Managing Information Organizations

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Thwarted by Authority

Case Study

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**Statement of the Problem**

In “Thwarted by Authority,” Ms. Delgado is confronted with three major problems in the organization. First, the power and influence that should come with her position is lacking. Second, the organizational culture is one of a lack of respect and communication. Finally, there is no avenue for conflict management in this organization and so the project again stalls.

Baldwin, et al. (2013) suggest that it is essential to define and structure the problem that needs to be addressed (p. 92). Even more essential, however, is “framing the problem correctly” (p. 96). In other words, before presenting possible solutions, one must truly see what the problem is. Baldwin, et al. ask succinctly, “Where is the real pain that we need to address?” (p. 513). Thus, the first task is to select the most urgent problem that needs to be solved. We have outlined the three major problems in the table below and ranked them according to urgency:

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | Not Urgent | Urgent | Very Urgent |
| Power & Influence |  |  |  |
| Organizational Culture |  |  |  |
| Conflict Management |  |  |  |

Since organizational culture is the most intractable of the problems, we have labeled it as “not urgent” as it would draw efforts away from pressing issues that can be immediately addressed. Second, while conflict management is urgent, it is actually an offshoot of the power and influence issue. Thus, we have selected power and influence as the most urgent problem. Ms. Delgado’s establishment of power and influence will help address the two remaining problems because her role in the organization will be more defined. As a result, our statement of the problem is as follows: The most urgent issue Ms. Delgado must address is the establishment of power and influence as the power struggles and poorly defined leadership roles within the management structure have significantly hampered her ability to enact the changes and fulfill the objective for which she was hired.

**Statement of the Facts**

In order to better understand the situation and the options Ms. Delgado has in relation to the primary problem, it is important to note the facts of the case as they relate to that problem. As Baldwin, et. al. (2013) say, one of the first steps of problem solving is to “determine the boundaries of [the] problem—that is determining what is truly germane to [the] problem and what falls outside the realm of the problem” (p. 100). This will be easier to do if the facts are clearly laid out in as impartial a manner as possible.

In “Thwarted by Authority” the following statements are germane to the issue of Ms. Delgado’s power struggle.

* The hospital libraries need to be streamlined and Ms. Delgado was hired to do this streamlining.
* The decision to streamline the libraries came from external pressure, not from an internal desire to change.
* Mr. Baird wanted to maintain the status quo and retain direct control over the library and therefore opposed the hiring of Ms. Delgado for the position.
* Mr. Baird is chairperson of the library advisory committee but is disliked by the other members.
* The committee uses a majority rules mentality, which is why they were able to hire Ms. Delgado over Mr. Baird’s wishes.
* The committee avoids contact and conflict with Mr. Baird.
* Ms. Delgado is not a part of the committee, but she meets with them once a month.
* Ms. Delgado reports to the committee on matters of policy and collection development and to Mr. Baird on matters of budget, personnel, and facilities.
* Ms. Delgado is the Director of Libraries and has direct authority over the other librarian and the non-professional who work at the two libraries.
* Mr. Baird is the Assistant Vice President of Education and Library Services; he has direct authority over Ms. Delgado and uses avoidance to stifle her department’s results.
* Mr. Baird resents Ms. Delgado’s presence, and Ms. Delgado dislikes Mr. Baird and his management style.
* There is virtually no communication between Mr. Baird and Ms. Delgado.
* When Ms. Delgado approached Mr. Baird’s supervisor she was rebuffed and told to handle the situation on her own.
* Mr. Baird informed Ms. Delgado via memo that she is not to approach the Associate Vice President or the committee members “behind his back” again.
* Ms. Delgado does not belong to a union

**Alternative Courses of Action**

While Ms. Delgado has many different options available to her, these are the six possible courses of action that represent her most feasible reactions followed by a chart elucidating the advantages and disadvantages of each.

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Course of Action | Explanation |
| Document Baird’s shortcomings | She can maintain the status quo for the time being, documenting all of Baird’s behavior in order to collect evidence she can use against him in future, whether as a form of blackmail against Baird himself, or as proof of his incompetence to his supervisor or to the committee. |
| Attempt to fulfill responsibilities on her own | Although she reports to Baird and to the committee, she could push forward with as many changes as she can oversee and implement by herself. |
| Attempt to influence Baird | She can ingratiate herself to Baird through dialogue. She might need to employ manipulation or flattery. |
| Attempt to form other beneficial relationships | She can go behind Baird’s back and develop coalitions with committee members and upper management in order to sway their behavior toward Baird |
| Undermine Baird | She can develop relationships with subordinates and with other departments to undermine Baird’s authority. This may include gossip or complaining to create sympathy with her side of the story. |
| Resign | She can leave the hospital, realizing she will not be able to accomplish the tasks for which she was hired and seek a position where the organizational culture is more compatible and her power is not so harshly curtailed. |

