

THE MANAGER

CASE STUDY FOR TRAINING AND GROUP DISCUSSION

Dr. Gumende Leads a New Task Force toward Results

Scenario

MOGADIA'S five-year health plan focuses heavily on adolescents because of their increasing risk for contracting HIV/AIDS and limited access to reproductive health services. To implement the plan locally, the Miassa Provincial Health Office contracted with the nongovernmental organization, Partnerships for Better Health (PBH), to deliver its new adolescent services. PBH was operating seven clinics in a large urban slum, offering family planning and maternal and child health services but was not serving the growing adolescent population. PBH's Executive Director, Dr. Margaret Kalu, made a commitment to the Provincial Director to offer the province's first youth-friendly reproductive health services within a year and formed a task force with a representative from each clinic. She chose Dr. Isaac Gumende, Director of Clinical Services in the largest clinic, to lead the effort.

At first, Dr. Gumende was enthusiastic about his new role, but as time passed, he became increasingly uneasy about the challenge he had taken on." Shortly after agreeing to head up the task force, he met with Dr. Kalu to discuss his concerns. When he entered her office, Dr. Kalu saw that he looked downcast. "Good morning, Isaac," she greeted him. "Sit down. I must say you look worried. Is something wrong?"

Dr. Gumende was relieved that she sensed his discomfort. He replied, "You're right. I'm worried about

my new responsibilities. Though I agree that outreach to youth is an opportunity to extend PBH's mission, I'm not sure you've picked the right person to lead this initiative."

Dr. Kalu raised her eyebrows. "I'm surprised by that. I've thought hard about this assignment, and I'm convinced that you're the best person to take on this challenge. In just four years, you've turned our least-successful clinic into a model with a high contraceptive prevalence rate and excellent quality of care, all within your budget! Your staff are loyal and efficient, with the lowest turnover of all our clinics. I've noticed that you continually update yourself on new developments in contraceptive technology and are becoming a resource to all our providers. Besides, I sensed that you had grown bored in your job and were ready to accept new challenges."

"I appreciate your trust," he answered, "and you're right that my job had become too comfortable. But I now realize what a risk I'm taking. If we don't have a good youth program in place by the end of the year, I will have let you down and damaged the reputation of PBH. Before, I was an expert on family planning, and my job was just to stay up to date and motivate my capable staff. Now I have to lead a more complex program, pull together a new team, and find ways to reach the young people in these slums. I have much to learn about how youth think and behave, how to

provide the services they need, and how to motivate them to come to the clinics.”

Dr. Kalu smiled. “You’re realistic about the problems. This makes me more confident that you’re the best person for the job. Why don’t you first meet with the task force and guide them in choosing strategies and setting priorities for the next three months? You’ll discover how the group works under your leadership. Then we’ll meet, and I’ll help you make a personal plan to strengthen your leadership abilities. Don’t worry, I won’t abandon you. I’ll meet with you regularly and give you the feedback and support you need.

Three weeks later, Dr. Gumende and Dr. Kalu met again. She noticed he looked more cheerful. When she asked how things were going, he answered, “The meeting with the task force had a rough start, but we’re on track now. When I opened the meeting, I sensed how anxious people were. They raised objections and asked hard questions that I couldn’t answer.”

Dr. Kalu listened intently. “What kinds of questions?” she asked.

“They talked about the dangers of bringing teens into our clinics,” Dr. Gumende explained. “And everyone wanted me to tell them what services we’ll offer and how we’ll attract these clients.”

“So what did you say? How did you react?”

Dr. Gumende’s face lit up. “At first I was worried, but I did what you often do—I listened and insisted that we all listen to each other. I admitted that I didn’t have all the answers, that we all had a lot to learn, but that I was confident that we could work through these issues and build a successful program. After three hours, we realized we needed more information about young people before jumping to conclusions. Then one member suggested that we ask the young people themselves. She set up two focus group meetings with young people at the local sports club. Several of us attended and were impressed by the ideas they gave us. Our second task force meeting last night was completely different—people were ready to

move, had a clear idea about what youth-friendly reproductive health services should look like, and felt confident they could develop them. We agreed that our main outreach strategy would be youth peer educators. Our priorities for the next three months are to recruit and train youth leaders in basic reproductive health information and counseling skills.”

