Sunshine University Engineering Library Case Study:   
Case Study Analysis

Hope D. Alwine, Kelly Beckham, Morgan Hayes, Hannah Hemphill, and Kimberly-Ann Seeger

University of North Carolina at Greensboro

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Dr. Julia Hersberger

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Abstract

Sunshine University Engineering Library is experiencing a strained working environment with the Systems Evaluation librarian, Penny. It is the responsibility of the group to work through the diagnostic approach, as described by Judith Gordon’s *Organizational Behavior: A Diagnostic Approach*, to make recommendations to improve the working relationships and aid in better performance for Penny (Gordon, 2002).

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# Description

Penny is the Systems Evaluation librarian at the Sunshine University Engineering Library and she is experiencing problems with adapting to her work environment in a healthy manner. She is responsible for offering technical support as well as training faculty and staff on the use of newly acquired technology. Penny was hired directly out of graduate school and has since encountered various issues with her boss, coworkers, and subordinates. Penny states she feels unmotivated and helpless in her position within the library. Most of Penny’s stress stems from two main problems: time management and communication issues with the library faculty and staff. The issues with Penny’s time management become apparent as she discusses her daily work routine. She starts the day by skipping breakfast and getting to work at 7:30 a.m., with the intention of having “a little quiet time” before the days begins. Penny states her stress begins upon entering her office as it is in a constant disheveled array of manuals, equipment, and cables. Penny spends an inordinate amount of time on routine tasks, such as checking email and responding to issues from the library staff and faculty.

In addition to having issues keeping up with the day to day activities, Penny feels that she never has enough time to test the new technology she is responsible for, let alone train the staff. The result is frequent meetings during lunch, and she ignores another meal during the day. Penny mentioned that she feels her boss, Sheldon, “expects her to be working 24/7.” In addition to the time management issues, Penny has difficulty with her coworkers. A major concern is her relationship with her boss, Sheldon, as she views him as her “nemesis.” Penny’s relationship with Sheldon is strained. On her performance evaluation, she received unsatisfactory marks because she doesn’t “play nice with others.” She feels that she received this because of Sheldon’s personal dislike for her. Penny also believes Sheldon should consult her on the new technology that is being bought as to be able to ensure its compatibility and usefulness with the current technology. Penny attempted to undermine Sheldon in a budget meeting with higher authority figures present to gain attention to the perceived problem. Penny’s coworkers also have difficulties communicating with her. Len and Bernie referred to Penny as a “control freak” and said that the training sessions are brusque and questions go unanswered. Bernie added that “it always seems that whatever we do isn’t good enough or fast enough.” Penny’s own perception of the staff she trains is negative. She referred to them as “idiots and slackers” and blamed them for her poor performance review. Penny’s issues with time management and communication are hindering her job performance and creating a stressful work environment for herself and others.

## Problem 1: Communication

### Diagnosis

Penny and Sheldon are failing to establish an open and positive dialogue. This interpersonal conflict is manifesting in a strained work environment. “Interpersonal conflict describes the situation in which two individuals disagree about issues, actions, or goals and joint outcomes become important” (Gordon, 1999, p. 275). Management style and personality differences between Penny and Sheldon are adding to the conflict and affecting their interactions, preventing a supportive communication climate. Without good communication, Gordon states employees can begin to feel defensive and threatened, therefore creating more problems (Gordon, 1999, p. 204). Penny is also not collaborating well with the rest of the library staff, due to controversy over scheduling technology training and her mannerisms when interacting with others. Distorted perception and the group’s overall lack of cohesion are preventing good communication, which is the foundation for positive work interactions.

### Prescription

There are three steps that should be followed to resolve conflicts at the group level: collaboration and team building, negotiation, and mediation. The suggested approach for the staff’s communication problem is to start with collaboration and team building, and if this does not improve the situation, then they will move on to negotiation, and finally mediation.

#### Collaboration and Team Building

“Collaborating emphasizes maximum satisfaction for both parties. Successful collaboration involves seeing conflict as natural, showing trust and honesty toward others, and encouraging the expression of every person’s attitudes and feelings” (Gordon, 1999, p. 282). There are various tools that can be used to encourage an open environment of collaboration and communication in the group including: team building exercises, informal social gatherings, and personality testing to identify strengths and weaknesses. A plethora of literature has been written on team building exercises that management should consider in order to establish a better group cohesion within the library staff.

