

## Aplin Public Library System Case Study in Managerial and Organizational

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## Part A

## Introduction:

The case study involving the Aplin Public Library System's (APLS) Department of Corporate Communications illuminates key managerial and organizational behavior principles and offers comprehensive insights amidst the conflict. This report will encompass background information on APLS, profiles of employee characters, and situational factors. Additionally, it will identify primary and secondary problems, concluding with the provision of a possible solution for the current situation and identification of the problem solver.

## APLS necessary background information:

The Aplin Public Library System (APLS) stands as one of the premier public library networks in North America, catering to over 2 million individuals, with nearly 894,000 active members. With its extensive reach encompassing 98 branches and a dedicated workforce of 1,815 full-time equivalent staff, APLS offers a broad spectrum of services. It plays a pivotal role in the heart of its diverse urban communities, reflecting its commitment to inclusivity and accessibility. The Department of Corporate Communications was created in response to both internal pressures and external challenges, such as funding cuts and the need for effective marketing and communication strategies to secure stable funding and promote the library's value to the community and municipal taxpayers.

## Relevant characteristics of protagonists:

In this case study, we will analyze four employees: Sandra Oh, Jonelle, Rick, and Mohammad. Among them, Sandra Oh stands out for her professionalism, dedication, and strong leadership capabilities. With an extensive background in the public library sector complemented by a Master of Library and Information Science, she demonstrates a profound commitment to public service and community engagement. Sandra's problem-solving approach is notable for her strategic thinking skills, particularly in how she addresses complex issues related to motivational and team dynamics directly. This proactive stance in tackling problems head-on showcases her as a manager who not only values effective communication but also actively pursues strategies to enhance team performance and morale. Jonelle, holding college diplomas in graphic arts design, has been a dedicated employee since 1978, known for her commitment to continuous improvement. However, she relies significantly on consistent positive feedback. Despite her historically high commitment and productivity, Jonelle's motivation has recently waned due to workplace challenges, including an unfulfilled promise of promotion and the

difficulties of transitioning back from maternity leave. As Allison Dunfield's 2022 article points out, it is common for mothers to develop a strong attachment to their newborns, leading to considerable psychological anxiety when returning to their jobs. This anxiety profoundly impacts their focus and enthusiasm for work, thus complicating communication in these situations. Rick has been with the company since 1992 and has a background in graphic arts design. He is the epitome of adaptability, collaboration, and a strong work ethic. Guided by Jonelle during his early days at APLS, Rick demonstrated remarkable flexibility and an eagerness to learn. Amidst departmental challenges, he, alongside Mohammad, has shown resilience and a commitment to teamwork. Rick frequently extends his work hours and enthusiastically takes on additional tasks, showcasing his proactive and supportive nature. This dedication is a testament to his positive contribution towards overcoming team obstacles. Mohammad reflective of a highly skilled, creative, and collaborative professional who brings significant value to his team. Graduating from Seneca College in June 2003, Mohammad initially joined the department on a contract to cover Jonelle's maternity leave. His rapid ascension from a temporary contract position to a permanent role as a full-time communication specialist underscores his exceptional abilities and the positive impact he has had on the department. His personality traits include a strong team spirit, as evidenced by his collaboration with Rick, especially in the face of departmental challenges following Jonelle's return from maternity leave. Mohammad's willingness to come in early, stay late, and take on additional responsibilities reflects his dedication and proactive attitude. Moreover, his ability to maintain a positive and collaborative work environment, even as the department faces issues of absenteeism, a lack of collegiality, and negative behaviors, highlights his resilience and constructive approach to teamwork.

Relevant situational factors:

Historical between Mary Beth and Jonelle:

In the history of the Aplin Public Library System, the discussion of Jonelle's potential promotion with the then-manager Mary Beth before Jonelle's maternity leave emerged as a critical event. The unforeseen departure of Mary Beth from the library during Jonelle's leave, coupled with the absence of formal documentation regarding the promised promotion, laid the groundwork for the challenges that followed. This omission significantly impacted Jonelle's motivation and adversely affected team dynamics upon her return.

Although the Aplin Public Library System (APLS) is not described with specific geographical details, its location in an urban setting within North America allows us to infer certain characteristics. Serving a diverse population across its branches, APLS is embedded in a landscape that spans various communities, likely reflecting a mix of socio-economic backgrounds. This suggests that APLS boasts a comprehensive infrastructure designed to meet

a wide array of informational, educational, and recreational needs, highlighting its pivotal role in fostering community engagement and providing access to a wealth of resources.

