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Getting Started: Training Modules for New Employees of the UNO Bookstore

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GETTING STARTED

Getting Started:

Training Modules for New Employees of the UNO Bookstore

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April 2021
Abstract

The University of Nebraska Omaha (UNO) Bookstore does not currently have an established training program to help new employees integrate into the organization. Inconsistency in training can cause unnecessary stress on employees and management. This capstone project aimed to alleviate some of this stress by creating four training modules specifically tailored to the needs of the organization. A needs assessment was conducted with input from the management team and employees to identify module topics that meet the UNO Bookstore’s exact needs. The following topics were identified: Onboarding Information, Conflict in the Workplace, Inter-organizational Communication, and Use of Technologically Mediated Communication. Training presentations were created using PowerPoint. These modules will assist the UNO Bookstore to ensure new employees receive consistent and comprehensive training to help them feel supported in the organization.

*Keywords*: training, modules, needs, onboarding, organization, workplace
Getting Started: Training Modules for New Employees of the UNO Bookstore

At some point, everyone experiences being the new employee in their workplace. Being a new employee is often riddled with feelings of uncertainty and anxiety as one tries to find their place in their new organization. I experienced this over three-and-a-half years ago at the UNO Bookstore when I began working as a student employee, just before my first year at UNO. It can be very intimidating to walk into a new workplace with no knowledge of the organization’s processes. One way to combat this is by having high-quality training for employees. The UNO Bookstore does not currently have any formal training process implemented. The organization relies heavily on its employees to train new workers. This has led to inconsistencies with training and caused unnecessary confusion of employees. With this project, I will create four training modules that will cover the following topics: onboarding information, conflict in the workplace, inter-organizational communication, and technologically mediated communication. These modules can be used by new and current employees of the UNO Bookstore to feel more supported in their work environment.

With this project, I have two goals that I hope to see accomplished through my work. First, I hope these modules help redefine the UNO Bookstore’s training process. Having a standardized process for training employees will take some of the burdens off of current employees and ensure that every employee is getting all of the training information. This will hopefully make new employees feel more confident and supported as they enter the organization. Second, I hope that this project will allow me to develop valuable skills that I can apply to future professional experiences. This project aligns with my career goals of working in operations, which is very employee-focused. By creating these modules, I will be able to grow my
proficiencies for training and workplace development that can translate directly to skills needed in future jobs.

**Methodology**

The first step of this project was identifying where the UNO Bookstore could use the training modules the most. My three-and-a-half years of experience working in the UNO Bookstore gave me insight into some of the organization’s needs, but input from the management team and other employees was necessary to ensure a holistic view of the issue areas were identified and analyzed. Additionally, by incorporating their ideas when picking the module topics, I ensured that the modules will be more tailored to the specific needs of the UNO Bookstore.

To collect data, I conducted a needs assessment of my organization by distributing a survey to my coworkers and interviewing my management team. I used a Google Form to create my survey for my coworkers. It was distributed to all staff members and student workers using the staff email list that was provided to me by my manager. The survey consisted of the following questions:

- Describe your training process at the UNO Bookstore. What departments were you trained in? How was your training conducted?
- Do you think your training was effective? Explain why or why not.
- What are some areas you think the UNO Bookstore could improve its training process? Are there areas where you think you could benefit from more training?
- What is something that you wish you were taught in your first few weeks at the UNO Bookstore that was not covered in your training?
By utilizing open-ended questions, I was able to receive responses about the employees’ specific experiences. Respondents were informed that their responses would remain anonymous, and none of the collected information would be shared with the management team. This was done to ensure honest feedback from employees. The survey was open for one week, and employees received a reminder email one day before the survey closed.

The management team was interviewed to allow for direct feedback to be collected. The interview was conducted in person and lasted approximately 45 minutes. The interview style allowed for a discussion about the needs of the bookstore. The following questions were asked during the interview:

- What, if any, are the current training protocols of the UNO Bookstore?
- What do you think are the organization’s largest areas of need?
- How could these modules be adapted to meet the needs of the organization?

