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Credits

RIVERBEND CITY: ACTION RESEARCH EVALUATION MISSION

INTRODUCTION: WELCOME TO RIVERBEND CITY

Expository Text: The Ruby Lake neighborhood's advanced manufacturing pilot program is complete. As per the first two phases of the Action Research Inquiry Cycle, the program was planned and then implemented. Now, Dr. Anya Petrova and her research team need to complete the final phase—evaluating the program.

In this mission, Dr. Petrova meets with her graduate students to discuss the evaluation, which will include an impact analysis and a cost-benefit analysis. After this is complete, Dr. Petrova will present the analyses and her recommendations to the one-stop center managers, and then to the Workforce Investment Board.

Instructional Text: The three scenes in this mission illustrate the third phase of the Action Research Inquiry Model—"Evaluate and Reflect on Results and Actions." As you watch, consider the degree to which the WIB and other stakeholders utilize the ARIC model effectively.

Characters in this Mission:

Phil Brooks - Unemployment Income Deputy Commissioner

Ling Chen - Counselor, Riverwood Community College

Kim Cohen - One-Stop Manager (Workforce Investment Act)

Daniel Fisher - Graduate Student

Todd Flannigan - VP, Aquila Optics

Stella Hennepin - Commissioner, Riverbend City Department of Resources and Economic Development

Pa Foua Lee - Graduate Student

Keisha Moore - Graduate Student

Darlene Parker - Workforce Investment Board Director

Anya Petrova - Public Administration Professor

Lydia Robbins - One-Stop Manager (Office of Disability Management)

Nathan Williams - One-Stop Manager (Unemployment Insurance/ Dept. of Employment and Training)

SCENE 1: DR. ANYA PETROVA'S OFFICE

Expository Text: Dr. Petrova meets with her graduate student research assistants to discuss the next steps—an impact analysis and a cost-benefit analysis.

Introductory Prompt: Click on all highlighted people to hear about the next steps.

Dialogue 01: Dr. Petrova discusses the impact analysis.

ANYA:

Daniel, Pa Foua, Keisha, nice to see you. As you know, Keisha and I met with the one-stop center managers. We communicated the initial results of our analysis of the 30-, 60-, and 90-day interviews. The next step is to evaluate outcomes in more detail. We'll be conducting two related types of analyses: an impact analysis and a cost-benefit analysis. Are you all familiar with these?

DANIEL:

Not really. Sorry. What's an impact analysis?

ANYA:

No need to be sorry, Daniel. This is a learning experience. The purpose of an impact analysis is simple: it assesses the degree to which a program produced the intended results. To the best of our ability, we answer the question: "How effective was this program?"

PA FOUA:

And if we can show the program was effective, then will the program be expanded throughout the city?

ANYA:

Well, that's the hope, but we don't have control over that. Our job is to analyze the results.

DANIEL:

Will we have to do statistics?

KEISHA:

Don't worry, Daniel. Statistics won't hurt you.

ANYA:

Yes, we'll be conducting inferential statistics. Our goal is to look at how the target population changed as a result of the intervention. We compare before with after. It's kind of like It's a Wonderful Life. We're asking, if this program had never taken place, where would these people be?

Dialogue 02: The graduate students discuss cost-benefit analysis.

DANIEL:

Okay, so I guess I understand the impact analysis stuff. You also said we'll be doing cost-benefit analysis. How does that work?

ANYA:

Well, that's where we look at the program's bang for your buck, so to speak. Even though we haven't conducted the impact analysis yet, it's pretty clear that this program had a positive impact on the participants. But we have to weigh that against the cost of the program. In the current economic climate, a new program like this needs to demonstrate cost effectiveness if it's going to survive.

KEISHA:

That's a shame. But I guess that's reality.

ANYA:

Unfortunately, this has been a costly program. Among other factors, the training program at the community college cost more than we projected.

DANIEL:

But a program like this can also save money, can't it? If people are working, then you don't have to pay for unemployment insurance and welfare, and stuff like that, right?

PA FOUA:

Yeah, or Medicaid. If a single mother gets a job with good benefits at a place like Aquila Optics, then her health insurance needs are taken care of.

