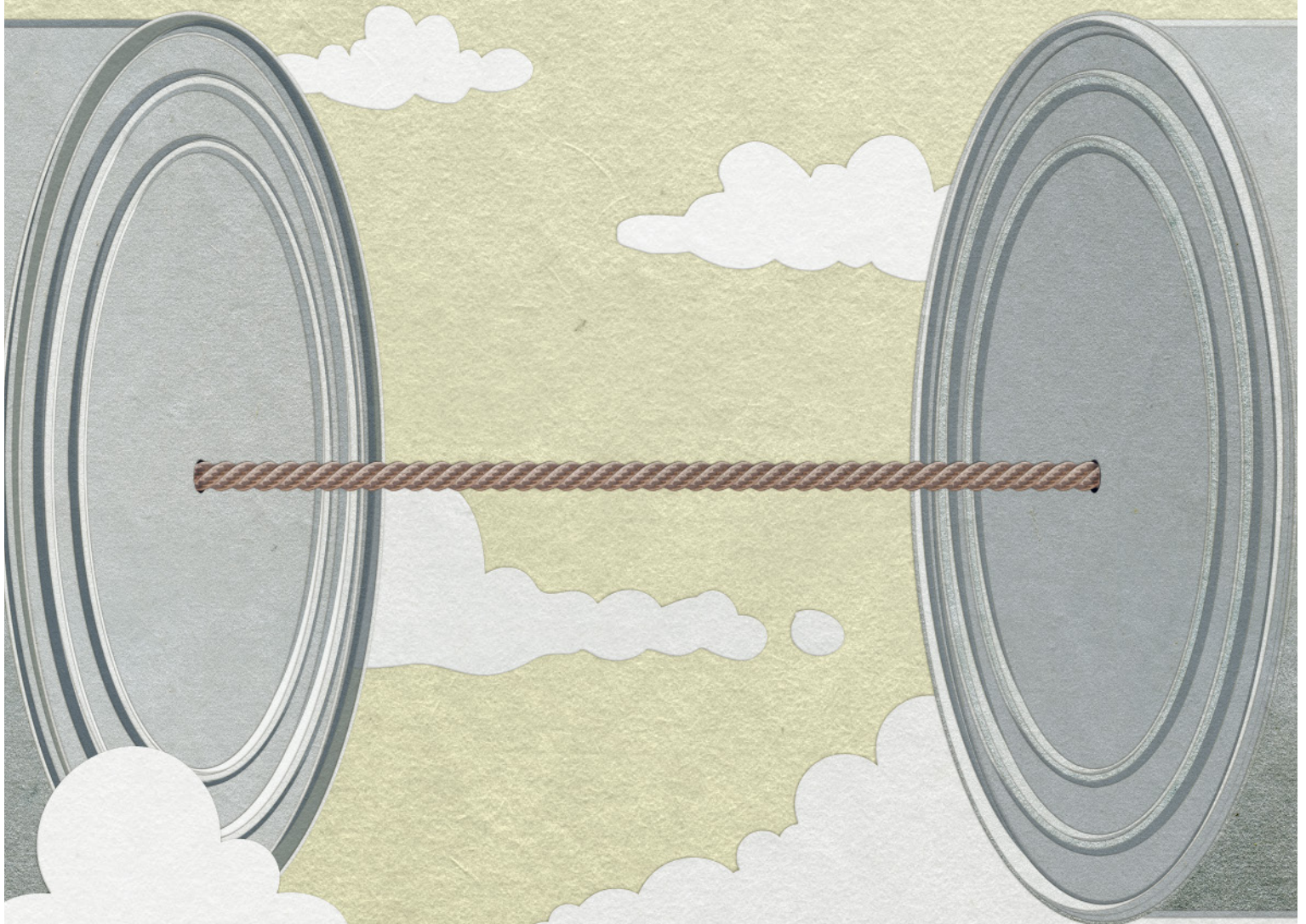


TEAM BENCHMARK™

Team Communication Profile™

Taking your team communication to new levels of effectiveness™



INTRODUCTION

For most of us, communication appears to be deceptively easy.

This is because our focus is generally on the activity of sending, somewhat less on the activity of receiving, but seldom on the most important aspect of communication: understanding. Communication doesn't take place until someone receives the message and understands it as the sender intended.

