The Professional Certificate in Management
Information and sample module material
A world apart from any other way of learning

Welcome to The Open University (OU), the UK’s largest university with over 250,000 students and the world’s leading provider of high quality, flexible learning.

Achieve your ambitions

We help ordinary people achieve extraordinary things, so if you want to improve your prospects through getting a qualification then we’ll support you every step of the way. And if you have a disability or additional requirements you will find a range of support services designed with you in mind.

Whatever your ambitions, make this the year you start to achieve them.

We make learning affordable

Investing in your own future may be one of the best decisions you’ll ever make, but finding ways to pay tuition fees can be a challenge. That’s why we ensure that you have as many options as possible to pay for your study, including access to government-backed finance schemes and fee support, as well as our own student budget account, OUSBA. You can even use OU gift vouchers towards the cost of study.

We’re more local than you think

Not only are we the UK’s largest university, but with an exceptional UK network of 7000 tutors, 350 tutorial venues and 13 national and regional centres, we’re more local than you may think. If you’d like to speak with us in person, why not attend one of our regional events; these can be found at www.opennearyou.co.uk.

Students love studying with us

That’s why they keep rating us so highly in the National Student Survey and their support has put us in the top three UK universities for student satisfaction since the survey began in 2005.

“The OU made me realise what I can achieve. During my five years of studying I’ve been promoted three times and have become a really confident person.”

Gerry McMurtrie, OU student

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You may find it easier to access information from our website at www.open.ac.uk/study.

If you would like this publication electronically, please call +44 (0)845 300 60 90 or email us from our website at www.open.ac.uk/contact.

Other alternative formats are available on request.
We hope that you will enjoy the material and that it will convince you that the Professional Certificate in Management is the appropriate qualification for you. We start by setting out how we will work with you, the programme appeals to a wide range of people. It's of particular value to:

- newly appointed or recently promoted managers
- managers at any level who have had little or no formal management training and want to strengthen their managerial capabilities
- technical, scientific and other specialists who want to broaden their knowledge and improve their career prospects
- those who want a taught programme before undertaking assessment for an NVQ in management.

Who is it for?
The programme appeals to a wide range of people. It's of particular value to:

- newly appointed or recently promoted managers
- managers at any level who have had little or no formal management training and want to strengthen their managerial capabilities
- technical, scientific and other specialists who want to broaden their knowledge and improve their career prospects
- those who want a taught programme before undertaking assessment for an NVQ in management.

Who will it give you?
You'll look at your role and how to develop it within an organisational context, learning to recognise your strengths and overcome your weaknesses. You'll learn how to work more effectively with colleagues and staff, covering issues of recruitment, motivation, teamwork and leadership. You'll explore marketing concepts to help you add value for your customers, understanding and satisfying their needs and communicating with them. You'll also learn how to use and interpret financial information. Finally, you will learn how to use all this knowledge to solve real-life issues and problems.

What will you study. What you'll gain

The programme will help you to perform more effectively as a manager, both as an individual and as a team player, as it:

- is a practical qualification for practising managers
- teaches how to manage, rather than about management, with an emphasis on doing rather than wholly on theory
- is problem-based enabling you to investigate workplace situations and how to improve them
- allows you to take your solutions and improvements and immediately apply them to the workplace
- develops key management skills such as managing people, effective planning and decision making
- is an opportunity to learn with and from other managers; sharing and comparing experiences and knowledge to understand the different contexts in which managers work and the challenges they face.

But that's only part of the picture. You'll also develop the essential skills for lifelong learning – from study skills and transferable intellectual skills to improved self-awareness and personal development.

So whether you decide to remain in your present role or move on, continue studying or travel the world – you'll be able to draw from and build on your learning, wherever life takes you.

The Professor Derek Pugh Award
This is awarded annually to the most outstanding student who has completed the certificate programme in the preceding year. Derek Pugh, Professor Emeritus of International Management at The Open University Business School, has been one of the most influential figures in the research and understanding of management in organisations over the last fifty years. For example, many certificate concepts about organisation structure and contingency theory have developed out of the work of Derek and his ‘Aston group’ colleagues. Derek has always recognised the importance and impact of certificate-level management development in improving the practice of management in organisations.

