TEAMWORK

Overcoming differences to work towards a common goal.

Instructor Guide

TEAMWORK PART II: COMMUNICATING EFFECTIVELY IN YOUR TEAM

West Virginia Department of Transportation
Division of Highways
Training & Development Section 2015

Make sure the participants have signed in, have a participant guide, know the location of restrooms, understand to go outside of the room to make calls, answer texts, etc.

Introduction

To be successful, any organization needs employees who are capable and confident in what they do. Any given organization has many different types of people carrying out different duties and responsibilities. These people have a range of internal characteristics which impact on their communication skills. These communication skills assist us in accomplishing both our individual and organizational goals, implementing and responding to organizational change, and coordinating organizational activities.

Brittany Natalie Fulmer 2010

Play the Video clip. Ask the participants if the clip shows effective communication. Allow them to comment.

Read the quote aloud.

Failure to communicate effectively within an organization is detrimental to the success of that organization. I today's economic climate, it is imperative that employees possess strong, or at least minimal, communication skills in order to carry out their job duties and responsibilities. Lack of communication will create personal or corporate stress, which is likely to lead to lowered productivity. Some people speak only when spoken to, and sometimes not even then. Others may verbalize without even being asked to. Factors such as fear or anxiety play an important part in our oral communication. Sometimes it is situational variables which affect our communication, such as how we feel that day, whether or not the topic of discussion interests us, who is initiating the communication, etc.

Workshop Objectives

By the end of this workshop you will be able to:

- Discuss how communciation affects your team

- Identify your personal conflict handling style

- Explain how to survive the ten most common communication mistakes

- Identify your personal level of tolerance for disagreement

- Identify your personal communication styles

"To be a poor communicator or not to be willing to communicate with others are dysfunctional behaviors in society. We normally communicate with people around us for a specific purpose; we either need their assistance, their cooperation, or their services. Amongst all human activities, communication may be the most important one. How well we communicate, how willing we are to communicate, and the degrees of apprehension we have about the process of communicating profoundly affects us throughout our lives."

Ahmad Mohseni and Sahar Niknejad 2013

Communication Norms

For your group, develop a set of communication norms that includes at least five guidelines or rules that members should follow in order to communicate effectively.

1.
2.
3.
4.
5.

Purpose:

1. To introduce the concept of communication norms.
2. To develop a set of acceptable communication guidelines.

Time:

15 minutes

Materials:

Page 2 of Participant Guide

Instructions:

1. Have the participants turn to p.2 of their participant guides.
2. Divide students into groups of five members.
3. Have the groups complete the page.
4. Upon completion, have the groups share their responses with the class.

Debriefing Questions:

1. How difficult was it to develop a set of guidelines?
2. How realistic is it for your group members to adhere to this code? What sanction(s) will your group apply to members who do not follow the code? How realistic is the application of a sanction(s)?
3. After listening to the guidelines developed by other groups, would your group modify its list to incorporate additional guidelines? Why?

COMMUNICATION AND PERSONALITY ISSUES FOR TEAMS

Communication Styles: *Communication style is defined as the way we use verbal and nonverbal communicative behaviors to indicate how literal a message should be taken or understood. There are no preferred attributes over others. There will be times when using a friendly style might be preferred over a contentious style, or vice-versa.*

Communicator Style Measure

This questionnaire contains statements about your communicative behaviors. Indicate how often each statement is true for you personally according to the following scale:

If the statement is **almost always true**, write a **5** in the blank.

If the statement is **often true**, write a **4** in the blank.

If the statement is **occasionally true**, write a **3** in the blank.

If the statement is **rarely true**, write a **2** in the blank.

If the statement is **almost never true**, write a **1** in the blank.

1._____I am comfortable with all varieties of people.

2._____I laugh easily.

3._____I readily express admiration for others.

4._____What I say usually leaves an impression on people.

5._____I leave people with an impression of me that they definitely tend to remember.

6._____To be friendly, I verbally acknowledge others' contributions.

7._____I am a very good communicator.

8._____I have some nervous mannerisms in my speech.

9._____I am a very relaxed communicator.

10._____When I disagree with others, I am very quick to challenge them.

11._____I can always repeat back to a person exactly what he or she meant.

12._____The sound of my voice is very easy to recognize.

13._____I am a very precise communicator.

14._____I leave a definite impression on people.

15._____The rhythm or flow of my speech is sometimes affected by nervousness.

16._____Under pressure, I come across as a relaxed speaker.

17._____My eyes reflect exactly what I am feeling when I communicate.

18._____I dramatize a lot.

19._____I always find it very easy to communicate on a one-to-one basis with people I do not know very well.

20._____Usually, I deliberately react in such a way that people know I am listening to them.

21._____Usually, I do not tell people much about myself until I get to know them well.

