



CONNECTIONS

Communicating in Culturally Diverse Environments



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The Effect of Communication on Performance

There is no activity that we engage in more often than communication. Be it listening, talking, reading or writing, we spend more time communicating with others than practically every other activity combined. This has significant implications for both individual and organizational effectiveness. Since we spend so much time communicating, it behooves us to do so as efficiently and effectively as possible. Unfortunately, most of us do not maximize our communication effec-

tiveness and this exacts a significant organizational cost. Specifically, there are ten things we know about communication:

1. We spend 90% of our time communicating with others on a daily basis. This includes listening, talking, reading & writing.
2. Managers spend 80% of their time communicating *orally* with others on a daily basis.
3. During communication, people spend more time *listening* than any other activ-

ity (e.g., reading, writing and speaking). Unfortunately, most of us are not very effective listeners.

4. The average listener retains only 50% of what is said immediately after hearing it.
5. The average listener retains only 25% of what is said 48 hours later.
6. The average listener retains less than 10% of what is said a week later.
7. Research consistently shows that the single most important skill that people

The Effect of Communication (continued)

need to perform well on the job is the ability to communicate effectively with others.

8. The two most important factors in helping graduating college students obtain employment are their speak-

ing skills and listening skills.

9. A recent study of top executives estimated that poor communication costs organizations between 25% and 40% of their budgets.

10. Another study of top executives estimated that

14% of each 40 hour work week is wasted specifically due to poor communication between managers and their staffs. Based on a 50 week year, this amounts to 35 wasted work days per employee!

COMMUNICATING IN CULTURALLY
DIVERSE ENVIRONMENTS

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Steps for Improving Communication

There is a significant cost to the poor communication that is pervasive in many of our work groups, teams, and organizations. Fortunately, there are several things we can do to improve the quality of individual and organizational communication:

- 1. Use Multiple Channels for Organizational Communication** - One of the most effective ways to ensure that people get your message is to send it across multiple channels. Some of the more effective channels include meetings, face-to-face talks, e-mail, faxes, telephone conversations, bulletins, postings, and memos. The key is to make sure you always employ multiple methods to disseminate your message, and never rely on a single channel.
- 2. Make Important Messages Repetitive** - In addition to using multiple channels, you can improve organizational communication by repeating important messages from time to time.
- 3. Focus on Listening** - This is vital during individual (i.e., one-on-one) communication. The biggest reason that most of us are poor listeners is

Steps for Improving Communication (continued)

that we don't take the time to *actively* listen. You can do this by utilizing reflective listening skills (paraphrasing what your speaking partner has said to confirm understanding), using good nonverbal behaviors and body posture (e.g., face your communication partner with an open stance), and focusing on your partner by making a conscious effort to listen first instead of trying to get your message across first. Do this by saying to yourself, "for the next three minutes, I am only going to listen".

4. Get Your Message Across - After you listen and fully understand your communication partner, you must make sure you can get your message across in the exact way it is intended. To do this, speak openly and honestly, and be as

straightforward as possible (i.e., no "beating around the bush"); speak inclusively and use terms that will be understood and respected by a diverse array of individuals; and check for understanding to make sure your message has been received accurately.

5. Handle Communication Problems - Finally, we must become more effective at managing the communication problems that will inevitably arise during human interaction. Such problems include conflict, difficulty in resolving problems, misunderstandings, dealing with difficult people and managing cultural differences. I will address these issues in future newsletters.