What is the Professional Certificate in Management?
The Professional Certificate in Management is an internationally recognised professional qualification for managers, designed to increase your knowledge, competence and confidence as a new, general or middle manager. Crucially, there are no entry requirements. The Professional Certificate in Management is accessible to you whatever your educational and training background.

As well as being a recognised professional qualification in its own right, the Professional Certificate in Management is also a foundation for further study at undergraduate and postgraduate level. It can count towards the BA (Hons) Business Studies (Q70) or the BA (Hons) Leadership and Management (Q54). It’s also the first step to a prestigious MBA.

Set your course for success
We’re delighted that you’re thinking of studying with The Open University Business School. The Professional Certificate in Management (S01) offers an innovative, accessible and stimulating insight into the world of business and management.

This booklet will give you a flavour of what to expect from the certificate. It will help you decide if it’s the correct qualification for you, and the right level to start your studies.

You should find the answers to your questions here. However, if there’s anything you’re unsure of or if you’d like to discuss your options, our specialist advisers are on hand to help.

Call us on +44 (0)845 366 6035 or visit our website at www.open.ac.uk/study.

Read on and discover all you need to know about the certificate.

What this booklet will do for you
We start by setting out how we will work with you, and the ground you will cover in the certificate. We’ve included quotations from students and employers to show you what’s in store and how valued the qualification is. We’ll show you how a module is structured week by week, and how much time you’ll need to commit as you progress. We’ve taken special care to tell you about our unique tutoring system which gives you access to expert guidance from a dedicated tutor throughout the qualification. The last section of the booklet is devoted to a sample of material for you to work through.

We hope that you will enjoy the material and that it will convince you that the Professional Certificate in Management is the appropriate qualification for you.
Why study with The Open University Business School?

Quality
You’ll be joining one of the most highly regarded business schools in the world.
We are one of Europe’s largest business schools, with a population of over 30,000 students. You’ll find our graduates in a wide range of senior positions throughout the commercial, public and voluntary sectors. Many students are sponsored by their organisations – including companies such as First Group, BT and Unilever.
We are among a select group of schools worldwide to be accredited by the leading international management education associations and industry bodies for the high quality of our programmes and teaching.

Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business (AACSB)
We were the first exclusively flexible learning school to be awarded international accreditation by the AACSB. The Association only grants this award to business schools meeting the wide-ranging quality standards valued by business and academic communities. These include Harvard University, London Business School, Dartmouth College and Stanford University. Among our strengths highlighted by the AACSB are:
• our effective use of excellent flexible learning and practice-based learning methods
• the support, enthusiasm and involvement of our alumni
• an ‘exemplary’ approach to the ‘team concept of curriculum development and its total stakeholder involvement’
• the commitment of our tutors, whom we refer to as Associate Lecturers to reflect their importance within our structure.

European Foundation for Management Development (EFMD)
European Quality Improvement System (EQUIS)
We hold the prestigious EQUIS kitemark of the EFMD, Europe’s forum for information, research, networking and best practice in management development. EQUIS sets the international standard for the auditing and accreditation of higher-education institutions in management and business administration. Other holders include HEC School of Management Paris, IESE Business School and Judge Business School, Cambridge.

The Association of MBAs (AMBA)
Independent accreditation by AMBA gives our MBA programmes real credibility in the international job market. The Association is unique in representing the interests of MBA students and graduates, leading business schools and MBA employers. Other holders include Henley Management College, Cranfield School of Management and London Business School.

The benefits of learning with The Open University Business School

Practical
Study alongside your current job, so you don’t have to put your life or career on hold to gain the qualification you want – over 70 per cent of our students fit OU study around work.

Relevant
Apply your learning to your own role as you study – really making the connection between theory and practice.

Flexible
Our flexible study method means that you can vary the pace and place of study to fit it around work, family and friends in a way that suits you – at home, at work or on the move.

Innovative
We offer cutting-edge teaching methods and learning materials – including online and interactive resources.

Supportive
You’ll have a personal tutor to assess and comment on your progress as well as advisory staff on hand throughout your studies. You can also participate in tutorials which provide the opportunity to swap experiences and ideas with other students.

