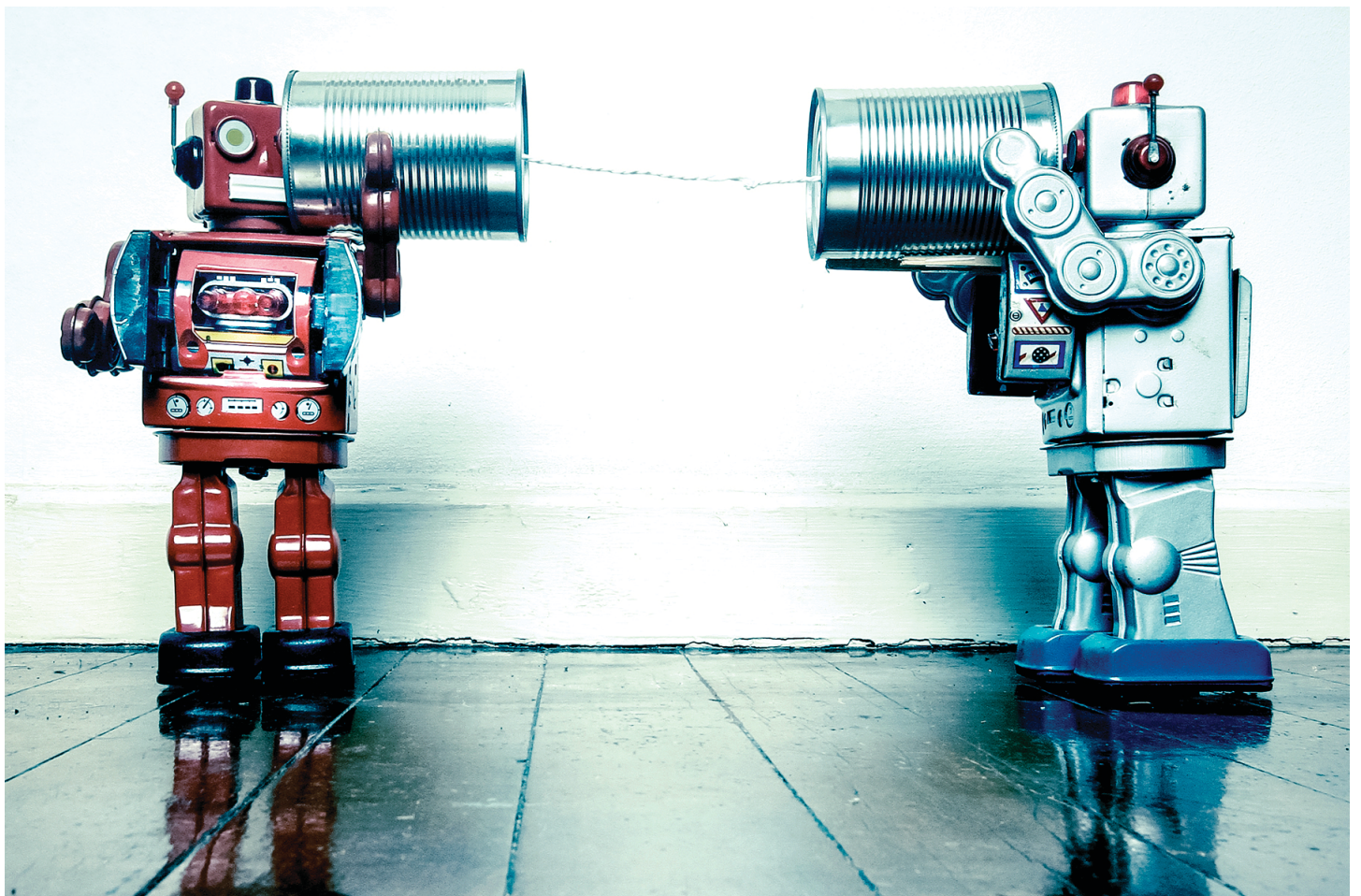


Effective communication in the workplace



About this free course

This free course provides a sample of level 1 study in Communication Technologies

This free course is an adapted extract from the Open University course .

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You can experience this free course as it was originally designed on OpenLearn, the home of free learning from The Open University –

There you'll also be able to track your progress via your activity record, which you can use to demonstrate your learning.

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Introduction and guidance

Introduction and guidance

Welcome to this free course, *Effective communication in the workplace*. The course lasts eight weeks, with approximately three hours of study each week. You can work through the course at your own pace, so if you have more time one week there is no problem with pushing on to complete another week's study.

You will be able to test your understanding of the course through the weekly interactive quizzes, of which Weeks 4 and 8 will provide you with an opportunity to earn a badge to demonstrate your new skills. You can read more on how to study the course and about badges in the next sections.

After completing this course, you will be able to:

- describe different types of communication and how they are used in the workplace
- recognise the skills required for effective communication
- understand the impact that communication can have on how people are perceived by others
- identify how effective communication can overcome challenges in the workplace
- reflect on current personal communication skills and how these can be developed and used more successfully.

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 'Course content'. From here you can navigate to any part of the course. Alternatively, use the week links at the top of every page 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.

The Open University would really appreciate a few minutes of your time to tell us about yourself and your expectations for the course before you begin, in our optional [start-of-course survey](#). Participation will be completely confidential and we will not pass on your details to others.

What is a badged course?

While studying *Effective communication in the workplace* you have the option to work towards gaining a digital badge.

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

To complete a course you need to be able to find about 24 hours of study time, over a period of about 8 weeks. However, it is possible to study them at any time, and at a pace to suit you.

Badged courses are all available on The Open University's [OpenLearn](#) website and do not cost anything to study. They differ from Open University courses because you do not receive support from a tutor. But you do get useful feedback from the interactive quizzes.

What is a badge?

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

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



How to get a badge

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

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

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

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

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

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

Get started with [Week 1](#).

Week 1: The importance of communication in the workplace

Introduction

Welcome to Week 1 of this free course, *Effective communication in the workplace*.

Communication is a crucial element of our daily lives, whether we are relating to friends and family, purchasing items that we need or sharing information with colleagues. We communicate with people and organisations every day, either in writing, verbally or even non-verbally.

The aim of this course is to focus on communicating with your colleagues, exploring the benefits of learning how to do it effectively and understanding the potential impact when we don't.

This week you will learn what communication is and why it's important and you'll consider some of the theory behind the communication process. Towards the end of the week you will be introduced to personal development planning and begin to consider creating an action plan. The action plan will be an opportunity for you to think through areas where you wish to improve your skills and set appropriate goals to do so. This structure will run throughout the course, allowing you to put your learning into practice as you go along.

To start, watch the following video in which Lynne Johnson introduces this week. Lynne works in the Careers Service at The Open University and has over 20 years of experience in adult career guidance.

Video content is not available in this format.

[Video 1](#)



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

- understand what communication is and why it is important at work

- explain what constitutes effective communication and list some potential barriers
- understand the benefits of using a personal development plan.

The Open University would really appreciate a few minutes of your time to tell us about yourself and your expectations for the course before you begin, in our optional [start-of-course survey](#). Participation will be completely confidential and we will not pass on your details to others.

1 What does communication mean?

In the *Oxford English Dictionary*, communication is described as ‘The transmission or exchange of information, knowledge, or ideas, by means of speech, writing, mechanical or electronic media’ (OED, 2019).



Figure 1 What is communication?

Two main types of communication are widely recognised and discussed in both business and academic literature:

1. Verbal communication, which includes both oral and written.
2. Non-verbal communication, e.g. facial expressions, body language etc.

You’ll learn more about these different communication types as you progress through the course. As a starting point, the following activity will give you the opportunity to reflect on when you’ve experienced them in both a positive and a negative way in the workplace.

Activity 1 My experience

Allow 15 minutes for this activity

Think of one example of good communication and one of bad communication that you have experienced in a work situation. Try to remember who it was with, how the information was delivered and how it made you feel.

List in the box below the reasons why you think one exchange went well and the other didn’t. Where the communication process wasn’t effective, consider what could have been done differently to improve it.

Provide your answer...

Discussion

When considering the positives and negatives of each interaction, did you focus on behaviours/facial expressions etc., or was it the language that was used that caused the exchange to go well or badly?

If you chose an example of written communication, for example an email, the relative success of the interaction will be linked to the words and tone used. Perhaps a friendlier tone, or closer attention to the details, could have improved the situation. Or maybe those elements were well done and made you feel positive.

In an oral exchange, it isn’t just about the words that are used, but the way they are delivered, the attitude of the deliverer etc. A smile and good eye contact can go a long way towards delivering a positive experience.

You'll explore non-verbal and written communication in more detail later in the course.

In the workplace, developing effective communication skills will enable you to interact more effectively with colleagues and customers, as well as improving your chances of gaining promotion or securing new employment.

There is also significant evidence, from the 1970s onwards, to support a link between effective communication in the workplace and enhanced job satisfaction. Clampit and Girard (1993) analysed the construct of communication satisfaction and concluded that:

... communication satisfaction factors provide an effective way to distinguish between employees who are in the upper and lower parts of the spectrum in terms of both job satisfaction and self-estimates for productivity.

(Clampit and Girard, 1993)

More recently, a study of nurses in paediatric intensive care units – a particularly high-pressure working environment – also concluded that 'There is a relationship between effective communication and job satisfaction that needs to be of a greater importance for organizations to achieve a higher success' (Ibrahim et al., 2013).

It makes sense that if those around you are communicating effectively and you have a clear sense of what is expected of you and how you can contribute in the workplace – you are likely to feel more satisfied.

In the next section, you'll explore what organisations can gain from effective communication.

2 Why is communication important in the workplace?

To start, watch this video of Rebecca Fielding, an experienced recruiter and owner of talent consultancy Gradconsult, explaining the importance of communication skills in the workplace.

Video content is not available in this format.

[Video 2](#)



For all organisations, ensuring effective communication is essential. This includes both internal communication with staff and external communication, e.g. with customers or suppliers.

For the purposes of this course, you'll focus primarily on internal communication, although much of the content will be equally relevant to communicating with customers.

Internal communication

As you've already seen in the previous discussion about job satisfaction and productivity, effective communication gives clear benefits to the individual, but there are significant benefits for the organisation too.

If communication is poor, reduced job satisfaction and productivity can have a significant impact on the business.

For example, when 4,000 people were surveyed by Think Feel Know Coaching, 46% said that they were 'unsure of what was being asked of them by their line manager when given tasks'. The same study estimated that up to 40 minutes per individual, per day were wasted because of this. Using these figures, an average company with 1,000 employees could have as many as 83 people doing nothing every day (Woods, 2010).

When there is uncertainty or change within an organisation, employees can feel ill-informed about the effects on their roles. If their concerns are not addressed and vital information is not communicated, staff morale will be affected. This can lead to a lack of trust and engagement, which can result in low productivity and absenteeism.

For an organisation to embrace effective communication, every individual must play their part – from senior managers to new trainees.

Sometimes, miscommunication is the problem. To avoid this, the video in Activity 2 suggests some simple rules.

Activity 2 Miscommunication

Allow 20 minutes for this activity

Watch the following TedEd video on miscommunication. When you've watched it, use the box below to summarise your understanding of the four practices they suggest.

Video content is not available in this format.

Video 3



Provide your answer...

Discussion

The four practices suggested are as follows:

- Recognise that there is a difference between passive hearing and active listening.
- Listen with your eyes and ears as well as your gut.
- Take time to understand the perspective of the person/people you are talking to.
- Try to be aware of your own perceptual filters.

The next time you are discussing a difficult issue with a group of colleagues, try to put these ideas into practice. You could even share them with the rest of the group. See if it makes a difference.

You'll learn more about active listening in Week 2.

When considering how to improve your overall communication skills, it can be useful to have an understanding of the theory behind the communication process itself. In the next section, you'll explore this in more detail.

3 How does the communication process work?

You communicate every day, whether it is in the form of a face-to-face or telephone conversation, an email, a text message, a Facebook post, a tweet or a presentation. Yet you will rarely stop to think about the way you delivered your 'message'.

Figure 2 demonstrates the communication process. The critical aspects of communication are how the sender conveys the message and how the recipient receives it.

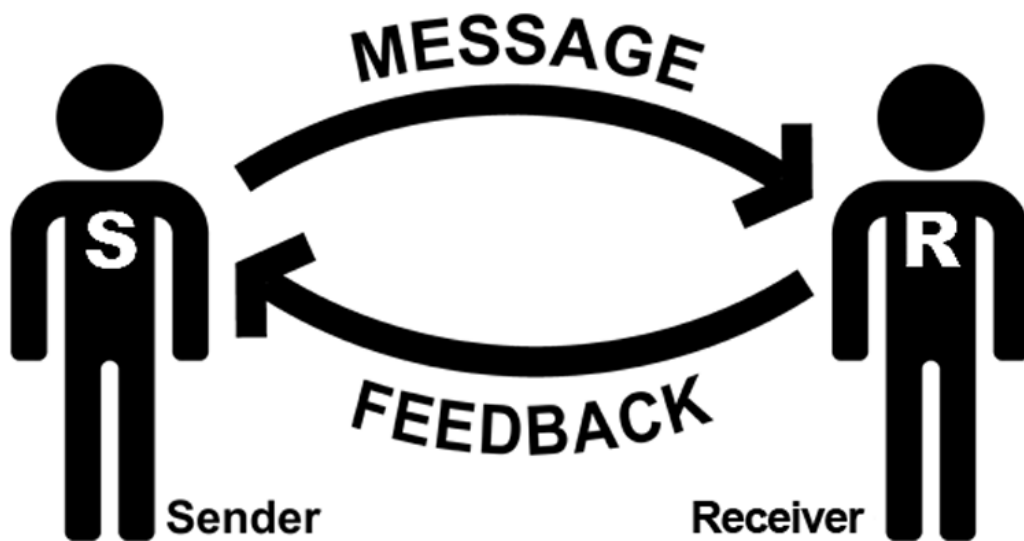


Figure 2 The communication process

In Figure 2, the receiver must provide feedback to allow the sender to know that the message has been understood.

Although this illustration demonstrates that communication is always between two parties, it is important to note that it is not always between two individuals.

Activity 3 Communication parties

Allow 5 minutes for this activity

Think of yourself as the sender and make a quick list of the receivers of your communications in an average day.

Provide your answer...

Discussion

Was it a long list or did you struggle to identify anyone? Examples might include the following.

Verbal (oral) communication: People you meet during your commute to work, colleagues in your department, staff in the canteen, retail staff in a local shop etc.

There may also be situations where you are communicating with several colleagues at once, such as in a meeting or while giving a presentation.

Written communication: In an average day you might send emails to colleagues, customers, suppliers or friends. Are any of those messages sent to multiple receivers? Do you do anything differently when they are?

Do you communicate with everyone in the same way, or do you change your tone, language etc. to suit your audience? You'll learn more about adapting your communication style in Week 2.

Figure 2 was a highly simplified representation of communication. Figure 3 shows how communication of the message can be broken down further.

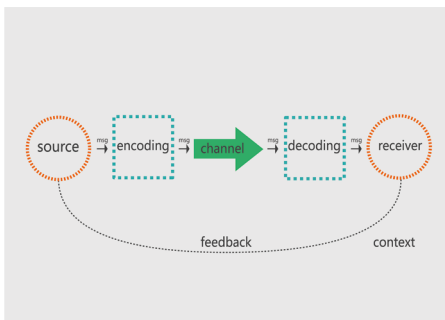


Figure 3 Communication: from source to receiver

Box 1 From source to receiver

'The source' is the sender. When you speak to someone or send an email, you are the source of the message.

'Msg' is the message.

'Encoding' is the construction of your message. Effective encoding will demonstrate clarity, and use appropriate language, reducing the risk of confusion. You should consider how the person reading or listening to your message will respond. If you are communicating your message to more than one person, remember that each person may receive it differently.

'Channel' is the form of communication (e.g. email, text message, telephone or face-to-face conversation). You should consider the best channel to deliver a message. For example, sometimes written communication may be the best approach, but not always. Understanding your audience is important in choosing your channel.

'Decoding' is the process that occurs when the recipient(s) hear or read your message. Effective decoding will occur if you have written or spoken your message clearly, demonstrating an understanding of what the receiver may know already. This helps the receiver to interpret the message correctly. Decoding is obstructed if you do not use appropriate language (e.g. the excessive use of jargon).

'The Receiver' is the recipient. It is important to note that one recipient may interpret the message differently to another. This is particularly relevant when sending a message to a number of recipients, such as a written communication (including emails, text messages or reports) or verbal communication to a group.

'Feedback' is critical. This helps you to judge whether your message has been received in the way that you intended. If you are delivering the message face-to-face (in person or via video messaging such as Skype) you can look for non-verbal as well as verbal responses to your message. You can also ask questions to help ensure that the message has been understood.

If you have ever been in a situation where someone disagreed with you and you felt that your point of view was not being heard, there could have been something wrong with the way that you were trying to deliver your message, or the way they were receiving it.

Effective communication can be achieved if you follow a simple process that allows you and the message recipient to understand exactly what you are trying to convey. The next section shows you an easy to follow, practical approach that will help to ensure that your communication is more effective.

