

Growing the Servant Heart

Leading Through Relationships Communications: A core competency for Servant Leaders

Student Notes

*These notes accompany the **Leading Through Relationships – Communications: A core Competence for Servant Leaders** on-line course module available at academy.christian-leadership.org*

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Objectives

These notes accompany the **Leading Through Relationships – Communications: A core Competency for Servant Leaders** module in the Growing the Servant Heart on-line course. This course is available free of charge at academy.christian-leadership.org

Communicating is a universal need just as speaking and listening are virtually universal abilities. However, just because we can speak and hear does not necessarily mean that we are effective communicators. We often think that verbal communication is simply about speaking and we lose sight of the objective, the desire to convey some piece of information or an idea to another person. Generally we feel because we have said it, the other person must have understood us. Alas, that is not what often happens; we may speak, the other person may have heard our words, but have they actually understood?

As we shall see there is an array of issues that work against understanding and so it is a very high risk that the other person has not actually understood what I thought I wanted to convey to them. Unless, that is, I focus on conveying understanding to the other person. Then, when It's my turn to listen I may hear the words the other person used but have I actually understood what the other person wanted to convey to me.

This module is about the parties of a conversation taking joint responsibility to ensure that a correct understanding has been achieved. This process is called Responsible Communications.

The **Growing the Servant Heart** programme is about providing practical tools to help the Christian leader function day-to-day. As such, the tools and approaches have been selected because they are supportive of the values and objectives of the Christ-centred servant leader.

At the end of this lesson, as the student, you will have:

- Considered the factors that work against effective communications.
- Explored how to become a Responsible Listener.
- Investigated how to be a Responsible Speaker.
- Examined an approach to making meetings effective.
- Reviewed how to make email a more effective communications channel.

Prerequisites

This module of **Growing the Servant Heart** can stand alone but is best considered having completed **The Jesus Model** and **Leading Through Insight** and **Leading Through Others** modules. These can be found at academy.christian-leadership.org

Biblical Perspectives

God is Our Model

*God is not a man, that he should lie,
Or a son of man, that he should change his mind.
Has he said and will he not do it?*

Numbers 23:19

We cannot go far wrong if we look to God as a model and guide for any aspect of how we live and relate to others. This amazing verse was spoken by a pagan prophet – Balaam. Israel was in their wilderness migration and Balaam had been retained by Balak, the King of Moab. Balak had charged Balaam to “curse Jacob for me and denounce Israel”. Having taken the money and started work Balaam had responded “How can I curse whom God has not cursed?” Balak was not pleased and complained.

Numbers 23:19 was part of Balaam’s reply. Essentially it tells us that we are not to look at God as if he is a fickle man, capable of changing his mind. Rather he is the model of integrity and he says what he means and does what he says. This is a good guide for all people, especially the Christ-centred servant leader.

The secret to this is to think; to consider carefully what to do and think clearly about what we say, seeking to honour God, so that we never have to back-track. In earlier modules we have seen the importance of being trustworthy. Thus, we need to be straight forward and honest in the things we say. Where we feel the pressure to be diplomatic in our style, we need to be sure never to actually say one thing while meaning another. We will soon be discovering too, the issues that obscure understanding, which cause our hearers to understand something different than we meant.

When we are dealing with people from another national culture, especially where one of us is not using our mother tongue, we need to make special efforts to be sure that understanding has actually taken place. Take time to review the **Gaining Cultural Insight** lesson. If you can obtain a copy, ing **Cross Cultural Communication A Visual Approach** by Richard D Lewis, Transcreen Publications - ISBN 095343981X will also be helpful.

The Value of Considered Speaking and Listening

*A word aptly spoken
is like apples of gold in settings of silver.*

*Like and ear-ring of gold or an ornament of fine gold
is a wise man’s rebuke to a listening ear.*

Proverbs 25:11&12 (NIV 1984)

These two insightful proverbs highlight the fact that there are two parts to successful communications: speaking and listening. They also emphasize the value of working at our communication skills.

What does it mean to speak aptly? It's about considering the hearer and how to convey the message to them so that they can receive it and understand it. It's about considering the content, the manner and the timing of the message. Proverbs is about wisdom, which is living in a manner that honours and pleases God, so from a Biblical perspective speaking aptly also includes honouring God through the things we say.

But it's not all down to the speaker. The preparedness of the listener to listen is of equal value. In fact, it is the act of listening that makes the aptly spoken word to be like "apples of gold in settings of silver" If the recipient does not listen then the speaker's words have no value at all regardless of how wise they may be.

Both the ability to speak well and listen well are vital skills.

The Impact of Words

*The tongue that brings healing is a tree of life,
but a deceitful tongue crushes the spirit.*

*Reckless words pierce like a sword,
but the tongue of the wise brings healing.*

Proverbs 15:4 & Proverbs 12:18 (NIV 1984)

Solomon tells us that words can be dangerous, they can also be very beneficial. The implication of his warning is that we need to consider carefully what we say and how we say it.

As Christ-centred servant leaders the last thing we want to do is to be reckless and crush the spirit of those that we lead. That is quite contrary to both the outworking of the character of Christ in us as we lead others, and our goal as servant leaders to enable those we lead to grow and achieve their full potential. Rather, it is our goal to stimulate life and vitality in those we lead. This means we need to enable those who are crushed and disengaged to become inspired, involved and committed to the journey. Therefore, we need to be wise, to be careful in the things we say.

The Heart Speaks

The good person out of the good treasure of his heart produces good, and the evil person out of his evil treasure produces evil, for out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks.

Luke 6:45

"For out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks" explained Jesus. He is teaching that it is what is within us, our ambitions, desires, motivations, good or bad, that determines what we do and

especially what we say. Simply it's about our deep-down heart motives and nothing we say or do can cover them up. One can try and be a servant leader but without the servant heart the desire to serve one-self will burn through in our actions and words, like a bright light on a foggy day.

Remember in **Reflections on Leadership**, and in our various considerations on integrity, we have observed that words and deeds must match. People do what the leader does not what they say. When the manner or tone of what is said or the leader's behavior, does not reflect the words used, then this simply reinforces this "follow my leader" dynamic.

As Christ-centred servant leaders we must strive to be mature in Christ and keep an eye on our own motives to make sure that our hearts and minds are aligned with him. If they are not, it will be visible to those we lead because what we say and what we do will not match. A heart that is not centred on Christ undermines our character, our leadership, our team and above all, Christ.

Reflections

- **Take a Moment:**
 - Before you proceed with this lesson take time out to prayerfully browse Proverbs chapters 8 to 18 and 25 & 26.
 - What do you learn from the wisdom of Solomon about speaking and listening?
 - How does this apply to other modes of communication?
 - How well do your communications skills compare to what you have learned from Solomon?
 - Identify three ways in which you can improve?

The Challenges of Effective Communication

Opening Reflection

Before we start this section take a couple of moments to consider the challenges of communicating with others.

- **Take a Moment:**
 - When do you consider that communication has been successfully achieved?
 - Why?
 - What steps do you take to ensure that you have communicated successfully?
- **Take a Moment:**
 - What is the most difficult communication obstacle you face?
 - Why?
 - In your experience what are the 5 biggest barriers to successful communication?

The Communication Concept

When it comes to communication, most people are under a huge misapprehension: we believe that all it is about is conveying a message to someone else, and when that message has left us our job is completed. Seldom do we do anything to ensure that the communication has been clearly understood.

Communications are only successful when the message has been received and understood and the other person is able to act appropriately.

There is a common, almost folk lore illustration of this in English. It relies upon puns; that is words that have a similar sound but a different meaning. It means that you have to read out loud the phrases used in the story. *Please note that Google Translate will not help you understand this illustration because it is to do with sounds of the English words used.*

In the First World War some British troops were waiting in their trenches to attack the enemy. The Captain in charge recognised he needed more soldiers for his attack to be successful. He needed to ask his commander for more troops but his messengers were all out taking messages. He had no usable paper because it was all wet, so he decided to send a verbal request down the line of soldiers, soldier to soldier. He instructed the first man to pass on the following message: *“Send reinforcements, we’re going to advance”*. The message was conveyed man to man, down the line, each repeating what they had been told, and eventually reached the senior commander.

Do you think the message was conveyed accurately to the senior commander?

Well, the message he received was not *“Send reinforcements, we’re going to advance”*. But *“Send three and fourpence¹, we’re going to a dance.”* - *Speak this paragraph out aloud.*

In the process of going from man to man, spoken by one and heard by the next, the message became corrupted because it had been misheard. Maybe gunfire or an explosion had obscured what was being said. One or two men, trying to make sense of it during a time of great stress, did the best they could. They repeated what they thought they had heard. That is why you have to speak the two phrases aloud to hear the similarity in sound. (In English the phrase “three and fourpence” sounds similar to “reinforcements” and the phrase “a dance” sounds similar to “advance”)

This illustrates that there are challenges and obstacles to communication being effective. In the story the meaning of the message became altered and the commander who received it was unable to act in an appropriate way.

There are so many opportunities for the intended meaning of any message to fail to be understood, that we need to take the possibility into account in our communication processes and work out how to minimise the problem.

¹ In the 1970s currency in the United Kingdom was decimalised becoming pounds and pence with 100 pennies to the pound. Prior to that the currency was pounds, shillings and pence with 20 shillings to the pound and 12 pence to the shilling. “three and fourpence” means three shillings and four pennies in what we now call “old money”.

Professor Wiio's "Laws of Human Communication"

Wiio's Laws of Human Communication fundamentally say if communication can go wrong, you can bet your life that it will. This is a key understanding necessary in developing effective communications skills.

Professor Osmo Wiio was born in 1929 and was a Finish academic and student of human communication. While he was a Member of the Finish Parliament he formulated his laws. While he may have been inspired by his colleagues, his laws do have a broader applicability to what you and I do every day. Wiio's 'Laws' are really insightful, but it has to be said that he wrote somewhat humorously. None the less, as you read his laws you will recognise their validity.

Communication usually fails except by accident.

Just to set the scene, ponder a moment the process required to transfer something from your mind to that of another person via speech. There is an awful lot going on. Ideas are turned into formulated concepts, concepts into words, words into sound waves, sound waves are mixed up with noise, sound waves are turned back into words, words into thoughts and thoughts back into concepts and ideas.

That whole process is conditioned by our skill with language, our vocabulary, understanding of idioms, our knowledge of the context and the concepts being transferred, how we feel, the Ladder of Inference, cross-cultural influences and a whole load of other stuff too. All that is going on before the recipient's attention is diverted or they are preoccupied. It also assumes that both their and our vocal, auditory and mental faculties are functioning well on any given day; not to mention our wilfulness. Do we even want to hear what is said?

It's a wonder that we succeed in communicating anything at all and it all leads to the following:

If communication can fail it will fail.

No individual factor is significant alone, but taken all together there is so much potential interference that the probability of failure is high.

If communication cannot fail, it still most usually fails.

There is so much to contend with you cannot possibly neutralise all the risks, so even when you think that you have set things up so that your communication must certainly succeed it will still fail.

If communication seems to succeed in the intended way, there has been a misunderstanding

If it looks like it worked easily and the recipient is happy, he probably understood it his way not yours. How many times, like me, have you thought that you understood something said to you? You then go away and as you do you begin to realise that it doesn't make sense anymore.

If you are content with your message, communication is guaranteed to fail.

If you're content with the message, then you styled the communication to satisfy yourself and you have failed to take into account the recipient and all those factors that work against his understanding.

If a message can be interpreted in several ways, it will be interpreted in a manner that maximizes the damage.

Whatever we prepare, there are so many ambiguities in and around language that your message can be interpreted in several ways. I recall taking ages, carefully writing and re-writing an open letter that was to be published in the local paper. I looked at it from every angle possible – honest I did. Imagine my horror when I received a letter of complaint because of the offence I had caused based on an interpretation I never saw at all! This also illustrates the previous point. I was content with my message.....

There is always someone who knows better than you what you meant with your message.

This can be tricky because these people propagate their misunderstanding on your behalf as they tell everyone what they thought you really meant but couldn't say so. Often, you will be unaware of what's happening. Imagine the consequences when this happens in combination with the previous law.

Sometimes, with the best motives in the world, they will even generate the messages they think you would want give. It is not ignorant and stupid people who do this. I came across one company where a senior management team member believed he was speaking on behalf of the CEO and often caused all sorts of damage.

The more we communicate the worse our communication fails.

The hope is that if we say something enough times it will sink in. Well I suppose it does. However, repetition does not clarify misunderstanding but will reinforce it. Also, it is possible to overwhelm people with communication in a way that prevents them from absorbing it.

