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Ethical Dilemma Analyses So, This Is Success?

You have been the Assistant City Manager of a small city for three years. One day, the City Manager, Mr. Smith, calls you in for a professional talk. He thinks very highly of your performance and that you have learned about all that you can in your present position.

He advises that, for your career development, it is time for you to seek a more demanding position and become a City Manager. Mr. Smith advises you to begin looking for a city manager position. He asks you to think about it. If you decide to leave, he will assist you through his contacts in the city management profession.

After you have discussed this with your significant other, you decide to take his advice and seek your own city. Mr. Smith assists you with telephone calls to other managers, an outstanding recommendation, and tips on how to find out about a community.

The recommendation of Mr. Smith and your outstanding references result in several interviews. One of these is from the Town of Fairview Hills, an upper-class suburb in a major metropolitan area in another state. Mr. Smith knows both of the past two City Managers of Fairview Hills. Both have advanced to other cities and have good reputations in the profession.

Mr. Smith calls them to inquire about the Town, and reports back that outside of the usual “idiosyncrasies” of the Town Commission, the manager is generally free to manage and is provided the resources to do that job. The major perennial issue in Fairview Hills is that of unions. There are also development pressures that are common to other municipalities in rapidly expanding metropolitan areas.

You have a successful interview with the five-member Town Commission; like what you see in the community; and, with the exception of news reports that imply Central City is crime ridden and apparently experiences problems with corruption, you think that this is an ideal way to begin your executive career. You accept the offer that is made to you.

As you assume your duties, you note that you are expected to have dinner with the Commission and the Town Treasurer preceding the twice-a-month Commission meeting. You think that this is a great idea and look forward to your first gathering.

You arrive to dinner with the Chair of the Town Board and are mildly surprised to be introduced to the President of a construction company and the Area Director of the largest labor union. The evening’s Commission meeting agenda is discussed over dinner and you find yourself feeling slightly uncomfortable.

The last item on the agenda for the Commission meeting is a series of road contracts which will be awarded. During dessert, one of the commission members, in opening this topic, casually turns to you and asks you, "what is your percentage?"

The look of surprise on your face is a cue to the Chair to recommend a break. He escorts you to the restroom and says he understands your surprise and then explains to you how construction contracts are awarded in the area.

Basically, the system is one of mutually agreeable bid-rigging by area construction firms who rotate the contracts so that all make money. In return for the cooperation of the Commission, the members are given "bonuses," as are several of the Town's executives. Generally, ten percent of the contract is the bonus pool that is divided on the basis of various percentages for the Town's officers.

Since the union is a part of the arrangement, the Town's cooperation provides peace and contentment on the part of the union. The Town is enjoying strong economic growth; public services are well funded; and, the citizens are quite pleased with their city.

Naturally, you are astonished and murmur your discontent to the Chair. The Chair says that he understands your attitude, but he also explains that this minimal compensation arrangement is common in the area and achieves the goals of the city and satisfies the public's needs.

You tell the Chair that you are not interested in any percentage. The Chair says that this is not a good idea. The people who run the construction businesses and the unions can play "very rough." He is quite serious. And, they "insist" that the City Manager participate.

A chill runs down your spine as you think of your partner and your two small children visiting at the moment with the Chair's wife at their home. You had noticed the muscular "doorman" when you entered the restaurant looked like he could remove that door with his bare hands.

The Chair explains that you will become a "consultant" to the construction company and that the percentage you receive will be billed as a consultant fee. You are free to do some consulting under the terms of your contract with the Town. Thus, there are no taxes or other irregularities. He suggests that if you are uncomfortable with the arrangement, you could do as previous managers have done and contribute your percentage to charity.

In any case, the Chair says that your agreement to a percentage is critical to the continuance of the gathering. He offers to tell the Commission that your percentage will be the "usual" as he walks out of the restroom. You remain, staring at yourself in the mirror.

What do you do now?

General Statement of the Ethical Dilemma:

I face a critical ethical dilemma between upholding community welfare through a continued fight against corruption and protecting my family's welfare and personal safety.

