

# Collaborative problem solving for community safety

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# Introduction

## Introduction

Welcome to this four-week free course *Collaborative problem solving for community safety*.

It examines some of the ways which OU specialists in creative problem solving recommend to tackle difficult problems, and how to implement them in a community setting.

To start your work on this course, watch the following video introduced by Open University academic and course author, Mike Lucas.

In this short video Mike gives you an overview of what you will be learning.

Video content is not available in this format.



In week 1, we begin by looking at how your own personal experience and sharpening your observational skills can contribute to your learning in this area. We go on to explore how through active listening and the development of empathy you can build strong relationships with other members of your community, which will aid you in practising a collaborative approach to resolving some of the key problems you experience. Finally, we examine one of these problem areas, support for vulnerable people in your community, and how this issue is being addressed in community policing.

In week 2, we examine how information about your community can be gathered from a variety of sources, and some of the techniques which can be used to make sense of it. These techniques will allow you to develop a deeper understanding of the types of relationships you already hold with other members of your community, and how to build on these to make you an effective community collaborator and problem solver.

Week 3 looks at the crucial area of communication, from reviewing your own personal communication skills, to developing approaches to communication with individual colleagues and peers, and with the community as a whole. We also examine a key facet of delivering services to the community in contemporary Britain, the importance of partnerships.

Finally, in week 4, we explore reflective practice, problem solving and decision making, and key aspects of working with others on the resolution of difficult or complex problems.

Each weekly section of the course begins by looking at an aspect of your learning: learning from everyday experience and the world around us, learning from others' ideas and with peers; learning by thinking and reflecting on events; from online information searches. The skills and habits of learning are essential to both collaboration and problem solving in any walk of life, and particularly important in tackling some of the complex problems related to communities and their safety.

### Moving around the course

In the 'Summary' at the end of each week, you can find a link to the next week. 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.

Other Open University courses that are related to this OpenLearn course, and you may be interested in studying, are: [BSc \(Hons\) Criminology and Law](#) and [BA \(Hons\) Business Management \(Leadership Practice\)](#).

You can now go to Week 1.

# Week 1: Observation and experience

## Introduction

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Welcome to Week 1.

This week we look at Learning and experience; Active listening skills; Developing empathy and building relationships; and Identifying vulnerability.

Sharpening your observational skills and drawing on previous experience to develop empathy with others are useful starting points in improving your contribution to community safety.



# 1 Learning and experience

The skills and habits of learning are essential to collaboration and problem solving, which are key factors in community safety.

Much of the learning we do as adults happens through actively seeking to learn something, because we either want to, or have to. At other times, we learn without realising it, and we may have little control over what happens.

As well as introducing you to some useful information and ideas, this course will help you recognise the value of your own experiences and everyday learning in dealing with problems of community safety.

## Activity 1 Set up a learning journal

Allow about 15 minutes for this activity.

While studying a course, it is good practice to keep notes and to have these in a fairly ordered way. So why not start now, keeping them in a digital or a paper file? This kind of record of what you are studying, and your thoughts about it, is often known as a 'learning journal'. Jot down your answers to the activities, ideas that particularly interest you and your thoughts along the way. Having a few headings, such as the names and numbers of the activities, will help you find them again later.

Making really useful notes – rather than a jumble of ideas – takes quite a bit of practice. Don't worry if yours aren't perfect to begin with; you will be given guidance and encouraged to reflect on your note-taking methods as you go along.

## 1.1 Different types of learning

When people write about the way we learn, there is often a distinction made between what is known as formal learning and informal learning. I expect you can guess roughly what is meant by these terms. Here are some definitions – see if they mean what you thought.

**Formal learning** mostly refers to the structured courses and workshops that take place in educational institutions such as schools, colleges and universities – where the main business is teaching and learning. People, usually with special qualifications, provide learning which often leads to assessments – such as exams – and in turn leads to certificates, degrees or qualifications.

**Informal learning** is more difficult to define because it covers so many aspects of our lives and many of the roles we play – like being an employee, a local resident, a professional, a citizen, a parent, a volunteer. One definition of informal learning is:

... the lifelong process by which every individual acquires and accumulates knowledge, skills, attitudes and insights from daily experiences and exposure to the environment – at home, at work, at play: from the example and attitude of families and friends; from travel, reading newspapers and books; or by listening to the radio or viewing films or television. Generally informal education is unorganised, unsystematic and even unintentional at times, yet accounts for



the great bulk of any person's total lifetime learning – including that of a highly 'schooled' person.

Coombs and Ahmed, 1974, p. 8

Formal learning has the advantage of offering a structure that can be reassuring to learners, and qualifications that can be useful for gaining work. Some people, though, find a formal structure stifling and relish the opportunity to explore aspects of a topic in their own way and at their own pace.

So, even if they want a qualification, they may choose an online course like this one which provides a combination of the two – a formal course with a Statement of participation or badge to recognise an achievement, but one that can be studied at their own pace and away from a formal institution.

Once you start to look at learning in more detail, you can see that there may also be other differences in the types of learning we do. Sometimes, for example, we set out intentionally to learn new things – to enrol for a course, teach ourselves a language in preparation for a holiday, learn how to operate a new smart phone or research a place we may want to move to. Coombs and Ahmed call this deliberate learning.

In contrast, other learning could be called accidental – occurring as a result of something that has happened and where you had no intention of learning at all. An example of this would be if your house was broken into – you may learn 'accidentally' about how the local police force works.

Although formal learning is often given a higher status than informal learning, one great advantage of informal and accidental learning is that it can take us in unexpectedly interesting and productive directions.

## Activity 2 Thinking about your own learning

Allow 20 minutes for this activity.

Having thought about other people's experiences and ideas about learning, it's time now to have a think about how *you* learn.

- 1 Make a note of five examples of things you have learned in the last two years that you can think of, in your learning journal.
- 2 Now decide if they are formal or informal. Were they deliberate or accidental? Maybe they are a mixture of the two like this course? Note down your thoughts.
- 3 Finally, choose one of your examples and think about the following questions:
  - Why did you want to learn this particular thing?
  - What did you find was easy to learn, and what was difficult?
  - Is this a typical example of how you approach learning something new?
  - In what ways is it typical?
  - Are there any aspects of your learning in this example that are unusual for you?

## Discussion

Reviewing the different ways that you learn can help you see both how much you have learned already, and the kinds of learning you prefer.



## 1.2 Using your everyday experiences

You will now be aware that a great deal of learning takes place in our 'ordinary' lives. So let's start to examine some of the things you probably do every day, without even recognising that they are tools that help you to learn.



Social scientist Neil Thompson (Thompson, 2005) suggests that knowledge and skills can be developed in the following six ways:

- Reading
- Asking
- Watching
- Feeling
- Talking
- Thinking

Combining some of these approaches helps to build a more rounded picture of a topic or of a skill that you are trying to acquire or develop. For example, reading an article in a magazine might lead to talking through the ideas with friends or colleagues, asking how they might do things differently and why. This in turn might encourage you to think about the way you normally approach similar situations, and then to try a different approach. Further reflection on whether or not it works for you and why (or why not) can be a valuable source of learning.

## 1.3 Sources of learning

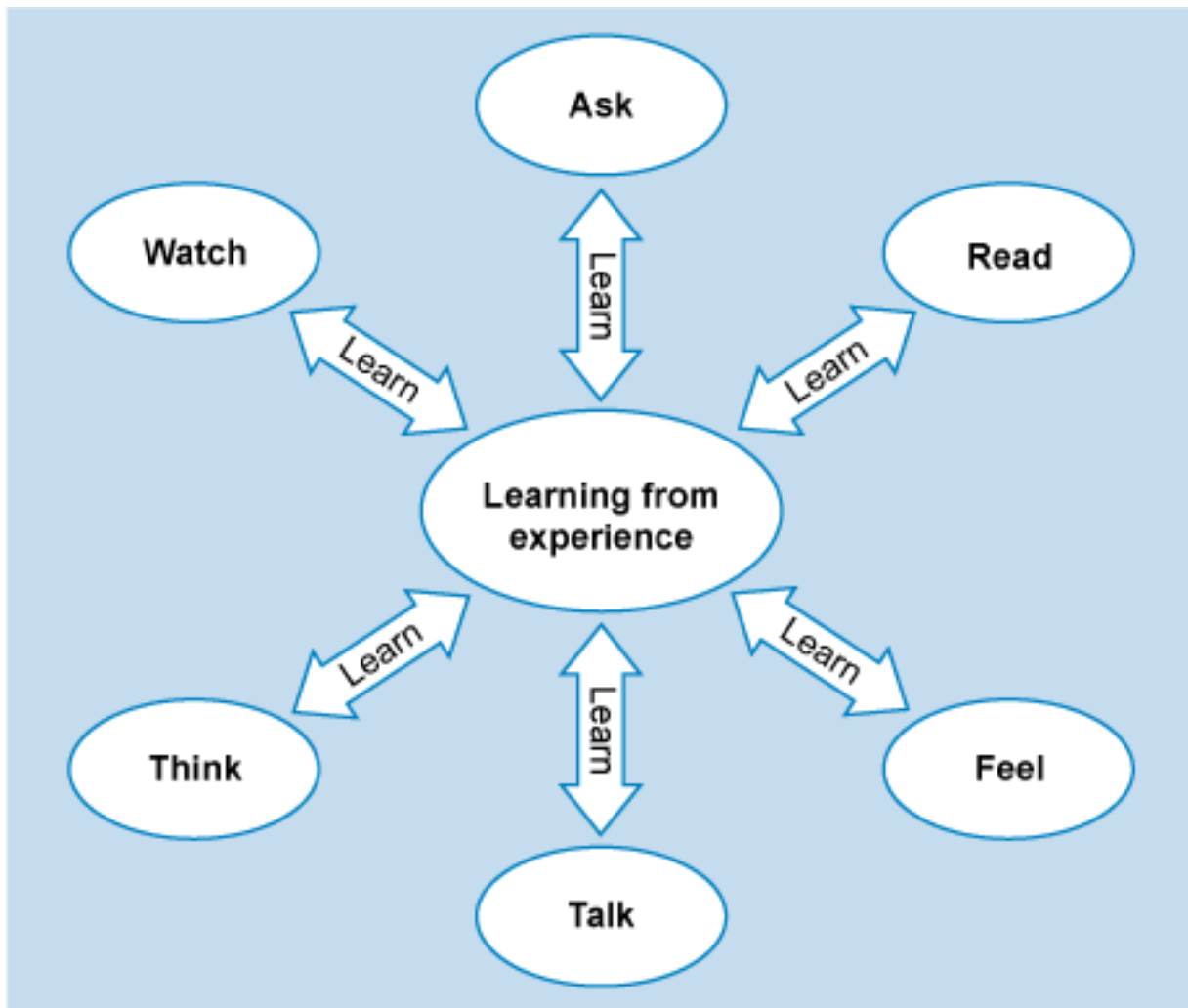


Figure 1 Sources of learning

You can develop your skills and knowledge when you:

### Read

There are many different sorts of books and other written materials that can:

- help you expand your horizons
- provide new insights and ideas
- help you learn techniques that will save you time.

All types of writing offer a learning experience, including novels and poetry, as well as non-fiction self-help manuals, documents and biographies.

## Ask

Some writing is aimed at professional or academic readers, so the style is sometimes hard to understand or appreciate. Asking other people to explain, or tell you what they think about the ideas, can help make sense of them.

You will learn a lot by asking other people – inside and outside of the workplace – how they tackle things and why they do things a certain way; what they have learned through study or experience.

## Watch

There are at least two aspects to watching:

- watching other people in order to learn different approaches to things
- watching carefully what happens when you do something new and then thinking about why it happened that way.

When you work on automatic pilot, you are not really thinking about what you are doing. However, opening up your attention and taking notice of what happens creates useful learning opportunities.

## Feel

Thoughts, feelings, attitudes and behaviours are all linked. You can use your thoughts to make sense of your feeling, and your intuition to guide your thinking.

## Talk

Sharing ideas with colleagues, friends, family or members of an organisation you belong to is a good way of learning to understand a range of perspectives on a situation and to challenge your instinctive responses. Regular conversations can also help sharpen your communication and problem-solving skills.

## Think

Having enough time to really think about your life and learning may seem like a luxury, but Thompson points out that thinking time is an essential for times when you are not busy. If you put some effort into thinking about crises and planning to avoid them, you can save time on fighting problems in the future. You can be more in charge of what is happening to you rather than feeling at the mercy of unforeseen events.

### Activity 3 Learning from experience

Allow about 15 minutes for this activity.

Looking at the diagram in figure 1, choose three of the sources of learning, and for each one write in your journal an example of when learning in this way helped you interact with your community. If you find it difficult to think of examples for some of the

sources, it may be that you don't learn in this way very frequently. You could make a deliberate effort to do so in the coming weeks.

If you can, add further examples to your notes later, or add examples of when you have benefited from the other sources of learning.

## 2 Active listening skills

### 2.1 Key elements of active listening

Whether we are talking to a family member, friend, colleague or client - or anyone else for that matter - we are constantly listening. Yet there is a difference between listening and active listening.

Active listening is a critical skill for everyone, but even more so for professionals working in roles such as community policing and when dealing with vulnerable people. The College of Policing, for example, defines active listening skills as:

paying careful attention to the intent and content of an individual's communications through use of a range of techniques (such as mirroring, paraphrasing, emotion labelling and use of open-ended questions) to demonstrate an understanding of their needs.

College of Policing *Mental Vulnerability and Illness*, 2013

In *Active listening: improve your ability to listen and lead* (2006, p.12), Michael Hoppe points out that active listening relates not just to a person's willingness (and ability) to hear but importantly also their willingness and ability to understand. In order to describe this Hoppe lists six key skills of active listening:

- Paying attention to your language and body language, as well as that of the other person.
- Holding your judgement so that you can be open to the ideas and perspectives offered by the other person, even if they do not necessarily accord with your own.
- Reflecting and paraphrasing the other person's information and feelings as a way of confirming and indicating genuine understanding.
- Using clarifying and probing questions to ensure that no key points remain unclear.
- Summarising to ensure mutual understanding and buy-in.
- Sharing your thoughts and addressing any concerns.

Most people would agree that each of these skills is highly important, but in reality they are all necessary. Being strong in just one skill will not enable you to be a good active listener, instead you should seek to improve your capability in each of these key areas.

## Activity 4 Active listening

Allow about 15 minutes for this activity.

Understanding your own level of active listening can be a really important step. Complete the following checklist to evaluate how good you are at listening:

Interactive content is not available in this format.

### Discussion

For any of the questions where you marked yourself 'agree', you may find the following suggestions helpful.

- 1 I sometimes indicate through my body language, tone or behaviour that I am not fully attentive:
  - Actively monitor and manage your body language to ensure that you are not inadvertently sending a message that you are not attentive.
  - Wherever possible try to find a time and location where disruptions will be minimised.
  - Try to complete one task or conversation before beginning another.
- 2 I can at times struggle to concentrate on the conversation:
  - Actively engage with the other person: turn towards them and be sure to maintain eye contact.
  - Take notes to help you remember important points.
- 3 I get annoyed if I feel that I am being slowed down:
  - Be proactive. Let them know you want to hear their concerns, suggestions, and needs.
  - Consider the potential costs of not slowing down and listening to the other person.
  - If due to time pressures you are unable to finish a conversation, be sure to agree another time when you can complete it.
- 4 I tend to concentrate more on what to say next rather on what is being said right now by the person I am speaking with:
  - Remind yourself that your primary goal is to listen and understand.
  - Set a goal of being able to repeat the last sentence the other person has said.
  - Give yourself a moment to formulate your response after the other person finishes speaking rather than just jumping in.
- 5 Instead of waiting for the other person to finish talking, I sometimes interrupt or may show signs of impatience:
  - Focus on what is being said, not what you want to say.
  - Give yourself a moment to formulate your response after the other person finishes speaking rather than just jumping in.
- 6 I have a tendency to give advice too soon and may propose actions or solutions even before the person I am speaking with has finished outlining their thoughts:
  - Consider that the other person may primarily need to be heard and understood.
  - Ask open-ended questions that encourage the other person to offer ideas.

- Don't be afraid of silence. It gives the other person a chance to continue, and it gives you a chance to collect your thoughts.
- 7 I am uncomfortable with silence in conversations and will often make a point of filling any gaps:
- Don't be afraid of silence. It gives the other person a chance to continue, and it gives you a chance to collect your thoughts.
  - Silence can also give you the opportunity to observe the other person's body language and to consider the context in which the conversation is taking place.
- 8 I become very uncomfortable if the person I am speaking with starts expressing emotions:
- Discuss the emotions as you notice them: "You seem worried about ... . Tell me more about it".
  - Pay attention to the tone of voice, body language, and the use of specific words – this can tell you a huge amount of what might really be going on.
- 9 I normally expect yes or no answers and can get frustrated when this is not the case:
- Remind yourself that such an expectation is not appropriate for active listening.
  - Avoid dead-end questions that ask for confirmation instead of insight: "Don't you think that...?"
- 10 I often keep my thoughts to myself, even when it would be helpful to share them:
- Being an active listener includes sharing your thoughts. Just remember that your primary objective is to understand; being understood is secondary.
  - Build on what the other person says: "That triggered the following thought for me".