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Course Of Action | Advantages | Disadvantages |
| Document all Baird’s shortcomings | Avoids direct conflict  She obtains proof of his incompetence and ammunition should her lack of results be questioned | Doesn’t solve the problem, keeping her from fulfilling responsibilities  If discovered will cause greater rift with Baird |
| Attempt to fulfill responsibilities on her own | Avoids direct conflict  Shows initiative and problem solving skills as she completes at least part of the task  Makes it clear where Baird is hindering the changes | Doesn't solve the problem  There will be changes she cannot enact on her own  Keeps her from being a team player  Makes it appear she also has avoidance issues |
| Attempt to influence Baird | Gets Baird to help her  Strengthens position in organization  Healthier work environment | Resentment on part of committee members  Baird might not be receptive  Could exacerbate the problem |
| Attempt to form beneficial relationships | Gains powerful allies to back up her requests  Gain control of organizational resources  Increases visibility in organization  Provides people who care about her situation | May cause relationship with Baird to deteriorate  Expectation of reciprocity from those on same level  Considered sucking up  Increased office tensions |
| Undermine Baird | Undercuts Baird’s legitimacy  Demonstrates Ms. Delgado’s scarcity  Provides satisfaction that she is doing something which will impact Baird | Possible bad reputation in organization  Worsens relationship with Baird |
| Resign | Peace of Mind  Freedom to pursue other opportunities. | Loss of job and benefits  Potential impact on new job prospects  Possible blow to self-respect |

**Evaluation of Advantages/Disadvantages**

To truly appreciate the inherent consequences of each action, a careful evaluation must be made. In the following section, the advantages and disadvantages of each course of action will be examined to determine whether they provide the desired increase in power and influence in the organization. These evaluations will be listed under course of action sub-headings.

*First Course of Action*

By documenting Baird’s shortcomings Ms. Delgado avoids direct conflict. Avoiding the conflict doesn’t really impact her power or influence as it simply maintains the status quo at present. In addition, as Weeks (2001) states, “avoidance usually makes a problem or relationship worse” (p. 114). However, it does keep her in a position with potential to change things in future, but this makes it a very small advantage if it can be considered an advantage at all.

Obtaining proof of Baird’s incompetence and the blocks to her control of the project which he has put in place provides Ms. Delgado with the potential for significant influence. It also provides her with ammunition she can use to either blackmail Baird into compliance or to push upper management into taking action against Baird, so having the documentation does provide her with tools she could use to enhance her power. However, simply documenting the issues will not matter unless she uses that documentation in some way. Having clear documentation gives her clout over Baird and the possibility of making a change if she can get anyone to look at and acknowledge the proof she has gathered.

This is why the disadvantage of not solving the problem is so strong. Simply documenting Baird’s shortcomings does not address the problems she is facing in accomplishing the integration she was hired to do. In addition, if Baird were to find out it would most likely cause an even greater rift between them. This could have one of two possible consequences. It could reduce her influence further as it could make her look petty or sly. Contrariwise, it could raise her power in Baird’s eyes, making him realize she is not willing to just stand by and do nothing. Therefore, this looks like it would be a disadvantage, but it also has the possibility of being an advantage and raising her influence.

*Second Course of Action*

One possibility is for Ms. Delgado to attempt to enact the changes on her own. By doing this she avoids direct conflict with Mr. Baird. As with the first option, this doesn’t directly impact her power or influence and avoiding conflict could diminish her standing. However, since the management seems to have a history of avoidance, this wouldn’t necessarily be a detraction either, making it marginally positive.

By moving forward with the changes she is able to accomplish, Ms. Delgado demonstrates initiative and the ability to enact change even in the face of opposition, which could raise the influence she has, particularly among those who report to her. However, this might also be taken as circumventing the authority structure, and changes she makes might be called into question by upper management, which could undermine what little power she currently holds. In addition, Baird might react against her as he may feel she is a “[t]hreat to established power relationships due to redistribution of decision-making authority” (Collins, 2013, *Week ten*, p. 2). Acting on her own could clearly show what she is able and unable to do while dealing with Baird’s intractable behavior, which may raise her own influence and help those in upper management more clearly see the struggles taking place between her and Baird. On the other hand, this may also end up masking the real problems of Baird’s behavior by ostensibly showing that things have been accomplished.

