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Central Columbia Hospital, Scenario A: Transactional to Transformational HR, Instructor's Manual

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STRATEGIC HR MANAGEMENT

instructor's manual

Central Columbia Hospital

Scenario A:
Transactional to
Transformational HR

By Steve Riccio, Ed.D., SPHR

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Please note: All company and individual names in this case are fictional.

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The case begins with introductory information about the organization and is then divided into five scenarios.

Each scenario includes question sets for **undergraduate** and **graduate** students. A debrief is included with each scenario, but because management dilemmas can be resolved using a variety of solutions, expect that students may come up with solutions that differ from those included in the scenarios. This document contains only Scenario A: Transactional to Transformational HR. The scenarios are as follows:

- **Scenario A:** Transactional to Transformational HR.
- **Scenario B:** Retention.
- **Scenario C:** Talent Development.
- **Scenario D:** Technology/Social Media/HIPAA.
- **Scenario E:** Acquisition and Organizational Culture/HR Communications.

Central Columbia Hospital: Overview

Central Columbia Hospital was founded in 1889 as a nonprofit, community-based health care facility in northeastern Pennsylvania. This 116-bed, acute care facility employs 963 employees and is nestled along the Susquehanna River's northern branch in Briar Creek. The facility provides general medical and surgical services to the surrounding community of approximately 70,000 people. The hospital is proud of its tradition of upholding its mission to these communities by providing comprehensive health care services in a compassionate, caring and cost-effective manner while maintaining the highest level of professional excellence. The hospital is in the process of a yearlong celebration commemorating its 125th anniversary by partnering with the community for free monthly health screenings, hosting a summer carnival on the hospital's grounds and reaching out to local elementary schools to provide free healthy lunches each week.

Dr. George Stiller has served as the hospital's board chair for the past six years and is an obstetrician/gynecologist (OB/GYN) in the community. Stiller has lived and practiced in this community for more than 37 years and has delivered many employees of the hospital. He is known for being kind, gentle and truly caring, and can recall almost everyone in the hospital by his or her first name. Employees often seek Stiller's sympathetic ear to express concerns about everything from staff-to-patient ratios to the cafeteria food. Stiller takes a hands-on approach to his duties as chair and voiced strong concerns about the hospital's recent national search for a new president and CEO. Stiller pushed to keep the search close to home and cautioned the board of potential consequences to hiring a noncommunity member into such a pivotal role. In the end, however, the board launched a national search that resulted in hiring Anita Green. Green previously served as the chief operating officer for two community hospitals in Michigan and Indiana. Although Stiller plays quite a visible role in his position, the balance of the board members see their roles as ones of governance, not focusing on daily operations. As a matter of fact, most agree the day-to-day decision-making should be left in the capable hands of Green. Green knows that Stiller wanted to keep the president and CEO search at a local level. This created some tension between them when Green arrived to Central Columbia, and this tension still plays out occasionally during board meetings.

Green has been with Central Columbia Hospital for a little more than three years. When she joined the hospital, it was financially hemorrhaging from every service line. In the past three years, however, she and her team have turned obstetrics, radiology, gastrointestinal, and out-patient laboratory and surgery into revenue-producing service lines. Green is still concerned about emergency services, general surgery, orthopedics and critical care services. She knows that staffing these services with competent and experienced staff is essential to getting these areas to perform at the levels needed to make the hospital financially solvent.

Green knows that other areas of the hospital also need attention. Compliance in this heavily regulated industry continues to create substantial challenges, including a strain on the hospital's human resources (HR). Green feels the hospital is vulnerable to legal risks without a position completely dedicated to addressing HIPAA (the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act), Medicare issues, and regulations associated with the Pennsylvania Department of Health and the Joint Commission's criteria such as staff educational requirements, orientation documentation, patient care, and safety protocols and procedures.

