

Messy Housemates

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Executive Summary

The following report presents a detailed description of a solution to a chosen case problem. The goal of this research paper is to convey the best way for people to resolve conflict with their roommates who they feel may have created an unclean living environment. Our goal as a group was to find a solution that would be sustainable and agreeable to all involved.

Following the agendas in the Learning Packet we were provided, as well as instructions given by Professor Shirene McKay, we arrived at a solution using the PAC-BOY method. Our team met together during class and outside of class in order to provide an adequate amount of time to devise an agreeable solution to our problem.

Through our reflective thinking and collaboration, we have concluded that the best possible solution for the problem of how to keep a clean environment is through a step-by-step process. The first step is to set up an initial meeting where all roommates discuss the issue using appropriate communication skills to avoid any conflicts. During this meeting, they will work together to create a chore chart that they can all agree upon, including consequences and rewards for motivational purposes, and also decide on when weekly meetings will be held. The weekly meetings will be important to ensure the solution is successful. All involved will also be required to sign an agreement in order to hold them accountable for their responsibilities as roommates. The goal is not to single out the messy roommates, but to address the cleaning problem and arrive at a solution that will benefit everyone.

Project Description

For this project, we chose Case Study # 9: Messy Housemates, because we all felt that we could relate to the problem. Our case study is about five people living together in a house/dormitory/apartment with only two people doing their part to keep the place clean. The two who are cleaning are dropping hints to the three who are not cleaning, but they still do not help and the cleaning roommates are becoming resentful toward the three who are neglecting their chores.

To help make the living arrangement less stressful with a better communication climate, the cleaning responsibilities need to be shared. Having a stressful living environment makes everything else in life seem difficult for some people, but others can function well in an untidy area. However, for those who can function well in an untidy area, they may not be able to adjust to nagging and hint dropping from those who are upset about the mess. Finding an agreeable remedy to this problem will benefit everyone.

Methods

To create team spirit in our group, we named ourselves: The Daizy Maids, which is an adapted name of a local cleaning company. We used the PAC-BOY method to solve our problem, which included writing our problem as an open-ended question, analyzing all sides of the problem using reflective thinking, and brainstorming several different criteria to evaluate the best possible solution (McKay).

Our group met outside of class almost every Tuesday and Thursday, usually an hour before class started. For our first meeting, Rebekah J. brought doughnuts and Jared brought hot chocolate, which was much appreciated by all. Eating and drinking delicious food made it more fun to work on our project. We all got along well in our meetings and had a lot of good laughs, especially when we were brainstorming solutions to our problem. Everyone fulfilled his or her role(s) diligently. Megan always typed up the meeting notes; Rebekah J. tried her best to follow up and remind each team member about their tasks and team meetings; Rebeka S. did a great job taking charge in meetings as a team leader and was readily available to ask for help if someone needed it; Jared worked at doing whatever “other” stuff we needed him to do and was a great devil’s advocate as we were hashing out what solution we would propose; and Melissa H. was always more than prepared for meetings and worked quickly and thoroughly at getting the PowerPoint completed. We will describe the steps that our group took to accomplish our purpose in the following pages.

In order to effectively evaluate, discuss, and solve this problem, we held several conference style meetings (Adler and Elmhorst, 312). These meetings took place before and during class. We also kept in touch through email and text messaging outside of class. By dividing this large project into individual tasks and separating the research, we

were able to quickly and effectively tackle this case study. We weighed many options and found that the best solution would be to implement a weekly chore chart and use rewards and consequences for completing or not completing the chores.

Part 1: Problem Question

As a group, we came up with an open-ended question for our problem. We knew if we stated it as a closed question, or implied a solution in the question, our presentation and group discussions would be closed off and we would not have enough information from different angles to find a solution.

Our final question is: “How can we manage house cleaning?”

Part II: Analysis of the Problem

When we read the description of the problem about two roommates doing all the cleaning while becoming embittered towards three others who did not clean, we all immediately imagined it to be a dorm-life situation. However, we also knew that it could be a living situation involving a house, apartment, condominium, etc. There are four women and one man in our group, and we each have different living situations and viewpoints, which gave us a lot of different ideas and experiences to work with while brainstorming.

Roommate issues are tricky to deal with, because when you are rooming with people you often are bound by a contract or circumstance to live with them for months or even years at a time. Handling the cleaning aspect is also difficult when living with others because of the differing opinions of what “clean” is, and because of differing feelings toward the act of cleaning (e.g. some people can function fine with hair in the shower drain and would rather shower forever in ankle-deep water instead of removing it from the drain). We knew that we would have to address the problem with a solution that would be acceptable to differing cultural backgrounds, cleaning method and abilities, ages, and genders.