22._____I tell jokes, anecdotes, and stories when I communicate.

23._____I tend to constantly gesture when I communicate.

24._____I am an extremely open communicator.

25._____I am a vocally loud communicator.

26._____In a small group of people I do not know very well, I am a very good communicator.

27._____In arguments or differences of opinion, I insist upon very precise definitions.

28._____In most situations, I speak very frequently.

29._____I find it extremely easy to maintain a conversation with a member of the opposite sex.

30._____I like to be strictly accurate when I communicate.

31._____Because I have a loud voice, I can easily break into a conversation.

32._____Often I physically and vocally act out when I communicate.

33._____I have an assertive voice.

34._____I readily reveal personal things about myself.

35._____I am dominant in conversations.

36._____I am very argumentative.

37._____Once I get wound up in a heated conversation, I have a hard time stopping myself.

38._____I am an extremely friendly communicator.

39._____I really like to listen very carefully to people.

40._____I insist that other people document or present some kind of proof for what they are arguing.

41._____I try to take charge of things when I am with people.

42._____It bothers me to drop an argument that is not resolved.

43._____In most situations, I tend to come on strong.

44._____I am very expressive nonverbally.

45._____The way I say something usually leaves an impression on people.

46._____Whenever I communicate, I tend to be very encouraging to people.

47._____I actively use a lot of facial expressions when I communicate.

48._____I verbally exaggerate to emphasize a point.

49._____I am an extremely attentive communicator.

50._____As a rule, I openly express my feelings and emotions.

Scoring: reverse code items 8, 15, and 21 (if you put a 5 for item 8, change this score to 1; if 4, change this score to 2; if 2, change this score to 4; if 1, change this score to 5).

Pass out a copy of the score sheet.

1. Add your scores for items 3, 6, 38, and 46. This is your **friendly** score.
2. Add your scores for items 4, 5, 14, and 45. This is your **impression leaving** score.
3. Add you scores for items 8, 9, 15, and 16. This is your **relaxed** score.
4. Add your scores for items 10, 36, 37, and 42. This is your **contentious** score.
5. Add your scores for items 11, 20, 39, and 49. This is your **attentive** score.
6. Add your scores for items 13, 27, 30, and 40. This is your **precise** score.
7. Add your scores for items 17, 23, 44, and 47. This is your **animated** score.
8. Add your scores for items 18, 22, 32, and 48. This is your **dramatic** score.
9. Add your scores for items 21, 24, 34, and 50. This is your **open** score.
10. Add your scores for items 28, 35, 41, and 43. This is your **dominant** score.

Communicator Style Definitions

Communicator Style is defined as the way an individual uses verbal and nonverbal communicative behaviors to indicate how literal a message should be taken or understood. This style may be comprised of any combination of these ten attributes. Generally, we each use several of these at the same time. This creates our "communication style cluster."

The 10 communicator style attributes are as follows:

1. ***Friendly*** people recognize others in a positive way and are generally considered to be kind and caring.
2. ***Impression leaving*** communicators have a memorable style, which depends on their affiliative expressiveness and use of information-seeking behaviors.
3. ***Relaxed*** communicators are anxiety-free and remain calm and at ease when engaged in interactions with others.
4. ***Contentious*** individuals will argue, and may get somewhat hostile, quarrelsome, or belligerent.
5. ***Attentive*** communicators are alert and are good listeners who are concerned with understanding others.

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6. *Precise* communicators try to be strictly accurate, using well-defined arguments and specific proof or evidence to clarify their positions.
7. *Animated* communicators use eye contact, facial expressions, gestures, body movement, and posture to exaggerate content.
8. *Dramatic* communicators use stylistic devices (exaggerations, voice, rhythm, stories) to underscore content.
9. *Open* communicators are extroverted, unreserved, and straightforward; they do not have problems directly communicating their thoughts or emotions.
10. *Dominant* communicators "take charge" of the situation by talking louder, longer, and more frequently than others.

We look at these scores in "clusters." Take your top three scores and these may be the most descriptive of your general style of communication.

Researchers have found that:

- ☐ Employees prefer their superiors to use the relaxed, friendly, and attentive attributes.
- ☐ Charismatic leaders tend to use the attentive, relaxed, friendly and dominant attributes.
- ☐ Strong public speakers are dominant, animated, open, friendly, dramatic, and attentive.

Discuss each of these and the impact on team communication:

- **Argumentativeness:** This is your ability to defend your position on a controversial issue while simultaneously attempting to refute another person's position on the same issue. This does not mean fighting. It is simply debating an issue. This is a positive trait to have. We make better decision when we are able to argue the points with others, as we may find out new information or points of view.