“Congratulations,” said Dr. Kalu. “You’ve achieved so much since our first meeting. You’ve learned about the concerns of members of your task force and gathered useful information about the young people we hope to serve. Most importantly, you’ve moved the task force from arguing about assumptions to agreeing on strategies and priorities.”

Dr. Gumende agreed, “Yes, everybody is enthusiastic. But the problem now is that they see how much work is needed, and they say they’re too busy. They’re not yet ready to take responsibility for tasks.”

Dr. Kalu replied, “Remember how discouraged you were at our first meeting, but you managed to draw the task force together. You’ll mobilize their energies if you don’t become defeated by each new obstacle. Now it’s time to build on what you’ve done and make that personal plan for leadership development that I suggested before.”

Discussion Questions

1. What did Dr. Gumende do in his previous position that made Dr. Kalu choose him to lead this effort?
2. What did Dr. Kalu do to challenge and support Dr. Gumende? What feedback did she give him?
3. How did Dr. Gumende help the task force begin to address their strategic challenge?
4. What current obstacle does Dr. Gumende face? What will he need to do next to lead his task force to results?

QUESTION 1 What did Dr. Gumende do in his previous position that made Dr. Kalu choose him to lead this effort?

Dr. Gumende was a highly effective manager, who also demonstrated some important leadership values. His persistence and commitment to results enabled him to turn around PBH's least-successful clinic. His respect for the capabilities of his staff resulted in high productivity and low turnover. He showed a commitment to learning by developing himself professionally and sharing his knowledge with his colleagues. And his doubts about his capacity to take on this new challenge demonstrated his integrity and commitment to serving others. He also demonstrated a strategic perspective, thinking what opportunities might enhance the mission of his organization.

QUESTION 2 What did Dr. Kalu do to challenge and support Dr. Gumende? What feedback did she give him?

Dr. Kalu challenged Dr. Gumende with the responsibility for leading an effort that is central to PBH's mission, one that could make or break its reputation. She is supporting him by being available when he needs to talk with her, listening attentively to his concerns, reassuring him about his ability, suggesting concrete leadership steps, and encouraging him to make a plan for his personal development. She gave him positive feedback on his successes and advice on how to address his tendency to feel defeated by each new obstacle that arises.

QUESTION 3 How did Dr. Gumende help the task force begin to address their strategic challenge?

Dr. Gumende helped the task force to answer two key questions for themselves and to understand the implications of their answers. The two questions and their answers were:

- What is the strategic challenge the task force is now facing?

The challenge is for the task force to begin to meet the reproductive health needs of adolescents.

- What do does the task force want to accomplish?

The task force wants to develop youth-friendly services for adolescents within a year.

Dr. Gumende already performed several leadership functions. He scanned the situation thoroughly. He recognized the differing perspectives and agendas of the members of his task force before they even met. He showed self-awareness, acknowledging his fears and analyzing the sources of his doubts about his capacity to do this work. He used the information from the focus groups to increase his (and his task force's) understanding of adolescent concerns and priorities.

He also succeeded in helping the task force members to focus on accomplishing their objective of providing youth-friendly adolescent reproductive health services. Together they developed a vision of appropriate adolescent services, defined a strategy, and set priorities for the first three months. In addition, he agreed to make a personal development plan to focus on the leadership abilities he needs to improve.

QUESTION 4 What current obstacle does Dr. Gumende face? What will he need to do next to lead his task force to results?

The task force resists taking personal responsibility for tasks and setting deadlines for themselves. Having made a good start, Dr. Gumende will need to involve the task force in answering other key questions:

- What are members of the task force willing to commit to doing in order to accomplish their objectives?
- Whom else can they mobilize to assist them?

To answer these questions, it is important for Dr. Gumende to align and mobilize task force members who are resistant to taking on added tasks. From now

on, he will need to work hard to help them define their roles, enroll others, and allocate the tasks that need to be carried out if the youth program is to open on schedule. He will need to develop insights into what motivates different task force members and consider whether rewards might help to mobilize them.

Finally, he will need to inspire them to take on their responsibilities, commit their time, energies, and resources, and carry them out over the next busy, demanding year. He has an excellent role model in Dr. Kalu, who inspired him by demonstrating leadership practices in all her interactions with him. Just as she continues to provide him with challenge, support, and feedback, he can do the same to build the leadership capacity of the members of his task force.

THE
MANAGER

MSH Publications
Management Sciences for Health
165 Allandale Road
Boston, Massachusetts 02130-3400
USA

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