

## Being an effective communicator in a team

Team 5 Color Global

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Fall 2013

Professor Ilknur Tekin

When it came to pick a subject for our research report, we all sat down, collaborated, and shared ideas. As we were discussing which idea was best, it was clear that there was one reoccurring theme throughout our ideas: how communication affects the quality of teams. This is not an unexpected coincidence. After all, good communication is crucial to a team's success. An excellent example of team success dependent on superb communication was relayed by McKinney, Barker, Davis, and Smith (2005). On the afternoon of July 19<sup>th</sup>, 1989, the flight crew of United 232 faced an extreme emergency. One of the plane's engines had exploded. The shrapnel had severed the hydraulic controls, leaving the plane in a state where it could not be steered by conventional means. This plane would normally be considered un-flyable, but the three members of the flight crew were able to work together with an off-duty United instructor (who happened to be on the flight) to steer the plane towards a nearby airport using only the remaining engines as their flight controls. The plane crash landed, but thanks to the communication of the pilots, they were able to save the lives of 184 people from a situation nobody would have been able to survive.

Thankfully, most teams do not have to face a situation as dire as the one the crew of United 232 had to face. Still, having good communication in a team is essential for success. In order to contribute to the good communication of a team, a person needs to be an effective communicator and we wanted explore what is communication, what are the qualities that are essential for communication, and how does communication affect teams in different stages.

### What is Communication?

The discipline of communication focuses on how people use messages to generate meanings within and across various contexts, cultures, channels, and media. It is a process which starts with an idea, thought or notion that we want to express or share. People encode their idea with their own unique perception, attitude, values, past experience, knowledge, culture and feelings which we call messages. Messages decode the idea based on their perception and if the receiver understands the message correctly, they give feedback to the sender and this cycle repeats itself as long as the conversation continues. However, there are many mediums that can be used to transmit the message using the same content but it might be interpreted differently using different mediums based on their richness. We will look into the richness of different communication media in table 1.

#### 1. Type of communication

**1.1 Oral communication** is the ability to explain and present our ideas in clear English to diverse audiences or between ourselves. This includes the ability to tailor our delivery to a given audience using appropriate styles and approaches as well as an understanding of the importance of non-verbal cues in oral communication. Oral communication requires the background skills of:

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Presenting	Audience Awareness
Critical Listening	Body Language

**Written communication** is the ability to write effectively in a range of contexts and for a variety of different audiences and purposes with a command of the English language. This includes the ability to tailor your writing to a given audience using appropriate styles and approaches. It also encompasses electronic communication such as SMS, email, discussion boards, chat rooms, and instant messaging. Written communication requires background skills such as academic writing, revision and editing, critical reading, and presentation of data.

**Non-verbal communication** is the ability to enhance the expression of ideas and concepts without the use of coherent labels, through the use of body language, gestures, facial expression, and tone of voice, and also the use of pictures, icons, and symbols. Non-verbal communication requires background skills.

	<i>Words</i>	<i>Control over format</i>	<i>Voice Tone</i>	<i>Immediate Feedback</i>	<i>Nonverbal Cues</i>	<i>Environmental Cues</i>	<i>Direct physical exchange</i>	<i>Informal Contacts</i>
<i>Person to Person</i>								
<i>Video Conferencing</i>								
<i>Phone</i>								
<i>Voicemail</i>								

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<i>Fax and groupware</i>								
Email								

**1.2 Types of teams:** Teams work together to accomplish common goals. They not only make things, accomplish tasks, provide services, offer advice, but they also seek to meet other goals. Currently more and more companies are incorporating teams—of a variety of sizes and types—into their workflows.

**Functional Teams:** These types of teams perform specific functions in an organization. They include members from the same department or work area who meet regularly. A manager holds the primary responsibility with subordinates reporting to this person. Often, these teams are permanent.

**Cross-Functional Teams:** Workers across functions of the organization make up these types of teams. People with separate areas of expertise work together; they are usually at about the same hierarchical level and can often make decisions without management. Often, these are temporary.