The process of sending, receiving, and understanding becomes even more complex in a team environment, which stresses horizontal interaction. Every person is "connected" to every other person on the team, as well as to a lot of people who aren't. The number of communication possibilities proliferates exponentially. Horizontal communication carries the price tag of complexity and an increased risk of misunderstanding.

Effective communication enables a team to achieve exceptional results, but it doesn't happen by accident. Most teams find that barriers to communication are legion: incomplete or disorganized information, too much data, poor timing, inappropriate vehicles for sending the message, and many more. As we consider these impediments, the astounding fact is not that communication is difficult, but rather that there is any communication at all! Not surprisingly, only the most astute, pragmatic, and persistent teams overcome them. A team can't achieve its purpose if members don't have the skills and willingness to address the complexities of communication and encourage creative, candid, and comprehensive dialogue.

The Team Benchmark Communication Profile will help your team assess, explore, and strengthen six critical factors for effective team communication:

1. **Clarity** in both purpose and message
2. **Climate** that is conducive to clear, accurate, timely communication
3. **Competency** in tapping into the collective IQ of the team
4. **Commitment** to the team's purpose and the hard work needed to achieve it
5. **Concentration** needed to send clear and precise messages on one hand and to hear and comprehend them on the other
6. **Courtesy** that fosters respect and acceptance of teammates and adherence to the team's ground rules for communication and interaction

"The single biggest problem in communication is the illusion that it has taken place."

George Bernard Shaw

COMMUNICATION FOR HIGH PERFORMANCE TEAMS

A team is like an automobile.

Many of us don't understand the inner workings of a modern automobile. Should we ever look under the hood, we see an indecipherable tangle of wires, tubes, pieces, and parts. If anything breaks down, we often don't know how to get it running again. As with cars, if we are going to build effective teams, start stalled ones, or fix broken ones, then we must become master mechanics of team dynamics.

As we have studied and researched teams and teamwork over the years, we have found similar qualities and characteristics in teams that achieve exceptional results. This list of characteristics has proven to be of immeasurable value as we have worked with clients to establish new teams or to intervene when team effort was less than effective. It's a short list; in fact, it contains only six characteristics, but each characteristic plays a specific and vital role in making the team effective, and is therefore worth a closer look. If one of these six characteristics is missing or inadequate, the team is, at best, limping. If two or three are lacking, this group is probably not a team at all.

In this Team Benchmark diagnostic, we provide for your team the opportunity to evaluate how it is doing in the sixth attribute of high performance teams – excellent communication.

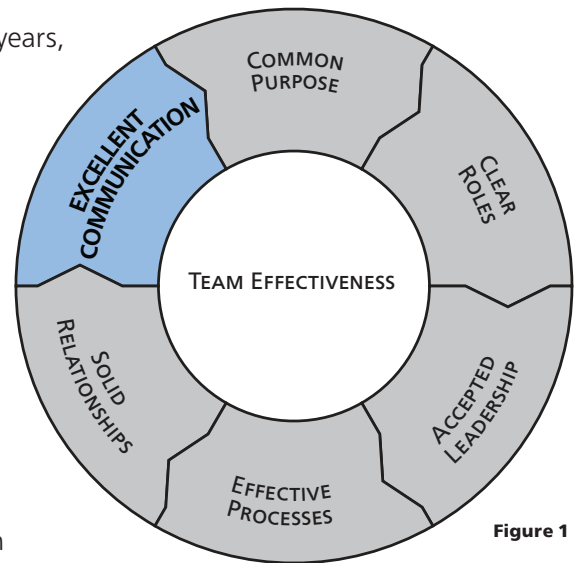


Figure 1

COMMUNICATION – THE MEANS OF TEAM COOPERATION

Effective teams almost always outperform other types of groups in creativity, problem solving, and decision making. Such performance is possible only to the extent that teams are able to tap into the collective brilliance of the group. This is done through communication that engenders creativity and discovery and that productively resolves differences and conflicts.

Skilled teams have a repertoire of many types and levels of team communication, each demanding a special set of skills. Operational or executional exchanges are generally straightforward and filled with the technical shorthand typical of that environment. In these situations, the emphasis is on clarity, accuracy, and efficiency.

