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Organizational Culture and Communication Competence Workshop: Masters Plan B

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Master's Thesis Plan B

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Abstract

This project began as an attempt to understand how events, such as the “Great Resignation” (i.e., an unprecedented mass exit of employees from the U.S. workforce), have impacted the way in which organizations are attempting to mitigate employee turnover. In addition, this project examined what role managers might play in promoting a positive organizational culture. A review of literature identified Schein’s (1990) model of organizational culture and Spitzberg and Cupach’s (1984) conceptualization of communication competence as useful frameworks for helping managers understand and promote positive organizational culture and employee mental health and well-being. In addition, the review of literature pointed to key skills that could be developed to increase the communication competency of managers. Those skills were identified as, but are not limited to, *perception checking*, *cognitive complexity*, *empathy*, and *role-taking*. These four skills were the focus of a proposed workshop that is aimed at promoting positive organizational culture and improving managers communication competences.

Table of Contents

Abstract 2

Introduction 4

Literature Review 6

Workshop Manuscript 19

References 48

Introduction

Organizations worldwide, specifically within the United States, are entering a transition stage. Specifically, as Covid-19 transforms from a pandemic to an endemic disease, many organizations are attempting to force employees to return to the office (Sherman, 2022). Despite such efforts, many American workers are resisting. By way of example, Smith (2022) found that although Goldman Sachs recently demanded their employees to return to the office, only half of their 10,000 employees did. This situation points to what some have described as a “disconnect” between employees and executives in modern-day organizations. Sherman (2022, para. 7), for example, noted “executive-employee disconnect represents a division between what’s best for the organization and what’s best for the individual”. With this disconnect permeating some of the world’s foremost organizations, finding solutions to what is best for the organization must, by necessity, include an understanding of what is best for the individual as well. In other words, what might organizations do to bridge the divide and find what is best for both parties?

Sull et al. (2022), found that toxic organizational culture is “10.4 times more powerful than compensations in predicting a company’s attrition rate compared with its industry” (p. 3). Similarly, Heskett (2011) found that organizational culture has accounted for between 20 and 50 percent of the differential in performance between organizations of the same industry. In addition, Sull et al. (2022) found that toxic organizational culture was also a primary contributor to the *Great Resignation*. The *Great Resignation* can be described as a mass exodus being experienced in the workforce wherein organizations are seeing a dramatically high turnover rate. Cook (2021) found that in July of 2021, four million people quit their jobs in the United States leaving 10.9 million jobs open by the end of that same month.

According to O'Reilly et al. (2014) a long-standing assumption is that senior leaders are the prime determinant of organizational culture. In fact, O'Reilly et al. (2014) found that, during the 1980's, many academics indicated that organizational culture could not change if those in positions of power and influence did not change themselves. Extending this notion, Schein (1985) claimed that "the only thing of real importance that leaders do is to create and manage culture" (p. 2). With numerous scholars finding how impactful leaders are in shaping organizational culture, researchers and practitioners have sought to identify skills/behaviors that might help managers improve their organizational culture. Wellmon (1988), for example, found that managers' level of organizational communication competence plays a crucial role in their ability to engage with subordinates, which, in turn, affects employees' evaluations of leaders and their perceptions of the overall culture within organizations. In other words, having more communicatively competent manager promotes more positive organizational culture and more satisfied employees. With this in mind, developing communication competence to promote organizational culture would be desirable.

To that end, the overall goal of this project is to a) review the literature on organizational culture and communication competence; and b) develop a workshop designed to train managers on how to be more communicatively competent. Specifically, this project is guided by the following research questions:

RQ1: What is the nature of communication competence?

RQ2: What skills/abilities improve communication competence?

RQ3: What is organizational culture and how is it related to communication competence?

RQ4: What teachable skills promote positive organizational culture and communication competence?

Literature Review

Communication Competence

Although multiple scholars have tried to conceptualize communication competence, doing so has been described as “climbing a greased pole” (Phillips, 1984, p. 25). Indeed, communication competence has been defined in numerous ways and there is not a universally accepted definition (Payne, 2005). Spitzberg and Cupach (1984) acknowledged this point as they reviewed the varying conceptualizations within the field, noting that that some approaches are cognitive in nature, while others focus on the consequences of behavior. Despite such variations, there is a significant amount of conceptual overlap. Specifically, virtually all conceptualizations point to the importance of context (Spitzberg & Cupach, 1984). Thus, while scholars have spoken to the nature of communication competence in general, they have also examined the concept in specific contexts, including relational of and organizational settings. Wellmon (1988), for example, noted that organizational communication competence is best conceptualized with specific features of contexts in mind. According to this view, communication competence is demonstrated by an individual who comprehends the intricacies of the organization in which they are communicating (also see, Johansson et al., 2014; Pundziene et al., 2007; Steele & Plenty, 2015; Waldeck et al., 2012).

Also highlighting the importance of context, Spitzberg and Cupach (1984) noted that communication competence includes both individual and contextual components, even though the goal of effective and appropriate communication remains the same. Rather than focusing on competence in the context of organizations, Spitzberg and Cupach’s (1984) model was originally designed to focus on *relational competence*. That said, to the extent that skills related to interpersonal communication are critical in organizational contexts (see DeKay, 2012), and to the

extent that my workshop focuses largely on interpersonal skills in the workplace, Spitzberg and Cupach's (1984) model provides a valuable framework for my current project. In other words, for the purposes of my workshop, I will be using the *relational competence model* as a framework.

Before expanding on the *relational competence model*, I want to note that both appropriateness and effectiveness are important to being a competent communicator. Indeed, competence is defined as,

the ability of an interactant to meet the basic contextual requirements of the situation-to be effective in a general sense. These contextual requirements include: (1) the verbal context, that is, making sense in terms of wording, of statements, and of topic; (2) the relationship context, that is, the structuring, type and style of messages so that they are consonant with the particular relationship at hand; and (3) the environmental context, that is, the consideration of constraints imposed on message making by the symbolic and physical environments. (Wiemann & Backlund, 1980, p. 191, as cited in Spitzberg & Cupach, 1984)

Essentially, in order to communicate appropriately, the interactant must recognize and adapt to verbal, nonverbal, relational, and environmental contexts. Just as there are specific guidelines that demonstrate appropriate communication, there are also similar aspects that Spitzberg and Cupach (1984) feel conceptualize efficacy. Specifically, they argue that effectiveness as a communicator relies on the ability to recognize circumstances. From there, communicators need to adapt to the situation so that they might achieve their desired goals. To summarize, then, effectiveness is the ability to achieve goals, and appropriateness is the ability to do so in a manner that fits the demands of the situation.

Expanding on the previously mentioned *relational competence model*, Spitzberg and Cupach (1984) argued that each communicative interaction consists of three elements: motivation, knowledge, and skills. *Motivation* occurs prior to the initiation of an encounter. Stated differently, competent communicators approach interactions with specific goals in mind. These goals are deemed to be the motivation behind an interaction. Within each encounter it is possible that a person's goals change, functioning in multiple ways. Indeed, Spitzberg and Cupach (1984) argued that "motivation not only serves to facilitate actual performance, then, but, over the long term, also acts to stimulate other attributes, such as social perception and cognitive complexity, that can enhance the competence of a person's interaction" (p.121).

Knowledge, the second element of the relational competence model becomes relevant as soon as a person decides to engage in an interpersonal encounter (Athay & Darley, 1981). Upon doing so, competent communicators anticipate what might be said, search for cognitive schemas that are necessary to communicate appropriately, and recognize communicative cues in order to pursue goals effectively. A competent communicator demonstrates knowledge as their encounter occurs. This is demonstrated through a concern of social appropriateness, appropriate self-presentation, and the ability to modify behaviors within specific situations (Snyder, 1979).

