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Communication and working relationships in sport and fitness



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Introduction and guidance

Introduction and guidance

This free badged course, *Communication and working relationships in sport and fitness*, lasts 24 hours, with 8 'sessions'. You can work through the course at your own pace, so if you have more time one week there is no problem with pushing on to complete a further study session. The eight sessions are linked to ensure a logical flow through the course. They are:

1. The purposes of communication
2. Impact and getting your message across
3. Effective communication enhancing relationships
4. Connecting with others
5. Becoming more influential
6. When does harsh feedback become bullying?
7. Power and its impact on the communication process
8. Topical aspects of communication.

The course will boost your ability to vary your communication approach according to the situation and the needs of the people involved. You will accelerate your learning by placing yourself in other's shoes during vivid video examples. These film clips show effective and ineffective communication in action, including spoken and non-verbal behaviour. You will examine a range of communication practices which will help you to build rapport and to deal better with a range of situations, including written communication.

There will be numerous opportunities to check your learning. This includes interactive quizzes, of which Sessions 4 and 8 will provide you with an opportunity to earn a badge to demonstrate your new skills. You can read more on how to study the course and about badges in the next sections.

After completing this course, you will be able to:

- recognise the importance of effective communication in the sector in benefitting sport and fitness participants' experiences
- evaluate your own communication skills
- demonstrate an awareness of being able to build and sustain working relationships
- use observational skills and new knowledge to interpret work interactions and relationships.

Moving around the course

In the 'Summary' at the end of each session, you will find a link to the next session. If at any time you want to return to the start of the course, click on 'Full course description'. From here you can navigate to any part of the course.

It's also good practice, if you access a link from within a course page (including links to the quizzes), to open it in a new window or tab. That way you can easily return to where you've come from without having to use the back button on your browser.

What is a badged course?

While studying *Communication and working relationships in sport and fitness* you have the option to work towards gaining a digital badge.

Badged courses are a key part of The Open University's mission *to promote the educational wellbeing of the community*. The courses also provide another way of helping you to progress from informal to formal learning.

Completing a course will require about 24 hours of study time. However, you can study the course at any time and at a pace to suit you.

Badged courses are available on The Open University's OpenLearn website and do not cost anything to study. They differ from Open University courses because you do not receive support from a tutor, but you do get useful feedback from the interactive quizzes.

What is a badge?

Digital badges are a new way of demonstrating online that you have gained a skill. Colleges and universities are working with employers and other organisations to develop open badges that help learners gain recognition for their skills, and support employers to identify the right candidate for a job.

Badges demonstrate your work and achievement on the course. You can share your achievement with friends, family and employers, and on social media. Badges are a great motivation, helping you to reach the end of the course. Gaining a badge often boosts confidence in the skills and abilities that underpin successful study. So, completing this course could encourage you to think about taking other courses.



How to get a badge

Getting a badge is straightforward! Here's what you have to do:

- read each session of the course
- score 50% or more in the two badge quizzes in Session 4 and Session 8.

For all the quizzes, you can have three attempts at most of the questions (for true or false type questions you usually only get one attempt). If you get the answer right first time you will get more marks than for a correct answer the second or third time. Therefore, please be aware that for the two badge quizzes it is possible to get all the questions right but not score 50% and be eligible for the badge on that attempt. If one of your answers is incorrect you will often receive helpful feedback and suggestions about how to work out the correct answer.

For the badge quizzes, if you're not successful in getting 50% the first time, after 24 hours you can attempt the whole quiz, and come back as many times as you like.

We hope that as many people as possible will gain an Open University badge – so you should see getting a badge as an opportunity to reflect on what you have learned rather than as a test.

If you need more guidance on getting a badge and what you can do with it, take a look at the OpenLearn FAQs. When you gain your badge you will receive an email to notify you and you will be able to view and manage all your badges in My OpenLearn within 24 hours of completing the criteria to gain a badge.

Get started with Session 1.

Acknowledgements

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Session 1: What are the purposes of communication?

Introduction

All through your life you continually change how you speak and what you speak about. Each situation you find yourself in demands a slightly different method of communication from you. You can probably think of situations when your communication has faltered and scenarios which result in misunderstanding. You either adapt by seeking expert help – for instance, special training is sometimes available to prepare you for public speaking or similar tasks – or, more likely, you reflect and learn from experience. Over time you develop differing degrees of awareness of how to respond appropriately in different situations. The opening two sessions of this course will accelerate your learning from experience.



Figure 1 Communication is key.

In this first session of the course, you will be introduced to the purpose of small talk and non-verbal communication. However, you'll begin to develop your understanding of the purpose of communication exchanges by going in at the deep end. First, you will watch an example of communication under intense pressure in motor racing.

By the end of this session, you should be able to:

- explain the different purposes of communication, whether that be small talk or the main part of any dialogue
- identify how communication goes beyond words and consists of how you say them with non-verbal elements such as gestures, facial expressions and eye contact
- appreciate that we can't always hide our innermost feelings.

The Open University would really appreciate you taking a few minutes of your time to tell us about yourself and your expectations of the course. Your input will help to improve the online learning experience. If you would like to help, and if you haven't already done so, please fill in this optional survey.

This course is supported and strongly recommended by UK Coaching. Whether you're just starting out or have been coaching for years you will learn new skills and demonstrate that you have been proactive in your professoinal development.

1 Life and death communication in motor racing

In this first activity, you will watch a lively extract concerning life and death decisions during a motor racing pit-stop.



Figure 2 Communication in the pit-stop can be crucial.

Activity 1 Chris Hoy's motor racing pit-stop

Allow about 20 minutes

When multiple Olympic cycling champion Sir Chris Hoy retired, he took up motor racing and went to the Le Mans 24-hour race to compete. Watch the video of Chris Hoy's motor racing pit-stop but **please be warned that there is some swearing in this clip** so carefully choose where you watch it so as not to cause offence to others. In addition to Chris Hoy who is driving, there are two other main people interacting: the race engineer (coordinating radio communications) and the team principal leading the pit-crew. Using examples from this video make notes on the following questions:

1. How does the competition situation influence the purpose of the communication and the tone that is used?
2. How are relationships strengthened or threatened through this exchange?

Video content is not available in this format.



Restrict yourself to **20 minutes** for this activity. It would be easy to spend hours on it with a very in-depth analysis; instead restrict your time, give your initial responses to the two questions and then read the Discussion to reinforce your learning.

Discussion

1. This is a very high-pressure situation requiring fast decisions and communication during competition: a race track pit-stop needs to be quick. Their communication has an **information function** (e.g. 'replace all four tyres') and/or an **interpersonal function** in developing confidence and/or trust and rapport. Analysis of individual interactions when taken out of this intense competition context should recognise the needs of this demanding environment.

   There are numerous examples of ambiguous communication or too much information or messages dominated by anger; this often makes these messages less effective. For instance, at one point Hoy has to say 'can you please stop talking, I'm going to have to come in …' as he fears for his safety.

   The first successful piece of **interpersonal** communication occurs when Chris Hoy (CH) comes into the pit-stop when his confidence has been threatened:

   > CH: 'I'm sorry about that, that's so annoying …' [i.e. an apology to the team]
   >
   > Race engineer: 'What's done is done, we can't change it, lets concentrate and we go again' [supportive and positive]
   >
   > CH: 'copied' [I have received the message].

2. In terms of relationships being strengthened or threatened, you might have noticed some of the following examples. Throughout the exchanges tensions run quite high and the team leader's anger could harm the relationship with his race engineer and team colleagues. One outburst appeared ego-centred and

perhaps unusual, e.g. ‘F*** him [i.e. the race engineer], I know what I’m talking about’.

The penultimate exchange between team leader (TL) and race engineer (RE), however, demonstrates listening to each other in the heat of the situation and the working relationship being maintained:

TL: ‘Are you going to tell him [Chris Hoy] that these [tyres] are cold?’

RE: ‘Will do once you’re done’.

After the pit-stop it is noticeable how the race engineer attempts to build rapport and confidence with Chris by asking ‘OK Chris, how are you feeling, everything OK?’

Although we all communicate every day, this video and research into the topic demonstrate that communication and working relationships are a complex set of social skills and behaviours (e.g. Bowes and Jones, 2006). However, here in this course, it is broken down into parts – thereby making it easier to study – and you will revisit this video in Session 2 to make further sense of it.

Right now, at the beginning of this course, you should consider to what extent you use small talk when you catch up with someone. Is small talk pointless chit-chat or a social lubricant?

2 What is the point of small talk?

The technical name for small talk is phatic communication; for example, ‘Hi, you OK?’ or a comment about the weather. Questions or comments such as these are not meant to elicit detailed responses but they do serve a social purpose.

Activity 2 What is the purpose of phatic talk?

Allow about 20 minutes

Listen to a linguist, academic and psychotherapist discussing phatic talk. The audio starts with psychotherapist and writer Philippa Perry describing phatic talk as ‘mundane information that has been exchanged between two people … ’ What do you think is the purpose of the phatic talk in different sport and fitness settings?

Audio content is not available in this format.

Discussion

In the audio, they describe phatic talk as ritualised and a process that helps establish a relationship or a transition before the more detailed conversation starts. They describe it as establishing goodwill, collaboration and cohesion, provided those interacting reciprocate (join in) the dialogue. If they choose not to respond, this could be interpreted as being unfriendly or even hostile. In sport and fitness the topics that are chosen to be discussed are selected in order to make mutual agreement almost guaranteed, such as ‘what did you think of the match/game/event at the weekend?’ or ‘how are your family?’

Phatic openings are invaluable means of establishing relations before getting down to the real purpose of the encounter.

3 More than words

Speech and phatic talk is enhanced through features such as the pace, volume, rhythm and intonation of speech (known as paralinguistic features). These, in turn, can shape meaning.

Activity 3 Phatic talk in action: Lauren's tennis coaching

Allow about 10 minutes

Watch this video of Lauren greeting a young tennis player.

As you watch the video, look out for how much mutual collaboration (contributions from both parties) and reciprocation (returning or mirroring the contribution) there is in the phatic talk.

Video content is not available in this format.



Discussion

The young tennis player instigates the interaction by smiling and asking 'how are you?' and this is mirrored by Lauren. Lauren gestures to the seat as a friendly invitation to sit down, hinting at her authority over him. Their conversation is up and running and Lauren asks him about how his week has been, his day at school and if he has been watching Wimbledon. The comment on the hot weather is safe ground they can easily agree on. Young people soon learn the ritual of these phatic openings even if they don't appreciate the purpose. The dialogue established, Lauren marks that the exchange is moving to a more instructional stage with 'brilliant … good … so', before explaining the focus of the training session.

You probably already appreciate some aspects of what we term **non-verbal communication**, but the next section will give you insight into its significance in building relationships and/or sustaining others' motivation.

4 Non-verbal communication in action

You may think that facial expressions – smiles, laughs, frowns – convey the way the speaker feels at that moment. You are indeed *partly* in control of feelings – or you can be, with practice. You may not be able to control your innermost emotions, but you are able to partly control the way you exhibit them; an important part of behaviour in working life.

Non-verbal communication includes several other features, such as gesture, proximity and eye contact. You will briefly examine each in turn in a moment.

Activity 4 Introducing non-verbal communication

Allow about 15 minutes

Watch the TED talk 'Your body language may shape who you are', in which Amy Cuddy explores the importance of non-verbal communication. Watch from 1 minute up until 3 minutes 27 seconds. As you watch, look out for:

1. Research examples that explain how long it takes for reasonably accurate first impressions to form?
2. How does the speaker use her hands and gestures in her talk? How much does it help or hinder her communication?

Discussion

1. Research suggests that it took between 1 second in one study (based on appearance) and 30 seconds in another (based on interactions with the sound turned down) for people to make rapid judgements or impressions that were fairly reliable.
2. She uses her hands to accentuate the rhythm of her speech and give extra emphasis to some words with more vigorous movements. There were also moments when she pointed inwardly to herself, indicating 'me/I' or reached outwardly to 'you', the audience. These inward/outward gestures enhanced her communication and are worth thinking about for your own use with groups.

In fact, evidence suggests that you can't entirely hide your innermost emotions: our faces leak information (Yan et al., 2013). The following video clip explains how numerous micro-expressions can involuntarily flicker across your face in 1/25th of a second.

Video content is not available in this format.



5 Gestures

Gestures, as you have just seen in the TED talk example in Activity 4, are actions made with the head or the hands.



Figure 3 Heads, hands and eyes can convey a great deal.

Activity 5 What do your head or hands say?

Allow about 15 minutes

Observe a number of face-to-face conversations between two people without being overly intrusive. Considering the shifting roles of speaker and listener, who mainly uses head gestures and who mainly uses hand gestures?

Discussion

Hand gestures are normally reserved for the speaker. The listener is normally restricted to a head gesture, such as nodding, which is important since it is able to signal to the speaker that the listener is understanding what is being said. Nodding is a sign of active listening, and it provides encouragement to the speaker and is important for the success of an interaction.

The topic of hand gestures is too large to discuss here. However, we can say that they can be either helpful for emphasis or, in contrast, overused and a distraction. Sometimes – as in the case of pointing at someone – they can even be seen as overbearing.

6 Proximity

Proximity concerns the distance people stand (or indeed sit) from each other in given situations. Anthropologist Edward Hall introduced the concept in 1969; he recognised four basic degrees of intimate, personal, social and public space.

Activity 6 What is your personal space limit?

Allow about 10 minutes

Watch up until 2 minutes 45 seconds of the following video in which a comedian tests Hall's four degrees of space with members of the public. This clip is not a scientific experiment but its purpose is to stimulate you to reflect on the following question: in a sport or fitness workplace, might proximity considerations be different in any way – if so, how?