In other instances, a team might find itself working through a specific team-thinking process, like problem solving or decision making, in which the conversation is less structured, but is still guided by the steps and principles of a specific process. The communication involved with discovery processes like planning, brainstorming, and conflict resolution involves much broader and less structured forms of interaction. It's this process of productive discussion and dialogue that high performance teams can mine for the synergy embedded in the collective wisdom of the team.

Just How Good is the Communication on Our Team? This Team Benchmark Communication Profile allows your team to assess its capabilities using six critical factors for highly effective team communication.

1. CLARITY

Communication, simply defined, is the act of conveying information. There are two important dimensions of communication clarity: clarity of purpose and clarity the message itself. The author of any communication, written or oral, must be clear about what he or she is attempting to convey, and then clear about how they go about conveying it. Both of these dimensions are incorporated in this diagnostic.

2. CLIMATE

Climate is the environment in which communication takes place. The qualities of a particular team climate will help or hinder communication. Team climates that are described as high trust, safe, valuing candor, and respectful of people promote effective communication. Unsafe, low trust environments have the opposite effect. High performance teams have healthy communication climates that facilitate clarity, accuracy, and appropriate speed.

3. COMPETENCY

Healthy communication requires a specific skill set – it doesn't happen by accident. Active listening, the art of asking good questions, getting to the point without a lot of wasted words, and communicating purposefully and clearly are skills that can be learned, practiced, and mastered over time. When a team takes the time to talk through the forms of communication that work best for key situations or develops ground rules to facilitate effective communication, it is showcasing its collective skill in communication.

4. COMMITMENT

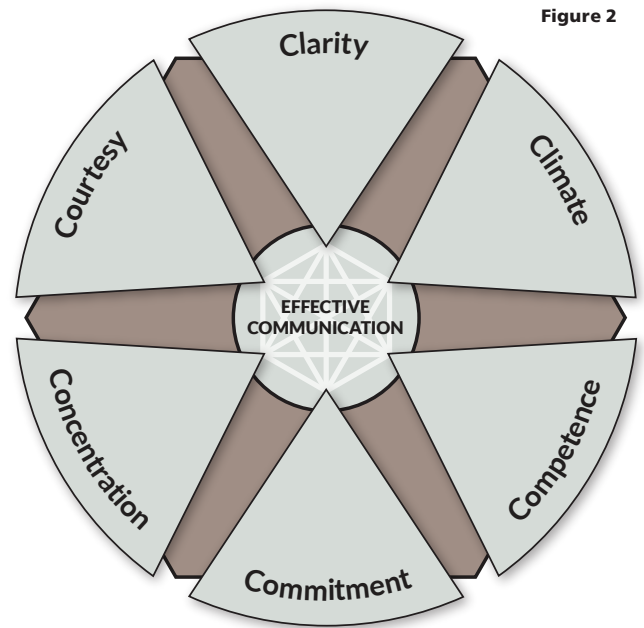
All the communication ground rules in the world won't help if individual team members don't have the commitment to apply them. Commitment to the team's purpose, as well as to one's teammates, provides the motivation needed to communicate at the levels required for high performance teamwork.

5. CONCENTRATION

In most communication materials, there is lot of emphasis on the importance of sending a message that is relevant, clear, and to the point, but receiving a message requires diligence too. Communication is a team sport, and attentive listening, questioning for understanding, and reflecting back the message is just as important.

6. COURTESY

Courtesy could be a range of behaviors, from something as straightforward as the application of the Golden Rule to something more detailed like establishing a set of communication ground rules. Basically, we are making the argument for team etiquette regarding communication. High performance teams often have a set of ground rules for communication (and often other dimensions of team life) and hold one another accountable for adhering to those rules.

