

Conflict Resolution in Schools

Guide for Educators in South Africa

Booklet 4

COMMUNICATION

Topics in this booklet:

- Effective communication in conflict resolution
- Two class exercises



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Booklet 4 - Communication

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Notes

Communication

Background

Communication is the process of transmission of information. It is a form of social interaction where at least two parties send and receive information using a common set of signs and rules.

Between parties, communication content includes acts that declare knowledge and experiences, give advice and instructions, and ask questions.

There are many different areas of communication, including non-verbal communication, verbal communication and symbolic communication.

Verbal communication is when we communicate our message verbally to the recipient of the message. We speak to others directly, or through a communications medium (such as the telephone).

Non-verbal communication includes gestures, sign language, facial expressions and body language. Much of the 'emotional meaning' we take from other people is found in their facial expressions and tone of voice while comparatively little is taken from what the person actually says. See diagram below.

Symbolic communications are the things that we have given meaning to and that represent a certain idea we have in place, for example, the South African flag is a symbol that represents our country.

Effective Communication

The purpose of communication is to get your message across to others clearly and unambiguously. Communication is only successful when both the sender and the receiver understand the same information as a result of the communication. This involves effort from both the sender of the message and the receiver. It is a process that can



be fraught with error, with messages often misinterpreted by the receiver. When this is not detected (by effective feedback), it can cause confusion and opportunities may be missed because of it.

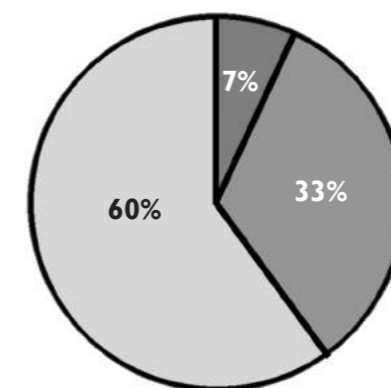
Body language is a vital component in effective communication. In fact, only a small percentage of impact is derived from the words used. (see diagram).

Communication skills, including written and oral presentations, as well as an ability to work with others, are the main factors contributing to job success.

The Communication Process

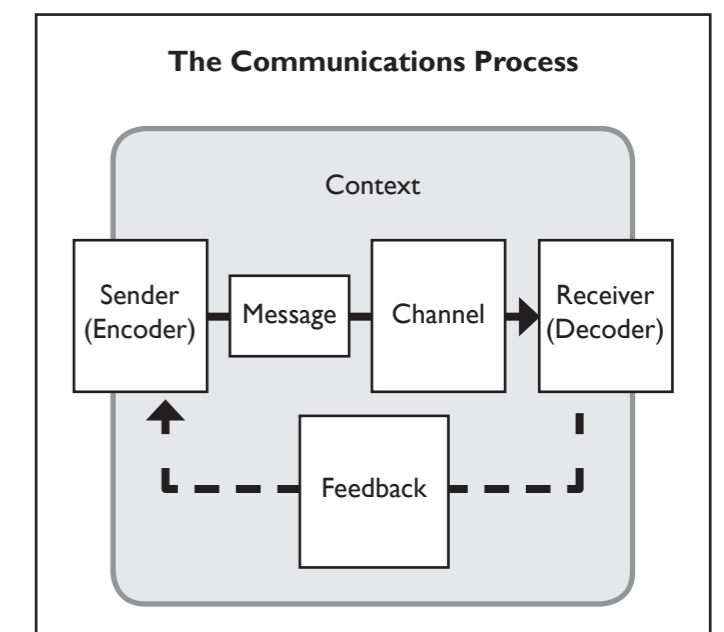
In a simplistic model, information is sent from a sender (encoder) to a receiver (decoder). However, a more complete model of the communication process has a number of stages: sender, message, channel, receiver, feedback and context. See the diagram below.

Problems with communication can creep in at each stage of this process, creating misunderstandings. Each stage of the process needs to be considered in order to be an effective communicator.



