

How to Effectively Communicate

Paul Newton



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Preface

Strong communication skills are arguably the most important attribute a manager can possess. This eBook explains the basic principles of communication so that you can create an open and honest communications environment in any situation.

You will learn how to:

- Determine your own preferred communication style
- Use this information to develop and enhance your communication skills
- Identify and respond appropriately to other people's emotions
- Apply the six components of the RESULT communications principle
- Overcome the most common barriers to successful communication

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Introduction

The ability to communicate is an essential life skill and one that can be continually developed. Even if you are a naturally good communicator, there are always opportunities and ways to enhance your communication skills.

Individuals who are good communicators find it easy to develop empathy and trust with others. These people adapt their style of communication to suit the audience and situation they are presented with.



Communication is a complex two-way process that can involve several iterations before mutual understanding is achieved. Communication takes place in many ways. You can communicate using words, symbols, pictures, graphics, voice, tone, facial expressions, clothing, and body language.

Most communication is a combination of these elements. By understanding how to use these elements effectively you can improve the way you communicate and achieve the best outcome for any situation.

Whether speaking formally or informally, addressing a meeting, or writing a report, the basic principles of communication are as follows.

Know your audience

Communication should always be packaged to suit the listener's level of understanding.

Know your purpose and topic

Make it clear whether you are delivering specific information, requesting information, or being social. Be aware of all the facts and details.

Anticipate objections and present a complete picture

Objections often arise due to misunderstandings. Communicate the benefits for both parties. Support your statements with evidence (e.g. statistics or testimonials).

Communicate a little at a time, then check the listener understands

Pause, ask questions, and give the listener an opportunity to ask questions.

Present information in several ways

What worked for one listener/reader may not work for another.

Develop practical, useful ways to get feedback

Feedback is the best way to evaluate the effectiveness of your communication.

In all areas of your life you will play many different roles in the communications process. At the highest level within this process you will either be the person instigating the exchange or the recipient of it.



Whichever one of these roles you play you will have a variety of options that will shape your communications and the level of preparation you are able to perform.

Those who instigate a communication will generally be performing one the following roles that will match the reason why the communication is taking place.

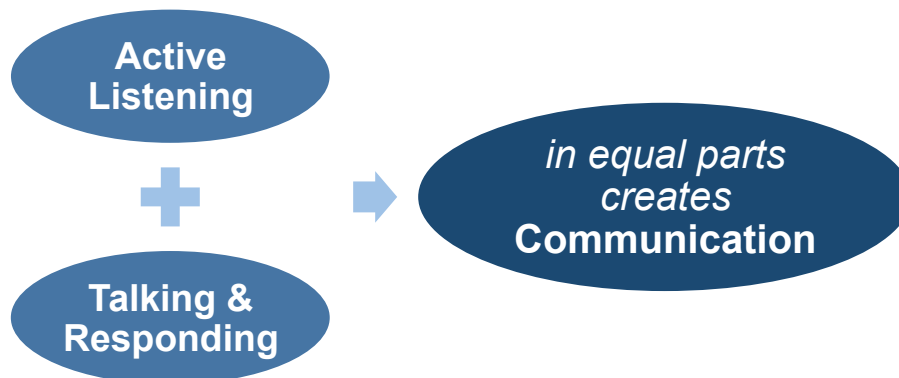
- **Communicator** – you have a need to inform an individual about some aspect of their work or you require them to take on a task you need to delegate. You might need to persuade someone or a group to accept the topic of your communication and its implications or repercussions. The communication may, or may not, have been expected and you will be able to establish this by listening and observing the recipients’ responses.
- **Investigator** – the reason for your communication is to find out some information or data that you need to make a decision. It can also be that you need to find out the latest status of a project or task.
- **Assessor** – you have to assess how well someone, or a group, is performing their role or task. In this role you may be responsible for gathering and collating the data you collect as part of this communication process.



If you are the individual receiving the communication then the role you will adopt during the exchange will fall into three broad categories:

- **Recipient** – you need the information or data contained in the communication to ensure that you can complete your task or perform your job. Much of the communication in this role is of a general nature and its purpose is to keep you informed of organizational changes and progress.
- **Participant** – this is the role you will often find yourself in. Your knowledge and skills are required in a discussion or decision-making process that has mutual benefit to those involved in the communication.
- **Antagonist** – your viewpoint may be contrary to that of other person or people in the exchange and you want to ensure that those involved in the communication are fully informed of all issues in order to ensure that a well-reasoned decision or judgment is the end result.

With each of these broad roles you will alter your behaviors and method of communicating to suit the environment and circumstance. But whichever high-level role you find yourself performing you will also need to actively listen to the whole of the two-way exchange.



An important skill that all good communicators possess is their ability to actively listen. Developing the skill of actively listening during conversations enables you to avoid misunderstandings, confusion, and misinterpretations. It also ensures that you are always looking at the ‘big picture’ when communicating.

Active listening is explained in detail in the eBook ‘Active Listening,’ which you can download free from www.free-management-ebooks.com.

Key Points

- Communication is a complex two-way process that can involve several iterations before mutual understanding is achieved.
- Active listening enables you to avoid misunderstandings, confusion, and misinterpretations.

1 Communication Styles

The ability to communicate is an essential life skill and everyone has their own style that they naturally adapt and develop to suit the different environments they operate in. Our need to educate, inform, persuade, or entertain drives our communications.

Each person’s communication style is a unique combination of their own innate skills and those learnt both formally and through experience. What makes some people better than others at communicating is their ability to adapt their style to suit the message, environment, and exchange.



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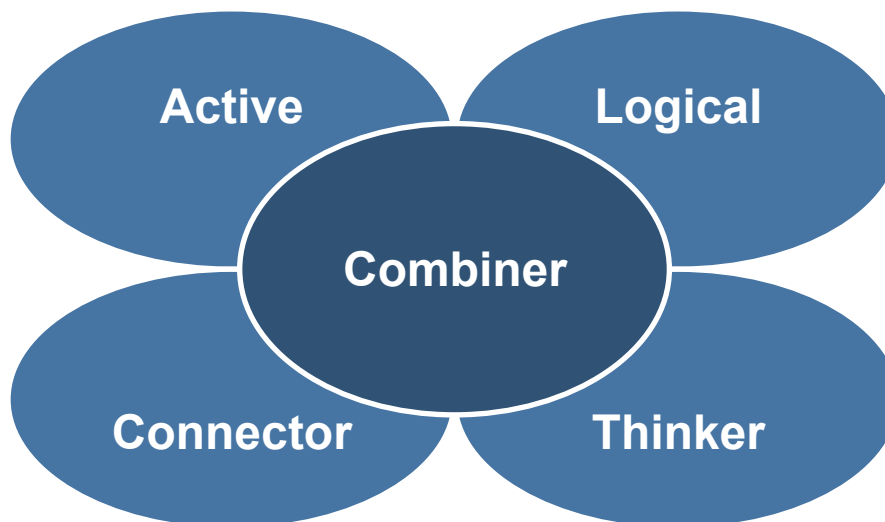


Whilst individuals may favor a particular way of communicating, they can alter their behavior to other communication styles if necessary to suit a particular situation. This flexibility helps them to come across as knowledgeable, confident, and empathetic.

There are four basic styles of communication, with a fifth being a combination of two or more of the four. Each of the four styles describes how you act in the majority of your communications. For example, do you usually:

- Take an active role in the communications?
- Connect and empathize with others?
- Take time to think and respond?
- Follow a logical path?

Or do you find that you usually use a combination of the four?



To discover which is your favored way to communicate read the following statements objectively and honestly. Highlight those that you feel best describes *how you like* to behave when communicating with others.

Do not try to relate them to any situation, just consider if it describes your natural feelings when communicating. The more honest you are in your selections the better you will know how you really communicate.