Green has asked the board to approve a corporate compliance officer position as a member of the executive team. The current risk manager, William Toth, has said that he is not interested in expanding his scope to encompass all compliance issues and prefers to stay focused on patient safety goals. He has made great strides in the internal reporting procedures for patient-care incidents, and although the numbers are higher than they were two years ago, Toth sees this as a success because the hospital now has a better understanding of the issues and has started processes to implement appropriate changes.

Patient satisfaction has been on the rise, but it is still well below where Green and her team would like it to be. With an overall patient satisfaction rating of 78 percent, Green and her team know there is still a lot of work to do to reach a 90 percent satisfaction rate (a goal that is 5 percent above the national average), a target she set shortly after she arrived at Central Columbia. Although many patients feel the care is competent, the hospital still lags in satisfaction regarding communication of medical care to patient and family members and timeliness of treatment. The executive team, including the newly appointed vice president of patient care services and chief nursing officer, Ann Romero, has suggested that these scores may reflect a delay by nursing staff to inform attending physicians of a patient's status. Others on Green's team are concerned that her patient satisfaction goal is too lofty too soon, and they feel it has caused stress and morale issues in several areas of the hospital.

Green set the 90 percent patient satisfaction rate goal as a result of a patient and employee satisfaction survey conducted two years ago. Since then, the hospital has continued to participate in the survey process on an annual basis. These surveys have provided valuable data that have allowed Green and her team to establish several operational and patient care improvement initiatives. Green used the weeklong celebration of National Hospital Week in May to share the results with employees during her town hall talks. Green has used several occasions such as National Hospital Week to celebrate and educate employees on the important work they do and the reasons why it is necessary to continue to improve. Green has addressed several questions regarding the rumors of mergers during these meetings, and she is always candid about the real possibilities and the need for improvement.

Table 1. Patient Satisfaction—Most Recent Annual Report (Compared to Peers, State and National Average)

Percentage of patients who:	Central Columbia	Competitor A	Competitor B	State Average	National Average
Reported that staff “always” explained medicines before administering.	59%	57%	63%	62%	64%
Reported that their room and bathroom were “always” clean.	65%	70%	73%	73%	73%
Reported that the area around their room was “always” quiet at night.	54%	52%	48%	54%	61%
Reported that yes, they were given information about what to do during their recovery at home.	86%	86%	87%	86%	85%
Gave their hospital a rating of 9 or 10 on a scale from 0 (lowest) to 10 (highest).	62%	66%	75%	69%	70%
Reported that yes, they would definitely recommend the hospital.	62%	69%	78%	69%	71%
Overall	78%	81%	71%	84%	85%

Table 2. Selected Results from the Most Recent Cultural Assessment—Survey of All Central Columbia Hospital Employees

Question	Previous Year	Current Year
I would recommend employment here.	66.0%	62.3%
I am proud to work for this organization.	73.2%	71.6%
I often leave work with a feeling of satisfaction.	82.4%	83.1%
I have considered leaving during the past six months.	47.8%	51.5%
I feel there are opportunities for long-term growth at the hospital.	62.3%	60.4%
I would recommend the hospital to others considering health services.	78.2%	77.0%

In addition to the changes Green is suggesting in the compliance area, she is also working closely with the current HR manager, Frank Scott. Scott has been with the hospital for 26 years and has been successful at processing the transactional work required to meet employee demands. It has become evident to Green, though, that Scott does not possess the knowledge and leadership skills needed to move this function to a more strategic level. Green is hoping to convince her executive team that it is time to begin a search for an individual who can move the HR function from being reactionary to one that will be instrumental in transforming the hospital. Scott currently reports to Jeff Curry, chief financial officer, but Green's vision is to have the vice president of HR report directly to her. Green's short list of issues for HR seems to grow longer every day, and she needs that function to partner with her to ensure success. Compensation, hiring practices, retention, talent identification and development, and diversity are just a few of the items that Green knows need to be addressed by the hospital to remain competitive.