View at: youtube:sgJ24hknbHs

Discussion

While a coach or instructor whose proximity was too distant might be perceived as uncaring, at the other end of the scale legitimate touching and manipulation of adult athletes into the appropriate position might be appropriate if there is consent (Kerr et al, 2015). For example, it would be common practice to ask 'is it OK if I move you into position?' or similar.

The following information on the NSPCC website offers guidelines for how physical contact between adults and children in sport can take place appropriately and safely.

7 Eye contact

The role of eye contact (its presence or absence) in face-to-face interaction is crucial. Eye contact during a neutral conversation lasts just a couple of seconds at a time.

Eye contact behaviour varies slightly in groups. If you are addressing a meeting, or coaching a team, eye contact can be vital for imparting a sense of inclusion, and also for holding attention. The speaker often ensures that everybody receives a share of the gaze.

Experienced coaches will know that prolonged eye contact in certain group situations can fulfil other functions, such as giving specific emphasis to part of a group.

You will have an opportunity to apply your initial learning to the communication exchanges in Chris Hoy's motor racing pit stop video at the start of Session 2, delving a bit deeper into what was said in speech and non-verbal communication. Non-verbal communication is a form of feedback between those in a conversation and therefore interpreted by people and thus they respond accordingly. The following observation is from an Open University student:

> I find Skype really difficult as I find the conversation cues difficult to read because there is no eye contact – in fact, I would far rather use face-to-face or phone.

8 This session’s quiz

Check what you’ve learned this session by taking the end-of-session quiz.

Session 1 practice quiz

Open the quiz in a new window or tab then come back here when you’ve finished.

9 Summary

The main learning points from this first session are:

- Communication often serves two purposes: conveying information and/or an interpersonal function. The interpersonal function relates to developing confidence, trust, rapport or alternatively more negative signals towards others.
- Phatic talk openings to dialogue are important in establishing goodwill, collaboration and cohesion between people.
- Communication involves not only the words you use, but also the accompanying paralinguistic features such as pace, volume, rhythm and intonation of speech, all of which add to meaning.
- Non-verbal communication features include gestures, proximity and eye contact that contribute to effective communication.
- Hand gestures are often used by speakers to accentuate the rhythm of their speech and give emphasis to certain words. They can also be used to point inwardly to magnify the first person (i.e. ‘me’, ‘I’, or ‘personally’) or outwardly to those listening (i.e. ‘you’).
- Head gestures are often used by listeners in a dialogue to show they are listening.
- You can partly control the feelings you exhibit but hiding your innermost emotions can be hard: our faces leak information as numerous micro-expressions involuntarily flicker across our face.

In the next session, you will explore how to get your message across effectively with particular reference to how your written messages can have most impact. Communication is also about the impressions you give to others when interacting with them: how does the persona you convey have an influence on your communication?

You can now go to Session 2.

References

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Audio-visual

Activity 1: Video: extract from: Chris Hoy 220 mph at Le Mans BBC Two last on 29 Oct 2016 © BBC 2016

Activity 2: audio: extract from: BBC Radio 4 Word of Mouth- Small Talk © BBC (2016)

Activity 4: Video: extract from: The Human Body episode 3 Emotions © BBC 2 last on Nov 2017 © BBC (2017)

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Session 2: Impact and getting your message across

Introduction

You will start this session by applying your learning to the motor racing video from Session 1. Then you will move on to explore two key questions. The first is what makes spoken and written messages effective? Clearly, this is connected to getting your message across in an optimal way, so you will discover how your written messages can have most impact, and you'll use the example of email as a communication channel since it illustrates characteristics that are also used in business and social media writing.

The second question you will respond to in this session is about the impressions you give to others when interacting with them: how does the persona you convey during interactions influence your communication? This is about how others might perceive you, even though they might not know you that well. For instance, it's likely that you already have an impression of Chris Hoy and this would influence how you communicated with him.

By the end of this session, you should be able to:

- use observational skills to interpret work interactions and relationships
- understand how the structure, sequencing and tone of messages, whether in writing or in speech, are a key feature of how clear and concise they are
- recognise how the way in which you create impressions in your communication has an impact on how others respond to you.

Before moving on, watch the following video featuring award-winning journalist Sue Mott and Open University academic and former Olympic coach Ben Oakley.

Video content is not available in this format.



1 Applying your learning: communication in motor racing

Before addressing the main questions in this session, you will use this opportunity to consolidate your learning and insights from Session 1 by revisiting the earlier motor racing film featuring Chris Hoy.

Activity 1 Revisit the earlier motor racing film

Allow about 30 minutes

Watch the video again. Please remember that this clip contains some swearing.

Video content is not available in this format.



This time, identify:

1. two examples of non-verbal communication in the film
2. why the race engineer uses paralinguistic features (i.e. pace, volume, rhythm and emphasis) in his radio communication to convey messages
3. what you think team members' impressions are of their team principal.

Discussion

1. One example of non-verbal communication is during the disagreement about the number of tyres to be fitted. The race engineer uses considerable hand gestures even while using the radio. At one point he uses a one-handed stop sign as the team principal says, 'Just put one … [you stop].' It appears that the listener, the team principal, can't see the gestures. This demonstrates how non-verbal communication is deeply integrated into language. When their

conversation heightens to open disagreement he ends the exchange without words: he uses a dismissive overhead throw-away movement.

The other example is when the team principal speaks with the pit-crew afterwards in which his hand gestures reinforce his frustration and he also points inwardly to himself to reinforce his 'I know what I'm talking about' message.

2. The race engineer tries to remain calm, speaking clearly and slowly to his colleagues on the radio: an important characteristic needed in his role in supporting the driver. He places emphasis on certain words, in italics, for effect, e.g. 'soft tyres to the car *immediately*' and 'OK Chris, how are *you* feeling, is everything OK?' This highlights in the first example the urgency and in the second the personal care in his relationship and support of Chris.
3. It is likely that the team members describe their team principal as being passionate, or similar, and that this sometimes is expressed as frustration or anger when mistakes occur. You could describe him as being confident in his own judgement: he often refers to his knowledge of motor racing. It is likely that outside this pressure environment he behaves very differently.

The videos that you will watch through this course feature speech and non-verbal communication. But what about communicating in writing: how is it different to speech?

2 To speak or write?

The major difference when writing compared to speaking is that usually you have the advantage of being able to prepare and draft your text.



Figure 1 Distinct differences between speech and writing.

Often, speech or writing will suit a particular message more than another depending on the context. For example, a coach may give verbal feedback to an athlete and then follow this up with electronic written communication. Sometimes writing is used as a more formal way of recording an exchange, particularly in management situations.

But whatever the communication channel, how do we help make our messages effective?

3 Developing an effective message

Effective messages are often characterised by being concise, with points made in a well-organised sequence – this clarifies their meaning. Workplace communication can use a range of media, such as telephone, Skype, WhatsApp and email. The next activity uses the example of email because it is a widely used form of business communication. However, the main focus here is on message structure rather than the media used.



Figure 2 Effective messages have similar characteristics whatever the channel used.

Activity 2 How would you improve this message?

Allow about 20 minutes

Read the following example of an email message from Mary, a strength and conditioning coach. She is writing about Jessica, a talented athlete working in an apprenticeship role in an organisation. The purpose of Mary's message is to alert the apprenticeship coordinator, Shamela, to the athlete needing some space in her timetable.

Mary's email

Hi Shamela

I've been working with Jessica on her free weight lifts and the problem is that she has poor range of movement, so she is not very good at getting into the catch position. She wants to do it properly, but she's not going to make progress until she can sort out her flexibility. I don't want to push her too hard until she has this. I've spoken to the physio last Monday and he has spoken to Jessica. The physio says that they can help Jessica, but Jessica hasn't been available to put in the extra time for the sessions with her since her current work schedule does not allow this. As we've talked about before, Jessica getting this technique correct is important to her so she can lift enough weight to have an impact on her power when running, without increasing the risk of injury. She can do the other gym work well. So could you free up some of Jessica's time so that she can put the effort in?

Thanks

Mary

(adapted from Kyndt and Rowell, 2012)

1. Overall, how do you think the message could be improved in terms of organisation, conciseness and/or clarity?
2. Note down the words that express matters negatively or positively – does the message convey an optimistic, constructive approach?

Discussion

1. Overall, the message is poor. It is not that clear because it meanders around following Mary's thoughts – it is disorganised and does not follow a logical, concise sequence. It comes across as passing on a problem that Shamela has to address.
2. There is a dominance of phrases such as 'the problem', 'not very good' and 'not going to make progress,' which give a downbeat impression and are not concise. Positive and constructive language is more likely to help build a stronger working relationship with the people reading a message.

This activity raises the question: how do we organise messages to be clear?

4 Structuring messages

A useful four-stage structure for developing written or spoken messages is: Situation, Target, Proposal, Courtesy (STPC). This is described in Figure 3.

Interactive content is not available in this format.

Figure 3 A four-stage structure for developing effective messages (adapted from Kyndt and Rowell (2012)).

Activity 3 Start using STPC in Mary's email

Allow about 10 minutes

Some of the text from Mary's email has been written in a more positive fashion, so now you need to arrange the sentences into a STPC structure. Click on each extract and drag it to the space where you think it belongs. You will be given feedback as you place the words and phrases.

Interactive content is not available in this format.

Discussion

You may have noticed that paying attention to the structure of a message such as this, and taking account of supporting your relationship with the recipient, is important in developing clarity and trust. In this case the proposed action is framed as a suggestion and gives the recipient, Shamela, some choice as to how to proceed. Also notice how the message begins and ends in an upbeat, positive tone.

Communicative features such as the clarity, positive tone and courtesy of this email strongly contribute to how the recipient will perceive the sender. A lot depends on the purpose of the written communication and in some cases a more directive message may be appropriate. However, in all messages you are creating an impression of yourself and as you will see these are important in on-going dialogue.

5 On show: work as a performance

The impressions you give to other people, whether communicating in speech or writing, strongly influence how others respond to us and can influence working relationships. A prominent author in coaching, Robyn Jones, has written an honest account of his semi-professional coaching while also managing shyness and frustration, stemming from a speech impediment. For him trying to coach seemed to be inviting ridicule and loss of 'face' (Jones, 2006). He therefore describes his coaching work as a type of performance.



Figure 4 What face are you wearing?

The following activity uses an extract from his explanation of coaching work as a performance and asks you to think about how you plan your communication.

Activity 4 Performance and managing impressions

Allow about 25 minutes

Read through the following short extract from Jones's (2006) article.

> **Portraying coaching as a 'performance'**
>
> This article presents an … account of myself as coach of a semi professional football … team … The purpose is to tell a different, perhaps a 'truer,' story about coaches and coaching ... . Principal among these is a portrayal of coaching … as a performance aimed at managing the impressions of others. … The front constructed relates to convincing athletes that the coach is confident, expert, in total command of events, sure of his or her judgment and, hence, is to be unquestioningly respected. It is a performance to be nurtured and protected at all costs. The case … is made that coaching relies less on the mechanics of how or what to coach and more on who is coaching, their perceptions of how coaches ought to act, and the relationships they have with those being coached…
>
> … More specific[ally], …[coaching] involve[s] attempts to hide weaknesses and to portray the person we would like to be.
>
> Goffman's (1959, 1969) work on personal 'front', 'impression management', and 'presentation of the self' examines notions inherently linked with social dealings, fulfilling others' expectations and manipulating self-image, it serves as a useful … signpost to … my story …
>
> (Jones, 2006, p. 1017)

Then consider the following questions:

1. To what extent do you agree/disagree that the coaching/instruction role is a 'performance', and why?
2. How do you plan your communication to 'manage the impressions you give to others'?

Discussion

1. Many observers of working relations would agree that coaching work is a form of performance in which, to a certain extent, you 'click' into a coaching or working role character. This is because the more extrovert aspects of your personality have to be emphasised, and the ability to smile and laugh, often with complete strangers and often when you don't feel like doing so, is important. Conveying attributes such as enthusiasm, authority, openness and insight often requires the adoption of a front, particularly if the work situation has been repeated many times before (e.g. a gym induction). However, someone working with people needs the necessary insight to be able to work out what is expected and to interact in the appropriate way. With this in mind self-confidence, prior preparation and role-related knowledge all contribute.

   A learner on a previous OU course observed: 'I think it is also about using your personality to convince participants you are genuinely trying to help and support them. It throws up the question, is it better to be led by a competent person you don't believe in, or by a less competent person you do believe in [i.e. who puts on a better performance]? If I'm honest I'd favour someone I believed in.'
2. Managing impressions can take many forms; here are five examples that we came up with. The **way you dress** is often a starting point for how others perceive you. Then there is the impression of **how well organised and prepared** you are and **how you react to unexpected events** – planning ahead and the ability to draw on experience in order to deal with new situations perhaps becomes easier as you get older. We felt that **honesty** is an aspect of managing impressions because participants easily sense if someone doesn't know what they are talking about. We also felt that **body language** can betray your best intentions; your non-verbal language often gives a stronger impression than words.

6 This session’s quiz

Check what you’ve learned this session by taking the end-of-session quiz.

Session 2 practice quiz

Open the quiz in a new window or tab then come back here when you’ve finished.

7 Summary

The main learning points from this session are:

- Being positive in communication exchanges is more likely to lead to effective outcomes.
- Structuring a message appropriately using Situation, Target, Proposal and Courtesy is more likely to lead to clear and concise messages.
- Whatever the channel (speech or written communication), it is essential to consider the impact of the impressions you convey on others you communicate with. You have started to consider how you might plan for communication 'performance' in different situations.
- Being aware of how and why you create impressions and the impact they might have is part of understanding yourself and your effective communication.

