Learning Guide

Communication process theory

Name:

Workplace:

9694 Demonstrate and apply knowledge of communication process theory

Level 3  5 credits
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Introduction

Communication is how we stay in touch with people. Communication makes the world go around and this learning guide will help you improve your communication, including with people of different cultures.

How to use your learning guide

This guide supports your learning and prepares you for the unit standard assessment. The activities and scenarios should be used as a general guide for learning.

This guide relates to the following unit standard:
• 9694 Demonstrate and apply knowledge of communication process theory (level 3, 5 credits).

This guide is yours to keep. Make it your own by writing notes that help you remember things, or where you need to find more information.

Follow the tips in the notes column.

You may use highlight pens to show important information and ideas, and think about how this information applies to your work.

You might find it helpful to talk to colleagues or your supervisor.

Finish this learning guide before you start on the assessment.

What you will learn

This topic will help you to:
• recognise elements of the communication process.
• identify and overcome barriers when communicating.
• improve your cross-cultural communication.
• understand the importance of non-verbal communication.
The communication process

Communication, is the means by which we stay in touch with other people and know what is happening in the world around us. It includes the way we express ourselves, learn and socialise.

Communication is inevitable. We may be unaware that we are continuously communicating. Even when we don’t verbally say anything or respond, we are still communicating something. For example, showing disinterest, avoidance, or pre-occupation with something else. Communication is taken for granted as a part of daily life. Most of the time we are not consciously thinking about how we communicate.

Becoming more aware of how you communicate, and the effect it has on others, is very useful in your work and in everyday life interactions. Good communication means different things to different people in different situations.

‘Communication theory’ simply provides an understanding of the communication process. There are six main elements to the communication process, each with a function in communicating.

Communication is a two-way process, an interaction between two or more people. It is about sending and receiving messages, thoughts, ideas and information, and responding. It also involves listening, processing the information, understanding the information, and responding and replying to these messages.

One person (the sender), sends the message, and the other person (the receiver), receives the message, interprets the message and makes sense of it. The receiver will often send back their own message. This two-way process is obvious when you observe people having a conversation, taking turns in speaking their ideas and opinions.

The communication process has six main elements
Communication can only be effective when both the sender and the receiver understand the same information as a result of the communication. If for instance, the sender uses jargon, the receiver may not be able to understand the message.

The success of the communication can be checked by giving feedback. The feedback from the person receiving the message may be as important as the message itself.

There are many ways that people communicate; from basic listening and speaking, reading and writing, gestures and sign language, and through mobile phones and computers. The communication channel is the method used to communicate the message, eg text, talking, email.

**Forms of communication**

Using a mobile phone to communicate via a text.

Using the telephone to communicate verbally.

The message will also depend upon the context or the situation. This can be the physical location and/or the social setting, for example, a private chat at your work desk or a public conversation in a work meeting. It is also about picking the right time for communication.

Good communication may mean different things to different people in different situations.
Kinds of communication

There are many different ways that we can pass on and receive information. People usually prefer particular ways of being communicated with. It may be that you have to change the style and manner of your communication to get your message across.

Written communication

Written communication is information that is written down. Examples may include personal plans, memos, emails and text messages. It may also include pictures, symbols and drawings.

Verbal communication

Verbal communication is what you say – and the words that you use. Examples of verbal communication are conversations, staff meetings and talking on the telephone. Jargon and abbreviations, such as medical words should be avoided where possible. Any medical terms that are used should be explained in a simple way.

Vocal communication

Vocal communication is how you use your voice, and includes the clarity of your speech, and your voice volume, tone and pitch.

Non-verbal communication

When we communicate face-to-face most of the message comes from non-verbal communication and body language, not the words we say.
Non-verbal communication and body language

Non-verbal communication is about exchanging information without speaking words. It includes what we do and how we do it. Examples are touch, a certain look, and your use of space. Physical contact, like shaking hands, gives a different message from patting a person on the back.

