

Role of communications in coordination activities:

What is your goal when you communicate with people?

Being able to communicate effectively is perhaps the most important of all life skills. It is what enables us to pass information to other people, and to understand what is said to us. Many communication courses and exercises are built around supporting the first part of the skills which is passing information to other people, for instance public speaking courses or written communication courses as well as others that focus on transferring information visually (using logos, maps, charts or graphs). Equally important as effectively passing information to other people is also understanding what is said to us, the latter depends on our listening skills.

“Any event that convenes a conversation == whether it’s a strategic planning session, a community engagement process, a workshop, or a dialogue between stakeholders — is only as successful as the quality of the listening taking place.” ([Avril Orloff](#))

Via exercises on listening habits and genuine listening we will built on improving our listening skills, the side effect of which should also be increased emotional intelligence, the term that is reluctantly coming into use in professional environments. The latter is underlying component of “soft skills” that are in high demand when we are confronted with the challenge of effectiveness of coordination activities. Developing emotional intelligence is challenging as this quality is unlike the “hard skills” and experience often difficult to define, and harder to cultivate. Emotional intelligence is said to have five main elements such as self-awareness, self-regulation, motivation, empathy, and social skills all of them playing an important part in effective communications. What has so far proven to support building up the levels of emotional intelligence is the ability to listen.

Why it is important to improve listening skills and ensure that we are able to transmit as well as receive information effectively? We will try to demonstrate it by explaining the difference between debate, discussion and dialogue:

DEBATE: When you're in debate mode of communication, the goal is really to be right.

In that situation there's always a winner and a loser and it is not a great way to connect across difference. In a way it resembles to monolog where the focus is extended speech by one person delivering his/her “speech” to the “audience.”



DISCUSSION: One of the goals of discussion is to try to come to some kind of conclusion or decision about something. Discussions and everyday conversation assume shared world views, mindsets, or a set of common beliefs.

DIALOGUE: on the other hand, assumes that people are coming from different perspectives or backgrounds, and it is effective in creating understanding across that divide. Dialogue involves trust, is collaborative and recognizes that people may approach and think about an issue in ways that are different from yours. Dialogue acknowledges that these different viewpoints may all have value. Dialogue is not about seeking a closure – it is about discovering new options.

Each of the above can have its purpose depending on circumstances but if we are pursuing inclusive policy-making processes then we should lean towards characteristics of dialogue, where listening skills play an important role. As listening goes hand in hand with respect, insight and knowledge, we are listing some techniques that support us in increasing them.

5 ways to build a dialogue:

1) Assume Positive Intent:

Consciously choose to believe that people have good intentions, and act and speak to the best of their ability. By assuming positive intent, we put our own judgments, viewpoints, and biases aside. We focus on what the person (speaker) actually means, rather than what we think we hear or see. We recognize that we do not always fully understand a situation or what another person is experiencing. When you listen – the attention should be on the speaker.

2) Ask Clarifying Questions:

Check your understanding often by paraphrasing what the other person said with clarifying language such as, "You are saying..." "Is that correct?" If you say: "I think I heard you say..." or "It sounds to me that..." – the attention is on you. The attention should be on the speaker. Don't be deterred if you are still unclear. Use additional questions to reach an understanding: "Can you say more about that, please?" or "This is an unfamiliar way of thinking about this for me. Can you give me more detail?" Ask and that way you will better understand.

3) Listen Humbly:

Put your own ego, assumptions, and viewpoints aside. Consider and learn from someone else's experiences as you listen. Use verbal and non-verbal cues to show that you are actively

listening. These can include phrases like "Go on" or gestures such as simply nodding your head (do not overdo it).

4) Use Pauses Intentionally:

Take a moment to pause and listen with intention to what is being said, and resist the urge to respond immediately. The speaker might add something.

5) Find Common Ground:

When possible, try to find common ground, such as a shared value, viewpoint, or idea. If you can't, at least you can set the tone for civility, and respectfully agree to disagree. For example, "I appreciate your perspective on this, even though I don't hold the same view."

Remember we can hear a lot, but it is up to us what and how we will listen. Importantly to note is that communication is a two-way street and you can only control yourself.

MOVING ON TO PRACTICE:

- **Discover what type of listener are you? (Refer to “Listening Habits” Exercise)**
- **Learn how to listen more effectively (Refer to “Listening” Exercise)**

Resources:

- Lynn, Adelle B. 2000. 50 Activities for Developing Emotional Intelligence.
- Mind Tools Content Team. 2020. Emotional Intelligence in Leadership. Available at (October 12, 2020) [online source](#)
- Skills You Need. 2020. Communication skills. Available at (October 12, 2020) [online source](#)

