

Teamwork Training

Small Group Communication

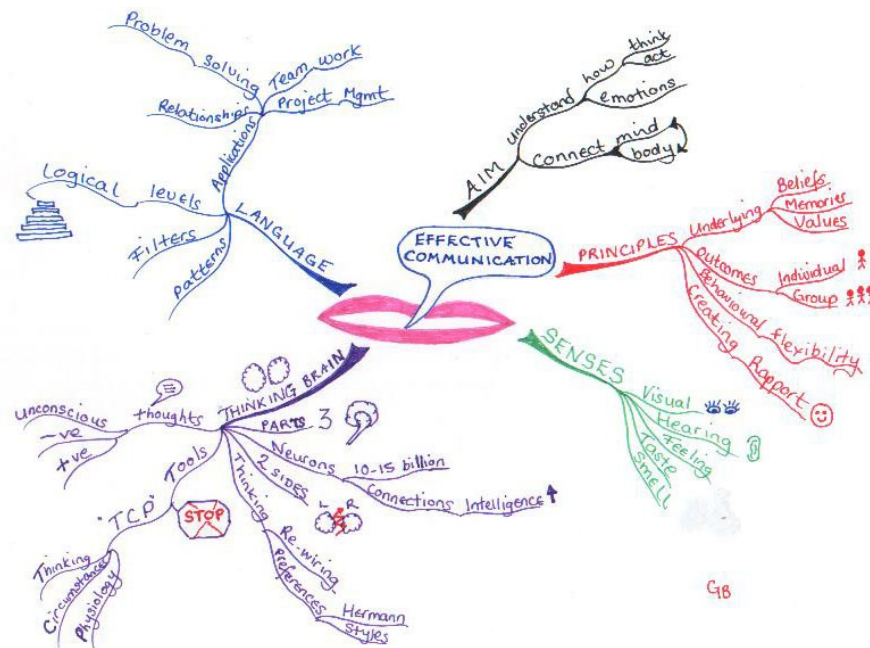
Definition of Communication

Communication consists of transmitting information from one person to another. In fact, many scholars of communication take this as a working definition. As Harold Lasswell (1902 — 1978 an American political scientist and communications theorist) said...

“Who (says) What (to) Whom (in) What Channel (with) What Effect”

There is much discussion in the academic world of communication as to what actually constitutes communication. Currently, many definitions of communication are used in order to conceptualize the processes by which people navigate and assign meaning.

Communication stands so deeply rooted in human behaviors and the structures of society that scholars have difficulty thinking of it while excluding **social** or **behavioral** events. Communication theory remains a relatively young field of inquiry and integrates itself with other disciplines such as philosophy, psychology, and sociology.



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Definition of a Small Group

It is important to initially define a small group.

Size

Most researchers define a small group as having at least three and no more than twelve or fifteen members. A group needs to have at least three members, otherwise it would be a dyad. With three members, coalitions can be formed and some kind of organization is present. Too large a group (more than twelve or fifteen members) inhibits the group members' ability to communicate with everyone else in the group.

Interaction

A group's members must be able to communicate freely and openly with all of the other members of the group. Groups will develop norms about discussion and group members will develop roles which will affect the group's interaction.

Goals

A group must have a common purpose or goal and they must work together to achieve that goal. The goal brings the group together and holds it together through conflict and tension.

Class Activity

Make a list of the groups to which you belong (for example, the basketball team, your family, your classes, etc.), which meet the accepted definition of a group?

From your own experience, how does communication in a group of people change when its size increases?

Types of Small Groups

Groups form to accomplish some objective. The objective may be to complete some kind of task or it may be to promote the interpersonal relationships between the group members. Many groups, however, fulfill both of these functions.

1. Social Groups

While all groups will have both social and task dimensions, some groups are predominantly social in their orientation. Examples of these groups would be families and social clubs. These groups provide for our safety and solidarity needs and they help us develop self-esteem.

2. Work Groups

Work groups function to complete a particular **task**. In a work group, the task dimension is emphasized. The group members pool their expertise to accomplish the task. Examples of this would be workplaces, campus organizations, or juries. There are several types of work groups, based on the work of Ivan Steiner:

Additive Work Group: All group members perform the same activity and pool their results at the end. An example of this would be gathering signatures for a

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petition drive.