No matter what changes she chooses to make, there will come a point when she is no longer able to work without Baird’s cooperation. This means that he will have to, at some point, see what she has done without his direction, and also diminish her power as others will see that there is a limit to what she can accomplish. Tied into this is the disadvantage of not being seen as a team player. By choosing to branch out on her own, she is not demonstrating her ability to work with others, which may hurt her standing in the organization when the work is reviewed. However, as was pointed out in the first advantage above, the organizational culture has a history of avoidance, so this may not be as much of a disadvantage as it might in another situation.

*Third Course of Action*

Attempting to influence Mr. Baird has several advantages. For example, he might be amenable to helping Ms. Delgado with her project of integrating the libraries. This is a real advantage, for as the case states, Baird has been standing in the way of actions getting done. While Ms. Delgado can do part of her job alone, it will be easier to do so with his help. However, it is worth noting that he has demonstrated intransience in the past, so his help is not a “sure thing.” Still, if he were to cooperate, Ms. Delgado would strengthen her position in the organization. This is a real advantage because it shows that Ms. Delgado has the ability to influence an antagonistic superior. The committee members have had little success in motivating Baird towards their choices, so Ms. Delgado would demonstrate power within the hospital library. Building a healthier environment is a bit more speculative because it relies on Baird’s reaction and the committee’s response. If Baird and Ms. Delgado are on the same page, or at least more cordial to each other, then the environment will be more productive. However, if Baird reacts negatively or the committee resents the move, then a healthier environment might not be achievable.

The attempt to influence Mr. Baird does carry with it some disadvantages, however. For example, the move might lead to resentment on the part of the committee. This could be a real disadvantage. The facts of the case have shown the committee does not hold Baird in high regard. A move by Ms. Delgado to influence Baird might be seen by the committee as a “sell out move.” This could further isolate her. In addition, Baird might not be receptive. He does not seem to appreciate having to answer to anybody. His power has been diminished by the hire of Ms. Delgado and he resents her presence. He could see Ms. Delgado’s cooperative offer as insincere or another way to chip away at his influence, which will widen the gulf. Finally, because of the tenuous relationship between all the parties involved, a move like this could breed resentment from both Mr. Baird and the committee leaving Ms. Delgado with no allies at all.

*Fourth Course of Action*

Collins (2013) makes the point that forming alliances can increase one’s political effectiveness (*Week nine*, p.4). By forming beneficial relationships, Ms Delgado can gain powerful allies who back up her requests and possibly allow her project to move forward despite Baird’s actions. Indeed, they may provide her with different ways to work with or around Baird and access to other resources available to managers within the organization. It will also boost her visibility in the company, and make it more difficult for Baird to fire her at the end of the year without his actions being questioned. The final advantage is a personal one of gaining people who care about her situation and provide support for her cause. The first three advantages of this option impact Ms. Delgado’s power and influence within the organization, while the fourth provides a personal boost for Ms. Delgado.

However, with this action Baird may view her developing relationships with others as threatening and distrust her more. Though her relationship with Baird may deteriorate, it probably won’t be much worse than it already is. There is also a strong possibility that other committee members or those in management may expect reciprocity or high levels of future commitment; this can be a disadvantage if she ends up in a toxic situation, but advantageous if she can continually rely on mutual reciprocity. Indeed, there is a decent likelihood that Ms. Delgado will be drawn into office politics and into increased office tensions, which may limit the power gained through allies and cause issue if any allies leave or are removed from the organization. If her behavior is perceived as sucking up it may give her a reputation, but that might not hurt her power in the company, since, according to Baldwin, et al (2013), people like to be flattered even if they know there are other intentions behind it (pp. 285-286).

*Fifth Course of Action*

Another option available to Ms. Delgado is the ability to ruin Baird’s relationships within the organization. By undermining Baird’s reputation, other parties working with Baird will continue to lose trust in him and may search for someone in his department who is reliable—Ms. Delgado. Damaging Baird’s legitimacy can boost Harriet’s influence with the committee and upper management but may also reflect poorly on the whole department, so while this may be an advantage it would be a small one. Though demonstrating scarcity by positioning herself as more reliable than Baird may be an advantage, it may also be viewed with suspicion by others in the organization, limiting the impact of that advantage. Finally, the primary advantage from this action is that there is personal satisfaction from getting Baird where it hurts, but this may cause feelings of guilt, which may turn that advantage into a disadvantage.

Before adopting this action, Ms. Delgado should consider that it may hurt her reputation in the organization, whether or not it succeeds. She may be labeled a gossip, and end up creating a political situation where she may not win. Indeed, this action is so drastic, that if Baird determines that she has engaged in this action, he may do all in his power to have her removed from her position with comments on her file. In this scenario, the disadvantages completely outweigh the advantages. This is not an advisable course of action.