Statements to Identify your preferred Communication Style
<p style="text-align: center;">Active</p> <p>When I'm talking I tend to miss others' reactions because I'm so involved. I can express myself clearly. I interrupt a speaker if I disagree with what they are saying. I am happy to select a topic and pace for a discussion. I tend to talk more than I listen. I'm happy to talk or discuss a topic whilst doing something else. Talking about a topic is preferable to thinking about it. If my interest is not engaged I will try to end or divert the discussion. I make sure my views are heard even if it means interrupting. I find my attention drifting if I get bored.</p>
<p style="text-align: center;">Logical</p> <p>I prefer to anticipate or deal with potential areas of confusion or conflict up front. My written communications get straight to the point. When I'm interrupted I lose my train of thought and find it hard to regain my flow. I do not like it when discussions stray from the point. I am happiest when things are written down. I take time to select the best way to communicate my message – face-to-face, call, memo, email, etc. I am happiest when meetings follow a timed agenda. I like to have 'to do' lists so I can cross things off as they're done. Conflict in the workplace is natural and I deal with it constructively.</p>
<p style="text-align: center;">Connector</p> <p>Shifting off topic does not bother me. I frequently repeat statements to check my understanding is correct. I am aware of and watch others' body language when talking. I recognize if I am not being understood. I seek others' contributions by asking relevant questions. I am happy to listen to others rather than having to talk. I watch others and alter my pace or language – for example, to ensure they understand what I'm saying. I can easily appreciate another's viewpoint. I will write several drafts when communicating important or sensitive information.</p>
<p style="text-align: center;">Thinker</p> <p>I consider the best way to present my views so others are receptive. I prefer to focus on facts and information. I express my viewpoint and ideas using charts and diagrams. I like to be in control of my gestures and posture. I take care to select the right words or phrases. I like to receive information that helps me to create or find a resolution. I find it difficult to know how best to deal with people when they become emotional. If I don't understand something I prefer to figure it out later rather than speak up. I find it hard to express in words my feelings and thoughts.</p>
<p>Combiner</p> <p>Similar number of highlights in each of the four sections above.</p>

Once you have read through all the statements have a look at the number of highlights you have in each section. If one section dominates the highlights then this is your natural style of communication and will be how you conduct the majority of your exchanges.

If there are a similar number of highlights in each section then you are a ‘Combiner’ – that is, an individual who uses a variety of communication styles, happily changing between them to achieve their objective.

Once you have determined your favored style of communication you must ask yourself:

1. Does your communication behavior match that of your organization’s style of communication? *If not, what can you do to make them more compatible?*
2. Is this the most effective style of communication for your role? *If not, which style best suits your role? Can you learn to adjust your communications style?*
3. Are your current communication skills likely to enhance your career? *If not, how can you develop them?*

Armed with the answers to these questions you will be able to determine how much correlation your current communication skills have with your role and organization. This will help you identify the best ways to develop these gaps in your communication skills to suit any situation you encounter.

The more you are able to adapt your style to suit the situation and environment the more effective your communications will be. This is the skill that ‘combiner’ communicators display in all their exchanges.

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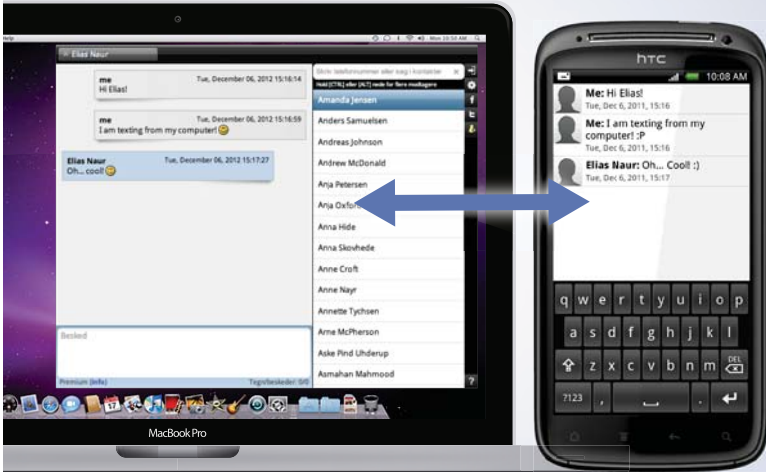
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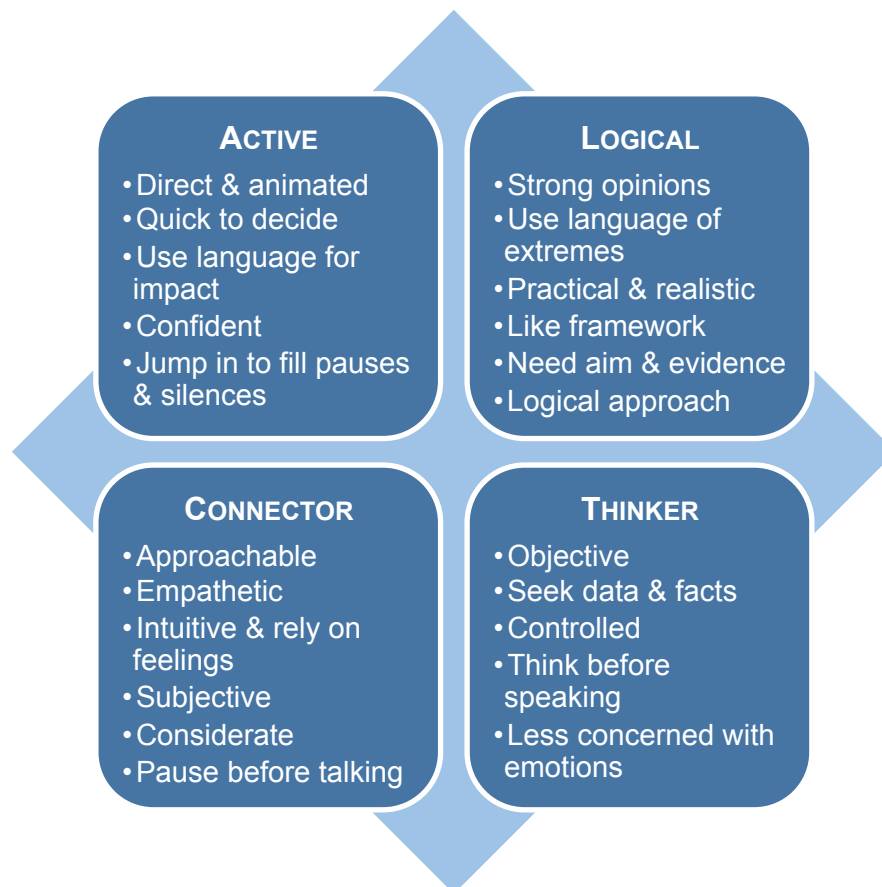
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One of the most effective ways to develop and enhance your communication skills is to actively seek new opportunities that test your ability to adapt and push the boundaries of your usual style. The more you communicate in a wide variety of situations the greater your ability to deal with any communications environments regardless of the context or circumstances.



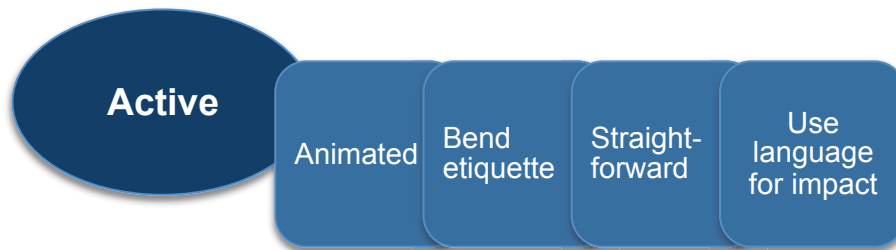
Each of the communication styles has its own characteristics as shown in the diagram. It is useful to be aware of these for two important reasons. Firstly, it helps you to appreciate how others might perceive you in an exchange. Secondly, you will be able to identify the same attributes in those you communicate with.

1.1 Characteristics of Communication Styles

'Active' Communicators

'Active' communicators come across as direct and confident in discussions, regardless of the extent of their knowledge on the subject. They will quickly state their point, summarize discussions, and make decisions. They don't like to be interrupted or excluded and will fill any silences or pauses.

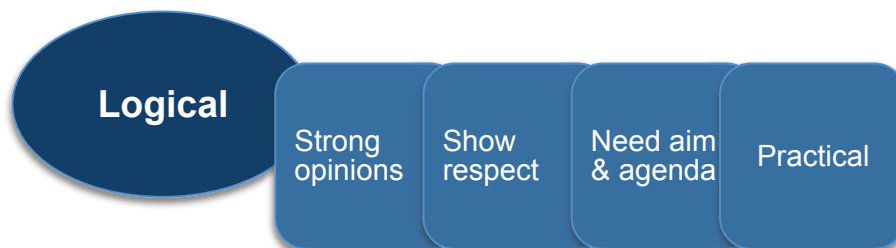
Active communicators are individuals whose words and body language are expressive. The words they use in conversations will make an impact and may often bend the rules of etiquette.