Primary problem:

Upon Jonelle's return from maternity leave, the Department of Corporate Communications at APLS faced several issues, notably her reduced motivation and productivity. This led to absenteeism, a lack of collegiality, and negative behaviors that affected the team's dynamics and morale. Despite attempts by Sandra Oh to address these issues, Jonelle's performance fluctuated, and her refusal to recognize the problem posed a significant challenge. The situation has polarized the department, pushing Sandra to consider various difficult solutions to resolve the motivational challenge and restore departmental harmony.

Secondary problems:

For the secondary problems, we encountered three different situations: interpersonal conflict, delivering on promotion promises, and ineffective communication and management strategies.

**Interpersonal Conflicts:** The team's interpersonal issues suggest a breakdown in mutual respect and understanding, highlighting a critical need for interventions aimed at rebuilding trust and enhancing collaborative efforts.

**Broken Promise of Promotion:** This situation has likely eroded Jonelle's trust in the organization, contributing to her disengagement and necessitating a thoughtful approach to repair the relationship and clarify future opportunities.

**Ineffective Communication and Management Strategies:** This indicates a gap in the leadership's ability to effectively identify and address the root causes of employee disengagement and dissatisfaction, necessitating a review and improvement of communication channels and management practices.

Although these three problems are closely related to Jonelle, she indirectly impacts the entire team's efficiency. For instance, the Broken Promise of Promotion not only affects her directly but also may lead the rest of the team to feel that promotions are unattainable, severely undermining the manager's credibility.

Problem solver:

Sandra Oh, as the manager of the Department of Corporate Communications, stands as the primary problem solver. She faces the challenge of motivating Jonelle, enhancing team dynamics, and ensuring departmental effectiveness and cohesion. Failure to resolve these issues could significantly impact Sandra's credibility and influence within the team.

## Part B

In this section, I will outline the steps for managerial problem-solving and case study analysis to assist Sandra Oh in identifying and resolving the issues in the current situation.

### 1. Identify the basic or primary problem.

The primary problem revolves around Jonelle's reduced motivation and efficiency following her maternity leave. This challenge is critical because it directly undermines team cohesion, efficiency, and morale within the Department of Corporate Communications. Jonelle's situation suggests a complex mix of personal and professional factors, necessitating a nuanced approach to re-engage her with her work and restore the department's productivity and positive dynamics.

### 2. Identify any secondary problems or symptoms.

The secondary problems include interpersonal conflicts within the team, marked by a lack of collegiality and cooperative behavior; ineffective communication and management strategies failing to address the root causes of Jonelle's behavior and productivity issues; and a broken promise of promotion, which has led to potential distrust and disillusionment within the team. These issues compound the primary problem, creating a complex environment that challenges the department's functionality and cohesion.

### 3. State any assumptions underlying the analysis.

Analyzing Jonelle's psychological state through phases sheds light on her teamwork aversion. This approach explores how personal challenges, such as her return from maternity leave and unmet promotion expectations, affect her emotional well-being and influence her workplace behavior; including absenteeism, a lack of collegiality, obstructionist and negative behavior in weekly team meetings and, at times, what appears as efforts to sabotage the other team members' work. The lack of support for new mothers, as highlighted by Allison Dunfield (2022), mirrors Jonelle's difficulties, potentially exacerbating her stress, anxiety, and dissatisfaction, thereby impacting her productivity and engagement at work. Despite Sandra Oh's attempts to address Jonelle's behavior, Jonelle consistently denies any issues. Despite brief improvements following these discussions, she quickly reverts to her previous, problematic behaviors. Sandra Oh's approach inadvertently worsened the situation. Attempting to boost Jonelle's productivity, Sandra assigned her additional work, hoping it would kickstart her output. However, Jonelle

vocally deemed this unfair, leading to a reduction in her workload. This confirms our assumptions that Jonelle is dissatisfied with her current workload arrangement. This confirms our assumptions are correct: Jonelle is dissatisfied with her current work arrangements, feeling that her efforts and rewards are not proportional.

4. Make explicit the objectives which your solution is intended to meet.

The proposed solution aims to enhance the work environment, foster trust among team members, and bolster authority and respect for management.

