

Course: Corporate Communication and Public Relations

Lecture 4: Effortless participation in any conversation on various topics

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Objectives

By the end of this lesson, learners will be able to:

1. Define a conversation.
2. Explain how to use your voice effectively in professional situations.
3. Identify the five stages of a conversation and general strategies for improving conversation skills.
4. Communicate effectively by telephone in a professional manner.

Introduction

At a workplace, employees need to have conversational skills that help them interact with customers and their coworkers.

Effective workplace communication contributes to achieving organizational objectives. Workplace communication is tremendously important to organizations because it increases productivity and efficiency.

This requires verbal communication skills that allows effective interaction and makes everyone feel welcomed.

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Good verbal communication skills are highly sought after by employers across a wide range of job roles and sectors, because they know that if someone is a good communicator they are likely to fit in quickly with the team and deal with customers effectively.

There are many workplace situations in which verbal communication skills is useful, such as meetings, giving presentations, etc.

Definition

Conversation

Cambridge Dictionary (2020) defines a conversation as a talk between two or more people in which thoughts, feelings, and ideas are expressed, questions are asked and answered, or news and information is exchanged.

According to Eckard & Kearny (1981) a conversation is the meaningful spoken exchange of ideas, information, or feelings.

Participation

Participation can be defined as action of taking part involved in something.

Use of communication skills at workplace

Effective communication skills can assist you when:

- ✓ Resolving complaints and handling confrontations
- ✓ Participating in meetings
- ✓ Maintaining your personal rights as an employee
- ✓ In a learning and/or training situation
- ✓ Customer/client presentation
- ✓ Writing reports

Workplace communication process elements

The communication process has seven basic elements that are essential for effective interaction at a workplace:

- The setting
- The message
- The channel or mode
- The sender
- The feedback
- The receiver
- Interference, distractions, or noise

Sender

The sender must:

- ✓ Relay the message in a clear and easily understood manner.
- ✓ Use an appropriate delivery mode to the receiver.
- ✓ Avoid technical jargon or unfamiliar terminology.
- ✓ Confirm the message has been received.

Receiver

The receiver must:

- ✓ Listen or read the message.
- ✓ Interpret the message.
- ✓ Clarification through questioning.
- ✓ Provide feedback and confirmation to the sender.

Communication channels

Communication channels at a workplace are:

- ✓ Speaking to customers or to fellow employees
- ✓ Emails
- ✓ Television and radio broadcasts
- ✓ Meetings
- ✓ Brochures, newsletters or flyers
- ✓ Newspapers, magazines or other types or printed media
- ✓ Etc.

The receiver must listen or read the message, interpret the message, seek clarification through questioning and provide feedback and confirmation to the sender

Verbal and non –verbal communication

Verbal and non –verbal communicators use the following:

- ✓ Verbal
- ✓ Oral
- ✓ Written
- ✓ Non Verbal
- ✓ Facial expressions
- ✓ Body language
- ✓ Gestures
- ✓ Personal appearance

Information flow

At a workplace, various communication modes are used to communicate, thus the information is shared through the following ways:

- Internally
- Externally
- Laterally
- Vertically
- Formally
- Informally

Communication breakdown

Workplace communication breakdowns can occur when:

- ✓ Inappropriate or unfamiliar words are used
- ✓ Inadequate language skills are used
- ✓ Receiver does not possess adequate reading skills
- ✓ Receiver or sender does not possess adequate writing skills
- ✓ Other noise or movement has distracted receiver or listener
- ✓ Irrelevant or incomplete information has been received or sent.

Communication styles

The nine common communication styles are:

- ✓ Relaxed
- ✓ Contentious
- ✓ Attentive
- ✓ Precise
- ✓ Dramatic
- ✓ Animated
- ✓ Open
- ✓ Dominant
- ✓ Friendly

Relaxed communicator

A relaxed communicator is ...

- ✓ Calm and confident
- ✓ Free of nervous speech mannerisms
- ✓ Relaxed and easy-to-follow writing style

Contentious Communicator

A contentious communicator ...

- ✓ Challenges people
- ✓ Is argumentative
- ✓ Is difficult to stop when agitated
- ✓ Easily able to create negativity
- ✓ Is annoying and irritating
- ✓ Causes tension and unrest

An attentive communicator

Constantly clarifies information ...

- ✓ Is a good listener
- ✓ Enjoys listening to other people
- ✓ Offers constructive feedback
- ✓ Is empathetic

A dramatic communicator

A dramatic communicator ...