ANYA:

That's absolutely correct, and that's an important part of cost-benefit analysis. Good jobs training programs can save the city money in the long run. Also, another thing to consider is the benefit of this program on Aquila Optics. It's in the economic best interest of the city that companies like Aquila remain in the city and thrive. And if we can attract more advanced manufacturing companies because we have the workforce to support them, that's even better.

Dialogue 03: The research team discuss their next steps.

KEISHA:

Okay, so let me make sure I have this straight. We're going to be conducting an impact analysis and a cost-benefit analysis. Then we'll present our findings to the one-stop managers, and then to the Workforce Investment Board.

DANIEL:

Why do we have to present the findings twice?

ANYA:

Good question, Daniel. The meeting with the one-stop managers is more about reflecting and having a dialogue. We're going to present them with some recommendations. But we want to dialogue with them and get lots of feedback before we make our final presentation to the board.

PA FOUA:

Why is that?

ANYA:

Well, the meeting with the Workforce Investment Board is a big deal. They're going to be voting on the recommendations we make. So we want to make sure the recommendations are well-thought out and reflect the best interests of the community as a whole. The one-stop managers can help us with that. They also might offer us some insight into the politics of the Workforce Investment Board. There might be some behind-the-scene politics that we don't know about that we need to consider when presenting the recommendations.

SCENE 2: BECK UNIVERSITY MEETING ROOM

Expository Text: In anticipation of meeting the the WIB, Dr. Petrova meets with the One-Stop Center managers.

Instructional Prompt: Click on all highlighted characters.

Dialogue 04: Dr. Petrova presents the results of the impact analysis and cost-benefit analysis to the one-stop center managers.

ANYA:

Thank you so much for meeting with us today. As you know, we've conducted an impact analysis and a cost-benefit analysis of the job training program. Next week, I'm going to be meeting with the Workforce Investment Board to present my findings and recommendations. But before I meet with them, I need to hear your feedback. I want to emphasize how much I want to hear your concerns and suggestions. I will be considering these very seriously before I make my final recommendations. The purpose of this meeting is to have a conversation with you about the proposed recommendations—not to present these to you in a top-down fashion.

LYDIA:

We really appreciate that, Dr. Petrova.

KIM:

Very much so. And we're eager to hear your recommendations.

ANYA:

Well, as we discussed earlier, I'm pleased to say that this program clearly has had a positive effect on the majority of the participants. Ninety-one percent of the participants were still employed after 90 days, and about 10 percent of those were promoted to supervisory positions. After conducting an impact analysis, it seems clear that most of these individuals are far better off than if they hadn't participated in the program. This is especially the case because the unemployment rate in the Ruby Lake neighborhood has actually gone up—even with the initiation of this pilot program.

NATHAN:

It's great to hear that the program has had a positive impact. But what about the cost-benefit factor?

ANYA:

Clearly this is an expensive program. We have to take that into consideration. But we also need to consider the cost savings of this program. Participants and their families are significantly less dependent on social services. Moreover, productivity at Aquila is up significantly, and executives are thrilled with the program. Helping a company like Aquila succeed and remain in the city is of economic benefit to everyone.

LYDIA:

So what do you recommend?

ANYA:

These are my recommendations—and let me emphasize again that these are preliminary, and that I want your feedback before my recommendations are finalized. I recommend that we move this training program forward. We should expand the program in the Ruby Lake neighborhood and in other city neighborhoods as well. We should also look at expanding into the suburbs that have a large population of workers who have been displaced from traditional manufacturing jobs. We have several companies in town who are interested in participating, most notably Aphilex Industries.

Because this is an expensive program, we need to be somewhat conservative in how much we expand the program. But because this program has been such a success, we don't need to be overly

conservative. I recommend we expand the program to accommodate 600 to 800 workers. After 90 days, we conduct a second impact analysis, and use that data to make further recommendations.

OK. So what are your thoughts?

Dialogue 05: The one-stop managers express concerns with the proposed scope of the program expansion.

KIM:

Dr. Petrova, I'm completely onboard with expanding the program. This is the most exciting employment innovation we've seen in Riverbend City for years. But I really need to question the scope here. In this economic climate, we're never going to get this expanded to 6 to 800 workers. Not when training is so expensive.