As the survey allowed for free responses from the employees, the format of these questions left the content to the management team. I allowed them to lead the topics of discussion and asked follow-up questions to clarify ideas.

I created four separate training modules that can be utilized by the UNO Bookstore. I used Microsoft PowerPoint to create the training presentations, and each training should take the employee approximately seven to ten minutes to complete. The modules were kept to this length so the information will be easily digestible by new employees. This means that if all four modules were completed consecutively, they would take the new employee about 30-40 minutes to complete. Additionally, each slide has an audio clip explaining the information. In addition to the presentation, a one-page document summarizing the training will also be included in each module. This handout can be used as a reference document after the employee has completed the
GETTING STARTED

training. By having slides, audio, and a handout, these trainings have been adapted to meet the needs of multiple learning styles in the hopes of engaging its audience.

Results of Needs Assessment

The needs assessment was essential in selecting the topics for each of the modules. By incorporating feedback from employees and the management team, I was able to identify specific needs that are not currently being met. Of the four module topics, one was decided from my personal experience, two were selected from the survey of the employees, and one was determined from the interview with the management team. The first module topic that was chosen was conflict in the workplace, and that came from personal experience. As an employee myself, I have an insider look at the organization. I have noticed multiple situations where employees have either had a conflict with a customer or another employee and weren’t sure how to handle it. Customer service jobs often come with customer conflicts, but it is important to know how to effectively manage the conflict so it does not become a larger issue. Conflicts between employees are rarer at the UNO Bookstore but still occasionally occur. These conflicts can make the workplace uncomfortable for others. This initial idea for a training on workplace conflict inspired me to pursue this project.

The next two module topics were developed based on feedback from the employee survey. The survey was sent out to all 21 employees, and I received seven responses. After analyzing the responses, I pulled two viable ideas for module topics: the need for onboarding training and communicating more efficiently within the organization. Multiple respondents cited being initially trained by another employee. While this training can be effective, it can also lead to inconsistencies because there is no formal training process. This prompted me to establish a module with onboarding information. This will ensure that all employees will receive all of the
essential information and nothing will be forgotten. Additionally, there were respondents who mentioned issues with communicating within the UNO Bookstore. When asked what they would have liked to learn in their first few weeks on the job, Respondent 3 answered the following:

  It would have been helpful if I had learned where to direct customers with specific questions. This is one of those areas that I learned as they came up, but it would have gone faster if I would have known this information beforehand.

Information needs to move quickly in order to keep the UNO Bookstore working effectively. By teaching new employees where information needs to go and the most efficient ways to do that, it can help to integrate them into the organization more quickly and allows them to work more efficiently sooner.

  The final module topic was decided following my interview with the UNO Bookstore management team. After discussing areas of need in the bookstore, the Bookstore Manager mentioned that she had noticed inconsistencies in how employees spoke to customers on the phone. During the COVID-19 pandemic, more of the store’s business was conducted online, and they saw an increase in communicating with customers through phone calls and emails. This has developed a need for a standardized process for how the UNO Bookstore handles technologically mediated communication.

  **Literature Review**

  This review of current literature will help guide my decisions of how to best create the training modules to ensure their maximum effectiveness once implemented. This project is based on an application of knowledge. Because of this, it is important to understand what we can gain from the established research and how it can be integrated into the training modules. This review is divided to organize relevant research for each of the training module topics.
Onboarding Information