- ✓ Acts out what is being said
- ✓ Emphasizes what is being said
- ✓ Speaks dramatically
- ✓ Uses a lot of physical gestures
- ✓ Writes dramatically
- ✓ Tends to be a story teller
- ✓ Is usually an attention-seeker

An animated communicator

An animated communicator ...

- ✓ Uses lots of gestures
- ✓ Use of facial expressions
- ✓ Use highly expressive words and meanings
- ✓ Is enthusiastic and energetic
- ✓ Is eager, lively and refreshing

An open communicator

An open communicator ...

- ✓ Does not hide anything
- ✓ Expresses their feelings and emotions
- ✓ Tends to be extroverted
- ✓ Is conversational and unreserved
- ✓ Can be frank and outspoken
- ✓ Is approachable

A dominant communicator

A dominant communicator ...

- ✓ Takes charge
- ✓ Interrupts frequently
- ✓ Likes to talk and hear themselves
- ✓ Is confident and self-assured
- ✓ Has high self-esteem
- ✓ Is competitive
- ✓ Often conceited

A friendly communicator

A friendly communicator ...

- ✓ Always shows interest in others
- ✓ Avoids confrontation
- ✓ Is helpful and sociable
- ✓ Acknowledges the achievements of others
- ✓ Likes other people

A precise communicator

A precise communicator ...

- ✓ Defines everything
- ✓ Uses traditional writing styles
- ✓ Likes documentation
- ✓ Requires proof
- ✓ Explains everything in clear detail
- ✓ Requires a high level of accuracy
- ✓ Tends to be a detailed person

Interpreting and comprehending spoken information

Interpret and comprehend spoken by:

- ❖ Becoming an active listener
- ❖ Asking plenty of questions
- ❖ Giving lots of feedback
- ❖ Stating your understanding

Interpreting and comprehending written information

Accurately interpret and comprehend messages by:

- ❖ Reading and re-reading the information
- ❖ Using a dictionary
- ❖ Using research
- ❖ Imagining what the writer is trying to say
- ❖ Determining what the meaning is
- ❖ Not basing your interpretation on your feelings, etc.
- ❖ Asking for help

Interpreting and comprehending forms/written materials

When working with forms:

- ❖ Read it thoroughly
- ❖ Understand all instructions
- ❖ Identify mandatory information

Hints for successful conversations

- ✓ Prepare, especially where to begin.
- ✓ Know your own interests and the essence of what you need.
- ✓ Anticipate (or find out) others' interests.
- ✓ Focus on interests and behaviors, not personalities.
- ✓ Create an environment based on trust.

Conversation at workplace

Analyze the difference in your view and the other party's view of events.

- Intentions
- Impact on the other
- Contributions to the difficulty
- Impact on identity

Elements of building trust


In order to build trust at a workplace, employees need to:

- ✓ Take responsibility for their own actions (accountability).
- ✓ Stay interested in others without much self-promotion.
- ✓ Act to draw out the best in others.
- ✓ Appreciate and value differences.
- ✓ Tell the truth (honesty).

Conversational skills

Conversational skills are important for both informal and formal context at a workplace. An employee with good problem solving ability, technical skills and attitude is considered as valuable asset, and with good conversation skills is an invaluable asset.

Informal conversations can be done through

- ✓ Exchange of pleasantries
 - ✓ Exchange of likes and dislikes
 - ✓ Exchange of facts
 - ✓ Exchange of observations
 - ✓ Exchange of opinions
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Informal conversations at workplace are also known as small talk.

The ability to small talk includes three main components:

1. Tuning-in Techniques
2. Listening manners
3. And acting appropriately when it's your turn to talk

Small talk

Small talk may seem unimportant, but it has a potentially huge impact on how others respond to you.

It contributes to your credibility and your ability to establish rapport; it also helps set clients at ease. If you work for a large company, small talk may offer the only way to connect with people in other departments.

In addition, it may be a way to build a bridge of communication with your superior.

Tuning-in techniques

Tuning-in techniques help a speaker to get actively engaged into a small talk:

- The first step for success in small talk is readying yourself to listen.
- The second step is to show others that you are paying attention.

