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Example: identify the reason and context for communication

Derek is a warehouse manager. The end of financial year is always a busy time due to stocktaking. Last year's stocktake had a lot of errors, so he wants to make sure the same thing does not happen again. He decides to get approval for overtime and introduce a more efficient recording system that will reduce the number of errors. He separates the tasks and takes time out to identify the context for the communication. He decides to use the 5 Ws strategy.

The 5 Ws strategy	
Communication task 1: Get overtime budget approved	**Communication task 2: Introduce the new recording system to staff**
• **Who:** General manager	• **Who:** members of the warehouse team
• **When:** at least four weeks before needed	• **When:** next team meeting
• **Why:** to ensure enough people are available to complete the stocktake in a timely manner	• **Why:** to get the team on board with the new system to avoid mistakes
• **Where:** monthly management meeting	• **Where:** staff room
• **What:** staff required, overtime costings, justification for the budget, volunteers	• **What:** recording procedure; step-by-step guidelines; how to complete forms
• **How:** write a formal proposal and table it at the meeting	• **How:** agenda item to discuss last year's mistakes and discuss new draft guidelines for recording stocktake.

Understand different communication situations

Context includes the situation and the particular combination of people involved in the communication.

Intrapersonal
Intrapersonal communication involves one person; referred to as self-talk. People talk to themselves many times a day.

Small group
Group communication is where a small number of people engage in an exchange of ideas and information. It involves three to 12 people.

Tips for considering your audience
Know each team member well. Be aware of their strengths, preferred working and learning styles, and literary skills, so you can communicate effectively.
Consider who else either intentionally or unintentionally is going to hear or see your message.
If you don't know the person you have to communicate with, find out who to address and the best way to present the information.
Be prepared and make notes on what you are going to say.
Find out whether they prefer you to communicate informally face to face or by email, or formally with an appointment and a written report or form.

Example: identify people relevant to the communication

George needs to put a proposal together and present it to a new senior manager who he has only met once. The context for this communication is organisational. The first step he takes is to use the workplace organisational chart to find out exactly who he will be writing to and how they fit within the organisation. George also uses the intranet to access the person's profile. He uses this information to target his communication. George knows that the time taken to complete this step will be beneficial in getting the results he is looking for.

Effective communication characteristics

Effective team leaders understand the importance of communication, and use a range of strategies and techniques to manage their team and ensure the work is understood and that work flow is efficient and meets designated outcomes.

Here is a list of communication characteristics commonly held by effective workplace leaders. These have an impact on the success of communication.

Check which ones you are confident you possess and consider those you may need to improve.

Self-awareness

- Communicate consciously and with intent.
- Each communication, no matter how small, should be thought out and considered. Have a clear picture in your head of your purpose.
- Be aware of factors that can impact on your message.

Well planned

- Know your audience and understand the context of communication, who you are communicating with and what their needs are.
- Organise your thoughts and present ideas and information logically.
- Anticipate the receiver's viewpoint and feelings, and take this into consideration when planning the communication.

Accommodating

- Adjust your style but not the message.
- Express yourself with conviction and communicate in an appropriate way.
- Tune in to your audience and seamlessly adjust, rephrase and tailor the message to meet their needs.

Active listening

- To be an effective communicator, you need to talk less and listen more.
- Maintain your focus and attention on the speaker throughout any exchange.
- Consciously choose to listen in order to understand the other person's point of view.
- Be attentive, pick up on subtle clues, modify and adapt accordingly.

Another advantage of this process is that it makes you more aware of the wants and needs of others. It is important to consider the desired outcomes of your audience as well as your desired outcomes before communicating. If you get the response you want, this indicates you have communicated effectively. For example, if you are preparing to run a brainstorming session to identify improvements to team processes, the desired outcomes may include active participation by all members, innovative ideas, and suggestions for implementation.

Using outcome-based thinking helps you to be clear about this from the start. The outcomes you are looking for become a reference point for you to evaluate your communication during or after the exchange. You are able to adapt and adjust your message throughout the process.

Example: understand the desired outcome of the communication

Jane ponders over the performance review meeting she is going to have with Sally. Sally has been her second-in-charge for 18 months now. She usually pays close attention to detail and completes tasks within allotted time frames. Lately, however, there have been errors in her reports and she always seems to be asking for extra time. Because of this, Jane's work is suffering. She is getting behind in the strategic planning process for the new year.

