Case Analysis: Team Weber

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A Brief Description of the Case

Penny is a new librarian that feels overwhelmed with the tasks required of her. Penny and her supervisor, Sheldon, are not on the same page when it comes to making purchases for new technology in the department. Sheldon often makes new purchases before Penny feels comfortable with technology that was bought previously. Penny would like Sheldon to consult with her before making new purchases to ensure that the new additions will integrate with the technology already in the library. Penny's lack of communication with Sheldon has trickled over into meetings with upper management and resulted in negative performance evaluations. Penny trains her department on new technology acquisitions but has yet to find a time for the meetings that work for other staff members and has resorted to hosting meetings during lunch which has put a damper on overall morale. Penny also has other duties in the department which includes providing technical support, but library staff and engineering faculty are often stopping by or emailing for mundane requests leaving her with little time to get much done when it comes to this aspect of her position.

Communication

The Weber group determined that there was a major breakdown in communication between Penny and Sheldon, and Penny and the rest of the team. Penny made a lot of assumptions about the workload of others and Sheldon's motivation for acquiring new technology at a rapid pace. Those two assumptions combined with Penny's decision to hold training sessions during staff lunch hours are evidence of the poor/lack of communication in the department.

From Penny's retelling of the events, it does not appear she is forming personal or professional connections with her team. Penny's feelings of being an outsider and lacking positive relationships with coworkers are a part of the lack of communication/miscommunication in the department. Gordon (2000) discusses the impact of "ineffective interpersonal interactions" which "can significantly affect the quality of communication. Lack of trust, power differences, dysfunctional norms and employee attitudes can create major barriers." (p. 200) Penny should try to create more personal interactions with members of the department to create a professional relationship built on strong communication to help eliminate miscommunications in the future.

With improved communication and stated expectations of the outcomes for training, many of Penny's issues would be resolved. A tip that Penny can use before entering any conversation with points she would like to discuss is to create a script beforehand to determine what to cover in each discussion. Gordon (2000) mentions creating scripts and/or event schemas to guide behavior which could remove some of the pressure Penny feels surrounding leading staff training (p.34). This script would give Penny the confidence that she needs to conduct the staff training sessions.

Penny must also communicate assertively, she must be "honest, direct, and firm, [she needs to] express [her] personal needs, opinions, and feelings in honest and direct ways."

(Gordon, 2001, p. 206) Penny can't expect Sheldon to know that she needs more time to test the new tech and train 4 professional librarians when making purchase decisions, she must state her needs clearly.

It also appeared to our group that Penny has a poor relationship with the other librarians in her department. She can improve her relationship with them by implementing some of the techniques that she adopted with Sheldon: communicating assertively, scripting and using the attribution process. Penny can also work to manage the impressions her coworkers have of her. Gordon (2001) states that "managing impressions involves first assessing the situation, setting impression management goals, and then selecting the best tactics. After enacting the impression management behaviors, managers can then assess their effectiveness and modify the goals or tactics used." (p.37) From the debriefing that Penny offered she has yet to ask any of the other librarians what their duties are, it would be helpful for her to know that her workload is not any more strenuous than that of others in the library.

Our prescriptions for Penny's communication issues are to develop staff cohesion and improve department communication. This could include the implementation of a department newsletter or emails to discuss small things, and staff meetings for larger issues. Penny should work to improve her communication skills overall.

Conflict Resolution and Stress

As evidenced by bringing her concerns to this group of friends, Penny does not easily see how others may perceive her actions, nor is she easily able to see from the viewpoint of others. Gordon (2001) notes that one way of managing conflict and better understanding someone, is for managers and employees to take on the other's perspective (p. 281). This "helps individuals disclose more information, express messages in ways that others better understand them, and consider and respond to the perspectives of others" (Gordon, 2001, p. 281). If Penny can begin to look at the perspectives of others in the issues she is having with them, this can help turn around how she perceives these actions, and in turn her own attitudes and perceptions of the situation.

One of Penny's areas of conflict with Sheldon is over the purchase of computer equipment and a difference of opinion on what should be purchased. Gordon also notes an example where the purchase of computer equipment can lead to "cognitive or substantive conflict" (Gordon, 2001, p. 276). While there was a difference in opinion, it seems that little or no discussion took place about what was purchased and therefore this conflict was not brought into the open where there could have been a chance of understanding or resolution.

Penny seems to be unfamiliar with grievance procedures, and mediation and arbitration, all of which are methods Gordons cites as forms of conflict management (Gordon, 2001, p. 282). As Sheldon is Penny's supervisor, she needs to bring these concerns to him, and if these efforts are unsuccessful, she should know what recourse she has. Direct communication and discussion should be her first actions but knowing what the next steps are if a consensus is not reached, will help empower her to move forward if her initial actions and resolution are unsuccessful.

Penny is, in her own words, overloaded. Gordon states that role overload occurs "When a role holder finds that his or her role requires too much time or knowledge" (Gordon 2001, p. 275). Penny is in this place presently. Managing expectations is one way to help overcome this. When Penny can practice conflict management, consider the view of others, and engage in conversation with Sheldon, one of the people who is best able to look at her role and responsibilities, then he can help her evaluate her priorities and through the process manage the expectations that are currently making her feel overwhelmed.

Penny has shared a copious amount of information on how she feels in her jobs and how she perceives her colleagues and her workplace relationships with those outside the workplace, but she has not made the effort to work with those directly involved. Gordon indicates that continuing workplace tension and conflict can lead to burnout as well as tension and stress (Gordon 2001, p. 279, 284). To help reduce stress, Penny's best efforts will be to address her concerns with Sheldon, and if necessary, take steps beyond these initial conversations. While addressing her concerns with Sheldon, she should also discuss expectations. Going forward, Penny should make every effort to address an issue or conflict when it first comes up (or after a cool-down period if necessary), rather than waiting until a situation escalates.

