Individual Case: Write-Up and Analysis  
  
“Hitting all the Right Notes”

Reid Woodwind has been playing the oboe ever since he could remember and as a child he had dreams of being the principle oboist for the Toronto Symphony Orchestra. Growing up in a small town outside of London, Reid’s family did not have a lot of excess money to spend and his parents had conflicting views of whether or not to entertain his musical passion. His father, who made his living as a hardworking labourer did not believe that his son could possibly overcome the unlikely odds of ever being a professional musician. His mother, on the other hand, had the opposite belief that with constant love, support and encouraged Reid would overcome the odds and reach his dreams. Against his father’s judgement, his parents invested in a high quality instrument for Reid and paid for regular, (and expensive) private lessons from professional musicians of the local orchestra.

Reid was grateful for the opportunity to learn from the best musicians in the country and did not want to disappoint his parents. With the pressure of his father luring over him he practiced for hours each day and worked tirelessly to build his technical ability and musicianship. He became dedicated to his instrument and even turned down social engagements with his friends to spend more time perfecting his craft. He would often show up to school with cracked lips and bandages wrapped around his fingertips from pushing himself to the point of injury. His hard work was not in vain as by the time Reid was sixteen he had won many regional solo competitions and successfully auditioned for the London Operetta, where he served as the principle oboe for 10 years. Here Reid performed classical operas such as “*Hänsel und Gretel*” and “*The Magic Flute*” and received an overwhelming number of glowing reviews for his virtuosic playing and rich tone quality. Several of his admirers begged him to teach their children how to play as beautifully as he did and it was this that inspired Reid to branch out into the world of teaching.

Though Reid did not have any formal teaching training, he excelled in this new environment and enjoyed sharing his musical passion with young people. Though performing professionally was an exciting and rewarding career, teaching gave him a newfound purpose in life. After 6 months of private ventures he yearned for more opportunity to engage with youth and he took over the conductor role of the London Youth Orchestra. Reid’s personal playing experiences translated very well into conducting and he found that he was able to encourage and motivate young musicians to achieve more than they thought they could. The students liked that he made them laugh yet had high standards that pushed them to achieve more than they could. It was important to Reid his students strived for excellence and he accepted nothing less than their best. He gave constructive and honest feedback when they struggled, believing that the hard truth would make them stronger and better musicians. Many students loved his approach to teaching despite the pressure that was put upon them while others

Through his networking connections Reid was presented with a faculty position at Forte University in Toronto. His colleague in the operetta had been a faculty member there for years and he was convinced that Reid would be a perfect fit for the role. After all, his years of experience more than qualified him for the job requirements. After a series of job interviews Reid was offered the position by Harmony Triad, the Chairman of the Music Department, and moved his family to Toronto. He was to be the conductor of the Forte University Wind Ensemble.

The Forte University Wind Ensemble (FUWE) was considered small with only 20 enrolled students, each paying tuition fees for a credit they would earn at the end of the year. Only music students were permitted to join the ensemble to ensure that the quality of the performances were held to the high standard that Forte U had come to be known for. After all, each student had proved themselves through the rigorous audition process. Unfortunately, the limited enrollment also created a unique instrumentation combination: 5 flutes, 3 clarinets, 5 saxophones, 2 trumpets, 2 tubas, and 3 percussionists. During his first semester, Reid noticed that the small numbers of the program limited the ensemble in a number of ways including the repertoire selection, the instrumentation of the group, and the overall sound balance. To take the high performing students to the next level Reid approached the Chairman of the Music Department, Mrs. Harmony Triad, and suggested that she allow him to open up the ensemble to other students and community members to overcome the barriers. He argued that by inviting more players to be part of the group it would allow them to perform more complex pieces that would challenge the technical and musical abilities of the students. In addition, a larger ensemble would likely attract a wider audience which would increase revenue from ticket sales for the performances. Mrs. Triad agreed to this suggestion on the condition that the integrity of the ensemble was not compromised.

The following semester the ensemble size double to 40 members as members of the community joined in, many of who were established amateurs that played in other orchestras and bands in the local region. The new members filled in missing instrument gaps and also brought their own expertise that heightened the quality of playing. The existing students welcomed them with open arms and finished the year on a high note having successfully performed an ambitious program to a sold out crowd. As years went on, the success of the FUWE grew and more and more non-registered members were invited into the ensemble.