Non-verbal communication also includes special communication methods like sign language.

Body language includes facial expressions, eye contact, posture, gestures, and all the ways we use our body to communicate. Examples include smiling, nodding, shaking the head, and gestures like shrugging of the shoulders.

Over 90% of our communication is non-verbal. This means that words are less important than the message our body gives out through other means. When there is a difference between verbal and non-verbal communication, the strongest message is generally given by non-verbal means. For communication to be effective, a combination of verbal and non-verbal communication is usually necessary.

You need to make sure that your body language, as well as how you speak, reflects the words that you are saying. For example, you may say, “Pleased to meet you” when you are introduced to someone. If you do not sound pleased, and turn away, the other person may get the feeling that you are not really pleased about meeting them.

Facial expressions

Facial expressions can reveal more of the meaning of a message as they usually communicate emotions, for example, smiling, frowning, raised eyebrows, yawn, sneer etc. These expressions all convey and strengthen the information being sent and received.

Facial expressions continually change during an interaction and are monitored constantly by the recipient. There is evidence that the meaning of these facial expressions may be similar across differing cultures. For example, smiling is a universal mannerism understood by all cultures world-wide.

Smiling is a powerful tool to convey friendliness, happiness, warmth and liking.

If you smile frequently you will be perceived as more likeable, friendly, warm and approachable. Smiling can often be contagious and prompts the other person to smile also.
**Gestures**

Gestures are non-vocal body movements used to express meaning. Hands, arms, movement of the head, face and eyes are all non-vocal, as are winking, beckoning, nodding, or rolling the eyes.

If you do not gesture in some way while speaking you can be perceived as boring, stiff, and unanimated. Nodding your head as a form of a gesture signals a positive reinforcement to the person you are listening to and indicates to them that you are listening and are in agreement.

**Body language**

Body language can be open or closed. Open communication gestures invite communication from the other person. The following are some examples of open gestures:

- a welcoming handshake.
- smiling.
- touching.
- making eye contact.
- leaning forward.
- relaxed posture.
- unbuttoned jacket.
- uncrossed legs.
- affirmative head nods.
- calm use of facial movements.
- a seating arrangement that presents no barriers.

Smiling is a powerful tool to convey friendliness, happiness, warmth and liking.
Different communication gestures send a signal that discourages communication and interaction. The following are some examples of **closed gestures:**

- frowning.
- hands covering mouth.
- moving away.
- arms folded (unless it’s cold).
- leaning back.
- rigid posture.
- legs crossed.
- peering over glasses.
- fidgeting.
- lack of eye contact.
- tapping/drumming of fingers on desk.
- glancing at exit or watch.

When body language is used with words, it can give a powerful message, for example, a combination of folding your arms, leaning back in a chair and looking at the floor or out of the window conveys to the other person that you are not interested or maybe annoyed or defensive.
Eye contact

Eye contact can indicate interest, attention and involvement. Gaze is also part of how eye contact is made and includes the actions of looking while talking, looking while listening, and the length of time of the gaze; as well as how frequently we glance at people, and the rate at which we blink our eyes. When we take an interest in something, our blinking rate decreases and our eyes begin to dilate; whereas if we dislike something, our pupils contract. Sometimes, people will wear dark glasses to hide this reaction from others.

Status indicators

Your dress conveys non-verbal clues about your personality, education, background, financial status and credibility. People with higher social status are likely to use less eye contact and have a more relaxed posture. They may show their status by sitting behind the desk when they talk to people of a lower status.

Time can also be an indicator of status. For example, how long a person will give another person to speak before interrupting them, or how long a person is made to wait, are all ways of showing higher status.

Use of space

The space or physical distance between the sender and the receiver of a message influences the way the message is interpreted. How space is used varies significantly across cultures and different settings within cultures. The distance between communicators will also depend on sex, status and social role.

Space in non-verbal communication can be divided into four main categories: intimate, personal, social and public space.