Key Actors

Key Actor	Role Description	Values Implicated
Me (the New City Manager)	Self	Integrity, Responsibility, Reputable
Mr. Smith (Mentor and Former City Manager)	Mentor-Mentee and Supervisor	Trust, Guidance, Professional Development
Chair of the Town Board	Supervisor	Accountability, Transparency
Town Commission Members	Peers	Responsibility, Ethical Governance
President of the Construction Company	Professional Acquaintance	Transparency, Fairness
Area Director of the Largest Labor Union	Professional Acquaintance	Fairness
My Partner and Two Children	Family	Security, Personal Safety, Family Welfare, Financial Stability
The Public	Professional Stakeholders	Public Trust, Community Welfare

Essential Facts

1. Mr. Smith has advised me to seek a City Manager position to further my professional development and offered to assist me with my job search through his professional contacts.
2. News reports suggest that Central City faces challenges related to crime and instances of corruption.
3. I accepted a job offer from the Town of Fairview Hills, an affluent suburb with issues related to unions and development.
4. I have been informed of a routine dinner with the Town Commission and other influential figures before the Commission meetings.
5. During the dinner, the practice of awarding contracts through a bid-rigging system involving kickbacks was revealed.
6. I was asked about my "percentage" in this system, suggesting my participation in the scheme was expected.
7. The Chair warned me of potential dangers to my and my family's safety and job security if I chose not to participate.
8. It was suggested that I could donate the kickback to charity, a practice previous City Managers had reportedly followed.

Missing and/or Implied Facts

1. There is no specific information about how much Mr. Smith knows about how the city is run and the implications for the city manager. It is possible to assume he has some level of knowledge of the dynamics of the corruption going on in the town. However, he might not understand the depth of the potential risk and that he could be endangering me by suggesting I apply for the job. It is not evident, but it is possible to assume that Mr. Smith's colleagues asked him to recommend a new city manager or that he was incentivized to recommend a reputable candidate who could gain public trust. This could imply that he acted under pressure or with a personal agenda or financial interest that may not align with my best interests.
2. News reports about corruption are mentioned, but how in-depth I researched them and their implications is unclear. One can assume that my research might have been superficial, leading to underestimating the severity and pervasiveness of corruption in Fairview Hills.
3. The spouse's income, financial situation, and how any decision could impact the family's financial stability are not considered. Assuming that my family could need my income to cover our financial responsibilities, my resignation could significantly impact our financial situation and future stability.
4. There are no details of any other job offers that might provide an opportunity to leave the situation. We can infer that a lack of alternative job offers could be a significant factor in my decision-making process, adding to the pressure of staying in a corrupt environment.
5. The exact nature of the threats to my family or previous incidents related to non-compliance are not detailed. It is reasonable to assume that the threats could be severe, ranging from social ostracization to potential physical harm, which adds to the urgency and weight of the decision. However, I assume that given that I am in public, there will be no immediate harm to me or my family.
6. There is no information about who hired the muscular doorman or the purpose of his presence. It is plausible to assume that his presence was intended as an implicit threat to ensure compliance with the corrupt practices, adding an element of intimidation.
7. It's not mentioned whether there are any disagreeing voices within the Town Commission or the town's administrative staff against the corrupt practices. The level of acceptance or resistance within the town's government is unknown. The lack of visible opposition suggests either widespread acceptance of corruption or a culture of fear that suppresses dissent.
8. It is unclear if there are systems of accountability or checks and balances in place that could be relied upon to address or report corruption or how difficult it could be to prove it. Assuming the corruption is entrenched, it is likely that any existing systems are either ineffective or compromised, making it challenging to report and address corrupt activities.

Behavioral Issues

1. The City Manager, Mr. Smith, recommended that I pursue a higher position and encouraged me to take the position of City Manager in Fairview Hills, signaling significant progress in my professional development.