The final element of the relational competence model is *ability*, which includes the capacity to enact various communication skills. Although Spitzberg and Cupach (1984) point to a number of specific skills that can be developed and taught to promote communication competency, three that they underline as being particularly important include "cognitive complexity, empathy, and role taking" (p. 43). First, *cognitive complexity* refers to the number of cognitive schemata an individual is able to utilize when processing information about the social environment (Bruch et al., 1981). Specifically, "cognitive complexity may be defined as the

capacity to construe social behavior in a multidimensional way” (Bieri et al., 1966, as cited in Spitzberg & Cupach, 1984, p. 43). Olson and Partington (1977) state that a cognitively complex individual is capable of assessing situations and other people from multiple perspectives, all while being able to incorporate contradictory information in an organized fashion. In essence, *cognitive complexity* is an individual’s ability to adapt their messages to a diverse audience. Being communicatively competent at a minimum involves the cognitive ability to “(a) process relevant information from the environment, (b) select information most relevant to a specific task, and (c) construct innovative patterns of performance by reconstructing familiar practiced paradigms to meet the instrumental demands of constantly varying interaction situations” (Athay & Darley, 1981, p. 299). To the extent that this skill requires understanding the perspective of others, it is related to another skill known as *perception checking*, which I discuss in more detail below.

Similarly, the second and third skills identified by Spitzberg and Cupach (1984) are related to *perception checking*. The second skill, *empathy*, has important differences from the third skill *role-taking*. Generally, empathy refers to an individual’s ability to experience an “emotional reaction to, or an affective experience of, another’s emotional state” (Spitzberg, 1980, p. 14), whereas *role-taking* involves the process of taking account of, analyzing, and adapting to the role of another (p. 45). In other words, *role-taking* is the process of mentally constructing an imaginative understanding of another’s role as to allow the management of an interaction to be effective. (Spitzberg, 1980). As individuals competently use *empathy* and *role-taking*, these skills allow them to more accurately predict how others will respond (Spitzberg & Cupach, 1984). The combination of these two skills account for the majority of the generic concept of adaptiveness (D’Augelli, 1973; Hale & Delia, 1976; and Marsh et al. 1981). As

mentioned earlier in this paragraph, empathy and role-taking share similarities with perception checking, as these skills all require the recognition of another's thought process.

Although my workshop will not focus on helping my participants develop all of the skills that contribute to communication competency (because of time constraints in the workshop), I do focus on developing some of those skills. Specifically, my workshop will aim at teaching managers how to develop cognitive complexity, empathy, and role-taking in order to competently communicate with their subordinates. In addition, as noted above, because these skills are related to the ability to check the accuracy of one's perceptions, my workshop will also promote effective perception checking.

Perception Checking

Perception checking is a skill that allows individuals to adapt their communication to diverse audiences. As managers work with more diverse team members, they will need to be able to recognize their subordinates' points of view. In addition, they need to understand that others may see the world differently, and that what has meaning for some people will not have meaning for others. Initially, meaning will be interpreted differently based on the subjective experience of each individual. Maintaining an *organizational culture* that includes space for all perspectives to be heard is the steppingstone to a positive culture that also promotes positive mental health and well-being.

Efron (1969) describes *perception* as the primary form of cognitive contact with the world. It is how individuals make sense of the world around them based on their subjective experiences. Perception is a process which encompasses three steps that determine what individuals focus on and levels of comprehension. Qiong (2017) states that the process includes (a) *selection*, (b) *organization*, (c) and *interpretation*. Qiong (2017) found that selection is most

heavily influenced by stimuli and most commonly recognized as sound. We cannot process every source of stimuli at once; because of this, individuals tend to select salient stimuli (e.g., their name being spoken in a loud room). *Selection* allows individuals to know what they should be paying attention to. As managers engage with individuals from diverse backgrounds, being able to recognize that not all individuals will focus on and select the same content when perceiving a situation, demonstrates communication competence.

After selecting stimuli, individuals proceed through the perception process by *organizing* that stimuli. This second step allows people to structure and give coherence to their social world, enabling them to recognize patterns of behavior as well as the ways in which people might vary with regard to those patterns (Cantor et al., 1982, p. 34). Through this step, individuals categorize people, objects, and events allowing them to create structure in an otherwise chaotic scenario that now allows understanding to take place (Qiong, 2017).

Interpretation, the final stage in the process of *perception*, is when individuals assign meaning and make sense of what is occurring. This stage is most crucial when developing the skill of *perception checking*. Cultural influence on the perception process changes individual *interpretation*; if multiple parties encounter the same stimuli, the meaning assigned and what was *selected* varies. Samovar et al. (1981) stated that cultural factors provide meaning when perceptions are made, therefore, implicating the connection culture has to the perception process. *Perception checking* becomes salient as cultural diversity occurs within an organization, which is happening at an increasing rate (Wilson, 2018).

Understanding the process of perception is a vital part in the development of perception checking, which is defined as the process by which the practitioner “provides feedback that [they] are aware of the emotions others have experienced or are currently experiencing” (Hansen

et al., 2002, p. 318). Extending this notion, Hansen et al. (2002) point to perception checking as basic listening skill that can be developed through practice as participants listen closely to others. Specifically, Adler and Proctor (2017) found that this skill is demonstrated as individuals follow a three-step process: (1) describing the observed behavior; (2) providing of at least two possible interpretations of the observed behavior; and (3) requesting clarification on how to properly interpret the behavior.

Organizational Culture

Before exploring how *organizational cultures* might be transformed, it is important to understand what *organizational culture* is. According to Schein (1992), *organizational culture* is, a pattern of shared basic assumptions that the group learned as it solved its problems of external adaptation and internal integration, that has worked well enough to be considered valid, and therefore, to be taught to new members as the correct way to perceive, think, and feel concerning those problems. (p. 2)

While there have been other attempts at conceptualizing *organizational culture*, none have been accepted as dominant. That said, because Schein's (1990) model of organizational culture is the most comprehensive, for the purpose of this project, I have limited my focus to it.

The three elements of Schein's (1990) model include artifacts, espoused values, and basic underlying assumptions. Before I expand on the elements within an organizational culture, I want to offer this example in order to help promote conceptual comprehension of the model. Imagine you have moved to a new country. Upon arrival you are faced with a variety of new and unfamiliar behaviors, all of which are common to the people that were born or have lived there for an extended period of time. This culture could be dramatically different from what you are used to, and in order for you to assimilate into your new home you must find ways to adapt to the

new culture. Schein's (1990) model offers insight into how culture, specifically organizational cultures, operate and how newcomers can assimilate.

The first element of Schein's (1990) model of organizational culture is an *artifact*. *Artifacts* are observable behaviors. Keyton (2011) states that anything that can be felt, heard, or seen within an organization can be labeled an artifact. *Artifacts* are both visible and tangible (Keyton, 2011). These visible/tangible behaviors are often too numerous for any one individual to observe and can range from how coworkers address each other to how individuals behave during organizational celebrations. A special type of artifacts includes behaviors known or identified as norms. Keyton (2011) identified a norm as a specific behavior that guides people's behavior in a specific setting. Norms are an informal regulation that is often performed by individuals unconsciously and have been found to be a form of social control. For example, when engaging in a conversation with someone in the United States, it is normal to participate in intermittent eye contact. However, too much eye contact during a conversation could be seen as awkward and inappropriate. There is an unspoken rule about how much eye contact is appropriate when conversing with others. This unspoken rule (a.k.a. norm), has become a form of social control dictating appropriate nonverbal behavior during conversations.

Second, *values* are the preferred state of affairs held by people within an organizational culture. Values are often highlighted on job applications and expressed through "strategies, goals, principles, or qualities considered ideal, worthwhile, or desirable" (Keyton, 2011, p. 24). Expressed values, however, are not always enacted in organizations. As an example, companies might express the *value* of teamwork when soliciting their organization to potential employees, yet, in reality, reward employees who focus on themselves instead of those who participate in team efforts. Experiences like this can create cognitive dissonance within employees, causing

them to experience feelings of uncertainty towards the organization and its *values*.