This freestanding community hospital has also been faced with maintaining its independence while being surrounded by two larger, growing health care systems. Although the hospital has been successful to date operating independently, the increased demand for specialized services and the shrinking reimbursement and payment for services are forcing Central Columbia to evaluate two possible moves to assist in providing the most comprehensive short- and long-term health care possible to the communities for which it cares.

Figure 1. Hospital Organizational Chart

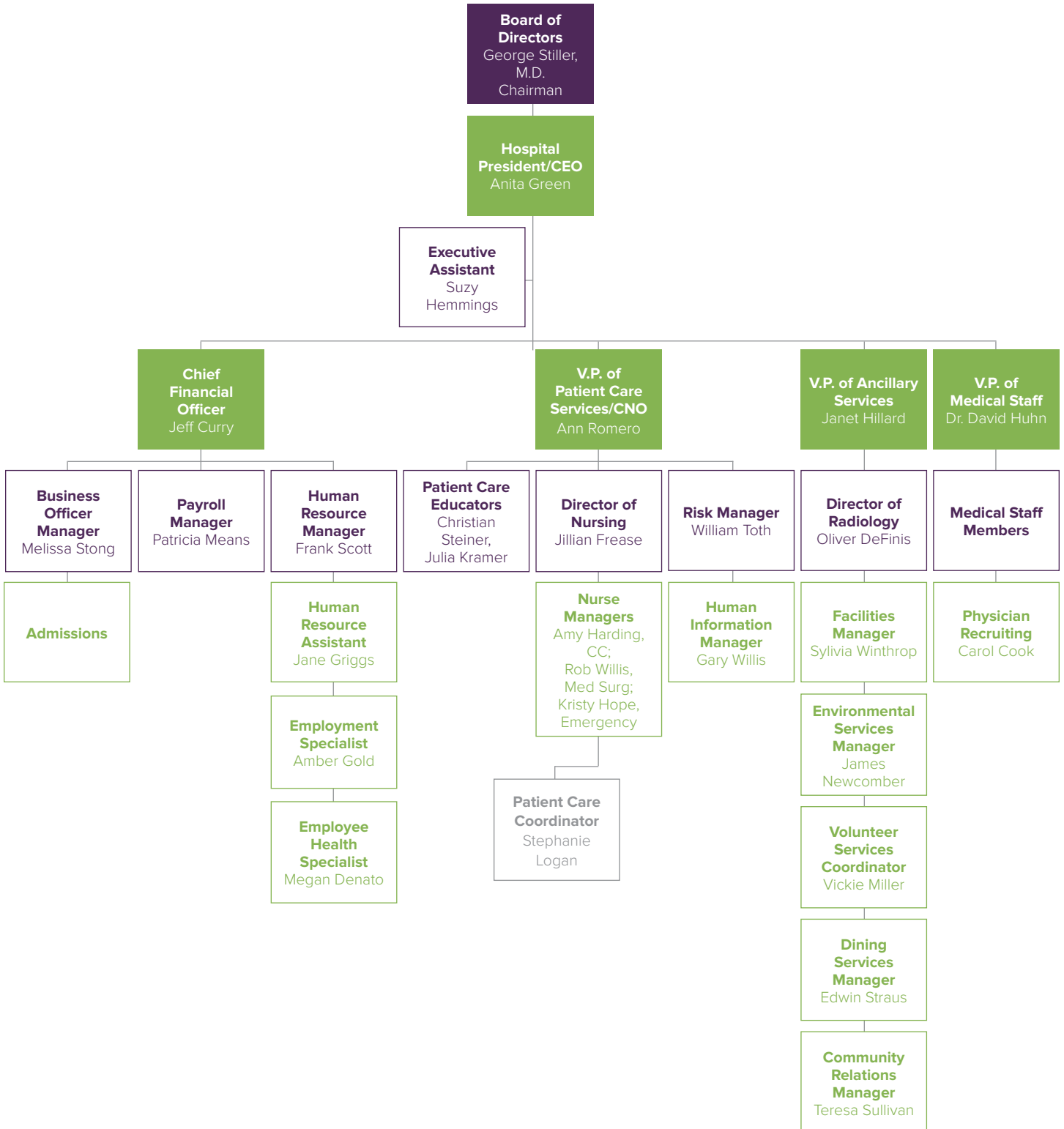


Table 3. Employee Count by Ethnicity and Gender

Total Number of Full-Time Employees: 963		
Ethnicity	Number of Employees	Percentage
White (Not Hispanic)	788	81.8%
Black (Not Hispanic)	95	9.8%
Hispanic	64	6.7%
Asian/Pacific	16	1.7%
Gender	Number of Employees	Percentage
Female	541	56.2%
Male	422	43.8%
Job Classification	Number of Employees	Percentage
Exempt	433	45.0%
Nonexempt	530	55.0%

Scenario A:

Transactional to Transformational HR

Players

- Anita Green, president and chief executive officer
- Frank Scott, HR manager

In Anita Green's office

Frank Scott anxiously awaited his meeting with Anita Green. Scott has served 17 years of his 26-year career at Central Columbia as the HR manager. He received a meeting request from Green's executive assistant with "Strategic Planning Discussion" as the subject line but was not given additional information.

Green hopes to use this time with Scott to share her goal to see the HR department transition from a transaction-based model to one that encompasses her vision of being a true business partner with the other departments. She knows that this will be a difficult conversation because the HR department has operated much differently under Scott's leadership. Many department leaders in the hospital have criticized Scott and his team for being too reactive and not responsive to their needs. Green knows this is the direction in which she must move the hospital and plans to approach her conversation with Scott carefully.

"Good morning Frank, I appreciate you taking a few moments this morning to talk about some thoughts I had for the hospital's future."

"Sure, Anita," replied Scott.

"Come on in and sit down," said Green. "Frank, I've been thinking about what's been working at the hospital and what still needs some attention. I realize that most of the issues we are facing deal directly with our employees. Of course, our people are the key to our success."

"You're singing my song, Anita; I couldn't agree more!" said Scott.

