

BA411 Final Project – Effective Communication

Situation:

Tim Smith the IT manager comes to you and says "My project coordinators are in a slump; they just are not producing their usual caliber of work. I need to find out what the problem is. No one on the project team knows what is going on. The communications from my project coordinators are coming across as rude, which in turn keeps morale low. The teams are not doing the work. I was hoping you would be able to put together an Effective Communication training for them to help get everyone back on the right track." There are 10 project coordinators in the IT department. Two of the project coordinators are in the organization's Bangkok office. Tim wants the training to last no longer than 4 hours and wants it to be face to face in a class room with you, the trainer. He does not want to fly the Bangkok associates in and would like you to set up a Skype session with them during your training. He also wants you to set up weekly coaching sessions with each project manager and himself for a month after the training is completed.

Training Purchased from USA Training: Effective Communication

You are to use this information, but are not limited to it. Tim wants to make sure this information is covered in the training as he went online and bought it from USA Training, however he is open to what research you find. He wants the training to be interactive and requests that you include at least one activity around communication in the training.

Effective Communication:

Introduction

People in organizations typically spend over 75% of their time in an interpersonal situation; thus it is no surprise to find that at the root of a large number of organizational problems is poor communication. Effective communication is an essential component of organizational success whether it is at the interpersonal, inter-group, intra-group, organizational, or external levels.

In this chapter we will cover the basic process of communication and then we will cover some of the most difficult communication issues managers' face-providing constructive and effective feedback and performance appraisal.

The Communication Process

Although all of us have been communicating with others since our infancy, the process of transmitting information from an individual (or group) to another is a very complex process with many sources of potential error.

In any communication at least some of the "meaning" lost in simple transmission of a message

from the sender to the receiver. In many situations a lot of the true message is lost and the message that is heard is often far different than the one intended. This is most obvious in cross-cultural situations where language is an issue. But it is also common among people of the same culture.

Communications is so difficult because at each step in the process there major potential for error. By the time a message gets from a sender to a receiver there are four basic places where transmission errors can take place and at each place, there are a multitude of potential sources of error. Thus it is no surprise that social psychologists estimate that there is usually a 40-60% loss of meaning in the transmission of messages from sender to receiver.

It is critical to understand this process, understand and be aware of the potential sources of errors and constantly counteract these tendencies by making a conscientious effort to make sure there is a minimal loss of meaning in your conversation.

It is also very important to understand that a majoring of communication is non-verbal. This means that when we attribute meaning to what someone else is saying, the verbal part of the message actually means less than the non-verbal part. The non-verbal part includes such things as body language and tone.

Barriers to Effective Communication

There are a wide number of sources of noise or interference that can enter into the communication process. This can occur when people know each other very well and should understand the sources of error. In a work setting, it is even more common since interactions involve people who not only don't have years of experience with each other, but communication is complicated by the complex and often confliction relationships that exist at work. In a work setting, the following suggests a number of sources of noise:

- **Language:** The choice of words or language in which a sender encodes a message will influence the quality of communication. Because language is a symbolic representation of a phenomenon, room for interpretation and distortion of the meaning exists. In the above example, the Boss uses language (this is the third day you've missed) that is likely to convey far more than objective information. To Terry it conveys indifference to her medical problems. Note that the same words will be interpreted different by each different person. Meaning has to be given to words and many factors affect how an individual will attribute meaning to particular words. It is important to note that no two people will attribute the exact same meaning to the same words.
- **Defensiveness, distorted perceptions, guilt, project, transference, distortions from the past**
- **Misreading of body language, tone and other non-verbal forms of communication**
- **Noisy transmission (unreliable messages, inconsistency)**

