



ON THE JOB: SOLVING COMMUNICATION DILEMMAS AT CEMEX

You work as a customer account manager in Cemex's Houston office, where you're an enthusiastic user of the Shift collaboration platform. Even in the best work environments, conflicts and misunderstandings can arise. Study these scenarios and decide how to respond, based on what you learned in this chapter.

1. You rely heavily on CEMEXpedia, the wiki that contains technical and business information about the company's operations. As you've become more experienced in your job, you have also become a frequent contributor to the wiki. Lately you've noticed one particular employee from the Cemex office in Madrid, Spain, keeps editing the pages you create on the wiki, often making changes that appear to add no value, as far as you can see. She doesn't seem to be editing other employees' pages nearly so often, so you are beginning to wonder if she has a personal grudge against you, even though you have never met her. You want to address this uncomfortable situation without dragging your boss into it. ~~How should you handle it?~~ **How should you not handle it**
 - a. Edit some of her pages needlessly to help her understand how annoying this behavior is.
 - b. Use the private messaging tools on Shift to ask her if there is something about your writing style that she finds unclear. That will open a conversation in a nonthreatening way.
 - c. Post a notice on the wiki, emphasizing that all edits should be useful and that unnecessary edits waste everybody's time.
 - d. Ignore her behavior; confronting her will get you nowhere.
2. You've been asked to take over leadership of a group of customer account managers that once had a reputation for being a tight-knit, supportive team, but you quickly figure out that this team is in danger of becoming dysfunctional. For example, minor issues that healthy teams routinely handle, from helping each other with computer questions to covering the phones when someone has an outside appointment, frequently generate conflict within this group. ~~What steps should you take to help your crew return to positive behavior?~~ **What is the worst option you would take?**
 - a. Give the team the task of healing itself, without getting directly involved. Explain the steps necessary in forming an effective team and then let them figure out how to make it happen.
 - b. Lead the "team restoration" project yourself so that you can mediate whatever conflicts arise, at least until the team is able to function on its own in a more positive manner.
 - c. Don't try to interfere; the negative behaviors were probably caused by an ineffective manager in the past, but now that you're in charge, the team will return to positive behavior under your enlightened guidance.
3. After a few weeks with the account management team, you notice that team meetings often degenerate into little more than complaint sessions. Workers seem to gripe about everything from difficult customers to the temperature in the office. Some of these complaints sound like valid business issues that might require additional training or other employee support efforts; others are superficial issues you suspect are simply by-products of the negative atmosphere. ~~How should you handle complaints during the meetings?~~
 - a. Try to defuse each complaint with humor; after awhile, employees will begin to lighten up and stop complaining so much.
 - b. Ask employees to refrain from complaining during meetings; after all, these are important business meetings, not random social gatherings.
 - c. Set up a whiteboard and write down each issue that is raised. After you've compiled a list over the course of a week or so, add a problem-solving segment to each meeting, in which you and the team tackle one issue per meeting to determine the scope of each problem and identify possible solutions.
 - d. Whenever a complaint is raised, stop the meeting and confront the person who raised the issue. Challenge him or her to prove that the problem is a real business issue and not just a personal complaint. By doing this, you will not only identify the real problems that need to be fixed but also discourage people from raising petty complaints that shouldn't be aired in the workplace.
4. You're in charge of hiring a replacement for a customer account manager who recently retired. Four job candidates are waiting outside your office, and you have a few moments to observe them before inviting them in for an initial interview (you can see them through the glass wall but can't hear them). Based on the following descriptions, which of these people seems like the ~~best~~ **worst fit** for the firm? Why?
 - a. **Candidate A:** A woman who is dressed perfectly for an interview at Cemex. Her appearance is contemporary but business appropriate, which suggests that she appreciates and shows respect for the situation she finds herself in. However, you are slightly troubled by the fact ~~that~~ she's listening to music on her phone and has kicked off her shoes and tucked her feet under her while she waits in the chair.
 - b. **Candidate B:** A man who has also dressed the part, although this candidate's behavior is nothing like the relaxed, carefree attitude that Candidate A is showing.

He seems to be juggling multiple tasks at once: checking notes on some sort of digital device, organizing a collection of papers he pulled from his briefcase, reattaching several sticky notes that keep falling loose, and fiddling with a mobile phone that he has answered at least twice in the few minutes you've been watching.

- c. **Candidate C:** A woman who closed the notebook she was scanning in order to help Candidate B with some problem he was having with his mobile phone. (If you had to guess, he was having trouble figuring out how to silence the ringer.) After their interaction, they shake hands and appear to be introducing themselves with

cordial smiles. Unfortunately, although the city is suffering through record high temperatures, her casual dress and sandals strike you as too informal for a job interview.

- d. **Candidate D:** A man wearing what appears to be a finely tailored, conservative suit. His appearance is more dignified and businesslike than the other three, and he knows how to dress for success—carefully knotted tie, starched shirt, perfect posture, the works. He keeps to himself and avoids bothering the other candidates, although his facial expressions make it clear that he disapproves of the noise Candidate B is making with his mobile phone.