Integrated learning
The final part of the certificate offers the opportunity to work with fellow students from a wide range of management backgrounds at a residential school. This will allow you to consolidate your learning and acquire further skills. If you are unable to attend the residential school there is an alternative online experience. The residential school module culminates in an examination based on a pre-issued case study.

Respected
Employers worldwide recognise the value of an Open University Business School qualification. Last year over 2,000 organisations sponsored employees to study our business and management modules.

Students love studying with us too, that’s why they keep rating us so highly in the National Student Survey. Their support has put us in the top three universities for student satisfaction since the survey began in 2005.
The certificate in outline: a guide to what’s covered

The Professional Certificate in Management consists of two 30-credit modules, lasting six months each, and one 10-credit module.

You are advised to sign up for the 30-credit modules one at a time. Each of these modules covers two subject areas. You will be required to complete one assignment per subject area and one final end of module assessment covering the whole module. If you just want to learn about a particular area of management (e.g. people management), or count one of the modules towards another qualification, you can study them individually. But completion of this certificate will give you an overall picture of issues and problems managers face and how to deal with them.

After completion of both modules, or towards the end of the study period of the second module, you will be required to take part in the final 10-credit module which includes a 2½-day residential school or an 18-day online school which is followed by a final examination.

Managing 1: organisations and people (B628 or BZX628)
This module looks at what managers do, concentrating on four key components of management:
- communication
- making decisions and solving problems
- planning, controlling, monitoring and evaluating
- the receipt and processing of information.

It looks at the human resource cycle, focusing on soft management skills such as motivating people, exercising power, influence and leadership and working in teams, as well as looking at recruitment, induction, performance, and staff development. It allows you, the manager, to look at all these areas in the context of the organisation in which you work while taking account of what is happening in the external environment. Finally, it considers how you, the manager, can act as an agent of change to enable your organisation to anticipate and respond to the changing world in which it operates.

This module is offered with a combination of face-to-face and online tuition. If you would prefer entirely online tuition please use the module code BZX629.

Managing 2: marketing and finance (B629 or BZX629)
This practical module is the second of three leading to the Professional Certificate in Management. It responds to the practical needs of aspiring and first-line managers, team leaders and supervisors, many of whom may not be directly involved in marketing or finance. It uses activities and problem solving to investigate topics such as the external environment; consumer relationships; market research; product/service analysis; price, promotion and delivery; quality; consumer expectations and satisfaction; financial planning and monitoring through budgets; cashflow; profit and loss. You will focus on scenarios, case studies and your own role, whether in the commercial, public or voluntary sector.

This module is offered with a combination of face-to-face and online tuition. If you would prefer entirely online tuition please use the module code BZX629.

Managing 3: the integration challenge (B690)
No manager would be able to operate effectively unless he or she had a holistic view of the job and was able to understand how each function impacts on the other. To complete your study of the Professional Certificate in Management, you are required to attend a residential school and take a three-hour examination which examines your ability to make connections across the four management areas studied in the previous two modules.

The residential programme is run either over a weekend or midweek (or over 18 days if taken online). At the school you get the opportunity to look at a business case created to help you integrate the knowledge you have gained on the other two modules. It is designed specifically to help you prepare for the examination.

The school develops:
- core interpersonal management skills
- team working
- negotiation
- self-evaluation of skills and behaviours.

To complete the Professional Certificate in Management you must successfully complete:

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Study routes

In order to complete the certificate in 12 months you can register to study Managing 3: the integration challenge (B690) alongside your second 30-credit module. The residential school and the examination do not take place until after you have completed your final end-of-module assignment on the second 30-credit module.

To complete the Professional Certificate in Management in 12 months

| 0–6 months | First 30-credit module Managing 1: organisations and people (B628/BZX628) |
| 6–12 months | Second 30-credit module Managing 2: marketing and finance (B629/BZX629) Managing 3: the integration challenge (B690) |

Qualification awarded: 
Professional Certificate in Management (S01)

To complete the Professional Certificate in Management in 18 months

| 0–6 months | First 30-credit module Managing 1: organisations and people (B628/BZX628) |
| 6–12 months | Second 30-credit module Managing 2: marketing and finance (B629/BZX629) |
| 12–18 months | Managing 3: the integration challenge (B690) |

Qualification awarded: 
Professional Certificate in Management (S01)

Key study components

Revision and examination

Case-study analysis leading up to the three-hour examination at the end of the residential school period.