- Receiver distortion: selective hearing, ignoring non-verbal cues
- Power struggles
- Self-fulfilling assumptions
- Language-different levels of meaning
- Assumptions-e.g. assuming others see situation same as you, have same feelings as you
- Distrusted source, erroneous translation, value judgment, state of mind of two people
- Perceptual Biases: People attend to stimuli in the environment in very different ways. We each have shortcuts that we use to organize data. Invariably, these shortcuts introduce some biases into communication. Some of these shortcuts include stereotyping, projection, and self-fulfilling prophecies. Stereotyping is one of the most common. This is when we assume that the other person has certain characteristics based on the group to which they belong without validating that they in fact have these characteristics.
- Interpersonal Relationships: How we perceive communication is affected by the past experience with the individual. Perception is also affected by the organizational relationship two people have. For example, communication from a superior may be perceived differently than that from a subordinate or peer.
- Cultural Differences: Effective communication requires deciphering the basic values, motives, aspirations, and assumptions that operate across geographical lines. Given some dramatic differences across cultures in approaches to such areas as time, space, and privacy, the opportunities for miscommunication while we are in cross-cultural situations are plentiful.

Reading Nonverbal Communication Cues

A large percentage (studies suggest over 90%) of the meaning we derive from communication, we derive from the non-verbal cues that the other person gives. Often a person says one thing but communicates something totally different through vocal intonation and body language. These mixed signals force the receiver to choose between the verbal and nonverbal parts of the message. Most often, the receiver chooses the non-verbal aspects. Mixed messages create tension and distrust because the receiver senses that the communicator is hiding something or is being less than candid.

Non-verbal communication is made up of the following parts:

1. Visual
2. Tactile
3. Vocal
4. Use of time, space, and image

Visual:

This often called body language and includes facial expression, eye movement, posture, and gestures. The face is the biggest part of this. All of us "read" people's faces for ways to interpret what they say and feel. This fact becomes very apparent when we deal with someone with dark sunglasses. Of course we can easily misread these cues especially when communicating across cultures where gestures can mean something very different in another culture. For example, in American culture agreement might be indicated by the head going up and down whereas in India, a side-to-side head movement might mean the same thing.

We also look to posture to provide cues about the communicator; posture can indicate self-confidence, aggressiveness, fear, guilt, or anxiety. Similarly, we look at gestures such as how we hold our hands, or a handshake. Many gestures are culture bound and susceptible to misinterpretation

Tactile:

This involves the use of touch to impart meaning as in a handshake, a pat on the back, an arm around the shoulder, a kiss, or a hug.

Vocal:

The meaning of words can be altered significantly by changing the intonation of one's voice. Think of how many ways you can say "no"-you could express mild doubt, terror, amazement, anger among other emotions. Vocal meanings vary across cultures. Intonation in one culture can mean support; another anger

Use of Time as Nonverbal Communication:

Use of time can communicate how we view our own status and power in relation to others. Think about how a subordinate and his/her boss would view arriving at a place for an agreed upon meeting...

Physical Space:

For most of us, someone standing very close to us makes us uncomfortable. We feel our "space" has been invaded. People seek to extend their territory in many ways to attain power and intimacy. We tend to mark our territory either with permanent walls, or in a classroom with our coat, pen, paper, etc. We like to protect and control our territory. For Americans, the "intimate zone" is about two feet; this can vary from culture to culture. This zone is reserved for our closest friends. The "personal zone" from about 2-4 feet usually is reserved for family and friends. The social zone (4-12 feet) is where most business transactions take place. The "public zone" (over 12 feet) is used for lectures. Similarly, we use "things" to communicate. This can involve expensive things, neat or messy things, photographs, plants, etc. Image: We use clothing and other dimensions of physical appearance to communicate our values and

expectations

Nonverbal Communication:

A "majority" of the meaning we attribute to words comes not from the words themselves, but from nonverbal factors such as gestures, facial expressions, tone, body language, etc.

Nonverbal cues can play five roles:

1. Repetition: they can verbally repeat the message the person is making.
2. Contradiction: they can contradict a message the individual is trying to convey.
3. Substitution: they can substitute for a verbal message. For example, a person's eyes can often convey a far more vivid message than words and often do.
4. Complementing: they may add to or complement a verbal message. A boss who pats a person on the back in addition to giving praise can increase the impact of the message.
5. Accenting: non-verbal communication may accept or underline a verbal message. Pounding the table, for example, can underline a message.

Skillful communicators understand the importance of nonverbal communication and use it to increase their effectiveness, as well as use it to understand more clearly what someone else is really saying.