Organizational *values* are often formed via perceived behaviors or *artifacts*. When new employees begin assimilating into a new organization, they will look to established identities within the culture to learn what is actually *valued*.

The last element of Schein's (1990) model of organization culture are *assumptions*. *Assumptions* are ideas or beliefs that are so deeply rooted within the organization that they are no longer discussed. Despite the deep roots of an *assumption*, they are often "subtle, abstract, and implicit" (Keyton, 2011, p. 26). An *assumption* is most easily recognized as the understanding or expectations of occupational roles. For example, a manager might rely on the HR department to resolve conflict rather than resolve it themselves. This is because they perceive conflict resolution to be a part of someone else's job/role. All three elements of this model, *artifacts*, *values*, and *assumptions*, contribute to the effects of the culture and how it impacts employees.

Schein views organizational culture as generally invisible albeit extremely powerful; it acts as a set of invisible guidelines that tells employees how to act giving them expectations to follow. Separate from the three elements that make up an organizational culture, there is an event that occurs throughout the development and growth of organizations. Schein (1990) claims that the event necessary for the formation of any organizational culture is that of a shared history. A shared history is when the organization has a pattern of behavior, a "history" with which they use a measuring stick to gauge employee assimilation. An organization's culture can elicit hostility toward new hires and existing employees, which impacts turnover, occupational satisfaction, mental health, and well-being (Beatrice, 2020; Kim et al., 2015; Kyron et al., 2021). If an organization's culture generates a high level of dissonance within employees, it can severely impact their well-being. Schein (1990) found that if this dissonance is not resolved, employees

will want to quickly part ways and separate themselves from the organization to lessen their perceived cognitive dissonance. Increased levels of cognitive dissonance within an organization often increases the emotional strain felt by employees, a condition often referred to as burnout.

A significant number of scholars have focused on the negative consequences of burnout (e.g., Dreison et al., 2017; Knudsen et al., 2006). Using burnout to expand on the relationship identified between organizational culture and mental health/well-being, a study conducted by Beatrice (2020) focused on the impacts of burnout caused by organizational culture. It is worth recognizing that their study was limited by the lack of past research looking into the relationship between organizational culture and burnout. However, a relationship between burnout and the communication competency within organizational culture was identified and recognized as a contributing factor.

The literature on mental health and well-being within organizations has primarily focused on its existence rather than solutions or effects (Nadinloyi et al., 2013; Slemp et al., 2014; Zheng et al., 2015), however, there are some studies indicating that an organization's culture impacts mental health and well-being. For example, Kyron et al. (2021) conducted a study that analyzed the mental health and well-being of emergency service employees in Australia. They surveyed 14,868 emergency service employees to try and determine the impact their occupation had on their mental health and overall well-being. Ultimately, they found that employees were experiencing severe negative effects in their mental health and well-being due to the existing cultures within their organizations. Kyron et al. (2021) also determined that occupational stress (regardless of the organization) could negatively affect *mental health* and *well-being*. Kyron et al. (2021) concluded that a potential solution could be increased mental health literacy training, emphasis on the importance of seeking early and appropriate support or treatment, and cultural

programs aimed at reducing stigma toward disclosing mental health issues. Organizational cultures that currently have some of these solutions in place for their employees have noticed a positive impact on *mental health* and *well-being*. Nadinloyi et al. (2013) found that there are several areas in which both parties' benefit. Specific benefits included reduced intentions to turnover, reduced absenteeism, reduced burnout syndrome, increased productivity, increased organizational commitment, increased job performance, and overall job satisfaction. Numerous studies provide similar results when addressing *mental health* and *well-being* in the workplace (Bevan, 2010; Kirk & Brown, 2003; Laschinger & Read, 2017).

The Impact of Communication Competency Skills on Organizational Culture

After reviewing literature on both *organizational culture* and *communication competence*, I have found that not enough studies focus on the connection between these concepts. However, I have also found that 1) employee's satisfaction is a sign of a positive organizational culture, and 2) there are specific skills that promote the development of both a competent communicator and a positive *organizational culture*. First, Madlock (2008), found that there was a significant increase in employee satisfaction when leadership demonstrated competent communication. These findings are supported by additional studies (Gorenak et al., 2019; Henderson, 2008; Steele & Plenty, 2015).

The skills of perception checking, cognitive complexity, empathy, and role-taking allow for appropriate and effective communication to take place. Through the development of these skills managers will be able to promote a positive organizational culture in which employees feel recognized. Moreover, as they learn to be competent, managers can adapt artifacts, values, and assumptions in order to promote a diverse community.

Conclusion

After reviewing the literature on *organizational culture* and *communication competence*, I propose that a workshop targeting managers would be the most effective way for existing organizations to begin a positive culture change. The goals of this workshop, using the framework established via the *relational competence model*, would be to 1) introduce managers to the concepts of organizational culture and communication competence, 2) provide managers with the motivation needed to understand the importance of communication competence, 3) establish the knowledge of the material that lays the foundation for the development of communication competence, and 4) develop skills related to perception checking, cognitive complexity, empathy, and role taking. It is my hope that, through this workshop, managers will be able to return to their organizations with the tools necessary to promote positive change to organizational culture and demonstrate increased communication competencies that allow for a more inclusive environment that cares for employee well-being and mental health. As organizations strive to find “what is best for the individual” (Sherman, 2022, para. 7) rather than what is best for the organization, they will realize that, often, these two goals are the same. As employees experience positive organizational cultures led by communicatively competent managers, both parties will find the results they desire.

Organizational Culture and Communication Competence Workshop

Overview

The second portion of my Plan B presents a workshop. This workshop, grounded in research from my literature review, is designed to teach participants what organizational culture and communication competence are, how they, as managers, impact their organizational culture, and what skills they can develop to become more communicatively competent. The goal is to provide participants with the motivation, knowledge, and skills that help promote a positive organizational culture. It is expected that this workshop will have anywhere from 10-20 participants.

Introduction

The first 10-15 minutes of my workshop will be used to introduce myself to the participants. Specifically, I will explain why I am here, my academic and professional background, and a few personal interests (e.g., hobbies, group affiliations, etc.) To get to know participants and help them get to know each other, we will engage in an “icebreaker” activity.

Activity #1: Getting to Know You: by Michelle M Pulaski (2007) (approx. 30-45 min)

Background

Initially, this activity was designed for use with students in traditional classrooms. I tailored the activity to adapt to a more professional audience, particularly in regard to the questions about assumptions. Specifically, the activity asks participants to make assumptions about an individual's identity based on first impressions.

Purpose

This activity aims to help break the ice and allow participants to build familiarity with others within the workshop. In addition to, it aims to promote conversation and kinship among

participants and, in the process, help participants become comfortable with both the environment and others. Pulaski (2007) originally developed it for a public speaking course. In their rationale, they mentioned that this activity helps alleviate some of the anxiety experienced when speaking in front of peers.

Description of Activity

Participants will be randomly assigned a partner, which ideally will be someone they have not met previously. Afterward, they will introduce themselves to each other by name only. Once participants have introduced themselves to each other, they will make assumptions about their partner. Specifically, they will be asked to record their assumptions about 1) their partners favorite sport, 2) their partner's favorite hobby, 3) their partner's favorite music genre, 4) where their partner grew up, and 5) their partner's favorite television show. At this point, the assumptions that were made should not be shared with partners.