- **Intimate space** is ‘reserved’ for people we are close to and are spaces in which we can smell, touch and sense the person (up to half a metre apart).

- **Personal space** is used when communicating with others and is usually from one to three metres for business and public communication.

- **Social and public space** is further away.
Positioning of your body is a part of body language and non-verbal communication.

People tend to sit closer to someone they like and may lean in towards the person, which creates a feeling of warmth and genuine interest in the person.

Ideally you should be on the same level as the person you are communicating with. For example, squat or sit down by a person who is sitting in a chair.

You should be on the same level as the person you are communicating with.

Silence

Silence can be a positive or negative influence in the communication process. It can be used to convey different things such as:

- I am too tired to talk right now.
- I don’t want to talk to you.
- I don’t know what you want from me.
- I’m lost and don’t know what to say next.
- I would like to think about what was said.
- I am comfortable just being with you.
Paralanguage

Paralanguage refers to how something is said, rather than what is said. Messages are conveyed by how a person uses their voice, for example pitch and loudness, rate of speaking, tone and rhythm and use of emphasis. Paralanguage may change the meaning of words and is influenced by the context in which the speaker is speaking.

Emotions can be expressed while speaking, for example, laughing, sighing and yawning. The style of delivery affects the message, for example, yelling out ‘hey stop that’ as opposed to whispering “hey stop that”. Both examples use the same words, but to a very different effect. Comments such as “uh-huh” show the speaker that the person is listening.

Personal presentation

Our communications are also affected by a variety of other variables, such as the clothes we wear, makeup and accessories. These elements offer signals relating to context, for example, formal versus informal, status and individuality.

Posture

You communicate messages by the way you walk, talk, stand and sit. Standing erect, but not rigid and leaning slightly forward communicates that you are approachable, receptive and friendly. Facing each other as you talk helps convey that you are involved and interested in what the other person has to say. Another technique is mirroring the body position and actions of the person you are communicating with.

Touch

Touch includes handshakes, holding hands, kissing (on the cheek, lips or hand), back slapping, high fives, and a pat on the shoulder or the brushing of an arm. Touching of oneself during communication may include licking, picking, holding and scratching. These behaviour patterns can send messages that reveal the feelings of the person who is trying to communicate. The meaning of the touch depends on the context of the situation, the relationship between the people, and the kind of touch that occurs.
Factors that affect communication

Communication can be improved or disadvantaged by many factors. These factors may become barriers to communication, interfering with our understanding, and effectiveness of the communication. Be aware of any barriers and how you can overcome them.

Attitudes

Our perceptions, attitudes and values influence the way we interact and communicate with others. Barriers may include factors such as our culture, religion, previous experiences and emotions. Being aware of our attitudes is a good start to developing effective communication with a wide range of people.

Age and gender

Communication is most successful if it is age and gender appropriate. This means considering the importance of factors which can limit or enhance communication, such as:

- forms of address, for example, using first names, or titles such as Mr or Mrs.
- forms of communication, for example, letter, email, telephone.
- language used, without a sexist or gender bias.
- disabilities such as restricted vision or hearing loss for older people.

Noise

We know that loud noises and distance can make communication difficult, for example, a builder hammering in the house next door, or speaking to someone from a distance.

Anything that interferes with a person’s understanding is also described as ‘noise’. Noise covers things such as sound, pace of speech, illegible writing, anxiety (psychological noise or disturbance) or semantic noise which is where a lot of jargon is used.

Language

Language is a very powerful tool. It helps us to create meaning through images and delivers messages about the world such as power, status and prestige. For example, a ‘title’ can send a message. Think of the image created when you use words like ‘Sir,’ ‘matron’ or ‘officer.’

Differences in the actual words used; accent, idioms or expressions; or words that are too difficult to be understood can create barriers. It may be necessary to ask the speaker to explain what they are saying in a different way before the message can be clearly understood.
Vocabularies are built up around particular professions. The health sector, for example, has its own language and terminology and uses jargon or technical language. Lack of understanding can lead to miscommunication, poorly understood messages or total rejection of the ideas being discussed.