4 Effective communication

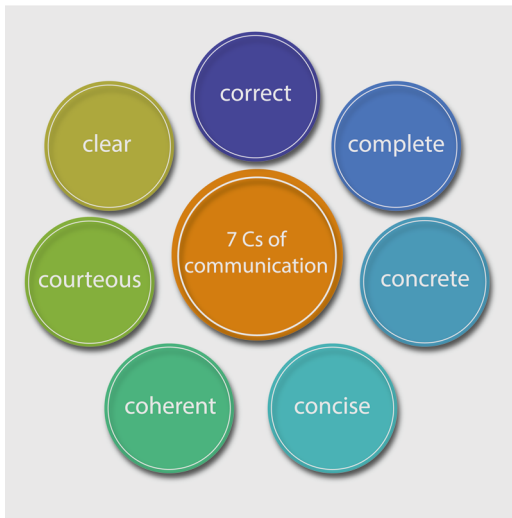
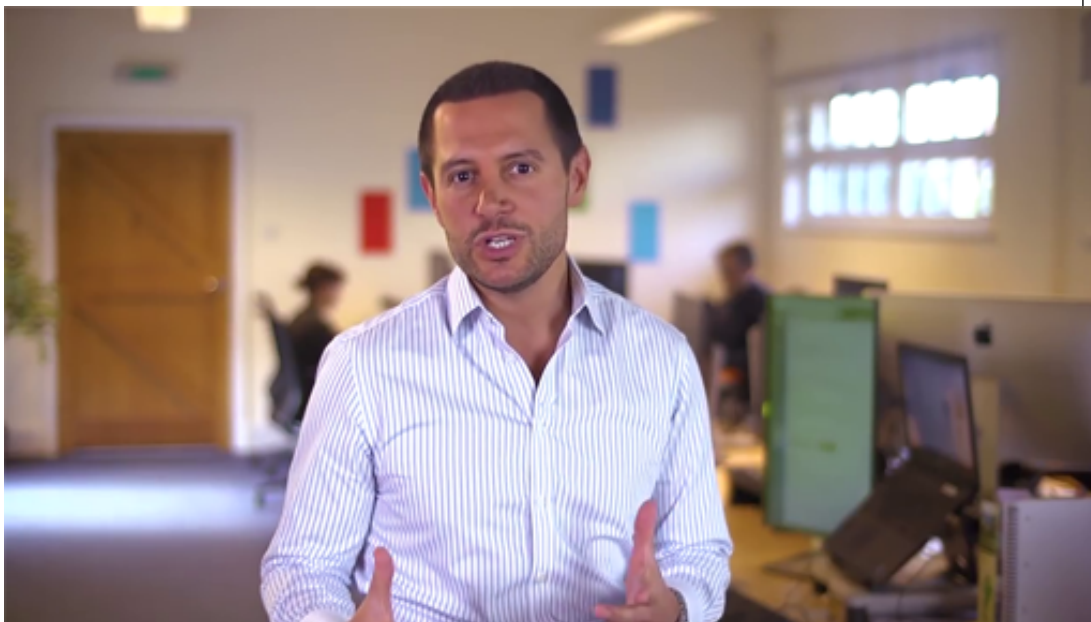


Figure 4 The 7 Cs of communication

Watch the following MindTools video to get a brief explanation of all the steps outlined in Figure 4.

Video content is not available in this format.

Video 4



You might also find this related article on the MindTools website useful:

[The 7 Cs of communication.](#)

If we were going to add an eighth C to the list, it might be awareness of the 'context' in which you are delivering the message. Consider who and where the audience is – are they friends, colleagues or customers?

Activity 4 The 7 Cs in practice

Allow about 15 minutes for this activity

Read the following email and work out which of the 7 Cs is missing from the approach – list them in the box below. Remember, you are looking for the message to be clear, concise, concrete, correct, complete, coherent and courteous.

Geoff,

I need those figures from you by Wednesday at the latest for a meeting with the clients.

Jane

Provide your answer...

Discussion

The message is certainly clear and concise, but does it contain enough information to be considered 'complete'? For example, which Wednesday is Jane referring too and will Geoff know what figures/clients she is talking about? When is the meeting due to take place?

It is also a pretty terse message, without any pleasantries or use of please and thank you, so Geoff might think it isn't very 'courteous'. This might impact on his willingness to comply with Jane's request.

It's difficult to know from such a brief message whether it is 'correct'. Jane might have got her dates wrong, but she's put it in writing so Geoff can only go on the information he has been given.

As well as the 7 Cs, another classification is the four basic styles of communication (UK VIP, no date). An awareness of these styles might give you some insight into how a colleague is feeling and what you could do to communicate more effectively with them.

The four styles are characterised as follows:

1. **Passive communication** – individuals have developed a pattern of avoiding expressing their opinions or feelings and allow grievances and annoyances to mount. They are prone to explosive, usually out of proportion, outbursts. They might say:
 - 'I'm unable to stand up for my rights.'
 - 'I get stepped on by everyone.'
 - 'People never consider my feelings.'
2. **Aggressive communication** – individuals express their feelings and opinions in a way that violates the rights of others. They may even be verbally or physically abusive. They might believe:
 - 'I'm superior and right and you're inferior and wrong.'
 - 'It's all your fault.'
 - 'I'll get my way no matter what.'
3. **Passive-aggressive communication** – individuals appear passive on the surface but are really acting out of anger in a subtle, indirect way. They usually feel powerless, stuck and resentful. Their perspectives might be:

- 'I'm weak and resentful, so I sabotage, frustrate and disrupt.'
 - 'I'm powerless to deal with you head on so I must use guerrilla warfare.'
 - 'I will appear cooperative but I'm not.'
4. Assertive communication – individuals clearly state their opinions and feelings. They value themselves, their time and their needs and respect the rights of others. They might feel:
- 'We are equally entitled to express ourselves respectfully to one another.'
 - 'I am confident about who I am.'
 - 'I'm 100% responsible for my own happiness.'

Clearly, assertive communication is the preference as it allows the individual to take care of themselves and is fundamental to healthy relationships. For the other three styles, encouraging colleagues to share their opinions and feelings, and to do so appropriately, is key.

When you look in more detail at challenging communication in Week 6, an awareness of your own communication style will be useful. Trying to be more assertive by clearly stating and valuing your opinions and respecting the rights of others will lead to more effective interactions.

Activity 4 demonstrated how an incomplete message can create a barrier to effective communication, and some of the communication styles outlined here are barriers in themselves. In the next section you'll explore other actions and behaviours that can have a negative effect.

5 Barriers to good communication

As well as considering the benefits of effective communication, it is important to explore common barriers to it.

The International Institute of Directors and Managers (Baker, n.d.) identify their top barriers to effective communication in the workplace as:

- inattention during conversations
- lack of feedback
- over-reliance on email
- lack of role models demonstrating good communication throughout the organisation
- physical office layout i.e. proximity to other people and the configuration of the office.

They go on to explain that these are all things that can potentially be improved upon, for example by choosing your most attentive time of day to have important conversations or arranging a face to face meeting with someone rather than firing off an email. If senior managers in an organisation aren't modelling good communication, there may be a training need there.

Inattention during a conversation is something that we are all guilty of from time to time. In the next activity you'll see how this and a lack of feedback between the sender and receiver of a message, can potentially impact on an income.

Activity 5 Folding paper exercise

Allow 15 minutes for this activity

This activity requires you to ask a colleague, friend or family member to help. It would be even better if you had at least two people in addition to yourself.

All of you should start with a sheet of A4 paper each. Ask your friends/colleagues/family to pick up their sheet of paper. Now explain that they must close their eyes and ask no questions.

Read out this set of 6 instructions and also follow them yourself. Make sure that you give everyone time to perform each action before going on to the next.

1. Fold your sheet of paper in half.
2. Tear off the upper right-hand corner.
3. Fold your paper in half again.
4. Tear off the upper left-hand corner.
5. Fold your paper in half again.
6. Tear off the lower right-hand corner.

Ask your colleagues to open their eyes and take a couple of minutes to look at each other's paper folding and tearing efforts.

If it is not convenient to identify others to help with this activity, watch this short video which illustrates how it works and the outcome:

[Classroom creativity exercise: follow the instructions](#)

(Source:

<http://veterinarybusiness.dvm360.com/five-minute-exercise-your-next-team-meeting>)

Discussion

It is quite possible that all your pieces of paper look different, with folds and tears in varying places.

Not being able to ask questions limits an individual's ability to understand exactly what is required of them. This exercise demonstrates that communication must be a two-way process if it is to be truly effective.

As you progress through the course, you'll consider some of these potential barriers in more detail and learn more about how to address and overcome them.

6 Creating a personal development plan



Figure 5 Watch your plan grow throughout the course.

Research suggests that creating a plan will make it more likely that you achieve your goals.

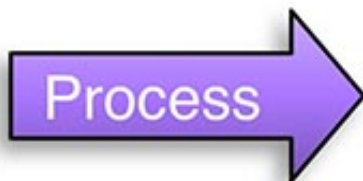
So you'll finish each week of this course by identifying opportunities to practice and further develop your communication skills. You will be able to follow a structured process called personal development planning.

To find out more, watch this video on personal development planning produced by the Open University's Careers and Employability team:

Video content is not available in this format.

[Video 5](#)

Personal
Development
Planning is a



The video explains the five main steps of personal development planning, which are:

1. identifying an area of development
2. planning what to develop
3. taking action

4. recording achievements
5. reviewing what has been learned.

Activity 6 Personal development planning

Allow 20 minutes for this activity

Download and save this [Personal development planning table](#). You can use this table to plan your long, medium and short-term goals.

Choose a goal that reflects what you have learned about this week and work through the table. For example, you might want to think about an aspect of miscommunication that you'd like to avoid in the future.

Long term goal: Avoid miscommunication

Short and medium term	Action required	Constraints	Resources – who or what can help me?	Target dates for action
Make sure I always consider the perspective of the person I'm communicating with	Ask others for their view before I present my own	Forgetting to do it in the heat of the moment	I could ask a trusted colleague to observe my approach in meetings etc. and give me feedback	Start on Monday with this new approach

You will be using this approach to goal setting each week throughout the course.

Discussion

This is an ongoing process, and one which may help you to identify other skills that you wish to improve or develop as you progress through the course.

Next week you will have the opportunity to understand goal setting in more detail. Each week thereafter you will review your progress and identify whether you wish to add any more to your plan.

7 This week's quiz

Now you've reached the end of Week 1, you can try a short quiz to help you reflect on what you've learned.

[Week 1 practice quiz](#)

Open the quiz in a new tab or window and come back here when you are done.

8 Summary of Week 1

This week you have been introduced to some of the key themes relating to communication skills. You have been presented with a model explaining how communication works, and familiarised yourself with the 7 Cs of communication.

You have also started your personal development plan, which you will use each week to help you to develop your own communication skills.

You should now be able to:

- understand what communication is and why it is important at work
- explain what constitutes effective communication and list some potential barriers
- understand the benefits of using a personal development plan.

Next week you will be focusing on non-verbal communication, exploring the non-verbal messages that you and others convey.

You can now go to [Week 2](#).

Week 2: Communication skills

Introduction

Welcome to Week 2. Last week you investigated the theory behind effective communication. This week, you'll be exploring some of the skills that are essential to achieving it.

There are many different communication and interpersonal skills that you can develop and use, but you'll start by focusing on two of the most important – listening and questioning.

Some professions depend almost entirely on being able to listen effectively – for example, counsellors, customer service staff and interpreters. However, being a good listener will improve your performance in any job as well as having a positive effect on your personal relationships.

In the following video, Lynne gives you a flavour of what you'll be learning this week.

Video content is not available in this format.

[Video 1](#)



By the end of this week, you will be able to:

- explain what is meant by 'active listening'
- ask more effective questions
- understand the role of self-awareness, empathy, adaptability and trust in facilitating effective communication.

1 Listening is more than hearing

Listening is the most fundamental component of interpersonal communication. For example, you use your listening skills to learn, for pleasure and to gather information. While we all use our listening skills every day, unless we are actively listening, we are unlikely to take in everything we hear.

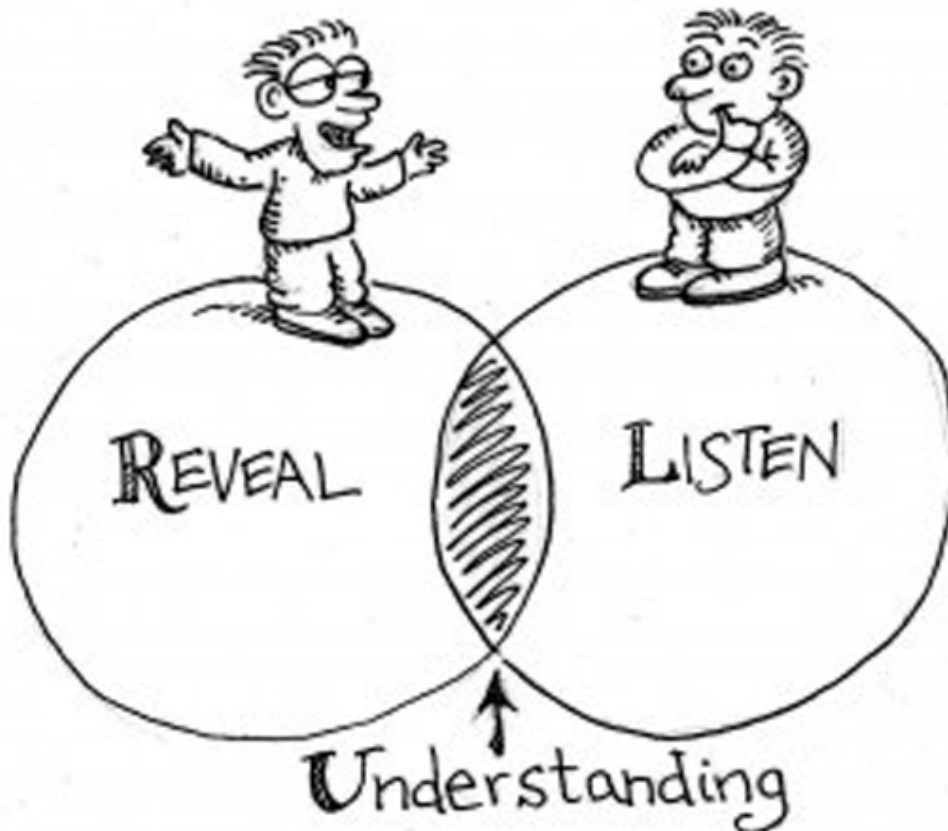


Figure 1 The importance of understanding.

For listening to be effective in the workplace, it should be an active process in which a conscious decision is made to listen to and understand the messages of the speaker. Horowitz (2012) explains how the brain responds differently when we use active listening.

...when you actually pay attention to something you're listening to, [...] a separate 'top-down' pathway comes into play. Here, the signals are conveyed through a dorsal pathway in your cortex, part of the brain that does more computation, which lets you actively focus on what you're hearing and tune out sights and sounds that aren't as immediately important.

Some people are naturally 'good listeners', but the rest of us can improve by learning and practising our listening skills.

2 What is active listening?

Active listening is a way of listening and responding to another person that improves mutual understanding. The phrase 'active listening' was first used by Rogers and Farson (2015) in the 1950s. They describe it as follows:

It is called 'active' because the listener has a very definite responsibility. He does not passively absorb the words which are spoken to him. He actively tries to grasp the facts and the feelings in what he hears, and he tries, by his listening, to help the speaker work out his own problems.

(Rogers and Farson, 2015)



Figure 2 An example of active listening.

Since the term was first coined, it has been adapted and there are now many variations of it.

In this course, you're going to focus on five key behaviours and actions that will help you to actively listen:

1. focus fully on the speaker
2. avoid interrupting
3. show interest
4. avoid appearing judgemental
5. provide feedback.

2.1 Focus fully on the speaker



Figure 3 An example of a focused conversation.

One way to combat our tendency to drift to other thoughts is to mentally repeat to yourself what the speaker has just said. Another way is to make notes. The physical act of writing will keep you focused, even if you never need to refer to the notes after the event.

If there are just too many distractions, tell the speaker at the earliest opportunity and suggest you move to a different place or delay the conversation until it is quieter.

Finally, make sure that you are not the cause of the distraction. Playing with your pen, or looking at your watch or your phone, is distracting for the speaker.

2.2 Tactics to avoid interrupting

Try to minimise your interruptions to the speaker's narrative. If you interrupt, even with a relevant point, the speaker will then have to pick up the threads of what they had originally been saying. We have all been in a position when someone says 'What I was saying was...', or 'the point I was trying to make was....' and then repeats a lot of things they have already told you.

Much of our time spent listening to people is actually taken up with rehearsing what you are going to say when it is your turn to speak. When you have sorted that out in your head, the temptation is to say it as soon as possible so that you don't forget. But you should resist this impulse. Taking notes can help – jotting down points that you want to respond to takes the pressure off trying to remember them and allows you to focus on listening.



Figure 4 An example of listening.

Having your lips apart and leaning towards someone conveys the message that you want to say something, and speakers may respond to this by stopping and letting you talk instead. So, one simple technique is to keep your mouth physically closed and lean slightly back in your seat (but not too far, you still want to demonstrate your interest). If you find it difficult to stop yourself saying something, rest your chin lightly on your hand.

Some interruptions can be helpful. For example, if you are not clear about something then you need to let the speaker know. You should do this as soon as possible because the longer the situation goes on, the longer it will take to put right.

Active listening is also about patience – accepting pauses and short periods of silence. Don't be tempted to jump in with questions or comments every time there are a few seconds of silence. Active listening involves giving the other person time to explore their thoughts and feelings.

2.3 Showing interest

It is not enough just to listen, you have to show people you are listening. If someone is speaking to you and they don't get any feedback, it is almost impossible to carry on. This could be non-verbal e.g. using facial expressions such as smiling or nodding to show your interest, or verbal but not intrusive, such as using vocal 'expressions' like 'Uh huh' or 'Mmm'.

Making eye contact with the speaker is generally encouraging; but eye contact can be intimidating, especially for shy speakers, so try to gauge how much eye contact is appropriate for any given situation.



Figure 5 An example of showing interest in a conversation.

Although some positive words of encouragement may be beneficial to the speaker, the listener should use them sparingly. Casual and frequent use of words and phrases, such as 'very good', 'yes' or 'indeed' can become irritating to the speaker.

2.4 Avoiding seeming judgemental

As far as possible, remain neutral until you have listened to what the speaker has to say. If you display anger, frustration or disapproval when someone is talking to you, they will respond by adjusting what they are saying and may also become angry, scared, defensive or openly hostile. At best this makes people less likely to want to talk to you; at worst it may mean that they withhold information that is important.



Figure 6 An example of a non-judgemental conversation.

Being judgemental can also be conveyed through what appears to be a positive attitude. For example, saying something like 'Nice to see you were on time' might imply 'You are not usually on time', or 'I hope this is not going to take long', etc.

In Activity 1 you'll have an opportunity to test your own judgements and assumptions.

Activity 1 Making assumptions

Allow 15 minutes for this activity

Take a look at the following list of ten objects and then spend some time noting your reflections on what the list suggests about the gender, age, beliefs, likes, dislikes or interests of the person who owns them. What might the list allow you to surmise about the owner's socio-economic background?

