



COMMUNICATION STRATEGIES, MINDFULNESS AND SELF-REGULATION

A guide to promoting the well-being of teachers and staff members



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Good day listeners, and welcome to our podcast. We are Community Psychology Honours students from the University of the Free State and we are honoured to present our podcast to you. This podcast focuses on two strategies. The first one involves how to have effective communication skills for better communication between you and your colleagues and the second one focuses on how you can be mindful during conflict as well as how to show self-regulate skills during conflict. We hope this information will be useful and effective to you. Please lend your ears to us as we unpack these interventions.

Communication Strategies

Communication strategies are essential tools for social interactions and by means which all bonds are made and preserved (Neuvonen et al., 2021). They act as guidelines for dealing with the general public, stakeholders and even co-workers (Ekeowa, 2016). There are certain communication strategies that can help you improve your communication skills. Firstly, verbal communication consisting of two categories which are oral and written communication. For example, oral communication can be things such as face-to-face communication, telephonic conversations, or video calls (Ayawan et al., 2022). Written communication is things such as text messages, or e-mail (Holmes et al., 2022). Before sending a text message or an e-mail proofread the message and take the time to edit where necessary. This can help to ensure that the written communication is done professionally as well as to make sure the message you are trying to convey is accurate.

To explain strategies regarding verbal communication, I will be giving a practical example. These examples may seem simple, but keep in mind how big the ripple effect of these interactions might be. The chances that both of us have been in situations like these are highly possible.

Say for instance Estian is new at Lettie Fouche and he needs the keys to the storage room for some supplies. Estian immediately emails the school principal: “I NEED THE KEYS TO THE STORAGE ROOM RIGHT NOW.” The chances the Principal’s first thought will be that this teacher is a demanding and arrogant person, yelling at him will be quite big. This

is merely because Estian used capital letters while writing the email instead of the appropriate capitalization. Estian would have portrayed the strategy appropriately if he were to use words such as please and kindly.

The same goes for oral communication where instead of emailing Estian decides to call the principal kindly requesting the keys and through this clarifying interaction form a deeper connection between himself and the principal.

Secondly, non-verbal communication strategies can be defined as visual cues such as body language, tone of voice, and facial expressions (Ahmed & Pawar, 2018). With this strategy, eye contact is also important because it indicates that you are paying attention to the individual that is speaking (Harris et. al., 2022). These cues are usually done unintentionally. Also, these cues are important to be aware of because you might be saying one thing but the other individuals might get the wrong idea just because your tone of voice or body language did not correspond to what you were saying (Ödemis, 2019). Therefore, these cues should be adjusted to what the speaker is trying to say. Non-verbal communication strategies are a good method to help to get your point across when speaking.

A lot is said without words when it comes to face-to-face interactions. Our body posture, facial expressions and even eye contact sometimes speaks louder than words. Good non-verbal communication skills express that you truly care and support what someone is saying. It is however very important to be aware of your own nonverbal cues as well.

Strategies to optimize your own nonverbal communication skills are as follows,

- ❖ Really pay attention to what the other person is saying.

You might think this comes without saying but this is crucial to being a helpful listener. You can achieve this by repeating something they just told you, keeping aspects like age and home language in consideration. An example of this is for instance saying, “I understand what you mean when you say you feel there is tension between some of the teachers”. This attention to detail will demonstrate that you genuinely care.

- ❖ Maintain comfortable eye contact.

There is a fine line between avoiding eye contact and staring. An important strategy to show that you are focused on what the other person is saying is to meet someone's gaze. Maintaining an open body position. Keeping cultural norms in mind, some cultures perceive eye contact to be disrespectful and it is therefore important to be knowledgeable about what is acceptable within the specific culture.

Here it is important to avoid any defensive body language such as crossing your arms over your body. An open body positioning will convey that you are listening to what the person is saying. You all have been scolded once in your life or have even given someone "the talk", now imagine someone with that body language telling you how good day they've been having. Not very friendly and inviting if you ask me.

- ❖ Be on the same level as the other person.