## 2.2 Barriers to active listening

Most people would agree that active listening is an important life skill, yet there are many barriers to doing it successfully. In the context of training police officers, Peter McDermott and Diana Hulse argue that, 'If officers cannot communicate with the public, poor community relations will hinder even the most technically proficient departments'.

But why is this the case? On a simple level, and again thinking about things from a community policing perspective, an officer might be under pressure to get things done quickly or be focused on calming or managing a difficult situation. Equally, however, the person or people they are dealing with might be distressed and upset, making it hard for an officer to engage in a proactive manner.

Whatever the reason, Elizabeth Kuhnke, writing in *Communication Skills for Dummies*, (2012), outlines some key barriers to active listening:

- **Assumptions:** When you make [such] an assumption, you're creating a conclusion based on partial information. No matter how tempting, refrain from speaking until the other person has finished. Then pause to show that you've absorbed what's been said before offering your opinion.

- **Defensiveness:** If you seek to protect yourself from criticism you place barriers between yourself and the messages other people are sending. Instead of viewing comments and criticisms as personal attacks, use the messages as an instrument for self-assessment, improvement and personal development.
- **Ego:** If you think that you've nothing to learn from what someone else is saying, or that you're better than the other person, you close yourself off and stop listening. Although you may not agree with what's being said, keeping your mind open may allow you to discover something you didn't know before.
- **Environmental distractions:** These distractions can be your own internal messages, including pre-judging the other person's point of view, or issues that are concerning you that have nothing to do with the person speaking. They can also include electronic gadgets and the room temperature. Put away your toys, let go of unproductive thoughts and make yourself comfortable in order to listen properly to what the other person is saying.
- **Intolerance:** If you close your mind to the beliefs and opinions of others, you stand little chance of hearing what they're saying and the messages beneath the spoken word. If you really want to understand other people and build a strong relationship with them, put yourself in their shoes and see how the world seems from their perspective.

Kuhnke, 2012, pp 60-61

## 2.3 Understanding what is said, understanding what is meant

A more specific challenge can be linked to focusing too much on what is being said at the expense of what is actually being meant. The key to overcoming this is an understanding of 'paralanguage', defined by the Oxford Dictionary of Psychology as 'the non-verbal aspects of speech that convey information to listeners, including accent, loudness, pitch, rhythm, tempo, timbre'.

An additional element of paralanguage is body language, the non-verbal ways of communicating with nuanced movements and expressions used by a person while communicating. You will explore body language in more detail in Week 3.

By paying attention to the key elements of paralanguage and body language we can look behind the curtain of what is being said to better understand what is actually meant. This is particularly important when dealing with vulnerable people, especially those in volatile and abusive situations who may be afraid to state directly the challenges they are facing.

## 3 Developing empathy and building



## relationships

### 3.1 What is empathy?



Figure 2 Most people use empathy in everyday life

One definition of empathy comes from the work of the US writer on counselling and social work, Gerard Egan, who defines empathy as:

The ability to enter into and understand the world of another person and to communicate this understanding to him or her.

Egan, 1986, p. 95

Most people actually use empathy in everyday life when they read a novel, watch a television soap, a film or a play. Indeed, we often judge the success of the novel, film or play by the extent to which we are caught up in the world it is portraying, and how 'real' the characters in the story feel to us. In so doing we identify with the characters we meet there and enter into their worlds.

You never really understand another person until you consider things from his point of view - until you climb inside of his skin and walk around in it.

Harper Lee, *To Kill a Mockingbird*

Empathy is a skill that is vital for understanding the experience of other people, especially those people whose experiences are very different from your own.

How people respond to stress and distress depends on their previous experiences and the sense they have been able to make of them. If an individual's experiences are very different from yours, then you may misunderstand their response, or even the cause of their distress. Such misunderstandings can potentially lead you to react unhelpfully, and to make things worse.

You cannot assume that other people will see things the way you do, or respond in the way that you would, because your feelings and reactions are influenced by your particular life experiences.

## 3.2 When empathy is difficult

When considering empathy, it can be useful to reflect on the way in which we relate to people. Aoife Lyons (a clinical psychologist) and Shane O'Mara (a neuroscientist) argue that 'we judge people first on their warmth and then on their competence, in a few seconds' (2016). While this applies to how we engage with other people (and the empathy we show) it also occurs when other people engage with us and make an assessment of us, including the empathy which we are demonstrating to them.

There are a number of reasons why on occasion it may be difficult to demonstrate empathy towards the people you encounter. The most obvious is when you find it difficult to tolerate a particular characteristic. A simple example might be if you find it difficult to 'get near to really smelly people'. This may seem trivial, but it is important to recognise the problem and thereby guard against giving an unsatisfactory service to 'really smelly people' or to any other group towards whom you feel an antipathy.

While this example seems straightforward enough, other instances can be trickier, when strongly held beliefs may clash. For example, you might find it difficult to show empathy towards a member of the public who is making racist remarks or refusing to accept services from an officer with a different ethnicity to their own.

Another and rather different circumstance might be where experiences described by a member of the public are beyond your comprehension, and trying to understand them is difficult and distressing for both you and the other person.

## 3.3 Empathy in policing

The quality of empathy is an essential skill in community policing, and like other skills it can be developed through practice and thinking about that practice.

Looking internationally, programs in various jurisdictions have considered the impact of empathy on police engagement with the public. A study funded by the US Department of Justice identified, for example, a capacity for empathy and compassion as a core competency of policing.

Where empathy-based programs have been specifically introduced in policing – such as Seattle Police Department's LEED program (short for 'Listening and Explaining with Equity and Dignity') significantly positive outcomes were evident both for police officers and the communities they serve with fewer arrests and lower rates of use of force.

## 3.4 Steps to building empathy

Stephen Covey, author of *The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People*, asserted that we should 'seek first to understand, then to be understood' (2004, p.235). This is all well and good, but how do we break this down to make it something we can take action on?

A key element of empathy is developing your emotional intelligence. In his book *Emotional Intelligence* (1998), Daniel Goleman defined it as: 'the capacity for recognizing our own feelings and those of others for motivating ourselves, and for managing emotions well in ourselves and in our relationships'. Goleman summarises the key elements of emotional intelligence as follows:

- **Self-Awareness:** emotional self-awareness, accurate self-assessment, self-confidence.
- **Social Awareness:** empathy, organisational awareness, service orientation.
- **Self-Management:** self-control, trustworthiness, conscientiousness, adaptability, achievement orientation, initiative.
- **Social Skills:** developing others, leadership, influence, communication, change catalyst, conflict management, building bonds, teamwork.

Each of these can be developed in order to strengthen our emotional intelligence and empathy, which jointly could perhaps be called our 'emotional literacy'. The simple steps to enhancing your emotional literacy would include:

### Activity 5 Practising emotion recognition

Allow about 20 minutes for this activity.

Think of an example when you remember noticing somebody's body language. Describe it in your learning journal, followed by what emotional state or personal trait they revealed. Then think of an occasion when your own body language could have been interpreted by others, write it down in the same way.

For example:

- John kept looking down and touching his forehead when he was speaking to Ben (his boss).  
He felt insecure and subconsciously wanted to hide his eyes or maybe reassure himself that he was thinking straight.
- I folded my arms when Jane was gossiping at the bus stop.  
I didn't agree with what Jane was saying. By folding my arms maybe I was creating a barrier between us and I showed I was uncomfortable.

Over the next few weeks, continue to make notes about both your own and other people's body language and what it reveals. Your general awareness will be heightened, and you might find you are able to interact more sensitively with others as a result.

## 4 Identifying vulnerability

### 4.1 The importance of identifying vulnerability in community policing

Watch the following video.

As we can see from the interviewees in this short video clip, identifying vulnerable people is a key part of community policing. Speaking at the November 2016 conference of the College of Policing, College CEO, Chief Constable Alex Marshall, asserted that 'Vulnerability is a priority for everyone in policing and it is important that we protect the most vulnerable in society and the officers and staff carrying out this essential work'

But what is vulnerability? While there are many working definitions the one most commonly referred to comes from the 1997 *Who Decides?* report. In that report a *vulnerable adult* is defined as a person...

who is or may be in need of community care services by reason of mental or other disability, age or illness and who is or may be unable to take care of him or herself, or unable to protect him or herself against significant harm or exploitation.

Lord Chancellor's Department, *Who Decides?*, 1997

When it comes to children, definitions of vulnerability are similarly diverse and often vary depending on the context of application. A more 'plain English' description is given by the Child and Maternity Health Observatory:

A vulnerable child... is one who is not within the social care system, but where there are warning signals that the child is becoming at risk of harm. The child and his or her family is likely to be receiving help from one or more agencies, and while no single agency has identified a significant risk to the child, when information from all agencies is pooled, the picture that emerges indicates that there are many factors having a negative impact on the child. While inter-agency data sharing to resolve child protection concerns is established, data sharing to identify these children who are earlier on in the process tends not to happen routinely in a similar way.

ChiMat *Identifying Vulnerable Children*, 2013

Police officers, social workers and other community-based professionals may have to use their professional judgement to intervene in people's lives. One of the reasons is because an individual may be deemed vulnerable in some way and may even need some decisions made on his or her behalf. It is important to note that this idea of 'vulnerability' is often challenged by people using services and groups representing them – on the basis that this term does not acknowledge people's strengths and emphasises only one negative aspect of their lives.

### Activity 6 Identifying vulnerability in your community: At risk groups and behaviours

Allow 15 minutes for this activity.

As highlighted by the definitions above, one challenge when discussing 'vulnerability' is recognising who exactly is vulnerable and the indicative behaviours.

Think about who you would include under the category of 'vulnerable people' in the community in which you live or work, and why. You may be able to draw upon your own work experience, or your experiences of receiving services.

#### Discussion

Those involved in community safety work will inevitably find themselves working with a range of groups who may be categorised as vulnerable, including children, older people, people with physical, mental or learning impairments, people who are unwell or caring for dependents, people who have drug or alcohol problems, and offenders.

This is quite a lengthy list, but does this mean that they are 'vulnerable'? This question is difficult to answer partly because of the different ways in which the word 'vulnerable' is understood. Does it, for example, include people who, despite being able to understand their needs and make decisions for themselves, would be at risk of physical or emotional harm if they did not receive services? To what extent do you think that vulnerability is simply the result of social disadvantage or lack of opportunity?

## 4.2 Key signs of vulnerability

Considering the wide range of potential types of vulnerability outlined above it is almost impossible to give a single, definitive list of the potential signs of vulnerability. A person suffering from mental health issues will, needless to say, demonstrate quite different signs of vulnerability to someone who is at risk of domestic violence. Those dealing with the vulnerable are consequently challenged to be aware at all times, to listen and engage actively and to ensure that they are empathetic to the needs of others.

The Vulnerability Assessment Framework developed by Wright and McGlen – two academics at the University of Central Lancashire – provides a useful model for assessing and, indeed, identifying the signs of vulnerability in a wide range of circumstances, most particularly those related to mental health issues.

Returning to community policing, the College of Policing points out that:

The VAF is a simple tool to prompt identifying vulnerability in all circumstances where the police have contact with victims, suspects and witnesses. It enables officers to build a more detailed record of the circumstances and information that led them to identify someone as vulnerable and in need of assistance, arrest or referral.

College of Policing *Mental Vulnerability and Illness*, 2013

To identify vulnerability, the VAF utilises a five-stage process with the initial letters ABCDE, each of which should act as a prompt to reflection and further investigation. The key stages are as follows:

- **Appearance and atmosphere:** what you see first, including physical problems such as bleeding.

- **Behaviour:** what individuals are doing, and if this is appropriate behaviour given the situation.
- **Communication:** what individuals say and how they say it.
- **Danger:** whether individuals are in danger and whether their actions put other people in danger.
- **Environment:** where they are situated, whether anyone else is there and what impact the wider circumstances may have on the individual's health and safety.

In a similar vein, the SafeLives DASH framework (formerly CAADA DASH) is a critical framework for the assessment of domestic abuse.

Regardless of which framework is applied, an assessment based on these points will potentially provide significant evidence to support subsequent arrest, detention or, just as importantly, support in the event of domestic or other abuse. When engaging with members of the community, police officers and others working in the community must be aware of signs of vulnerability and should have a framework such as the VAF, SafeLives DASH or similar at the front of their mind at all times.

## Summary

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In Week 1 we examined the importance of active listening and empathy as key skills of policing. One particularly relevant area of application of this is in terms of recognising vulnerability in service users and members of the public. While there are different frameworks for understanding and assessing vulnerability in people, at the end of the day they rely on the ability of those working with them – including those involved in Community Policing – to actively listen and engage with them with empathy.

In week 2 you will begin by considering how to gather and make sense of information about the community you work and/or live in. You will then look at the kinds of stakeholder groups involved in community safety work, and how to build and use a personal network to support your own contribution.

You can now go to Week 2.



# Week 2: Understanding community relationships

## Introduction

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Welcome to Week 2.

This week we look at Searching for and making sense of information; Identifying community stakeholders and assessing their interests; and Building network relationships.

Information is an essential resource for problem solving, and comes in a variety of forms. You will start this week by focusing on the information you hold or can gather about the community you are part of.





# 1 Searching for and making sense of information

## 1.1 Different types and sources of information

It is important to recognise first of all that information comes in a variety of forms which affect the ways you may be able to use it.

- **Quantitative information**

Information presented in numerical or graphical formats. Examples include reports about levels of crime, local property values, business investment or average wages, waiting times at the local A&E or even reports from surveys about local community members' attitudes to safety and risk.

- **Qualitative information**

Written, spoken or visual information which indicates something about the quality of life or work within a community. This is often gathered through interviews or focus groups with community members, or from third party observations.

- **Situational information and ongoing intelligence**

Information gathered or provided to assess a specific situation or set of circumstances. Eye-witness reports to an accident or crime are a good example of this. Other information, which we often refer to as ongoing intelligence, is gathered from a variety of sources over a long period to enable us to examine particular patterns of for example organised crime behaviours or road traffic activity.

- **Subjective and objective information**

Information which is provided as an expression of someone's opinion, has to be weighed against that which is from a neutral, disinterested source.

Understanding information is not just a question of what type of information you gather but where it can be found. Some information comes from personal experience or contacts, some from organisational sources like managers or staff reports, some from the mass media such as radio, TV or newspapers, and increasing amounts of information (as well as a fair amount of misinformation) comes from social media.

Issues of community safety often require the gathering and sifting of these various forms of information about sources of threat and risks, and their causes, and about the consequences and impacts. The problems identified are often not straightforward or simple to understand, and consequently difficult to resolve. In the next study activity you will learn one simple method for categorising the information you gather and receive to give you an indication of whether you gain a balanced view of a situation.

### Activity 1 What types of information do you use?

Allow about 20 minutes for this activity.

You will come across all manner of everyday information, which tells you something about what is going on in your local area from community notice boards to local

newspapers, from websites to regular community group meetings. Make a list of the different sources of information you have come across and any more you can think of. Now try to categorise the type of information you get from each of these sources by positioning them on the diagram below:

Interactive content is not available in this format.

### Discussion

The majority of the information we receive is very subjective as it is often offered to back up someone's opinion or argument for a change or improvement. It is often seen as important to present information in a balanced or objective way but for most of us it is very difficult to keep our opinions separate from the information we choose (or choose not) to present. The best way of gaining a balanced view of any event or situation is to gather information from a range of sources which represent a broad range of the different views which have a bearing on it.

## 1.2 Using mind maps to help make sense of complex information

One technique for making sense of complex information that many people find helpful is to draw a mind map that allows you to explore how all your different ideas could be connected.

Mind mapping was invented and developed by Tony Buzan, an author who has explored ways in which people think and learn. The technique helps open your mind to a broad range of ideas, and record these in a flexible format that can be easily altered and developed. So, as well as organising your thoughts and essay plans, mind mapping can help you to think more creatively and to come up with new ways of looking at things.

A mind map can be produced for any subject or topic. A good way of creating a mind map is to start with a large sheet of paper and coloured pens or pencils. Mind maps usually begin in the middle of the paper with a word, phrase, picture or symbol that represents the topic being explored.

The next stage is to let your mind wander as freely as possible around the topic. Think of some key words or phrases (there is no right or wrong here), then write them near to the central image or words. Finally, connect each of them to the centre with lines. This is the beginning of your mind map.

Keep adding lines and words (and pictures, if you like), linking them to each of the words or phrases that triggered them – so that your map becomes a network of words and lines.