**Leadership Teams:** Management takes a strategic role in guiding business decisions. They are made up of leaders from varied departments. The goals of leadership teams are generally aligned with the mission and vision of the company.

**Self-Directed Teams:** Also called self-managed teams, these groups operate without managers, and no one is in a position of authority. They are designed to give employees a feeling of empowerment and ownership of the job. These types of teams are newer: they've been around in the U.S. for decades and originated in Great Britain and Sweden in the 1950s. Research has shown that employees in self-managed teams have higher job satisfaction, increased self-esteem, and grow more on the job, but these teams aren't without their drawbacks.

**Virtual Teams** are comprised of members who are not located in the same physical location; they may be in different cities, states, or even separate countries. They use technology and specific skills to achieve a common goal. They tend to be more task and project oriented but focus less on social interaction.

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These individuals seek to become aware of, analyze, and address problems within the workflow of the organization. Overall, they hope to improve performance and make management aware of any issues. This idea originated in Japan by large firms striving for quality. Usually, these are made up of three to 12 people who do similar work.

**Task Force Teams** are experts—generally a cross-section of people—joined together to solve a well-defined and temporary assignment. They have a sense of autonomy and don't need to constantly consult superiors to get things done.

## 2. Who is A Communicator?

The short answer is: someone who communicates. But everyone communicates, for better or for worse. Yet we don't call everyone a communicator, do we?

Let discuss some characteristics which differentiate communicators with other people, It is the ability to develop a keen external awareness that separates the truly great communicators from those who muddle through their interactions with others. The number one thing great communicators have in common is they possess a heightened sense of situational and contextual awareness. They are great listeners and astute in their observations and skilled at reading a person/group by sensing the moods, dynamics, attitudes, values and concerns of those being communicated with. Not only do they read their environment well, but they possess the uncanny ability to adapt their messaging to said environment without missing a beat.

### ***2.1 Traditional expectation from a good communicator***

No matter what form the communication is, there are some ground rules for effective communication. According to Principles of Communication (n.d.), the traditional expectations from a good communicator are:

- **Knowing your purpose.** What you want to achieve through communication? It can be selling an idea, or building relationships, or exchanging information, etc.
- **Knowing your audience.** To achieve your goal in communication, you need to satisfy the audience with something that they are interested. Knowing you audience includes knowing your audience's interest and the way they would like to been interacted with.
- **Knowing your topic.** Purpose can be transformed into communication topics. There may be one integrated topic (in public speaking), or several different topics flowing on the way (in friends gathering).
- **Being clear and concise.** Clarity is a very important quality to get message across. An important measurement for effective communication is to check whether the message the

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sender gives is the same as the receiver receives. Try to minimize the information in each sentence, and be direct to avoid confusion.

- **Anticipating objections.** Anticipating objections is a good way to help the communicator think through what he/she is trying to deliver, so that to validate the message being send out. Questions should be asked before head, like “What questions may be asked?” “What information will they be looking for?” “How will the person respond?”.
- **Presenting a rounded picture.** Enough background information and thorough thinking of the situation can help audience’s understanding. Lacking of such information can result in too many questions and confusions.
- **Achieving credibility with your audience.** If audience does not believe in you, he/she is not going to believe what you say. No matter what communication techniques are utilized, lacking of sincerity can shut down the door of communication.
- **Communicating a little at a time.** Too much information can be overwhelming and results in a lot of confusion.
- **Following through on what you say.** No matter what is the initial plan, follow through on what you said. Gaps can result in losing audience, and can kill the communication.
- **Presenting information in several ways.** Presenting information in different ways can maximize the amount of information that audience receive. It is also a good exercise for communicators to find out the most effective way to deliver message.
- **Developing a practical and useful way to get feedback.** Feedback can be collected during communication, like asking question “what do you think about my idea?”, and after communication, like sending out survey papers.
- **Using multiple communication techniques and tools.** For example people remember 40% of what they see and hear, but they only remember 20% of what they hear. Animation and pictures can help improve understanding. New technology can be utilized as tools for communications.