Learning Objectives Checklist

Assess your understanding of the principles in this chapter by reading each learning objective and studying the accompanying exercises. You can check your responses against the answer key on page 647.

Objective 2.1: List the advantages and disadvantages of working in teams, describe the characteristics of effective teams, and highlight four key issues of group dynamics.

1. Teams can achieve a higher level of performance than individuals alone because
 - a. They combine the intelligence and energy of multiple individuals
 - b. They can foster motivation and creativity
 - c. They involve more input and a greater diversity of views, which tends to result in better decisions
 - d. They do all of the above
2. Which of the following is a potential disadvantage of working in teams?
 - a. Teams always stamp out creativity by forcing people to conform to existing ideas and practices.
 - b. Teams increase a company's clerical workload because of the additional government paperwork required for administering workplace insurance.
 - c. Team members are never held accountable for their individual performance.
 - d. Social pressure within the group can lead to groupthink, in which people go along with a bad idea or poor decision even though they may not really believe in it.
3. Conflict in team settings can be ____ if it forces important issues into the open, increases the involvement of team members, and generates creative ideas for solving a problem.

Objective 2.2: Offer guidelines for collaborative communication, identify major collaboration technologies, and explain how to give constructive feedback.

4. Which of the following is the best way for a team of people to write a report?
 - a. Each member should plan, research, and write his or her individual version and then the group can select the strongest report.

- b. The team should divide and conquer, with one person doing the planning, one doing the research, one doing the writing, and so on.
- c. To ensure a true group effort, every task from planning through final production should be done as a team, preferably with everyone in the same room at the same time.
- d. Research and plan as a group but assign the actual writing to one person, or at least assign separate sections to individual writers and have one person edit them all to achieve a consistent style.
5. Which of the following steps should be completed before anyone from the team does any planning, researching, or writing?
 - a. The team should agree on the project's goals.
 - b. The team should agree on the report's title.
 - c. To avoid compatibility problems, the team should agree on which word processor or other software will be used.
 - d. The team should always step away from the work environment and enjoy some social time in order to bond effectively before starting work.
6. Which of the following is not a benefit of using social media for business communication?
 - a. Social media are "out in the open," so messages are easier for managers to monitor and control.
 - b. Social media help erase geographic and organization boundaries.
 - c. Social media give customers an easy way to voice their opinions and concerns.
 - d. Social media can help "faceless" companies adopt a more human, conversational tone.

Objective 2.3: List the key steps needed to ensure productive team meetings.

7. What are the three key steps to making sure meetings are productive?
 - a. Planning, planning, and more planning
 - b. Preparing carefully, conducting meetings efficiently, and putting meeting results to productive use
 - c. Preparing carefully, conducting meetings using true democratic participation, and using meeting technologies wisely
 - d. Preparing carefully, using meeting technologies wisely, and distributing in-depth minutes to everyone in the company
8. Robert's Rules of Order is a guide to ____ procedure.

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Collaboration, Interpersonal Communication, and Business Etiquette

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After studying this chapter, you will be able to

- 1 List the advantages and disadvantages of working in teams, describe the characteristics of effective teams, and highlight four key issues of group dynamics.
- 2 Offer guidelines for collaborative communication, identify major collaboration technologies, and explain how to give constructive feedback.
- 3 List the key steps needed to ensure productive team meetings.
- 4 Identify the major technologies used to enhance or replace in-person meetings.
- 5 Identify three major modes of listening, describe the listening process, and explain the problem of selective listening.
- 6 Explain the importance of nonverbal communication and identify six major categories of nonverbal expression.
- 7 Explain the importance of business etiquette, and identify four key areas in which good etiquette is essential.



ON THE JOB: COMMUNICATING AT CEMEX

Social Communication “Makes a Big Company Look Like a Small Company”

You have probably been on a lab team or other project team that had trouble collaborating. Maybe you couldn't get everyone in the same room at the same time, or important messages got buried in long email threads, or good ideas were lost because the right information didn't get to the right people at the right time.

Imagine trying to collaborate when you have thousands of potential team members spread across dozens of countries. The Mexican company Cemex is one of the world's largest producers of concrete and its two primary components, cement and aggregates (crushed stone, sand, and gravel). Cemex faces teamwork challenges on a global scale, with 44,000 employees in more than 50 countries. After a period of worldwide expansion that began in the 1990s, the century-old company now operates quarries, cement plants, and other facilities on every continent except Antarctica.

Concrete and cement are two of the oldest products on earth and might not spring to mind when most people think of innovation. However, innovation is key to Cemex's long-term success, for several reasons. First, architects and builders continue to push the envelope by creating designs that require concrete with new performance and handling qualities. Second, Cemex's ability to operate profitably depends on running efficient



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An innovative collaboration platform helps the global cement company Cemex operate with the agility and flexibility of a small company.