

# OGL 481 Pro-Seminar I: PCA-Political Frame Worksheet

---

## **1) Briefly restate your situation from Module 1 and your role.**

On Thursday, April 12, 2018, two black men were arrested at the City Center Starbucks in Philadelphia on suspicion of trespassing. The two gentlemen had made a request to use the restroom, which was refused since they had not purchased any Starbucks products, and they were asked to leave shortly thereafter by employees. The gentleman declined the request, and the manager of the location subsequently took matters into their own hands and contacted the authorities to have the would-be patrons removed. It was later verified that they were meeting with another patron, Andrew Yaffe.

My role in the organization will be as an HR representative working with a crisis team to develop a strategy to deal with the aftermath of two African American gentlemen being arrested on suspicion of trespassing during an incident at a Philadelphia Starbucks that took place on Thursday April 12, 2018. My team will have to consider this issue from multiple frames (HR, political, symbolic, ethical, and structural) to respond to both public backlash and political fallout for this blunder. Immediate and effective responses are critical when dealing with a publicly traded corporation.

## **2) Describe how the politics of the organization influenced the situation.**

Starbucks takes great concern with their public and political image. Top-down decisions that affect the company at large are controlled by a board of directors who act as a functional hierarchy. One thing that remains consistent is the invested interest of founder and CEO Howard Schultz. While Schultz has always operated on a basis of altruism, there is no denying that pushing full-time benefits, insurance, and college funding for partners was a savvy political move for the organization.

Because the political frame assumes that scarce resources and enduring differences put conflict at the center of day-to-day dynamics and make power the most important asset, Starbucks has worked to eliminate resource scarcity by developing product branches and acquiring brands under the Starbucks umbrella. Still, the organization is not free from the concerns of competing stakeholders jockeying for their own respective interests (Bolman, 2021, p. 191). Specifically with this incident, the company had great concern over losing not only customers but stakeholders as well if the situation was not monitored and handled delicately.

Starbucks made the decision to make a public response of apology to the gentleman that were arrested as well as to the public, recognizing that the organization had work to do when it comes to handling incidents that may result in discrimination. They also shut down all company-

owned stores for anti-discrimination and sensitivity training on May 29, 2018. All partners participated in a curriculum designed by nationally recognized experts with the intent to “address implicit bias, promote conscious inclusion, prevent discrimination and ensure everyone inside a Starbucks store feels safe and welcome” (Starbucks Coffee Company, 2018, para 3). The politics of the organization dictated that a swift and public response was pertinent to saving face and keeping stakeholders happy.

**3) Recommend how you would use organizational politics for an alternative course of action regarding your case.**

Starbucks is already well known for being forward-thinking and politically savvy when it comes to their handling of partners, customers, and stakeholders. The company has closed its doors for partner training courses and curriculums on more than one occasion. In previous years Starbucks shut down for a half-day of training to reinforce quality beverage craft after CEO Howard Schultz had received reports of falling standards in stores. A quick response to issues is always politically necessary.

A good use of Starbucks political force would have been community outreach programs focused on helping those in areas with higher rates of hate crimes and discrimination. Starbucks has a lot of money that they can and do throw at causes that represent the organization's ethics and core values. I would propose that the company research bills and proposals on the house floor that support Starbucks anti-discrimination values that they might add their support and voice to in the public. Having a platform comes with the added responsibility of using it to do good. Starbucks could go a step further and show that they are willing to do whatever it takes to prevent discrimination not only in their stores but in all retail and food-service spaces across the country.

**4) Reflect on what you would do or not do differently given what you have learned about this frame.**

I would have acted as the company did as far as the public apology, the specialized curriculum for anti-discrimination and sensitivity training, and the shutting down of company-owned stores to ensure that the program was administered and assessed properly. A quick response and observable action were necessary steps in saving political face. Empowering partners to know the correct way to handle situations is important. Showing the public that you are willing to put your money where your mouth is by losing a half-day's profit nationwide is a calculated move from a political viewpoint.

I think my focus is that we could have gone a step further. Having a world's famous coffee company that prides itself in fair-trade coffee farming coalitions and giving back to its partners sets a precedent within the company: we care about people. Lobbying for causes that represent the core values and interests of the company as it pertains to this incident would have been a politically strong action. It would have meant something to the public, but also to the

partners and stakeholders. Many people have a personal stake in what the company does and does not say or do when issues like discrimination have the company under a microscope. I want to know I am working for an organization that is willing to go the extra mile, not just take a day of training and hope the whole thing disappears soon, which is how it could have been perceived by some.

## Reference or References

- Bolman, L. G., & Deal, T. E. (2021). *Reframing organizations: Artistry, choice, and leadership*. Jossey-Bass.
- Starbucks Coffee Company. (2018, April 17). *Starbucks to close all U.S. stores for racial-bias education*. Starbucks Stories. Retrieved January 12, 2023, from <https://stories.starbucks.com/press/2018/starbucks-to-close-stores-nationwide-for-racial-bias-education-may-29/>
- Starbucks' organizational structure [Interactive Chart]*. Organimi. (n.d.). Retrieved January 21, 2023, from <https://www.organimi.com/organizational-structures/starbucks/>