

# OGL 481 Pro-Seminar I: PCA-Ethical Communities Worksheet

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## 1) Briefly restate your situation from Module 1 and your role.

**Your Role:** You are an external customer who, along with your wife, shops regularly at Trader Joe's.

**The Situation:** The situation is your analysis of how Trader Joe's successfully operates on a business model that is fundamentally different from its competitors. This model is built on three key elements that create a perception of honesty and integrity:

**Product Transparency:** A strategy of ~80% private-label products, which allows them to control quality (no GMOs, artificial flavors, etc.) and offer a "no-questions-asked" return policy.

**Pricing Integrity:** A formal policy of "everyday low prices" with no sales, coupons, or loyalty cards, which creates a simple, transparent agreement with all customers.

**Store Culture:** A community-focused atmosphere fostered by investing in friendly, helpful, and well-paid "Crew" members.

## 2) Describe how the ethics of the organization influenced the situation.

Trader Joe's ethics seem clearly rooted in product transparency, purity, and the customer's 'island vibe' experience. From my perspective as a customer, it is easy to understand what Trader Joe's stands for when I shop at their stores. Their products are straightforward and pure, and I know that I am buying a quality item backed by their "no questions asked" guarantee. The 'island vibe' and my interactions with Crew members make me feel highly valued. They believe in keeping costs low for the consumer in an attempt to save money for both of us. Overall, I feel excited and "rewarded" when shopping at Trader Joe's, which aligns with the core values they attempt to provide for consumers.

## 3) Recommend how you would apply one of the ethical community metaphors (see Exhibit 20.1 in Bolman and Deal) for an alternative course of action regarding your case.

While Trader Joe's is often praised for its customer-facing culture, the organization is not perfect and has faced valid criticism regarding its operational ethics in recent years. The

most pressing issue is the accusation of aggressive union-busting tactics toward employees attempting to unionize. This adversarial approach creates a toxic environment that threatens the core identity of the company. To course correct, I would recommend that Trader Joe's leadership and Crew members apply the 'Family: Caring and Love' metaphor from Bolman and Deal. This frame suggests that an organization functions best not when it is run like a rigid hierarchy, but when it operates with the psychological support and emotional bonds of a family unit, giving the company soul (Bolman & Deal, 2021, p. 413).

To make this metaphor a reality, the organization must prioritize "caring" over "controlling." As stated in our textbook, "A compassionate family or community requires servant-leaders concerned with the needs and wishes of members and stakeholders" (Bolman & Deal, 2021, p. 416). This means leadership must listen to the root causes of the union's efforts rather than trying to suppress them. I believe that by fostering a renewed sense of unity, love, and mutual respect, they can resolve the grievances that are currently dividing the Crew. If the employees feel genuinely cared for by their "work family," that positive energy will translate directly to the floor; the increased compassion would be felt all the way through to the customer's experience, ultimately strengthening the brand.

**4) Reflect on what you would do or not do differently given what you have learned about ethics.**

As a leader at Trader Joe's, I would choose to embrace the challenge of unionization rather than resisting it, especially if it represents the genuine will of the Crew members. Instead of viewing organized labor as a threat to management, I would view it as an opportunity to practice true servant leadership. My goal would be to demonstrate support through tangible actions and policies that validate their concerns. By prioritizing the well-being of employees over the preservation of traditional power dynamics, I would aim to rebuild the trust that has been eroded in recent years.

I believe this shift toward genuine service and care would work wonders throughout the organization. When leadership treats employees with dignity, that sentiment cascades downward—from the inner circles of the home office to the daily interactions on the sales floor. If Crew members feel secure and respected, they are naturally more inclined to extend that same warmth to the public. Ultimately, the care and service cultivated internally would be felt by every customer who walks through the doors, reinforcing the authentic culture that Trader Joe's strives to project.



## Reference or References

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