Tutorials and TMAs

Group learning with tutor and fellow students face-to-face and/or online. Your tutor marks and provides feedback on your TMAs.

Module guides, books and activities

Module guides and module activities lead you through the module and refer you to the textbooks and The Manager’s Good Study Guide where appropriate. The module books provide you with the learning material and activities to help with your learning. These materials are available online and in a printed format.

Module website

Provides access to module content, online forums and module-related material and information.

The integration challenge

2½-day residential school or an 18-day online experience.

The problem-based approach to management learning

One important difference between this programme and other management programmes is that you may have considered or studied is that it is problem based. Many management qualifications provide a clear academic understanding of management issues, and this is useful. But being a successful manager requires more than this. Our approach combines academic understanding with practical application. During your studies you will regularly solve management problems by applying relevant management knowledge. ‘You learn not just ‘what’ but ‘how’ (as well as ‘why’, ‘when’, ‘where’ and ‘who’).

A problem is simply an opportunity to improve or do something differently. Problem solving is applied to difficult and negative situations, and also to any situation where we want to do something differently and perhaps better than at present. You will work on two types of problem, using either your own work situations to think about how you could make a change or improvement, or scenarios (problem-solving case studies) which are similar to real work situations.

As you go through the modules, you will be able to use more learning in each problem, thus integrating through application what you have learned earlier in the module.

Themes

There are three main themes running through the qualification:

- **Ethics**, which covers the moral principles that shape and influence a person’s behaviour and corporate social responsibility.

- **Sustainability**, which requires that human activity only uses nature’s resources at a rate at which they can be replenished naturally.

- **Climate change and management** explores change in climate caused by human and organisational activity and is closely related with sustainability.

All three themes are related and overlap, but managers’ actions and behaviours have a great influence on how the world will tackle these issues. As you gain a deeper understanding of the context and complexity of management issues and management in general, we expect you to include ethics and sustainability as issues in developing solutions.
Module components

The Open University Business School uses a combination of different media in order to suit the various ways in which people learn, and the particular strengths of each form of teaching. During each module you will use the following resources. All your books are accessible via the module website and in printed form.

Module books
The essential material for each 30-credit module is delivered in four books.

Module guide
Each module is accompanied by a module guide which explains the structure of the module and how you will engage with the main textbook and the related activities. It also explains how the assessment works. The guide includes a summary of the academic themes and techniques you will engage with and gives an insight into the importance of the weekly related activities.

Module activities
Activities are your starting point every time you sit down to study. They guide you to which texts you need to read and the activities you need to undertake week by week. The activities are available in print and are also available electronically on the module website. Many of the activities have a collaborative element which you will undertake with other students in your group.

Module textbooks
The module textbook contains all the reading you will need to do to understand the necessary management concepts, ideas, models and processes. The textbook is available in print and electronically on the module website. The Open University is an invaluable aid to your learning. It will lay the foundations for improving your management skills. It helps you understand the nature of adult learning and to prepare and organise yourself to make the most of your learning efforts.

The module website
The dedicated module website is based around a week-by-week Study Planner supplementing the weekly module activities. Through this website you will have access to a student café, your tutor group forum and electronic copies of the materials mentioned earlier. The module website is also where you will access the assessment booklets. There is a news section where the module team will post items for important note and also items of interest to your study.

Tutorials
Tutorials provide a chance for you to meet and work with other students and your tutor in a face-to-face or online environment. Exercises, case studies and discussion will help to reinforce your grasp of essential concepts.

Online support
You will have access to an online forum in which you can share information and ideas with other students in your group and with your tutor. Some forums are synchronous; for these you will need a headset.

Assessment
Tutor-marked assignments (TMAs) are written assignments on which you receive detailed comment and a mark from your tutor. They are submitted electronically. On each 30-credit module there are two. You will also be required to undertake an end-of-module assignment (EMA) which is also submitted electronically.

The student experience

With 40 years’ experience of helping busy people manage part-time study, we have a clear philosophy about the importance of planning.