You may recognize members of your team who act this way and you may be aware that they have a tendency to talk things up. Their ability to listen to others is often overshadowed by their enthusiasm for talking and being part of the discussion.

'Logical' Communicators

There are other individuals who, like Active communicators, express their opinions with conviction, but who otherwise have quite different attributes. 'Logical' communicators can be recognized by their respectful and practical manner. You can often identify these individuals by their tendency to use their own past experiences to inform them about how current issues should be dealt with.



Logical communicators like a logical framework for their communications, i.e. timed agendas that are adhered to, and a stated aim. They prefer to see supporting written evidence and tend to judge people by how they deliver what they say they will do.

You will also hear Logical communicators frequently using language of extremes. For example:

- *Users always do...*
- *You'll never get them to accept...*

'Connector' Communicators

There are others within your team that can be singled out because they always try to prevent discussions becoming confrontational and have a need to involve everyone. These individuals are 'Connector' communicators, born diplomats who are tactful and considerate of others in the discussion and of their point of view.

Their style of communication makes them approachable and empathetic. They often encourage general discussions at the start of a meeting so that they can gain an understanding of each person.



You can see that these individuals with their intuitive ways and affinity with the feelings of others will irritate the Logical and Active communicators. But Connectors are good to have in discussions because they will carefully consider an issue before voicing their opinion, thereby often bringing balance into discussions.

‘Thinker’ Communicators

The trait of thinking before speaking is a characteristic Connectors share with ‘Thinker’ communicators.

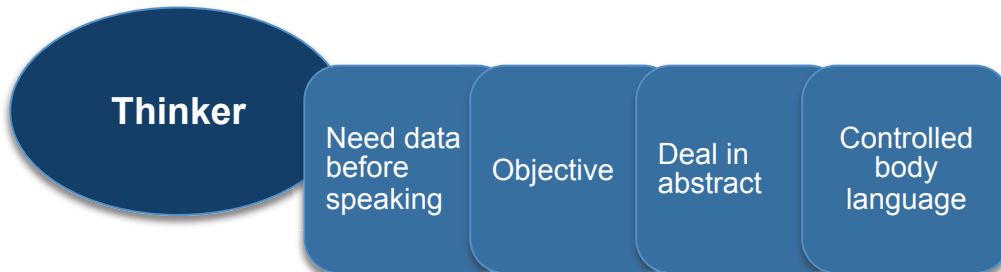
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But there the similarities end. Thinker communicators will be objective, while Connectors tend to be subjective. Those who have a Thinker communications style seek out facts and figures rather than feelings to support what they say. Without such supporting evidence such individuals are reluctant to speak. They will portray controlled body language throughout conversations whether they are talking or listening.

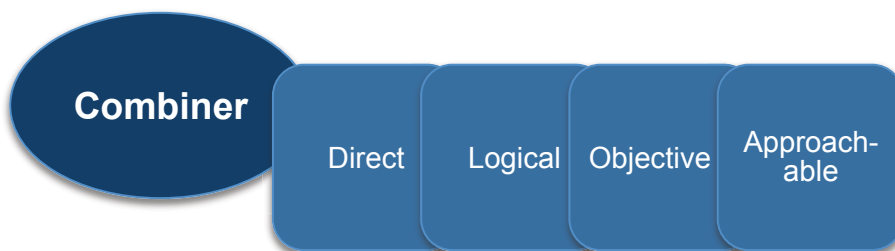


You can recognize the Thinkers in your team because they will be individuals who are happy to talk about abstract ideas and strategies. Their communications are most effective in small rather than large groups.

‘Combiner’ Communicators

The characteristics of the ‘Combiner’ communicators mean that they are able to adapt themselves to suit their audience. They can be objective or direct. They can lead discussions and draw in contributions from others.

Such individuals show respect to others and have the ability to draw together disparate conversations into a coherent argument that aids decision-making. They are comfortable with using facts as well as relying on their intuition. Their adaptability and skills in reading and matching situations make them excel when communicating.



Remember, even Combiners have a preferred style, so the best way to emulate them is to watch how these individuals adapt their natural communication style. These observations will help you to understand how they use their body language, words, and behaviors to alter their style of communication.

This knowledge of how others communicate will help you to develop your own communications skills. As with body language, being able to ‘mirror’ the other person’s communications style will create a positive atmosphere for the exchange to take place in.

This does not mean you have to only communicate in this style. But by starting in a style and manner similar to the other member of the exchange you create a positive environment you can both feel comfortable in. This will make your objective easier to attain.

Key Points

- Each person’s communication style is a unique combination of their own innate skills and those learnt both formally and through experience.
- Most people have a preferred style or a combination of styles that they use in the majority of their communications.
- ‘Active’ communicators will come across as direct and confident in discussions.
- ‘Logical’ communicators are respectful and practical. They tend to draw on their own past experiences in making decisions.
- ‘Connector’ communicators are tactful and considerate of others in the discussion and of their point of view.
- ‘Thinker’ communicators prefer facts and figures rather than feelings to support what they say, and are reluctant to speak without supporting evidence.
- A ‘Combiner’ can mix and match all four of the previously described styles in order to lead discussions, draw in contributions from others, and present a coherent argument that aids informed decision-making.



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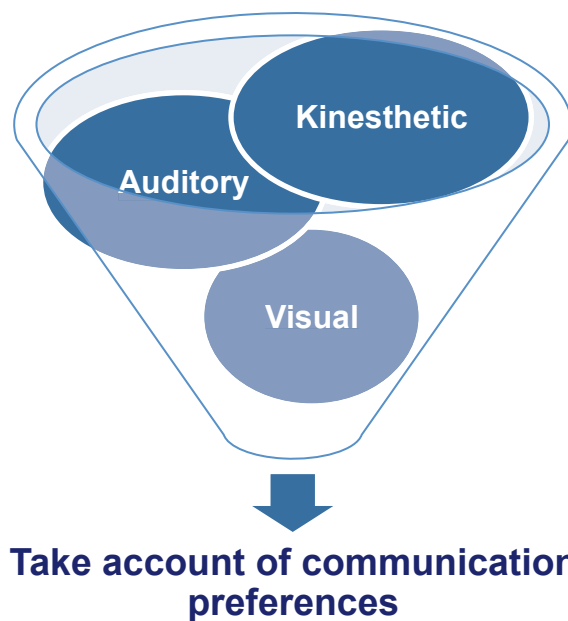
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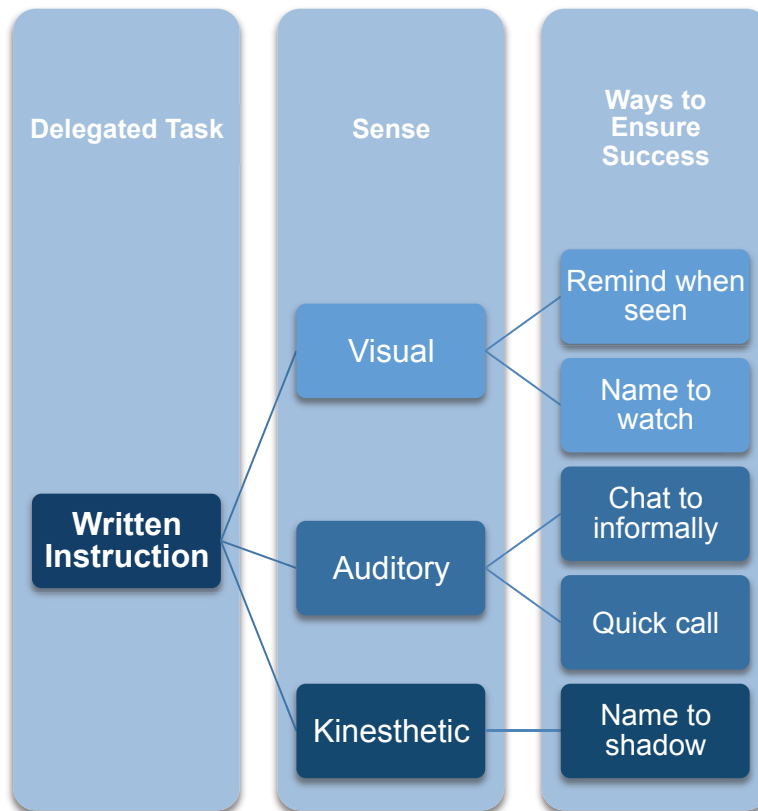
2 Perceptual Preferences

You also need to be conscious of the fact that different people prefer to receive information in different ways. That is, they may be naturally visual, auditory, or kinesthetic communicators. This aspect of communication is especially important when you are delegating a task. People who are 'Visual' retain information best when shown what is required. 'Auditory' individuals will grasp what you mean when they are verbally told. 'Kinesthetic' people prefer to be given a demonstration of what is needed.



