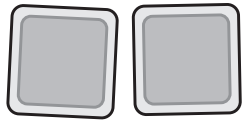


PART

III

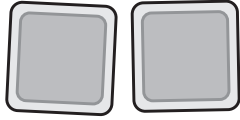


Activities

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1 Building Blocks for Effective Communication



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Purpose

To allow participants an opportunity to experience their own and others' communication styles, gaining insight into what is effective and ineffective about their own styles of communication. In addition, participants will have the opportunity to give and receive feedback regarding their own preferences related to communication styles.

Objectives

During the activity participants will

1. Identify communication styles that are effective and those that inhibit their ability to communicate effectively
2. Become more aware of their communication styles and their impact on others
3. Gain experience giving and receiving feedback regarding communication behaviors that are effective and ineffective

Target Audience

Any group working on identifying and/or improving communication skills

Group Size

- Minimum: two people
- No maximum

Duration

- 45 to 60 minutes, including 20 to 30 minutes to debrief

Physical Setting

A room with enough space to accommodate pairs sitting face-to-face with dividers between them

Materials and Equipment

- Two bags for each pair with at least ten (to ensure sufficient complexity) Lego[®]s of matching size and color in each

- Divider for each pair, masking the work area of each player
- Chart paper for debriefing
- Markers
- Self-stick dots (six per participant, half one color, half a second color)

Facilitation Notes

This activity could bring up potentially sensitive communication issues. The facilitator must be able to create a safe space in which people are able to discuss topics that have possibly never been discussed openly before.

Facilitator Preparation

Fill two small plastic bags with identical sets of Legos (the same number, color, and size) for each pair. Set up dividers between members of each pair. The divider should be high enough that they cannot see what the other person is doing, but low enough that they can still see each other's facial expressions.

Process

1. Pair up the participants.
2. Have the pairs sit across from each other with a divider separating them that prohibits them from seeing what the other person is doing.
3. Give each person in a pair a matching set of Lego blocks.
4. Have them decide who will build/communicate and who will be communicated to/listen.
5. Tell the person doing the building/communicating that he or she will have 5 minutes to plan and build something out of the Lego blocks, using all the pieces.
6. After the creation is complete, tell each builder that he or she has 10 minutes to communicate to the other person what has been built and how to build it him- or herself.

7. The listener is able to ask clarifying questions to better understand what to do.
8. Optional: If there is an odd number of participants, choose an observer. Have this person observe the interactions between the pairs including the ways in which the communicator attempts to get the other person to understand and the way in which the person listening responds. Give the observer an opportunity to share his or her findings with the group.
9. Have them take apart their structures and reverse roles, so the former listener builds/communicates and former builder listens and replicates.

Debriefing

Ask participants to individually take a few minutes to reflect on the following:

1. What worked well, and why did it work well? What were effective methods of communication? Why were they effective?
2. What was challenging? What were some of the ineffective methods of communication? Why were they ineffective?
3. What did it feel like to give directions? To receive the directions?

Then, in their pairs, ask them to do the following:

1. Share responses with your partner.
2. Together, identify three to five behaviors that illustrated effective communication.
3. Together, identify three to five behaviors that illustrated ineffective communication.

Reconvene the group, and ask each pair to report out its findings to the large group. Chart all the responses and then give all participants six sticky dots, three each of two colors.

Ask all participants person to mark the top three effective communication behaviors with dots, using one color (such as red). Ask

everyone to mark the top three ineffective communication behaviors with the other color dots (such as blue).

After everyone has placed his or her dots, ask the following questions:

1. What are the implications of what happened for the individual, the group, the organization? Focus on what's most relevant for the group.
2. What can you learn from this experience?
3. Is there anything you are committed to doing differently moving forward?

Variation 1: Back-to-Back Building

Process

Have the pairs sit back-to-back so that they cannot see what the other person is doing. In this version they will be unable to see each other's facial expressions, which should impede their ability to communicate effectively.

Debriefing

For the debriefing, ask questions that will help people reflect on and identify the implications of this constraint:

1. What helped you to be successful when you could not see the other person?
2. What made this task difficult?
3. What are some similarities between this activity and communication in real-life situations?

Variation 2: Silent Listener

Process

Set up the players as in the original version with a divider preventing them from seeing their work area but enabling them to see

each other. In this variation, the listener is not allowed to ask clarifying questions (or communicate in any way) to better understand what to do.

Debriefing

For the debriefing, ask questions that will help people reflect on and identify the implications of this constraint:

1. What helped you be successful when you could not talk to the other person?
2. What made this task difficult?
3. What are some similarities between this activity and communication in real-life situations?

Contributor

Ellen Greenberg is an organization development consultant working with individuals, groups, and organizations to create new solutions and approaches that lead to sustainable results, greater success and healthier, higher-performing organizations. Ellen has worked for more than fifteen years with non-profit, for-profit, and government agencies in management and consulting capacities. She is a skilled trainer and facilitator who has designed and delivered workshops on consulting skills, strategic planning, team building, effective communication, facilitation skills, coaching skills, and change management. Ellen received a master's of science in organization development from American University in 2006.