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SMM - IO3
Training Module 5
COMMUNICATION AND NETWORKING
FOR THE SMM
Booklet

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Communication and networking activities concern transversally the action of the School Mobility Manager since he has:

To talk to different addressee groups (e.g. public stakeholders, parents, educators, pupils, public in general)

To be able to communicate about plans, projects, actions

To be able to market/bargain advantages/ benefits of the proposed actions

To be able to raise interest and increase participation of target groups

Identify and select necessary stakeholders and to address them.

For that reasons, the present booklet presents some useful principles and suggestions about effective communication and networking issues.

COMMUNICATION - LET'S TRY A DEFINITION

Communication is simply the act of transferring information from one place to another.

This simple definition would imply (according to the different Channels used) different categories of communication that include:

Written Communication: *letters, e-mails, books, magazines, the Internet or via other media.*

Verbal/Spoken Communication: i.e. face-to-face, telephone, radio or television and other media.

Non Verbal Communication: *i.e. gestures, body language, how we dress or act*

Today more and more we confront also _Visualizations_: i.e. graphs and charts, maps, logos and other visualizations (emoticons..) that can communicate messages.

Communication Channels is the term given to the way in which we communicate. There are multiple communication channels available today, for example face-to-face conversations, telephone calls, text messages, email, the Internet (including social media), radio and TV, written letters, brochures and reports to name just a few.

Communication Process
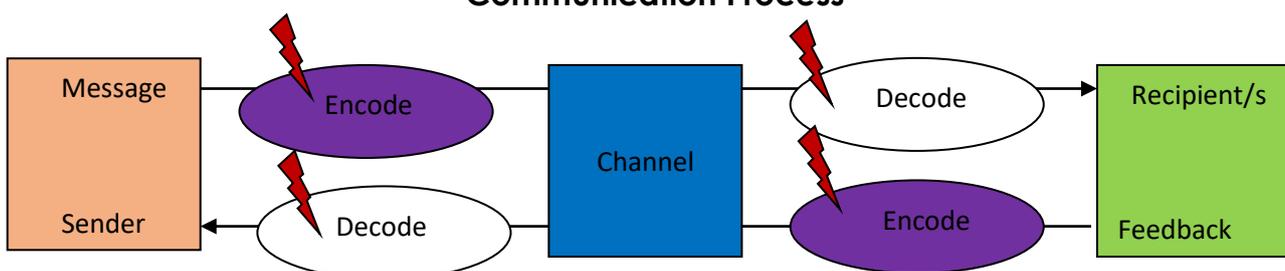
According to the Communication process The sender must encode the message (*the information being conveyed*) into a form that is appropriate to the communication channel, and the receiver/s then decodes the message to understand its meaning and significance.

Misunderstanding can occur at any stage of the communication process.

Effective communication involves minimising potential misunderstanding and overcoming any barriers to communication at each stage in the communication process.

EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION - ITS 4 MAIN PRINCIPLES

Usually people tend to take the **communication process** for granted: we generally figure that the communication between two or more people is not a big deal. It just works. However, the reality is very different and the process of communication is actually impressively complex.

There are many factors that determine whether a particular communication experience is likely to be successful or not. There are **internal factors** that affect each person participating in the communication process individually, **interactional factors** that affect how information is sent and received between two or more people, and external factors that affect the extent to which the physical environment can lead to an effective communication.

Effective communication can be defined, in fact, as *a connection between people that allows for the exchange of thoughts, feelings, and ideas, and leads to mutual understanding*. This exchange is evidenced when a speaker sends a message to which a listener responds. It seems simple, but it isn't.

There are also certain principles concerning the communication process, as well as skills people can learn and practice. When people are aware of these principles and apply this information, they significantly decrease the likelihood of misunderstanding and conflict and increase the chances of successful and skilful communication.

We can identify **four principles of communication:**

The message sent is not necessarily the message received

It is impossible to not communicate

Every message has both content and feeling

Nonverbal signals are more believable than verbal signals.

