



E-PARCC

COLLABORATIVE GOVERNANCE INITIATIVE

Syracuse University

Maxwell School of Citizenship and Public Affairs

Program for the Advancement of Research on Conflict and Collaboration

Pioneer Scouts of Rose Ravine

TEACHING NOTE

The teaching note below highlights two approaches to using this case in an educational session. The first is structured around decision points and asks students to play the role of organizational managers. The second approach is focused on themes within management (e.g. culture, change, collaboration) and requires the students to explore the case in light of different topics. The case, like real life, is detail rich and would be difficult to use as a simulation.

Regardless of the approach taken, student should be encouraged to come to class with:

- The assigned portion of the case read
- Responses to the guiding questions along with their justification
- A list of contingencies not identified in the case which would impact their decisions

CASE OVERVIEW

Pioneer Scouts of Rose Ravine is a case study that examines the conflict surrounding a nonprofit organization that is entering a period of merger and expansion. Several strategic choices set the agency in a negative direction that requires communication, collaboration and creative problem solving to recover. Unfortunately, the culture of the organization, interpersonal conflict and the environmental constraints make this all but impossible from which to recover. The case is divided into three sections. Section one provides an introduction to the case and a summary of the relevant actors and the problems that they face. This includes the organizational staff,

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funding model, and direction for the future. Section two describes the organizational dynamics in which the conflict plays out. This includes the personalities of key staff and the culture of secrecy and negligence. Section three describes the chronology through which the organization came to its present state. The chronologic presentation creates multiple choice points during which students may suggest an alternative course of action. Section three can be used independently as a short case, but lacks many of the details that add to the case's complexity.

This teaching note summarizes the case, identifies major themes and key points for instruction that may not be immediately evident in the case, and introduces two strategies for use in a classroom setting.

MAJOR CASE THEMES

- Organizational Culture
- Organizational Change
- Collaborative Public Management

CENTRAL POINTS OF THE CASE

- Strong organizational culture while often advantaging organizations hindered Rose Ravine's ability to respond to its environment.
- The cultural change between older staff who had built their careers around the organization and newer staff who were more professionalized created a source of conflict.
- A lack of diversity in the finances of the organization prohibited its ability to respond to changes in the environment.
- Personal emotions about the organization trumped reason in making decisions about the headquarters and recovery from the economic crisis.
- An outsider was brought in to help the organization. Her detachment enabled her to approach solutions that were unfeasible for insiders.
- The negotiation with Buffalo Bluffs was hindered from the start by two differing perspectives of the current situation.
- Secrecy was pursued as a mechanism to manage public relations, but this secrecy exacerbated the public relations problem.
- Lack of communication and ineffective communication made the layoffs more difficult for the organization.
- Establishing a meaningful future for Rose Ravine required collaboration beyond the organizational boundaries.

USING THE CASE IN A CLASSROOM SETTING

This case can be used in either the undergraduate public affairs or masters of public administration classroom. While the case tends to focus on nonprofit management, it can be used to demonstrate the importance of culture, external variables and human resources practices in conflict resolution and organization change in a number of public and nonprofit contexts.

The case is designed to be used in two alternative ways.

Option 1

One option is to introduce the case sequentially with students addressing a series of decision points throughout this case. This can be done within the class context with each section of the case assigned prior to the class where it is to be discussed or with each section introduced within longer seminar classes with time for students to read the sections between discussions. Since the adopted strategy is presented following each decision point, instructors may want to hand the case out in a series of handouts so as to not bias student perspectives.

In addition to the decision points presented in the case, there are a number of questions that can be introduced to facilitate each section. Section one sets the context for the case. This section is designed to stimulate discussion about organizational culture, funding, strategy, and change. Specific questions that students should address include:

1. What are the advantages and disadvantages of strong culture? Is the presence of a “Pioneer Scout” way a good thing for the organization?
2. What advice would you provide regarding the renovation of the building given the current economic conditions and pending merger? Is this a situation where the time is right or where you shouldn’t count your chickens before they hatch?
3. What advantages and disadvantages do you see for the funding model? What recommendations would you make for the future?
4. In what ways is the merger of councils necessary for the future or a source of conflict to come?
5. What steps should be taken to prepare the organization for pending organizational change?