In the next session, you will identify how workplace trust and rapport is developed in one-to-one communication. By observing those working in a hospital you will start to understand in more detail what is meant by person-centred communication.

You can now go to Session 3.

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Session 3: How can effective communication enhance relationships?

Introduction

The aim of this session is to illustrate communication's role in building working relationships based on respect and trust. You will explore a number of ideas that help you understand the one-to-one communication process which is important in developing your workplace trust and rapport.

One of the first activities is to see what you can learn from those working in a hospital. Medical staff need to work with numerous different people to support therapeutic relationships. They sometimes speak about needing to be patient-centred, just as we in sport and fitness also talk of person-, customer- or athlete-centred working. This session focuses on understanding what is meant by person-centred communication. You will discover that part of being person-centred is how well you listen to others and enhance working relationships.

By the end of this session, you should be able to:

- demonstrate an awareness of your abilities to build and sustain working relationships
- describe the three main elements of a person-centred approach in which communication is authentic, non-judgemental and empathetic
- explain how you can use the various skills of active listening to help build sound working relationships.

1 Applying your learning: learning from medical staff

In 2016, the BBC were permitted to film in St Mary's hospital in London to capture the day-to-day interactions of medical practitioners. The way they interact with each other and the public is illuminating for people working in sport and fitness.



Figure 1 Communication in hospitals needs to be excellent.

Activity 1 Learning from medical staff

Allow about 30 minutes

There are two clips in this video-related activity, which focus on sustaining relationships in a busy hospital. The first clip is the morning teleconference update, focusing on bed space in the hospital; the second is a preparatory meeting of a surgeon and their patient who is having a surgery to treat cancer.

There is a question for each clip:

Clip 1 (teleconference): To what extent is Lesley's (Hospital Site Director) informal teleconferencing tone appropriate to sustaining working relationships?

Clip 2 (surgeon and patient): How successfully does Dr George Reese convey that he is patient-centred?

Video content is not available in this format.
Clip 1



Video content is not available in this format.
Clip 2



Discussion

She uses an informal manner (e.g. ‘the gang at Charing Cross’; ‘you guys’). However, informal does not mean ineffective in sustaining relationships; the meeting is conducted briskly and the essential information is communicated. For example, notice how she closes the meeting by using the words ‘our focus’ to

describe the immediate tasks ahead. The reminder of the time of the next meeting demonstrates clear task-related communication.

Dr Reese demonstrates his patient-centred approach by sitting at the same eye level as his patient; he smiles and updates his patient as to why there is a delay. He re-assures by saying ‘as soon as I know, you’ll know’ in relation to bed availability. He asks if his patient has any questions and remains unruffled when the issue of car parking costs is raised by the patient’s friend; he politely re-focuses the conversation.

By using this medical example you will be able to begin to make sense of how you and others maintain and perhaps build you own working relationships.

2 Assessing your skills

Spoken communication is a particularly important part of working in sport and fitness. Some of this will be formal (e.g. an appraisal or session debrief), while some will be quite informal (e.g. chatting with participants).

In Session 2, Activity 4 you explored the impressions we can give to other people, and your performance is a part of this. In the next activity you will think about various aspects of your communication practices.

Activity 2 Self-evaluation of your communication skills

Allow about 15–30 minutes

The purpose of this self-evaluation activity is to raise awareness of your own style of communication and to encourage you to seek feedback from others. Complete the following self-evaluation questionnaire 1 (personal use).

If possible, pass this second questionnaire 2 to two people you trust to give open and honest feedback of how they perceive your communication. Ed Cope, who works for the Football Association, explains why:

> a limitation of self-reflection is that it is restricted to our level of knowledge. Ultimately, we only know what we know and so if we are not conscious of something then we cannot reflect on it. So, this is where receiving feedback from others is so vital.
>
> (Cope, 2018)

It is really worthwhile seeking what others think; you are strongly encouraged to use this opportunity to review your own skills.

Discussion

Both your responses, and those of any colleagues who filled in the questionnaire, will help set the scene for the remainder of this course as you become more aware of the various factors that go into effective communication. By receiving feedback from others and/or reflecting on how your communication is viewed, it may help you to enhance your self-awareness and to consider aspects that could be improved.

3 The person-centred approach

The term a ‘person/learner/athlete-centred approach’ often features in discussions about interpersonal communication because of its positive effect on motivation. The approach takes the other perspective into account through a collaborative process. It rejects the idea that people should try to gain authority over others and instead proposes a shared power model. The idea is that an individual is likely to be more motivated and empowered if they are involved in making their own decisions. Therefore it is viewed as helping encourage more engaged and motivated collaboration in communication.



Figure 2 Heads work better together when there is respect and trust.

The term was developed by psychologist Carl Rogers. The **person-centred approach** maintains that three aspects need to be present to create a climate conducive to openness – congruence, unconditional positive regard and empathy (Nelson et al., 2014).

You will now consider these three aspects.

4 Exploring what person-centred means

In this section and the next you will unpick what is meant by person-centred and apply it to contemporary sport and fitness.

Look at Figure 3 and explore your understanding of what is meant by congruence, unconditional positive regard, and empathy by clicking on each heading . You will see there is an additional explanatory video under the empathy heading. Take time to carefully read through these descriptions and watch the video: these points are the central part of this session.

Interactive content is not available in this format.



Figure 3 The three aspects of a person-centred approach.

A transcript for the video in the ‘Empathy’ tab is available: Transcript for empathy video.

These three aspects are useful to look out for the next time you are observing communication exchanges. In particular the way in which your authentic self might be revealed by showing **some** of your genuine feelings where you believe it might benefit communication and/or learning (e.g. living emotions such as enthusiasm, anger or sympathy). There is an outline of an example of responding to a sport and fitness scenario in a person-centred way in the next section.

5 How would you react?

In this activity, you will consider how you might react to the situation using one aspect of the person-centred approach.

Activity 4 Being non-judgemental

Allow about 5 minutes

Jack, a physical activity worker is chatting with Norma, a shy and overweight newcomer who has just joined his group. Norma reveals that she eats six packets of crisps a day. Jack is quite shocked by this.

Consider how you would react to such information in your own sport or fitness environment if a newcomer made such a revelation. What might be an appropriate response?

Discussion

A non-judgemental response may be ‘OK, so when during the day do you eat crisps?’, while a judgemental response may be ‘Six packets!’, said with a shocked facial expression. To respond to Norma in a non-judgemental manner is likely to build trust and encourage her to feel confident about revealing more information to Jack.

Perhaps as well as being non-judgemental, an element of empathy is useful in trying to understand and reflect back what you have heard in order to make the other person feel understood. These and other skills will be explored when you consider active listening in the next section.

6 Active listening: more than paying attention

The skill of active listening is a key part of helping create genuine two-way communication: it is far more than just paying attention.



Figure 4 Careful focus helps decode messages and non-verbal clues.

This series of three back-to-back sections will explain the detail of active listening. In the first activity, some leading practitioners describe what it is. The second and third sections show an example of poor and then excellent listening in action.

Activity 5 The Professor, Samaritan and sport negotiator

Allow about 15 minutes

Go to The Why Factor: listening and listen from 03:11 ('there is research that indicates …') to 06:15. In this clip, an American Professor of psychology, a volunteer for the Samaritans (a UK charity that provides support for people in distress) and another American academic (a sport business negotiator) describe active listening. How does what they say apply to sport and fitness environments?

Discussion

The Samaritans volunteer gave the clearest summary when she talks about asking open 'what/why?' style questions, summarising what the other person has said and reflecting this back to them. This is combined with empathy and recognising that sometimes, silence can be useful. These might all be used to facilitating conversations in sport since they provide true interpersonal interaction rather than a leader or coach being on broadcast mode, i.e. conveying *their* information.

The sport negotiator viewed empathy as a particularly important aspect of active listening in his work during negotiations or conflict resolution. This is partly about trying to understand and learn as much as possible about the other person's perspective and demonstrating that that view is being heard and understood correctly. In sport, being able to demonstrate to others that their view has been understood can be particularly important when dealing with conflict. There are many other useful insights in this programme which we recommend you listen to in full or use as a resource with others.

7 What makes someone a poor listener?

This activity shows an example of some embarrassingly poor listening, the characteristics of which may be familiar. Later, you will see the same scenario re-imagined with far better listening skills evident.

Activity 6 The bad listener

Allow about 10 minutes

Watch this example of a bad listener who is meant to be acting in a supportive career-mentoring role.

Video content is not available in this format.



Pay attention to what it is that characterises him as being so poor at this skill. Here are some prompt words that may help you identify aspects of his listening behaviour: self, interpretation, opinion.

Think about your own experiences of not being listened to properly: what goes through your mind?

Discussion

The male participant refers to his own agenda and gives the impression the conversation is partly about his own ego. He also offers interpretation of what the other person is saying and promptly offers his own opinion in a way that has little regard for person-centred mentoring and the feelings of the other person.

The type of thoughts that you might have experienced could include:

- frustration
- a dent to your confidence
- a decrease in any respect you hold for the other person

- perhaps a need to re-state any ideas you were expressing.

An alternative approach, as in this video, is to maintain a polite silence.

It would be very interesting to ask the male in this video and his colleagues to complete the self-evaluation questionnaire from Activity 2. The difficulty of people with egocentric characteristics is that they are poor at reading how others perceive them.

8 A better experience of listening?

A better experience of the same scenario plays out in the next video. This is an opportunity to see how the situation has a completely different complexion largely caused by the listener reflecting back what they have heard and allowing the other person to determine where the conversation goes.

Watch the film now.

Video content is not available in this format.



Workplace interactions like this, in which there is a genuine attempt to listen to and support colleagues, are the basis for authentic relationships in the workplace.

A summary of the key aspects of active listening appears in Figure 5 below. Click on each heading to reveal the summaries.

Interactive content is not available in this format.

Figure 5 A summary of the three main elements of active listening

Notice how minimal verbal encouragement is referred to in this summary and it is the role of this conversational encouragements that you will explore in the next session.

9 This session’s quiz

Check what you’ve learned this session by taking the end-of-session quiz.

Session 3 practice quiz

Open the quiz in a new window or tab then come back here when you’ve finished.

10 Summary

The main learning points from this session are:

- Building effective working relationships is more likely if the principles of a person-centred approach are used in which communication is authentic, non-judgemental and empathetic.
- Authenticity is viewed as the way in which you might show some of your feelings and, where appropriate, choose to share these feelings if you believe it might benefit communication and/or learning.
- Empathy is seen as a significant skill in effective communication, and one that needs practice.
- The skill of active listening can be summarised as:
    - attentive body language (non-verbal communication) that uses appropriate posture, gestures, eye-contact and facial expressions to show engagement
    - following skills that allow the speaker to talk in their own way with verbal encouragement and infrequent questions and silences, as appropriate
    - reflective skills in any dialogue that restate feelings or message content and summarise main issues.

In the next session, you will continue to explore how your communication contributes to connecting with people you work with. This ranges from subtle verbal and non-verbal signals that encourage dialogue, to giving away a little personal information about yourself to help build rapport an trust. This is all a delicate balancing act and you will also identify what can get in the way of relationships: you will explore something called your ‘unconscious bias’.

You can now go to Session 4.

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Video

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Session 4: What helps in connecting with others?

Introduction

Connecting with people you work with, whether they be colleagues or participants, means being able to build a bond that stimulates their interest and engagement.

Much of what you have already covered so far helps build a work connection and in this session you will build on this by exploring three further aspects that support working relationships. The first you will look at is the use of subtle verbal and non-verbal signals that encourage dialogue to continue. The second is how your initial impressions of people are often influenced by something called ‘unconscious bias’; you will explore the implications of this. Finally, in building relationships, it can help to reveal or disclose personal information about yourself – this can be a delicate balancing act for different personalities and situations.

By the end of this session, you should be able to:

- understand the important role you play in keeping a conversation going and encouraging others to want to contribute
- appreciate how we often hold pre-conception of others based on first impressions and these can be a barrier to effective communication and collaboration
- recognise that, in appropriate situations, giving away some personal information about yourself can help build stronger working relationships.

Watch this video, in which Sue Mott and Ben Oakley introduce the session further.

Video content is not available in this format.



1 Applying your learning: learning from doctors

You start by dropping into St Mary's Hospital in London, where four exhausted doctors discuss whose operation should proceed.

Activity 1 Doctors meet about their operations

Allow about 15 minutes

A bit of background is needed for this short clip. Consultant Simon Ashworth (seated in his office) controls the Intensive Care (IC) bed spaces, which are needed by other doctors for their patients recovering from operations. He has one bed remaining and two doctors, George Hannah and Richard Gibbs (he remains largely silent), who need the IC bed confirmed for their operation to proceed.

Watch the clip: how does Ashworth's communication approach maintain his professional relationship?

Video content is not available in this format.



Discussion

The consultant Ashworth remains calm and tries to explain his underlying values of patient safety that are driving his decision making. Three times he tries to explain the risks of proceeding with George's six-hour operation as potentially compromising any slack in the ICU bed availability for unforeseen emergencies, e.g. a car crash. He also attempts to show empathy and understanding for George's situation of cancelling an operation for the second time by saying 'you know, I understand the logistics of that are difficult …'. Addressing people with their first names and maintaining eye contact to help show that he is closely attending to their messages and trying to connect with them in difficult circumstances. Also notice that at one point, all four people allow a silence of about 3 seconds while they think. Often, such

> silences can be filled unnecessarily by people feeling uncomfortable and talking. Silence can provide useful space in conversations to reflect on the most appropriate action.

