



MODULE 7: **EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION**

PARTICIPANT WORKBOOK

LIFE SKILLS PROGRAMME

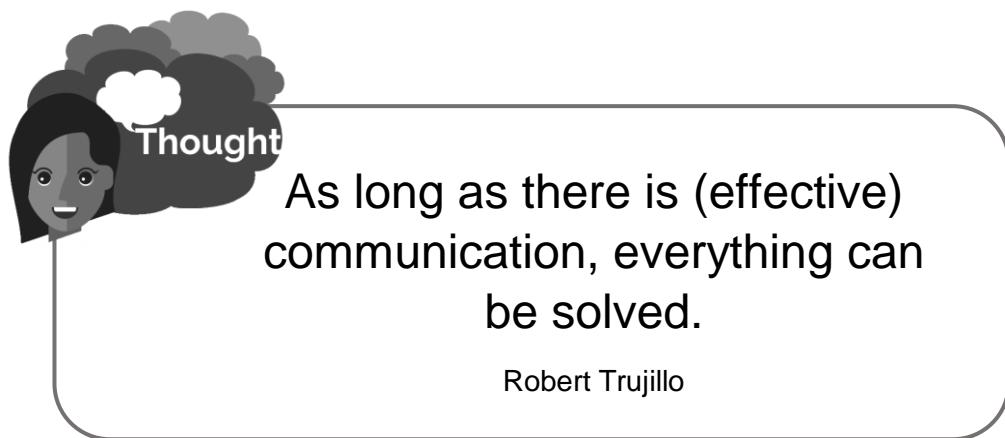


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Module outcomes

By the end of this session, you will:

- Understand the 'what' and 'how' of effective communication
- Know the different parts of the communication process
- Know how to use the STAR-method to improve your communication
- Be able to identify barriers to communication and how to overcome them
- Learn more about active listen
- Master the art of asking good questions to enhance your communication skills

1. Introduction

Communication is a major part of who we are. We start communicating before we are born and tend to not stop throughout our lives. Be it verbal or written, we all need to communicate with others in order to achieve our goals and dreams, build and maintain relationships, solve problems, or deal with stress, and be effective at work.

When we hear the word *communication*, we usually only think about how we communicate with others. However, we should not forget that we also often must communicate with ourselves. Although this module does not deal with self communication, it is important that we make time for reflection about ourselves.

ACTIVITY 1

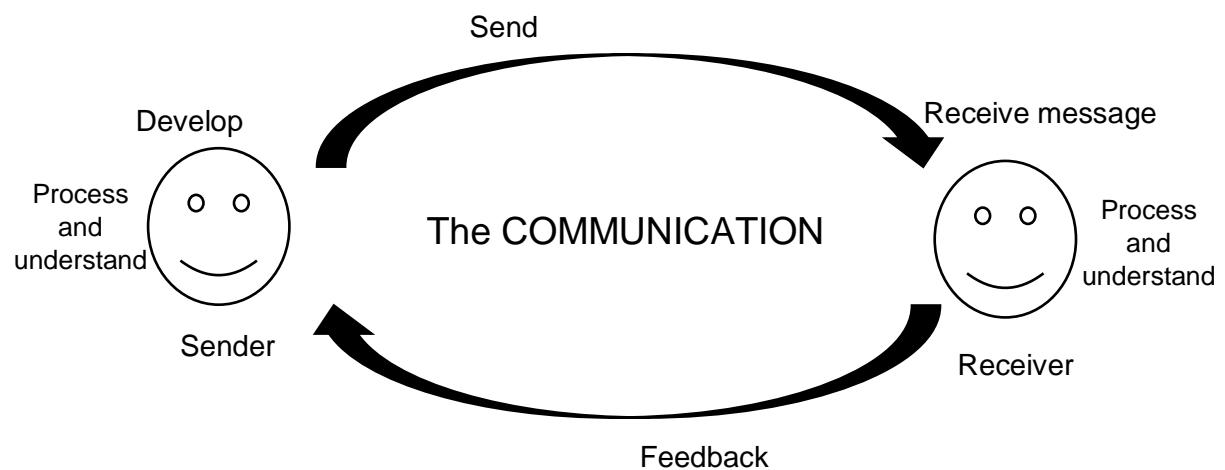
2. What is communication

Communication is the process of giving and receiving information. This information could consist of ideas, feelings, experiences, and facts, and shared through speech, writing, or signs. Communication can take place between two people, between people in small groups, or between millions of people via television or the internet.