Section two introduces the interpersonal dynamics within the organization including the personality of senior staff and the board’s relationship with the organization. It invites students to move beyond the organizational sources of conflict and strategy to the role of personality and social dynamics in leading an organizational change.

1. Where do you place primary responsibility for the conflict that is emerging in the organization- with the board, the staff or elsewhere?
2. What suggestions do you have for reducing the conflict or using the conflict in productive ways?
3. Who should bear primary responsibility for setting the strategy and direction for the organization? What strategy would you recommend?
4. Are these problems just “personnel” problems or are there cultural elements that contribute to this conflict?
5. What is the role of collaboration in addressing the organizations challenges?

Section three outlines how the crisis unfolded. It examines the major obstacles that arose during the course of the expansion and realignment. This section invites students to evaluate the actions of the board and staff and to identify the role that culture and leadership played in perpetuating the conflict. These issues are much more implicit than in past sections, so student should be encouraged to make assumptions in light of missing information. There are several decision points built into this section of the case. Students should be encouraged to address their strategies for:

- Dealing with the breakdown in the Buffalo Bluffs merger
- Resolving the debt crisis of the organization
- Handling staff turnover and employee morale
- Managing the layoffs and accompanying challenges
- Enacting organizational change
- Negotiating mergers with other organizations

In addition to those addressed within the discussion questions students may also wish to discuss:

- Use of the bequest to support operating revenue
- Informing staff and volunteers of challenges in the organization
- Decisions that could have been made to prevent the eventual dissolution of the Rose Ravine council
- Carol’s handling of the tension that she experienced between the board, staff, volunteers and PSUSA
- Issues of public relations inherent in the case
- The role of organizational culture in the demise of the organization
- Best practices of organizational change that could have been utilized by the Rose Ravine Council
- Best practices of collaborative management could have been utilized among PSUSA, the Rose Ravine board and staff, and potential merger partners to improve the operation of the organization.

If the cases are presented prior to the class where they are discussed, students should be encouraged to prepare a one page summary response to one of the guiding questions. This helps facilitate the discussion and avoids issues of groupthink that are prone to arise during class discussions. Another option is to assign students a role in the conflict (e.g O’Flanigan, Cruise, Program Staff, Wagner) and ask them to discuss the case from their vantage point. While the complexity of this case limits its use as a simulation, individuals can engage in perspective taking to evaluate the case from the vantage point of different roles. They should be encouraged to evaluate the case in terms of the dominant themes of conflict, change, leadership, or culture.

Option 2

The second option is to introduce all three sections of the case at once. While this removes the decision forcing character of the case, it allows students the ability to understand the complexity of what initially seems like a simple choice. When the case is introduced in one segment, students should organize their responses around themes in the case rather than decision points. This section discusses the major themes and introduces guiding questions and supplemental readings. As with option one, this process works best when students are encouraged to write response papers prior to class discussion. The supplemental readings are beneficial to provide the students with a theoretical framework to answer the question.

Organizational Culture

Organizations need to create a unified culture when they engage in collaborative action. Rose Ravine is an organization that prides itself on having a strong culture: “The Pioneer Scout Way.” Yet, this culture was not nearly as unified as it initially appeared. Additionally, some elements of the culture, while strong, hurt the organization more than helped.

1. What are the advantages and disadvantages of strong culture? Is the presence of a “Pioneer Scout” way a good thing for the organization?
2. In what ways did the cultural differences among the actors affect the ability of the organization to succeed?
3. In what ways is the ultimate demise of the council foretold by the organizational culture?
4. How might the culture of Rose Ravine be reshaped so as to avoid the ultimate closing?
5. In what ways can one observe cultural differences in the concerns and positions of the case actors?