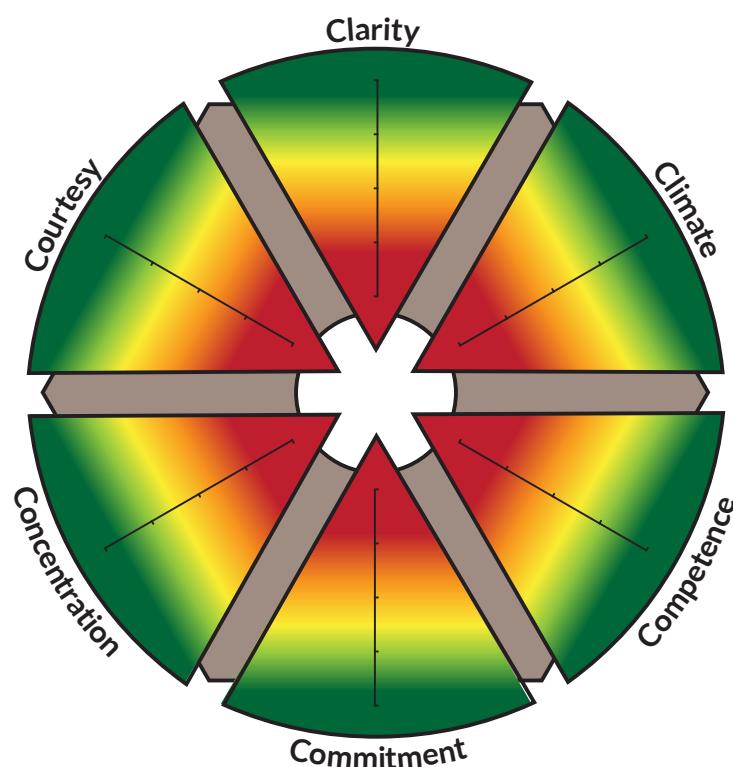


INTERPRETING YOUR TEAM'S RESULTS

Each question within the Team Benchmark Communication Profile was rated by your team members on a five (5) point scale ranging from Not at All Descriptive (1) to Very Descriptive (5). Your answers have been compiled to provide both individual scores and an average team score for each Benchmark factor.

Low performance in any one of the Benchmark Communication factors can result in serious communication challenges for your team, and is worthy of closer examination and a clear action plan for improvement. Use the following table to assess your overall and factor-specific scores:

Rating Scale				
1–1.99	2–2.99	3–3.49	3.50–3.99	4.00 - 5.00
Poor	Somewhat Poor	Adequate	Good	Excellent
We avoid conflict at all costs. If we can't, it's toxic to our relationships.	We avoid conflict whenever possible, it only leads to trouble.	It's a coin toss as to whether conflicts will turn out well.	Some sticking points, but our conflicts don't create issues.	Conflict and creativity are practically the same to us!



1. Overall, which of the six factors was rated the strongest?

2. Weakest?

3. Are there significant score differences among team members?

4. What accounts for these differences?

5. As a result of your scoring and discussion, which of the Benchmark factors, if strengthened, could most improve team effectiveness?

CLARITY

DISCUSSION

1. In your opinion, what are the key challenges for your team in the clarity of its communication?
2. What are the consequences of these issues for your team and what will happen if it does not address them?
3. What are some specific actions you can take as a team to address these challenges?

a. _____

b. _____

C. _____

CLIMATE

DISCUSSION

1. In your opinion, what are the key challenges for your team in terms of its climate for communication?

2. What are the consequences of these issues for your team and what will happen if it does not address them?

3. What are some specific actions you can take as a team to address these challenges?

a. _____

b. _____

c. _____

COMPETENCE

DISCUSSION

1. In your opinion, what are the key challenges for your team regarding its competence during communication?

2. What are the consequences of these issues for your team and what will happen if it does not address them?

3. What are some specific actions you can take as a team to address these challenges?

a. _____

b. _____

c. _____

COMMITMENT

DISCUSSION

1. In your opinion, what are the key challenges for your team regarding its commitment to effective communication?
2. What are the consequences of these issues for your team and what will happen if it does not address them?
3. What are some specific actions you can take as a team to address these challenges?

a. _____

b. _____

C. _____

CONCENTRATION

DISCUSSION

1. In your opinion, what are the key challenges for your team around its concentration on effective communication?

2. What are the consequences of these issues for your team and what will happen if it does not address them?

3. What are some specific actions you can take as a team to address these challenges?

a. _____

b. _____

c. _____

COURTESY

DISCUSSION

1. In your opinion, what are the key challenges for your team around its courtesy during communication?
2. What are the consequences of these issues for your team and what will happen if it does not address them?
3. What are some specific actions you can take as a team to address these challenges?

C. _____

DETAILED RESULTS

Below you will find your team's average response to each question in order from the highest score to the lowest. As a team, review the results and discuss where you may have been surprised – or not surprised – by what you discovered.