A. Characteristics

As we analyzed the issue, we were only able to see mostly negative characteristics. We observed that being in an unclean and messy environment causes tension. If one person feels they are putting forth more work and effort into making the place clean, that person may begin to build up feelings of frustration and resentment toward the other roommates. Tension could also be the result of a lack of communication, possibly because of cultural misunderstanding or a language barrier. Arguments will most likely happen because of a lack of good communication, and without a proper solution the buildup of harsh feelings will worsen. Stress is another negative characteristic. Living somewhere that makes you and others around you feel uncomfortable and embarrassed to bring friends over is stressful. Depending on how severe the situation, loss of friendship or even housing would be another negative.

However, we observed that there were also a few positive characteristics. One of which is a chance to bond and feel united with fellow housemates by solving the cleaning situation. If they all work together to keep the area clean, they feel like a team and enjoy the joint victory. The addition of a chore chart and schedule will also add to the sense of teamwork and communal responsibility.

B. History

Almost everyone at one time or another has dealt with a messy roommate, such as a sibling, parents, friends, college roommates, etc. But what has been done in the past to keep the living space clean when dealing with housemates? The first and most common approach to a problem like this is dividing the chores using a chore chart or similar device. Other things that have been tried are chore jars, weekly meetings, paid outside help, and bribery. Sometimes it is helpful to view a roommate situation as a parent-child relationship. Parents often use incentives like candy and toys to encourage their children to do assigned chores. When applied to college students, however, motivation and parental guidance is lacking and the cleanliness of the living environment can suffer. There are many different situations in which this problem can occur, such as when a best friend is the messy roommate, or when two strangers, one of which is sloppy, are assigned to room together.

In some dorm situations there is a landlord or a resident assistant (RA) who checks to make sure that cleaning is being done. There are some cases when a chore chart works for everyone and they all do their work. There are also many cases when there is one lazy person who does nothing and leaves it up to others to clean up. Some people are okay with always cleaning because they like it, but that is rare. In many cases there will be one person who does not chip in, which causes tension between all involved.

In some cases, a chore chart works for everyone and they all do their work, but if it is not enforced or if someone is not on the same page as everyone else, the work might not get done. This issue could cause resentment toward living companions. Living in this type of atmosphere is not healthy for building relationships.

Rebeka Stevens lived in college housing for a year and told us of her situation saying, "Three out of eight girls in our dorm would not do their share of the work. One did absolutely nothing all the time and never made an effort to clean, which was extremely frustrating because we had set up a chore chart. My roommate and I were doing all the work every week because we could not stand how dirty our apartment was getting. We tried talking to her, but she had her opinions and managed to get away with it for a year. The other two were just awful at cleaning up after themselves and would leave dirty dishes in the sink, or something would explode in the microwave and they would leave a gross smelly mess for the next person to clean up. Eventually we set up cleaning meetings, but that only worked for about a month. Living in a dorm was definitely challenging and it led to a lot of fights when people were not chipping in and doing their share of the work."

C. Stakeholders

It would seem unlikely that there would be many people other than the roommates who would be affected by this problem, but surprisingly there are. The mood of one person can greatly influence the mood of others, like parents, teachers, friends, significant others, etc.

Because each person in the house/dormitory/apartment has a network of people he/she is connected to, there really seems to be an endless number of people who could be affected by this cleanliness issue.

D. Policies and Politics

The regulations that will impact our solution will depend on the kind of situation the housemates are living in, i.e. dormitory, apartment, or housing.

Dormitory

- Any complaints can be taken to the RA.
- Some universities/colleges have periodic inspections of dormitories.
- Any violations could result in warnings and/or fines (Yale).

Apartment/House

- Any complaints that cannot be resolved would be taken to the landlord or other property manager.

E. Resources

Rebekah Jackson talked to her mother about what kind of solution would work. Her mother gave her the idea of a chore chart. She also gave the suggestion to move out if you have roommates who are not complying with rules. However, our team concluded that that would be a difficult and extreme thing to do, especially if it was a dormitory.

Online, there were many resources like blogs and websites devoted to student life.

Rebeka S. lived in a college dorm for a year and she had a lot of personal anecdotes that we listened to and gleaned ideas from.

