

SOUTHWESTERN ASSEMBLIES OF GOD UNIVERSITY

**Organizational Communication, Conflict Resolution, and Negotiation
LDR 5323-92**

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Assignment 7: Integrated Paper

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Introduction

In an effort to enact a turnaround for their operation, Merck Sharp & Dohme Argentina, Inc. (MSD) appointed Antonio Mosquera to spearhead this effort. Tasked with a “mandate to remake the insular subsidiary into a dynamic, modern business organization (Payne & Hogan, 1997, Revised 2006), Mosquera set about to change the corporate culture in a business climate and geographic location that resisted change. A key part of organizational transformation for Mosquera started with bringing in key people who could help him to enact his vision for change throughout the organization. Among his key leaders were Cristina Quinteiro, human resources director, Martin Rodriguez Hunter, sales director, and Silvia Ring, director of development and training.

As is often the case with corporate change in an environment somewhat hostile to change, efforts ran into difficulty in the form of a conflict of interest situation. Ring, in particular, felt pressure to violate new standards set for an internship program in the interest of bottom line considerations. Influence was being exerted on her to choose a lesser qualified candidate, who had political connections that could benefit the organization by way of a significant increase in sales.

People like Ring often find themselves in a delicate position which causes them to face harassment or fear retaliation for unpopular actions (Saleh, 2005). For this reason, Saleh (2005) recommends the use of an organizational ombudsman so that a person struggling in such a situation could have a confidential entity who would hear his or her concerns.

However, this is one of many useful functions that the ombudsman could serve in organizational conflict resolution. The ombudsman could mediate organizational disputes and take proactive measures in heading off potentially volatile conflict situations (Saleh, 2005). By so

doing, Saleh points out that organizations can take a significant step toward avoiding litigation. Even Jesus discusses the wisdom of negotiating a solution without having to take it to court (Matthew 5:25). Barkat (2015) points out that this model of conflict resolution is finding favor in the public and private sectors alike. The purpose of this paper is to explore resolving conflict at MSD by negotiating a suitable resolution inhouse.

The Onset of Conflict

Kimberly Strom-Gottfried (1998) cites Moore (1986), who gives a variety of sources for organizational conflict, which include inconsistencies in data, value conflicts, structural problems, and conflict of interests. The case at hand involves both a conflict over values as well as a conflict of interests. Pressure is being exerted against Ring for her adherence to standards that exclude the politically connected candidate, and influence is being exerted on her from within the company. According to Barry and Robinson (2002), “Ethical dilemmas are an inescapable component of the landscape of negotiation specifically and the management of conflict in general.” They add that the very nature of conflict resolution involves promoting understanding and communion among those with divergent interests.

Point of Contention

Mediating principled solutions and resolving moral dilemmas in an ethical framework are what allow the ombudsman to bring significant value to an organization (Miller, 2014). With that in mind, such a person would play an important role in guiding MSD toward a solution. While Mosquera had done an admirable job in charting a course for organizational change, empowering key people to take needed action, and communicating values that would facilitate corporate change, still some elements within the organization were not fully on board with the new direction, as evidenced in an attempt to engage in “business as usual.”

The Role of Communication

In the case at hand, communication played a role in fueling conflict, as it often does. An examination would reveal some areas that would deserve a little scrutiny. Waxman (1987) notes that situations that reflect organizational conflict usually represent a small part of trouble brewing below the surface. While this case has not revealed a significant schism up till now, taking preventative measures would preclude the deepening of discord. In this way, an ombudsman could assist in taking initiative in productive communication (Waxman, 1987).

Communication at the Outset

Prior to the events in this case, Mosquera developed a statement of corporate mission and values as part of his effort to change the culture at MSD by emphasizing ethical behavior. Included in their values are items affirming teamwork and open communication, open-mindedness and the freedom to express constructive criticism, a commitment to avoid adversarial comments about coworkers, and a respect for differing opinions. These values would have a bearing on the attitudes that provide the impetus for communication.

The beginning of tensions accompanied an effort by a midlevel manager to influence Ring to accept the wellconnected student into the program (without regard for the student's placement ranking) strictly for what the student can add by way of additional sales. The same manager also appealed to Rodriguez Hunter, who agreed that every effort should be made to admit the student into the program. He, in turn, also made an appeal to Ring to give the student placement in the program. These interactions caused Ring to feel pressure that she had to comply, even if it was at odds with her convictions.

The Evolution of Communication

Mosquera called a meeting with Rodriguez Hunter, Quinteiro, and Ring to address the

issue. However, he was vague in his invitation, not offering much by way of explanation. This left Ring secondguessing herself and perhaps feeling a lack of support from the top. Even so, Mosquera gave each an opportunity to voice an opinion and expressed an openness to hear the ideas of others. This is very much in keeping with the tone that he set for the organization and the values embodied in it.