There is *one-way communication* - for example, the president addressing the nation on live TV, and mass communication, like newspapers, magazines, Twitter, and Instagram. Then we also get *two-way communication*, also called *interpersonal communication*. It is the type of communication used in everyday human relationships, at home, and in the workplace. Interpersonal communication affects everything we do and is therefore a very important skill to master.

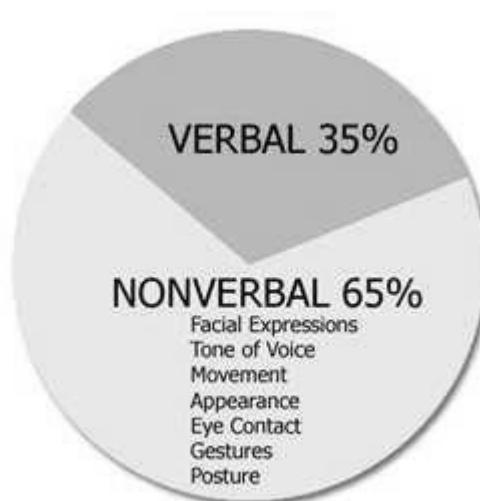
3. How do we communicate?

In any interpersonal communication, two or more people are involved: (1) the sender (the person talking or writing) and (2) the receiver(s) (the person/people listening or reading). The two roles will swap many times, allowing for questions to be asked and feedback provided.



4. Ways of communication

We communicate in three main ways: by speaking, showing non-verbal behaviour, and writing. Generally, speaking and non-verbal signs are linked together, and a lot of information can be shared in a relatively short space of time. However, written communication is a vital part of efficiency, especially at work. If we look at the figure below, it is interesting to see how we say a lot without using words!



4.1 Spoken and written words

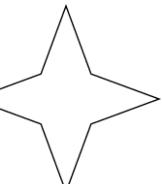
In order to share information, thoughts, options, ideas, and feelings with others, we need to construct words into a meaningful message. The STAR-model is one way to achieve this:

S = Situation

What is the situation? “Where?”, “Who?”, “When?”; e.g. “Last weekend, I was working in the garden.”

R = Result

What was the result? Close message off on a strong and definite note; e.g. “Now the soil is ready for me to plant the seeds this coming weekend!”



T = Task

What was/is your task? “What?”, “Why?”; e.g. “Mama had asked me to prepare the soil for planting.”

A = Action

Provide solid description; state precise actions that will resolve any issues; “How?”, e.g. “I cleared out all the weeds and dug in the fertilizer.”

ACTIVITY 2

Task



Write a short message to a friend, using the STAR-model, describing a recent event in your life, like attending this workshop.

4.2 Paraverbal communication skills

Think of a time when you received a message but what was being said was not how you interpreted the message. For example, the Proteas cricket captain congratulating the other side on their win, but his tone is sombre, and it sounds like he is speaking through gritted teeth. We often hear someone say: “It’s not *what* you say, it’s *how* you say it”.

- **Pitch**

Just like a musical instrument, your voice can project sound in different keys. This is called pitch. A high pitch is often interpreted as being anxious or upset. A low pitch sounds more serious and convincing. The receiver hears the words being spoken AND the pitch of your voice. All this information is used to interpret what you said and how the other person(s) understand the message or if they maintain interest in what you are saying.

- **Tone**

“I don’t like that tone!” - I am sure you have heard this a few times in your life. The speaker was referring to the combination of various pitches in your voice which created a specific mood. Your tone shows your attitude towards a situation or topic and therefore influences your and the receiver’s behaviour.



Key Learning

The following tips project a more positive tone:

- A low pitch is more pleasing to the ear.
- A smile, if appropriate, tends to warm up anyone’s voice.
- Sitting up straight and listen.
- Monitor your inner voice. Your thoughts will carry into the tone of your voice.
- Varying the pitch of your voice and rhythm of your speech to create interest and variety for the listener. Place emphasis at the right time.

Speed/Rhythm

The pace or speed at which you speak also has an effect on your communication ability. Someone who speaks quickly is harder to understand, while someone who speaks very slowly will lose the audience’s interest quickly! Speed or the rhythm of your speech also influences the tone and emotional quality of your message. A rushed pace can create anxiety and a feeling of being pushed along, while a slow pace can lead to the listener feeling as if the message is not important. In most situations a moderate pace is most effective. It comes across as natural, and helps the listener focus on your message.

