

A case of contact

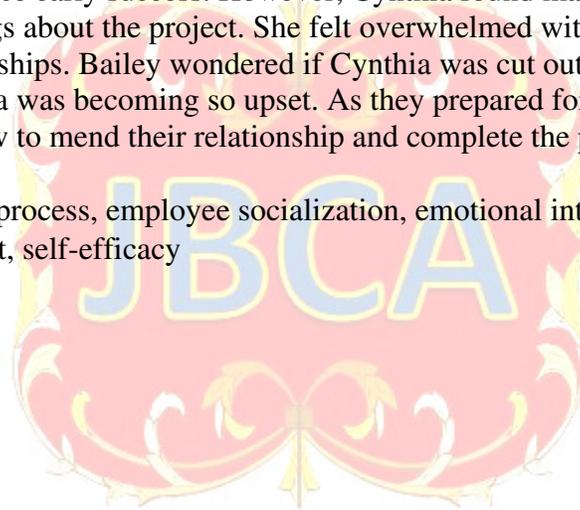
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ABSTRACT:

Cynthia Kovacs was embarking on her first job out of college at a small mid-Western newspaper. With internship experience under her belt, Cynthia felt ready to tackle any assignment given to her. Her boss, Bailey Thomas, had welcomed many reporters-to-be to the newsroom over the decades she had spent in the business. By giving Cynthia her first project pursuing networking leads, Bailey believed she was giving the new hire a manageable task where she could experience early success. However, Cynthia found many roadblocks and struggled with her feelings about the project. She felt overwhelmed with the expectations of the job and her work relationships. Bailey wondered if Cynthia was cut out for the newspaper business and why Cynthia was becoming so upset. As they prepared for their weekly meeting, both were wondering how to mend their relationship and complete the project.

Keywords: On-boarding process, employee socialization, emotional intelligence, motivation, performance management, self-efficacy



INTRODUCTION

Cynthia Kovacs was a recent graduate of a small, mid-Western university. She had majored in journalism, worked on the school newspaper, and was looking forward to making the leap from college life to working and living on her own. She had earned solid grades during her undergraduate career; not the highest, but good enough to maintain her scholarship and win a few writing awards. She had minored in Innovation and Entrepreneurship, so Cynthia felt she had a good balance of skills between her writing acumen and her exposure to business essentials.

She was not originally from the mid-West but enjoyed the area so much that she decided to remain there after school to look for work. She really liked the small-town vibe. She knew that print media was going through a period of consolidation in response to the shift from hard copy newspapers to online publications but felt equipped to navigate these choppy waters.

Cynthia had not worked as a journalist for any publications outside of her college paper but had shadowed reporters and other professionals during her internships. It was through one of these internships that she was able to develop a strong contact with the head of the newsroom at the local paper. By leveraging her education, and her bright and bubbly personality, Cynthia was able to procure a position. It was not exactly what she wanted; she wanted reporting assignments focused on local politics and her own byline! What she was able to obtain was an entry level position working the phones and social media and finding leads for stories for other reporters.

Cynthia came to work ready to dig in and give it her all. If she showed enough enthusiasm, they would surely move her up quickly to a writing position, she thought. Arriving at work punctually at 8:30 am, Cynthia was shuttled through the Human Resources department, filling out forms, figuring out how many dependents she had for taxes, and trying to understand how direct deposit worked. This took several hours, and Cynthia was more tired than she cared to admit by the time she reached the newsroom floor and met her boss, Bailey Thomas.

LEARNING THE ROPES

Bailey Thomas considered herself an old school newspaper woman who had made the adjustment to 21st century journalism with its modern modes of advertising, telling a story, and making information accessible to as many people as possible. Of course, this also came with trying to keep a small-town newspaper afloat financially as more long-time customers unsubscribed. There was a lot of pressure on the management from the owners of the paper to make their output as relevant as possible and try, in some way, to mimic the 24-hour news cycle that dominated non-print news media such as local TV, cable news, and of course, the internet.

This pressure had honed Bailey's skills of precision and organization; it made her a very tough manager of the newsroom. She had the largest staff and assigned tasks to the local news reporters. Most who worked under her felt her to be fair and knowledgeable. She had trained many of the reporters who worked under her over the last 10 years, and seen others go on to careers at major city newspapers. Bailey knew the local paper was merely a steppingstone for some, but she believed in the integrity and importance of their product for their readers.

Bailey was looking forward to working with her new hire, Cynthia Kovacs. The young woman came highly recommended by Charles McNulty, the managing editor, who oversaw the day-to-day production of the newspaper. He said she was a hard worker, quick learner, and was deserving of a shot. This was high praise coming from Charles because he was not one to be

generous with compliments. Bailey hoped she could train Cynthia quickly and get her to be productive soon.

Cynthia arrived, finally, in the newsroom after her processing through Human Resources. It was close to noon, and she was famished. She hoped she could have a lunch break. She was finding that getting up at 7 am to come to work for a full day took some getting used to. Cynthia and Bailey finally met and sat down to discuss the basics of the job. Cynthia wanted to pay closer attention, but her stomach was grumbling. Bailey outlined who Cynthia would be working most closely with, assessed what technology she already was familiar with, and showed the new hire to her workspace.

