

First Line Management CMI Level 3

Session 9

Managing Conflict & Communication

Contents

Managing Conflict	Page 2
Aspects of Communication	Page 4
Good Communication Skills	Page 6
Barriers to Communication	Page 11
Communication Skills Test	Page 12
Active Listening	Page 13

Dealing With Conflict

Conflict

There are times when Managers and Supervisors get involved in conflict with other people in the organisation or other people from outside the organisation such as service users or customers. Conflicting views or disagreements can lead to a heated argument in which both parties try to 'win'. Inevitably the loser will nurse resentment and try to 'win' the next round. This type of conflict is unhealthy for the organisation because a lot of energy and effort is being used destructively.

'Negative' conflict can occur when:-

- i) individuals feel personally criticised, **or**
- ii) one or both of the individuals takes up an 'attacking' stance, **or**
- iii) individuals are at cross-purposes.

A certain amount of conflict can be very healthy for an organisation. This is 'constructive' conflict here, both parties recognise that they have different views and try to learn more from each other's experience. They are more interested in facts than in being 'right' or winning the argument. They find that a better decision can be reached by taking both viewpoints into account rather than one side 'steam rolling' over the other, therefore situations which involve potential or actual conflict call for skilful handling.

Methods for Handling Conflict

1. Avoid Emotional Outbursts

When situations get emotional, people respond to the emotions rather than the facts. If a situation is heated it needs to be calmed before any useful discussion can take place. Things you can do are:-

- i) Avoid acting in anger; give yourself time to consider the situation calmly.
- ii) If the other person is emotional, calm the situation before dealing with the case. You could sit the person down and respond calmly. Sometimes it helps to let the person blow off steam.
- iii) If you cannot calm the situation, you could choose to send the person away saying that you will talk with him when he has had time to calm down.

2. Avoid 'Personal' Criticisms

We all react when we feel criticised and this can lead to an escalation of conflict. If you need to give a warning you can make it less personal by the following means:-

- i) Do not warn people in front of others. If the situation is serious, take them to an office where you can both sit down
- ii) Talk about 'the situation'. Instead of saying "I'm telling you ..." say "this is the situation, so this is what has to be done"

- i) Talk about facts rather than making personal attacks, e.g. instead of saying “that was a stupid thing to do” you can say, “when you did so and so this happened”.
- ii) Avoid sarcasm; the other person does not know where he/she stands with you.

3. Persist

Do not give up too easily. If you are having difficulty getting your message across, or if you are faced with a barrage of excuses, just calmly repeat your message. The other person will learn that you are not going to be put off.

4. Stick to One Subject at Once

Avoid being drawn off the subject, perhaps by a complaint about something else. Say you will deal with it later when the first matter has been resolved.

5. Listen

Listen to what the others have to say and make an effort to see it from their point of view. Make sure that they know that they have got their message across and that you understand it.

6. Look For Common Ground

Conflicts often become worse because the parties concentrate on their differences and try to prove that each is right and the other wrong. Handling conflict constructively means also looking for the points on which the two parties can agree. This calls for careful listening and explaining the other person’s viewpoint by this means a ‘win/lose’ situation can be avoided.

Aspects of Communication

In the execution of Managerial tasks such as forecasting, planning, decision-making, and controlling, etc., there will be a need for management to give or to obtain information. Without such a flow of information, judgement will be affected and managerial performance will be impaired. The total information flow within a firm constitutes the Communication Process. A Management Information System is the part of the total communication process, which refers to a formalised flow of information. There is obviously much communication, which is not formalised and arranged in the form of a regular procedure.

1. Definition of Communication

The Oxford English Dictionary defines communication as the imparting of facts or knowledge. This type of general usage definition is not entirely meaningful in the industrial context. There are many interpretations of the term but really good definitions are hard to obtain.

Moonman's concept is perhaps the most appropriate.

“Communication is the capacity of an individual or group to convey ideas and feelings to another individual or group, and, where necessary, to evoke a discriminating response.”