Two of the main lessons from this are first, how those involved maintain a calm consistency in their communication making effective dialogue easier. Second, Ashworth shows good listening skills, including use of empathy and courtesy.

2 Minimal encouragers in conversations

Imagine if, when the four doctors were talking, that Ashworth did not acknowledge or respond to what they were saying? Alternatively, imagine you talking and those opposite you show completely blank faces and motionless bodies.

There is a very important role played by words and sounds such as ‘mm’, ‘yeah’ or ‘OK’ as encouragement in active listening. It signals for the other person to continue. By giving signals of comprehension and agreement non-verbally and/or verbally, you are using what are known as **minimal encouragers**.



Figure 1 Who looks like they have encouragement to talk next?

Providing your colleagues or strangers with small verbal and physical signals to feel more comfortable helps to smooth the flow of the conversation. The trouble is we often forget to do it.

3 What else matters in brief encounters?

In your busy working life, you come across many people. However, for new relationships and key people you are working with how else can you create connections to them beyond using minimal encouragers? In this next activity a national coach and academic (Jones, 2009) tells a brief yet powerful story of what he learned from a short encounter with a newcomer to his group.

Activity 2 A coach's story: the smiling gallery

Allow about 20 minutes

Read the following first-hand account from Jones (2009) of an early morning walk down a sports centre corridor dressed in an official tracksuit with his two assistants Jon and Rich, during which he encounters a newcomer to the group he would meet later that day. Jones is head coach of the national age-group squad of young footballers and he admits to feeling 'respected, important, good … here, my thoughts and words matter'.

What is the main message you take from this story? Look out for at least three words used in the story that help to describe its main message.

> The talk turns to the boys … It's a light-hearted chat, sprinkled with sarcasm at a few of the players' seeming lack of ability demonstrated in the first tentative session last night. I mumble an agreement …
>
> A boy comes towards us. His face is familiar, although his name eludes me. He immediately averts his gaze … He's one of the youngest in the squad …
>
> The 'word' on him is that his technique and passing are good, but that he's not aggressive or assertive when under pressure.
>
> I'm suddenly aware that the boy is close. He moves a little to his left allowing this group of betters to pass without having to break stride …
>
> As we pass, the boy unexpectedly looks up … I glance at him. He holds my eyes, long enough to make a connection; a look which beseeches recognition, interaction, any kind of acknowledgement. He smiles nervously, hopefully, needfully.
>
> My mind is elsewhere; I look at him but don't see him. Consequently, I don't even nod my head; not even an instinctive, superficial gesture. His smile vanishes. The moment slips by.
>
> My stride becomes less purposeful as I begin to confront the poverty of my action … I should have said something to him, at least have acknowledged him; shouldn't I? I scan my mental coaching manual for the answer and … seemingly rigid girders of 'good practice' guidelines [and models] … faithfully regurgitated.
>
> I think of the image I purposefully cultivate at these gatherings; knowing, confident, …, enjoying the status and power that the role provides. Is that how I'm supposed to be?
>
> … back to the boy … I watch him … His talent needs care. … it needs my care. I call out his name, 'Hey, Pritch!' As he turns, I gesture … I meet him half-way. As we do so, I greet him and smile. His eyes beam. We chat informally about his background, his school and his club. His initial shyness begins to thaw. His

> hesitant, staccato replies, ‘yes thanks’, ‘not really’, ‘hope so’, slowly give way to more confident sharing; … it turns out we have some acquaintances in common, from which he obviously draws great reassurance. I learn a little more about his brother … and his sister.
>
> …. I give him some additional constructive feedback … His gratitude is obvious; not for the advice but for the encounter, the encouragement, the recognition, the smile. I glance at my watch … We part, he smiles again …
>
> (Jones, 2009)

Discussion

It is likely that you have experienced similar self-doubt in social situations such as this. Perhaps you’ve witnessed a situation when little attention was given to a person: recognition in itself can often be valuable in building rapport, connection and belonging in a strange new environment. Jones (2009) calls this seeing or noticing others. The main words used that were highlighted by previous readers are: care, recognition, acknowledgement, encouragement, smile, chat and reassurance. You were not expected to list all these!

After this encounter, Jones recalls that later he tells the assembled group of boys ‘that they can trust me, that I can see them and that, if they have the confidence to try to show me their best, they too can perhaps join the smiling gallery [the team photos on the walls of the building]’.

The importance of a small behaviour of stopping, smiling and chatting to a relative newcomer and, if possible, remembering their name conveys that you care and are encouraging of their place among the work team. Small behaviours can demonstrate that you have made a genuine effort to connect with another person.

Perhaps you already find yourself noticing others, nodding, smiling and using encouraging words. If so, then there is a good chance that your communication skills are well developed.

4 How does unconscious bias affect relationships?

You have seen how relationships can be built. Apart from shyness what are the barriers that often prevent us from building workplace relationships with others? You might think it is just about active listening and behaviour. However, what you think about another person also has subtle effects. This is particularly so in the initial impressions that form when you first meet new sport and fitness colleagues, athletes, participants or parents. For example, in the smiling gallery story, the early 'word' on Pritch before anyone had spoken to him was that he was shy and not aggressive or assertive enough.

The false expectation we often initially have of people, using the limited information we have at the time, is known as unconscious bias and if we are honest with ourselves, we all hold some degree of bias about others. These biases often affect the way we connect with others during our initial interactions with them.

Activity 3 Exploring first impressions and unconscious bias

Allow about 15 minutes

Business psychologists Binna Kandoler and Nic Sale explain this as an entirely natural process in this insightful short video.

1. After watching this, identify what type of unconscious bias you may hold in sport and fitness activity or the workplace. You will not be asked to reveal these to others.
2. What is the salutary closing advice given when meeting or interviewing people to help override any bias you may hold?

Discussion

1. It is very useful for you to know and recognise your own biases. For example, in sport an initial impression that body piercings characterise a certain personality trait might exist, e.g. extroverted, creative or aggressive tendencies. Kandoler and Sale explained how the first four minutes of a job interview are often used to reinforce a first impression of a person, with the remaining time spent looking for evidence to confirm the first impressions were correct, known as **confirmation bias**. We also reject information that does not confirm our biases – first impressions can be difficult to overcome. Any bias is particularly influential when recruiting staff or identifying sporting talent.
2. The video suggests that deliberately and consciously recognising your bias and putting it to one side can then open up the potential to objectively identify evidence for what a person is really like beyond your initial expectations.

The main thing with bias is to be able to recognise it. In Session 8, you will see that confirmation bias can be particularly evident in our use of social media.

A further point to raise here is that we tend to be drawn to and develop rapport with people similar to ourselves and so have a natural preference for these people. This can affect the

relationships we form with people, so knowledge of this is helpful to try and overcome biases in early interactions.

5 How much of yourself should you reveal?

Sharing personal information can often help to enhance communication and relationships. For example, in The Smiling Gallery story (Activity 2) coach Jones deliberately finds out more about Pritch's brother and sisters. Sharing aspects of ourselves encourages authenticity and honesty in communication (Rogers, 1980).

Other people have explained common-sense ideas of relationships developing over time through a process of self-disclosure (Bylund et al., 2012). This process is commonly described using an onion metaphor, to suggest the levels, or layers, of self-disclosure (see Figure 2). Often, only the outer surface layer is seen by others, as that is the identity we are comfortable presenting.

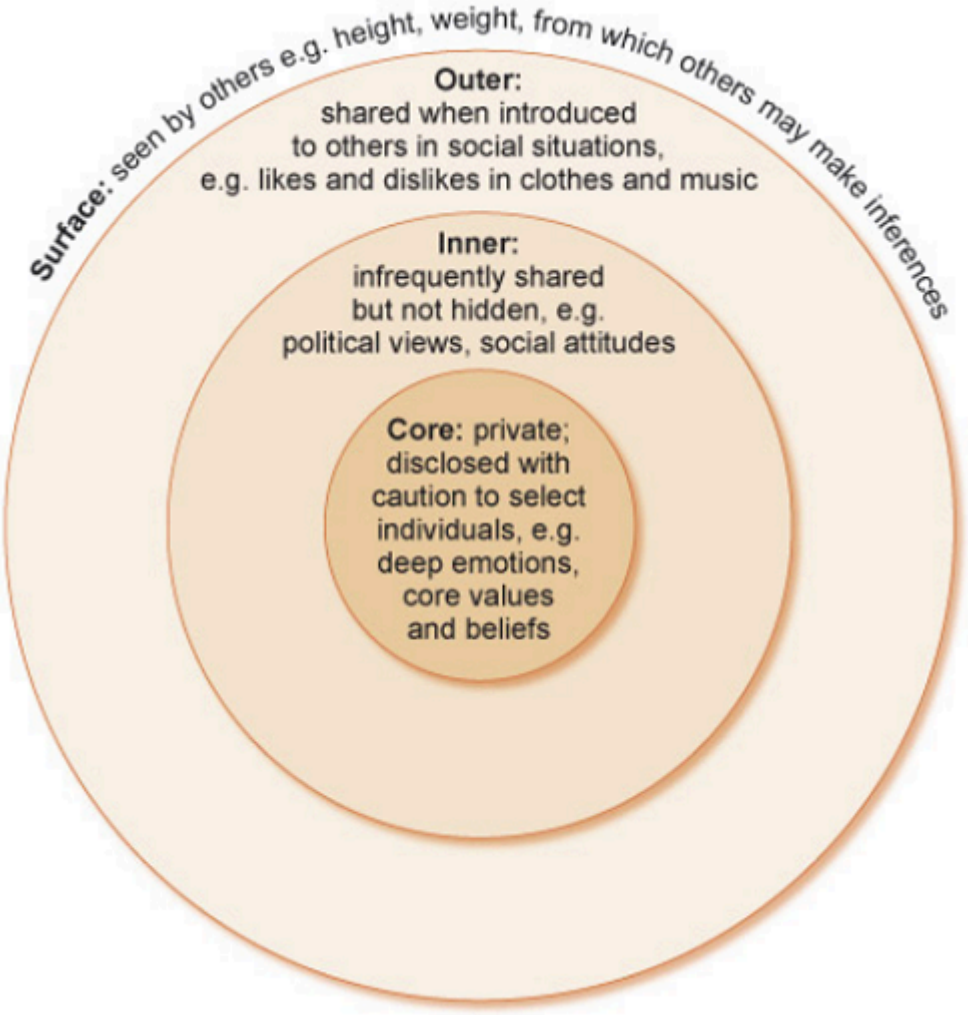


Figure 2 Levels of self-disclosure (Bylund et al., 2012).

Activity 4 Appropriate sharing to facilitate connection

Allow about 15 minutes

Think of a time when you (or a colleague) shared personal information in one-to-one conversation, or revealed information in a group or a workshop.

- What was the impact of this sharing?
- Do you consider it appropriate to talk about your own personal experiences with trusted work colleagues?

Discussion

Sharing personal experiences at work very much depends on the situation, your personality and your view of how appropriate you feel this is. In everyday social contexts, we seek out similarities to establish a common ground and build relationships that may open up communication further. Simple disclosures can help in this, such as mutual sporting interests or family experiences.

One person who completed this activity recalled that they had gradually learned about the benefit of disclosing a bit more of themselves at work and that this had become easier with age and experience; when they were in their twenties they said they were too concerned with managing impressions and not confident enough to reveal personal information.

Coaching, teaching, fitness training and management/leadership organisations each have their own professional standards, which attempt to clarify what is appropriate in terms of disclosure and professional relationships although these statements are often written in very general language. See Box 1 for an example.

Box 1 Two key principles of the Code of Practice for Sports Coaching

- **Relationships:** Coaches must develop a relationship with their participants (and others) based on openness, honesty, mutual trust and respect.
- **Responsibilities** (personal standards): Coaches must demonstrate proper personal behaviour and conduct at all times.

(UK Coaching, 2017)

6 Your progress using the course map

The purpose of this section is to visually indicate your progress through the course so far. Figure 3 shows an outer green shaded box in which 'writing … speech … non-verbal communication' are located. You have already started to explore aspects of all these three communication channels. Other aspects of your study start at the centre of the spiral and take you around it, revisiting three segments: 'building relationships', 'influencing others' and 'awareness of …'. You have now completed the building relationships segment along with parts of the other two, indicating that you are about halfway through the course with some more interesting insights to come.