An employee’s initial training experience can set the tone for their first impression of their workplace. It is important to set employees up for success from their first day. Onboarding training includes basic norms and expectations of the workplace. This could include dress code policies, how to request time off, or attendance expectations. It is imperative that employees understand these to ensure a smooth transition into the organization. Even more important, a lack of training can decrease workplace safety (Elliot, 2020). There are often precautions specific to each organization that are in place to keep everyone safe while completing their jobs. If these precautions are not shared with new employees, it could put them and current employees in unnecessary danger. Additionally, it is important for new employees to have a basic understanding of their job and the organization. While studying health care teams, Thomson et al. (2015) explained that successful communication within a team requires those members to possess a level of knowledge about their roles. This idea can be tailored to the UNO Bookstore because if an employee is knowledgeable about their job, they will be able to communicate better with others. By understanding their job and role, it can help employees recognize the areas they still need clarification on and improvement in. It is frustrating when one feels confused but doesn’t know how to ask the questions they need to be answered to be successful. Onboarding training can help employees gain this basic understanding of their work, so they can start out feeling supported. These policies and expectations can become overwhelming if not delivered effectively to new employees. Cooper (1997) explained that when sharing complex communication ideas with employees, it is effective to break them down into component skills. This module will break down the expectations and norms of the UNO Bookstore so that employees can easily grasp them. Employees will also be able to reference the module after their
training if they need to clarify any of the information presented to them. Once an employee understands the goals and norms of a workplace, it is time for them to start working with their new coworkers. The next module will help guide employees through the unavoidable conflicts they will experience at work.

**Conflict in the Workplace**

Conflict is inevitable in the workplace because you are mixing different personalities together under some high-stress situations. In order to navigate any issues that may arise, it is important to understand how to manage conflict in the workplace to avoid any long-term problems and reduce excessive stress on employees. Interpersonal conflict can lead to physical health problems in employees (Wright et al., 2017). If your employees aren’t healthy, they can’t perform at peak efficiency, and your organization’s productivity will suffer. Handford and Koester (2019) found that workplaces seem to work better when conflict isn’t allowed to escalate. This speaks to the importance of this module. Giving employees the communication tools to handle conflict before it becomes an issue helps all parts of the organization. Finally, people with higher emotional intelligence can tend to have behaviors that are helpful in handling conflict (Krishnakumar et al., 2019). This is significant to understand before creating the training modules. Not all employees will have the same emotional intelligence levels, but by incorporating this information into the module, you can help employees develop these behaviors. Workplaces are more conducive for productivity when there isn’t conflict, but it is not always avoidable. This is why it is essential for employees to understand how to effectively manage conflict in their workplaces. One cause of conflict could be not communicating through the proper channels to share information. The next module will focus on the importance of communicating effectively with people within their organization.
Inter-organizational Communication

Communicating effectively with those within your organization is important to maintaining a high level of productivity at work. In a training exercise, Jackson and Kaluber (2018) noticed a high willingness to support a team member if they appeared to be struggling or upset. This supportive communication can help new employees when they are learning. Much of the current training process at the UNO Bookstore is based on employee support. This module can help model some ways for employees to communicate more clearly and efficiently when solving problems with a coworker. There is a high level of collaboration among employees at the UNO Bookstore, which again, highlights the need to communicate clearly. Jurkowski and Hänze (2015) found that when students were trained in transactive communication, there was an increase in the benefits of cooperation. These are skills that can be incorporated into the training modules to help employees. Transactive communication demonstrates the need to be trained as a good listener, as well as a good communicator. One has to be able to comprehend the messages that are being transmitted to them so they know how to proceed. Even though listening is extremely important in the workplace, many workers will never receive formal training on it (Cooper, 1997). By teaching employees to be better listeners, they will become better communicators, which is beneficial to the organization. When examining inter-organizational communication, it is necessary to look at both communications between coworkers and between different factions of the workplace. While the research has mostly followed communication between employees, I will stretch that to incorporate communicating with different departments of the UNO Bookstore into this training module.

Use of Technologically Mediated Communication
Communicating efficiently is extremely important to the success of sharing information in an organization. One barrier that can inhibit communication is using a technologically mediated channel. There are many points during a shift where a UNO Bookstore employee has to use technologically mediated communication. Most often, it occurs when communicating with customers. Talking with a customer on the phone or through an email can scare some employees, but it is an important part of our job. This module will help employees understand the best practices of communicating with customers through a technologically mediated channel. Many customer service associates experience the situation where a customer feels emboldened to disrespect you when you are communicating over the phone. Givens and McNamee (2016) explained that customer service jobs could benefit from training on focusing on the humane aspects of their work. This is important to remember and understand at the UNO Bookstore because you need to be able to compartmentalize a bad phone call so that it doesn’t impact the rest of your shift. The training module can share tips and best practices to work through those difficult interactions while incorporating some of the information from the conflict module. Even though some of the phone conversations are negative, there are still positive interactions between customers and employees over the phone. Boström et al. (2020) identified that using person-centered care communication helped nurses connect with their patients when talking over the phone. These person-centered techniques can be implemented in the UNO Bookstore to improve the quality of the phone conversations. In addition to communicating over the phone, some employees also utilize email to communicate with customers. This is a new practice at the UNO Bookstore, and there is room for growth for all employees. Middaugh (2015) highlights many best practices for communicating through email. These practices can be integrated into the training module to make sure that employees are communicating efficiently, professionally, and
GETTING STARTED