DETAILED RESULTS DISCUSSION

1. Do you, as a team, believe this is an accurate reflection of where the team is regarding its communication?

2. Were the scores for the individual team members relatively close? How did your team members assessments compare?

3. Based upon this summary, can you identify your team's three biggest barriers to fast, clear, communication?

a. _____

b. _____

c. _____

COMPLETING THE ACTION PLAN WORKSHEET

This Action Plan Worksheet is a template on which your team can design a development strategy for each selected item. Like any of the worksheets in this document, it is merely a framework you can use as a guide. Feel free to change or adapt it to make it best suit the needs of your team.

Before you complete the worksheet, make copies to use for additional action plans as you continue to develop your team to new levels of effectiveness.

DIRECTIONS:

1. Review each of the possible action items your team listed for each factor.

2. Choose the top three issues that most need developing.

-
-
-

3. Prioritize these issues according to their importance:

- a.
- b.
- c.

4. Develop an action plan for each of these three using the worksheets on the following pages.

5. Commit to implementing your ideas over the next 90 days.

TURNING PRINCIPLES INTO PRACTICE

Here is your opportunity to turn principle into practice—to take a meaningful first step in becoming a more effective team.

- | 1. Question # | Factor | Question |
|---------------|--------|----------|
|---------------|--------|----------|

6	Skill	We focus on the root of the problem
.....
.....

2. What are the current consequences of this communication challenge (e.g., feelings, results or impact, etc.).

3. Identify the root causes of the current situation (e.g., attitudes, lack of knowledge or skill, lack of resources, outside pressures, etc.).

4. Describe the desired situation.

Action Step	Responsibility	Date
-------------	----------------	------

.....
.....

5. What specific steps will you take as a team to address the root cause and transform the current situation into the desired situation? Who is responsible for what? By what date?

6. Specifically, how will you measure progress as you work in this area? Can you state it in terms of output (e.g., increased production, decreased costs, etc.)?

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MONITOR AND MEASURE

1. Set a date to review your progress with the team.
2. Review your Action Plan.
3. What is working? Not working?
4. Are we achieving our desired results? If so, how can we continue to leverage our effectiveness?
5. If not, what must we start doing?
6. Stop doing?
7. What changes will we implement going forward?

PRINCIPLES IN PRACTICE

**ACHIEVING EXCEPTIONAL RESULTS THROUGH
EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION**

UNDERSTAND AND PLAN FOR COMMUNICATION FILTERS

At Lake Havasu, Arizona stands a bridge whose origins stem from thirteenth century England. U.S. developers purchased the bridge in 1968 and painstakingly dismantled it brick by brick. It was then shipped to Arizona and reconstructed.

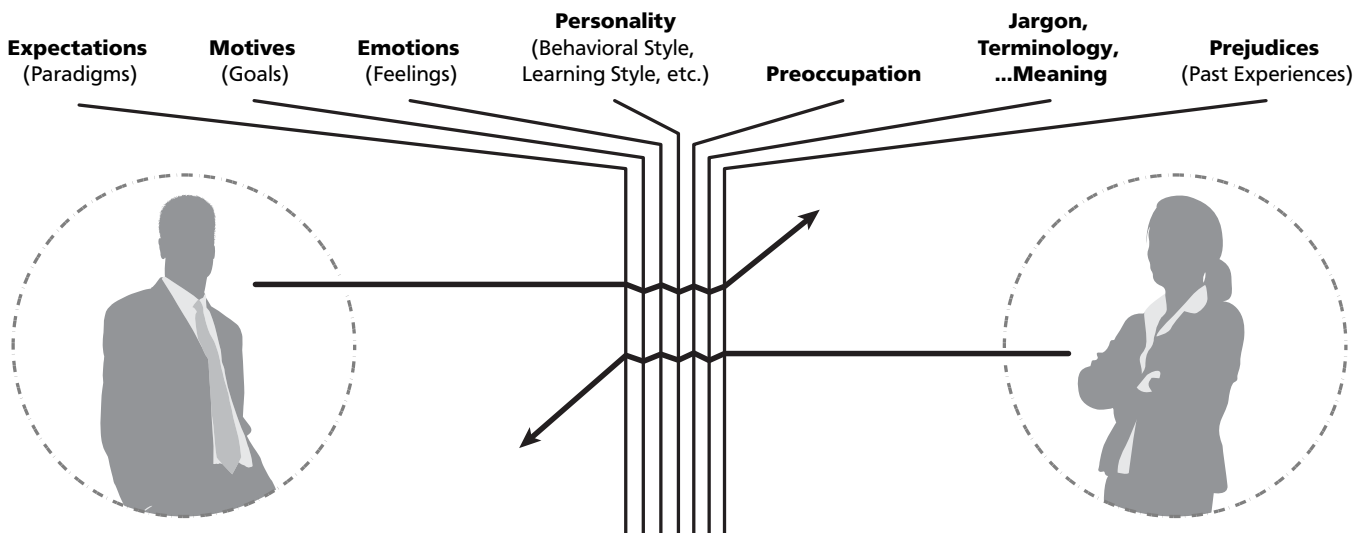
That's the way we communicate, but instead of bricks, we use verbal and nonverbal symbols. We take an idea or picture in our head, dismantle it, and send it over to the receiver word by word, gesture by gesture, and inflection by inflection.