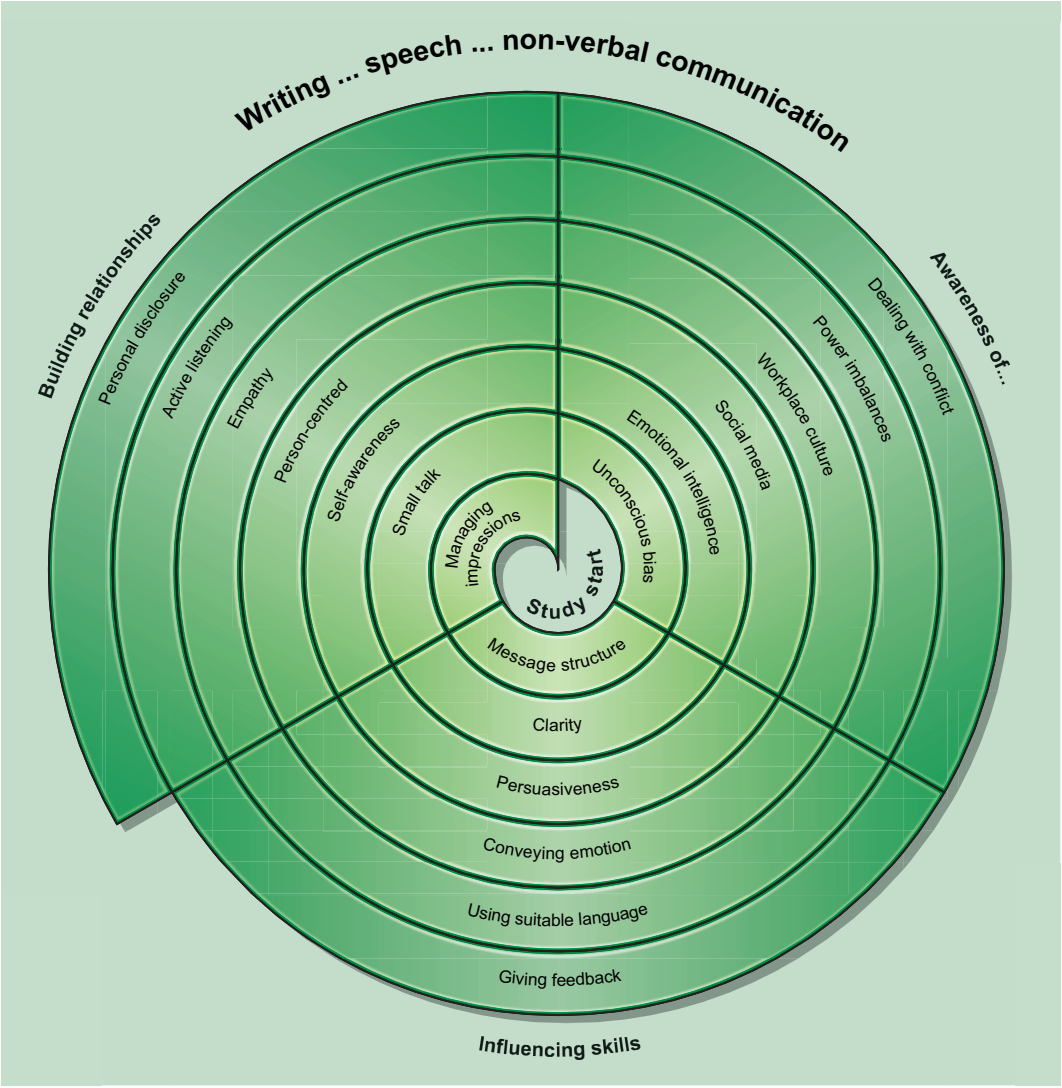


Figure 3 Themes and topics on the course map

7 This session’s quiz

Now it’s time to complete the Session 4 badge quiz. It’s similar to previous quizzes, but this time instead of answering five questions there will be 15.

Session 4 compulsory badge quiz

Remember, this quiz counts towards your badge. If you’re not successful the first time, you can attempt the quiz again in 24 hours.

Open the quiz in a new window or tab then come back here when you’ve finished.

8 Summary

The main learning points from this session are:

- Attending to others in a dialogue uses a range of minimal encouragers and behaviours to keep the other person(s) engaged and to help support the flow of conversation.
- Recognition and care for others conveyed by taking time to notice and engage with them can help develop connection and belonging to work teams.
- Unconscious bias often may affect our interactions and relationships with others as we often seek to confirm our first impression of someone. Recognising your unconscious bias is an important first step.
- Confirmation bias can often cloud our judgement; it is the tendency to interpret new evidence as confirmation of one's existing beliefs or theories.
- Self-disclosure is a useful feature of developing relationships but it can be difficult to decide how much to reveal to others; once again much depends on the situation.

In the next session, you will cover a really valuable skill which we'd all like to have: how to influence others. In other words, what is the secret to get other people in your workplace to convince others to accept and, if necessary, take action based on your perspective. You will see some compelling examples of how this might be achieved.

You can now go to Session 5.

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Box 1: extract from: UK Coaching (2017) *Code of Conduct for Sports Coaches; Rights, Relationships and Responsibilities* [online], Leeds, UK Coaching. http://www.ukcoaching.org/sites/default/files/13.%20Code%20of%20Practice_0.pdf

Images

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Figure 2: adapted from Bylund C. L., Peterson, E. B. and Cameron, K. E. (2012) 'A practitioner's guide to interpersonal communication theory: an overview and exploration of selected theories', *Patient Education and Counselling*, vol. 87, pp. 261–7.

Audio-visual

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Session 5: How can you become more influential?

Introduction

The ability to positively influence someone's behaviour or ideas is a highly regarded attribute, both in the sport and fitness workplace and in many areas of life. If you influence others you are getting them to buy into part of your vision. It is a skill to convince others to accept and, if necessary, take action based on your perspective.

In this session, influencing others is explained by considering how you can create credible spoken or written messages and use language that is more likely to have an impact. Potentially there is a lot you can learn and apply to your own communication from some of these insights.



Figure 1 How can your communication influence others to take action?

By the end of this session, you should be able to:

- identify which parts of the advice about persuading and influencing others you already use and which parts might try to adopt more in the future
- recognise, with examples, how credibility can be enhanced by appropriate language use
- observe how personal experiences, emotion, enthusiasm and conviction can contribute to convincing others of a viewpoint.

1 Land the message

You will start this session by hearing how those working in the sport and fitness sector often describe influencing others as an integral part of their job.



Figure 2 Landing something as expected can never be assumed

Activity 1 A performance analyst's focus on landing the message

Allow about 10 minutes

In this video, Chris White, Head of Performance Analysis at the English Institute of Sport, describes 'landing the message'. His job involves observations to enhance sport performance primarily delivered through statistical analysis and visual feedback (video analysis). Which strategies does he describe in order to land the message?

Video content is not available in this format.



Discussion

Chris identifies the starting point as building close working relationships. Once integrated with a coaching team, he suggests influencing as being about presenting messages in the most appropriate way. Sometimes, small bite-sized messages are used, while at other times a holistic overall view of potential changes is presented. Cope (2018) observes: ‘my experiences, particularly joining a new organisation, have taught me to take the time to understand other people’s perspectives before making a decision or thinking I know a situation when I maybe don’t’.

One of the key questions is how to make messages more compelling or persuasive.

2 What makes messages more persuasive?

In Session 2, Activity 3 you worked through an example of an email that used the Situation, Target, Proposal, Courtesy (STPC) structure to help make a message more effective.

Your chances of influencing others will increase if you can include credible evidence and data in an argument. For instance, consider whether the additional evidence in italics increases the persuasive weight of the argument in the email example below (from the same activity).

> The physio can certainly assist with developing flexibility and help keep her injury free while running faster. *Recent evidence from our lab testing suggests that a 10 per cent increase in flexibility might lead to her 20 metre sprint speed increasing by a similar amount.* Therefore, we need to have some dialogue about how she could fit this into her work pattern.

Good supporting evidence, provided it is presented in a concise way, helps influence others.

3 Making your messages more memorable

Think about those who have tried to influence you. What did they do to make their case stick in the mind and what can you learn from this?

Activity 2 How memorable is this sport practitioner's case?

Allow about 10 minutes

Watch this clip of Lance Walker who works at Michael Johnson Performance in Texas, USA. As he makes the case for exercise recovery to improve human performance, consider and make notes about the effectiveness of both his content (i.e. what he says) and delivery (i.e. how he says it).

Video content is not available in this format.



Discussion

Message content: he explains different types of recovery but it is noticeable how he mainly uses the first person, drawing on not only his experience but yours too and what this could mean for you. He attempts to make it personal. For some, his words may offer a vivid vision of what may be possible, using emotive phrases such as: 'Wow', 'think of all the crazy things', 'it's exciting' and 'the new frontier'. In summary, he draws on his personal experience and he uses authentic emotion.

Message delivery: It's his delivery which really brings his message to life – you can see his excitement through his tone, animated eyes, gestures and non-verbal communication. He even uses his hands to help draw a picture of a steep recovery curve. In summary, he speaks with enthusiasm and conviction.

This example suggests that influence may partly be achieved through an authentic approach and providing a clear vision using stirring language and enthusiasm. Some might say he also draws on emotion.

However, in addition to using appealing words, in some situations conciseness is also powerful.

4 How can you make a concise case?

An argument or case for change often can gain clarity and therefore strength by being crystallised into a few key points. Speech writers, for example, make frequent use of the rule of three: a group of three concepts to express an idea, emphasise it and make it memorable (Jefferson, 1990). The device has been used in the Olympic movement – e.g. Faster, Higher, Stronger – and can be also used for remembering tactics or strategy. For example, tennis coach Brad Gilbert successfully used this rule of three to help his athletes approach major tournaments:

1. Aim for steady, consistent play – this is enough to win 90 per cent of the time.
2. Attack your opponent's weaknesses – instead of you succeeding, make them fail.
3. At the start of a tournament, count backwards from the twenty-one sets it takes to win – make this your goal: one set at a time.

(Agassi, 2010)

The simplicity is both appealing and memorable while also offering clear direction and purpose.

5 Supporting agreement and action

Influential talk makes uses of many features covered in previous sessions of this course. In particular, listening, empathy and body language skills, if effectively used, can increase the participants' personal credibility and perception of trustworthiness, as Table 1 shows.

Table 1 Influential talk

Skills from previous sessions	More general influencing skills	Key ingredients of the message
Active listening	Credibility	Structure (STPC)
Summarising	Rapport	Positive language
Empathy	Trust	Logic and evidence
Body language	Authenticity	Emotive words/vision
		Conciseness

While logic, data and structure of a message may gain you agreement to a proposition, arguably it is positive language, emotive words and delivery that is more likely to persuade your listener to take action (Kyndt and Rowell, 2012).

> Logic + data + structure = agreement
> Logic + data + structure + positive language + emotion = agreement and action

In reality, of course, things are never that simple. This formula works as a basic principle, but remember that approaches need modifying according to context and people's needs.

6 Hedging and boosting words

In some situations, you need to make your argument very strongly in order to communicate your point effectively. In others, however, a forceful tone may prove counter-productive and a more tentative approach could produce better results. With this in mind, you will now look at what we term hedging and boosting words and phrases.

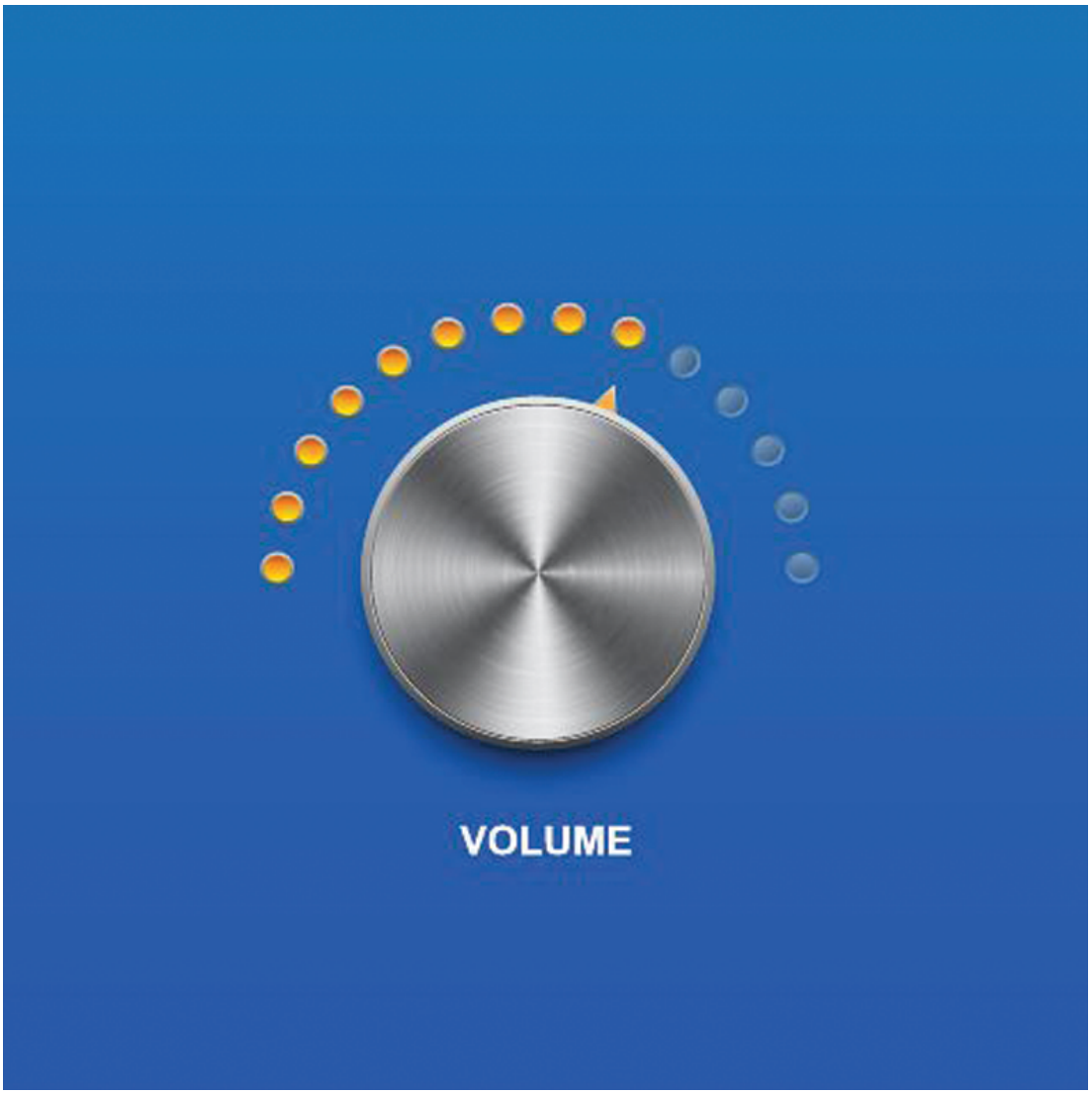


Figure 3 Will your audience respond best to a higher or lower tone of persuasion?