ACTIVITY 3

Task



Write down what you think I mean when I say the following sentence in three different ways:

"I didn't say you were wrong."

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

4.3 Non-verbal communication

Effective communication is more than the words used. Your body is adding to the message, often in a more powerful way than the words you use. It has been found that 7% of our message is verbal, 38% is paraverbal, and 55% is from body language (Albert Mehrabian, *Silent Messages*, 1971). Body language is another name for non-verbal communication, and can be divided in a few categories:

- **The space between us**

How you use physical space when talking will send a message to the receiver. In some cultures, people like to stand close to the person they are talking to, while others prefer some distance, particularly in formal situations.

- **Personal appearance: the way you look**

How you are dressed and groomed, and how you feel about yourself portrays a message to others. We also discuss this in the *Building my brand* module of this programme.

- **Posture: the way you stand and sit**

The position in which you hold your body while standing and sitting sends a message to the receiver. For example, sitting hunched over typically indicates stress or discomfort, or leaning back shows a casual and relaxed attitude, while standing very straight generally says that the person is inflexible and/or anxious.

- **The position of your arms, legs, feet, and hands**

Where and how you place your hands, arms, and legs send a message to the other person(s) and influences how they interpret your message. In general, crossed arms and legs often indicate a closed-off attitude, while fidgeting hands or feet may be a sign of boredom or nervousness.

- **Facial expressions**

This refers to how you pull the muscles in your face to express your thoughts and feelings towards a situation or topic. These expressions are not always in our control. There are universal facial expressions that are interpreted in the same way around the world, such as happiness (raised corners of the mouth), and surprise (arched brows, wide open eyes, dropped jaw).

- **Gestures**

A gesture is a non-verbal message that is made with a specific part of the body, such as the head or hands. Gestures differ greatly from regions and from cultures. Therefore, it is important to be aware of your gestures and how they may be interpreted by the person you are communicating with. If you pay attention to other people's gestures, you will gain greater insight into the message they are sharing as well as their feelings.

ACTIVITY 4

Small Group



How do you interpret the below gestures and are you aware of a different meaning in another culture?

Gesture	Interpretation	Alternative interpretation
Nodding head		
Moving head from side to side		
Shrugging shoulders		
Tapping hands or fingers		
Shaking index finger		
Thumbs up		
Pointing index finger at someone		
Handshake		
Waving hand		
Tapping toes or feet		
Looking at your watch		

5. Communication barriers

On the surface, communication seems simple. I talk, you listen. You send me an email, I read it. The national soccer team is announced on TV, we watch it. However, there is a lot more to it than that. Below are two common barriers to communication and how to reduce their effect.

- **Language barriers**

If you do not understand the language of the sender, you will not understand what the message is. There are a few ways to reduce the impact of these barriers:

- As a group, identify that the barrier exists. Identify things that the group can do to minimise it, for example, not using slang when talking with people from different generations or regions.
- Pictures speak a thousand words and can communicate across languages.
- If you are going to communicate with this person on a long-term basis, try to find a common language. You may also consider learning their language.

- **Cultural barriers**

One's culture influences how we communicate, what we pay attention to around us, and how we perceive the situation. You need to be aware of your cultural influences as well as those of the receiver. A word or gesture can be interpreted very differently from one culture to the next. If you are not sure about the cultural influences of the other person, feel free to respectfully ask them about it and learn.

6. Listening skills

Listening and hearing are not the same thing. Hearing is what the body does when it takes in the sounds all around us. Listening is more complex and involves processing the words and the other factors discussed in this module, and then interpreting the entire message. There are three basic steps to actively listening.

1. Be empathetic and try to recognise where the other person is coming from. This will give you more information on how the other person is feeling or how he/she may be interpreting the situation. You can learn more about empathy in the Interpersonal Relationships module of this Life Skills programme.
2. Listen to what is being said closely and attentively. Pay attention to the words that are used, the tone of voice, and other gestures to fully understand the message.
3. Respond appropriately. This can be done verbally by asking questions for clarity, or non-verbally with a nod of the head and maintaining eye contact.



Key Learning

We have two ears and one tongue
so that we would listen more and
talk less.