“I’m glad you see it that way,” said Green. “What I’m trying to determine is how to move the HR function to be more of a partner in our business decisions, and I think I have a plan that might get us a little closer.”

“Well, I can’t wait to hear this plan. You certainly have my attention. To be completely honest, this has been an ongoing struggle for us,” replied Scott.

“Well, for the past three years, I continue to question why the HR department reports to the CFO,” said Green. “My thought is to have the head of HR report directly to me. That would mean that this position would be a member of the executive team.” As Green completed her thought, Scott began to look concerned.

“So are you looking to promote or add a new position?” asked Scott.

“I am looking to add a senior HR position,” Green gently replied.

Scott hesitated to think of something appropriate to say before responding with, “Hmm, I see. What kind of experience and education are you thinking for this position?”

“Well, I believe the position requires someone with ample experience in HR and in health care since so many of the issues we need to address are interrelated between HR and patient care practices. I also believe that this position requires a minimum of a master’s degree in HR management, business or health care administration and a professional HR certification. Our world continues to get more and more complicated,” Green said.

“Well, you know that I have a bachelor’s degree but not a master’s, so I guess you are looking to replace me,” Scott said sharply.

“That’s not what I am saying, Frank. You have been a valued member of our team, and I don’t see a reason why that has to change. What I am saying is that the department must change to be a partner that can influence the strategic direction of the organization.” Green continued, “I have to be honest with you, Frank. It shouldn’t be a surprise that many people in the hospital have a less-than-ideal perception of HR. For us to be successful, we need to seek additional leadership that can help expedite this transformation.”

“I wanted to talk with you so you can ask questions and process this information before we begin the recruitment process,” she continued. “I know this is a lot to take in, and I want to make myself available to you for any questions and concerns you may have as we continue down this path,” she added. Green concluded by asking Scott to take time to consider the change. “I know so much must be going through your mind,” added Green. “Let’s get together within the next week to discuss how best to proceed.”

