



Your Role as an Effective Communicator

Learning Outcomes

By the end of this unit the learner will be able to:

- ✓ Apply the key principles of effective communication in a workshop setting.

Your Role as an Effective Communicator

Leading a Discussion

Communication, or the transfer of a message, is an essential part of any learning situation. In communication, we impart knowledge, express opinions, share feelings and discoveries, report views, and agree or disagree with others.

Because it usually rests with the trainer to trigger the communication process, and because the quality and depth of the communication depends to a large extent on his/her skill, you will want to develop your ability to carry on discussions that get everyone involved.

Leading a Discussion

Good discussions require more than simple questions and answers. When done properly, discussion is an extremely valuable method of learning and instruction. In fact, it is the most common technique used to get learners involved and participating. However, discussion leaders need skill and style to maximize learning.

Every leader will eventually develop a style or a way of doing things. You probably already have a sense of your style. What is right for one person may not be right for another. One person might use more control with the group; another may prefer a low profile that allows him or her to stay in the background. Whatever style you choose, remember that your main responsibility as a discussion leader is to guide, involve group members, and summarize the ideas presented.

Your role should be based on your skill and ability to listen constructively, to question skillfully, and to coordinate the contributions of each individual.

Questioning as a Training Technique

A great deal of communicating is done by asking questions. Questioning sometimes implies doubting, but for trainers and facilitators, it can mean:

- Requesting information in order to gain knowledge
- Seeking clarification
- Establishing facts
- Satisfying curiosity

You as the trainer want to make learning more **effective** and **meaningful**. To do this, it is necessary for both the trainer and trainees to develop questioning techniques that facilitate free discussion and expression of feelings and ideas.

The ability to use questions effectively can also depend on having an ear for **hidden meanings**. For example, a participant may begin a conversation with a statement that is easy for them to make, but which doesn't really address what is on their mind. Sometimes they haven't admitted to themselves what the problem is, or they themselves may honestly not know.

For example, let's say that a participant complains about the lack of organization at a session, in that the group didn't break for coffee at a fixed time. A non-directive question ("You feel this unstructured format is a bad thing?") may bring out the feelings behind the complaint.

Let's look at some types of questions that trainers can use to improve communication.

Types of Questions

Leading Questions

These questions contain the correct answer. They can be used to draw out the shy or quiet individual and to guide the learner toward the correct answer. Example: "You can see the advantages of working together on a project, can't you?"

Factual Questions

The questions ask the student to give the what, where, when, why, and how. Examples:

- How many times a day would you use a lecture format?
- When would a lecture format be most helpful?

Problem Questions

These stimulate and challenge the learner. The question may be used to set up a situation involving a number of factors and perhaps some controversial elements. Example: "When you have a group of young, restless males and they are no longer listening to the topic under discussion, what strategies can you use to keep them engaged?"

Attitudinal Questions

This type of question is used to bring out the feelings of the other person. Example: "If I understand you correctly, you feel we've taken too long to cover this topic? Do others feel this way too?"

Kirkpatrick's Levels of Evaluation

Level One: Reaction

How do we know the training we just delivered was effective? Even if the participants seem happy as they walk out the door, and even if they give you high marks on the evaluation form that they hurriedly

filled out before they left the room, this doesn't give us a clear picture of whether they truly learned and whether they can use what they learned.

Educators generally use four levels of evaluation. The most common model is that developed by Donald Kirkpatrick in 1959. Since that time, Kirkpatrick's work has been adapted worldwide. It continues to apply to the training environment today just as it did then.

Kirkpatrick's model looks like this:



The first stage, **reaction**, is measuring the participants' reaction to the program. Did they like you? Did they like the program? Were they happy as they walked out the door? This level of evaluation has sometimes been called "smile sheets." It is sometimes dismissed as incidental to the true evaluation process.

However, they are more significant than they may at first appear. While liking a workshop or a facilitator does not necessarily mean participants learned, disliking a workshop or a facilitator (or the room, or the materials, or any other element of the learning process) can hamper learning.