How it’s organised
Here’s how the first module (Managing 1: organisations and people (B628)) is planned across 22 weeks.

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The integration challenge – revision and examination

The final part of the certificate, The integration challenge, takes place over a period of six months and culminates in the final examination.

You will prepare for this examination over a five month period, during which time you will consolidate your learning from your previous study and work with other managers from various backgrounds, giving you the opportunity to share your ideas. This module includes a 2½-day residential school (or our 18-day online experience) which focuses on the integration of management disciplines and problem-based decision making.

The examination is based on a pre-issued case study for which you will be provided with revision and examination preparation.

Click www.open.ac.uk or call +44 (0)845 366 6035
Your tutor. The human face of distance learning

Your tutor is central to your learning. He or she will provide tuition to your tutor group for the two 30-credit modules either face-to-face, or, if you opt for the online version, will host the equivalent activities through online forums.

Your tutor will manage the online activities which link your tutor group, whichever version of the modules you take, and act as a continuous point of reference for issues and questions you wish to raise by email or telephone.

Your tutor also marks and gives detailed feedback on your TMAs. These are an essential part of your learning.

Tutorial groups are formed on a geographical basis and based on student numbers, drawing on The Open University’s national and international infrastructure of regional offices. While The Open University Business School is famous for flexible learning, our tutors make sure that help is always close at hand.

Your tutor will provide a total of 30 hours support, either face-to-face or online.

Open University Business School tutors are selected for their subject expertise as well as the currency of their practical experience. A network of nearly 1000 individuals, they come from a variety of professional backgrounds. Many hold senior management positions or are active in consultancy. Their experience spans organisations large and small in the commercial and not-for-profit sectors. All will have relevant insights to share with you whatever your work involves.

The Open University Business School invests substantial resources in training and developing each tutor in order to guarantee you the best in tutorial support. Each tutor participates in rigorous quality control processes so that you can be confident of teaching standards. Student feedback consistently rates tutors as amongst the most popular and highly appreciated aspects of what we provide.

What do students and employers say about the Professional Certificate in Management?

Great qualification which I thoroughly enjoyed. I thought the books were well written and presented – I could study on the train and make notes at the same time. The level of learning was right for me – lots of new concepts but some similar ground having been a practising manager for some years.

I found the qualification beneficial and the concepts and techniques I have learnt have added value to my day-to-day management duties.

The Professional Certificate in Management qualification is fundamental to the success of the company. If I am in a workshop, I can identify the people that have done this qualification immediately from the way they organise themselves and address the problem in a methodical and logical manner.

I enjoyed the TMAs as they were all based on my real-life work environment and I was able to apply concepts to work problems. I liked the fact that there was collaboration with other managers so we learned about different industries. The electronic TMA system was great. Definitely recommend it.

My sponsor (Managing Director of my company) has expressed his admiration for the depth and range of issues studied and the way they have been applied to work situations.

I recommend this qualification to anyone wishing to gain a comprehensive grounding in management.
Sample module material

This section attempts to show you a little of what you might be expected to do during a week’s study period. Here we have chosen the subject of communication which is covered in week 2 of Managing 1: organisations and people (B628).

Communication

Communication is a core management skill. But what does it mean to communicate effectively and is there one best way that will work in every situation? What skills do we need? How can we communicate about technical matters whilst, at the same time, help our people to feel valued and motivated? Communication skills and knowledge vary considerably between individuals, as do communication problems in different situations. For this reason, in presenting the topic of communication, we have covered a range of sub-topics from interpersonal skills to the use of new technology.

When people are asked about what is done well and less well in their organisation, the most frequent criticism is about communications. They often criticise the quality of senior managers’ communications with those at lower levels of the organisation. But communication can be managed well and the materials here should help you to achieve this.

Theories of communication

1. A magazine advertisement for a broadband service claims that it will enable ‘much faster communication’ between your computer and the internet. It states a precise data transfer rate as a measure of this ‘improved’ communication.

2. At a company’s annual shareholder meeting the audience watches a video, hears speeches and receives brochures. After the meeting the director and the head of corporate communications congratulate each other. ‘We’re really communicating the message to stakeholders,’ the director says.