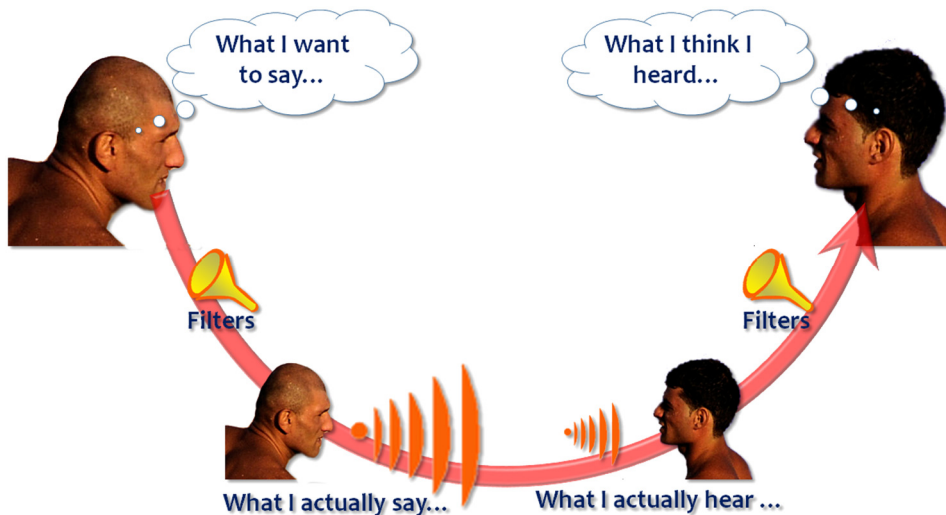
The more important a situation is, the more likely it is that you forget an essential thing that you remembered a moment ago.

We've all been here!

One of my communications flaws is, with absolute clarity of thought and understanding, to open a remark by saying something like: "There are three things I want to say....." By the time I have finished the second one I have completely forgotten what the third one was. I now practice hard at not using that introduction in the hope of disguising my failings.

The Communication Process

Having had the reality check from Professor Wiio let's take a closer look at the communication process. Then we can begin to see where the issues arise and start working out what we can do to maximise the probability of success.



These two men are engaged in a dialogue. Each is speaking and listening to the other and responding to what has been said. Let's look at the process in more detail starting with the man on the left:

- He has in his mind something he wants to say. There is some concept, perspective or information he wants the other man to understand.
- He needs to convert those thoughts into words and in so doing those thoughts are filtered in some manner on their way to becoming the words that he actually speaks. There are lots of factors at work in those filters. A simple example is to consider vocabulary; imagine that he is not speaking in his natural language. He is German speaking, and he is speaking in Greek. He has to formulate and verbalise his ideas in German and then translate them to Greek. Even if he is completely fluent in Greek there will still be some concepts that are difficult to translate. So what he actually says is only an approximation of what he originally thought he wanted to say.
- The spoken words travel as sound waves and are heard by the second man. Then, assuming he hears the words clearly they have to pass through his filters before his brain processes what he thought he heard.

The vital question is: Does what the second man thinks he heard match what the first man wanted to say?

The problem is the barriers to communication which first of all impact what the first man thinks he wants to say and what he actually says. These barriers may cause the first man's thoughts and perspectives to be wrong at the outset. If that is the case, even if he managed to accurately speak out his thoughts the communication would fail.

A similar but different set of barriers filter what the hearer hears and these affect how he interprets what is heard.

Then, of course the whole process works the other way round because a dialogue is two way and so the second man makes his reply which is affected by these issues in reverse.

Thinking this process through in this way highlights exactly why Professor Wiio is justified in stating that “Communication usually fails except by accident.” The model we have used is one for verbal communications but the essential issues apply to all forms of human communications.

The question is “What can be done to increase the probability of successful communications?” Because of its importance this lesson will focus on addressing this issue for verbal communications. But the basic principles will apply to other forms.

Communications Barriers and Filters

Now let’s spend a little time thinking about some of the issues that make up the barriers and filters that negatively affect our ability to communicate.

Given that the Christ-centred servant leader’s goal is to enable others to achieve their full potential it is essential that we consider how to communicate in such a way as to facilitate this. Therefore minimising the communications barriers is an essential consideration for us and those we lead.

Background

Our background, including our national culture, has an impact on how we think and it colours the words we use or don’t use. It colours how we see the world, our opinions and expectations. Thus our backgrounds will determine what we think and how we convert that into spoken words. Similarly it colours the meaning we give to words and phrases, filtering what we hear and it affects how we interpret what we think we hear.

Cultural factors

In the **Gaining Cultural Insight** lesson we learned how the cultures of our childhood countries determine how we think. What we think is appropriate and inappropriate, normal and abnormal and this translates into behaviour.

Recall the dimension of Power/Distance and consider the situation which might arise between a manager from a low power distance country and staff member from a high power distance country. The manager invites the staff member to help him solve a problem but the staff member expects the manager to tell him what the solution should be. Imagine the response of the staff member when the manager seeks their assistance. Imagine too the manager’s response when the staff member finds it difficult to rise to the challenge.

Mother language

In a cross-cultural situation one of the people may not be using their mother tongue. So, unless they are extremely fluent, their ability to phrase ideas into words will be limited as will their ability to accurately understand what is said. More than this, language translation is inexact because some words have no direct equivalents. Where there are huge cultural difference then some ideas and idioms do not cross the language and cultural boundary.

The church I attend in England has a Cantonese speaking congregation. There is always much amusement in joint services when a complex idea, needing lots of words in English becomes a couple of words in Chinese and a simple idea needing a few words becomes a long, long interpretation in Chinese – and vica versa of course. Fortunately both groups have a sense of humour and seem to find the situation similarly amusing.

Circumstances

The circumstances of one or other of the people involved in the dialogue also has a significant impact. My son's first job after graduation was as a salesman. Many times he came home feeling bruised by a customer, or potential customer, who had been abusive. Without justifying the abuse we always reminded him that he didn't know what was happening in that customer's life or what happened just before they met. The circumstances of the other person shape and sometimes block our ability to communicate effectively with them.

Timing

Closely related to circumstance, timing is everything when we seek to communicate. Choosing the right time can make the difference between failure and success.

Lack of sensitivity

Lacking sensitivity to someone's situation and circumstances is obviously related to the previous two points. Sensitivity to others is also an aspect of emotional intelligence, especially awareness of others and empathy. These will allow you to tailor how you speak and respond to the other person in your conversation, maximising the probability of a successful communication.

Non-verbal communications cues

So called verbal communications is less about words and more about other verbal cues and body language than you might think. As we shall see later more than 90% of verbal communications is not about words. It is about how you say the words (tone of voice and inflection) and body language (posture and expression). When some or all of these factors are lacking, or not understood, words are misinterpreted. Cross-culturally body language will vary, So, what happens when a particular body language in my culture is affirmative but in my correspondents culture it is insulting?

I just saw a television programme about a young British man of Ghanain descent. He went to Ghana to learn about his grandfather and great grandfather. In Ghana he met a tribal chief who knew their story but he confronted the young man about his body language, which was unacceptable in Ghana.

When the young man spoke he conveyed his feelings with many hand gestures which was not acceptable. Neither was using the left hand when giving and receiving; this was considered very offensive. The first is normal in Great Britain and the second is simply not an issue. So be warned and be prepared.

Preferred communications style

We each have preferences about how we communicate. This is not so much about the preferred media but the style and content of the communication. We will look at this subject later in the lesson. But for now it is sufficient to recognise that if I determinedly stick to my preferred style at the expense of yours it's unlikely that I will be able to convey the ideas that I want to.

Too much or too little information

The information content needs to match the needs of the communication and the listener. Providing too little information will mean that the recipient cannot respond because he has not learned enough from the provider of the information. A similar outcome can be expected if the communication includes so much information that the recipient is overwhelmed and cannot process what they have been told.

Regardless of the level of information demanded by the subject and the required action, In terms of style, some people need detail and some people demand the big picture. If we are insensitive to that need then the recipient will be unable to confidently process the information.

Disorganised information

If the information being conveyed is disorganised then the recipient will be unable to process it and respond appropriately.

Wrong medium

This is tied up with the quantity and nature of the information that needs to be conveyed and people's preferred styles. For instance, if a lot of precisely detailed information is to be conveyed then a written medium is needed but conversation may be needed first. Alternatively, if someone prefers visual forms of communication, e.g charts, diagrams pictures, then verbal communications may not be the best way to facilitate their understanding.

Beliefs and assumptions

Our beliefs and assumptions about situations and people not only colour what we want to say and how we say it, but they greatly affect how we process the things that are said. Do you recall the Ladder of Inference?

The Ladder of Inference

We looked at the Ladder of Inference in **Leading with Insight**. It's a description of the way we look at the world, and how the things we believe about situations and other people influence our responses. Frequently these beliefs and outlooks do not have a solid foundation. To put it plainly they are just plain wrong.

We witness or participate in situations, and our beliefs determine how we analyse the situation and the facts we select as being significant.

The facts we select tell a partial story so we fill the gaps with assumptions. Assumptions are pseudo-facts that we devise to plug the gaps in the story and make it logical and consistent from our own perspective. Seldom are these assumptions tested to prove they are sound

Having filled out the story we draw conclusions and act. These conclusions are heavily influenced by the things we believe, which they inherently affirm, even if they are erroneous. Also the new assumptions we make are affirmed and develop the status of beliefs

Our pool of beliefs and world view are strengthened by the conclusions we reach. After all, if our conclusions are valid then our beliefs must be sound.

Seldom do we test any of this for validity. The Ladder of Inference sits squarely in the barriers and filters that distort our ability to communicate effectively.

Reflections

- **Take a Moment:**
 - Think about your attempts to communicate effectively, try to focus on your communications with specific people:
 - Which of the barriers have you noticed when communicating with them?
 - What steps could you take to limit the impact of these barriers
 - In general?
 - With those specific individuals?

- **Take a Moment:**
 - Reflect again on the Ladder of Inference (see **Leading with Insight**). If you can, identify some situations where you have seen this at work in yourself.
 - What was the situation and what happened?
 - How did this effect your communication with the people concerned?
 - What strategies could you have used to improve the outcome?

- **Take a Moment:**
 - Review what you have learned about emotional intelligence and national cultures.
 - How can that knowledge be turned to wisdom by applying it to your communications skills?
 - Be specific and identify 3 emotionally intelligent strategies you can use to improve the effectiveness of your communications.

Verbal Communications

If we consider the time we spend communicating with others, by far the largest proportion of time is spent in what we refer to as verbal communications; that is talking with each other. We use it to pass the time of day, show concern for others, convey information, illicit information by asking questions, envision and encourage others, and a whole lot more. So we will now concentrate on verbal communications.

Defeating the Forces of Confusion

As we have just seen there are so many forces at play when we seek to communicate with another person that it is a wonder that we manage to communicate at all. It should therefore be no surprise when miscommunication occurs, but so often we do not anticipate it and we take few, if any steps to minimise the risk, seeking to assure ourselves of success.

But alone the talker cannot succeed. They need the help of the listener if there is to be any chance of successful communications ever occurring. Thus it has been said:

“Speech is a joint game between the talker and the listener against the forces of confusion. Unless both make the effort, interpersonal communication is quite hopeless.”

This makes communication a critical issue for you as a Christ-centred servant leader. If you are unable to communicate effectively with others, especially those whom you lead, how will you enable them to achieve their full potential? How will your team members ever be able to collaborate effectively and reap the rewards of being a highly effective team? How will you inspire them with the vision that leads to the destination of their journey?

The aim of this lesson is to help you with answers to these questions, so that you might achieve your full potential as a Christ-centred servant leader.

The Irony of Verbal Communications

The irony of that which we think as verbal communications is that words comprise only 7%. Of what, then, does the other 93% consist? According to Dr. Albert Mehrabian 38% of verbal communication is conveyed by tone and inflexion, that is how we say what we say. The remaining 55% comprises our body language, which is about our facial expression and posture. So we need to watch for body language and even take time to learn about it.

The implication of these statistics is that face-to-face communications is vitally important. Although not always possible it should be our preferred communications mode, especially when sensitive or emotionally related matters are its subject. Documentary communications, especially emails, only deliver words. The horror of communications is text messaging and Twitter, neither of which are as rich a communications method as email, and that is full of issues. We will look at emailing later in this lesson.

It's not practical to communicate some things by speech because they are too complex, involved or need a permanent record, so they must be transmitted in documentary forms. Even then, this is best supplemented by spoken communications, preferably face-to-face. Careful choice of communications method is required.

As an example of the importance of tone and inflexion, in English there are multifunctional words (such as 'nice') whose meaning can be completely reversed by how we say them. Dependent upon these non-verbal cues 'nice' can mean that something is really very pleasant or the exact opposite not very pleasant at all. Tone, Inflexion, expression and posture are all important in choosing the correct meaning.

The speaker's and the listener's body language, their posture and expression, is also very important. We won't be spending much time addressing these aspects of verbal communication but would recommend that you study this separately. There are many books and web-sites that consider body language.

Face-to-face meetings also provide opportunity to repeat things and respond to puzzled looks. Both of which are important aids to achieving understanding.

