CONTENTS

Communicating in a Team
Session Objectives 3
Target Audience 3

The Key to Communicating in a Team 4

Communicating in a Team
Video Description 6

Communicating in a Team
Session Plan 6

Communicating in a Team
Handout 1 - Assessment Sheet 8
Handout 2 - Action Planning Sheet 10
COMMUNICATING IN A TEAM
SESSION OBJECTIVES

By the end of the session, participants will:

1. Be able to describe three main types of team communication skills.

2. Have assessed their own team's communication strengths and weaknesses.

3. Have identified three specific behaviours they, as individual team members, can do to improve their team's communication performance.

TARGET AUDIENCE

This package is aimed at team leaders and team members. In fact, anybody who works with other people will benefit from this program.

THE KEY TO COMMUNICATING IN A TEAM

With more and more emphasis on restructuring and developing teams as the basic unit of work, team communication skills are vital. Unfortunately, many people are being restructured into teams, but are not being given the necessary skills and knowledge to be able to work effectively in this way. A common need is the development of effective team communication skills.

There are three essential team communication skills.

1. Accept Diversity.

Just what does 'diversity' mean? Diversity means variety and difference in the composition of a team or group. Accepting diversity means realising, accepting and assisting people from different backgrounds who may be part of your team. When you think about it, there are all sorts of people that can work in a team. The most obvious example is people from different ethnic backgrounds. But there are other sorts of diversity. More and more men and women are working in non-traditional roles. Similarly, age diversity is increasing, as is diversity of people with different levels of abilities or impairments. People from a variety of backgrounds may need special assistance and support if they are to contribute to the work of a team.

The main ways in which you can accept diversity are:
a. Being sensitive to the difficulties that some team members may be having. It is all too easy to expect people to fit in and be the same as everybody else. But people from different backgrounds may have difficulty and it is important to be sensitive to those difficulties.

b. Helping people with different backgrounds. An obvious example of this is people from non-English speaking backgrounds, where language may be a problem. This may be a problem particularly when they are being given instructions or directions, or being coached. Time, patience, support and encouragement needs to be given to these people, to ensure that they understand what is happening and what is required.

2. Participate In Meetings.

With increased emphasis on teams in today's organisations, many teams are being expected to hold meetings, to solve problems and generate ideas for improved productivity. Many people are not used to participating actively in meetings, so participating in a meeting is a key team communication skill.

What are some specific ways of improving meeting participation?

a. Listening and showing interest.

Many people who may not be used to participating in meetings may feel reluctant to participate, reluctant to express their views, especially if they feel that other people are not listening and showing interest. So it is important that everybody pays attention, looks at the people who are speaking, listens and shows that they are interested in and paying attention to what is being said. This encourages participation.

b. Staying on track.

It is very easy in any meeting for people to go off on tangents to discuss all sorts of items. The result? That the meeting ends up achieving very little. Going off on tangents is one of the main reasons why people feel so dissatisfied with meetings. That is why staying on track is a key team communication skill. Staying on track means knowing what the issue or problem is that you are discussing and avoiding going off on tangents until that item has been satisfactorily dealt with. It means staying in control.

c. Being open to ideas.

A great temptation occurs in meetings to prejudge what somebody is saying, to evaluate an idea before really hearing it out in full. That is why it is important to remain open to ideas, to be prepared to hear them out and to really consider them before making any assessment or evaluation.
3. **Ask For Feedback.**

'Continuous improvement' is a term that is being used a lot these days, particularly in teams where people are working together to achieve goals. It is always important to strive for continuous improvement. One of the best ways of doing so is to ask regularly for feedback on both individual and group performance. How are we going? What are we doing well? What are we doing poorly? It is important to ask for feedback from one's workmates, one's colleagues, one's team leader, even one's manager, but also from one's customers or clients be they internal or external.

The main skill in asking for feedback is to push for detail, because the problem is often when you ask for feedback you end up with very poor quality information.

Some of the sorts of questions that can help in getting useful feedback are:

- Is there anything I/we could be doing better?
- Could you be more specific?
- Can you give me/us an example?
- How would you like me/us to do this differently?

Asking for feedback means that you can find out what you need to do better, and that can lead directly into continuous improvement.
COMMUNICATING IN A TEAM
VIDEO DESCRIPTION

This video is 10 minutes long. It uses a number of real life team situations to show how three key team communications skills can result in better team functioning. The team communication skills focussed on are 'Accepting Diversity', 'Participating In Meetings' and 'Asking For Feedback'.

The video is presented by well known psychologist Peter Quarry. Peter is coproducer of the People Skills series.

COMMUNICATING IN A TEAM
SESSION PLAN (2 hours)

1. Introduction -10 minutes

   • Explain session objectives to participants (see page 3).
   
   • Ask participants what concerns, issue, needs and expectations they have for this session.
   
   • Outline the structure of the session.

2. Group Discussion - 30 minutes

   • Ask participants to consider how well their team currently functions. They should use the Assessment Sheet (Handout 1) to assist them with this.
   
   • Ask participants to summarise their discussion by identifying three communication strengths and three communication weaknesses in their group.

3. Screen Video & Discuss - 30 minutes

   • Introduce the video Communicating In A Team, saying it will identify the three main team communication skills necessary for effective team functioning.
   
   • Screen the video.
   
   • After the video, encourage discussion using the following discussion starters:
   
   - How relevant were the ideas presented in this video to your team?
   
   - How useful were they?
   
   - What in particular did you learn that can be applied to your team's functioning?
4. Team Communication Improvement Action Planning - 40 minutes

• Ask participants to review their team communication skills in the light of the video and the group discussion they had earlier in the session.

• Ask participants to develop some action plans to improve their team communication skills. Action plans should consist of specific suggestions of who should do what by when. To assist participants with this they should use the Action Planning Sheet (Handout 2).

5. Evaluation -10 minutes

Ask for feedback from participants about the session.

Ask each participant to identify three specific behaviours they can do in their workplace to improve the communication in their team.
Below are a number of questions that relate to how effective your team communication is. Consider each for your team. Try and identify specific examples of your team communicating well or poorly in relation to each question.

**HOW WELL DO TEAM MEMBERS IN YOUR TEAM:**

- Accept team members from different ethnic or other backgrounds?

- Address the issue being discussed at team meetings?

- Ask for feedback from each other on how they can improve their performance?

- Offer support or encouragement for team members from different backgrounds?
  - Genuinely listen and show interest when others are talking at team meetings?

- Stay in touch with customers or clients?

- Assist any team members with language problems?

- Consider ideas and suggestions fully at team meetings before evaluating them?

- Ask the team leader how they can improve?

**ON THE BASIS OF YOUR DISCUSSION, SUMMARISE BELOW WHAT YOUR TEAM'S THREE MAIN COMMUNICATION STRENGTHS AND THREE MAIN WEAKNESSES ARE.**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>STRENGTHS</th>
<th>WEAKNESSES</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>