Applying the Leadership and Navigation Competency

One of the behaviors representative of this competency is the ability to lead the organization through adversity with resilience and tenacity. It is when things unexpectedly go badly for a firm that the management team finds itself tested in a way that can never be truly captured in a job description. This activity places the students in a difficult situation.

Trouble at the Top Means Trouble All Around

Describe the following scenario to the students:

You are the vice president of HR of a well-known, publicly-traded, national pharmaceutical manufacturer. You are about to go into a meeting of the company's executive leadership team. A very unfortunate event has occurred. You have just concluded a highly sensitive investigation of your company's CEO, and as a result, tomorrow the CEO will be announcing his or her resignation. This comes amid allegations of improprieties, violations of your company's ethics code and potential sexual harassment. Most members of the executive team were unaware of the charges and subsequent investigation, and so they will be hearing this news for the first time.

Now, have students consider what they will do as members of the executive leadership team to help lead not just the HR team but the entire organization through the turbulent times ahead.

There are different ways you can approach this activity:

Option 1

Divide the class into two groups. Have one group talk about what roles group members would have to play as leaders of the company. Have the second group discuss challenges specific to members' roles as leaders of HR.

Option 2

Do not divide the class. Instead have all students work as one unit to contribute as many idea as they can.

For whichever option you choose, here are some ideas to help facilitate a robust conversation:

1. How will you communicate what has happened to the company? [Email(s)? Town hall-style employee meeting? Intranet posting(s)? Social media?] What are the pros and cons of these different methods?
2. The message: Regardless of *how* you say it, what should your message *be*? How open and transparent should communications be? Is there anything you will specifically choose *not* to say? What will you do to regain trust?
3. How will you collaborate with the management team to do "damage control"? Who will be responsible for what? How will the message cascade down through layers of management, through different departments?
4. Will an interim CEO be appointed while the search for a permanent replacement is underway? If so, how would you support that person? What challenges will be unique to his or her role? What might the interim CEO's goals be while serving in this transitional capacity?
5. How will you deal with the media? The public? Stockholders?
6. From a purely HR view, how might this affect:
   a) Talent acquisition and retention efforts.
   b) The company employer brand in the media and in social media.
   c) Employee morale and overall engagement.
   d) Organizational productivity.
   e) Corporate risk concerns.
   f) And any other angles you would like to address.

Two examples inspired this activity:

- "Why the CEO of This Top Ad Agency Just Quit," http://fortune.com/2016/03/18/gustavo-martinez-steps-down/?xid=soc_socialflow_twitter_FORTUNE
- "HP CEO Mark Hurd Resigns Unexpectedly Amid Scandal (UPDATED)" http://www.wired.com/2010/08/hp-ceo-mark-hurd-resigns-unexpectedly-amid-scandal/

You can read the two articles referenced above for your own information, but there is no expectation that the students will know any additional details beyond those provided. That said, reading the articles may inspire you to ask different questions or pose different challenges.