Bailey found Cynthia to be initially very warm and engaged, but soon noticed that she was getting edgy and was fidgeting. Bailey could not imagine what was going on and continued through the introductions. Finally, as Cynthia was shown to her desk, she asked “When is lunch?” which came as a total surprise to Bailey. She had not taken lunch in years; she gobbled something edible at her desk most days, but mostly subsisted on substantial amounts of coffee and protein bars. Bailey told Cynthia she could take lunch now, and she should come back afterwards and set up her workspace.

Cynthia felt a bit intimidated by Bailey, who did not seem to be like Mr. McNulty at all. Bailey seemed more demanding and matter of fact. Somehow it did not occur to Cynthia that this was not an internship any longer, but a real-life job. She came back from lunch feeling a bit better and began to organize her desk and computer. By the end of the day, she was tired, but she felt she had made a good first impression and was ready to tackle her responsibilities.

IMMERSION

Cynthia worked hard during her first two weeks, getting up to speed with the operations of the paper, learning the names and beats of the reporters, the deadline schedule and that lunch was a very rushed affair. She had regular, daily tasks to accomplish such as scanning social media sites for potential stories for reporters and writing up brief synopses of each with correct contact information. She then had to forward each to the appropriate reporter. Cynthia was expected to attend the morning editorial meetings where stories were discussed and debated. She really enjoyed the level of energy and engagement in the morning meetings and while she was not able to contribute much yet, she knew she had picked the right profession. Her mornings were terribly busy as she was pressed to get the leads out quickly to the reporters so they could follow up. The afternoons were a bit slower, but she was still expected to monitor the newswires for breaking news and respond quickly to any emails from the beat reporters on the city desk.

She began to understand the rhythm of the day and got to know other employees, like Steve Busch. Steve had been at the paper for two years and was the first-string reporter for news out of City Hall. He remembered what it was like to be the new hire in a busy newsroom and tried to help Cynthia acclimate. People can seem so gruff and preoccupied in the news business, and Steve tried hard to be different. He stopped by Cynthia’s desk almost every day just to say hello and see how she was doing.

One of Cynthia’s first long term assignments was to update a spreadsheet of contacts and their information for the city desk. She needed to make contact with those listed to confirm contact information and introduce herself as a new staff member who might be communicating with them in the future. Like with most assignments both at college, and in a newsroom, Cynthia understood that deadlines were critical. Bailey had given Cynthia a month to initiate contact,

obtain the required information, and update the spreadsheet. She explained that maintaining the most accurate information for the paper's networks and community resources was important for reporters who required quick access to local professionals and other businesspeople. Frequently a news story would require more than one reporter and if everyone could have access to an updated spreadsheet of contact info, it would make everyone's jobs easier.

Cynthia got busy with the assignment right away, reaching out to people with whatever contact information she could obtain. Sometimes it was a phone number, sometimes an email address, and sometimes it was necessary to trace the contact via a social media or networking website. She emailed and called the contacts she was given and waited for responses. As for the ones for whom there was no relevant information available, Cynthia decided not to tackle those just yet.

TREADING WATER

A few days went by, and Cynthia had received notifications that some emails did not work anymore, and some phone numbers had been disconnected, and she began to get a bit concerned about meeting her deadline. The next day Cynthia and Bailey arrived at the building at the same time and took the elevator up to the office together. They chit-chatted about the weather which was getting hot and which kind of donuts might show up at the morning meeting. Cynthia tried hard not to be intimidated by Bailey and thought these conversations were signs that she was starting to fit in. She wanted to share her frustrations over the project but was not sure this was the time or place to do it. She had noticed that besides their weekly meetings it was difficult to just pop into Bailey's office for a quick question; Bailey always seemed to be on the phone or working with the higher-level editors.

Two weeks into the project, Bailey started to panic. She had her weekly meeting with her boss coming up Friday afternoon and she did not want to arrive empty handed. In an email, Cynthia explained to Bailey how she reached out to the sources provided and asked them to contact her. She shared her frustration that few if any of her emails or voice messages had been returned after already waiting over a week for responses. She expressed her concern that the project was due in just a few weeks and asked if Bailey could provide any assistance.

Bailey, who was known for her quick responses to emails, wrote back later that day with empathy that Cynthia was having such a tough time and mentioned that it is not uncommon to experience roadblocks when doing this type of outreach. She suggested that Cynthia use her leverage as a newspaper employee to make her requests sound urgent and important and that she talk to the reporters for any tips.

Cynthia took this encouragement to heart and by Friday afternoon, had received some responses to her communications. There were more questions than answers though, as the contacts seemed a bit suspicious of who she was and why she wanted their information. She and Bailey met at 3 pm for their weekly meeting, with both looking at the spreadsheet.

