1.1: Why Study Group Communication?

Learning Objectives

1. Understand the importance of group communication

Communication is key to your success, in relationships, in the workplace, as a citizen of your country, and across your lifetime. Your ability to communicate comes from experience, which can be an effective teacher, but this text and the related group communication course will offer you a wealth of experiences gathered from professionals across their lifetimes. You can learn from the lessons they’ve learned and be a more effective team and group communicator right out of the gate. According to Ken Boughrum, Executive Vice President and Managing Director, and Tyler Durham, Vice President and Managing Consultant, Stromberg Consulting, “Great teams are distinguished from good teams by how effectively they communicate. Great team communication is more than the words that are said or written. Power is leveraged by the team’s ability to actively listen, clarify, understand, and live by the principle that “everything communicates.” The actions, the tone, the gestures, the infrastructure, the environment and the things that are no done or said speak and inform just as loudly as words. O’Rourke, J., and Yarbrough, B, (2008). Leading Groups and Teams. Mason, OH: South-Western Cengage Learning, p. 2. Effective teams and groups start with effective communication.

Communication Influences Your Thinking about Yourself and Others

We all share a fundamental drive to communicate. Communication can be defined as the process of understanding and sharing meaning. Pearson, J., & Nelson, P. (2000). An Introduction to Human Communication: Understanding and Sharing. Boston, MA: McGraw-Hill. p. 6. You share meaning in what you say and how you say it, both in oral and written forms. If you could not communicate, what would life be like? A series of never-ending frustrations? Not being able to ask for what you need, or even to understand the needs of others?
Being unable to communicate might even mean losing a part of yourself, for you communicate your self-concept—your sense of self and awareness of who you are—in many ways. Do you like to write? Do you find it easy to make a phone call to a stranger, or to speak to a room full of people? Do you like to work in teams and groups? Perhaps someone told you that you don’t speak clearly, or your grammar needs improvement. Does that make you more or less likely to want to communicate? For some, it may be a positive challenge, while for others it may be discouraging, but in all cases, your ability to communicate is central to your self-concept.

Take a look at your clothes. What are the brands you are wearing? What do you think they say about you? Do you feel that certain styles of shoes, jewelry, tattoos, music, or even automobiles express who you are? Part of your self-concept may be that you express yourself through texting, or through writing longer documents like essays and research papers, or through the way you speak. Those labels and brands in some ways communicate with your group or community. They are recognized, and to some degree, are associated with you. Just as your words represent you in writing, how you present yourself with symbols and images influences how others perceive you.

On the other side of the coin, your communication skills help you to understand others—not just their words, but also their tone of voice, their nonverbal gestures, or the format of their written documents provide you with clues about who they are and what their values and priorities may be. Active listening and reading are also part of being a successful communicator.

Communication Influences How You Learn

When you were an infant, you learned to talk over a period of many months. There was a group of caregivers around you that talked to each other, and sometimes you, and you caught on that you could get something when you used a word correctly. Before you knew it you were speaking in sentences, with words, in a language you learned from your family or those around you. When you got older, you didn’t learn to ride a bike, drive a car, or even text a message on your cell phone in one brief moment. You need to begin the process of improving your communication skills with the frame of mind that it will require effort, persistence, and self-correction.

You learn to speak in public by first having conversations, then by answering questions and expressing your opinions in class, and finally by preparing and delivering a “stand-up” speech. Similarly, you learn to write by first learning to read, then by writing and learning to think critically. Your speaking and writing are reflections of your thoughts, experience, and education, and part of that combination is your level of experience listening to other speakers, reading documents and styles of writing, and studying formats similar to what you aim to produce. Speaking and writing are both key communication skills that you will use in teams and groups.

As you study group communication, you may receive suggestions for improvement and clarification from professionals more experienced than yourself. Take their suggestions as challenges to improve, don’t give up when your first speech or first draft does not communicate the message you intend. Stick with it until you get it right. Your success in communicating is a skill that applies to almost every field of work, and it makes a difference in your relationships with others.

Remember, luck is simply a combination of preparation and timing. You want to be prepared to communicate well when given the opportunity. Each time you do a good job, your success will bring more success.
Communication Represents You and Your Employer

You want to make a good first impression on your friends and family, on your instructors, and on your employer. They all want you to convey a positive image, as it reflects on them. In your career, you will represent your business or company in teams and groups, and your professionalism and attention to detail will reflect positively on you and set you up for success.

As an effective member of the team, you will benefit from having the ability to communicate clearly and with clarity. These are skills you will use for the rest of your life. Positive improvements in these skills will have a positive impact on your relationships, your prospects for employment, and your ability to make a difference in the world.

Communication Skills Are Desired by Business and Industry

Oral and written communication proficiencies are consistently ranked in the top ten desirable skills by employer surveys year after year. In fact, high-powered business executives sometimes hire consultants to coach them in sharpening their communication skills. According to the National Association of Colleges and Employers, the top five personal qualities/skills potential employers seek are (NACE, 2009):

1. Communication skills (verbal and written)
2. Strong work ethic
3. Teamwork skills (works well with others, group communication)
4. Initiative
5. Analytical Skills

Knowing this, you can see that one way for you to be successful and increase your promotion potential is to increase your abilities to speak and write effectively.

Teams and groups are almost universal across all fields because no one personal has all the skills, knowledge, or ability to do everything with an equal degree of excellence. Employees work with each other in manufacturing and service industries on a daily basis. An individual with excellent communication skills is an asset to every organization. No matter what career you plan to pursue, learning to interact, contribute, and excel in groups and teams will help you get there.

Figure 1: Effective communication skills are assets that will get you there © Jupiter Images
Key Takeaway

Communication helps you understand yourself and others, learn new things, and build your career.

Exercise 1

1. Imagine that you have been hired to make “cold calls” to ask people whether they are familiar with a new restaurant that has just opened in your neighborhood. Write a script for the phone call, and focus on the climate, the environment, and the service. Ask a classmate to co-present as you deliver the script orally in class, as if you were making a phone call to the classmate. Discuss your experience with the rest of the class.

2. Imagine you have been assigned the task of creating a job description for a Social Media Manager. Search online and find at least two sample job descriptions, and create one. Make sure you pay attention to words like “effective in virtual teams” and other details that highlight the importance of communication skills. Please present the job description to the class and share what you learned on how communication skills play a role in the tasks or duties you have included.