Once both parties have finished recording the assumptions they have made about their partner, they will work together to discuss and correct any information their partners might have gotten wrong. Along the way, they should share with each other information about how they formed their assumptions. For instance, did the way a partner dressed influence assumptions about musical preferences? If so, how? Once their exploration of each other's assumptions is complete, participants will take turns presenting their partner to the rest of the people in the workshop. Afterwards, I will debrief the participants on the purpose of this activity. Specifically, I will introduce them to ideas about how our assumptions can lead us to make poor judgments or even develop misunderstandings. For example, should someone discover that any of their assumptions were wrong, it demonstrates the importance of suspending judgements before getting to know someone. Keeping this in mind, I will guide my participants through a

discussion of how this information might be important to them at work. For example, I can ask participants how assumptions might come into play when managers are assigned new team members. Are there negative consequences to, making flash judgements? What consequences might occur? This activity was chosen with the direct intention of helping participants recognize everyone is prone to making incorrect assumptions and that their ability to perceive others may not be as competent as they previously thought.

Before moving forward, participants will take a 15-minute break.

Workshop Preview (10 minutes)

After the introduction activity is completed, and once participants have returned from their first break, I will give a brief overview of the workshop's material and the order in which it will be presented. The workshop is composed of two overarching topics: *organizational culture* and *communication competence*. In addition, over the course of the workshop, I will provide participants with the motivation, knowledge, and skills needed to improve their ability to communicate appropriately and effectively with others. As mentioned in my literature review, Spitzberg and Cupach (1984) pointed to the important role played by motivation, knowledge, and skills in communication competence. As such, these components will be used as the framework for my workshop. Based on my personal experience in organizations and my research in the field of communication, I recognized that many managers struggle in their communication with employees. Specifically, such experiences have led me to recognize the change necessary for organizations to adapt to the needs of their employees in order to create a more positive and healthy organizational culture. It is for these reasons I have chosen organizational culture and communication competence as the topics for my workshop. Based on my literature I also believe

that a workshop developed for managers can help them promote positive organizational cultures and improve their communication competency.

**Motivating Managers by Helping Them Understand Their Role in Shaping
Organizational Culture** (approx. 30 min)

Not all managers are motivated to become competent communicators. As such, one goal of this workshop is to promote motivation toward competence by showing managers why they should be invested in improving their communication competence. To accomplish this, I plan to illustrate negative outcomes of a toxic communication culture and the positive consequences of a healthy culture led by a communicatively competent manager.

To this end, this section of my workshop will introduce managers to several concepts I discussed in the literature review portion of this Plan B project. Specifically, I will begin by motivating participants to engage with the workshop. I will do this by showing them, as stated in my literature review, that: 1) the most important thing managers do is create and manage culture (Schein, 1985); 2) organizational culture cannot change if those in positions of influence do not change themselves (O'Reilly et al., 2014); and 3) toxic organizational cultures are over 10 times more influential in predicting turnover than compensation discrepancies (Sull et al., 2022). This stems from the stress and burnout employees experience while working in a toxic organizational culture.

Stress and *burnout* have significant effects on *mental health* and *well-being*. This is particularly important for managers in my workshop to recognize, as many organizations have been experiencing high turnover levels as a result of such issues. To help provide managers an example of the relationship between organizational culture and mental health, I will share with them a study conducted by Kyron et al. (2021). As noted in my literature review, this study

analyzed emergency service employees' mental health and well-being in Australia. This study surveyed nearly 15,000 individuals to try and determine the impact their occupations have on their mental health and well-being. Kyron et al. (2021) found that employees were experiencing severe adverse effects on their mental health and well-being caused by occupational stress and organizational culture. In addition to, Kyron et al. (2021) found that stress caused by occupation negatively impacts mental health and well-being, regardless of organizational affiliation. In order to help alleviate some of this stress organizations should increase mental health literacy training and emphasize the importance of seeking early and appropriate treatment.

After discussing these topics with the participants, I intend to engage with them by asking a simple question: “How do you believe this material applies to your job?” I expect most managers to mention that setting realistic goals or not criticizing employees for using their paid time-off as ways in which they can help alleviate some workplace stress. After hearing from the participants, I will ask them to participate in a “mini” activity taking approximately 15 minutes. I will start this “mini” activity by asking, “Have you ever worked for or been a part of an organization you did not like?” and “What was it about the organization you did not like?” I will then ask them to identify what specifically caused them to dislike their last organization. I expect that at least one participant will mention a previous struggle caused by a manager. However, should no one raise that issue, I will specifically ask if they’ve ever struggled due to a manager’s expectations of behaviors. This section aims to connect participants with upcoming material while also identifying the role they, as managers, play in organizational culture.

**Providing Managers The Knowledge They Need to Promote Positive Organizational
Change (approx. 30 minutes)**

This section of my workshop aims to help managers recognize that in order for them to engage with others competently, they need to know how to do so. This section will begin with an exercise that asks participants to reflect on an experience.

Activity #2: Culture Shock (approximately 30 min)

Background

This exercise is one I have used in my own classrooms. I developed it to help participants empathize with individuals who feel lost or out of place, allowing them to recognize the difficulties experienced when assimilating to a new or unfamiliar environment.

Purpose

This exercise aims to help managers recognize the culture shock new employees experience when assimilating into an organization, allowing managers to identify the need new employees have for additional support.

Description of Activity

This activity begins by asking participants to imagine they have just moved to a new country and face a variety of new and unfamiliar behaviors, all of which are common to the people who have lived there for an extended period of time. Specifically, participants will be told: “Imagine you are trying to navigate your way to and around a grocery store. The road signs are in an unfamiliar language, cars are on the opposite side of the road, and you struggle simply finding your way to the store. Once you are finally there, you are faced with a problem. All the products on the shelves are unfamiliar, none of the employees speak your language, and you are unsure the actual cost of items as the currency is different than your native country. If you have any hope of surviving you must adapt to this new culture, and it must be done quickly as your

stomach growls loudly. What is the first thing you will do to make sense of this new world? How can you help yourself assimilate into this culture?"

Ideally, participants will mention the need to find someone who is willing to help them and someone who can "show them the ropes". By doing so, I can relate this to their roles as a manager clarifying that new employees need someone to help them, and they are in a position to do just that. However, should no one say they would attempt to find someone to help them, I will ask them to give examples of when they had gone through a similar experience. These experiences could have occurred while on vacation or moving to a new location and whether or not anyone had helped them when they got there. It is my hope that participants are able to make connections between this exercise and real-life scenarios they have already been a part of. By doing this, it provides participants insight into the experience new employees have when joining a new organization.

This activity aims to prepare participants to be introduced to Schein's (1990) model of organizational culture, also laying a foundation for learning about perception checking. In order to do this, I will debrief the activity by asking the following questions: (a) why do you think transitioning to a new culture is difficult?; (b) what do you believe would be most helpful when someone is attempting to assimilate into a new organization?; and (c) what do you feel makes an organizational culture positive or negative? It is my aim to help managers identify specific struggles new employees face when transitioning into their organization.

After this, participants will go on a 15-minute break.

Schein's Model of Organizational Culture (approx. 45 minutes)

The next section of my workshop is designed to help participants understand the model of organizational culture. I have chosen this model for this workshop because it offers the useful

definition of what elements are found in an organizational culture--elements that, if a manager does not understand what an organizational culture is or how it is developed, they will be unable to competently promote positive culture. To help participants understand the model, I will engage them in discussions about the three elements of organizational culture. I will guide the discussion about the three elements in order to demonstrate how new and current employees perceive organizational culture. This will be done with the goal of allowing participants an opportunity to recognize how the behaviors they enact everyday are interpreted by their subordinates. Schein's (1990) model of organizational culture focuses on three elements: (a) artifacts, (i.e., behaviors that are normal within the organizational culture); (b) values (i.e., the principles or qualities that are seen as ideal); and (c) assumptions (i.e., the perceptions about others within the workplace). All three of these elements can be internalized within any single employee, however, managers are the ones most looked up to. In other words, a common assumption is that if managers are doing something, it must be acceptable.