Mind Time

Another important factor in verbal communications is what we do with our minds while we are listening.

In English we normally speak at rate of between 100 and 150 words per minute. Now studies show that we process what we hear at a rate of between 600 and 700 words per minute. So a listener is

normally only using around 20% to 25% of his processing capacity to listen to the words that have been spoken. So, here is the question: What do we do with the other 75% to 80%? The equivalent of up to 600 words per minute.

Well,

we get distracted by things around us, we think up our reply, we get bored and think of other things, word association sends our thoughts somewhere else, we think through options triggered by what we hear, and a whole host of other things.

It's important for us to keep focused on what is being said otherwise we will miss something and may be not even notice.

Responsible Communications

From what we have seen it is plain that effective communications is not the responsibility of the listener or the speaker alone. It is a partnership between them, each having to play their role in order to ensure that understanding has been achieved, so that the listener can take whatever steps are necessary in response. Only then can both achieve their full potential. This requires each to be concerned about and focus on the other person; a central characteristic of the Christ-centred servant heart.

So as a Christ-centred servant leader we need to take responsibility to ensure that understanding is achieved. Similarly we need to encourage those we lead to take the same responsibility both for themselves and the other person they are in dialogue with. This we call this Responsible Communications and it has two aspects:

- The Listener takes responsibility to ensure that they have understood what the Speaker was trying to say to them; that is, the thoughts he wanted to convey.
- The Speaker takes responsibility to ensure that the Listener has actually understood what they were trying to convey.

It's a combined responsibility and both parties must engage collaboratively with each other to ensure that understanding has been achieved. Only then has the communication been successful.

If the Speaker is concerned that the Listener can achieve their full potential then he must do all he can to ensure that the Listener has properly understood what was being said. Likewise, if the Listener is concerned that the Speaker can achieve their full potential then he must do all he can to ensure that the Speaker has really communicated what he meant. Only when understanding has been achieved will the communication be successful. Focus on and concern for the other person is the key. This why effective communications is a partnership.

As we go on through this lesson we will unpack the concepts of **Responsible Listening** and **Responsible Speaking**.

Responsible Listening

Opening Reflections

- **Take a Moment:**
 - How effective do you think you are as a listener?
 - Rate yourself on a scale of 1 - 10 where 1 is extremely poor and 10 is extremely good.
 - Why do you rate yourself at that level?
 - List at least 3 reasons
 - Would others agree with your self-assessment?
 - Why do you think that?

- **Take a Moment:**
 - It's been said that

"Being listened to is so close to being loved that most people can't tell the difference."

David Oxberg

- Do you agree?
- Why do you think that?

What is Responsible Listening?

In human communications we have observed we tend to think that it's mostly about the effectiveness of speaker (or sender) of the message. The irony is that it's as much, if not more about the listener.

We saw from Professor Wiio's observations that there are many forces working against the likelihood of success when we try to communicate. However, it's only the receiver of the message who is able to confirm that understanding has been achieved. So as we look at how the communications partners can take responsibility to assure understanding is achieved, we will start with Responsible Listening.

There are two strategic actions undertaken by the Responsible Listener and we will unpack these in this topic. As a Responsible Listener you will:

- Accept responsibility for understanding what other people say no matter how poorly they communicate.
- Prove to the other person that you have understood their total message.

This is radically different from normal attitudes to communications. It involves active listening skills but is far more than just using active listening techniques. It starts with the servant heart, which is concerned for the other person. It's about enabling them to succeed in what they set out to communicate by taking steps to ensure that they do succeed. It doesn't hide behind their failure but has as its goal, enabling them to be successful through a collaborative partnership.

Such an attitude can make an enormous difference in the quality of the relationship between the partners in this collaborative effort.

Being a Responsible Listener

There are a number of factors that we can address that will enable us to be Responsible Listeners they include:

- Focus on the speaker
- Avoid the barriers
- Avoid distractions
- Encourage the speaker
- Close the loop
- Be patient in reply

Recall the communication process we looked at earlier. Altogether these tips will help us improve our ability to understand what the speaker intended to convey in the first place. We'll now look at each of these in turn.

Focus on the speaker

We are seeking to participate in a collaborative partnership aimed at achieving understanding. So, we need to focus on our partner in the joint effort; they must be the centre of our attention.

We need to use that spare thinking capacity of 600 words per minute to help and not hinder us.

Don't react but pay attention?

We need to guard against the Ladder of Inference processes which give rise to our reaction. They cause us to impose our own meaning on what was said and then being selective about what we choose to pay attention to.

We need be clear that we actually hear the words used by the speaker. So if we devote our capacity to listening instead of reacting we increase the likelihood that we will hear what is actually said.

Leave your reply until you reply.

We often begin composing our replies while the other person is still speaking. This is not a logical step because until they have finished we don't have all the information we need in order to reply. It becomes easy for us to then focus on our own thoughts and give less attention to our counterpart than is necessary to hear all that they want to say. So it's best to avoid composing our replies until we reply.

Listen with your eyes

Also we need to be certain that we picked up on the other 93% of the communication that is not in the words. Two thirds of that is body language which we pick up with our eyes. So not only do we need to focus our ear on the speaker we must make them the focus of our eyes, being aware of their changing posture and expressions. We won't cover this further here but there are a number of good books and web sites that concern themselves with this subject.

We also need to pay attention to how their tone of voice and the way they stress words colours what they say. When they said “That’s nice” did the mean that something was good and pleasant or did they mean the exact opposite?

Avoid distractions and barriers

Focusing on the speaker, using our 600 word per minute processing capacity to actively listen to our counterpart and read their body language will go a long way to helping us avoid distractions and by-pass the barriers.

Avoiding the Listening Barriers

There is virtually an endless number of barriers and filters that prevent us hearing what is being said let alone getting to what the speaker really wanted to say. Let’s consider just a few of the obvious ones:

Heightened emotions

As we considered in **Leading with Insight**, self-awareness is a key attribute for anyone working in a collaborative partnership. The ability to monitor ourselves allows us to counter emotional responses and manage how we respond to people.

If the topic under discussion is emotionally sensitive, or we are in an emotionally heightened state, then it is very likely we will not be able to focus on the other person or hear what is actually being said. It may be we need to dial back our emotions or ask that we continue the dialogue at another time. If that is the case its best to make plans and not just leave things hanging.

Familiarity

If we think we know about the topic being discussed, feel that we know more than our counterpart or hold strong opinions about the subject, then we may well think we don’t need to listen to them, because “we know it all”.

Maybe we, do but they may have an insight.

Maybe we don’t and they know something that is actually new to us.

If either is the case, then our servant-hearted concern for them should cause us to set aside our familiarity with the subject and listen anyway. It may turn out to be a significant opportunity for both or either of you. At the very least it will graciously demonstrate your interest in and concern for them, and that will pay dividends in your relationship and the level of trust that they have in you.

Fear of change

Change is a significant cause of fear in people and fear blocks one’s ability to hear what is being said.

Think back to the Amygdala Hijack we looked at in **Leading with Insight**. In that case the amygdala registers a threat and overwhelms the brain’s ability to think at all, let alone logically for a few seconds. But even in less severe situations, the fear of change can load the

brain with emotional reaction and prevent the listener from hearing what is being said. This is a phenomena that also occurs with bad news.

As a listener perhaps the only steps available are to breathe deeply, seek calm and ask the speaker to help you understand. This requires the good relationships and trust we have discussed earlier in the programme, and it requires the speaker to exercise their servant heart to help. Then make an arrangement to meet with the speaker again to go through the issue once the emotion has subsided and, as the listener, you are able to process the message more rationally. Of course, for Christians in such situations we also have the resource of prayer and faith to help us, even if we only have opportunity for no more than a Nehemiah like arrow prayer (Nehemiah 2:4)

The wrong moment

There are all sorts of reason why the speaker might have chosen the wrong moment and they all mean that you cannot give the conversation the attention that it and the speaker deserve.

It may be that it's the wrong moment because of the things we have just considered, it may be as simple as you don't have time just then. If that is the case then, if possible, it's better to make an arrangement to talk later than try to squeeze it in and fail to communicate.

Impatience

Impatience with the speaker can be a significant block to hearing what is said. This can arise from factors such as the speaker providing insufficient or too much detail. It may be you've talked about this matter a number of times and they just don't seem to get it, or any number of causes. In any event your impatience prevents you from hearing what is said.

If that is the case then you need to dial back in to Christ's servant heart. Remember the woman with the discharge of blood in Mathew 9, Jesus had time for her despite already being on his way to raise a girl from the dead. Stop and give time to the other person. If you don't have time just then graciously arrange to meet and go through the matter again.

Jumping to conclusions

Jumping to conclusions has the Ladder of Inference written all over it but it has an extra factor. Once we have arrived at a conclusion we will also stop listening. Why would we need to listen anymore? The matter is now dealt with in our own minds. Once we stop listening we stop hearing what the other is trying to say.

Because we jumped to a conclusion we have missed the steps of confirming our understanding, which may be wrong.

If we do jump to a conclusion, what we need to do is recognise it, step back and reengage with the speaker. We can do that by asking for instance: "Am I right in concluding that....?" If we are they will confirm our thoughts but if not, then they can help us understand and reach an appropriate conclusion.

Adopted positions

If we have an immovable opinion that we have chosen to adopt, and what the speaker has to say doesn't fit, then we can dismiss them in our minds and pay no attention to them.

The first observation is that this is not a demonstration of a gracious Christ-centred servant heart that is interested in the other person. We still need to take time to engage with the speaker because if we are right and they are wrong, then we need to help them reorientate their thinking, otherwise they will not grow to achieve their potential. On the other hand we may be wrong. Then as Christ-centred servant leaders we must be gracious and humble enough to recognise that we benefit from the collective wisdom of the team, and we are still learning and growing.

Distractions

There are many things that can distract us and many of those are specific to us, but if we work at being focussed on the speaker we will minimise the impact of distraction.

- **Take a Moment:**
 - Reflect upon the things that distract you when you are in conversation with someone.
 - What are they?
 - What can you do to counter these distractions?

Encourage the Speaker

This may seem odd. Why should you encourage the speaker?

- **Take a Moment:**
 - Have you ever spoken to someone you thought wasn't listening to you?
 - How did that make you feel at the time?
 - How did you react?
 - What do you think you can do to encourage a person who is speaking to you.

Encouraging the speaker energises them. It helps them to feel engaged with you and that there is a point in continuing. It helps them be more interactive and more interesting, which in turn makes it easier for you to listen to them.

Much of our encouragement can be shared via our body language. Bear in mind, though, that in cross-cultural situations the "rules of body language" may well be very different. This is especially true when considering Western, Arabian, African, Latin and Far Eastern cultures. If you are working in cross-cultural situations then it is advisable to take time to investigate what constitutes appropriate body language – see the Bibliography.

Broadly speaking in western cultures there are three key things you can do to help the person speaking to you.

Make and maintain appropriate eye contact

Keeping appropriate levels of eye contact tells the speaker that you acknowledge them and

are paying attention to what they are saying. It demonstrates interest in what they have to say. Consequently it is encouraging feedback to the speaker.

Continuous, unbroken eye contact can be threatening, which of course has a negative effect on the speaker. Because it can be threatening we tend to break and re-engage eye contact. So do not be afraid if that happens.

In Arabic cultures eye contact is less common and considered less appropriate, especially between sexes. Intense eye contact can show sincerity. In China and Japan eye contact is often considered inappropriate and subordinates do not make eye contact with superiors. In African and Latin American cultures it can be considered aggressive, confrontational and extremely disrespectful.

If you are in place where there are visual distractions you will continually look away and that may not be helpful. If that is the case then ask the speaker to pause for a moment because you are being distracted and perhaps ask to change location slightly so you can give them your full attention.

If you find looking at someone's eyes disconcerting, then look at the bridge of their nose. They will think that you are looking into their eyes. Be aware too, that visual thinkers may break eye contact with you when they are thinking.

Confirm with positive body language

You can confirm your interest and understanding with positive body language. So nodding in affirmation and smiling for instance. Leaning slightly towards the speaker also conveys interest, leaning away the opposite.

Folding your arms indicates that you are switched off by the speaker so be relaxed and let your arms hang comfortably at your side. If you are sitting then bringing hands together in your lap can convey openness and interest.

Again, recall that the above advice more often than not works in Western cultures but if you are working cross-culturally take time to learn what body language is and is not appropriate for that national culture.

Provide verbal confirmation

Verbal confirmation with positive expressions conveys interest and engagement, as does asking for clarification on things. However, you need to avoid continual interruptions which will make it difficult for the speaker.

Close the Loop

Closing the loop with the speaker is a crucial element of assuring understanding. It's a process that listeners can use to confirm understanding for themselves and let the speaker know what they need to clarify for you. The processes outlined are often called active listening.

Convey what you thought they said

Referred to as reflection, this is the process of repeating back what you think you have heard.