Supplemental Readings

- Khademian, A. M. (2000). Is Silly Putty Manageable? Looking for Links Between Culture, Management and Context. ” in J. Brudney, L. O’Toole and H.G. Rainey, (Eds). *Advancing Public Management: New Developments in Theory, Methods and Practice*. Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press.
- O’Reilly, C. A. & Chatman, J. A. (1996). Culture as social control: Corporations, cults, and commitment. *Research in Organizational Behavior*, 18, 157-200.
- Schein, E. H. (1992). *Organizational Culture and Leadership* (2nd). San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Sørensen, J. B. (2002). The strength of corporate culture and the reliability of firm performance. *Administrative Science Quarterly*, 47(1), 70-91.

Organizational Change

The council merger should have been easy. It lacked the characteristics of most difficult organizational changes: change forced by external factors, lack of internal and external support, and an ambiguous path towards achieving the change. In this case, it was clear that the organization would be changing in the future. Staff and volunteers were universally supportive of the change. While there were roadblocks, the path to the change was clear. Yet, the merger of the organization and the renovation of the headquarters were catastrophic.

1. What should leadership have done to improve the chances of a successful change?
2. What factors lead to more or less successful changes among nonprofit organizations? To what degree are those factors present or absent in the present case?
3. How well did organizational change agents consider John Kotter’s eight steps of leading change? If you were in charge of leading this change, how would you have utilized these steps?
4. Compare and contrast the approaches of O’Flanigan and Carol in their attempt to manage the change? What is the source of these differences?
5. How might broadening the change coalition have influenced the outcomes of the change effort?

Supplemental Readings

- Galaskiewicz, J. & Bielefeld, W. (1998). *Nonprofit organizations in an age of uncertainty: A study of organizational change*. Transaction Publishers.
- Jaskyte, K. (2004). Transformational leadership, organizational culture, and innovativeness in nonprofit organizations. *Nonprofit Management and Leadership*, 15(2), 153-168.

Kohm, A. & La Piana, D. (2003). *Strategic restructuring for nonprofit organizations mergers, integrations, and alliances*. Portsmouth, NH: Greenwood Publishing Group.

Kotter, J. (1996). *Leading change*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Collaborative Management

The successful survival of Rose Ravine requires collaborative management. This is true because of the affiliate nature of the nonprofit. The local board has legal and fiduciary responsibility, but the organization is also under the auspices of national guidelines. Additionally, the merger of Rose Ravine with Buffalo Bluffs or PSCI entails requires a collaborative relationship necessary to merge the cultures and meet joint goals. Consider the following questions necessary for collaborative public management:

1. In what ways does being an affiliate organization (ie having both a local board and national governing body) benefit and hinder the operation of Rose Ravine.
2. What personal, organizational and environmental constraints kept Rose Ravine from entering into productive collaborative relationships?
3. The merger process, unlike affiliation, is a cooperative and negotiated endeavor. What best practice of collaborative management were or were not followed in the negotiation?
4. Collaborative management offers opportunities for conflict (both productive and detrimental), creativity, and growth? What recommendations would you make to Rose Raving and PSUSA to increase the benefits associated with collaborative governance?

Supplemental Readings

Agranoff, R., & McGuire, M. (1999). Managing in network settings. *Review of Policy Research*, 16(1), 18-41.

Agranoff, R., & McGuire, M. (2004). *Collaborative public management: New strategies for local governments*. Georgetown University Press.

Ansell, C., & Gash, A. (2008). Collaborative governance in theory and practice. *Journal of public administration research and theory*, 18(4), 543-571.

O'Leary, R., & Bingham, L. B. (Eds.). (2009). *The collaborative public manager: New ideas for the twenty-first century*. Georgetown University Press.