These four aspects of the communication process are universal (whether the topic is the post-election political economy or simple sharing of the events of one's day with others). Paying conscious attention to these four elements of the communication process, regardless of whether you are on the sending or receiving end, can improve the quality of your communication by making it more skillful, effective, and successful.

The message sent is not necessarily the message received

We often assume that just because we said something (or thought or intended something) that, when another person doesn't understand what we mean, it's their fault. After all, the person who sends the message knows exactly what he or she meant. However, what the person on the receiving end of the message hears and understands may be quite different. In contrast to being anyone's "fault," this is simply one of the ways the communication process can go off track.

The message sent may not be the message received because it must pass through a filtering system of thoughts and feelings (for both the sender and the receiver).

There is considerable room for misunderstanding between what the speaker intends to say, what he or she actually says, and what the listener hears. The less conscious attention the speaker and/or the listener is paying (the more distracted they are by internal or external inputs) when the message is sent and the more emotionally charged the subject is, the more likely it is that there will be a disconnect between what the speaker intends to say, what he or she actually says, and what the listener hears.

The only way to be certain that the message you send is the same one the other person receives is through the **process of feedback**. This is more critical when what your communication is of special importance or you sense from the other person's reaction whether verbal or nonverbal that he or she is unclear.

Checking out the accuracy of your communication involves literally asking what the other person heard you say. If what he or she reports hearing does not match up with what you intended, you can then clarify your message by sharing what it was you intended to say.

Then you can again ask for feedback, checking out what he or she heard this time. This process may seem complicated, but it results in more clear and accurate

communication. Sometimes this process may go through two or three rounds to ensure the speaker and listener are on the same page. The more matter-of-fact this process is the more successful it will be.

It is impossible to not communicate

All actions both intentional and unintentional communicate certain messages. For example, deliberately ignoring someone is not "not communicating." Quite the contrary (as you know if you've been on the receiving end), this action sends a strong message. Moreover, verbal communication (the words used) is only one part of the larger communication process that includes body language, facial expression, tone of voice, and voice volume.

Every message has both content and feeling

Each message consists of content and feeling. The content is what the message is about based on the words used. The feeling connected to the content is expressed through nonverbal cues—body language/gestures, facial expression, tone of voice/inflection, and voice volume.

Whenever there are discrepancies between a message's content and feeling, confusion is created for the listener, especially if the content and feeling seem to contradict each other.

Electronic communication—via email, text, and other forms of instant messaging—can be so challenging and easily misinterpreted precisely because the words used are isolated from any and all of the nonverbal cues that provide essential information and clarification.

Nonverbal signals are more believable than verbal signals

Whenever there is a discrepancy between the content (verbal) and feeling (nonverbal) of a message, the person on the receiving end will almost always give more weight to the feeling. In other words, if the words a speaker uses don't match up with his or her tone of voice, facial expression, body language, and other nonverbal cues, the listener will pay more attention to and believe the nonverbal behavior.

Consider how you react when someone gives you what sounds like a compliment: "You look great", but with a tone of voice that you perceive as sarcastic. Are you more likely to believe the verbal (words used/content) or the nonverbal (tone of voice/feeling)?

Based on these previous considerations and principles, in the following paragraph some useful suggestions about improving communication skills valid also for the School Mobility Manager.

HOW TO IMPROVE COMMUNICATION

The importance of *practice*: Developing advanced communication skills begins with simple interactions. Communication skills can be practiced daily in settings that range from the social to the professional. New skills take time to refine, but each time you use your communication skills, you open yourself to opportunities and future partnerships.

Involving the audience: Whether you are speaking or listening, looking into the eyes of the person with whom you are conversing can make the interaction more successful. Eye contact conveys interest and encourages your partner to be interested in you in his return.

Gestures and appropriate volume: These include gestures with your hands and face. Make your whole body talk. Use smaller gestures for individuals and small groups wider for larger groups/audience. Use a volume that is appropriate for the setting. Speak more softly when you are alone and close. Speak louder when you are speaking to larger groups or across larger spaces.