Jane wants Sally to get back on track. She needs her to go back to producing the quality work that she had previously been producing. Jane wants to find out if there is anything going on outside work that may be affecting Sally's work. Jane wants to be able to offer Sally any support she needs.

Jane decides to write down the outcomes she is looking for from this performance review meeting. She then considers how she will open the meeting. She asks herself: 'What would be the best way to get Sally talking about how she feels?' Jane writes down some questions she could ask during the meeting. Jane also writes a statement that describes how she wants Sally to respond at the end of the meeting. Jane decides she will use this statement to review the meeting after it is over.

... continued

Verbal communication

Verbal communication is any type of interaction that makes use of the spoken word to convey a message. Examples of verbal communication are giving and receiving information through:

- attending one-on-one meetings and group meetings
- providing training, coaching and mentoring
- using Skype
- making a presentation
- participating in formal or informal discussions
- giving verbal feedback
- counselling.

Nonverbal communication

Communicating a message through body language is referred to as nonverbal communication. It is often ambiguous, as it can have different meanings depending on the user's personality, background and culture. When your nonverbal signals match the words you are saying, they increase trust, clarity and rapport. Examples of nonverbal communication include:

- facial expressions and gestures
- how close we stand and how much eye contact we make
- posture
- touch
- how fast or how loud we talk and the tone of voice.

Choose a method of communication

Select the best method for communicating by evaluating each method against the specific requirements of the communication.

Use a set of criteria by which you can evaluate the methods.

The situation

Is the context a regular meeting, a report, a presentation, group training or counselling session? The context may clearly dictate the method of communicating, such as a verbal and electronic presentation; a written annual report; a demonstration using written documents, body language and verbal instructions; or a face-to-face private individual performance appraisal or counselling session.

There are other advantages to choosing written communication.

Advantages of written communication
Written communication can be a follow-up to verbal communication, to reinforce or confirm something.
If you want your message to be authoritative, putting it in writing can help.
Written communication is useful for sharing factual communication.
Written communication is useful for conveying the same information to a large number of people.
Written communication is useful as a reference; for example, if you are introducing new systems or procedures, providing written material means you have something to refer back to.

Practice task 5

Read the case study, then answer the questions that follow.

Case study

Matt arrives in the office early one morning. There are a number of issues with his team that he needs to deal with. Two of the team members had a disagreement in the team meeting yesterday that got quite heated. Some things were said that were inappropriate and they left the meeting feeling angry and upset. Matt knows that he has to take some action. He is new to the role of team leader and this will be the first time he must address a conflict situation.

1. What methods of communication should Matt use to address this conflict situation?

2. Explain why this method would be the most effective in meeting the requirements of the communication.

Effective listening as a solution to communication barriers

The ability to listen effectively greatly enhances the communication process and can help to minimise the impact of barriers. Listening effectively means you are listening to the explicit meaning of the words you hear, as well as implicit meanings, unspoken words and nonverbal cues.

Effective listening is often referred to as active listening, which means you make a conscious choice to listen to someone else so you can genuinely understand their point of view.

Most people listen with the intent to reply. As someone else is talking, they are formulating a response in their head. During this time the listener is not giving the sender their full attention. They are not tuned in to all the cues being sent. It is therefore possible to miss the real meaning of someone's message.

Improving your listening skills will minimise the impact of communication barriers on the success of the communication process.

Tips for active listening
• Let the other person know you are listening to them by using body language and other signs that acknowledge the speaker.
• Give the speaker your full attention.
• Put your distracting thoughts aside.
• Avoid being distracted by environmental factors.
• Reflect what the speaker has said by paraphrasing.
• Ask questions to clarify.
• Summarise the speaker's points periodically to show you have understood.
• Allow the speaker to finish their points before asking questions.

Follow organisational policies and procedures

It is important to understand the guidelines available for you to use to ensure any communication undertaken meets the organisation's standards, policies and procedures.

Here are some examples of typical workplace policies and procedures, and how they can be incorporated into the communication process.

| Policies and procedures and the communication process |
| --- |

Work health and safety

WHS procedures:

- state the legal requirement for employers to consult workers
- give steps to be taken to elect representatives and select the communication channels that will be used to consult employees.