2. I accepted an invitation to the customary pre-commission dinner, which aligns with local traditions and practices for incoming city officials, without questioning his transparency despite the corruption reports.
3. I left my children in the care of the Chair's family, unaware at the time of the underlying implications and potential threats associated with the local corrupt system, involving them in my professional network and thrusting their personal safety.
4. Lack of in-depth research on the nature and implications of corruption in my new place of employment, blindly trusting Mr. Smith's guidance.
5. The Chair of the Town Board is participating in the corruption of contract allocation, pressuring me to accept and speak on behalf of the corruption group about potential consequences, requiring me to break all principles of ethical governance and integrity to protect my position and family's welfare..
6. The Chair of the Town Board suggested a money scheme to receive the commission for participating in corrupt contract allocation and even donate to charity if unwilling to take it.
7. The group participating in corrupt practices took a scary-looking doorman to the meeting.
8. I was seen in public having dinner with members of the construction company and participating members of the leadership in the local corruption group.

Ethical Issues

I must choose between prioritizing the broader good and focusing on community welfare by fighting corruption in my role as City Manager or maintaining my family's welfare and personal safety, which might be at risk due to my anti-corruption efforts.

Ethical Issues Analyzed

On the one hand, my duty as City Manager compels me to fight corruption, a key element in fostering community welfare and trust in local governance. There is the possibility of starting a battle against corruption is pivotal for cultivating a culture of integrity and accountability, benefiting the entire community. Upholding these values aligns with the ethical principles of fairness, accountability, and ethical governance, aimed at creating a transparent and just environment for the citizens of Fairview Hills.

However, my active involvement in this battle risks exposing my spouse and children to potential dangers and social scrutiny, which could undermine the family's welfare and personal safety. Prioritizing my family's well-being might necessitate decisions that restrain my effectiveness in addressing community corruption but ensure their safety and stability. Such choices underscore the values of security, personal safety, and family welfare, starkly highlighting the personal costs associated with public service roles. Balancing these considerations demands a nuanced approach: I must weigh the immediate safety of my family against the long-term communal benefits of eradicating corruption.

Action to be Taken

After carefully considering the ethical dilemmas presented by my current position as City Manager of Fairview Hills, and the direct threats to my family welfare and personal safety, I have decided to resign. This decision comes as a response to the untenable position of balancing the severe risks associated with fighting corruption in the city against the potential harm to my family. My action is informed by a strong commitment to both ethical governance and the security of my family. It has become increasingly clear that the environment in Fairview Hills may compromise my professional integrity due to the pervasive corruption and pose significant risks to my family's well-being.

In seeking new employment, I will prioritize opportunities in environments where ethical governance is promoted and enacted. This move aligns with my core values of fairness, accountability, and community welfare, which are essential for fulfilling my professional duties without compromising my ethical standards or the safety of my loved ones. This decision is supported by a deliberate and thoughtful process, acknowledging the potential personal and professional repercussions of resigning. However, the need to provide a safe and stable environment for my family while adhering to my ethical principles takes precedence. By taking this step, I aim to continue my career in a capacity that allows for effective leadership without the ethical conflicts presented by my current role. I am committed to finding a position where I can make meaningful contributions to community welfare and governance, free from the systemic corruption that has marred my experience in Fairview Hills.

Consequences of These Actions

Resigning from my role as City Manager due to ethical conflicts will bring positive and negative consequences that are pivotal to my personal and professional life. Firstly, this decision upholds my ethical standards and reinforces my commitment to integrity. It demonstrates my unwillingness to partake in or be complacent about corrupt practices. This stance could enhance my reputation among discerning employers and colleagues who prioritize ethical governance, potentially opening doors to opportunities within organizations that share these values.

Additionally, prioritizing my family's safety and emotional well-being is a significant positive outcome of this decision. By stepping away from a position that puts them at risk, I am ensuring a safer and more stable environment for them, free from the threats and stress associated with my anti-corruption efforts. This will undoubtedly alleviate much of the tension and concern my role in Fairview Hills has introduced into our lives.

On the professional front, although resigning offers a path to potential long-term fulfillment in a more ethical work environment, it also introduces a period of career disruption and uncertainty. The immediate future may involve navigating unemployment or a challenging job market, which could potentially disrupt financial stability and pose family difficulties and stress. Moreover, there is the risk that some members of my professional network might view my departure as a failure to confront challenges, potentially complicating my efforts to secure a new position.