- 42-inch flatscreen TV
- Porsche 911 car
- Golf clubs
- Rosary beads
- Laptop computer
- Screwdriver
- Bicycle
- Tennis racket
- Tennis ball
- Hammer

Provide your answer...

Discussion

It is interesting to reflect on the assumptions you can make about people based on the objects they own or use. Although there is nothing in the list above which specifies the owner's gender, many of the items could indicate the sort of objects which a man might own or aspire to own – the large-screen television, the sports car, the sporting equipment.

Similarly, we might surmise that the owner of the objects on this list is wealthy – they have a huge TV and an expensive super car.

There are a number of pieces of sporting equipment on the list, which might suggest the owner likes to play outdoor sports.

The rosary beads might indicate that the owner is a Roman Catholic.

You do not really know anything about the hypothetical owner, but have already begun to form a series of opinions about who they are, and what they like and dislike, based on the things they own. Objects are integral to the way others can be viewed and the assumptions made about them. Clothing choices can have a similar impact.

Although this activity is not based on direct communication, the person who owns these items might talk about them at work – giving colleagues an opportunity to make assumptions about them and their values. If you allow it to, this information might influence your ability to build rapport or work effectively with this individual, for example by interpreting their intentions wrongly.

(Adapted from [An introduction to material culture](#))

Try to avoid stereotyping and making assumptions about people on the basis of their difference from you. Differences might include ethnicity, gender, age, religion, nationality, socio-economic status or disability. You'll explore diversity in the workplace, and its potential impact on communication, in Week 7.

2.5 Providing feedback

In order to reduce the impact of your own assumptions and attitudes, it is important to provide the listener with feedback. It is a way of demonstrating that you are listening and checking that you have understood what you have heard.

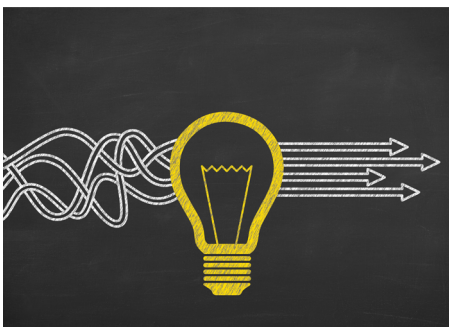


Figure 7 Feedback.

The key skills required in giving effective feedback are:

- Paraphrasing – putting what the speaker has said into your own words and playing this back to the speaker. This can be useful for several reasons. It demonstrates that you are listening carefully and trying to understand. It gives the speaker an opportunity to correct anything you have misunderstood. It also encourages the person to elaborate and offer further explanation. Make sure you do this when they have finished making their point rather than interrupting them mid-flow.
- Summarising – summing up the whole discussion concisely can provide a useful overview, particularly if it has been a long conversation. It could be that the person you are talking to is rambling and wandering off the point or they may be repeating themselves or adding unnecessary details. You can also use this technique to check the accuracy of your own understanding.
- Reflecting – focusing on reflecting the emotion behind the words in order to show comprehension. For example, if someone seems confused by the situation they are describing, you might include a comment such as ‘... and you feel confused by this’ in your paraphrasing or summary. It is a powerful skill that can reinforce the message of the speaker and demonstrate understanding. This will inevitably encourage the speaker to continue.

3 Asking effective questions

If you are, for example, a line manager or supervisor, or you're talking to a client, it is important to create an environment where the speaker feels that their issues/concerns/problems have been listened to. One way to do this is by asking effective questions. Project management company Mosaic Projects (no author, no date) has produced a detailed white paper on active listening and effective questioning, which includes the following list of question types:

- **Open questions** – to gather information and facts, for example: 'What are your concerns and worries about this situation?'
- **Probing questions** – to gain additional detail, e.g. 'Can you explain why that matters?'
- **Hypothetical questions** – to suggest an approach or introduce a new idea, for example 'If you could get additional funding or resources, how might that help?'
- **Reflective questions** – to check understanding, such as 'So would you prioritise the most critical areas for attention first and make sure that everyone knew what was most important?'
- **Leading questions** – are not always well received but can be used to help a person reach a conclusion or have an idea that you feel will be beneficial. For example, 'Had you thought about giving the project leadership role to Jennifer?'
- **Deflective questions** – to defuse an aggressive or defiant situation by re-directing the force of the other person's attack, e.g.
 - Dissatisfaction: 'I'm not happy with this project!'
 - Response: 'What can WE do to make it right?'
- **Closing questions** – to bring agreement, commitment and conclusion, e.g. 'When will you talk to your team and the client about this?'

They explain that questions can be used for different purposes, such as to provide structure, direct flow or help us to reach closure.

Coaches use open questions to help their clients move forward and this technique can be equally useful in a conversation with colleagues, particularly if you are in a supervisory role. Activity 2 shows you the coaching process in action.

Activity 2 Open and closed questions

Allow 15 minutes for this activity

Watch this video on good questioning practice. In it you will hear both open and closed questions being used.

What observations can you make about the questioner? What type of questioning helps to encourage the speaker to give full answers?

Video content is not available in this format.

[Video 2](#)



Provide your answer...

Look for opportunities to use effective questions in your interactions with colleagues. You could make this part of your Week 2 personal development plan.

4 Other useful communication skills

There are a number of other skills and abilities that might not immediately seem relevant, but which are crucial in facilitating good communication. They include:

1. self-awareness
2. empathy
3. adaptability
4. building trust and relationships.



Figure 8 Other useful communication skills.

4.1 Self-awareness

To be an effective communicator, you need to be self-aware. Watch organisational psychologist Tasha Eurich explain what our self-awareness is, why it's important and how we can develop it further in this short video.

Video content is not available in this format.

[Video 3](#)



Increasing your self-awareness allows you to communicate more honestly, with greater openness to the feedback you might receive. As a consequence, you will communicate more effectively with those around you.

4.2 Empathy

Another skill linked closely to effective communication is empathy. Watch this short video from CivCom to find out more about using empathy at work.

Video content is not available in this format.

[Video 4](#)



You might think that people are either empathetic or they are not, but research suggests that empathy is partly innate and partly learned, and something we can all improve on. Author and leading authority on building client relationships, Andrew Sobel (no date) recommends the following actions:

- Challenge yourself – learning a new skill or competency will humble you and humility is a key enabler of empathy.
- Get out of your usual environment, e.g. through travel to somewhere you wouldn't normally go – it gives you a better appreciation for others.
- Get feedback – ask for feedback about your relationship skills from family, friends and colleagues, and reflect on it.
- Examine your biases – we all have hidden biases that interfere with our ability to listen and empathise, e.g. relating to age, or gender.
- Ask better questions – aim to bring three or four thoughtful questions to every conversation.

It is interesting to note the recurring themes of feedback, listening and effective questioning, which you've already seen are key to effective communication.

4.3 Adaptability

You'll start this section with a case study.

A case study

Two bank employees are due to visit a local school to talk about personal finance. They are delivering a talk to children aged 10 to 11. The purpose of their visit is to explain key points about saving, cashless purchases and how to use cashpoints. The children may have questions about the differences between types of plastic card, and how and when to use them.

In order to communicate more effectively, the bank has created fun characters for children and an easy to read website with activities to help them learn about budgeting.

When running a similar programme for 16-year olds, they will adopt a different approach. For example, they will introduce more financial terminology. They won't necessarily use the fun characters, but they will need to keep the content relevant, using examples such as saving for a costly electronic device.

When the bank employees return to their branch, they may then be selling services like mortgages or insurance policies to customers. They will use different language and skills to answer complex questions about personalised financial situations.

The importance of being able to adapt your communication style to suit the situation or environment is a recurring theme throughout this course.

Think about the groups of people you could encounter during your working day. For example, you might be chairing a meeting, delivering a presentation to colleagues, or dealing with a query from a customer. How might your communication style differ?

Sharing a joke that worked socially with friends may not be appropriate in the workplace. Consider who you will be talking to – what might their expectations be?

A key starting point is to establish the purpose of the communication. For example, explaining a technical process might require a different communication style to mediating an argument between disgruntled colleagues.

Activity 3 Adapting your style

Allow 20 minutes for this activity

Think of something you do regularly, either at work or as a hobby. For example, at work you might write social media posts for your organisation, or your hobby might be playing a sport.

In the box below, summarise your activity as if you were talking to a senior manager at work.

Provide your answer...

Now summarise the same activity, but imagine you are talking to a child.

Provide your answer...

Discussion

These are two extremes that you usually wouldn't encounter in the workplace, but the point of the exercise is to consider how you might change the language you use, level of detail you share etc.

When talking to a senior manager, you might choose to highlight some of the key skills required to complete your activity or outline the successes you have had. For a child, you would simplify the information and perhaps try to entertain them with a funny story.

This approach is equally relevant when dealing with different groups of colleagues in the workplace. Thinking about their needs and expectations will help you to tailor your communication.

4.4 Building trust and relationships

You'll have realised by now that the most important elements of effective communication overlap and interlink. For example, building trust is much easier if you can show empathy for the other person, actively listening and asking them the effective questions as you build your relationship.

Watch this short video from Accredited Skills to learn more.

Video content is not available in this format.

[Video 5](#)



When you work in an environment where colleagues trust each other and have positive relationships, the communication between them will be more honest and open and therefore more effective.

In a blog for *Psychology Today*, Russell (2016) lists a number of characteristics of a workplace where trust is in action. Many of them relate to communication, including:

- Ideas are shared freely; contribution, collaboration, innovation, and cooperation thrive.
- Victim thinking, finger-pointing, and negative storytelling are infrequent.
- Regular feedback and dialogue is commonplace.
- Healthy conflict, grounded with best-of-self behaviours like integrity, ethics, and big-team thinking prevails.
- People like each other and show care and concern for one another, even volunteering to pitch in when others need assistance, without needing to be asked.

5 Personal development plan

This is your opportunity to revisit your personal development plan and think about everything you've covered this week. What would you like to work on?



Figure 9 The growth of your personal development plan.

Activity 4 My Week 2 plan

Allow 20 minutes for this activity

As you near the end of the learning for this week, take some time to identify any areas that you wish to further develop or practice. Then add this goal to your personal development planning table that you started in Week 1.

Perhaps you could practise active listening with someone that you do not always agree with, use some effective questions or develop your self-awareness by getting some feedback from someone you trust.

As well as setting a goal for this week, take the opportunity to review any goals you set yourself last week. If you are finding it difficult to meet the time frames you set, maybe they were unrealistic and you need to change them to fit in better with your workload.

Discussion

By reviewing your plan, you will identify which goals you are on target to complete. You will also identify those goals that you may not have focused on yet. Take time to consider why this is the case. Are they no longer priorities?

Reviewing your plan will help you to refocus and re-energise.

6 This week's quiz

Now you've reached the end of the week, you can try a short quiz to reflect on what you've learned.

[Week 2 practice quiz](#)

Open the quiz in a new tab or window and come back here when you are done.

7 Summary of Week 2

This week you explored listening and questioning techniques to further enhance your communication skills, and you developed your understanding of other aspects of effective communication such as empathy and building trust.

You should now be able to:

- explain what is meant by 'active listening'
- ask more effective questions
- understand the role of self-awareness, empathy, adaptability and trust in facilitating effective communication.

Next week you will start to investigate different forms of communication, starting with non-verbal.

You can now go to [Week 3](#).

Week 3: Understanding non-verbal communication

Introduction

Over the next three weeks of the course, you will be looking in more detail at the different forms of communication, i.e. non-verbal, verbal (or oral) and written.

This week you will be introduced to non-verbal communication, often referred to as body language, but not limited to this. The *Collins English Dictionary* defines non-verbal communication as:

... those aspects of communication such as gestures and facial expressions that do not involve verbal communication but may include non-verbal aspects of speech.

In studying non-verbal communication, you will gain an insight into the unspoken messages you are conveying to colleagues, interviewers, family and friends. Understanding body language will help to deepen your awareness of how someone is feeling, perhaps about a task or personal matter. It will help you to understand how some of your own signals may be perceived at work, so you can minimise them if they are negative and make better use of them if positive.

Watch this video of Lynne Johnson who will give you some more information about what you'll be focusing on this week.

Video content is not available in this format.

[Video 1](#)



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

- understand and interpret non-verbal communication
- reflect on the way that others perceive you
- present a positive personal image.

1 What is non-verbal communication?

You may not be aware of it, but your non-verbal communication gives away clues about how you are feeling.

Figure 1 illustrates just how significant body language can be when we communicate our feelings. During the 1960s and 1970s, Albert Mehrabian's work on spoken communication led to the conclusions outlined in the pie chart – figures which are widely quoted in recruitment and business contexts.

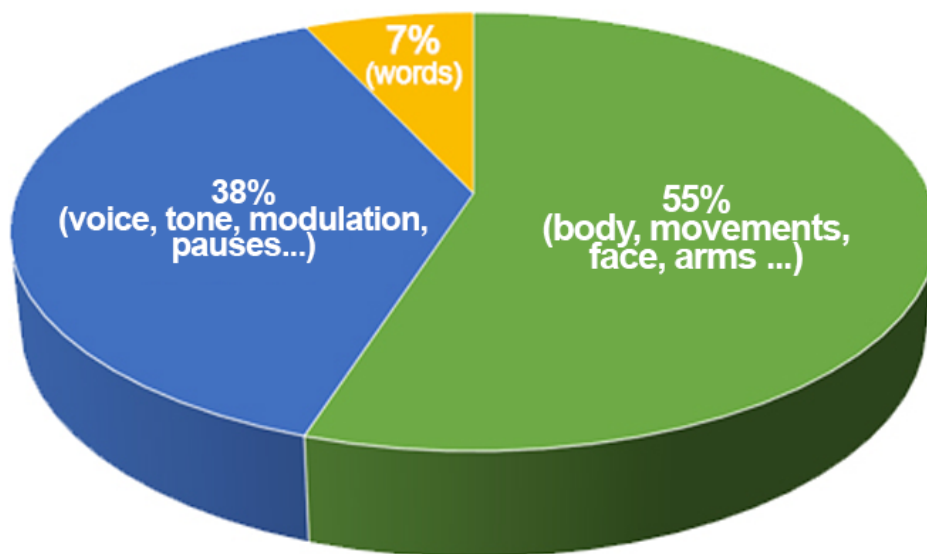


Figure 1 Different types of non-verbal communication.

It might be a surprise to see that the words you speak only account for 7% of the meaning of your message. Much more important are the tone of your voice (the pauses, etc.) and your body language, including your facial expressions, your gestures and posture.

However, many authors have found fault with these conclusions and Mehrabian himself has explained that:

... this and other equations regarding relative importance of verbal and nonverbal messages were derived from experiments dealing with communications of feelings and attitudes (i.e., like-dislike). Unless a communicator is talking about their feelings or attitudes, these equations are not applicable.

(Mitchell, n.d.)

So it is clear that these figures won't apply in every work situation involving communication, but if feelings or attitudes are involved, such as in a meeting where you feel strongly about a particular issue, they are worth taking into account.

They also help to raise our awareness of the potential significance of non-verbal cues. While the percentages may not always be so striking, it is important to take that aspect of our communication seriously.

In the workplace, understanding non-verbal communication will help you to better manage and understand the feelings of your colleagues and customers. Familiarising yourself with some of the signals or cues you might encounter, will be a helpful process.

Non-verbal cues can also contribute to hasty judgements about others. Being aware of how you react to someone's clothing, gestures or other non-verbal cues will help you to focus on the message being delivered rather than being distracted by an inappropriate outfit or lack of eye contact.

Activity 1 Identifying non-verbal cues

Allow 10 minutes for this activity

Non-verbal signals are in all of our everyday conversations, from formal meetings, to informal chats.

Watch the short video below and make a list of the positive and negative non-verbal cues that you spot.

[Non-verbal communication skit](#)

Provide your answer...

Discussion

For negative behaviours you might have spotted:

- looking at his phone
- hands in his pockets
- checking his watch
- shaking his head in disagreement.

Positive behaviours in the second half of the film include:

- nodding
- slightly raised eyebrows
- mirroring gestures
- holding his chin.

If you can pick up these cues in your everyday conversations, you'll gain an advantage in understanding how your contributions are being received.

2 Key cues

Below are examples of some of the most common 'key cues' and how they can be perceived by others. It will be useful to keep in mind that they may relate to your own perceptions of others as well as theirs of you.

1 Crossed arms and legs



Figure 2 Crossed arms and legs conveying negativity

Perhaps among the most obvious key cues is crossed (or folded) arms and legs. Although they may indicate that an individual is feeling insecure or defensive, they present a 'physical barrier' that the other party could perceive as resistance to their ideas:

Psychologically, crossed legs or arms signal that a person is mentally, emotionally, and physically blocked off from what's in front of them.

(Baer, 2014)

Imagine if you were in a meeting or having a conversation with someone. How would you feel if the person you were talking to adopted a crossed arms and crossed legs position? Avoiding this type of body language can help to demonstrate that you are interested in the conversation or meeting. It could also help with the flow of the discussion.

Useful note: Legs crossed at the ankle could demonstrate a more relaxed approach.

2 Posture



Figure 3 The importance of good posture.

Your posture, or the way you hold yourself, is critical to the way you are perceived by others.

- Standing or sitting tall with your shoulders back can demonstrate power and confidence, as in Figure 3.
- Slouching can indicate boredom or a lack of confidence.
- Leaning in towards someone can demonstrate interest in what they are saying.

However, be careful not too lean in too close when talking to a colleague. Cultural norms vary but it is important to be aware that keeping appropriate distances will prevent people from feeling uncomfortable.

3 Gestures

The way that you or others use hands and arms during conversations can impact on the message being delivered. For example, politicians often use their hands when delivering speeches to stress specific points. Researchers in this field suggest that this adds impact and these visual cues help to better deliver the message.

However, if your hands and arms are moving wildly while you are trying to explain something, this can be a distraction and is best minimised.

Handshakes are an important gesture when it comes to making a good first impression. In 2015, Front of House Recruitment conducted a study of recruiters who perceived a weak handshake as reflecting a lack of enthusiasm and confidence (Morrissy-Swan, 2018). To help you prepare a firm handshake, it is useful to practice with friends or family.