Strengthsfinder 2.0 is an excellent program that builds a stronger team unit. It examines the individual first, utilizing a personality test to identify strengths and weaknesses. Next, individual results are analyzed to gauge how the group works together. Then looking at the results in a “big picture” manner, providing a group discussion establishes a dialogue for how the group can work more efficiently and effectively. In addition to this program (or ones like it, such as the Keirsey personality test), it is wise to invest some time in informal social gatherings with co-workers to build better relationships, rapport, and trust.

#### Negotiation

Negotiation is the next step in solving communication problems, if team building and collaboration exercises do not improve the working environment. Negotiation is a process where two parties, that are interdependent, come together to reconcile differences with bargaining techniques (Gordon, 1999, p. 314). The collaborative negotiating strategy, frequently combined with integrative bargaining, helps parties find common goals and communicate needs to one another (Gordon, 1999, p. 319). Integrative bargaining occurs when negotiations help all parties to achieve a gain. They must determine what is acceptable; a minimum that can be considered and a maximum that can be asked of the others, which results in a win-win situation (Gordon, 1999, p. 315).

#### Mediation

“In mediation, a neutral party tries to help disputing parties settle the issues that divide them. The mediator brings the parties to agreement by making procedural suggestions and keeping channels of communication open.” (Gordon, 1999, p. 282-283). Mediation can be used to help Penny establish job roles and alleviate tension with Sheldon. Sheldon and Penny ultimately have similar goals and mediation can facilitate a productive conversation to reach said goals.

### Evaluation

For Penny to improve her communication techniques, she and the staff should first attempt collaboration and team building. If after two weeks the relationships in the office are not improving, negotiations should take place between Penny and management. If these attempts continue to fail, mediation is the next step and a neutral party will be brought in to guide the conversation.

## Problem 2: Time Management

### Diagnosis:

Penny comes into work early to gain “quiet time” but is stressed upon entry to her office, which is in a constant state of dishevelment. Penny spends the majority of her day on menial tasks due to her inability to prioritize. Her lack of prioritization, good planning, time management, and organization has not allowed her to make the most of this time. The result of her disorganization and inefficient time management is her constant overwhelmed and stressed feeling, making it difficult for her to do her job.

### Prescription

For Penny to be able to function in an optimum and efficient manner, her office needs to be organized. Per Cochran, an organized desk allows for the person to remain focused on one project at a time rather than being distracted by the piles of papers on the desk (Cochran, 1992, p. 39). Second, Penny needs to establish a priority system in which to rank her tasks. It is recommended to use the A.B, C priority ranking, developed by Alan Lakein, in which a series of questions ask what is of high priority (labeled with A, or whatever nomenclature is preferred), medium priority, and low-priority. Penny will then be able to structure her “To Do List” with a priority ranking system to finish tasks that are important and urgent (Cochran, 1992, p. 21). To ensure less distraction and more focused work, Penny can use the Pomodoro Technique which takes a single task and then dedicates a specific amount of time to it (for example, 45 minutes) and then allows for a short break (Cirillo, 2011). Additionally, Penny needs to develop better balance in her work day. For example, scheduling her time using Google Calendar will allow her to structure her day and using Doodle poll to gather feedback for scheduling training meetings will help her accommodate others’ needs. Another recommendation is to schedule quiet time on her calendar, where Penny can have short periods during the day to remain focused and to gain perspective on the situation.

### Evaluation

Time management is a skill that is specific to the person. In order for Penny to find the best option for time management she should try the different strategies in earnest for a few weeks before deeming them unhelpful and moving on to another. There is a lot of literature pertaining to time management and planning techniques that have proven successful for many people. It is up to Penny to determine which method works best for her.

## Problem 3: Individual Behavior

### Diagnosis

Gordon defines perception as “the active process of sensing reality and organizing it into meaningful views and understanding” (Gordon, 1999, p. 31). However, when misunderstood it can often result in individuals having different views of the same events which leads to conflict. Penny is focusing on “select and limited features” in situations with coworkers, developing a distorted perception of them (Gordon, 1999, p. 31). One of Penny’s mistakes is her misuse of nonverbal signals, such as her constant rolling of her eyes in meetings which sends the wrong message to her coworkers. Improving the work environment and group dynamic requires awareness of other’s perceptions (Gordon, 1999, p. 22).

“Attribution refers to the specification of the perceived causes of events. Not surprisingly, different people often attribute different causes to the same event” (Gordon, 1999, p. 39). Penny tries to ensure that circumstances are never “her fault” and attributes much of the library’s problems to situational conditions and other people’s failures. Penny’s attribution bias is isolating herself from the group. She is not taking responsibility for her actions and is constantly blaming her coworkers rather than seeking a solution or compromise.