Conjunctive Work Group: Group members perform different, but related, tasks that allow for the completion of a goal. Every group member must complete their task in order for the group task to be completed. An example of this would be an assembly line, in which each worker performs tasks that together build a completed car.

Disjunctive Task: Members meet to determine the best alternative for a problem or issue. There are two types of disjunctive tasks:

Judgment Task: Group members must choose one correct answer from all alternatives.

Decision-Making Task: Group members must choose the best alternative from a set of options. There is no one correct answer for a decision-making group.

3. Emergent or Contrived Groups

Some groups form spontaneously, such as a group of friends, these are emergent groups. Other groups are contrived, that is, they are formed for a specific purpose. Organized clubs, social groups, or committees are contrived groups.

Class Activity

What type of group is this class?

What type of group is a jury in a court of law?

What task does a jury perform?

Why do people join a group?

Why People Join a Group

People join groups for a variety of reasons. Some group members are motivated by task concerns and others are motivated by interpersonal attraction to other group members.

1. Group Synergy

Group synergy refers to the idea that two heads (or more) are better than one. You may have also heard the phrase, "The whole is greater than the sum of its parts," which also refers to group synergy. Put simply, groups are often capable of producing higher quality work and better decisions than an individual working alone.

2. Support and Commitment

A group may be more willing to take on a large project than would an individual. In addition to its increased ability to perform work, the group can provide encouragement and support to its members while working on a big project.

3. Interpersonal Needs

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Individuals often join a group to meet their interpersonal needs. William Schutz has identified three such needs: inclusion, control, and affection.

Inclusion is the need to establish identity with others.

Control is the need to exercise leadership and prove one's abilities. Groups provide outlets for this need. Some individuals do not want to be a leader. For them, groups provide the necessary control over aspects of their lives.

Affection is the need to develop relationships with people. Groups are an excellent way to make friends and establish relationships.

Class Activity

Why did you join the groups to which you belong?

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The Trust Factor

Why Trust is Critical in Small Group Communication

Webster's Dictionary defines trust as the "assured reliance on the character, ability, strength, or truth of someone or something."

Many leaders believe that one of the main keys to the survival of a team or small group is trust. Trust is a critical issue in any type of relationship because a relationship without trust is not really a relationship at all. One of the problems that people encounter when dealing with small groups is that you cannot automatically instill trust into the members. Even with the appropriate individuals on a team, a team that does not build a trusting relationship is not an effective team. Research shows that trust is the basis for creating a healthy work environment.

Trust is the necessary precursor for the following:

- Feeling able to rely upon another person;
- Cooperating as a group;
- Taking thoughtful risks;
- Experiencing believable communication.
- Commitment to a course of action

Trust forms the foundation for effective communication, motivation, and contributions of energy towards the final goal.

Class Activity

Do you trust the people in the groups that you belong to?

What different levels of trust are there?

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Teams vs. Groups

Not all groups in organizations are teams, but all teams are groups. The difference between a team and a group is that a team is interdependent for overall performance. A group qualifies as a team only if its members focus on helping one another to accomplish organizational objectives. In today's quickly changing business environment, teams have emerged as a requirement for business success. Therefore you should constantly try to get groups to become teams and facilitate the evolution of groups into teams

A group consists of any number of people who interact with one another, are psychologically aware of one another, and think of themselves as a group.

A team is a group whose members influence one another toward the accomplishment of an organizational objective(s).

Types of Teams

Today we find all kinds of teams in society, and they generally fall into one of two primary groups:

- Permanent teams
- Temporary teams

Here are some of the common types:

1. Task Force - a temporary team assembled to investigate a specific issue or problem.
2. Problem Solving Team - a temporary team assembled to solve a specific problem.
3. Product Design Team - a temporary team assembled to design a new product or service.
4. Committee - a temporary or permanent group of people assembled to act upon some matter.
5. Work Group - a permanent group of workers who receive direction from a designated leader.
6. Work Team (also called Self-Directed Work Team or Self-Managed Work Team) - an ongoing group of workers who share a common mission who collectively manage their own affairs within predetermined boundaries.
7. Quality Circle (today also under various other names) - a group of workers from the same functional area who meet regularly to uncover and solve work-related problems and seek work improvement opportunities.

The name of the group or team type is less important than the purpose for which it exists. These names simply give us a common language to help us define team types.