Unfortunately, we may have sent a marble temple, but they think they received a mud hut, and often no one knows that what was sent is not what was received. George Bernard Shaw once said, "The single biggest problem in communication is the illusion that it has taken place." We couldn't agree more.

Like the bricks, words must navigate their way through a lot of debris that filters, distorts, and blunts the intent of a message (Figure 1). The current state of the receiver's emotions, motives, preoccupations, expectations, prejudices, and personality are but a few of the barriers that must be hurdled.

Each of us has a preference for how we give and receive information—how we communicate. Most of the time, we assume that everyone else likes to exchange ideas the same way. If we are a "cut to the chase," bottom line communicator, we can't understand why anyone would want to be buried in details. On the other hand, if we can't make a decision without all the facts, we usually don't understand how others can make a decision about the "how" before considering all aspects of the "what." Differences in personal style can impose formidable barriers to communication. Understanding those differences and adapting to our audience's style is critical to getting a message across effectively.

Figure 1



UNDERSTANDING THE BIG PICTURE – EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION REQUIRES MORE THAN THE RIGHT WORDS

In most spoken communication, we must take into account that words alone account for only seven to ten percent of the message (Figure 2). Vocalics (tone, inflection, volume, speed) account for 35 percent of the message, and body language makes up the remaining 55 percent. Unfortunately, it is rare that we have mastered the ability to listen effectively to both the music and the words.

Therefore, we need to choose the right medium for our message, remembering that face-to-face communication is the richest form because we can draw on the resources of words, body language, and voice to deliver our ideas. At the same time, we can receive a constant update on how the audience is receiving our message and can make mid-course corrections if we're going astray.

For that reason, messages that are sensitive or unwelcome may demand a face-to-face discussion, while information of a general, unemotional nature works well with a leaner method of delivery. When we put things in writing, for example, we lose everything but the words. An e-mail or text is the stripped-down version of written communication (but without the spontaneity of spoken communication). It's all too easy to hit the "send" button before we've really had the chance to think about its effect on the audience. Further, some people hide behind electronic communication to avoid the discomfort that face-to-face or voice communication can produce, particularly in the case of an unpleasant topic.

Voicemail also has its pitfalls. Although we have the benefit of voice inflection and tone, we need to use voicemail primarily for the transfer of unemotional information.

Teams that communicate successfully understand the importance of choosing the right channel for the right message.