Today, just 4 years since Reid took over as conductor there are upwards of 80 unique members in the group, consisting of 45 community members and 35 registered students. Melody Bass, a trombone player, is one of those registered students and the most senior in her section. She is in her third year at Forte University in the Music Performance program and is planning to graduate next year. She has been a registered student in the FUWE since she started her degree, though doesn’t see a future for herself in ensemble performance. Melody is an average trombone student who doesn’t put a lot of emphasis on her practicing, but what she lacks in musical talent, she makes up for in dedication to the ensemble. She has never once missed a rehearsal and is always the first to help set up or take down the stage before or after practice. She is also the president of the Music Social Committee where she organizes and plans events for all of the other students. She is well connected within the ensemble and is well liked by her peers. This year one of the pieces on the program features an exposed trombone solo that Melody has been assigned and has been very excited to play. It is very technically challenging and she has not perfected it as heard in the rehearsals throughout the term. Reid has not seen Melody in the practice rooms outside of rehearsal and has heard from some of his other students that she spends a lot of time at the bar.

During the rehearsal before the concert, Melody struggled to perform the solo to Reid’s standard yet again. Reid expressed his disappointment and highlighted that her lack of practice is affecting her performance. With the integrity of the ensemble at stake Reid decided to take away her solo and give it instead to a community member who is professional trombonist.

Melody left the rehearsal angry and distraught and immediately went to speak with Mrs. Harmony Triad.

“ *I’ve had enough! I have been a member of that ensemble for 3 years and I earned the right to play a solo. How could Mr. Woodwind give it away to someone else who just joined the group this year? They don’t pay tuition fees, or audition to get in or have to complete a playing test for a grade, yet they seem to get all of the opportunities in this place just because they are better musicians. How am I supposed to get better if I don’t have the chance to prove myself? It’s just not fair! Something needs to change or else I’m going to quit. I’m sure social media would love to hear about it”*

As the Chairman of the program, Harmony was disappointed to hear that her students were not having the best experience in the FUWE. Then again, she knows that there are two sides to every story so it was important that he hear from Reid Woodwind to learn more about his decision. During their discussion, here is what Reid had to say about Melody,

“*Melody is a great kid; however, she has had many opportunities to improve her playing. It is the week before the concert and she still cannot execute the solo. People have come to know the FUWE for its excellent playing and it would be an embarrassment to us and her if she played the solo so poorly. In the real world if you don’t earn it, you lose it and students should not expect to have opportunities to handed to them. I’d be happy to let her play a solo next year if she earns it.”*

Hearing from both parties Harmony now had more information to the puzzle, however the right way to proceed was still not clear to her. On one hand she has come to respect what Reid Woodwind has done for the music program by forming a strong community connection and increasing member loyalty to Forte University. With his tactics people know about the music program and expect high quality performances. He has also increased student enrollment over the years and has contributed to increased revenue from box office sales. On the other hand, the FUWE exists to provide an educational experience for students and is intended to provide professional performing opportunities to registered music students. The University core values include growth and self-reflection and it is her role to ensure that the needs of the students and future students to come are being met. At what point should the integrity of the ensemble affect the learning of the students? Should Harmony trust the expertise of a friend and faculty member or overrule the decision in favour of Melody? How should Harmony proceed to balance the integrity of the FUWE with the University’s mission?

**Summary**

Key players:

**Reid Woodwind** – conductor of the Forte University Wind Ensemble (FUWE) and professional musician  
**Harmony Triad** – Chairman of the Forte University Music Department  
**Melody Bass** – trombone student at Forte University and member of the FUWE

After achieving much success as a freelance oboist and professional orchestral musician, Reid Woodwind was appointed as a faculty member of Forte University. His main role was to conduct the Forte University Wind Ensemble, which consisted of 20 registered students at the time. The low enrolment numbers posed a number of problems in regards to performance, the most pressing being limited instrumentation needed for more complex pieces. With the approval of the Music Chairman, Reid invited professional musicians from the community to fill in the missing gaps of the ensemble, under the condition that the high performance standard was not compromised. Over the course of four-years the ensemble grew to upwards of 80 members, including an increase of 15 registered students.