These categories can also be dependent on the type of task you are asking someone to perform. For example, if a team member is having difficulty with something, then it may be beneficial to use another way of getting the information across, rather than providing more detail using the same communication mode.

This doesn't mean you need to repeat your instruction in three different ways, but you may benefit from using a supplementary form of communication to ensure your message is correctly interpreted.



For example, in an email you could:

- Remind the person of when they saw you or another perform the task. Or give the name of someone who performs the task – Visual
- Call them up to run through the instructions and give them the opportunity to ask questions – Auditory
- Give them the name of someone they can shadow – Kinesthetic.

Choosing the best way to inform or feed back to a member of your team should also take into account this aspect of communication.

- **Visual People** – will put into pictures what they read, hear, or are told.
- **Auditory People** – will use your tone, pitch, and other para-verbal signals to interpret meaning. They struggle to take in what they read unless it is supported by what they hear.
- **Kinesthetic People** – will remember what was done rather than what was said. They are happy to be moving or making contact when communicating.

By communicating in a way that correlates with the individual's innate preferences you will ensure that your message is accurately received and interpreted. You should gather this knowledge as you observe your team perform their tasks and record how well they achieve their objectives.

The key to successful communications and delegation is that you retain control but give the individual the correct tools and support to perform the task. Your role is to focus on the required result and to give constructive feedback when monitoring indicates that more direction is needed.

Key Points

- People may be naturally visual, auditory, or kinesthetic communicators.
- Using a supplementary form of communication can help your message to be correctly interpreted.
- Visual people put into pictures what they read, hear, or are told.
- Auditory people may struggle to take in what they read unless it is supported by what they hear.
- Kinesthetic people remember what was done rather than what was said.
- Communicating in a way that correlates with the individual's innate preferences will improve the chances that your message is accurately received and interpreted.



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3 Attitudes to Communications

Effective communication depends on your ability to read the attitude of the other person or group. This is something that can be picked up from the behavior you see and will reflect their emotions and feelings towards the communication.

The emotions you identify throughout your communication will alert you to any need to alter your communication style to suit that emotion being displayed. This is important whether you communicating at work or in your personal life.

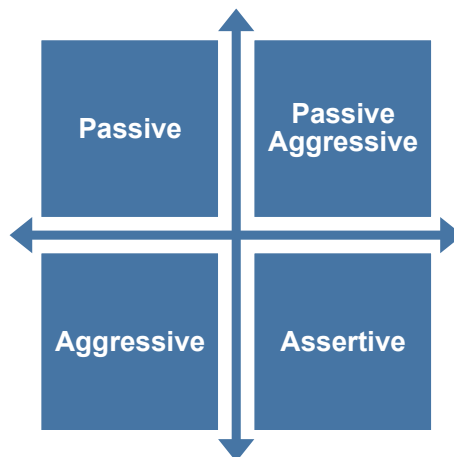
Being able to adapt your communication style will aid you in achieving your objective. There are four types of attitudes towards communication:

- Passive
- Passive Aggressive
- Aggressive
- Assertive

Passive Attitude

Firstly, there is the 'Passive' communications attitude. This best describes someone who tends to remain silent and go along with other people's views and opinions, even if they disagree with them.

You may recognize this individual within your team or department and have thought that they were uninterested in the discussion so did not ask for their views. Another possibility is that they are a Thinker communicator who is hesitant to join in because they lack the information to support their views. By training your observation and listening techniques to pick up on such nuances you will be able to greatly improve the effectiveness of your communication.



Passive Aggressive Attitude

The second communication attitude is known as 'Passive Aggressive.' You will be able to identify such individuals in your discussions because they are the ones who use their body language or tone of voice to gain control over people or situations.

For example, they may use sarcasm to subtly disrupt proceedings and manipulate a discussion to their viewpoint without being confrontational. When you see this happening you will need to regain control of the conversation and create a more positive and effective atmosphere so that you can attain your objective.

This may be something an Active communicator does to keep the discussion moving along at their own pace. It is also a way someone who is a Connector may respond if they feel people's feelings are being overlooked or ignored.

Aggressive Attitude

The next communication attitude is called 'Aggressive.' This behavior, if not brought swiftly under control, is very disruptive and destructive. This attitude describes a one-way style of communication as the person is not listening to or acknowledging anyone else in the exchange.



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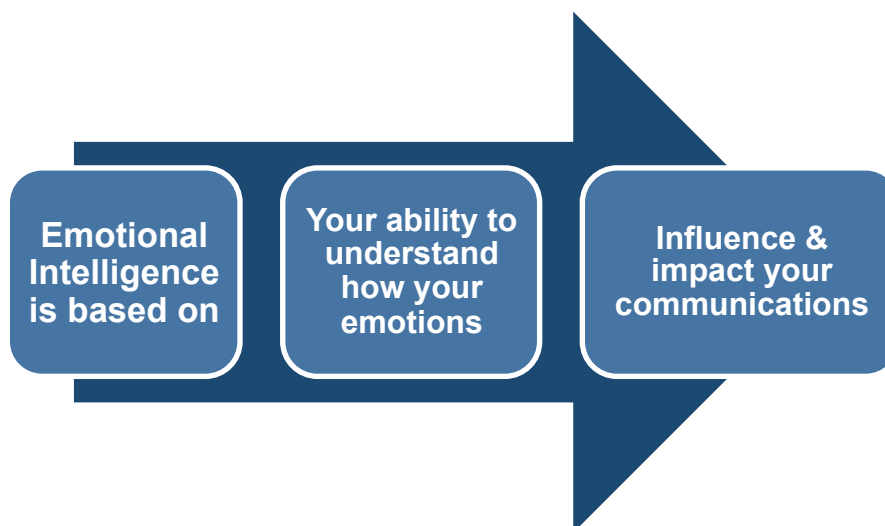
You will be able to recognize this sort of person because they will be expressing their views strongly. They will want to control the exchange so that they can achieve their own ends. Such individuals often display body language that is dismissive or threatening.

Assertive Attitude

The fourth communications attitude, known as 'Assertive,' is the one you and others in the exchange need to adopt in order to communicate successfully. This attitude creates an environment of honest and open communications where people are able to express their beliefs and views.

This attitude encourages people to feel comfortable expressing themselves because they know that opinions will be listened to and respected whether or not they are agreed with.

In your management role you should always display an assertive attitude. The skill is learning to adapt what you say during the exchange so that you efficiently achieve your objective without alienating anyone.



This relies on your emotional intelligence, which can be defined as your ability to control and manage your own emotions and to understand those of others. It is described in detail in the eBook 'What is Emotional Intelligence,' Which you can read on [bookboon.com Premium](https://bookboon.com/Premium).

Your ability to identify and respond appropriately to other people's emotions is reflected in your capacity to build rapport, empathy, and relationships. Those who have excellent interpersonal skills and emotional intelligence tend to be more successful and productive.

The first step you can take to achieve this is to have a clear understanding of how your own emotions influence and impact your effectiveness in communicating. Your aim is to ensure that your emotions inform your communications rather than hijack or sabotage them.

Key Points

- Effective communication depends on your ability to read the attitude of the other person or group.
- There are four types of attitude: Passive, Passive Aggressive, Aggressive, and Assertive.
- 'Passive' describes someone who tends to remain silent and go along with other people's views and opinions, even if they disagree with them.
- 'Passive Aggressive' describes someone who uses a mixture of body language, para-verbal signals, and sarcasm to undermine honest communication.
- 'Aggressive' describes someone who is not listening to or acknowledging anyone else in the exchange.
- 'Assertive' describes someone who is honest and open in their communications and allows others to express their views.
- Your own emotions and your awareness of others' emotions should inform your communications rather than hijack or sabotage them.