Artifacts

Managers are the primary proponents of artifacts. Keyton (2011) found that as new employees enter an organization, they will look to established identities such as managers to understand how to behave. Based on my literature review, artifacts are defined as tangible and visible (Keyton, 2011), any behavior that individuals can observe, feel, or hear. They can range from how coworkers address each other to the behaviors exhibited during social events. To illustrate, I might ask participants to imagine the consequences of various behaviors. What, for example, might be the effects of arriving at work and walking straight to your office without greeting others? Engaging in this discussion should help participants see that, while it is important to demonstrate to others that productivity matters, ignoring your team members and

other employees can be perceived as a lack of care or concern for others. These types of behaviors can create a work environment that is not conducive to the employee's mental health or well-being. Managers must recognize artifacts are seen as "normal" or commonly practiced within their organization. The norms enacted by managers specifically carry a heavy toll. As stated in my literature review, a norm is a pattern of behavior exhibited within an organization that dictates what behavior is appropriate for any potential situation.

Values

Values are the preferred state of affairs held by organizational cultures. They tend to be revealed through "strategies, goals, principles, or qualities considered ideal, worthwhile, or desirable" (Keyton, 2011, p. 24). As new employees enter an organization, they look to the artifacts (norms) to interpret values and their legitimacy. Using an example from my literature review, I will help participants identify what values are. For example, companies might express the *value* of teamwork when soliciting their organization to potential employees. In reality, employees who focus on themselves and their work are rewarded/promoted over those who participate in team efforts. To explore this topic further, I will ask participants, "Does your organization promote equality among employees?" "What does equality look like in your organization?" I might ask them, for example, whether and how it has been expressed within the organization that everyone matters and that no one is better than the other? As another example, I might ask how a parking lot might be designed to respect certain employees? Are there reserved parking spaces for senior employees that might promote some interests over others? Who in the organization has the biggest office? How might office space impact perceptions of equality? What department has the "best" views? How might office location also impact perceptions of equality? By asking these questions I intend to challenge participant's perceptions of how their

organization has expressed its values and whether or not its verbalized values align with their expressed values. When an organization's cultural values do not align, and when what is said and what is done differ from each other, it can create cognitive dissonance within employees, causing them to experience feelings of uncertainty towards the organization and its *values*. In order to help managers comprehend how they can use an understanding of artifacts and values to change their culture I will ask them to work backwards when analyzing their organization's culture. Specifically, if teamwork is highly valued, what artifacts support this value? How do their behaviors demonstrate they value teamwork? If the artifacts do not support the value, this is a sign that cultural change needs to take place (Keyton, 2011). These discrepancies can often be deeply rooted in the organization and will require managers to dig deeper so that they can discover what behaviors are connected to their organization's artifacts and evaluate whether or not they are consistent with their company's values. As they dig deeper, they will begin to identify *assumptions*.

Assumptions

Assumptions are ideas or beliefs that are so deeply rooted in an organization's culture that they are no longer discussed; they are accepted as fact. Despite assumptions being deeply embedded within an organization, they are often subtle, abstract, and implicit (Keyton, 2011). People make assumptions based on their role, the role of others, and if they perceive behaviors to be appropriate for their role. To help managers understand this, I will ask them to identify their assumptions about other departments and how these assumptions impact their job. Specifically, I will ask: "What department most closely works alongside yours? What are your expectations of people in that department? What do they do to help you? What is it that the two departments tend to disagree on the most?" It is my hope that at this point a specific department and behavior will

have been identified where the behavior is considered to be a part of the other department's job description and not their own. Following this, I will ask participants why they think this behavior is so hotly disputed and what do they think can be done to resolve the dispute? At this point, I expect them to say that the organization would need to clarify job descriptions, allowing for a better understanding of whose job is what. However, I will ask them if they believe that a change in job description would actually solve the problem when there are still assumptions held by both departments on whose job it really should be. It is my hope that this will help participants recognize where job discrepancies come from and how deeply held assumptions, when left unaddressed, can create contention down the road.

After this, participants will take a 15-minute break.

Activity #3: Layers of Organizational Culture: Yilmaz (2014) (60 minutes)

Background. This activity was initially designed for undergraduate students taking an organizational communications course. However, the content and goals of the activity are aligned to meet the exact needs of this workshop.

Purpose. My purpose for including this activity is to help participants understand how they can identify markers of organizational culture using Schein's (1990) model. It is also included to help them participate in a hands-on experience allowing them to identify the artifacts, values, and assumptions of a widely known organization and the artifacts, values, and assumptions that exist within their own organization.

Description of Activity. The activity asks participants, who will be put into groups of 3-5, to choose a company they are familiar with. They will use supplies that have been provided, (i.e., posters, articles, newspapers, and so forth), to construct a presentable example of an organization's artifacts, values, and assumptions. It is also possible that they use digital resources

to create their presentation. The organizations that will be used must be well known and easily recognizable. To illustrate how the activity works, imagine that a group of participants have selected Walmart for their analysis. Within their presentation, the group might present an artifact of Walmart's culture as employees being disinterested, unmotivated, or even unhelpful. They might also present ideas with which other participants disagree. For example, they might suggest that Walmart values teamwork and equality, while other participants point to Walmart as having a high-power culture where subordinates have no say. With regard to assumptions, participants might suggest that, at Walmart, it is assumed that no one works outside of their department and that a sporting goods employee will tell you they cannot help in the produce department. After each group has crafted their presentation, they will be asked to share their findings with the other participants. While sharing their presentation, they will be asked to justify why they believe their findings are artifacts, values, and assumptions. After participants have presented their findings, I will debrief the participants by asking the following questions: (1) Which artifacts, rituals, ceremonies, metaphors, and so on do you think (insert organization here) employees exercise?; (a) Which textual materials/personal experiences did you use to draw your conclusions?; (b) Did you identify any discrepancies between the artifacts and the espoused values of (insert organization here)?; and (c) How do you think (insert organization here) can bridge these discrepancies? (2) How would you explain the "basic assumptions" of (insert organization here)? (3) In which ways is your analysis of basic assumptions different from other groups? (4) Do you think basic assumptions drive the espoused values of (insert organization)? Why? Why not? (5) Did you identify a fragmented or unified culture at (insert organization)? Do you find this problematic? (6) Are there any areas for improvement in the implementation of espoused values in (insert organization) culture? (7) What is one thing you learned about Schein's (1990) Model

of Organizational Cultures after completing this activity? (8) What were some of the advantages and disadvantages of using Schein's (1990) model to analyze (insert organization) culture? (9) If you could change one thing, what would you do differently while jointly completing this activity with your group members? How would that improve your analysis?

Now that participants have been able to take a more analytical approach to the model, I will ask them to use the same process they just went through to identify their own organization's artifacts, values, and assumptions. As they do so, I hope that they will be able to recognize discrepancies, if there are any, between elements of their organization's culture.

After this activity, participants will take a 15-minute break.

Communication Competence (approx. 35 minutes)

This section of the workshop will begin with me asking participants what they believe it means to be communicatively competent. Based on experiences with my own students at Utah State University, I expect participants will mention that competent communication happens when others understand what is being said. After hearing from the participants, if necessary, I will extend their ideas not only to illustrate the complexity of communication competence, but also to help them understand how important it is to them as managers. Specifically, I will inform managers that communication competence is a perceived skill, meaning that their ability to adapt their messages to different audiences and be understood by a diverse audience, is what demonstrates communication competency. In addition to, I will provide participants with the definition given by Spitzberg and Cupach (1984), which says that communication competence is demonstrated by individuals who possess motivation, knowledge, and skills necessary to achieve the goal of competently communicating messages that are appropriate and effective. In addition

to this, I will inform participants that there are multiple skills, such as empathy and role-taking, they can develop to become communicatively competent.