Bailey noted that Cynthia had spoken with some of the contacts but that not much of the spreadsheet was filled out. She asked if Cynthia had started investigating how to locate contact information for names of people for whom the newspaper did not have any information. Cynthia was flustered already and explained that she felt there was too much work to do on this project in the time she was given. She shared that she was upset that it seemed like she had not worked hard at all when in fact she had put in many hours. Cynthia recalled how well she did in her college courses and that she was now feeling like a failure in her first real job! Her voice rose

as she exclaimed that it was not her fault that people were not getting back to her, and she should not be punished for something that was out of her control!

Bailey was taken aback at Cynthia's defensiveness and began to question whether she was truly understanding what was required to complete this task and how best to allocate her time to this project. She also recognized that maybe Cynthia needed more time to adjust to her new job. She extended the deadline a week and Cynthia gratefully thanked her for the extra time.

By late in the third week of the project Cynthia had had some success connecting with sources, but the remaining empty spaces on the spreadsheet were looking more intimidating with each passing day. Steve was still coming by to say hello almost every afternoon and always asked how she was getting along. Cynthia was grateful for the kindness but afraid to complain to anyone about her frustrations on the project. Steve noticed that Cynthia seemed more nervous than usual, and her smile was forced. He tried to put her at ease by talking about the morning meeting that everyone in the newsroom attended and was pleased to hear that Cynthia really enjoyed the give and take between the reporters and the editors on the latest stories they were working on. He gently asked how her project was coming along and was disappointed when Cynthia again had a forced smile and showed fake optimism. He wished she would feel comfortable asking him for help.

After speaking with Steve, Cynthia turned back to her computer screen and emailed Bailey to inform her that while she had had some success since their last meeting, she was still perplexed as to why so many of the sources had not gotten back to her after multiple attempts to contact them. Cynthia said maybe she could just complete part of the spreadsheet and leave the rest to someone else.

Bailey understood that her new hire was really struggling and suggested that Cynthia look back and see how she sent out the correspondence. Was everything spelled correctly? Did emails go into people's spam folders instead of their inboxes? Bailey thought it was unusual that this many contacts did not respond. When this project had been done in the past, it did not seem to be as difficult to complete. She asked Cynthia to send her all the communication she had attempted along with the email addresses. Bailey wanted to assess how Cynthia was wording her requests as that may have been part of the problem. Bailey was left feeling perplexed however, that this new employee, who came so highly recommended, waited until now to voice her anxiety about feeling unable to complete the project. She pointedly asked Cynthia why she waited so long to communicate these issues.

Cynthia appreciated that Bailey emailed her back quickly but wished more than once that she could sit down with her boss more than once a week. It was even hard to find time to talk to her in the hallways of the office; but then again, Cynthia was simultaneously intimidated and in awe of Bailey which made it much easier to communicate via email. Cynthia's frustration was magnified because she wanted to connect with the sources as she developed her own network. She started to make use of social media sites to increase the likelihood of getting a response, but even that began to feel like a dead end.

Cynthia could sense that her boss was disappointed in her work product. She wished she understood better why this assignment was so important. Why couldn't each reporter simply have their contacts? Why did they have to be maintained in a full spreadsheet? And finally, why couldn't each reporter simply update this document in real time?

Cynthia sat at her desk and felt that Bailey was berating her which really got her angry. She wrote back quickly to Bailey to say she did not like being treated this way and said she really did not understand the necessity of the project in the first place and that she had mentioned

she had been having problems with this project from the beginning. She was good and ready to simply give up on this assignment and take on a different one. She had been given a stupid project to work on! It wasn't fair.

Bailey read the email and sighed. She was starting to feel irritated at Cynthia's behavior and tone. Bailey was her boss, not her parent. This was not the first time this project had been completed – Cynthia was not starting from nothing – it was an update. People wanted to have contacts with the newspaper and reporters as part of their network. Bailey knew that Cynthia wanted to be a reporter and dig for facts, but how did she ever expect that to happen if she could not find basic contact information? The high number of no responses that Cynthia was reporting was very unusual. It made her wonder what Cynthia was doing. This younger generation was supposed to be so tech and internet savvy. Bailey thought of responding immediately but she could tell Cynthia's emotions were running high and thought it could wait until morning.

The next day Bailey again tried to take a kind tone with Cynthia as she really did not want this young woman to feel she could not make it in this profession simply due to difficulties with this initial project. She noted that Cynthia seemed to be doing well with her daily work. She said in her follow-up email that she understood Cynthia's frustrations, but that not being kept in the loop as to the progress (or lack of progress) on the project made it impossible for her to help Cynthia be successful. Bailey reminded Cynthia that she wished to review all the communications that she had sent out so that she could assist in locating better contact information. She did want to help her and did not want to see her fail.

Cynthia felt some relief knowing that her boss was willing to help her and promptly sent Bailey the communications she had requested. By the next day Cynthia's spirits were up as some people were getting back to her with information – finally! The extra week that her boss had given her was really helping give her the impetus to push forward. She even realized that she could go to her new colleagues in the newsroom for assistance, like Steve. She felt a little of her confidence returning. She emailed Bailey to let her know of her progress.