Be considerate of those whose cultural views do not permit this however, as well as those with pre-existing conditions who may not wish to shake hands.

4 Mirroring

Mirroring occurs when one party copies some of the body language presented by the other party. Examples include actions such as smiling and leaning forward. It is something that we do unconsciously and can help to break down some barriers.

Being aware of the other party mirroring you is helpful as it tells you that the other person is interested in what you are saying and could help to create a more positive interaction.

5 Eyes

Have you ever been in a situation where someone has avoided eye contact with you? How did this make you feel? Eye contact is a very important non-verbal communication skill, particularly in the West.

People who avoid making eye contact may be perceived as untrustworthy or shy, although too much eye contact can be unnerving for the other party. It is important to strike a balance.

It is useful to note that in some cultures eye contact can appear to be disrespectful, therefore if you do meet people from other cultures as part of your work, it will be helpful to understand what the protocols are beforehand. You'll explore cultural diversity and communication further in Week 7.

6 Facial expressions

The facial expressions of the person you are communicating with will help you to be aware of whether they have understood what you are saying.

For example, slightly raised eyebrows and a smile can indicate approval, whereas unconscious nodding of the head or frowning could demonstrate that the other party is distracted by other thoughts and possibly not listening.

7 Dress code

Most people will make judgements about individuals based on what they are wearing, so the way that you dress can also have an impact on the messages you deliver.

This is especially true at interviews, where it is vital to present a positive image.

Activity 2 Examining non-verbal communication

Allow 30 minutes for this activity

Test what you have learned by observing the non-verbal cues of two different people. They could be colleagues, family, friends or even public figures. You can do this in one of two ways:

- make some notes while you are observing the person (either in person or on a video clip)
- make a list beforehand and tick off what you observe.

If you undertake this observation in person with someone you know, it might be helpful to explain what you are doing!

Discussion

How did you find this activity? Were you surprised at how many cues you noticed? Did it give you a different impression of your colleague/friend/family member?

3 How others perceive me

How you are perceived in the workplace can impact on your relationships with colleagues and career progression, and it depends just as much on your non-verbal communication as it does on what you say.

Watch this MindTools video to see in practice how some relatively minor actions, combined together, can create a strong impression.

[Body language](#)

Below is an activity which will help you gain further insight into this.

Activity 3 Evaluating non-verbal communication

Allow 15 minutes for this activity

Imagine that you are in a work setting, perhaps in a meeting. Consider what message you might be conveying to your colleagues, if you use the non-verbal cues below during the meeting.

Non-verbal signal	Could indicate ...
Sitting back in a chair, legs crossed at the ankle	<input type="text" value="Provide your answer..."/>
Fidgeting with hands, drumming on the table, tapping feet	<input type="text" value="Provide your answer..."/>
Sitting forward in a chair, maintaining eye contact	<input type="text" value="Provide your answer..."/>
Palms open, shoulders raised, eyebrows raised	<input type="text" value="Provide your answer..."/>
Flaring nostrils, hands on hips, torso thrust forward from the hips	<input type="text" value="Provide your answer..."/>
Shoulders sagging, slumped posture, eyes looking downwards	<input type="text" value="Provide your answer..."/>
Head lifted high, chin jutting forward	<input type="text" value="Provide your answer..."/>

Discussion

There are no right or wrong answers here but be aware that the suggestions below are common interpretations of these behaviours.

Non-verbal signal	Could indicate
Sitting back in a chair, legs crossed at the ankle	Relaxed, confident
Fidgeting with hands, drumming on the table, tapping feet	Nervous, anxious
Sitting forward in a chair, maintaining eye contact	Interested

Palms open, shoulders raised, eyebrows raised

Submission, lack of aggression

Flaring nostrils, hands on hips, torso thrust forward from the hips

Defiance, aggression

Shoulders sagging, slumped posture, eyes looking downwards

Sadness, fear, weariness

Head lifted high, chin jutting forward

Superiority, fearlessness, arrogance

Do you recognise any of these in yourself? Maybe you sometimes sit too far back in a chair and risk coming across as too relaxed for the situation you are in. Or are you prone to fidgeting? If you are, try placing your hands in your lap with your fingers gently laced together – this should stop you from repeatedly scratching your ear or playing with your watch. Use the personal development plan at the end of this week to address any issues you identify.

4 Presenting a positive image

First impressions are very important, particularly at interviews, as you do not always have the opportunity or time to change a negative impression.



Figure 4 Presenting a positive image in the workplace.

It can take as little as three seconds for someone to make a judgement about you, based on the way you are holding yourself (your posture), the way you are dressed (whether it is appropriate for the context) and other non-verbal signals such as smiling or frowning. Therefore, taking the time to think about the impression that you give others is crucial in ensuring that you set the right tone for building and developing good relationships.

The people who you meet are more likely to actively listen to what you say if they are not distracted by your appearance or mannerisms.

Below are some quick pointers for you to consider next time you attend an interview or meet someone new at work.

- Be relaxed and be yourself. If you are not, this can make the other person feel uncomfortable too. If you feel that you are nervous, then try to relax by undertaking some deep breathing exercises (see Activity 4 this week).
- Be punctual. Nobody likes to be kept waiting, especially if that person has never met you before. This is particularly important for interviews – always allow plenty of time for traffic or transport delays. It is better to be early and have time to calm your nerves than to be rushing.
- Appropriate appearance is essential. Dress for the occasion and environment. If it is an interview you are more likely to need formal attire. As well as the choice of outfit, you should always ensure that your attire is clean and neat. Your personal grooming is also important – use appropriate levels of make-up and be clean shaven if you do not have a full beard or moustache.
- Remember to smile, as this will help others to relax. A note of caution, though – a fake smile can be perceived as being insincere.

Next time you are due to meet someone for the first time, consider adopting/practising some of these approaches.

You can also take steps to minimise some of the negative cues that can work against you in situations such as interviews or meetings with colleagues.

It might be helpful to reflect on occasions in the past when you have been nervous or lacked interest in what you were hearing. Can you recall your posture, or any other non-verbal cues, such as sweaty palms or doodling on your notepad? Could you act differently if you faced this situation again in the future?

To reduce the nerves just before an interview or meeting, try deep breathing exercises. When you are stressed the chances are that you are not breathing deeply enough, which can impair your thoughts. Ensuring that you breathe slowly and deeply during interviews or other similar situations will help to reduce your nerves.

Activity 4 Practice deep breathing

Allow 5 minutes for this activity

Try this breathing exercise recommended by the NHS to reduce stress and anxiety.

This calming breathing technique for stress, anxiety and panic takes just a few minutes and can be done anywhere.

You will get the most benefit if you do it regularly, as part of your daily routine.

You can do it standing up, sitting in a chair that supports your back, or lying on a bed or yoga mat on the floor.

Make yourself as comfortable as you can. If you can, loosen any clothes that restrict your breathing.

If you're lying down, place your arms a little bit away from your sides, with the palms up. Let your legs be straight, or bend your knees so your feet are flat on the floor.

If you're sitting, place your arms on the chair arms.

If you're sitting or standing, place both feet flat on the ground. Whatever position you're in, place your feet roughly hip-width apart.

- Let your breath flow as deep down into your belly as is comfortable, without forcing it.
- Try breathing in through your nose and out through your mouth.
- Breathe in gently and regularly. Some people find it helpful to count steadily from 1 to 5. You may not be able to reach 5 at first.
- Then, without pausing or holding your breath, let it flow out gently, counting from 1 to 5 again, if you find this helpful.
- Keep doing this for 3 to 5 minutes.

(NHS, 2018)

You can also use this breathing technique to calm yourself if someone has upset you, or behaved in an aggressive manner. By remaining calm, you reduce the chances of losing your temper and also appearing aggressive. You'll find out more about communication in challenging situations in Week 6.

4.1 Job interviews

The job interview is a key situation where you want to present yourself as positively as possible. Watch this video, where recruitment specialist Rebecca Fielding shares her thoughts on effective ways of using non-verbal communicating during a job interview.

Video content is not available in this format.

[Video 2](#)



Creating a good impression at interviews – a checklist

- Turn off your mobile phone.
- Start introductions with a firm handshake.
- No matter how you feel on the inside, demonstrate confidence by maintaining good posture, i.e. standing tall and sitting up straight.
- Be positive, even if it is a difficult interview.
- Maintain good levels of eye contact with all interviewers.
- Smile.

5 Personal development plan

Each week of the course you are encouraged to set a relevant goal. But setting goals can be a challenging process. For example, you might be over-ambitious or choose goals that are too easy. You might set unrealistic deadlines or be too vague about what you are trying to achieve.



Figure 5 The growth of your person development plan

For some advice on SMARTER goal setting, watch this short video by Creative Huddle: [SMARTER goal setting](#)

Activity 5 My Week 3 plan

Allow 20 minutes for this activity

Take some time to identify one action or goal to set yourself this week. Perhaps you would like to appear more confident by changing your posture? Think about what you learned in the video about making your goal Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Relevant and Timebound, Emotional and Rewarding (SMARTER).

Add your goal to the personal development planning table you downloaded in Week 1. Each week you will have the opportunity to review your progress and set additional goals.

Discussion

Once you are more aware of non-verbal cues, it can be relatively easy to identify areas for improvement. For example, you will know if you are someone who fiddles with their phone or keeps checking their email in meetings, so perhaps leaving your phone in your bag or pocket would be a good starting point.

However, some cues are more difficult to spot in yourself. Asking a trusted colleague for feedback about your non-verbal cues could be a really useful exercise in helping you to identify any issues you need to work on.

6 This week's quiz

Now you've reached the end of Week 3, you can try a short quiz to help you reflect on what you've learned.

[Week 3 practice quiz](#)

Open the quiz in a new tab or window and come back here when you are done.

7 Summary of Week 3

This week you focused on non-verbal communication, considering just how much you can unconsciously give away about your feelings when you communicate with someone. You learned about the significance of gestures, posture and facial expressions when conveying a message and had the opportunity to practise assessing non-verbal communication by watching a video and observing someone you know.

You considered how you may be perceived by others and took the opportunity to reflect on and perhaps minimise any negative cues.

You should now be able to:

- understand and interpret non-verbal communication
- reflect on the way that others perceive you
- present a positive personal image.

In Week 4, you will be exploring verbal (oral) communication.

You can now go to [Week 4](#).

Week 4: Verbal communication in the workplace

Introduction

Welcome to Week 4 and to the topic of verbal communication. Strictly speaking this terminology refers to both spoken and written communication, but it is commonly used to mean speaking, and that is what you'll be focusing on this week. You'll move on to written communication in Week 5.

Good verbal communication skills are highly sought after by employers across a wide range of job roles and sectors, because they know that if someone is a good communicator they are likely to fit in quickly with the team and deal with customers effectively.

This week you will have the opportunity to consider some of the workplace situations in which you might use your verbal communication skills, such as in meetings or when giving presentations.

Lynne Johnson introduces the week in the following video.

Video content is not available in this format.

[Video 1](#)



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

- understand different types of conversation
- feel confident about participating in meetings
- prepare for presentations, networking events and job interviews.

1 Using verbal communication in the workplace

There are several different ways to classify verbal communication in the workplace.



Figure 1 An example of verbal communication in the workplace.

A number of online sources suggest 4 categories (ATIO, n.d.):

1. Intrapersonal communication – the internal communication we have with ourselves (linked to self-awareness).
2. Interpersonal communication – one to one conversation between two people.
3. Small group communication – more than two people are involved but the group is small enough to allow everyone an opportunity to interact.
4. Public communication – when one individual addresses a large group, e.g. a public speech.

Whereas Quain (2018) divides it into:

- work meetings
- verbal presentations
- conversations between employees
- considerations for an effective workplace, i.e. clarity of messages.

As you work through this week, you'll see many of these categories reflected in the content and you'll recognise some of the skills you looked at in Week 2.

First, you'll focus on a fundamental element of verbal communication in the workplace – the conversation.

2 Types of conversation

Conversation is likely to be the most common scenario in which your verbal communication skills are required in the workplace.

Conversations can be formal or informal, work related or sometimes about building relationships with colleagues, such as when you discuss what you did at the weekend, sporting events or television programmes you've enjoyed.

As with the types of communication outlined in the previous section, you will find many different classifications and frameworks for conversation in both the business and academic literature.

Here, you'll concentrate on the work of Ford and Ford (2009), who classify workplace conversation as follows:

Initiative conversations – where you propose something new or different, i.e. initiating something. Effective initiative conversations will tell people what you want to accomplish, when you want to accomplish it and why it matters.

Understanding conversations – the most important aspect in this case is that they are two-way dialogues. The purpose of these conversations is to get a full view of how to make something happen and who will work to accomplish it.

Performance conversations – these are conversations that include specific requests and promises to clarify the actions, results and other requirements that you expect someone to deliver. Performance conversations are specifically designed to get people into actions, and they provide the foundation for building accountability.

Closure conversations – involve reporting on the status of a project, follow-up on a request or promise, or confirm that a job is complete. These conversations build credibility, accountability and good relationships.

Ford and Ford go on to explain that by using these four conversation types appropriately, you will have more success in initiating things, getting people to understand your message, promoting effective action, and completing things.

Most of us will be proficient in using some of these conversation types and not so comfortable with others. By reflecting on those we use most often and learning when it is appropriate to use each type, we can make sure our conversations are more productive for all involved.

Activity 1 Which conversation type?

Allow 10 minutes for this activity

Look at the following scenarios and choose the most appropriate conversation type from the list.

Martha is going to be involved in a new project. She has lots of ideas about how to do things. She's excited about the project meeting next week.	Initiative
	Understanding
	Performance
	Closure

George has been working with a client for three years, their contract is coming to an end and he is moving to a new department. He has a final meeting with them tomorrow.

Initiative
Understanding
Performance
Closure

Parminder is implementing a new IT system in her department. There has been a lot of resistance to the idea and she has decided to meet with each section of the team to discuss it in more detail.

Initiative
Understanding
Performance
Closure

Discussion

Martha and the project team need to have an initiative conversation, where they can share their goals and ideas, and work out what they want to accomplish.

George and his client should have a closure conversation in which they celebrate a productive partnership and confirm that the job is complete. This will help to maintain their positive relationship and might lead to more work in the future.

Parminder needs to have several understanding conversations with the team. She needs to make sure they have an opportunity to share their views and that she listens and is clear about what they need to do in order to accomplish an effective system changeover.

By thinking about the purpose of your meeting and the type of conversation you need to have, you can better prepare for the discussion and ensure a more constructive outcome.

For example, Parminder could easily waste a week feeling defensive and arguing with team members about a system they don't feel confident with. If she recognises that an understanding conversation needs to be a two-way dialogue and that her goal is to increase her colleagues' understanding of how they can participate effectively in the project, she should have a more productive outcome.

Conversations also take place in meetings – a workplace activity that many people find daunting. You'll consider how to participate effectively in the next section.

3 Participating in meetings



Figure 2 Involvement at a meeting.

Attending meetings is a very common practice in most working environments – some would say too common! Meetings may come in the form of daily briefings or occur weekly, monthly or less frequently.

You may attend meetings for numerous reasons, both in and outside work. Meetings can involve two or more people and are increasingly held virtually, where one or more of the participants are not physically in the room.

Activity 2 My experience of meetings

Allow 15 minutes for this activity

Thinking about your own experience of meetings (they do not have to be in the work setting), list the things that you find positive and negative about them. Focus in particular on the verbal communication that takes place.

Provide your answer...

Discussion

It is useful to reflect on your involvement in meetings as it can help you to identify ways to improve your experience in the future.

On the negative side you may have included:

- feeling awkward and inarticulate
- regretting that you didn't contribute to a particular discussion
- feeling that others always seem to know how to present their points more persuasively than you
- feeling frustrated that others don't let you speak.

If you have ever experienced any of these scenarios, it is safe to say that you are not alone. A key issue for many people in meetings is finding an opportunity to contribute. Take a moment to reflect on why that might be the case for you.

- Do you feel frustrated when a colleague you discussed your great idea with now shares it with the group and fails to mention you?
- Do you lose interest when your points are not heard because of louder people in the meeting?
- Is confidence, boredom or frustration a factor?

Recognising the problem will help you address the issue.

More positive experiences might include:

- enjoying the opportunity to have a detailed discussion
- communicating with colleagues you don't see very often
- feeling that you are contributing to decisions/solutions.



Figure 3 The importance of participation.

Contributing in a meeting can be daunting, but there are many reasons why it is in your best interest to do so, including the opportunity to:

- participate and gain recognition for your contribution
- share and develop your ideas through discussion with others
- build networks through establishing common ground and interests.

To help set you on the path to participating in and contributing to meetings, try some of the suggestions below:

- Remember that you know about your work and its context and that makes you an expert. Use that knowledge to help build your self-confidence.

- Prepare in advance of the meeting. Make sure you read the agenda and consider the points that you may wish to raise. Undertaking research in advance is especially helpful if you prefer to take a more considered approach.
- You might consider adding an agenda item, which will help you to raise a specific point that you would like meeting participants to address.
- If you take the bold step of speaking early on, this will build your confidence and encourage you to speak more throughout the meeting.
- Asking questions or seeking clarification also helps to show that you are interested in the points being made. Note of caution: Remember not to be aggressive, to dismiss somebody else's contribution or to interrupt the speaker.
- Keep your points snappy. Start them with 'I would like to add...' or 'Can I say...'. Avoid starting with an apology, such as 'I'm sorry but...' as this tone can reduce the impact of what you are trying to say.
- Sometimes you will find it easier to engage if you invite others to share their points, particularly if you notice that a colleague has tried to share their views but is struggling to be heard.
- Avoid outright disagreements. Try to use language that is softer in tone and less confrontational than 'I disagree'. Examples could include 'I agree with xxx but have you also considered...' or 'I view it another way because...'.

If you are an introvert, then the planning and preparation points listed here could be particularly helpful.

If you are an extrovert, and do not normally have a problem speaking in meetings, it is also worth considering how you might be perceived. For example, do you allow others to contribute? Do you dominate discussions because others do not seem to want to join in?

As with many things, it is about creating a balance. The more people who engage, the richer the experience for everyone and greater the potential for better outcomes for the business.

