

PART ONE

**Product, Brand, and
Identity Management**

Setting the Stage

SNAPSHOT

Institution:

Meadowbrook Clinic, a two-physician medical practice specializing in family medicine

Location:

Washington (population 438,042), located in the East South Central region of the United States

Characters:

Ms. Linda Douglas, Administrator (retiring)

Mr. James Reynolds, Administrator (newly hired)

Dr. Karen Robinson, Co-Owner and Physician

Dr. Thomas White, Co-Owner and Physician

(all of Meadowbrook Clinic)

Context:

In this case, a newly hired administrator seeks to professionalize the business operations of a clinic, but shortly after orientation, he sees conflict between a key goal of its physician owners and reality.

James Reynolds is excited. He just received the telephone call that he had been waiting for—an opportunity to join Meadowbrook Clinic as its new administrator. Accepting this new opportunity, James is especially enthusiastic because he will be the first professional administrator in the

history of the medical practice. While this new employment position will likely prove to be challenging, it will afford him a unique opportunity to professionalize operations; something James welcomes.

Owned by Drs. Karen Robinson and Thomas White, Meadowbrook Clinic specializes in family medicine. The two-physician practice has grown over its 6 years of existence, bringing the clinic to a point where professional administrative practices are needed to enhance internal and external business operations, affording greater opportunities for prosperity. Drs. Robinson and White were beginning to see weaknesses resulting from inefficient operations that were negatively impacting practice growth. This they attributed to a lack of vision and expertise on the part of the clinic's office Administrator, Linda Douglas.

Drs. Robinson and White have been very proud of their practice's fast-paced growth over its brief lifespan, but they are hungry for more. The clinic is situated in the East South Central region of the United States, specifically, the city of Washington (population 438,042), an area that is expected to witness enhanced population growth in coming years. The two physicians wish to position their practice to capitalize on the coming boom. Drs. Robinson and White were especially desirous of engaging in marketing to increase patient traffic, perhaps positioning the practice to hire another physician to address the extra volume. Unfortunately, Linda did not possess the skill set to capitalize on coming opportunities, nor did she have the desire to acquire the skills to do so.

Not unlike many small medical practices, the administrative infrastructure of Meadowbrook Clinic merely had evolved, primarily as a clerical function at the hands of Linda, who possessed solid office management skills but lacked formal training in executive administration. Her formal education was limited to high school and some coursework in the area of office management at a technical college; most of her training was on-the-job. Linda had performed well in past years, but the business of medicine and the intricacies of the external environment were growing increasingly complex, convincing Drs. Robinson and White that a professionally trained administrator was necessary.

For the medical practice, the timing could not have been better. Linda was preparing to retire, making for an easy and conflict-free transition to professional management. To ease the transition even further, Linda agreed, at the request of Drs. Robinson and White, to remain employed

until Meadowbrook Clinic had successfully recruited a new administrator. With James' hire, Linda's retirement could now proceed, prefaced by a brief orientation period that she would provide for James.

James indeed fit the role of the professional healthcare administrator. He possessed 15 years of experience in ambulatory care management, primarily working for for-profit and not-for-profit hospital-based clinics. He also held a Master of Health Administration degree and a few administrative certifications, affording additional knowledge and providing further confirmations of his abilities to enhance operations at Meadowbrook Clinic.

Presenting for work on his first day, James was warmly welcomed by all of Meadowbrook Clinic's employees. A 2-week orientation period conducted by Linda immediately ensued, permitting James an invaluable opportunity to observe current practices, shadowing the very person who had been in charge of such for years. This also facilitated James' plan to simply observe clinic activities for 2 weeks, upon which he would provide a preliminary report to Drs. Robinson and White outlining his observations and plans for improving administrative operations.

