



University of Maryland

Department of Civil & Environmental Engineering
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Pearl Diving Assignment 2

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Professor:

Dr. Shana Webster-Trotman

Student:

Dario Cúlap – 118459349

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1. Introduction

Management is a subject that I have been interested in for a long time, and I do believe that communication is one important aspect of it, especially because in a project it is possible to go as far as we need or wish to into analysis, scheduling, risks and costs, but if all of that information is not well communicated throughout the project's stakeholders than the purpose of the information itself (inform) is not met.

2. E-mail to the Team

Subject: Need for increased communication

Hello everyone,

I hope that each one of you is doing well.

I'm writing you this e-mail because in the last few days I have noticed a general lackluster performance of team. In these days I have been thinking about how to resolve this issue and the main idea is to increase our communication, and for this I want to make a better and more welcoming environment so that everyone can freely speak their minds.

The first thing I would like to do is to set up a meeting with each of you individually tomorrow and the day after, this is to better understand how you feel, if you have any concerns or things you would like to share with me. I won't speak a lot during the meeting, I want you to tell me how you feel, if you have been having any issues (personal or work-related) or feedback in general. After the individual meetings I will also setup a group meeting to discuss the same, be sure no personal information will be shared with the other members of the team.

The next step will be to put in place a virtual box where you will be able to give anonymous daily feedback. I would like to have feedbacks on anything, whether negative or positive, how you have been feeling, what you think of the work you have done that day, or in general if you have any concerns. If you don't feel the need to give feedback one day, you don't have to, but I would encourage everyone to give a daily positive and/or negative feedback. On this note, I have already created the virtual box which you can access through this link: www.virtbox.co.uk/team

I hope this will increase the team's communication and improve the overall environment and performance. Thank you for taking the time to read my e-mail.

I wish each of you a wonderful rest of the day,

Dario Cúlap

3. E-mail writing – The skill I need to improve

In one of the classes activities, we were assigned to write an e-mail considering the recipient's main personality trait. I believe it is extremely important to know how to write a proper e-mail, especially in an era like this one where a lot of the conversation is carried out through e-mail (either for convenience, or because people are not together in the same office).

Often, I find that when I write an e-mail, I tend to give a lot of information, this interferes with the readability of the e-mail itself and the convenience factor I was mentioning before. I believe it is therefore important to know how to tailor an e-mail that is easy and quick to read, but also has all the information that it needs to have. To do this I think many of the information will be “between the lines”.

On top of this, the e-mail must be tailored to the recipient, this is a big factor that I was not considering at all before: I was writing e-mails as I wanted to receive them. From now on I plan to write my e-mails considering the recipient, how he / she may perceive the e-mail and how he / she would like to receive an e-mail. I believe this is important as in many cases the way I talk or write might be completely perceived wrong by the other person: I may be perceived as too straightforward when I thought I just didn’t want to waste their time, or I might be perceived as wasting their time by asking how they are feeling when they don’t want to share that with me.

So, overall I would say e-mail writing is a skill that I need and want to improve, not only for the tailoring to personality factor I’ve been talking about before, but also to improve my conciseness skill: as I said I tend to fill e-mails with a lot of information, with many words, and a lot of explanation because I’m worried that the recipient will misunderstand me; even though that worry can’t go away, I still need to improve my e-mail writing skills to try and reduce it so that I don’t have to over-explain myself to do the same.

4. My Boss Called me an “Idiot”

My boss called me an idiot during a team meeting in front of everyone: this is a very tough situation because there clearly are two levels of power (me and the boss), and the higher one decided to use a violent way of speaking.

The first course of action that I would take is unfortunately unknown to me, it is going to be very instinctive, and therefore I must analyze it. So, the first rational course of action I will take is to analyze what I’m doing, and how I’m feeling to *retrace my path* (Patterson *et al.*, 2012):

- *[Act] Notice your behavior. Ask:*
Am I in some form of silence or violence?
- *[Feel] Get in touch with your feelings.*
What emotions are encouraging me to act this way

Knowing myself, the answer to the first question is yes, I would be in a form of silence. When someone says something negative or violent to me, I tend to act in two different ways: either I become physically violent towards objects (I could for example throw a bottle, or smash the door), or the other way is to keep myself in complete silence. I’ve been talking about this with my psychologist and my behavior under highly stressful crucial conversations, but I won’t specifically get into why I have these two courses of action. Nonetheless, because of the context, I believe that remaining silent would be my course of action, I tend not to be physically (or verbally for that matter) violent in a professional or public setting, therefore I would just

keep my mouth shut and if I'm asked something I would probably answer with "I'm not sure sorry".