Interviews and assessment centres

These points are equally relevant if you have to participate in a group discussion as part of an interview process.

Many graduate interview processes involve an assessment centre, where candidates are required to participate in a range of activities. Find out more on the [Open University Careers and Employability website](#).

4 Presenting and networking

In this part of the course you will look briefly at using your verbal communication skills in front of audiences, such as when delivering presentations or meeting groups of people for the first time.



Figure 4 Presenting to an audience.

4.1 Presentation skills

If the thought of delivering a presentation fills you with dread, you are not alone. Being prepared and learning to manage your nerves can help make the experience less stressful. Below are some pointers to help you.

1. Know your audience.
Consider who you will be delivering your presentation to. How much do they know already? Think about the types of questions that they might have – try to prepare for these in advance.
2. Know your material.
If you know very little about the subject, this will add to your anxiety. Spend time researching and thinking about the information you wish to share. Remember, this information has to be engaging and you simply cannot present everything you know. By sticking to the key points, you will ensure that you do not bore your audience. Consider other ways to engage, perhaps by asking the audience a question.
3. Structure the presentation.
Create an order for your information and stick to it. Minimise nerves by using cue cards, notes or slides. A word of warning – memorising everything that you intend to say may result in a robotic and/or monotone delivery.
4. Practice.
Once you have devised your structure and written your notes/cue cards or slides, you should run through the presentation. Ensure that you are speaking clearly and slower than your usual pace. This will also help you to assess your timings.
5. Final preparations.

If the presentation is in your place of work, try to practice delivering in the room before the real thing, or at the very least familiarise yourself with the space. This too can help settle nerves.

6. Manage your nerves.

- Walk around during the presentation. This helps to use up some of the nervous energy that you have.
- Take deep breaths throughout (see Week 3, Activity 4).
- Have a drink of water close to hand. All the talking could give you a dry mouth (which will not help your nerves).
- Remember to smile, which will help you and others to relax.

Finally, remember that the presentation involves an audience, so try to stop thinking about how you are feeling and focus on keeping them engaged, avoiding the situation in Figure 5 and aiming for Figure 6!



Figure 5 A negative meeting.



Figure 6 A positive meeting.

Even if your role doesn't require you to deliver formal presentations, you will often be presenting to colleagues informally, for example in meetings, and the same rules apply, i.e. know your audience, know your material and aim to structure what you say.

Increasingly, employers require job applicants to deliver presentations, mostly because they wish to observe the candidate's communication skills and ability to handle pressure. They also be looking for coherent proposals, arguments or ideas.

4.2 Networking and 'elevator pitches'

'Networking' is a process of human interaction that aims to increase your number of social or professional contacts. Once established, these contacts may help you in numerous ways.

Networking events are formally arranged by many organisations but networking can also happen spontaneously when you meet someone in an informal environment, such as the school that your child attends, your book club or a training event.

Whether you are networking formally or informally it is useful to prepare a few lines to say about yourself, for example if someone asks what you do. This is often called an 'elevator pitch'.

An elevator pitch is a short summary of yourself, focusing on what you would like the other person to know. As the term suggests, the delivery of this 'pitch' takes the same amount of time as a short journey in a lift or elevator. Remember that it should be brief and informative.

As with many of the communication techniques already covered, your elevator pitch should be relevant to your audience.

Activity 3 Create your own elevator pitch

Allow 25 minutes for this activity

Watch the following video of three different elevator pitches.

Video content is not available in this format.

[Video 2](#)



In the box below, summarise your opinion of each of these pitches and choose the one that you like the best.

Provide your answer...

Now have a go at writing your own elevator pitch. You could model it on the one you like the best in the video or do something else. Think about the following:

Duration: Around 30 seconds long.

Message: What information would you like to communicate?

Keep it engaging: How will you explain what you do in an interesting way that keeps the person's interest?

Discussion

Do not worry if your pitch is initially too long. It is important to have a starting point and you can always edit it down. If you really struggle to make it shorter, ask a friend or colleague to help you. A good tip would be to record yourself on your phone and ask them to watch you.

Watch the following video to see how our three volunteers found the creation process.

Video content is not available in this format.

Video 3



Once you have created your pitch, practise it in front of the mirror so it doesn't sound strange when you say it out loud!

Other useful networking tips include:

- Practising your networking skills is really valuable. Striking up conversations with strangers may be outside of your comfort zone, but if you practise and use this skill you never know when it will pay off.
- If you are attending a formal networking event, try to have a plan. Give yourself a target for the number of contacts you would like to make. Try to find out who will be attending and decide if there are specific individuals that you would like to meet. Remember that even if the people you meet can't help you directly, they might be able to introduce you to someone who can.

5 Verbal communication in job hunting

Another workplace situation where verbal communication plays a crucial role is the job interview.

Watch this video of Rebecca Fielding explaining how employers assess your verbal communication skills from the moment they meet you.

Video content is not available in this format.

Video 4



Although you might feel nervous about attending an interview, remember that this is an opportunity to communicate your skills and experiences to an audience who are interested in hearing what you have to say.

As well as remembering the importance of creating a good first impression, as outlined in Week 3, it can be useful to have a structure in mind when answering interview questions. This will help you to communicate more effectively and concisely with your interviewers. The STAR technique is a useful one:

- Situation
- Task
- Action
- Result

This is particularly useful when preparing for or answering competency-based questions.

Watch this short video produced by Guardian Jobs to help you to understand [how to use the STAR technique during an interview](#).

5.1 Telephone interviews



Figure 7 A telephone interview.

Telephone interviews are commonplace in many recruitment processes and one of their primary aims is to assess candidates' communication skills. Preparing for telephone interviews is much like the preparation you should do for face-to-face interviews. The difference is that the interviewer will not be able to observe your non-verbal communication, i.e. your facial expressions or body language.

To help with this, here are some key approaches you should consider adopting:

- Carefully choose a good location for your interview, where you can minimise distractions or interruptions. This will support active listening.
- Actively listen to the questions to ensure that you understand exactly what is expected of you; and wait for the interviewer to finish speaking before you start.
- Think about your tone and try to vary it to engage the listener. Smiling can help to reduce your nerves and will come across in your voice.
- When you can't see the interviewer, you might be tempted to relax too much. Remember this is part of a formal process. It can help to dress as if you were attending a face-to-face interview and sit at a table or desk rather than in a comfortable chair. This will be reflected in the way you communicate.
- Keep a drink of water close by.
- Keep your CV handy in case you wish to refer to it, but do not rustle papers as this can be distracting for the interviewer.

Activity 4 Practising telephone interview skills

Allow 30 minutes for this activity

Ask a colleague, friend or family member to ask you the following questions over the phone:

1. Can you tell me about a time you worked as part of a team?
2. What are your strengths and weakness?
3. How would your friends describe you?

Ask your friend to note how relaxed you seemed to be, the tone of your voice, and the quality of your answers. Also ask them to check whether you used the STAR technique

in question 1. If possible, record the conversation as this will help you to further understand areas that you need to develop.

As well as telephone interviews, more employers are now using video interviews in their recruitment processes. You'll find out more about that in Week 8.

6 Personal development plan

It's now time for you to look at your personal development plan again.



Figure 8 The growth of your personal development plan.

Activity 5 My Week 4 plan

Allow 15 minutes for this activity

Identify one of the points made this week that you wish to develop/improve and add it to your personal development planning table you downloaded in Week 1. For example, you might want to practise your telephone interview skills some more, or commit to participating in the next meeting you attend. Focus on the timeframe that you set yourself. Is your goal achievable within that timeframe?

Discussion

This week you may have chosen a goal that will help you to improve your participation in meetings or enhance your presentations. Remember to ensure that the goal is realistic.

Take a few minutes to also review your goal from last week. How have you approached this activity? If you do not feel that you have made progress, consider whether you have broken the goal down into achievable segments? Have you allowed yourself enough time? Do you have all the resources that you need?

If you are not currently in paid work, there may be opportunities to develop the skills discussed this week within voluntary roles that you hold or clubs and societies that you are a member of.

7 This week's quiz

Now it's time to complete the Week 4 badge quiz. It's similar to previous quizzes but this time, instead of answering 5 questions there will be 15.

[Week 4 compulsory badge quiz](#)

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

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

8 Summary of Week 4

This week you looked at using verbal (or spoken) communication skills in the workplace. You explored some of the common areas where you would be expected to communicate verbally such as in meetings, giving presentations and when networking. Finally, you focused on communication in face-to-face and telephone interviews.

You should now be able to:

- understand different types of conversation
- feel confident about participating in meetings
- prepare for presentations, networking events and job interviews.

Next week you will be focusing on written communication skills.

You are now halfway through the course. The Open University would really appreciate your feedback and suggestions for future improvement in our optional [end-of-course survey](#), which you will also have an opportunity to complete at the end of Week 8. Participation will be completely confidential and we will not pass on your details to others.

You can now go to [Week 5](#).

Week 5: Written communication skills for the workplace

Introduction

Last week you were introduced to verbal communication and this week you will shift your focus to written communication, which can pose different challenges. The scope for misunderstanding is substantial, primarily because you are unable to see or hear how the message is being read.

Can you think about the last time you used written communication? How much time did you spend considering how the reader might interpret what you had written?

Written communication is everywhere: in adverts, in emails, newspapers, social media, text messages and the internet. Therefore, gaining a good grasp of written communication skills will help you in your work and other personal or professional environments.

You will start this week by exploring different forms of written communication.

Now watch the weekly video in which Lynne Johnson tells you about this week.

Video content is not available in this format.

[Video 1](#)



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

- adapt your communication style for different audiences and formats
- write clear and effective communications, including emails and reports
- understand how to use your written communication skills to enhance job applications.

1 The importance of written communication

Good written communication skills are necessary at every stage of your career, whether you are a job seeker or already in work.

Watch this video, where Rebecca, a recruitment specialist, shares her thoughts on the importance of written communication in the workplace from an employer's perspective.

Video content is not available in this format.

[Video 2](#)



Written communication is hugely important in conveying information in a variety of ways. Throughout your day, you may come across it in numerous forms.

Activity 1 Different forms of written communication

Allow 10 minutes for this activity

List at least five different forms of written communication that you have encountered this week.

Provide your answer...

Discussion

There is no right or wrong answer. Your list could include any of these, but you may have others which are specific to your work, personal circumstances or a voluntary role.

- emails (personal or professional)
- meeting agenda and/or minutes
- letters
- leaflets
- text messages
- reports
- newspapers
- websites
- application forms for jobs or loans
- CVs
- posts to social media and forums
- covering letters.

After compiling your list, were you surprised by the number of forms of written communication that you have encountered?

When communicating in writing there are a number of key elements to get right, and you'll explore these in the next section.

2 Effective written communication

Two key elements of effective written communication are:

- knowing why you are writing, i.e. the purpose of the message
- knowing who you are writing for, i.e. your audience.



Figure 1 An example of written communication.

Once you've identified your purpose and your audience, the next stage is to pinpoint the key messages that you need to communicate.

Activity 2 Identifying key messages

Allow 20 minutes for this activity

Imagine that you are tasked with creating a poster for a charity bake sale in your office. First, identify the audience and the purpose in the box below. Then list your key messages.

Finally, write the text that you would put on the poster. Don't worry about layout etc. – just think about the words you would use to communicate the key messages to your colleagues in an appropriate style.

Provide your answer...

Discussion

The audience is your colleagues in the office.

The purpose of the poster is to encourage people to either bake or buy cakes for the sale.

Key messages might include:

- the purpose of the event, i.e. a bake sale
- the date
- the time
- the location
- details of the charity involved.

What tone/language did you decide to use? The tone for a poster about a fun event at work can be considerably different to a notification of a formal meeting.

Did you come up with a headline that would catch their attention? If this exercise was real, images would also be a good way to make the poster eye-catching.

Activity 2 gave you the opportunity to consider audience, purpose and key messages. Then you started to look at the use of appropriate tone and language.

A document from a writer's workshop at The University of Washington (no date) describes the following characteristics of effective language. It should be:

1. concrete and specific, not vague and abstract
2. concise, not verbose
3. familiar, not obscure
4. precise and clear, not inaccurate or ambiguous
5. constructive, not destructive
6. appropriately formal.

Many of these points are also reflected in the 7 Cs of communication that you looked at in Week 1 and could equally be applied to verbal communication as you become more experienced in using them.

In the next section, you'll focus on one of the most common forms of written communication you'll encounter in the workplace – the email.

3 Writing clear and effective emails

In the workplace not all communication can be oral, especially in large organisations, where employees may be in different parts of the building, the country or even the world. Colleagues may not be available at the same time as you, due to time zones or working patterns. Therefore, significant amounts of information are communicated in writing, much of it by email.



Figure 2 The importance of emails

The email revolution has led to significant changes in the way people work. It is estimated that by the end of 2019, the number of worldwide email users will increase to over 2.9 billion (Radicati, 2015).

In the workplace, emails are used for numerous reasons, such as to convey or request information, invite you to a meeting, or to distribute a report attached as a separate document.

In 2012, McKinsey published research that suggested 28% of an employee's working day is spent checking and replying to email messages (Wasserman, 2012).

3.1 Email errors

This next activity encourages you to think about how you use email, and some of the common mistakes that can be made.



Figure 3 Sending out emails without errors

Activity 3 Reviewing your communication

Allow 10 minutes for this activity

Read through the following statements and make a note of the ones that refer to you.

- You sometimes wish you could backtrack after sending a message, but it's too late.
- You sometimes forget to add an attachment that you promised in the message.
- You have sometimes sent messages via email when you knew a telephone call would have been better.
- You haven't tidied your inbox or deleted any messages for a long time.
- You have sent private or confidential messages via email, which you have later regretted.
- You sometimes send messages off quickly without a greeting or sign-off.
- You often send messages without checking through for good grammar, spelling and punctuation.
- You accidentally communicated more widely than you intended by using Reply All.

Provide your answer...

Discussion

This is an opportunity to highlight some of the communication mistakes that you may be making when you email. You might want to think about how often this has happened in the past and take steps to ensure it doesn't happen in the future. (Although if you have ever sent a private email to a wider audience than you intended, you probably won't ever do it again!)

3.2 Writing effective emails

Emails can be problematic for numerous reasons, many of them highlighted in Activity 3. This can lead to confusion and tension between the sender and the receiver.

There are some rules that will help you reduce that confusion.

- Ask yourself, would a phone call be quicker and more effective? For example, if you're having to create a very long email message to explain the context of your question – that could be a good time for a phone call.
- Subject lines are more important than you might think. Aim to be clear and informative and grab the receiver's attention much like a newspaper headline. If the topic changes during an email exchange, remember to change the subject line – this will help if you are searching for an email later on.
- Text should be clear and succinct. It might be easier to send a couple of emails on different subjects, rather than one very lengthy one with numerous topics.
- Always proofread what you have written to ensure accuracy and avoid some of the problems listed in the previous activity.
- Check your tone and be polite. For example, using capital letters in an email can add emphasis but can also appear to the receiver as if you are SHOUTING AT THEM!
- Be mindful about how formal or informal you should be. Some individuals like an informal approach, while others prefer more formality. The use of emoticons should also be considered in the same way.

Another important tactic is to consider how the reader might feel after reading your message. If there's a chance they may react badly, you could change your tone or arrange a face-to-face conversation to avoid unnecessary tension and confusion.

If someone has sent you an email that has left you annoyed or upset, a top tip is not to respond immediately. Even if you compile a response – do not send it.

By giving yourself some thinking time, you may decide to reword your response, get some advice, or perhaps have a spoken conversation with the sender to resolve any issues.

Another form of written communication in the workplace is the report.

4 Planning and writing reports

Writing a report is a common workplace activity for some, but may seem daunting if you have little or no experience of doing so. As with other forms of written communication, the key is to understand who the audience is and prepare and plan appropriately.

Case study: Shania

Shania has just started working at an estate agency. She has been asked to write a report about the numbers of properties sold and commission earned through the agency in the last six months. Before she can compile the report, she has to gather information and data. As she works through this data, she identifies some trends, such as two-bedroom flats selling more quickly than other properties and four-bedroom houses being the least in demand, although supply is fairly high. She will need to decide which aspects of her research and analysis will be most relevant in her report, so she consults with her manager. She also looks at previous 6 monthly reports to see how others have produced them and what has been included.

To ensure that you understand your 'brief', you need to clarify exactly what the report should include and the appropriate layout. For example, does it need a cover page, a contents page, an introduction and conclusion? Do the pages need to be numbered? Planning and preparation might include looking at how previous reports have been presented in the same context. This will give a quick insight and may answer some of your queries in terms of structure, length and tone. You could also talk to the person who has tasked you with writing the report to find out what their expectations are.

When compiling a business report, you also need to determine whether any additional research or analysis is needed.

You may find it helpful to consult this checklist before you begin.

Report writing checklist:

- consider the audience
- know your brief
- identify the best structure
- consider writing an outline/plan and obtaining some feedback
- gather information
- write content
- edit/proofread.

4.1 Proofreading

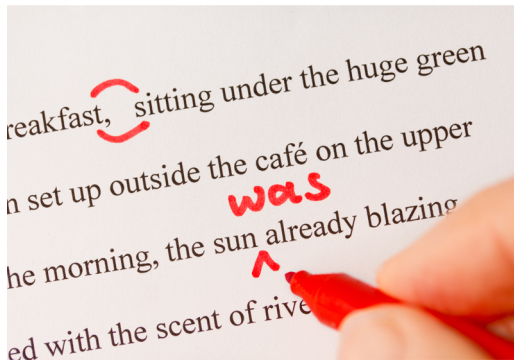


Figure 4 The importance of proofreading.

An essential part of written communication is proof reading what you have produced. This is to ensure that you have not made any mistakes in your text.

In everyday life, it is common to skim read texts to identify what you are looking for in a piece of written communication. This means that you may not always read entire words and sentences, but you still understand the gist of what is being said. This is a different skill to proofreading.

Sometimes the words you have used are not incorrectly spelled, but are not the correct words in that particular context. For example, if you were skim reading you may not notice that you have written 'reminder' instead of 'remainder'. It is important not to rely on technology to pick up errors as spell checkers wouldn't see this as a mistake. Therefore, proofreading involves focusing on each word to ensure that it reads correctly in the context of the rest of the text.