However, before I provide participants the information needed to comprehend the two skills, I will introduce participants to the relational competence model, which for the purpose of this workshop is used as the framework for understanding communication competence. This framework, states that communicators must be motivated and possess appropriate knowledge and skills to competently communicate (Spitzberg & Cupach, 1984).

Motivation

As noted in my literature review, *motivation* occurs before the initiation of an encounter. Stated differently, competent communicators approach interactions with specific goals in mind. These goals are deemed to be the motivation behind an exchange. Within each encounter it is possible that a person's goals change, functioning in multiple ways. Indeed, Spitzberg and Cupach (1984) argued that motivation helps increase performance, and over time stimulates additional attributes such as social perception and cognitive complexity. These attributes in turn, enhances an individual's ability to engage in competent communicative interactions. For example, if you want to get a promotion, you are motivated to work harder. If you are about to get fired because you are always late to work, you are motivated to wake up earlier to get to work on time. In addition to, if your goal is to have healthy employees, succeed in your job, or promote a positive organizational culture, you will be motivated to be a competent communicator. In other words, to be a competent communicator, you have to be motivated. Without motivation, possessing knowledge and skills means nothing because you will not have the drive to implement the knowledge and skills you possess.

At this point, participants will take a 15-minute break.

Knowledge

In my literature review, I referenced Athay and Darley (1981), who noted that *knowledge* becomes relevant as soon as a person decides to engage in an interpersonal interaction. A competent communicator demonstrates knowledge as their encounter occurs. Showing a concern with social appropriateness and the ability to control/modify self-presentation behaviors is important. In turn, using this ability in particular situations to adapt appropriately is essential. To help participants comprehend this, I will expand on the example I used for motivation. Another key component of knowledge is that competent communicators must know (i.e., have knowledge) about what skills help them be competent. They must know, for example, what perception checking is and what its steps are. They must know what empathy is.

As before, however, if someone is *motivated* to be competent, and has *knowledge* about what it takes to be competent, they might still fail to be competent. Why? They might not be able to perform competently. That is why they need to practice skills (in this workshop and beyond), so that they can develop the *ability* to perform the skills

Skills

In this section I will provide participants with the information needed to comprehend the skills that develop communication competency. As noted in my literature review, Spitzberg and Cupach (1984) identified several skills that promote the development of communication competency. Because no single workshop could teach all the skills associated with communication competence, for the purposes of this workshop I have limited the focus to two of the skills Spitzberg and Cupach (1984) identified, while adding a third skill that was found salient within my literature review. Specifically, these skills are empathy, role-taking, and the ability to perceive people more accurately. In addition, I will provide participants with a

springboard for increasing their level of cognitive complexity, by presenting them with an activity that allows them to practice the skill while also identifying areas in which their cognitive complexity could be increased.

Cognitive Complexity

In keeping with Spitzberg and Cupach's (1984) notion that communication competence requires knowledge, at this point in the workshop I will provide participants the knowledge necessary to understand what cognitive complexity is and how they might use it to improve their communication competency beyond the workshop. As mentioned in my literature review, *cognitive complexity* refers to the number of cognitive schemata an individual can utilize when processing information about the social environment (Bruch, Heisler, & Conroy, 1981). Specifically, "cognitive complexity may be defined as the capacity to construe social behavior in a multidimensional way" (Bieri et al., 1966, p. 185). A cognitively complex individual can assess situations and other people from multiple perspectives, all while being able to incorporate contradictory information in an organized fashion (Olson & Partington, 1977). *Cognitive complexity* contributes to an individual's ability to adapt their messages to a diverse audience. Being communicatively competent at a minimum involves the cognitive ability to: "(a) process relevant information from the environment, (b) select information most relevant to a specific task, and (c) construct innovative patterns of performance by reconstructing familiar practiced paradigms to meet the instrumental demands of constantly varying interaction situations" (Athay & Darley, 1981, p. 299). To the extent that this skill requires understanding the perspective of others, it is related to another skill known as *perception checking*, which will be covered later on in the workshop.

Activity #4: Musical Schemas and Cognitive Complexity: By Christopher P. Wyant (2006)

Background. Originally, this activity was designed for a classroom with the intent of teaching students about cognitive complexity. I have adapted this activity to meet a professional audience.

Purpose. The purpose of this activity is to highlight the perceptual process. Particularly, allowing participants to use their cognitive schemata in identifying different types of music and the individuals who might listen to a specific genre. It is also the purpose of this activity for participants to reveal their musical schemata to the group, ideally broadening participants' understanding of the types of individuals who listen to specific music genres, and, in the process, demonstrating that cognitive complexity allows for more accurate perceptions.

Description of Activity. This activity will take approximately 30 minutes. I will select five different songs from five different music genres, allowing for one to two minutes of each song to be played. This will be most successful if I use songs that are easily connected to stereotyped identities. For example, country, heavy metal, classical, and rap are all music genres that have stereotyped identities. However, I will choose one song that can be seen as a multidimensional song, a song that can fit into multiple music genres, which will be played last. Before playing the songs, I will provide participants with a piece of paper on which they will create eight to ten columns that will depend on the number of songs I have decided to use. Half of the columns will pertain to the stereotyped identities that participants believe would listen to each genre (e.g., grandpa, snob, southerners, etc.). The other columns will be used for participants to write down their subjective opinion of the music (e.g., "this music sounds angry, and I don't like it," or "this music is too slow, and it doesn't keep my attention.").

Once the activity begins, participants will be asked to identify a stereotyped identity and their subjective opinion of the song. After each song has been played, participants will then be

asked to share their responses with other participants. It is important that they note any differences or similarities in their responses. As participants engage in their group discussions, I will ask them to identify how music genres are a cognitive schema, and how it impacts our perceptions of others. Should they have difficulty doing so, I will ask them how their cognitive structures play into how they communicate with others that they have organized into a specific group (i.e., engineers, salesman, human resources, and customer service). It is my hope that they will recognize how their cognitive structures affect their interpersonal communication with these various groups. Once this is completed, I will debrief the activity by asking what genre they thought each song was and why. It is my hope that some participants will be able to recognize music genres better than other, identifying their cognitive complexity in relation to music. I will inform participants that if they were more familiar with the various music genres, it would be easier for them to identify what genre each song falls into. From here I will ask participants: “How do you see this being relevant to your job? How can being cognitively complex help you at work?” It is my hope that they will identify that being cognitively complex on various topics allows for them to engage with individuals more competently.

After this, participants will take a 15-minute break.

Empathy and Role-taking

When instructing participants on empathy and role-taking, I will teach both skills simultaneously, as they both have similarities that allow them to function in unison. Having said that, I will provide participants clear definitions of the concepts so that the differences between the two are clear. Specifically, in my literature review, I note that empathy refers to an individual's ability to experience an “emotional reaction to, or an affective experience of, another's emotional state” (Spitzberg, 1980, p. 5). In contrast, role-taking involves taking account

of, analyzing, and adapting to the role of another (Spitzberg & Cupach, 1984). In other words, role-taking “involves a mental and imaginative construction of another's role for purposes of managing interactions” (Spitzberg, 1980, p. 5). Whereas empathy is the cognitive ability to feel the emotions being experienced by another person (Spitzberg & Cupach, 1984) role-taking occurs when using an imaginative construction to simulate someone else’s role. It is important that managers understand the differences between these two as each one allows for competent communication to take place without overstepping boundaries. As participants competently use the skills of empathy and role-taking, it allows them to more accurately predict how people will respond and accurately interpret their communicative cues (Spitzberg & Cupach, 1984). When combining these two skills, Hale and Delia (1976) found that it accounts for much of the generic concept of adaptiveness. Adaptiveness is what allows competent communicators to manage the dialogue used when communicating with various identities. I will then provide participants with the information found by D'Augelli (1973) and Marsh et al. (1981), which suggests that empathetic and role-taking abilities enhance dialogue management. As mentioned earlier in this paragraph, using the skills of empathy and role-taking contribute to one’s ability to adapt to others’ perspective. This is how empathy and role-taking share similarities with perception checking, as these skills all promote the recognition of another's thought process, thereby, helping them adapt their communication to others.