2. Principles of Communication

Some of the principles of communication are well expressed by Deverell. They are summarised as follows:-

- i) Communication is not an end in itself. What is said or written in any context is a complex fusion of aims and techniques. Technical Transmission.
- ii) There are two basic aspects of the communication situation. The first is the value of message, that is the experience, instructions, information or attitudes to be conveyed. The second is the technical aspect of communication. It is concerned with the reasoning, which governs choice of the medium, the language and other skills, which are brought to bear on the process.
- iii) Every act of communication must have a purpose but there is no single purpose for all communication. The basic objective must always be clear to the communicator before he initiates the process.
- iv) The first step towards effective communication is to make one's ideas clear to oneself and to plan adequately.
- v) The successful exercise of communication techniques depends largely on language skills.
- vi) Successful communication depends equally on an understanding of individual and group psychology.
- vii) Just as the transmission skills are speaking and writing so the reception skills are listening and reading.
- viii) Intelligently practised communication skills can raise levels of work interest and productivity.

3. Elements of Communication

In a communication process one can distinguish the following components.

- i) The message transmitter
- ii) The message itself
- iii) The recipient of the message

The communication process is meaningless unless there is attention and perception by the recipient within the context of a given environment.

The psychology of perception and observation is relevant here.

4. The Role of Recipient Expectation

There is a tendency for recipients to be more perceptive to messages, which relate to their expectations. The state of mind of the recipient can be an important factor in his ability to receive messages.

5. The Nature of Suggestion

There are many situations in which the transmitter of information endeavours to influence the opinions of others such as convincing them of the desirability of a certain course of action or to certain attitudes. Suggestions can be significant here. It has been defined as an attempt to get others to accept a belief without any logical ground for accepting it.

6. Carriers of Communication

The main groups can briefly be stated as follows:

- i) Speech
- ii) Para-linguistics, such as behaviour and appearance.
- iii) The written form.
- iv) Visual Display generally.
- v) Other sensory transmitters, such as Braille.

In a company context we may find the following vehicles of communication:

- i) The personal relations between colleagues as well as in the Manager/Subordinate relationship.
- ii) Internal correspondence and reports, computer print outs, etc., both on a regular and on an occasional basis.
- iii) Notice Board statements.
- iv) House Magazines.
- v) Meetings of committees, such as works council, and the publication of minutes.
- vi) Publication of annual reports and accounts.
- vii) Open meetings, either at departmental or works level.
- viii) Staff manuals giving details and information about the company to new employees.
- ix) Induction or “in-house” training courses.
- x) Manuals or specifications describing standard practice and method of work.
- xi) Pamphlets or notices inserted in wage envelop.
- xii) Tannoy messages, telephones etc.

7. Features of Good Communication

- i) Clarity - clear, simple text with illustrations or models where this can help in the formation of visual concepts.
- ii) Appropriateness - the message is developed with the recipient in mind.
- iii) Adequacy - the message should be complete in itself.
- iv) Timing - the right moment can be most important.
- v) Consistency - the communication must be consistent with the circumstances and other communications.

8. Communications and Organisation Structure

Organisation structures can be assessed in relation to the effectiveness of communication, which they allow. Consider such aspects as:

- i) The length of the information chain with attendant effectiveness impairment at each point of transmission.
- ii) The relationship between line and staff specialists. Use of different language concepts, bottlenecks, empire building.
- iii) The use and success of system. The degree of decentralisation in terms of decision-making, local initiative, etc.
- iv) The selection and training of supervisors and managers.

Good communication skills

Being an effective communicator takes real skill. Communication skills have to be developed, honed and added to on an on-going basis. They are the heart of interpersonal skills and the greater your awareness of how it all works, the more effective your communication will be.

To be effective in business, you have to communicate well. To be a good manager, you have to communicate exceptionally well.

Here we look at basic communication dynamics, learning skills to improve your communication, using effective communication to improve and promote interpersonal relationships, creating an effective communication strategy. We could write a book about the importance of communication key skills, but for now you can content yourself with some essentials for becoming a more effective communicator.

Communication skills - the essentials

Communication is individual

We're not all the same

When you look at communication, presentation skills are not all there is to it. Far from it. Everyone communicates differently and sees the world differently. The greatest skill you can have in order to instantly and significantly improve your communications skills is to understand the other person's point view and how they see the world. Then you can adjust your own communication to take that into account.

Change yourself to change others

Alongside this has to be the knowledge that the only person you can be sure of changing in any communication is you. Therefore, the most effective way to be in charge of what happens in any communication dynamic is changing what you do. When you can do this you are well on the way to promoting better relationships.