- **Verbal Aggressiveness:** while argumentativeness is considered to be a constructive communication trait, verbal aggressiveness is not. It is defined as the tendency for an individual to attack the self-concept of another person for the purpose of inflicting psychological harm and is considered to be a form of symbolic aggression. A verbally aggressive person does not attack the issue, he attacks the person. This could take the form of teasing, character attacks, ridicule, insults, profanity, threats, background attacks, physical appearance attacks. These can result in hurt feelings, anger, irritation, embarrassment, deterioration of relationships, termination of relationships, and even physical violence. To say the least, this is not how we should be communicating in the workplace.

- **Machiavellianism:** Machiavelli was a sixteenth century writer who offered advice on how to influence people and exert power over others. We refer to a person's ability to manipulate a situation in order to influence and control the situation for his own purposes as Machiavellian. People who are more so, are harder to influence, view interactions as social competitions, are often ideologically neutral, have little emotional involvement in their interpersonal relationships, and will shift their commitments when it is to their advantage to do so.

Willingness To Communicate (WTC)

Willingness to communicate is the most basic orientation toward communication. Almost anyone is likely to respond to a direct question, but many will not continue or initiate interaction. This instrument measures a person's willingness to *initiate* communication.

Directions: Below are 20 situations in which a person might choose to communicate or not to communicate. Presume you have completely free choice. Indicate the percentage of times you would choose to communicate in each type of situation. Indicate in the space at the left of the item what percent of the time you would choose to communicate.

(0 = Never to 100 = Always)

_____1. Talk with a service station attendant.

_____2. Talk with a physician.

_____3. Present a talk to a group of strangers.

_____4. Talk with an acquaintance while standing in line.

_____5. Talk with a salesperson in a store.

_____6. Talk in a large meeting of friends.

_____7. Talk with a police officer.

_____8. Talk in a small group of strangers.

_____9. Talk with a friend while standing in line.

_____10. Talk with a waiter/waitress in a restaurant.

_____11. Talk in a large meeting of acquaintances.

_____12. Talk with a stranger while standing in line.

_____13. Talk with a secretary.

_____14. Present a talk to a group of friends.

_____15. Talk in a small group of acquaintances.

_____16. Talk with a garbage collector.

_____17. Talk in a large meeting of strangers.

_____18. Talk with a spouse (or girl/boyfriend).

_____19. Talk in a small group of friends.

_____20. Present a talk to a group of acquaintances

Source:

McCroskey, J. C. (1992). Reliability and validity of the willingness to communicate scale. C*ommunication Quarterly, 40,* 16-25.

Barriers to Effective Communication

Show video on "Communication Overload"

Have you ever had ***COMMUNICATION OVERLOAD***? This occurs when there is more communication or information coming into a unit or system than the system can cope with or handle effectively. This can make our communication less effective. Think about it – when you are bombarded with communication from too many directions, you might tend to limit your interpersonal contacts to people who are more necessary for you to function. You can handle only so much communication effectively; we don't function well with communication overload.

ASK: So how do we handle this overload?

Record some ideas on flip chart. Some possible responses may include the answers below:

One of the most popular ways to handle overload is called ***omission***. You simple omit handling some incoming information, doing a certain task, or omit communication with certain people. Do you ever omit returning phone messages because you figure that they'll call you back or solve their own problems? This is the most commonly used omission method.

Another way to deal with overload is called ***error***. This is the result of trying to deal with overload and failing. Examples might include: not proofreading letters before sending the, not correcting errors on reports, not correcting statements we have made. We're so busy we don't read things carefully and correct mistakes. Overloaded people make errors and do not have time to find and correct them all.

We also use ***filtering*** to handle overload by letting things pile up and some of those things resolve themselves. One high level manager in another large state agency said that she would leave a lot of the items in her "in box" alone, because they would "go away eventually." What if they don't "go away?" It usually takes longer to make up for what happened than it would have taken to handle the issue in the first place.

The ever-popular ***priority system*** is employed when we handle input based on what we think is important and what is not. Usually this means that we end up handling requests from our bosses, not from our subordinates. We don't mind this system if we are at the top of the work food chain,; if we are at the bottom, we dislike it.

Some people really try to do it all. They usually end up ***approximating***, or doing things halfway. They do it all, but nothing is done well.

Delegation is one of the more successful methods of handling overload. Give it to someone else to do! The key, of course, is to give it to a competent individual. Many a manager started out as an employee who was asked to handle overload for his or her supervisor. If you handle enough of these requests competently, you might be noticed as an up-and-comer.

You can *realign your resources* to deal with overload by decentralizing or defusing some of the decision making to people who are just as competent as you to handle certain decisions. Share the responsibility with others.

Planning ahead by recognizing when peak overload times arise regularly can help you cope when potential problems might arise. If you know that the beginning of each month is busier than usual, then plan for it. If you're a procrastinator, you will have difficulty planning and sticking to your plan.

