

Alternate Scenario Resolutions: Chapter 1

Here is the scenario:

Chad was sent a confidential report that could help him justify a project he was working on. The report contained data that showed how the project would improve productivity and increase profits. However, the report also included personal performance data that could compromise multiple employees in the company.

Chad had three facts to consider: (1) he was unsure whether the report should have been shared with him, (2) he did not want to compromise employee privacy, and (3) his managers were desperately looking for him to find ways to justify the project, and this report would solve that problem. As we see, Chad is faced with competing objectives and finds himself unsure of how to proceed.

Mandatory Responsibility Standard

The mandatory responsibility standard focuses on taking ownership of actions, decisions, and outcomes. Against these ethical focus items, Chad does have a concern.

First, he has decided to keep the report, despite his concerns about whether he should have the report at all. Second, he is considering acting based on that document, even though there could be a compromise of employee privacy.

Mandatory Responsibility Standard: Solution

To address these concerns, Chad should get confirmation from his manager or HR about the appropriateness of his having the report.

If he uses the report as part of the justification, he should edit the data appropriately (in conjunction with his management team) to eliminate exposing any personnel data. If that isn't possible, Chad needs to understand the outcomes that will occur if he uses the report to justify his project.

While the project may move forward, compromising personal information is an outcome that Chad must accept, including the impact on him personally, should that data be exposed.

Mandatory Respect Standard

The mandatory respect standard focuses on:

1. Negotiating in good faith
2. Not using our expertise or position to influence others to benefit personally at their expense
3. Not acting in an abusive manner toward others
4. Respecting the property rights of others

Should Chad move forward and fulfill his responsibility standards as discussed above, he will be fine in the context of the first two focus areas: “negotiation” and “using his position appropriately.”

What he does with the report and personnel data that he received will have a significant bearing on the standard for “not acting in an abusive manner.” Also, considering personnel information could be treated as something that is “owned” by the personnel involved, then what Chad does with the personnel information will have a direct bearing on his property rights obligation.

Mandatory Respect Standard: Solution

For Chad to fulfill his respect standard, he should either (1) abandon the report and justification of his project using that information or (2) ensure that any personnel information remains confidential and is not shared any further.

Data from the report, other than the personnel information, would then be used to justify Chad's project.

Mandatory Fairness Standard

There are two primary considerations with fairness:

1. Avoiding conflict of interest situations
2. Avoiding favoritism and discrimination

Chad's situation doesn't likely involve favoritism or discrimination. However, the situation does raise the question of whether Chad would be doing anything with this report if there wasn't information in it that's relevant to justify his project. He has a conflict of interest between justifying the project and compromising confidential information.

Mandatory Fairness Standard: Solution

Given this, it is important that Chad talks with his manager, sponsor, and potentially HR about how to proceed. Their direction to him could resolve his personal conflict of interest, as he would be following a more objective opinion (HR's opinion, for example) on how to proceed. Also, he needs to be open to the possibility that he can't use the data to justify the project, as he hopes. Furthermore, he might even receive some counseling, as he potentially shouldn't have accepted the report in the first place. He needs to accept the outcomes his manager and HR might recommend.

Mandatory Honesty Standard

The mandatory honest standard involves:

1. Engaging in behavior that does not deceive others
2. Not engaging in dishonest behavior for personal gain or at someone else's expense

Mandatory Honesty Standard: Solution

In short, Chad needs to “come clean” about his having a copy of the report, where and how he got the report, and be transparent about what he does with any information within the report. Given the confidential information included in the report, this may present challenges. However, to meet this mandatory standard, Chad must share openly with the appropriate management personnel.