Hedging is used to show courtesy and respect for others' views, an important part of any dialogue whether in writing or spoken (Leech, 1983).

In contrast, **boosting** is used to show confidence in your claims and results (Hyland, 2000). It is a way of being far more definite and strong in your views.

These language choices help build a relationship with the reader or listener, particularly the use of hedging words which often help reduce perceptions of arrogance and over-confidence.

For example, look at this sentence: 'What they expect is a big factor'.

The person seems very confident of what they claim, as shown by the use of 'is'. The use of 'big' also boosts the claim. However, in some situations hedging words such as 'could

be' or 'may be' might replace the confidence of 'is'. It is a softer suggestion and recognises other people's perspective may adjust or modify your own ideas.

You will recall a further way of shaping the impact of dialogue is the use of emphasis which Chris Hoy's race engineer did by stressing words, e.g. 'soft tyres to the car *immediately*' and 'OK Chris, how are *you* feeling, is everything OK?'

7 Test your ability to spot appropriate language

The purpose of this section is to apply your learning in identifying hedging and boosting language.

Activity 3 Test your ability to spot hedging or boosting in action

Allow about 10 minutes

Read the sentences below, specifically looking for use of hedging (softer or tentative) and boosting (strong) words.

Identify the words that boost or hedge claims by selecting the highlight tool and clicking the relevant words once.

Interactive content is not available in this format.

Discussion

Some words such as, ‘actively’ and ‘enormous’ make the claims stronger. ‘Must’ indicates an urgency to do something. On the other hand, ‘some’, ‘maybe’ and ‘perhaps’ are commonly used to make claims cautiously as these tone down the assertion.

The skill here is the judgement of recognising situations where boosting or hedging are more effective; this will come with experience and also by reflecting on your tone of communication.

Boosting words tend to be used a lot in social media, a subject you will consider in Session 8.

8 This session’s quiz

Check what you’ve learned this session by taking the end-of-session quiz.

Session 5 practice quiz

Open the quiz in a new window or tab then come back here when you’ve finished.

9 Summary

The main learning points from this session are:

- Messages can be made more persuasive by credible supporting evidence and data.
- A more persuasive message delivery draws on personal experiences, enthusiasm and conviction.
- Credibility is enhanced by appropriate language use: hedging and boosting language is particularly valuable and, if the situation demands, stirring words that convey emotion.
- Messages can become more persuasive if they are concise. The rule of three is a useful principle; i.e. crystallising information into three key points to emphasise it and make it memorable.
- The listing of structure and positive language (from Session 2) combined with logic, data, and emotion (from this session) was used to help summarise the ingredients of an influential message.

The main focus of the next session is to apply what you've learned so far to video examples, some of which include a feedback element in working teams. It is an opportunity to consider your own approach to giving feedback and to explore the possible boundary between harsh feedback and bullying.

You can now go to Session 6.

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Video

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Session 6: When does harsh feedback become bullying?

Introduction

The main focus of both this session and the next is to apply what you have learned so far to video examples, many of which include a feedback element in working teams. It is an opportunity to put what you have learned into practice by observing and interpreting communication in action, and considering your own approach to giving feedback.

You will explore feedback communication principles and consider the possible boundary between harsh feedback and bullying. This issue is partly about how the work environment, sometimes called 'work culture', shapes and constrains feedback communication practices.

This session will help you to better appreciate how you and others might give feedback to others in an effective way. This is all linked to becoming more influential and credible in how you interact with others.

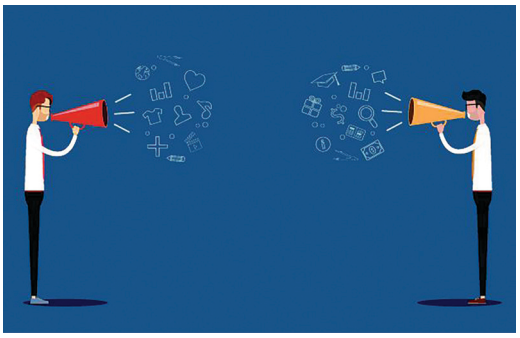


Figure 1 There are alternative ways to give feedback rather than in public and at high volume.

By the end of this session, you should be able to:

- interpret examples of how the culture of a sport or a team/organisation and accepted ways of working often shape and constrain the communication practices used in that environment
- describe some aspects of communication used in feedback are more likely to be accepted and taken on board
- discuss the influences that contribute to a possible boundary between harsh feedback and bullying.

1 Feedback in a motor racing team

In Session 1, you saw Chris Hoy competing in a motor racing team. The activity below has a focus on the communication in a training and learning situation. In this next video, Chris Hoy and colleagues are preparing for the Le Mans 24-hour race, in which drivers change over many times during the race.

Activity 1 Feedback in a motor racing team

Allow about 20 minutes

Here, the team principal (TP), gives feedback to a member of his pit-crew about how to assist Chris Hoy in driver changeovers. Chris Hoy (who is wearing a helmet) also gives his input. Watch the video and respond to the following questions – however, be warned **that there is some potentially offensive language and behaviour in the clip so you should be careful where you watch the clip in case it is heard by others**.

Video content is not available in this format.



1. Comment on the potential impact of this communication exchange on the unnamed pit-crew member and other team members, including Chris Hoy.
2. How could the TP improve his communication based on what you have learned so far?

Discussion

1. Here are some of the impacts that you may have noticed. For the pit-crew member, criticism in public is potentially humiliating and he is less likely to speak up again after he is told, ‘don’t argue, just do as you are told and you’ll

learn'. He chooses to remain silent thereafter, although it is clear from his non-verbal communication that he is annoyed.

For Chris Hoy and other team members, the impact is that they are unlikely to challenge the TP in public for fear of similar treatment. However, although Hoy does try to explain how an approach that avoids shouting might yield better results this is also dismissed: 'I don't want to hear excuses, I want to see people pushed'. At the end of the video, Hoy provides subtle non-verbal support to the castigated pit-crew member through gesture and touch.

2. One of the main things the team principal (TP) could consider is the benefit of remaining calmer and controlling his emotions under pressure. At the moment, this clouds his interactions with others and has an impact on how it makes others feel. His self-awareness of his harsh communication behaviour and pushing others probably arises from his past experiences and immersion in the motor sport environment; that said, others may not agree with his view of 'learning'. He would benefit from viewing this incident played back to him, along with having a dialogue with a mentor he respects. An ongoing discussion and reflection with a mentor about the possible role of building rapport and trust in coaching and the overall team environment would be valuable.

In the next section, you will explore more about the influence of the workplace environment, sometimes called culture, which shapes and constrains behaviour and communication practices.

2 How does workplace culture affect feedback?

In sport and fitness workplaces, feedback is a key component in improving skills and overall working practices. You will now think about how workplace culture might influence the feedback communication style used.



Figure 2 Does your work culture influence creativity, collaboration or conflict?

Activity 2 Workplace culture towards feedback

Allow about 10 minutes

Listen to this audio, in which Kate Arneil and Michael Rosen discuss workplace culture towards feedback and praise.

Audio content is not available in this format.

To what extent do the practices described occur in your sport or fitness organisation?

Provide your answer...

Discussion

Unless you work in, for example, a sales role in which humiliation for poor sales and ranking lists (sticks) are sometimes balanced with incentives for high sales, such as weekends away at a plush hotel (carrots), you are unlikely to see this traditional approach being widely used. You are more likely to see some management practices that attempt to recognise and value your work contribution, but of course, it is largely down to the approach of those who manage your work. If you work for yourself, you might practise enhancing the recognition you give to those you interact with. An organisation's practices, its rituals, the social norms and accepted ways of working are often collectively known as 'culture'. This is the context in which all interaction occurs and it influences communication.

To extend your learning about motivation and culture from the above audio the next section addresses a very topical issue in sports squads and tackles it head on with a challenging question.

3 When does tough coaching become bullying?

In the build up to the 2020 Olympic Games a number of sports have been forced to address claims of bullying following formal complaints from elite athletes about coaches' communication behaviours.

Activity 3 When does tough coaching become bullying?

Allow about 15 minutes

In this audio, Professor Chris Cushion and top footballer, Rachel Williams, respond to the interviewer's questions about such accusations of bullying.

Audio content is not available in this format.

What do you think is the boundary between tough coaching and bullying drawing on your experience and this audio?

Discussion

In the audio, Williams pointed out that some, but not all members of her team, found occasional communication practices unacceptable. Although this was tolerated whilst the team was successful, it would be less likely to be supported when results falter or a team is put under pressure or members of the team feel like outsiders. Cushion's important observation of coaching being largely about power will be explored later, in Session 7.

Here, the motor racing team scenario is used to help put the discussion in context. The culture in the motor racing team is largely influenced by the team principal's straight talking style. The boundary between his tough words and bullying would be determined by the situations in which he says things, how often harsh words are used and the opportunities for team members to raise concerns and speak openly. It would also depend on how those people the words were directed at perceived them, which as you heard in the interview clip is different for each individual.

The features of a person-centred approach to communication (Session 3) may be useful in interpreting such situations. In addition, appreciating some key evidence-based principles behind feedback may help guide your practice and that of others.

4 Exploring three feedback principles

There is a considerable amount of management and coaching research and resources dedicated to explaining effective feedback in sport and in the workplace. Effective communication is a key part of feedback. You will now consider part of an article in which ways to give effective feedback are described. It comes from the field of education, but most of its ideas apply to the workplace and sport.

Activity 4 Ways to give better feedback

Allow about 30 minutes

Read the three sections ‘Correct quietly’, ‘Combine open and closed questions’, ‘End with clear action points’ in this Guardian article ‘
Seven ways to give better feedback to your students’.

How do these three principles compare or contrast to your own experiences of how feedback is delivered in sport or fitness?

Discussion

Correcting quietly, with private individual correction, is perhaps standard practice in many workplaces, yet in parts of sport there are plenty of examples of feedback being given in public and sometimes at high volume. The quieter approach was highlighted using the highly appropriate term ‘the whisper correction’. The use of open questions was explained as being valuable as they allow the voice and perspective of participants to be heard and this is seen to influence their engagement. The earlier section on hedging and boosting language is also highly applicable to optimising feedback communication.

The advice to ‘end with clear action points’ is reflected in a 2017 insight into a national rugby team’s feedback practice. The national coach Eddie Jones said: ‘We don’t have old-fashioned team meetings where the coach gets up and makes a speech for 10 minutes … We never have a meeting that lasts longer than 15 minutes and we never have a meeting that has more than three points’ (Austin, 2017).

5 How can personalised feedback be developed?

In the workplace, it is often easy to forget that you work with a collection of individuals with different personalities and life experiences and that these people are likely to have subtly different needs or preferences for receiving communication. Some may want a direct approach (e.g. 'just move your weight over this way a bit further'), while others may prefer a different style such as: 'you need to explain the reasons why you think x will help, so I can understand it better'. Others may fall somewhere in between.



Figure 3 Plastic ducks are all identical but should all people be treated in the same way?

Activity 5 The power of speed coaching

Allow about 10 minutes

Watch this short video of a British coach developer working in the USA with elite sport coaches talking about a speed coaching exercise he finds highly effective in his work. How might speed coaching, or a similar exercise aimed at revealing individual communication preferences, be applied to your own situation?

Video content is not available in this format.



Discussion

If sport and fitness organisations have a genuine interest in developing people, the video suggests they need to recognise that people want to be treated as individuals and not processed as if they were all the same. Identifying each person's preferences may take time and effort, but this may well pay off in the longer term if it results in more effective implementation of feedback and open dialogue. It is likely that relationships between people in a sport team or organisation will improve if there is some recognition of each person's individual communication preferences.

The question posed in this section may have got you thinking about developing people in the workplace. With this in mind, one American basketball coach took personalisation to the extreme. Watch this account of his unusual pre-game routine with his players: Meet the college basketball coach with dozens of handshakes and unlimited swag.

This is not a pragmatic workplace approach, but it does illustrate how you should strive towards what Turnnidge and Cote (2016) describe as coaches and leaders displaying genuine care and concern for people.

6 This session’s quiz

Check what you’ve learned this session by taking the end-of-session quiz.

Session 6 practice quiz

Open the quiz in a new window or tab then come back here when you’ve finished.

7 Summary

Some of the main learning points from this session are:

- Some of the main principles of communication used in feedback include: using quiet correction where possible, to use a combination of open and closed questions that allows others to contribute, and to end with clear action points.
- The culture of a sport or a team/organisation is its practices, rituals, the social norms and accepted ways of working; these often shape and constrain the communication practices used in that environment.
- Cases in which tough coaching or harsh language are used were often related to use of power, in which there is a danger that this tough or harsh approach becomes the cultural norm.
- Ideally, those working with groups should try to identify and respond to each person's individual communication preferences, and display care and concern for people.

In the next session, you will continue to interpret some very engaging real life video scenarios and this will make you more aware of how power and control is used in communication exchanges which is likely to make you reflect on your own practices.

You can now go to Session 7.

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Session 7: Power and its impact on the communication process

Introduction

There are some very engaging real life video scenarios in this session that you will be asked to interpret. One video is about coaching elite child athletes and another examines a dispute between two neighbours, in which the dialogue plays out in two ways. Asking you to analyse and interpret such examples gives you a further opportunity to apply your learning, and it will enhance your awareness of communication skills.