The Communicating at Work textbook contains helpful material relating to our problem. Chapter 2 discusses communication across cultures, which helped us to realize that whatever solution we create for our problem needed to be agreeable to people from different cultures. In chapter 5, conflict management was emphasized and directly relates to our conflict issue between roommates. The textbook illuminated ways to solve problems through avoidance, accommodation, competition, collaboration, compromise,

and negotiation. Because we decided to include weekly/monthly meetings in our solution, the chapter on effective meetings, chapter 9, was also helpful (Adler and Elmhurst).

Part III: Criteria

For the criteria section, we have to consider that everyone involved is going to have different ideas and backgrounds that will affect which criteria can be used. Realizing that we would have to address such diversity made us put a lot more thought into our criteria.

The first three criteria came from our learning packet and we added seven other criteria we felt were important and fair for everyone involved (McKay).

A. Our general goal was to come up with a realistic solution that would satisfy the cultural backgrounds, characteristics, and personalities of each roommate.

B. Specific Criteria:

Our solution will...

1. Apply principles of effective communication that we are learning in our Communication 1010 class
2. Be achievable within a contracted time frame
3. Cost less than 30 dollars
4. Be agreeable to all parties
5. Be respectful to everyone
6. Be considerate of cultural backgrounds
7. Define the goal/give everyone a clear understanding of the goal
8. Support what is best for all involved
9. Consider everyone's ideas of how to keep house clean
10. Encourage motivation toward the goal

Part IV: Brainstorming Possible Solutions

While we brainstormed, we had a lot of fun thinking "out of the box". Someone even suggested a humorous shock collar method of conditioning people to clean. We did not turn any ideas down, we were open to all suggestions and we all participated. Hearing from both genders was interesting; we noticed that boys have different ideas than girls do.

Below are some of the solutions we came up with:

1. Make and agree on a chore chart
2. Plan and attend weekly meetings
3. Enforce consequences when chores are not completed
4. Have incentives

5. Put a list of chores in a jar and when someone breaks a rule they have to draw a chore out of the “chore jar” and complete it
6. Designate someone to inspect the living space weekly or monthly to make sure everyone is doing his/her part
7. Write/sign a cleaning contract
8. Have cleaning parties to make it fun
9. Hire maids/other outside help
10. If it is only guys, a girlfriend comes in to help clean
11. Invite mothers to come and clean
12. Make sure everyone is putting forth effort
13. Zap, Taser, or use a shock collar as a consequence
14. Throw away anything found on the ground once a week as a punishment for leaving it out and an incentive to put away belongings
15. Throw anything on the ground out the window
16. Assign tasks to each roommate
17. Be nice and respectful to everyone so they will be nice and respectful back
18. Have a “heart to heart” talk on why things are not getting done, and what can be fixed to get everyone involved
19. Beat them up/physical punishment

Part V: Solution Analysis

A. Possible Solutions:

- Organize weekly meetings
- Agree on a chore chart
- Have weekly inspections from a designated person
- Work on communication skills to make all situations fair
- Have consequences for work that is not done, and have rewards for work that is finished
- Outside/paid help

B. Chart

We filled out a chart comparing our solutions against the criteria we chose. This chart can be found in Appendix 2. Solutions are listed across the top and criteria along the left. We ranked each solution on a scale of 0-5, with 0 meaning that the solution will not meet the criterion at all, and 5 indicating that it meets the criterion completely. The scores were totaled at the bottom.

C. Final Solution

Effective communication will be a key point for each step of our solution. We concluded that a lack of communication is at the heart of the conflict between the housemates. In order for them to resolve the issues they will need to communicate more effectively. It will be important for the individuals to understand how to communicate across cultural,

gender, generational, and language barriers because these barriers easily cause friction (Adler and Elmhurst 74, 76). Our final solution involves three steps.

The first step is to have a meeting where each roommate will discuss the problem and establish a positive communication climate. It will be helpful to encourage each other to use confirming messages with the use of “I” language and be honest, and avoid using negative messages that are evaluative and might make the other roommates feel defensive (Adler and Elmhurst 128). The goal of the first meeting is to focus on the solution, not the problem. A collaborative approach to resolving the conflict would work best for them because it is important for them to work together to agree on a solution that works best for everyone (Adler and Elmhurst 141). During this meeting, all will collaborate to create a chore chart. There are several options available to them. They can use a rotating chart (Chua), or use a guide to help them create one (Allcot). There are also websites that will create it for them and send them reminders (Get Satisfaction Inc.). They will also establish when the weekly meetings will be held, and conclude the meeting by signing an agreement to hold each of the roommates accountable.

The second step is to execute the chore chart and continue to hold weekly meetings. As time passes, they may realize that they need to reorganize the chores, as well.