Knowing this I would go to step two to analyze my feelings. I need to understand the emotion that I'm feeling: since I'm not in the actual situation I could for example guess that I would feel hurt, and maybe inferior.

Now that I have understood how I am acting, and what I am feeling, I must understand the reasons behind, so the *why* (Patterson *et al.*, 2012):

- *[Tell story] Analyze your stories.*
What story is creating these emotions?
- *[See/hear] Get back to the facts.*
What evidence do I have to support this story?

I would try to ask myself if I'm hurt because the word that the boss said is hurting me, because the boss called me an idiot since he thinks my idea is stupid, or because I feel disrespected. I'm a high D (*DISC Personality Trait*), therefore the answer would probably lay between being hurt because my boss insulted my idea or being hurt because my boss disrespected me. I highly value respect, both of my person and of my ideas, and I don't like when people ruin my image by saying wrong things, or by saying them in a very violent way.

Then I will try to gather evidence to support the theory that my boss wanted to disrespect me. Because one word has only been said, and I don't have any actions that the boss did to support my assumption, I'm lacking in one big component of the whole analysis: understanding the intentions of the other party. At this point what I would do is continue the meeting, not mentioning what happened, trying to act as it never happened and later, once the meeting is finished, confront the boss – this is going to allow me to fully understand my boss' intentions.

To speak with the boss, I need to make sure that there will be a safe environment to do so, I cannot fall back into a violent situation like the one in the meeting, therefore I need to ask myself the *Start with Heart* questions (Patterson *et al.*, 2012):

- *What do I want for me?*
- *What do I want for others?*
- *What do I want for the relationship?*

To the first question I would answer that I want the boss to respect me, understand that the way he talked to me hurt me and that I want there to be mutual respect between us two.

To the second question I would answer that I want for the boss to be able to talk to me and tell me what he / she thinks I did wrong. I need the boss to feel comfortable in sharing his / her opinions without the need to fall into a violent conversation. This also related back to me as I also need to truly understand what the boss wanted to say.

To the third question I would answer that I want the relationship to go back to a professional standard, where both of us respect each other and where the boss is able to tell me what I'm

doing wrong, and me receiving that constructive criticism without interferences from violent words.

Now is the time to confront the boss, tell him / her what I think and understand what he / she wanted to tell me:

I would start with telling what I need: *Hello boss, may I steal some of your time to talk about the incident that happened today in the meeting. I really want to better understand what I did wrong and at the same time make sure we can keep our relationship healthy and mutually respectful.*

At this point I can assume the boss would accept my request and most likely ask me what I wanted to talk about, to which I would reply: *I would like to understand what brought you to call me an idiot in front of the team. The last thing I want is for us to lose the communication channel, and so I would like to understand the reasons that made you use that word with me.*

Here I have stated what I don't want, this is part of explaining what I want for the relationship, but also within the conversation I'm making my boss understand that I'm here not to attack him / her, but to preserve our communication channel (Patterson *et al.*, 2012):

- *Addresses others' concerns that you don't respect them or that you have a malicious purpose (the don't part).*
- *Confirms your respect or clarifies your real purpose (the do part).*

Let's now assume that the boss gave me a good answer on which I can reflect and improve. The next step is to let the boss know that I felt hurt and disrespected when he / she used that word on me and ask not to use such a violent language anymore: *Thank you for sharing with me your concerns, it means a lot to me, and I have to tell you that at first, I felt hurt and disrespected by the word you told me. This is also a reason why I wanted to see you and talk to you directly. I really value our relationship and the mutual respect we have, and I strongly think that a more professional way of communicating can improve my work much more than a violent one. So, thank you again for taking the time to share with me your concerns, I hope that the next time we might be able to have a conversation like this from the beginning.*

I'm emphasizing the fact that this conversation is not about me or about my boss, rather about our relationship and communication channel. This way I will not be perceived as selfish, and I keep the focus on the main goal I have: preserving the relationship with someone that I will have to work with (Patterson *et al.*, 2012).