In Green's office: Five days later

"Frank, please come in," said Green.

Before sitting, Scott replied, "Thanks. Anita, I've been thinking about our conversation on Tuesday, and although I have to say it came as a bit of a shock, the more I think about it, I have to admit that it makes complete sense. I'm also happy to hear that HR will report directly to you. This is something I've been hoping for long before you arrived. Although reporting to Jeff [Curry] allows for better synergy in a number of ways, today's workforce requires stronger representation by its HR department. I really want to be part of this transformation and have come to offer my assistance in developing the announcement for the VP position and vision for our department's future."

"Frank, this is great news. I can use your insight into what you see as the top challenges for us as a hospital and for an individual coming into this role," said Green. "In addition to drafting the announcement, I'd appreciate it if you could create a list of your top five issues based on data your team has collected and summarize what a candidate will need to possess to be successful in our culture and in the position." Green asked Scott to have a preliminary draft to her within two weeks.

"I'm guessing Jeff is fully aware of your vision and is on board," added Scott.

"He is," replied Green. "There was some reluctance at first, as you can imagine. Of course, finance likes to have control of the human costs to the organization. He realizes, though, that having HR represented at the senior level makes the most sense given the complexities the hospital faces regarding compliance and developing our talent." She continued, "I would recommend discussing the next steps with Jeff as soon as you can to begin working on a transition strategy." As Scott was leaving Green's office, Anita added, "Oh, Frank, I would like you to lead the search for the vice president position."

In Frank Scott's office later that day

With a lunch meeting confirmed with Curry for tomorrow, Scott sat down at his desk to make a list of all of the tasks he was responsible for and then looked at the top issues facing his department. He also considered obtaining input from his staff without mentioning Green's intentions until the appropriate time. As he picked up his pen, he started to reflect on his 26 years of service at the hospital and contemplated his own future.

SCENARIO A: QUESTIONS FOR UNDERGRADUATE STUDENTS

1. Scott and his team have been considered too reactive and nonresponsive by other departments. How can this perception affect the effectiveness of the HR department and the hospital?
2. Define what is meant by “transactional” versus “transformational” as each relates to the HR function in an organization.
3. What specific skills, knowledge and talent should Green look for in a leader who will be able to successfully perform in the newly created senior HR position?

SCENARIO A: QUESTIONS FOR GRADUATE STUDENTS

1. Explain the importance of the HR department as a business partner. Explain the actions Central Columbia’s HR staff should take to establish partnerships with other hospital departments.
2. Under Green’s vision, HR will now be reporting to the CEO. What message does this send to Central Columbia’s employees? In what ways might HR be viewed in this capacity?
3. What are the pros and cons of assigning Scott to lead the search for the new vice president?

Debrief

SCENARIO A: QUESTIONS FOR UNDERGRADUATE STUDENTS

1. Scott and his team have been considered too reactive and nonresponsive by other departments. How can this perception affect the effectiveness of the HR department and the hospital?

Overcoming a negative perception is one of the most difficult challenges an HR department can face. Keith Hammonds' article in the August 2005 edition of *Fast Company*, titled "Why We Hate HR," pointed to a series of frustrations employees and supervisors have with HR. In the article, Hammonds referred to HR as a "necessary evil" and characterized the profession with phrases including "nonsensical rules" and "duplicative and wasteful." Columbia Hospital's HR department has a reputation of being too reactive and nonresponsive, and as such, it is not meeting its constituent's expectations, and worse, can be viewed as a liability. Taylor and Stern (2009) emphasized the value of credibility, suggesting that it is essential for HR to be successful. Beyond simply meeting expectations, credibility is earned by building strong working relationships throughout the organization, delivering on promises and understanding the issues facing each department.