"No" is also a very effective way of dealing with overload. It's all right to say that you are already overcommitted. It's not a dirty word. Some people are more difficult to say no to than others. You might also ask your boss to help you determine, or prioritize those tasks to take care of which ones (s)he wants dealt with faster.

Sometimes we use the old-fashioned *escape route* by taking a "mental health" day. The biggest problem with this one is that the work will still be there waiting for you when you return, unless you have used one of the previous methods.

The opposite to communication overload is *COMMUNICATION UNDERLOAD*. As you can imagine, this exists when the communication of information is below what the system needs to operate effectively. In under-load situations, people do not have enough work to do, so they create things to do. They might create committees to work on useless things, get bored and start wanting to make unnecessary changes. They also tend to frequently find fault with the way others do their jobs. This can result in their sending memos to people who are already overloaded.

DEFENSIVENESS occurs when an employee feels threatened or intimidated and doesn't trust others in the organization. Expecting co-workers to treat us the way we treat them is not always a realistic expectation. We have found that certain messages tend to create a defensive atmosphere.

- When they feel that they are being *evaluated or judged*, some people may tend to become defensive. Therefore, we should try not to sound as if we are judging others when we communicate with them. Can you think of an example?
- How do you like it when someone suggests to you that you should *change your behavior*? We usually resent others telling us our behavior is inappropriate, even when it might be.
- When we receive a message that may suggest the presence of some hidden strategy to manipulate us, we may get defensive. Most of us would prefer to simply be told what we need to do instead of being manipulated into doing it.
- Do you like being *ignored* in your workplace? Most of us don't appreciate this type of behavior. Some people in the workplace simply ignore others or are neutral toward them. This can result in a feeling of defensiveness. Being ignored is a bad as being undervalued.
- When some people act like they know more than the rest of us, are more intelligent, have higher status or are above others, we might react defensively. People who seem very certain of their ideas or opinions may trigger defensiveness in others. If someone is quick to answer, effective in argument, and really wants to negotiate or compromise, he may be perceived as causing others to feel defensive.

These types of messages are seen as barriers to effective communication because they are seen as barriers to trust, feelings of support, or understanding. They can create hostility and anxiety and cause people to be less willing to communicate. What we now know is that the messages themselves do not cause the problems. It is our perception of the messages that causes the problems. If an individual is insecure with low self-concept, (s)he may be likely to feel threatened by others at work. When this does happen, such people become defensive and highly unreasonable in their reactions to others.

So what is the best way to deal with defensive people? Ignore them and stay out of their way. Whatever you say is likely to be taken the wrong way, so it's best to say nothing. The only kinds of communication they can handle are deference and agreement.

STATUS can be a barrier for communication. The higher up on the work food chain you are, the less likely you will have time to spend with all of your employees and the more likely that you will receive a lot more communication than your employees. You might have to delegate tasks or communication to others. That does not mean that you don't forget or neglect your employees. It simply means that you have less time to spend with them, so someone else may have to handle that communication for you.

↓

SLIDES 9 & 10

Our **communication climate** is a major factor in communication. We have a few types that have been identified.

You can tell if you're likely working in a **dehumanizing climate** if you go to work with little enthusiasm, do your job, then go home. You will see little communication between you and your supervisor and sometimes communication between you and your co-workers is forbidden or discouraged. Some workplaces keep employees separated at work, assign them tasks that keep them apart, and try to prevent them from socializing at all. This climate can lead to distrust, distortions, dislike, and decreased production. Employees do not perform at their highest potential because they are unhappy with the communication situation.

_____

Go to page 10 in your participant guide and answer the questions on the "Understanding Communication Climate."

Understanding Communication Climate

*For each question, answer **yes** or **no***

1. Do group members inform you about their true feelings, opinions, and suggestions for completing group tasks?
2. Do you become nervous when you make suggestions to group members?
3. Does your group typically leave a meeting feeling energized and supplied with clear information about how to complete a task?
4. Do you often find yourself at a loss for words when you talk with your group?
5. Do you seek feedback from group members on your effectiveness as a communicator?

6. Do you choose to communicate with group members via the telephone or e-mail rather than face-to-face?

7. Are you able to present ideas to group members in a fashion that fosters cooperation?

8. Does your group keep you informed about the group task on a need-to-know basis?

Scoring: If you answered yes to the odd-numbered questions, your group is experiencing a supportive communication climate. If you answered no to the even-numbered questions, your group is experiencing a defensive communication climate.