Activity #5: Role-taking: A Walk in My Shoes: Educurious E. (2022) (approximately 45-60 minutes)

Background. This activity was originally designed for students. I have adapted it to meet a professional audience.

Purpose. The purpose of this activity is to allow participants to engage in a scenario wherein they have to actively pretend to be someone else, quite literally engaging in role-taking. By asking participants to step into the shoes of someone else they will have to force themselves to think how they feel that person would think. Because participants do not know the emotional state of the individual they are pretending to be, it allows an opportunity for them to differentiate the skills of role-taking and empathy.

Description of Activity. Each participant will be given a pair of sunglasses to wear for the duration of this activity. Each pair of sunglasses is connected to a different identity. The identities are ideally people with whom they are familiar. For example, blue sunglasses might represent Barack Obama, while red sunglasses represent Rosa Parks. Each pair of sunglasses will have a name written next to it on a piece of paper identifying which identity they are connected too. After participants put on the glasses, they will be placed into groups of two to four, depending on the number of participants. Once participants are in their groups, they will tell their group members what identity they are speaking for (e.g., Barack Obama) and will be provided a series of questions that they will need to answer. For example, these questions could be, why did you (e.g., Barack Obama) want to be a politician? Or how did you feel being elected president of the United States for two consecutive terms? While these questions are likely to vary, the intention is to allow participants an opportunity to identify with the beliefs, knowledge, and preferences of the identity that their sunglasses are tied too. Once every participant has had an opportunity to answer the questions, they will then trade sunglasses (i.e., identities) with someone from a different group or pair and re-enact the activity under their new identity. Afterwards, I will debrief the activity by asking questions that probe participants' understanding of and experiences with role-taking. For example, (1) how did it feel to see the world through

another person's eyes? (2) Were there things you felt, or did that were different from how *you* would have responded? and (3) How can seeing the world through someone else's eyes help you better understand their behavior? After this activity is complete participants will take a 15-minute break.

Once participants return from their break, I will introduce an activity that helps them develop empathy. Specifically, I will recall how in the previous activity their goal was to think like to someone else, but in this new activity the objective is to feel someone else emotions, not just recognize what they might be thinking.

Activity #6: Trading Places Worksheet: Jeremy Sutton (2021) (approximately 30 minutes)

Background. This activity was designed by Jeremy Sutton. It was not designed for any one specific group of people. I have adapted it to meet a professional audience.

Purpose. The purpose of this activity is to allow participants to practice using empathy or role-taking in a conflict resolution scenario. Conflict tends to be when we are most unlikely to want to empathize with others, which is why this activity can be so useful when developing this skill. By allowing participants to engage in an activity that requires empathy, it allows them to understand how empathy can be used to find a mutually beneficial solution. On the other hand, this skill also allows for the development of role-taking. Should participants be unable to feel the emotions of their counterpart in this activity, they should then be able to take account of, analyze, and adapt to the role of another.

Description of Activity. To start this activity, I will ask participants to sit quietly, and breathe easily. I will tell them, "You will need to ground yourself in the present moment by focusing on your breath. Once you have allowed yourself to become focused, you will be asked to focus on a difficult or uncomfortable conflict you are currently having with someone. While

thinking of this scenario you will be asked to write down your thoughts and feelings for a few minutes. Afterward, return to the present moment by focusing on your breathing and noticing how you feel. Then, write down the thoughts and feelings you think the other person in this conflict might have. Specifically, what do they think and how do they feel? Afterwards, return to the present moment by focusing on your breathing and noticing how you feel. From here, you will imagine a person with great wisdom (real or imagined) and feel their support, compassion, and consider their guidance. Write down the thoughts and feelings you think the wise person might have about the situation from their perspective for a few minutes. Once this is done, you will need to return to the present once again by focusing on your breathing and noticing how you feel. Take the time to recognize the wisdom and insight this exercise has offered to your situation. Because the nature of your conflicts is potentially extremely personal, I will not ask you to share what the conflict is, but I will ask “how you feel (if at all) this has helped you empathize with the other party involved in your conflict?”

I predict that some participants will mention how this process has allowed them to recognize both sides are dealing with strong emotions and that by empathizing with each other, they could reach a mutually beneficial solution. At this point participants will take a 15-minute break.

In order to further develop empathy, participants will be asked to participate in second activity. However, this activity specifically tries to help participants recognize how biases impact their ability to be empathetic.

After this activity, participants will take a 15-minute break.

Activity #7: Exploring Implicit Biases: Jaclyn R. Shetterly (approximately 45 minutes)

Background. Similar to other activities, this was designed for university students to help them understand the importance of role-taking and empathy in relationships. I have adapted it for a more professional audience.

Purpose. This activity aims to allow participants to engage in a fictitious scenario that, if committed to, can demonstrate how biases impact their ability to use the skills of empathy and role-taking and help participants identify any existing biases. It challenges participants to think critically about how their biases and lack of empathy can impact the formation of relationships. This allows participants to overcome their biases and refute any stereotypes they may hold. This is particularly helpful for managers as they are likely hold stereotypes or biases towards their subordinates which can inhibit their ability to competently communicate with them.

Description of Activity. At the beginning of this activity participants will be asked to consider the following scenario for several minutes: “the zombie apocalypse has just broken out at your workplace, and you are the only one in your classroom who has quick access to a vehicle to leave the workplace. Unfortunately, your vehicle only fits seven people (including yourself)” (Shetterly, 2022, para. 5). Following the scenario, participants will be given a list of twelve fictional characters, from which they must select only six people to take with them. In addition to, participants will be asked to rank each individual on how likely they are to survive on a scale of 1-10 (1 being very unlikely, five being somewhat likely, and ten being very likely). This scale forces participants to identify why they do or do not want to take someone and why they will or will not survive; it allows them to examine their implicit biases. After students complete the worksheet and identify who they are taking with them and who is being left behind, they will be placed into small groups to try and convince other participants why the individuals they have chosen should be saved. The group must come to a combined decision; this means individuals

will have to defend their choices and argue for them. Once the activity has taken place, I will debrief participants by asking the following questions: (1) What order did your group come up with? Why? (2) Describe any disagreements that your group members had about individuals' rankings. (3) How did your perspective about certain characters change with this activity? Why? (4) What did you learn about role-taking in this activity? Empathy? (a) Why is this important? (b) How does this relate to other material we have learned so far? (5) What did you realize about your own biases? (6) What role does role-taking and empathy play in biases? From here I will tell participants about unique skills that each of the twelve fictional characters had. The purpose behind this is to allow participants to realize that their biases may have stopped them from bringing a nurse, craftsman, or survival expert with them in their car. As participants recognize their biases it will allow them to see how biases may limit their ability to see specific skills held by their subordinates that would allow for their team to operate more efficiently.

A second step in the debriefing process will be done individually after the workshop. Participants will be asked to respond to the following prompt: How do your implicit biases affect who you create relationships with, and how can role-taking and empathy change that? They will be asked to email their responses to me so that they can further apply and process the activity, allowing them to evaluate their implicit biases privately.

After this activity, participants will take a 15-minute break.

