

Less Than Effective Interpersonal Communication Case Assignment

CMN 1101: Fundamentals of Human Communication

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Executive Summary/Abstract

The scenario in question involves a job in go-kart racing. Specifically, the job concerns the safety aspect of such racing. At full shift, there are seven workers employed as race officials. These seven participants all use a radio to verbally communicate with each other to send/receive "warnings," and/or "penalties," to a driver committing such infractions. Each worker also has a flag and a sign to signify a driver to slow down (yellow flag), let a faster kart pass them (blue flag), stop the race (red flag), etc. The warnings and penalties (shown visually by a rectangular sign with the words WARNING and PENALTY) are given to drivers who bump into other karts/the protective barriers, pass/speed on yellow lights/flags, etc.

Due to the nature of the job, communication is of utmost importance. Therefore, workers must be always alert as to send signals out to others to clear warnings and cautions so that every racer receives word on their driving ability (if they are posing as danger to other drivers on the track). With that said, the radios that each worker receives are awful. They are old and their inner circuits are loose which makes for hearing a loud or faint buzzing sound that accompanies someone talking via a radio. Despite their terrible condition (even though some work well enough to make out the words that someone says) the manager for whatever reason still uses them and distributes each to every official. The officials (some of who do not care to voice their concern) take the radios and deal with it. Some have even gone so far to squeeze the radio in their hands (by doing so, the inside battery becomes more connected and as a result, hearing on the radio can be clearer) just to hear what needs to be heard.

Ultimately, this is an issue that hinders communication greatly; if one official on the track cannot hear the other, how can they proceed to give out warnings and penalties? Or wave specific flags per situation? Looking to find a solution, a small group of workers who care for their job want to press the issue of failing radios on to the manager (who is rarely present to greet the workers). The way around this? An assistant manager is present where he could pass along the problem to the manager and propose a meeting between the workers and the boss. The small group of devoted employees, seeing that the assistant manager is present, go up to him and collectively state their issue. They also persuade the assistant that if he wants to look good in front of the boss (for doing a good job on his part), that he helps them with their

case. The assistant manager will then take the issue and meet with the manager to propose a conference with the workers.

1. Identity of the Parties

Individually, the parties expressed in this case center on a group of seven male adolescents who work together at a racetrack and its governing body: the manager and assistant manager. Each of the members of the seven-man race crew, all of whom are high school and college aged, work in cohesion to ensure the safety of all participants kart racing on the track. As expected, they play an extremely important part in ensuring that the business is safely and punctually handled. The manager and assistant manager ensure on their part to supervise the race officials and make executive decisions on the welfare of the business (i.e. internal and external affairs). Together, as part of a greater relationship, the crew and the managers form an organization built on serving people fun while making sure that the fun served is executed and managed properly.

2. What is the present context—family or organization

The communication channel (for the race officials and managers) is done both via radio and face to face. The seven employees themselves are of roughly equal importance in terms of communicating certain information, thus having an optimal share of power among everyone involved in a given race. In contrast, the assistant manager (who slightly has more power than the race officials but less power than the manager) and the manager take more action (usually face to face) in scenarios involving race dynamics or events outside of them. Despite a higher power interaction existing, as already stated in the abstract, the manager is hardly

ever present, making the assistant manager more powerful in this situation. The assistant manager is the only means of communication between the race officials and the manager (the liaison). When employees need to express any type of concern, they need to talk it over with the assistant manager so that he may bring it to the manager.

3. What listening behaviors occur?

Clear listening behaviors are observed in the conflict presented in this scenario. Some race officials (four of seven) voice their concerns with the assistant manager in order to improve an intricate part of their job. The employees who care about the quality of their job know that they need better means for listening if they are to do their job optimally and due to this, they understand that letting the assistant manager know about the issue at least opens discussion for improvement. The officials decide to let him know face to face that their faulty radios are unacceptable for proper communication. The assistant manager repeats their problem to them in order to make sure he understands the problem word for word. He then writes down a few notes, which displays how intently he listens, and ensures the concerned employees that he would speak with the manager about their concerns. He also thanks them for bringing up the problem to his attention.