Remember the communication process. It starts with what the speaker wants to say which, when put into words may not be quite the same thing. You hear these words but by the time you have processed them they may mean something quite different to the original thought in the speaker's head.

Paraphrasing what you think the speaker has said is helpful. It allows you to interpret the meaning and convey it back to the speaker in a different form. If you misunderstood, then paraphrasing will make that much clearer than simply repeating what was said to you. Paraphrasing also helps you be an active listener, that is, take in and understand and recall what has been said.

Reflection lets the speaker know how close you are to understanding what he wanted to say. He can then clarify any misunderstandings.

Summarise periodically

This is somewhat like reflection but is about summarising a collection of points that combine into some bigger idea. It allows you to share the conclusions you are drawing from what is said and it provides an opportunity for the speaker to confirm or correct your understanding.

Use questions

If the speaker's message is unclear or confusing questions can be used to ask for clarification and to provide more detail.

- The question may be broad such as: "I didn't understand that, please can you tell me in a different way?"
- The question may be specific such as: "If such-and-such is the case then does it mean....?"
- The question can ask for more detail: "Can you expand that point and give me more detail about please?"

Questions also turn the engagement with the speaker from a monologue to dialogue, as both the listener and the speaker take responsibility to ensure that understanding has been achieved. The process is also an encouragement to the speaker and will help them feel that it is worthwhile to achieve understanding.

Be Patient in Reply

When it comes to replying be patient. One of the things that blocks our opportunity to understand is using our spare capacity to formulate our reply while the speaker is speaking. Not only does this steal our ability to help ourselves understand, as we have been discussing, but most likely means that we have jumped to a conclusion, which is probably wrong.

Leave the reply for your reply.

If you have been engaging with speaker through reflection, paraphrasing, summarising and questioning, you will not forget what has been said and, because you will have a better understanding, you will be able to formulate a better reply.

It may also be that the best reply is a question along the lines of “If then, is that correct?”

Formulating a reply while the speaker is speaking often means that the speaker and listener are in disagreement but that disagreement may have arisen through misunderstanding. So being certain that understanding has been achieved is the best strategy for generating a sensible reply.

Because understanding is the goal it is important that you be candid and open in your reply. Remember that you are in a partnership that jointly owns the dialogue. Respectful honesty is important in ensuring understanding has been achieved and that you, the listener, can correctly take whatever action is necessary.

Results and Benefits

The result of Responsible Listening is that understanding is achieved. This underpins trust because both speaker and listener demonstrate that they can work together collaboratively and this enables them to be mutually effective. Then the individuals concerned are more able to achieve their full potential, which is the goal of the Christ-centred servant leader.

Reflections

Take a Moment:

Using the Responsible Listening Questionnaire below, prayerfully perform a self-assessment on your responsible listening skills. Then if you feel able, ask some other people that you trust for their assessment too (see Appendix B for a questionnaire). Average their scores.

	Self-Assessment	Trusted Others				Average
		A	B	C	D	
How well do you encourage the person you are listening to by showing that you are engaged, interested and following them?						
Score on a scale of 1 -10 where 1 is very poor and 10 is excellent.						
A. Use of appropriate eye contact						
B. Use of appropriate body language						
C. Appropriate levels of verbal confirmation						

	Self-Assessment	Trusted Others				
		A	B	C	D	Average
<p>How well do you close the loop with the person to whom you are listening to ensure understanding is achieved?</p> <p>Score on a scale of 1 -10 where 1 is very poor and 10 is excellent.</p>						
A. Reflecting what has been said						
B. Summarising what has been said						
C. Asking questions to confirm or clarify what has been said						
<p>How patient are you in your reply?</p> <p>Score on a scale of 1 -10 where 1 is very poor and 10 is Excellent.</p>						
A. Rushing to reply						
B. Composing your reply while listening						
C. Being candid, open and honest in your reply						
D. Being respectful in your reply						

- Is there a difference between your self-assessment and the assessment of others?
- What does the difference tell you?
- What actions could you take to improve each element by 2 points or achieve a minimum of 7 on each element?
- Now work out an action plan to practice those improvement steps over the next 6 to 12 weeks and then re-run the assessment.

Responsible Speaking

Opening Reflections

- **Take a Moment:**
 - How effective do you think you are as a speaker?
 - Rate yourself on a scale of 1 - 10 where 1 is extremely poor and 10 is excellent.
 - Why do you rate yourself at that level?
 - List at least 3 reasons
 - Would others agree with your self-assessment?
 - Why do you think that?

What is Responsible Speaking

Having considered the listening side of the equation we now turn our attention to Responsible Speaking. Plainly, if the speaker fails to be clear about what is being said and fails to take steps to assure the listener understands then the communication will certainly fail.

In keeping with the Christ-centred servant leader's focus on others, the responsible speaker needs to keep the people he is seeking to communicate with in mind. It's all too easy for us to focus on our perspective and goals, as opposed to the needs of the people to whom we are speaking, and the challenges they have in receiving what we have to say. Remember Professor Wiio's observation:

If you're content with the message then it's guaranteed to fail.

This is because if you are content with the message you styled it to satisfy yourself. You have failed to take into account the recipient and all those factors that work against his understanding.

As we look at the issue of being a Responsible Speaker we will consider some practices that you can employ to help improve the probability that understanding will be achieved.

There are two strategic actions undertaken by the Responsible Speaker and we will unpack these in this topic. As a Responsible Speaker you will:

- Accept responsibility for ensuring that the listener understands what you wanted to communicate
- Provide the listener with the opportunity to confirm they understand your message

Essentially this means that, being aware that what is in your mind to communicate is unlikely to be successfully communicated, you take additional steps to help the listener understand. The Responsible Speaker does not assume that understanding is achieved just because they have spoken. Recall that:

Speech is a joint game between the talker and the listener against the forces of confusion. Unless both make the effort, interpersonal communication is quite hopeless.

Therefore, the Responsible Speaker seeks to establish a collaborative relationship with their listener, so that together they can achieve a shared understanding.

Being a Responsible Speaker

There are a number of factors that we can address that will enable us to be Responsible Speakers they include:

- Make understanding the goal.
- Make it interesting for your listener.
- Develop a partnership with your listener.
- Avoid overwhelming your listener.
- Pay attention to your listener's non-verbal cues.
- Address your listener's learning style.

Recall the communication process we looked at earlier. Altogether these tips will help us improve our ability to convey what we intended to convey in the first place. We'll now look at each of these in turn.

We will look at the matter of learning styles when look at message content in the next topic.

Make Understanding the Goal

Keep it simple

Have you ever been in a situation where you have thought "I understand all the words individually but I have no idea what they are talking about?" or the speaker's message is full of technical terms with special meanings, jargon, acronyms and initials that we do not understand? I suspect we all have at one time or another.

In cross-cultural situations relying heavily on allusions² and using idioms³ has the same effect. We thought about this when we considered the issues between different mother languages in the section on **Communications Barriers and Filters**.

The problem is that the speaker is so caught up in their situation or themselves, they give no consideration to their listener. They make what they say complicated and confusing, demonstrating a severe lack of emotional intelligence and concern for others. So as a rule, the best thing to do is to "keep it simple" and avoid jargon and technical terms, but if you can't, make sure that you explain them. Also minimise the use of allusions and idioms unless you are certain the listener understands them.

Avoid assumptions

Assumptions are dangerous because they are things that are accepted as true or as being certain to happen, but there is no proof to support them. They are most times unstated, so the listener is often unaware of them. Thus your assumptions may be entirely invisible and so the listener is completely unaware of them. Likewise, the speaker may be entirely unaware of the listener's assumptions. This may be very true in what are called "high context" cultures. The context is all the things everyone is supposed to know about; this leads to many things not being said. It is a problem for people from a low context culture where it is expected that the context is established for each interaction.

Assumptions underpin expectations, so the speaker may have a false expectations of what the listener understands or will do, and neither the listener nor the speaker are likely to be aware. The net result is at least failed communication.

² An allusion is a figure of speech meant to call something to mind without directly mentioning the subject (<http://www.oxforddictionaries.com>); e.g. "I was surprised his nose was not growing like Pinocchio's." This refers to the story of Pinocchio, where his nose grew whenever he told a lie. It is from *The Adventures of Pinocchio*, written by Carlo Collodi. It means the person to whom the allusion is applied is liar.

³ An idiom is a group of words established by usage as having a meaning not literally deducible from the individual words (<http://www.oxforddictionaries.com>); e.g. if, in English, we say someone was "over the moon" we mean they were delighted and very happy.

Before you communicate, identify your assumptions and test them with the listener, especially if the matter is of significant importance or actions are expected as result. Also confirm that the listener is able to take the desired action, i.e. they know exactly what to do and have all that is necessary to enable them to take the action. Even then, on the grounds of Professor Wiio's laws, make sure they know to ask you questions if they get into difficulty.

Give time for the listener to absorb the message

Too much information given too quickly can defeat effective communications because the listener doesn't have time to absorb, process and confirm what is being said. So deliberately give them time to think by breaking up what you say into smaller segments with pauses that allow them to ask questions.

Confirm understanding

You can also actively confirm understanding by asking questions that allow the listener to reflect and summarise what they have heard and ask their own questions to clarify and confirm particular points.

When circumstance allow, perhaps the best way to confirm understanding is to have the listener demonstrate understanding by taking practical actions. This allows them to convert the information you have given them into knowledge because practice is one of the most powerful teachers. Your feedback will help them complete the task.

Avoid simply asking "Do you understand?" The listener will be thinking "Understand what specifically?" but will likely answer "Yes" anyway, even when they don't.

Sometimes your listener will be afraid of interrupting you and your questions of them effectively gives them both permission and opportunity to do so.

Make it Interesting for your Listener

Include the listener

From the perspective of being a Christ-centred servant leader, communication is a collaborative process that is jointly and equally owned by both the listener and the speaker. It's a dialogue; a conversation. From the speaker's perspective the most important person in this collaborative partnership must be the listener, not the speaker. The goal is to convey understanding to the listener; the goal is not about providing opportunity for the speaker to speak.

So take positive steps to include the listener and develop the partnership. We've seen at least one way already, that is to ask and invite questions for clarification and to obtain detail. We are about to consider some more in the next few sections.

The greatest benefits of developing a collaborative partnership to achieve understanding are directly in line with the principles of servant leadership. Trust is developed and the listener is enabled to feel ownership of, and commitment to, the outcome. Both are vital qualities in the performance of highly effective teams. Such participation will also extend both the speaker's and the listener's self-awareness and awareness of the other person.

Engage the listener's interest

It is important to keep the listener interested in what you have to say. Communication will certainly fail if they get distracted and stop listening. So think about how to present what you are saying in a way that generates interest. Some of the things we will look at shortly will help. Think about:

- What you need to convey.
- What they need from you.
- How to present what you say so as to develop interest even intrigue.
- Use “cliff-hangers” between segments – so when you pause they are in suspense wanting to know more. For some subjects this might be quite difficult, for instance servicing a car or cleaning a drain.
- Consider learning to use stories to illustrate what you say or perhaps even to convey information, implications, possibilities and so forth.

Also use positive body language to engage and interest your listener. Although as we have discussed what is and isn't positive or acceptable body language is culturally dependent.

Address the listener's needs

This is perhaps the most important point. What you say must meet the listener's needs in relation to the communication. If you know your audience well, then you may have a good idea as to what these needs are. You must consider what you want the listener to do and anticipate the questions they will have.

However, there will be some things that you don't know about the listener (remember the JoHari Window we looked in the **Leading with Insight** module). This means that in order to increase the chances that your communication will be successful you must solicit these things from the listener, and then respond to them.

It is important to remember that just as you have a need, which gave rise to you speaking to them, so the listener has needs that must be met in order that they understand. As you are speaking, one of the things they will be using their spare 600 wpm capacity for is trying to answer this question: “**What's In This For Me?**” (WIT-FM) Which translates to two other questions: “Why is this conversation of benefit to me?” and “Why should I be interested?” These questions are not at all mercenary because the answer may be as simple as they want to know what you need them to do. The benefit to them is being able to take the appropriate action.

Therefore, if this WIT-FM question is important to the listener, then by definition it is important to you, the speaker. You need to inspire interest in them and make sure they understand why they need the knowledge you are seeking to impart.

In the context of being a Christ-centred servant leader, the leader's goal is to be focused on the listener, seeking to enable them to achieve their full potential. Making sure the WIT-FM question is answered must therefore be a priority.

In the first place you may not know what the questions are and that is the importance of engaging in dialogue with the other person. Answering the questions requires a collaborative effort, a joint exploration of the matter in hand, that allows you both to ensure that understanding has been correctly conveyed and, the WIT-FM question is answered. This is the goal of responsible communications, where both listener and speaker take responsibility for achieving understanding.

Develop a Partnership with your Listener

Achieving successful understanding is a two-way thing. As we have discussed it requires a partnership between the speaker and the listener. Both speaker and listener have the same, shared goal – understanding.