You are the only one of you

There's never one right way to communicate. Authentic effective communication always happens when we reply on those things we know to be true about or for ourselves. Remember your personal style probably says more for you than all the words you use can.

What's already working?

Most people tend to look at what's wrong with themselves and other people rather than focusing on what already works. Remember, something (more than one thing, of course) has to be working well for you to have got this far already!

How communication happens

Verbal and Non-Verbal Communication

Interpersonal skills. Everything communicates. Remember! If you aren't clear about what you mean and what your intention is, the other person (or people) could easily (and sometimes deliberately), misinterpret what you mean.

What you do matters as much as what you say. It's now accepted that the words account for only 7-11% of a communication. Your behaviour will 'read' unconsciously to other people and you can certainly be more in charge of the reading matter!

Language is one of the most powerful reflections of how we think and feel about ourselves and others. You need to be aware of the padding, justifications and excuses you use and whether they are appropriate. You can make a big impact simply by changing some of your language and developing your verbal skills. This way you can significantly improve your communication skills.

Communication Cycle

There is a neat communication cycle we've come across that can help you understand how to make communication work better. It means that you can take responsibility for every stage on the Communication Cycle:

Spoken - Heard - Understood - Agreed To - Acted On - Implemented.

Be aware of where you or others tend to fall off the cycle.

What can get in the way of effective communication?

Here are some common barriers to effective communication.

We all make too many assumptions

Be aware of the assumptions you make, especially making something up and then acting as though what you made up was true. Notice if you alter your behaviour with certain people because of the assumptions you make about them. Also be aware of the assumptions you think other people make about you.

Assumptions aren't necessarily 'bad'. Sometimes it's important to let people keep their assumptions (or some of them at least!) about you.

One effective way to deal with assumptions is to say to the other person, 'I've assumed such and such. 'Is that true?' or 'I'm making an assumption here about... Do you agree?'

Good communication in the workplace is often sabotaged by too many unconfirmed assumptions.

Patterns/Reverting to type

We are pattern-making beings, which is good. However, sometimes we get so used to behaving and responding in certain ways that it's hard to see that there's any other way of doing things. When the pressure is on or we are under stress, even our best intentions may go out the window as we revert to type.

Habits, patterns, routine ways of thinking and behaving are difficult to change. Noticing your patterns at least gets you aware of them! One way to practise this is to see how many communication habits and patterns have crept into your workplace. Try not to judge them. You can always decide if you want to change them or not.

Needing to be right

This is one area we all know about - the need to be right and in turn for the other person to be wrong. One skill that does need practise is to let go of needing to be right. Think of it as presenting information or a point of view rather than having to bludgeon someone else with your arguments.

If you want to promote effective relationships, this is one of the greatest communication key skills you can have is to be able to change what you want from a communication. You may have started out wanting the other person to agree with you, but by giving that up you can change your want to letting them know you understand their point of view.

Conflict Resolution

Conflict

One of the purposes of conflict is to arrive at a resolution, so if you avoid conflict, the problem usually (though not always) gets worse. The earlier you can identify that there is a problem and intervene, the better it will be. Good communication skills require you to be able to resolve conflict.

Agreement

Find something (anything will do) in the other person's argument which you can genuinely agree with. This is a great way to take the wind out of someone's sails and ensure you don't get drawn into an insoluble argument. People usually won't listen until they feel heard.

Bridge Building

Really listen to what the other person is saying - they usually give a lot of information without realising it. Building bridges by making an offer can help enormously, as can changing what you want.

'I' not 'You'

Use 'I' statements, not 'You' statements to avoid blaming. This also means that you take responsibility for how you feel, rather than making the other person responsible for making things all right for you.

Improving communication skills

Be a good influence

Attitude

You can change the direction of a communication if you change your attitude. There is no one attitude that's the 'right' one to have, though being direct and clear certainly helps.

Effective Listening and Responding

You can have tremendous influence on a communication as the listener and the responder. When we get little or no response from the listener, we often project our assumptions onto them about what they are thinking (and usually we assume they aren't thinking good things about us!).

Be positive

Use affirmation and encouragement to get the best out of people. Notice when others do things well (even if it's part of their daily routine). This shows you're being attentive; most people respond well when they know that others are aware of what they do. Quite simply, the workplace can be a far better place to be if you consciously sprinkle your communication with positive feedback.

