Module 4 Assignment-Case Study: The Poorly Informed Walrus

Nicole Weiser

University of Mary

BUS 504: Management and Organizational Behavior

Assistant Professor: Raquel Jessen

May 27, 2016
Module 4 Assignment-Case Study: The Poorly Informed Walrus

**What barriers to communication are evident in this fable?**

Unfortunately for the walruses, a few different communication barriers were present in The Poorly Informed Walrus fable that led to all the walruses leaving. Three specific barriers present and that were discussed by Uhl-Bien, Osborn and Schermerhorn (2014) include interpersonal, physical and semantic barriers. The interpersonal barrier that was present was avoidance. Avoidance is when individuals ignore a problem because of fear of having an uncomfortable conversation (Uhl-Bien, Osborn & Schermerhorn, 2014). In the fable, there was an interpersonal barrier because Basil feared the response by the Old Man. Because of this Basil avoided the important discussions of what was really going on with the walruses rather than telling the Old Man. A physical barrier was present as well, there were not specific distractions that caused the physical barrier but the Old Man was not present. Instead he was up above “basking in the sun” not engaged in what was happening with the others. With this the Old Man was not seeing what was really going on and he was not dedicating his time to his team to gather the correct information. A final barrier was a semantic barrier, this barrier involves sending mixed messages when communicating and not clearly stating a problem (Uhl-Bien, Osborn & Schermerhorn, 2014). As Basil feared telling the Old Man the truth he gave mixed messages and covered up or minimized what was really happening to protect himself from getting yelled at as well as to make the Old Man happy.

Besides these specific barriers there was also a breakdown in the flow of communication. As the Old Man was always looking for a status report the flow of communication used was upward communication. Uhl-Bien, Osborn and Schermerhorn (2014) describe upward communication as “the flow of messages from lower to higher organizational levels” (p. 244).
Basil was giving the Old man updates but due to fear of upsetting his boss, Basil was filtering this information and only telling bits and pieces of the truth. Because of Basil’s inaccurate information the Old Man was unable to react and help rectify the problem occurring.

A final barrier was in the lack of Basil using his voice. As Basil feared retaliation from the Old Man he did not feel he had a voice but instead chose to be silent. This silence led to the loss of the Old Man’s team without him even knowing a problem existed. Voice is important as it “helps improve decision making and promote responsiveness in dynamic business conditions” (Uhl-Bien, Osborn & Schermerhorn, 2014, p. 245). If Basil did not fear the Old Man he may have been more inclined to use his voice and speak up about his concerns. Employees are more willing to use their voice if they feel they have open communication between themselves and their managers or leaders.

What communication “lessons” does the fable offer to those who are serious about careers in the new workplace?

Good communication is so important for any organization to be successful. To be good communicators we need to be open, honest and clear in our communication. The Old Man in the fable did not communicate well or promote good communication with his employees. With his yelling his employees felt fear and in the end barriers arose that prevented good communication. As a leader in an organization we must promote positive communication which includes relationship development and maintenance, use of supportive communication principles and active listening (Uhl-Bien, Osborn & Schermerhorn, 2014). I specifically work in healthcare and as a healthcare leader I need to be aware of how I communicate to my staff and be a role model in effective communication. I need to encourage and educate them on positive ways to communicate to peers, patients and supervisors. “To foster good relationships, ensure good
clinical environments and staff job satisfaction, managers need to adopt open, approachable leadership styles that involve actively listening to and respecting staff, and involving them in decision making and governance” (Timmins, 2011, p. 32).

Communication is key to success personally and professionally. This fable is a great example of poor organizational communication that led to breakdown of a team. This example can occur and probably does in many organizations. The fable teaches us that to be successful and to be effective communicators we need to establish good relationships which will in turn eliminate barriers and lead to supportive, open and honest conversations among our teams.
References
