

Communication

Verbal and non-verbal communication

Verbal:

Transferring information with words

Non-verbal:

- The way the words are said: strength, tempo, rhythm, pausing, tone of voice etc.
- Body language: facial expression, gestures, eye movements and glances, posture, place in the room, laughter, cry, sweating, blushing, dilatation/constriction of pupils etc.
- Outer appearance: hair, clothes, jewellery/accessories etc.

The own body language is often something one is not self-conscious of, yet it has great impact on how a message is received.

One-way communication and two-way communication

In one-way communication the sender delivers his message to a passive receiver, who doesn't have the possibility to ask for clarifications, more information, whether he understood the message correctly etc. The sender also doesn't know whether the message was received, and if it was whether it was understood and will lead to action in the intended way.

One-way communication can be the preferred model when:

- time and speed is more important than precision and accuracy
- the task is simple, based on routine and one that the receiver is well familiar with
- the situation doesn't allow time or possibility for questions or clarifications

In a two-way communication situation the receiver can check the message with the sender, and thus an opportunity for interaction is opened. This increases the chances that sender and receiver will have understood each other better.

Two-way communication is always a superior means to tell new and complicated things, solve problems etc.

Furthermore one-way communication often decreases the will to work, motivation, work satisfaction and effectiveness.

Conflict resolution

Conflicting ideas and/or interests and goals. Unless a leader/group deals with the issue at an early stage it risks becoming an obstruction to the work and progress of the group, instead of the source of inspiration for constructive development it could become.

Establish good communication between the conflicting parties, at an as low as possible stress level. Intelligent and constructive solutions are more likely to be identified at a low stress level. This is

also where one can determine whether the conflict is caused by faulty communication or by something else.

The peaceful resolution of a conflict is often dependent on two factors:

1. how much one values achieving the goal
2. how much one values having good relations to one's counterpart

Sometimes *avoiding confrontation* might be the right thing to do, in order for the parties to be able to calm down.

When time is lacking (e.g. in an emergency) *forcing your way* could be a way of moving forward.

For the same reason, or for future collaboration's sake, *submission* might be an easy alternative.

Compromise is a "middle-way" alternative, that sometimes appear as the optimal solution in a situation of time constraint; both parties are equally unsatisfied, but feel at the same time that they have gained something important.

None of these methods will permanently solve the conflict, though. This will mean that future collaboration between the parties might be disturbed by this partially unresolved matter. The one method that could lead to an actual resolution of the conflict would be to reach a *consensus*, meaning that both parties work together to achieve a mutually satisfactory solution.

Obstacles in the strive for consensus might be:

- Refusal to realise that the other can have good reasons for his interpretation of facts.
- Refusal to realise that the other might have other and better sources of information to base opinions on.
- Rude or aggressive behaviour against the other – leading to a "*fight or flight*" situation making rational reasoning and sound judgement difficult.
- Intentional attempts to hurt, put the blame on or morally condemn the other, or otherwise act in a destructive manner (hate, threat, mockery, revenge).

Consensus can easiest be achieved if one:

- listens attentively and really tries to understand
- is respectful and considerate towards the other through words and body language
- shows a will to compromise
- allows the other to have his say

Feed-back

One important communication tool in order to prevent conflicts from arising, or to help resolve them when needed, is **effective feed-back**. Giving and receiving effective feed-back is often difficult for both the giver and receiver. Feed-back is often most effective if it has been solicited or if it has been made a natural and agreed-upon part of the interaction process.

Feed-back...

...is descriptive rather than judgmental (use "I" messages to describe what you feel and have observed)

...is both positive and negative (use the *PNP*, or "*sandwich*", *approach*: positive, negative, positive)

...is specific rather than general

...takes into account the needs of both the receiver and the giver

...is directed at behaviour which the receiver can do something about

...is solicited rather than imposed

...is checked to insure clear communication

...is directed primarily at a person's performance or behaviour rather than at the person himself (use examples)

...is most useful when given immediately after work has been completed or behaviour has been exhibited

Furthermore, make sure to:

- **create a safe environment** for the feed-back process (the right time and place, be open, agree to disagree, focus on problem-solving)
- **articulate common goals and objectives**
- use **non-threatening language**
- use **transitional statements** such as "at the same time", "in addition" and "furthermore" rather than "but" or "however"
- **don't monologue**, give the receiver a chance to respond
- use **appropriate body language**
- strive for a **mutually satisfactory outcome** (summarise what has been agreed to, agree to meet again to discuss progress if necessary)