The importance of basic communication skills

What's most important is that you don't leave the business of communication to chance. Raise your awareness, develop your skills and you'll be a role model for effective communication.

Barriers to Communication

Barriers exist between transmitter and receiver whenever we communicate with another person. There are thousands of these barriers, which can change, twist or even eliminate the information we send.

The following are just a few examples:

- ❖ Linguistic: language level, jargon, foreign language, accent, dialect, slang.
- ❖ Physical: deafness, speech impediment, volume, speed of speech illness, pain, fatigue, stress.
- ❖ Psychological: fear, anxiety, nervousness, insecurity, assumptions, prejudice.
- ❖ Environmental: noise, distractions, discomfort, distance, cold, danger.
- ❖ Intellectual: experience, education, intelligence, retention level.

As a team leader, it is your responsibility to communicate effectively with your team. If the team don't understand, then it is your fault. It is no use assuming that because the receiver hasn't received, then the receiver is faulty. If the receiver hasn't received, then the transmitter has a responsibility to put the information in a way in which it *can* be received. This means following three steps:

1. Identify what, if any, of the information *has* been understood.
2. For information that has not been understood, find out why. This means identifying the barrier.
3. Remove the barrier or put the information in a form that gets around it.

Communication Skills Test

NAME

This is a test of your skills under tight time pressure. You have TWO minutes only.

IF YOU FINISH WITHIN THE TWO MINUTES, PLEASE REMAIN SILENT.

1. Read everything before you do anything.
2. Put your name in the upper right-hand corner of this paper.
3. Circle the word 'name' in the second sentence.
4. Draw five small squares in the upper left-hand corner of this paper.
5. Put an X in each square mentioned in number 4.
6. Put a circle around each square.
7. Sign your name under the title of this page.
8. After the title write 'yes, yes, yes'.
9. Put a rectangular box around sentences number 7 and 8.
10. Put an X in the lower left-hand corner of this page.
11. Draw a triangle around the X you have just made.
12. On the back of this page multiply 70 by 30.
13. Draw a circle around the word 'paper' in sentence 4.
14. Loudly call out your first name when you get to this point in the test.
15. If you think you have carefully followed directions so far, call out - 'I have carefully followed directions'.
16. On the reverse side of this paper add 107 and 278.
17. Put a circle around your answer to this problem.
18. Count in your normal speaking voice from 1 to 10.
19. If you are the first person to get this far, call loudly - 'I am the leader in the following instructions'.
20. Write 'Slow down and think' in capital letters at the bottom of the page.
21. Now that you have finished reading carefully, do only sentence 1 and 2.

Active Listening

Active listening is the difference between just hearing what people say as they express opinions, develop arguments or just 'drone on' and making a real effort to understand what they are saying and sometimes even helping them to say it. Active listening is a skill, which can be developed. It is not easy and requires a great deal of self-discipline.

Benefits of Actively Listening

Benefits of actively listening can lead to a workable solution by helping us to bring out common ground or shared opinions. This allows people to build on positives rather than to destroy each other's points by highlighting negatives. People contribute more because you have shown that you respect their opinions and because there is less chance of their ideas being lost. It decreases dominance in groups by a few members and cuts down cross talk because people wait for others to finish before they come in. It will make meetings more effective by reducing repetition and by minimising the chances of people "switching off".

It will increase a group's effectiveness at coming to consensus decisions, by making individuals feel more committed to group aims. People sometimes fear that active listening will lead to even longer meetings. Interestingly, this tends not to be so, since people don't feel the need to keep re-introducing the point that no-one listened to the first, or the next, or the next

Techniques for Active Listening

Giving Attention

Set time aside to listen. Give attention and show it (by nodding, maintaining eye-contact etc.)

With-Holding Comment

Let the other person finish - often the nub of an argument can be in the last few words.

Checking Back

Try to re-state what the other person just said, using their words as far as possible. They can check that what you heard is what they wanted to say.

Clarifying

Summarise what you understood were the main points, to check understanding.

Building-On

Develop the other person's argument or position. Don't use this as a technique to knock down their ideas and substitute yours!

Showing Support

Express your interest and encourage the speaker to continue.

Structuring

Help the speaker to develop and structure their idea. Summarising and agreeing the main points before moving on can be a very useful activity.