

Practitioner Toolbox

Skills for Labour Relations Practitioners

April 12, 2020

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Introduction

Whether you are a human resources assistant or a labour relations practitioner, communication skills is an important skill to have when interacting with both internal and external stakeholders. The following presentation will provide an overview of some important elements of communication and resources that can be used as resources.

Communication can be seen as the sharing of information between two parties with the purpose of mutual understanding. It can occur through many various channels and for various purposes. Factors such as emotions, body language, tone, etc. can all play a role in how effective communication is. This presentation will go through various elements of communication in the hope that it can be used in the future as a resource.

1) Effective Communication Channels

Communicating effectively is an important skill to have in the workplace. There are various stakeholders that Labour Relations Practitioners have to communicate with in their day to day work. Identifying the message and reviewing channels that can be used to deliver the message is important.

Communication Theories:

Lasswell's Communication Model describes a basic principle of communication. It focuses on answering the following questions:

Who? The communicator

Says what? The message

In which channel? The medium

To whom? The audience

With what effect? The expected outcome

Mehrabian's Model is another communication model that looks at verbal/non-verbal messages. The model reviews the importance of three elements in communication, with the provided level of importance:

The words used – 7%

The tone of voice – 38%

The Non-verbal behaviour of the sender – 55%

In looking at planning communication strategies, it is important to look at who, what, why, when, where, and how.

Resources:

An excellent Ted Talks presented by Amy Cuddy, a social scientist from Harvard University:

https://www.ted.com/talks/amy_cuddy_your_body_language_may_shape_who_you_are

Types of Communication Models are explained in this link by Business Communication: <https://thebusinesscommunication.com/types-of-communication-model/>

Additional Resources:

For information on the communication process, and interaction model of communication and transaction model: <https://2012books.lardbucket.org/books/a-primer-on-communication-studies/s01-02-the-communication-process.html>

2) Planning Communication

This topic goes through why planning out a communication strategy is so important. Prior to delivering a message, it is important to consider:

- Who will be sending the message?
- What is the objective and key message?
- What is the channel to deliver the message?
- Who are the stakeholders?
- How to measure success?

Resources:

The Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs has a great six steps outline of how to plan communications: <http://www.omafra.gov.on.ca/english/nfporgs/03-033.htm>

Additional Resources:

Wainger Group describes why communication plans are important, including clarity of purpose, audience definition, staff and stakeholder alignment, smarter use of resources, a way to measure success. More information on these resources can be found here: <https://waingergroup.com/5-reasons-you-need-a-communications-plan/>

Mindtools has some really useful tools on communication planning. Templates can be found here on how to plan out communication:

<https://www.mindtools.com/CommSkill/CommunicationsPlanning.htm>

3) Synthesizing, Collecting and Communication information:

As a Labour Relations Practitioner, it is important to be able to collect information and data, and be able to present it. Various situations may arise that warrant this, such as during negotiations and market research, during arbitration/grievances and studying case law, or even just dealing with employee relations. It all starts with a topic or idea, and with research you can build on that idea/topic and present the synthesized information.

This youtube video by GCFLearnFree presents how you can synthesize information effectively: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7dEGoJdb6O0>

Additional Resources:

This youtube video has a great explanation of how to analyze and synthesize information:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=B_blopoiFfs

The following link is an excellent resource that goes through why synthesizing information is important and what is involved in the process: <http://studyskills.curtin.edu.au/wp-content/uploads/2014/12/Section6-Synthesising-text-version.pdf>

4) Communication in Managing Change

Being able to communicate during a time of change is extremely important. It will have a huge impact on your workforce.

John Kotter's book on leading change is a good book that covers the following 8 step process in effectively dealing with change:

The **eight** (8) stages of the process are the following;

Create a sense of urgency: Help others see a need for change

Create a guiding coalition: Put together a group with enough power to lead the change

Develop a vision and strategy: How will the future be different from the past, how do we get there

Communicate the change vision: Constantly communicate the new vision

Empower broad-based action: Get rid of obstacles

Generate short term wins: Create some visible success

Consolidate gains and produce more change: Gain momentum by pressing on

Anchor new approaches in the culture: Make sure the new ways of doing things are part of the culture

Additional Resources:

The following resource is helpful in identifying why a communication plan in change management is so important, and what aspects should be considered. The review a 5 step process which includes assessing the situation and need, create a communication change plan, prepare people for the key influencer role, execute the communication plan, and evaluate how people are feeling. More details and templates can be found here: <https://www.yourthoughtpartner.com/blog/change-management-communication>

5) Communication During Collective Agreement Negotiations

There are informal and formal communication channels that can be used to communicate with stakeholders. Formal communication is mandated by law or by past practices and customs. For example, a notice to bargain or strike or bargain is a formal communication. Informal communication is used throughout various processes. This can be in the form of for example, the management team communicating in the caucus to discuss a particular strategy for negotiation.

