

OGL 481 Pro-Seminar I: PCA-Structural 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 affective responses are critical when dealing with a publicly traded corporation.

2) Describe how the structure of the organization influenced the situation.

Starbucks uses a “matrix organizational structure that combines several functional and product-based divisions” (Organimi, 2023, para. 7). Functional divisions include human resources and public relations. Product divisions include merchandise, ingredient procurement, and baked goods, as well as non-Starbucks brands that operate under the Starbucks umbrella. Top-down decisions that affect the company at large are controlled by a board of directors who act as a functional hierarchy. The board, along with product-based divisions and geographic divisions, make up the company’s organizational structure.

The company chose to deal with the situation in Chicago by making a public response of apology to the gentleman that were arrested as well as the public, recognizing that the company had work to do when it comes to handling incidents that may result in discrimination. A little over a month after the incident, on May 29, 2018, Starbucks closed all company-owned stores for anti-discrimination and sensitivity training. Nearly 175,000 partners received a training 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 company also made efforts to improve their training curriculum for newly hired partners to ensure the program reflects the company’s values.

The company was concerned primarily by two things: 1) public image and shareholder losses, and 2) preventing future incidents. Apologies and observable, actionable changes needed to be made to reassure shareholders and customers alike that the company puts inclusion and ethical principles first. Making the choice to close every location for half a day of business was costly to Starbucks, but far less expensive overall than doing nothing. This was a top-down

decision, with every store receiving the same training regardless of location or individual store needs.

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

The structural support of the organization creates rules, policies, procedures, and hierarchies to coordinate diverse activities (Bolman & Deal, 2021). Starbucks has had 50 years to design, develop, and improve upon their training programs and procedures. The company has also implemented technology to streamline training programs, including computer training modules and simulations. It seems that we could do better than just a one-off training day for the entire company that does not cater to the specific needs of store locations.

Incident reporting within stores allows for compilation of records specific to individual locations. More effort should be focused on investigating stores with a high number of incident reports for inconsistencies in company training, policies, and practices. Without performing an assessment there is little way to ascertain the root cause of the higher volume of reports from one location to the next. A report regarding a customer confrontation may be due to employee bias at one location, but due to an abusive or unruly customer at the next. All incidents are unique, and all angles must be examined. Bias and discrimination displayed by our partners is responded to with a zero-tolerance policy, but subtle or even unconscious bias can be difficult to detect. It is often only through long-term observation and reporting that we catch these issues and correct the course.

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

Starbucks has the capacity to form specialized assessment groups to be sent into inner-city stores to further investigate their specific needs regarding bias and sensitivity training. The employees at these stores will deal with incidents far more frequently than lower-traffic locations, and the incidents are often more intense with bigger consequences. While a standardized training program should be implemented company-wide, special attention should be shown to locations struggling the most with these specific issues. Support for the partners following incidents should also be made a priority. There were likely partners at the Chicago location during that incident who felt uncomfortable and unable to speak up or speak out against the actions being taken by their co-workers.

I would have made sure that notable and respected experts helped in developing the training plan that was put into place, but I would have gone a step further and dug deeper into the underlying issues high-traffic city stores face. Empowering partners to know the correct way to handle situations is important. Just as much as we do not want partners to act on bias, we do not want our partners to be subjected to bias and discrimination by others. We do not want our partners to freeze like a deer in the headlights in fear of doing the wrong thing when incidents occur. We need to protect our customers and our partners equally.

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/>