NATHAN:

I agree with Kim. Dr. Petrova, here's one piece of the situation you may not know. The director of the Workforce Investment Board, Darlene Parker, is probably going to run for governor this next election.

ANYA:

I see. That's good to know.

NATHAN:

As you probably know, the current governor is under fire because of perceived fiscal irresponsibility. And given what I know about Darlene's background, I'm guessing she'll be running on a fiscal responsibility platform.

KIM:

Which doesn't mean she's going to reject the expansion of this program outright. At least I don't think she will.

NATHAN:

I don't think she will either. But I do think we need to scale this down considerably or she won't be on board.

ANYA:

If 6 to 800 is too high, what do you think is more reasonable?

KIM:

It's hard to say. Maybe 200, with an emphasis on there being a second impact analysis? That way, you can sell them on the fact that you'll have a larger pool of participants to analyze before moving forward with a larger program expansion.

LYDIA:

I agree. I also think we need to limit this to the Ruby Lake neighborhood, where the initial program was successful, and maybe add one or two other low-income neighborhoods. I don't think expanding this to the suburbs is a good idea at this time. We don't want to veer too far away from the target population that was analyzed in the impact analysis.

Dialogue 06: The one-stop managers discuss ways to cut down the cost of program.

LYDIA:

Dr. Petrova, I'm completely onboard with expanding the program. This is the most exciting employment innovation we've seen in Riverbend City for years. But I really need to question the scope here. In this economic climate, we're never going to get this expanded to 6 to 800 workers. Not when training is so expensive.

NATHAN:

Well, there's the industry-specific assessments. Those are pricey. But we can't control the price of those.

LYDIA:

Well, what about the training at the community college? Does that course need to meet as often as it does? Maybe we could make it into a half-course?

KIM:

Oh dear, Lydia, I don't think that's a good idea. If we cut corners on the course, the workers' success rate on the job might decline. And then the cost-benefit ratio goes down.

ANYA:

And it's important to keep the companies satisfied. The Aquila executives were pleased with the preparation level of the workers. I recommend that we don't mess with that.

LYDIA:

I'm just throwing out ideas. Is there some way to tweak the course so that the same material is taught in a shorter amount of time? Maybe we can make the course online.

KIM:

Not everyone in this target population owns a computer.

LYDIA:

That's true. So is there anything we can cut without sacrificing the quality of the program?

KIM:

We could improve the screening process for applicants. I mean, a 91-percent retention rate after 90 days is excellent. However, that nine-percent loss represents money we spent training people who didn't make it.

NATHAN:

Great idea, Kim.

ANYA:

I also like that idea. Let's brainstorm some ideas for improving the screening process, and I'll include these in my recommendations.

Dialogue 07: The one-stop managers express their concerns about the soft skills coaching program.

NATHAN:

Dr. Petrova, there was only one part of the program that I felt was somewhat lacking: the soft-skills coaching class at the one-stop center.

ANYA:
How so?

NATHAN:
I don't think many of the participants took the training very seriously, for a number of reasons. They missed the opportunity to learn some valuable lessons.

KIM:
I know. This is so frustrating. Workers need this kind of soft-skills training. Look at why the majority of the participants left. Not because of job performance. They were let go because of lateness and absenteeism and other unprofessional behavior. Improving the soft skills training could mean less attrition, and that could save the program money.

NATHAN:
I totally agree, Kim. We need the soft skills training. But maybe we need to find some ways to reinforce how important this training is?

LYDIA:
Absolutely, Nathan. I think the trainer did a pretty good job. But maybe we could help reinforce the message by bringing in successful people from the neighborhood to speak about their experiences.

ANYA:
That's an excellent idea, Lydia. And I think we can definitely present improvements to the soft-skills training as a cost-saving measure.

SCENE 3: ONE-STOP CENTER

Expository Text: After meeting with the one-stop center managers, Dr. Petrova tweaked her recommendations. Now it's time to present the recommendations to the Workforce Investment Board. The WIB will be voting on Dr. Petrova's recommendations.