Learning is sometimes a painful process, so we can use the information we gather from these reaction sheets to alert us to potential problems and to revise or fine tune our presentation style and our materials, if need be.

This level of evaluation can answer questions such as:

- Was the material appropriate for this group? Was it too hard or too easy? Did it focus on what they wanted or needed to learn?
- Was the course adequate for the group? Was there enough material or too much material? Did it cover enough of the topic or was there too much material covered too quickly?
- Was the course delivered efficiently for the group? Did participants spend time and energy on those topics that needed the time and energy?

Rather than wait until the end of the workshop when participants are leaving, you may wish to measure their reaction mid-course. This can act as a reality check for you and allow you to adjust and revise for the second half of the programme.

Sample One

Course: _____

Date: _____

Instructor: _____

PLEASE INDICATE YOUR CHOICE WITH AN X:

- 1) Strongly agree
- 2) Agree
- 3) Not Sure
- 4) Disagree
- 5) Strongly Disagree

	QUESTION	1	2	3	4	5	N/A
1)	Were materials provided clear and easy to read?						
2)	Did the transparencies/videos reinforce the course content?						
3)	Did the hands on scenarios help you in understanding course content?						
4)	Was the instructor prepared and knowledgeable?						
5)	Was the instructor helpful by giving clear instructions and answers?						
6)	Did the instructor hold your interest throughout the training course?						
7)	Were the classroom facilities clean and comfortable?						
8)	Did you have enough time to finish the scenarios and test?						
9)	Did the training course provide you with what you wanted to learn?						
10)	Would you send others to Acme Training?						

Suggested Improvements:

Sample Two

Name:

Course:

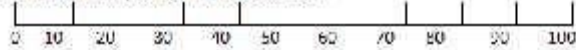
Date:

Facilitator:

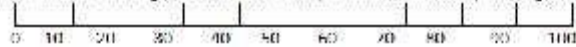
Please give your rating for the following aspects on a scale of 0-100, where 0 is "unsatisfactory" and 100 is "excellent."

Course Content

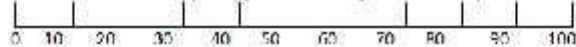
1. Were the course objectives defined and clear?



2. Was the course well organized so that the topics flowed smoothly and logically?

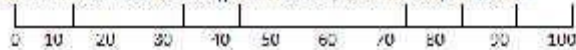


3. Were the workbook and supporting materials easy to follow and practical?

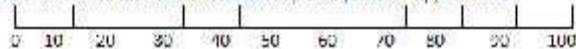


Facilitator

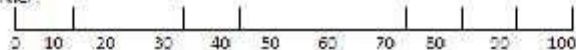
1. Did the facilitator have knowledge and mastery over the subject matter?



2. Was the facilitator able to combine theory with practical application?

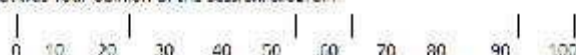


3. Did the facilitator stimulate ideas and communicate in an interesting and informative manner?

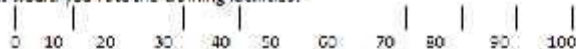


General

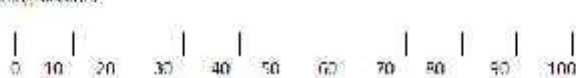
1. What was your opinion of the session/program?



2. How would you rate the training facilities?



3. On the scale below, please rate your knowledge and skill level on the subject matter of the program, with a B on the line for before this session and an A on the line for after this training session.



4. What suggestions do you have to improve future sessions/programs?

5. What are some immediate steps you will now take as a result of taking this program?

6. Additional comments:

Sample Three

You can draw a five-point continuum on the flip chart and ask participants to respond to the several points on it by a show of hands.

How many feel there was too much stuff today?



How many feel the day went too fast?



How many feel the day went too slow?