Mind maps are often very personal – they are, after all, maps of *your* mind. They can be as elaborate or as simple as you wish – whatever you find helpful. Some people like to add a lot of detail, including colour, pictures, page references and examples, while others prefer a simple plan, concentrating on key points.

The figure below is a simple mind map that a student created for another course aimed at developing learning skills, reflecting on what they had learned.

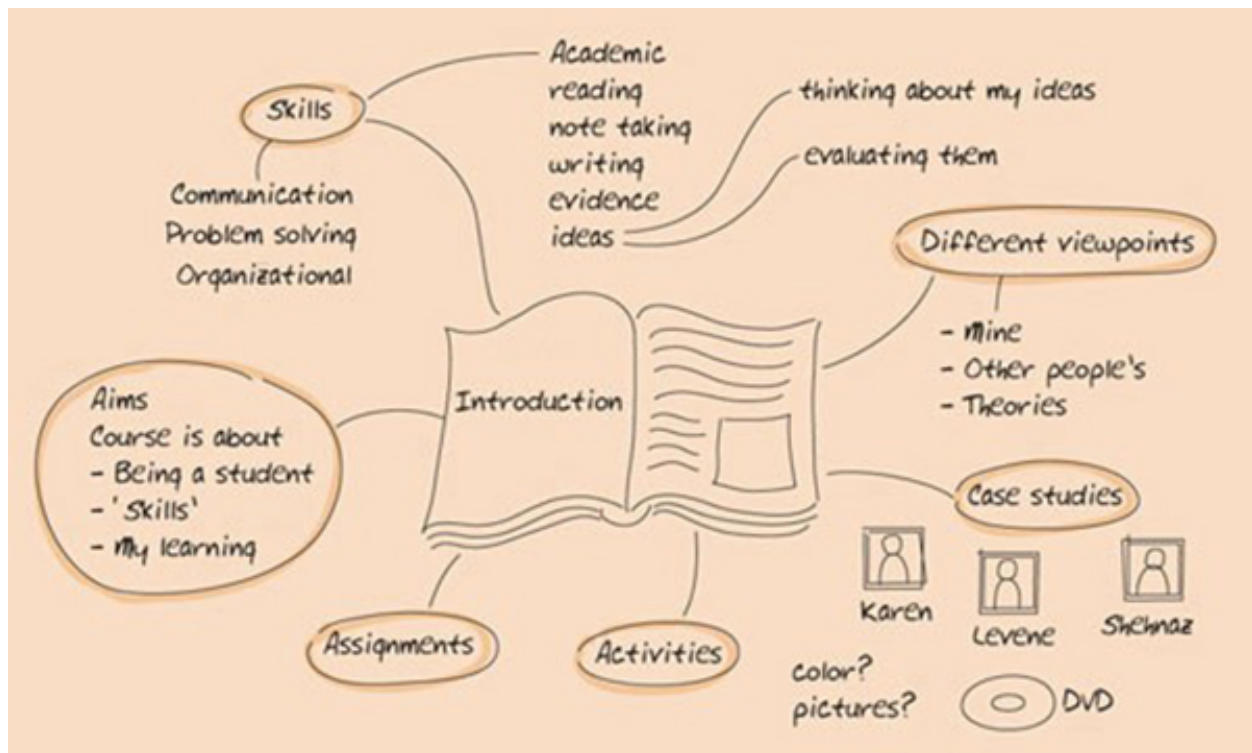


Figure 1 Mind map of an early *Succeed with learning* course

## Activity 2 Creating a mind map

Allow about 20 minutes for this activity.

Thinking about the community you live and/or work in, make a mind map to help you summarise 'what makes my community distinctive'.

For this mind map, the central theme is 'my community', so put that in your central bubble, surrounded by five or six key things about the community which make it distinctive for you. These could be anything from its location (close to the city centre, countryside or water?); its history; some of its best/worst amenities (parks, sports or cultural facilities and regular social activities); the character and/or groupings of its inhabitants; the effectiveness/ineffectiveness of its public services; its political make-up. Draw lines from the central bubble outwards to the others, and add more bubbles and lines as you think of related things that you have learnt.

### Discussion

Take a look at the mind map I drew of the community I live in.

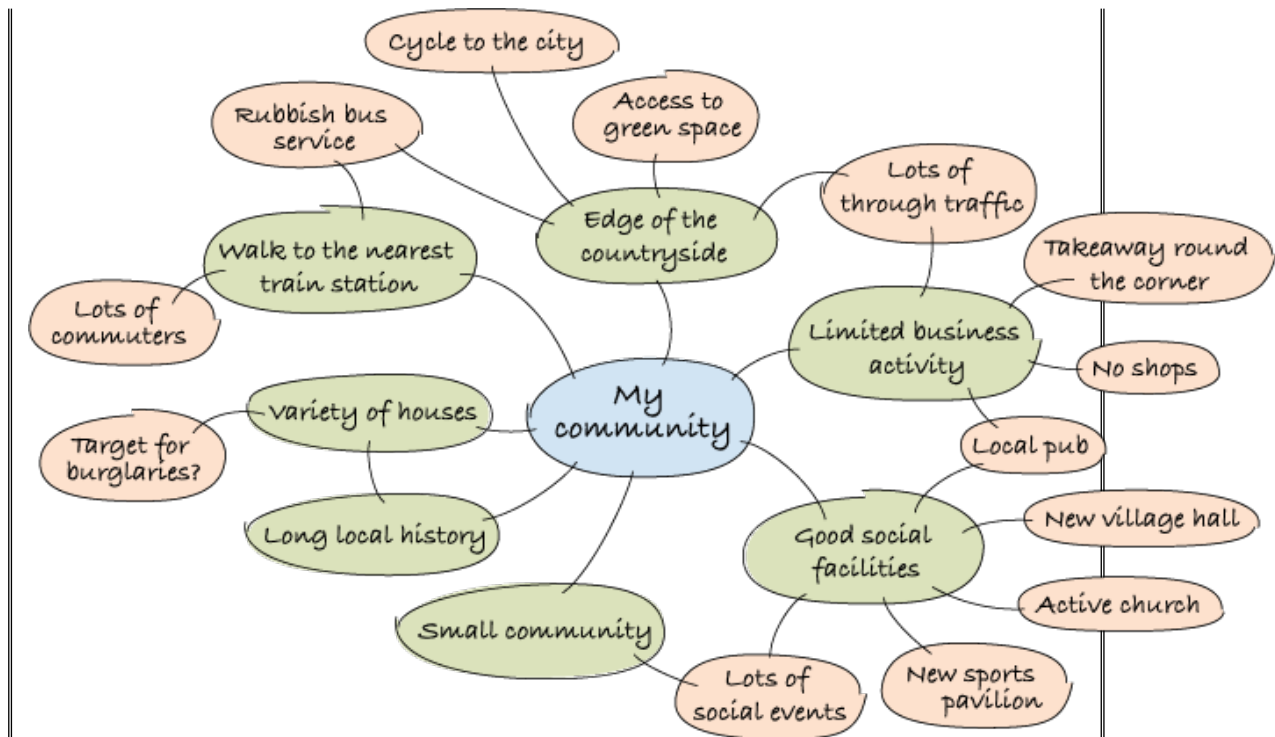


Fig 2 'My community' mind map.

Here I started by listing few distinctive features (in the green boxes), then moved on to think about some of the secondary consequences of those features (in the orange boxes) before I put in the linking lines. Remember that a mind map is a very personal piece of 'sense-making', so my neighbours or even members of my family might not produce anything similar, but the important thing is to highlight what makes it distinctive for you. Also note that its shape will change the more you think about different features and how they link together.

## 1.3 Further uses for mind mapping

Constructing mind maps can feel strange at first. However, with a little practice you can adapt the method for any complex topic or situation in business, education or your personal life – whenever you want to make sense of something, particularly when you are trying to work out what to do next. They can also be created in groups so that you can share and stimulate ideas.

## 1.4 The internet – using information found online

You may be someone who uses the internet fairly regularly to search for information, or perhaps you are still quite a novice. It is widely used to find out about leisure interests, health issues, to contact friends using social media sites or to look for study opportunities. The web is also a very valuable learning tool – providing virtually limitless access to a huge range of ideas, libraries, courses and people. It has also become in the last few years an important way of storing and accessing information about a community, and for community members to exchange information between themselves.

But given the ever-increasing volume of information on the internet, some of which may not be entirely accurate or reliable, it is all the more important to have a way of evaluating the information you find.

By evaluating, we mean judging how accurate the information is likely to be. This is especially important because information found on the web is not subject to regulation or quality control. This means that information might be out of date, misleading or even dangerous.

Fortunately, many people have spent time considering how to evaluate web-based information, or websites. A useful checklist has been developed by The Open University so that its students can be fairly sure of the quality of their sources. This is known as the PROMPT checklist, and is shown in the video below.

Video content is not available in this format.



Here's an explanation of each of the terms (in relation to using the internet).

- **Presentation** – ask yourself about the appearance of the website:
  - Is the information clearly communicated?
  - Is the website easy to navigate?
  - Is the language clear and easy to understand?
- **Relevance** – ask yourself whether the website is really the most suitable for your needs:
  - What is the information mainly about?
  - Does the information match my needs?
- **Objectivity** – ask yourself whether the website is likely to give a balanced view of the topic it covers:

- Does the author of the information on the website make their position or any vested interest clear?
- Is the author likely to be biased?
- Is the language emotive or designed to persuade?
- **Method** – ask yourself if the information provided backs up or supports any claims that are made on a website. This might be information about the ‘experts’ quoted, or the source of ‘facts’. Is it clear *how* the information was collected?
  - If ‘experts’ are mentioned, are they named?
  - Are links provided to any research data?
  - Do you trust the information provided and the claims made?
- **Provenance** – ask yourself about the authenticity of the website and reliability of the place where the information provided comes from:
  - Is it clear *where* the information has come from?
  - You might consider the website address or URL (uniform resource locator) - academic websites in the UK, like The Open University, usually end with ‘ac.uk’ and in the USA they usually end in ‘edu’.
  - Is the author or organisation responsible for the website clearly identified?
  - Is the author or organisation likely to be trustworthy?
- **Timeliness** – ask yourself whether the information on a website is likely to be sufficiently up to date for your needs:
  - Is it clear *when* the information was produced?
  - Does the date of the information meet your requirements (does it matter for your purpose)?
  - Could the information be out of date?

## 2 Identifying community stakeholders and assessing their interests

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### 2.1 Introducing stakeholders

In your work or volunteering – or other areas of your life – you may have noticed that some individuals and groups have quite a lot of power in deciding how your community is run or how services are provided. Power means the potential to influence, but whether people use this power will depend on what interest they have in influencing the community.

Some people have little power but a lot of interest in how things are run, what is done by and for the community, and the quality of the services provided. These individuals or groups could be community residents, service users, volunteers, local business owners and employees, employees of community service providers and the local media, to name a few. These are some of the many stakeholders in the community.

In Week 3 you will be introduced to different sources and forms of information which makes sense of complex issues and problems which many communities face. Many of the



people who need to know this type of information are the community's stakeholders. In this session you will explore their role and contribution.

There are many reasons why it is important not to neglect stakeholders: ensuring that people are consulted can help less powerful groups have a voice in decision making but equally, some groups may decide to campaign against a decision made by staff or trustees. These groups may be powerful enough – or rally enough support – to reverse decisions or to prompt action. For example many police forces around the UK have established local advisory groups to inform the policing team in their area of the community's priorities and ongoing concerns.

In this session you will think about the stakeholders in your community, explore the different perspectives they hold and the amount of power each has to influence how the organisation fulfils its mission. You will also learn about some of the ways in which community services and voluntary organisations work and communicate with their stakeholders.

The stakeholder approach originated with business and management theorists in the 1960s as a way looking at an organisation's priorities and how they are reached. The term stakeholders encompasses many different people and groups who have an interest in how well an organisation is run, including a business's shareholders who obviously want a return for their investment. When we apply the term stakeholders to voluntary organisations, it has a similar meaning but the stakeholders are different.

In the context of community activities, stakeholders are individuals or groups that have a 'stake' in, are affected by, or can have an effect on those activities.



### Activity 3 Brixton Splash – Organising a community event

Allow about 10 minutes for this activity.



Figure 3 Brixton Splash community festival

'Brixton Splash' was a community festival which ran from 2006 until 2016 when public safety concerns about its organisation were raised. Read the following extract from the promotional literature of the festival in 2015, and make a list in your learning journal of who you think the stakeholders are.

*Brixton Splash is an annual free street music festival in Brixton, London, which started in 2005. It is organised by a community organisation and uses volunteer stewards on the day. It currently has funding from the Arts Council and has had funding from Lambeth Council in the past. Its aims are:*

- *To promote and celebrate African-Caribbean heritage and culture, and its influence in the local area and beyond.*
- *To promote equality and diversity for public benefit through an inclusive festival that will foster understanding and harmony between people of diverse backgrounds.*
- *To advance education in music, arts, heritage and culture through a festival and outreach programme that will bring people of diverse backgrounds together for the appreciation and celebration of African-Caribbean culture and Brixton.*

*We celebrate our community's diversity, its progress through the years and the fusion of numerous ethnic groups that now call Brixton home, by creating a cultural explosion proudly specific to our location and history. We*

*successfully balance welcoming those who are just discovering Brixton with those who have always believed in Brixton's unique identity, throughout the years. We remain loyal to and proud of our Afro-Caribbean heritage which has defined our community since the Windrush generation of the late 1940s and 1950s.*

*The Festival is a celebration of community cohesion, vibrant inner city living and Brixton's contribution to the wider world. Brixton is currently the go-to area in London to enjoy everything culinary and creative with big name businesses moving to the high street and entrepreneurs developing the markets.*

*Lambeth is one of the most diverse boroughs in the country, with over 130 languages spoken. Brixton sits in the heart of the borough and is a bustling hive of activity. There is a strong history of music and the creative arts and numerous cultural groups are based in the area.*

*Our Festival is free for everyone, operates between midday and 7 pm on the first Sunday in August every year and has become a premier event in the London Events Calendar.*

*Each year we improve and enhance the content of our event to build on its success and broaden its appeal.*

*Brixton Splash, 2015*

#### Comment

The stakeholders include:

- the local community
- local businesses
- volunteers and staff
- Lambeth Council
- the police
- visitors to the event from outside the community
- sponsors.

## 2.2 Stakeholders in community policing

Policing is example of a community service with a complex range of stakeholders. Take a look at Figure 3. These are just some of the stakeholders we can identify in community policing



Figure 4 The stakeholders in community policing

The inner ring of the diagram – directly circling community policing – depicts the primary stakeholders. These are individuals and groups that have a direct, specific interest in how community policing is run, its mission, its effectiveness and other day-to-day issues.

The outer area depicts the secondary stakeholders, who may also have an interest in the community policing but perhaps not as directly or as specifically as those in the inner circle. Of course, secondary stakeholders can also take a direct interest – for example, in the case of inter-service partnerships, the partners will want to ensure that partnership commitments are being upheld by the police force in question.

Watch this video of Ben Hargreaves, a Chief Inspector in Dorset Police, talking about the work of neighbourhood advisory groups in community policing. Where do you think these groups will fit on Figure 4 above.

Video content is not available in this format.



#### Activity 4 Mapping your stakeholders

Allow about 10 minutes for this activity.

In your learning journal, make a list of the primary and secondary stakeholders of a community activity, project or organisation with which you are familiar. This can be any aspect of the community where you live, work or volunteer.

You might like to create a stakeholder diagram, similar to Figure 4 to depict the stakeholders you identify. Your diagram will have your chosen activity, project or organisation in the centre.

What similarities and differences with the case example did you note and why?

#### Discussion

You probably found both similarities and differences – depending on the size of the activity you chose, as well as what field it is in (e.g. health and social care, environmental, hobby or sports and so on). You might also have found that Figure 4 made you think more widely about the people who might have an interest in your community.

This activity will have helped you think about who the stakeholders are in the context of community safety. We will return to the theme of how to work and communicate with community stakeholders later in this course. For now though it is time to look at a different model of relationships which both contrasts with and complements the stakeholder model.



## 2.3 Understanding influence and interests

A method used to depict the relationship between a stakeholder's interest in the community and the power they have to influence it is a matrix (see Figure 5). On this matrix, large-scale employers or providers of public services, like local authorities for example, would be placed in the high interest/high power category. Similarly, an organisation might have stakeholders that have a high degree of influence but little interest in the activities of a specific community (for example policy makers). This might apply to some of the secondary stakeholders you identified in Activity 2. What about those with a high degree of interest but low power? Service users and staff in the organisation will often fall within this category, but not always.

		Level of interest	
		Low	High
Power	Low	e.g., general public	e.g., service users, staff (often)
	High	e.g., policymakers	e.g., funders, members

Figure 5 Power and interest of stakeholders matrix (Source: adapted from Johnson and Scholes, 1999)

### Activity 5 What kind of community stakeholder are you?

Allow about 5 minutes for this activity.