Approximately:

- 7% depends on words used
- 33% on voice and intonation
- 60% on body language



Sender:

Consider the audience and the context of the message, as well as the subject. The message must be appropriate to its target audience.

Message:

Written, oral and non-verbal communications can affect the message. Use of poor verbal and body language can also confuse the message. Its length, tone, style, method of organisation, argumentation used, intellectual and emotional components are all important, as well as the truth and validity of its content.

Channel:

Messages can be sent through a number of channels e.g. face-to-face contact, by telephone, e-mail or letter. The channel chosen has to be appropriate. For example, it always causes outrage when a boyfriend or girlfriend decides to finish a relationship by e-mail or SMS!

Receiver:

Each receiver has their own ideas, feelings, culture and past experiences that will influence their perception of the communication process. Keep the receiver in mind when you assess the impact of your message.

Feedback:

The receiver will provide feedback to the message. This could be verbal or non-verbal. Close attention to feedback is necessary to good communication.

Context:

This is the situation in which your message is delivered. This may be at work, school or in the family. Each context has its



own culture and appropriate way of doing things. The context also includes past history that shapes the background of the communication.

Perception

Perception also comes into this process (see Booklet 3). Our personal filters, assumptions, judgments, and beliefs can distort what we hear. The sender perceives the message (and the context and situation) in terms of their own world view. So does the receiver, because they relate their own personal understanding to their own past experiences. Feedback is important to clarify individual perceptions.

Voice and Communication

Below are some useful tips on verbal communication:

Voice projection:

It is important to speak clearly and project your voice. Vary your voice and speak with enthusiasm and conviction. Don't talk too quickly, or too slowly, and don't talk in a monotone.

Language:

Avoid the use of abbreviations, jargon, technical or complex language. Simple, expressive speech is more effective.

Humour:

Humour is generally good and helps to increase interest and build rapport, but ensure that it is used appropriately.

Statistics:

The use of statistics or figures can be effective if they are used sparingly and for impact (did you know that one in five South Africans has...). But beware, too many statistics can be boring!

Respect:

Be aware of any cultural differences, foreign pronunciation, names, dialects, regional accents etc. Respect the viewpoints and experiences of others. People are often offended by derogatory remarks relating to race, religion, gender, age or colour.

Body Language

As can be seen above, body language forms an important part of effective communication. Here are some tips:

Eye Contact:

Helps to build up a relationship. Switch eye contact between people when talking to a group. Use a friendly facial expression to acknowledge people you pass - and smile!

Overt body language and mannerisms:

Have an open posture and gestures. Don't be rigid, but don't fidget or gesticulate too much. Be relaxed and confident.

have to translate the drawing into verbal communication. Often verbal communication is not precise enough to make the meaning clear. People have to think deeply in order to make verbal communication clear to another person. Then the first volunteer has to not only listen carefully, but also to translate the words into meaning. But their meaning may not be the same as that intended! When we listen, we automatically relate the message we receive to things that we are familiar with (according to our own experience). That is: we try to bring things into our own scope of understanding.

The person speaking often misses out important information because they take it for granted.

The person listening often fails to listen properly – jumping to conclusions based on their own preconceptions.

The learners could have improved their drawing by more effective communication – the drawer thinking and formulating their speech more accurately, the listener by more active listening, and both by more cross-checking and feedback. Also, more non-verbal communication could have helped (gestures, sign language, facial expressions etc.).

Conflict often arises because of poor communication. Misunderstandings arise, and people jump to conclusions. If the situation is not checked, it can spiral out of control, with one misunderstanding leading to another.

Effective communication is needed to resolve conflicts: it is vital to ensure that each party's understanding of the conflict is clarified and understood, so common ground can be found.