*Sixth Course of Action*

Ms. Delgado also has the choice to resign if the situation becomes intolerable. Like all moves, it has its advantages. For instance, peace of mind is a legitimate advantage in that she won’t have to worry about this job anymore if she leaves. However, she might worry about her future prospects and in addition, her pride might be a little hurt, so these aspects could take away from the advantage. Also, given her statement in the case study, it would bother her to give up. A second advantage is that she can now seek employment elsewhere. It is important to note that she has the freedom to pursue other positions; however, we are not evaluating whether she will actually find a new one at this point.

In comparison, there are some serious disadvantages to the move. Loss of job and benefits is a true disadvantage. Leaving a major position after a short period of time because of job conflict might hamper her ability to transition to a new position. This is a legitimate disadvantage of leaving. Yet, since there is an explanation of why she left, this might mitigate the negative effect. Finally there is a possible blow to her self-respect. This could be a very real disadvantage. Though the case study indicates that Ms. Delgado is strong minded and committed to her job, she has still failed to accomplish her task if she chooses to resign. In effect, she has given up whatever power and influence she might have had.

The negatives would seem to outweigh the positives in terms of Ms. Delgado’s expression of power and influence within this organization. Leaving is an expression of self-power because she has chosen to walk away from an untenable situation. However, within the context of the organization, this eliminates her power and influence.

**Certainty of Occurrence of Advantages/Disadvantages**

The following tables are a presentation of the estimated certainty of occurrence of each advantage by course of action:

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **1. Document Baird’s Shortcomings** | **Probability** |
| Avoids direct conflict | 90% |
| Obtains proof/ammunition | 100% |
| Doesn’t solve problem/can’t fulfill tasks | 70% |
| Discovery cause greater rift | 50% |

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **2. Attempt to Fulfill on Her Own** | **Probability** |
| Avoids direct conflict | 70% |
| Shows initiative/completes part of task | 90% |
| Makes it clear where Baird is hindering | 60% |
| Changes she cannot enact alone | 100% |
| No team player/questions of avoidance | 30% |

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **3. Attempt to Influence Baird** | **Probability** |
| Gets Baird to help her | 60% |
| Strengthens her position in organization | 80% |
| Healthier work environment | 50% |
| Resentment on part of committee | 65% |
| Baird might not be receptive | 65% |
| Could Exacerbate the problem | 55% |

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| 4. **Attempt to form Other Beneficial Relationships** | **Probability** |
| Gain powerful allies/increases visibility | 80% |
| Gain control of organizational resources | 40% |
| Provides people who care about situation | 100% |
| Cause relationship with Baird to deteriorate | 80% |
| Reciprocity/Increased tension | 90% |
| Considered sucking up | 40% |

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **5. Undermine Baird** | **Probability** |
| Undercuts Baird’s legitimacy | 80% |
| Demonstrates Ms. Delgado’s scarcity | 50% |
| Provides satisfaction of action | 50% |
| Bad reputation in organization | 50% |
| Worsens relationship with Baird | 100% |

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **6. Resign** | **Probability** |
| Peace of mind | 60% |
| Freedom to pursue other opportunities | 100% |
| Loss of job and benefits | 100% |
| Negative impact on new job prospects | 45% |
| Blow to self-respect | 50% |

**Best Alternative Course of Action**

While undermining Mr. Baird and attempting to fulfill her responsibilities on her own are both expressions of her power in the organization, such actions could be divisive and lessen Ms. Delgado’s influence. Thus, based on our analysis, we have determined that trying to influence Baird is the best course of action, as he is focal point of the issues that are stalling the company. Also, according to the case study, Baird’s cooperation is essential for this project because he controls the budget, personnel, and facilities. These are vital to the integration project because they can determine how Ms. Delgado will proceed.

As Baldwin, et. al. (2013) suggest, power and influence are generated by successful relationships between people and such relationships need to be cultivated in a “proactive” way (p. 293). By reaching out to Baird and trying to understand where he is coming from in order to gain his support, Ms. Delgado is addressing the situation with “professionalism,” which entails dealing with social situations and “bring[ing] out the best in people” (p. 294). More importantly, such professionalism fosters an atmosphere of trust and respect (p. 293). Abels, et al. (2003) showcase this professionalism in their description of competencies, stating that an information professional “[b]uilds an environment of mutual respect and trust; respects and values diversity,” “[w]orks as part of the team regardless of his/her position or level,” and “[d]evelops and uses leadership and collaboration skills” (p. 13). Reaching out to Baird is an expression of these professional management skills.