The importance of your *body language*: Body language can say so much more than a mouthful of words. The mismatch between the message sent and the body attitude is one of the main causes of misunderstanding.

Using effective *listening skills and empathy*: Not only should one be able to speak effectively, one must listen to the other person's words and engage in communication on what the other person is speaking about and paying real and without prejudice attention to what the other person is saying. Use the techniques of clarification and reflection to confirm what the other person has said and avoid any confusion. Try not to think about what to say next whilst listening; instead clear your mind and focus on the message being received. When communicating with others, try not to be judgmental or affected by preconceived ideas or beliefs - instead view situations and responses from the other person's perspective. Stay tuned with your own emotions to help enable you to understand the emotions of others.

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NETWORKING

As far as **Networking** is concerned, it can be defined as the exchange of information or services among individuals, groups, or institutions and, more specifically : *the cultivation of productive relationships for employment/business/project development*.

For the School Mobility Manager it can be turned into: *all the productive relationships for the successful development of its activities* (from the context analysis to the dissemination and valorization of results).

This is the reason why networking is a transversal concept and activity at the same time that affects all the management issues.

Here follows some key concepts and suggestions for a useful and successful networking in the framework of management activities.

Networking **advantages**:

Mutual help: from partners and other stakeholders part of a network you can benefit from other specific competences and/or help on specific issues/ problems arising from the activities.

Growth opportunity: having a pertinent and solid network of partners and/or stakeholders is a real growth opportunity since it enables the confrontation between experts, colleagues/stakeholders on suitable issues. It is also a mean of further training for all members.

Wider visibility: putting together network communication resources (in terms of contacts, channels, tools and operating people) enables a wider and more extensive visibility of the activities/ results of a project/action. It creates also more opportunities/chances of further cooperation for the future on the specific and/or on different topics, giving a concrete sustainability perspective to the activities carried out.

Economize costs: "*there is a strength in numbers*" is not only a "saying". The activation and effective management of a network can really produce scale economies for the activities carried out, especially for the communication and dissemination ones, enabling further saving opportunities for other investment.

NETWORKING MANAGEMENT STRATEGIES

Networking is based on **Relationship management** which is a strategy in which an organization maintains a continuous level of engagement with its audience. This management can happen between a business and its customers or between a business and other businesses or between partners and partners/stakeholders.

The Network or relationship management can rely on some principles that are connected to the Project Cycle Management as well:

NETWORKING CHANNELS

In order to create and/or wide a network we can consider and rely on two main "channels":

Physical Communities: Associations, Umbrella organizations, Public Institutions, Local Authorities, Enterprises, Pertinent exhibitions/fairs/events, Training agencies ect…

Virtual Communities: i.e: Linkedin – Xing – Viadeo – FaceBook – BNI – PWA, Webpages, Web sites, Dedicated Blogs ect…

Nowadays, e-networking is much more exploited because it can count on a wider potential of contacts and multiplier effects because it combines the potential of traditional networking with the internet ones.

USEFUL COMMUNICATION AND NETWORKING TOOLS FOR THE SMM

Materials and further description of the following Items are presented and collected in the section "Related tools Materials"

Focus Group I focus group are an instrument of research and analysis often used in project management activities. It is a kind of qualitative interview during which a moderator asks in a informal and apparently not structured way a set of issues of discussions to a small/medium group of informed and available pertinent people that are asked to confront and share opinions and information.

Storytelling communicate important messages to people as they can be fun and interesting use life experiences for building success strategies maintain the focus of learners by using narrative structures, well-known themes etc.

Demonstrations   actually show and explain learners how to do something provide hands-on experience (hear, see and do) provide a direct interaction between experts and other audience

Debates it is useful overcome initial nervousness about public speaking identify and work on significant problems create a climate of constructive mutual criticism

Newsletter is an information gratis periodical update that a partnership/network send to members concerning its activities. Nowadays it is usually distributed by e-mail. If it is in HTML it can contain also images. The sending frequency is variable (monthly, weekly).

Specific multiplier events creation, implementation and/or participation.