3. Two people are sitting in adjacent seats on an aeroplane. One person is talkative; the other person pretends to sleep to avoid a conversation.

4. Danja didn’t like Tabitha but it was important not to show it in front of her boss, Sam. When the three of them met Danja smiled at Tabitha as she greeted her. In an instant, Sam saw that Danja’s smile wasn’t genuine. ‘Those two don’t get along with each other,’ she thought.

In the first example, the communication is not ‘human’; computers and server’s exchanging information have no awareness that they are sending or receiving electronic symbols and no understanding of where the data came from (or went to). They cannot understand what it means. In the second example, the company seems to be ‘communicating’ a one-way flow of information from the company to the shareholders. Was anyone listening, watching, reading? In the third example, the ‘sleeper’ is saying nothing but is communicating the message: ‘I don’t want to talk to you now’. The person is simply using non-verbal communication. The example also shows that it’s hard not to communicate – even silence communicates something! In the fourth example, Danja communicated the message she intended not to. So, the view of communication we are proposing is wide. It is very inclusive and allows consideration of issues such as interpretation, intention, context and meaning.

We all communicate but the basis for improving communication skills is knowing something about how communication ‘works’. A general definition of communication is ‘social interaction through messages’. As the examples show, people use the term communication in many ways ranging from the speed of transmission of information through a channel, to interactions that involve intention and understanding.

Understanding communication

Interpersonal communication is complex. Generally, we communicate far more meaning than just the words we speak, and what is understood by the person with whom we are speaking may not be what we intended. Understanding how misunderstanding can occur equips us better to improve our own communication. We consider three main approaches to understanding verbal (and written) communication which provide insight.

The first of these three approaches is that of John Austin (1962) who introduced the idea of language use as ‘speech acts’ in which it is possible to distinguish between:

- the literal or ‘dictionary meaning’ of words (locution)
- the intention of the speaker (illocution)
- how the utterance was received by the listener or the consequence for the listener (perlocution) which may or may not be unintended.

Austin proposed that language is not a fixed system of rules with sentences delivering ‘facts’ whose truth or falsity can be judged. His idea was that language involves actions, context, situation and audience. The same words can be used for different purposes (intentions) – so the illocution can be hidden within the locution. Consider the statement: ‘Tom is very thorough’. Depending on context, the statement can be meant positively (‘Tom’s good at his job’) or negatively (‘Tom is being very slow; anyone else would have finished the job a long time ago’). Speakers’ intentions are said to fall into one of five categories:

- to describe something
- to influence someone
- to express feelings or attitudes
- to make a commitment
- to try to achieve something.

(Source: Deaux et al., 1993).

Here is an example of Austin’s distinction, adapted from a study of managers’ communications and people’s reactions at a Californian ski resort by Guild (2002). It is also an example of how misunderstanding can occur (in this case, through poor communication by senior managers). The senior managers had to reduce the number of seasonal workers because of lack of snow. However, the managers gave as their reason, ‘not lack of snow’ but ‘to maximise shareholder value’. This ‘message’ upset the employees who cared about staff to a company that was greedy.

A further consequence was that dismissed workers refused to be re-employed by the company, harming customer service.

This approach provides insights into the ways in which we convey our messages, their consistency with prior messages and the need to consider the context and the knowledge, needs, concerns, values and situation of the message recipients. The example reveals one of the typical ways in which recipients of messages construct different meanings from those which managers intended to communicate.

A second approach to understanding communication is known as ‘speech act theory’, originated by Erving Goffman (1967). Goffman’s view was that a person needs to live up to his or her self-image, thus needs to ‘save face’ – that is, maintain self-respect. At the same time, a person needs also to maintain the ‘face’ of other people. Goffman maintained that face saving constituted the ‘traffic rules of social interaction’.

Everyone plays the game, which is based on a working acceptance of what people say rather than a ‘real’ acceptance. A person may want to save face because of pride or honour, or because of the status power he or she can exert over others. A person may want to save the ‘face’ of another person because of emotional attachment to the other person, because of the moral rights of the other person, or simply to avoid hostility.

Each person’s sub-cultural or ethnic culture will have their own face-saving practices.