_____

Another work climate is called the ***"Happiness for Lunch Bunch."*** This climate is primarily concerned with employee welfare and co-worker communication. They will spend a lot of time worrying about change or communication between workers and management. The chief concern here is the employee's well-being. You will likely see little time spent on tasks, yet enormous time is spent on ways to improve the employees' environment. That sounds great until you realize that the work isn't being done. You might see lots of committees for everything so that employees can have input. Little work is being done and most of the communication is through those committees. No one is really sure of what (s)he should be doing. All they're concerned with is that everyone is happy. Communication tends to be narrow and distorted and people will often stifle their real feelings for fear of hurting someone else.

We tend to see the de-humanizing climates in the private sector; the other group is more represented in nonprofits or government. Neither of these climates is desirable.

The ***open climate*** is one in which both task and employee welfare are considered. Employees are encouraged to talk with one another and with their supervisors to solve task problems, people are expected to do their jobs well and be open to new ideas and change. People feel like they can express their opinions, be straightforward, and not feel they will be criticized for being honest. This climate encourages personal achievement and growth. The other two do not. This is a climate in which people feel supported and not threatened; they feel comfortable and generally enjoy their work. They're expected to be involved and do more than just put in their time or socialize. Some people might not like this climate if they just want to be left alone to do their work. *Which kind of climate would you prefer?*

Play the comical video clip on slide 10.

Management Communication Styles

Your management communication style has probably been constant across time. It may have changed if you moved into another organization or your own supervisor changed.

Your management communication style will affect your employee's perceptions of you and the organization and is a major factor in employee satisfaction.

Handout "Leadership Decision-Making: Tell, Sell, Consult, Join" chart

Tell: In decision-making, the manager who used this style habitually makes decisions (or receives them from above) and announces them to employees, with the expectation that they will be carried out without challenge. The communication tends to be downward, one directional and non-interactive. This manager will accept questions if they are concerning clarifications on how the job is to be done. ASK FOR EXAMPLES.

Sell*:* In decision-making, this manager makes the decisions, or receives them from above, and tries to persuade the employees of the desirability of the decision. His communication is downward, sometimes in either direction laterally, and tends to be more interactive. This manager welcomes questions and enjoys persuasive counterarguments. Concern for the employees' satisfaction is often present. ASK FOR EXAMPLES.

Consult: This manager also makes the ultimate decisions, but not until the problem has been presented to employees and their advice, suggestions, information has been obtained. Communication is upward, laterally, and interactive. The manager does not establish an adversarial relationship and employees communicate with the manager to help make the best decision. The manager cares about the employees' well-being. ASK FOR EXAMPLES.

Join: This manager will not make the decision; the authority to make the decision is delegated to the employees. The manager defines the problem and indicates the limits within which the decision must be made. Typically, majority opinion will determine the decision after open discussion. Communication tends to be horizontal, some up and down and highly interactive. The manager and employees communicate as equals or near equals. The primary concern for decision making is employee desires. ASK FOR EXAMPLES.

Some of the factors that determine which style we use are:

Time – if a decision needs to be made quickly, the manager may have to make it. If there's no time to consult, you get limited information for making the decision.

New managers tend to make all of the decision or they delegate all decisions. This is because they may be insecure and unsure of their personnel. Either direction can cause problems in the long run. If you delegate all the time, you may be perceived as a pushover; if you always make the decisions, you may be seen as a tyrant.

Disagreement vs. Conflict

Who can tell us the difference between disagreement and conflict?

Disagreement is defined as a difference of opinion between persons. Conflict in the work situation is the process that occurs when a group, due to their interdependence, their real and perceived differences, and their emotions, engage in an expressed *struggle* that impedes task accomplishment.

Disagreement is then not a negative thing. It can be quite functional and positive and is probably good for the growth of an organization. We can disagree and still maintain a good working relationship. Although disagreement does not necessarily lead to conflict, in any situation where people are disagreeing the potential exists for conflict to raise its ugly head.

It takes only one person, not two, in a relationship to perceive conflict, and if one perceives it, it exists. Conflict, unlike disagreement, has no positive outcomes. It should be avoided in organizations. As it grows, it festers and finally spreads. Good working relationships are destroyed, it can escalate to involve many people, and it can permanently damage the group's reputation and the people within the group can have their reputations damaged, is not destroyed.

Whereas disagreements can be resolved and the relationships still be intact, *conflicts cannot be resolved, only managed.* The way a person habitually deals with disagreement has more to do with whether or not the disagreement will lead to conflict than with the simple presence or absence of disagreement itself. People differ in the extent to which they can tolerate disagreement and avoid entering into conflict.

CONFLICT

Why do we have conflict? We enter into conflict for several reasons:

- When we're evaluating ideas critically
- When our communication and personality traits are the center of the issue
- When we're making decisions, solving problems, or dealing with conflict among members
- When we perceive an imbalance between members' contributions to the group

Conflict Handling Styles

Let's face it. We cannot avoid conflict at work it will come to us in one form or another – conflict over ideas, conflict over differences in personality or communication traits, conflict over procedures, and conflict over perceived inequalities. These are going to come up whether or not we like it. What is important is how we handle the conflict when it arises.