5. Generate as many alternatives, reasonable solutions as possible.

A Reconnecting with Jonelle and offering her the option to bring her child to work aims to mitigate the separation anxiety many working mothers face. By expressing understanding and empathy towards Jonelle's situation as a mother from a fellow woman's perspective, this approach acknowledges the challenges she is facing and shows support for her dual role.

B The strategy highlights the need for empathetic dialogue with Rick and Mohammad, recognizing the challenges postpartum anxiety may cause in a colleague's work behavior. Appreciating their efforts during this period is crucial. Additionally, promising a quick resolution to the situation is essential and threatened Jonelle that she would be fired if she didn't work hard.

C Communicating with Mary Beth to gather any information on the reasons behind Jonelle's potential promotion could assist Sandra Oh in determining whether to support Jonelle's advancement further.

D Setting up a promotion plan with Jonelle, Sandra Oh could explain her newness to the position and her lack of awareness of prior arrangements, seeking Jonelle's understanding. Collaboratively drafting a promotion path could enhance their relationship, offering Jonelle a clear vision of her advancement possibilities.

E Create a new position title for Jonelle and apply for a budget to recruit a new employee. Rick and Mohammad will be responsible for teaching the new employee how to complete the task. Jonelle will be laid off when the time comes.

F For Sandra Oh, don't do anything and let Jonelle figure it out on her own.

6. Evaluate each of the alternatives you have identified.

A Pros: Potentially improves Jonelle's morale and productivity by reducing personal stress and demonstrates a flexible, empathetic workplace culture, enhancing employee loyalty.

Cons: May not directly address underlying issues related to trust and promotion expectations. The presence of a child's crying could potentially impact the work efficiency of other employees.

B      Pros: This strategy enhances team morale by acknowledging challenges and efforts, and promoting a supportive and inclusive work culture. It aims to foster team understanding, appreciation, and confidence in leadership, ultimately ensuring a cohesive and supportive work environment. Additionally, it is important to consider that Jonelle's recent addition of a baby will increase her living costs, which may reinforce her commitment to retaining this job.

Cons: Not everyone may understand Jonelle, and the threat may not be effective, potentially intensifying Jonelle's resistance toward her colleagues and further diminishing Sandra's prestige, as the problem remains unresolved.

C      Pros: Directly address underlying issues related to trust and promotion expectations.

Cons: It may be difficult to reach Mary sometime after she has resigned.

D      Pros: Directly address underlying issues related to trust and promotion expectations.

Cons: Depends on whether Jonelle is willing to cooperate.

E      Pros: Increase Sandra's status within the team and address the individuals' causing problems.

Cons: This will make others fear that they might be the next ones to be laid off, reducing team trust. Additionally, if Jonelle discovers the issue prematurely, it will further embarrass Sandra.

F      Cons: This solution won't solve the problem unless Sandra wants to switch to other departments or roles.

## 7. State your choice of the best solution

The best solution would be a step-by-step approach. First, try to contact Mary as soon as possible and ask for her suggestions. If it is not possible to contact Mary and Jonelle still desires a promotion, Sandra can then proceed to establish a promotion plan with Jonelle, offering her a clear vision of her advancement possibilities. This will greatly enhance Jonelle's trust in Sandra and boost Jonelle's enthusiasm for the job, leading to a perfect resolution of the issue.

## Conclusion:

Jonelle was qualified for a promotion, but her dissatisfaction with the situation has greatly affected her colleagues. To ensure normal work progression, Sandra must swiftly address the

issue and realign operations. Jonelle's potential termination is cautiously considered due to her experience and historically excellent work attitude. The core issue stems from unmet promotion promises, contributing to negative emotions and distrust. Understanding the cause and effect is crucial before making decisions, as premature actions could create team rifts, risking future project success. In analyzing this case, we primarily relied on organizational management theories to understand each team member's self-needs. Fulfilling their self-actualization is key to motivating them to work. At this stage, the group is in the forming phase of development. Sandra must unify the team to lead them to the next stage. This approach underscores the importance of addressing individual motivations and the group's developmental stages to enhance team cohesion and productivity.

#### Reference:

[1] Allison Dunfield (2022), the globe and mail: Moms aren't getting enough support when returning to work, <https://www.theglobeandmail.com/business/article-moms-arent-getting-enough-support-when-returning-to-work/>