

## **Teaching Note**

### **After Hours**

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*This teaching note has been prepared by the authors, one of which experienced the situation first hand. It is intended to present a difficult managerial situation and be the basis for a class or professional discussion. The names of the individuals and the workplace have been changed to preserve anonymity. This work presents the views of the authors on the basis of their managerial experience and training.*

### **Critical Incident Overview**

This critical incident describes a situation that a relatively new mid-level manager experienced in the workplace. It was seemingly a case of sexual harassment, presented in the form of second hand information from a subordinate. This subordinate claimed to witness an explicit sexual act between another employee and an upper level manager in the vicinity of the business. Once addressed, the employee claimed that the sexual favor was not consensual, but a “quid pro quo” situation. The manager, who was currently off the clock when presented with this information, was forced to make a quick decision on what to do with this second hand information. Students are asked what they would do if placed into this situation.

This critical incident can foster many different types of discussion, as there are many different things at stake here. Some of these include power and influence, sexual harassment, communication, integrity of the workplace, and the reputation of the business.

This critical incident was created for and tested in a discussion-based undergraduate organizational behavior course. Thus, the Learning Outcomes and questions address content from a typical organizational behavior course. However, discussion is appropriate for any college level management, organizational behavior, or human resources course.

### **Research Methods**

This critical incident was written based on interview information of the mid-level manager who was confronted with this difficult situation. The names of all parties have been concealed in order to protect business integrity and personal identity.

## Learning Outcomes

In completing this assignments, students should be able to:

1. Deliberate the model of the communication process and dissect the effectiveness of communication channels that were in place at this business.
2. Analyze the dynamics of power, influence, and authority on the situation, and comprehend the long-term effects of this incident on the integrity of the workplace.
3. Analyze how the Six Steps to Making an Ethical Decision could be applied. Consider the Ethical Commitment of the supervisors in this scenario and whether or not the displayed Ethical Consciousness and Ethical Competency.
4. Examine the options that supervisors and how they could affect the workplace by using PADIL.

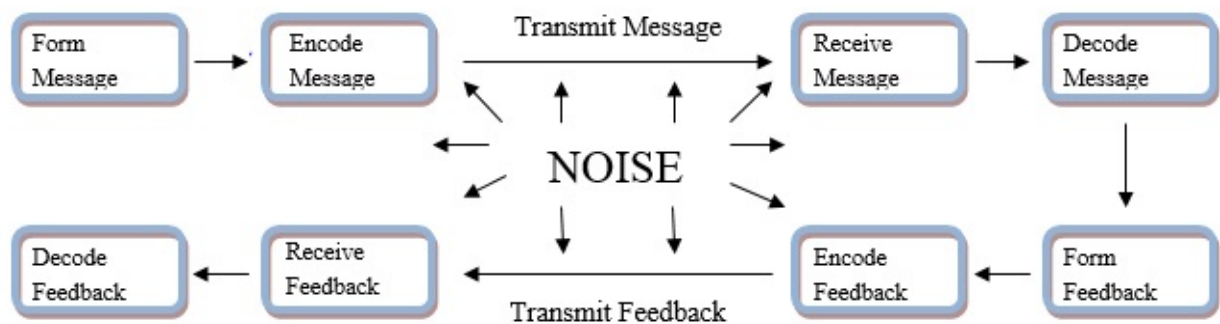
## Discussion Questions

1. Consider and define the Model of the Communication Process. Which, if any, parts of the process were effective? How was the message and outcome effected by noise? (LO 1)
2. What were the sources of Power in this situation? How was Authority or Influence demonstrated in the workplace? How could these concepts have been used to the manager's advantage? (LO 2)
3. Did the managers in this situation have an Ethical Commitment? Did they display Ethical Consciousness and Ethical Competency? (LO 3)
4. Consider and model the Six Steps to Making an Ethical Decision. Which steps were missed by the managers in this situation? (LO 3)
5. Construct a PADIL model to show the problem solving process that the manager took in this situation. (LO 4)

## Answers To Discussion Questions

- 1. Consider and define the Model of the Communication Process. Which, if any, parts of the process were effective? How was the message and outcome effected by noise? (LO 1)**

Communication is an essential aspect within any business form of management. The communication model shows the process of communication from the sender to the receiver, and then back to the sender. The sender forms the message, encodes the message, and then transmits it to the receiver. The receiver then receives the message, decodes it, forms feedback, encodes the feedback, and transmits it back to the sender. The sender receives and then decodes the feedback. During transmission, however, noise can get in the way. Noise could be things such as uncertainty, misunderstanding, or even actual noise (Baldwin 2013, p. 159). An example of the model may be viewed below.