How many times have you written an email or a text message and realised after you sent it that there was an error, such as a spelling mistake or the wrong date? Reading your text with a 'critical eye' will help to minimise these errors. Even if you are in a hurry, it is worth the extra few minutes taken to read through your communication. The implications of a mistake could be quite serious. Imagine that you have sent an email to your line manager which has a number of spelling and grammatical errors. Your manager may conclude that if you cannot write a clear and coherent email you may be poorly representing the company.

As Rebecca explained in the video, one spelling mistake in a job application could be enough to put you on the reject pile.

Have a go at the activity below to practice your proofreading skills. Remember that proofreading is not only looking for spelling errors, but grammatical ones too, including the appropriate use of punctuation and tenses.

Activity 4 Practising your proofreading skills

Allow 15 minutes for this activity

Can you identify the errors?

Proofreading task:

Most people take their digital cameras within them when they go on holiday or shoot quick snaps on the mobile phones. But, more often then not, the results can be dissappointing. This is because most cameras aren't set up correctly, the subject is

poorly framed, or the flash is set to Automatic when it should be Disabled. Fortunately, a few simple techniques, can help you take better photos the next time you travel.

Discussion

Most people take their digital cameras **with** them when they go on holiday or shoot quick snaps on **their** mobile phones. But, more often **than** not, the results can be **disappointing**. This is because most cameras aren't set up correctly, the subject is poorly framed, or the flash is set to Automatic when it should be **disabled**. Fortunately, a few simple techniques can help you take better photos the next time you travel.

As well as more formal types of written communication, such as reports, you may be required to engage with informal formats such as social media posts. This will require a different writing style altogether. You'll find out more about those in the next section.

5 Writing for social media

A form of written communication that has become more relevant in recent years is the social media post.

Although you might mainly associate Facebook and Twitter, etc. with your social interactions, businesses are increasingly using social media platforms to communicate with both employees and clients.

The basic considerations are the same – you need to be aware of the audience you are communicating with and the tone and language you use. But the delivery style is very different to anything else you have covered this week.

Express Writers (2017) give the following tips in their blog post about writing social posts:

- In general, shorter posts are better. Facebook and LinkedIn posts can be longer. Twitter only allows you to post up to 280 characters at a time.
- If you have more to say, e.g. in a Twitter post, you can include a link to a relevant blog post or article.
- On some platforms, such as Facebook, including a photo, graphic image or video will grab users' attention. On Instagram, the image is the main part of your post.
- Hashtags can connect your post to a wider discussion and help you to communicate your message to a larger audience.
- LinkedIn is the most relevant platform for industry news with users posting company updates and events, new ideas and insider experiences. Including headings and subheadings is a good way to make long posts more readable.

They finish with the following best practices:

- When in doubt, keep it short.
- Be authentic.

Activity 5 Write a tweet

Allow 15 minutes for this activity

Imagine that your boss has asked you to send a tweet on behalf of the department that your office will be closed next Wednesday (17 March) for a day of staff training. You'll all be away from the premises at a local hotel, learning about customer service. You'll be there from 10am–4pm and hopefully the day will include a nice lunch! If there are any emergencies, customers can contact this number for assistance – 01632 554 346.

How will you explain that clearly to potential customers in 280 characters? Use the box below to devise your message. Note – Twitter includes spaces and punctuation in the character count.

Provide your answer...

Discussion

Did you find it difficult to fit all the information in? Was it easy to decide which bits to leave out of the message and which to prioritise? Did you strike the right tone, for example apologising for any inconvenience?

An example might be:

Please be aware that on Wednesday 17 March, the office will be closed all day for staff training. We are sorry for any inconvenience this may cause. In case of emergency, please contact 01632 554346 for assistance.

Although Twitter might not be a platform you need to engage with, either in or outside work, the discipline of getting your message across effectively in a restricted number of characters is a good one to practice.

If you want to explore social media and digital forms of communication in more detail, look at these other OpenLearn courses:

[*Digital literacy: succeeding in a digital world*](#)

[*Personal branding for career success*](#)

6 Written communication skills for the job-hunting process

This course has focused on developing your communication skills in order for you to be more effective in your work or for any future role that you wish to undertake. So to finish this week, you'll look at how employers assess your written communication skills during job hunting.

When you apply for a job, there is usually a written application stage, whether that is a CV, application form or some other expression of interest, often with an accompanying cover letter.



Figure 5 Working on your CV

In each piece of written communication, there are some key considerations:

Presentation: employers can assess your communication skills simply from the way you have presented your application. An application with poor spelling or grammar will usually not progress to the next stage of the recruitment process.

Clarity: make sure that the content of your CV, covering letter or application form is concise, relevant and clear. If an employer can't assess your application quickly and easily, they are more likely to reject you from the process.

Relevance: try to communicate relevant information to the recruiter. By tailoring your application to each role/organisation, you can demonstrate your understanding of their needs and the particular ways in which you meet them.

In an application form, you may find specific competency-based questions about when and how you have utilised certain skills. The STAR technique, mentioned in Week 4, will help you provide a structure to your answer and ensure that it is clear, concise, coherent and complete. As a quick reminder:

- **The Situation** will set the scene, i.e. where and when your example took place.
- **The Task** is the problem to be resolved or objective to be achieved.
- **The Action** is where the main body of text should be concentrated – what steps did you take to resolve the problem?
- **The Result(s)** – what was the desired outcome? Was it achieved? Was there anything that you would do differently?

Activity 6 Practising the STAR technique

Allow 20 minutes for this activity

Answer the following question using the STAR technique.

Give an example of a time when you had to deal with a difficult situation.

Provide your answer...

Discussion

Now compare your answer with the example below:

Situation	Last summer I was employed at a local restaurant.
Task	My role involved serving customers their food, taking payment and dealing with any problems that arose.
Action	On one occasion, a difficult customer started shouting at one of my less experienced colleagues. I joined the conversation to support my colleague and was able to calm the customer down by listening carefully and calmly to her problem (cold food) and offering a range of possible solutions for her to choose from, including reheating the food and offering a free desert.
Result	The customer appreciated my calm approach and agreed to have her food reheated. She left the restaurant happy with the result and paid in full for her meal.

Did your answer address each point like the example above?

Could you have developed any areas further?

Did you choose the best and most relevant example you have for dealing with a difficult situation?

Remember: the way you convey your answers will allow recruiters to judge your communication skills from the outset. **Proofreading your application is essential.**

Nobody wants to see poor spelling or grammar or read the wrong company name if you've cut and pasted from a previous application!

7 Personal development plan

Last week you set a goal relating to your verbal or oral communication skills. What steps have you taken to try to fulfil this goal? Have you considered what resources and how much time you will need?



Figure 6 The growth of your personal development plan.

Activity 7 My Week 5 plan

Allow 20 minutes for this activity

This week, consider one specific gap in your written communication skills which you would like to focus on in the short term. For example, you might want to look for opportunities to practise your proofreading skills or get some feedback from a colleague on your email style and tone.

Each week use your personal development planning table (downloaded in Week 1) to record your actions and successes.

Discussion

Depending on your personal context, you might have chosen report writing or social media posts as an area of written communication you want to improve upon. An appropriate action might involve volunteering to write a report or blog post for your department. If you explain to your line manager or other colleague that you want to develop your skills in this area, they may offer advice and agree to provide feedback on your progress.

8 This week's quiz

Now you've reached the end of Week 5, you can try a short quiz to help you reflect on what you've learned.

[Week 5 practice quiz](#)

Open the quiz in a new tab or window and come back here when you are done.

9 Summary of Week 5

This week you looked at different types of written communication that you may encounter in the workplace. You focused on email etiquette and looked at the importance of proofreading your work. You also considered how accurate and relevant written communication can enhance future job applications.

You should now be able to:

- adapt your communication style for different audiences and formats
- write clear and effective communication, including emails and reports
- understand how to use your written communication skills to enhance job applications.

Next week you will look at challenging workplace situations and discover how good communication can help you to deal with them.

You can now go to [Week 6](#).

Week 6: Dealing with challenging situations

Introduction

Welcome to Week 6. This week you will explore challenging situations and consider how better communication can alleviate or avoid them. You'll focus on managing your own emotions as well as identifying techniques to enable you to work collaboratively with others.

Now watch Lynne's video to hear more about this week's content.

Video content is not available in this format.

[Video 1](#)



By the end of this week, you will be able to:

- understand the importance of working well with others
- identify a range of techniques for managing your emotions in the workplace
- deal more effectively with challenging conversations.

1 Working with others

During your working life, you will encounter many different people and personalities, and you will frequently be required to work with people who have a different approach to you. Sometimes this will lead to an increased level of productivity, by bringing together different approaches and strengths. On other occasions these differences can lead to slow progress or inefficient practice, perhaps due to prolonged discussions, lack of decision making, or even mistrust between colleagues.



Figure 1 The importance of working together.

The ability to work effectively with other people requires a strong commitment to open, honest, clear and respectful communication. The goals of any task have to be well-defined and all members should be clear about their specific responsibilities. This isn't always easy to achieve, and involves the leader of the team regularly reiterating the goals and sharing progress towards them.

Flexibility is another key strength when working with others. Being flexible in your approach to people and tasks is more likely to achieve positive results. Lack of flexibility can sometimes be due to fear of change, but that can also be overcome by clear lines of open communication and two-way dialogue. If people understand why they are doing something, and how their actions will benefit the project, department or organisation, they are more likely to embrace it.

To explore some of the other elements that make working with others more effective, watch this short video about good collaboration.

Video content is not available in this format.

[Video 2](#)



1.1 Leaders and followers

A key working relationship is between a leader and a follower, for example your manager and you. Effective communication between these two roles ensures that the workplace runs smoothly. If communication isn't effective, a number of challenges can arise.

The most important element in a successful leader/follower relationship is trust. You learned about building trust in Week 2, so you know that open and honest communication plays a fundamental role.

As a leader, you should communicate often. Your role is to motivate your followers by:

- sharing a clear vision that you believe in, and focusing on the impact of the work you are doing
- leading by example and making yourself visible and accessible to them
- supporting their needs so they can work efficiently and effectively.

This isn't always an easy path to tread, but it is part of your role as an effective leader, so you must find time for it.

As a follower, you can be positive and proactive, providing support to your leader(s) as a partner rather than a subordinate. You can communicate more effectively with them by:

- asking questions
- providing constructive feedback
- fulfilling your commitments and asking for help when needed
- volunteering for opportunities to contribute your ideas and expertise.

Communicating honestly with your manager can sometimes feel challenging, but if your feedback is constructive and you deliver it appropriately and with tact, it should be well received.

Activity 1 Communicating with leaders

Allow 15 minutes for this activity

Think about a relationship you have at work with a senior member of staff. It might be your line manager or a departmental manager or someone from another department that you work with on a particular project. If you aren't currently working, consider the hierarchies in any voluntary organisations or clubs you are involved with and choose a suitable individual from there.

How do you communicate with that individual? Is your communication open and honest or do you feel you can't tell them what you really think?

How do they communicate with you? Have they taken the time to build your trust?

Note your thoughts in the box below.

Provide your answer...

Discussion

You might already have an open and trusting working relationship with this person, in which case – keep going as you are and celebrate it!

Or, perhaps you can now see the benefits of communicating more openly with the individual you chose for this exercise. Try asking some questions in your next meeting with them and gauge their response. This could be the beginning of a more productive relationship.

Or maybe the individual you thought of struggles with effective communication and building trust. Are they better at written or verbal messages? Could you focus on the form of communication they seem more comfortable with and use that more effectively?

If you want to understand more about how leaders and followers can work together more effectively, investigate the OpenLearn course [Leadership and followership](#).

When the working environment does not allow for open and honest communication, people become less flexible and more focused on their own concerns. This can lead to strong emotions and difficult situations. In the next section you'll look at managing your own emotions – a useful skill that can help to diffuse a range of issues.

2 Managing your emotions



Figure 2 It's important to be able to manage your emotions.

If the circumstances that lead to difficult situations can be prevented, this will reduce the likelihood of confrontations and arguments. It is important to understand your own emotional responses in such situations, as these will impact on your communication skills. Understanding your emotions is essential before you can begin to manage them.

Remember that you can choose how you react to circumstances that you experience both at work and at home. The way that you react to negative experiences in your professional life may need to be different from how you react to situations in your personal life. For example, raising your voice to children in order to discipline them may not have serious repercussions at home, but is unacceptable to shout at colleagues in most work places. You'll find lots of discussion and advice online about managing your emotions in the workplace. Pearson (2017) recommends the following approaches:

- Facing negative emotions
 - Reflect on and learn to recognise your own emotional triggers – what provokes an emotional reaction in you? Ask trusted colleagues and friends for their observations.
 - Stay calm, breathe deeply and model behaviour – for example, if you feel your emotions rising, pause and take a deep breath. That short delay can help reason rather than instinct drive your response.
 - Fine tune your radar – learn to recognise when others' negative emotions are rising.

2.1 Negative emotions

In her study on emotions at work, Fisher (1997) asked 116 people to report on the frequency with which they had experienced 135 different emotions in the workplace.

Although many positive emotions, such as satisfaction, enjoyment, enthusiasm and optimism appeared at the top of her results table, some of the highest scoring negative emotions were frustration, worry and anger.

The MindTools content team (no date) recommend dealing with these emotions in a range of ways, including:

Frustration

- Stop and evaluate – think about what is frustrating you, and perhaps write it down. This will help you to understand and reflect on whether it is actually something important.
- Find something positive about the situation – this will help you to think about it in a different way.
- Think about why an individual may be causing you frustration. Could they be experiencing some personal problems? Do they lack confidence? Perhaps they need some training or mentoring.

Worry

- Don't surround yourself with worry, for example by regularly meeting with others who feel the same – this will not help to reduce your own feelings of anxiety.
- Try the deep-breathing exercise you discovered in Activity 4 in Week 3 – to lower your heart rate and help calm your nerves.
- Consider how you could change the situation – brainstorm some possible solutions.

Anger

- Watch for early signs of anger – being self-aware is very important and stopping your anger early is key.
- If you start to get angry, stop what you're doing – practise the breathing exercise mentioned earlier.
- Picture yourself when you're angry – how are you behaving? Are you shouting or pointing your fingers at an individual? Consider how you might feel being on the receiving end of such behaviour – is that really the impression you want to give your team, your employer or co-workers?

For more hints and tips on dealing with the other negative emotions highlighted in Fisher's study – check the MindTools article outlined in the references section (MindTools Content Team, no date).

Activity 2 Negative emotions case study

Allow 25 minutes for this activity

Maya is a junior HR administrator looking for promotion. She wants to develop and demonstrate some of the skills she will need in her next role, so she puts herself forward for a new project.

- Maya is the most junior member of a team of four.
- Eva, one of the HR managers, frequently delegates duties to her at the last minute and has a short temper.
- Neil, another colleague on the team, often spends hours playing games on the internet, but is one of Eva's good friends in the office.
- Charlene, who worked in the staff development team, has not previously worked with Maya.

Eva is leading the project and has already delegated many of the tasks without discussion. Charlene is tasked with devising the questions to be asked, Neil is to conduct the interviews and focus group tasks and Maya is asked to write up the notes/minutes of the meetings.

Maya feels that her responsibilities don't stretch her capabilities and is frustrated by the lack of discussion.

Once the project starts, Neil's notes are not helpful and Maya finds herself contacting interviewees to re-interview them. Neil is commended for his efforts and fails to mention Maya's additional contribution.

Which of the five negative emotions do you think Maya is feeling? You can choose one or more from frustration, worry, anger, dislike and disappointment.

Summarise your advice for Maya in the box below.

Provide your answer...

Discussion

Maya could have experienced all five of the emotions listed.

Many of the negative emotions were due to her experience of working with Neil. She may have been frustrated that he was given greater responsibility than her, then angered by having to do the work herself.

She could have been disappointed by the fact Neil took credit for some of the work that she had done and that she had not had the recognition that she felt she deserved. Over the course of the project she could have developed a dislike for Neil.

Advice for Maya:

Maya should try not to let her feelings get the better of her as she is building some useful skills.

She could benefit from practising breathing exercises to calm herself when she feels particularly angry.

She could also arrange to talk to Eva about her contribution to ensure she know what Maya has done. Chatting to Charlene about her actions and ambitions (without being negative about Neil) could also be beneficial.

Charlene's role in the staff development team might allow her to gain access to training, mentoring etc.

There are no right or wrong answers in this activity. It is designed to help you consider some of the options and help Maya return to a positive and productive mindset. Practising this type of analytical approach might make it easier for you to apply it to yourself in a similar situation.

Although this section contains lots of suggestions for working through your negative emotions, it can be a difficult process to step back from your feelings and analyse them dispassionately. You might find it easier to talk things through with a trusted colleague or coach.

3 Challenging conversations

There will be lots of occasions throughout your career when you have to have a challenging conversation with an individual or group of people. Nobody finds these discussions easy, but there are plenty of tools and techniques you can use to make them more productive and positive experiences.

3.1 Challenging opposing views

When communicating with colleagues and customers you may have to deal with people who hold opposing views or who have ideas that they feel are better than yours. In situations where you would like to challenge an existing approach, you have to use your communication skills to influence the views of others, without appearing to be aggressive. Imagine that you are in a meeting and you have an idea that is different to the one that your colleague has put forward. She seems to have the backing of your manager. Yours is a new approach and you have spent some time researching it and would like a fair hearing.

Your colleague is behaving smugly and does not want to hear your idea, and your manager isn't interested either.



Figure 3 Communicating in a presentation.

There are a few simple techniques that you could adopt that will help you to influence the conversation:

- First, be fully prepared. Have your idea ready and ensure that you have actively listened to the other ideas or opinions, as they might also support your suggestions.
- Present your ideas coherently and quickly.
- Demonstrate how your idea will benefit your colleagues/business/customers. Prepare for negative responses and questions by anticipating them.

Leadership author Suzi McAlpine (2014) suggests some possible opening lines for a constructive discussion, including:

‘I have a different perspective.’

‘What other alternatives have you considered?’

‘What are the potential risks?’

‘Do you mind if I challenge that idea?’

