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Waste Audit at Innovation Works London (B)

William Diebel and Professor Stephan Vachon wrote this case solely to provide material for class discussion. The authors do not intend to illustrate either effective or ineffective handling of a managerial situation. The authors may have disguised certain names and other identifying information to protect confidentiality.

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Laura Pendlebury had received approval for her waste audit plan for Innovation Works London (Innovation Works) on June 18. Innovation Works’ caretaker was to begin waste collection for the audit on June 19 and continue for a full week. To gain more insight from the audit efforts, the waste was to be identified and segregated by floor in an attempt to pinpoint high- and low-performing areas with respect to waste diversion rates. Following the collection week, the waste audit was to take place at Innovation Works during the evening of June 26.

Unfortunately, things had not gone according to plan during the waste collection phase. Pendlebury received information that the waste being collected was not being separated by floor, due to a change in the caretaking staff. While Pendlebury worried that this lack of segregation by floor would lead to less insightful analysis, she remained optimistic that the audit would still yield data from which an actionable plan could be developed. To complicate matters further, however, Pendlebury received the following email from Sienna Jae Taylor at Innovation Works, three hours before the waste audit was scheduled to begin:

Hi Friends,

I have some (unfortunate) news.

There was a miscommunication with our compost company and while our entire team was in a meeting they took all the compost we had been saving.

I contacted them to see if by a long shot they could bring the bins back but they’ve already dropped them off. They said they could send the weight tickets but I am not sure how helpful that would be.

I’m looking for your advice on the best way forward. I imagine postponing is not a great option . . . will the weight info suffice?

I’m so sorry this happened.

Pendlebury understood that such an unforeseen event could happen and appreciated Taylor’s email and efforts to recover from the situation. All the landfill and recycling waste from the past week had been collected, and all of the audit supplies had been set up and prepared at Innovation Works the day before. Pendlebury pondered her options. On one hand, the audit was ready to go and the team was thrilled and eager to contribute its time to an organization such as Innovation Works. On the other hand, she wanted to provide a strong waste management plan based on the data to be generated during the audit. Should she postpone the audit (i.e., ask Innovation Works to restart the collection of waste on another week)? Or should she go ahead as planned and perform the best she could with more basic data?