5. My personal story

My story starts in 2014, this was the year I was graduating from middle school and had to look for an apprenticeship. The true reason why I chose an apprenticeship was because I wanted to work, but there was a side reason if you will: I did not have high enough grades to go to high school – In Switzerland, in order to be admitted to high school, you need to finish your middle school with a grade of 4.75 out of 6 or above (where 4 is sufficient), I did not have that grade at all, I knew I was going to graduate with a score of around 4 to 4.5 out of 6, and so the only option I had was an apprenticeship.

I made a list of 3 companies I wanted to work at, the first one rejected me and didn't even give me an interview, the second one did the same and the third one gave me an interview. The one that gave me an interview was the one I really wanted to work at: it was a big international company where I knew I could really develop myself and have an awesome experience.

So, I went to the interview, the interviewer asks me to sit, asks me how I was doing and why I wanted to be a civil drafter, what was it about engineering that I really liked. I told him what I tell to this day: I want to make an impact on the environment around me, civil engineering to me seems the best way to do so. He was very surprised, he said "well that's a very good reason, would you like to come for a day of internship? We will let you look around the office, we will show you what we do, and you will be able to see if you truly like the company or not."

I was extremely excited; it was the first time a company gave me a shot and showed me that they noticed me.

I went to the internship day, as the interviewer said they showed me everything, all the departments: the IT department, the water engineering department, the tunnelling department, the structural department, they showed me the projects that they were working on, the projects they worked on, ... and at the end of the day the interviewer told me to send them an email if I still wanted to do the apprenticeship there as a civil drafter, and to send them the expected final grades as soon as I had them.

I went home, I told my family about the internship, that I really loved it and that I was so excited to start working for them.

So, around May I send them the grades: they were not very good grades, I was expected to get around a 4.5 out of 6 at the end of the school year. This were not official grades but we wouldn't have any further exams so they were very close to the official ones I would later get. After a couple of weeks, the interviewer got back to me with an email, I was very excited, I opened the email and I was truly ready to see that they accepted me and that I could sign the contract, and I started reading: *We unfortunately regret to...*

I was devastated, I could not believe it, they told me that they were very impressed to see me so excited about engineering, that it showed that I truly liked it so how is it that they rejected me? I continued reading and the explanation for the rejection was "*Your grades are not high enough for the standards of [name of the company]*".

Well, ok. At that point I had nothing to say but "ok" to myself. It wasn't their fault of course, I objectively did not have good grades, with my grades I couldn't even get into high school if I wanted to, so they were right. I started crying, I was so sure that they would accept me, and they didn't.

A couple of days go by, and I must find a solution, I can't go to high school, I can't apply for other jobs because it's too late, and I can't stay at home for one year; so, what do I do?

Fortunately, I found out that there was a full-time school to get the same exact diploma (Civil Drafter), I wouldn't work which was not a great thing for me, but at least I could start my journey into Civil Engineering. The applications closed at the end of June I think, I know it was after the school year ends because this school required a minimum grade of 4.5 out of 6

on the official transcript. I remember my grade was 4.51, I barely had the minimum grade to apply and so I did.

This school had a closed number of 25 students, there were around 100 applicants I believe, for this reason there was an exam, and they would take the best 25. I got in. I did not know how I scored on the exam, it was never told to me, I know I wasn't one of the best, but I also was not one of the worse, so in September 2014 I started this full-time school.

At the end of the first semester my parents get called in by the director of the course: in about 4 classes I had out of 8, I had an insufficient grade (a grade less than 4 out of 6). I was in danger of being expelled and if I did not get those grades up by the end of the school year, I could not repeat it (the maximum number of insufficient grades to be allowed to repeat the year is 2, and to go to the next year you must have an average of 4 or above).

My dad was present at the meeting with the director of the course, I was present too and after the meeting my dad told me something along these lines: *"I am forgetting what the director just told me, I will not tell you what to do, you decide"*.

I knew why my grades were that low, I was not paying any attention in class, I would come at school late, I would not do the homework, ... I did not do my job which was to study. So, after Christmas break, I decide to do something about it, I sat in the front row in class, I took notes, I did the homework, I asked questions to the teachers, and I tried to be a better student. After just a few months (around mid-March) my grades went up, they were not good, but I was not in danger of not being able to re-take the first year, and I wasn't even in danger of failing the year. And so, I start thinking again about what the previous company told me "You don't have good enough grades". Yes, that was still true, but it didn't mean that I couldn't make them good, I brought them from insufficient to sufficient, maybe I can bring them from sufficient to good.