Another way of using the continuum is to place it on a wall. The five degrees may actually be posted via flip chart sheets at five wall positions or just pointed to in a general way: "Strongly Agree is here;" "Agree is here;" etc. Then let participants position themselves physically, in relation to the five degrees, to indicate their reaction or feeling about a given evaluation question.

Sample Four

COURSE: _____ DATE: _____

We believe that the customer's perception is the only reality. Your comments will be of help in the design and delivery of our workshops. Please be as candid and specific as possible. Thank you.

What is your **general opinion of the session/program?**

Excellent ____ Very Good ____ Good ____ Fair ____ Poor ____

What did you benefit from most?

What suggestions do you have to improve future sessions/programs?

Rating of the speakers' ability to communicate material in an interesting and informative manner:

Speaker's Name	Excellent	Very Good	Good	Fair	Poor

How would you rate the training facilities?

Excellent ____ Very Good ____ Good ____ Fair ____ Poor ____

What are some immediate steps you will now take as a result of taking this program?

Additional comments

Level Two: Knowledge Evaluation

The second level is **learning or knowledge evaluation**. This is the heart of an evaluation strategy. Did the participants learn? Usually we can measure learning by determining whether the learning objectives have been met.

If the objective was an increase in **knowledge**, this can be fairly easily tested by a pen and paper test, just as teachers do in school.

If this was a **skill** to be learned, the test can be a post course performance test. For example, if the skill to be learned was using an electronic cash register, they can demonstrate their skills in a series of situations. Or, you may want to ask them to complete a comfort level evaluation.

Testing for a change in **attitude** is more difficult. We can speculate about whether there has been a change, but actions will speak louder than words. Change in attitude is best measured after participants have returned to the workplace and have the opportunity to apply their new skills.

Samples of knowledge and skill of evaluations are shown on the following pages.

Sample Comfort Level Evaluation

Course: _____ Date: _____

Please take a minute to indicate how comfortable you are with the skills you learned in today's session.

Technique or Skill	Piece of Cake I didn't have any trouble with this and will be able to use it easily.	Let Me Practice I'm catching on, but I need more practice time.	Show Me Again I'm having trouble with this and need more instruction.
1.			
2.			
3.			
4.			
5.			

Sample Pre and Post Test

Rating Chart 1 = Fair 2 = Needs 3 = Good 4 = Very Good 5 = Excellent
Work

For your pre-workshop exercise, please fill in the space on the right hand side. You will be asked at a later date to complete the score on the left hand side as a post-workshop exercise. Your ratings will not be shared with anyone.

Pre-Workshop Rating		Post-Workshop Rating
Role As A Member of The Management Team:		
1	Understand your role as a supervisor	
2	Maintain good working relationships with colleagues and senior management	
3	Foster quality consciousness in the work group	
4	Have effective ways to eliminate stress	
5	Be able to see the overall picture	
	TOTAL	
Your Organizational Skills:		
6	Define work objectives so they are clear to employees	
7	Prioritize work to be done	
8	Handle details effectively so things don't slip through the cracks	
9	Use a planner to schedule work	
10	Manage multiple priorities, projects, and assignments	
	TOTAL	
Your Leadership Skills:		
11	Help others build self-esteem	
12	Manage a diverse workforce	
13	Use the technical, organizational, and human support available to improve job performance	
14	Establish and maintain high performance goals for the unit	
15	Be a role model for your employees	
	TOTAL	
Your Communication Skills:		
16	Provide clear directions or instructions	
17	Use questioning techniques to collect information	
18	Encourage feedback from peers, work group, and supervisors	
19	Provide timely feedback on performances	
20	Really listen to what others are saying	

TOTAL

Your Interaction/Team Skills:

- 21 Develop work teams to prepare them for future responsibilities
- 22 Understand and accept the potential of team work
- 23 Build a climate for effective team functioning
- 24 Work with people of diverse aptitudes and attitudes
- 25 Recognize individuals for the contribution they make

TOTAL

Problem/Conflict Resolution Skills:

- 26 Handle and resolve conflicts as they arise
- 27 Be proactive in identifying potential problems
- 28 Be creative when solving problems
- 29 Recognize conflict as a positive element in a work group
- 30 Follow up to see if solutions are really working

TOTAL

Pre-Workshop Score

Add your points for each category and enter here.

