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What did you just say?
Eliminating the gap between your words and their understanding
When you communicate you can only control the ‘push’ – your words
How those words are received, processed and interpreted is beyond your direct control and is impacted by:
• Environmental factors
• Personal bias
• Individual factors
The problem made worse

Today’s working environment adds barriers to communications everywhere
• Greater technology interaction meaning less physical interaction
• Remote workers and non-standard working hours
• Multiple offices / teams in global locations

Expectations make effective communication even more important
• Do more with less
• Global competition
• Pressure on margins
Many different theories of effective communication
Most based on work of Shannon & Weaver in the 1940s
Getting practical

- Theories are valuable in that they help us understand the different elements of a concept

But...

- We have to apply those theories to the real world situations we face on a daily basis
As communicators we can only observe how our messages are received
• Are they driving the right behavior?
• Are they producing the expected reaction?
• Are responses consistent or are there variations?

When we observe undesired ‘symptoms’ we must address the underlying problem
• Solutions come from removing communication barriers
• Observed reactions are clues to those barriers, not the barriers themselves
Symptoms vs. problems

Lack of understanding
- Not ready to receive
- Absence of ‘foundation’
- Unclear message
- Inconsistent message
- Insufficient messaging

Undesired reaction
- Undesirable message
- Unclear message
- Inappropriate interpretation

Individual anomalies
- Ineffective delivery mechanism
- Personally undesirable message
- Individual barriers
Solving problems

The quick, and wrong, approach

- Implementing solutions in isolation is unlikely to deliver success
- ‘Hit and miss’ approach at best and may create more problems
- Tactical attempt to solve individual issues, not strategic approach to resolve overarching problems

In this context a ‘solution’ is nothing more than the deferral of problems – at the cost of lost goodwill, effort, productivity, etc.
Successful communication requires an environment where communication can be clear, complete, concise and exempt from ‘noise’

- Involves everyone who is part of the communication
- Requires active commitment to successful interactions
- Built on complete openness between team members
- Must always be non-judgmental
The right environment

- Cultural commitment
- ‘Live what you preach’
- Communication equality

- Evolution of all elements – culture to tools
- Validation of improvements

- Tools and processes
- Coaching and guidance
- Practical prioritization

- Open feedback loop in all directions
- Active acknowledgement

Commit
Support
Adjust
Feedback
Communication is personal and difficult
  - Mistakes will occur
  - Mistakes will be viewed as personal failings by sender and recipient

Cultural change takes time
  - Cannot be forced
  - Easily undermined, creating lasting damage
No organization or individual is perfect

- Mistakes happen, what measures success is how you deal with them
- Communication mistakes will fester if not addressed immediately
- Blame must be avoided, apologies may be necessary
Solving problems – the right way

Recognize
- Identify that a problem exists
- Understand the extent of the problem
- Establish impact of mistake – who, how, etc.

Mitigate
- Try to correct the damage done by the mistake
- Stop further damage from occurring
- Include impact on person making the mistake

Assess
- Understand why mistake occurred
- Likely to be multiple contributing factors
- Establish steps needed to address situation

Correct
- Implement all required adjustments identified
- Validate adjustments have worked
- May require phased implementation

Prevent
- Look for controls / training / etc. that will help prevent problem from recurring
- Look for similar scenarios that could be problematic and address them
The key to successful communication

Know your audience

Understand their needs

Tailor your message

Choose appropriate medium

Use correct style

Consider timing

Deliver the message

Confirm understanding

Adjust / correct

No shortcuts – all steps are necessary
A communication support toolkit

- Communication will never be easy, but modern tools can help
  - Advances in technology make communication more immediate, flexible and interactive
  - Tool options increase the likelihood of finding ‘the right’ approach

But…

- Every opportunity also poses a threat – an opportunity to get it wrong
# Virtual meeting platforms

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# Instant messaging tools

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| • Immediate communication – rapid resolution of questions  
• Closer one on one communications regardless of location  
• Non disruptive communications (use of ‘busy’ status) | • Opportunities for distraction  
• Loss of focus on other tasks  
• Lack of record of communications | • Use primarily for informal communications, follow up with other methods for formal agreements  
• Schedule ‘quiet’ and / or available times for teams  
• Train users to maintain status settings |
Help with

- Communication to a broad audience – often people you would never otherwise reach
- Access to leading edge thinking
- Instant feedback / assistance

Beware of

- No editing – be careful what you say, be careful what you believe
- ‘Nowhere to hide’ – even deleting messages doesn’t necessarily remove it
- Potential for negative reactions

Tips

- Avoid blending personal and professional
- Carefully consider what you say and what you consume
The best tool is the one between your ears

- Communications problems are usually the result of
  - Failing to recognize the potential for problems
  - Failing to respond appropriately to the situations you face
  - Making assumptions and failing to validate them
  - Being oblivious to changing situations

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