

CHAPTER 32

From Miscommunication to Understanding: A Manager's Guide

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ABSTRACT

One of the main challenges managers face is communicating and communication is essential to any organisation. Despite the fact that managers are faced with employees, teams, customers and stakeholders on a day-to-day basis, failure rates are still high. Miscommunication is the act of sending a message that is unclear or completely missing, is sent with a negative tone, is misinterpreted by the recipient, or leads to conflict, mistake, loss of morale and productivity. The article explores the implications of improving the communication skills and practices of managers to shift from poor communication to real understanding. It takes a look at the nature of miscommunication, why it occurs, how it manifests and what the consequences are, in terms of the performance of the organisation. It also considers what this means for the manager in terms of making messages clear, creating trust and keeping the channels of communication open. Practical solutions are clearly described, such as an approach to active listening, emotional intelligence, structured feedback, cultural sensitivity and choice of communication methods. The article is reflective and uses mundane workplace examples to enhance managers' practice. If communication is enhanced, managers could anticipate better working relationships, team working and ultimately better performance for the organisation.

Keywords: Miscommunication; Workplace communication; Active listening; Communication channels; Managerial effectiveness.

1.0 Introduction

The managers, who have developed efficient managerial system, understand the role of communication in each managerial task. It is vital to planning, organising, leading and controlling and it is through communication that they receive instructions, expectations, feedback and decisions from their employers.

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Communication, however, is never guaranteed and one of the most common challenges that organisations struggle with is the potential for miscommunication. Miscommunication is when the message that is sent by a sender is not received by another person in the way that the sender intended. The impact of its effects is significant: Staff unsure of their role and responsibilities make errors, lose time and become frustrated. Communicating clearly, listening and being empathetic fosters trust and understanding with a manager. Poor communication by a manager creates an employee team of confused, hesitant and displeased members. This article is an exploration into why so many messages get lost in office settings and what managers can do to transform miscommunication into understanding.

2.0 The Concept of Miscommunication in the Workplace

A single message can be the difference in the process of work in an organisation. Nothing is achieved without exchange between persons, whether it's setting the goals or giving directions. When leaders communicate simple instructions to a team, goals are interpreted and plans are coordinated, when information about what is needed is not consistent, plans are not coordinated.

But even with good intentions, you can get confused. When the message isn't clear, it slows work down, when it's unclear under pressure, it's unclear when it's under pressure, and when it's unclear once it's done, it's done. When a message fails to hit home with a manager, then it leads to misunderstanding; a misjudgment creates a tense dynamic in a team; delays build up and lose momentum. There is a gradual drop in morale and the whole business gets the strain, gradually.

Most people don't realize what really causes these failures: unclear wording and unchallenged assumptions, and they impact morale and performance. The manager is more important than is often realized because the manager's actions will either help or hinder the flow of information. They may listen rather than speak, restate contentions and pose questions. If tone and timing as well as silence are not heard, then there is not much use in an intended meaning.

The first step to trust is to feel heard, and staff should not have to wait for a problem to occur before being invited to speak. Sympathy is not equal to empathy: empathy is concerned with what lies behind the words. There are many things that small practices can do that make a big difference — reiterate key points, look back on what was said in interpretations, mention what is not known, etc. — and over time, things change without anyone forcing them to alter. Psychological safety builds incrementally, which is why folks ultimately raise their voice, and repetition is what makes understanding a habit (Edmondson, 2019). This sort of communication starts within the organisation. Leaders

communicate messages to staff that influence daily activity in a way that is appropriate. When expectation is shared in a clear way, then it is created successfully; when expectation is shared face-to-face, then it is better understood; when there is continuous dialogue, then direction becomes clearer. People understand their role in the broader purpose when it's expressed. Easy information sharing ensures no friction between groups and trust builds when actions match words. It is here that collaboration becomes evident, work flows smoothly, mistakes are minimized, and progress is possible.

3.0 Types and Causes of Miscommunication

Messages travel imperfectly. If an idea is communicated in a workplace, the receiver might not get what was communicated; as a message travels through a series of roles, something is lost at one point, the tone is altered at another. With no one on purpose trying to cause gaps, they inevitably grow bigger as a result of poor understanding, and one wrong signal might result in a wrong decision made for the wrong reasons. Often people lose clarity without realising.

3.1 Ambiguous instructions

The smallest missing detail is a source of confusion. When instructions are not specific, they ask employees to guess what is desired and guesswork always results in mistakes. Without context, understanding is lost, without terminology, knowledge is replaced by speculation. To a manager, there are obvious things that are not obvious to a person in another department.

3.2 Failures of listening

Listening is an easy habit to lose. When people focus on what they want to say, they're not listening, and information goes out the window at the exact moment they're not paying attention. There's a lot of information that can be missed because managers and employees didn't mean to be missing it.

Mind-wanders also when people are interrupted or when their message is ignored. Selective listening alters the message and listening is missing the meaning when the message seems one-sided. In others there is more downward communication: workers are told something but are not given a chance to comment and after the announcement, there is no expectation of hearing them, and there is silence.

3.3 Emotional conditions

The emotional state affects the interpretation of a message. In times of high tension, words are lost; fears reduce questions and anger can quickly cloud meaning. If one

employee has a fear of being blamed, he or she may be hesitant to seek help because he or she will say nothing, and as a result errors compound. Each of these negative emotions, fear, stress and frustration, further diminishes candid exchange and distrust deepens it. When employees feel that authority is distant, they often withhold questions and uncertainty spreads when people don't ask.