Essentially, Goffman sums up for us the meaning of ‘face’: we might confess to a personal failing to avoid having to be inconsistent, that is, act in a friendly way while feeling negative to the person; we might suggest things, or use humour, or be ambiguous rather than choosing words which would be unctuous. By doing this we are not seen to have ‘officially’ communicated the message. And recipients also can behave as if they hadn’t ‘officially’ received the message. For example, we might invite another person to speak at a meeting – ‘You first’ – conveying a ‘modest’ view of ourselves while complementing the other person. In some group situations, a person will be dependent on others for supporting his or her ‘face’ and in some circumstances, a group may come to share ‘a face’.
Consider the following messages and ‘politeness’ interpretations.

**Text 1**

‘Thank you for the great job you did during stage one of the [...] for the new courses. As discussed at the last workshop [...] in order to facilitate the success of stage two a workshop has been planned [...] Helen and Patrick join me in inviting you to this very important workshop. [...] It is imperative that those involved in stage two [...] attend this workshop.

We know that this is an extra commitment but need your assistance and support [...] Could you please make the necessary arrangements to ensure that your classes are covered. [...] We look forward to seeing you on [...]’.

**Comment**
The message, from the university’s second in command, thanks and invites the people to whom it is addressed. It makes requests for support and commitment and for arrangements to be made. However, there is little doubt that attendance at the workshop is mandatory, made clear by the word imperative. It is little short of a ‘bald directive’: Do this! Note also the use of the word you: when the writer is designing to make the message seem inclusive, but don’t really succeed – not helped by the formal language used elsewhere in the message. The writer of Text 1 has power; he can be confident that his demands will be met regardless of how ‘nice’ he is.

**Text 2**

‘Hello everyone again.

I’m coming under some pressure a little further up the line to provide an update on the status of the [...] project. I’d be very grateful if you could send me [...].

Sorry to hassle you on this, but as there is a deadline [...] for getting the first section of all courses online the sooner I have an idea of what’s going on the sooner I can provide help where needed.

If you have already responded, thanks. If you haven’t, or if I’m writing to the wrong person, please update me/ask me to remove your name from the list. That way you can avoid these increasingly desperate calls for information.

Thanks a lot.’

**Comment**
The message was written by the manager of the project coordinator, neither of whom had power over academic colleagues. By the time this message was sent, deadlines were being missed, the task was more time consuming than had been expected and there was growing resistance to it among the academics. The text states that senior managers require this but note how the writer tries to separate himself from the senior managers’ command (‘...send me...’) with the use of the words ‘I’d be grateful if...’ – The writer attempts to be closer to the recipients of the message than to the senior managers. Note the use of informal language and the use of I and you; there is none of the ‘forced inclusiveness’ used in Text 1.

Often we use politeness strategies without much thought. However, by consciously considering the use of negative strategies, our requests are more likely to be accepted when we have little status power to insist.

The third approach to looking at discourse focuses on conversation between people as part of actions which are ‘situated’ in time, place and context. Such conversations are known as ‘talk-in-interaction’. The central tool of the approach is conversation analysis which aims to reveal what a conversation is ‘doing’ as it develops. It was developed by Harvey Sacks, in the 1960s and 1970s and elaborated by Emanuel Schegloff and others. Sacks believed conversation, far from being disorganised, is highly structured. He considered, among other things, turn-taking; how participants organise topics and how, in group settings, the next speaker is ‘chosen’.

Gibson (2008) describes conversation as incrementally and progressively produced and subject to the ‘rule’ of one person speaking at a time. Conversation ‘options’ change as the conversation progresses: questions need immediate answers; the moment to make a complaint passes quickly; what can be said right now is constrained by what was said before. Speakers must also choose what they say from a number of things they could say, and quickly; hesitation invites someone else to speak. Moreover, the speaker can both select the next speaker, by posing a question to a particular person, and what the next speaker will talk about. In this way, obligations and expectations are set up.

A problem with the approach, according to Gibson, is that it does not respond to several factors we have argued to be important:

- non-verbal aspects of communication (a criticism which can be made of the other approaches too)
- what participants are like, including their formal status
- the relationships between participants
- how all these affect the content and course of conversation.