The third step involves consequences for not completing assigned tasks and rewards for those who perform well. This will ensure that the plan will be successful in the long-term. It will be important for the roommates to continue to communicate effectively with one another. Communication during the weekly meetings will be the key to a successful solution. If they remember to be open, honest, and respectful to one another and they can learn to communicate with each other, it will decrease the chance for conflict.

D. Possible Negative Consequences

Roommates may not agree on the chore chart. If this occurs, there are alternative solutions to consider, such as paying for a cleaning service (Allen) or other outside help (mothers/girlfriends). There is also a possibility that the solution is only successful for a short time and then fizzles out because of lack of communication, people not doing their chores, or no enforcement of consequences and rewards for chores. It would then be important to have a meeting similar to the first meeting to discuss why the plan is not working and ways that they could improve it.

If the roommates are unable to agree, it may be necessary to bring in a mediator such as a RA who can help solve the problem. If all else fails, someone should move out.

Part VI: Implementation of the Solution

We, “The Daizy Maids”, recommend that the roommates have a meeting to address the cleaning problem. During this meeting, each roommate will be able to vocalize how he/she feels about the cleaning issue and convey what he/she wants to change about it. Also during the meeting, the roommates will collectively brainstorm cleaning

responsibilities to include in a chore chart and determine which task(s) will be assigned to each person.

We recommend that at the end of the first meeting, each member should sign a cleaning contract and agree to attend weekly meetings, which will start a week after the initial meeting.

We recommend that the following meetings will involve talking about how each member is doing with his/her chores and execution of consequences or rewards.

We recommend that if after several weeks the cleaning problem is no longer an issue and people are doing their jobs, they should decide whether to continue having the weekly meetings or to just meet monthly instead.

If an individual is not completing his/her cleaning tasks or is going above and beyond, the group will decide what consequence or reward he/she should receive.

Conclusion

When rooming with other people, cleanliness can become a major issue and can be a difficult task at times. Different cultures have different ideas of what clean is. To one person having their closet on the floor is acceptable and to another it is not. In order to manage the cleaning, a chore chart, good communication skills, and conducting weekly meetings would be helpful. This can be hard to enforce, but with patience, consequences, and rewards, the results will be well worth the effort.

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Appendix 1: The Daizy Maids Team Contract

Class: Comm 1010-12

Semester: Fall 2011

Date Created: October 20, 2011

Team Name: The Daizy Maids

Location and Type: Classroom, Face-to-face

Team Members in Attendance:

Rebeka Stevens

Melissa Hoch

Rebekah Jackson

Megan Reeder

Jared Schutz

Team Norms

Relational Norms

1. Everyone Participates
2. We need to be open-minded to every ones opinions
3. Give honest feedback
4. Encourage one another
5. Try to have fun with the assignment.

Task Norms

1. Everything gets turned in on time
2. Everyone needs to be prepared for each meeting
3. If you know you are going to miss a meeting, email all your information to the group prior to the meeting.
4. Set goals and meet them, stay on task

Consequences of Breaking Norms

1. Fellow members may lower that member's participation score.
2. If a member is late or misses a meeting, they will need to bring food or some tome type of reward for the team the next time we meet.

Team Member Roles

Task Roles:

Leader: Rebeka S.

Power Point Expert: Melissa H.

Scribe: Megan

Editor: Rebekah J.

Information/Opinion giver: Melissa H.

Relational Roles:

Listener: Melissa H.

Compromiser: Rebeka S.
Encourage: Rebekah J.
Tension reliever: Megan
Harmonizer: Jared

Problem Defined as: How can we housemates prevent the resentment that is building up among us over our messy environment?

Problem Analysis Assigned

Characteristics: Jared
Stakeholders: Megan
History: Rebeka S.
Policies and Politics: Melissa
Resources: Rebekah J.
Other: Jared

Appendix 2: Solution Analysis Chart

This chart shows how we evaluated the proposed solutions based on our criteria.

	Weekly Meeting	Chore Charts	Inspections	Communication skills	Paid/outside help	Consequences/punishments
Communication	5	5	5	5	5	5
Achievable in time frame	5	5	5	5	5	5
Less than \$30	5	5	5	5	4	3
Agreeable	3	5	3	5	3	3
Be respectful	5	5	3	5	5	3
Considerate of cultural backgrounds	4	5	4	5	3	3
Clear understanding of the goal	5	5	5	5	5	4
Support what is best for all involved	5	5	4	5	3	3
Consider everyone's ideas on how to keep clean	5	5	4	5	3	5
Encourage motivation towards goal	5	5	5	5	2	5
Total	47	50	43	50	38	39