4. What language use occurs?

Everyone involved: the four officials and the assistant manager use appropriate language during the social discussion; only two employees speak out prominently. The other two show nonassertiveness, and contribute less to the discussion. Those assertive enough take the initiative to describe the problem at hand to their best ability. This means the use of descriptive language/

paralanguage, logistics, and gestures to convey points in a convincing and concerned manner. The language and haptics in use were powerful enough to get the assistant manager on their side of having the issue solved. Ultimately, the employees are able to state the problem so clearly that the assistant manager expressed his need to bring this information to the manager.

5. What is the goal structure of the parties?

Both the race officials and the managers have the same goal essentially: to minimize error and maximize performance for race safety. With that said, the goal structure for the parties are as follows: (1.) the officials talk with the assistant manager, have him on their side and get him to speak with the manager, (2.) the assistant manager then discloses the issue with his superior and talks him into meeting with the officials, and (3.) the manager will finally meet with the officials to propose a solution (replacing the bad radios with the good ones). Even though this structure presents one goal (to better communication between officials on the track), there are actually more that are subtly present. For the assistant manager, he needs to make sure that he is facilitating between two parties as doing so ensures that his boss is happy and that on his record will show that collaboration is being done on his part to help the business improve. It is a fact that the workers bring up to pressure him into siding with them. The manager himself needs to fulfill his goal of improving his business to attract as much volume as possible for the racetrack.

Since each individual goal relates to one another and overlap, strictly speaking, these goals are shared among everyone because one party's goal influences another's for a shared cause. Due to the shared cause for improving

business, past goals were mainly met with cooperation and collective judgment. However, those goals concerned race timing and escorting racers in and out of the track, a detail that cannot be overlooked at all. With this new issue of having officials not being able to communicate with each other adequately, it must be said that at present time the manager is unaware of the situation and its negative impact of the safety of the races. What more is the perceived sense of the manager being cheap in not wanting to spend money on new radios until the old ones break for good.

6. What are the actions and messages?

A conversation is documented between one of the race officials and the assistant manager. The official expresses the seriousness of how the manager handing out worn-out radios without thought negatively impacts the quality of the job. This exchange is documented moments before a group meeting is called where four workers in total (including the speaker) disclose further detail surrounding the faulty radios:

(Firmly speaking and walking toward): “Hey, we’ve got to do something about these radios. I could barely make out what each person is saying, whether in the corkscrew or up top. This is getting really frustrating.”

(Puzzled, showing eye contact): “Are they getting that bad George? I know they’re getting old, but no one else seems to be having that much of a problem.”

“Well that’s because there aren’t many of us who really care enough to say anything to Matt [manager]. *(Pause, maintaining eye contact)*: This has been going on for quite some time, Bilal [assistant manager]. How long is he going to just keep handing us these broken things and expect for us to just deal with them?”

(Shaking head): “I don’t know, George. I haven’t really talked to him too much about the radios.”

“Well, I think a conversation is definitely necessary. *(Stressed tone and hand gestures)*: We need to make sure each person coherently hears every warning and penalty given out for the sake of maintaining safety on the track. Essentially, what’s the point of having these things if we can’t hear each other when we’re using them?”

(Calmly, remaining in position): “Ok George—I hear your concern. Bring everyone to me so I can take notes on the situation to present to Matt later.”

7. What are the functions of the actions and messages?

George’s action of addressing the main issue on behalf of the race officials and the subsequent meeting with the assistant manager serves to make the conflict public and on its way to being solved. Although the consensus is that most of the workers complain about the old and broken radios (some more than others) no one had actually spoken up and said anything about it to management. George speaking up brings the issue to the spotlight and creates awareness for a conflict that exists for the officials but not to management; as such, prior to the interaction, no disagreement was observed explicitly between the parties.