From the power/interest matrix in Figure 5, which box do you think you fit into?

#### Comment

This type of stakeholder mapping can be useful for thinking about how you might engage with the different stakeholders in your community role, whether that be in a service organisation like policing, emergency response, health or social care, or as an active member of community groups like the parish council or Neighbourhood Watch. In general, most ordinary members of the community are low power/low interest, but by studying this course you are perhaps indicating that you have a higher interest. If you are an employee or volunteer in a community-based organisation/service, it is likely that you will be low power/high interest, but if you are in a locally elected role your power will tend to be higher. If you are in a senior role in an organisation with a branch in the community, or are involved in national policy making which affects communities, you are likely to be high power/low interest. If you also live in a community affected by policy decisions you may face a conflict of interests.

## 3 Building network relationships

### 3.1 What is networking?

The *Concise Oxford English Dictionary* (2009, p. 961) defines a 'network' as an 'arrangement of intersecting horizontal and vertical lines.' This might not immediately seem relevant to networks of people but actually it helps with visualising how people in a network connect up, because the dictionary goes on to suggest that a network can also be 'a group or system of interconnected people and things'. Figure 6 is an example of what a network of people might look like. It shows clearly the direct connections from one person to another. However, it also shows that the same people are connected indirectly, via other contacts.



Figure 6 Example of a network of people

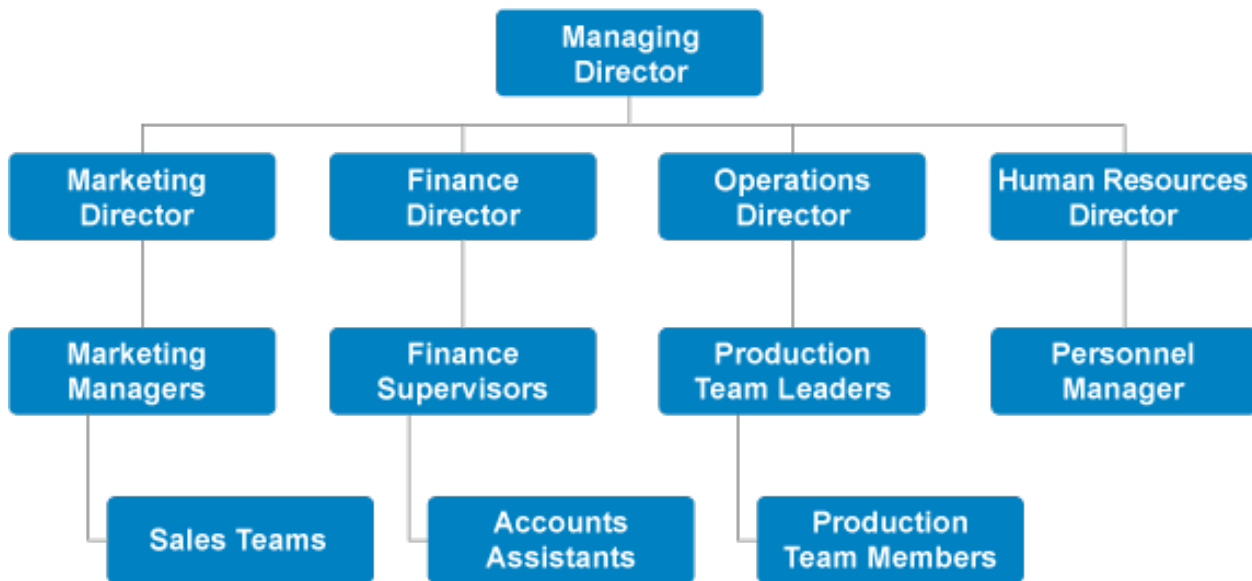


Figure 7 A typical organisation chart for a business

Alternatively, Figure 7 is an example of a typical organisation chart for a business. There are vertical lines between people, representing who is more senior and who reports to whom. As well as this vertical arrangement, there are also clear horizontal arrangements for the roles. These indicate which departments are equal to but different from each other. Effectively, the organisation chart shows how the ‘system’, which is the business in this case, is interconnected and meant to function.

However, most people who have worked in organisations know that people do not always communicate in the vertical and horizontal ways which the chart suggests. People talk to the people they know. So a more informal network will exist within any organisation and it will look more like the interconnected web shown in Figure 6.

This is because networks are groups of people with a common interest, one which is not dependent on tasks or work objectives. For instance, your organisation might have a running club, where all the members are interested in running but wouldn’t necessarily work with each other directly.

Networks bring together people with a common interest, they are largely outside formal structures, and any hierarchy which might exist is based on the usefulness of a person to the network.

## 3.2 What does networking look like in practice?

A network is basically a group of interconnected people with a common interest. The network is the result of making these connections – otherwise known as networking. However network relationships also have a number of other characteristics which distinguish them from those found in organisations, communities or friendship groups.

The connections in a network tend to be fairly informal, without contractual ties. At the same time though, a network relationship develops on the basis of ongoing reciprocal obligations, so it tends to be more formal than a friendship. What turns something from a social event with friends into a networking activity is the common purpose – you have a reason beyond just liking the people you are interacting with.

According to Himmelman (1996), a researcher in different forms of collaboration, the main purpose of a network is to facilitate exchanges of information between members for



mutual benefit. To that we might add the exchange of personal resources such as skills, knowledge and contacts for mutual benefit.

## 3.3 How can a network support collaboration and problem solving in communities?

By now you understand a little more about networking but may also have questions about how it fits in with tackling community issues or solving problems. Here are three key ways that networking is useful:

- 1 Ensuring you understand the context of events** Networks help provide you with information about *underlying* activities and changes in the community, such as who is involved in local health, education and care provision, the local business environment or changes to housing provision and the residential make-up of particular neighbourhoods. For instance, at a formal community group meeting it is likely that there will be as many ideas shared between network members during coffee, as during the formal meeting itself.  
Online social media channels like Facebook, Twitter or Instagram make it possible to connect with people who you might never meet in another way. Many community groups and services have set up online networking activities using one or more of these. They can help keep track of the ongoing concerns of those community members who are proactive on social media.
- 2 Helping you to get things done** Community activities such as school fetes, voluntary neighbourhood projects or organising support services for vulnerable community members often depend on strong underlying networks. Community leaders and service providers have to work closely with parents, volunteers, and residents to initiate and coordinate these activities. All of this will depend on the mutual exchange of information, local knowledge and skills which characterise strong networks.  
However, this is not always as easy as it sounds. In a complex world, getting things done often requires working with people outside the immediate network and influencing them to help. For instance, it might not be possible for one small local organisation to establish a community garden, but by working in partnership with other groups and the local council this could be enough to get it off the ground.
- 3 Finding creative solutions** Networks also provide a way to increase personal creativity and problem solving ability because they allow you to see things from another's perspective. While many organisations benchmark themselves against their industry competitors, they might learn more by comparing how they do things with an organisation in a very different sector.

### Optional Activity: Exploring creative problems using network contacts

This is quite time consuming so you may want to try it in your own time when you have finished the course. In addition to networking, you will need to think about how you use some of the skills you have started to develop like active listening.

Anyone who has spent a long time thinking about a particular problem or is immersed in a culture that tends to approach problems in particular ways is likely to find it difficult to break out of a mindset which constrains their creativity. Using someone from our

personal network who is not involved in the problem itself can offer a fresh pair of eyes to help unlock this mindset.

Try the following process with someone from your network who you can trust will work with you:

- 1 Write down a problem that you are trying to solve as clearly and simply as you can.
- 2 Show your problem description to one or more people who have no direct experience of the problem and ask them to think about it for a day or two, writing down any questions or ideas they have about it.
- 3 Sit down with them in a mutually comfortable environment – it may a café or just a quiet corner of your workplace – and ask them to go through their questions and ideas while you make notes. It is likely many of these ideas are quite 'naïve' given their lack of familiarity but is important that you listen respectfully.
- 4 Now try to feed back your own thoughts on how their questions and ideas could be useful to moving your thinking forward.

### 3.4 Understanding your community network and how to use it

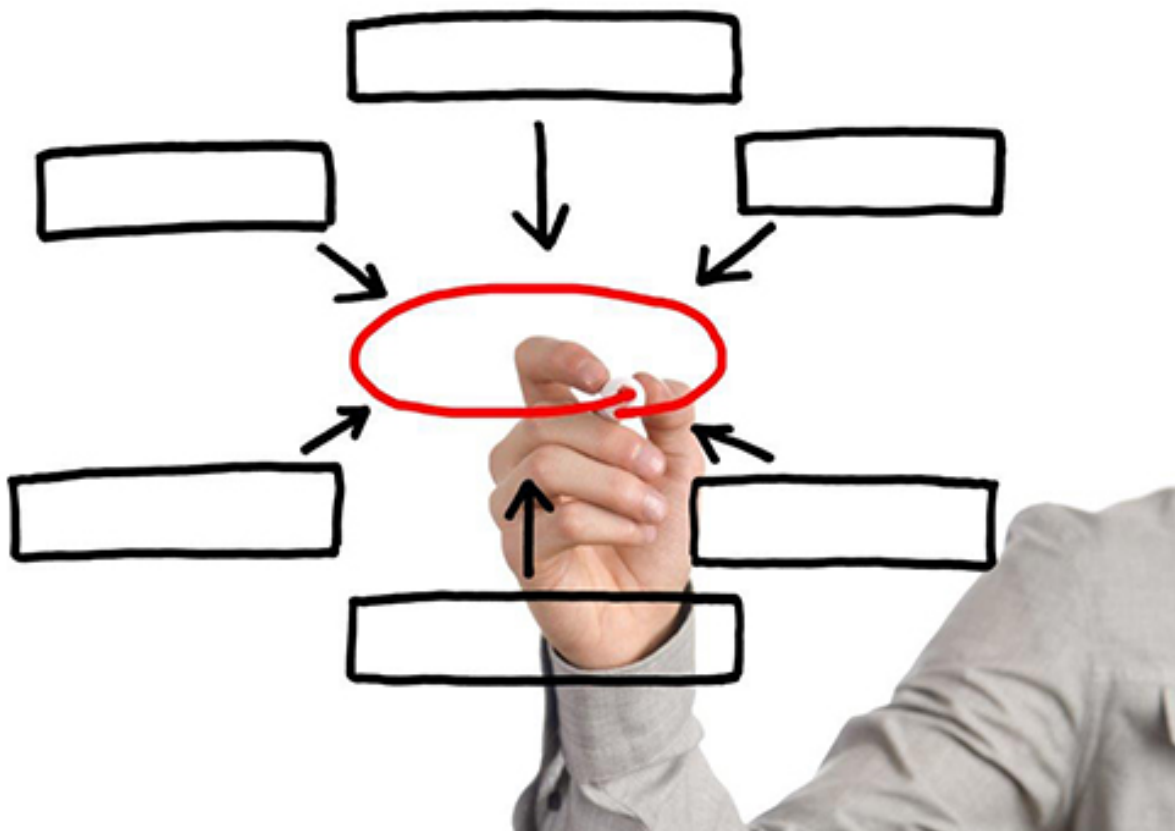


Figure 8 Your complete network

You will now have some understanding of why networks are so important in understanding and working with your community. From a personal perspective they can provide you with regular information, potentially deep local knowledge and sometimes resources on which you can draw to get things done. It is useful to get an understanding of how your network, and the contacts within it, fit together. It will make it clearer where they cross and are connected. You will use your notes from Activities 3 and 4 to do this now.

### Activity 6 Mapping your whole network

Allow about 20 minutes for this activity.

This three-part activity helps you to create a 'network map'. This is a visual representation of all your contacts, and how they might connect together.

#### Part 1

From your contacts list or address book make a list in your learning journal of people you know who have knowledge of or work in the community you work with. It doesn't have to be a long list, just start with five or six key names. This is the network. You may add more names later as you develop the next part of the activity.

#### Comment

Remember to include your online contacts from social media, if you are already actively engaged online.

#### Part 2

Below this list, create a visual diagram of these network members. This is not a drawing exercise, you are simply trying to show on paper how things 'look' inside your head. One method of doing this is to use a mind map.

There are many ways to approach this. You could put yourself in the centre, with links from you to each of your different networks, off which you can write the appropriate names.



Figure 9 How your network mind map could look

#### Comment

When you think visually, you often think differently and see things you might not have realised before. The final step in the exercise, therefore, is to reflect on what you have learned about your existing network.

#### Part 3

Write down your answers to the following questions in your learning journal to help you think about what you have learned from your mapping. Do not feel constrained by these prompt questions though. Make a note of whatever feels significant to you.

- 1 Is the network imbalanced in some way? For example, do you have a great network of people from your own organisation but know relatively few people outside your usual place of work? What effect might this have?
- 2 Are there any strands of the network which need to be improved to help you to satisfy your main purpose in networking? What and why?
- 3 Is there anyone else you can add to the network who might help you in the work you do in the community?

#### Comment

You may have been surprised by how extensive a network you have already developed. You will almost certainly have noticed some gaps or duplications in it. This

is fine though, as it is a natural result of different ways we live our lives. The important thing is to consider how you can use and sustain your network or extend it.

Creating networks is one thing, sustaining them is another. You need to be realistic, therefore, about how broad and deep a network you can manage at the moment. Being able to use networks skilfully and respectfully is the real challenge.

## Week 2 quiz

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This quiz gives you the opportunity to check your understanding of the subjects you have covered in Weeks 1 and 2. It consists of eight questions and will help you to assess your own progress.

[Week 2 quiz](#)

Open the quiz in a new tab or window (by holding ctrl [or cmd on a Mac] when you click the link).

## Summary

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This week the key learning points have been about how to gain insights by gathering and making sense of information about the community you work and/or live in. If you have particular responsibilities of care or safety in that community it is essential you gain this understanding, and that you work to maintain it and periodically review and reflect on changes which are happening. But these things cannot be done in isolation. You will need to work closely with other colleagues, community members and partner service providers in order to develop a common understanding of the key issues and how they might be addressed.

Next week you will begin to look at how you can develop the communication and relationship-building skills needed to make this work effective.

You can now go to Week 3.

# Week 3: Communicating in your community

## Introduction

Welcome to Week 3.

This week we look at Learning to communicate more effectively; Communicating with colleagues and peers; Communicating with the community and the general public; and Working with partner services and groups.

The word 'communicate' comes from the Latin word *communicare*, meaning 'to give' or 'to share'. So, clearly, the idea of communication has always involved more than one person.



# 1 Learning to communicate more effectively

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Where there is communication of any kind, there are always those who send a message and those who receive it. Having good communication skills involves being aware of both sender and receiver.

Communication takes many forms, for example:

- talking
- listening
- body language
- tone of voice
- writing
- sharing ideas or information online.

We often change the way that we speak depending on the circumstances; most of us, for example, watch what we say so as not to offend or upset others. But the verbal or spoken aspects of communication form only a part of what is going on. Whenever someone communicates with another person, they are engaged in a constant process of interpretation to try and make sense of what is going on.

Most of us have some awareness of the impact of body language. We may believe, for example, that politicians can modify their body language so that they do not give away too many clues about themselves. We probably try to make sure that our own body language suits the particular situation we are in. For example, you would probably act differently if you were in the middle of an excited crowd compared with if you were in a public library. Given the complexity of communication, it is not surprising that we are often misunderstood or misinterpreted. It is perhaps surprising that so much of our communication does appear to achieve at least some success.

Human societies have developed many ways of communicating. Often, these make it possible for one person, or groups of people, to communicate with many others. These people may or may not be present when the process of communication is started. These types of communication include lectures, concerts and the media (such as television, radio, newspapers and the internet).

To summarise:

- Communication takes many different forms.
- Communication uses different channels.
- Communication affects all aspects of life.

Sometimes we feel we are communicating well, only to find that we have been misunderstood – that we haven't really communicated at all. Joseph O'Connor and John Seymour, pioneers of a communication method known as neuro-linguistic programming (NLP) suggest that:

The meaning of communication is the response you get.

(O'Connor and Seymour, 1995, p. 18)



### Activity 1 Understanding misunderstandings

Allow about 5 minutes for this activity.

What do you think of the idea that you know how well you've communicated by the response you receive? Can you write down some examples from your own life? It is always important to check the responses of the people you aim to communicate with. Once you have a reasonably clear picture about this, it is much easier to see where you might want to increase your communication strengths and decrease any weaknesses.

## 1.1 Communication skills

You looked at Neil Thompson's work on learning from experience in Week 1. Here he points out that it is not just what people say that counts; it is how people say it too. Maybe you noted this in your examples?

So, if someone seems to talk rather quickly, this may be because they are excited, angry or worried. If someone speaks slowly, this may be because they are tired. Or it may indicate a lack of confidence in what they have to say. Similar comments may be made about the pitch of a voice. Neil Thompson suggests that:

flat, unmodulated pitch can reflect a depressed mood, while high or fluctuating pitch can signal ... anger, fear or excitement.

