

Facing an Impossible Situation?

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Synopsis

This case describes first lieutenant Mike Dawson's experience during his U.S. Army 2011-2012 tour in Afghanistan as an engineer advisor attached to an Air Force unit advising Afghans in support of Operation Enduring Freedom. His primary responsibility was to coordinate an on-the-job training (OJT) program providing the Afghan military with the skills needed to maintain base facilities under construction and scheduled to be turned over to the Afghans. The key issue in the case is that Dawson faces a stoppage in the OJT program for which he is responsible, a situation created when an Afghan military intelligence officer named Colonel Farhim failed to sign passes permitting the Afghan OJT trainers to enter the base. Dawson, a young and lower ranking U.S. Army officer in an advisory position, must convince the older and much higher ranking Afghan Air Force officer to sign paperwork to keep Dawson's OJT program running.

Learning Outcomes

In completing this assignment, students should be able to:

1. Critique the advantages and disadvantages associated with each of the approaches to Mike's decision that were identified in the case.
2. Analyze the cultural factors that help to explain why Colonel Farhim resisted cooperating with NATO on programs that were potentially beneficial.
3. Compile planning issues for Mike to consider in approaching his conversation with Colonel Farhim as a negotiation.

Application

This case is appropriate for upper-level undergraduate and graduate courses in conflict management, international business, negotiation, organizational culture, and organization behavior. Key issues within the case are cultural differences, political dynamics, preparing for a negotiation session, conflict resolution, and upward communication. Student discussion should encourage creative thinking regarding approaches to resolving the issue Dawson had with the colonel as well as analyzing reasons that account for the colonel resisting a program that on the surface should be highly beneficial for his military, his people, and his country.

Key Words

cultural differences, negotiation, goal alignment, coercion, rational persuasion

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