Being classified as reactive, while not ideal, is far less damaging than being considered nonresponsive. Nonresponsive is a different issue and a much bigger concern in many ways. This suggests that the department is lacking in the overall service it should be providing to the hospital's departments. When such a climate exists, departments may take shortcuts in areas such as hiring and terminating employees if they feel they are not being supported. This puts the hospital at serious risk from a legal perspective. Although the HR department will soon undergo a restructuring, it is essential that it document its current ("as is") processes and evaluate how HR staff members currently communicate with their colleagues. Even though many processes may change as a

result of the department's restructure, HR cannot simply sit back and wait. This would merely reinforce the perception that already exists.

Green or Scott may wish to have an outside consultant conduct an assessment of the HR department as part of the transition effort in hiring a new vice president. In the meantime, Green should be deeply concerned about the allegations and recommend that Scott address these issues by meeting with key leaders in the hospital. Scott also needs to determine if his department is currently staffed appropriately to meet the needs of the organization. Beyond the number of people on staff, he must assess if the individuals have the appropriate skills to meet growing demand. It is unclear what Scott's role will be in the organization once a new vice president of HR is hired. Green should make it quite clear, however, that Scott's main responsibility is to improve the current service level to the hospital and its employees.

2. Define what is meant by “transactional” versus “transformational” as each relates to the HR function in an organization.

DeCenzo, Robbins and Verhulst (2013) identified three major areas of the HR function: transactional, tactical and strategic. Transactional work focuses on administrative efforts, including processing payroll, benefits, hiring and terminating. Tactical work addresses potential solutions for various employee issues, including conflict, performance issues and onboarding. Strategic goes beyond the individual and group and aligns the HR function to the needs and goals of the entire organization. This role requires a long-term, forward-thinking approach. Similar to the model identified by DeCenzo et al., SHRM identifies HR's expanded role in three separate categories: strategic, administrative and operational. For many chief HR officers, balancing transactional and transformational work is difficult. When an organization is in more of a steady state, time and effort can be devoted to transformational work. On the other hand, when organizational change, turnover or an emphasis toward recruiting occurs, HR departments (and others) play more of a transactional role (Wright, 2011).

Green's vision for the HR department is to assume a transformational role in the long term because she feels the department's current limited strategic focus has hindered it as an organization. However, with the perceptions that currently exist in the hospital, Green may want to ensure that HR first places particular emphasis on the transactional and tactical work to be certain it is meeting expectations on a daily basis. Committing to a more strategic direction in the future will help support transactional decisions to be made. For example, if Central Columbia lacks standards for a total rewards strategy, a goal could be to review its current compensation and benefits structure to promote equity and transparency.

Articulating a revised compensation philosophy is a necessary first step before decisions related to pay and benefits can be determined.

3. What specific skills, knowledge and talent should Green look for in a leader who will be able to successfully perform in the newly created senior HR position?

Green wants to hire a candidate with the following experience, education and characteristics:

- Previous HR experience at a senior level in a hospital setting.
- Firm understanding and practical application of talent management strategies.
- Strategic mindset with expertise in leading comprehensive HR transformations, including assisting with leading a large-scale strategic planning process in an organization.
- In-depth experience with HR information systems (HRIS) and data analytics to support HR business decisions.
- Possession of a master's degree and professional certification in HR.
- Experience in leading performance management solutions.
- Advocate for employee engagement programming.
- Someone who will serve as a strong communicator with Green and the senior leadership team to identify and address challenges related to HR.
- Experience in succession planning to address the organization's future leadership needs.
- The ability to lead the organization through a systemwide compensation study.
- Strong team leader.
- Firm understanding of compliance issues in the health care industry.
- Understanding of talent management.
- Ethical behavior.
- Ability to identify and articulate core values of the HR department and the hospital.
- Experience in employee relations and conflict resolution.