This technique allows for the interaction to be less threatening and more comfortable. So this might mean standing up or sitting down depending on the position of the person you are having the conversation with.

- ❖ Sit alongside and angled toward the person rather than directly opposite them.

This strategy will allow the conversation to feel nonconfrontational and friendly.

- ❖ Avoid fidgeting

During a more sensitive and serious conversation one might be tempted to fidget but these actions might be distracting to the person who is talking and might give the impression that you are nervous, bored, or uncomfortable. So, avoid picking at your nails, twiddling a pen or any other distracting movements.

If anyone is interested, a link will be provided to access a summary of these key points mentioned in the comment section of the podcast.

IMPROVE YOUR LISTENING WITH **NON-VERBAL SKILLS**

-  Pay close attention to what the person says.
-  Maintain comfortable eye contact. Don't avoid eye contact, but do avoid staring.
-  Maintain an open body position. Don't cross your arms over your body, as this may appear defensive.
-  Sit down, even if the person is standing, as this seems less threatening.
-  It's best to sit alongside and angled toward the person rather than directly opposite him or her.
-  Do not fidget.



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Nonverbal communication and body language express a great deal. Good nonverbal skills show you are listening, while poor nonverbal skills can damage the rapport and negate what you say. Keep these nonverbal cues in mind next time you have a conversation with someone who may need help.

BE THE 1 TO MAKE A DIFFERENCE 

Image: <https://www.mentalhealthfirstaid.org/external/2018/06/6-ways-to-improve-your-non-verbal-communication-skills/>

Thirdly, paraphrasing strategies can be defined as strategies that you as the speaker can use when you are struggling to express yourself in the right manner. Rather structure a sentence in your own words without using words that you are not familiar with, to reduce confusion (Ahmed & Pawar, 2018). Because language differences are part of our everyday lives try and

use words that can be understood by most individuals. In other words, simplify sentences when speaking in English because it is not everybody's mother tongue. For example, saying "During our scheduled meeting at o eight hundred we are going to discuss a variety of inconveniences we have encountered." Rather say, "During today's meeting at eight in the morning we are going to talk about different problems that we are having."

Lastly, seeking help or asking for clarification, is another strategy that can be useful to improve communication. When you as the listener do not understand what the speaker is trying to say rather ask them to state the sentence in such a way that you can understand it better. Rather ask the speaker to clarify so a misunderstanding can be avoided. Living in a multilingual country such as South Africa and working in such a setting, language can sometimes be a barrier. Therefore, seeking help or asking for clarification to understand what the speaker is saying can be a great help. (Ahmed &Pawar, 2018).

To conclude then, these communication strategies combined would provide you as the listener, with the needed abilities to optimize your own communication skills that can help you in your everyday life. So, think about how you communicate with others on a daily basis and ask your colleagues how they find your communication towards them; also, check for areas to improve. For example, sometimes I would talk too fast and people then misunderstand what I am saying and do not feel comfortable asking me to repeat myself.

Now let us move to how mindfulness and self-regulation can help you in resolving conflict.

Mindfulness and Self-regulation towards Conflict management

Conflict is an inevitable part of an organisation. It is better to manage it, rather than to avoid it. If you avoid resolving conflict, it can lead to other consequences such as low levels of job satisfaction. Hence, it is important to come up with ways to combat or decrease conflict in order to have a healthy working space and have healthy relationships among colleagues. As conflict was named as one of the key issues among teachers and staff members, it was important to come up with an intervention that will help address this issue. Therefore, we believe that mindfulness and self-regulation are interventions working towards conflict management.

To start off with, mindfulness is the ability to purposefully pay attention in a particular way, in the present moment and without judgement (Kabat-Zinn, 1994). Mindfulness brings awareness to current experiences, by allowing us to observe and attend to the changing thoughts, feelings, and sensations from moment to moment. This allows us to be fully alert on what is happening in the here and now (Bishop et al., 2004). One way to practice mindfulness during conflict is through mindful speech and listening. One can practice this by:

- ❖ Speaking with honesty and strength
- ❖ Listening with kindness and compassion
- ❖ Listening non-judgementally and tune in into one's own patterns during conflict
- ❖ Paying attention to verbal communication and nonverbal cues as well as one's reactions to these cues.