**Fig 1. Author Adapted Common Model of Communication Process (Note: you will find many versions of this common model in any search for communication models and most text books that discuss communication in an organizational setting. Original appears to have been introduced by Shannon and Weaver in 1948.)**

Students can use the common model for communication to understand what might interfere with communication in this situation. One activity would be to have small groups analyze the situation with this model and then build an ideal situation or apply it to their own situations. Students can have a robust conversation about the importance of communication. When the model is used successfully and noise is minimized, communication and response comes easy. The model of communication highlights that communication success and failure is multidimensional, and thus dependent on several links in a chain. In this case, the sender (John) relayed important information to the manager (Lauren) on duty, Lauren (the receiver) was able to comprehend the information being told, but failed to properly decode and give the correct feedback. Lauren knew she must do something but didn't follow through due to the "noise" from the other shift manger's influence in her decision. Instead she kept the information concealed and didn't follow the proper procedure, and report the incident.

At Triple M's Steakhouse the communication process was not effective. If the organization had implemented clear communication procedures and supplied communication training, the incident might have been avoided and handled differently. Starting at the bottom of the corporate ladder, if employees and middle managers knew exactly what is expected of them they could have taken a different approach. If they felt comfortable with communicating with peers and subordinates, they could have openly talked about the problems they were facing. If the middle managers were empowered and had different level of authority they would have had the power to act on the situation at hand.

## **2. What were the sources of Power in this situation? How was Authority or Influence demonstrated in the workplace? How could these concepts have been used to the manager's advantage? (LO 2)**

Power is the ability to exert influence to control others or events, and the capacity to defend against the influence of others. Authority is a type of power a person possesses due to their position. Influence is the power in action. The sources of power in the situation is not clear due to the lack of authority which Lauren has. This is why she went to her fellow shift managers to see what to do. She does not have the authority to write someone up without a salaried manager there, so her hands were tied. She almost had too much power over the situation without having

enough authority. The influences came from the other shift managers and she should have just gone to the top manager. By doing that she would have taken all of the responsibility off of her shoulders. (Baldwin 2013, p. 275)

If Lauren had an already well-established Legitimate Power (Baldwin 2013, p.279) she would have taken a different approach on the situation. Legitimate Power is power base that relies on a position in the formal hierarchy of an organization. This type of power comes from the company's policies and procedures and guides the compliance within the organization. By becoming a manager Lauren gained a legitimate power with her role but was not trained on how to manage it.

In discussing power, students may bring up the issue of quid pro quo. Although, quid pro quo is complicated legally, in brief, quid pro quo is a situation in which a manager forces a sexual act or other type of favor in exchange for a "favor" from them, often the victim's job security. See discussion below.

### **3. Did the managers in this situation have an Ethical Commitment? Did they display Ethical Consciousness and Ethical Competency? (LO 3)**

Ethical Commitment is when a person is dedicated to do what is right even when they face potential repercussions (Baldwin 2013, p.123) Ethical Consciousness is understanding the ramifications of choosing a less ethical course of action (Baldwin 2013, p.123). Ethical Competency is the ability to consider the ethics involved in problem-solving. In the situation of the incident in Triple M's Steakhouse the managers did not take appropriate ethical actions in term of Ethical Commitment. They decided to keep quiet, which violated all ethical principles and norms within the organization, which should have been the core of their decision making.

### **4. Consider and model the Six Steps to Making an Ethical Decision. Which steps were missed by the managers in this situation? (LO 3)**

In order to be making ethical decisions there are six important steps to consider. It is important to

1. *Gather the facts*-gather as many as relevant facts about the problem as possible.
2. *Define the ethical issue*- sort all the ethical issues involved.
3. *Identify the affected Parties, Consequences, and Obligations* – recognize who's is involved, what consequences they might face, and what are your personal obligations to fix the problem.
4. *Consider your integrity* – think about legality, ethics, and negative implications on organizations.
5. *Think Creatively about Actions* – using the moral imaginations – the ability to see the ethical problem present, to imagine all possibilities and alternatives, and to evaluate for an ethical standpoint.
6. *Check your instincts* – before selecting the final course of action consider your gut feelings (Baldwin 2013, p.128).

The managers at Triple M's Stackhouse clearly missed most of the important steps in their decision making process. They gathered facts, they defined the ethical issues and knew who was involved and the consequences they face. They did not consider their integrity and their personal obligations. They decided to ignore the right ethical solution because of their personal friendship with the employee involved in the incident.