Later that morning Bailey read Cynthia's email and breathed a sigh of relief. It seemed the newbie was finding her feet at last. She was at least reaching out to others for help. She replied to Cynthia with supportive words and confidence in her ability to complete the project. Bailey found herself preparing for her weekly meeting with Cynthia with more thought than usual. She was uncertain how to approach Cynthia's weaknesses but also wondered if the usual training process for new hires had been inadequate. What adjustments should she make to her expectations of Cynthia? What skills was she underestimating in this young woman? Bailey was pleased that Cynthia had learned not to give up so easily. Yet she wondered if she was going to have to coddle Cynthia far into the future or would she eventually take more ownership of her work and her potential?

Cynthia, for her part, was still nervous that she did not understand what was expected of her and at what level she had to perform. She was happy that she and Bailey had a formal meeting on the calendar; how could she explain to Bailey that she needed more of this type of interaction to feel on track? She wondered if she would be able to make it through her probation period. She really wanted to discuss how she could be supported better but was afraid she would come off as demanding. Cynthia felt like she had been thrown in the deep end of a pool. Is that what working in journalism was really like? When Bailey and Cynthia met for their regular Friday meeting that week, they greeted each other with cautious smiles knowing how difficult the week had been and that the project still needed to be completed.

TEACHING NOTE

Synopsis

Cynthia Kovacs was embarking on her first job out of college at a small mid-Western newspaper. With internship experience under her belt, Cynthia felt ready to tackle any assignment given to her. Her boss, Bailey Thomas, had welcomed many reporters-to-be to the newsroom over the decades she had spent in the business. By giving Cynthia her first project updating a spreadsheet with contacts and information, Bailey believed she was giving the new hire a manageable task where she could find early success. However, Cynthia found many roadblocks and struggled with her feelings about the project. She struggled with new expectations and work relationships and Bailey wondered if Cynthia was cut out for the newspaper business. As they prepared for their weekly meeting, both were wondering how to improve their relationship and complete the project.

Research Methods

This is a fictitious case. All information contained herein was fabricated by the author(s). Any similarity contained herein to actual persons, businesses, events, etc. is purely coincidental and is the responsibility of the author(s). Please contact the case author(s) directly with any concerns.

Learning Objectives (LOs)

After reading and studying this case, students should be able to:

1. Understand linkages between emotions, emotional intelligence and motivation and job performance.
2. Apply motivation theories to understand and improve employee performance.
3. Describe elements of effective time management techniques.
4. Evaluate onboarding and socialization strategies for new employees.
5. Develop a plan to evaluate employee strengths and weaknesses using performance management techniques

Questions

1. Assess Cynthia's level of emotional intelligence (EI). How could she have demonstrated higher EI? What emotions did Cynthia experience and how did they affect her level of motivation and job performance? (LO1)
2. Why did Cynthia's motivation to complete the project decrease and how does it relate to her self-efficacy? (LO1, LO2)
3. Assess Cynthia's time management skills. How should Cynthia better develop and incorporate time management skills? (LO3)
4. How is Cynthia progressing through the different components of employee socialization? (LO4)
5. What factors does Bailey need to consider when developing a plan for how to move forward with Cynthia? What are Cynthia's strengths and weaknesses or areas for improvement? (LO5)

6. What should Cynthia and Bailey do to prepare for this meeting? What positive outcomes could be achieved? (LO5)

Answers to Questions

1. Assess Cynthia's level of emotional intelligence. How could she have demonstrated higher EI? What emotions did Cynthia experience and how did they affect her level of motivation and job performance? (LO1)

People who know their own emotions and can read other's emotional cues are likely to have high emotional intelligence (EI). These people can 1) perceive their own and others' emotions, 2) understand the meaning of those emotions and, 3) regulate their own emotions. (Goleman, 2008).

Cynthia demonstrates some of the behaviors associated with EI. When Cynthia first encountered multiple problems on the project, she showed some persistence. She initially made several adjustments; she reached out to her boss, used multiple methods to contact people simultaneously, and followed up faster when she did not receive a response. These are actions that would be expected of someone with a proactive personality and an internal locus of control. Yet, she was not getting the desired results which resulted in extreme frustration.

Cynthia can perceive and label her emotions and she demonstrates the ability to understand the meaning of those emotions. She is less skilled at regulating her emotions and identifying emotions in others. Cynthia perceives her own emotions and understands the meaning of them:

- Positive anticipation and looking forward to making the leap from college life
- Enthusiasm
- Tired and hungry
- Intimidated by Bailey who was not like Mr. McNulty
- Enjoyed the level of energy and engagement in the morning meetings
- Frustrated and concerned about meeting her deadline
- Panic rising when she had few results to bring to the meeting with Bailey
- Feeling stuck about what to do
- Upset to not see the work she put in reflected in her output
- Unused to feeling like a failure
- Grateful for Steve's kindness
- Afraid that she should not complain about her frustrations on the project
- Unfair to be penalized for something outside her control
- Disappointed to never hear back
- Very confused and feeling unable to complete this assignment
- Very frustrated with this assignment
- Stressed a bit with first job
- Feels a lot better after people started responding
- Still nervous about her job
- Happy to be meeting with Bailey
- Cautious as meeting starts

Students can use an emotion wheel such as Plutchik's (1980) to show the type and range of Cynthia's emotions and how they affected her performance. Students will notice that when Cynthia encountered problems and her efforts to fix them did not result in an immediate payoff, her frustration grew. While her initial persistence harnessed her positive emotions, the lack of results created in Cynthia emotions and moods with an elevated level of negative affect. In addition to affecting her performance, Cynthia's emotions started to affect her core self-evaluation and what she thought of herself and her capabilities. This led directly to a decrease in her self-efficacy; she began to think that she had no control over the situation (external locus of control), assumed she was a failure, and would therefore be penalized. She asked to be removed from the project and be assigned a different task. She was effectively giving up; her motivation to complete the project was extremely low, almost nonexistent at this point.