As we've just seen, to achieve understanding requires an interaction between speaker and listener because there are things that unless the listener tells you won't know. If you don't know them you cannot address them. Consequently as the speaker, it is your responsibility to engage the listener in dialogue. Often, people with something to say forget this because they are only interested in themselves. That causes the listener to switch off. So remember, effective communication requires a partnership and with that comes a dialogue.

As we have already discussed, you can invite the participation of the listener, by providing them with opportunities to confirm and clarify their understanding, by inviting questions as you go along. You can also ask questions designed to discover if you are getting your message over.

Avoid Overwhelming your Listener

Be deliberate

A quality communication is designed to do the job intended and is generally succinct, providing just what is needed. Such communications require thought and discipline in preparation and delivery.

We have all probably come across people who just talk, they spew out words, they digress, and they don't get to the point. Such people inundate and overwhelm their listeners like a tsunami. If the necessary information is in what they say, it is buried in their confused and confusing message. Even if the listener wants to understand it is made very difficult for them. As a Responsible Speaker take time to prepare your message and be disciplined in its delivery so that you do not overwhelm your listener; be deliberate.

Take time

Some people rush the message. They appear, speak very quickly and disappear; it's like having been visited by a whirlwind and the listener is left bewildered wondering what that was all about. Focus on the listener and remember you want them to understand. Take time over what you have to say. If you or they do not have the time then use a shorter communication first: just outline the issue and arrange to meet when time is available.

If it's a complicated topic, and you know the dialogue could be lengthy, then it will probably be best to arrange a time to meet to have the conversation.

Speak in shorter segments

As we have already discussed, speaking in shorter segments is a means of giving the listener time to absorb what you have to say. It also provides opportunity for them to clarify their understanding. This is a process that naturally slows down the delivery of information and reduces the likelihood of overwhelming the listener, because it shares control of the communication flow with them.

Speaking in shorter segments will normally require some preparation and discipline in delivery, especially if you are a “whirlwind” type communicator.

Follow up with the detail

If understanding requires lots of detail or grasping complexities, then it is unlikely that one conversation can achieve understanding anyway. Plan a follow-up meeting in which detail can be provided and explored.

Pay Attention to your Listener’s Non-Verbal Cues

As you are speaking remember to focus on the listener, engage them in the conversation and watch out for their expression and posture as you speak, and their tone and inflection when they speak.

Remember that around 55% of our communications is via our posture and expression. Watch the listener’s body language they will communicate a lot without even opening their mouth. This will guide you in how you engage them in dialogue. You are looking for cues that tell you things like:

- This is not a good time.
- I am supposed to be somewhere else.
- This is taking too long.
- I have to go now.
- I don’t understand.
- I am puzzled?
- Why is this relevant to me?
- What does he want?
- I am curious.
- I am interested.
- I need to know more.
- And so on.....

When you read the signals adjust your approach accordingly.

Similarly, when they speak their tone of voice and the inflexions will convey information. Respond to them and adjust what you say and do to achieve understanding.

Failure to respond to the unspoken messages can mean the difference between success and failure.

Planning the Message

In the light of what we have learned about being a Responsible Speaker we now have some tips on preparing the message.

Objective

Clearly, and as precisely as possible, identify your purpose and how you will know that it has been achieved.

Content

Having identified the objective, determine what information needs to be conveyed to the listener in order that they will understand what is required and be able to play their role in achieving the objective. Don't forget to consider how to make your requests for their action. Also remember to look at the issue from their perspective so you can begin answering their WIT-FM questions.

Structure

Give your message a clear and simple flow and structure, minimising jargon, explaining technical terms, avoiding allusions and idioms, especially in a cross-cultural setting. Consider how your listener prefers to receive information; we will consider this, and message structure, in a moment.

Confirmation

Consider the best way to confirm that your listener has understood. You need to use open questions that probe their understanding e.g. "Just to be sure that I have communicated what I intended, can you tell me what you think I have said?"

In complex situations there may be other ways to confirm understanding. For instance, with a complex task you might ask the listener to plan their action and check the plan with you. This will inevitably enable them to identify gaps in their knowledge and understanding.

Completion

In situations where there is lots of information and detail to be conveyed, or there is only time to introduce the matter, consider and plan how you and your listener will complete your communication and arrive at understanding.

If you find yourself in a situation where you have not had time or opportunity to plan your message, you can engage with your listener to work through these 5 steps together. From the Christ-centred servant leadership perspective this would be excellent practice as it engages the other person and draws on their wisdom. This will enable them to have greater degree of ownership of the goal and outcome.

Structuring the Message

There are many ways to structure the message. The following tips suggest one way which takes into account preferences about receiving information and learning. It is a simple, easy to remember approach based on four questions and it provides a sensible flow for the main sections of the message. If the message is long or complicated then the lengthy sections will need to be split into segments as already discussed.

These four points can be used as a structure for most communication:

Why?

Everyone needs to know why this matter is important but some will not be able to engage with you unless this is spelt out for them. So explain why it is important to them. In part this is addressing the WIT-FM question. Give reasons and if possible examples of why it is important. This information will include the response or action required by the listener.

What?

Everyone needs the essential information but some people are happy to receive it in outline and sort the rest out for themselves, some will need lots of detail. In any event you will need to answer the question “What is it all about?” by providing the necessary background and detail.

How?

This addresses the listener’s “What do I need to do?” question. Some people will just need the required outcome to be explained, others may need more detail about exactly what they have to do and when they have to do it. This is where you need to know your audience and be in a position to engage the listener in a dialogue until they are happy they can do what is required.

What If?

“How Can I learn for myself?” Not everyone has this question but answering it anyway may be helpful. Some people work best when they can go away and learn what it is all about and what needs to be done for themselves. They need a head start by being pointed in the right direction. They may also need a challenge.

Helping Your Listeners Hear

We each have a preference for the manner in which we learn. This determines the best way for us to receive information and so it affects how that information ought to be presented to us for the best results. In general each individual is mix of these types but one may be their strongest preference.

Verbal learners

These people prefer to receive information in the form of words, either written or spoken. They can process these forms effectively. They are happy receiving documentation or receiving spoken instruction.

Visual learners

These people like to receive information in the form of images, pictures and charts. They help them understand. Written or spoken instruction is less effective and more difficult for them. When they receive documentary information they need images and charts to help them make sense of it.

Kinaesthetic learners

Kinaesthetic learners prefer to learn by doing. They need to get their “hands on” and give it a go. This implies they need to put into practice what they learn as they learn it, they will make mistakes but without practicing they find it difficult to achieve understanding.

We tend to think that words are everyone’s preference, but that is not the case and sensitivity to how others prefer to learn will help us to help them understand the message we are trying to convey.

Reflections

- **Take a Moment**

Using the Responsible Speaking Questionnaire below, prayerfully perform a self-assessment on your responsible speaking skills. Then, if you feel able, ask some other people that you trust for their assessment too (see Appendix B for a questionnaire). Average their scores.

- Is there a difference between your self-assessment and the assessment of others?
- What does the difference tell you?
- How could you improve each element by 2 points (or achieve a minimum score of 7)
- Work out an action plan and practice those improvement steps over the next 6 to 12 weeks and then re-run the assessment.

	Self-Assessment	Trusted Others				
		A	B	C	D	Average
How good are you at helping your listener understand? Score on a scale of 1 -10 where 1 is very poor and 10 is excellent						
A. You keep your messages simple and straightforward						
B. You avoid or clarify assumptions						
C. You give the listener time to absorb the information						
D. You take steps to confirm their understanding						
How good are you at making it interesting for the listener? Score on a scale of 1 -10 where 1 is very poor and 10 is excellent.						
A. You include the listener						
B. You engage the listener’s interest						
C. You address the listener’s needs (Answer the WIT-FM question)						

	Self-Assessment	Trusted Others				
		A	B	C	D	Average
<p>How good are you at creating a partnership with the listener?</p> <p>Score on a scale of 1 -10 where 1 is very poor and 10 is excellent.</p>						
A. You encourage the listener to be an equal party in the conversation						
B. You invite the listener to seek clarification and detail						
<p>How good are you at not overwhelming the listener?</p> <p>Score on a scale of 1 -10 where 1 is very poor and 10 is Excellent.</p>						
A. Your messages are planned, succinct and deliberate in delivery						
B. You take the necessary time to ensure understanding						
C. You divide your message into segments						
D. You follow up with the detail rather than dumping it all at one time						
<p>How good are you at picking up the listener's non-verbal cues?</p> <p>Score on a scale of 1 -10 where 1 is very poor and 10 is Excellent.</p>						
A. You focus on the listener and not yourself						
B. You respond to the listener's posture, expression, tone of voice and inflection						

- **Take a Moment:**
 - Consider something you need to explain, or have recently explained, to someone.
 - Practice using the four question structure and plan your message.
 - Consider the preferred learning style of your listener, and work out how to present your message to them so that they understand more easily.
 - Try out the message with the listener and get their feedback.
 - How did it go?
 - What did you learn?

Facilitating Communications in Meetings

Opening Reflections

- **Take a Moment:**
 - Reflect upon your experience of two or three recent meetings.
 - Score these meetings out of 10 on the following factors (where 1 is very poor and 10 is excellent):
 - How effective was the meeting?
 - How well did participants work together in the meeting?
 - How good was the outcome of the meeting?
 - How effective were communications during the meeting?
 - Why did you score these factors as you did?

Meetings and communication are inextricably linked; it is impossible to have a meeting without the communication process taking place. Whether understanding is achieved may be another matter. Consider Professor Wiio's laws applying to the network of communications between all the people in the room. Where understanding is not achieved meeting participants will not be aligned and will find it hard to work together to make the meeting effective.

Throughout the **Growing the Servant Heart** programme we have identified that meetings are important tools that enable the Christ-centred servant leader to help those whom they lead to achieve their full potential. It is important then, that meetings be helpful and effective and that the participants are able to communicate effectively.

The Role of Meetings

Meetings are used for two main reasons:

Efficiency of communication

Meetings are used so that everyone hears the same message and the originator only has to share it once. However, we've just spent time looking at the issues about one listener actually understanding what was intended by the speaker, let alone many listeners.

In this case all the principles we have discussed still apply and the speaker needs to be a Responsible Speaker and the listeners each need to be Responsible Listeners. However, the

clarification process becomes a multi-faceted discussion, which can make understanding more difficult.

Harnessing collective wisdom

Meetings are used to gather information, share views, ideas and insights, identify solutions, draw conclusions and make decisions. They enable the collective wisdom of the team to be collaboratively applied.

Such meetings, if run well, will be structured and have an agenda. However, as most people who attend meetings will have experienced, meetings are not always effective in achieving these things. This is mainly because the participants have different perspectives and modes of thinking. Thus their objectives and emotional reactions to what others say, and sometimes to the other people in the room, can be markedly different. With regard to these factors, individual participants are often not aligned in their thinking or objectives. So, for instance, one person is making a logical argument while another has a positive emotional reaction, another a negative reaction, and another may be triggered to identify alternative perspectives. All of this can be going on at the same moment.

Participants who are not aligned and who are operating in different modes can easily end up working at cross purposes. How many of you have been in meetings that should have been short but have gone on far too long because of unexpected disagreement, alternative views and emotional responses.

The Basics of Managing Meetings

For meetings to be effective ensure:

The objective and purpose of the meeting is clear

Frequently the objective of meetings are unclear and whilst a meeting might seem to be the right thing to do, if its purpose is not clearly set out it will get nowhere. Because of lack of clear thought about the objectives many unnecessary meetings have been called, when all that was needed was an individual to take some action.

There is an agenda

Even where there is a clear objective a meeting needs a definite agenda that sets out the meeting time, location, its purpose, the stages that the meeting will pass through or items to be considered, and ideally time allocation. Even so-called “agendaless” meetings have agendas, although they are minimal. They have a purpose but otherwise the main body of the meeting has an open, format-free discussion section. This may be followed by a section to draw conclusions and agree actions.

The right people attend

Given the purpose of the meeting and the things the meeting needs to accomplish, the right people need to be in attendance. Avoid inviting people who have no purpose in being there. It does happen when the meeting is not well planned.

Decisions are made and actions are agreed

Towards the end of the meeting, or perhaps individual agenda items, the outcomes need to be agreed. That is, decisions are made and actions identified, allocated and agreed.

Outcomes are recorded

Most meetings need some written record, especially if decisions are to be made. Often a record of the decision making process will be needed for future reference. Sometimes it is necessary to revisit the decision weeks or years later and the record then becomes important.

Remember, even if participants had perfect understanding and absolute agreement at the end of a meeting, memories fade and recollections become inaccurate. This is why meeting notes or minutes setting out understandings and agreements are essential. It can save much pain and upset later on.

Effective facilitation is available

Meetings work best when someone acts the facilitator or chairman to guide the meeting through its steps, seeking to ensure that everyone participates and complies with any meeting rules.