Instructional Prompt: Click on the highlighted people to hear the meeting.

Dialogue 08: Dr. Petrova summarizes her findings and recommendations.

ANYA:
Thank you all for giving me the opportunity to work with you on the Ruby Lake neighborhood pilot employment training program. As you know, we've conducted a impact analysis and a cost-benefit analysis of the program, and we've met with one-stop center managers to incorporate their feedback into our recommendations.

I've prepared a PowerPoint presentation to present our recommendations in detail. Before we begin the presentation, I'd like to summarize our findings. Based on our research, we've concluded that the employment training program has had a strongly positive economic impact on the majority of the participants. The program also has had a positive economic impact on Riverbend City as a whole. Money has been saved on social services. In addition, Aquila Optics has benefited economically from the program, and that's a clear benefit to the city.

As you'll see in the PowerPoint presentation, this program was more expensive to conduct than originally anticipated. After weighing the expense of the program with both the benefit to workers and the economic benefit of the program to Riverbend City, my recommendation is that at this time, we expand the program conservatively. Several other advanced manufacturing companies in the city have expressed interest in the program, including Aphilex Industries. I recommend we expand the program in the Ruby Lake neighborhood and bring approximately 100 more workers into the program. In addition, I recommend we select one or two similar neighborhoods in the city and bring in an additional 100 to 150 workers.

I also recommend that after these workers have completed a 90-day work cycle, we conduct another impact analysis and cost-benefit analysis. The larger sample size will allow us to conduct a more detailed analysis, and data from this analysis can be used to determine whether this program should be expanded further. This will also give us more information about why a certain percentage of workers are dropping out, which is information we can use to improve retention.

I also recommend several areas where costs can be saved. First, based in part on the feedback of the one-stop center managers, I recommend some improvements in the screening process. Overall the process was successful in that there was a 91-percent retention rate after 90 days. However, if we could improve this retention rate to 95 percent or higher, money could be saved on training. In addition, I also recommend that we improve the quality of the soft-skills coaching at the one-stop centers. The majority of workers who were dismissed were let go because of professionalism issues.

So, I have quite a few details to fill in. Please turn your attention to the PowerPoint presentation...

Dialogue 09: After the PowerPoint presentation, the WIB has questions.

DARLENE:

Dr. Petrova, that was an outstanding presentation. We know that a great deal of hard work went into your analysis and we are very grateful.

(applause)

ANYA:

Thank you. What questions do you have?

DARLENE:

Well, unfortunately, in this economic climate we have to pay close attention to fiscal responsibility. I do appreciate that your recommendations limit the amount of new participants to a maximum of 250. However, I think that number needs to be even smaller.

STELLA:

With all due respect, Darlene, I was actually wondering if 250 people is a high enough number. This program clearly has had a positive impact on the participants. Ninety-one percent is an outstanding retention rate. I was hoping that we could expand this program into some of the first-ring suburbs like Brooklyn Rapids. That's an area that's been hit hard by the loss of manufacturing jobs. And there are rural areas like Brown Trout Bay that could also benefit from this kind of economic development.

DARLENE:

Stella, I really do appreciate your economic development perspective. In a different economic climate, I'd be more likely to think big too. But right now a conservative approach is necessary.

PHIL:

I'm inclined to agree with Dr. Petrova that 250 people is a good balance between too conservative and not conservative enough. I also would like to expand this program throughout the city and in other areas of the state. But this is a good start. If the next impact analysis is impressive, then we can expand the program further.

DARLENE:

Absolutely, Phil. But I'm still not convinced that we need 250 participants. Can't we just recruit 100 more people from the Ruby Lake neighborhood?

LING:

Well, one thing to keep in mind is that if we're going to do another impact analysis, we would benefit from a larger sample size. Among other things, this will give us a better idea of why people don't make it through the program. Then we can develop more effective retention strategies—which will save money.

STELLA:

And wouldn't we also benefit from having a more diverse population of workers in the sample?

LING:

Maybe, but not necessarily. I think we need to measure the impact of this program on our target population before we move to a new population. If we implement this program in a rural area like Brown Trout Bay, the impact might be completely different.