It is worth noting that other parts of her job were fine. She felt she was learning more about the job, developing relationships, and was able to contribute to other tasks. However, her emotions led to cognitive distortions that resulted in increased feelings of vulnerability and of being judged, which fueled stronger negative emotions in Cynthia. She was not able to regulate her emotions and adjust her behavior and it resulted in decreased motivation.

Cynthia may not have developed the skills needed to understand the emotions of others. Her feelings also affect her perceptions of the conversation with Bailey when she later says she felt Bailey was berating her when there is no indication that Bailey did this. She mentions feelings of unfairness and of being penalized even though no penalties appeared to be forthcoming or were imposed. These are indications of the impact on her motivation level. The situation no longer appears equitable to her, and her self-efficacy is eroding. In addition, as she explains what has happened and her lack of output, her emotions are coloring her interactions with her boss. Her communications are taking on an emotional edge as shown in her language/word choice, her assessment of being penalized, and feeling yelled at. Some examples include:

- She complained that she had been given this "stupid" assignment; it wasn't fair.
- She felt like a failure in her first real job.
- Her voice rose when she exclaimed that she should not be punished for something that was out of her control.
- She could not grasp why the assignment was so important.

2. Why did Cynthia's motivation to complete the project decrease and how does it relate to her self-efficacy? (LO1, LO2, LO5)

Cynthia's motivation for completing the assigned networking project changed over the month she was working on the project. At first, she was motivated to perform well in her current position to earn a spot as a writer. Her motivation to complete the project decreased as she encountered unexpected problems.

Several motivational theories can account for her behavior throughout the case. (Self-Efficacy Theory, Expectancy Theory, and Equity Theory.) Self-efficacy is a component in each of these theories.

Self-Efficacy Theory: When initially assigned the task, Cynthia believed that she could complete it. Her self-efficacy was high. She had been a successful student and completed other similar projects, was experienced using spreadsheets, liked interacting with people, and knew that having solid contacts and a well-maintained network were important for reporters. She believed that if she put in the time, that it would result in the desired outcome. The factors that resulted initially in high self-efficacy include: her prior relevant experience (enactive mastery);

she knew this project had been completed before (vicarious modeling); her boss believed she could complete the task (verbal persuasion); and she wanted to succeed and emulate Bailey (arousal) (Bandura, 1997).

Self-efficacy theory would predict initially that she would succeed at the task. As the weeks went on, her self-efficacy regarding the project decreased when she encountered unexpected difficulties, including missing information and few or no responses from contacts. She was used to being solely in control of her work product and she was dependent upon others to respond to complete this task. Cynthia was making friends with her co-workers, but she was afraid to reach out and ask for advice or strategies other than to her boss. She felt alone and ill-equipped for the task. These factors made it difficult for her to adjust her approach. She perceived herself as failing at the task which created a downward negative emotional spiral that led to her belief that she could not complete the assigned project and a much-reduced sense of self-efficacy.

As the case concludes, Cynthia's self-efficacy starts to improve after she asks Bailey for assistance, and Bailey is forthcoming with help and advice. Bailey also offers some encouragement and reaffirms that Cynthia can complete the task. However, there is still much to be done and there is no guarantee that Cynthia's motivation will remain high.

Vroom's (1964) Expectancy Theory of Motivation: The change in motivation levels throughout the case can be explained through the utilization of the expectancy theory of motivation, a model that incorporates perceived self-efficacy. Expectancy theory focuses on three relationships (Vroom, 1964). The first is the effort-performance relationship which is the belief or expectation that a task can be accomplished. Cynthia had high self-efficacy since she believed that she could complete the task successfully. The second relationship is that of performance – reward. Cynthia also believed that if she did an excellent job on this and other tasks that it would lead to recognition from Bailey and from her co-workers, leading to reporting assignments on local politics. That is, she believed that if she performed well it would lead to discernible rewards. The third relationship is that of rewards – personal goals or valence. Cynthia personally valued the rewards the organization offered. In Cynthia's case, this was also high.

Bailey had set a difficult, specific goal for Cynthia; while it was a stretch goal, it was attainable. Initially, expectancy theory would predict that Cynthia would succeed at the task. As the case progresses the effort-performance link is weakened in these three relationships and Cynthia's expectancy falls, leading to reduced motivation.