Diogenes

ACTIVITY 5

Task



Complete the questionnaire to find out
if you are you a good listener.

Question	Yes	No
1) When a problem arises at work or school, do you often react before you have all the facts?		
2) After you receive the answers to a question and the other person starts talking about an unrelated subject, do you lose interest?		
3) Do you tend to daydream in conversations after you have made your statement or completed your presentation?		
4) Do you often finish sentences for the slow, deliberate talker, in the interest of saving time?		
5) Do you view listening to a colleague or friend's personal stories as more of a waste of time than an opportunity to gain insight into his or her personality?		
6) Do you feel uncomfortable asking others if they understand your instructions or requests?		
7) If you get bad news, would you think about that during subsequent discussions with others for the rest of the day?		
8) When someone is confusing you, are you hesitant to ask clarifying questions?		
9) Do you become nervous or apprehensive in the presence of a senior person?		

If you answered "yes" to any of the questions, you probably struggle to listen under the pressure of day-to-day activities. Anxiety, preoccupation, and pressure can undermine the abilities of even the best natural listener.



Key Learning

You can do the following things to help you be a better listener:

1. Don't get distracted by other things, e.g. people talking around you, your phone, activities outside.
2. Avoid interruptions. If you think of something that needs to be done, make a mental or written note of it and forget about it until the conversation is over or you have read the full message.
3. Apply the 90:10 rule. Try listening for 90% of the conversation and only do 10% talking.
4. Keep to the topic being discussed. Ask questions for clarity and add information related to the topic.
5. Make sure you understand what the other person wants or expects from you. Don't give advice if not asked for.
6. Make sure the physical environment allows active listening. Reduce noise and distraction and stand or sit comfortably.
7. Take notes. Notes help when you need to recall what was discussed and actions required.

7. The art of asking good questions

We get a number of broad categories questions. This include open and closed questions, as well as probing and summarising. The situation and what you wish to achieve will determine which type of question you need to ask.

Open questions / open-ended questions

These questions are phrased in such a way that the other person is encouraged to respond in a descriptive manner and not just give a yes or no reply. Open questions usually include one of the following words: Who? What? Where? When? Why? How?

It is better to ask open questions because they allow conversations to flow, gathering more facts and overall enhance the communication.

Closed questions

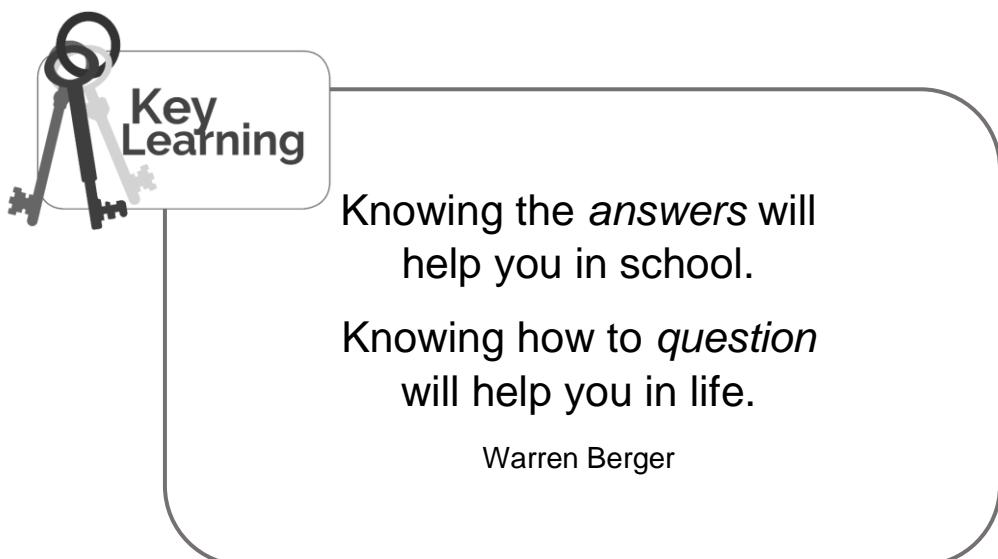
Closed questions limit the answer to yes or no, or a specific piece of information, like a multiple-choice quiz. For example, “What is your favourite chocolate?”, “Were you born in December?”, or “Is it five o’clock yet?” While closed questions tend to shut down communication, they can be useful if you are searching for a certain piece of information or drawing the conversation to a close.

