mentor or guide during the transition period.
- D. Ask her employees for their assistance in getting her up to speed.
- E. Ask HR for direction and guidance.

DILEMMA 30– Level of difficulty 1

Miruna sees that her top performer, Gentile is struggling lately. Through her numerous discussions with Gentile, Miruna realizes that she is under a lot of stress and at risk of burning out. At the same time, Gentile is her right-hand person, and Miruna is in the middle of a very stressful period, with multiple projects running at the same time. How should Miruna handle the situation?

- A. Invite Gentile to access counseling services through an employee assistance program.
- B. Ask HR to intervene.
- C. Lighten Gentile's load and reassign the tasks to others.
- D. Figure out, with Gentile, how she can do her job more efficiently (focusing on the top priorities).
- E. Tell Gentile point-blank that she needs to perform or else her job is at risk.
- F. Give Gentile a month off and take on all her tasks herself.
- G. Discuss Gentile's performance with the entire team, and use her as an example, hoping this will motivate her (and others) to work harder.

DILEMMA 31– Level of difficulty 3

One of Miruna's employees, Alina, is coming to her for a private conversation. Alina tells her that she has been feeling uncomfortable with some of the comments that other employees have been making towards her. This is the third time that Alina is in this sort of situation. During her investigation, Miruna realizes that, indeed, other employees are displaying inappropriate behavior. How can Miruna handle the situation?

- A. Fire the employees who are displaying inappropriate behavior.
- B. Tell Alina to toughen up.
- C. Ignore the problem; it will go away on its own.
- D. Ask HR for advice.
- E. Meet with all employees and discuss the importance of building a respectful workplace.
- F. Discuss this with HR and arrange a meeting with Alina and the HR department to document the case properly.

DILEMMA 32– Level of difficulty 3

Miruna's team has a very popular employee, Alex, who is creating negative disruption in the team by stirring up conflict, while not being the person directly involved in the conflict. Alex is using his popularity to start gossip and pin employees against each other. Also, Alex undermines Miruna's team leaders in front of the team. Because Alex is influential, the team believes him. How can Miruna handle this?

- A. Fire Alex immediately.
- B. Meet with Alex, tell him that his behavior is inappropriate (be specific), and begin the progressive disciplinary process.
- C. Ask HR to intervene.
- D. Ask her boss for assistance.
- E. Ask Alex's coworkers to help her build a case against Alex by recording conversations, etc.
- F. Let it go. If Alex is doing his job, that's all that counts.

DILEMMA 33– Level of difficulty 4

Miruna's HR Manager, Lea, slowly starts to misuse company funds. Lea is going to lunches that aren't needed business-wise but that are paid by the company, and she is not correctly reporting benchmark numbers to global HR in a way that results in an increased salary for her. Lea reports directly to Miruna from an admin perspective, but Miruna does not have the authority to fire Lea. Professionally, Lea reports to a Headquarters manager. Lea, in her position as HR Manager, is exposed to very sensitive data and information, including information about Miruna. How should Miruna approach the situation?

- A. Meet with Lea and point out the questionable behavior.
- B. Do nothing since she doesn't have complete authority over Lea.
- C. Contact the Headquarters manager who is Lea's boss and inform them of the inappropriate behaviors.
- D. Ask for her boss' advice.
- E. Gather more information and evidence as a way of building a stronger case.
- F. Tell Lea to stop this behavior or else she will be reported.

DILEMMA 34– Level of difficulty 1

Given that Miruna works in the high-tech industry, the technology that her company uses is always changing. Recently, the business has learned that a technology that they use will be 'retired' in the next 1.5 years. As a result of this changing technology, Miruna will have 10 developers who are no longer needed. How should Miruna handle the situation?

- A. Let go of all 10 developers.
- B. Gradually retrain all the developers in the new technology.
- C. Discuss the situation with the developers and ask them if they want to be retrained for a new career path.
- D. Ask HR to handle this situation.
- E. Do nothing. Deal with the situation when she is facing it.
- F. Tell the developers that either they learn the new technology or their job is on the line.
- G. Tell her boss that she shouldn't make this decision and the organization has to decide what to do.

DILEMMA 35– Level of difficulty 1

Because the company that Miruna is working for is new, not all policies and processes are in place. During the recruitment process, the decision was made to hire junior employees and train them for their roles internally. As such, most employees are being hired with little to no experience. During their day-to-day work, Miruna is seeing issues such as inappropriate dress in the work environment. How can she reinforce the rules and boundaries given that policies are not in place?