Anti-discrimination

Anti-discrimination procedures:

- state the legal requirement for employers to protect people from harassment and discrimination on the basis of age, sex, gender, disability and race
- give steps to be taken to raise a grievance, and links to codes of conduct that describe how everyone will be treated with respect and professionalism.
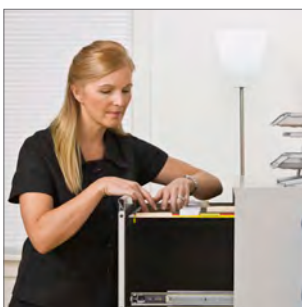
Privacy

Privacy procedures:

- state the legal requirements for employers to handle personal information appropriately
- give steps on how to ensure information is kept confidential and stored correctly.

Summary

1. Context in communication refers to the circumstances surrounding the message. Taking the time to identify the context helps to ensure your communication will be effective.

2. Different contexts can require you to communicate in different ways. To be an effective communicator you need to adapt your communication to suit the context.

3. It is very important to know your purpose and audience before communicating. This enables you to target your communication so it is easily received and understood.

4. Environmental and personnel factors can impact the success of the communication. You need to be aware of where the communication is going to happen, and take your perceptions and emotions into account when delivering the message.

5. Communication can either be written, verbal or nonverbal (body language). The methods you choose need to be suitable for the context.

6. By identifying potential barriers in each communication context you can minimise their impact.

7. It is important to take into account relevant business policies, procedures, regulations and legislation when taking part in any communication in the workplace.

Choose the appropriate communication media

Consider the context and purpose of your communication and the intended audience before choosing the communication media you are going to use. Individuals who use the appropriate communication media are effective communicators.

The following factors can help you to make the right choice of media.

Media richness	Richness is the media's ability to convey a message through more than one cue (visual, verbal and nonverbal) and to reproduce the information sent over it without loss or distortion. Media is also considered rich if it allows for immediate feedback. The richest media, therefore, is face-to-face communication.
	The leanest media does not provide the opportunity for feedback and is not personalised for the audience. It also generally takes a longer time to convey understanding. Examples of lean media are posters or unaddressed bulk emails.
	Generally speaking, you would use the richest media for more complex messages, to help communicate emotions and facilitate feedback. In contrast, leaner media is more suitable for sending simple, routine messages.
Message formality	our media choice can govern the style and tone of your message. The degree of formality of your message depends on the purpose of your message and the relationship you have with the audience.
	For example, a text message to a friend is less formal than a letter to an employer. Follow the organisation's policy for addressing people correctly according to their position and level of authority.
Media limitations	Every medium has its limitations. For example, although face-to-face communication is a rich media it can be restrictive. This is because the sender and receiver must be in the same place at the same time. Digital tools such as Skype can be used to overcome this barrier.
Sender intentions	What do you want the audience to think about you after they have received the communication? If your desired outcome is that the audience sees you as approachable, you may choose a different media than if you wanted the audience to see you as an authority.

Business email

Context: situations that require longer messages such as responding to a customer or team inquiry, collecting and providing feedback and giving instructions

Advantages: electronic records can be created; attachments can be included; and there is a record of date and time of message for follow-up

Business letter

Context: situations that require a formal response and a professional image such as introducing an organisation to new clients or responding to a customer complaint

Advantages: use of templates saves time; a style guide provides guidance on formatting and layout; and a written record can be retained and referred to by the recipient

Report

Context: situations that require research information to be presented, data to be analysed, proposals and recommendations to be made in a formal setting

Advantages: different software applications can be used to graphically present information; and the document is structured for ease of reference

Presentation

Context: situations that require verbal explanations combined with visual aids; for example, inducting new team members or introducing a new product

Advantages: verbal communication supported by written and visual communication; use of multimedia adds interest and variety; and the presenter can observe the audience response and modify accordingly

Effective listening techniques

Listening enables you to build productive relationships with others. Effective listening is a way to show respect for another person. Listening is about trying to understand how other people see situations and events so you can respond appropriately.

Active listening shows the person you value their view and respect their opinion. Listening is essential in gathering and providing sound information. It breaks down communication barriers, and establishes and maintains relationships.

Here are some effective listening techniques.

Face the speaker

Put aside papers and the phone, and look away from your computer screen and other distractions. Give the speaker your undivided attention.

Be attentive

Be present in the moment, and mentally screen out distractions such as background activity, noise and your own thoughts. Do not plan what you are going to say next while the other person is speaking.

Keep an open mind

Listen without judging or mentally criticising the things being said. Avoid jumping to conclusions.

Listen

You need to focus on what is being said. Let the words create a mental picture in your mind. If your thoughts start to wander, refocus immediately. Do not interrupt. Interrupting sends a message that you believe your view is more interesting, accurate and relevant. You need to remain tuned in to the other person until they finish what they have to say.