concisely to get the information across. Communicating using a technologically mediated channel can be tricky, but it is an important skill to master for our workplace.

The research laid out above clearly indicates that when employees are well-trained, everyone benefits. The UNO Bookstore is in need of a formalized training program, and this project can satisfy that need. Jacobs et al. (1996) found in their research that employees are often more eager to receive workplace trainings than employers are ready to provide it for them. This points to the importance of having an employee, like myself, step up and offer to support the management team. Additionally, research has found that when employee trainings are provided by the employer, as opposed to utilizing off-site trainings, employees saw increased wages (Ananiadou et al., 2004). My experience as an employee makes me uniquely qualified to assess the needs of the UNO Bookstore. I can combine the hands-on experience I have and the knowledge of the literature I have gained to create high-quality modules for the organization.

**Distribution of Training Modules**

After completing this project, all of the training modules and additional documents will be shared with the UNO Bookstore. These modules will be available to them to use at their will. Copies of each training module and reference documents will be included following the reference section. These training modules should be administered to new employees in their first month of employment to maximize their effectiveness.

**Discussion & Conclusion**

There are strengths and areas for growth with this project. The greatest strength for this project is its focused nature on issue areas identified by the UNO Bookstore staff. The needs assessment allowed for the module topics to be specified to the exact needs of the organization. Additionally, the modules will be available to the UNO Bookstore to use freely. There is no limit
to how many employees can use the training modules. This will ensure that every new employee has access to a structured training experience. Finally, my experience as an employee brought a viewpoint that was valuable for this project. I was able to design the modules in a way that I think would be successful in the organization. Without my experience, the modules may not have been tailored as successfully to the organization’s style.

There are still areas of growth for this project. If I could conduct the needs assessment again, I would have given the employees more time to respond to the survey. While I was able to gather meaningful data from the responses I received, I think more input would have been helpful in developing overall themes from the response. Another weakness of this project is the need to keep the modules updated. I intentionally used generic language when talking about specific managers in the modules in the case that they would leave the position. Still, there is some information in the modules that would need to be updated as changes were made to the organization. This responsibility will be on the UNO Bookstore to maintain the modules.

While the information in these training modules may seem mundane to some, everyone wins when employees are well-trained. By conducting a needs assessment, these modules were able to address needs identified by people who know the organization best: the employees and the management team. The complied research reinforces the identified needs as areas that are important to the overall efficiency and productivity of organizations. Additionally, the literature provided the necessary framework to understand how each of the topics plays into the more significant role of an organization. By implementing a structured training process, new employees will be set up for success. This, again, will improve the working environment of the UNO Bookstore.
References


Onboarding Information
Welcome to the UNO Bookstore!
## Store Information

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Address</th>
<th>Operating Hours</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>UNO Retail Store</td>
<td>6001 Dodge St, Omaha, NE 68182</td>
<td>Monday-Thursday: 8:00 am – 5:00 pm, Friday: 8:00 am – 4:00 pm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UNMC Retail Store</td>
<td>3908 Jones St, Omaha, NE 68198</td>
<td>Monday-Friday: 8:00 am – 4:00 pm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Warehouse Fulfillment Center</td>
<td>601 S Saddle Creek Road</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Scheduling and Availability

• Send semester availability to the Bookstore Manager prior to each academic semester
  o Update as needed
  o Schedules are sent out every week for the following work week

• Time off requests need to be submitted two weeks before the dates requested
  o Submit in writing or in an email to the Bookstore Manager