Let's take a look at the different styles for handling conflict: avoiding, competing, compromising, accommodating, and collaborating.

AVOIDING – people who use this style are neither cooperative nor assertive when confronting conflict. This person may appear uninterested in conflict because it is viewed as hopeless, useless, or punishing. It may be that he views the issues surrounding the conflict as trivial. Avoiders will not take sides in a group and may physically leave the situation. They might also appear apathetic, which may or may not be an accurate perception made by others.

COMPETING – people who use this style place a high priority on group tasks rather than relationships. These people are usually very assertive and not very cooperative. They see conflict as a nuisance partly because they see losing conflict as a weakness. Because winning gives some people a sense of exhilaration and excitement, they may hide their true motives and withhold information that might weaken their positions.

COMPROMISING – These people agree to be agreeable and strive to find middle ground between assertiveness and cooperativeness. They will alternate between satisfying their own needs and satisfying the needs of group members.

ACCOMMODATING – these people are highly concerned with the welfare of other group members. They are highly cooperative but low in assertiveness, tend to be highly flexible, desire to be accepted by other members and do not like to be confrontational because they're afraid that other group members' feelings may be hurt.

COLLABORATING – these people are high in both cooperativeness and assertiveness. They work toward a solution that satisfies the needs of all members and promote a candid exchange of logic and emotion. They consider conflict to be natural, helpful, and they refuse to sacrifice the needs of other members for the good of the group.

PLAY SIDES 18 & 19 and ask what type of conflict handling style is being used.

Tips for Handling Conflict

- Group conflict can result in decreased affect, or liking, for the group. When we experience little conflict, we see more positive feelings about each other than we see in groups that report moderate or high amounts of conflict. We also see more negative feelings toward the group when the issues are over evaluating ideas, feelings, or procedures. We are less likely to quit a group when the conflict over feelings is low.

- Conflict can occur over issues such as struggles for leadership, perceived unequal workloads, group member personality differences, procedural issues, differences in group goals, and differences in ideology. The biggest source of conflict is based on misunderstandings among group members, which they consider to be a communication failure. Conflict may also arise when members engage in deviant behaviors which violate group norms. Some examples are: not participating in group discussions, missing group meetings, fighting for leadership, "testing" members' opinions, and forming coalitions. When we see these types of behaviors, conflict will not be far behind.

    Stress may also trigger conflict. The stress itself may not be that important, but how we handle or try to reduce the stress. Some ways we can do that are: remaining centered on our tasks while stressing teamwork at the same time, finding humor in tense situations, and being sensitive to each other's concerns.
- The collaborating style is preferable to the other styles because it produces higher quality outcomes, is regarded as the most effective style, and results in more group member satisfaction. Compromising is the least-effective style, as one group member must give up something for it to be successful at all.

    Avoiding is more effective when others can resolve the conflict more effectively. When we need a quick and decisive decision, the competing style is best. You can compromise when collaboration is unsuccessful. Sometimes other members of the group need to learn from their own mistakes, so you might use accommodating for these situations. How many times do parents let their children make their own decisions in order for them to learn from the mistakes that sometimes result? When you want to combine the insights and varying perspectives of all group members, use the collaborating style.

- Some group conflict may be unresolvable. There may be times when resolution is simply not possible. Breakdowns in communication can create rifts which cannot be repaired. If we are involved in a group where a member is disagreeable or difficult, no amount of interaction can change this member's lack of willingness to resolve conflict. Verbally aggressive people are more likely to approach a conflict situation in a controlling manner and are less likely to approach in a non-confrontational manner. Rather than wasting time, energy, and group resources in trying to resolve conflict in these situations, it's best if group members recognize that some conflict is unresolvable and focus their energy elsewhere.
- There can actually be benefits to conflict. In the short-term, the benefits of conflict include coping with the immediate issue and arriving at a decision or solution that satisfies group members. In the long-term, the benefits of conflict include establishing norms and procedures for group members to consider in conflict situations.

Five Questions That Can Make Conflict as Constructive as Possible:

Think about the last time you had a conflict with another person at work.

1. What perceived loss or threat of loss has led you to perceive conflict?
2. How do you define the conflict issue?
3. What issues impact your choice of conflict-handling style?
4. How is your behavior influenced by the behavior of other group members?
5. What are the short-and-long term consequences of this group conflict?
    By answering these questions, you may gain a different perspective of the conflict.

