



Capstone Case Study: Space Contractions

Using the information we have covered on organizational culture, change management, leadership competencies, healthy departments, giving feedback, and intentional leadership styles, consider the following case study. Your task is to describe how to navigate the difficult process before you as effectively and constructively as possible. Be sure to consider:

- Core work that must be done
- People who perform the work
- How you communicate
- Your leadership and management choices
- Addressing and leading change
- Your ability to address disagreements, complaints, and tension
- Working within the university's hierarchy
- Your comfort with negotiations, influence, and persuasion

Each small group will present its approach to the full group. You should identify one member to be your spokesperson. You are welcome to use slides, a document or any other vehicle for making your presentation.



Budget Contractions...Building Closing

Your department has been in its own building, one of the older buildings on campus. Though it's a bit shabby, it has been adapted over the years for your unit and is seen as "home" for faculty, staff, and students. As the university has grappled with budget cuts, a decision was made at the campus level to close your building and move your department to floors on a newer building. You made every appeal and argument you could, and the decision is now final—and the move is happening next Fall, otherwise known as only a handful of months from now. People in your department are not happy about it, especially as the planning process for the move makes the hard choices that will be made even clearer.

Even though your department has robust student enrollment, you have had ample room and, it emerges as the planning process moves forward, many of your faculty have more space per person than the university's guidelines permit. Some of your professors have two offices, on different floors of your building. Some of the administrative staff have private offices, and grad students are often two per office, rather than the more typical four per office. You have been reminded repeatedly by the Office of Space Utilization that the university guidelines will be applied to all in the new building.

You take the proposed space allocation plans to your advisory committee, a small group of senior long-term faculty. They recommend that you simply book the university's movers, circulate a memo that advises everyone what their new office assignments will be after the move, announce the two week time period during vacation when the movers will be in the building, and remind everyone of the university's space allocation guidelines. They believe that this is the most efficient path. Even if there is some initial grumbling, it will subside. After all, members of the advisory committee remind you, you are dealing with adults.

You spend some time following up individually with members of your advisory committee and those conversations are troubling. Each one explains that his or her special circumstances demand a different space allocation than the norm. Everyone has reasons, and none of the reasons are the same. It could be specialized skills, research productivity needs, or tradition and habit, or respect for longevity, or workload. One even tells you that he required two laboratories in support of his phenomenal research success. However, when you check the key card data, you found out that no one had entered the second laboratory in nearly seven months. When you share the data with him, he explains that great new things are coming, and the space will be extensively used very soon.

In addition to your responsibilities as department head, you serve on a high-profile statewide advisory committee, and a university-wide task force examining the implications of climate change on new university initiatives. You also participate in various committee assignments in your college and campus-wide. Your own research program needs a proposal submitted to renew your major grant. Your family is stressed by the ongoing pandemic, and you are tired. Time is scarce.

The announce-and-execute strategy is really appealing from a time perspective. At the same time, some of your peers inside and outside the university are more cautious. Your spouse reminds you of an experience at the university where you both did your graduate work: a long-time successful department head had to step down after a bruising and contentious office space shuffle because of hard feelings. You know the coming time will be tough for the department, and there are some strategic planning issues around which you will need extensive collaboration and cooperation from everyone. Furthermore, either way, you foresee many meetings with disgruntled colleagues, which will eat into your already tight schedule. You want productivity and morale to remain high and you really need to compress space.

What kind of management challenges are you facing? Who do you need to include in your decision-making? What does success look like?

What will you do, and how?