• In the event of sickness or an emergency:
  o Call the UNO Bookstore main line and ask to speak with a manager
    ▪ (402) 554-2336
  o Email Bookstore Manager
Dress Code Expectations

- **Shirt options (includes name tag)**
  - UNO shirt
  - UNO affiliated group shirt
  - Business casual shirt
  - Ex.) Sweater, polo, button up

- **Work appropriate pants**
  - Leggings are not work appropriate unless you are wearing a dressy sweater or shirt and are covered up appropriately

- **Close-toed shoes**
Bookstore Lingo

**Rush:** The first week of every semester

**Buyback week:** The last week of every semester

**PRISM:** The computer system we use to find item information, process orders, and handle general merchandise issues

**The Winter Room:** The room in the basement of the UNO Bookstore where winter clothes are kept in back stock (caps & gowns are also kept here)

**Pam’s Area:** The area in the basement of the UNO Bookstore where back stock of school supplies, summer clothes, drinkware, and spirit is kept
Conflict in the Workplace
Overview

Definition

Conflict with a customer

Conflict with a coworker
Conflict is Inevitable

When people have different expectations or hold different positions on ideas, **conflict** can ensue.

It is important to find the best ways to manage conflict in the workplace, so it doesn’t become a larger issue.
Conflict with a Customer

• Listen to the customer
  o They feel frustrated and want to be heard
  o Search for solutions

• Maintain your composure
  o It can be difficult to handle a conflict, but it is important to stay calm.

• Know when its time to bring in a manager
  o If you feel threatened, scared, or uncomfortable, always find a manager to assist with the conflict.
Conflict with a coworker

- The most constructive way to manage a conflict with a coworker is through collaboration.
  - Focus on the problem, not the people
  - Use common ground to compromise
  - Brainstorm multiple solutions for resolving the conflict that both of you agree with
  - Combine the best parts of these solutions into a single solution

- Follow up with a manager if conflict persists or impedes the working environment
Conflict is inevitable in the workplace, but it is necessary to understand how to best manage it.

When a conflict occurs with a customer, keep calm, try to find solutions, and get a manager if the situation escalates.

Collaboration and compromise are the most effective strategies to managing a conflict with a coworker.
Inter-organizational Communication
Overview

Definition

Importance

Use at the UNO Bookstore
What is Inter-organizational Communication?

- **Inter-organizational communication** is communication that occurs within an organization’s structures.
  - Ex.) emails between managers, phone calls to different departments, etc.

- In organizations with high levels of collaboration, effective inter-organizational communication is essential.
Importance of Inter-organizational Communication

- EFFICIENCY
- COLLABORATION
- INFORMATION SHARING
Importance of Inter-organizational Communication

**Efficiency**
- Fast-moving workplace
- Ensure goals are completed correctly the first time

**Collaboration**
- Use of work teams to accomplish goals
- Multiple departments working together

**Information sharing**
- Make sure that everyone has the most current information
Use of Inter-organizational Communication in the UNO Bookstore

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Have information at the ready</th>
<th>Ensure you are getting the information to the correct person</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• When you need to get information to another department, anticipate the questions they may ask you and be prepared to answer.</td>
<td>• When information gets to the correct person the first time, there are fewer opportunities for miscommunications.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Review

- Inter-organizational communication is the communication that occurs within an organization.

- Effective inter-organizational communication can improve the efficiency, collaboration, and information sharing of an organization.

- The UNO Bookstore utilizes inter-organizational communication every day to ensure high levels of productivity throughout the organization.
Using Technologically Mediated Communication
What is Technologically Mediated Communication?

A communication medium is the way that you communicate with others.

The way that you communicate impacts how well your message can reach its intended receiver.

