Qualifier Question

Leonard Johnson
Ljohnson305@gatech.edu

1 HISTORY

Before I dive into the qualifier question that my mentor proposed, I will need to provide some context. All of my assignments have been focused on providing some type of educational technology to the public safety field. More specifically, to the 911 dispatcher (Telecommunicators) area. My wife has worked in the 911 field for the better part of 20 years and I have witness first hand the lack of educational tools.

1.1 Assignment 3

In my assignment 3 journal section, I had written about my experience after visiting the 911-dispatch center where my wife works. I witnessed several new trainees using handwritten flashcards to learn the police variant of the phonetic alphabet (NATO phonetic alphabet, 2019). This took my research into an area that focused on effective communications not only in the public safety sector but also in the military, aviation, and government.

2 QUALIFIER QUESTION

In assignment three, you referenced S*ymbolic Communication: signifying calls and the police response*. What are the main lessons in Manning's work?

2.1 Peter K. Manning

Peter K. Manning was born in 1940 is an award-winning social scientist and a police scholar. He has authored over 20 books which most of his topics include rationalizing the interplay of private and public policing, crime mapping and analysis, and democratic policing. He is currently in Ireland doing police research for new book on the transformation of policing since the Patten Report (Independent Commission on Policing for Northern Ireland, 2019).

2.2 Signifying calls and the police response

The author, states this book could be seen as the third installment of a trilogy. The first, *Police Work (1977)* and followed up by *Narc's Game (1980).* I have read

neither of these. The book was written at a very high level and if I had to guess, it was targeted for other sociology experts in the field such as himself. The book is a study into organizational communications with a focus on police departments. However, he goes way deep into fields such as message construction, message patterns, communication units, how does the meaning of a message change once it crosses internal technological boundaries. There is a lot of in-depth theory.

2.3 Message processing through different environment

According to Manning (1988) is the focus is always put on communications output such as response times and citizen's satisfaction but very little focus on the internal mechanism that are responsible for this. In chapter two, this is where Manning goes into detail to describe the message process. The rest of Manning's book is interesting but it deals with some items that are beyond the focus of my original research. Items such as the social interactions of two specific police organizations from two different countries. The idiosyncrasies of UK police in public settings versus US police in the same setting.

2.4 The Message

The main lesson in Manning's work is that *messages* can change state between the start state and ending state. While Manning uses the police department setting for his observation and empirical analysis about the message construction and deconstruction – it could be applied to any other arena.

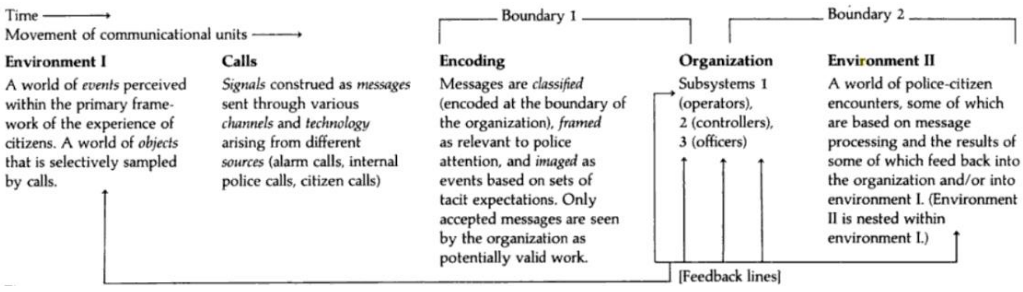

Figure one – Messages flow

The flow chart above shows how Manning breaks down communications into communication units and how they traverse across boundaries. While this sounds a little bit confusing, I will try to explain in a real-world example.

Environment I — A citizen just witnessed her two-year-old son, who was running with scissors, fall down and cut his hand. This traumatic experience by the citizen was considered an *event*. This event has context, a meaning, feelings, importance, and urgency for the citizen.

Calls — The citizen calls 911 and those messages are transferred into electronic signals. This part is the heart of Manning's work. Manning (1988) states, "*Signals* are construed as *messages*," which means that once a message (911 phone call) is made and converted – it changes from its original message.

Boundary 1 - Encoding — Depending on type of call – in our example it was citizen calling, it is *classified* into a predefined framework of importance, and that determines its destination. The boundary in this example is the electronic telecommunications method used to route calls, alarms, texts, etc. The citizen's 911 call is classified into a level of importance by the phone system (our boundary and encoding) and forward to a 911 operator. Another example could be, if a building's fire alarm was activated, those signals and messages would be sent to the fire department.

Organization — This is the entity that handles the messages and was routed by the framework. For instance, the 911 call would go to a 911 operator, a fire alarm would go to the fire station, questions about a call would go to a Police Sgt.

Boundary 2 – Environment II - This is the secondary boundary/environment and is based on the real-world interactions from the results of the organizational sent messages. In the example of our 911 call, this would be the interaction between the Police Department with the mother and medical services with the child.

2.5 My thoughts

The biggest take away from Manning's research was that the simple action of communication of individuals across boundaries (cell, telephone, text, computer, email, and letters) would actually change the contextual meaning, importance, personal feelings of the message. There is little emphasis put on this activity or understanding the complexity of it.

2.6 Wrapping up

The phonetic alphabet was created to provide a clear and safe communications means across radio channels regardless of what language was being spoken. It is

of paramount importance to officer safety that when reporting license plates to dispatcher that it is understood what they are saying. According to Manning (1988), "At the dispatch level the meaning of the message changes as a result of the interface between the controller and the officers."

Witnessing the dispatchers trying to learn the phonetic alphabet through flash-cards sent me to brainstorming. What effective methods could I come up with to help in this endeavor? If message change from boundary to boundary wouldn't it be more effective to learn the phonetic alphabet from a voice-activated system instead of a flashcard.

3 REFERENCES

1. NATO phonetic alphabet. (2019, September 14). Retrieved from https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/NATO_phonetic_alphabet.
2. Manning, P. K. (1988). *Symbolic communication: signifying calls and the police response*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.
3. Independent Commission on Policing for Northern Ireland. (2019, June 26). Retrieved from https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Independent_Commission_on_Policing_for_Northern_Ireland.
4. Manning, P. K. (1997). *Police work: the social organization of policing*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.
5. Manning, P. K. (1980). *The narcsgame: organizational and informational limits on drug law enforcement*. Cambridge, MA: Massachusetts Institute of Technology.