There are often differences in power (i.e. experience or authority) between those involved in any communication, but this session makes you more aware of this. The potentially negative influence of power and control in an unbalanced dialogue is illustrated.

It is perhaps fitting that one of the final video situations you address, a dispute, is one that requires extremely well-developed communication skills. By the end of this session, you will be far more aware of how to respond to power imbalances and use of the full range of interpersonal skills in potential disputes.

By the end of this session, you should be able to:

- identify when a power imbalance may be negatively influencing communication and what you can do to help avoid this
- observe others communicating in situations in which there is a dispute and reflect how you might respond towards an appropriate outcome.

1 Coaching child athletes

In the following video, you will interpret communication in a particular environment: ice skating. This illustrates the challenges of working with child athletes, with a view towards possible selection to a national squad.



Figure 1 Child athletes, coaches and communication in ice dance

Activity 1 Child athletes, coaches and the high performance manager

Allow about 20 minutes

This video features excerpts from a BBC documentary that follows young child athletes Lily, 11, and Genevieve, 12, as they pursued their dreams of becoming competitive figure skaters, and provides some of the background context alongside short coaching interactions. The first excerpt features Lily and the second features Genevieve. In the third excerpt, Robin Cousins, GB Ice Skating High Performance Manager, observes and talks to Genevieve.

While watching the three clips make notes on examples of effective communication in relation to the following:

- how feedback is delivered including use of any non-verbal communication
- evidence of communication that supports the coach-athlete relationship.

Video content is not available in this format.



Provide your answer...

Discussion

In excerpt 1, Lily's coach Catherine Hudson uses positive language to frame her feedback; for example. 'I really liked how you … '. She also tried to explain **why** they were doing a practice at speed, which perhaps affects how the message is received. It was noticeable how she made use of positive visual modelling to show a movement: 'Finish it and grow [arms aloft demonstration] … that's it'. In the limited glimpses we see of them together, there is some evidence of a trusting and respectful relationship between them.

In excerpt 2, Genevieve's mother has a direct approach to communication, which both mother and daughter admit to being complicated by the dual coach/mother relationship. Her mother shows some sympathy at the difficulties this can cause. You might have noticed the possible influence of cultural differences in the strict training approach between expectations of British parenting and her mother's heritage in Bulgarian gymnastics.

In excerpt 3, we see Robin Cousins with Genevieve. He uses visual demonstration of her hand position that is then corrected. At one point when he is talking to her, his crossed arms and straight posture explicitly convey his authority as head of the Olympic programme. In his feedback to her, he encourages her to be less tentative and perform to the crowd. It is unclear how this message is received by Genevieve. He shows his high expectations for her by standing above her and saying with pointing gestures, '… you better make sure it's a performance you want to talk about since we'll be talking about you'. He ends this with a high five and then looks away. To us as an onlooker, this appears to be signalling that there is additional pressure for Genevieve at her forthcoming championship and that the conversation is finished.

This is a high performance environment in which isolated conversations, when removed from the coaching context, can seem harsh and out of place. However, in this situation the fact that 10 and 11 year olds are involved makes the balance between instruction, challenge and supportive communication even more delicate. After all, children often find it difficult to offer their opinions to adults, due to the age gap and resultant power imbalance.

2 How might power imbalances hinder communication?

Acquiescence occurs when a person indicates that they agree with something even though they do not. Think about the ice skating example you have just seen or the pit-crew member in the motor racing driver changeover video in Session 6. In both cases, if those being instructed do not want to be seen as difficult they remain largely silent.



Figure 2 How often is power and authority balanced in working relationships?

Acquiescence can often happen in the sport workplace, especially in instructional or coaching situations; these are often power relationships that can be either productive or oppressive. For example, research has demonstrated that professional coaches using video feedback in elite youth football dominate the conversation. The turn-taking that is a feature of balanced dialogue is made unequal as the coach controls the conversational direction (i.e. topics addressed) (Groom et al., 2012).

Activity 2 Your experience of power imbalance

Allow about 20 minutes

Think back to a recent conversation (ideally in a sport and fitness setting) where you felt that you had less power than the other person did, or even no power at all. Write notes about the following:

- Who was this conversation with and why did you feel that you had less or no power?
- How did you react during this conversation? For example, did you challenge them, acquiesce or become annoyed?
- Using your experience of having limited power, how might this shape your behaviours when you find yourself in a position of power?

Discussion

Communication is in many situations about making and maintaining connections with others. Professional relationships need to be established and maintained so that tasks or learning can be achieved. By being aware of the concepts of acquiescence and oppressive power, you can find ways of decreasing the perceived power differences and encouraging others to express themselves openly, including

better understanding their needs. For example, the following may help with children: crouching down at a similar eye level, asking questions, finding ways for those that are silent to contribute in a non-threatening way and refraining from giving too much instruction and feedback.

Being aware of acquiescence and oppressive power imbalances is very useful when you observe and interpret workplace episodes and, arguably, this lies at the heart of the motor racing and ice skating examples you have viewed.

3 Potential disputes: using your interpersonal skills

In work teams or in individual relationships you often encounter key moments where communication and relationships come under scrutiny. Disputes and conflict can happen to everyone. You might be expecting it or it might take you by surprise, but how you respond really matters. Will your actions escalate the situation or diffuse it (Dfuse, 2017)?

Thinking of the sport workplace, referees, teachers, coaches and management teams often face conflict. Pause for a moment: identify what advice you would give to others about how to deal with conflict. This is obviously an enormous topic but would any of these points be part of your advice?

- Pausing/delaying a response to reflect on what outcome you want is often wise. If possible, avoid responding immediately when emotions are often heightened.
- Focus on the behaviour, not the person, e.g. 'You came across as very aggressive … '
- Avoid saying 'calm down' since this can often inflame a situation.
- Conveying empathy is important, e.g. 'I can see how …', 'I recognise why …'.

If you want to find out more about conflict resolution then this fascinating BBC radio programme on conflict resolution (28 minutes in length) might be a useful resource for you.

4 Watch two approaches to a dispute

The following video example of a neighbour dispute draws out a number of ideas covered earlier in the course. The first part of the video (Clip 1) is an aggressive approach resulting in a full-blown argument between neighbours. Clip 2 shows a different approach results in far more of a dialogue between the neighbours.

Activity 3 Neighbour dispute and dialogue

Allow about 25 minutes

1. Watch the two clips. In Clip 1, swearing has been deleted but the overall aggressive tone of this dispute means you should watch it in private so as not to cause offence to others. Then watch the different approach in Clip 2.
2. Focusing on Clip 2, identify examples of:
   - phatic talk
   - hedging language
   - non-judgemental response (person-centredness)
   - empathy (person-centredness)
   - authenticity (person-centredness)
   - active listening
   - any other interesting observations of communication practices.

Video content is not available in this format.
Clip 1



Video content is not available in this format.
Clip 2



Discussion

This table is used to show some of the examples from Clip 2 that can be applied to each of the communication practices. In the table, Neighbour A is the visitor and Neighbour B is the home owner. Read about other interesting observations below this.

Table 1 Examples from Clip 2

Communication practice	Example from Clip 2
Phatic talk	A: 'Hello mate, how's it going?'
Hedging language	A: 'I just wondered, whether at some point we could have a chat …'
Non-judgemental	A responds in a non-judgemental way on hearing B has been 'flat out'
Empathy	A shows an empathy in expressing concern about what B and his children must be going through, his tone of voice also conveys this and it is also reinforced by asking 'how are you feeling?'
Authenticity	The manner in which B reveals his family's struggles with his wife's condition gives the impression that he is authentically showing part of his true self.
Active listening	A displays this throughout but in particular when he reflects back to B 'I don't want to add to your pressure but …' and then about the tree removal timing 'if it works for you it's good for me'.

Other interesting observations of communication practices are:

- The way in which A says '… the tree that is causing US a problem', which makes it a joint problem.
- Neighbour A shows a degree of self-awareness and the impressions he might give others by remaining courteous, knocking on the door gently and keeping positive as the STPC model suggests.
- Assuming that this situation used actors, the only criticism might be that there seemed to be little use of minimal encouragers or hand gestures largely because their hands remained firmly stuck in their pockets through Clip 2.

While you have the Clip 1 footage from this confrontation in your mind, it is timely for you to briefly think about the challenges of using the telephone as the communication tool. Would it be a help or a hindrance in this dialogue?

5 The telephone: a help or hindrance?

Why could the use of the telephone as a communication tool make defusing conflict more challenging, compared with face-to-face interaction?

The use of the telephone makes immediate communication possible, which is often a real bonus. However, it also makes reading the non-verbal communication almost impossible (apart from intonation) and minimal encouragers become less evident. In the neighbour dialogue (Clip 2), sighs, shoulder shrugs, eye contact and facial expressions all provide added information for each neighbour to communicate and to signal that it was the other person's opportunity to respond. This is why pausing, conversation turn-taking and summarising are perhaps even more important than usual when the telephone is used.

In addition, since the telephone is so immediate, hedging language along the lines of 'Is it a convenient time to talk right now?' is often an appropriate way to begin a conversation.

6 This session’s quiz

Check what you’ve learned this session by taking the end-of-session quiz.

Session 7 practice quiz

Open the quiz in a new window or tab then come back here when you’ve finished.

7 Summary

The main learning points from this session are:

- One aspect of effective feedback highlighted how one ice skating coach tried to explain why they were doing a practice; this may impact on how feedback messages are received.
- Those leading or instructing others should be alert to negative communication practices and acquiescence enhanced by any power imbalances. Ways of decreasing this include: finding ways for those that are silent to express themselves in a non-threatening way, better understanding other's needs, attending to power-related non-verbal communication and communicating at a similar eye level.
- In confrontational situations, the practices of active listening, empathy or allowing turn taking in the conversation all help partly decrease the potential conflict.
- The communication practices of pausing, conversation turn-taking and summarising are perhaps even more important when the telephone is used.

In the next session, you will look at topical aspects of working relationships including emotional regulation and social media communication. You will identify some of the distinctive features of interacting with others using this medium before progressing on to complete the final quiz that will enable you to claim your digital badge.

You can now go to Session 8.

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Activity 3 Clips 1 and 2: Tree Argument (1) and (2) Defusing Conflict programme http://dfuse.org.uk/defusing-conflict/ Courtesy of Dfuse

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Session 8: Topical aspects of communication

Introduction

This final session looks at three topical aspects of communication and working relationships. The first topical aspect refers to a term that is increasingly slipping into the language of those that work with people in sectors as diverse as business, to education, including sport: something called ‘emotional intelligence’, which you will consider in a moment.

The second aspect is something you may not be familiar with; it’s known as emotional regulation, which has an important role to play in communication. In fact, some argue that without this key ingredient it is difficult to influence others, be credible or even be successful.

It’s an absolute certainty you will already know a fair bit about the third topic: social media. You will look at distinctive features linked to interacting with others using this medium. Since social media is widely used for work-related communication, it is important that dialogue using this channel is effective. You will consider what a sport medicine community advises as its social media communication top tips.

Once you have completed these three topics, you will then think about how you might apply your learning from this course before progressing to the final quiz and your digital badge.

By the end of this session, you should be able to:

- use your new knowledge to interpret work interactions and relationships
- evaluate your view of ‘emotional intelligence’ and ‘emotional regulation’ and how they contribute to communication practice
- recognise some of the main features of and advice about social media as a communication channel.

1 Is emotional intelligence a useful idea?

The first topical aspect you consider is the term ‘emotional intelligence’, which is often used interchangeably with so called ‘soft’ or people skills. It was popularised by journalist Daniel Goleman (1995) in his book *Emotional Intelligence: Why It Can Matter More Than IQ*. But to what extent is it useful when analysing communication?



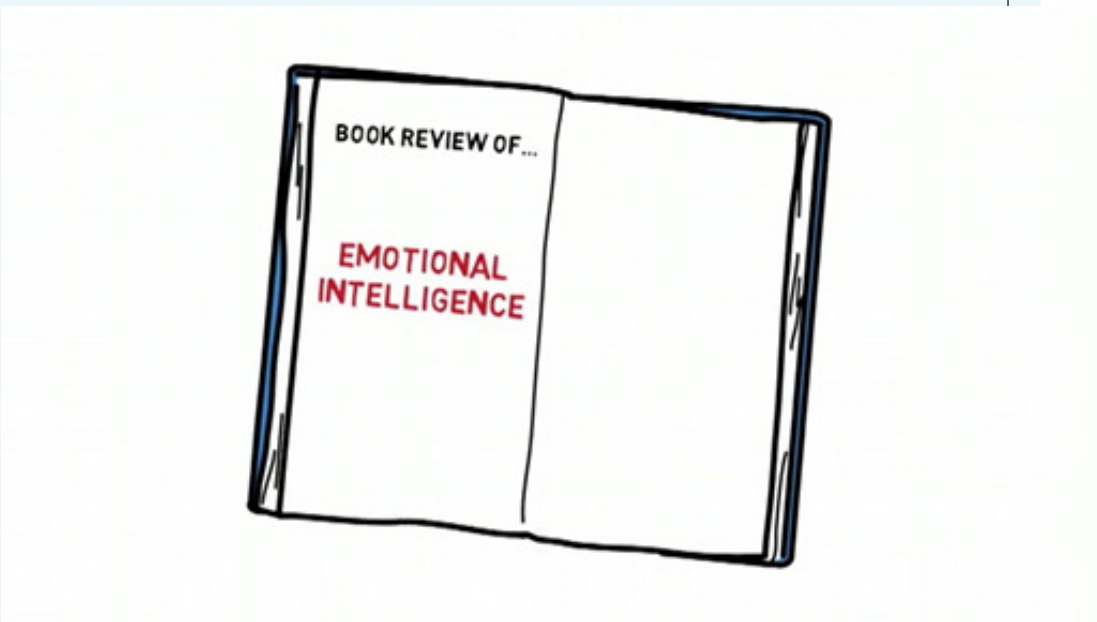
Figure 1 Emotional intelligence: bright idea or fancy dress?

