

CONFLICT SENSITIVE COMMUNICATION

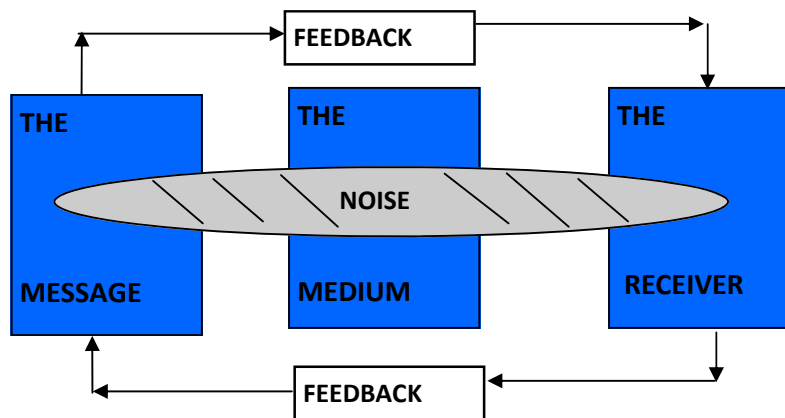
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Communication is the method of conveying information to another person or group of people in a form that it would be clearly understood by those for which the information is meant in order to secure appropriate response. Communication is said to be conflict sensitive when parties involved in the process pay adequate care to ensure that their communication does not trigger conflict or fuel existing conflict.

From the above, it is understood that the person giving out the information should put conscious effort into what s/he has to say, how it is said, the choice of words and images/pictures used and the medium used, putting into consideration the 'context' of the receiver. The person giving out information should also be sensitive to confirm that the person or people for whom the information is meant were able to understand it clearly and respond or react appropriately.

Since the purpose of communication is to secure desired response and action, it is therefore important to understand why the desired response is not obtained in some instances, this is generally referred to as the 'noise' factor.

A typical diagram of a conflict sensitive communication framework has five components: the message, the medium, the receiver, noise and feedback. It can be represented by the following diagram:



THE MESSAGE

The receiver of the information should be properly considered when making the choice of words, images and the medium of communication to ensure that they are not offensive culturally or socially offensive and also that the language is not above the level of the receiver. In some environments some words may have different meanings and some pictures may not be appropriate in the cultural context.

THE MEDIUM

The medium of the message is both about the source: the person or group of people sending out the message and the method and environment in which the message is conveyed and received.

The credibility of the source and the personalities can make people to pay attention and receive it as authentic information or make them to receive it with some doubt. This is why celebrities are used to promote products and ideas. The medium has to be appropriate to give adequate 'opportunity-to-see/ hear' and the advantages and disadvantages of each one should be considered.

a) The person delivering the message should look capable and credible to be taken seriously, ability to speak in the language of the hearer with proper pronunciations so as not to convey doubtful meanings and the manner of dressing are important where such matters may determine whether the speaker gains meaningful acceptance or not.

b) The print gives advantage in that it can be read over and over again till it is understood, it can also be kept for reference. The message can be personalised such as letters or email or may be through fliers, posters, newspapers, banners and bill boards etc

c) Radio can easily be heard by more people even in remote areas if listeners tune in. The limitation here is that the message is made as general broadcast and response may not be easily harvested except a random few who may have opportunity to phone in if it is a live broadcast.

d) Television gives advantage of both voice and picture; viewers can literally be taken to the scene of events and shown the evidence, it has strong power of persuasion but competition with several other channels, fewer access to television and electricity failure in developing communities are some of the challenges. As with radio broadcast, only limited response can be harvested through telephone during the program.

e) Personal meetings can be the most persuasive form of communication in that it gives opportunity for immediate response, explanation and continuous effort by the parties to convince each other about one another's view point. Pictures can be presented and video can be played to support each opinion for additional effect.

f) Telephone conversations can be used to open and sustain communication. The telephone can be used skilfully in many instances with nearly the persuasive result of personal meetings if the credibility of the source is good and if adequate patience is taken to explain issues to one another. Sending text messages can also be helpful to clarify or confirm that both parties understand the issues and respond appropriately.

g) The internet offers countless opportunities such as website, blogs, tweeter, face book, email, linkedin, badoo, and so on. The internet can be used to establish wide networks of contacts to exchange ideas and opinions; pictures and video can be added and additional information can be obtained from several website to enrich knowledge.

THE RECEIVER:

The person or persons to whom the message is being conveyed is receiving it within his or her own social, cultural and sometimes, literacy context which has to be most carefully considered when preparing the message. The choice of words, images or pictures, colours, the medium/media used and choice of locations for meetings must be agreeable to the receiver.

NOISE:

During the preparation and after the message has been prepared, the noise factor refers to anything that can distort the primary intention of the message from being received and understood with the same meaning and intention so as to generate the expected response.

Some of the factors that can amount to noise are:

1. **Language:** Is the communication in the language that is well understood by the receiver? Some words may have different meanings; the message should be as clear as possible and be communicated in simple language.

2. **Socio-cultural differences:** The socio-cultural background and context of the person giving the message and the receiver(s) may be different. Some words may have different meanings to the the parties, the time of meetings must be convenient for both sides, different colours and mode of dressing may have different meanings to each of the parties.

3. **The medium** should be capable of delivering the message clearly. Telephone conversation may have network sound distortions; figure 'one' may look like figure 'seven' and a noisy environment may hinder both the speaker and the hearer from understanding each other. The credibility of the medium must be acceptable to both parties.

4. **Timing:** Learning to say the 'right words at the right time' and even when to use silence or withdrawal as an effective communication tool is a valuable skill of a good communicator. It can be a wasted effort airing television or radio program when the target audience is supposed to be at the place of worship, it would also be better to simply seat quietly than to

be relating stories of people who have been similarly bereaved at a place of mourning. The time and duration of meetings should be agreed to by the parties.

FEEDBACK:

After message has been sent out, it is necessary to ascertain that the receiver got the message and understood it in the context and meaning that it was meant to be received. This may require asking questions to confirm that the message was clearly understood.

Another tool that helps feed-back is active listening. This requires both parties to allow each other to take sufficient turns to respond and express their mind, feelings and opinions. Some words may not be spoken but a keen communicator would understand the sighs, facial expressions and body language.

Communication is conflict sensitive therefore if adequate care is taken by parties concerned to ensure that dialogue continues in all situations and that care is taken not to hurt the feelings of one another. It is not in the interest of parties for communication to break down if peaceful co-existence is to be maintained; the interest and wellbeing of all parties must also be put into consideration whenever planning decisions are being considered and taken.

RESEARCH:

The place of research in order to achieve maximum desired response per unit of time and money spent in order not to create conflict or add to the problem by sending out confusing information cannot be undermined. Even in inter-personal relationships, people need to study each others character and attitude about various issues, likes and dislikes, and parties must also be ready to adjust and tolerate or accommodate one another for long term sustainable peace to exist.

When violent conflict has already taken place, it may have been accompanied by people being injured, destruction of lives and properties, displaced persons, personal economic losses, collapse of social infrastructure like schools and hospitals, some people may have been abducted and taken hostage. Third parties are usually required to rebuild communication bridges and restore peaceful co-existence. Since all parties in conflict lose resources, time and lives depending on the nature of the conflict, it is usually better to engage one another in constructive communication to avoid the losses and injuries associated with violence. The slogan in International Center for Community Peace is **“it is better and cheaper to manage our peace so that we will not manage conflict”**