When communicating through technology, you must take extra care to make sure your message reaches your receiver how you intended.
Why do we need to understand communicating through technology?
Using the Phones with Customers

• Always start with a short, warm greeting
  o “UNO Bookstore, this is Abby. How can I help you?”
    ▪ Quickly establish the organization, your name, and offer help

• Your tone matters! The customer will be able to tell how you feel based on how you answer the phone.
  • Try smiling when answering the phone

• Be prepared to listen to the customer
  o Bring something to take notes on
  o Gather all of the information you can before putting a customer on hold
Using thePhones withCustomers

Be confident, but don’t make up information

Make sure that all of the customer’s questions have been answered before ending the call

Use the same warm tone you started with to end the call
Using Email with Customers

• Occasionally, the best way to contact a customer is using email.

• Start with a warm greeting
  o If you are responding to an email, you can use the name they signed their email with.
  o If you are unsure of their name, you can always use a generic greeting.

• Be concise

• Conclude with professional sign off
  o Ex.) sincerely, best regards, etc.

• **ALWAYS** proof-read your emails before you press send.
Review

• Technologically mediated communication is used all around us at work.

• It is important to understand the best practices of communicating through technology to avoid any miscommunications and improve workplace efficiency.
UNO Bookstore
Onboarding Information

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- Leggings are not work appropriate unless you are wearing a business casual shirt

Close-toed shoes

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**BOOKSTORE LINGO**

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Pam’s Area: The area in the basement of the UNO Bookstore where back stock of school supplies, summer clothes, drinkware, and spirit is kept
Managing Conflict in the Workplace

CONFLICT IS INEVITABLE
When people have different expectations or hold different positions on ideas, conflict can ensue.

It is important to find the best ways to manage conflict in the workplace, so it doesn’t become a larger issue.

CONFLICT WITH A CUSTOMER
• Listen to the customer
  • They feel frustrated and want to be heard
  • Search for solutions
• Maintain your composure
  • It can be difficult to handle a conflict, but it is important to stay calm.
• Know when its time to bring in a manager
  • If you feel threatened, scared, or uncomfortable, always find a manager to assist with the conflict.

CONFLICT WITH A COWORKER
• Use collaboration to work through conflict
  • Focus on the problem, not the people
  • Use common ground to compromise
  • Brainstorm multiple solutions for resolving the conflict that both of you agree with
• Combine the best parts of these solutions into a single solution
• Follow up with a manager if conflict persist or impedes the working environment

TAKEAWAYS
Conflict will occur in the workplace, but it is necessary to understand how to manage it effectively.

Utilize collaboration and compromise to constructively manage conflicts.
Interorganizational Communication

**DEFINITION**

Inter-organizational communication is communication that occurs within an organization’s structures.

Ex.) emails between managers, phone calls to different departments, etc.

In organizations with high levels of collaboration, effective inter-organizational communication is essential.

**IMPORTANCE**

- **Efficiency**
  - Fast-moving workplaces require efficient communication
  - Ensure goals are completed correctly the first time

- **Collaboration**
  - Use of work teams to accomplish goals
  - Multiple departments working together

- **Information sharing**
  - Make sure that everyone has the most current information

**USE IN THE UNO BOOKSTORE**

- Have information at the ready
  - Anticipate questions you may be asked and be prepared to answer.

- Confirm the information is getting to the correct person
  - When information is shared correctly, there are fewer opportunities for miscommunications.

**TAKEAWAY**

Effective inter-organizational communication can improve the efficiency, collaboration, and information sharing of an organization.
DEFINITION
Technologically mediated communication is when you communicate through technology. When communicating through technology, you must take extra care to make sure your message reaches your receiver how you intended.

USING PHONES
• Start with a short, warm greeting
  • “UNO Bookstore, this is Abby. How can I help you?”
• Focus on keeping an upbeat tone of voice
• Be prepared to listen to the customer
  • Have paper you can take notes on with you when you take a call
• Be confident
• Make sure all customer questions have been answered
• End the call with a warm tone

USING EMAIL
• Start with a warm greeting
• Be concise, but clear
  • Be very intentional with your words because it is the only message the receiver will have
• Conclude with a professional sign off
  • Sincerely, best regards, etc.
• ALWAYS proof-read emails before pressing send
  • Ensure emails are error free

TAKEAWAY
It is important to understand the best practices of communicating through technology to avoid any miscommunications and improve workplace efficiency.