3.4 Cultural and linguistic differences

Accent and idiom change meaning when a team is made up of different people. There are nuances associated with words in various languages, and the tone makes all the difference; something that is perfectly fine in one culture can be offensive in another. There can be further differences in the conventions of the workplace, and misunderstandings of cues are more common than participants can imagine (Hall, 1976).

3.5 Channel and medium

When written, there is no gesture or expression, and messages are open to question. When there is a screen between people, tone is lost; when there is a screen between the sender and the recipient, then the tone will be lost all the way. A note can be short and abrupt without the warming that a smile or a pause would add, and words alone have an impact they never anticipated. Therefore, the richness of a medium should match the complexity and sensitivity of the messages (Daft & Lengel, 1986). But hierarchy adds to the challenge, because it could make it hard to provide honest feedback before it's given.

4.0 How Miscommunication Affects Organisational Results

When people have to deduce meaning, it takes awhile. Where messages conflict, minor errors increase and they add up to major ones. One miscommunication can cause a whole activity to get out of sync and one event can throw off the entire process, with results appearing months later.

Time is wasted and repeated work is created due to miscommunication. Confusion is multiplied by lack of instructions and progress in learning is delayed even further. Confusion creeps back in undetected, and relationships become marred by poorly selected words, which cause people to feel criticised. When things get too complicated, people isolate themselves from their work mates, work becomes exhausting without obvious goals, and messages are lost. When there is a lack of understanding, individuals ultimately seek other opportunities for work. Team relationships go sour over months, decisions take longer to make and quality of judgment decreases. Ambiguous communication is not only an undesirable situation, it's a structural issue: if communication is not clear, momentum will stall and coordination will be unreliable.

5.0 The Manager's Responsibility

The clarity in the workplace is determined by the managers. Their voice has a major impact on the way that their message is received and often the first impression is the only one that matters, sometimes it's a question, sometimes it's a silence.

The manager's job is to communicate clearly and simply in terms that everyone can understand. Instructions should be given to the degree of importance and the reason for its importance should be explicit. Questions that come from the response are a good thing, rather than a hindrance.

The little difference in the way managers communicate can go a long way in clearing up much of the confusion. Instead of each talking over the other, they start to listen. When the situation changes from passing information to getting it across, what was once an "information" message becomes a "communication" message, and the gap between speaker and listener becomes much smaller.

The biggest single practice is to listen, or see things from the other person's perspective, and it changes the impact of a message. A manager who takes time to think about what something will look like to an employee, is on a clearer path to understanding. Open-ended questions, not assuming an answer, will allow a richer narrative to develop, and when discussing is truly two-way, misunderstandings will come to light early instead of later. The clarity is obtained through listening, not through lecturing. This kind of support means that employees are likely to do a much better job when they can ask questions freely, errors are less likely to happen and trust builds as knowledge is gained.

6.0 Practical Approaches to Better Communication

6.1 Active listening

Active listeners are attentive listeners who pay close attention to the speaker. They don't interrupt and they try to understand the content of a message and the emotion that accompanies it (Rogers & Farson, 1957). Paraphrasing what is said, summarising what is said and asking clarification are signs of engagement and that understanding is correct.

6.2 Attention to non-verbal signals

Words are not the only tool for communicating information – posture, expression and gesture can communicate as well and an alert manager would sense hesitation or discomfort that has not been expressed. These types of practices facilitate effective communication and long-term productive relationships over time.

6.3 Establishing open channels

In such environments where people can talk freely, a more complete picture emerges. Leaders' actions in showing concern for honesty and courtesy build trust without any formal declaration. Teams stay connected, and everyone feels like a strong player, through regular meetings, and through the opportunity to contribute. People who feel their opinions are listened to are more likely to be able to identify themselves with the goals of the organization and open discussion can lead to the development of new ideas and solutions more rapidly.

6.4 Selecting the appropriate channel

Various messages demand various media. Use personal contact for complex or sensitive matters, tone and response is immediate, routine information can be communicated in writing. One of the easiest ways to avoid unnecessary misunderstandings is to match up the channel with the message.

6.5 Learning from communication failures

An important thing to note is that if a message doesn't connect, it is often due to the way it was sent, not necessarily the person. The managers who look at these failures see patterns and make changes in their practice: no clarity, no response, questions that were never answered. Ambiguous instructions are more conspicuous, and feedback loops are formed where they didn't exist before. As the experienced leaders, they realise that what someone does not say is as important as what they do say and gradually they reflect on past failures and modify their approach to the exchange of information, slowly establishing trust with each other.

7.0 Conclusion

How teams perform is, to a significant degree, dependent upon how well they communicate with the people in the team. Vital communication failures slow work and erode confidence and often destroy coordination. Communication failure, however, does not create an irreparable damage.

Modest attention yields substantial improvement. Speaking directly, checking that everyone has understood and confirming shared expectations reduce errors markedly, and sustained effort of this kind produces consistently better exchange. Effective teams are not formed at a stroke; they develop through a succession of small, well-conducted interactions. Productivity follows naturally once silence is no longer mistaken for agreement.

Moving from confusion to clarity is not a simple undertaking. It requires understanding what goes wrong and persistence in addressing it. As leaders become more

skilled at exchanging information, a workplace operates more smoothly and the people within it feel genuinely heard.

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