Ignorance of language can also cause miscommunication. For example, a young person who communicates effectively with their peers may not be so successful with an older person who may neither understand nor value the informal style used.

Illness or tiredness can reduce the concentration of both the sender and receiver of the message. This increases the likelihood of misunderstandings arising. Physical factors such as having a heavy cold can cause difficulties in speaking or hearing the message clearly.

**Education factors**

The effectiveness of various methods of communication can differ according to a person’s level of education. Research has shown that less educated people rely more on what they hear (aural) and the pictorial means of communicating, for example, television, whereas educated people tend to use print media to a greater degree.

**Socio-economic factors**

Socio-economic factors include our occupation, wealth and education and each of these factors can influence how a message is perceived. These factors are linked to our perception of the world through a combination of self-esteem, opportunity for education and advancement, status, our peer group, our achievements and our values. When we are communicating with people, we are more likely to be successful if we use real examples which are likely to be understood by, and are meaningful to that group of people.

Wealth can also have a profound effect on attitudes and values. For example, a speech made to a group of low income workers about free health care is likely to be received differently from the same message given to an audience of wealthy high income earners who have an interest in health insurance. For this reason the speech needs to be ‘delivered’ in a different manner.

**Family background**

Our experiences in the family in which we grew up can affect how well we communicate. Some families communicate openly, or at a particular time or place, for example, at the dinner table over a meal. In other families, this may not happen, so alternative ways of communication need to be developed.
Sometimes the failure to develop effective communication within the family structure influences how people will communicate for the rest of their lives. For example, if the family does not routinely discuss matters, problems or conflict, a family member may never see this as a useful way to communicate and to resolve issues.

Our position in the family can also convey status and speaking rights in some cultures, and this in turn affects how we are expected to communicate in certain situations. For example, in many cultures the eldest son is expected to speak for the family, in the absence of an older male.

**Ethics**

Ethics are the rules and codes of conduct that we adopt to guide our behaviour. There are ethical implications for the way we communicate, and a useful test can be to question the approach and purpose of our efforts. When we take responsibility for our behaviour and are sensitive to the behaviour of others, we are likely to better communicate.

Questions you can ask yourself when thinking about ethical communication.

- Who will benefit if I communicate effectively?
- Is my approach honest and sincere?
- Is my message clear?
- Is my message unbiased?
- Have I represented the information/situation fairly?
- Have I considered the values, feelings and needs of the person I am communicating with?
- Is my communication respectful of all concerned?
Cross-cultural communication

Culture describes the socially transmitted beliefs, values, customs, behaviour patterns and practices characteristic of a particular group of people. Culture contributes significantly to the way you live and to what makes you unique. It includes the way you dress, your language, type of food eaten, greetings, manners and rules that you live by.

Culture is something that you learn from your family and your surroundings and gives a common framework of meaning. People’s culture influences the way that they perceive, interpret, express and respond to their situation and surroundings, including how they communicate and interact.

Shared cultural understanding means people from the same culture can read ‘signals’ such as body language, gestures, where people choose to position themselves, words that are said or not said. This ability helps people to know what others are thinking or feeling or why they are behaving in a particular manner.

Communication difficulties between cultures may occur because both verbal and non-verbal language differs between cultures. An interpreter can translate the spoken language but gestures or practices may be more subtle.

An example of a communication issue is when a person of a different culture does not make eye contact when talking to you. You may think it is a sign that the person is not telling the truth, or is unreliable or not trustworthy. To the other person, it may be a sign of showing respect.

Knowing what a different culture requires means that you can understand the behaviour in terms of the other culture, not your culture.

Status

When working with Pacific families, communicating with the male head of the extended family who makes the big family decisions, could be an important aspect of care.

In the Māori culture, the language (Te Reo) is highly valued and an integral part of the culture. Because of this, a Māori family may appreciate and respond positively to information that is written or spoken in both English and Māori.