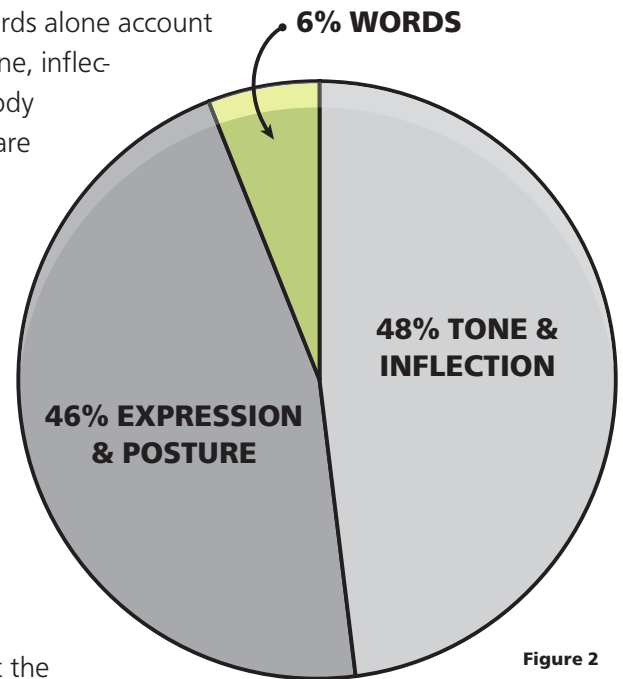


Figure 2

SO MUCH INFORMATION, SO MANY FORMS OF COMMUNICATION, SO LITTLE TIME

As if communication weren't difficult enough, we must now take into account the challenges introduced with the distributed work force of this new century.

We're all suffering from information overload. Our desks are piled high with stacks of magazines that we'll read "when we get around to it." Our attention spans are less than half of what they 30 years ago. We have more choices of ways to deliver messages, but we have perhaps less control over the quality of those messages.

A complex number of communication networks must be established and maintained in a team setting. In a more hierarchical structure, in which the chains of command and communication are rigidly adhered to, the communication process can be fairly straightforward. Information largely flows in only two directions, with little opportunity for dialogue.

But a team setting stresses horizontal interaction. Every person is connected to every other person on the team, as well as to a lot of people who aren't. The numbers of communication possibilities proliferate (Figure 3). Horizontal communication carries the price tag of complexity and an increased risk of misunderstanding. As we consider these impediments, the astounding fact is not that communication is difficult, but rather that there is any communication at all!

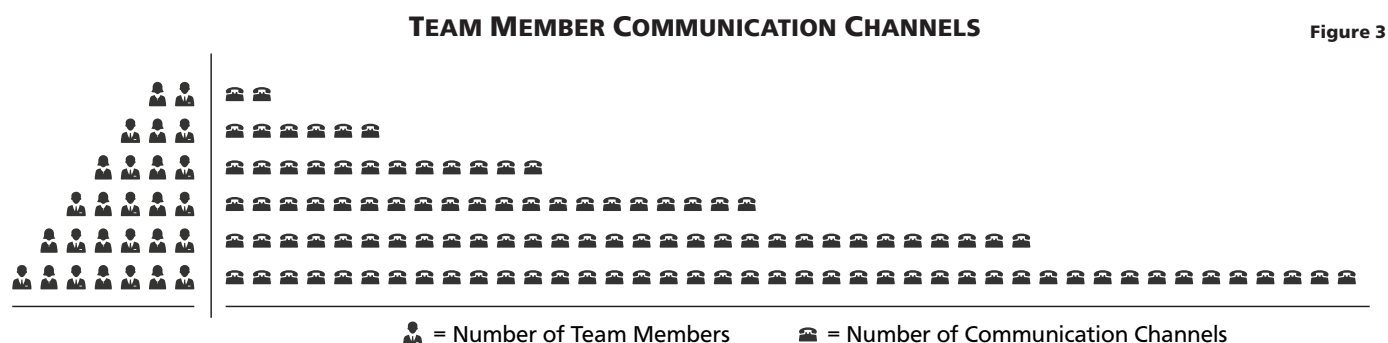


Figure 3

LISTENING ISN'T JUST WAITING TO TALK

No team can communicate successfully without highly developed listening skills among team members. Most experts would agree that listening is the most overlooked and underused component of communication. Although listening comprises about 45 percent of the communication process, we usually have little or no formal training in this important skill.

Further, in American culture, we tend to view listening as passive behavior. How many times have we said, "I'm going to that meeting, but I won't participate. I'll just listen?" We see power as in the hands of the one who has the floor at the moment. In many cases, one's position in the company determines how carefully we listen to that person.

Almost every expert on the subject tells us that to be a good listener, we have to decide that listening is important. We have to learn to want to listen and take the proper steps to create a healthy listening environment. Eliminate those internal and external distractions that interfere with our ability to concentrate on what someone is telling us. Turn away from the computer, turn off your cell phone, close the door to your office, get out from behind your desk, and sit at a conference table.