(Thompson, 1996, pp. 83–84)

Thompson suggests that quiet speech can indicate a lack of confidence, fear or anxiety, whereas loud speech can suggest aggression or a lack of sensitivity. Loud speech may also be used by someone who is fearful or anxious, so we have to be careful not to make assumptions.

Body language, the non-verbal communication everyone makes through expressions, posture and movement, can be simple, but once you start thinking about it, you realise how complex it can be. For example, how much eye contact should we make? Too much direct eye contact can be seen as challenging or threatening and too little eye contact can be interpreted as indicating untrustworthiness. It is important to note that these interpretations can vary from one culture to another, as some see it as polite to avoid eye contact as much as possible.

One Open University student, Karen, reflected the following about her developing communication skills:

An important aspect of developing your communication skills then is conveying what you say in a manner appropriate to the circumstances. This may mean quickening or slowing your speech, projecting or calming your voice, and using gesture and body language appropriately. This will help you gain the confidence of the listener in what you say.

## 1.2 Developing your communication skills

### Activity 2 Reflecting on your communication skills

Allow about 30 minutes for this activity.

Think of a recent interaction you have had with someone. (This could be one of the situations you have identified in a previous activity, or another one.)

- Write a short account (maximum 300 words), giving as much detail as you can. At this stage of the activity, don't worry too much about the communication aspects of your story.
- Once you have finished writing, put it aside for a few moments. This will give you time to think about what you have written.
- Now return to your account and identify any communication skills that you can see in your interaction with the other person. (You may wish to refer back to the six example communication skills given at the beginning of this section.)

### Activity 3 What your communication skills say about you

Allow about 20 minutes for this activity.

In the table below, write examples where your own communication skills (effective or not) have revealed something about you to the person you were communicating with. The first example is how Karen (the OU student already mentioned) might have completed the table.

Interactive content is not available in this format.

#### Discussion

Our communication skills, or lack of them, can have more effect than we might think. Reflecting on what you reveal about yourself can allow you to become a more effective communicator. In Karen's case, improving one communication skill had the knock-on effect of improving another.

## 1.3 Online communication skills

The internet, and the recent expansion of online social media platforms, offers a wealth of opportunities for communication that most of us use regularly these days. Much of what we have learned about online communication through the development of email, web chat rooms and learning forums applies also to social media exchanges via Facebook, Twitter and other channels which support online interaction between members of organisations and communities.

There are two main ways of communicating online, and these are called synchronous and asynchronous, which can be defined as follows:

- *Synchronous* communication means taking place in 'real time'; for example, via instant messaging or a 'chat' facility.
- *Asynchronous* communication takes place when participants communicate in their own time; for example, by responding to messages that have been posted in an online forum.

If you take part in social networks, you will recognise that these terms could be applied to those too.

Whether you are using the internet for study or personally, it is important to remember you are communicating with real people. Special care must therefore be taken to avoid misunderstandings.

Good online communications often involve:

- **Thanking, acknowledging and supporting people**

People cannot see you nod, smile or frown as you read their messages. So, if they get no acknowledgement they may feel ignored and be discouraged from contributing further.

- **Acknowledging before differing**

Before you disagree with someone, try to summarise the other person's point in your own words. Then they know you are trying to understand them and will be more likely to take your view seriously.

- **Making your perspective clear**

Try to avoid speaking or writing in a dogmatic and an impersonal way, so avoid phrases like 'It is a fact that ...' as they leave no room for anyone else's perspective. So, why not start with 'I think ...'? When you are studying a course, you may want to present someone else's views; if so, say whose they are, perhaps by a quote and acknowledgement.

- **Clearly showing your emotions**

Smileys or emoji's can be used to express your feelings. Other possibilities are punctuation (! # @ \* !), <grin> or <joke>.

Emotions can be easily misunderstood when you cannot see faces or body language. People may not realise when you are joking, and one person's joke may not seem amusing to someone else. You should always be aware of the receiver(s) of your message, particularly as people from widely differing cultures and backgrounds may read what you write online. What you find funny may be offensive to them.

- **Avoiding 'flaming'**

If you read something that offends or upsets you, it is very tempting to dash off a reply and hit 'Send' – but don't! Online discussions and Twitter exchanges seem to be particularly prone to such 'flames', and can escalate into a flaming spiral of angry messages. So if you feel your temperature rising as you write, save your message, take a break or sleep on it – don't hit 'Send'.



Figure 1 Online communication can be misunderstood

## 2 Communicating with colleagues and peers

### 2.1 The basic communication model

The main reason for speaking or writing is to communicate with other people. This consists of giving them a written or spoken message they can understand and respond to. As illustrated in Figure 2, communication takes place when a sender, in this case a speaker or a writer, sends a message to a receiver, in this case a listener or a reader. The receiver often responds to the sender by speaking or in writing.

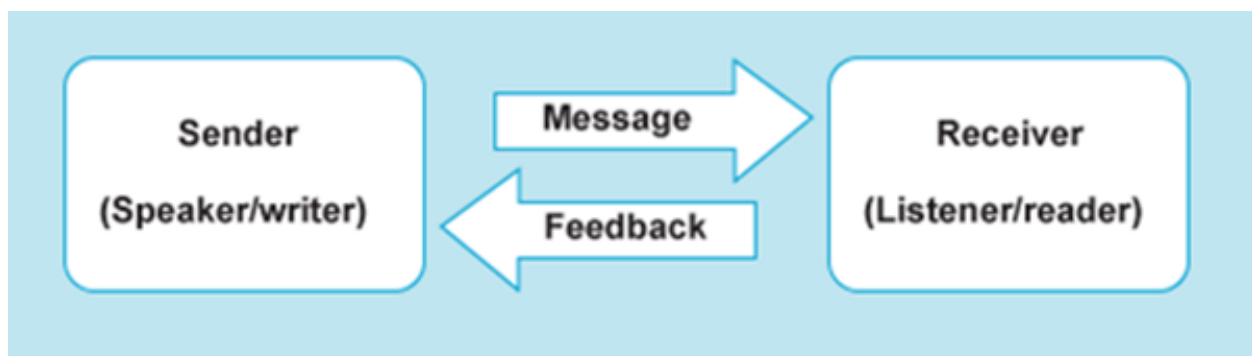


Figure 2 The basic communication model

The key feature of this process we will look at first is the concept of feedback. As we will see, this is a vital tool for developing your skills when you are communicating with colleagues and peers on a one-to-one basis.

## 2.2 The importance of feedback

Organisations which provide services to the community often require their staff to coordinate their work very closely. For those working in community healthcare or policing for example, who may be passing and receiving information across work-shift handover times or between colleagues covering a 24-hour on-call rota, it is vitally important that key issues are clearly identified, and that those receiving information understand its significance. There may for example be safety risks or vulnerable community members who depend on this good communication.

The essence of good communication in an organisational setting like this is to ensure that two-way communication is maintained through feedback. Like any communication skill, feedback – how to seek it, how to give it and how to receive it – must be practiced carefully and regularly.

Good managers for example, will usually aim to give constructive feedback to a member of their staff on their performance. Your manager should tell you where you have done well, where you have done less well and how to develop your skills and knowledge.

Feedback from others happens in more informal contexts too. If you have ever been told something about yourself that you didn't know, that resulted in you gaining confidence in your abilities, you have benefited from positive feedback. Getting feedback from another person, of course, isn't always constructive; it can be difficult and even stressful. However, planned well, it can be useful both in confidence building and in highlighting areas for personal development.

One big advantage of gathering feedback from other people is that their view of a problem you may be tackling may be different from the one you have yourself. Drawing on their perspectives can help you think about a problem in a different way, and open your mind to new possibilities and opportunities.

### Activity 4 Getting feedback from a trusted colleague or peer

Allow about 10 minutes for this activity.

Take a few minutes to think about asking someone for feedback, particularly on your communication skills.

Note down your thoughts about people you might ask. They would be taking the role of a mentor – someone with relevant experience who you can trust to advise you, so choose them carefully. It may be a friend from your community perhaps.

## 2.3 Using your feedback

What do you do with the feedback once you have it? Rather than just make notes about it, in this section you will be introduced to a tool for exploring the impact that feedback can make. This is known as the Johari Window.

The Johari Window is named after its originators, Joseph Luft and Harrington Ingram. An outline of a Johari Window is shown in Figure 3. Have a look at this now. The ‘window’ covers the four white areas in the diagram; together they look something like the panes of a window – hence its name.

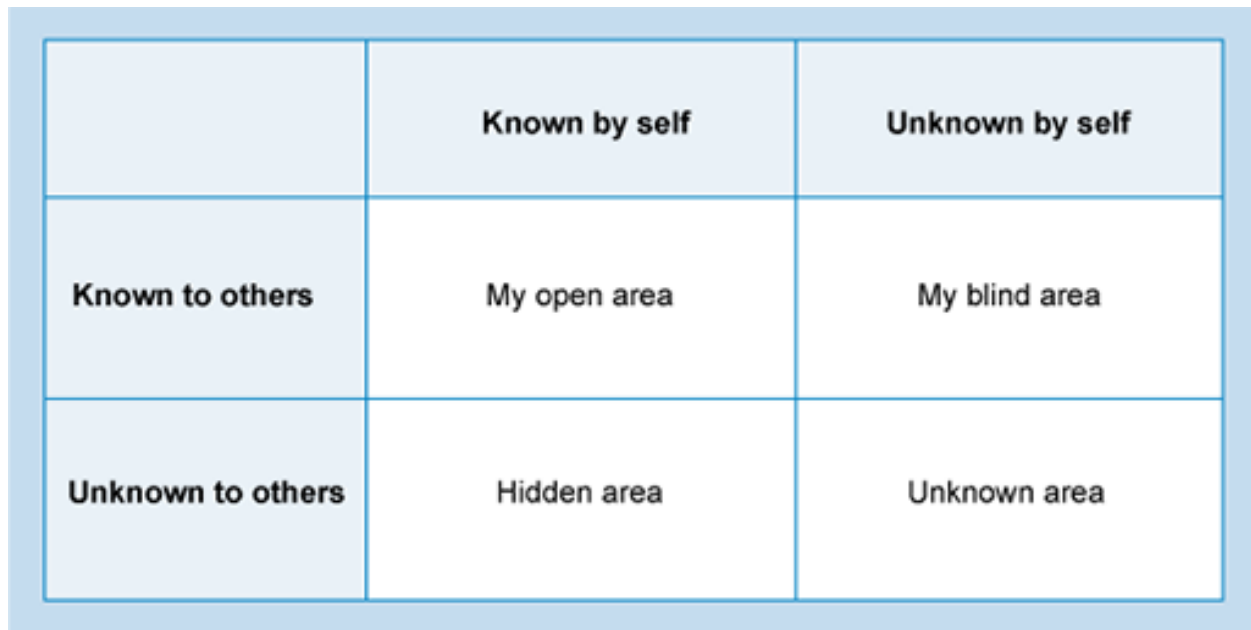


Figure 3 The Johari Window

The **open area**, top left, is where you record what you know about your communication skills, and are happy to share with others. An example might be if you are happy to tell someone about the fact that you are a confident public speaker and have addressed public meetings.

The **blind area** is for other people to add what they know about you, which is unknown by you. You might, for instance, be unaware that someone finds you a good listener or that you have a subconscious habit when speaking.

The **hidden area**, bottom left, is what you know about yourself, but would normally prefer other people not to know. This could include opinions that you do not want to share with others, as well as any weaknesses that you feel you have – maybe due to a lack of confidence.

In the bottom right-hand corner is the **unknown area**. This box will stay empty – it represents aspects that are as yet unknown to anyone, both to you and to others. This might include hidden talents, subconscious feelings, or abilities and qualities that have never been brought to the surface – and there will be some of these for us all. As soon as these are known, however, they would be added to one of the other boxes.

### Activity 5 Using the Johari Window to help develop communication skills

#### Part 1: Creating your Johari Window

Allow about 20 minutes.

Get a large sheet of paper and draw yourself a blank Johari Window diagram. It should look something like Figure 3, with four headings as shown, and have space to write a few things in each box.

First, try to list the things you are willing to share with a colleague or peer about your communication skills. These can be things you feel confident at or have been told you are good at in the past, and things you are happy to acknowledge that you are not so good at. Enter these into the *open area* box of your Johari Window diagram.

Remember that the open area is for information you are happy to share.

Then try to list any things you feel uncomfortable or self-conscious about which you feel get in the way of your communications with other people. Enter these into the *hidden area* box of your Johari Window diagram. Remember that the hidden area contains information that you are aware of, but which you normally prefer to keep to yourself (for example, perhaps a lack of confidence or a quality you're not too proud of).

Of course, you may be happy to share specific pieces of information with some people and not others, so you may well want to adapt the contents depending on who you ask to be your mentor. But do note that if we share aspects of ourselves with others, it puts them in a better position to give us accurate (and more helpful) feedback; for example, saying you are not confident about something can prompt another person to reassure you about your skills or qualities.

The next stage is to ask your real or imaginary mentor to see if they can add anything to your window.

## Part 2: Getting feedback from someone you know

Allow about 30 minutes.

Show the open area of your completed Johari Window to your chosen mentor, hiding the bottom half of the diagram. Ask them whether they can add any information about your qualities and skills in communicating, and write it in your blind area box. If you feel confident about the way the discussion is progressing, you may choose to reveal what you wrote in your hidden area, which may lead to more information for your mentor to write in your blind area. (The Unknown area box remains empty.)

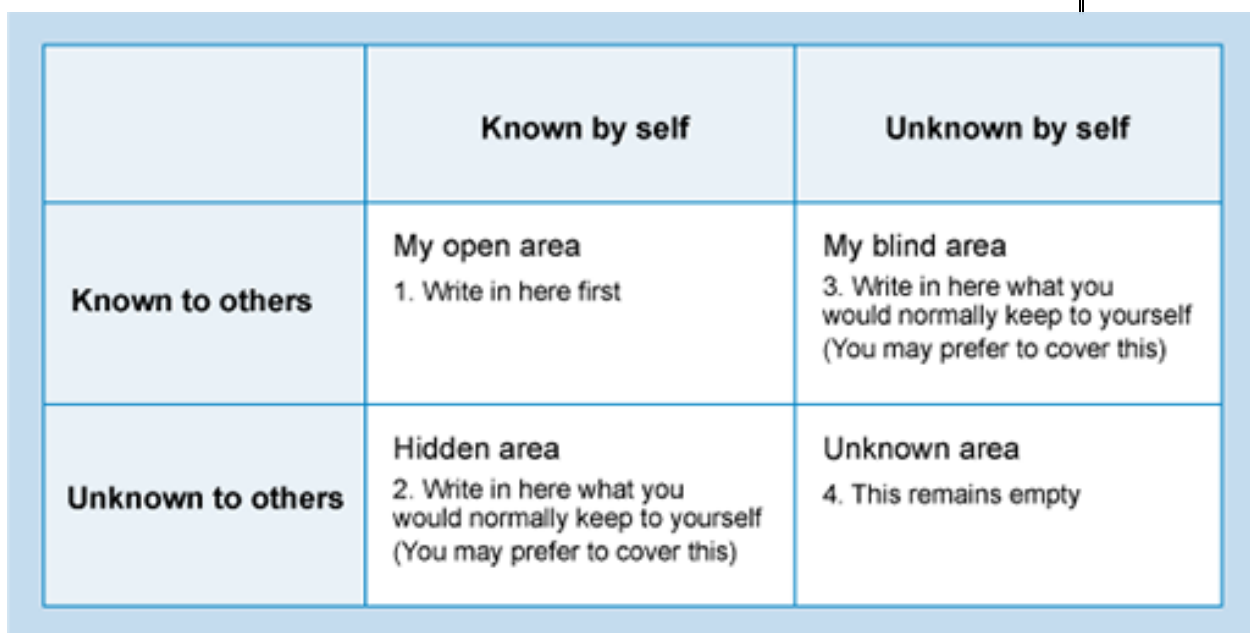


Figure 4 Your Johari Window

## Discussion



Did you learn anything new?

Once you have seen or heard feedback you can move this information from the blind to the open area because, of course, you and your mentor are now both aware of it and sharing it! (Albeit artificially with an imaginary mentor, but you can still learn from this.)

If you also decided to reveal something from your hidden area to help you get more useful feedback, some information will be ready to be moved from your hidden to your open area too.

The Johari Window is useful for getting and making sense of feedback on a range of skills and how they are developing. So if you have someone who is willing to help you with aspects of personal and/or professional development other than communication skills, make use of this technique with them if it is helpful.

## 3 Communicating with the community and the general public

### 3.1 The process model of communications

One of the key challenges of communicating with a wider, public audience is to develop effective messages which provide community members, partner organisations and other stakeholders with the information required to achieve a desired outcome. Communication is described by Chris Fill in his book, *Marketing Communications: engagements, strategies, practice*, as 'transmission of information, ideas, attitudes, or emotion from one person or group to another' (Fill, 2005, p. 31). There are many models and frameworks available to help with thinking about or planning communications with community stakeholders or the wider public. The process model of communications in Fig 5 below builds on the basic communication model you saw in Section 2.1.