Negotiation between Parties

Strom-Gottfried (1998) references steps to conflict resolution by Fisher, Ury, & Patton (1991). The first step in their negotiation process seeks to “avoid positional bargaining.” The second step seeks to “separates the people from the problem.” The third step involves shifting from “positions to interest.” The fourth step aims at avoiding jumping to conclusions while exploring mutually beneficial possibilities. The fifth step in negotiation seeks to find objective criteria for evaluation. Finally, for difficult situations, they recommend a form of “negotiation jujitsu.” This involves accepting the position of the other party instead of resisting it (Fisher, Ury, & Patton, 1991). Strom-Gottfried (1998) describes this last step as “the culmination and integration of all the preceding steps.” Armed with a strategy like the one suggested here, and ombudsman could work with the parties involved in order to come to a mutually agreeable solution.

Observable Emotional Patterns

Ring, having acted according to the guidelines for selection reacts with anger. Not only is she subject to pressure, but she knows that those advocating for the politically connected candidate were trying to work around her in an effort to get their way. Quinteiro is holding fast to her position that the candidate should not be admitted because he placed sixteenth, just below the cutoff. For her, an objective standard is in place and it should be honored so that the process will

be respected. After all, she has the responsibility to enact transformation by way of human resources, which means adhering to a hiring policy (along with the mission and values statements) that will facilitate cultural change. Rodriguez Hunter is experiencing some frustration of his own. Since he has the responsibility of boosting sales that had flatlined, he sees adding the candidate, who brings promising sales potential, as a way of fulfilling his responsibility. Proverbs 18:17 reminds us, “The first one to plead his cause seems right, Until his neighbor comes and examines him” (NKJV). Each of the three has a valid point, so they need help in arriving at a principled solution.

The Function of the Ombudsman

While each team member struggles with his or her frustration, a look at the bigger picture would show that this process presents a healthy dynamic because it is promoting an open exchange of ideas. This is good for the overall progress of the organization. Now, in order to move ahead, each party must learn how to negotiate with that bigger picture in mind. This is where an ombudsman would serve well. According to Waxman (1987),

In developing the ombudsman concept, it is important to maintain a flexible and open approach to conflict resolution.... The success of the ombudsman approach, in fact, depends on resourcefulness and on the ability to find or to create ad hoc solutions to new, complex, and unanticipated problems.

Sherman (1995) affirms the importance of the ombudsman having mediation skills, even though their approach to problem solving is more informal. Taking this further, Waxman (1987) lists essentials that go along with the position of ombudsman, which include confidentiality, institutional informality, feedback, and objectivity.

Steps toward Resolution

With the above mediation tools in hand, the MSD leaders can now work at a solution which takes the company's mission and values into consideration, while also considering the position of each of the parties involved. In other words, can they find a way that will enable them to adhere to their hiring standard while also accommodating the request of the sales director? On the one hand, by accepting student sixteen, the company could take a significant step backwards, a step decidedly in the direction of the status quo by allowing political and bottom line concerns to override principle. This would cause Mosquera to lose credibility, and it could also undermine the morale of those who support his efforts to transform the organizational culture.

On the other hand, the company does have a responsibility to increase sales and remain competitive. A decline in market share benefits no one. Adding someone who could help the company to maintain a competitive edge will also aid in advancing Mosquera's progress. Furthermore, the candidate with influential ties scored just below the candidate in fifteenth place. If it comes down to scores alone, the difference is negligible, yet the positives could be exponential. Is the system so rigid that it cannot weigh in other factors in order to make an informed choice? These are things that the directors must discuss openly, with due respect to the concerns of all who are involved.

A Suggested Solution

Some additional questions for consideration remain. For example, what does Mosquera have to say? Does he have an opinion one way or the other? What impact will the appointment have on the organization? Will it hurt morale, or will it help, especially if they are able to successfully negotiate a win-win situation? While these questions remain open, the following

solution presents a outcome which will likely be beneficial to all.

God's word says, "The integrity of the upright will guide them" (Proverbs 11:3a NKJV), and "The righteous man walks in his integrity; His children are blessed after him" (Proverbs 20:7 NKJV). The answer lies in the values statement. Having kept item number 21 "Involve employees in decisions that affect their word," the parties involved should (preferably with the help of an ombudsman) work through number 44 "Demonstrate that she/he is genuinely open to hearing different opinions. This will pave the way for a conversation between the directors that seeks to promote understanding. Number 56 "Work to make the company more competitive," and number 60 "Strive to achieve or exceed profit and cost objectives" do come into play in this discussion. They emphasize that the company should act in its own best interest financially when possible. However, the overriding principles at work here are expressed by number 37 "Forfeit personal or short-term success/gain if it means compromising the integrity of the company," and number 43 "Demonstrate honesty and ethical behavior in all transactions."

That would mean not hiring the well-connected student, but adhering to the hiring standard instead. In the end, the company should not sacrifice integrity for the sake of temporary profit. In the long run, it will end up costing the company more. If Mosquera loses credibility, then it will have an adverse effect on the goal of cultural transformation. Furthermore, it will undermine morale that they have worked hard to rebuild. On the other hand, adherence to their mission and values will lead to long-term productivity and profitability, which will come as a result of integrity, not at the expense of it.

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