Equity Theory (Adams, 1964): Although not apparent at first, Cynthia applied equity theory when she began the networking project, making key assumptions that impacted how she handled the task. She assumed that when she reached out to a contact using the information she was provided, that they would respond back relatively quickly. She did not factor in the number of times she would need to reach out, the various channels (e.g., multiple social media platforms, personal contacts, and traditional methods such as phone and email) she would need to use, and the additional research that would be required to track down correct contact information. When she began working on the project, she grossly underestimated the inputs of time, effort, and skill sets required to complete the task. She thought the inputs needed to complete the project would be much smaller and more limited in scope. Initially, her input/output ratio was in alignment. This looked to her like an easy and routine project that offered reasonable rewards/outcomes for the perceived effort it would take. Cynthia does value the outputs. Initially, a state of equity exists for Cynthia, and she perceives her situation as fair.

Equity theory predicts that employees will make one of six choices in situations of perceived inequity: 1) change inputs, 2) change output/outcomes, 3) distort perceptions of self, 4) distort perceptions of others, 5) choose a different referent, 6) leave the field. Cynthia uses 5 of the 6 options to try and resolve the perceived inequity.

Because of the assumptions Cynthia made, she developed a timeline and plan to complete the project that was unrealistic and ineffective. By the time that became apparent, she was in danger of not completing the task. When the outcomes are less than she expected, Cynthia perceives an inequity. At first, she changes her inputs (e.g., she spends more time on the task, she changes some of her methods). When her increased inputs do not provide increased outputs, Cynthia's perception of inequity and unfairness are magnified. She starts to question the value of the project, distorts her perceptions, and even tries to distort the perceptions of others, by telling her boss, Bailey, that the assignment is unimportant, and she is being treated unfairly. At this point, Cynthia thinks she is working extremely hard to achieve a questionable objective. She believes that no matter what her inputs are she will not get the desired results because the results are dependent upon others' behavior. She also begins to reference other outcomes (penalties and punishments) she will receive if the task is not completed which serves to further increase her perception of unfairness/inequity. When she adopts this perspective, Cynthia tries to get out of completing the task and asks that it be assigned to someone else (i.e., leave the field). Near the end of the case, Cynthia considers reaching out to peers and her boss in another effort to affect inputs and outputs.

3. Assess Cynthia's time management skills. How should Cynthia better develop and incorporate time management skills? (LO5)

Ineffective time management and procrastination are often related and lead to predictable outcomes such as working at the last minute, increased stress, and a decreased ability to handle unexpected events. Students should note that Cynthia did not procrastinate when she started the project. She thought the task was clear and that she knew what steps needed to be taken to accomplish the task. She started the project right away – without stepping back and assessing all the steps required to complete it.

Cynthia started the project after only assessing the tasks she (personally) had to complete (e.g., find contact information, reach out to verify, develop a spreadsheet). She did not realize that this was an interdependent project that required the participation of others – many others. She knew the task was important to her and her organization but did not realize that the contacts did not categorize her request as equally important. Cynthia made a key assumption that sources would respond quickly but she was mistaken. Some of the contact sources bounced back, others did not work, or were disconnected. She did not consider the time that others may take to respond, the number and frequency rate of follow-ups she would have to initiate, and the time and effort required. Cynthia had a month to complete the project and she used almost 25% of the time waiting for responses before following up again.

Time management is an adaptive decision-making process that adjusts a person's time to changing situations. Research shows that three skills lead to effective time management: Awareness, Arrangement, and Adaptation (Dierdorff, 2020). Often people jump into a task without having developed a full understanding of what is required. Cynthia should have asked some key questions before beginning the project:

- Who developed or updated this list previously?
- Was she able to contact them and obtain some tips about what worked and what did not?

- How important and urgent was this task to her boss and others?
- Are some contacts more important than others?
- What was the size of this project?
- How many contacts were needed?
- How many were blank?
- Can the project be chunked into segments based on importance?

Cynthia needed answers to these questions to prioritize the project among her other responsibilities.

It was good that Cynthia contacted her boss the day before their scheduled meeting so that she did not walk in and totally surprise Bailey. However, rather than asking Bailey what should be done, Cynthia should have been more proactive and asked if she could discuss what steps she had taken to get additional feedback from her boss at their Friday meeting. Perhaps if Cynthia had included an example of one of the messages she had received back from a contact, Bailey might have been able to provide concrete advice on such things as how to effectively word these emails. In addition, Cynthia should have tried contacting people via multiple communication methods the first time or within 24 hours when she received no response rather than needing Bailey to suggest it.

Often when a person thinks of time management, they only consider the organizational aspects of time management. Dierdorff (2020) has pointed out that organization is only one of several aspects of effective time management. Students can use Dierdorff's model to assess her strengths and weaknesses, as indicated in Tables 1 – 3 (Appendix).

4. How is Cynthia progressing through the different components of employee socialization? (LO4)

There are three stages to employee socialization (Noe, 2005).