Meeting effectiveness is reviewed

As observed in the **Leading through Others** module, it is very helpful to gain feedback on the meeting process so that improvements can be made. This can be in the form of a simple feedback questionnaire that scores effectiveness in terms of a few key factors. For example:

- How clear was the meeting's purpose and objectives?
- How good was time keeping?
- How well prepared were participants for the meeting?
- How effective was the meeting process?
- How effective was the meeting in making decisions?
- How necessary was the meeting?

The feedback questionnaires should be periodically reviewed by the team as a whole with the aim of improving the process.

However, having the basics right does not ensure that effective communication takes place, nor that the meeting will be efficient and effective in achieving its objective. We will now look at one approach to help make meetings more efficient and effective, while allowing all the participants the freedom to express their ideas, concerns and enthusiasms.

De Bono's Thinking Hats – A Team Process

Thinking Hats is an approach to meetings, particularly ones aimed at finding solutions and agreeing decisions, which can help them be much more effective and timely. In the **Leading Teams with a Servant Heart** lesson we identified that teams need effective processes. De Bono's Thinking Hats could be one of the processes that enables meetings to work well.

The scheme was devised by Edward de Bono who is internationally regarded as an authority on teaching thinking as a skill. He had faculty appointments at the universities of Oxford, Cambridge,

London and Harvard. He describes this approach to meetings in his book **Six Thinking Hats®** published by Penguin (ISBN 978-0-14-029666-2). If you want to adopt this approach to meetings and decision making then reading this book is essential. It's not a long book and it is an easy and enjoyable read.

De Bono's Thinking Hats approach has been used around the world in many different national cultures. It recognises that in a meeting the participants have a number of legitimate needs and reactions such as: the acquisition of information, logical thought, emotional response, "light bulb" moments where new ideas emerge and so on. In a meeting these all get mixed up as one person provides information, another makes a logical deduction and third responds emotionally. This *all-at-the same-time-mix* reduces the effectiveness of meetings and can be the obvious cause of conflict as opposed to collaboration. The difference in thinking styles between individuals at one time can add to the confusion that prevents effective communication.

Conflict in meetings is made worse in western cultures because our general thought processes tend to be adversarial. We argue for our point of view. This is seen so clearly in courtroom situations where winning and not necessarily truth and justice are the goal of both the prosecution and defence counsels. In meetings this culture can extend the duration and make it difficult to arrive at a decision. This is because the goal is not to mutually find the best decision but to persuade everyone to go with what I think is the best decision. This is not a Kingdom of God perspective.

- **Take a Moment:**
 - Reflect on your own national culture and consider how it affects the way meetings might work in your situation.
 - How does this compare with what you have learned about leading with a Christ-like servant heart?

De Bono's thinking hats is an approach that allows all the participant's reactions, and minimises adversarial conflict, by seeking to align everyone's thought processes at each stage. Because at each stage the thinking process is aligned, the opportunities for misunderstanding are reduced and communication becomes more effective.

The benefits are directly in line with the goals of the Christ-centred servant leader:

Better focus

The meeting participants collaboratively focus on the same thing at the same time with the objective of achieving good and appropriate outcomes. Thus it releases them from having to argue their case in order to win. The win becomes better decisions and a good outcome for the team. As we saw in **Leading Teams with a Servant Heart**, in highly effective teams members subordinate their own goals to that of the team. Members win when the team as a whole is successful.

Improved effectiveness

Teams who use this approach testify to the fact that their meetings are shorter and more effective. It is said that it seems as if "decisions make themselves."

Enhanced clarity

The hats allow the meeting participants to adopt the same kind of thought processes at the same time, which reduces confusion and enhances clarity. This in turn improves the quality of the communications, reduces lost time and conflict. All of which leads to a more collaborative and effective meeting.

Greater ownership

The hats give everyone the opportunity to express their thoughts and feelings clearly and in a way that is understood by the other participants. The meeting is able to accept contrary views as valuable inputs and allow them to be weighed appropriately in arriving at a conclusion. Consequently, using the hats increases the sense of ownership of the outcome amongst the participants.

Breaks through cross-cultural barriers

The testimony of many is that the thinking hats approach is an aid to cross-cultural communications. The structure aligns the thinking processes with basic human perspectives and outlooks (Neutrality, pessimism, optimism, emotional feeling, creativity) which are found in people regardless of national cultures. Thus each hat provides a declared and understood point of commonality which is a platform for understanding others in the meeting.

The Thinking Hats

The idea of the hats is simply a visual code for the kind of thinking the meeting participants together, or an individual, needs to do at a particular time. It enables the meeting participants to be on the same page and engage in the same activity, thus reducing conflict and confusion. Each hat has a colour because de Bono's intention was that it would give a visual clue as to what the hat was about.

(The colours of the hats work at two levels. They make each hat distinct as a label for thinking processes, which is the most important use. Using the defined colours makes them universal so that it is common to all who know about it. The colours also echo the emotional context of the associated thinking. However, if in your culture the colours don't match the meaning of the hats, simply choose colours that do convey the ideas described. For the sake of universality it is best to avoid doing this if at all possible)

White hat:

White is a neutral colour and the white hat is neutral and objective. It is about facts and figures and the provision of information.

Yellow hat:

Yellow is a bright, cheerful colour, suggesting a positive outlook. So, the yellow hat is about an optimism; what is good about an idea and about its potential.

Black hat:

Black suggests seriousness and so the black hat is cautious, looking for risks and weaknesses in ideas.

Red hat:

Red suggests emotion and anger, and so the red hat is about emotional response.

Green hat:

Green suggests fertile growth and newness. So the green hat is about thinking creatively and generating new ideas.

Blue hat:

Blue is a cool colour symbolic of the sky which is above everything else. The blue hat represents the control and direction of meeting and thinking process determining the use of the other hats.

Aligning ones thinking to the nature described by a particular colour hat is described as “wearing” that particular hat.

Aligning Meeting Participants

The hats can be used in a number of ways.

The alignment in thinking brought about by all “wearing” the same colour hat at the same time helps the thinking process. This is because everyone in the meeting is pulling in the same direction because they are deliberately adopting the same type of thinking process. This helps the communication process because aligning participant’s thought processes make it easier for them to communicate.

The facilitator might use them to define the stages of a meeting as information is received, ideas are created and so on. They would do this by either predetermining the sequence in which hats would be used or saying, for instance, “Let’s do some black hat thinking now” when it’s time to identify the weaknesses of a proposed course of action.

Stepping through the hats in a predetermined sequence allows the person with great emotional reservations about an idea to hold them in check until the red hat time. In the mean time they can participate effectively during the other stages of the discussion.

A participant could tell the rest of the meeting where they are coming from by saying, for instance: “Wearing my yellow hat, I think that is great idea because it has these other possibilities too....” This means the listeners know how to respond to the comments being made. The declaration about wearing the yellow hat also tells the other participants that the speaker is aware of what they are saying although they may be out of step with rest of the conversation. So declaring the hat one is wearing helps remove some of the communication barriers and sources of annoyance and conflict.

The servant heart and granting permission to speak

The hats give people permission to think in certain ways and express those thoughts. This requires that others in the meeting accept the resulting observations as legitimate. This attribute of using the hats can help those who are hesitant and unsure of themselves. Imagine a junior manager in a meeting which includes the CEO.

The CEO offers an idea.

The junior manager has strong reservations about this idea. Would they normally speak up? Probably not.

However, the red and black hats give permission for the junior manager to declare their reservations and prepare the CEO to accept the comments as a positive contribution. Thus the hats enable both communication and participation. In short they facilitate effective collaboration.

This means, of course, that the senior people in a meeting play to the rules. This would be a natural outworking of a Christ-like servant heart on the part of those in the meeting who are leaders. It is also an expression of true collaboration in a Christ-centred servant leadership environment, where position and status are set aside and the goal is that others are enabled to operate at their full potential.

The Hats in More Detail

Now let's look at the six hats in more detail.

The white hat

The white hat is about neutrally and objectively receiving information. Information is the input that allows us to understand situations and provides the platform from which we can make informed decisions. It includes assessment of the information which allows for participants to express their opinions about its validity. White hat thinking also seeks missing information.

Wearing the white hat is about the processing of facts and figures, receiving data and identifying missing information. It allows for the recognition of at least two qualities of information:

- That which is true – the checked and proven facts and;
- That which is believed to be true but still requires verification.

However, there is a spectrum of validity of facts ranging from always true to never true with usable levels in between, for instance, most times true, sometimes true and very occasionally true. Being able to categorise facts in this way allows participants to set aside emotional reactions and to assign actions to verify the data. In a collaborative meeting this will unite participants in the manner in which they deal with the data because the quality of the data is openly recognised.

There is another approach to grading information quality. That is using a ranking based on a recognised intelligence grading system. The information/fact is graded according to two sub-divided parameters:

Reliability of the Source

- | | |
|---|--------------------------------|
| A | Always reliable |
| B | Mostly reliable |
| C | Sometimes reliable |
| D | Not reliable |
| E | New Source/Unknown reliability |

Validity of the Information

1	Confirmed (by other sources)
2	Probably true
3	Possibly true
4	Doubtful
5	Improbable
6	Cannot be Judged

Thus information from a well-known and reliable source but which has not be confirmed might be graded as A2 or A3. Where as if it was confirmed by a second source it would be graded as A1. Credible information from a new source could be graded E2 or E3.

For the white hat to function a neutral, dispassionate attitude enabled by the collaborative, open and agreed categorisation of facts is required.

The red hat

Wearing the red hat gives permission to participants to examine and express their feelings about the matter in hand. This is important because it recognises that we are emotional beings and so respond emotionally to facts, ideas, conclusions and situations.

The red hat gives permission to have an emotional response, a feeling, and have all the participants understand what is going on, to accept it and take it into account. The negative feelings someone might have are legitimised and can be put on the table without fear of censure. When they are in the open they become facts that are owned by the meeting for due consideration. The individual concerned does not have to keep coming back to them. When the red hat is taken off it gives the participants permission to move on.

De Bono advises that there should never be an attempt to justify the feelings or provide a logical basis. That they exist is a fact that has to be taken into account by the meeting. He also identifies two types of feeling:

- **Ordinary emotions**
These are feelings such as fear, hatred, dislike, suspicion and the like.
- **Complex Judgements**
These include emotional factors such as hunches, intuition, personal taste, aesthetic feelings and so on.

Both are included in the red hat emotions, although it will be helpful to understand to which category a red hat observation belongs.

The black hat

De Bono describes the black hat as the hat of survival, the hat of caution. It is about identifying the dangers and weaknesses, obstacles and downsides, risks and potential problems concerning the issue under discussion. In that sense it is about a negative perspective. It has a pessimistic outlook, but deliberately so.

Wearing the black hat gives permission for participants to think negatively and share their observations without fear of being labelled as being negative, unhelpful, not on side and so

on. If deliberately used as a phase of the meeting then everyone is thinking the same way, looking for the issues. Black hat thinking turns this negative activity into a positive contribution to the process as ideas are tested for flaws and weaknesses.

If someone raising a negative issue in a meeting declares that they are “wearing their black hat” everyone knows to see it is a positive contribution without the need to begin a counter argument. The issue is something that needs to be addressed and resolved. Black hat thinking is not about argument and counter argument. Its purpose is to declare and record the points where caution is required for the benefit of everyone.

Black hat thinking asks questions such as:

- Does this fit with past experience?
- Does this fit our policies?
- Does this fit our goals and purpose?
- Does this fit our ethics,
- Does this fit with a Kingdom outlook
- Does this fit with God’s plan and purposes?
- Does this fit our resources?
- Does this fit our abilities?
- Does this fit the facts?

(The above may be a helpful checklist)

De Bono warns that black hat thinking can be over used and dominate thinking in western cultures, and then it becomes unhelpful.

The yellow hat

Wearing the yellow hat gives permission to deliberately be optimistic, to look for the upsides, the benefits of a situation or suggestion. It is deliberately positive and constructive.

Yellow hat thinking ranges from the practical and logical to dreams and aspirations. It seeks to find value and benefit supported by soundly based optimism. It can also declare observations which rely upon a less soundly based optimism, provided this is clearly qualified and labelled, so everyone knows. Such thinking can speculate about the possibilities. Such speculation feeds creativity.

The green hat

Green hat thinking is about alternatives and new ideas; seeking innovative ways of achieving goals. It’s about leaving the well-trodden pathways of thinking and finding alternative and innovative ways to achieve the goal. It’s about changing perspectives and gaining different outlooks. So the Green hat gives permission to look at things differently.

It’s best if both speaker and listener are wearing green hats at the same time. Offer visionary innovation to someone in black hat thinking mode and it will simply generate a litany of “Why you can’t ...

Wearing the green hat says we are now going to deliberately look for new possibilities without censure. Considered analysis of those possibilities happens when wearing the red, black and yellow hats. This means in the green hat mode that there need be no argument about “pie in the sky impossibilities”. As we shall see in the next module such impossibilities, even if of no immediate practical benefit, can stimulate an innovation which delivers great benefits.