### Prescription

One of the recommendations from Gordon is that both managers and employees attempt to see the situation or problem from the other person’s perspective to gain a better understanding (Gordon, 1999, p. 281). Penny should begin a self-improvement regimen to address her distorted perception and attribution bias. Through professional development and impression management, Penny should be able to create a clearer picture of what is expected of her in the work environment.

#### Professional Development

Professional development is often available through professional organizations, like American Library Association. Penny is fresh out of library school, therefore she needs more experience and to accept the fact that there is always more to learn. The following recommendations can help Penny: social learning, networking, and participating in webinars and conferences. *Social learning* pertains to watching other people in their roles to gain a better understanding of other people’s positions as well as the relation to the perceiver’s role (Gordon, 2002, p 60). *Networking* is a great way to improve communication and learn from other’s experiences. Penny can create contacts through professional organization membership and participating in their conferences and roundtables. *Webinars and conferences* can provide good resources to bridge the gaps in Penny’s managerial skills. By watching webinars or using resources from professional organizations, Penny can gain a better understanding of what it means to be an effective manager and how to be a better teacher for training sessions.

#### Impression Management

It is not the *responsibility* of coworkers and superiors to “fix” Penny. She must be willing to accept her distorted perception and attribution bias and change them. Research and readings on organizational behavior and office relationships will be Penny’s responsibility. The group must be willing to communicate their opinions in a constructive manner so Penny can begin to understand their views and responses (Gordon, 1999, p. 281). Through this change, Penny should be able to deem the appropriate action for situations and judge her response accordingly. “We might manage impressions by the way we dress, speak, or otherwise present ourselves” (Gordon, 1999, p. 36). Changes to her mannerisms, such as not rolling her eyes, will give a better impression and people will be more willing to communicate with her.

### Evaluation

Individual behavior is dependent upon the person’s willingness and devotion to improvement. Feedback from friends and coworkers can help gauge the success or failure of an individual's growth. Penny should work with the different techniques and learning methods for a couple weeks before deciding if it is unsuccessful or successful. She should seek feedback from her peers. The feedback should come in a positive format, focusing on the good aspects of change rather than a “you’re doing it wrong” style.

## Conclusion

Penny and the staff at the Sunshine University Engineering Library have many issues and problems to address to gain a better work environment for everyone. It is the responsibility of Penny to address her individual issues and to improve her time management skills while it is upon the group to establish better communication and group cohesion. The case study analysis provides a diagnosis of the problems, prescriptions to resolve said problems and finally guidelines for evaluation for each prescription process. Through these recommendations, the Sunshine University Engineering Library can begin work to create a better working environment for all.

References

Bolton, R., & Bolton, D. G. (2009). *People Styles at Work...and beyond: Making bad relationships good and good relationships better* (2nd ed.). New York: American Management Association.

Cirillo, F. (2011). What is the Pomodoro Technique? Retrieved from https://cirillocompany.de/pages/pomodoro-technique

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Rath, T. (2007). *StrengthsFinder 2.0*. New York, NY: Gallup Press.

# MEMORANDUM

TO: Penny

FROM: Hope Alwine, Kelly Beckham, Hannah Hemphill, Morgan Hayes, and Kimberly Seeger

DATE: April 17, 2017

SUBJECT: Recommendations for better working relationships and environment

We understand that you are experiencing difficulties at work and are concerned about your relationship with your boss and your co-workers. It seems that you are having a hard time communicating with others and accomplishing your work because of all the new technology, demands of helping and training co-workers, and the lack of time you have to focus solely on your work. We realize that you are stressed and could use some friendly advice including tips on getting organized, taking care of your work and personal needs, and improving communication with others in order to create a fluid and harmonious work environment.  Also, remember that you are in a field of constant change and you’ll never know everything there is to know -- learning is a major part of the library and information studies field, so seeking improvement of oneself and the library itself is always going to be part of your job.

**Improving Communication**

Gordon points out that there is increased performance, satisfaction, and end result when groups have strong interpersonal relations. This creates group cohesion, and the more the members connect and work together the better they perform (Gordon, 1999, p. 153). When individuals come together to create something new, such as a new idea or concept, it requires good communication, collaboration and sometimes negotiation.