DARLENE:

And it's not economically feasible to expand the program to rural areas. Not at this time.

STELLA:

But please, everyone, keep in mind that the expense of the program is balanced by the positive economic benefits. Isn't the goal of a job training program to move people off of social services and into stable employment?

PHIL:

Absolutely, Stella. That's why I don't think that 250 participants in the next round is too many. The initial impact of this program was impressive.

TODD:

Also, here's something to consider: if we have a high enough number of participants, we can get a bulk discount on the industry-specific evaluations.

DARLENE:

That's a very useful piece of information, Todd. How much of a discount are we looking at? And how many participants do we need to qualify?

TODD:

I don't know offhand, Darlene. I can give the company a call right after this meeting. But I know the bulk savings can be significant.

STELLA:

So it's possible that we can actually save money by testing more people?

TODD:

Possibly. I'll let you know right away. And let me just say that from the perspective of Aquila Optics, we're certainly hoping this program will be expanded—if not now, then at some point in the near future. As a Riverbend City-based company, this employment program has meant a serious boost to our bottom line. That means we can expand and invest more resources in Riverbend City.

STELLA:

And that means more money and more economic development for Riverbend City as a whole.

ANYA:

Well, I know you all have quite a bit to discuss. Please don't hesitate to call me if you have further questions.

DARLENE:

Thank you so much, Dr. Petrova. We'll be voting on your recommendations on Friday, and then we'll contact you right away about our decision.

SCENE 4: BECK UNIVERSITY BAR

Expository Text: The WIB has voted on Dr. Petrova's recommendations. Dr. Petrova takes her graduate assistants out for a beer to discuss the results.

Instructional Prompt: Click on the highlighted people.

Dialogue 10: Dr. Petrova shares the news.

ANYA:

So, I heard from Darlene Parker.

KEISHA:

Omigosh. I'm so nervous.

PA FOUA:

What did she say, Dr. Petrova?

ANYA:

The Workforce Investment Board has approved all of our recommendations.

DANIEL:

They did? No way!

KEISHA:

That's awesome!

PA FOUA:

So they agreed to expand the program to 250 participants?

ANYA:

They sure did.

DANIEL:

Let's have a drink!

ANYA:

Drinks are on me. And snacks too. Jalapeño poppers, anyone? They're my favorite. And order whatever you like.

KEISHA:

Thank you, Dr. Petrova! It's been such a pleasure.

ANYA:

I couldn't have asked for a better group of research assistants. And I hope you'll be around next semester. We'll have another impact analysis and cost-benefit analysis to conduct.

DANIEL:

I'll drink to that!

INTERACTIVE

In the missions used in this class, you watched a program intervention that followed the Action Research Inquiry Cycle. In this interactive, you will practice your knowledge of the ARIC. Match the action to the correct step in the ARIC.

1. Conduct 30-, 60-, and 90-day reviews of the program participants. (correct step): Collect and Analyze Data
2. Present a preliminary draft of recommendations to stakeholders for discussion. (correct step): Reflect on and Dialogue on Next Steps
3. Discuss the problems that are in need of an intervention. (correct step): Assess the Core Issues
4. Present the initial results of the intervention to stakeholders. (correct step): Communicate Results
5. Recommend actions to stakeholders. (correct step): Recommend or Decide on Next Steps
6. Create an impact analysis. (correct step): Evaluate Outcomes.
7. Locate background information about relevant trends. (correct step): Review the Literature
8. Conduct focus groups with stakeholders and potential participants to gather preliminary feedback. (correct step): Design the Projected Intervention
9. Provide information to potential participants about the intervention process. (correct step): Implement the Intervention

On one side of the screen, place 1-9 in the order here. On the other side, learners will drag and drop the choices into these nine categories, in this order:

1. Assess the Core Issues
2. Review the Literature
3. Design the Projected Intervention
4. Implement the Intervention
5. Collect and Analyze Data
6. Communicate Results
7. Evaluate Outcomes

Instructional Designer: Laura Badaracco Amend

Project Manager: Jesse Rosel, Karen Dodd, Julie Greunke

Editor: Tom Kapocius

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