PREVENTING CONFLICT

1. If we can communicate similar attitudes about the topic of issue at hand while at the same time expressing some difference of opinion, we may reduce the potential for conflict. If we express our agreements before we express our disagreements, our communication is far less likely to be seen as an attack by the other person.
2. If we already have mutual liking for each other the differences in opinion that will occur in communication about the issue will most likely remain at a disagreement level rather than move into conflict. An expression of positive affect, particularly when sincere and previously acknowledged, blunts the potential for disagreements growing into conflict. Especially try to avoid the "but…" in your statements after you have given a sincere statement of feeling.
3. If you know that there are some topics that someone finds unpleasant or dislikes discussing, try to avoid bringing these topics into discussion. That doesn't mean that discussion on these topics will never occur. It just means that we should not dwell on things that have potential to make people angry or make them feel like they are being "singled out." If someone has a topic that sets him or her off, simply try to avoid that topic, if you can. If it does come up, you can try to steer the conversation into another direction.
4. Do not constantly remind others of their past failures, particularly in front of their colleagues. If you constantly remind people of their failures and embarrass them in front of others, you cannot expect their feelings to remain positive about you, despite your positive intentions to resolve the issues. Instead talk about their successes or the progress they have made. Focus on the positive, not the negative. If you have nothing good to say, don't say anything.
5. When you feel an argument arising, try to stay objective and keep an open mind. Communicate about common goals and areas of similarity, such as common attitudes, beliefs, and values. Do not get so involved in the issues that you cannot think objectively about them and never, ever start using name calling as a technique to get your point across. Communication should always be as positive and reinforcing as possible. If a fight is what you want, name calling is certainly a great way to get one!
6. Some issues are just not worth arguing about to the point that conflict might be created. Pick the issues you want to argue about and pursue them. Do not argue for the sake of argument. Highly argumentative types must be cautious about this behavior. They will argue for the pure enjoyment of it. Other highly argumentative people will also enjoy rising to the occasion. People who do not enjoy argument do not get the same feeling from it. Sometimes it is best to let the other guy have his way
7. A method of preventing conflict from occurring is to raise your level of tolerance for disagreement. This may be more difficult than some other methods of preventing conflict; however, it will allow you to be more accepting of other people's views and reduce the potential for conflict.

If you can raise the level of your tolerance for disagreement, reduce the importance of issues in your communication, and increase the level of affinity between yourself and others the likelihood that conflict could occur will be decreased.

➢ Play slide 20 which will lead in to the activity.
➢ Display slide 21, Bridge Construction Activity.
➢ Read the directions aloud from the handout.
➢ Allow the participants the allotted amount of time to complete the activity.
➢ Give the "winning" group a prize of some sort.
➢ Ask if there was any disagreement amoung the group members involving the construction of the bridge and allow for some discussion.

Tolerance for Disagreement Scale

Activity: have participants take the Tolerance for Disagreement Scale in the participant guide. Pass out the score sheet. Discuss the results.

TOLERANCE FOR DISAGREEMENT SCALE (TFD)

The tolerance for disagreement scale is designed to measure the degree to which an individual can tolerate other people disagreeing with what the individual believes to be true. This conceptualization is similar to that of argumentativeness. People with high argumentativeness are likely to be able to deal with more disagreement than those people who are low in argumentativeness. Alpha reliability estimates for the TFD scale can be expected to be in the neighborhood of .85.

Strongly Disagree ❶	Disagree ❷	Neutral ❸	Agree ❹	Strongly Agree ❺

_____ 1. It is more fun to be involved in a discussion where there is a lot of disagreement.

_____ 2. I enjoy talking to people with points of view different than mine.

_____ 3. I don't like to be in situations where people are in disagreement.

_____ 4. I prefer being in groups where everyone's beliefs are the same as mine.

_____ 5. Disagreements are generally helpful.

_____ 6. I prefer to change the topic of discussion when disagreement occurs.

_____ 7. I tend to create disagreements in conversations because it serves a useful purpose.

_____ 8. I enjoy arguing with other people about things on which we disagree.

_____ 9. I would prefer to work independently rather than to work with other people and have disagreements.

_____ 10. I would prefer joining a group where no disagreements occur.

_____ 11. I don't like to disagree with other people.

_____ 12. Given a choice, I would leave a conversation rather than continue a disagreement.

_____ 13. I avoid talking with people who I think will disagree with me.

_____ 14. I enjoy disagreeing with others.

_____ 15. Disagreement stimulates a conversation and causes me to communicate more.

From:
Teven, J.J., Richmond, V.P., & McCroskey, J.C. (1998). Measuring tolerance for disagreement. *Communication Research Reports*, 15, 209-217.
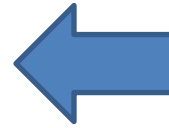Richmond, V.P., & McCroskey, J.C. (2001). *Organizational communication for survival: Making work, work* (2nd ed.). Chapter 14. Needham Heights, MA: Allyn & Bacon.

Tolerance for Disagreement (TFD) – Scoring Sheet

Directions: Add the scores in columns 1 and 2 below separately and write the totals in the rectangular boxes. Then, complete the formula in column 3.