‘Here’s another angle to consider.’

‘We’ve listed why this is a good idea. Let’s consider why this is a not a good idea for a moment.’

3.2 Sharing bad news

Sharing bad news in the workplace might involve telling someone they haven’t got a promotion, discussing poor performance or even giving notice of redundancy. If you’re not a leader, you might have to tell other team members that work won’t be completed on time or inform clients that you’re going to miss a delivery deadline.

These types of conversations are tough, but there are better ways to deliver the news.

First, always deliver bad news in person. While presenting it in an email might avoid facing the initial reaction, you will have to deal with the consequences at some point and hearing it directly from you might cause the receiver to react more positively.

The Business Administration department at New England College (no date) suggests five primary steps for delivering bad news:

1. Prepare for the conversation itself. You need to completely understand the situation before speaking with the person involved. Make sure you can address all the details clearly and accurately.
2. Alert the employee/colleague as to the nature of the conversation. Aim to be direct but delicate, delivering the bad news in a simple and straightforward way. Use short sentences and clear phrasing.
3. Be honest and reliable. Stay objective, treat the person with respect and don’t try to sugarcoat the truth or soften the blow. Be honest.
4. Demonstrate empathy. Think about how you’d treat a friend in the same situation. Give care and understanding and deliver the news in a place where they can work through emotions and retain their dignity.
5. Give people time to take in the news. Allow time for the person to process the levity of the conversation. Answer questions and make sure they fully understand the situation.

Sometimes, you might find that the news isn’t received as badly as you anticipate. By preparing for the conversation, you’ll be in a better position to adapt and respond to their needs.

3.3 Dealing with an angry customer or colleague

Many people can identify a situation where they have dealt with a difficult or angry customer or colleague. In these scenarios it is important to establish fully the details and reasons for the anger. By identifying the cause, you can emotionally distance yourself from the situation and start to help to diffuse it.

Being respectful at all times will also help to reach a solution. If somebody is so angry that they do not want to listen to what you are saying, it is OK to tell them you are leaving the

room and will return when they are calmer. You could also try this approach if you are talking to an angry customer or colleague over the phone. You should advise them that you will be putting the phone down, to give both parties the opportunity to reflect.

Try not to get emotionally involved. Even if the person is angry with you, do not respond with anger. This will make the situation worse and will get in the way of identifying the cause. Some other tips include:

- Show empathy – try to imagine how the person is feeling and understand why they are upset/angry.
- Ask open questions to help identify the cause (you explored asking effective questions in Week 2).
- Look for a resolution, and apologise if you think it will help. This does not mean that you are acknowledging any guilt, but the apology may help to calm them down. 'I'm really sorry that you are feeling this way' is a useful neutral apology that you could try.

Activity 3 An angry colleague

Allow 20 minutes for this activity

Maya has arrived at work to find that Eva is furious. Maya knows Eva well enough to identify her signals, such as banging things on her desk and deliberately ignoring Maya's good morning greeting.

As Maya is about to sit down at her desk, Eva walks over and very sternly states that she would like to speak with her right away. Maya follows Eva into a small meeting room. Eva's actions have left Maya feeling very nervous about what the conversation will involve. She immediately thinks that she has done something wrong.

Eva starts the conversation by shouting that Maya has not provided her with some information regarding the project. Maya is upset and angry. She says that she was unaware of such a request, which further fuels Eva's anger.

How could Maya diffuse the situation from this point on? Note your ideas in the box below.

Provide your answer...

Discussion

The first thing Maya needs to do is control her own rising anger, perhaps by taking some deep breaths and trying to see Eva's perspective.

Maya could then attempt to diffuse Eva's anger by trying to establish what is making her angry. For example, she could say:

'I'm sorry that you're so angry.'

'Tell me the information that you need and I'll do my best to find it straight away.'

'I'm sorry that I missed your request for this data. Could you resend the email?'

If Maya demonstrates empathy, actively listens and shows a real interest in helping to resolve the issue, it should help to dissipate the anger being experienced by Eva.

However, if Eva crosses a line and behaves in an inappropriate or bullying way, Maya should discuss this with an appropriate professional within the organisation.

4 Personal development planning

You can now continue your personal development planning.



Figure 4 The growth of your personal development plan.

Activity 4 My Week 6 plan

Allow 15 minutes for this activity

Can you recall a situation where you have experienced one of the five emotions mentioned earlier? Consider how you could have improved or changed your approach. Add a suitable goal to your personal development planning table.

Choose an emotion that you experience frequently, rather than one you have only experienced occasionally, so that opportunities to practice your new approach are likely to arise within your proposed timeframe.

Once you have added your goal, take some time to review a previous goal. Consider the actions that you have taken to date and whether you have met any of your goals yet.

5 This week's quiz

Now you've reached the end of the week, you can try a short quiz to reflect on what you've learned.

[Week 6 practice quiz](#)

Open the quiz in a new tab or window and come back here when you are done.

6 Summary of Week 6

This week you have looked at using communication to deal with a broad range of challenging situations. You have explored your own emotions, learned techniques to help dissipate negative feelings, and begun to understand that *you* decide how you react to a particular situation. You have looked at how these issues can impact on the working environment and how to challenge the opinion of others.

You should now be able to:

- understand the importance of working well with others
- identify a range of techniques for managing your emotions in the workplace
- deal more effectively with challenging conversations.

Next week you will look at the impact of diversity on communication.

You can now go to [Week 7](#).

Week 7: Communication and diversity

Introduction

This week you will explore another important aspect of communication in the workplace – communication and diversity.

In modern working environments you are highly likely to experience diversity, either within the workforce, or among clients or customers. Diversity is a broad term that covers different groups in society and can relate to gender, age, disability, ethnicity, religious beliefs and sexual orientation, among others. While it will be impossible to cover all aspects of diversity in detail this week, you'll look at the broad principles, which can be summarised as treating everyone equally and with respect.

As you found out in Week 2, you will often need to adapt your communication style depending on who you are communicating with. This week, you will have the opportunity to understand and explore this further as well as reflect on some of your own experiences. Now watch this short video to hear Lynne explain what you'll be looking at this week.

Video content is not available in this format.

[Video 1](#)



By the end of this week, you will be able to:

- demonstrate an understanding of the recent history of diversity in the workplace
- understand some of the cultural and generational challenges that can be experienced in the workplace
- consider the perspective of disabled colleagues or clients.

1 The recent history of diversity in the workplace

Since the 1950s, the UK has experienced significant shifts in the makeup of its work force. From changes in the economy necessitating the need for migrant labour to the 1995 Disability Discrimination Act preventing employers from discriminating against disabled people, there has been an unprecedented increase in diversity across large parts of the country's employment sector.



Figure 1 Diversity in the workplace.

Activity 1 Diversity in your workplace

Allow 10 minutes for this activity

Consider your current or a previous working environment. Can you list some examples of the diversity that you have experienced among colleagues and customers?

Provide your answer...

Discussion

How did you find the task? There are no right or wrong answers here, but your list may have included some or all of these categories (Ahmed, 2018):

- race and ethnicity
- age and generation
- gender and gender identity
- sexual orientation
- religious and spiritual beliefs
- disability and ability
- socioeconomic status and background
- thinking style and personality
- personal life experience.

Although you might not have thought of the final two categories, the diversity that they bring to the workplace can present challenges. For example, Ahmed describes the possibility of a team with introverted personalities struggling with giving a monthly presentation. He also suggests that the life experience of someone who has seen active service in the armed forces might bring particular issues to the workplace.

Understanding this breadth of diversity should help you to identify many occasions when you have experienced some level of diversity both in and outside of work.



Figure 2 Diversity across the world.

Other historical developments have also contributed to this increase in diversity. For example, in 1996 the duty to require employers to make reasonable adjustments for disabled employees came into effect, making work spaces and education opportunities more accessible. The Equality Act of 2010 brought together lots of different legislation including previous legislation on sex, race and disability, in order to make the legal requirements easier to understand.

Freedom of movement from European Union member states has also contributed to significant work force diversity. European migrants work in all sectors, from low-skilled roles such as farm work to highly skilled roles within the NHS and UK universities.

As a result of the UK's vote to leave the European Union in June 2016, significant numbers of EU migrants have already left the UK and may continue to do so. Some sectors have begun to experience the impact.

2 Culture and communication

Culturally diverse working environments can experience communication problems because there is greater potential for individuals to misunderstand or misread non-verbal signals, or gain the wrong impression from an overuse of jargon or the way something is written.

For example, in some cultures making eye contact is considered disrespectful and can be interpreted as a sign of dishonesty, whereas in others making eye contact is seen as essential in building rapport.

You don't need to have a detailed knowledge of different cultural norms, but an awareness of cultural diversity will help you to communicate more effectively within a diverse environment.

Under the UK's Equality Act, it is considered important to develop some understanding of different cultural practices. This is more likely to be a requirement if there is a particular customer or client group to consider, for example, health care workers understanding the particular needs of traveller communities.

Some companies in the UK work extensively with overseas clients, such as in China or the Middle East, where the way business is conducted may be very different. This has led to communication strategies being developed to ensure compliance with cultural norms.

Activity 2 Understanding cultural differences in the work place

Allow 30 minutes for this activity

The following video describes some of the differences in working practices between nations and the adjustments that individuals and business make.

Video content is not available in this format.

[Video 2](#)



1. Can you name any of the languages spoken by the team based in the UK?
2. Can you name three different countries that team members originate from?
3. What language are many of the staff learning?

Discussion

1. The staff members who explicitly mentioned their language skills could speak Polish, German, French, Spanish and Portuguese.
2. You could have chosen Germany, Pakistan, Italy, China, Poland or Brazil.
3. Portuguese.

How did you find this activity? Do not worry if you did not manage to answer all the questions correctly. Overall, this case study is a positive demonstration of how valuing diversity in a workforce, and appreciating and understanding the differences that individuals bring, helps to bring teams together. There is also a company ethos to support staff in building an understanding of the culture/countries in which the business operates. This is valued by businesses and individuals from these countries.

Working in cross-cultural environments can be demanding, but there are some steps you can take to maximise working relationships.

- Managers and business leaders should ensure that staff have some understanding of the cultural differences they will be experiencing.
- If businesses have significant interests in other countries it is important to understand simple things such as public holidays and time zones. Being mutually respectful and aware of differences is essential.
- Avoid using humour as a way to break the ice, as this could backfire in a country where the workplace is more formal.
- Be aware that some cultures do not have a diverse workforce (e.g. in terms of gender, ethnicity or disability). However, this lack of familiarity with diversity should not detract from the expectation of an open-minded approach from all.

Activity 3 Thinking about diverse workforces

Allow 20 minutes for this activity

Imagine that you are part of a new project team.

Half of the team are based in Mumbai, and half are in London. In India, there is considerable formality in business working environments and some staff might find the comparative informality in the UK a little difficult to understand.

1. Can you envisage any communication problems the team may face? Consider some of the practical concerns.
2. What could the team manager in London do to help non-Indian staff prepare for their new team experience?
3. What could the team manager do to support the members of the team based in India?

Provide your answer...

Discussion

1. Some of the practical considerations would be time zones and also the communication challenges. Although the Indian team have a good standard of English there may be some issues around use of jargon, colloquialisms and accents that are unfamiliar to people outside of the UK, which could hamper communication.
2. The team manager could offer training for non-Indian staff, which could include cultural awareness to understand how business in India is conducted, and some language training for greetings.
3. The team manager could offer training to the Indian members of the team, which could cover how business is done in the UK. It could also cover the UK perspective and approach to office etiquette, so that Indian colleagues are aware of and not surprised by a less formal approach.

Different cultures have variations in the way that they conduct business meetings, eat, drink and greet each other. Demonstrating an understanding of difference, or a willingness to learn about it, will go a long way towards gaining the respect of international colleagues and associates.

3 Disability and communication

According to government data (DWP, 2018), there are almost seven million people of working age living with a disability or health condition in the UK. Not all are in employment, but many who aren't would like to be.

Living with a disability, or working with someone who has a disability, presents no additional communication barriers in many cases. However, in some cases there may be some issues to consider. In this section you will explore perceptions of disability and how they can impact negatively on communication.

Activity 4 Talking about disability

Allow 15 minutes for this activity

Watch this video produced by Scope, which features people with a broad range of disabilities and highlights some of the awkward questions that disabled people are frequently asked at work.

Follow this link to access the video:

[‘End the awkward at work’: disabled people tell Scope their stories and tips](#)

If you have a disability, how did you feel after watching the video? Can you identify with any of the points raised?

If you don't have a disability, how did the video make you feel? Have you ever made similar comments or judgements?

Discussion

There are no right or wrong answers here, but it is important to understand how others feel. The awkwardness is experienced by both parties and communicating these feelings honestly will help to reduce the impact on your work and relationships with colleagues.

Scope's 'End the Awkward' (no date) campaign suggests the following when communicating with someone who has a disability:

- Think about the language you use when referring to a disabled person. Refer to them by name, rather than as 'the visually impaired one' etc.
- Don't ask inappropriate questions about their disability or how they cope with certain aspects of life. Focus on the person rather than their disability and choose topics that you'd chat to any colleague about, e.g. the weather, what they did at the weekend etc.
- Don't make assumptions about their impairment or assume they need your help. For example, do not grab the handles of a wheelchair without the occupant's permission, even if they look like they need help. Ask them about their needs and how you can best help them in the workplace.
- If you are their manager, you will need to ensure that reasonable adjustments are made to remove or minimise disadvantages in the workplace.
- If an individual is accompanied by a helper, interpreter etc., be sure to communicate with the individual themselves rather than directing your questions or comments to the person who is with them.

If you have a disability yourself, you may feel anxious about fitting into a workplace or being able to communicate effectively with your colleagues, and in some cases this may stop you from looking for employment.

But according to the NHS (2017) almost half of all disabled people of working age are now employed.

People with different disabilities can and do have successful careers in a huge variety of roles and sectors and there are many employers that do not see disability as problematic. For example, a Manager for National Grid says:

Creating an inclusive environment where everybody is welcomed and developed to fulfil their potential is part of National Grid's inclusion and diversity policy. The employees that join us do exactly the same jobs as anybody else and have totally fitted in. It's fantastic to see the confidence of people grow once they're back at work and we've implemented quite a few operational ideas put forward by our disabled candidates.

(Radar, n.d.)

Being able to communicate effectively with employers and colleagues is a crucial part of building confidence in the workplace and this is no different for people with or without disabilities. Those with limited employment experience can build their communication skills in other ways, such as through volunteering, undertaking work experience or participating in social activities.

It is important to note that some disabilities or health conditions could give certain benefits for specific roles, so focusing on strengths is important.



Figure 3 Focus on your strengths.

For example, a banking professional has the following story:

I'm the best proof reader for reports in my area. You'd think with a severe visual impairment that I'd be the worst but because my issue with my sight forces me to read things more slowly than others, conversely I notice errors or poor grammar more than anyone else does. I also only have to read a report once (no matter how complicated) to get its full meaning whilst my peers tend to charge through them (as I used to when my sight was better) and then have to read them again as they fail to get the full message.

(Radar, n.d.)

4 Generation and communication

Communication styles and approaches continue to change as each new generation enters the job market.

There are currently four generations represented in the workplace and although generational cut-off isn't an exact science, they are commonly defined as follows:

Baby boomers – born between 1944 and 1964

Generation X – born between 1965 and 1981

Millennials (or Generation Y) – born between 1982 and 1994

Generation Z – born between 1995 and 2010

Each generation comes with its own set of characteristics based on the environment in which its members were raised, e.g. post-war, during financial crisis etc., and Murray (2017) illustrates some of the key work-related differences in a useful table.

Table 1 Characteristics of different generations*

	Baby boomers	Generation X	Millennials
Communication	Face-to-face	Email or Instant Messaging	'Just text me'
Attitude to work	Loyal to my job	I work to live	Play then work
Information	Print me a copy	Send me a copy	I'll google it
What they want at work	Respect my title	Respect my ideas	Respect my skills
Areas of focus	Focus on progress	Focus on results	Focus on involvement
Priorities	Work comes first	Family comes first	Friends come first

* Note: Not enough is yet known about Generation Z in the workplace to clearly define their characteristics.

These generational characteristics can lead to various challenges in the workplace. Adapting your communication style and content to the needs of your audience is an important consideration in this context.

For example, if a leader comes from a different generation to their team, the details in this table indicate that they might need to use communication methods outside their comfort zone in order to fully engage and share information with team members.

A commonly discussed characteristic of 'millennials' is their desire for more feedback than previous generations. This can be very positive, but does require a different approach to communication, perhaps with more regular use of the 'performance' conversation type you discovered in Week 4.

Activity 5 My own experience

Allow 15 minutes for this activity

Think of someone you work with or encounter on a regular basis, at work or perhaps through voluntary work or a hobby, who is from a different generation to you. Don't choose a family member as that will bring a different dynamic to your reflections.

In the box below list any positive or negative aspects of communicating with them.

Provide your answer...

Discussion

Did you choose someone older or younger than you? Did the points you made align with the differences outlined in the table?

There will always be people who fall outside of these generalisations, so perhaps you chose an older person who is a whizz on social media, or a young person who enjoys the art of letter writing!

The point of this activity is to reflect on the differences you observe between you and people around you and whether those have a positive or negative effect on your ability to communicate with them.

If they are negative – what can you do to make communication between you more effective? For example, if they hate emails and rarely respond to them, try to get into the habit of putting your head around their office door and asking your question in person, or leaving a note on their desk.

5 Personal development planning

As you near the end of the course, it is important to consider the goals that you set early on. How have you found the process of setting your own goals? Have you changed your approach since Week 1?



Figure 4 The growth of your personal development plan.

Activity 6 My Week 7 plan

Allow 20 minutes for this activity

This week, set yourself one final goal relating to your communication skills. Reflecting on your own experiences of working with others, be it in a diverse/or non-diverse environment, is there someone you'd like to develop a better working relationship with? Could you do anything differently in terms of the language or methods you use to communicate with them? If so, set yourself a goal to ensure that you meet this objective.

Discussion

Next week is the final week of the course, which will give you an opportunity to look back at all the goals you have set yourself and monitor their progress so far.