Therefore, with having one employee express their dissatisfaction with an aspect of their job amongst a group of workers and talking about it to someone who has the power to forward the cause, an incentive is provided to gather everyone who supports the cause to emphasize importance of the issue. With more people on board and being vocal, the issue in question becomes more pronounced and is subsequently taken to a higher order power for determination

of a possible resolution. On everyone's part, an attempt to communicate with actions and messages to the managers is meant for directness and team effort as both qualities establish a tangible problem that is supposed to be taken care of immediately and professionally.

8. What is the style of expressing the conflict?

The style of expressing the conflict is solo assertiveness on George's part and group assertiveness on everyone else's part, physically and vocally. George expresses his thoughts on the defective radios clearly but without judging his assistant manager or barking out any type of orders; the same can be observed with the group with two members being more vocal and visually expressing. In both solo and group cases, self-respect and professionalism between the assistant manager and the speaker(s) are maintained during the interaction.

9. What is the communication climate in the relationship?

The messages made out to the assistant manager—and ultimately the manager—are supportive in nature. The race officials want to demonstrate care for their job and by proxy, the management is part of the job as a whole. A cause for improvement is a catalyst for an increasingly supportive environment where one party benefits from the other. Defensiveness may be an underlying element to the communication climate as some workers want to be seen as working to the fullest extent that their equipment provides; some of those same workers may be framed for missing warnings and penalties when in reality, they couldn't hear due to radios not providing the best hearing possible. In that case, workers must defend their mistakes since those weren't caused directly by them.

No types of disconfirming messages are exchanged due to four workers being present out of seven—the four that showed up themselves showing passion for their job. The other three who would otherwise be a part of the discussion would have given disconfirming messages as it is clear they don't care about improving their job quality.

10. What are the motives underlying the actions and messages?

Behind the actions and verbal messages exchanged between the officials and the assistant manager, the values demonstrated encompass care, cohesion, concern, and affirmation. No cultural assumptions are observed since everyone involved are regional (multiple area town) workers. The wants and needs behind the communication given out by the officials illustrate an urge to bring about a longstanding problem between two parties (one of which comprises of younger men, some of whom are inexperienced and the other of which comprises of older men, both of whom are experienced) in an open, straightforward, and equalizing manner (that puts both parties on leveled terms despite different hierarchal backgrounds). Trust is somewhat of an issue between the manager and officials due to two causes: the manager, as aforementioned, is not always present to attend to possible problems that may occur on the track (problems that require a manager to immerse themselves in employee affairs consistently) and some workers have shown disdain for their job which has lessened the overall trust of the manager somewhat.

11. What are the feelings/emotions involved in the dispute?

The emotions and feelings expressed in the dispute are that of anxiety (for meeting with the manager), stress and frustration. The most dominant of these

emotions is of course frustration. The fact that communication between officials is important to maintain as part of the job description and how the manager himself doesn't follow proper communication guidelines himself is ironic in their position but unacceptable. Despite this, the handling of the dispute via the assistant manager by verbal means is performed without harsh emotion. The main reason for this is due in part that the officials have never really set out to make their dispute public even though such situation like this would have been taken care of if the manager himself was with them more often.

Conclusion of the Case

Seven members of a racing track are experiencing a major problem with communication. Said communication is done by radio handed to every race official in order for each to send and receive warnings and penalties to racers who commit dangerous maneuvers. The issue with this communication is that the radios are in poor shape and that they hinder the quality of each worker hearing one another for performing their duties properly. Fed up with the problem, four of the seven workers decide to speak with management to get new radios in order to meet the qualitative demands of the job. However, as the manager is rarely present at the track, the four passionate workers instead interact with an assistant manager who serves as the liaison between the two sides. One of the workers approaches the assistant first and introduces the problem; the other three then come forward and collectively illustrate the problem, its background, and its negative effects on each official's work performance. Persuaded and informed, the assistant manager takes notes of their details and reports to the manager to request a conference between him and the officials. The result of this case will be revealed following discussion.