As Jorritsma & Wilderom (2012) observe, “Communicative middle managerial agents who are made responsible for the task are one key to culture and climate improvement; these middle-level actors have to receive appropriate top-level support so that they can optimize the change success” (p. 384). From a practical perspective, there is one key element that outweighs the others in terms of an exercise of power and influence on the part of Ms. Delgado: Mr. Baird has been a stumbling block for the smooth operation of this organization. To garner his cooperation provides a twofold advantage. First, the library integration will proceed more smoothly. Second, Ms. Delgado will have achieved what nobody else has been able to do. She will have gotten through to Mr. Baird. Both her power and influence increases in the eyes of her colleagues. In addition, her position is solidified as a “go to” person whenever the committee needs something of Mr. Baird. This makes her position in the hospital even more essential.

The one caution is that the move could exacerbate the situation through resentment on the part of the committee and Mr. Baird. However, Ms. Delgado is already limited with how far she can go. If Baird resents her attempt, he will most likely withdraw his support even more by avoiding contact. The committee might no longer be willing to help, but there is no evidence that it is doing so anyway. She would be forced to accomplish whatever she can do for the project on her own. However, she is already in that position, so despite the potential disadvantages, an attempt to influence Baird carries with it the greatest potential advantages.

**Group Strategies and Responsibilities**

For most of the assignment, the group used brainstorming and discussion via Discussion Board to develop a consensus on the items we desired to present. The primary section that needed a more involved strategy was the evaluation of the advantages and disadvantages and the estimation of their certainty of occurrence. To complete this project each group member aided in brainstorming, in discussion, in writing portions of the narrative, and in review of the drafts.

During week 9 of the term Rebecca initiated discussion of the primary problem and statement of the facts. After continual discussion of this, consensus was reached on the statement of facts, and a general idea was formed regarding the problem statement. Kenya introduced possible courses of action later that week, which were discussed in detail by all three group members, with Rebecca initiating information on some of the advantages and disadvantages. Mike began the narrative early in week 10 and more involved discussion of the courses of action and their advantages/disadvantages ensued. Kenya developed a point system to rank the advantages/disadvantages for each course of action to help determine the best course of action, which can be found in the appendix.

In order to clarify this system and touch base for the completion of the project, we met via Skype. During this discussion, each group member chose two courses of action and examined each advantage and disadvantage, their point value, and their certainty of occurrence. We each drew up a narrative for their discoveries, which was shared with the others for editing.

There was no formal delineation of responsibilities. Group norms were formed through high expectations and trust in the other team members’ abilities. As a result, each of the members of the group engaged in the following activities:

* 1. Brainstorming
  2. Communication
  3. Construction of Narratives
  4. Review of Materials
  5. Consensus building

Rebecca was very resourceful and added to the team in many ways. She was very facile with technology, communicative, insightful, and was often instrumental in ensuring the team was on the right track. Mike was also very resourceful and integral to the team. He provided several insights, raised many questions which needed to be explored, was very supportive of team efforts and also ensured the team maintained focus. Kenya was instrumental in getting discussion moving and was often key in meeting deadlines and accomplishing tasks effectively. She provided vital insight into the evaluation process of the case study.

Overall, we felt that this was one of the most beneficial group projects we had worked on and we were very grateful for the cooperative mentality and supportive initiative each member took throughout the process.

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**Appendix**

Process for determining best course of action:

* 1. For each course of action, begin with a “0” point value.
  2. If the course of action is an advantage in terms of her power and influence, use the max value at +5. If a disadvantage, use the max value at -5.
  3. If there is a negative or positive aspect for that course of action, +/- 1 per aspect. (e.g. Baird not being receptive to Ms. Delgado's overtures is a -5, but the upper management noting that she is trying her best is a positive aspect, so add 1 to -5, etc.)
  4. Add results to get the overall value of the course of action. If positive, this indicates it truly is an advantageous course of action and if negative, disadvantageous.
  5. The highest overall score is the best course of action. If two scores are identical, consider certainty of occurrence.

Chart containing total points used to determine best course of action:

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
|  | **Evaluation of advantages & disadvantages** | **Certainty of occurrence percentages** |
| **Document Baird’s Actions** | +1 | +80% | -60% |
| **Solve on Own** | +2 | +73.3% | -65% |
| **Influence Baird** | +3 | +63.3% | -65% |
| **Form Relationships** | +1 | +75% | -75% |
| **Undermine Baird** | -8 | +60% | -75% |
| **Resign** | 0 | +80 | -65% |

Legend

+ = advantage

- = disadvantage