6 This week's quiz

Now you've reached the end of the week, you can try a short quiz to reflect on what you've learned.

[Week 7 practice quiz](#)

Open the quiz in a new tab or window and come back here when you are done.

7 Summary of Week 7

This week you have looked at diversity and communication. You've considered diversity in several forms and explored ways to communicate more effectively with individuals who are different from you. You've learned that encouraging their ideas and input, through the use of appropriate methods or language, can enhance the workplace for everyone.

While you can never become an expert on all the differences and diversity you might encounter, issues around miscommunication are often similar across all groups in society. For example, there is little practical difference between failing to understand someone because they have a speech impairment, or because of a strong regional accent. In both cases, there are things that can be done to facilitate that understanding.

Organisations that reflect a diverse society are often more attractive to potential employees, consumers and service users. Ignoring diversity by not working to ensure a reflective work force does not make good business sense. Consequently, more and more employers are beginning to see the value that diversity brings.

You should now be able to:

- demonstrate an understanding of the recent history of diversity in the workplace
- understand some of the cultural and generational challenges that can be experienced in the workplace
- consider the perspective of disabled colleagues or clients.

Next week you will look at how communication is changing in the workplace with the impact of new technologies and different approaches.

You can now go to [Week 8](#).

Week 8: The future of communication in the workplace

Introduction

Welcome to Week 8, the final week of this course. Last week, you explored some of the issues surrounding diversity and communication, and this week you'll look at how technology has influenced the way we communicate and will continue to do so into the future.

Now watch Lynne Johnson's final video of the course to hear more about what you'll be learning this week.

Video content is not available in this format.

Video 1



By the end of this week, you will be able to:

- reflect on the advantages and disadvantages of working remotely
- understand the potential benefits of a strong LinkedIn profile
- recognise how virtual or augmented reality might impact on communication in the workplace.

1 The impact of technology on

communication

Watch this short video to review the remarkable impact that technology has had on communication throughout history.

[From Stone Age to Tech Age: the big ideas that shaped history](#)

From a workplace perspective, one of the key advantages in recent times has been the increase in remote communication, allowing colleagues to work together from different locations – enhancing diversity in the workplace and giving employees greater flexibility.

1.1 Remote working

In the UK, there are 4.8 million freelancers, mostly home-based workers, making up 15% of the workforce, and companies are increasingly allowing employees to work remotely (Sawa, 2019).

Benjamin (no date) suggests 6 ways for an organisation to communicate effectively with its remote workers:

1. Balance your communications – remote employees can be overlooked because they are out of sight. Try to ensure that someone speaks to a remote member of staff at least once every working day.
2. Replace water cooler moments with short but frequent communications – exchange pleasantries at the beginning of the day and keep them in the loop about daily happenings in the office.
3. Choose the right medium for your message – messages that require a quick response should be delivered by phone or instant message, complex instructions can be emailed.
4. Think critically about how your message will be perceived – as you learned in Week 5, without non-verbal cues, written messages can be misconstrued.
5. Remember that communication is not a one-way street – let remote colleagues know how to contact you and when you will be available.
6. Provide opportunities for interaction with other colleagues – this will help them to feel more involved.

From the perspective of the employee, this last point raises the issue of potential loneliness.

Watch this video to hear remote worker Rab Segall talking about how he combats this problem.

Video content is not available in this format.

[Video 2](#)



Activity 1 Could I work remotely?

Allow 10 minutes for this activity

In the box below, summarise what the pros and cons of working from home would be for you. Aim for at least 3 pros and 3 cons.

Provide your answer...

Discussion

Even if you've never worked at home in an employment context, the experience could be very similar to time spent writing a dissertation or other piece of academic work. Dorsey (2017) outlines the following pros and cons:

Pros

- flexible working hours
- no commute
- better work-life balance
- home comforts
- no office politics.

Cons

- social isolation
- few work friends
- lack of group brainstorming and colleague support
- distractions
- IT issues.

It is interesting that many of the negatives of working from home relate to communication – whether that is social or task-related. Did you highlight any communication issues in your list?

If you are at an early point in your career, you might find that working surrounded by people is more valuable at this stage, as it allows you to establish networks more easily and experience many of the situations and issues outlined so far in this course. The more communication experience you can gain, the better your skills will become.

Remote working is also particularly relevant to a topic you investigated in Week 4 – participating in meetings.

1.2 Remote attendance at meetings

Increasingly, individuals are expected to participate in meetings remotely, meaning that attendees may not all be in the same room. As organisations become increasingly collaborative and extend their contacts across the globe, many have moved to use platforms such as Skype to undertake group or one-to-one meetings.

Not being physically present with co-attendees can add communication pressures. For example, you may not be able to see facial expressions and body language. This can hamper your ability to grasp how your (or someone else's) point has been received or understood.

To combat this situation, it is important to deliberately check with other attendees. For example, you may wish to ask others what they think about that point. Perhaps ask individuals by name, rather than opening up your questions to everyone attending.

Getting as much practice as you can will build confidence in participating in such meetings. Using platforms such as Skype can feel daunting so try to familiarise yourself with the tool.

If possible, start with one-to-one or smaller groups, perhaps with a friend, family or colleague who is similarly cautious about the technology.

1.3 Using Skype

Skype is a commonly used communication tool, for both one-to-one discussions and group calls.

As mentioned in the previous section, it can take some time to get used to using it, but Bednarz (2016) has the following advice for maximising the experience:

Prior to the call

- Check the time zone.
- Have an agenda prepared (you could even share it with the other person in advance).
- Test your equipment.
- Eliminate possible interruptions.
- Wear appropriate clothing and think about lighting, for example, try not to have a window behind you.

During the call

- Focus on the conversation – practice active listening (as discussed in Week 2) and think about your non-verbal cues, such as eye contact, posture etc.
- Remember to look into the camera – particularly when you are talking about something important. That way – they will see eye contact from you and be more engaged with what you are saying.
- Check for understanding – ask effective questions, invite feedback, etc. Make regular glances at the other person's face so you can check their facial expressions.
- Smile and keep the conversation going – use phrases like 'are you with me?' or 'do you know what I mean?' as this can help with awkward pauses if the connection is slow.

After the call

- Follow up with a thank you email summarising agreed points and further steps.

You've looked at some of the day-to-day issues of communicating remotely and the potential for isolation. In the next section, you'll start to think about how technology can help to grow and enhance your profile in the working environment.

2 Growing my profile



Figure 1 Social media platforms.

In Week 4, you looked briefly at the craft of writing social media posts, but there is one social media platform that has particular relevance to communication in the world of work and is likely to remain a key resource in the future.

LinkedIn can bring a range of work-related benefits. Rycraft (2018) outlines the following:

1. Gain exposure to hiring managers and recruiters – 93% of recruiters use LinkedIn to research and recruit candidates.
2. Demonstrate your knowledge, credibility and leadership expertise – having a LinkedIn profile helps build trust with employers and recruiters as they can see your recommendations and connections and evidence of where you have added value.
3. LinkedIn has a great job board – you can directly apply for roles, save job searches, and flag to recruiters that you are open to hearing about opportunities.
4. You can gain social proof for your skills and talents – through recommendations and endorsements from others. Anyone who sees your profile can see these and it shows you have other experts backing up your claims to have certain skills. This is very powerful in making connections.
5. Join LinkedIn Groups – meet people with similar professional interests and expand your network from other graduates to professionals already working in your industry. Groups allow you to take part in discussions and start conversations with key people in key organisations.

All of these points involve communication, whether communicating your skills and experience to potential recruiters or building relationships with interesting and potentially useful professionals in your industry.

Activity 2 My LinkedIn profile

Allow 20 minutes for this activity

A key element of your LinkedIn profile is the summary section. This appears at the top of your profile and is the first thing people will read about you.

Do you already have a LinkedIn profile?

- If yes, use this activity to review and update your summary section.
- If no, consider setting one up and then using this activity to fill in your summary section when you are ready.
- If you have no interest in setting one up at the moment, this activity will still be useful for future job applications. You could also use it to review or add to the 'elevator pitch' content that you came up with in Week 4.

A LinkedIn summary is usually no more than 2–3 paragraphs long. It gives information on your skills and experience and is an opportunity grab people's attention and encourage them to read on.

Compose your summary in the box below. If you need some inspiration, use Google to search for examples of LinkedIn profile summaries. Articles such as [5 templates that'll make writing the perfect LinkedIn summary a total breeze](#) could be helpful.

Provide your answer...

Discussion

When writing a profile summary, Grainger (no date) suggests the following:

- Target the audience you want – think about who you want to read it and what you want from them. This will help you find your core message.
- Be authentic, honest and concise.
- Let your personality shine through – show recruiters who you are.
- Explain what you do (briefly) – condense the details into a manageable paragraph that gives a taste of your expertise and previous roles.
- Show off your talents – demonstrate your knowledge.
- Master the art of a 'closer' line – work out what impression you want to leave the reader with in your closing sentence.

Raising your online profile allows you to expand your network and communicate with a wider range of individuals. This could certainly be useful to your career development but might also bring insight into particular issues that you and your team face in your current workplace, or opportunities for collaboration.

2.1 What next for LinkedIn?

Personal branding expert William Arruda (2017) has the following predictions:

- Expect real time video to be the next feature enhancement, allowing you to live stream. It is also likely that Skype will be integrated into the contact section of your profile.
- Look out for a capability that links your calendar with LinkedIn so you can receive a dossier of information about someone before your meeting with them – making your meetings more fruitful.

There are many social media platforms that are commonly used in a work context. To find out more about them, read Hootsuite's useful summary article [10 types of social media and how each can benefit your business](#).

As you have already experienced, technology plays a key role in workplace communication. But how might we communicate in the future? You'll explore some of the possibilities in the next section.

3 The future of workplace communication



Figure 2 Futuristic communication.

As you might expect, there are many suggestions and ideas about the communication methods of the future and how they might change our workplaces, but an interesting topic to consider here is that of augmented, virtual and mixed reality.

Augmented reality overlays digital elements on what you can already see, whereas virtual reality completely immerses you in an artificial environment generated by a computer. Mixed reality falls somewhere between the two, allowing you to interact with virtual objects but in the real world.

Watch this short Microsoft HoloLens promotional video to see how mixed reality could potentially change your work environment in the future.

[Microsoft HoloLens: mixed reality in the modern workplace](#)

3.1 Augmented reality

Pierce (2018) describes an augmented office environment of the future:

Picture it: You get to the office, grab a keyboard off the shelf [...], and find an open space. You log in to your glasses, and your entire workspace appears in front of you. To your right is a shelf stocked with all the apps and bookmarks you use every day. You reach over and grab one, place it on the floor, and the full-scale CAD model of the car you were designing pops into place. Pinned to the wall are all your digital notes, arranged in exactly the way you left them last night. To your left hover six virtual screens displaying browser windows, stock tickers, and Twitter. You ask Siri to pull up your email, and your inbox appears. You can see everything, but all anyone else sees is you, wearing glasses [...], typing on a keyboard and reaching around in the air.

While your first thought might be that working like this could be isolating, Pierce thinks that 'collaboration could actually improve', allowing us to 'share information in more useful ways'.

To meet our need for social interaction at work, we might find that our working habits change, taking us back to the days where everyone had a coffee break at 11am and sat together in the tea room having a face-to-face conversation!

3.2 Virtual reality

Virtual reality is already used in some industries for training and education. It is particularly useful for training employees who will have to go into hazardous environments.

While the technology still needs further development before it can become widely adopted, some commentators are imagining a time where it could be used for virtual meetings in which our avatars (our embodiment in the virtual world) meet in more interesting locations and have more stimulating meetings as a result.



Figure 3 A boardroom on a beach.

4 The impact of generation Z



Figure 4 Lots of smartphones.

In Week 7, you considered the impact of different generations on communication in the workplace. Generation Z (born from 1995 onwards) was not included in the discussion, as they are just starting to enter key roles within the workforce so there is still limited evidence available for their workplace behaviours.

However, there is some detail emerging on characteristics that may have an impact on their communication style when they do become more representative in the workforce (NFON, no date).

- The smartphone is very important to this generation. It makes them part of a fully connected, 24/7 online community in which virtual and personal contacts are considered equal.
- They are highly capable of multi-tasking, moving back and forth between real and virtual worlds and across channels, recording and filtering information. For example, at work they are likely to conduct research on the internet during a meeting, contributing their findings as the meeting goes on.
- They have a short attention span. The time they can focus without getting distracted is estimated at approximately 8 seconds.
- Many of them consider personal conversation to be the most effective form of conversation. However, they also communicate using images, emoticons, GIFs, short videos and live streaming – so communication tools that mix speaking and writing with visual elements will be popular.

Clearly, this generation will embrace the virtual technologies outlined this week, but it is encouraging to see their preference for face-to-face communication too. Will that eventually reverse the growing trend for remote working, or will technology offer attractive solutions that cover both bases?

Activity 3 Generation Z

Allow 5 minutes for this activity

Think about someone you know from generation Z (it might even be you!). Do the characteristics outlined in this section sound right? Is there anything you would do differently when communicating with a member of generation Z now that you know about their preference for a smartphone or short attention span?

Provide your answer...

Discussion

It seems that texting or using other forms of social media with short snappy messages could be a useful communication strategy. If you have to use email, make sure your emails are clear and concise.

Consider asking individuals from Generation Z to be involved when any visual activities are required in the workplace, such as poster design or images for social media to attract or engage your client group. This will play to their strengths.

Try not to be offended by their use of smartphones during meetings or even conversations. This is not intended to be a ruse as they are probably still engaging with you and the discussion topic – you could check this by asking what they are researching or what they've discovered.

In the next section, you'll look at the impact of technology on the future of job applications.

5 Marketing your communication skills in the future

Changes are already occurring to the application processes used by some employers, and in this section you'll explore some of them in more detail.



Figure 5 Making a video CV.

5.1 Video CVs

In some sectors, particularly those with a creative or visual emphasis, the video CV is already being used, and with platforms such as LinkedIn likely to introduce more video capabilities in the future, this is a growing trend.

As with a standard written CV, you need to keep your message concise and relevant to the employer, but there are other considerations.

Appearance

You have an opportunity to match your visual content to the culture of the organisation you are applying to in a way that would be much harder on a written CV. Think carefully about what you wear, the background you use, etc. Clearly demonstrating your cultural fit at this early stage in the process can be very beneficial.

Professionalism

Make sure your video is professional and easy to access. If they can't hear you properly or part of your head is cut off in the shot – you won't be creating a very good first impression.

Remember to look into the lens of the camera as that will ensure you are making eye contact with the audience.

Verbal communication

As well as thinking about your non-verbal clues, focus on the clarity and speed of your speech. Nerves can make us talk faster in an interview, but you have the advantage of being able to record this again so that should reduce your anxiety and allow you to present what you have to say more effectively. Writing a script and learning it should also help with this.

Camera work

It might help to have a camera operator rather than doing it all yourself. That way, you can focus your attention on what you say rather than whether the equipment is working etc. You will also have the advantage of an actual person who can give you some feedback as you go along rather than talking to an imaginary panel of recruiters.

A video CV provides a great opportunity to demonstrate your verbal communication skills and display your personality to employers prior to meeting them.

Useful to note: Much of the advice for recording video CVs is equally applicable to video interviews, but be aware that the systems employers use don't always let you re-record your input, so check that before you start. Also, the questions will be randomly selected from a large question bank, so scripting your answers could be risky. You don't want to sound over-rehearsed and wooden or to answer the question you have anticipated rather than the one that was actually asked.

5.2 Chatbots

Chatbots (like Amazon's Alexa or Apple's Siri) have recently appeared in the recruitment sector, using artificial intelligence to take on repetitive tasks and shortlisting a pool of qualified candidates for the recruiter.



Figure 6 A chatbot on a smartphone.

The chatbot might ask candidates a series of questions, recording data and ranking applicants. They can answer simple candidate queries and even organise meetings and phone calls.

A survey by Allegis (Fisher, 2017) suggests that 58% of job seekers are comfortable interacting with artificial intelligence apps to answer initial questions in the application and interview process. 66% are glad to have AI apps help with interview scheduling and preparation. So there is some acceptance of this process, but a way to go before we all embrace it.

As the person on the receiving end of a chatbot's communication skills, a top tip is to keep your sentences clear and concise.

Doing some research about the company prior to your interaction with the chatbot might allow you to use key terms in your answers that you know are used by the organisation, e.g. on their website or in their job descriptions. This might help if the chatbot is programmed to look for key words.

6 Final review of your personal development plan

Now you have reached the end of the course, this is an opportunity to reflect on your personal development planning table, which you downloaded in Week 1 and have been filling in throughout the course.

You should also celebrate what you have achieved, through finishing this course and accomplishing some of the goals that you set yourself.



Figure 7 The growth of your personal development plan.

Activity 4 My personal development plan

Allow 30 minutes for this activity

Use the box below to write a quick summary of what you have achieved so far.

Provide your answer...

Discussion

Using a personal development plan should not be limited to this course – it is an evolving document which you can add to as you identify new areas to develop. You can use it as a mechanism to continue to enhance and develop your skills throughout your career.

You might find that don't want to use this table any more but there are lots of other ways to record your goals and review your progress.

Depending on your preferences, you might want to start a career development journal – noting your thoughts and reflections as you develop your skills. Or you could find an app for your tablet or smartphone that allows you to log goals and monitor progress.

7 This week's quiz

Now it's time to complete the Week 8 badge quiz. Like the Week 4 badge quiz, it has 15 questions.

[Week 8 compulsory badge quiz](#)

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

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

8 Summary of Week 8

This week, you have looked at some of the pros and cons of the increasing trend for remote working, considered how LinkedIn can facilitate more effective communication with a wider network of contacts, and learned about the impact that technology might have on work-related communication in the future.

You should now be able to:

- reflect on the advantages and disadvantages of working remotely
- understand the potential benefits of a strong LinkedIn profile
- recognise how virtual or augmented reality might impact on communication in the workplace.

Congratulations! You have come to the end of the course and should already be feeling more confident about using your communication skills at work.

Where next?

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Tell us what you think

Now you've come to the end of the course, we would appreciate a few minutes of your time to complete this short [end-of-course survey](#) (you may have already completed this survey at the end of Week 4).

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