

STRATEGIES

Fall 2002

SHOP TALK

Overcoming Organizational Static: Can You Hear Me Now?

From The President's Desk

Suzanne M. Miklos, Ph.D.

A series of commercials for digital mobile phones humorously points out the problems caused by miscommunication. For example, one cell phone user asks her husband to bring *shampoo* on his way home from work, only to find later that her backyard pool now contains *Shamu*. Another husband brings home a *soap opera star* in lieu of *soup from the store*. In these cases of miscommunication, cellular phone static is the culprit.

The parallel in business occurs when we apply solutions to organizational problems without clearly hearing what is behind the static in our companies. This “organizational static” can result from misaligned processes, conflicting goals, and disconnects between leaders and employees. Static then leads to miscommunication about problems and needs. The end result is that well-intended solutions often produce unintended organizational outcomes—which can sometimes become a larger problem than a company originally faced.

While the simple purchase of a digital phone won't eliminate organizational static, doing an appropriate needs analysis often will help. I had the pleasure of collaborating with a terrific sales trainer to work with a service organization to increase their cross-sell ratios. The company identified sales training as the solution, and had actually implemented similar training in the past without realizing the desired business results. What organizational static interfered with the training producing business results? To find out, we conducted an analysis of the company's cultural beliefs, barriers, and rewards as they related to sales performance. This cultural analysis enabled us to identify and remove the organizational static – resulting in a successful training intervention that achieved the desired business outcomes.

When we are moving so fast in our businesses it is easy to quickly identify a solution to the problem symptoms. Yet without looking at the context surrounding the problem or need, much like the cell phone commercials demonstrate, we risk ending up with *Shamu* instead of *shampoo*!



O.E. Strategies has expanded!

We have moved our offices to:

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Our e-mail addresses remain the same



Supervisor's Corner:

Are You Ready for Some...Teamwork?

Rebecca Toney, Ph.D.

Why is it that teams composed of individuals chosen for their expertise and trained in problem-solving techniques routinely fail? Even when goals are clearly outlined, teams often fail to achieve their goals within a reasonable timeframe—and sometimes not at all.

Many times, what is missing is the foundation needed for effective teamwork. Teams need to have a well-established process for working together and communicating effectively that all team members know and understand. This provides a foundation of readiness that is essential for teams to succeed.

A few key factors underlie the readiness of a team. These factors work together to create a team atmosphere in which members trust one another, can contribute and criticize ideas openly, and have confidence that they are moving in a forward direction. Readiness is fundamental to all teams, regardless of their specific goal or purpose. Learning teams, problem-solving teams, planning teams, and cross-functional teams all need to achieve a certain level of readiness before they can expect to successfully move forward. Ground rules and expectations can help the team succeed.

Communication

Central to team performance is the manner in which team members communicate. Communication is important whether the team is widely distributed across long distances, or meets together in one room. Team members should strive to communicate clearly, accurately, and in a way that other members can find meaningful and take action on the message. If a message is unclear, members should be welcomed to seek clarification until all understand the message.

Teams also need to have enough channels of communication open so that all members can send and receive messages to all other members. This may be a more significant issue for long-distance teams. E-mail, fax, phone, voice-mail, teleconferencing, and video conferencing have opened up numerous channels, and teams should consider the best channel for any given interaction. If the team does have a defined leader, it is this person who should set the example for communication by being accessible.

Respect

Strive to create an environment that is safe for members to share new ideas, explore alternatives, and make mistakes. Team members showing respect for one another create this environment at the most basic level. Team performance is enhanced by critical examination of plans and ideas, but is worsened by criticism of team members themselves. The team's leader should lead the way by demonstrating respect toward all members, and expecting respect from all in return.

Goals

Although it may appear that the goals for the group have been established with the convening of the team, some members may not be clear about the goals or have their own goals for the team. Taking the time to identify the multiple (and sometimes conflicting) goals of all team members will enable the team to work together to set priorities and move forward together. If the team is a standing committee that changes membership periodically, ensure new entrants are brought up to speed on the team's shared goals. Likewise, if the team takes a new direction, make sure that members agree upon the new goals.

Clear communication, respectful treatment, and shared goals among team members will give a team the foundation of readiness it needs to perform effectively.

Focus on Employees:

How Can a Survey Help My Organization?

Marie D. Francosky, Ph.D.

O.E.Strategies, Inc.welcomes Marie Francosky as a Senior Consultant.Dr.Francosky brings a wealth of information about surveys to our organization.In this article,She answers questions concerning how many people should participate in an organization's survey.

SCENARIO: Your organization wants to collect information on an important business issue or group topic using a survey. You've identified the target group of people from whom you'd like to gather opinions.Now,an important question surfaces: *"Do you invite everyone from that target group, or just some of them?"*

Do I have to survey the entire group of people to receive usable information from the survey?

No, a subgroup of people can be used to represent the entire group. This subgroup is called the survey sample.

Can surveying a "sample" of people tell you the opinions of an entire group of people?

Yes, but there is a minimum recommended number of people, depending on the total number of people in the target group. Through a simple mathematical formula, survey experts can calculate the recommended minimum number of people who must return completed surveys so that your results are reliable.

How many people need to fill out the survey so that I can feel confident that the results will be useful?

The smaller the size of the entire target group of people from which you want to draw conclusions, the richer the percentage of people needed to return surveys in order for you to have information that accurately represents the opinions of the entire group. The larger the initial target group, the smaller the percentage of people you will need to actually fill out and return the survey in order to get an accurate view of the entire target group's opinions.

How many people do I need to invite to participate in my survey?

This depends on your return rate. Both the minimum number of participants needed and the expected return rate are factors critical to planning your survey process design. A return rate is the percentage of people who actually return a completed survey questionnaire to you. This rate is calculated by dividing the number of returned surveys by the number of surveys you distributed. If you know from past experience that the typical return rate is low (for example, less than 30%) for your organization, then you will need to invite more people to get the minimum number of people required. A good rule of thumb for a new employee survey program is to expect a 50% return rate, unless employees complete their surveys during work. In that case, return rates are usually higher.

If I invite a group of people to participate in my survey and only a very small percentage (5%) actually completes the survey, is my information any good or have I wasted my time and money?

Generally speaking, the more people who respond to a survey the better. However, most experts in the field of survey work recommend that efforts should be made to obtain at least a 30% return rate. Activities can be initiated to help boost an initially low return rate. If your final survey participation rate is less than 30%, then caution must be used in interpreting the results. Survey information based on low return rates can be used as an initial peek into people's opinions, but should not be taken as the final answer to the question(s) being investigated. Other sources of information (focus group discussions, employee suggestions, supervisory perceptions) on the targeted topic should be used to confirm or refute the conclusions being drawn from the survey results.

On The Move

O.E. Strategies and its staff had a busy first half this year. Among the places you may have seen, read, or heard about our company and our employees are:

Cleveland Enterprise Magazine, Spring 2002: Dr. Toney participated in the Weatherhead Perspectives column as an expert in training and development of supervisors.

Sun Newspapers: The Chagrin Valley Times reported on Orange School District's SchoolPrism Process results.

SIOP 2002 Annual Conference, Toronto, Ontario Canada: A roundtable discussion highlighted the collaboration of O.E. Strategies and L.A. Dreyfus on a workforce development project that required a culture change for successful implementation.

The Second Annual Northeast Ohio Regional Human Resource Conference, Kent State University - Stark: Dr. Miklos led a seminar on "Making Job Descriptions Work."

Parma Community Hospital: Jessica Lynn Miklos was born April 10 at 8:30am. Weight: 7lbs. 15 oz. Length: 20 inches.



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