

Social Media doesn't have to be Isolating: Using CMM theory to make meaning between parents, teenagers, and the group

Caly Meyers, National Louis University

The Coordinated Management of Meaning Theory (CMM) was used as a framework for a communication workshop and group social video project involving teenagers and their parents/adult family members. CMM theory looks at communication as a multi-varied, dynamic process between participants. The focus of this theory is on meaning-making between people, while staying mindful about hidden processes and richness of stories. The workshop was designed with three communication goals in mind: 1) Appreciating the richness of conversation 2) Slowing down a conversation to learn from it 3) Keeping in mind the larger goal of better communication, with an awareness that better communication could be created. Each of these goals was matched with a tool (the Daisy model, the Serpentine model, and a logic model). These models were presented to participants in a communication workshop. Then, members got to test out these models by working on a social video on Vimeo. Social video itself was a communication and meaning-making tool in this project. Together, pairs worked to create a video answering the CMM question, "How can we make a better social world?"

Six participants in Chicago participated as part of a pilot program after the workshop was designed. These three pairs of moms and their son/daughters went through three sessions: The first being a communication workshop, the second being a training on social video and reminder of CMM tools, and the third being presentation of the videos and a discussion on the project.

Through this pilot program, it was found that participants were reporting a difference in how the age groups communicated, with teenagers describing social media as a vital part of their communication while mothers felt frustrated by it—not surprising considering this supports past literature. The participants reported the project was helpful and they reported being more mindful of the other person, not jumping to conclusions, slowing down the conversation, being more patient, listening more, and talking more after going through the workshop. All participants cited the Daisy Model as helpful and one also reported the Serpentine model was helpful in slowing the conversation down.

Other workshops will now be tested (and evaluated with qualitative and quantitative data) in the Chicago community with minor adjustments suggested by the pilot group. Here are three questions for consideration after completing the workshop: 1) Since no participant mentioned the logic model as being helpful, how can we teach the "constructive" communication that CMM values? Is there a tool that we can design so that people keep the final goal in mind, being aware they can create something better? 2) How can we communicate with a teenager that is using ways of communicating that we might not understand or even recognize as communication? 3) What role does power play? How can we get people with more "power" to be open to constructive communication?