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Debrief

SCENARIO A: QUESTIONS FOR GRADUATE STUDENTS

1. Explain the importance of the HR department as a business partner. Explain the actions Central Columbia's HR staff should take to establish partnerships with other hospital departments.

The case discussed a number of ongoing HR challenges that must be addressed, including compensation, hiring practices, retention, talent identification and development, and diversity. The HR department has been characterized by its constituents at Central Columbia Hospital as nonresponsive and too reactive. Both terms do not reflect the traits of a business partner. In the Central Columbia case, the HR department is faced with what could be considered as a credibility crisis that will require a dedicated effort to be viewed as collaborative and supportive.

SHRM recently identified business acumen as the most critical competency for the HR professional. For HR to be considered a true business partner, it must be cognizant of the goals and challenges facing the hospital and its individual departments. There is a human element contained in each of the goals and challenges, and HR must not only understand those human elements—it must be prepared to offer solutions.

Ulrich and Brockbank (2005) noted that “HR earns its place by providing deliverables, not just doables.” Though performance reviews, policies and other compliance matters are fundamentally important, rarely are they seen as adding value to the organization by its constituents. In the case, Scott and the future vice president of HR must take a more proactive approach to engage the hospital's senior leaders and departments and help them achieve their goals.

HR at Central Columbia must focus on a “back to basics” approach to regain the trust of the departments it serves. Addressing compliance will be critical in building a stronger partnership. Although departments will expect more from HR, overlooking compliance will be detrimental to the organization (McConnell, 2011).

2. Under Green’s vision, HR will now be reporting to the CEO. What message does this send to Central Columbia’s employees? In what ways might HR be viewed in this capacity?

An organizational shift in which the HR department now reports to the president and chief executive officer typically has positive ramifications in terms of how HR is viewed by employees. Employees feel they have a stronger voice when a direct relationship exists with the top level of the organization. If HR is aligned with finance, employees may perceive that HR must make decisions that are in the best interest of the business and not the employees. Even if the CFO has HR management expertise, there can be a perception that finance does not understand the human element of the organization. In other words, decisions will be made based on the best interest of the bottom line. Finance is the area often reinforcing that human resources are the largest expense for an organization based on salary, benefits and liability. For example, if the HR department aligned with finance implements or revises a policy based on the Fair Labor Standards Act (FLSA), despite the importance of equity and compliance, employees may see this change as a business decision in which HR is not representing employee interests (Denning, 2011).

Having a direct reporting relationship with Green sends a message that she will be more in tune with the culture and climate of the organization. It will be important for Green and the new vice president of HR to articulate how the newly formed relationship will benefit employees and the organization. Even more significant, Green needs to ensure that she is visible throughout the organization and to make herself available to speak to employees individually and in group settings.

3. What are the pros and cons of assigning Scott to lead the search for the new vice president?

Having the department head lead a search to select the next individual to fill that role is a decision that must be exercised with caution. This will be a visible search because it is the first time the hospital has hired a vice president of HR. Some may argue that Central Columbia should hire

an executive search firm to lead this effort. Although search firms can be an expensive option, there are a number of benefits. A search firm will develop the position announcement, market the position and narrow down the number of candidates to be interviewed (Wasserman, 2010).

Green's decision to have Scott lead the search has several advantages and disadvantages. From a positive perspective, Scott has the experience in the field, serving for more than 26 years as an HR professional, 17 of those years at Central Columbia alone. His years of service also demonstrate his understanding of the organization's culture. One would assume that he has a strong understanding of the people and operational issues regarding the hospital. Also, Scott probably has a firm grasp of who could potentially serve as committee members in the vice president search.

On the other hand, one could argue that Scott should not lead the search. As the current HR manager, he may have his own biases of who would be a successful candidate. Green has made it clear that Scott does not possess the qualities she is looking for in the vice president role. Although Scott seems to have a positive attitude and the best interests of the hospital in mind, his commitment to leading an effective search could come into question given the feedback Green provided him and his reaction to the news.

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