Elders, parents and grandparents, and leaders in the community may have higher status in many cultures. Men, for example, have a higher status than women in many cultures.
Introducing yourself

Some cultural groups have specific ways of making introductions, for example, shaking hands, joining the palms of hands, smiling and bowing. If you are unsure, ask the person or a family member.

When introducing yourself to a person of another culture, consider the following guidelines.

• Greet the person, for example, ‘good morning’ or ‘good evening.’ or use the appropriate cultural greeting, if you know it.

• Say your name.

• Say what your role is and why you are there.

• Use the person’s title when addressing them.

• Ask the person (or family) what name the person would like to be called by.

• Ask how to best pronounce (say) the person’s name if you are unsure.

• Speak clearly but not too slowly.

• Smile and have a friendly but respectful manner.

• Offer to shake hands only if it is appropriate for the person’s culture and will not cause discomfort.

• Use eye contact appropriately. You may need to find out about the person’s preferences so that you do not cause offence with too much eye contact.

• Be aware of your body language and position.

Body language, using gestures and speaking clearly are all important when communicating.
Body language

It is important to be aware of your own body language when communicating with people from other cultures. Remember body language includes body posture and gestures, eye contact, facial expressions and personal space and touch.

Body posture and gestures

A lot of information can be gained from looking at a person’s posture and gestures.

Gestures can have different meanings in different cultural groups. For example, a ‘thumbs-up’ gesture is a signal of approval in many countries but an obscene gesture in others, such as Iran.

Japanese people will nod to indicate that they are listening. The gesture does not necessarily indicate understanding or agreement. People from some parts of India may shake their heads to show agreement.

Eye contact

Europeans value eye contact and use it to indicate attentiveness and honesty. Over 70% of the world however prefers not to have direct eye contact. Asian, Māori and Pacific Island people treat the lowering of the eyes as a sign of respect. Eye contact can be affected by gender and status as well as by culture.

Facial expressions

Facial expressions may not mean what you think they mean. For example, Japanese people can be straight-faced when happy. Some cultures may smile even when feeling angry or sad.

Personal space and touch

Personal space depends upon the situation, culture, age and intimacy or closeness between people. The acceptable physical distance between people differs between cultures. For example, in the Middle East people of the same sex stand closer to each other than Europeans do, but people of the opposite sex stand much further apart.

In some cultures people show respect to others by keeping their head lower than the person who is being spoken to.

Try to be on about the same level as the person you are communicating with. Sit down by a person if they are sitting in a chair.

Your role often requires you to get into close proximity and touch the other person. Deliberate touching can be perceived either as a gesture of warmth and comfort, or an invasion of their privacy and space.
People from some cultures, for example, from Arabic countries, are only comfortable with someone of the same sex touching them. In Maori culture a person’s head is considered sacred.

Some people consider that ‘safe’ areas to touch are the hands, upper arm and upper back (pat on the back). If you are not sure, do not touch any part of the person without their permission. It is advisable to check with the person about what is comfortable for them.

Interacting with people from different cultures requires consideration of their cultural values.

**Use plain language**

Use plain language when communicating with people from other cultures. Use simple, everyday words that most people should understand.

When communicating, it is important to:
- be aware of any cultural phrases or responses that you may be using that may not be understood by the other person, for example, ‘she’ll be right’.
- avoid using technical or specialised terms that may not be understood.
- avoid sayings that may be confusing, for example, ‘pull your socks up’.
Asking questions

When asking questions it is important to be aware of the emphasis, tone, and volume of your voice. ‘Emphasis’ is the stress or weight placed on a word in a sentence to give it more importance.

Your tone can communicate your feelings (such as surprise or approval). People from other cultures may not understand the tone of your questions. Some people, such as Chinese, place great importance on the tone that is used when speaking and have more tones than English.