Practicing mindful speech and listening will ultimately lower emotional stress responses during discussions of conflict and post-conflict perception of the relationship, allowing better communication during the discussion (Niemic et al., 2021). Another practice of mindfulness is the calm practice. We have once experienced situations that started off being addressed nicely and the more, we talk, the angrier we become, and then we end up finding ourselves saying horrible, unpleasant things that makes the conflict even worse. If only we could pause and hear ourselves before speaking. Therefore, the calm practice involves the S.T.O.P technique. So let us engage in this technique together:

- ❖ **S**top – stop and interrupt your thoughts for a moment and pause whatever you are doing.
- ❖ **T**ake a breath- Now notice that you are breathing for a second. Breathe in slowly through the nose, expand your stomach, and exhale slowly deeply through your lips as if you were going to whistle.
- ❖ **O**bserve- become the observer of your thoughts, emotions and physical reactions. What thoughts do you notice? What emotions are present? How does your body feel? Tune in and sit with whatever happens for a moment

- ❖ **Proceed-** Finally, mindfully think about how you would like to respond. What is that one thing you can focus on right now? What is your most important and urgent priority? Narrow down your focus and take small steps at a time.

<https://thewellnesssociety.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/02/STOP-Technique-PDF-1.pdf>

Secondly, self-regulation can be understood using the EAGSS acronym and it is as follows: (Baumeister&Vohs, 2004):

E - To control one's emotions

A - To attain, maintain and change one's level of alertness appropriately for a task or a situation

G - To formulate a goal, monitor goal-progress and adjust one's behaviour

S - To manage social interactions

S - To be aware of your strengths and weaknesses, and having various strategies to tackle day-to-day challenges.

Self-regulation is crucial in the workplace. For instance, it helps to prevent you as the teacher from acting out in more socially unacceptable ways, such as yelling at the principal when he has done or said something that does not sit well with you (Ackerman, 2018). Thus, knowing how to self-regulate can help you to prevent such an instance which is a possible trigger of conflict. Also, self-regulation helps people having conflict to come together and agree on what the actual cause of the conflict between them is (Oettingen & Gollwitzer, 2003), allowing individuals to change the way in which they respond to different situations of conflict (Baumeister & Vohs, 2007). The following are self-regulation skills you can apply to avoid any sort of conflict (Thompson, 2021):

- ❖ **Communication** – Practicing self-regulation improves your ability to actively listen and understand what is happening around you without shutting down.

- ❖ **Conflict Resolution** – You can handle conflicts well because you consider differing opinions and better empathize with co-workers and others you interact with in the workplace
- ❖ **Perspective** – Self-regulation enables you to be calm in challenging situations and respond more effectively
- ❖ **Problem Solving** – You are more likely to be a good problem solver because you can consider many logical options and can adapt to new situations
- ❖ **Time Management** – When practicing self-regulation, you can improve your time management by holding yourself accountable for deadlines
- ❖ **Stress Management** – Regular self-regulation practices can help calm yourself and manage the extra stress that comes with the workload and other social factors that might affect your work ethic.

In essence, we believe that these interventions contain valuable information that can help you not only in the context of work, but also in your life outside work too. Always remember that communication is something we practice in our everyday life; it doesn't have to be perfect but having the right skills for it makes it easy for us to communicate with others and actually understand each other during communication. This will aid you to be mindful when you speak or listen to someone else speak, helping you to self-regulate things like your emotions. Always ask yourself these 4 questions: 1. How do I communicate with others? 2. How do others find my communication to them? 3. Do I listen mindfully to others when they speak? And 4. How often am I able to self-regulate during conflict? This will ultimately help you to have a better relationship with your colleagues and other people you relate with outside your work environment

Thank you for listening and we hope you enjoyed our podcast

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