### ***Types of communicators***

Norton (1977, 1978)’s study on communicator style has been cited and explored extensively (Bednar, 1982; Potter and Emanuel, 1990), and has set the classic tune to classify communicators. According to Norton (1977), there are ten different styles of communicators:

<b>Dominant</b>	The dominant communicator speaks a lot, takes charge in a social situation, comes on strong opinions, and controls informal conversations.
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<b>Dramatic</b>	The dramatic communicator delivers message in a dramatic and exaggerated way, for example utilizing fantasies, stories, strange voices
<b>Contentious</b>	The contentious communicator is argumentative.
<b>Animated</b>	The animated communicator utilizes many body languages and facial expressions. Another sign is that they sustain eye contact.
<b>Impression Leaving</b>	The impression-leaving communicator has a special style of communicate, and he/she trends to be remembered because of the style. Generally, what is said and the way it is said are emphasized
<b>Relaxed</b>	The relaxed communicator shows calm and peace during communication. Potentially he/she works on tasks in a slow manner.
<b>Attentive</b>	The attentive communicator shows great interest in what the other is saying, and deliberately reacts in such a way that the other knows he or she is being listened to. People love to talk with communicators.
<b>Open</b>	The open communicator is not reserved and he/she says what he/ she is thinking. He/she is also not afraid of talking about personal stuff and what is deep in heart.
<b>Friendly</b>	The friendly communicator shows friendship to people, acknowledges others' contributions, openly expresses admiration, and tends to be tactful.
<b>Precise</b>	The precise communicator argues with strictly accurate fact, and prefers well-defined arguments

Communicator styles vary with situations, audiences, emotions, and a normal human being should be able to perform several different communicator styles (Rovai, 2003). For example, a custom-service representative may be described “friendly” by her customers, but she may be more relaxed when she talks at home. Unlike personality, communicator style can be manipulated by the communicator (Norton and Nussbaum, 1980).

### 3.0 Effect of communication on Teams in Various Stages

If we analyze drexler-sibbet team performance model, we will see every process from creating the team to sustaining the team and becoming high performance team is highly dependent on effective communication. Below analysis shows that what stage of team building is all about and how in each stage of team process, good communication can resolve things and bad communication can leave things unresolved.

1. **Orientation:** In the Orientation Stage, team members need to get their bearing, finding out what they're about as team, what gives they have to manage and what kind of a

*Resolved*

•Purpose  
•Team identify

1.Orientation

WHY am I here?

*Unresolved*

•Disorientation  
•Uncertainty

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team they are in the process of creating which means getting clear communication about their purpose as a team, expectation of contribution to team, so the team as a whole may develop a sense of identity,

**2. Trust Building:** When a team has trust, its members respect and rely on one another, and feel secure in one another's confidence. Trust means not only telling one another the truth, but also being able to count on others to do their part, to have the competence to work effectively, and to be reliable enough that others can count on it that you will do what you say you're going to do. Trust produces the kind of information sharing that is essential to all of the remaining stages.

*Resolved*

- Explicit assumptions
- Clear, integrated Goals Shared vision

**2. Trust Building**  
*WHO are you?*

*Unresolved*

- Caution
- Mistrust
- Facade

**3. Goal Clarification:** This is the stage 3 of a team's development. Fundamental purpose from Stage 1, has to be communicated into more specific goals and objectives. The team gives specific answers to the question "What are we doing?" It draws a vision for itself, that provides the general direction for its work. It also sets clear goals that are milestones along the way, measures of its progress, both internally and externally.

*Resolved*

- Assigned roles
- Allocated resources
- Decisions made

**3. Goal Clarification**

*WHAT are we doing?*

*Unresolved*

- Anxiety
- Skepticism
- Irrelevant competition

**4. Commitment:** Stage 4 is pivotal in a group's development. In this stage, a team sets itself to do its work, makes the necessary choices, let go of old assumptions, and find resolution which is needed to carry it to successful completion. The questions are answered: decisions are made, resources are allocated, promises are set, roles are formed, responsibilities are shared, and the team agrees on how it will do business. The crux of Stage 4 is genuine commitment by the members to what the group is set to do.