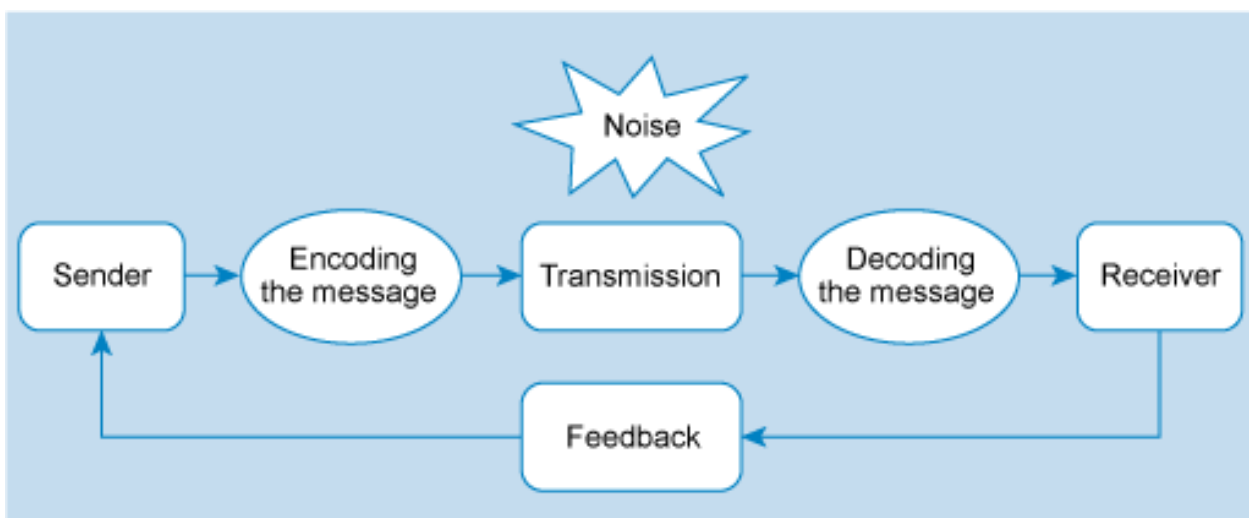


Figure 5 The process model of communications

The main components of this model are explained below:

- The sender is the person starting the communication.
- The message itself (the information the sender wishes to communicate) moves through the diagram and is shown by the arrows.
- Encoding the message turns it into a form which can be transmitted, e.g. written, oral, visual or a combination of two or more. Does it need to be broken down or simplified for the receiver to understand it? Do the sender and receiver use the same language or will some form of translation or interpretation be needed?
- Transmission of the message – for a simple communication between two people this may be a quick chat, a phone call, a written note, a text or a Tweet. For more complex communications or between one sender and many receivers, more planning may be needed.
- Decoding the message is necessary if there is anything about the language the sender uses, or the way it is transmitted which may cause a misunderstanding or misinterpretation by the receiver.
- The receiver is who the message is intended for. In this model the receiver should gain the same understanding of the information as the sender.
- Noise refers to external distractions and sources of miscommunication. In a spoken public address this can literally be noise from the external environment such as traffic, audience chatting or heckling. In an email it could be the arrival of other emails into your inbox.
- Feedback is the receiver's action on receipt of the information. In Section 2.1 we looked at feedback between sender and receiver as a part of two-way communications between two individuals. Here feedback is different, referring to how the receiver responds to the communication.

### Activity 6 Using the process model to assess your communications

Allow about 15 minutes for this activity.

In your learning journal jot down a recent situation when you were required to communicate with more than one member of the community where you work, volunteer or live. This may have been a spoken address or request to members of the public. It may have been something written or visual which you presented or displayed. Or it could have been something you circulated over the internet or through social media.

Then consider and write down what actions that communication led to? Did you receive a direct response from one or more of the receivers, or did it prompt the receivers to any form of action positive or negative? From your observations of these actions, write down how effective you think the piece of communication was?

Finally, using the process model of communication explained above, identify what you did well and what you think could improve on to make future communications more effective.

#### Discussion

No one can expect all individual pieces of communication they send to be perfect but what the model does is help us to analyse the extent to which they are effective in prompting the feedback and action we expect. It also allows us to identify the different stages of how a piece of communication works, to establish whether we can manage

any of them better in the future. So for example, you may have been talking in your own first language to some people in a group, for whom this was a second language, and whose grasp of some words you use isn't so great. You may have used technical or jargon words with which some people are not familiar. You may have chosen a medium which is inappropriate for the message you are conveying. Or it is possible that the environment you are communicating in is just too 'noisy'.

## 3.2 Communicating with community stakeholders

In Week 2 you identified the stakeholders in your community and considered their interests. Working with multiple stakeholders can be a complicated process and you may have to adopt different ways of communicating and engaging with different community stakeholders. As you found earlier, stakeholders can have competing views on their community's interests and activities so it can be difficult to negotiate between them.

You can use the power/interest matrix you came across in Week 2 to think about possible aims of your communications with different stakeholders: this is depicted in Figure 6 below. This time each of the boxes tells us the type of communication strategies we might use with each of the different stakeholder categories.

		Level of interest	
		Low	High
Power	Low	Monitor and inform	Inform and consult
	High	Keep satisfied	Engage and influence

Figure 6 Power, interest and communication aims (adapted from Johnson and Scholes, 1999)

Looking at the boxes now, you can start to think about different levels of communication which will suit the different stakeholders:

- *High power/high interest* people must be fully engaged. This group is the one that organisations will work with closely.
- *High power/low interest* people need to be involved in determining any decisions arising from what is being communicated.
- *Low power/high interest* people need to be kept well informed and consulted.
- *Low power/low interest* people should be monitored but they may not want to become heavily involved in the organisation's work.

Communicating effectively will help your work within the community. Managing the sometimes diverse interests and demands of different groups in any community is a

challenge that can be met more successfully when communication helps to coordinate work within the community and to build consensus on what makes the community safer and more cohesive.

Some common examples of community communication:

High power/high interest groups may be engaged by methods such as:

- public testimony in government venues (such as local councils)
- service user and other stakeholder representatives on boards
- participation in collaborative project teams and task forces

Common methods for ensuring low power/high interest groups are informed or consulted are:

- regular meetings with community representatives
- periodic meetings with stakeholder groups (such as community meetings)
- conducting case studies with service users and providers.
- social media engagement activities e.g. Facebook or Twitter groups

Typically lower interests groups can be kept informed by such things as:

- website communications
- annual reports and other publications provided to the public
- press releases
- partner service events e.g. fire and rescue, police or emergency services presence at a school fete
- guest speaking engagements at meetings

Some of these communication methods are more participatory and engage with stakeholders in a way that empowers them and gives them a voice. Other strategies are simply a means of communicating the main activities of a community service organisation. However, all of these activities are ways in which public service or voluntary organisations can communicate with community stakeholders, and manage their stakeholder relationships and the expectations of their stakeholder groups.

In the video below, Police Officer Ben Hargreaves talks about his experience of communicating with different stakeholders in his community.

Video content is not available in this format.



## 4 Working with partner services and groups

### 4.1 What do we mean by ‘working in partnership’?

It is particularly important to develop good, ongoing communications with public services stakeholders – in policing, health, education, social care and local government for example – and voluntary organisations, from churches to neighbourhood action groups, who help get things done in the community. The phrase ‘partnership working’ is used to describe a wide range of arrangements and ways of working, from informal networking between individuals, to formally contracted service partnerships which benefit communities in a variety of ways.

Vipin Chauhan, writing about partnership working in the context of the voluntary and community sector, comments that:

Increasingly, voluntary, community and public sector organisations are caught up in this frenzy about ‘partnership’, ‘multi-agency’, ‘inter-professional’ and ‘inter-agency’ working. Such terms are used almost daily without paying much attention to what they mean in reality ...

(Chauhan, 2007, p. 233)

In some cases, people have specific ideas about the differences between these different terms. For example:

- Inter-agency working usually refers to arrangements between two or more agencies for planning, implementing and evaluating joint projects or longer pieces of joint working.
- Multi-agency working refers to representatives from a number of agencies coming together to look at a problem in a holistic way.
- Multi-disciplinary working refers to teams made up of people from a range of professional backgrounds.

For the purposes of this course, we have defined partnership working as: two or more parties working together towards a common goal, to provide a coordinated response to the needs of the community in a way that attempts to overcome boundaries between services.

Different types of partnerships exist. They may be based on:

- The *themes and issues* they are addressing and in their breadth of focus – from partnerships with a very specific focus, for example drugs and substance misuse, through to partnerships addressing a much broader set of issues, for example regenerating a town or an estate.
- The *range and nature of the partners involved*, including whether they involve statutory, voluntary/third-sector and/or private sector organisations and whether other community representatives are also involved.
- The *time span* – they may be focused on one-off, short-term projects, or develop into longer-term plans for working together.
- The *impetus for partnershipworking* – it may come from the bottom up or the top down. In other words, partnership might have developed as a response to needs and issues identified locally or as a result of a ‘top-down’ directive – for instance, in response to a new government policy or piece of legislation, in which case engagement might be *compulsory* rather than *voluntary*.
- *Planned collaboration/evolved relationship* – some partnerships, like projects, arise because people have a specific outcome in mind. Alternatively, ideas about what you might do or achieve as partners might evolve over a period of time and as relationships develop.

## 4.2 Levels of partnership

As we have seen, partnership working can involve different levels of formality and commitment, from work based on quite loose and informal networks at one end of the spectrum, through to working arrangements based on formal agreements and organisational structures at the other. A model of partnership, where the different levels of commitment are built up step by step, is illustrated in Figure 7.



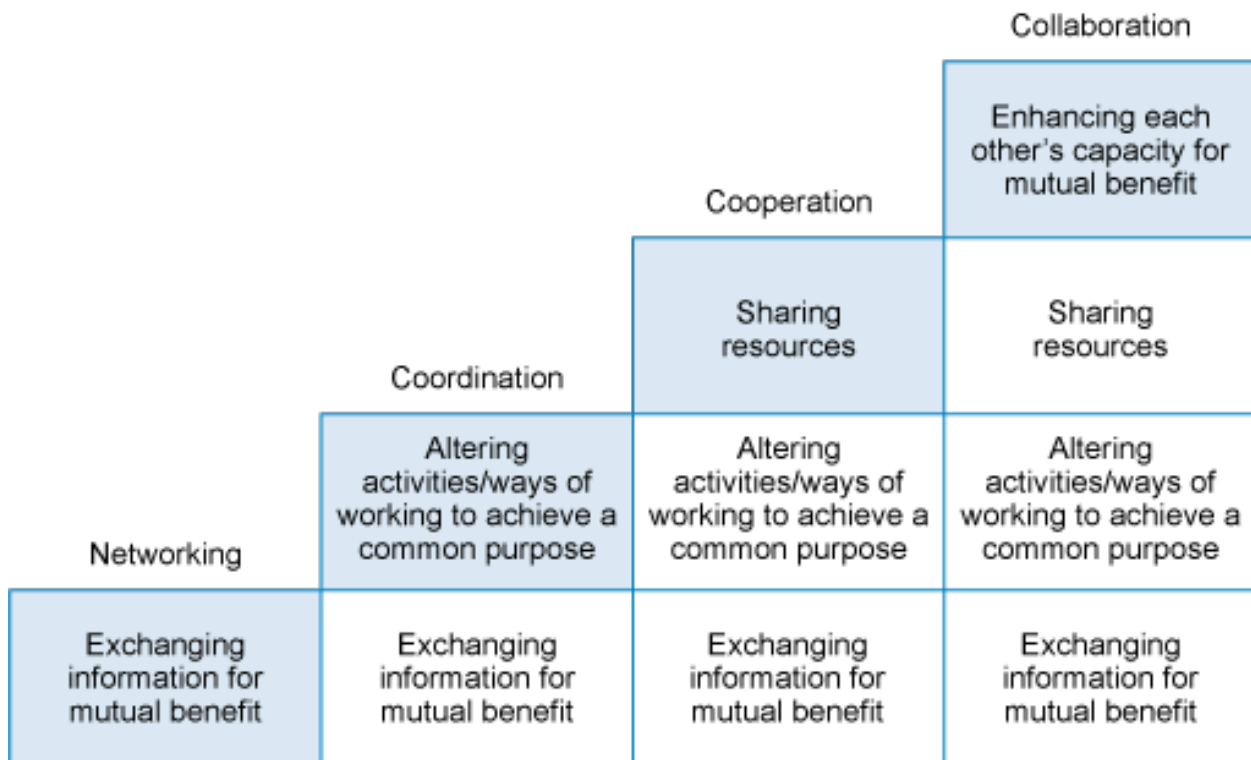


Figure 7 Levels of partnership

**Networking** is the most informal level of partnership working. There needs to be a minimal level of trust and willingness to share information, and the contacts are usually made informally, person to person rather than organisation to organisation.

**Coordination** goes a step further, adding altered activities or ways of working to networking behaviours. Coordination can help to address problems of fragmentation, overlap and duplication in services.

**Cooperation** moves the partners up another step. At this level organisations might share resources – including money, staffing and buildings.

**Collaboration**, at the top of the 'staircase', involves enhancing the partner so that both benefit. This is a top level partnership, with each person or organisation helping their partners to become better at what they do.

There are three key factors which influence the level of partnerships which can be reached - the three Ts of:

- **Time** (how much time is available),
- **Trust** (how well the people involved know and trust each other) and
- **Turf** (how high is the potential for turf wars, based on different values and purposes, readiness for power sharing, cultural differences, and so on).

### Activity 7 What kind of partnership?

Allow about 20 minutes for this activity.

Working in your learning journal and thinking of the range of service providers and voluntary organisations you work alongside, (other than the one you work for or may be part of), who do you think is the key partner in helping you contribute to community safety?



Thinking of the four levels of partnership in the staircase diagram in Figure 7 above, how would you characterise the partnership you have with this group or organisation? Assess the three T's in your partnership as follows:

- (i) How much time is available to work in partnership?
- (ii) How well do the people involved know and trust each other?
- (iii) How high is the potential for 'turf wars' based different values, purposes, power and cultures

### Discussion

Most partnerships working in community settings are based on a lot of mutual goodwill and understanding of the common purpose around such values as community well-being and safety. However the lack of time to establish regular and ongoing communications between partner groups, and the organisational tendency to defend particular patches of 'turf' or jurisdiction, can undermine this goodwill.

Developing a partnership is often not as simple as ascending the kind of 'staircase' shown in figure 7. For example, sometimes two public service teams, e.g. fire service and police response teams, may share resources like a central operations building or station, and share information extensively, but they often do not work in collaboration because they have not adopted joint or common ways of working. The best they may achieve is coordination of call-out responses.

## Summary

This week you looked at how your communication skills can be improved to better support your contribution to enhancing community safety. Communication doesn't just mean how you convey messages in words but how you conduct yourself – your body language and writing style – and how you are able to manage your online communications. Thinking about all of these can improve the consistency and confidence of your communications. You then went on to consider how to improve communication in three different contexts:

- 1 with individual colleagues and peers
- 2 with community and broader public audiences
- 3 with partner groups or organisations.

This highlighted three important issues:

- 1 assessment of the effectiveness of communication by observing feedback
- 2 the importance of planning the different elements of communications to wider community audiences
- 3 recognition of the kind of relationship you have with stakeholders and partners which forms the background of your communications.

In the fourth and final section of the course we look at the analysis and resolution of problems and the skills of reflection and decision-making which support this.

You can now go to Week 4.

# Week 4: Problem solving and decision making

## Introduction

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Welcome to Week 4.

This week we look at Learning through reflection; Assessing critical problems in community settings; Different approaches to decision making; and Identifying potential solutions.

The key to effective problem solving and decision making is the ability to reflect on past actions and experiences in order to understand our own assumptions about the current situations we face.



# 1 Learning through reflection

Many of the activities in this course ask you to think back over things you have already read and see if you understand them or can apply them to your own life. 'Thinking back' in this way is a vital component of what we mean by reflection.

Reflection is one of those things that is both really simple and quite complex. It is simple because, like learning, we all do it – it is really nothing more than thinking back over something that you or someone else has done. Reflection can also serve as a guide for future action – we learn from thinking back over our experiences and deciding whether or not to repeat them.

For example, if we have a great meal at a restaurant, we may think we will go back there; if we then remember how rude the waiter was, we may decide not to. Reflecting encourages us to weigh the different aspects of an experience and decide what to do in the future.

## 1.1 Reflection at work

People in many different careers are expected to be reflective about their work. Doctors, social workers, nurses, teachers and police officers are all supposed to be what are known as 'reflective practitioners'. This means that they are supposed to learn from what went well, and from their mistakes, to ensure that they become better at what they do.