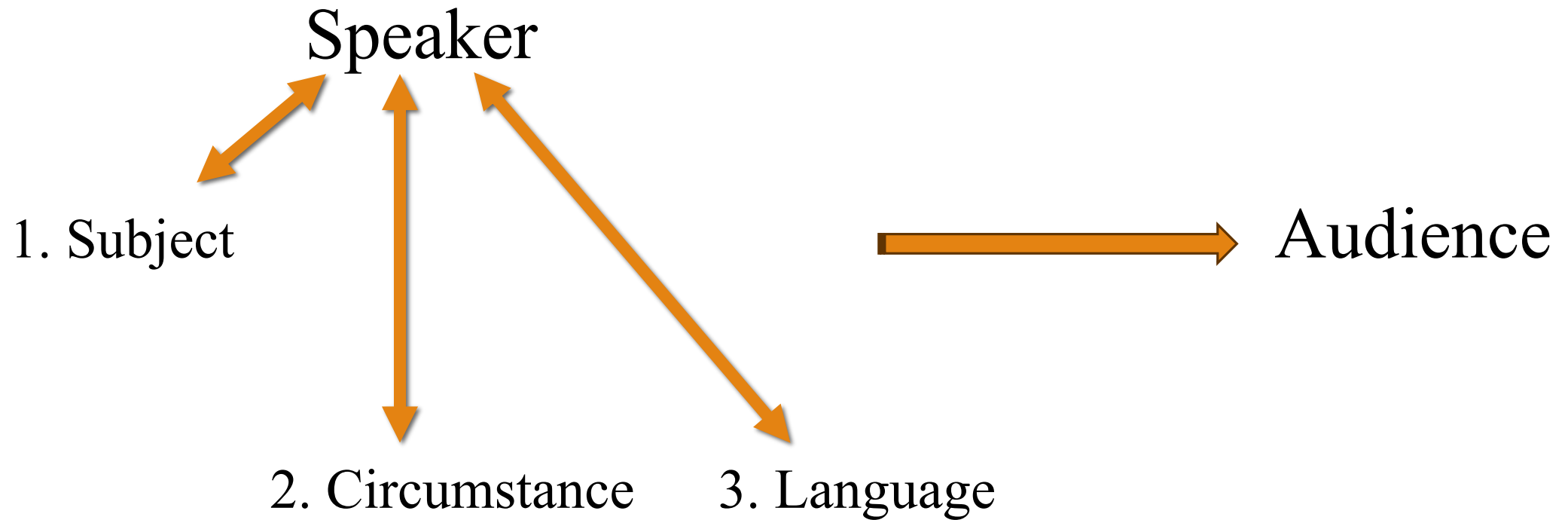
Listening manners

- ✓ Create a setting in which you can listen
- ✓ Tune out internal distractions
- ✓ Monitor your body language

Give yourself one point for each time you do one of the following.

- ✓ Offer words of encouragement
- ✓ Repeat or paraphrase what the person said
- ✓ Ask and clarifying question
- ✓ Prompt the person to continue

A speaker and the context



Why improving your conversational skills?

Aspects

- ✓ Family
- ✓ Relationship
- ✓ Social
- ✓ Psychological

Purpose: Create social networks to accomplish your goals.

Face-to-face communication

There are two basic ways of face-to-face communication:

1. Body language
2. Verbal communication

Both are interconnected and interdependent, but verbal expressions are always assisted by one's body language.

A good conversationalist

A good conversationalist should have the following qualities:

- ✓ To know any topic, culture, politics, sports, entertainment, others. Information means power.
- ✓ To be a good observer
- ✓ Evy contact. To smile/create a good atmosphere
- ✓ Initiative/tranquility
- ✓ Presentation/to find deals in common
- ✓ To show interest respectfully
- ✓ To hear the other person.

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- ✓ To make people feel they are the center of attention
- ✓ To use follow up questions
- ✓ To give my opinion but respect other's questions
- ✓ To ask for advice
- ✓ Do not interrupt. Do not hog the conversation. Wait to give your opinion.

A good impression is what we look for in a very first conversation.

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A good conversation is like a game, it is a two-way process where each participant play his/her role.

Good communication contributes to the success of an organisation/institution.

If you vocabulary, purpose and style of speaking are good., then you can contribute successful to the growth of your organisation/institution.

Remember

- ✓ Don't forget that your ideas matters to the organisation/institution and/or customers you receive.
- ✓ The way to be a good conversationalist is by practicing, talking, and listening. Don't be afraid to break silence at your workplace.
- ✓ Use a good language to express yourself.

Tips to improve conversation skills

1. Smile! Show a pleasant personality

Who would want to converse with a grumpy and gloomy person? No one, right?

That is why it is important to show a pleasant smiling image. Not only when there are people around you, but at most times. Pleasantness is a feeling rather than an outward appearance.

When pleasantness becomes a feeling, it radiates outward and people at workplace will notice. Aside from feeling pleasant inside, project yourself through proper dress code and grooming. Remember that a first impression lasts. Impress people with your oozing personality as early as possible.

2. Maintain eye contact

A pleasant personality is just one step in the right direction. You may gain the attention of someone at first glance, but it only creates a shallow first impression.

Sustain that first impression with eye contact. When you are conversing either one-on-one or with a crowd make sure to catch eye contact from time to time.