Probing questions

Probing questions can be open or closed, depending on why you ask the question. For example, if you are not clear on something that someone said, you would ask the other person(s) to share more information so that you can fully understand their message. Clarification questions often look like this: “Please tell me more about ...”; “What did you mean by ...?”; “What does ... look like?”; “What else happened after that?”; or “Could you please give me an example?”

Summarising

These are more like a statement you construct using the relevant points of the discussion. By summarising you show the other person you were listening, what your understanding of the discussion was, as well as allow them to correct any misunderstandings. For example: “So what I hear is that you selected the March Excel spreadsheet, inputted all the invoices but the figures still did not balance?”



8. My Action Plan



Please take a moment to reflect on the value of this life skills module that you have completed now. Also think how you are going to apply what you have learnt to develop yourself as best as you can.

1. What was interesting and new to you in this module?

2. What was the most valuable insight that you had today?

3. How can you use what you discovered today?

4. What will you do differently from now on as a result of what you learned today?

5. What is the first step you will take?

6. What are some of the obstacles you may encounter?

7. What will be the best way to deal with them?

8. How will you know that you have successfully applied your new knowledge and skills?

GOOD LUCK WITH THIS!

9. Recommended resources

Larsson, K. (no date). Conscious body language. Your most sensational soft skill. Available at <https://bookboon.com/en/conscious-body-language-ebook>

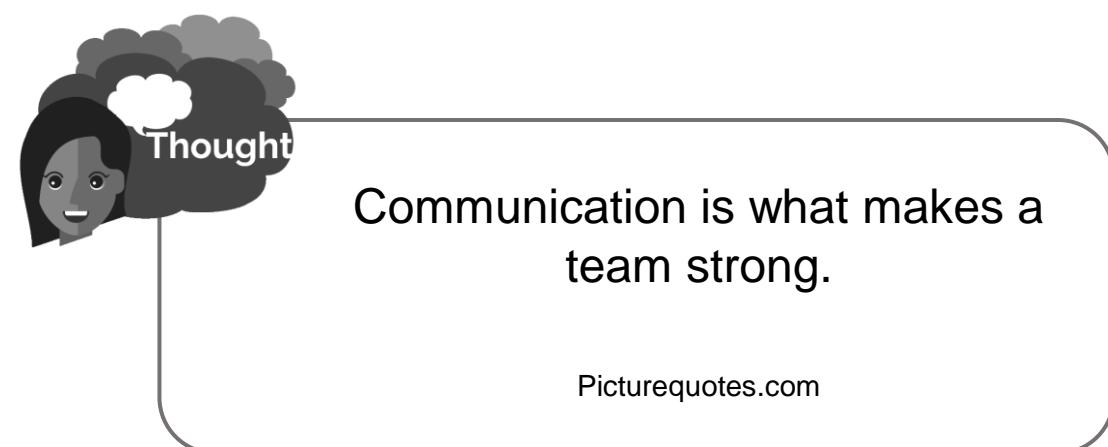
Lowndes, L. (2003). How to talk to anyone: 92 Little tricks for big success in relationships.

Mohutsiwe, S. (2016). How young Africans found a voice on twitter. TED Talk available at https://www.ted.com/talks/siyanda_mohutsiwa_how_young_africans_found_a_voice_on_twitter#t-338302

MTD Training. Effective communication skills. Online resource available at <https://bookboon.com/en/effective-communication-skills-ebook>

Patterson, K. Grenny, J. McMillan, R. Switzler, A. (2002). Crucial conversations: Tools for talking when stakes are high. USA: McGraw-Hill.

Taylor, H. (no date). Communication in the Workplace. Online resource available at <https://bookboon.com/en/communication-in-the-workplace-taylor-ebook>



Did you know?

We have many more modules that were specifically designed to help you develop those skills that are essential to function effectively in life and in the workplace. Ask your facilitator about the following modules:

1. Who am I?
2. Building my brand
3. Managing time
4. Be more resilient
5. Creative problem solving and decision making
6. Building interpersonal relationships
7. Effective communication
8. Dealing with conflict
9. Understanding the world of work
10. Personal development plan

For e-Learning and other resources, visit
www.nyda.gov.za

You cannot teach a man anything.
You can only help him discover it
within himself.

Galileo