Perception (approx. 45 minutes)

Now that I have discussed organizational culture with participants and they have had an opportunity to analyze an organization's culture, I will help them explore the skill of perception checking and how it can be helpful when attempting to implement organizational change. As mentioned in my literature review, perception checking is "the process by which the practitioner

provides feedback that (they) are aware of the emotion's others have experienced or are currently experiencing" (Hansen et al., 2002, p. 318). After introducing the concept, I will guide participants through the perception process (a) selection, (b) organization, and (c) interpretation (Qiong, 2017), so that they can understand how it functions. For a manager to competently engage with their employees, they must understand their perceptions.

Selection

First, I will explain to participants that selection is the first step in the perception process, and that it is heavily influenced by stimuli; as mentioned in my literature review, we cannot process every source of stimuli at once. Because of this, individuals tend to select stimuli that is most relevant to them. Selection allows individuals to quickly recognize information or content that is applicable or salient to their identity. For example, I will ask participants to imagine being in a loud crowd surrounded by noise and then suddenly hearing their name yelled out loudly. I will ask, "What would you do?" I expect that it will be said that they'd turn and try to find who shouted their name. It is at this point I will explain that amidst all the stimuli that could be seen or heard in a loud crowd, they will focus on their name as they find it salient to their identity. To expand on this, I will then ask participants questions like, "Are there any water bottles in the room? Is your chair comfortable? Are any of you itchy right now?" It is my intention that by asking these questions participants will realize they are uncomfortable in their chairs or that they are itchy, at which point I will inform them that they only became aware of these things after I mentioned them. This is because they only perceive details that they find applies to them. Afterwards, I will explain that as managers they need to recognize that not all encounters or events will be interpreted the same as diverse individuals could potentially, and likely will, select different stimuli that change their perception of an event.

Organization

This is the part of the process when we begin to make sense of the world around us. As stated in my literature review, organization provides us with the ability to make sense of the world around us. As we encounter different scenarios, we organize our general knowledge about the environment and society so that we can predict what patterns of behavior are acceptable or expected in any given scenario (Cantor et al., 1982). Using this step, we put things or even people into specific categories to rapidly make sense of the world around us, allowing us to create structure in an otherwise chaotic scenario that now allows understanding to take place (Qiong, 2017). To help illustrate this, I will ask participants to imagine they are attending a sporting event without the ability to categorize. What would this look like? Specifically, imagine that the New England Patriots are playing against the Miami Dolphins and that you wouldn't be able to categorize teams based on the color or numbers on players' jerseys. What would it be like? What would happen during this game? I imagine that participants will express that it would be utter chaos and that neither team would be able to effectively communicate or be able to score amidst the chaos. Afterwards, I will explain to the participants that without the ability to organize information no one will be able to assign meaning to what is happening and there would be endless confusion. To further their understanding, I will explain that when people organize information that they have selected, it is based off what makes sense to them. I will explain that if a manager wants to competently engage with a diverse team, they will need to recognize that others think differently than they do.

Interpretation

In the final stage of the perception process, it is essential to help participants recognize that this is how individuals assign meaning to form an opinion on what is happening. To help

them recognize this I will show participants the painting “American Gothic” by Grant Wood. I will then give participants two minutes to construct their own story about what is happening within the painting. I will then ask three to five participants to share and explain their interpretations to the rest of the workshop. I expect that very few, if any, of the stories will be the same. I will then help guide the participants in a comparison between the different stories as to highlight the differences. I will then tell the participants that even though they all encountered the same stimuli, their interpretations of the painting had significant differences, which in hope will highlight the importance of perception. I will then inform participants that interpreting communicative interactions is even more difficult as the interactions themselves are more complex than the analysis of a still image, explaining to participants that cultural background and identity influence the perception process and that it changes how individuals interpret a situation. As mentioned in my literature review, culture plays a key role in how individuals form their perceptions. In order to begin to perceive someone else’s perception, there needs to be an understanding of their cultural identity.

Perception Checking. After explaining the perception process to participants, I will give them the information necessary to comprehend and practice the skill. To begin this section, I will ask participants to imagine the following scenario involving partner A and partner B: “Romantic partner A comes home from work, says nothing to their partner B (who is on the couch watching TV), goes to the bedroom, and slams the door behind them. In response partner B goes to the room and asks their partner, “Why are you so mad at me?” With this scenario in mind, I’ll ask the participants, “How do you supposed partner A might respond?” My guess is that participants’ answers will depend on their own assumptions about reasons for partner A’s behavior. Specifically, if they assume, as partner B did, that partner A is, indeed, mad at their partner, they

might predict that partner A will provide reasons for being mad at partner B (e.g., “You didn’t take out the trash,” “You forgot our anniversary,” and so on.”). But what if partner B’s perceptions were wrong? In other words, in this scenario, partner B is assuming what is true. They are assuming, as if it is a fact, that partner A is mad at them. With this in mind, I’ll ask participants to consider possible alternative reasons for the partner A’s behavior (e.g., “Is it possible they are not mad at partner B?” “Why else might they have slammed the bedroom door?”).

It is my hope that, through this discussion, participants will recognize that partner B made an assumption about partner A’s behavior.

I will then help guide them to understand that, when people express their perceptions and/or opinions as if they are a matter of fact, it can lead to communication problems. How people react to such expressions, in turn, might make the problem even worse. I will then explain, had partner B decided to do a perception check rather than make an immediate assumption about partner A’s behavior, they might have resolved the situation in a way that demonstrated communication competence. It is important to note that perception checking does not change facts. It is possible, for example, that partner A in this scenario was actually mad at partner B. That said, perception checking “provides a better way to handle your interpretations” (Adler & Proctor, 2017, p. 123) because, implementing this skill allows for misinterpretations to occur less often.

From here, I will inform participants that effective perception checks are composed of three parts. First, a perception check begins with a description of the behavior that was noticed. Second, it should include at least two possible interpretations of the observed behavior. And finally, a perception check includes a request to clarify how the behavior should have been

interpreted (Alder, 2017). For example, had partner B done a perception check, they could have *described the behavior* by saying, “I noticed you came home, didn’t greet me, went to the bedroom, and slammed the door.” Next, they could have *offered alternative possible* interpretations by saying, “I was wondering if you had a bad day at work, if you are mad at me for some reason, or if something else is going on?” Finally, they could *request clarification* by saying, “Can you help me understand what is going on?” After having explained this process to participants I will then ask them to participate in an activity where they get to practice perception checking.

After this, participants will take a 15-minute break.

Activity #8: Perception-Checking Practice: Adler, Rodman, and Athena (2020) (approximately 25 minutes)

Background. This activity was originally designed for university students, I have adapted it to meet a more professional audience. Specifically, by changing the scenario in which participants engage with during the activity.

Purpose. The purpose of this activity is to allow participants to practice perception checking in fictitious scenarios that emulate common interactions that occur within the workplace, at home, and among family.

Description of Activity. During this activity participants will pick a partner to practice developing a message that uses all three steps of the perception checking process. Participants will be asked to create a perception checking response to the following three scenarios: First, “You made what you thought was an excellent suggestion to aid your boss. Your boss looked uninterested but said that they would check on the matter right away. Three weeks have passed, and nothing has changed. What will you say to your boss in order to check your perceptions?”

Second, “A neighbor has not responded to your ‘good morning’ for three days in a row. This person is usually quite friendly and often initiates contact. What will you say to your neighbor in order to check your perceptions?” Third, “You haven’t received the usual weekly phone call from your parents in over a month. The last time you spoke, you had an argument about where to spend the holidays. What will you say to your parents in order to check your perceptions?” Once participants have had an opportunity to create their responses, they will then be asked to share them with their partner. After doing so, each set of partners will choose who had the best response for each scenario and will be asked to present their response to the other participants in the workshop.

Conclusion

Within this workshop I will have provided participants with the motivation, knowledge, and skills necessary to developing their communication competency so that they can promote positive organizational cultures. Having said that, this workshop has room for future development that would allow more skills to be included to help participants improve their competency.

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