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# 43 communication games for teams

by [James Smart](#) on February 7, 2024

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**Effective communication is a vital aspect of how we work with others.** When communication is open, honest, and effective, our working relationships are richer and more fulfilling.

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breaks down, it can create friction, misunderstandings, and disconnection - leading to an ultimately unproductive workplace.

**In this guide, you'll find communication games and exercises designed to improve and teach communication skills to your team.**

Try running these activities with any group that wants to communicate more effectively, be better listeners and improve their interpersonal relationships.

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## **Why are communication skills important at work?**

Effective communication is a vital aspect of any high-performing team. With good workplace communication, teams can more effectively align on what's important, feel connected, and effectively achieve their goals.

Communication skills like active listening, honesty, radical candor, and respect can help your team create strong working relationships, be more productive and feel happier too!

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Without effective communication, problems like team siloing, misalignment, employee unhappiness and more are likely to surface. Something as simple as an unsent email or a bad Zoom meeting can be what makes a campaign fail or a team become unproductive. Working to improve team communication can be transformative for your interpersonal relationships, whatever your role or workplace!

## What are the benefits of improving workplace communication?

The benefits of good communication in the workplace are numerous and extend beyond meetings, interpersonal communications, and emails.

Effective communication is at the heart of how your team interrelates and collaborates. Team members who communicate well are often more connected, more resilient and able to be productive in their roles too!

With a considered effort to improve communication skills and bolster emotional intelligence across your team, you can see some of the following benefits:

- Better conflict management and conflict mitigation
- A more connected and resilient team
- Improved surfacing of problems and challenges
- More productive and engaged teams
- Supercharged innovation and ideation
- Help cross functional teams work together effectively
- Improved employee happiness and satisfaction
- A culture of trust, openness and radical candour
- Knowledge and skill sharing
- Better relationships and improved empathy
- More effective, fit-for-purpose solutions
- Highly aligned and driven teams

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The best format for improving team communication is often a workshop or training session.

By guiding your team members through a series of activities that includes experiential games and opportunities to practice their conversation skills and sharpen their emotional intelligence, you can have a profound impact on how your team members collaborate.

With SessionLab, it's quick and easy to [create a group workshop](#) on any subject.

Drag and drop your activities into place to create your schedule in minutes. Design an effective learning flow or training session with clear timing for every item in the agenda.

When you're done, create a printout of your agenda to bring to your communication workshop and facilitate with confidence.

**Essential Training Session**
 SessionLab

Create training sessions tailored to your needs and your participants, starting with the essential building blocks of great learning experiences.

In this template for experiential learning, based on Kolb's learning cycle, you will find space to prepare the group, practice skills, learn new content and reflect on how to apply it to real-world situations after the training.

Simply click on Export, then Duplicate this session to tailor it to your needs, add your favorite activities and adapt the flow to your group!

■ logistics ■ energizer/icebreaker ■ exercise ■ discussion/debriefing ■ break ■ content

TIME	NAME	DESCRIPTION	ADDITIONAL INFO
09:00 0	<b>Before the session</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Set up the room</li> <li>Prepare materials</li> <li>Share with participants some information about what will be expected of them in this session</li> </ul>	
09:00 10m	<b>Introduction</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Introduce yourself and the aim of the training session</li> <li>Clarify any logistics (such as where the coffee break will be)</li> <li>Share the agenda for the day</li> </ul>	
09:10 10m	<b>Group agreements</b>	Enable presence and participation by making clear what is expected from participants during the day. Propose some group agreements and invite the group to add anything else needed to create an excellent learning environment.	
09:20 10m	<b>Icebreaker</b>	Break the ice with an activity to enable participants to meet one another and introduce the topic of the session.	Find over 100 icebreakers and energizers in SessionLab's Library -> Or start with a selection of all-time favorites here: <a href="https://www.sessionlab.com/blog/icebreaker-games/">https://www.sessionlab.com/blog/icebreaker-games/</a>
09:30 30m	<b>Training activity</b>	Experiential learning begins with training activities designed to test skills, often in playful ways, with direct, practical experience.	The order of activities in this template is based on Kolb's learning cycle, a framework illustrating the steps needed for effective learning to happen.
10:00 10m	<b>Debrief</b>	Debrief with the group what happened during the activity and start teasing out learnings and generalizations.	In this framework, the first step is known as concrete learning and refers to practical activities, often in teams, in which participants are given the opportunity to engage directly with the topics and challenges of the training.
10:10 10m	<b>Break</b>		This is the second step of Kolb's learning cycle, reflective observation. At this stage, participants form and share opinions about what happened during the learning activity.
10:20 30m	<b>Presentation</b>	After direct experience and reflection, participants are likely to need some food for thought: offer some theory, models, and framework to help conceptualize and articulate learnings.	Abstract conceptualization is the third step of Kolb's learning cycle. Based on this model, explanations, content, and logical approaches are most likely to be understood and remembered if they come after practical experiences and reflection.
10:50 40m	<b>Simulation, role play or case study</b>	Time to try again with some practice, applying new concepts through activities that bring learning one step closer to reality, such as simulations, role plays, or group analysis of case studies.	In the fourth and last step of Kolb's learning cycle, called active experimentation, learners are tasked with using their new knowledge in activities that mirror reality and demonstrate how learnings can be applied in real-world practice.

A completed SessionLab agenda for a [training session](#).

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# Communication games to improve listening skills

Better communication starts with learning to listen. Particularly in our working relationships, a failure to listen effectively can be the root cause of many strained conversations and misunderstandings.

Learning to listen means being more present, trying to understand what other people are trying to communicate, and empathizing with their position.

Whether it's everyday meetings or [team building sessions](#), learning to listen can be swiftly transformative for groups of all shapes and sizes. The communication activities below are a great place to start on your journey to being a better listener, so let's get started!

[Blind Drawing](#)

[Best Summary](#)

[Active Listening](#)

[Spread the Word](#)

[Open Questions Role Play](#)

[Team of Two](#)

## Blind Drawing

A key part of developing our communication abilities means learning to navigate gaps in understanding and listen more carefully to what other people are saying.

Put your team's communication and listening skills to the test in this quick, creative game. Start by asking team members to pair up. Next, one person must describe an object in abstract terms, without giving away what the object is. The other team member must draw the object as best they can with the instructions they receive.

This team communication exercise is great demonstrating the power of clear communication while also warming up your group. Debrief the exercise and ask participants what they would do to improve next time for best results.

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**Blind Drawing**




#teambuilding #communication #creative thinking #remote-friendly



Test your communication and interpretation skills with Blind Drawing!

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## Best Summary

In many cases, better workplace communication begins by paying closer attention to our colleagues, whether that's on Zoom, over email, or in real life. Best Summary is a great communication exercise for teaching the value of paying attention, taking notes when necessary, and listening more actively.

Start by preparing a presentation into several logical units. After the first unit, distribute index cards and ask each participant to summarise the presentation so far. Next, sort everyone into teams and have each team pass their summary cards to the next group to evaluate and rate.

Once the best summaries have been decided, offer feedback on key points and then continue the presentation. Follow this with another summary and evaluation step so everyone can quickly and effectively use the feedback from the first round to improve their listening and summarization skills.

**Best Summary**




#thiagi #debriefing #closing  
#presentation #action



Asking listeners to summarize your presentation from time to time is a good technique for encouraging people to listen carefully, take notes, and to review the content. Best Summaries uses this basic concept.

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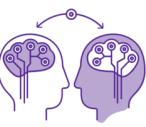
## Active Listening

Whether you're a practiced active listener or not, using the method with a practical communication activity is important in building the skill and ensuring you really live the values of active listening in your workplace. In this communication method from Hyper Island, start by introducing the idea that when we listen to others, we often do so without giving our full attention.

Split participants into groups of three so they can each explore the roles of subject, active listener, and observer while working on a common problem or topic. By ensuring each group member experiences all three roles and reflecting on their experience, you can help your team improve workplace communication with better listening and presence in communication.

**Active Listening**

#hyperisland #skills #active listening  
#remote-friendly



This activity supports participants to reflect on a question and generate their own solutions using simple principles of active listening and peer coaching. It's an excellent introduction to active listening but can also be used with groups that are already familiar with it. Participants work in groups of three and take turns being: "the subject", the listener, and the observer.

3     593     SEE MORE

## Spread the Word

When trying to impart the practical benefits of being a better listener to a group, it can help to show how active listening can help prepare us for follow-up tasks. With this communication game, begin by sharing a short 10-20 minute presentation with your team. Next, invite small groups to independently prepare a 3-minute presentation on the key points from your presentation for a specific audience such as 7-year-old children, engineers, or volunteers.

This is also a great way to impart other aspects of effective communication to a group, such as the need to tailor content to a

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what we're discussing. Be sure to debrief effectively and highlight how teams that listened carefully were better able to summarise key points and deliver effective presentations.

**Spread the Word**

#thiagi #presentation #skills

 Asking the participants to summarize the key points from a lecture is an effective way to strengthen their understanding and recall.

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## Open Questions Role Play

A common pitfall for people who need to improve their communication is focusing on what they are about to say, rather than listening to the other person. This communication activity uses the power of open questions and active listening to teach participants better communication skills.

Begin by sharing the six kinds of open question with the group: What, Why, When, How, Where and Who. Next, invite one team member to volunteer and leave the room while the other team members decide something they wish to know about the volunteer. For example, the group may wish to know where the person last went on holiday.

Invite the volunteer back and ask them to make a statement about anything they wish. The group can then ask any open question to try and learn where the person last went on holiday but can only ask a question based on the last thing the volunteer said.

So for example, let's say the volunteer starts by saying, "I had to have a cup of coffee to start my day." The group might ask, "Where do you usually drink your coffee?" and then attempt to use the volunteers answers to guide the conversation forward while always referring back to something they said.

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Experiential communication games like this one can be incredibly powerful when it comes to teaching communication skills and making them stick. Be sure to bring it to your next communication workshop or training session!

## [Open Questions – Role Play](#) #communication #skills #active listening

An extract from Rudyard Kipling's poem in "The Elephant's Child" literally OPENS up opportunities to practice a key skill as part of a communication skills course as well as allied skills in active listening and observation.

## **Team of Two**

Whether it's at home or at work, many of our closest and most important relationships are between us and one other person. When communication with that person becomes strained, it can affect our personal and working life in a profound way.

Team of Two is a communication exercise designed to explicitly help two people work and communicate together more effectively. Improving your communication skills through the lens of a single person-to-person relationship can make the process more approachable and instantly gratifying. Be sure to give it a go!

## [Team of Two](#) #communication #active listening #issue analysis #conflict resolution #issue resolution #remote-friendly #team

Much of the business of an organisation takes place between pairs of people. These interactions can be positive and developing or frustrating and destructive. You can improve them using simple methods, provided people are willing to listen to each other.

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“Team of two” will work between secretaries and managers, managers and directors, consultants and clients or engineers working on a job together. It will even work between life partners.



In Aga Leśny's [Communication for Youth workshop template](#), you can explore a complete process for improving communication skills in a group.

## Fun communication games for teaching communication skills

Improving how a team talks to one another can be hard work. Teaching better communication techniques and improving core communication skills such as active listening is important, but it's vital you help everyone warm up and arrive in the workshop ready to become a better communicator.

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These games are great ways to demonstrate the power of effective team communication while also helping a group warm up and get to know each other. Let's take a look!

[Stress Balls](#)

[Minefield](#)

[Sticks – A Metaphorical Simulation Game](#)

[Broken Email](#)

[Double Talk](#)

## Stress Balls

Energizing your team while demonstrating the importance of good communication is a great way to kick-off any team workshop. Stress Balls is a fun communication game that starts simple but can easily get out of control – a good analogy for workplace communication!

Start by forming a circle with a single stress ball and a rule to pass it along to the left. Over successive rounds, you'll add more balls with additional rules and debrief how the added complexity impacted the efficacy of the task. Not only is Stress Balls a fun energizer but it can serve as a great introduction to communication skills and concepts you might explore later in the session.

[Stress](#)

[Balls](#) #energiser #communication #teamwork #team #thiagi #action #icebreaker

Understanding the importance of communication and teamwork is an important requirement for high performance teams of knowledge workers. This exercise is an effective energizer that requires communication and teamwork. Ask participants to form a circle and throw a ball around to simulate the movement of a m

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variables such as speed, quantity, and complexity to create a mess.

## Minefield

Few games improve communication skills as well as needing to navigate an obstacle course while blindfolded! In Minefield, teams must go through the course in the time allocated one by one while other team members will verbally guide them.

Start by creating a simple obstacle course of soft toys and mines that players must navigate. Have a large group? Create two courses and two teams and keep track of how many mines are hit to determine a winner.

**Minefield** #teampedia #teamwork #action #team #icebreaker

A fun activity that helps participants working together as a team while teaching the importance of communication, strategy and trust.

## Sticks – A Metaphorical Simulation Game

A powerful learning point from any discussion of communication in the workplace is that conversations often feel different for all those involved. While an email, video call, or impromptu meeting might be zero stress for you, it might take a lot of energy for someone else.

Sticks is a game that can help a group build greater awareness of how our energy levels, intentions and responses can affect workplace communication. Start by asking pairs to hold a stick between them without using their hands. One person is designated to lead the pair around the room or to a destination with the goal of keeping the stick upright without talking. Switch roles before then adding the rule that the person being led must keep their eyes closed. During the debrief, ask everyone to share what they learned about effective communication and what the effects of applying different pressures on them.

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## Sticks – A Metaphorical Simulation

**Game** #communication #team #teamwork #action

When people interact or communicate with each other, they use certain amount of energy or pressure. Here's an activity that makes participants aware of such energy exchange and helps them explore how to manage this process.

## **Broken Email**

When communication fails, it can be hard for a group or team to pass knowledge or tasks effectively between members. Avoid potential frustration by helping a group learn how to better communicate ideas and pass information on effectively.

For this communication technique, start by asking small groups to stand in a line. Show the person in the back a simple image and then take it away. That person is then tasked to trace the image on the next person's back using their finger. Each group does this with the next person in line until the person at the front must then draw the image on a piece of paper. For added fun, add a time limit or give each time a different image. The result is a fun, reflective team game that can help kickstart a session on improving communication in the workplace too!

## Broken

**Email** #communication #collaboration #teampedia #icebreaker  
#team

This a simple game in which participants play in teams and their task is to replicate an image shown to the first team member as they are set up in a chain. The winner is the first team to correctly reproduce the “email”

## **Double Talk**

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Sometimes, the cause of ineffective communication is simply the fact that people are preoccupied with other thoughts and aren't fully present in the conversation. Try this communication exercise if you want to jolt a group awake or gently introduce concepts of active listening while having fun.

Start by putting people into pairs and ask one person to be a listener while the other person plays the role of the IV. While the facilitator gives a short, preferably dry, presentation, ask the IV to whisper distracting thoughts in the listener's ear. Next, ask the group some questions based on your presentation and reflect on how well they listened.

Reveal to the group that IV stands for inner voice and debrief on how letting your inner voice distract you while attempting to listen or communicate can lead to frustration or missed insight. Be sure to give kudos to the most creative inner voices for their distractions while debriefing to make this communication game extra memorable!

### **Double Talk** #energiser #thiagi

Participants at a training session are often preoccupied with other important things in their life. Here's a simple jolt to wake them up.

## **Nonverbal communication games**

Humans communicate in so many different ways beyond verbal communication. We use body language, eye contact, touch, proximity and many more methods to communicate with others, often without knowing!

These nonverbal communication games are designed to improve self awareness and teach communication skills that lie outside of traditional verbal methods.

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[Birthday Lineup](#)[Mirrors](#)[Nonverbal improv](#)[Near and far](#)

## Birthday Lineup

The best communication games are often the most simple. Birthday Lineup is a great communication exercise that teaches the importance of nonverbal communication. Begin by asking team members to organize themselves in a line according to their birthday without speaking. Without the ease of verbal communication, team members must attempt to communicate effectively by using body language, hand signals and touch.

Want to complicate things or try a variation? Blindfold a few team members or ask people to line up alphabetically. In any case, debrief by asking what the experience was like and what they learned about different people's communication styles.

[Birthday Lineup](#) #icebreaker #team #teampedia #opening

This is a simple warmup game where people use non-verbal communication to organise themselves into lines based on the give criteria

## Mirrors

Becoming more aware of the body language of others (and ourselves!) is an important part of improving our communication skills. In this simple communication game, ask team members to get into pairs and choose one person to be the leader.

The goal of the game is for both people to become perfectly in-sync, as if they were the reflection in the mirror. Have one person start leading by moving and creating shapes and then, after a few minutes, switch leadership to the second person. Switch back and forth a few times and eventually let them share leadership.

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This communication exercise is especially effective for teaching teams to communicate in a way that their partners can follow (not too fast!) and that communication is more enjoyable when you're working together!

**Mirrors** #improv game #flexibility #active listening #listening and awareness #speaking #accepting offers #trust #leadership #em #fb

In pairs, players mirror one another's movements.

## Nonverbal improv

Nonverbal communication is all about communicating meaning with our bodies, our eyes, our gestures and more. As human beings, we often do this unconsciously. In this communication game, teams are invited to consciously try and communicate a phrase to a partner without speaking.

Start with simple phrases to warm-up your group before moving to more difficult ones. Miming, "Would you like a drink?" is one thing, but how about, "Don't go swimming! There's a shark in the water!"

As with all communication exercises, the experience of working with good, poor or plain different communication styles can be an effective way of improving communication skills and asking participants to be more thoughtful in how they communicate.

**Non-verbal improv** #improv game #energiser #fun #remote-friendly

An improv game where participants must use non-verbal communication and actions to communicate a phrase or an idea to other players. A fun game that's a great way to open a discussion on better communication!

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## Near and far

Whenever you bring a group of people together, you are also creating an interconnected system. How we choose to communicate with one another and the group at large can have a profound effect on that system. Consider how a spat between managers can ripple out to impact group dynamics. The Near and Far nonverbal communication game is a great way to teach communication skills while also introducing systems thinking to group.

Start by asking team members to stand in a large circle where they can make eye contact with one another. Next, ask each team member to silently choose one person in the group to stay close to and pick another they attempt to stay far away from.

Finally, have everyone attempt to be simultaneously near and far from their chosen people while moving around the room. As soon as the group moves into action, interesting dynamics will unfold. Afterwards, ask everyone to share their experiences and how this might relate to group dynamics and communication within groups.

### Near and

**Far** #icebreaker #energiser #action #thiagi #outdoor #warm up

Near and Far is a wonderful warm up game that provides excellent avenues to build connections and to discuss various issues of corporate culture and dynamics. I have used it in conferences and it is suitable for small, medium, and large groups.

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## Communication activities to improve honesty and openness

Good communication is all about finding ways to be open and honest while staying productive, respectful, and empathetic toward others. These communication techniques are designed to help everyone in a group communicate their needs, concerns, and challenges with a framework that promotes cohesion and trust.

Finding ways to be more open and honest is key when it comes to solving organizational problems and these activities can be helpful in encouraging these values in your team.

[Appreciative Interviews](#)

[What will you tell who about what made your day today?](#)

[Stinky Fish](#)

[Generative Relationships STAR](#)

[Bright Blurry Blind](#)

## Appreciative Interviews

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When trying to move past a problem or communication block, it's easy to fall into a pattern of focusing on the negative elements and what went wrong. Appreciative Interviews is a great method to solving problems by starting from a point of exploring previous successes in pairs.

Each person tells a story about a time they worked on a challenge and were proud of the outcome. Each partner then takes turns interviewing the other to discover why that situation was a success. Afterward, groups of four retell their partner's story and listen for patterns and insight the group might use or learn from in the future. Not only is this communication activity great for surfacing solutions positively, but it also encourages active listening, empathy and openness within a team.

## Appreciative Interviews (AI) #issue analysis #liberating structures #storytelling

In less than one hour, a group of any size can generate the list of conditions that are essential for its success. You can liberate spontaneous momentum and insights for positive change from within the organization as “*hidden*” success stories are revealed. Positive movement is sparked by the search for what works now and by uncovering the root causes that make success possible.

Groups are energized while sharing their success stories instead of the usual depressing talk about problems. Stories from the field offer social proof of local solutions, promising prototypes, and spread innovations while providing data for recognizing success patterns. You can overcome the tendency of organizations to underinvest in social supports that generate success while overemphasizing financial support, time, and technical assistance.

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## What will you tell who about what made your day today?

If workplace communication has become difficult there are things we might tell one person about how we're feeling but not others. Think about workplace issues that you don't feel you can share with your boss, but then discuss with your partner or friends outside of work. Often, after talking about a workplace challenge with someone outside of work, we then feel ready to talk about it inside of work.

This communication activity utilizes this effect by asking a group to reflect on what they would say about a meeting, workshop or challenge and who they would say it to. By employing this framework, a group can not only concretize their learnings for the day but also consider how they communicate to different people. Often, we are more open and honest with some people than others when debriefing an event. By touching on this as a group, we can think about how we might communicate more openly with those people who most need it.

### What will you tell who about what made your day today? #closing #commitment #prepare for action #communication #celebrating #feedback

At the end of a meeting, participants have to go back to their boss, organization, community or family. There they'll asked a question like "what did you do?". This prepares them to that question, informs them about what others will say – and who maybe the source of this message and it give them as well as you feedback on the session. It also reinforces commitment.

## Stinky Fish

Communication is hard if uncertainties, anxieties or interpersonal issues don't have space to surface and continue to have an effect on our relationships. Stinky Fish is a framework for sharing issues, creating openness, and finding solutions as a group. As a communication exercise, it's effective at helping a team get things off their chest constructively and with a view to ~~create solutions rather than attributing blame~~.

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Invite each group to write down their personal stinky fish relating to a core organisational challenge or around the subject of communication or connection. Next, give everyone time to share their fishes with the rest of the group and reflect on the experience. For best results, follow-up with an exercise that helps resolve those issues though bear in mind that finding time and space to share these worries constructively can often have a positive effect in itself!

### **Stinky Fish** #hyperisland #skills #remote-friendly #issue analysis

A short activity to run early in a program focused on sharing fears, anxieties and uncertainties related to the program theme. The purpose is to create openness within a group. The stinky fish is a metaphor for “that thing that you carry around but don’t like to talk about; but the longer you hide it, the stinkier it gets.” By putting stinky fish (fears and anxieties) on the table, participants begin to relate to each other, become more comfortable sharing, and identify a clear area for development and learning.

### **Generative Relationships STAR**

When workplace communication is strained, it can feel tough to find a productive way to explore what has affected everyone’s working relationships safely. Communication activities that include a set framework for guiding conversations can help keep things on track and also ensure the group’s psychological safety is maintained. Start by introducing the four points of the star: Separateness, Tuning, Actions and Reasons for working together.

Ask each person to reflect on where the team is currently at in regards to each of the four points before then sharing these in small groups and find points of consensus and difference. From there, brainstorm actions you can take to improve these points and find those you can make i

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has a chance to share their feelings openly and be heard, you can help a group communicate effectively and then improve a situation from there.

## **Generative Relationships STAR** #team #liberating structures #teamwork

You can help a group of people understand how they work together and identify changes that they can make to improve group performance. All members of the group diagnose current relationship patterns and decide how to follow up with action steps together, without intermediaries. The STAR compass tool helps group members understand what makes their relationships more or less generative. The compass used in the initial diagnosis can also be used later to evaluate progress in developing relationships that are more generative.

## **Bright Blurry Blind**

Organizational silos or feelings of an 'us and them' dynamic is antithetical to good workplace communication. Building a one-team mentality that helps people interact meaningfully and positively regardless of their department or role. Bright Blurry Blind is a great communication activity that gives employees the chance to speak openly and honestly about concerns and then build a more positive working relationship.

Start by sharing the three metaphor cards for what is bright, (clear, common knowledge) what is blurry, (known but not spoken about openly) and blind (not known and should be). Have groups arranged by role or department then create a presentation of what is bright, blurry or blind for them and their department to share with the rest of the organization. Follow with some reflection on the process and consider how you can help blind issues surface, what you can do to ensure blurry issues become bright and how to better communicate any concerns between teams in the future.

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## Bright Blurry Blind #communication #collaboration #problem identification #issue analysis

This is an exercise for creating a sense of community, support intra and inter departmental communication and breakdown of “*Silos*” within organizations. It allows participants to openly speak about current issues within the team and organization.

## Communication exercises to improve empathy and understanding

Without empathy and understanding, working with others can prove difficult, if not impossible. Whether it's how we communicate in the workplace or converse in our interpersonal relationships, it can always be helpful to find ways to empathize with the other person and understand their position.

If you're a leader wanting to [improve your facilitation skills](#) and figure out how to help your team, empathy and understanding is possibly the best place to start. Let's get started.

[Heard, Seen, Respected](#)

[Understanding Chain](#)

[Seven Words](#)

[Translated Rant](#)

[Both Sides](#)

[What, So What, Now What?](#)

[Better Connections](#)

## Heard, Seen, Respected

One of the baselines for effective workplace communication is ensuring that everyone is heard when they try to speak, i  
and is respected by others. In this activity f. [Get started with a workshop template](#) 

purpose: to practice listening without trying to fix anything or make any judgments. Next, break the group into pairs and ask everyone to share a story of a time when they were not heard, seen, or respected.

By first sharing these stories before moving to groups of four to discuss patterns, your team can effectively see how the concepts of listening and helping people be heard without first rushing to judgement can help everyone communicate better and be more understood. The result is a group that can more effectively empathize and help one another be seen and heard – a surefire way of improving communication in the workplace.

### **Heard, Seen, Respected (HSR)** #issue

*analysis #empathy #communication #liberating structures #remote-friendly #values*

You can foster the empathetic capacity of participants to “walk in the shoes” of others. Many situations do not have immediate answers or clear resolutions. Recognizing these situations and responding with empathy can improve the “cultural climate” and build trust among group members. HSR helps individuals learn to respond in ways that do not overpromise or overcontrol. It helps members of a group notice unwanted patterns and work together on shifting to more productive interactions. Participants experience the practice of more compassion and the benefits it engenders.

## **Understanding Chain**

Building shared understanding is fundamental to creating a culture of clear, effective communication. In an organization, it often falls to managers to impart information to the rest of the team and help them understand their position though, without the right approach, this isn’t always effective.

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Understanding Chain is a communication activity designed to help create an audience-first approach to communication. Start by asking a group to think of who they'll be talking to and invite them to brainstorm questions that the group might ask of them. Next, invite the team to place those in the understanding chain, under one of three headings: situation, complication, or resolution. By first empathizing with an audience and sorting questions into a story chain, your group can effectively understand what they need to present and in what order in order to successfully build understanding.

### **Understanding Chain** #gamestorming #communication #action

In the Understanding Chain game, a group shifts from a content focus to an audience focus, and draws out a meaningful, linear structure for communication.

### **Seven Words**

Words have impact. Not only do the words we choose have an effect, but our tone, delivery and where we place stress in our sentences and arguments have an impact too. This activity is based on the concept of thinking about how we say something, alongside thinking about what we say. Start by writing a seven-word sentence about yourself on a flipchart while stressing the "I" of the sentence. Ask the group to comment on the message and meaning that was conveyed by how you said the sentence and collect different interpretations. Follow with pair work where participants write and interpret their own sentences before debriefing as a whole group.

By asking the group to consider the importance of how we say things as well as reflecting on moments they felt misunderstood, they can better empathize with others and try to create conversations free of possible misinterpretation in the future.

### **Seven Words** #thiagi #communication #skills #remote-friendly

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Ever heard the cliché, “*It’s not what you say, but how you say it*”? The Seven Words jolt dramatically demonstrates this principle. You demonstrate how the meaning of a sentence changes as you emphasize different words. Later, you invite pairs of participants to explore this concept.

## Translated Rant

When passionate people care about something and something goes wrong, this can lead to people feeling upset, hurt, or angry. When this happens, it’s easy to react to the immediate situation instead of trying to understand where they are coming from and help them move forward. This communication game for work is a highly effective way to helping a group better empathize and communicate under conditions of upset or duress.

Start by asking pairs to work together with one person ranting for sixty seconds on their pet peeve or major annoyance. Next, invite the second person to translate the rant into what the first person cares about, what they value, and what’s important to them. Check to ensure the second person got it right before switching roles and debriefing. By helping a group see what’s behind the rant and focus on what an upset person might care about and value, future conversations, and disagreements can be handled more empathetically and productively.

### Translated Rant #active

*listening #emotions #values #trust #conflict #introductions #opening #connection*

One person rants for 60 seconds. The second person translates their rant into what they care about and value.

## Both Sides

When we receive different sets of advice that might seem contradictory, it might seem that there is a lack of understanding ↗ Get started with a [workshop template](#) 

important aspect of receiving advice and moving forward constructively is understanding that advice is contextual and that even if the advice might seem contradictory or not wholly helpful, the intention of the person is good.

Both Sides is a communication activity that helps a group explore the advantages and disadvantages of two sets of advice or sides of an argument and reach an understanding that incorporates elements of both. It's so easy to get ourselves into a position of saying one side is right and the other is wrong, though this isn't always an empathetic or understanding approach.

Try using this activity the next time differences of opinion or advice create a blocker at work. You'll often find that by seeing both sides, you can help all parties feel more seen and valued while also finding a productive way forward.

### **Both Sides** #structured sharing #issue analysis #thiagi #team #culture change

Organizational life is full of paradoxes. It looks as if you always get contradictory advice. For example, one manager suggests that all your training should be on the Web. Another manager extols the virtues of classroom teaching. In a situation like this, it is useless to ask, “Which is better: online learning or instructor-led learning?” The answer is invariably, “It all depends.” In the complex real world, the effectiveness of any strategy depends on the context. For example, training effectiveness depends on the content, objectives, learners, technology, and facilitators. In order for you to come up with the best strategy, you must explore the advantages and disadvantages of conflicting guidelines.

That's what BOTH SIDES helps you to do.

One of the first steps to improve empathy and understanding at work is being able to see an event free from judgment and from multiple perspectives. This exercise from Liberating Structures is a great framework for reflecting on an event as a group and building mutual understanding without conflict.

Start by asking individuals to reflect on what happened and what they noticed before discussing why it was important and then finally making suggestions on how to move forward as a team. By surfacing thoughts and feelings objectively and sharing them, a group can better understand an event and its importance in an effort to do better next time. With practice and a considered approach, this communication technique can be your goto activity for debriefings and building team understanding.

### **W<sup>3</sup> – What, So What, Now What?** #issue analysis #innovation #liberating structures

You can help groups reflect on a shared experience in a way that builds understanding and spurs coordinated action while avoiding unproductive conflict.

It is possible for every voice to be heard while simultaneously sifting for insights and shaping new direction. Progressing in stages makes this practical—from collecting facts about *What Happened* to making sense of these facts with *So What* and finally to what actions logically follow with *Now What*. The shared progression eliminates most of the misunderstandings that otherwise fuel disagreements about what to do. Voila!

## Better Connections

Workplace communication can prove difficult if you don't know your colleagues very well and feel disconnected from your team. Truly getting to know everyone in your team as people and not just because of their job title or departmental difference. Better Connections is a commun

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group understand one another as individuals, form better relationships and thus contextualize how we communicate in future situations.

Start by asking a group to pair up with someone they don't know too well and rate how connected they are to that person. Next, ask each pair to take three minutes to describe a close relationship with someone they love very much while the other person listens carefully. Debrief afterward and reinforce the point that better connections are formed through sharing, listening, and finding safe ways to communicate in the workplace.

### **Better Connections** #interpersonal

*relationships #teambuilding #team #connection #thiagi #get-to-know*

We build a stronger relationship with people when we see them as human beings with whom we share similarities in terms of family and life situations. It is very difficult to form strong relationships with people about whom we know very little. We feel more connected to “full” people. For example, take John, the accountant. If I think of John as an accountant, I might put him into a box of what I think I know about accountants. I might not feel connected to accountants and will treat him accordingly. But when I think of John as a keen mountain climber and outdoor adventurer with two children, one of whom is graduating from university next month, then John becomes human to me, and I can feel connected to him.

## **Exercises to teach clear communication**

Have you ever felt a discussion around a workplace challenge or new project go around and around to the point of being unproductive or frustrating?

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Finding ways to be clear, concise, and stay on topic is a vital communication skill that can help both in and out of the workplace. These communication games and activities are effective at not only providing a framework for clear communication but can help teach groups and individuals how to be more clear and concise in the future. This alone can be a surefire way to help teams be more productive!

## [What I Need From You](#)

### [Clear Communication](#)

### [Customer Service Categories](#)

### [500-year-gap](#)

### [Name That Tune](#)

## **What I Need From You**

A common reason for unproductive or frustrating workplace relationships is a lack of clarity in what two parties need from one another. Misalignment or misunderstandings are problems within themselves but can also create further frustration and communication issues.

What I Need From You is a communication technique that encourages a small group to share their core needs simply and clearly with those affected and then invite the other person to respond with concision. Ensure everyone makes clear, concrete requests and to give clear requests too. By practicing this communication style, your team can fix existing issues and also find better ways to communicate needs and dependencies in the future.

**[What I Need From You \(WINFY\)](#)** #issue analysis #liberating structures #team #communication #remote-friendly

People working in different functions and disciplines can quickly improve how they ask each other for what they need to be successful. You can mend misunderstandings or dissolve prejudices developed over time.

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members need in order to achieve common goals. Since participants articulate core needs to others and each person involved in the exchange is given the chance to respond, you boost clarity, integrity, and transparency while promoting cohesion and coordination across silos: you can put Humpty Dumpty back together again!

## Clear Communication

Some communication concepts are best explored with simple games that allow people to learn and engage while having fun. When it comes to helping a group communicate more clearly, this communication game is a great way of iterating quickly and building on learnings.

Start by choosing a category of communication skill. Good examples include active listening techniques or purposes of communication. Have small groups each write a clear response to the concept on an index card and then vote for the clearest example (no voting on your own card!). Repeat and reflect to help a team share examples of best communication practices quickly while also learning the value of concision.

**Clear Communication** #thiagi #skills #idea  
generation #communication

In any content area, one difference between a beginner and an expert is the latter's ability to come up with different examples that belong to the same category. This activity strengthens your ability to come up with examples of communication concepts.

## Customer Service Categories

Clear, effective communication is a staple of great customer service. But learning how to anticipate the needs of others and r helpful whatever your role.

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In this communication game, start with a customer service category such as 'How to win customer's trust' or 'What customers expect.' Invite each person in the group to take turns to say an item that belongs to the category while listening to the items supplied to the other players. Ask the group to eliminate any player who hesitates for too long, repeats an item, or offers an item that doesn't belong to the category. This game is great for encouraging the learning of key communication concepts but also for building core communication skills.

### **Customer Service Categories** #customer service #improv

*game #issue analysis #thiagi #idea generation*

Players take turns to supply items that belong to a specific category related to customer service. Any player who hesitates too long, repeats a previous item, or supplies an inappropriate item is eliminated. The last player left standing wins the game.

### **500-year-gap**

Gaps in a group's shared understanding can be one of the biggest challenges to effective workplace communication. While these gaps are likely to occur when people from different backgrounds and disciplines work together, there are things we can do to close these gaps and facilitate better communication.

In this communication activity, start by splitting a group into pairs and having one person role-play someone from 500-years-ago. Have one person explain a modern-day object or appliance – such as a mobile phone or airplane – to the person from 500 years ago without telling them what it is. Encourage those people to fully embrace the mindset of someone from the past and ask questions in character. When debriefing, be sure to ask how the group made assumptions in understanding and how they tried to navigate the knowledge gap with concision and clarity.

### **500 year gap** #active

*listening #speaking #communic*

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*communication #empathy #improv #em*

In pairs, one person describes a modern appliance to someone from 500 years ago

## Name That Tune

So many misunderstandings and breakdowns in communication can simply come from a gap in the information two parties possess. Communication games like Name That Tune are effective methods of teaching communication skills in an experiential manner.

In this game, start by getting team members into pairs. One person will start as the listener and the other will start out as a tapper. The goal of this communication exercise is for the tapper to choose a familiar song and to tap out the rhythm on the table with their fingertips. While tappers might expect listeners to easily guess the tune, the information gap between them can make this a nigh impossible task.

To demonstrate the power of sharing information when communicating with others, try running a second round where one person can hum or give a clue and see how different the results are.

**Name That Tune** *#communication #learning #thiagi #skills*

In his book, You Are Not So Smart, David McRaney describes an experiment by Elizabeth Newton that explains the illusion of transparency. This happens during the communication process when others are not privy to same information as we are. While we may think all of our thoughts and feelings are visible to others, we often overestimate the actual transfer of information. The participants pair up and one partner taps out a familiar song with fingertips. The finger-tapping partner predicts the listener will be able to guess the tune. These

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partners are surprised to discover that while the tune is obvious to them, their listening partner is unable to guess it.

## Activities to help identify and improve your communication style

Communication is often more complicated than it first seems. Articulating our needs, listening properly and responding with care takes time and effort and people communicate differently. Learning your communication style and taking steps to become a more effective communicator by being aware of how others communicate can be truly transformative.

If you or your team find that conflict arises easily or that some members regularly feel unheard or unable to speak, that's likely a problem with clashing communication styles. While most of the communication techniques in this post can help improve communication generally, it can also be effective to reflect on how our individual communication styles can impact group dynamics. Dedicated effort on this can help unblock unproductive working processes and improve interpersonal relationships in a cinch! Let's give it a go!

### Grounded Assertiveness Communication

#### Yes and Picnic

#### Reframing Silence

## Grounded Assertiveness Communication

Navigating workplace communication successfully means not only identifying how we communicate, but how others do it too. With this exercise, start by introducing sets of cards with the four basic communication styles: passive, aggressive, passive-aggressive, and assertive.

Have pairs or small groups then draw a random communication style card and roleplay a scenario using the scenario on the card. When debriefing, be sure to reflect on the tone, energy, and body language generated by each scenario. Learning how different communication styles Get started with a workshop template 

productivity of a conversation can be transformative. Be sure to give this game a go if you want a quick and easy way to introduce communication styles to your team.

## Grounded Assertiveness

Communication #communication #boldness #openness #body language

Framework: Consideration for Others x Openness of Communication

Participants practice 4 modes of communication – Aggressive, assertive, passive, passive-aggressive in improv scenario

## **Yes and Picnic**

For some groups, the traditional labels associated with communication styles can be limiting or difficult to get their heads around. Whatever framework you use, the end goal is the same – to help everyone communicate better while understanding that people communicate differently.

Yes and Picnic is a great workplace communication activity to help show a group how our approach to a conversation can massively impact the outcome. Start by asking pairs to plan an imaginary event together and have four conversations on the subject. One person should enthusiastically want to do the activity while the other person responds with a response ranging from a simple no, to a yes and back and forth. By having each pair use responses that correspond with typical communication styles, they can see how these can impact a conversation and consider how to use them moving forward.

Yes, and Picnic #improv game #yes, and #active

listening #accepting offers #fle. Get started with a [workshop template](#) 

## 4 conversations about how to listen, acknowledge, and build

### Reframing Silence

When working as a team, silence can be interpreted differently by everyone in a group. What might be necessary reflection time for one person might be considered awkward or a sign of non-participation by others. Using a communication activity to reframe silence and help quieter group members contribute is a great way to help a group grow and learn to sit with silence.

Start by explaining all the ways in which silence can be interpreted, ask for understanding and space, and then gently encourage participation from quieter teammates. When it comes to effective workplace communication, helping everyone be understood while being given a chance to contribute can make all the difference. Try following this exercise with further activities and discussions and challenge the group to be aware of the lessons learned, whatever the workplace context.

#### From Silence to Vibrance #managing difficulties #group development #online #engagement #team dynamics

Sometimes a number of people are silent and there is not necessarily a dominant person in the group. This often happens in cultures where being assertive is not valued.

### Communication games to improve self awareness

Some workplaces issues can stem from failing to understand or be aware of the ways in which our actions or communication styles can affect others. Being self-aware when we communicate often means being mindful of how we listen, speak and deliver information, all while also being aware of our own needs, triggers, and sore points.

As with all communication skills, what might seem easy for one person or situation might not be easy in another. Recognizing<sup>1</sup> Get started with a [workshop template](#) 

communication and then moving towards improving it is the first step on your communication journey.

[Everyday Hassles](#)

[Lasting Impression Elevator Pitch](#)

[Blame or Praise](#)

[Social Virus](#)

[Playing with Status](#)

## Everyday Hassles

Even the most self-aware of us can often have automatic responses and behaviors which can affect those around us. Think about how getting stuck in traffic might lead to us getting angry without thinking. Does that response actually help or make us feel good?

This communication game is designed to show us that our automatic responses can be changed and we can improve behaviors that might otherwise affect our workplace relationships. Start by asking small groups to brainstorm alternative, better ways to respond to an annoying situation such as getting stuck in a traffic jam. By then considering alternative responses to a series of hassles and then identifying patterns, your group can each see how we might reconsider our automatic responses and be more self-aware of how we communicate with others.

**[Everyday Hassles](#)** #issue resolution #issue analysis #stress management #thiagi

It is a great activity to show participants that it is plausible to change our automatic behaviours and reactions to annoying situations.

## Lasting Impression Elevator Pitch

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Most people know that first impressions have a lasting impact that can make all the difference to how we later communicate. Being aware of how we introduce ourselves and our roles can be crucial at improving both our careers and workplace relationships.

This exercise from Thiagi Group asks participants to prepare an elevator pitch for quickly describing themselves, their role and interests. By workshopping and reflecting on how they've presented themselves to others, your group will be more self aware in future communications. Plus, they'll learn a valuable skill in being able to discuss themselves and their role with efficiency and clarity. Perfect when it comes to working with others and communicating better at work!

### Lasting Impression Elevator Pitch #communication #elevator pitch #thiagi #skills #action

How do you explain what you do to someone you meet for the first time and make a lasting impression? Being able to explain what you do may result in a career spurt—or at least help you avoid some embarrassment. Participants write a short pitch they can use to introduce themselves to clients or new acquaintances or to make unscheduled presentations. Later, they have the pitch critiqued and improved using a three-part rating system.

## Blame or Praise

A large part of using self awareness to be a better communicator is in gaining knowledge of how we can interpret situations because of preexisting conditions. This communication game is another great method for helping a group develop workplace awareness. Start by distributing the two different versions of the blame or praise handout among the group and ask them to record their responses.

Both versions of the handout explain how a company chairman's decisions either had a positive or negative effect on an outcome. Crucially, each handout differs in regards to whether the chairman intended to

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reflecting as a group, we can learn to separate intentions from outcomes and practically examine how certain conditions can impact how we perceive and communicate with others.

### **Blame or Praise** #decision

*making #communication #thiagi #issue analysis*

This exercise is based on Joshua Knobe's experiments on intentional activity and side effects. It explores how a person's intentions affect our decision to assign blame or praise to a behaviour. Participants work with two different versions of the same situation. One version focuses on a harmful side effect of a decision, while the other deals with a helpful side effect. The debriefing discussion explores how we are more willing to blame for harmful side effects than praise for helpful side effects.

## **Social Virus**

We've all been caught up in workplaces where positive or negative feelings have spread through the team. By considering how our emotions can be transmitted through a group, we can start to practice a greater degree of self-awareness and control in all of our workplace communications.

Start by choosing one person at random to be the infector general, whose job it is to infect other people in the group with a negative facial expression. Once infected, a player's role is to try and infect three other people. After a negative round, switch it up to a positive infection. Communication games like Social Virus are great for teaching concepts in a fun, memorable way while also inviting self-awareness. Try it at your next team meeting as part of a broader conversation on group communication for even better results!

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**Social Virus** #emotional intelligence #positive psychology #teamwork #thiagi #action #issue analysis

We all know how quickly the cold or flu can spread through the office, but we don't often think about how contagious our emotions can be. This exercise provides a brief simulation of how quickly both negative and positive emotions can be transmitted. One participant is selected to be the Negative Infector General and asked to infect others with a negative emotion. During the next round, you pretend to select another participant to be the Positive Infector General. At the end of the second round, participants are surprised to find out that they became more positive even though no one initiated the emotion.

## Playing with Status

Organizations aren't flat. Sometimes, communication between people at differing levels of seniority or expertise can feel tough because of this imbalance, but it doesn't have to be! Playing with Status is a communication game where pairs roleplay a simple workplace situation multiple times with different levels of status.

Being aware of how power dynamics can not only affect how others speak to you but how you might speak to them can be transformative when it comes to improving communication at work. When we're made to feel inferior in status or are simply unempathetic to how status affects others, the result can be damaging. Don't let this be the case in your organization!

## Playing with

**Status** #teambuilding #communication #team #thiagi

Participants are given a short script of 8-10 lines of neutral dialogue. The scene may depict a job interview, a team meeting, or a social gathering.

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below) or a coaching session. Pairs take turns enacting the scene, playing with the status relationships through non-verbal behaviours.

## Communication techniques for giving feedback

All teams have times when they need to reflect, debrief and share feedback. Done correctly, it's one of the best ways to improve group dynamics and be more effective in your working practices. Done incorrectly, poorly delivered feedback or unfocused discussion on what went wrong can do more harm than good. These communication activities are designed to help a group give better, more focused feedback that helps everyone share how they feel in a productive manner.

[Feedback: Start, Stop, Continue](#)

[Principles of Effective Feedback](#)

[One Breath Feedback](#)

### Feedback: Start, Stop, Continue

Effective communication is all about concision and empathy, though when teams come to giving one another feedback, that can often go out of the window. Communication frameworks such as this exercise are great for helping groups have productive feedback sessions that build trust and openness.

Have small groups work to write feedback to each other using a simple start, stop and continue structure. By filling in the gaps in set sentences, each person is able to deliver consistent feedback that is simple and useful to everyone. Finish by having each person deliver feedback verbally and then handing the post-it to the person addressed. You'll find that feedback is not only more effectively transmitted but also received, and without the potential for as many difficult, unproductive discussions.

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## Feedback: Start, Stop,

Continue #hyperisland #skills #feedback #remote-friendly

Regular, effective feedback is one of the most important ingredients in building constructive relationships and thriving teams. Openness creates trust and trust creates more openness. Feedback exercises aim to support groups to build trust and openness and for individuals to gain self-awareness and insight. Feedback exercises should always be conducted with thoughtfulness and high awareness of group dynamics. This is an exercise for groups or teams that have worked together for some time and are familiar with giving and receiving feedback. It uses the words “stop”, “start” and “continue” to guide the feedback messages.

## **Principles of Effective Feedback**

Outcomes and frameworks shaped by a group are often more effective than those simply given to them. What works for one team might not work for another, and this communication exercise is all about coming up with a set of rules for giving feedback that is bespoke and designed by the team that will use it.

Start by working in pairs to give examples of when they have received effective and ineffective feedback. As a group, you'll then brainstorm principles of effective and ineffective feedback and agree on a set to use in feedback sessions moving forward. By finishing with a discussion of how to ensure these principles are followed, you can have more meaningful and productive communications around feedback. You'll also have a readily usable resource for the future!

## Principles of Effective Feedback #hyperisland #skills #feedback

The purpose of this exercise is for a group to discuss, define, and come to agreement around

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feedback. Participants discuss examples of effective and ineffective feedback in pairs, then work together to define “effective feedback.” Then, as a group, they create a list of principles that they will aim to work by.

## One Breath Feedback

Unfocused communication can be frustrating and unproductive for all involved, especially when it comes to giving and receiving feedback. Some people might feel intimidated when giving feedback at the end of a session or alternatively, someone might continue speaking long after their point has been made.

Avoid these situations and create a more productive, concise feedback culture with this communication exercise. Simply ask your group to give feedback using just a single breath – often just 20-30 seconds per person. By clearly outlining this rule in advance, your team will also have to carefully consider what they might say too – a great result for any workplace communication!

### One breath feedback #closing #feedback #action

This is a feedback round in just one breath that excels in maintaining attention: each participant is able to speak during just one breath ... for most people that's around 20 to 25 seconds ... unless of course you've been a deep sea diver in which case you'll be able to do it for longer.

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## In conclusion

Strong, effective communication in the workplace is crucial for effective teams, though, without considered effort, it can become problematic.

We know that when group communication breaks down or is in need of improvement, it can be difficult to know where to begin. By using communication games, team members can find a framework for moving forward, improve their listening skills and develop their emotional intelligence too!

Ready to go further? Explore this guide on [how to plan an effective workshop](#) for the next time you're leading a session of communication skills.



**James Smart**

Head of Content

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**TOPICS****GROWTH AND DEVELOPMENT**

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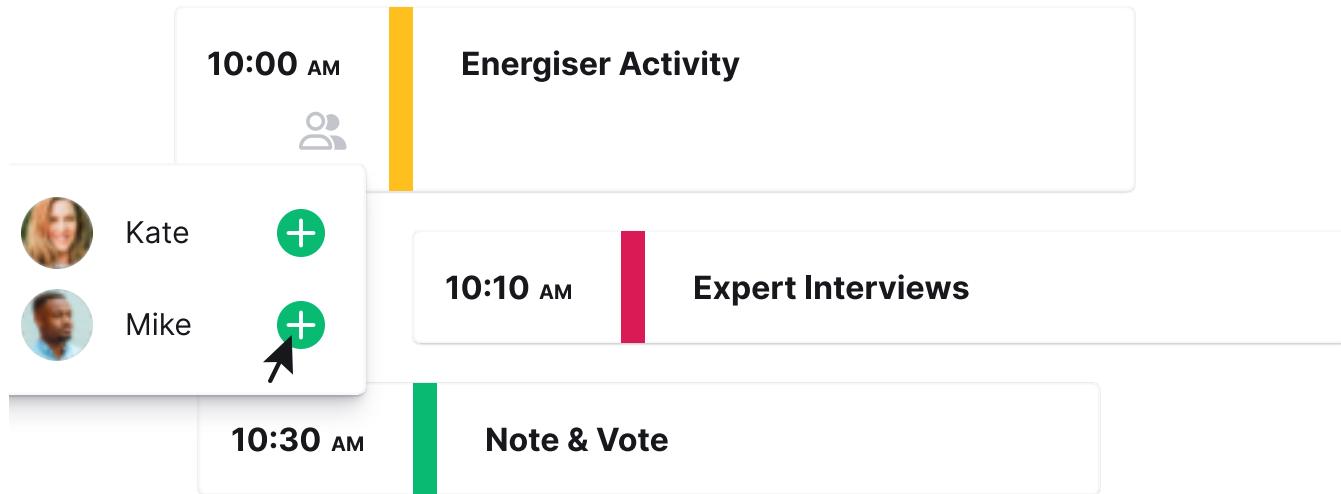
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