

Using a Conflict Mediation Case in Organizational Behavior or Negotiations Courses: A Role-Playing Activity

William H. Ross, Jr. and Uzay Damali

Department of Management, University of Wisconsin – La Crosse, USA

Abstract. This paper offers instructors a new conflict mediation role-play activity for use in Organizational Behavior or Negotiations courses. The activity, adapted from actual incidents, allows teams of students to assume the role of negotiators in a dispute between different departments within the same organization. Each team is asked to use the Dual Concerns model (Thomas, 1992) to select the negotiation strategies they will use when they meet with the other team: *Competing, Accommodating, Avoiding, Compromising, or Collaborating*. They must negotiate in the presence of their General Manager who supervises both departments. Additionally, those assigned the role of General Manager can choose strategies from the Carnevale (1986a) Strategic Choice model of mediation: *Compensation, Pressing, Integration, and Inaction*. This Case Paper describes the role-play activity. The Teaching Notes offer instructors guidance for using this managerial mediation exercise.

Keywords: managerial mediation, Dual Concerns model, Carnevale Strategic Choice model, conflict management, negotiation, pedagogy, role-play activity.

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Case Overview

The case is set at a local cable television station in the United States. Briefly, a conflict arose between employees working in two departments. The people working in the *Sales Department* sold 30- and 60-second commercials to local businesses. They had conflicts with those who made the commercials in the *Video Production Department*. The salespeople often promised extra (free) commercials to prospective customers; while this helped ensure sales, it created extra work for those who made the videos.

There were other problems too. Salespeople complained about the poor quality of the commercials and argued that this necessitated giving free commercials. The salespeople also complained of recent “pranks” that the video production employees had played, intending to hinder their sales efforts. (The

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pranks occurred when the *General Manager* was out of town.) The Video staff complained of a “lavish” Sales Department “travel and entertainment” budget, while Video Production lacked the latest “cutting edge” equipment. The station recently secured funding for several new interns; how they were to be divided between the two departments was subject to negotiation. Finally, there were funds to upgrade the employee lounge. However, there was disagreement as to what furniture (e.g., a billiards table vs. table tennis) was to go into the lounge; staff in each department had preferences.

Students are assigned to one of three roles (Sales Department, Video Production Department, or General Manager). They must resolve these issues by using negotiation with the assistance of managerial mediation.

HANDOUTS FOR VARIOUS ROLES

Video Production Department

Assume that you are a member of the Video Production Department for the Super-Duper Cable TV Company. Your team is highly skilled. While some experienced team members have only a high school diploma, most have a college degree in video production or a related field.

Your team makes television (TV) commercials for local businesses in the various markets served by Super-Duper. Team members work with business owners or managers to write acceptable scripts; then the commercials are filmed (frequently on location), edited, music is added, and the final ‘polished’ copy is made for airing. It typically takes several days to create a commercial for a local company. Some customers are extremely ‘picky’ and occasionally commercials must be re-filmed several times before the customer is satisfied.

Local commercials are an important and growing source of income for the Super-Duper company. The good news is that revenues are up: Commercials are inserted in both local programming and national programming (including broadcasts, streaming, satellite broadcasting, and Internet). Traditionally, companies paid for airtime on television stations, and the Super-Duper company owned the commercial. Increasingly, copies of the commercials (e.g., on DVD) are sold outright to the local businesses; then the businesses can buy airtime on non-cable local TV channels (or on other streaming, satellite, or cable companies) and the firms can supply their own video content (e.g., DVDs) of their commercials to maintain consistent advertising. In response to this trend, Super-Duper has increasingly offered “bundled” advertisements, where Super-Duper acts as a “broker” and seeks to negotiate lower ad rates on multiple streaming and satellite platforms. This strategy has also resulted in increased revenue.

Video Dept. team members often travel to other locations to film. Therefore, it is important that everyone in the Video Production Department should work