Green hat thinking is creative thinking. In the next module we will look at some tools to assist in such thinking.

The blue hat

De Bono describes Blue hat thinking as “thinking about thinking”. It’s about facilitating and directing the flow of the meeting and keeping the meeting’s focus. It asks: “Which hat do we need to wear now?” The facilitator, wearing the blue hat, is like the conductor of the orchestra. They call for particular kinds of thinking when the flow of the meeting demands it.

The facilitator may start with a plan as to the way the hats will be used but find it necessary to call up additional thinking of a particular kind. For instance if the green hat stage generates something unexpected but attractive the facilitator may need to call up more black hat thinking to test the idea,. Conversely, if black hat thinking identifies a significant issue with an idea, more green hat thinking may be needed to see if the issue can be dealt with.

Blue hat thinking also monitors the thinking and makes sure that the rules are followed. For instance at the red hat stage, when negative feelings are expressed, these must be accepted and not argued against. It’s yellow hat thinking that examines and tests negativity by addressing the up sides or green hat thinking that finds alternatives.

Blue hat thinking includes summaries, overviews and drawing conclusions. It stops arguments and insists that an issue being argued over is recognised and set out as factor that has to be considered wearing the other hats.

Blue hat thinking is not limited to the meeting facilitator. Anyone can offer blue hat observations and suggestions but its good practice to recognise the kind of thinking and declare it when the comment is made.

Using the hats

We will now look at a possible meeting flow using the hats by way of example:

Stage 1: Blue hat

Outline the purpose and goal of the meeting

Stage 2: White hat

Collect and receive information. Analyse and evaluate it in terms of its reliability, validity and value.

Stage 3: Green hat

Based on the purpose of the meeting and the inputs received, green hat thinking shapes the options that achieve the declared purpose.

Stage 4: Red hat

This allows the emotional responses to the green hat solutions to be declared and registered by the meeting. It addresses questions such as “Does it feel right?” and expresses concerns or delights about the options.

Stage 5: Black hat

This considers the green hat solutions to see if they meet the purpose. What is wrong with the option? Are there any problems that might prevent the solutions from being realised? Are they in line with Godly, kingdom thinking, bringing honour and glory to God?

Stage 6: Yellow hat

What are the opportunities and upsides and benefits of the alternative solutions?

Stage 7: Blue hat

The closing stage. Blue hat thinking summarises the findings of the meeting and seeks to draw conclusions. Once the conclusion have been reached, wearing the blue hat everyone reviews the meeting asking: “How did we do?” “How can we do better?”

Ongoing: Blue hat

During the meeting blue hat thinking will have steered the participants through the meeting’s steps to a conclusion. Where necessary, in each stage, other hats may be called up to address an issue. For instance, if in stage 1 the wording of the purpose turns out be ambiguous the green hat thinking would be called up to refine the wording and black hat thinking to test the revised wording before moving on.

General

The hats do not have to be used in the order set out in this example and some hats may be repeated. For instance, a second cycle of green, red, black and yellow hats may be planned because it is anticipated that the ideas generated in the first pass may need refinement before a conclusion can be reached.

Also because a hat is called for does not mean that lots of time need to be spent on that stage of thinking. For instance if at the red hat stage no one has any emotional reactions, perhaps no more than a minute or two is required.

Reflections

- **Take a Moment:**
 - Identify a safe and straight forward meeting that you can use to practice using the Thinking Hats. (You may find it helpful to set up a meeting you have specifically designed just to practice using the thinking hats approach).
 - Make sure you have the meeting basics set up
 - Think through how you might use de Bono's thinking hats (a pre-planned flow is recommended).
 - Explain the rules to the participants (give them a copy of the overview in Appendix A).
 - At the end evaluate the meeting.

Even if you don't use the Thinking Hats get the meeting basic right.

Emailing and Responsible Communications

Opening Reflections

- **Take a Moment:**
 - Consider how much time you take handling emails.
 - Pick a small selection of email conversations and consider if the time spent was effective and how you could have handled those conversations more effectively.
 - What time savings could you have made?

Considering Emails

Emails have a depressing ability to consume so much time driving our work activities that we only get on to the day job when everyone else has gone home! Such a situation works against a team being highly effective. Therefore, it is crucial that we work out a responsible communication strategy for emails.

The secret is to understand when using emails is helpful and when they hinder. If we can get our heads around this, even if no one else does, we can make a difference to our individual and team effectiveness.

You will recall in **Leading Teams with a Servant Heart** we saw that highly effective teams establish effective processes for how they work. If we can do this regarding emails for our team, even if everyone outside works differently we can make a significant difference in the effectiveness of our team.

The Value of Emails

What are emails good for?

Emails are excellent when information needs to be elicited or passed to another person or a group. However, a considerable amount of communication is about dialogue, and that is not easy with email.

What are emails useless for?

Email is very very difficult to use effectively where the content impinges on someone's emotions and that happens so easily, even when it's the last thing on the sender's mind. The unintended misunderstanding or slur rapidly explodes and the situation escalates. One reason for this is that, emoticon's aside, convey none of the tonal or visual clues that help us interpret what is said.

Remember that even in so called verbal communications only 7% -10% of the meaning is conveyed by the words. The rest is communicated by tone of voice, inflection, expression and posture. So what chance does email have?

Email is also poor when any matter of even modest complexity needs to be resolved quickly. They normally generate long strings of time consuming emails in attempts to clarify the situation.

What other means of communication can we use?

Email has tended to become the default organisational/business communications mechanism and that is where the problem lies. It used to be much cheaper than phone calls and it also offers an asynchronism which is attractive. In other words we don't have to wait for the other person to be available, and that gives the illusion of efficiency.

The main alternative that is available to us is to use our voice. If we cannot go and speak to our correspondent face to face (and how many emails are sent across even small offices?) we can benefit from free phone calls via services like Skype. Even better, to get more help from communications markers we can benefit from inexpensive video calls too. We desperately need to become intelligent about the use of email; to ask ourselves "How best can I communicate in this situation?"

Email and 12 Major Communication Roles

But first:

- **Take a Moment**
 - List as many of the various purposes for which we use communications that you can think of.
 - Now give each a score between 1 and 10 to represent how effective email is for that purpose (1 is completely ineffective and 10 is perfectly effective)
 - What conclusions can you draw?

Let's explore this some more as we look at 12 communications roles and consider the effectiveness of email.

Transferring information

Email is excellent for this, assuming that we are good at composing them. It allows information to be set down and communicated in a clear and resilient manner; resilient because the email can be kept and the information retrieved at will.

Discussions, dialogue and debate

Emails are really poor at this because anything that has even the slightest complexity stimulates questions and generates misunderstanding and lack of clarity. This results in “Email ping-pong” as ideas, questions and clarifications bounce back and forth.

For most people these kinds of emails take lots of time to write and get right. All of that is before you involve more than one other person. Then you end up with multiple divergent conversations. Chaos! The best solution is to talk with your fellow participants. Best of all is to do it face-to-face in a meeting but even a phone or Skype conference call is far superior to using email.

Documentation

Emails are terrific for documenting discussions; not holding them but documenting the outcome or the agreement. Follow up the verbal discussion with an email setting out the conclusion.

Serious negotiation

Email is just not the tool for conducting negotiation. Negotiation is a particular kind of discussion. For it to be successful you need as many of communication markers as you can possibly get; remember the missing 93% of the communication. Email’s role is documentation. In this case it may be used at key points in the negotiation to capture the agreement on the points discussed so far.

Simple negotiations

Email is usable for the simplest negotiations such as agreeing a time or a place to meet. This is barely more than the exchange of information and would normally only require a couple of rounds of email.

Problem solving

Email has a role to play in problem solving but it’s not as the main tool. Problem solving is a complex form of dialogue or negotiation, often with several people involved. In this case Email’s best role is one of documentation. The best communications approach to problem solving is verbal discussion, ideally in a meeting. That may not always be possible so phone calls and phone/Skype voice or video conferences are useful mechanisms. Where problem solving requires several conversations over a period, using emails in their information transfer mode to share new ideas between meetings can also be very useful.

Stimulating and sharing ideas

Email can be useful for this provided the temptation to debate is resisted. The request for ideas and the ideas returned are really about the transfer of information. Moving beyond the collection of ideas into the development of solutions is effectively problem solving for which Email is a poor tool.

Developing plans

This is a combination of problem solving and negotiation for which Email is not best suited at all except in its documentation role.

Sharing plans

This is the transfer of information for which email is excellent.

Resolving conflicts

Conflict resolution is normally an emotionally charged negotiation and all the communication markers emerging from tone, inflection, expression and posture are vital. This can really only be done in person, face-to-face. We may fight shy of doing this out of fear and apprehension, but they are not good reasons to resort to Email. Most times Email will only exacerbate the situation. If the issue is not emotionally charged then a phone or Skype call works, perhaps followed by an Email to document the outcome.

Personal/emotional counselling

Email has no real role here apart from perhaps being a stop-gap or emergency last resort. Counselling, especially therapeutic counselling, needs face-to-face time because a relationship of trust needs to be built and the missing 93% of the communication process is required. In support of face-to-face meetings phone/Skype and video calls can work really well, especially where geographical separation makes regular face-to-face meetings difficult.

Coaching

Coaching is similar to counselling in many ways and the main work is best done face-to-face (see **The Effective Practices of the Servant Leader**) and email serves well in its documentation role. However, coaching is about a medium to long term relationship and email may be useful in some of its roles as a supplementary communication mechanism between meetings, especially if the coach and coachee are separated geographically. However, scheduled (or ad hoc when necessary) phone/Skype or video calls are preferable to total reliance upon email.

Developing a Responsible Emailing Strategy for your Team

A problem with email is exactly how can one take responsibility for ensuring that communication has been achieved.

- How can you ensure that the recipient has properly understood what you intended to communicate?
- How can you be sure that you have understood exactly what the originator wanted you to understand?

One approach is to reflect upon our considerations and only use email for those tasks for which it is effective. Even then, additional, situation specific mechanisms are required to confirm understanding has been achieved. Perhaps the best approach is to keep messages simple and confirm understanding with a phone call.

One problem with emailing is that there is a tendency for the sender to feel that their responsibility has been fulfilled when they press the send button. However, even if the message has been perfectly conveyed in the text, we must remember that email is not a mechanism that guarantees delivery to the recipients. Nor does it guarantee that understanding is achieved and remembered. It is susceptible to transmission failures, spam-filters and overfull inboxes, overwork and bad timing for the recipient.

We saw that one of the steps necessary in helping a team, and its individual members, work collaboratively is to collectively work out the ground rules for the team processes. This applies to all means of communication as much as anything else. The best way to do this is to call the team members together to a workshop in which they can collectively develop their ground rules for Responsible Communications, including those for email.

Reflections

- **Take a Moment:**
 - Do you or your team use other communications mechanisms such as collaboration aids or social media, for example Twitter and Facebook or their equivalents?
 - Review how each mechanism is used and the degree to which they are effective.
 - Identify the communications roles for which they are used.
 - On a scale of 1-10 assess how effective they are in each role.
 - Based on this assessment determine when and how they can be best used.

Summary and Conclusions

We started by looking at the Bible and saw how God is an honest and straightforward communicator, recognising that he is our model. The Bible is about communications and has a lot to say about communicating. We learned that words are important and must be used wisely because they have a significant impact for better or worse. We saw too, that our words reflect the true nature of our hearts and that a bad heart has bad motives and brings forth bad words. A good heart has good motives and brings forth good words.

The Christ-centred servant leader is one who seeks to live out Christ's servant heart in their own character, expressing concern that others be the best they can be for God in practical ways. Even with a good heart, filled with the character of Christ, communicating effectively and successfully is a significant challenge. With the best will in the world so many things can go wrong. We saw Professor Wiio's attempt to highlight that when he formulated his insightful 'laws' of communication, which can be summarised as "if communications can go wrong they will go wrong". This means that we must deliberately take steps to increase the likelihood that our attempts at communication will be successful.

We have to overcome the many barriers and filters that interfere with our attempts to convey what we really wanted to convey to another, so that they understand what we really meant. Emotional intelligence is a key skill in seeking to achieve this. We need to be aware of others character and personality, so that we can consider what they may think we say when they hear our words. Similarly we need self-awareness when we seek to hear and process the words they utter. We also need to recognise that these words may not accurately reflect what they wanted to say anyway.

So we examined the concept of Responsible Communications. That is that both speaker and listener take responsibility together to ensure that the ideas that were intended to be conveyed are actually conveyed and that real understanding has taken place. This is far more than a concept; it requires positive action, on the part of both speaker and listener, in order to achieve this goal of confirmed understanding. Thus we looked at the different skills required for being a Responsible Speaker and a

Responsible Listener, working in a collaborative partnership to successfully complete the communication, ensuring that understanding is achieved.