*Resolved*

- Assigned roles
- Allocated resources
- Decisions made

**4. Commitment**

*HOW will we do it?*

*Unresolved*

- Dependence
- Resistance

**5. Implementation:** As work begins, timing and sequencing become an overriding concern "*who does what, when, and where?*" Within whatever overall direction is chosen in Stage

*Resolved*

- Clear processes

**5. Implementation**

*WHO does WHAT*

*Unresolved*

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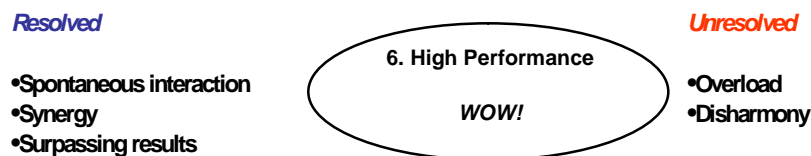
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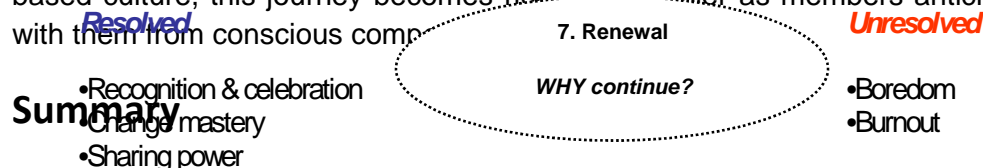
four, action plans with task, time, and objectives need to be followed. There are many ways to achieve this kind of integration, but all involve aligning on a clear order of work and systems for communicating progress. Conflict, confusion, and missed deadlines indicate lack of resolution of these issues.

**6. High Performance:** When team members have developed an implicit trust among themselves and have mastered the technologies of their work, a new dimension of performance becomes open to them. Their inner connectedness supports a high level of synergy and creativity. The easiness of their interactions enables them to respond nimbly to changing conditions and produce extraordinary results that draw the response, “Wow!” The way members of high performing teams work together is distinctive. They interact easily, with little defensiveness, and an intuitive sense of how to be supportive of one another. They are accomplished in their work and at ease with it. They respond to one another, bring out the best in one another, and in doing so lift the team’s performance to a higher level.



## 7. Renewal

High performance teams lose their edge or complete their tasks and inevitably ask “**Why continue?**” Earlier answers to key concerns no longer fit. People arrive and leave, and the group alignment can change. Burnout is a common result of not renewing purposefulness and vision while keeping up a high performance pace. But when a team commits to learning and renewal, congruence of teams and their visions over a long period is possible. Renewal might consist of regularly setting aside time for team practices, or having special annual celebrations of completion and realignment. Often it is the link with another cycle of team process which begins back at orientation, moving through trust and goals back to commitment. In a team-based culture, this journey becomes richer and easier as members anticipate issues and deal with them from conscious comp





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In this project we asked ourselves fundamental questions about communication, and tried to tease out a framework of communication in team, so that we can understand how to be effective communicators within team. Communication is the exchange of information and it is what we are doing every day, but in this project we found out that different communication medium actually has different richness, with person to person communication ranked as the richest form. We summarized different types of communicator and traditional expectation from a good communicator. We found out that the number one thing that good communicators share is a heightened sense of situational and contextual awareness, with which good communicators capture and understand important information from others and the environment. At last, we reviewed the effect of communication on teams in various stages. The development of high performance team is highly dependent on effective communication, and at different stage of team building, there are different expectations for communicators.

This research project was limited by time and knowledge we currently had, and was far from sound and exclusive. However, our understanding of communication was greatly improved during the research process, and we realized new expectations on ourselves as communicators in a team.

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