Learner Worksheet

Not applicable

**Further Resources:****Websites:****Wikipedia Encyclopaedia**

<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Communication>

Mindtools:

<http://www.mindtools.com/CommSkill/-CommunicationIntro.htm>

<http://www.mindtools.com/CommSkill/-ActiveListening.htm>

<http://www.colorado.edu/conflict/peace/treatment/-activel.htm>

Publications:**Active Listening**

Title: Managing Conflict - With Confidence (Primary and Secondary), Australia.

Authors: Clare Heaton & Maureen Lynch.

Publisher: Pearson Longman 2003
ISBN 01-74091-059-1

Class exercise:

Drawing Game

Objectives

To help learners to understand that:

- People see the world differently and it is often difficult to explain your world view to others
- Effective communication is more difficult than imagined, and is a two-way process
- Effective communication is needed to resolve conflicts: it is vital to ensure that each party's understanding of the conflict is clarified and understood, so common ground can be found

Age/level

Age 10 and above

Duration

Twenty minutes

Materials

- * Two flip charts, or a flip chart and a blackboard.
- * Chalk or marker pen



Procedure

Ask for two learners to volunteer to demonstrate an exercise to the class. Ask for volunteers that enjoy drawing and talking!

Now ask one volunteer to sit with their back to the class, right at the front of the classroom. Place the other volunteer behind them, with a flip chart and marker pen. The first volunteer must not be able to see what is being drawn on this flip chart (or the learner drawing).

Now ask the volunteer with the flip chart to draw a simple picture of either an ideal place to be, or a nightmarish place to be. Nobody should talk during this process.

When the drawing has been finished, the educator should place it where the main body of the class can all see it clearly. The drawing must not be visible to the first volunteer.

Now, the second volunteer (who drew the picture) must talk the first volunteer through the drawing, to try and help them to reproduce the picture without actually seeing it.

The second volunteer must try to explain clearly to the first volunteer all aspects of their picture and the first volunteer should try to reproduce this on the other flip chart (or the blackboard). The first volunteer should ask questions whenever the instructions are unclear. The flip chart they are using must also be visible to the learners.

The aim is for the two learners to communicate as effectively as possible in order to help the first learner to draw a picture that matches the original drawing as closely as possible. Other learners are not allowed to help!

When both pictures have been finished, put them side by side to compare the results.

Ask the class how similar they are.

Ask the volunteers how difficult the exercise was.

What were the main problems?

Discuss with the volunteers and then widen the discussion to include the whole class.

See below for 'Issues to Explore' in the discussion.

Issues to Explore

See the background information on communication (the background information on perception may also be useful).

The communication processes involved in the drawing game were: observation, perception, encoding (into speech), transmission and reception, decoding and perception (the listener making sense of what they are hearing). It is a long process with many stages at which error (or misunderstanding) can creep in.

For the second volunteer, it is difficult to explain clearly the detail of their own picture. This is because they are familiar with the scene that they have imagined and then drawn, and so they tend to leave out important details. Then they



Stance:

Stand upright, in a relaxed manner. Place your feet comfortably apart, and arms hanging loosely by your side (when not in use).

Facial expression:

Smile at those you are talking to (when appropriate). Convey cheerful warmth.

Spatial distance:

Try to get close to those you are talking to, but not so close as to crowd them.

Silence:

Don't be afraid of pausing. Some space and time is sometimes needed for the person you are with to think and reflect.

Active Listening

People speak at a rate of 100 to 175 words per minute (WPM), but they can listen intelligently at 600 to 800 words per minute. Since only a part of our mind is paying attention, it is easy to let our mind drift - thinking about other things while listening to someone.

People often do not listen attentively, but are distracted and half-listening, half thinking about something else. We are often preoccupied with our own half of the communication, for example, preparing our own reply, when we should be listening. We assume that we know what the other person is saying and means, because we relate this to our own preconceptions. The cure for this is active listening.

Active listening is a style of listening that gives your full attention to the other person, and eliminates distractions. The listener focuses attention on the speaker and then repeats, in their own words, what they think the speaker has said. This enables the speaker to find out whether the

listener has really understood. If the listener did not, the speaker can explain in another way, until their meaning is clear. This improves mutual understanding.