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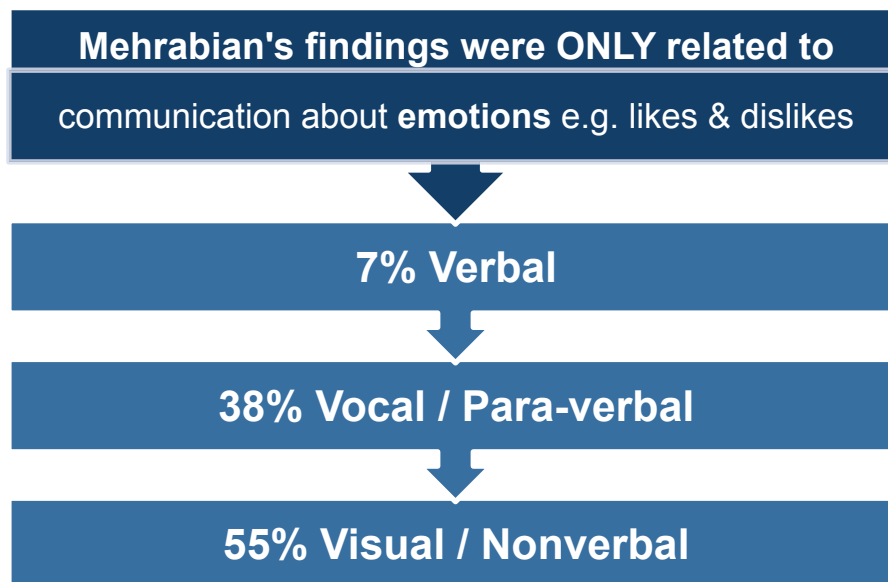
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4 Communication Research

There is a whole industry built on helping you to become a better communicator. Unfortunately, some of what is written about this topic is rather misleading. For example, many people have misinterpreted and misquoted the findings of Albert Mehrabian's research, which created the '7%-38%-55% rule' or the '3 V's.'



Mehrabian's research, conducted in 1967, was concerned with the relative importance of verbal and nonverbal signals when communicating feelings and attitudes, rather than general everyday or workplace communications. However, it has been cited as applying to all forms of communications and has been interpreted as stating that over 80 percent of all communications is nonverbal.

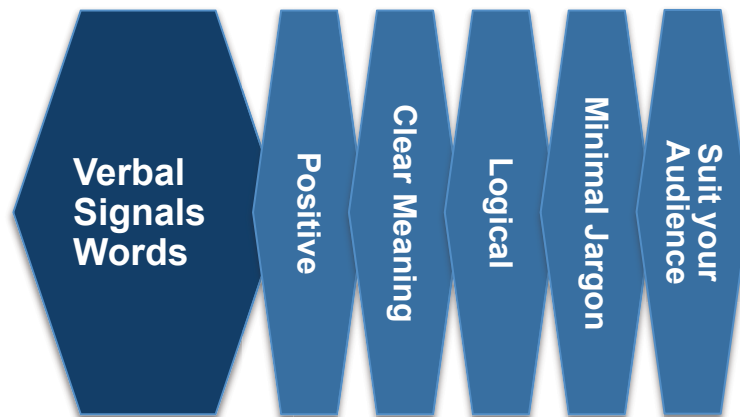
This misinterpretation of Mehrabian's findings has been repeated so many times that it has become widely believed that nonverbal elements are more important than the actual words used to communicate a message. This is simply not true in the case of most workplace communication.

The ability to explain and get across complex ideas, messages, and instructions is paramount for a manager. Using all the three types of signals – verbal, para-verbal, and nonverbal – to ensure that your message is comprehended and received in a positive way is an essential aspect of your communications skills.

4.1.1 Verbal Signals

You should not underestimate the impact of the spoken or written word. How you phrase your message and the actual words used can totally alter the meaning of your message.

In your management role you need to express your requirements, approach, ideas, and strategies clearly so all who hear understand. In the majority of cases you will want to use positive language, telling people what you want or can be done, rather than what you don't want or cannot be done.



It is important to remember when selecting your words to make sure that your choice portrays the level of authority and respect your communication requires. It is essential that your words convey the same meaning to all your audience regardless of their level of knowledge.

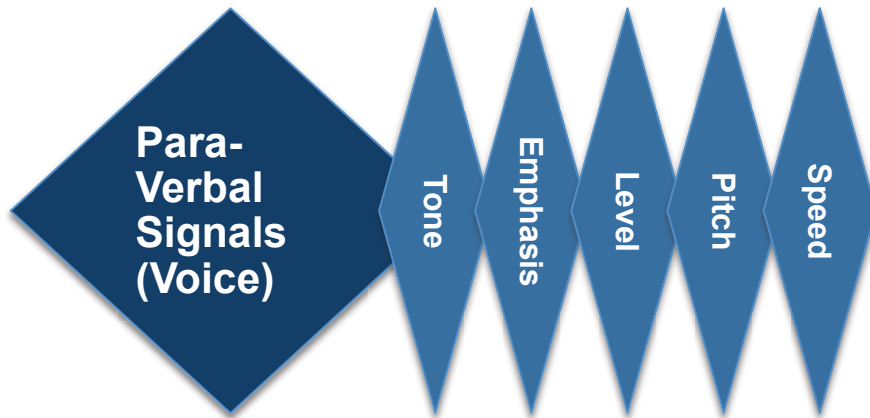
Be mindful of jargon, and when to use it in your communications. Also your words need to present a logical description of the action you need to take place to achieve your objective or perform your role. You want the words to appear natural and appropriate to the situation.

The importance of your words increases tenfold when you are communicating in writing. This is because your reader or audience only has the words in front of them to ascertain your meaning and the required action. Making sure your grammar and spelling are correct is essential in this type of communication.

4.1.2 Para-Verbal Signals

The next level of signals you give to those you speak to are the para-verbal or vocal signals. These are important aspects because often without realizing it you will convey meaning in *how* you deliver what you say.

These signals include such things as the tone you use when speaking. Does your voice sound as if you are pleading with your team to perform their tasks? Or does it come across as a suitably authoritative request for information about how the task is progressing?



The pitch and volume of your voice also convey meaning to your audience. For your message to be effective these must match your words. If your voice is naturally quiet or soft you will have to develop your delivery technique so that your voice has the appropriate ring of authority for the situation.

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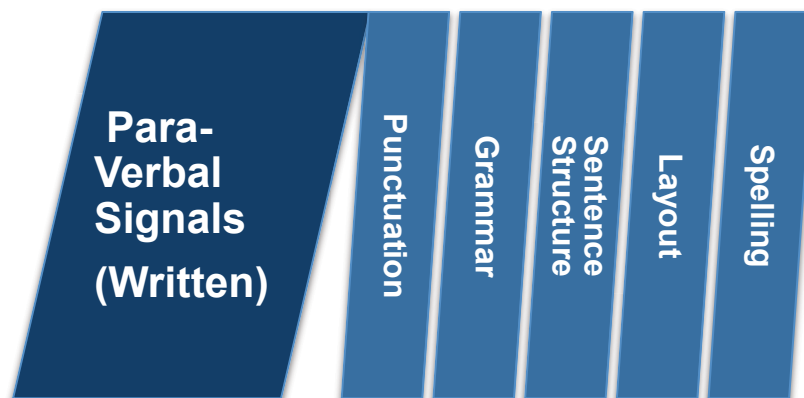


It is this group of signals that will convey your exact meaning or help you to modify it to suit your audience or circumstances. They also convey your attitude and emotion towards the communication. When you feel strongly about an issue you may find that your voice rises, but this level and pitch may not reflect the right attitude for your communication.

Shouting at someone who isn't doing what you want them to do is not the way to correct such behavior. You may need to offer further instructions or information so that they review how they are conducting the task. You may need to clarify that their understanding of what you want done matches what you want them to do.

Your dominant emotion when communicating is easily discernible in the speed of your delivery. Those who are nervous or anxious will tend to talk more quickly, often giving the impression of a lack of confidence or knowledge. Being able to control your emotions when communicating indicates an effective communicator. Your ability to do this relates to your level of emotional intelligence.

Being able to influence the para-verbal signals you use when communicating is a significant skill, and directly relates to how effective your communications are. You will need to focus on this area when developing your communication skills.