A word of warning: Non-verbal cues can differ dramatically from culture to culture. An American hand gesture meaning "A-OK" would be viewed as obscene in some South American countries. Be careful.

Developing Communication Skills: Listening Skills

There are a number of situations when you need to solicit good information from others; these situations include interviewing candidates, solving work problems, seeking to help an employee on work performance, and finding out reasons for performance discrepancies.

Skill in communication involves a number of specific strengths. The first we will discuss involves listening skills. The following lists some suggestions for effective listening when confronted with a problem at work:

- Listen openly and with empathy to the other person.
- Judge the content, not the messenger or delivery; comprehend before you judge.
- Use multiple techniques to fully comprehend (ask, repeat, rephrase, etc.).
- Active body state; fight distractions.
- Ask the other person for as much detail as he/she can provide; paraphrase what the other is saying to make sure you understand it and check for understanding.
- Respond in an interested way that shows you understand the problem and the

employee's concern.

- Attend to non-verbal cues, body language, not just words; listen between the lines.
- Ask the other for his views or suggestions.
- State your position openly; be specific, not global.
- Communicate your feelings but don't act them out (e.g. tell a person that his behavior really upsets you; don't get angry).
- Be descriptive, not evaluative-describe objectively, your reactions, consequences.
- Be validating, not invalidating ("You wouldn't understand"); acknowledge other's uniqueness, importance.
- Be conjunctive, not disjunctive (not "I want to discuss this regardless of what you want to discuss").
- Don't totally control conversation; acknowledge what was said.
- Own up: use "I", not "They"... not "I've heard you are non-cooperative."
- Don't react to emotional words, but interpret their purpose.
- Practice supportive listening, not one way listening.
- Decide on specific follow-up actions and specific follow up dates.

A major source of problem in communication is defensiveness. Effective communicators are aware that defensiveness is a typical response in a work situation especially when negative information or criticism is involved. Be aware that defensiveness is common, particularly with subordinates when you are dealing with a problem. Try to make adjustments to compensate for the likely defensiveness. Realize that when people feel threatened they will try to protect themselves; this is natural. This defensiveness can take the form of aggression, anger, competitiveness, avoidance among other responses. A skillful listener is aware of the potential for defensiveness and makes needed adjustment. He or she is aware that self-protection is necessary and avoids making the other person spend energy defending the self.

In addition, a supportive and effective listener does the following:

- Stop Talking: Ask the other person for as much detail as he/she can provide; ask for other's views and suggestions.
- Look at the person, listen openly and with empathy to the employee; be clear about his position; be patient.
- Listen and Respond in an interested way that shows you understand the problem and the other's concern is validating, not invalidating ("You wouldn't understand."); acknowledge

other's uniqueness, importance.

- Check for understanding; paraphrase; ask question for clarification.
- Do not control conversation; acknowledge what was said; allow the other to finish before responding.
- Focus on the problem, not the person; is descriptive and specific, not evaluative; focuses on content, not delivery or emotion
- Attend to emotional as well as cognitive messages (e.g., anger); aware of non-verbal cues, body language, etc.; listen between the lines
- React to the message, not the person, delivery or emotion
- Make sure you comprehend before you judge; ask questions
- Use many techniques to fully comprehend
- Stay in an active body state to aid listening
- Fight distractions
- Take Notes; Decide on specific follow-up actions and specific follow up dates

Constructive Feedback: Developing Your Skills

"I don't know how to turn her performance around; she never used to have these attendance problems and her work used to be so good; I don't know why this is happening or what to do." This manager is struggling with one of the most important yet trickiest and most difficult management tasks: providing constructive and useful feedback to others. Effective feedback is absolutely essential to organizational effectiveness; people must know where they are and where to go next in terms of expectations and goals-theirs, their own, and the organization.

Feedback taps basic human needs-to improve, to compete, to be accurate; people want to be competent. Feedback can be reinforcing; if given properly, feedback is almost always appreciated and motivates people to improve. But for many people, daily work is like bowling with a curtain placed between them and the pins; they receive little information.

