Manager’s Hot Seat Teaching Notes

Video #16 Globalization & Cross-Cultural Communication

Introduction

This scenario explores the complexities of global and cross-cultural communication. The challenges of communicating in one culture and country can increase exponentially when people communicate across cultures and counties. This case shows how easy conflicts can occur with incongruent personality types and viewpoints on how a project should move forward. Other issues include global and cultural work and communication problems.

Learning Objectives

1. To analyze and evaluate approaches to conflict resolution.
2. To recognize cultural differences in nonverbal communication styles.
3. To identify traits of effective meetings.

Scenario Description

Overview

The Director of Communications for Zenith Fine Furnishings, Janet Kassevelli, oversees a special project and must contend with freelancers that essentially speak different languages—a visual artist and database programmer. The problem is that neither party can understand what the other wants or intends and blame the other for work on the project not being completed. The freelancers look to the director to help them articulate their points in a different way.

Profile

* **Janet Kassevelli**, Director of Communications, Zenith Fine Furnishings
* **Jake Simms**, Freelance Fashion Photographer
* **Sangita Chaturvedi**, Senior Programmer, New Delhi Code Source

Backstory

Zenith Fine Furnishings is entering a period of business growth. Research has determined that furniture sales increase dramatically when stores create an online experience that mirrors their product line. Janet Kassevelli turned to two experts to conceive and implement the project with her: Jake Simms and Sangita Chaturvedi.

Jake Simms, a reputable local fashion photographer (who used to do product shots for Zenith in his early career) has been hired as a consultant. Since Simms has experience in furniture, works as his own stylist, and is an expert in translating mood and vibe visually, he is directing the creative vision for the online website.

Sangita Chaturvedi has handled the customization of Zenith’s manufacturing and operations networks (JIT inventory, etc.) for many years. Chaturvedi and her team also worked with Kassevelli to upgrade the company’s basic website to include a simple shopping cart system and a customer tracking system.

Chaturvedi initially requested the manager hire a web designer to interface between the fashion photographer and the programming team, but there was not any money in the budget for it. Simms is angling to get other projects from manager.

Scene setup

The project is behind schedule and a third milestone has not been met. The programmer and creative director blame the other and cannot agree on how to get the work done. The current disagreement is over the site map. Simms wants everything clickable and accessible from everywhere else; Chaturvedi insists this makes for an impossible user path. Neither is willing to concede. The manager sets up a video conference with Chaturvedi in India, while Simms joins her in her office in the United States.

Scene Location

Videoconference room at Zenith Fine Furnishing Headquarters.

The Meeting—Summary

Simms and Chaturvedi argue with one another in front of Kassevelli over how to complete the project. Simms talks about his vision and is upset that Chaturvedi is not following the abstract guidance he has been sending her in emails. Chaturvedi is upset because she wants concrete guidelines on the look of the website so that her team can do the programming.

After they argue back and forth for a while, Simms and Chaturvedi are interrupted by Kassevelli who demands to know how they can move forward with the project that is three months behind schedule. She gets Simms to concede that he will send Chaturvedi example photographs of how the site should look; Chaturvedi will be responsible for the buttons and other navigation features of the website. However, the trio reaches another disagreement over the completion date for the mockup. Simms and Kassevelli want to the mockup sooner and do not care that Chaturvedi has a family wedding to attend.

Afterthoughts—Summary

Kassevelli believes the meeting went really well, but recognizes that outsourcing projects presents new challenges. She sees her role during the meeting as a facilitator and seems optimistic about the project moving forward. She also recognizes that she needs to be more proactive, to be more sensitive to cultural differences, and to hold more video conference calls. This approach will be the only way for the project to get completed.

Discussion Questions

*Leaning Objective #1 To analyze and evaluate approaches to conflict resolution.*

What are techniques for dealing with conflict resolution? Which of these did you see Kassevelli enact during the meeting?

Possible steps for conflict resolution include:

* Make sure the people involved really disagree.
* Check to see the everyone’s information is correct.
* Discover the needs each person is trying to meet.
* Search for alternatives.
* Repair negative feelings.

Discussion will vary somewhat based on what students observed in the video. But in general, Kassevelli made sure that both Simms and Chaturvedi disagreed and tried to understand what each disagreed about. She also attempted to discover each of their needs and suggested alternatives for accomplishing the task at hand. She attempts to repair negative by getting both team members excited about the project again. However, she may have contributed to more negative feelings by demanding that Chaturvedi miss her family’s wedding.

*Leaning Objective #2 To recognize cultural differences in nonverbal communication styles.*

Why did Chaturvedi not make direct eye contact with Simms or Kassevelli?

Nonverbal communication is an important part of communication in intercultural settings. North Americans typically see eye contact as a sign of attention as well as openness and honesty. In many cultures, however, dropped eyes are a sign of appropriate deference to a superior; direct eye contact can be considered aggressive or show a lack of respect. Chaturvedi may not have made eye contact because of her cultural values.

*Leaning Objective #3 To identify traits of effective meetings.*

Kassevelli suggests in the follow-up interview that she believes the meeting “went really really well.” What do you think? How effective or ineffective was the meeting between Kassevelli, Simms, and Chaturvedi?

Answers will vary by student discussion. However, be sure to help students see that this scenario had the most important trait of an effective meeting—a clearly defined purpose, that is, how they were going to move forward with the project.

When things started getting out of hand with Simms and Chaturvedi arguing with one another, Kassevelli remained impartial and did not get caught up in their squabble. She was able to focus them back on the task at hand. At the end of the meeting, Kassevelli also outlined who is responsible for completing which tasks.

The meeting was ineffective when Kassevelli and Simms displayed a lack of cultural understanding for Chaturvedi.