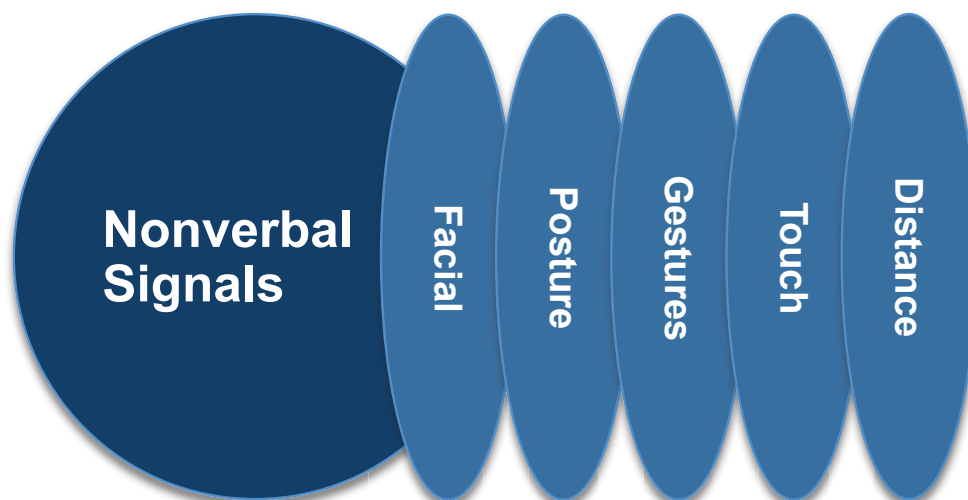
In writing, the para-verbal signals are communicated by your use of punctuation, grammar, spelling, and the structure of your sentences. Your para-verbal abilities must reflect your level of authority. Poorly spelt or phrased sentences can be as detrimental to the communication of your message as shouting or excessive use of jargon.

The use of elements such as bullets, capitalization, bold, etc. in the layout of your document allows you to emphasize key points. Presenting your argument in a logical manner is also a significant factor in communicating well in writing.

4.1.3 Nonverbal Signals

This group of signals, often referred to as body language, plays a key role in how effective your communications will be, but it must not be your sole focus. Each of the three signal areas has a role to play in how effective your communications are, and the proportion assigned to each will vary according to the circumstances of each exchange.

Your nonverbal signals, or body language, provide your audience with the clues they will use to determine your attitude and feelings towards the communication. These include such things as your posture, facial expressions, and gestures.



It is well known that your facial expressions reveal your true emotion in a situation. Your eyes and lips will reflect how you feeling about an exchange. Different cultures focus on different aspects of the face when assessing the emotional reaction of the person they are speaking to.

These cultural differences are also noticeable in the gestures and element of touch used in an exchange. People from the southern Mediterranean, for example, are known to be more expressive in their hand and arm gestures than many other cultures.

They also are quite tactile when communicating and may perceive you as being less approachable or more authoritarian in your communications if you avoid touching. If you do not reciprocate in a way that reflects the behavior of the person you are communicating with, the emphasis or empathy you want to express may be misinterpreted.

When you are communicating you need to be conscious of the posture you adopt. This is because it informs those involved in the exchange how attentive you are and how interested you are in what is being said.

An open posture generally shows you are more supportive of what is being said than a closed one. But if your posture appears too relaxed, and you maintain little eye contact, you may portray the attitude of someone uninterested in the topic.

The other aspect posture communicates during an exchange is how comfortable the other person is with the distance there is between you. Each individual's level of personal space is unique and is a reflection of their culture and character.

You need to quickly pick up on such signals when communicating and if you are too close to the other person then you need to subtly move away from them until you see them relax.

If you are observing a conversation you will also be able to identify how close or personal the relationship between these individuals is from the distance they stand or sit apart. To be an effective communicator you need to be aware of these unconscious and unintentional nonverbal signals and respond accordingly in order to achieve your objective.

The more experience you have of communicating in all sorts of situations – at work, at home, formally, informally, with friends, etc. – the larger your own personal library of such signals will be. It is important to remember that many of your own and others' nonverbal signals are intuitive and as such are hard to control.

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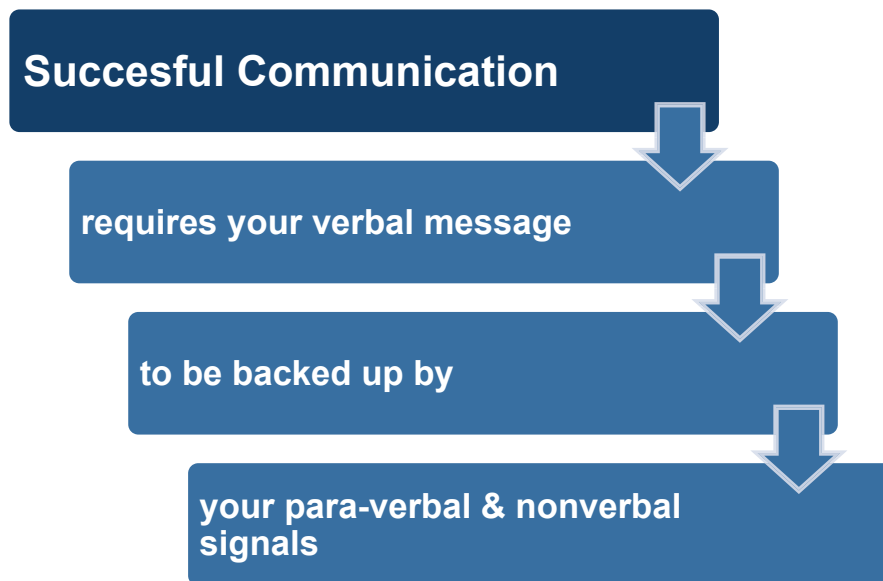
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The more you are able to master your own emotions during communications the more effective you will be and the more aware you will be of your own nonverbal signals and how they could be interpreted. The more you actively observe those you communicate with the greater your skill will become in ensuring that your words have a 'perfect' correlation with your para-verbal and nonverbal signals.

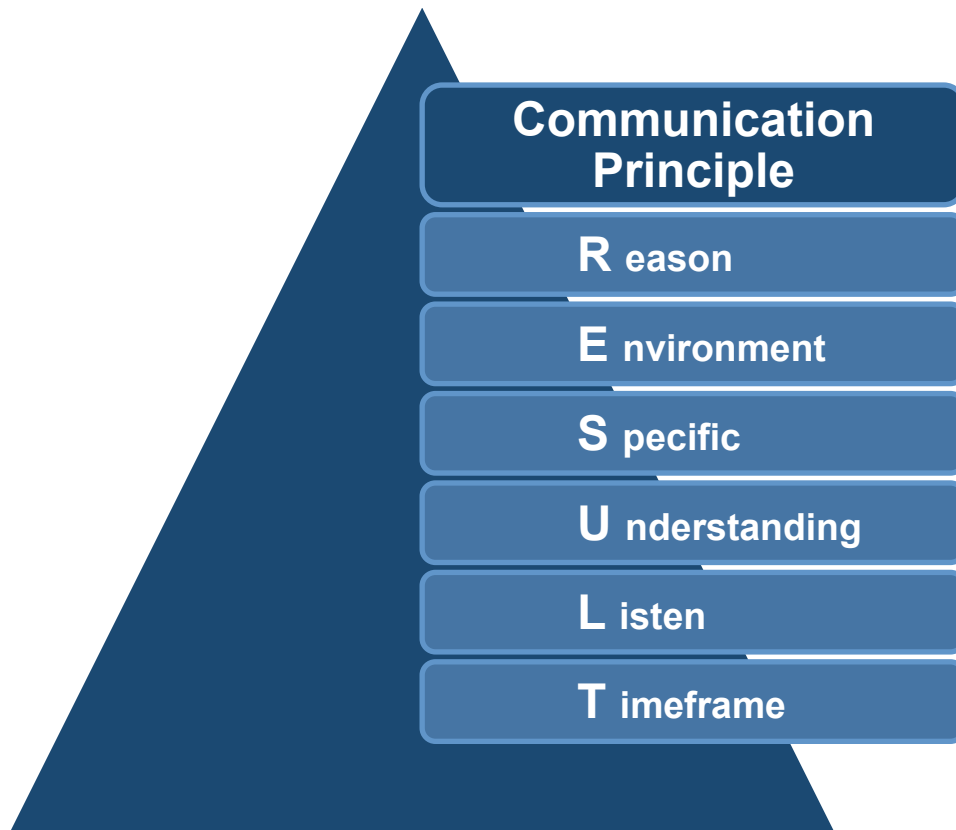
Whilst it is important to be aware of the nonverbal signs people exhibit during this process, using and developing your emotional intelligence is far more beneficial than worrying unnecessarily about decoding all of the subtleties of people's body language.