Ury and Fisher developed the Harvard Negotiation Project, which identified three main communication problems in negotiations and proposed solutions to these problems. The problems include:

Negotiators might not be talking to each other in a way to be understood.

People not be hearing you.

You might be misunderstood.

To overcome these problems, Ury and Fisher proposed:

Actively listening and acknowledgement

Speak to be understood

Speak about yourself, not them

Speak for a purpose

Resources:

Conduct during bargaining is very important during the bargaining process. There are various acts that may fit into the unfair labour practices. For example, an employer should not intimidate employees in an attempt to bargain directly with them. For a more comprehensive list of unfair labour practices, a good resource is go2HR which speaks about unfair labour practices and employer communication:

<https://www.go2hr.ca/legal/labour-relations-code/unfair-labour-practices-and-employer-communication>

Additional Resources:

SHRM has a list of unfair labour practice by management which can be found here:

<https://www.shrm.org/resourcesandtools/tools-and-samples/hr-qa/pages/managementunfairlaborpractice.aspx>

6) Difficult Conversations

Providing feedback to someone is never easy, but following a few steps and using effective tips and techniques can help to provide feedback successfully.

Feedback should follow the following guidelines:

- Tied to a goal
- Must be specific
- It must be timely
- It must be ongoing
- It must be consistent

Resources:

The ABC's of Effective Feedback is an excellent resource. It is a three-step process which includes Action, Because, Could We as the critical stages in providing feedback. Focus on the specific issue and source of data collection, focus on demonstrating the impact of the action, and then focus on developing an action plan. More details and tips can be found here:

<https://gbr.pepperdine.edu/2011/02/the-abcs-of-effective-feedback/>

Additional Resources:

The Balance Careers provides more tips on how to provide feedback that helps employees improve.
<https://gbr.pepperdine.edu/2011/02/the-abcs-of-effective-feedback/>

Go2hr has a great article on getting C.L.E.A.R. in providing feedback. This includes providing the context, language, expectations, assessments, and results. This article is a great because it takes into account three contexts or “hats” we may wear in providing feedback. These include as a Manager, as a Mentor and as a Coach. <https://www.go2hr.ca/performance-management/are-you-being-heard-giving-c-l-e-a-r-feedback-just-in-time>

BambooHR has a great article on the best practices of giving employee feedback. This article includes not only the things you should do, but also things you shouldn't do. Using words for example as “always” and “never” when providing feedback is not a wise move.

<https://www.bamboohr.com/blog/best-practices-employee-feedback/>

7) Listening in the Workplace

When we interact with stakeholders, whether internal or external, we are exercising listening types. These include:

- Appreciative listening: listening for pleasure
- Comprehensive listening: understanding the message that is being communicated
- Critical listening: evaluating/judging what is being said
- Empathic listening: listening to someone with a deep understanding and sharing the emotions and feelings involved in the communication.

7) Listening in the Workplace

Active listening techniques involves creating an atmosphere where both parties feel like they are able to speak and be heard. Techniques involved include:

- Questioning
- Restating
- Summarizing
- Reflecting
- Encouragement
- Clarify
- Validating
- Redirecting
- Silence

7) Listening in the Workplace

Questioning techniques can be used to assist with the type of information you are trying to receive. The purpose may be to get more details or to improve the relationship between two people. The four types of questions are:

Open Question: Looking for an open answer.

Closed Question: Looking for a short focused answer.

Leading Question: Looking to lead the speaker in a desired direction.

Multiple Questions: Series of questions used to create some confusion or tension.

Additional Resources:

<https://www.mindtools.com/CommSkill/EmpathicListening.htm> Mindtools elaborates on empathic listening and how important body language is when listening and the importance of listening empathically.

This video shows how we can improve active listening skills such as paying attention and making eye contact:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?time_continue=2&v=t2z9mdX1j4A&feature=emb_logo

Forbes provides a great article on how empathic and active listening can improve workplace communication. Some really great tips are included here:

<https://www.forbes.com/sites/forbescoachescouncil/2018/12/19/how-empathic-and-active-listening-can-improve-workplace-communication/#570cd971f3c9>

Resources: https://www.mindtools.com/pages/article/newTMC_88.htm Great tool to understand questioning techniques and how they can be used in the workplace.

8) Conflict Resolution

Conflict resolution is important to learn as most (if not all) of us will encounter conflicts in the workplace.

