**The Understanding Chain:**

**Creating Effective Messages from Classic Stories for Various Audiences**

MOBTC 2018 at Coastal Carolina University

June 6 – 9, 2018

Abstract

Today’s employers are looking for graduates who enter the workforce as skilled communicators. Our unique OBTC session presents three interlinked gamestorming activities that leads educators through audience, information, and message activities to create messages for varying audiences based on classic stories (or Disney films). Each activity is team based, interactive, and reinforces the writing process of plan, write, and edit using analysis and reflection. A 90-minute activity session takes educators through the highlights and materials, giving participants three experiential classroom activities to build communication skills.

*Keywords: managerial communication, audience analysis, gamestorming activity*

The Understanding Chain:

Creating Effective Messages from Classic Stories for Various Audiences

Too many college students tune out in managerial communication class lectures. Yet, “the ability to convey ideas to others through verbal and written means, using clear and effective language that accounts for the audience, ”remains one of the leading skills sought by 21st century employers” (Farrugia & Sanger, 2017, p. 7). One way to enhance learning in managerial communication undergraduate classes is to engage students in a gamestorming session where classic stories (or Disney films) are adapted by student teams through reflection on audience, information, and message analysis to create effective messages for varying audiences.

**Teaching Implications**

***“Active learning across the disciplines is key to deeper learning:*** *In the past few decades, learning scientists and educators have been arguing for a transformation of traditional instruction from an exclusive reliance on didactic lecturing, or what some call “sit and get” where students passively sit and receive information, to a more hands-on, active, and engaged form of teaching and learning. When students actively construct their own understandings of an idea, principle, or concept—…it increases learning and retention, and also their ability to transfer newly acquired knowledge to different settings” (Hora, 2017, p. 9).*

Few would argue that lecture is more engaging than active learning. Likewise, educators understand that students can learn a concept more adeptly when it builds on previous knowledge. Further, researchers are informing educators that students learn better from their peers. Intuitively, then, playing a game with peers that draws on previous experiences and challenges learners to use course concepts in difficult applications would foster engaged learning.

**Application to Conference Theme**

Actively engaging today’s students in reinventing classic stories to create effective business messages through reflection, harnesses our heritage to reshape communication skill development in the classroom.

**Unique Contribution to OBTC**

This work has not been presented before, and it is not under review anywhere else.

**Proposed 90-Minute Session Activity: The Understanding Chain**

Drawing from David Gray (2010; 2011), a chain game, The Understanding Chain (see **Appendix A**), was designed to engage teams of undergraduate students in adapting messages from various classic stories (or Disney film) for varying audiences. This activity is designed for small groups ranging from three to six, ideally five. It supports managerial communication modules that highlight audience analysis, gathering information and analyzing a problem, and then adapting and creating a message for varying audiences.

**Session Learning Objectives**

Following this session, participants should be able to use The Understanding Chain activity to have students: analyze the wants and needs of varying audiences; gather information from classic stories (or Disney films) to identify and analyze a problem as determined by their group, and use the information and problem they have gathered to adapt messages for varying audiences.

Teaching topics relevant to this session: Business Communication, Managerial Communication, Audience Analysis, Information Analysis, Message Development.

**Exercise Overview**

The Understanding Chain is a three-part experiential activity for small groups (**see Appendix A**) adapted from David Gray (2010, 2011) and uses the writing process of plan, write, and review for audience, information, and message analysis adapted from Peter Cardon (2018). Each activity is approximately one hour in length and is for a traditional classroom setting that works for classes with numbers ranging from 15 to 60 where students can be put into small groups ranging from three to six, ideally five.

**Part 1: Understand Your Audience**

Understand Your Audience, Part 1 (see **Appendix B**), introduces students to the idea that effective business communicators first need to plan prior to writing and editing to create effective business messages. It uses the concept of audience analysis to take students through an example audience analysis (see **Appendix C**) before putting students into small groups to analyze and reflect on an assigned audience (see **Appendix D**) using a handout (see **Appendix E**) for guidance.

**Part 2: Gather Right Information to Understand Problem**

Gather Right Information to Understand Problem, Part 2 (see **Appendix F**), introduces students to information analysis using the example of *Cinderella* (see **Appendix G**). Students gather information from a classic story (or Disney film- see **Appendix H**) guided by a handout (see **Appendix I**) to identify and understand a problem as determined by their group through discussion and reflection.

**Part 3: Develop Your Message**

The final activity, Develop Your Message, Part 3 (see **Appendix J**), pulls in the prior activities by using the audience analysis, such as corporate leaders, and information gathered and analyzed from a classic story (or Disney film), such as *The Lion King*, to create a message for their audience. The example of *Cinderella* for college students (see **Appendix K**) is used to demonstrate. Student groups use a handout (see **Appendix L**) to guide discussion and reflection to develop a message. The activity ends with a brief presentation from each group and a short poll such as through *Kahoot!* to choose the most effective message for an audience by the class.

**Session Description**

This 90-minute session will take participants through an abbreviated session for each of the three parts of The Understanding Chain, an experiential Communication activity, to create effective messages for varying audiences through reflection on audience, information, and message using classic stories (or Disney films). It includes access to materials, activities, and debrief tips so participants can use the activities in their classrooms.

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| Time in Minutes | Session Agenda, 90 minutes  The Understanding Chain |
| 0-15 | 1. Introduction to “The Understanding Chain” activity |
| 16-30 | 2. Overview of Part 1: Understand your Audience |
| 31-45 | 3. Overview of Part 2: Gather Right Information to Understand Problem |
| 46-60 | 4. Overview of Part 3: Develop your Message |
| 61-75 | 5. Debrief |
| 76-90 | 6. Resources- please bring a memory stick |

**References**

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**Appendices**

Appendix A: The Understanding Chain activity, 3 parts

Appendix B: Understand Your Audience, Part 1

Appendix C: Audience PPT

Appendix D: Audience Assignment

Appendix E: Understand Your Audience handout

Appendix F: Gather the Right Information to Understand a Problem, Part 2

Appendix G: Information PPT

Appendix H: Story Assignment

Appendix I: Gather the Right Information handout

Appendix J: Develop Your Message, Part 3

Appendix K: Message PPT

Appendix L: Develop your Message handout