Key Points

- One of the most-cited pieces of research into communication – [Albert Mehrabian's '7%-38%-55% rule'](#) – does NOT apply to workplace communication.
- The words you use are the most important part of a workplace communication and you should choose them carefully.
- You must make sure that your message is backed up by the appropriate para-verbal and nonverbal signals.

5 Using the RESULT Principle

This tool can help you to improve your communication skills and become an effective communicator regardless of the situation you are in. The six components of the RESULT principle are:



5.1.1 Reason

All communication must be for a reason and the most effective dialogues will have a sole purpose or objective that the instigator wants to achieve as a result of the communication. The more thought you put into why you want to open up this process the more objective and focused your purpose will be.

The most productive communications have a single objective ensuring clarity and ease of comprehension. Any conversation, discussion, or meeting can have many exchanges but focusing on a single objective will ensure your success.

Once you have established the reason why you want or need to communicate you can structure the format of your message according to the principle's other components.

5.1.2 Environment

In your management role you will find yourself needing to communicate in a wide variety of situations – for example, with your team, colleagues, management, stakeholders, suppliers, etc. For your communications to be effective it is essential that you define the nature of each situation and adapt your message to fit what you see.

Is the environment a positive or negative one? Are the individuals reacting to events or being proactive? Is there conflict, aggression, dissension, or apathy? The questions are endless, but by asking just a few simple questions you will gather the necessary intelligence to communicate effectively. This preparation enables you to adopt the best style of communication to suit your approach and prepare for potential arguments or problems.

5.1.3 Specific

Having defined your reason for communicating and the type of environment it will take place in you must now specify exactly what it is you want or need from the other person. You must make sure that you have any supporting information, background, or data that guarantees that your message and exchange will have clarity.

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In some contexts you will need to break down your supporting information into manageable chunks. For example, if you have to report on the progress of an event or project you will have to adjust your message according to the specific audience:

- Executives want to hear financial and business aspects
- Users will want to hear how it is progressing
- Project members want or need to know how well each phase or individual process is going in comparison to the plan
- Stakeholders want to know that business needs are being met.

Being specific is not just related to the message itself; it is also about who needs to be informed. Many people gloss over this aspect of communication and cause themselves problems by sending inappropriate messages to the wrong audience, resulting in unnecessary interruptions and diversions.

If you select *only* those who have a *real need* to know the contents of the message you will have more effective communications. Technology such as emails and texts make it all too easy to copy in unnecessary and inappropriate people. Lead by your own example and you will create an open and honest communications culture.

5.1.4 Understanding

Whatever form of communication you need to conduct, an essential part of the process is ensuring that the recipient actually understands correctly the message you want to give them. You also want to be sure that resulting action by an individual or group is what you want and expect so that you achieve your communication objective.

You can't afford to make any assumptions: you need to get confirmation from the recipient that they have the same understanding as you about what a situation may be and what the required action plan is. It is vital that you remember that comprehension is a two-way process. Not only do you need to know that others in the communication process understand you, but you also need to confirm that you have understood what they have told you.

5.1.5 Listen

You will only gain this level of 'true' understanding if you actively listen to what is being said and observe the behaviors of those involved in the communication. Make sure that your own verbal and nonverbal communications convey the message you want.

Remember, use your observation skills throughout the exchange to gauge the attitude and acceptance of your audience. Ensure that you are totally focused on what is being said and feed back your own understanding of what you are being told.

If you do this you will avoid any unnecessary confusion and misinterpretations that often occur when someone does not take the time to listen properly.

5.1.6 Timeframe

The final aspect of the RESULT principle is concerned with the amount of time you have to prepare for and conduct the actual communication. Not all exchanges occur in situations where you have all the time you want.

Frequently you will find that the time you have to prepare is very limited and you will have to adjust your preparation to fit what time you have at your disposal. However much time you have, make sure that you use it effectively by following these principles. The better prepared you are the more effective and productive your communications will be.

Key Points

- The RESULT principle can help you to improve your communication skills.
- The acronym stands for Reason, Environment, Specific, Understanding, Listen, and Timeframe.



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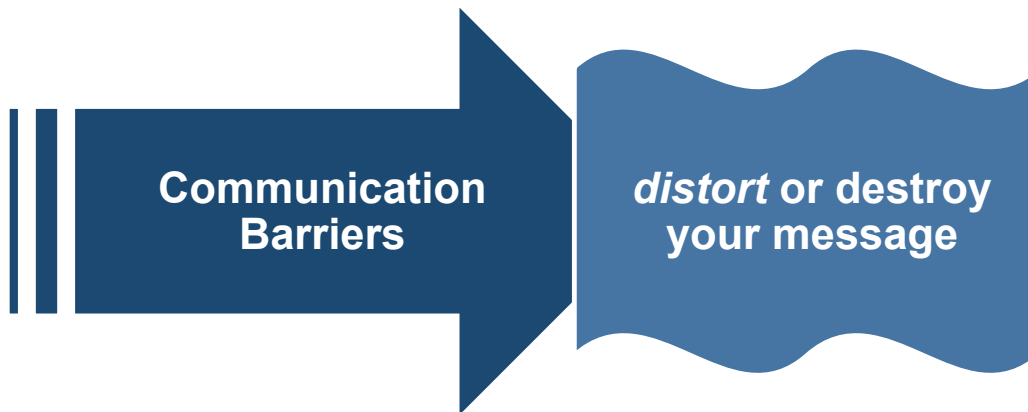
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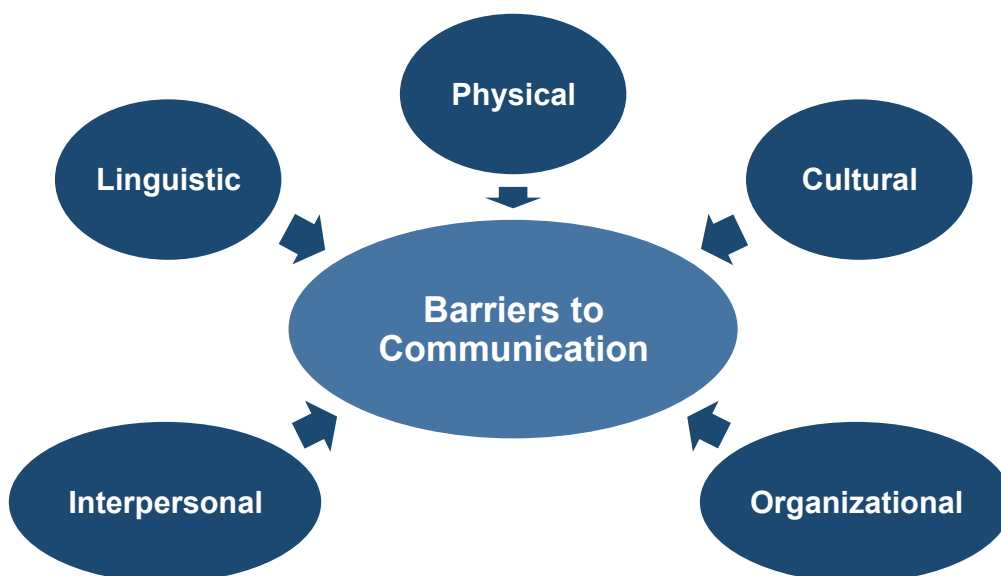
6 Barriers to Communication

Problems with communication occur when the way in which we express ourselves is not fully understood and appreciated by those we want to communicate with. Some of these differences are within our control, others are not, and being forewarned about such obstacles influences how successful your communications will be.



Communication often takes place in a complex and uncertain environment; understanding how to minimize such difficulties will have a direct impact on how effective our communications are. Those who are seen as good communicators have the ability to adapt their communication style to overcome barriers to understanding and to maximize the impact of their message.

There are numerous barriers to communication that can be classified as:



6.1.1 Organizational

Every organization you come into contact with in your role has its own ethos and set of acceptable behaviors. To be a successful communicator you need to understand the beliefs and values of your own organization.

You will be able to identify in your senior management the sort of behavior that is deemed appropriate for the organization. You will also have the opportunity through the example you portray to influence the behavior and beliefs of those who report to you or interact with you.

These behaviors will determine the type of environment your organizational communications occur in. Is it one of openness and trust, or is it one of guardedness and blame? Whatever atmosphere your day-to-day activities occur in, you will need to adapt your style and signals to best suit the environment.

Often within organizations confusion and obstacles to communication result from poor definition of individual roles within the structure and of their working relationships and interactions. How many times have you found several people believing that a task is the responsibility of someone else? Rather than take the trouble to ensure someone accepts ownership, some people will simply sweep the task under the carpet on the assumption that someone else will perform it! This does not bode well for success.