¹ Jerry A. Dibble and Beverly Y. Langford Communication Skills and Strategies, Atlanta, GA, Dibble and Langford, Atlanta, GA., 1990, p. 14

Not only do external, physical distractions hamper listening, but internal ones do too. Your listener may have just gotten some bad news and isn't in the mood to hear about the latest sales projections.

You can always tell someone that it's not a good time and that you would like to schedule a time when you can give the subject your full attention. That approach is far better than what we do all too often—pretend to listen while our minds are elsewhere.

Further, we often make the mistake of treating listening as merely waiting for our turn to talk. While other team members are making their points, we're preparing our rebuttal. It takes practice and discipline to withhold the urge to jump in with our opinion and really concentrate on what the other person is saying.

Good listeners ask questions to clarify understanding and to let the speaker know that we are paying attention. Good listeners also "listen" with their body language as well as their auditory systems. They make eye contact, lean forward, nod their heads, and use any number of gestures and behaviors that signal attentiveness. As they focus on the speaker, they also listen with their eyes, by observing the demeanor and body language of the speaker, and they pay particular attention to what isn't being said.

Successful teams take listening seriously and make sure that everyone on the team listens holistically: with the senses, the mind, and the emotions.

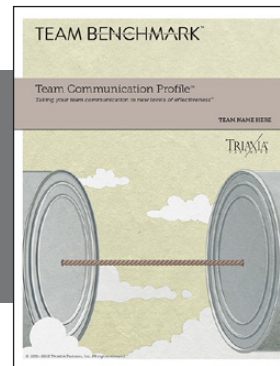
SUGGESTED READING

Harkins, Phil (1999). *Powerful Conversations: How High Impact Leaders Communicate*. New York: McGraw-Hill.

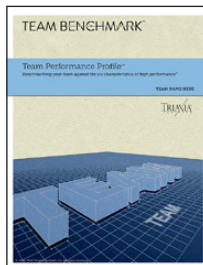
Scott, Susan (2002). *Fierce Conversations: Achieving Success at Work & Life, One Conversation at a Time*. New York: Viking Penguin.

Adler, Ronald B.; Towne, Neil (1999). *Looking Out Looking In*, Ninth Edition. Orlando, FL: Holt, Rinehart and Winston

YOU'VE COMPLETED THE TEAM COMMUNICATION PROFILE™ REPORT



Also available from
TEAM BENCHMARK™



TEAM SKILL SURVEY™

MEASURE YOUR TEAM AGAINST THE SIX CHARACTERISTICS OF A HIGH PERFORMANCE TEAM.

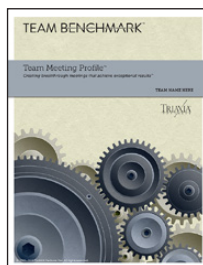
The Team Skill Survey™ assists your team in evaluating its strengths and weaknesses against in each of the six characteristics of a high performance team. The resulting Team Skill Survey Report is designed to prioritize allow your team to attack its development needs with the confidence of knowing they are targeting the right issues.



TEAM DEVELOPMENT PROFILE™

FIND YOUR PLACE ON THE ROAD TO HIGH PERFORMANCE TEAMWORK.

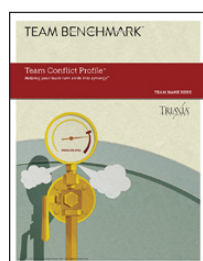
The Team Development Profile™ enables your team to visually identify its current stage of team development, and better understand its potential for greater synergy and team effectiveness.



TEAM MEETINGS PROFILE™

ACHIEVE UNCOMMON RESULTS ON COMMON GROUND.

This powerful meetings diagnostic will provide your team with unique insight on how well they are managing meeting together. Meetings are the playing field for high performance teams. Effective or not, meetings cost money and consume valuable resources. The real issue is not the cost of meetings but rather, the cost of poor meetings. High performance teams master the three critical dimensions needed for effective meetings: the people, the purpose, the process. This diagnostic allows your team to graphically identify strengths and weaknesses across each of these three meeting components.



TEAM CONFLICT PROFILE™

FREE YOUR TEAM FROM THE FLAWS OF FRICTION.

This Team Benchmark™ diagnostic enables the team to identify and address conflict issues that de-rail team effectiveness. The instrument highlights attitudes, actions, and processes that can stifle your teams ability to work together. Utilizing this data, the team is able to give immediate attention to the key issues and define a clear path for improvement.