Thomas Kilmann, Conflict Resolution Styles: Describes that there are five main styles or behaviours that people can deal with conflicts. They vary amongst two dimensions being assertiveness or cooperativeness. The five styles are:

- **Competing:** Assertive and uncooperative approach. Standing up for your rights and defending your own position.
- **Accommodating:** Unassertive and cooperative approach.
- **Avoiding:** Unassertive and uncooperative approach, and don't deal with it.
- **Compromising:** Assertive and cooperative to a certain extent.
- **Collaborating:** Working out a win-win situation for both parties.

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- Compromising: Assertive and cooperative to a certain extent.
- Collaborating: Working out a win-win situation for both parties.

Parties can work out disputes along a continuum where they have various levels of control. These include negotiation (between both parties), mediation (neutral mediator to help), and arbitration/litigation (where a third party to decide on the conflict on their behalf).

Additional Resources:

Gregg Learning has a great video on workplace conflict and ways to approach it:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=V79uO74vWfc>

Liz Kislik is a management consultant and business coach for various companies. A great way to deal with conflict at work and what we can do to fix it.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2l-AOBz69KU>

GCLearn has a quick and easy guide as to conflict resolution at work. Understanding another's point of view:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rXiMGT-Ie0M>

9: Diversity and Confidentiality in the Workplace

Diversity in a workplace provides a leading advantage to employers that embrace it. Aspects of why diversity is so important such as it drives innovation, and it helps in employee satisfaction at work are included in this great article by Business 2 Community:

<https://www.business2community.com/human-resources/the-importance-of-cultural-diversity-in-the-workplace-02111445>

Confidentiality is required from aspects of an organization where information is received that is considered sensitive. For example, in HR we may receive employee and management information on certain issues. As a result, it is important to maintain confidentiality around that information.

A code of ethics is a set of principles that help to guide employee conduct. These might be in the form of a company code of ethics or a regulating body such as the Human Resources Professional Association of Ontario.

<https://www.hrpa.ca/Documents/Regulation/Rules-of-Professional-Conduct.pdf>

Additional Resources:

This video is a comprehensive idea of how cultural diversity impacts the workplace. One great example is how one culture may view situation uncertainty a different way than others. The first step is to understand our own cultural viewpoints:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GEJ3rBAuz28>

The types of diversity in the workplace are explained well in this video such as Generation X versus Generation Y. This video was provided by PHRS Consulting:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MtD8A_a8WQ&list=PLSek_EfGfPMQXX7zTfodmDaS-wRXuWamB

10) Communication during a crisis

A Crisis is an unforeseen event or incident that has negatively impacted the operation of a company and/or its employees. An emergency response plan in a company helps to plan for a crisis in order to take the appropriate action. The best way to communicate with employees is to talk to employees first, remove uncertainty, address employee questions, be consistent with messaging, use employee feedback, involve senior management, be open to external help.

Additional Resources:

Bernstein Crisis Management lists steps an organization can take to manage a crisis and communicate. To note that they include the steps in a pre-crisis phase and establishing what messages are provided and how they are provided:

<https://www.bernsteincrisismanagement.com/the-10-steps-of-crisis-communications/>

SHRM writes about communicating effectively in a crisis:

<https://www.shrm.org/resourcesandtools/hr-topics/risk-management/pages/communicate-effectively-crisis.aspx>

Kleiner Perkins Caufield & Byers talks about things to know about crisis communication. It's important to know where the business vulnerabilities are and training the crisis team needed to build it up:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=koC7nCMqPhg>

Conclusion/Summary:

This practitioner toolbox was an overview of the course of Communication Skills in Labour Relations. We looked at how communication channels such as emails and in person meetings can be used to effectively communicate messages and when they should be used. The importance of planning communication was also discussed and the steps involved in planning strategies, including who should communicate the message and using what channel. In Topic 4 we went over synthesizing, collecting and communicating information which is helpful to do to provide a base of effective communication.

Topic 5 went into managing change and topic 6 went into communication during collective agreement negotiations. Topic 7 was a helpful topic of having difficult conversations at work which is bound to happen in every practitioners' career. Topic 8 and 9 were looking at listening and conflict resolution which is important to acknowledge. In Topic 10 we looked at the importance of diversity, ethics and confidentiality in the workplace. Topic 11 was an overview of communication during a crisis and the aspects that would need to be covered.

As we can see communication has many elements to it. From the basic "how to" communicate, to what communication tools and templates are available for more specific events/situations. Communication is an important aspect of any organization and understanding these elements allow for a more progressive and diverse environment.