



discussion



Additional resources
required:
None



This module is
suitable for:
Staff at all levels



Time required to run
this module:
75 minutes

aims of this module:

- To enable participants to test their communication skills.
 - To test individuals listening skills.
 - To test participants' abilities to get their point across effectively whilst building an understanding of others' feelings.
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Exercise

Split participants into two discussion groups. (If this results in groups with more than eight participants you might want to create additional groups, with some groups working on the same issue).

Make sure that each discussion group has enough space to sit in a circle, and are not so close to the other group(s) that they become distracted by what's happening there. Ideally, you'll have a separate room for each discussion group.



It's a good idea to create your discussion groups in a way that means participants won't be seated next to people from their group when they return to the main classroom.

Give one participant from discussion group one a copy of brief one, and a participant from group two a copy of brief two.

Explain that the discussion groups have 30 minutes to reach a decision about the issue they've been given, and immediately separate the groups so that they can begin.

After 30 minutes, stop the exercise and ask participants to return to their seats.

Give each participant a supply of blank Summary Sheets so that they have one for each member of their discussion group. Ask them to write the name of one other participant from their discussion group at the top of the first sheet and, in the space below, summarise that participant's viewpoint, as expressed in the discussion they've just held.

They should repeat this process for all of the participants who were in the same discussion group as them.

Allow 15–20 minutes for this exercise, and then ask the participants to distribute their completed sheets to the participants whose views they've summarised. All participants should receive a Summary Sheet from each of their discussion group colleagues.

Ask participants to read through the summaries they've received, and to consider how well their colleagues have captured their point of view. Ask them to score each summary using the grid at the bottom of the sheet, but emphasise that they must be able to justify their scores to their colleagues.

Discuss the key learning points from the exercise.

Discussion Questions	Learning Points
What did this exercise require?	This exercise required two key skills: The ability to express a point of view clearly and concisely, and an ability to build a clear understanding, through active listening and questioning, of other peoples' views.

Discussion Questions (continued)	Learning Points (continued)
How well (or badly!) did this exercise go in terms of communication skills?	This exercise may have gone badly, if participants failed to question, or actively listen to what others were saying.
Why?	
How well were you listened to?	When the discussion involves emotive issues, it can be difficult to listen effectively. If we're not careful we can become so focused on trying to make sure our own view is heard,
How well did you listen to others?	that we fail to listen to other people. And, if we don't think they're listening to us (because they too are
How well did other team members summarise their viewpoints?	focused on getting their point across), we'll just talk louder and faster. Soon, everyone is talking at top volume and nobody is listening.
What helped or hindered active listening?	Some people, who felt they weren't being listened to, might be surprised by the accuracy of the summaries they received. Where this happens it
Were you surprised by the accuracy of anyone's summary?	shows that simply hearing what someone else is saying is not enough; we have to demonstrate through our body language and through acknowledgement that we have listened and understood.
Who did you find it easiest to listen to?	We tend to listen better to those who express similar opinions to our own. We need to guard against "turning a deaf ear" to those who disagree with us.
Why?	

Discussion Questions (continued)	Learning Points (continued)
<p>What was important when getting your own view across?</p>	<p>Communication is usually most effective when it is clear, concise and to the point. This is especially important in groups; otherwise a lot of time and energy will be wasted.</p>
<p>What would have helped you communicate your ideas more effectively?</p>	<p>Some preparation time would have given participants the opportunity to think about the key points they wanted to make, prioritise these, and identify how they communicate these effectively.</p> <p>They could also have used preparation time to consider what others might say, and to prepare themselves for that.</p> <p>Preparation time before any meeting is useful – it is very difficult to communicate effectively 'on the hoof'.</p>
<p>What else did you observe in the meeting?</p>	<p>Not only were participants expected to contribute to the content of a discussion; they also needed to observe what was happening as well. This would have helped them to:</p>
<p>What sort of body language did you notice?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Assess the impact of their own contribution. • Assess the impact of others' contributions. • See who was not contributing and try to draw them in.



You might want to record key learning points on a flipchart as the discussion progresses.

Give participants a copy of handout two. Highlight again any key learning points that came out of the discussion, and suggest that participants record these in the handout.

Check for questions before moving on.

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