The volume and tone of your voice can indicate your feelings, for example, speaking loudly can imply frustration and sound demanding.

Listen to the person. Gestures used by Europeans to indicate that they are listening may not always be understood in the same way by other cultures. Other cultures may use a nod, silence, stillness or looking away to show that they are listening.

Give the person enough time to answer. If people are from another cultural group, they may be trying to find the right English words before they answer. After you have allowed some time, and if the person still appears to be struggling with the question, re-phrase the question or try another way of asking for the information.

The 60-second rule

For people who do not speak English as their first language, it can take up to 60 seconds for people to go through a translation process. They have to:

- listen and hear the English words.
- translate the English into their own language.
- think through the answer in their language.
- translate the answer back into English and then answers.

Time

Different cultures have different perceptions of the importance of time and timeliness.

Europeans have a strong sense of time and structure, with agendas and timeframes for meetings. Maori have a more relaxed approach to time and a meeting will take as long as is needed for all people to be heard.

Japanese and Germans are prompt and on time and they do not like to be kept waiting. If they are told ‘it’ll be about 10 minutes’ then 10 minutes only is the time they will expect to wait.

North Americans, whilst expecting prompt attention, speak more slowly than New Zealander’s and often find our speech fast and hence sometimes difficult to understand.
Effective and efficient communication

Communication is a complex process. It requires a lot of thought and sometimes effort to make sure that the communication interactions we have are successful.

If your communication has the desired outcome, then you will know it was a successful interaction. This means that the communication interaction was effective.

We know from experience that effective communication requires:

- a **purpose or reason** – something to communicate about.
- a **strategy** – a way to communicate (how we will best get the information to the people who we want to receive it).
- **acknowledgement or feedback** – somebody to communicate with who acknowledges your communication.

When any of these factors are missing, limited, or ineffective you will have difficulty communicating effectively.

Consider any barriers there may be, and how to overcome them to make the communication more effective.

**Efficient communication** means spending the minimum amount of time and effort to get the communication message across successfully. This may involve:

- the best communication strategy for the purpose.
- age appropriate communication strategies.
- making sure you contact the right people.
- confirming appointments or contacts prior to the event happening.
Think about all the tasks you do in your role that include communication interactions. Using the table below, record your interactions. An example has been done for you.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Interaction with a child</th>
<th>What you need to communicate</th>
<th>Your strategy</th>
<th>How you ensure the communication is effective and efficient</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Explain what will be happening.</td>
<td>Give simple instructions, model the process, use clear language, use visual aids.</td>
<td>I would check the child understood what was happening, and explain each step.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Interaction with an adult

Interaction with colleagues

Interaction with a manager
It is important to know that the communications strategies you are using are working effectively and efficiently. You can do this by:

- monitoring the communication interactions you have against what you expect your result to be.
- monitoring the responses to your communication interactions.

Sometimes communication interactions do not have the desired outcomes and are unsuccessful; or to get the desired outcome you have to put in a lot of extra time and effort.

Have an alternative strategy in mind if communication is not as successful as you intended. This is an important part of ensuring that your communication interactions are effective and efficient.

Alternative strategies should be both practical and relevant to the situation.

**Plan**

Consider your target audience and think about the best way you can carry out the communication interaction. Consider all possibilities and have a back-up plan ready.

**Do**

Carry out the communication interactions.

**Check**

That you are getting the desired outcomes from your communication interactions – monitor how successful they are and make adjustments as required.

**Act**

Follow up and implement alternative communication strategies where necessary.
Think about **two communication interactions** that did not go as well as you had hoped and then answer the questions below.

<table>
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<th>Interaction one</th>
<th>Interaction two</th>
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<td>Example of communication interaction</td>
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<tr>
<td>How did you know the interaction was inefficient or ineffective?</td>
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<tr>
<td>What barriers were there to communication?</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>What could you do or what did you do to improve the communication interaction?</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>What other strategies could you have tried?</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Was the communication strategy practical and relevant?</td>
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</table>