Mgmt. Team	Org. Skills	Leadership Skills	Communication Skills	Interaction/ Team Skills	Problem/ Conflict Skills	TOTAL

Post-Workshop Score

Add your points for each category and enter here.

Mgmt. Team	Org. Skills	Leadership Skills	Communication Skills	Interaction/ Team Skills	Problem/ Conflict Skills	TOTAL

Level Three: Transfer of Learning

Evaluating transfer of learning is more difficult, but often the most effective type of evaluation that we can do. **Can and will participants use their learning back in the real world?**

As an example of what we mean, imagine that you attended a workshop on managing conflict. You enjoyed the workshop (reaction) and you learned a great deal about what conflict is and how it should be managed (learning). However, the next time you and your partner are in a conflict, or you have two employees who are engaged in a conflict you must help them resolve, everything you learned went flying out the window. There was no transfer of learning.

Often, evaluating transfer of learning means **collecting information** from the participant, his or her manager, his or her customers, and even co-workers. Your goal is to determine whether there has been an impact on everyday life at work. This can be conducted in several ways, including a questionnaire, interview, or as part of a 360 degree performance evaluation.

When you send participants back to use these skills on the job, creating some type of support system at work can be very useful; this is best done in a partnership between you and the participant's supervisor or manager.

Level Four: Impact Evaluation

The fourth evaluation level is whether all that training made an impact: **did it make a difference** if the employee was a more skilled customer service representative, sales executive, or supervisor? When training has been truly successful, there is a natural transition from learning a skill to owning a skill, and ultimately passing it on to others.

A direct business result is difficult to measure. For example, sales training may lead to an increase in sales. A workshop on safety may reduce accidents. Customer service training may reduce customer complaints. Even then, there are so many variables that it is difficult to measure impact of training in isolation.

When we consider the impact of training, we should also ask whether the training was **appropriate, adequate, and effective.**

- For example, perhaps the sales training increased sales yet at the same time elevated work-related stress. Thus, the training might not have been **appropriate.**
- If safety training reduced 7 % of the accidents when management was hoping for a 100% reduction, the training would not have been **adequate.** (Perhaps more time was needed for demonstrations or role play.)
- A drop in customer complaints may have been the result of **effective** training, or the drop might have been a result of a new billing system installed at the same time.

Watch out for other factors, such as where a manager acknowledges the value that training should have, and simultaneously increases expectations. When the measurements are taken, it could appear that training missed the new benchmark, where in reality improvements using the previous numbers were measureable and noteworthy.

Evaluation must begin as the training program is being put together.

- What is the training to achieve?
- What are the objectives of the training?
- How will these results/objectives be measured?
- Finally, what support is in place to ensure the training is put to use?

Test Your Knowledge

Sample Impact Evaluation for Participants

Would you please take a few minutes to help us measure whether this training program has made a difference for you at work.

Participant's Name: _____

Manager's Name: _____

Company Name: _____

Program Title: _____

Dates of Program: _____

Location of Program: _____

Have you seen a positive change in your skill level? If so, in what area(s) have these changes been most noticeable?

What are you doing differently now? Do you feel these changes are directly related to your training program?

Have you had any difficulty using the skills/knowledge covered in the course? If so, what difficulties have you experienced?

Do you have suggestions for additional or advanced training that you feel would be helpful to you?

Additional Comments:

Completed forms should be mailed to: _____

Forms may also be faxed to: _____

Thank you for your co-operation.

Skill Application

Test Your Knowledge

prepare a reaction evaluation for your short segment of training. Use the space below to sketch out your template.

Further Reading:

