

Effective communication

Although the purpose of communication encompasses a wide range of interactions and objectives, it is **often used to move people to action and decision-making**.

It is easier to move people to action when we have a **connection with them** – a common purpose or belief.

We can move people to action by convincing them that our purpose is their purpose, and therefore, what **we have to say will impact them**.

The EPIC framework

McKinsey's EPIC framework for communication was designed to provide a **holistic approach to communication** in almost any type of interaction.



Empathy

Connecting with
our audience



Purpose

Considering our needs
and the needs of others



Insight

Articulating our ideas in a
clear and compelling way



Conversation

Orchestrating a
two-way flow

The purpose of this framework is to guide us in **creating deeper connections** with others, **aligning on a shared purpose** with them, **inspiring action**, and **encouraging significant change**.

Empathy

Empathy is the ability and willingness to **understand** and **connect** with the **emotions, thoughts,** and **perspectives of others**.

Empathy is not a one-size-fits-all concept; it encompasses a **spectrum of empathetic experiences**, from basic understanding to profound emotional connection.

The spectrum of empathy represents a range of empathetic responses that we may exhibit, **varying in intensity and depth of understanding**.



Compassionate empathy: The ability to not only empathise but be **motivated to take action to alleviate their suffering or distress** by offering support, comfort, or assistance.

Emotional (affective) empathy: The ability to **share in another's feelings** and empathise with their thoughts or perspectives to understand and forge a deeper connection with them.

Cognitive (perspective-taking) empathy: The ability to **recognise and understand** another's thoughts, feelings, or perspectives on an intellectual or rational level **without sharing** in the emotional experience.

Empathy in practice

But how do we actually practise empathy in interactions? Let's look at an interaction between President Aziza Naledi and Chidi Kunto from Maji Ndogo as an example:

President Naledi sat in her office, her brow furrowed as she reviewed the latest data analysis report provided by Chidi. The report contained some potentially sensitive findings regarding the impact of the water crisis on various communities.



(Looking up from the report) Chidi, these findings are crucial, but they also paint a grim picture. When we share this with the public, I can't help but think about how they might react. Many of them have been suffering for so long.



(Nodding) You're absolutely right, President Naledi. I can imagine that when people see these results, they might feel a mix of frustration, anger, and despair. They've been living with the consequences of this crisis day in and day out.



(Sighing) Yes, and they might also feel a sense of hopelessness. We've promised change for so long, and it's disheartening to see that progress has been slow.

Empathy in practice



I completely understand, President Naledi. We must remember that the data isn't just numbers; it represents the lives and well-being of our people. It's our responsibility to present this information in a way that acknowledges their struggles and shows them that we're committed to making a real difference.



(Looking determined) You're right, Chidi. We can't shy away from the truth, but we can also use this data as a catalyst for change. Let's work on a communication strategy that not only presents the findings but also outlines the concrete steps we're taking to address the crisis. We need to show them that we're in this together.



(Smiling) I'm with you on that, President Naledi. Together, we can not only provide the insights but also offer a ray of hope and a path forward. It's all about action.



In this discussion, Naledi and Chidi **demonstrate empathy by considering how the public might feel** when presented with the challenging results of the data analysis. They **acknowledge the emotions of frustration, anger, despair, and hopelessness** that people may experience and **commit to presenting the information** in a way that both **acknowledges their struggles and offers a path forward**.

Empathy in practice

To **implement empathy** further, we can consider the following while communicating, and also upon reflection after an interaction:

Put ourselves in their shoes: How might other people feel about the results or insights we are sharing? What emotions might they experience when presented with this information?

Listen actively: Are we actively listening to their questions, concerns, and feedback during the discussion? How can we show that we value their input and perspective?

Tone and non-verbal cues: What is our tone of voice and how might it affect the emotional tone of the conversation? Are we being attentive to the non-verbal cues (body language, facial expressions) that convey emotions?

Ask open-ended questions: What questions can we ask to encourage them to express their true thoughts and feelings? How can we create a safe space for them to share their concerns?

Address concerns and misunderstandings: When misunderstandings or concerns arise, are we addressing them without dismissing anyone's feelings? Are we patient when explaining and clarifying as needed?

Purpose

Purpose is having a **clear understanding of the specific goal or objective** we aim to achieve in an interaction.



Our purpose

- Involves defining what we **want to achieve**, the **outcomes we seek**, and the **message we intend to convey**.
- Emphasises the importance of having a **well-defined reason** for an interaction.
- It ensures that we can **effectively convey our message** and **achieve the desired results**.



Considering others

- Part of establishing a clear purpose is **considering what the other person or audience needs** from the interaction.
- This includes **understanding their goals, concerns**, and what they **hope to gain or accomplish** through the communication.

Purpose in practice

What does purpose look like in an interaction? Let's look at another interaction between President Aziza Naledi and Chidi Kunto from Maji Ndogo as an example:



(Leaning forward) Chidi, I've been thinking a lot about our mission to solve the water crisis. It's not just about data and analysis; it's about our purpose. Why do we do what we do?



(Nodding) You're absolutely right, President Naledi. Our purpose goes beyond numbers and reports. It's about improving the lives of our people, ensuring they have access to clean water, and creating a better future for generations to come.



(Smiling) Exactly. That's why it's crucial that every analysis we conduct, every decision we make, is aligned with our purpose. We're here to make a positive impact, to bring about change.

Purpose in practice



I couldn't agree more. Our purpose is like our North Star. It guides us, reminds us why we're in this, and motivates us to do our best work.



(Determined) And it's not just about us. We need to communicate this purpose to our team, to the public, and to everyone involved. When people understand our 'why', they'll be more motivated to join us in our mission.



(Enthusiastic) I'm all in, President Naledi. Let's make sure that every action we take, every analysis we perform, is driven by our purpose – to solve the water crisis and improve the lives of our people.



In this discussion, Naledi and Chidi emphasise the importance of purpose in their work to address the water crisis. They recognise that their mission is **not just about data analysis** but about the deeper purpose of improving lives and creating a better future. They also stress the need to **align their actions and communication** with this purpose to **inspire** and **motivate** others to join in their mission.

Purpose in practice

To **implement purpose** further, we can consider the following while communicating, and also upon reflection after an interaction:

Identify the goals: What are the specific goals or objectives the other person wants to achieve through this interaction? What outcomes or information are they seeking?

Clarify expectations: Have we discussed and clarified the expectations for the conversation? Do both parties have a clear understanding of what we hope to accomplish?

Explore the priorities: What aspects of the data or discussion are most important to them? Are there specific areas or data points they are particularly interested in?

Address the concerns: Are there any concerns or uncertainties they have that need to be addressed? How can we provide reassurance or solutions to their concerns?

Feedback and adaptation: Do we ask for feedback during and after the interaction to ensure it aligns with their purpose? How can we adapt our approach based on their feedback and evolving needs?

Insight

Insight refers to the **understanding, clarity, or knowledge** that we bring to an interaction, and involves being able to communicate it in a **clear and compelling way**.



In the context of communication, having insight means having a **deep understanding of the subject matter** and the **ability to provide meaningful and relevant information** to support the message.

It's important that we are **prepared, well-informed,** and have a **clear grasp** of the facts, data, or insights that we contribute to an interaction.

Having insight contributes immensely to effective and impactful communication.

Remember, **if we're not convinced** about what we are saying, or if we are **unsure** about what we are trying to say, we **won't be able to convince anyone else**.

Insight in practice

What does insight look like in an interaction? Let's look at an example where Chidi doesn't get the "I" in EPIC right, and loses his audience very quickly:

Chidi had been tasked with presenting the findings of a complex data analysis to a group of stakeholders, including President Naledi. He had spent weeks diving deep into the data, and as he began his presentation, his enthusiasm for the details got the best of him.



(Excitedly) Good afternoon, everyone. I'm thrilled to share the results of our latest data analysis on water consumption trends. To start, let me take you through the extensive dataset we collected over the past year. We captured hourly water consumption data for every town in the country.

Audience: *(Listening attentively at first)*



(Projecting a complex graph on the screen) As you can see here, this graph represents the hourly water usage patterns for the region of Sokoto. Now, if we zoom in on the second week of July, you'll notice some interesting fluctuations. I've colour-coded the bars to indicate different types of water fixtures used during that time.

Audience: *(Starting to look puzzled)*

Insight in practice



But wait, there's more! If we switch to a logarithmic scale, we can observe the subtle variations in water flow during peak hours. This level of granularity allows us to identify potential areas of improvement in our water conservation strategies.

Audience: *(Confused and disengaged)*

President Naledi: *(Whispering to a colleague)* I'm losing track of what he's trying to tell us.



(Continuing with more detailed graphs and charts) Now, let's not forget about the outliers in the dataset. By applying a robust statistical analysis, we can pinpoint the instances of abnormal water consumption, which may require additional investigation.

Audience: *(Visibly disengaged, checking their watches)*

President Naledi: *(Whispering to Chidi)* Chidi, I appreciate your thoroughness, but can you please get to the key findings and recommendations?

Insight in practice



(Realising he went too far) Of course, President Naledi. My apologies for delving into the minutiae. Let me summarise the main insights.



In this example, Chidi's enthusiasm led him to **provide an overwhelming amount of information**, causing the **audience to lose track** of the main point. It highlights the importance of **balancing detail with clarity** in presentations to ensure that the **audience remains engaged** and **understands the key takeaways**.



What could Chidi have done differently?

Insight in practice

Start with a clear agenda: Chidi could have begun the presentation by **outlining the main objectives and the key insights** he planned to share. This would provide the audience with a roadmap of what to expect.

Summarise first: Instead of diving straight into the details, Chidi could have started with a **high-level summary of the most important findings and recommendations**. This would ensure that the audience had a clear understanding of the main takeaways.

Use visual aids effectively: Chidi should have used visuals like charts and graphs to illustrate his points concisely. However, he should have chosen visuals that **supported the key insights rather than overwhelming** the audience with unnecessary data.

Avoid jargon and technical details: Chidi should have **explained complex concepts in simple terms**, avoiding technical jargon that might confuse the audience. He could have provided additional technical details **only if requested** or if they were **directly relevant** to the key findings.

Prioritise the most significant insights: Chidi should have focused on the insights that had the most significant impact or required immediate attention. This would have helped **keep the presentation concise and relevant**.

Engage the audience: Chidi could have **encouraged questions and interaction** throughout the presentation to ensure that the audience remained engaged. This would allow him to clarify any confusion and tailor the presentation to the audience's needs.

Conversation

Conversation involves planning and orchestrating a **two-way flow of ideas, information, and feedback**.

Very often we **talk to an audience rather than with them**. Sometimes it's due to passion or enthusiasm, as in Chidi's case, or because we feel like "conversation" doesn't really fit the type of interaction.



However, conversation is not only the flow of words between two or more people in the moment of the interaction. It's more about **sparking discussion between people**.

We can strategically use a **combination of questions and statements** to guide a discussion:

- **Questions** can be used to seek input, gather feedback, and encourage participation.
- **Open-ended questions** encourage thoughtful responses and promote engagement.
- **Statements** can convey information, clarify points, and provide context.

Conversation in practice

What does conversation look like in an interaction? Let's look at another example of Chidi presenting insights to stakeholders and President Naledi:

Chidi had been tasked with presenting the findings of a complex data analysis to a group of stakeholders, including President Naledi. He had learned from his past experience and was determined to not only provide valuable insights but also engage the audience in a productive discussion.



Good afternoon, everyone. Today, I'd like to share with you the key insights from our recent data analysis on water consumption trends. To start, let me summarise the most important findings.

Audience: (Attentive)



Our analysis reveals that our water conservation efforts have led to a notable reduction in consumption across all regions. Western Region stands out with a remarkable 30% reduction, mainly attributed to the implementation of smart irrigation systems.

Conversation in practice

President Naledi: *(Engaged)* That's promising. What about the other regions?



In the Eastern Region, we achieved a commendable 10% reduction despite facing challenges related to irregular water supply. In the Southern Region, we initially saw a 12% reduction, but it tapered off over the last quarter, indicating the need for re-evaluation.

Audience: *(Actively listening)*



Now, as we consider these insights, I'd like to hear your thoughts. What strategies or initiatives do you believe would complement the progress we've made in the Western Region?

President Naledi: Well, expanding community-level engagement programs is a good start. What do you think, Chidi?

Conversation in practice



Absolutely, President Naledi. I'm glad you mentioned that. I'd also like to hear from the rest of the team. Are there any specific ideas or experiences you think we should consider in the Western Region?

Audience: *(Engaging in discussion, sharing ideas)*



In this example, Chidi not only **presented insights** but also **proactively prompted the audience** with questions and statements that **encouraged discussion and engagement**. He fostered a **collaborative atmosphere**, encouraging input from President Naledi and the team, and ensured that the presentation led to a productive discussion.

When we **get “conversation right”** in our interactions, we are not only fostering collaboration but **inherently getting empathy, purpose, and insight “right”**. We are now actively speaking with the audience, listening to their ideas and concerns, aligning on the shared objective, and articulating it in a compelling way.

Mastering impactful communication

Let's challenge ourselves to **strive for impact** in our next interactions by practising and reflecting:

Practise **having impactful communication**

Practise having impactful interactions by **actively applying the EPIC principles in our conversations** with peers, mentors, friends, and family.

Reflect after interactions

Reflect after interactions by considering **what went well, what could have been improved**, and **how we can apply these insights** to enhance our future communication.