So, I convinced myself I was worth another shot, I started contacting all the companies I could find in my Canton, I didn't care if I had to travel 2 hours every day to go to work, I wanted to work. I did not repeat the same mistake as before, I did not only contact 3 companies I contacted more than 40 companies if I remember correctly. Almost all of them rejected me: there was another big problem now, I was asking to start an apprenticeship on the second year... since the first year I did as a full-time student counted towards the same diploma, I didn't have to start back on the first year, so I wanted to start my apprenticeship on the second year – but all the companies already had an apprentice that was about to turn to the second year so who would take me?

Fortunately, I found one company who later I discovered had an apprentice who didn't like the place (for personal reasons) so he resigned. They were willing to give me an interview, I went there I did the interview they ask me the same questions as before and after a couple of weeks I get the e-mail...: *"We are glad to inform you that..."*.

It was the best thing in the world to me, I felt so good about myself, and I felt so grateful for the opportunity they gave me. I switched school and went to the part-time one, the diploma was the same, so the subjects were the same and I continued my studies. After a total of 4 years of school I graduated as second best for the entire diploma (this meant second best also

considering those who continued with the full-time school). I later became an expert for pre-construction surveys for the same company and they gave me compliments because I was one of the best apprentices that they ever had.

The story continues, and this is just the beginning of the bigger story that brought me to the University of Maryland, but maybe that will be for another pearl diving assignment.

6. OCEAN Personality Test

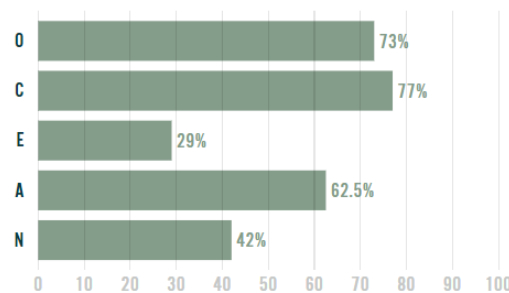


Figure 1 - Results from OCEAN personality test

I believe my OCEAN personality test agrees quite a bit with the other personality tests I have done (DISC and Jung). The only point where I'm not 100% sure that I agree on is the "Agreeableness": I do like to help out and I do sometimes put myself in second place, but I am not empathic with people, I don't like to help out in the "emotional" sense, I'm not too supportive and I don't usually like to hear about other people's personal problems. I do sometimes listen to them, and I try to help if I can, but I don't enjoy doing so; what I do like is helping "manually" like when someone wants to learn something I know, I like to share my knowledge, or if someone has a problem with their computer, I usually like to help.

I very much agree with "Conscientiousness": In the personal story that I wrote I believe it's clearly shown that I put in the effort even if I don't see results immediately; when I have a goal in mind, I will pursue it until I get to it or until I really can't do anything else but to quit. This also relates a bit to the "Dominant" factor in the DISC personality test where it says that I am practical in dealing with problems: I am, and if I want to pursue a goal I do it very practically and in an organized matter, I can keep the focus for a prolonged period without getting distracted even if I don't see results immediately.

It is hard for me to say if taking multiple tests is beneficial, I think it really depends on how these tests have been created and what scientific background they have. I am not a psychologist, nor I have studied these tests in depth. I do believe it was beneficial for me to take the Jung and the DISC tests, but the OCEAN did not give me any insights other than what I already knew, and I believe it made a mistake for the "Agreeableness" trait, considering also that it differs from the Jung test where one of my weaknesses is being "dismissive of emotions". Overall, for me the Jung test is the most accurate and the one that gave me all the information I needed to understand myself better, especially the one I did on 16 personalities which explains all your strengths, weaknesses, friend relationships, love relationships, ... I read all about my personality (INTJ-A) and I have to say I agree with basically everything (both weaknesses and strengths) and I have learned to take advantage of the strengths and improve on my weaknesses.

As discussed in the previous Pearl Diving Assignment, I still have a lot of work to do, especially when it comes to understanding people's emotions, and I'm trying to do that by talking more to people and letting them talk about their feelings with me.

7. References

Patterson, K., Grenny, J., McMillan, R. & Switzler, A. (2012) *Crucial Conversations*. McGraw Hill.