Non-verbal behaviour can be used to raise the channel of inter-personal communication. Non-verbal communication includes facial expressions like smiles, gestures, eye contact, and even posture. This shows the person you are communicating with that you are indeed listening actively and will prompt further communications while keeping costly, time-consuming misunderstandings to a minimum.

Useful tools that can be used in active listening are summarising (to affirm understanding), non-threatening questions (to build understanding and dialogue) and reflection (to demonstrate interest).

Other tips for active listening include: -

- Use appropriate eye contact;
- Lean forward and look interested;
- Use encouraging contact words (e.g. 'I see' or 'Shame') or nod agreement;
- Do not fiddle, look bored or look at your watch;
- Do not interrupt, change the subject or bring in your own viewpoints;
- Do not introduce empathy-blockers (see below).

Empathy-blockers are ways in which the listener reacts that can indicate to the speaker that they are not empathetic (sharing their feelings), and thereby stop them from continuing. They include:

Fixing the problem ("What we'll do is...")

Criticising ("Oh you always do...")

Reassuring ("Don't worry everything will be OK")

Moralising ("You really should try to...")

Class exercise:

Brick Wall

Objectives

To help learners to understand that:

- Effective communication is a two-way process;
- Good listening is an important part of effective communication.

Age/level

Appropriate for ages 8 and above

Duration

Twenty to thirty minutes

Materials

- Lists of scenarios (see below)
- Cardboard 'brick wall' (or drawing)

Procedure

Begin by explaining to the learners that when they are talking and somebody interrupts or blocks them, it is as if a large 'brick wall' has come between them. This is just the opposite of active listening.

Ask for three learners as volunteers to role play in the front of the class.

The first (Learner A) will read the part noted 'A' below, one question at a time while trying to talk to their fellow learner (Learner B).

Learner B will read the responses to Learner A. They are 'brick-walling'.

The third learner will play the wall. Each time Learner B reads his or her 'brick wall' response, the third learner puts the brick wall in between the first two.

After each scenario, ask Learner A how it made them feel when Learner B used that particular brick-wall response.

Did it help them to talk about their point of view? In a conflict, what effect would it have? Throw open the questions to the class when the play-actors cannot answer, or get them to add to an incomplete answer.

The educator can explain to the learners the type of brick-wall response being used (noted on the educator notes below). At face value, some seem more acceptable than others, but none provide the open and respectful response needed for effective communication.

Review the communication process for learners. Discuss the fact that the message was not getting to the recipient at all in this game. Also, note that there was absolutely no feedback. There may as well have been a real brick wall between the two learners.

Discuss the importance of active listening and feedback in the communication process.

Discuss how lack of effective listening can affect conflicts.

Issues to Explore

See the background information on communication (this includes the communication process).

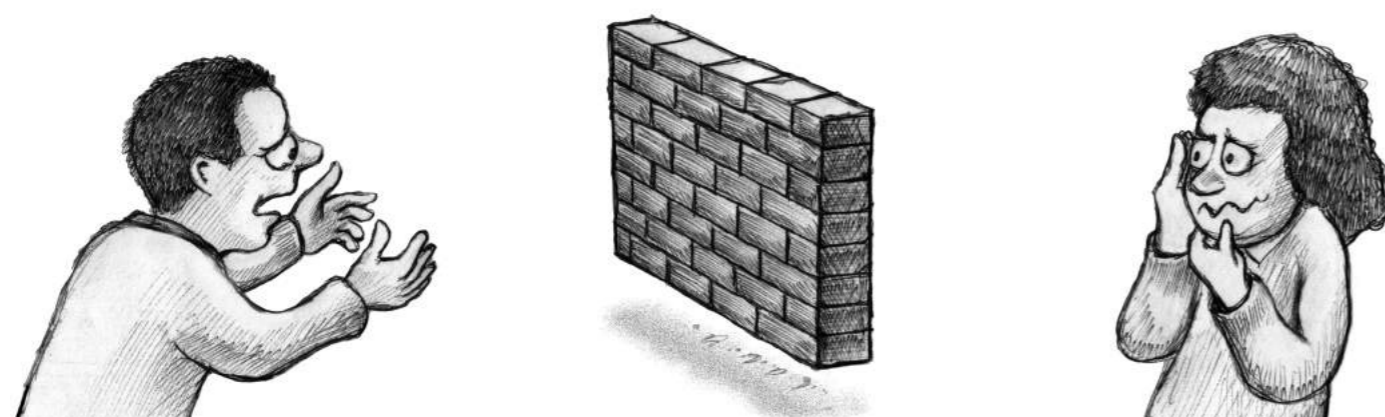
Effective communication is a two-way process, one person providing information, another asking questions and both cross-checking to ensure a common understanding.