Stemming from his career experience, Reid held himself and his students to the highest musical standard. Being professional musicians, the community members helped raise the performance standard of the group and permitted Reid to attempt more difficult music with increased technicality. This in turn led to more exciting concerts that yielded high profits from box office sales.

In preparation for the most recent concert, Melody was given the opportunity to play an important trombone solo, however due to poor practice habits and a lack of skill she has been unable to reach the standard set by Reid. Despite giving her chances to improve, Reid decided to take away the solo from Melody and give it to a professional member instead. Melody was upset with this decision and took her complaint to Harmony Triad.

As the Chairman of the Music Department Harmony must decide whether it is best to support her faculty or her students, while maintaining the integrity and standards set out by Forte University.

**Problem Statement**  
How should Harmony Triad respond to Reid’s decision in order to maintain the integrity and mission of the music program at Forte University?

**Relevant Theories**

*Ethical Dilemma* – decisions that may conflict with one’s own personal values can create ethical dilemmas between what a person believes is “good” versus what is “right”. Each person views ethical dilemmas through a different lens and behaviours may be assessed differently according to the ethical viewpoint that is used. When situations are approached through a Moral Rights View, the fundamental rights of each person is respected regardless of the impact on the larger society. Individuals are not discriminated against based on gender, race or ability level. When viewed through a Justice View, all individuals are treated equally according to the standards and policies set in place. Decisions are often made as “black or white” with no middle ground (Schermerhorn, Bachrach and Wright, p 43).

*Bureaucratic Organization* –Max Weber believed that organizations with a defined hierarchy, formal rules and procedures, impersonality and merit based promotions would be more efficient and ethical than other systems (Schermerhorn, Bachrach and Wright, p 26). Despite these benefits, bureaucratic organizations are often rigid, resist change and have apathetic employees.

*Reward and Coercive Power* – managers have the ability to influence the behavior and outcomes of their employees with the use of rewards and punishments. Positive rewards incentivize people to act in a desired way and encourage them to maintain consistent focus to receive the reward. Conversely, if the desired behavior is not achieved, coercive power may create reprimands for employees or the removal of positive incentives (Schermerhorn, Bachrach and Wright, p 265).

**Possible Solutions**

1. Harmony could decide to support Reid’s decision to take away Melody’s solo away. This would confirm the high performance standards set by Forte University and not undermine the integrity of the ensemble. It also reinforces the reward/coercive policy to ensure that all members are continuously motivated to perform and improve upon their performance. Supporting Reid’s decision also supports the bureaucratic organization of the ensemble and allows him to maintain his authority and control over the group. Each member is held to the same standards and is treated impersonally and thus, fairly.

While this decision supports the University faculty, it could also demotivate the student from future practice and create a divide between the registered and non-registered members. The student may decide to drop out of the course and/or program and deter future enrolment if students do not feel they are supported or provided opportunities.

1. Harmony could decide to overrule Reid’s decision and return the solo to Melody. Though the performance quality may be compromised, the learning experience of the student is paramount. Moral ethical code encourages us to refrain from discriminating against someone’s skill level and instead provide opportunities for self-growth and reflection. Students come to university in order to make mistakes and learn as reflected in the university’s core values.

On the other hand, reversing Reid’s decision undermines his authority which is necessary for his role. Allowing a student to play the solo without earning the right, it devalues the systems since standards can now be bent for certain individuals. Members may also begin to question his leadership abilities and challenge his future decision for the group. We know that Reid holds himself and the group to high standards so if the standards slip he may decide to step down as conductor and leave Forte University.

1. Harmony could support Reid’s decision to take away Melody’s solo, but also talk with Reid privately to remind him of the University’s core values. A future policy that places the needs of students above those of non-registered students can also be created to ensure that those who are paying for the experience are supported throughout the process. This allows the University to maintain its high standard while confirming Reid’s leadership over the group.

The following chart can be used to help determine the best possible course of action for Harmony. A negative (-) sign indicates the chosen decision will have a negative effect for the University, while a positive (+) sign indicates the chosen decision will have a positive effect on the University. The decision with the most positive overall effect will be suggested as the best course of action that Harmony can take in this situation.