2C | Employ two-way processes to ensure a message is received, acknowledged, clarified and understood

Two-way communication means both parties transmit information. One person or group expresses an idea. The other person or group receives and understands the message. Two-way communication includes feedback from the receiver. This feedback information informs the sender that the message has been received as the sender intended.

Effective two-way communications is circular. The sender sends a message and at the same time pays close attention to the messages coming back to them. They use this information to adjust their communication as needed.

Communication is negotiated. The intent of both the sender and receiver is mutual understanding. Both sender and receiver listen to each other, gather information and are willing to make changes to ensure the other party understands. It is a reciprocal process, with both parties being prepared to give and take.

Communication responsibilities

As a workplace leader you need to be accountable for the success of your communication. You should have full control over your message, the communication channels you use, and the amount of time you allow for the receiver to clarify and confirm their understanding.

Check that you understand your communication responsibilities.

Communication responsibilities:

- Communicate clear instructions to team members.
- Listen to team members' feedback.
- Encourage open communication among team members.
- Strive for team consensus and win–win agreements.
- Communicate team views to upper management.
- Motivate and inspire the team.
- Provide opportunities for team members to clarify and confirm their understanding.
- Provide constructive feedback to the team on how it may improve.

Acknowledge a message

To acknowledge a message means you are allowing the other person to have their view and that you recognise and appreciate their perspective. After acknowledging a message you can respond appropriately. This process demonstrates your commitment to understanding the other person's point of view without judgment.

Example: use two-way processes

Simon asks Melissa to write a press release about a new product. Melissa nods and smiles. Simon takes this feedback as an indication that she understands his message. However, he decides he wants to double-check. He has had issues in the past with assuming people have understood, only to find out they have gone down a different track.

Simon continues the conversation by asking Melissa the following question: 'What ideas do you think should be included in the press release?'

Melissa responds with ideas that suit the correct product. Simon concludes the conversation with Melissa, knowing that she has understood his message.

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Practice task 10

Read the case study, then answer the questions that follow.

Case study

Jackson is part of a team investigating a new software program that his department is going to use for managing projects. He needs to get three quotes from different software companies. He receives one quote by email. He responds to the email by the end of the day. In his email, he thanks the company for the information and tells them he will get back to them within two weeks.

Jackson receives another quote over the phone. He concludes the call by summarising the information provided by the sales representative, asking them to confirm all the inclusions, and giving them a time frame for when he will let them know if the quote has been accepted.

The third quote is received in writing during a face-to-face meeting with a sales manager. Jackson notices an installation fee as well as an ongoing maintenance fee is included in the written quote. He asks the sales manager to clarify the charges. Jackson did not ask for this service to be included when he made his original inquiry. The sales manager tells Jackson he will prepare a new quote immediately so Jackson can present it with the other quotes.

1. Explain three feedback processes Jackson used.

Summary

1. To communicate respectfully means you are willing to show consideration and appreciation to the other person.

2. Effective listening is a way of showing respect to another person. It means you want to understand exactly what the other person means.

3. Effective two-way communication is circular. The sender sends a message while at the same time receiving and interpreting messages from the receiver.

4. Acknowledging a message demonstrates your commitment to understanding the other person's perspective.

5. Always clarify and confirm the message has been received and understood.

6. Use a variety of feedback methods to identify how successful your communication skills and processes are.

3A Maintain a record of communication process and outcomes in line with enterprise policy and procedures

Records of communication processes and outcomes provide you with a reference point to go back to when you are taking follow-up action. Rather than relying on memory, a written record provides a valid, reliable and acceptable representation of events and discussions. It is precise and easily retrieved by all relevant parties for future reference. Written records can help to build common understanding by clearing up any confusion.

Communication records may be kept to:

- satisfy legal requirements
- monitor productivity and projects
- make informed decisions about items such as pay rises and promotions
- manage the performance of employees
- record disciplinary action, including termination
- continuously improve the communication processes used.

What records are kept?

Records provide information that can be acted upon to improve the outcomes of the organisation at all levels. Here are some examples of the types of communication records kept and an explanation of their purpose.

Minutes of meetings

Minutes record main points of discussion and action to be taken, who is responsible and the time frames for the action to be completed.

Performance management

Performance appraisal records detail a person's performance discussion, future training and development to be undertaken, and career planning.