This incident goes beyond the ethical commitment of an employee. It is an abundant case for sexual harassment. Sexual harassment is any unwanted or unwelcomed sexual advances, requests for sexual favors, or any verbal and physical harassment of a sexual nature. In most cases of sexual harassment the intention of the accused does not matter, the significant impact is on the victim's way of perceiving the actions. In order to prevent miscommunications of sexual harassment, companies should have training in which every individual takes assessments and clarifies what are the appropriate, acceptable and unacceptable engagements between employees.

In Triple M's Steakhouse there should be zero tolerance for sexual harassment. Managers and all staff members should receive proper training on how to handle situations in which sexual harassment is present. They should know how to avoid such situations to prevent job disturbance. This means that if anyone observes someone else being harassed should know how to act. Sexual harassment does not only affect the victim in a quid pro quo situation, it causes what is called a hostile environment. A hostile workplace affects job performance and creates an intimidating and offensive environment. This type of harassment can include jokes, pictures, comments or any other acts that some might seem harmless, to others they are offensive.

Proving quid pro quo is a complicated legal topic. If this case is used in a business law class then employment law should be addressed. However, it is relevant for undergraduates to learn this behavior is unacceptable and that it should be taken straight to the direct chain of command. Students had a healthy conversation about the topic of hostile work environments.

**5. Construct a PADIL model to show the problem solving process that the manager took in this situation. (LO 4)**

PADIL, pronounced "paddle," is a popular problem solving model to assist in analyzing situations and coming up with an effective decision. PADIL is an acronym that stands for problem, alternatives, decide, implement, and learn.

a) Problem – The most important part of the decision making process is identifying the correct problem to begin solving. Though there were many things wrong in this situation, the overarching theme is a problem with the process of communication. Lauren realized that the communication process was messed up. She did not trust the communication from her employee, and didn't know if it was true. She also did not feel comfortable communicating the information to her superior.

b) Alternatives – There were many potential solutions to the problem at hand. The one that Lauren chose as a manager was probably not the best one. One important part of problem solving is determining whom to involve (Baldwin 2013, p. 94). Lauren did not do this successfully when she reported across (to her other shift managers), rather than up (to a salaried manager other than Ron, the accused). Though it may not have been the best choice, Lauren's course action was an alternative, nonetheless. She made a decision quickly and under pressure, which could have caused her to make the wrong one. Lauren could have been brave and had the integrity to report it to her salaried boss as soon as she was given the information. She could have also used a company provided ethics hotline to report the incident anonymously. Lauren should have been able to realize that it was not her job to make the decision on whether or not the information was true, but she decided to handle the situation the best that she could on her own.

c) Decide – Ultimately, Lauren used the information and alternatives that she had and decided to handle the situation on her level. She informed the other shift managers in order to get their opinions, and they agreed with her that it could not be true. Lauren then decided to keep the situation quiet, hoping it would go away. She made this decision based on her weighted ranking of her options and decided that given the broken communication channel between her and her salaried boss, she would let the information go and not take the information up to her manager. She did, however, decide to talk to Ron, the accused, about the situation and tell him to take care of it.

d) Implement – In order to implement the decision that she made, Lauren gathered her fellow shift managers and told them the information that she had received. They also thought that it could not be true, so she implemented her second plan – talking to Ron. He informed her that he would take care of it, and she let the situation go.

e) Learning – The learning, in this situation, was the most important part of the process. Lauren realized, after everything happened, that she should have taken a different alternative. She realized that she had not followed an ethical decision making path, and knew that she should have reported it to a higher-up in the beginning (whether that was her boss or the ethics hotline). She also realized how broken the communication process really was. She did not trust the information she was given, she didn't have the training or authority or knowledge to deal with a situation like this, and she was afraid to report it to upper management because in the event that it was not true, she might lose her job. She knew that more training was needed for all employees of her level and realized that she should have sought out more help when she didn't know what to do.