* Group cohesion and team building
  + Get to know your co-workers and how they learn best. Team building exercises will help you work together and become accustomed to others.  Developing good working relationships benefits the work environment as a whole.
  + Use the Strengthfinder 2.0 program to find your strengths and strategies that will help you change the way you look at yourself and others (Rath, 2007).
  + Informal gatherings with your co-workers are a relationship building opportunity. Try organizing a monthly breakfast, a holiday party, or attend a community event together.
* Collaboration concerns
  + Talk to Sheldon about scheduling, responsibilities, training, and helping with technology. Let him know that you want to be more involved with selecting the technology for the company, instead of just telling people how it works!
  + Use Doodle polls and Google calendar to help with scheduling of training sessions and to set up appointments with coworkers.
  + Be sure to listen to your coworkers and register their feedback, use it in a constructive manner on how to proceed in the future.

**Organization and Time Management**

*Organization* - You will start your day in a positive way if you organize and prioritize things. It is very satisfying seeing items crossed off a “To Do List”, and you can move up the ones that you didn’t accomplish. This will give you a clear idea of the tasks you have accomplished.

* First things first, organizing your desk can greatly improve productivity and help maintain focus on a single task (Cochran, 1992, p. 21).
* Another way to help keep yourself on track when completing a task is to utilize the Pomodoro technique, as designed by Francesco Cirillo, which instructs you to focus on one task for a certain amount of time (for example, 45 minutes) and then take a short break before completing another (Cirillo, 2011).
* Learn to prioritize your tasks, using methods like the A, B, C Priority Ranking (Alan Lakein; from Cochran, 1992). For example, A is very urgent and important, B is important but not as urgent, etc. *Remember* that just because something is urgent does not make it important, while many important tasks are not considered urgent.  Post John Cleese’s “Is it Urgent? Sign on your door (Hersberger, Time Management Lecture, 2017).

*If these techniques do not appeal to you, there are many other methods of organization and task management – explore which technique works best for you*.

*Time Management* -  Structuring your day also includes designating (and sometimes limiting) the amount of time spent on each task.

* Ask, *“What is the best use of my time right now?”  (Alan Lakein)* Prioritize and delegate some responsibilities! Utilize your resources such as student workers to help delegate some of the menial tasks so it can free up some of your time.
* Establish boundaries. You need time to get your work done. “All librarians need some time each day for quiet, concentrated work, *scheduled like any other appointment*.”  (Cochran, 1992, p. 25) You need to “schedule” time for yourself and for helping others. “In addition to reserving time for others in meetings and other commitments, an effective work and appointment schedule will include time reserved for commitments to yourself. A good time manager schedules the work she wants to accomplish each day as a commitment to herself” (Cochran, 1992, p. 24).
  + Let people know you need to not be interrupted and give them a time to come back later so you can have some quiet, productive time. We suggest a sign, “Please, do not disturb until \_\_\_\_\_\_\_” or have them schedule an appointment with you.

**Individual Behavior**

It is important to grow as a person for both yourself and to nurture lasting relationships with other people.  Organizational behavior is an interesting area of study pertaining to how an individual, group, and organization work together in order to create a finely tuned machine, producing quality products with efficiency.  By exploring individual and group behaviors, it will put things into perspective for yourself as well as grant insights into other’s behavior.

* Impression Management
  + Understand how you are perceived by others. “A high degree of self-awareness contributes to establishing and maintaining good relationships with others (Bolton 2009).
  + Managing how we are perceived is very important. “Nonverbal signals can also deliver unintended messages.” (Gordon 7, p. 191) Rolling your eyes and muttering during meetings, can unintentionally give the message that you are annoyed and don’t want to be there.
* Personal Needs:
  + Take time for breakfast. It is the most important meal of the day! Make sure that you eat a healthy meal that will get you ready for the day. Make time for lunch - Keep lunch time for eating, not for training sessions. Maybe go for a walk outside or talk to a friend. We understand the training sessions are important, but you can make time for that during the work day.
* Professional Development:
  + Professional development through professional organizations or programs offered by the University are a great way to obtain experience, learn valuable new information, and create a great network of colleagues for guidance and advice. Attend workshops and webinars. It is important to be constantly learning how to better our management and teaching abilities.

Suggested Readings/References:

Bolton, R., & Bolton, D. G. (2009). *People Styles at Work...and beyond: Making bad relationships good and good relationships better* (2nd ed.). New York: American Management Association.

Cirillo, F. (2011). What is the Pomodoro Technique? Retrieved from https://cirillocompany.de/pages/pomodoro-technique

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Rath, T. (2007). *StrengthsFinder 2.0*. New York, NY: Gallup Press.

We are here to help you and will be glad to discuss these recommendations with you further upon your request.

All the best,

Hope, Kelly, Hannah, Morgan, and Kimberly