- Stage 1 - Anticipatory/getting in (pre-arrival)
- Stage 2 - Encounter/breaking-in (begin job)
- Stage 3 - Metamorphosis/staying in (adaptation and adjustment)

The length of time it takes employees to complete these stages varies based on the position and the organization but usually occurs over a period of 2-4 months for a position like Cynthia's. Cynthia had positive feelings during the anticipatory stage based on her internships and work with Mr. McNulty at the paper. She had some idea of the position requirements and knew it was not exactly the position she wanted but assessed that it was a viable entry level position, resulting in a valuable experience, leading to her desired career path/goal of becoming a city reporter. These experiences provided some information that would function as a realistic job preview (RJP), but a formal RJP may have helped lessen the confusion Cynthia experienced when struggling with the project.

Cynthia was excited to start her new job and she was motivated to prove herself to her boss and colleagues and to succeed. She completed the orientation program the first day and met with her boss and was introduced to the busy office routine and what she was expected to do on a day-to-day basis. Bailey introduced her to many of the people she would be working with in the newsroom. After letting Cynthia get comfortable with the routine for two weeks, she assigned her a project. The initial project Bailey assigned had the three characteristics needed for a good first assignment which often affects whether a person stays or quits (Feldman, 1976). The task was technically challenging. It was a large project, utilized many of Cynthia's pre-existing many

skills and required her to extend and refine those skills, it was related to her job and her future desired position, and it did not involve her in work conflicts or political problems. Given the circumstances, Cynthia appeared poised to successfully navigate the Anticipatory/Getting-In stage.

Cynthia encountered difficulty in Stage 2. She was mastering all her assignments and making a positive contribution, except one – the network/contact project. She was trying unsuccessfully to master the technical demands the job placed on her. Cynthia became so frustrated that she no longer saw the relevance of the project and she asked that her project be reassigned to another coworker. At the same time, Cynthia was making friends and developing working relationships with her coworkers. Despite these relationships she is not comfortable asking for help, she respects but feels intimidated by Bailey, and she worries that if she asks for help from coworkers, it will be perceived as complaining. Getting integrated into the team is a challenge for Cynthia. Often during this stage, a formal or informal mentor - such as a boss or an experienced employee - becomes important to the new employee's success.

Bailey's communication with Cynthia showed signs of mentoring. For example, in the email Bailey acknowledges Cynthia's frustration. She continues to provide her with concrete suggestions to overcome this difficulty. She provided similar support throughout the case. Additionally, Steve, a colleague with more seniority and in a position like the one Cynthia aspired to, offered to provide pointers, and said he had the time available to help her. Yet, Cynthia felt self-conscious and did not accept the offer and continued to struggle on her own. She is having trouble adjusting socially to the work team and feels unattached. She needs to learn to relax around her coworkers, figure out what they expect of her, and establish a role for herself.

Learning what it takes to become an effective employee outside her work group and how to balance the demands of work and personal life are the activities that will face Cynthia in Stage 3 - socialization, metamorphosis/staying-in - if she stays long enough.

5. What factors does Bailey need to consider before developing a plan for how to move forward with Cynthia? What are Cynthia's strengths and weaknesses or areas for improvement? (LO5)

Bailey needs to assess several factors before developing a plan:

1. Assess Cynthia's strengths and weaknesses.

Strengths

- performing well at the other job tasks
- has some time management skills
- wants to perform well
- is developing relationships with other co-workers
- adjusted her methods on the project
- asked for advice, suggestions and help from the boss
- asked for help prior to meeting times
- admires her boss

Weaknesses:

- Did not think through the project and understand the interdependencies
- Low self-efficacy for the task
- She wants to quit the task, low task motivation now
- Negative emotions are impacting her perceptions and assessments of the situation
- Emphasizing what she cannot control
- Few skills to deal with project setbacks

2. Identify the stage of employee socialization is Cynthia currently in and how Bailey can facilitate her transition.

Cynthia is primarily dealing with Stage 2 issues of employee socialization and success at this task will be important for her progression. Bailey set a challenging and specific goal that she thought was a stretch goal but manageable. Right now, it is not perceived as a stretch goal but one that is unattainable. Cynthia needs Bailey to make the task clearer and to help her develop a specific path for completion. Bailey needs to help her set realistic expectations.

3. Identify what she has observed about Cynthia that will help her prepare for and structure the meeting.
 - She feels lost and needs more clarity about how she can accomplish the task & manage the project.
 - She is questioning the value of the assignment.
 - Self-efficacy is low and her motivation to complete the task has plummeted.
 - Focusing on what she cannot control
 - Experiencing emotions with a high negative affect
 - Negative emotions are affecting her self-evaluations, she feels like a failure
 - She has a good prior record of accomplishment, and she is satisfied with other aspects of her job.
 - She is used to being successful.
 - She is used to working independently and has a limited organizational network.
4. Bailey's goals centered around getting Cynthia up to speed and acclimated and develop a better boss employee relationship.
 - Clarify the performance management system and help Cynthia understand the expectations to reduce her fear and uncertainty.
 - Establish that they both want Cynthia to be successful and integrate Cynthia into the department.
 - To help Cynthia set a clear goal and expectations so she knows what she needs to do and how her performance will be assessed. Provide examples of what behaviors and results are rewarded. She is focused on failure and penalties and some of this may be unfounded.
 - Guide Cynthia in ways to get the project completed.
 - Help Cynthia develop realistic expectations about success and failure and learning.
 - Help build persistence when goals are not met.
5. Identify Cynthia's goals. Cynthia's goals center around task clarity, acquiring competence, emotional regulation, and her relationship with the boss.
 - To know what was expected of her.
 - To complete the task successfully.
 - To perform well and see results for her efforts.
 - To feel like she had some control over the outcome.
 - To feel reassured and less anxious
 - To feel and be supported.
 - To develop better communication with her boss.