Maintaining eye contact is sending an unspoken message to your audience or an individual saying that you can be trusted. As the saying goes, “the eyes are the windows of the soul.” Maintaining eye contact builds trust, credibility, and confidence.

3. Speak clearly and in a moderate voice

The main purpose of speaking is to be understood. No one would want to listen to you if you are just garbling and babbling nor shouting or speaking in a very loud voice. Speak confidently.

4. Listen with empathy

Effective communication is all about listening. Remember that most people need a listening ear. Listen genuinely and respond appropriately. Do not interrupt out of the blue, find a perfect gap in your conversation where you can speak. Acknowledge what the person said and respond appropriately as much as possible. Show empathy when you speak.

When your audience or someone sees that you are listening intently through your eye contact, your body language, and facial expressions they will feel connected with you. Take note that effective verbal communication is not just about speaking, but most importantly, it is also about listening.

5. Respond with emotion

Psychologists have proven that EQ (Emotional Quotient) is equally important as IQ (Intelligence Quotient). Research shows that school children remembered the lesson best when their teacher teaches with emotion. For instance, injecting humor in the lesson or connecting the lesson with their personal experience.

This is the same when you are talking with someone, respond with relatable and appropriate emotion. Responding with an appropriate emotion is acknowledging the feelings of someone you are talking with. When they are happy, you should also be happy for them and when they are sad, you must show empathy. People will remember you because you have touched the emotional part of their being. Here are some examples to respond with emotion:

- give a genuine compliment (even a small compliment means a lot to people, but make sure that you hit the compliment at the right spot, it could be misunderstood, be mindful);

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- notice details (these details could become a conversation piece that could bring you to a deeper and more relaxed conversation with someone, for instance, notice their shoes, their bags, or anything trivial about someone you are talking with);
- your emotional response depends on whom you are talking with (is it your boss, your co-worker, some random stranger, or a friend?) Understanding your level of connectedness with people around you will help you respond appropriately.
- responding with emotion goes hand in hand with choosing the right words to say. Think before you speak. If you don't know what to say, be genuinely honest about it rather than pretend to know something.

6. Maintain a relaxed body language

Your body language speaks a thousand words, so be wary of your body gestures. Here are some body languages that you must avoid.

- Crossing arms or putting both hands on your hips does not project positive open conversation.
- Fidgeting while conversing with someone shows disinterest.
- Looking all over the place and glancing sideways in a noticeable manner shows that you are not ready for the conversation.
- Not maintaining eye contact shows disrespect.

7. Engage and sustain

If you have successfully achieved the tips from numbers 1-6 it means that you have engaged your audience well. Now your next task is to sustain the interest of your audience or the person you are talking with. In my opinion and according to my experiences, I get fascinated with a talker who knows a lot of topics.

People who can converse with topics on various fields of interest amaze me. I wouldn't mind talking with people longer if I can get interesting insights and topics that I don't know yet.

So, if you want to sustain your conversation offer topics that you think would interest your audience. Read a lot about various topics so that you have more to offer. And if your audience has questions, you have some solutions or answers to offer.

8. Study and observe other people

There are two things you must remember: one, observe great conversationalists and study how they converse; two, study and observe your listeners.

First, pick someone that will serve as your model. Listen to that person always; observe how that person converse; his body language and the words that he uses. You can pick out the thing that you like and improve on other things. However, be your person and be original in your approach.

Second, study and observe the non-verbal communication of people around you. Some non-verbal communication includes the tone and pitch of the voice, body movement, facial expression, posture, eye contact, and some physiological manifestations. These non-verbal communications give you an important clue on how to convey your message more clearly.

9. Read books about how to improve conversation skills

There is a significant difference between a normal conversation and a genuinely good conversation with a strong connection. A meaningful conversation creates a wonderful mutual feeling. I have experienced it myself many times, it feels great to see that your message has come across and well appreciated. The book “How to Talk to Anyone About Anything” covers useful topics about how to improve conversation skills. It covers other important topics such as:

- improving your social skills
- mastering small talk
- connecting effortlessly
- Making real friends

10. Practice

Nothing is more important than practice. Theories and tips are just there to guide you. No matter how many tips and books you have read and memorized if you do not act you will not improve.

So, practice! You can practice in front of the mirror. Let me tell you, practicing in front of the mirror is very effective.

It allows you to see yourself talking so that you will know which part to improve on. You can also practice with children. Children can be the best critique because they speak their minds without judgment.

11. Test yourself

There are plenty of free testing tools on the internet that measure your level of communication effectiveness and conversation skills. You might try to assess yourself for further improvement.

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Thank you!