

## Team Norms and Communication

### Communication? Isn't this an *Engineering* class?

Communication is something we have been doing all of our lives, so why do we spend significant effort in a *University-level engineering* course on communication? One reason is that employers of engineers, when asked what they look for in new employees, nearly unanimously list communication skills as a top priority (see section F – Introduction to Teams).

There are many reasons why engineers need good communication skills. Engineers need to communicate well with customers in order to understand and meet their needs (see section E – Quality). Engineers need to communicate with project sponsors to fully understand project inputs and constraints, and they need to clearly communicate their designs to the project sponsors. Engineers need to communicate with engineer and non-engineer team members in order to productively complete team tasks and to derive the maximum benefit from teamwork.

*If it seems as if too much attention is being paid to communication at the expense of technical issues, consider the following:*

Even the most innovative, valuable, and important technical work of the decade, inadequately communicated, will never be implemented, or even recognized.

On the other hand, flawed technical work that is well-communicated, even if it is flawed, can be improved, can be evaluated, and can ultimately be implemented.

Take a few minutes and try to recall some examples from you own knowledge or experience in which poor communication led to a problem not being solved, a problem's solution being delayed, or a poorer-quality solution than possible being implemented.



This Workbook section will discuss oral communication in high-performing teams (Written communication is addressed in Section J). In addition to the discussion on communication, this section is also concerned with **team norms**, the mutually-agreed upon standards of behavior of team members.

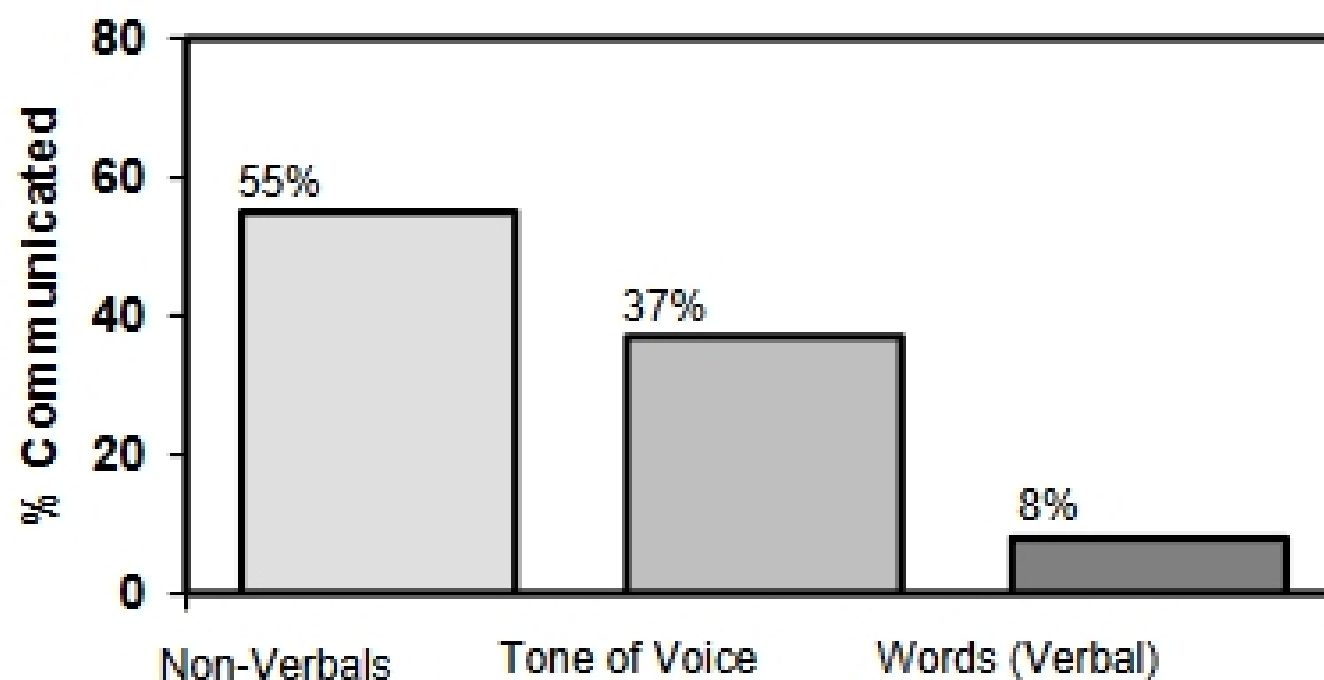
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Many people have had the experience when sending electronic mail of inadvertently confusing, annoying, or offending the email recipient. Humor, it turns out, is *especially* difficult to communicate using printed words alone. This has led to the (spontaneous?) development of a set of symbols, called 'smileys' or 'emoticons', used in electronic mail and other electronic media to communicate emotional state along with the words being sent. (one listing of 'smileys' can be found at <http://www.netlingo.com/smiley.cfm>).

<u>Common 'Smileys'</u>			
:-)	Basic	:~*	Kiss
:)	Basic Little Kid	(-:	Left Hand
(:-)	Big Face	:-{	Mustache
:-]	Blockhead	:(	Sad Little Kid
;-)	Chin up	:-/	Skeptical
:-S	Confused	;^)	Smirking
:-(	Crying	:-0	Surprised
>:->	Devilish	:-\	Undecided
:")	Embarrassed	'-)	Winking
>-)	Evil Grin	,-)	Winking Happy
:-!	Foot in Mouth	,-}	Wry and Winking

Long before electronic communication became widespread, social scientists had studied the roles of verbal and non-verbal elements of communication. The figure below illustrates a very important finding: in face-to-face communication, the words used contribute less than 10% of a communication – non verbal visual and auditory signals communicate over 90% of the content!

### Elements of Face-to-Face Communication



Communication is more than what we say or even what we mean to say. It is what our listeners think they heard and what they think we meant. Our intentions may not equal

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their perceptions. What they heard may not be what we meant. What eventually lodges in each person's mind has as much to do with our internal filters, the mood we are in, when the conversation took place as it does with words actually spoken.

These factors should be taken into account when clear communication is the goal. Communication is a total of all the things said -- and not said. Signals may be sent by the *absence* of communications as clearly as by any carefully worded announcement. Such signals are all most invariable the wrong ones. In the absence of direct information that is frequently disseminated, people will fill in the blanks themselves with preconceived notions, hearsay, personal opinions and innuendoes. Silence is often more harmful than simply providing people with the facts.


### Communication Roadblocks

Communication doesn't always go well, even when those communication have the best of intentions. There are *behaviors* (as distinguished from *attitudes*) that have been found to be particularly destructive to good communication. Can you think of any?



After you have come up with your own list, look over the list of communication roadblocks given below. Try ranking them according to how much these behaviors bother you. Then try ranking your *own* behavior -- which of these are *you* most likely to exhibit? Consider asking a friend or a family member to rank the behaviors according to how often *they* think you exhibit the behaviors.

**Communication Roadblocks**

<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>❖ Directing</li><li>❖ Interrupting</li><li>❖ Judging</li><li>❖ Name Calling</li></ul>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>❖ Moralizing</li><li>❖ Persuading</li><li>❖ Ridiculing</li><li>❖ Warning</li></ul>
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### Listening Skills and Techniques

Clarity is a key to effective communication. All communication involves both a *sender* and a *receiver*. As a result, not only does the sender need to master effective communication skills, but *the receiver must also master effective listening skills*. Good listening means that your mind is open to what the other person is trying to convey.