6. What should Cynthia and Bailey do to prepare for this meeting? What positive outcomes could be achieved? (LO5)

Employees often find meetings such as this intimidating. When they are still developing a working relationship with the boss and have limited work experience, it can create additional anxiety. It will be best if both Bailey and Cynthia are prepared prior to the meeting. Cynthia has asked for help several times and Bailey responded to each of those requests and still it was not enough to get the project on track.

This meeting is important and can be critical to whether Cynthia decides to stay or to quit. Bailey should identify the purpose of the meeting as a joint problem-solving session to enable Cynthia to successfully complete the project. Cynthia should be involved as an active participant in the meeting as her previous communications expressed repeatedly that she felt she had no control over the situation and the results. Bailey should ask Cynthia to prepare in advance an informal outline and timeline of how she managed the project and what went well and what did not. They can then use that as a starting point for the meeting. This may help Cynthia feel more in control, eliminate any surprise, or worry about what will happen during the meeting and send a signal that the culture is one of collaboration and problem solving, not judgment and penalties. This can set the tone for the meeting and their relationship going forward.

The primary goal for both the employee and the manager should be to work together to get the new employee up to speed on her job and to learn about the culture, norms, and performance expectations at the newspaper. They both want Cynthia to be successful. Additional sub-goals would include identifying and demonstrating aspects of the organizational culture and norms, improving the boss/employee working relationship, and developing a sense of partnership.

Bailey should reiterate that she has confidence in Cynthia and that together they will problem solve and develop an action plan for handling the project. Bailey should listen when Cynthia describes what she had done that was effective and ask questions that help her learn how to assess what worked and what did not and to troubleshoot and anticipate problems. Bailey should adopt a participative style to facilitate engagement and empowerment. However, Cynthia wants clarity. At the end of the discussion the action steps and methods should be written and reviewed and checked for clarity. The meeting format should be one where they are working together to develop an action plan. Cynthia needs to regain her confidence and self-efficacy. Having an informal hallway meeting or briefly reporting on project results more frequently than once a week for the next few weeks can help build Cynthia's confidence – she will learn how to effectively access and use her boss' time, try out different methods of communication, and receive more regular feedback.

Bailey should explain why she assigned the project to Cynthia, why it is important for the business and what she thought Cynthia would learn from the experience. A key reason for the assignment was to help Cynthia build connections and relationships with others in the business and coworkers at the paper. It may also be helpful to examine together the communication approaches Cynthia used when trying to contact professionals.

Bailey needs to describe her communication style and ask Cynthia what she needs. Cynthia has been hesitant to informally ask for help from her boss or to accept help when offered from others. Bailey should give her a clearer idea of what the organizational norms are regarding communication and asking for information and other forms of assistance.

The key positive outcomes are that the goals for both Bailey and Cynthia are achieved. This includes retention of Cynthia as an employee, creating more of a partnership within the boss/employee relationship, and the acculturation of Cynthia to the workplace culture.

Appendix

Table 1

Awareness that time is a limited resource	
Timing up How long you have spent rather than time left	Cynthia focused on the time left rather than time spent resulting in waiting too long for responses before following up.
Realistic assessment of estimated vs. actual time	Cynthia underestimated the time needed to complete project because she did not map out all aspects of the project.
Future time perspective How does today affect next week?	When Cynthia tried to reach each contact, she assumed the task was complete or would be – she failed to factor in the follow-up time and frequency needed.
Avoid sunk cost fallacy Value of the outcome and who is affected	Cynthia did not fall into this trap because she spoke to her boss.

Table 2

Arrangement of goals, plans, and schedules	
Important but unfamiliar tasks have steeper learning curves	Cynthia incorrectly assumed that this was a familiar and important task. She did not know it required different methods and the cooperation of others.
Prioritize activities	Cynthia prioritized the task of the initial contact but not the follow-ups required.
Schedule protected time	Cynthia could have set up follow-up times so contact was made during less busy times for email and voicemail utilizations.
Do not underestimate – consult others	Cynthia had opportunities to ask others for help and did not advantage of them (i.e., Steve)
Half-size goals	Cynthia could have chunked up the task. This may have helped her see what she was accomplishing.

Table 3

Adaptation to how time is used as situation changes	
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Short burst of effort – avoid procrastination	Cynthia could have used this strategy to help manage her motivation. She could have structured her day to work for 15 minutes to follow up and then move to another task. Intervals.
Create contingency plans	Cynthia did not have a contingency plan.
Reduce time wasters	No evidence this was a problem.

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