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Verbal communication

Why is verbal communication important to business?

Verbal communication is at the core of what most of us do - whether you're building a business, leading change, dealing with difficult situations, revitalising a team, coping constructively with complaints or creating an exceptional customer service climate.

The essential actions taken by managers and staff happen almost entirely through verbal communication. It sets the emotional tone and builds relationships that ultimately determine the performance culture of the workplace.

If verbal communication is not effective, coordination breaks down, relationships suffer, mistakes multiply and productivity plummets.

How can verbal communication impact your business capabilities?

Building verbal communication skills is a basic business necessity considering the essence of a manager's work is mostly verbal. There are capabilities that can assist a manager to diagnose:

- What happens in my communication with others?
- What kinds of conversations do I have?
- How can I have more frank, open interchanges?
- What new verbal communication skills do I need?

5 Conversational Capabilities

1. **Observation:** Accurately observing what's going on in your verbal communication with others, to enhance your ability to use different tools and strategies to improve outcomes.
2. **Connecting:** Relationship-building to help you understand and connect with others, maintain constructive, open and creative relationships and resolve conflict, complaints and differences of opinion.
3. **Self-Awareness:** Knowing your perceptions, beliefs, triggers and behaviours, and being aware of how you apply this self-knowledge in terms of the impact your thoughts, feelings and behaviours have on others, and whether they achieve good outcomes?
4. **Mental Modelling:** How alert you are to your own beliefs and world views and how they affect your conversations. It also means being able to find out about other's mental models and 'reframing' or reinventing when you find they no longer serve you very well.
5. **Balancing:** Involves both saying what you have to say (ie. stating your position clearly) and being equally able to really listen openly to what others are saying – and inviting them to say it. Balancing can help create more constructive conversational climates, reduce defensiveness and increase openness and creativity.



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Types of verbal communication

Understanding these different modes of group discussion and their protocols provides a powerful verbal communication coaching tool.

1. Debate is what we see most of in conventional conversation: 'I put up my point of view, you put up yours - and we try to knock each other out'. This is an inappropriate style if what you want is meaningful interaction. Constructive communication is productive dialogue and skillful discussions where new insights can emerge through healthy give and take.
2. Discussion focuses on decisions and actions. I may still want to see my view prevail, but there's some concession to listen to other's viewpoints, exchange facts and opinions and perhaps even alter my position as a result. In terms of our conversational continuum, polite discussion is different to skillful discussion. Polite discussion is really a veiled version of debate. It's 'polite' only insofar as conflict, controversy and 'hard-to-handle' issues are kept concealed under the surface. Polite discussion is actually anything but. It's riddled with hidden agendas, 'corridor talk', secret lobbying, dissembling, manipulation, factionalism and thinly veiled competition.
3. Dialogue is designed to promote a free-flowing interchange of ideas and create an open, equal and collaborative conversational climate. In dialogue:
 - The 'point' of the conversation is to share perspectives and understandings;
 - People talk together to find meanings and develop new ideas and concepts - feeding off each other's contributions;
 - The purpose is to go past the understanding of individual team members - to explore issues creatively from many points of view.

Further information

The following fact sheets provide further information on these issues:

- Change management
- Business communications
- Effective work teams
- Help groups make decisions
- Improve your interviewing skills
- Manage conflict
- Verbal communication – how to communicate effectively