One-to one conversations are hard enough, let alone the many-to-many dialogues encountered in meetings. The basic principles of Responsible Communication apply but there are some extra factors introduced by the meeting scenario. There are some basic rules for setting up and running a meeting which we reviewed. We also looked at De Bono's Thinking Hats approach to meetings. Especially those that are about finding solutions and making decisions. It's an immensely practical approach that aligns the thinking of participants. It steps them through the kinds of thinking that are needed by people trying to solve problems and make decisions. It makes room for people's caution and emotional response for instance, but enables them to be received by the meeting as positive contributions. It allows them to be expressed when the other participants are ready to hear them.

Finally we considered email as a communication mechanism, what it is good for and when to use it. Wearing my Black Hat I have to say that Email is dangerous because it has the immediacy of the spoken word but it lacks the rest of the message that is conveyed between speaker and listener. In a face-to-face conversation only 7% of the communication is contained in the words. The other 93% is conveyed by tone and inflection of voice, expression and posture. None of that is conveyed by email. The net result is that an email can have disastrous consequences for the recipient because 93% of the message is missing. No wonder emails can so often cause so many problems!

The challenge of this lesson is that to allow our Christ-centred servant hearts work out their concern for others, we have no choice but to improve our communication skills. No one is good enough because the challenges we face in successful communication are unique to each and every situation and each and every attempt to communicate. There are so many barriers and filters that we have to adopt an approach that accounts for them. Even if we successfully communicated with someone yesterday, today is another day. Both our and their situations are different, things may have happened in the meantime that work against successful communication.

As a Christ-centred servant leader the challenge is to allow our concern that others be the best they can be for God, make us committed to ensuring that others successfully understand what we meant to say, and vica versa. It needs us to commit to being Responsible Communicators.

If you want things to come out the way you think they should, you probably are the best person to improve the chances that they will. By taking responsibility you gain the right to influence the outcome."

Action Plan

Practice Makes Perfect

Review this lesson and prepare yourself a Responsible Communications prompt card which reminds you of the steps you need to take.

Share what you have learned about Responsible Communication with someone that you trust and practice it with them. Swap roles so you can develop your skills as both a Responsible Speaker and a Responsible Listener.

In the meantime, when speaking with others, think about what they need to understand and work towards them achieving that understanding. Both ask and invite questions to probe understanding.

So, starting today, adopt Responsible Communications strategies in your dealings with other people. Assemble your Responsible Listening and Responsible Speaking action plans and put them into motion. Monitor progress using the questionnaires.

Effective Meetings

Take time out to read Edward de Bono's book on Thinking Hats.

Plan some smaller meetings that use the Thinking Hats approach and evaluate them. You will have to instruct people in how to use the hats. Use the Crib Sheet in Appendix 1 to do this and as a guide for the meeting.

Further Study

If you haven't done so yet, browse Proverbs chapters 8 to 18 and 25 & 26 and look to see what you can learn from the Wisdom of Solomon about speaking and listening? Ponder also how this might apply to other modes of communication as well. Having done that, compare yourself to what you have learned and see if you can identify at least 3 ways in which you can improve.

Further investigate and develop your active listening skills.

Similarly learn about body language and develop your skills in this area.

Regarding communication in cross-cultural settings, Cross Cultural Communication A Visual Approach by Richard D Lewis, Transcreen Publications - ISBN 095343981X is a recommended read.

Next

The Next Module is entitled **Leading the Journey**. Leadership is about leading people on a journey to achieve something. It's about envisioning as well as enabling and, because vision is about achieving a different outcome, journeys inherently involve change. This module looks at the issue of developing and sharing a vision and leading people through a journey of change.

Grand visions often emerge from the heart but this is not true of all visions. For instance a small team may be confronted with a problem. At one level the vision is to have solved the problem but problems need solutions. For the team that will resolve the issue, the actual solution is the vision. Their journey is to implement the solution they envisage. So, this module also spends some time looking at the very practical issue of creative thinking; the process of finding new and innovative solutions and alternatives.

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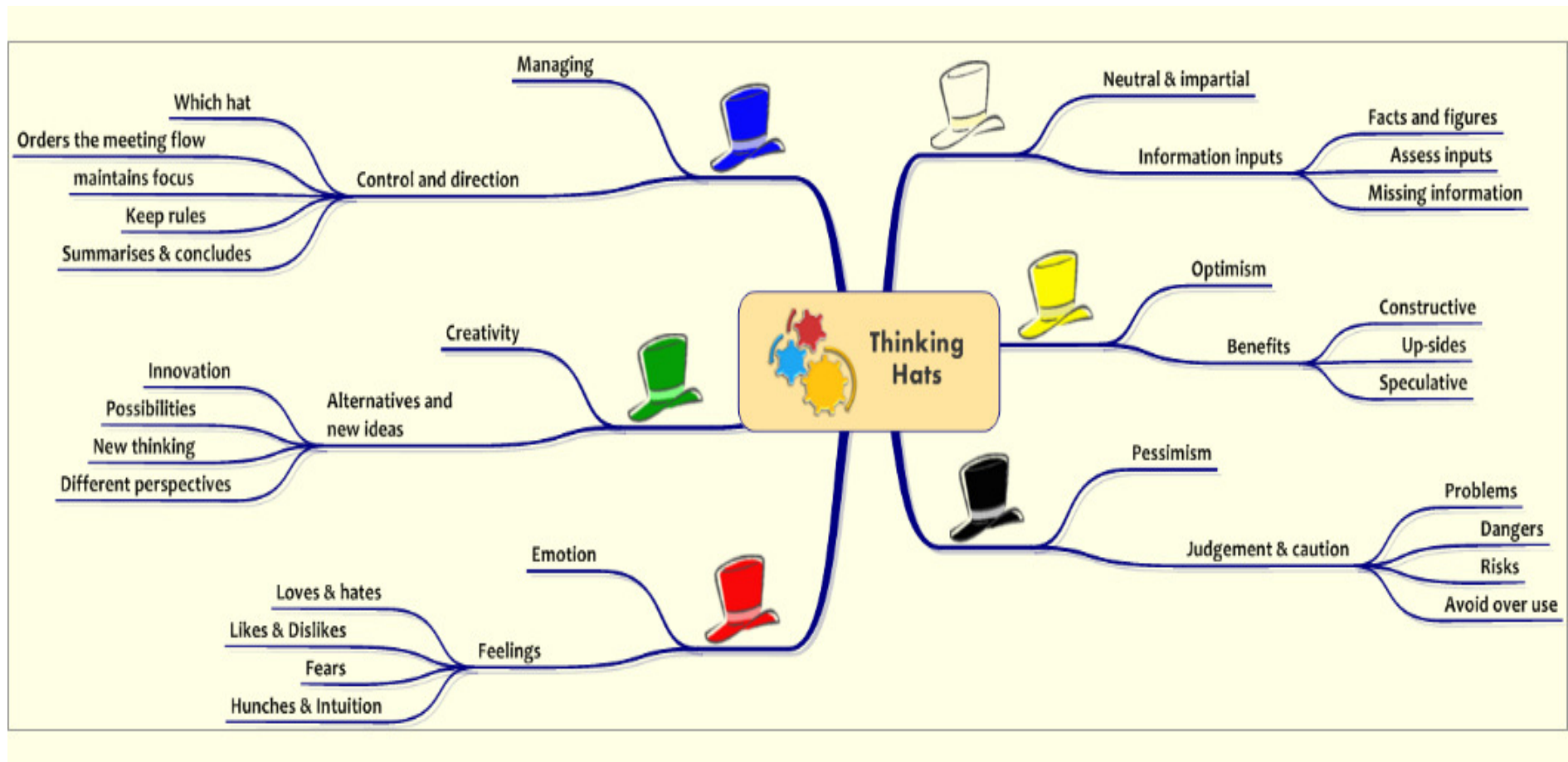
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Appendix A: de Bono's Thinking Hats Crib Sheet



Appendix B: Responsible Communication Questionnaires

Responsible Listening Questionnaires

Main Questionnaire

	Self-Assessment	Trusted Others				
		A	B	C	D	Average
<p>How well do you encourage the person you are listening to by showing that you are engaged, interested and following them?</p> <p>Score on a scale of 1 -10 where 1 is very poor and 10 is excellent.</p>						
A. Use of appropriate eye contact						
B. Use of appropriate body language						
C. Appropriate levels of verbal confirmation						
<p>How well do you close the loop with the person to whom you are listening to ensure understanding is achieved?</p> <p>Score on a scale of 1 -10 where 1 is very poor and 10 is excellent.</p>						
A. Reflecting what has been said						
B. Summarising what has been said						
C. Asking questions to confirm or clarify						
<p>How patient are you in your reply?</p> <p>Score on a scale of 1 -10 where 1 is very poor and 10 is Excellent.</p>						
A. Rushing to reply						
B. Composing your reply while listening						
C. Being candid, open and honest in your reply						
D. Being respectful in your reply						

Trusted Person Responsible Listening Feedback Questionnaire

	Assessment
<p>How well does the subject encourage the person to whom they are listening by showing that they are engaged, interested and following them?</p> <p>Score on a scale of 1 -10 where 1 is very poor and 10 is excellent.</p>	
A. Use of appropriate eye contact	
B. Use of appropriate body language	
C. Appropriate levels of verbal confirmation	
<p>How well does the subject close the loop with the person to whom they are listening to ensure understanding is achieved?</p> <p>Score on a scale of 1 -10 where 1 is Very poor and 10 is excellent.</p>	
A. Reflecting back by paraphrasing what has been said	
B. Summarising what has been said	
C. Asking questions to confirm or clarify	
<p>How patient is the subject in making their reply?</p> <p>Score on a scale of 1 -10 where 1 is very poor and 10 is Excellent.</p>	
A. Rushing to reply	
B. Composing their reply while listening	
C. Being candid, open and honest in their reply	
D. Being respectful in their reply	

Responsible Speaking Questionnaires

Main Questionnaire

	Self-Assessment	Trusted Others				
		A	B	C	D	Average
<p>How good are you at helping your listener understand?</p> <p>Score on a scale of 1 -10 where 1 is very poor and 10 is excellent</p>						
A. You keep your messages simple and straightforward						
B. You avoid or clarify assumptions						
C. You give the listener time to absorb the information						
D. You take steps to confirm their understanding						
<p>How good are you at making it interesting for the listener?</p> <p>Score on a scale of 1 -10 where 1 is very poor and 10 is excellent.</p>						
A. You include the listener						
B. You engage the listener's interest						
C. You address the listener's needs (Answer the WIT-FM question)						
<p>How good are you at creating a partnership with the listener?</p> <p>Score on a scale of 1 -10 where 1 is very poor and 10 is excellent.</p>						
A. You encourage the listener to be an equal party in the conversation						
B. You invite the listener to seek clarification and detail						

	Self-Assessment	Trusted Others				
		A	B	C	D	Average
<p>How good are you at not overwhelming the listener?</p> <p>Score on a scale of 1 -10 where 1 is very poor and 10 is Excellent.</p>						
A. Your messages are planned, succinct and deliberate in delivery						
B. You take the necessary time to ensure understanding						
C. You divide your message into segments						
D. You follow up with the detail rather than dumping it all at one time						
<p>How good are you at picking up the listener's non-verbal cues?</p> <p>Score on a scale of 1 -10 where 1 is very poor and 10 is Excellent.</p>						
A. You focus on the listener and not yourself						
B. You respond to the listener's posture, expression, tone of voice and inflection						

Trusted Person Responsible Speaking Feedback Questionnaire

	Assessment		Assessment
<p>How good is the subject at helping their listener understand?</p> <p>Score on a scale of 1 -10 where 1 is very poor and 10 is excellent</p>		<p>How good is the subject at not overwhelming the listener?</p> <p>Score on a scale of 1 -10 where 1 is very poor and 10 is Excellent.</p>	
A. They keep their messages simple and straightforward		A. Their messages are planned, succinct and deliberate in delivery	
B. They avoid or clarify assumptions		B. They take the necessary time to ensure understanding	
C. They give the listener time to absorb the information		C. They divide their message into segments	
D. They take steps to confirm the listener's understanding		D. They follow up with the detail rather than dumping it all at one time	
<p>How good is the subject at making it interesting for the listener?</p> <p>Score on a scale of 1 -10 where 1 is very poor and 10 is excellent.</p>		<p>How good is the subject at picking up the listener's non-verbal cues?</p> <p>Score on a scale of 1 -10 where 1 is very poor and 10 is Excellent.</p>	
A. They include the listener		A. They focus on the listener and not themselves	
B. They engage the listener's interest		B. They respond to the listener's posture, expression, tone of voice and inflection	
C. They address the listener's needs (Answer the WIT-FM question)			
<p>How good is the subject at creating a partnership with the listener?</p> <p>Score on a scale of 1 -10 where 1 is very poor and 10 is excellent.</p>			
A. They encourage the listener to be an equal party in the conversation			
B. They invite the listener to seek clarification and detail			