Example: maintain records of communication process and outcomes

Jeff's team meetings are held on the first Wednesday of each month. Each person in the team takes turns chairing the meeting and taking the minutes. Jeff provides training for all his team on minute taking. He provides the following template that meets the requirements of the records management policies and procedures.

Minutes of team meeting held on:

Location of meeting:

Chairperson:

Minute taker:

Present:

Apologies:

Topic:

- – Key points
- – Action required
- – Who by
- – Time line

All team members know that minutes need to be emailed to all team members by 5.00 pm the day after the meeting. A hard copy needs to be placed in the team meeting folder and an electronic copy filed on the intranet in a folder titled 'Team Meeting Minutes'. These minutes provide an effective written record of team activities, achievements, issues and concerns. They are often referred to when planning new projects.

Communicate follow-up actions to relevant people

Most formal workplace communication results in follow-up action being taken. Always follow up any communication you have made to ensure the process is finalised and outcomes are achieved. Identify people you need to contact; this may be to gather further information from them or to provide them with documentation such as results, minutes or reports.

Part of your responsibility and accountability as a team leader may be to inform others of the follow-up actions they need to take and then to monitor them to make sure the actions happen.
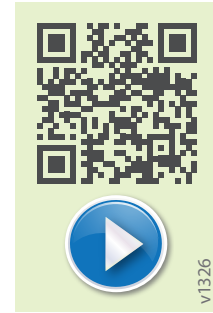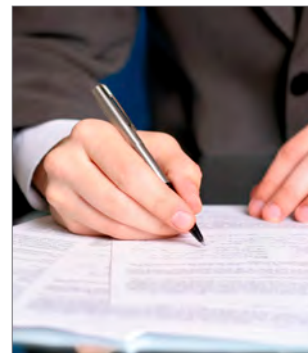
Communicate follow-up actions from meetings

Follow-up actions often result from meetings. Everyone involved needs to respect and observe the actions requested and the deadlines set in order to achieve the required results. All meeting documents, including agendas, minutes and supporting documents, should be stored together for future reference.

Follow-up actions can be documented in the minutes of the meeting. They may involve a range of tasks, such as gathering further information, sending information to specific people, arranging further meetings, collecting quotes or preparing a report.

Ensure the minutes are produced and distributed to all attendees the next day. Make sure you clearly identify who is responsible for what action as well as the deadline for completing the actions.

Team leaders need to check to ensure action is taking place as agreed. This could mean checking on progress between meetings by sending an email or making a phone call to individuals who agreed to take follow-up action.

Communicate follow-up actions using email

Email is a convenient way to communicate. Messages move quickly, and information can be readily shared in the body of the email or through attachments. Emails are also easily archived and searched. They can be sent to multiple people and groups for use as a collaboration or project management tool. Using emails means that a record of communication is maintained for future reference. Follow-up action can be documented in emails.

Written text can sound harsher than the spoken word. You should not write an email when you are upset; you may later regret it and there is no way to take it back.

3C | Identify and incorporate opportunities to improve leadership communication processes

Effective communicators own their messages. If there is a communication breakdown they take time to reflect on how they planned the communication, how much they knew about the audience, their choice of communication channel and follow up to see if there is any area they can improve on. If the communication process was successful, they identify what helped to make it successful and ensure they transfer this to similar communication situations.


Team leadership communication processes

Communication is one of the essential elements of leadership. Without effective and timely communication, leaders may struggle to complete tasks.

The goal of any leadership communication process is the acceptance and understanding of the sender's message by the receiver.

The leadership communication process uses the following model.

Sender → Message → Channel → Receiver

Feedback
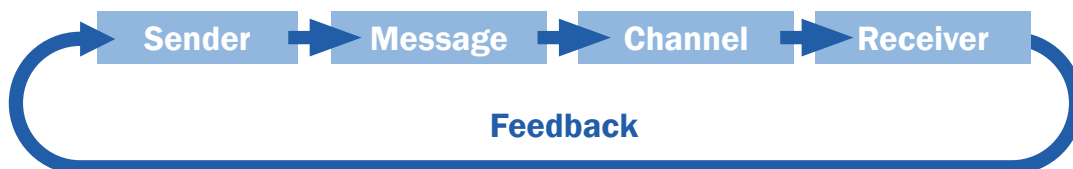
Sender – the person who intends to communicate

Message – the information to be sent to achieve an outcome

Channel – the chosen method of communication to transmit the message to the team

Receiver – the individual team member or group to whom the message is directed

Feedback – the way of knowing if the communication has been effective or not