Nearly 2 weeks into his observations, James, for the most part, had come to understand Meadowbrook Clinic. He witnessed good things that he believed should be retained and bad things that he definitely was determined to eliminate. As for the good things, he noted a high degree of camaraderie among professional, technical, and clerical staff members, making for a cordial atmosphere that positively resonated with Meadowbrook Clinic's patients. Further, maintaining adequate personnel coverage across the clinic's schedule (weekdays from 8 AM to 6 PM) was problem free, with employees working closely with each other to ensure that Meadowbrook's patient base was efficiently and effectively addressed.

James also noted an excellent physical environment, with the clinic sporting an attractive, comfortable decor that was aesthetically and ergonomically pleasing for both patients and employees. Basic administrative processes seemed to be in order, with admissions, payroll, and other core activities being carried out prudently. Further, patients seemed very pleased with both the care delivered at the clinic and ancillary administrative processes, although satisfaction was not being formally measured.

James indeed believed that Meadowbrook Clinic possessed a firm foundation upon which future gains could be accomplished. However, to do

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so, he knew that a number of weaknesses would need to be addressed. The administrative framework, for example, was very visibly a clerical model, with Linda serving primarily as an advanced paper-pusher. Executive management processes and practices were universally absent, just as James expected. No efforts were made in the areas of strategic planning, with the clinic not even having a mission statement. Also absent were any stated goals and objectives, hampering opportunities to engage in organized pursuits and track progress.

Marketing efforts were nonexistent, with Meadowbrook Clinic relying completely on word-of-mouth communications from satisfied patients and referrals from other practitioners in the marketplace for new patient traffic. Nor were there any efforts to monitor the environment or track patient satisfaction. As James had expected, the basic office management requirements of the medical practice were being handily addressed, but advanced administrative techniques and procedures were absent.

James was confident that he could design and implement an administrative floor plan that would set the stage for professional business operations. But he was particularly concerned regarding one of the key desirables expressed by Drs. Robinson and White—growth. James knew that he could develop a marketing communications plan that would bolster patient volume, but he was unsure of exactly how the clinic would accommodate that growth.

By his estimation, Meadowbrook Clinic's waiting room and parking area were reaching their capacity limitations with the current patient volume addressed by the practice. Further, the clinic was landlocked, completely surrounded by other establishments, with no easy opportunities to purchase adjacent space for clinic and parking area enhancements. Drs. Robinson and White had indicated their satisfaction with the location of Meadowbrook Clinic and had even invested thousands of dollars recently to upgrade the medical practice. These were clear indications that the two physicians had no intentions of accommodating growth through the physical relocation of Meadowbrook Clinic.

As James' 2-week observation period drew to a close, he entered the weekend with the goal of writing a report conveying recommendations to Drs. Robinson and White. Some concerns could easily be addressed; others would be more difficult.

DISCUSSION

1. James indicated that he planned to install an administrative floor plan to set the stage for professional administrative operations. Although the case gives a few indications of what he has in mind, think about strategic management, marketing, and other professional management activities, and provide insights into exactly what such a floor plan would involve.
2. Based on accounts by Drs. Robinson and White, Meadowbrook Clinic seems to have witnessed pleasing growth over its 6-year history, but it now seems that growth limitations are appearing, which the two physicians attribute to a lack of skill and innovation on the part of Linda. Based on James' findings concerning growth barriers, do you think Drs. Robinson and White correctly identified the cause of plateauing practice growth? Please justify your response.
3. Assume that the physical environment of Meadowbrook Clinic and its parking area are of sufficient size to accommodate increased patient volume. How would this change your response provided in the prior discussion inquiry? Be sure to provide descriptive details.
4. Assume that James is accurate in his assessment of the physical growth barriers faced by Meadowbrook Clinic. Assume also that Drs. Robinson and White will not consider relocating their medical practice for the purpose of increasing capacity. Given all of this, what, if any, avenues of practice growth remain possible?
5. What do you believe would enter a potential patient's mind if he or she drove to a clinic and witnessed a jam-packed parking area and waiting room, clearly demonstrating that the clinic was operating at or even beyond capacity? What effect would this have on growth? What are the implications of this for marketing?