Be aware of the many reasons why people are hesitant to give feedback; they include fear of causing embarrassment, discomfort, fear of an emotional reaction, and inability to handle the reaction. It is crucial that we realize how critical feedback can be and overcome our difficulties; it is very important and can be very rewarding but it requires skill, understanding, courage, and respect for yourself and others. Withholding constructive feedback is like sending people out on a dangerous hike without a compass. This is especially true in today's fast changing and

demanding workplace. Why managers are often reluctant to provide feedback? As important as feedback is, this critical managerial task remains one of the most problematic. Many managers would rather have root canal work than provide feedback to another-especially feedback that might be viewed as critical. Why are managers so reluctant to provide feedback? The reasons are many:

- Fear of the other person's reaction; people can get very defensive and emotional when confronted with feedback and many managers are very fearful of the reaction.
- The feedback may be based on subjective feeling and the manager may be unable to give concrete information if the other person questions the basis for the feedback.
- The information on which the feedback is based (eg. performance appraisal) may be a very flawed process and the manager may not totally trust the information.
- Many managers would prefer being a coach than "playing God."
- Other factors get in the way of effective communication or feedback sessions. Some of these reasons are:
 - Defensiveness, distorted perceptions, guilt, project, transference, distortions from the past.
 - Misreading of body language, tone.
 - Noisy transmission (unreliable messages, inconsistency).
 - Receiver distortion: selective hearing, ignoring non-verbal cues.
 - Power struggles.
 - Self-fulfilling assumptions.
 - Language-different levels of meaning.
 - Manager's hesitation to be candid.
 - Assumptions-e.g. assuming others see situation same as you, has same feelings as you.
 - Distrusted source, erroneous translation, value judgment, state of mind of two people

Characteristics of Effective Feedback

- Effective Feedback has most of the following characteristics:
- Descriptive (not evaluative) (avoids defensiveness.) By describing one's own reactions, it leaves the individual free to use it or not to use it as he sees fit.
- Avoid accusations; present data if necessary.

- Describe your own reactions or feelings; describe objective consequences that have or will occur; focus on behavior and your own reaction, not on other individual or his or her attributes.
- Suggest more acceptable alternative; be prepared to discuss additional alternatives; focus on alternatives
- Specific rather than general.
- Focused on behavior not the person. It is important that we refer to what a person does rather than to what we think he is. Thus we might say that a person "talked more than anyone else in this meeting" rather than that he is a "loud-mouth."
- It takes into account the needs of both the receiver and giver of feedback. It should be given to help, not to hurt. We too often give feedback because it makes us feel better or gives us a psychological advantage.
- It is directed toward behavior which the receiver can do something about. A person gets frustrated when reminded of some shortcoming over which he has no control.
- It is solicited rather than imposed. Feedback is most useful when the receiver himself has formulated the kind of question which those observing him can answer or when he actively seeks feedback.
- Feedback is useful when well-timed (soon after the behavior depending, of course, on the person's readiness to hear it, support available from others, and so forth). Excellent feedback presented at an inappropriate time may do more harm than good.
- Sharing of information, rather than giving advice allows a person to decide for himself, in accordance with his own goals and needs. When we give advice we tell him what to do, and to some degree take away his freedom to do decide for himself.
- It involves the amount of information the receiver can use rather than the amount we would like to give. To overload a person with feedback is to reduce the possibility that he may be able to use what he receives effectively. When we give more than can be used, we are more often than not satisfying some need of our own rather than helping the other person.
- It concerns what is said and done, or how, not why. The "why" involves assumptions regarding motive or intent and this tends to alienate the person generate resentment, suspicion, and distrust. If we are uncertain of his motives or intent, this uncertainty itself is feedback, however, and should be revealed.
- It is checked to insure clear communication. One way of doing this is to have the receiver try to rephrase the feedback. No matter what the intent, feedback is often threatening and thus subject to considerable distortion or misinterpretation.

- It is checked to determine degree of agreement from others. Such "consensual validation" is of value to both the sender and receiver.
- It is followed by attention to the consequences of the feedback. The supervisor needs to become acutely aware of the effects of his feedback.
- It is an important step toward authenticity. Constructive feedback opens the way to a relationship which is built on trust, honest, and genuine concern and mutual growth.

Resources

<http://www.cbsnews.com/news/us-education-spending-tops-global-list-study-shows/>