Many organizations' communication problems can be directly attributed to poor operational skills. This can be caused by a lack of procedures that help define and structure communications. Or it can be the result of little or no understanding of other operations within the organization or its external suppliers.

Without this level of appreciation and comprehension unrealistic demands can be placed on others. This confusion and misinterpretation can be avoided by taking the time to learn about other departments and external bodies and listen to what they say in response to your communication.

Organizational barriers can also occur if you use an inappropriate communication tool to send your message. Is the sending of an email or text an appropriate way to inform someone of a major disruption to service that will have serious financial implications if not addressed immediately? No, it is not. A personal call or going to the office of the senior executive will portray the correct level of urgency and importance for such a message.

Selecting the best communication tool to send your message is an essential component of excellent communication skills. Much of this comes from experience and observing how senior management and personnel in external organizations communicate their messages.

In some instances you may want to use more than one tool. For example, in the situation above you may want to speak to the person face-to-face first and then confirm that conversation in an email, copying in only those who need to be kept abreast of the situation.

6.1.2 Physical

This relates to the physical attributes of the environment the communication takes place in. This means such things as the layout of the room and access to privacy.

Many individuals operate in open plan offices, which whilst offering easy access to other members of the team when working within a group, can make other tasks more time consuming than necessary. Developing ideas or strategies, for instance, may require a quieter, more private environment, with few or no interruptions.

Organizations generally conduct a wide variety of tasks, and management need to provide environments to suit different tasks if their workforce are to operate and communicate effectively. For example, providing access to private rooms as well as open plan offices, and being willing to allow people to work from home, offers a choice of environment to best suit the task at hand.

6.1.3 Cultural

Organizations, with their global markets and operations, need to be conscious of what they say and of the interpretations different nationals working for them may give to their messages. This is especially significant if your message needs to be translated into other languages.



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For example, Spanish is much more formal when communicating in writing than it is verbally. Conversational Spanish is more colloquial and direct, supported by appropriate gestures and eye contact. So when you are making organizational communications you need to have a native speaker translate your message to make sure that it communicates what you want it to mean.

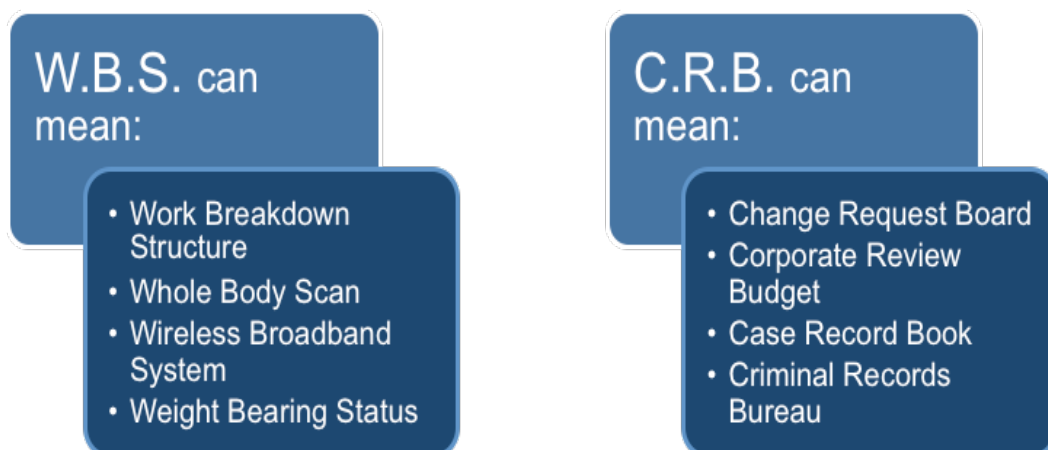
When thinking about cultural differences it is important not to pay too much attention to stereotypes. A stereotype is 'a widely held but fixed and oversimplified image or idea of a particular type of person or thing.' However, some stereotypes do have their roots in observable behavior. For example, many people from the British Isles use understatement in their everyday speech and would describe something as 'not bad' when in fact they thought it was good or even very good. This type of cultural difference can confuse people who speak the same language but who are not used to hearing understatement used in this way.

Cultures also have different interpretations of what is meant by something being 'urgent' and what level of work is considered stressful. This may result from different working hours in certain countries, and the fact that operations are taking place in different time zones. So when you are communicating your message you will need to take these into account.

Your message needs to clearly state your definition of terms such as 'afternoon,' and you should make sure the date you require the task to be completed by is accurate for the time zone of the recipient. For example, Friday 20th actually occurs on different days if you are based in London and the recipient is in Hong Kong.

6.1.4 Linguistic

With the increase in specialist language and jargon within the workplace, ensuring that what you are saying is interpreted as you want and expect is an essential aspect of communication.



This is especially important when communicating with a wide variety of industries because each one may have their own expressions and acronyms for terms, as shown in the diagram above.

In your communications you should never assume your meaning is the same for all those you are interacting with. You need to actively listen to and observe your audience to ensure that your message is received in the way you intend.

6.1.5 Interpersonal

Some barriers to communication result from the interpersonal skills of the individuals involved. Each person's level of self-esteem and their degree of confidence will be portrayed to others by the communication signals they display. It will also be reflected in the attitude they adopt during the exchange.

An aggressive attitude that may be intended by the communicator to display confidence may be interpreted as arrogance. Their nonverbal signals may be seen as an attempt to hide their lack of knowledge. The aggressive attitude might also be a way of showing how stressed they are in their current role and that any further demands on that person's time is just too much for them to cope with.

To be an effective communicator you must also be conscious of your own bias, which can influence how you respond in an exchange. This may not be an informed bias: it may be based merely on your own experiences or knowledge base. If you don't open your mind to listen carefully to what is being said and objectively assess what you hear your bias will persist and could become a barrier to the communication process.

Developing your own questioning, analytical, and listening skills is essential if you want to communicate successfully and will have a direct impact on your career development.

Key Points

- Barriers to communication can be classified as organizational, physical, cultural, linguistic, and interpersonal.
- Organizational barriers can be directly attributed to poor operational practices.
- Physical barriers include distance, lack of appropriate technology, and lack of privacy.
- Cultural barriers include differences in the interpretation of word meanings in different cultures even though they may be using a common language.
- Linguistic barriers include jargon and acronyms that mean different things to different groups.
- Interpersonal barriers include the many nonverbal signals that can easily be misinterpreted.

7 Summary

Good communication skills are essential to your management career. When you communicate well:

- You are able to build rapport with others
- You come across as organized and efficient
- You appear knowledgeable
- You set expectations accurately
- You avoid misunderstandings
- You can give clear instructions or explanations
- You act with confidence
- Other people trust and respect you

Communication is a two-way process and it is only successful when all of the parties involved have the same understanding of what has been communicated.

Each person's communication style is a unique combination of their own innate skills and those learnt both formally and through experience. What makes some people better than others at communicating is their ability to adapt their style to suit the message and the environment.



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Most people have a preferred communication style that describes how they behave in most of their communications. There are four basic styles (Active, Logical, Connector, and Thinker) and each one is useful in its place. However, a skilled communicator uses each of these four approaches depending on which one is the most appropriate at the time.

People also have preferences when it comes to receiving information and it is important to understand these when delegating work or giving instructions because using a supplementary form of communication can ensure that your message is correctly interpreted.

Effective communication depends on your ability to read the attitude of the other person or group you are communicating with. You can do this by observing their body language and using active listening to make sure that you really do understand their attitude and reaction to your message.

One of the most-cited pieces of research into communication is that conducted by Albert Mehrabian in 1967. His research was concerned with the relative importance of verbal and nonverbal signals when communicating feelings and attitudes and has been interpreted as stating that over 80 percent of communications is nonverbal. However, his research was restricted to communication about emotions and his findings cannot be extrapolated to apply to typical workplace communications.

Whilst it is important to be aware of the nonverbal signs people exhibit during the communications process, using and developing your emotional intelligence is far more beneficial than worrying unnecessarily about decoding all of the subtleties of people's body language.

The RESULT principle can help you to improve your communication skills. This acronym stands for Reason, Environment, Specific, Understanding, Listen, and Timeframe.

As well as having an understanding of the RESULT principle, there are certain barriers to communication that you need to be able to identify and overcome. The key to success is to ensure that communication is a two-way interactive process and that both parties understand each other clearly.

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