It is important that the listener reacts in a way that encourages the speaker to continue speaking, being open and receptive. This involves creating an atmosphere of trust, respect, empathy and understanding.

Care has to be taken to avoid the use of empathy-blockers. Some of the 'brick wall' behaviours are empathy-blockers.

Conflict often arises because of poor communication. Misunderstandings arise and people jump to conclusions. Resentment can arise if parties feel they are not being listened to or interpreted correctly. If the situation is not checked, it can spiral out of control, with one misunderstanding leading to another.

Effective communication is needed to resolve conflicts: it is vital to ensure that each party's understanding of the conflict is clarified and understood so that common ground can be found. Conflict resolution can be aided if each party involved feels that they have been listened to, and understood.



Learner Worksheets

Role-play sheets are necessary for the educator, Learner A and Learner B. See below.

Learner A (Speaking)

For each session, learner A has to say:

"I am feeling really bad about the fight we had."

This will be repeated 16 times (Learner B will give 16 different responses)

Learner B (Responding)

1. 'You'll be fine, don't worry about it'
2. 'My Dad's bought a new car'
3. 'Did you hear that Joshua and Martin had a really big fight?'
4. 'There is nothing to talk about'
5. 'Go away. I've had enough of you'
6. 'Oh you always feel bad about everything, you wimp'
7. 'You're a moron'
8. 'Me too, but I always feel worse than you'
9. 'Well, you shouldn't have started it then'
10. 'Do you realise what you did wrong? You didn't wait your turn'
11. 'You should get help. You're a psycho'
12. 'If you do it again, I'm going to have a go at you'
13. 'You get over there and do as I say'
14. 'You're only feeling bad because you got into trouble'
15. 'Why do you feel like that? Do you fight with everybody? Did you do this at your last school?'
16. 'You did the right thing to come to me to say sorry'

Educator

(Use the following to explain the type of 'brick-wall' and Learner B's response to Learner A saying "I am feeling really bad about the fight we had").

1. Reassuring
'You'll be fine, don't worry about it'
2. Diverting
'My Dad's bought a new car'

3. Distracting
'Did you hear that Joshua and Martin had a really big fight?'
4. Refusing to co-operate
'There is nothing to talk about'
5. Rejecting
'Go away. I've had enough of you'
6. Put down
'Oh you always feel bad about everything, you wimp'
7. Name calling
'You're a moron'
8. Me too
'Me too, but I always feel worse than you'
9. 'Shoulding'
'Well, you shouldn't have started it then'
10. Persuading with logic
'Do you realise what you did wrong? You didn't wait your turn'
11. Insulting
'You should get help. You're a psycho'
12. Threatening
'If you do it again, I'm going to have a go at you'
13. Bossing
'You get over there and do as I say'
14. Interpreting
'You're only feeling bad because you got into trouble'
15. Probing
'Why do you feel like that? Do you fight with everybody? Did you do this at your last school?'
16. Patronising
'You did the right thing to come to me to say sorry.'