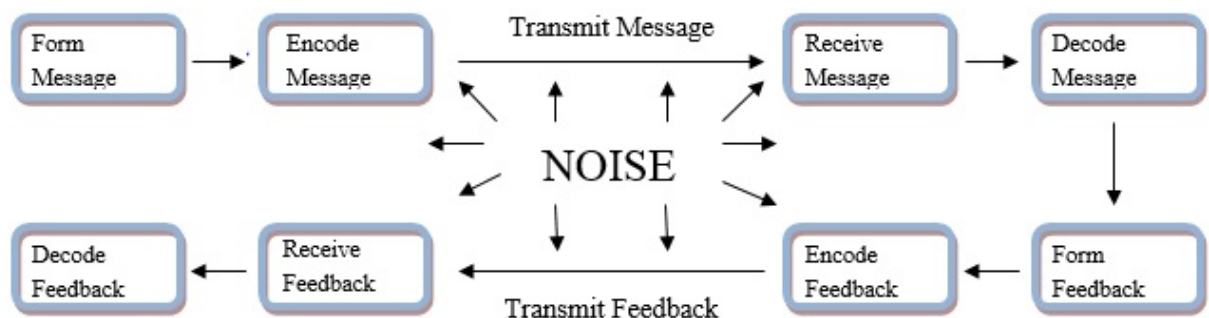
## General Discussion

The concepts used in the learning outcomes for this CI draw from common concepts found in typical Organizational Behavior textbooks. One textbook in particular was referenced with page numbers to assist the faculty member.

However, here are some additional resources that can be provided the class prior to reading the critical incident:

### Model of Communication Process:

- 1) Suggested active learning homework: Have your students conduct an internet search on the terms “Communication Process”, “Communication Loop” and “Communication Noise.” Have them compare the various models they find and build a common one that includes the sender, receiver, and noise impacting the communication process. Use this model to answer Q1. The model should look similar to the one provided below.
- 2) The Communication Model provided here is commonly found in Organizational Behavior and Management text books in chapters dealing with communication.



Below are common definitions within the model.

- *Sender Forms a Message:* The originator of message or the information source selects desire message
- *Sender Encodes the Message and Transmits it :* The transmitter which converts the message into signals
- *The Receiver Receives and Decodes the Message:* The destination of the message from sender. Based on the decoded message the receiver gives their feed-back to sender. If the message is distracted by noise it will affect the communication flow between sender and receiver. Decoding is the reception of the signal which converts signals into message. A reverse process of encode
- *Noise:* The messages are transferred from encoder to decoder through channel or direct dialogue. During this process the messages may be distracted or affected by physical

noise like horn sounds, thunder and crowd noise or encoded signals may distract in the channel during the transmission process which affect the communication flow or the receiver may not receive the correct message. The model clearly deals with external noises only which affect the messages or signals from external sources. Psychological or internal noise has also been identified as an issue in disrupting the message.

- Note that in forming feedback and sending a new message back the same actions occur with the same potential issues.
- To assist students in understanding the issues of external or internal noise, you can play the childhood “telephone game” or brainstorm frame of reference sources of noise or misinterpretation of messages.

3) Some additional “accessible” reading that would provide students with background to develop further solutions in this situation are as follows:

- Goulston, M. (2015). How People Communicate During Conflict. *Harvard Business Review*, 93(6), 22.
- Heen, S., & Stone, D. (2014). Find the Coaching in Criticism. *Harvard Business Review*, 92(1/2), 108-111.

### **Other Pedagogical Materials**

While reviewing and discussion questions, instructors should encourage discussion by asking students to choose and discuss in small groups what they would do as the mid-level manager presented with this situation. This could be done as an interactive activity as well, asking students to stand on one side of the room if they support reporting the incident to their manager’s manager or on the other side if they would confront and deal with the perpetrator either alone or with other managers on their level. There could then be a spectrum in between for those who somewhat agree and somewhat disagree. Here are some questions to facilitate this activity:

- a) How many of you support the decision of the mid-level manager to go to the top manager in order to report this incident?
- b) How many of you support the decision to contact other mid-level managers on the same level and confront your manager/the perpetrator directly?
- c) Discussion Question: How could PADIL have been used more effectively? What steps would you have done differently in the decision making process?
- d) Another note on teaching practices: This discussion could heavily lean towards sexual harassment in the workplace and what that looks like. During testing, the conversation took a turn in this direction. The authors have avoided that route for the purpose of teaching other related concepts. However, if discussion does lead a class in that direction, the website for the Society of Human Resources Management could be a great teaching resource. More information can be found at [www.SHRM.org](http://www.SHRM.org).



## Epilogue

The outcome came about six months after Lauren had the talk with Ron. Upper management found out what had happened and decided to relocate Ron to another store. They felt they had to do this due to the majority of the staff knowing what happened between Ron and Amy. Lauren had a conversation with Matthew (the General Manager) explaining step by step what she knew. Matthew did not reprimand Lauren because he knew she was put in a very uncomfortable situation. He explained that he wished she would have come to him right away, but he understood why she did not. Amy moved shortly after and no one spoke of the incident after that.

## References

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