① ② ③

1. _____   3. _____

48

2. _____   4. _____

5. _____   6. _____

➕

7. _____   9. _____

Total from ①

8. _____   10. _____

14. _____   11. _____

➖

12. _____

Total from ②

13. _____

➗

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≥ or 47   =      High


32 - 46    =     Moderate
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This is simply defined as the amount of disagreement a person can tolerate before (s)he perceives the existence of conflict in a relationship. A major degree of difference of opinion must be expressed or a substantial increase in negative affect must be present in order for conflict to result. Some situations, problems, and issues are worth arguing about, and some are not. Even fewer are worth getting into conflict over.

No matter how well we communicate with another, sometimes the other person will still perceive conflict when we do not. Remember, conflict is experienced by an individual, not a dyad. It is quite possible for one person in a situation to perceive a high degree of conflict while at the same time the other person experiences no conflict at all. When this occurs, the probability that the other person will also experience conflict later is substantially increased. The person experiencing conflict (person A) is likely to react harshly to the other person (person B), thus reducing good feelings of person B for person A. Now person B begins to feel threatened and responds in kind. The more they talk, the worse it gets. Conflict feeds on communication. When conflict is present, communication is more likely to increase it than to reduce it.

Why Some Do Not Survive:
Ten Common Communication Mistakes

Employees Themselves Often Create Horrible Working Conditions: DOAs (Dead on Arrival)

DOAs hold supervisors solely responsible for their growth and motivation. They may often be heard saying things like, "My supervisor doesn't do enough to improve my life or help me grow" of "My supervisor just will not give me a chance to show what I can do." They have not realized that they have to be their own main motivators. They want to blame their supervisors and the system for their lack of success. They don't realize that they must earn opportunities in m most organizations.

DOAs often think they know it all and refuse assistance from other employees and their supervisors. They may say, "Of course I know how to do that" or "Anyone can do something that simple." When most of us learn we are working with someone like this, we keep our advice to ourselves and let them fail on their own. This know-it-all behavior often reflects the DOA's insecurity and fear of looking inadequate to others. However, it is usually seen by others as arrogance, and others are more than delighted to watch arrogant DOAs fall flat on their faces.

DOAs make statements about how behind the times the organization is and how out of touch the organization is. These statements are usually highly offensive to established employees who are put on the defensive with the new employee. They are likely to think, or say, "Why don't you go back to that place then?"

DOAs want all the rewards available in the system without paying any dues or putting in the time to earn them. They will complain that co-workers with more seniority than them get things they do not, and often they will be complaining to some of those same co-workers. "Why does everybody else get the day off they want but I don't?" They are not willing to do the "grunt" work others have done in order to earn the respect of their co-workers and supervisors. They simply want it all without doing the work.

DOAs often deviate from the organizational norms. They do not conform to the common norms such as being on time for meetings, wearing certain apparel, etc. Worse, they may even criticize the norms. They are oblivious to the fact that the very person to whom they are talking may have helped establish the norms.

DOAs enjoy arguing over insignificant issues simply to get attention. Unfortunately, they do get attention – the wrong kind. Many other people will ignore the DOA, even if he or she does have a good idea, because they figure they are going to have to argue over some insignificant issue.

DOAs are constantly "poking their noses" into other peoples' business. They may like to be "in the know." They try to get access to the rumor mill by telling others what they learn from their snooping. After a while, people stop communicating significant issues with them for fear of anything they say will be misinterpreted or used against them.
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DOAs usually step on the toes of the people in the good old boys/girls club. They will often point out to others around them that these people do not seem to be as productive as the rest, that they seem to get all of the benefits, or that they are out-of-date. DOAs forget that the old boys and girls established much of the system and have friends "where you would least expect them to be."

DOAs usually will talk negatively about their boss and their co-workers behind their backs at social gatherings or other functions outside the immediate work unit. They usually think that this will help them obtain higher status, when in fact; all it does is keep them from being considered for higher positions. Nobody wants to hire individuals who talk negatively about their boss and co-workers.

DOAs try to get things accomplished without following the proper communication channels in the organization*. They tend to want to jump proper channels, such as "bypassing" their immediate supervisor when they want something they think the supervisor will not agree to. Rather than trying to make their idea compatible with the supervisor's ideas, they simply go above him or her with their ideas. This is a stupid move. Almost any supervisor will become upset with an employee that ignores the chain of command and goes above him or her. And almost anyone at a higher level will inform the supervisor that his has happened within minutes.

These are 10 common communication errors that cause discomfort in the system. Many of these mistakes can even lead to your being forced out of the system. Use these approaches and you, too, can be a DOA!

Play the video clip from *Big Bang Theory* to end the training session*.*