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| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Decision | Maintain Standards | Retain Trust in Leadership | Support student needs | Protect Future Enrolment | Total |
| Support Reid | + | + | - | + | 3 |
| Reverse Decision | - | - | + | - | 1 |
| Support Reid and devise policy | + | + | + | + | 4 |

**Best Solution**

From the chart above it is clear to see that Harmony’s best course of action is to support Reid’s decision to take away Melody’s solo but also create a policy for future years that would put the educational needs of the students above the performance output. Following this course of action maintains the University’s standards and reinforces the expertise of the faculty member while also being sensitive to the needs of the students.

From a managerial standpoint it is important that Harmony support the decisions made by her faculty members to show students that the University is a united front. Senior leadership trusts that faculty have the best interest of the program at heart. The bureaucratic hierarchy is maintained and Reid is able to keep the respect that he has earned from his members.

In addition, though it may appear unethical to take away an opportunity from one student it also reinforces the need for hard work and persistence from all students, especially if they are to succeed in a musical career. The reward/coercion strategy is not jeopardized and Reid can continue to exercise his “expert power” over the ensemble. Students have come to respect that Reid brings a wealth of experience to the group and they recognize that he has the ability to reward or punish students for not meeting the agreed upon standards.

From an ethical standpoint, the decision to support Reid does not improve the situation for Melody and could potentially cause a brief drop in enrolment in the Wind Ensemble. The addition of a policy to highlight student success over non-registered students is therefore crucial to ensure that students feel supported by their faculty and can feel confident in their choice to attend Forte University. The policy should insist that registered students have priority for solos and exposed parts to facilitate their learning and prepare them for future careers in performance. The policy should not work against the reward/coercion model already in place, but act to compliment it.

The policy also strengthens the bureaucratic organization by establishing more concrete structure for the ensembles. All members will be aware of the expectations and the processes in place for dealing with future situations like this. Should another student fail to meet the standards, a justice-based ethical viewpoint can protect the integrity of the University and give them justification for their actions.

**Action Plan**

*Immediate Action*Harmony should conduct a follow up meeting with Melody to let her know of the final decision. She should use this opportunity to explain the reasoning behind her decision, focusing on what Melody can control: her own behavior and practice habits. This reinforces the university standards and makes Melody accountable for her actions. Melody may be upset with the decision so it will be important that Harmony is sympathetic to her feelings.

Harmony should also meet privately with Reid. This will give her an opportunity to explain to him her final decision, verifying her trust in his professional judgement. Harmony should also inform Reid of the new policy that will be put into effect within the following semester to ensure there are processes in place for future events. To help smooth out any “sourness” that has developed between Reid and Melody, Harmony should encourage him to speak with Melody as soon as possible to regain her trust and loyalty to the ensemble.

*30 – 60 days later*Before the start of the next academic year, Harmony should meet with Reid and other relevant faculty members to devise a policy that outlines “students’ needs first”. The policy should cover things such as the process for new community members joining the ensemble, solo and parts allocation, progress tracking and a buddy system should this situation repeat itself. By involving the faculty members in the creation process they will feel that their expertise is valued, while also forcing them to reflect on the student experience at the university. Faculty often forget what it is like to be a student which can create a disconnect between them so bringing forth the concerns and needs of students will help them improve the quality of their teaching overall.

*Future Action*The policy should be shared and explained to all members of the FUWE at the first rehearsal of the next academic year. Any major solos should be assigned to the most deserving student as early as possible to allow for plenty of time to practice. If a community professional is within the section, they could be paired as a mentor who acts to motivate and assist the student in developing their tone, technique and musicality to the best of their ability. Checkpoints throughout the term can be used to help Reid monitor the student’s progression through their learning. Feedback can be provided well before the final rehearsal to support the student towards success. If the student is still unable to perform to the required standard the policy takes effect and a new soloist is chosen from the remaining students, and then non-registered members.

**Resources**

Schermerhorn, J., Bachrach, D., & Wright, B. (2018). *Management: Fourth Canadian Edition*. Toronto, Ontario.