The need for such reflection actually applies to a very wide range of work. Would you like to have your car fixed by a mechanic you know never reflected back about whether they had tightened all the wheel nuts?

The basic starting point is that everyone reflects and, if it is done well, it makes it possible to get much more out of any experience – so that learning is more fulfilling and constructive. A good way of developing your reflection skills is to make yourself aware of the process. The following activity should help you tune into it.

### Activity 1 Reflection on today

Allow about 20 minutes for this activity.

Start with an actual experience from today; give it a title in your learning journal and then note down a brief answer to each of the following four questions. The last question perhaps is the most important.

- 1 **Who** was there?
- 2 **What** was the sequence of events?
- 3 **Where** did this happen?
- 4 **When** did this happen?
- 5 **What have I learned** from this?

### Discussion

You may have chosen something practical like your journey to work or making a meal. Or you may have chosen something more personal. Either is fine, as long as you have reflected on what you learned and, ideally, how this might affect your future actions.

## 1.2 Reflecting on your learning

In Week 1 of this course it was suggested that you might wish to keep a learning journal. Keeping a note of your reflections in your learning journal helps you to both record and consolidate your learning. Using a journal in this way ensures that you capture your thoughts; otherwise there is always a strong possibility that they are lost.

It is a good idea to review your learning journal entries on a regular basis and this can help you to recognise:

- your progress – as you see that there are things that you used to find difficult, but can now do relatively easily
- recurring themes in your thoughts and actions that may indicate potential areas to develop in the future.

### Activity 2 Your learning journal

Allow about 20 minutes for this activity.

Have a look back through your learning journal. Is it a jumble of random notes, or have you organised it into weeks and activities? Are you jotting down your thoughts as well as the key points and the activity answers?

As we near the end of the course it is a good time to review and reflect on how you are keeping your notes. See if you want to change things, now that you are probably getting a better feel for the kind of notes you wish to make and how much space they take up.

#### Discussion

We can gain a lot from thinking back over things by ourselves. It is also valuable, at least occasionally, to think about other points of view or perspectives. One way of doing this is by getting feedback from others.

## 1.3 Making a change

Reflection often leads to the identifying a change needed in some aspect of what we have been reflecting on, whether it's our work, our learning habits or our lifestyle. But making that change can then prove more problematic than we think.

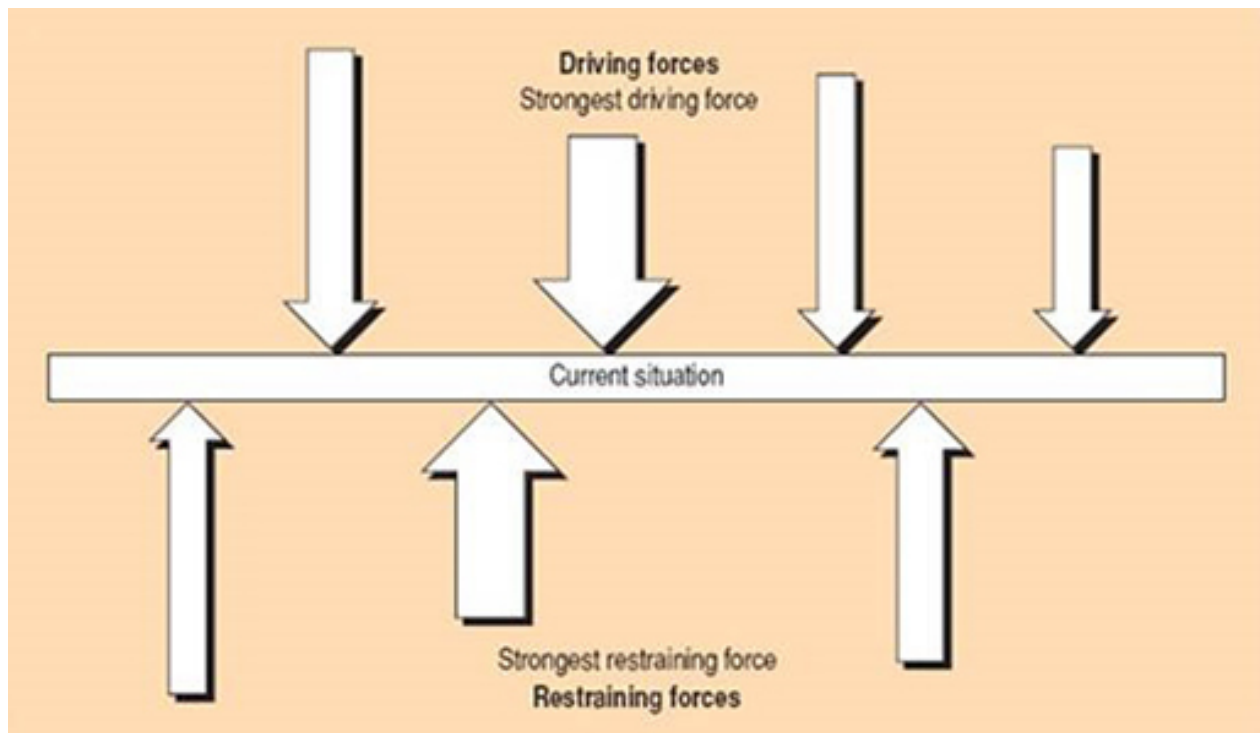


Figure 1 Force-field analysis

In the mid-twentieth century Kurt Lewin, a social psychologist who worked in Germany and America, developed a theory called force-field analysis to think about the way in which changes made in the workplace succeed or fail (Lewin, 1947). It can be applied to any action planning or reflection process.

Lewin suggests that any attempt to make changes will involve forces in favour of change and forces against it. For change to occur successfully, the forces in favour must be stronger.

This is something like a tug of war in that if the forces on the left side are stronger than those on the right, then the change can go ahead.

This might not seem much different from the familiar 'pros and cons' idea, but pictures often express ideas more clearly than words. A force-field diagram helps you visualise the relative strength of the different forces, as you will see shortly. It lends itself to thinking about how you can weaken the team on the right, or bring in heavyweights to add to the one on the left.

There will almost always be forces in favour and forces against the changes that you are thinking about. Some forces will be quite significant; others might not have much effect. It is useful, once you have thought about what the main factors are, to estimate how much impact they might have on you achieving your target goal.

In a force-field analysis diagram, you can use arrows to represent the different forces, with the thickness of the arrows indicating the amount of impact. The thin arrows indicate fairly minor factors; the fatter ones indicate major influences.

## 2 Assessing critical problems in

# community settings

In many ways life is about solving problems and making decisions. Whether it is choosing a profession, deciding where to go on holiday or selecting a café for a quick coffee, we are constantly challenged to make decisions and solve problems.

Needless to say, the same applies in the workplace where making decisions and solving problems can be as an individual or as part of a team. In areas such as community policing you could be dealing with sensitive problems and the impact of decisions taken on a day-to-day basis can be far reaching. It is consequently important to approach problem solving (and decision making) in a sensitive and considered way.

## 2.1 What is a problem?

A 'problem' can be understood in many different ways. Problems can be seen as a perceived difference between how things actually are and how they ideally should or could be. You might, for example, have a feeling that:

- Things aren't right.
- I know that things aren't right.
- I want to make things better.
- I can tell if the situation gets better or worse.
- I can influence this situation for the better.

On a practical level it can be worth considering two key questions:

- **What 'things' aren't right?** These could be relationships, as well as objects and people. Where shall I draw the boundary?
- **What do I mean by 'aren't right'?** Could this include decisions that need making, opportunities and possibilities that might be explored, creating something new that hadn't previously existed, and improving something that's already 'right' (but could be even better)?

So, for our purposes, we can conveniently use the term 'problem' as a shorthand to include issues, opportunities, challenges, concerns, and difficulties.

### Activity 3 Is this a problem for solving?

Allow about 10 minutes for this activity.

I keep six honest serving-men  
(They taught me all I knew);  
Their names are What and Why and When  
And How and Where and Who.

Rudyard Kipling, 'The Elephant's Child'

Think of a challenging situation, a difficult decision, an opportunity for change, or some issue that could be considered problematic. Then, use the five-point list in combination



with some '5Ws and an H' questions (i.e What? Why? Where? When? Who? How?) to run a quick check on whether this is a problem amenable to an attempt at solving it.

### Discussion

For example, you could ask (and briefly answer):

- Who thinks things aren't right in this situation?
- How do I know that things could be better?
- Why do I (or does someone else) want the situation to change?
- What will show me that matters are improving?
- Where could I make my influence felt in this context?

This activity might start you thinking in a new way about your problem, or confirm what you are already sure of, or suggest that you don't yet know enough about the issue. Or you might conclude that this issue is too trivial to be a real problem, or too big to tackle – in which case, consider whether it is worth addressing a smaller part of the issue.

## 2.2 Solving a problem

People such as community police officers, who work with the community and diverse groups, will often face a wide range of problems on a daily basis either individually or as part of a team. Either way, you will do it better if you have a good feel for what problem solving involves.

The term 'problem solving' is widely used but there are many other terms (e.g. 'opportunity finding') that convey very different shades of meaning, some of which may be more suitable for your purposes. For instance, often:

- What you are tackling is not a 'problem' in the 'something-has-gone-wrong' sense, but a concern, an opportunity, a new direction or an improvement. It may be about 'pursuing good things' rather than 'fixing bad things'
- The main activity is not 'solving' but exploring, defining, resolving, bypassing, reframing or managing.
- It is not a single, discrete problem, but a densely interconnected part of a huge web of issues and concerns that change and develop over time and may transform in appearance depending on your viewpoint.

When you find yourself in a situation that calls for some kind of analysis or action, see which terms provides the best and most helpful frame for your thinking. For instance, some people find it helpful to reframe 'problems' as 'opportunities' or 'challenges' – for them these more open frames may feel exciting and optimistic – while others may find the neutral language of 'issues' and 'concerns' more helpful. Each of the many different terms creates its own metaphor for what is involved, and suggests its own, slightly different, ways of working.



Figure 1

## 2.3 Tame problems, messes and wicked problems

Many problems have tried and tested solutions, or standard ways of working out a solution, and they do not need a particularly 'creative' approach – these are often called tame problems. For example, if I find I have no food in my kitchen, I don't usually have to be creative about solving that problem – I can just go the shops or order a home delivery. It's only in less usual circumstances (I've got people coming to a dinner party, or I'm living miles from the nearest town) that I might need a creative solution to that situation.

While many challenges in organisational life are straightforward and routine tame problems, sometimes they conceal what academics have named variously as 'messes' (e.g., Russell Ackoff in *The future of operational research is past*, 1979) or 'wicked' problems (H. J. W. Rittel, 1972).

Messes and wicked problems are complex sets of problems in which many different potential issues are interlinked. These problems may be closely linked to the differing values, perceptions and world views of the people who are involved in aspects of the situation.

The following diagram summarises the key elements of messes or wicked problems:

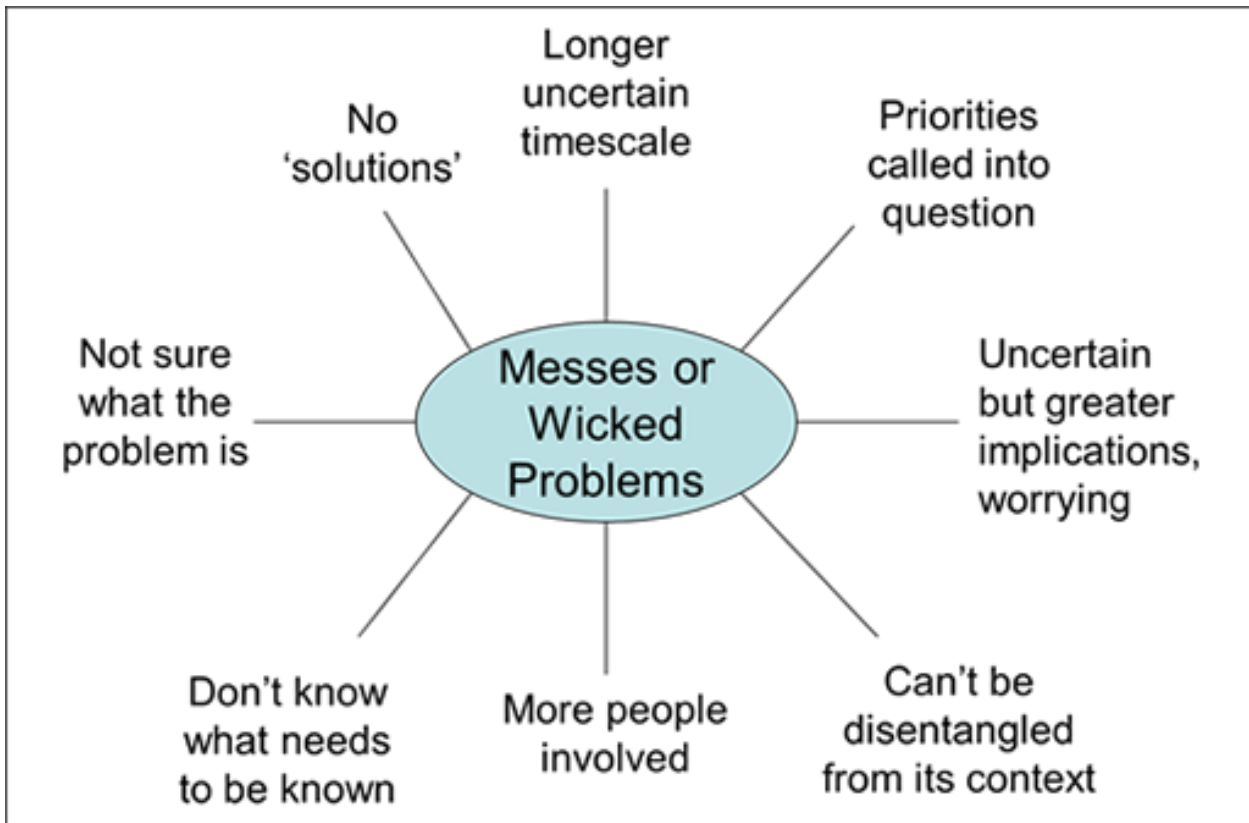


Figure 2 Messes or wicked problems

#### Activity 4 Tame or wicked?

Allow about 20 minutes for this activity.

Spend a few minutes reflecting on two or three challenging issues that concern you at the moment and some of the stakeholders involved.

For each issue, write down a list of stakeholders involved – people who can affect it or are affected by it. In your mind, try to step into each stakeholder's shoes so that you get some feel for how that party sees your issue. Write a sentence or two about the problem from the point of view of each of these stakeholders. Perhaps make a few notes about some of the more marked differences that emerge from this exercise.

Work through the characteristics outlined in the diagram above and see how they apply to your issues. If '1' means 'very tame' and '10' means 'very wicked', what score would you give these issues?

#### Discussion

Messes or wicked problems do not respond readily to conventional approaches to problem solving – if it were that straightforward to solve the problem, it wouldn't be a messy one. Messy issues call for new approaches, different from what has been tried before, and are likely to need solutions that are tailored to that particular situation.

Managing messes or wicked problems usually needs a lot of patient exploration and consideration of the issue, backed up with ways of 'mapping' the situation so that you can see how all the bits fit together.

Wicked problems may have no neat and tidy 'solution' at all, or no single solution. Often they boil down to finding acceptable ways of coping, both collectively and

personally, or of finding a compromise between different initial starting points – also known as ‘satisficing’.

Problems in these areas can easily become very ‘political’, raising issues such as trust, respect, role and communication, so discussion, debate and negotiation are often critically important if you are to make good progress.

In practice, the complexity of many situations often means that it may be better to think of continuous, ongoing ‘problem management’ rather than one-off ‘problem solving’ with a clear beginning and end. For people working in community policing, the individual episode may well be just one issue in a continuing portfolio of issues. The resolution of one issue often results in a changed environment that raises new issues.

## 3 Different approaches to decision making

In the end, solving any problem comes down to making a decision. An important step in developing a collaborative approach to problem solving is to understand your own and others’ approaches to decision making. This next activity explores your approach.

### Activity 5 Your decision making

Allow about 10 minutes for this activity.

Think of a major decision you have recently been involved in making at work. For each of the following statements about your decision-making process make a note of the number which shows your level of agreement with the statement.

Interactive content is not available in this format.

The questions in Activity 5 divide into three areas of decision making:

Questions 1–4: formal, rational process

Questions 5–8: rules of thumb/psychological process

Questions 9–12: process affected by social pressures.

What does the bar chart you have constructed tell you about the decision-making process you described? Which was most important in this case? (Note your answers in your learning journal.)

### Discussion

In many decisions all three play a part.

The three different approaches to making decisions reflected in this activity form the core of the discussion of decision making in the next section.

## 3.1 Rational decision making

It can be tempting to view all decision making as a formal and rational process, and perhaps this is how you do it yourself.