Resigning might also have broader implications for the community of Fairview Hills. While my departure could spur necessary introspection and reform within the city administration, there's equally a chance that my successor may not uphold the same ethical standards, possibly allowing corrupt practices to continue unabated. This could delay any real progress towards improving the city's governance, ultimately failing the community I aim to protect.

Ethical Criteria Used to Determine Action

In confronting the ethical dilemma posed by the corrupt environment in Fairview Hills, my decision to resign from the role of City Manager was informed by several foundational ethical theories and principles, which guided a principled approach to this complex situation.

Firstly, the framework on administrative responsibility outlined by Cooper (2012) emphasizes the necessity for public administrators to maintain the highest standards of integrity and accountability. Cooper articulates that integrity is fundamental to public trust and effective governance. This principle directly influenced my decision to resign rather than compromise these ethical standards, reflecting a commitment to responsibly uphold my duty to the public and my professional ethics.

Furthermore, Rawls' (1971) theory of justice, which posits that decisions should be made under a veil of ignorance to ensure fairness and equality, reinforced the need to prioritize the community's welfare over personal or professional gains. This approach aligns with the ethical requirement to act impartially and equitably, affirming my resolve to avoid actions that could perpetuate injustice or corruption.

Additionally, as discussed by Sekerka and Bagozzi (2007), the concept of moral courage in leadership highlights the importance of making ethically sound decisions despite potential risks to personal and professional standing. Their analysis underscores that leaders must exhibit moral courage by making tough choices that foster an ethical climate, even when they may lead to personal or professional sacrifices.

In terms of personal safety, the ethical principle of self-preservation, which is often discussed in the context of ethical decision-making in hazardous situations, played a crucial role. According to Beauchamp and Childress (2013), individuals have a duty to protect themselves from harm as a fundamental aspect of ethical behavior, especially in roles where their decisions can have far-reaching consequences on their personal lives. This perspective supported the difficult decision to resign, prioritizing the safety and well-being of my family and myself in the face of potential retaliation or harm due to my anti-corruption stance.

Word Search

Integrity (8): 1 in Relationship Table; 1 in Ethical Issues Analyzed; 3 in Action to be Taken; 3 in Consequences.

Transparency (10): 1 in Relationship Table; 2 in Ethical Issues; 2 in Ethical Issues Analyzed; 2 in Consequences; 3 in Ethical Criteria Used to Determine Action.

Trust (6): 1 in Relationship Table; 1 in Ethical Issues Analyzed; 2 in Consequences; 2 in Ethical Criteria Used to Determine Action.

Responsibility (3): 2 in Relationship Table; 1 in Ethical Criteria Used to Determine Action.

Fairness (4): 2 in Relationship Table; 1 in Ethical Issues Analyzed; 1 in Action to be Taken

Professional Development (3): 1 in Relationship Table; 1 in Essential Facts; 1 in Behavioral Issues

Accountability (5): 1 in Relationship Table; 1 in Missing Facts; 2 in Ethical Issues Analyzed; 1 in Action to be Taken.

Family Welfare (6): 1 in General Statement; 1 in Relationship Table; 1 in Ethical Issues; 2 in Ethical Issues Analyzed; 1 in Action to be Taken.

Community Welfare (6): 1 in General Statement; 1 in Relationship Table; 1 in Ethical Issues; 1 in Ethical Issues Analyzed; 2 in Action to be Taken.

Personal Safety (9): 1 in General Statement; 1 in Relationship Table; 1 in Behavioral Issues; 1 in Ethical Issues; 2 in Ethical Issues Analyzed; 1 in Action to be Taken; 2 in Ethical Criteria Used to Determine Action.

Reputable (2): 1 in Relationship Table; 1 in Missing or Implied Facts.

Security (4): 1 in Relationship Table; 1 in Ethical Issues Analyzed; 1 in Essential Facts; 1 in Action to be Taken.

Financial Stability (3): 1 in Relationship Table; 1 in Ethical Issues Analyzed; 1 in Consequences.

Ethical Governance (4): 1 in Relationship Table; 1 in Behavioral Issues; 2 in Action to be Taken.

References

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