Activity 1 A one-minute explanation of emotional intelligence

Allow about 10 minutes

Watch the following video, which briefly explains Goleman’s book. There are five aspects that he claims make up emotional intelligence, two of which you have come across already in this course (self-awareness and empathy).

Video content is not available in this format.



1. Note down the list of five aspects.

2. Consider to what extent emotional intelligence (EQ) is used in your sport environment and any thoughts on it being a useful idea for understanding communication and working relationships.

Provide your answer...

Discussion

1. You have already covered **self-awareness** and **empathy** (Session 3) and have explored **building relationships** (Session 3 and 4). The other two aspects were **managing emotions** and **self-motivation**.
2. You can see that EQ pools together a number of components into one. One way of seeing its use in sport is to search for online references to it. There are many and varied results from internet search engines: a frequent mention of EQ in popular coaching material is its interchangeable use with interpersonal skills. Also, the original author, Goleman, provocatively uses the term 'intelligence': it certainly grabs people's attention but the question is how much evidence is there for his bold claims of it mattering more than IQ?

Emotional intelligence is a term you need to know about in sport and fitness because it is often referred to in training and online material. However, caution is needed. The main scientific critique of EQ can be summarised as follows:

1. Groups of widely studied personality, motivational, emotional regulation, self-control and assertiveness attributes **should be called what they are**, rather than being mixed together in a haphazard assortment (Mayer, 2009).
2. Exaggerated claims have been made. For example, claims often focus around EQ leading to job or leadership success (e.g. Sternberg, 1999)
3. There is disagreement how EQ should be measured (e.g. Antonakis, 2009) or indeed if it can be measured (e.g. Fiori & Antonakis, 2012).

To conclude, if you do come across the term 'emotional intelligence' you need to be wary of exactly how people are using the term.

In the next section you will hear how one influential coach talks about his coaching practice including reference to his emotions.

2 A coach's story: emotional regulation

Emotional regulation is the second topical aspect you explore. You have already seen that conviction and stirring words have a place in influencing others. But how does one coach view the role of emotional regulation in his communication?

Activity 2 Danny Kerry's journey as head coach of GB hockey

Allow about 15 minutes

The purpose of this activity is to hear how Danny Kerry, Great Britain Olympic hockey coach, explains his coaching and management journey, including a key aspect of his working relationships.

Watch the video and, while watching, identify and note:

Video content is not available in this format.

Why does he identify managing and regulating himself as being a key skill in managing relationships with others?

Discussion

Kerry talks about the importance of self-management and self-regulation – he does not fully explain these terms. They are about controlling your emotions and feelings, particularly in stressful situations, so that you can communicate using calm consistency. This helps earn trust, respect and a greater likelihood that you might instil confidence in others. Notice how Kerry talks of emotional regulation rather than using emotional intelligence. You will recall how in the motor racing and neighbour dispute videos, there were colourful examples of people not controlling their emotions and feelings often resulting in abrupt and ineffective communication.

In the video you have just watched, Danny Kerry chose to use hedging or boosting language that demonstrated something forcibly (e.g. 'a huge amount') or with humility and less certainty (e.g. 'I'm not sure I've …').

This subtle use of language is not always so evident in social media, the topical communication issue you turn to next.

3 Social media communication in sport workplaces

Many organisations use social media among larger workplace groups, and also to speed up knowledge generation. Media such as blogs, wikis, YouTube, Facebook and Twitter, all used alongside internal social-networking sites are often utilised. It's undoubtedly a communication channel that allows many different people to contribute to discussions in an easily accessible manner, and this is part of its appeal. Since this is widespread in many workplaces, it is important to think about how to send suitable messages via this channel.



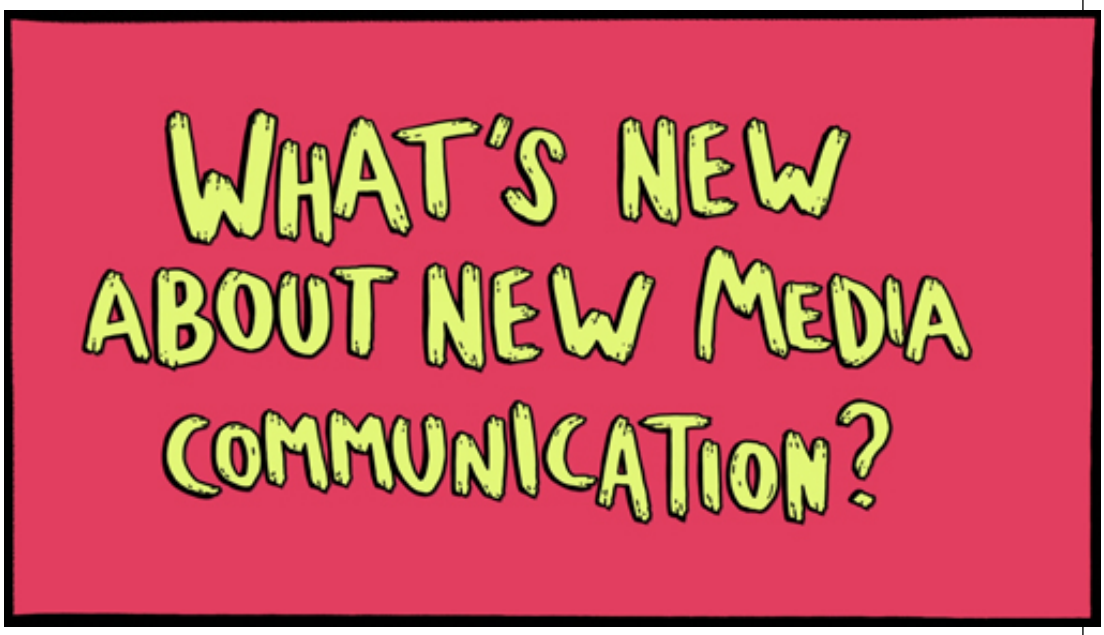
Figure 2 Does social media blur professional, social and personal boundaries?

Three distinctive features of communicating on social media are:

1. In face-to-face interaction you speak to different people in different ways. You don't speak to your father-in-law the way you speak to your colleagues. However, on social media, **you write your message without necessarily knowing who will be reading it**. All these readers will see the same message and make different assumptions about the sender.

   This connects to communication partly being about managing impressions or a performance provided for a particular audience. The difficulty with social media is a potential blurring of your different professional, social and personal group boundaries.
2. Another distinctive feature of social media communication is the possibility of your account becoming an **'echo chamber'**, with a tendency towards **confirmation bias** (also outlined in Session 2): social media can reinforce the beliefs of users because users generally tend to seek out news and views that tally with their own opinions. Research suggests that social media can create an echo chamber in which a network of like-minded people share controversial views and selective information. This means that any biases held are simply repeated back to users unchallenged and thereby confirmed as fact. For example, a group of sport practitioners may convince themselves that they are open-minded about people with body piercings, but if their social media circle is drawn from people with limited experience of such body decorations, any stereotypes may often be reinforced without challenge.
3. Watch this short animation. The main message it conveys is: it's best to assume that everything you put on social media is public and searchable or has the potential to be.

Video content is not available in this format.



4 Tips from the sports medicine community

The British Journal of Sports and Exercise Medicine is one of the leading communication platforms for professionals working in this part of the sports sector. Their guidance on communication via social media is a useful reference point for those working in sport environments (see Figure 3). Read through their ten top social media tips and identify those that have particular relevance in your sport or fitness environment.

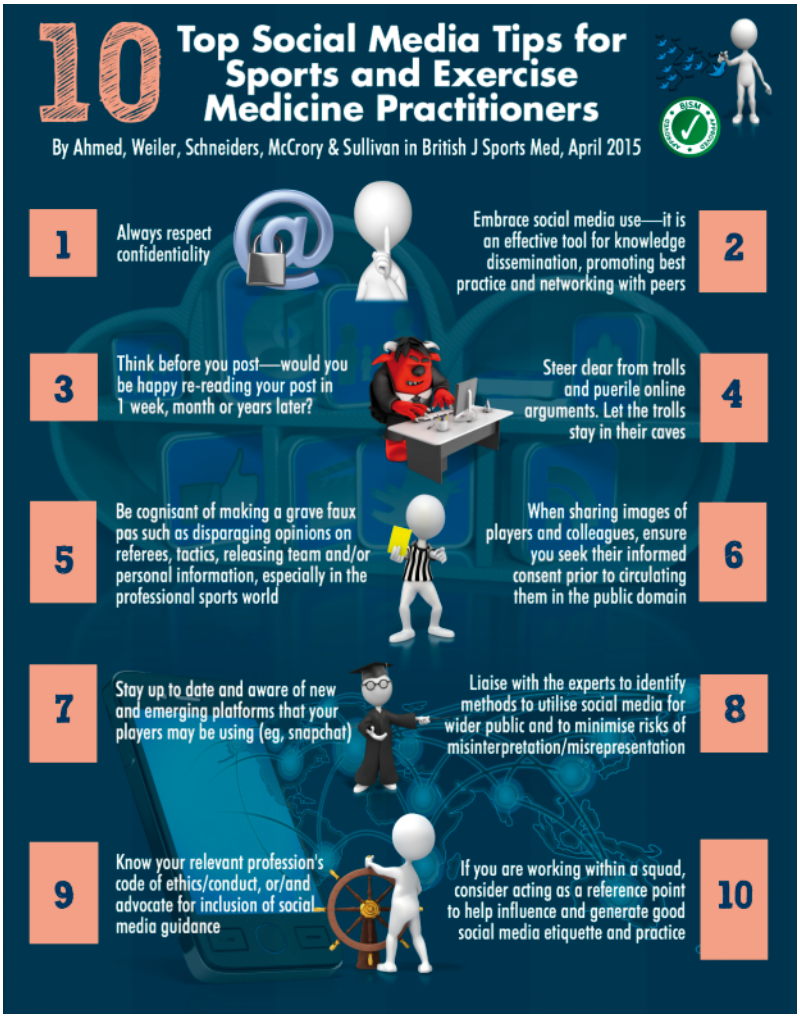


Figure 3 Ten top social media tips for sport and exercise medicine practitioners.

5 Final course reflection

You are about to view the summary of this final session and take the final quiz. Hopefully, in finding out more about effective and ineffective communication practices this course has surprised you in places and enhanced your understanding of your workplace and working relations in your role.

On occasion, your analysis and interpretation of the materials will have taken you in unexpected directions: into hospitals, a motor racing team and scenarios in which there is confrontation and conflict. One of the most powerful ways of using what you have learned is to use your increased knowledge to reflect on your own communication practices. However, this final film outlines how reflection is at its best when it focuses beyond any deficits that you or others identify.

Activity 3 Getting the most from reflection

Allow about 10 minutes

Watch the following short 'Role of reflection' film and identify what Professor Tony Ghaye conveys about learning from experience, beyond just using a deficit approach to reflection (focusing on things that don't go well).

Video content is not available in this format.



Discussion

Ghaye suggests that you need to select what parts of good and bad experience you want to reflect on and learn from. The deficit approach to reflection is often highlighted as the way to learn, but if it were that simple he asks, 'why do we still have performance issues?' He suggests that a strength-based approach is also needed to provide a balance since sustaining effectiveness is equally as difficult to achieve as correcting failures. Focusing on what makes communication and

> working relationships successful is valuable, just as much as any negative experiences.

In addition, by completing this course you may have developed more confidence in studying online: this style of video-rich learning means that you can easily make connections and apply links between ideas and practice. A similar approach is used on a similar badged course on OpenLearn, *Exploring sport coaching and psychology*, and the BSc (Hons) Sport, Fitness and Coaching.

A final likely course outcome is the increased self-awareness of your own communication. This will increase the chance of your participants or colleagues becoming more engaged in what you say and perhaps even increase their and your satisfaction.

6 This session’s quiz

Congratulations on almost reaching the end of the course.

Now it’s time to complete the Session 8 badge quiz. It is similar to the badge quiz that you took at the end of Session 4, with 15 questions in total.

Session 8 compulsory badge quiz

Remember, this quiz counts towards your badge. If you’re not successful the first time, you can attempt the quiz again in 24 hours.

Open the quiz in a new window or tab then come back here when you’ve finished.

7 Summary

The main learning points from this session are:

- Wariness was expressed in the term ‘emotional intelligence’ which has become a haphazard assortment of ideas. Some researchers suggest analysis and understanding of its components separately may be more valuable.
- The importance of emotional regulation was emphasised as contributing to calm, consistent and effective communication.
- Three features of social media communication were identified as a difficulty in crafting messages for multiple audiences, the ‘echo chamber’ phenomenon and its public and potentially searchable nature.
- A balanced approach to reflection that considers strengths and weakness should be employed to help you learn from experience and apply some of your knowledge from the course.

You can now return to the course page.

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Tell us what you think

Now you have completed the course, we would again appreciate a few minutes of your time to tell us a bit about your experience of studying it and what you plan to do next. We will use this information to provide better online experiences for our learners and to share our findings with others. If you would like to help, please fill in this optional survey.

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