- A. Develop policies and processes that she considers appropriate and discuss the best way to implement them with HR.
- B. Manage each issue on a case-by-case basis.
- C. Ask HR to deal with this situation.
- D. Do nothing – everything will iron itself out over time.
- E. Meet with employees as a group and develop norms and standards for conduct in the workplace.

DILEMMA 36– Level of difficulty 4

Miruna has a very problematic, underperforming employee, Chana. After another poor year-end evaluation, Miruna wants to let him go. Chana has been through two documented improvement plans with no improvement, and Miruna believes that there is nothing else that she can do to help Chana improve his performance. Since Chana knows that his job is on the line, he obtained a doctor's note for a medical leave for three months due to “medical conditions caused by stress in the workplace.” Furthermore, in an email to the company, Chana claimed wrongdoings such as an inability to take time off or being contacted outside of working hours. Miruna has proof of the falsehood of these claims. How should Miruna approach the delicate situation?

- A. Fire Chana for poor performance and fabricating falsehoods.
- B. Meet with Chana and give him ‘another chance’ but with a ‘final warning’ (this is his last chance).
- C. Tell HR to handle this situation.
- D. Do nothing: let the chips fall where they may.
- E. Try to convince Chana to leave.
- F. Have Chana transferred to another department (give a glowing reference and make him someone else’s problem).
- G. Stop all communication with Chana and inform her direct manager and HR about the situation.

DILEMMA 37– Level of difficulty 3

Miruna’s direct report, Ionut, has informed her of a difficult situation he is having with his employee, Alan. Alan is very rude to Ionut in front of the team, always misses deadlines, and refuses to perform assigned tasks. When Ionut tried to reinforce the need to perform these tasks and respect deadlines, Alan claimed that he was being harassed. Alan requested a meeting with his manager and HR and specifically asked for Miruna’s presence as well. When contacting Miruna, Alan made general claims of harassment but didn’t want to give further details. How can Miruna proceed with the meeting?

- A. Tell Alan that the meeting can only proceed if he gives her specifics. General accusations without details are unacceptable.
- B. Hold the meeting, asking all parties to explain themselves.
- C. Tell HR to handle this issue.
- D. End the meeting and meet with HR and Alan privately and obtain details. Then meet with Ionut for his explanation. Then hold the ‘larger’ meeting to discuss the differing perspectives and determine future courses of action.
- E. Tell Ionut to begin a progressive disciplinary process.
- F. Tell Ionut to fire Alan.
- G. Suggest that Ionut file a counter harassment claim with HR.

DILEMMA 38– Level of difficulty 1

During a company event, Miruna’s best-performing employee, Megan, harassed another team member to the point of making them scared. Several team members told Miruna about how Megan crossed ethical boundaries. How should Miruna handle this situation?

- A. Ignore it. It was a one-time situation, and there is no evidence other than hearsay. Besides, Megan is a great worker.
- B. Fire Megan on the spot.
- C. Meet with Megan to discuss the incident, make it clear that the behavior was unacceptable, and ask Megan to apologize to the ‘harassed’ team member for her behavior.
- D. Get HR to handle it.
- E. Hold an anti-harassment workshop that makes it clear that the behavior demonstrated by Megan is unacceptable.
- F. Proceed with disciplinary actions against Megan.

DILEMMA 39– Level of difficulty 1

Due to increased demand from customers, Miruna’s company is making her department (including management, but not the entire team) work during the traditional winter holiday period. Unfortunately, Miruna and her team leaders had already planned their holidays. The rest of the team is working during this period, as usual, however, the company needs two managers to be available. What should Miruna do?

- A. Go on her holidays and let others sort out the problem.
- B. Ask HR to resolve the issue.
- C. Not take her holidays and ask for volunteers in her team to cover the shifts along with her.
- D. Go on her trip to Montreal as planned but work online from her destination.
- E. Roll a die: the two managers who get the lowest number must cancel their holidays.

DILEMMA 40– Level of difficulty 1

Miruna's direct reports are very happy doing their current jobs. However, she thinks that they are in their comfort zone and have stopped continuous learning. Miruna is always learning something new, and she feels that all her employees should learn at least one new skill per quarter. What can Miruna do?

- A. Change her expectations. If her employees are doing their jobs well, why stress about continuous learning?
- B. Meet with each employee individually and map out a plan for new skills to be learned, based on their wishes.
- C. Meet with her direct reports as a team, discuss the need for continuous learning (for their current jobs and future promotions), and develop a collective learning plan.
- D. Ask HR for their advice.
- E. Schedule learning opportunities (courses etc.) for her employees and inform them of this.
- F. Make a career plan for each of her employees and present it to them individually, explaining the importance of continuous learning.

DILEMMA ANSWER KEY (DAK)

Instructors may contact the first author for a copy of the DAK.