Gibson’s idea is useful to managers. It asks us to think about features of conversation, the demands and constraints on participants, and the choices we have. It also suggests the skills required both to ensure the participation of others and to direct conversation when required.

All three approaches – those of Goffman, Sacks and Gibson – remind us of issues in communication such as:

- more than facts are communicated: values and opinions (including prejudices) may be part of communication content, and are likely to shape communication behaviour in a variety of other ways
- how others interpret what we say, based on their current knowledge and understanding, and what they will do as a result
- how status power is communicated through language
- the nature of the language used
- communication is a kind of ‘game’ in which everyone is allowed to save face
- participants in a conversation shape the nature of the conversation.
Activity

Allow 30 minutes for this activity.

Here you are presented with a problem-solving activity. We ask you to identify a situation in which you would like to improve communication and work out what you need to do to make the improvement.

This activity is designed to build awareness of how you communicate by assessing a request you have made in writing to a more junior person. The requests may have been made by memo form or by email. We would prefer a written message so that you can see exactly the words that you used. If your requests are generally made verbally, recall what you said as accurately as possible. The request should be more substantial than, for example, ‘would it be convenient to move our Thursday meeting from 10:00 to 14:00?’ but no more than 250 words long.

Features of a request to a direct report/more junior person

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Who the request was made to, and their status, that is, their level in the hierarchy relative to your position:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The wording of the request:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Three key features of the language used in the message:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How I would improve the message:</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Identify three main features of the language used and record them in the proforma provided below. The main features are likely to be the degree of empathy used and ‘politeness’ factors, dependent on factors such as social distance, relative power and degree of imposition. Then say how the request might have been improved. The location (what you said) and the illocution (what you intended) will be clear to you. However, if you had feedback on the perlocution – how your request was received and interpreted, then use this feedback to inform your suggested improvement.

Problem-based activity

Of course, completing an activity is only a small part per se of solving a problem. You are asked to complete much larger activities which entail more reading and reflection about a particular problem. We ask you to consider what action you might take to improve a situation.

By getting you to take further steps such as drawing conclusions, making recommendations, identifying strengths and weaknesses and considering their implications, we lead you to a solution for that particular problem. The module sets out a model for this type of problem solving which you will be asked to use throughout the module. An example of a completed pro-forma for this activity is shown opposite.

Communication improvement: an example

Identification

Monthly project team meetings are unproductive. Decisions made are poor and one team member has a negative attitude, which causes conflict.

Analysis

Possible reasons for situation:

1. Long agendas and a lot of information to deliver, not all of which needs discussion.
2. Insufficient time to discuss important issues. Decisions are often reviewed at next month’s meeting because people have second thoughts.
3. Presence of one member disruptive.
4. I am not good at managing this type of conflict.

Conclusion

Problem caused by insufficient attention to agenda. What can be delivered in advance? What does the audience need? Need to improve my skills in dealing with conflict.

SMART (Specific, Measurable, Agreed, Realistic and Timed) recommendations

1. Attend to agenda.
2. Identify items which need most consideration and circulate in advance.
3. Acknowledge ability of negative person to see the problem and involve her in possible solutions.
4. Agree changes with team members and review after two meetings.

Strengths: benefits, weaknesses and implications

Strengths:

1. Sending out information in advance saves time in meeting.
2. Allows time for solutions to be thought about prior to meeting and allows time for discussion in meeting.

Weaknesses:

1. If people are not prepared to think in advance about issues, then not enough time available for discussion about important items.
2. Negative person may continue to be disruptive.
3. Attitude of this person may continue to be negative even if asked to find solutions.

Implications:

1. Administrative tasks will change with work on agenda spread over a longer time period.
2. If new system works well, may need to buy group conferencing software which will need resource and training implications.

Working on this type of problem is not easy but you should have an action plan to put into place to discuss and implement. The better your analysis, your solution and your scrutiny of the possible weaknesses and implications, the better you should be able to resolve issues and improve situations in such a way that they are not likely to recur. Keeping focus on the specific issues is hard work.

You may have also realised that there are a number of issues related to the one you identified. That’s why managing is messier rather than technical and mechanistic. Can you identify a problem and solve it using a similar approach? This module aims to do just that.

References


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