An example of a 'rational process' for arriving at a decision is described by Max H. Bazerman in *Judgement in Managerial Decision Making*, in terms of the following steps:

- 1 Define the problem
- 2 Identify the decision criteria
- 3 Weight the criteria
- 4 Generate alternatives
- 5 Rate each alternative on each criterion
- 6 Compute the optimal decision.

More sophisticated versions of such processes allow for the calculation of probabilities for different possible outcomes associated with each alternative and the weighting of the perceived benefit of those outcomes by their probability.

Unfortunately however, humans are not always so inherently logical or rational. While we may think that our decision making processes are based on logic and optimising outcomes, the reality is somewhat different.

## 3.2 A psychological perspective

Man is not a rational animal; he is a rationalising animal.

Robert A Heinlein

None of us has infinite resources or time to devote to gathering and analysing information in order to support our decisions. In addition, there are limitations to the amount of complexity we can cope with.

So even where we make conscious efforts to make decisions according to a more rational process, we often need to make simplifying assumptions and accept that we may not have all the information that we would like.

In order to do this, and to help make decision making easier, we each work with a set of often unconscious 'rules of thumb' to guide us: for example, rather than engaging in a detailed evaluation of the merits of different breakfast cereals on a daily or weekly basis, we might save time and energy by associating a particular brand with quality and choose that by default.

Many of these rules of thumb are entirely unconscious and while often useful, may also lead to some significant biases in our decision making. There are six commonly held sources of bias which can hamper our decision making:

- Confirmation bias – the tendency to search for and interpret information consistent with our existing beliefs
- Availability bias – the tendency to overestimate the importance of something we can remember easily
- Hindsight bias – the tendency to see past events as being more predictable than they were before the event occurred
- Anchoring effect – the tendency to overemphasise or over-rely on a single piece of evidence
- Framing effect – the tendency to draw different conclusions from the same information presented in different ways, e.g. a food is '85% fat free' or 'contains 15% fat'

- Meta-cognitive bias –the tendency to believe that while others may suffer from bias, we are immune from it

### The effect of question framing on recall

Framing effects can be quite subtle and even affect our recall of events. For example, in one study, groups of students were shown a film of a car accident. Each group of students was shown the same film clip and then asked 'How fast were the cars going when they xxxx each other?' 'xxxx' was different for each group, variously 'smashed into', 'collided into', 'bumped into', 'hit' and 'contacted'. The table below shows the average speed estimated by each group.

Verb	Mean Estimate of Speed (mph)
Smashed	40.8
Collided	39.3
Bumped	38.1
Hit	34.0
Contacted	31.8

Those who were asked the 'smashed' question were also more likely to believe they had seen broken glass in the film clip than those who were asked the 'hit' question. There was no broken glass.

Loftus and Palmer, 1974

## 3.3 Social pressures affecting our decision making

Unfortunately, both the rational and psychological perspectives on decision making tend to ignore the social context in which each of us lives and works. Broadly, there are three kinds of social pressure which affect how we make decisions:

- Coercion
- Imitation
- Conformity

**Coercion** refers to the social sanctions that can be applied if we do not act in socially legitimate ways. The law is one source of coercive pressure, but so too for example, is the knowledge that you will get promoted only if you act in ways which fit accepted ways of doing things in your organisation.

**Imitation** refers to the pressures to copy what others do. The world is complicated and finding the best-possible solution is often difficult. One way of dealing with this complexity is to copy others, in particular observing what 'successful' others do or have done: for example, a person who we respect or a person we wish to emulate. Of course, imitation can be a successful strategy, but it can often happen with little regard for the different contexts and challenges faced by different people at different times within organisations.

Finally, **conformity** refers to pressures linked to what we think we 'should' do. They concern our values and the broader social values to which we subscribe. Some organisations make explicit attempts to foster particular kinds of values, but such



pressures also come from outside the organisation, such as from a particular professional or religious affiliation.

A key driver of social pressures can be the culture of an organisation. While there are many definitions of organisational culture, Terrence Deal and Allan Kennedy in *Corporate cultures: the rites and rituals of corporate life*, proposed that culture is quite simply “the way we do things around here” (1982). An organisation’s culture can impact our decision making in so far as we may often seek to make decisions which align with what we perceive to be the way things are typically done. For example, it may be generally accepted within an organisation that individuals at a certain level should not make decisions beyond certain limits without first engaging the support of someone more senior. While formal checks and balances can be in place to ensure that this is the case, the pressures to conform with this can also be wholly unspoken.

In this section we have seen that we are not simply rational decision-making machines, but rather are influenced in our decision making by a range of psychological and social elements.

We are all driven to varying extents by the need for social legitimacy and the demands of groups of which we are members. Paying attention to these social contexts and pressures can help us understand our own approach to decision making and the limitations which we may encounter.

## 4 Identifying potential solutions

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### 4.1 Decision making in policing

In the following video, Police Officer Ben Hargreaves discusses the challenges around decision making for community safety.

Video content is not available in this format.



While this is a powerful framework for problem solving (and has been adopted by police forces across the UK) it cannot be seen in isolation from the underlying social and psychological perspectives. Your own personal biases and preferences will have an impact on how you understand and interpret data and the way you relate to policies and 'objective' guidelines. Much of this will also be impacted by culture and the unspoken rules evident in organisations.

### The National Decision Model

The NDM is a police framework designed to make the decision-making process easier and standardised. It should be used by all officers, decision makers and assessors who are involved in the whole decision process. Not only is it used for making decisions but to assess and judge those decisions. It can also be used to improve future decisions and help to create techniques and methods for many different situations.

The NDM is based around the police force mission statement and the Code of Ethics, which should be considered when completing each of the stages. You should ask yourself whether the action you are considering is consistent with the Code of Ethics, what the police service would expect, and what the community and the public as a whole would expect of you.

The NDM stages are:

Stage 1 Gather information about the problem in hand. Not only should you work out what you do know, but what you do not know. You will use the information gathered in stage 1 throughout the rest of the process and also when your decisions are being assessed and judged after the event.

Stage 2 Determine the threat, its nature and extent so that you can assess the situation and make the right decisions. Ask yourself, do you need to take the necessary action straight away or is this an ongoing problem? What is the most likely outcome and what would be the

implications? Are the police the most appropriate people to deal with the problem, and are you best equipped to help resolve the problem at hand or would somebody else be better?

Stage 3 Knowing what the problem is, you will need to determine what powers you and the police have to combat the problem. Ask yourself which powers will be needed and if the required powers and policies need any additional or specialist assistance to be instigated and introduced. Is there any legislation that covers the process?

Stage 4 Armed with all of the information regarding the problem and any policies and other legislations that may exist, you are in a position to draw up a list of options. You should also use this opportunity to develop a contingency plan or a series of contingencies that can provide you with a backup plan if things do not go exactly to plan.

Stage 5 Once you have determined the most appropriate action, it is time to put this in place. Perform the most desirable action and, if necessary, begin the process again to get the best results possible. Review the process and determine whether or not you could have done things better and what you would do in the future if you were faced with a similar, or the same, problem.

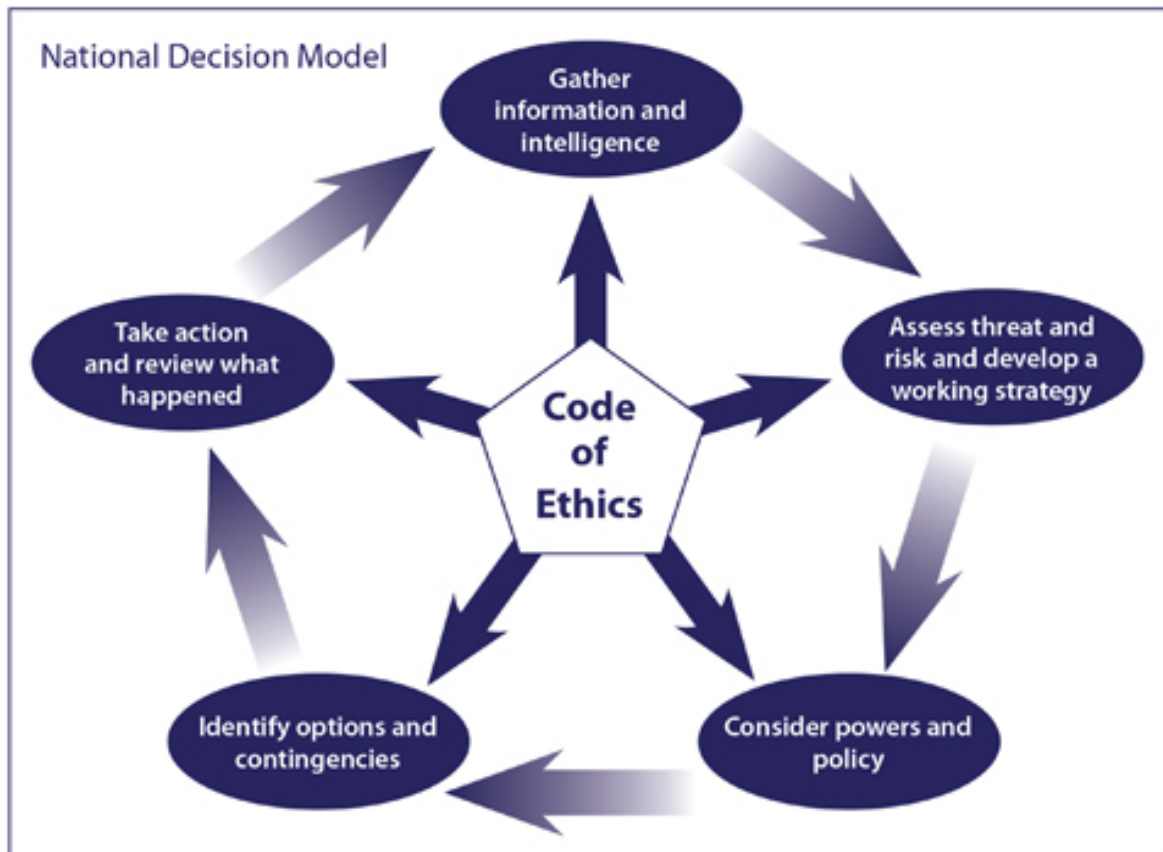


Figure 3 National Decision Model

PCSO Operational Handbook, 2016, pp. 41-42

When it comes to policing, there are many standard decision making models to refer to such as OSARA and the National Decision Model. What they share is an attempt to put a

common, objective framework on decision making efforts so that decisions can be objectively supported and justified, can be explained to colleagues and can be clearly analysed for lessons and understanding after the fact

## 4.2 Proposing and negotiating solutions

While not every decision we make can be 'right', by using appropriate frameworks such as the NDM and taking into account our own limitations as decision makers, we can at least hope to make 'good' decisions in the light of the available information. Yet if making good decisions is critical, so too is actually implementing those decisions. As we have already seen, when engaged in community policing certain skills such as active listening, communicating and stakeholder management are of key importance. When it comes to the actual implementation of decisions these all come together to form key elements of influencing and negotiation.

## 4.3 Influencing

Influencing – not to be confused with the potentially more cynical and harmful concept of manipulation – comes in many shapes and forms. The Oxford Dictionary, for example, defines influence as 'the capacity to have an effect on the character, development, or behaviour of someone or something, or the effect itself'.

The American psychologist, Robert Cialdini, in *Influence: Science and Practice*, (2001), identified six key principles of influencing that are worth reflecting on:

- **Reciprocity**: that we tend to repay, in kind, what another person has provided to us
- **Consistency**: we tend to behave in a manner which is consistent with what we have previously done or previously committed to
- **Social proof**: in order to determine what is correct we observe what other people do or think is correct
- **Liking**: we most prefer to say yes to people we know and especially those we like
- **Authority**: people tend to follow the instructions of authority figures
- **Scarcity**: a perceived scarcity in supply will drive an increase in demand.

On a simpler level, when seeking to positively influence a stakeholder or stakeholder group it is worth considering the difference between Push influencing and Pull influencing:

- Push influencing
  - More talking than listening
  - Emphasis on facts, not feelings
  - The influencer works mostly alone
  - The focus is on quick results.
- Pull influencing
  - Listening before talking
  - Emphasis on understanding needs and getting to know the other person
  - The influencer works together with others
  - The focus is on long-term cooperation.

### Activity 6 How do you influence others?

Allow about 5 minutes for this activity.

Reflect back on the last few weeks and think about times when you have sought to positively influence people. Using the key elements of Push and Pull influencing outlined above think about your own style and how often you have applied each. In your practice, which style of influencing do you believe is and has been most effective?

## 4.4 Negotiating

While many police officers are trained in negotiation techniques for difficult and often extreme situations of stress and danger, it is worth remembering that each of us negotiates on a daily basis. From ensuring that your five-year-old child eats his or her greens to agreeing a schedule of work for your house with a builder, negotiation is ever-present.

The key to successful negotiation lies in recognising our own personal biases and requirements, building trust and empathy, actively listening to the needs of others and the application of positive influencing techniques. Negotiation in a community should not be adversarial and should not be about seeking a win/lose outcome, but rather seeking a win/win in which all parties gain from both the process and the outcome.

But how to go about this?

Psychologists suggest that a good way to start negotiations in this context is to first seek out areas where you agree, and to acknowledge these communal values and/or interests; then to address the minor disagreements; before attempting to deal with any more major disagreements.

This allows time for some rapport and trust to be built up and means major disagreements are more likely to be dealt with in a more rational and adult manner than would otherwise be the case – even if deadlock seems to appear.

## Week 4 quiz

This quiz gives you the opportunity to check your understanding of the subjects you have covered in Weeks 3 and 4. It consists of eight questions and will help you to assess your own progress.

[Week 4 quiz](#)

Open the quiz in a new tab or window (by holding ctrl [or cmd on a Mac] when you click the link).

## Summary

This week you have developed your understanding of reflective practice as a means of promoting self-awareness and initiating change. You have gained a better understanding of different types of problem and examined your decision making in the context of three

different approaches. Finally you have looked at two different elements of solving problems with others, influencing and negotiating

This concludes your study of *Collaborative problem solving for community safety*. We hope you have enjoyed the course and that you move on to other courses at the Open University.

Other Open University courses that are related to this OpenLearn course, and you may be interested in studying, are [BSc \(Hons\) Criminology and Law](#) and [BA \(Hons\) Business Management \(Leadership Practice\)](#).

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## Further reading

[http://discoverpolicing.org/whats\\_like/community-policing/skills-abilities/](http://discoverpolicing.org/whats_like/community-policing/skills-abilities/)  
<https://www.ncjrs.gov/pdffiles1/nij/grants/249881.pdf>  
<http://www.open.edu/openlearn/health-sports-psychology/social-care/introduction-social-work-wales/content-section-6.1>

A significant library of resources and 'best practice' guidelines exists for working with vulnerable children and adults.

Some key documents would include:

Guidance on Safeguarding and Investigating the Abuse of Vulnerable Adults 2012:

<http://library.college.police.uk/docs/acpo/vulnerable-adults-2012.pdf>

Safeguarding Adults A National Framework of Standards for good practice and outcomes in adult protection work:

<https://www.adass.org.uk/AdassMedia/stories/Publications/Guidance/safeguarding.pdf>

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## Acknowledgements

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### Week 1

#### Images

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#### Figures

**Figure 2** © Mikolette/Getty Images

#### Text

**Activity 4** Active Listening – extract adapted from Active Listening, edited by Michael H. Hoppe, pp 9–12, Center for Creative Leadership, 2006.

**Section 2.2 extract** adapted from Kuhnke, E. (2012), *Communication Skills for Dummies*, Chichester (pp. 60–61), John Wiley & Son.

#### Audio visual

**Section 4.1 video** The importance of identifying vulnerability in community policing. Speaking at the November 2016 conference of the College of Policing, College CEO, Chief Constable Alex ) licensed under the terms [http://www.college.police.uk/ Legal/ Documents/Non\\_Commercial\\_ College\\_Licence.pdf](http://www.college.police.uk/Legal/Documents/Non_Commercial_College_Licence.pdf) © College of Policing.

### Week 2

#### Images

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**Figure 3** Brixton Splash community festival: © A bloke called Jerm in Flickr  
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**Figure 6** © alexsi/Getty Images

**Figure 8** © Muharrem Oner/iStockphoto.com

#### Text

**Activity 3** Brixton Splash – Organising a community event: extract from promotional literature (Brixton Splash 2015)

## Week 4

### Images

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**Figure 1** © Sondem/Shutterstock.com

**Figure 3** National Decision Model: National Policing Police Community Support Officer: Operational Handbook, June 2015, 41–42, © College of Policing Limited (2015) licensed under the terms [http://www.college.police.uk/Legal/Documents/Non\\_Commercial\\_College\\_Licence.pdf](http://www.college.police.uk/Legal/Documents/Non_Commercial_College_Licence.pdf)

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