

Memo short report

Sociology, Communication



The recent conflict in FinanceGates Project was definitely harmful to the overall success of the project and the spirit of cooperation InternetGates Company tries to promote among its employees. From my viewpoint as that of a third party, I see the issue as a communication problem created by barriers that often stand between employees from different backgrounds. The solution can action directed at improving communication skills of our employees in various departments.

Frank Brown, Marketing Manager for FinanceGates, as it turned out, had long been confident that the course taken by the project is completely wrong and doomed to fail. His impression of the ideas put forward by the Project Manager, Brian Graham, had long been negative, as he believed them to be both ineffective and unrealistic. However, for lack of communication skills expressed in shyness and fear to lose rapport with the boss, Frank was reluctant to share this with him. In this conversation, however, he simply exploded, telling Brian Graham all the negatives he had in mind.

I personally witnessed this conversation and can reproduce it fairly precisely as it was etched upon my memory. Frank began by reporting about his findings during the preparation of the marketing plan. As he was sharing his insights, Brian once again expressed his dissatisfaction over delays in Frank's work. He stated: " Once again, you are not able to meet the deadline for your marketing plan. I just remind you that our company places special emphasis on meeting deadlines, as I have already told you more than once".

Frank seemed very frustrated by this remark and began to justify himself by saying that facts that would support the current direction of business are

very hard to find. In essence, what he has produced so far was a brief study of the market that showed limited opportunities for the kind of product the company expected to sell – and therefore turning it into a plan will be difficult, not impossible. In his speech, Frank complained about the boss “limiting his initiative” and lacking “flexibility”.

The boss was listening to Frank’s tirade silently, showing signs of anger with his facial expression. However, he did not interrupt Frank who seemed really carried away with his emotions. When Frank seemed done with his speech, Brian said: ‘Okay, I have listened to you, and now you will listen to me. You have to be ready with your plan in three days. If you have nothing to show on Friday at noon, we will have to talk about your prospects in this company. Because one thing I want everybody to follow is take a positive attitude toward work and strive to complete every assignment with maximum quality. You do not seem to have it, but maybe I am wrong.’

Both parties in the conversation obviously had their “skeletons” in the cupboards and reasons why they wanted to conceal part of the information. I know, for example, that Frank is driven by the perceived lack of rewards in this position. He confided in me at one point that in our organization he feels underpaid and misses the trappings of a managerial position, as in the previous job he was head of a marketing department. His past record also involved numerous conflicts with superiors as he sought to defy their authority; this was the way he learned to interact with superiors and it is not easy to abandon. His habits include arguing with the boss, not being

cooperative. In turn, Frank expects all superiors to hostile and critical toward him.

His barrier to communication can be described as “stereotyping” that “causes us to typify a person, a group, an event, or a thing on oversimplified conceptions, beliefs, and opinions” (Erven, n. d., p. 3). Frank stereotypes all superiors as people with enormous amount of power they use to oppress subordinates. His stereotypical, habitual strategy is to offer resistance.

Brian’s problem is most probably lack of understanding for human nature. Poor listening skills contribute to communication barriers. In previous conversations, he could have noticed Frank’s unwillingness to support his ideas, but never paid attention. It seems to me frequently that he places too much emphasis on authority and too little on persuasion. In this case, his mistake was forcing an employee to do something in a rude manner, without asking for cooperation and testing willingness to help.

To remedy the situation, both Brian and Frank require counselling that will help them change their communicative styles. Instead of showing quick aggression, they should both opt for communication patterns that will provide the room for the other person’s self-esteem instead of being confrontational. Brian, for instance, can change his attitude to subordinates to a more positive one, beginning to see them as people who are inherently good and are trying to accomplish their tasks effectively instead of accusing them of being lazy or inadequate. For Frank, it can be recommended that he, too, stop seeing the boss as an enemy and rather as one who can provide assistance to him.

I also propose that InternetGates organize a training for project managers and, if possible, their teams focusing on communication. The topics could include communication styles, communicative strategies, barriers to effective communication, and how to overcome them. Learning more about differences in cross-cultural communication will also be relevant to our employees since we are an international company. Trainings would provide managers with a background in communication that would help them resolve day-to-day conflicts that arise out of misunderstandings.

Sincerely,

Peter Black

References

1. Erven, B. Overcoming Barriers to Communication. Retrieved August 9, 2006, from <http://aede.osu.edu/people/erven.1/HRM/communication.pdf>
2. Hampton, J. (2006, May 8). Barriers to Communication. Retrieved August 9, 2006, from <http://www.community4me.com/barriers.html>