Teamwork and Training

The breakdown in communication within the department has prevented the department from developing a cohesive team. Members of the Weber group participate in gaming sessions with Len and Bernie, while other members have run into Sheldon at comic con. Penny needs to try to become a part of the group and develop the routine of attending gaming sessions or discussing comic con with Sheldon. Gordon (2001) discusses how over time, groups develop habitual routines that "foster coordination among group members, often freeing some to work on new challenges" (pp. 157). Habitual routines "'also contribute to members'" confidence in performing their roles and reduce the likelihood that the group members will perceive their peers as behaving in unacceptable ways" (Gordon, 2001, p.157). Penny could get in the habit of setting goals for the training sessions. Gordon (2001) states "the most effective goals are challenging, specific, measurable and accepted by group members" (p. 158), it is important that all group members buy-in to the changes that Penny is attempting to make.

To conduct productive meetings Penny can follow the instructions given by Gordon (2001, p.207)

- Determine the goal of the meeting
- Prepare for the meeting by reserving appropriate location, setting a time limit, developing an agenda and distribute materials in advance (possibly through email or during staff meetings)
- Conduct the meeting, this includes convening the meeting on time and encouraging widespread participation
- Conclude the meeting by recapping any decisions, specifying the next steps, and asking for evaluations

Offering a web-conference option for training would allow the most flexibility in scheduling the meetings, but it is ultimately up to Penny to find what works best for her department. When considering whether to host in-person meetings, or allow staff to participate from other locations, Penny should consider that "in-person meetings ... may also create greater group cohesion, understanding and purpose" (Moinz 2005, p. 86-87). Penny could begin the improved training sessions in person, to create group cohesion, with the option to move to an online format if that would suit the department best. Penny could also poll everyone to see when everyone is available, develop a plan for training, and provide evaluations after training.

Organization, Priority, and Time Management

Time management is an essential duty when managing other employees. Penny struggles in this area so time management is a major prescription to her issues in cohesion with both priority management and teamwork. One of the first things Penny can do to work towards a better time management structure is identify her values as a manager and for her professional workspace because as Cochran (1992) notes "The first step in any effective time management program involves identifying personal and professional values and establishing goals and objectives in support of those values" (p. 19).

From there Penny can establish goals related to her management values and break down the goals into achievable actions. By breaking down each goal Penny can work towards making an action plan for each day. By taking the time to make a daily plan Penny can begin to note the items on her task list that are not a priority and distracting from the task at hand. According to Cochran, "Starting from the goals and objectives established, a good time manager develops a plan of action each day. This daily plan will determine whether one achieves his objectives and attains his goals since it provides direction for one's work efforts" (p. 21). Therefore, all activities on the daily plan should directly support Penny's goals and objectives, otherwise, they are only acting as a distraction (Cochran, 1992, p. 21).

Two key components of organization management include creating a door policy and a virtual calendar. Penny can achieve a door policy by blocking out "quiet time" on her calendar which opens time for her personal work, so she does not feel as overwhelmed, or pressed for time. She can implement these time management boundaries by using a virtual calendar software to be accessed by her co-workers and management alike.

A virtual calendar can be created through Google Calendar. Google Calendar allows employees to easily view other employees' calendars within the workplace and to quickly see when someone is available. Thelander and Åkerström write that "schedules and calendars regulate and plan work-time for many employees [and] … it eventually becomes mapped out and divided into meetings, tasks, and assignments." (p. 151) The benefits of having a mapped-out week will quickly become clear to Penny. She shares that she is struggling with finishing her tasks on time and does not understand how to delegate. By having a calendar system, Penny will

be able to recognize what takes up most of her time and who within her workplace has the time to assist with these projects.

As Penny works on her organization and priority management, she should recognize that she will not be able to completely satisfy her current issues with finishing projects. As she integrates organization methods into her workplace, communication will improve, and her employees will feel more at ease approaching Penny when projects do not look like they will be completed by a specific date. Organization and priority management are important methods in ensuring that Penny is carving out specific times within her day to work on projects and to support her employees.

Lastly, Penny should reflect on what she is doing right. Penny is predisposed to have a negative mindset on her work because she tends to be caught in a catching up cycle. By implementing these time and priority management skills she will be able to reframe the cycle and in doing so reframe her way of thinking and remind herself that "a librarian may have accomplished many important tasks, but she may obscure her achievements because she emphasizes the negative-those tasks left undone-instead of accentuating the positive" (Cochran 2, p. 18). As she prioritizes tasks and completes those most important to the success of her day Penny can feel more confident in the work she is completing and gain a more positive outlook on her professional direction.

Evaluation

Action Plan	Evaluation Timeline
Penny will meet with Sheldon to discuss technology purchasing plans and establish a timeline for developing procedures	Two weeks
Penny will research grievance procedures, mediation, and arbitration	30 days
Create an online calendar	30 days, 60 days
Organize desk and office	30 days, 60 days
Implement office hours	One week

We have created a timeline above for Penny to follow. We expect Penny to implement these items within the next two months. Our second column is when we expect to evaluate each of the items on the list. These items will provide Penny with a baseline to immediately improve the issues she is facing within her workplace. We will be evaluating Penny face to face, where we will discuss her progress with our action plan.

After the initial 60 days, Penny can meet with us as needed. Any meetings after the initial 60 days will allow Penny to reflect on her progress and allow us to give her updated feedback.

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