



Scenario: Death By a Thousand Rules

Group Size: 4-15

This scenario may contain explicit language and references to harmful situations which may be emotionally activating for some people. If you need support, services are available through the [CAF Member Assistance Program \(CFMAP\)](#) and the [Employee Assistance Program \(EAP\)](#).

"Steve, you're so miserable these days!" says Michelle Finnington to her husband, Steve, in the middle of another sleepless night. "How long can this go on?"

"It's work," he admits. "You know, it's the new director. I've never seen anybody quite like her. She doesn't trust us. She oversees all our work. She demands to be cc'd on all direction we give staff and contractors."

Steve is a retired logistics officer who was happy to be able to stay at the Department of National Defence (DND) by moving into a civilian job as head of a procurement team five years ago. Happy, that is, until the new director showed up last year. She was newly promoted and said to be handpicked by the Director General.

She quickly became known as a complete micromanager. "She routinely bypasses me and her other managers by assigning work directly to subordinates three and four levels down the chain of command," says Steve. "She has created so many new rules and procedures that almost every project ends up stalled in the bottleneck at her office door."

Steve and his fellow section heads agree that the new boss does not respect them or trust their ability to manage. The increased stress is taking its toll. Some of Steve's subordinates have left, creating an experience deficit on his team. Worse yet, Steve spends so much of his day hiring replacement staff that he barely has time to manage his regular workload.

"We've explained all these concerns to the director, but nothing has changed," says Steve.

Frustrated and discouraged, Steve is not sleeping well. He knows he's a good leader but is thinking a lot lately about his options.

Categories

Principles:	Respect the Dignity of all Persons
Values:	Courage, Stewardship, Excellence
Cultural Themes:	Leadership, Teamwork
Misconduct Types:	Not Specific
GBA Plus Themes:	Not Specific
Audience:	Defence Team

Facilitator's Guide

Learning Objectives:

- Discuss the ethical principle of Respect the Dignity of all Persons in this situation.
- Discuss the ethical values of courage, stewardship, and excellence in this scenario.

Facilitation Questions:

1. What is the problem in this scenario?
 - Open group discussion.
 - Discuss personal management styles and how personality conflicts in power relationships are always tough, and tricky to handle.
2. What considerations are at play with respect to Defence Ethics?
 - Open group discussion.
 - Discuss the ethical principle of Respecting the dignity of all persons in this situation.
 - Discuss the ethical values of courage, stewardship, and excellence in this scenario.
 - If the new director knows her style is unwelcome, then the director has chosen not to live up to the DND and Canadian Armed Forces (CAF) Codes of Values and Ethics. She is neither demonstrating stewardship nor excellence since she is not effectively providing purpose to her team. In fact, she appears to be reducing the quality of work produced by her group.
3. If you were Steve in this situation, what could you do?
 - Open group discussion.
 - Option 1: Talk to the director. The principle to "work together with honesty, openness, and transparency" may best address the situation. It would be a conversation demanding courage and skill, and it may still fail, but this is not a good enough reason not to try.
 - Option 2: Delicately discuss with colleagues or other senior staff. Could Steve delicately inquire about their Director General's awareness or perceptions of any issues or developments related to the director? Can he get some sense of whether there are individuals up the chain of command who might be more open to listening to his point of view about her management style?
 - Option 3: Submit a formal complaint. On-the-record steps of complaint represent an escalation with accordingly heightened risks to Steve. Reprisals against Steve may be forbidden but, of course, categorical, and harsh accusations are likely to drive the relationship further in a negative direction.
 - Option 4: Ignore the issue. Unless the new director's tenure in the position will be very brief, doing nothing is not the best solution.