Young Migrant Integration Leaders [EXEMPLAR]

IO1 – Integration Leaders Curriculum

Module 3: Effective Communication

Self-directed Learning Content

Introduction to the Module:

This is the third module of the Integration Leaders Curriculum Manual. This module addresses the topic "Effective Communication", which includes definitions of important terms; an overview of what we understand as "communication" with whom we tend to do so and why; and an overview of effective communication best practices. Last but not least, the text will cover communication skills, why they are important when it comes to relating to other people and which are essential for the purpose of improving group climate.

The importance of the activities included in this module is supported by scientific research that clearly shows how practising communication skills in a small group or within a team, can enhance your group performance in terms of communication (Hollingshead, 1998).

This module is focused on providing a basic theoretical foundation of relevant topics that are related to effective communication, as well as a stimulating reflection on relevant topics, and sharing several frameworks and best practices regarding becoming an effective communicator. Of course, as EXEMPLAR brings an innovative approach to this field, it is of great significance to point out that these frameworks and best practices are provided in an inspirational context and as a basis to develop ideas and experiment with them to produce new creative, efficient and effective approaches for civil society engagement.

Learning Outcomes Achieved:	Knowledge: - To reflect on ones' way of communicating in a team. - To realise the challenges in group communication. - To understand how the variation in the ways of communicating affects the effectiveness of communication.
	Skills: - Skills to strengthen networking with others. - To discover better (more systematic) ways of communicating. - To adjust ones' communication style to different situations.
	Attitudes: - To build self-confidence and self-worth. - To become aware of the effectiveness of sharing information. - To view the communication efforts of others through the lens of their context/situation.

Theoretical Content:

The main theoretical content of this module will cover two topics: how we communicate effectively in groups and non-violent communication skills.

The core idea of effective communication is that information is passed from one source to a receiver through a medium or channel and the receiver acts (thinks, does something, says something) in response. As communication is not a linear, input-output process, just transmitting a piece of information does not mean we communicate. We will look into this further ahead.

How often do you find yourself participating in a small group? Whether formally or informally, we do so often! While you are reading the following paragraphs, consider the groups you already belong to and think about how, in your experience, these groups apply the good practices you will learn and what effect the application of such practices has on productivity and the effectiveness of group communication.

Groups can be more or less stable in their structure, and the members who make up a group can come and go. What is the most important factor in the success of a group? Communication is. Communicating effectively is the founding stone of small group communication, which leads to increased group productivity and enhanced decision-making abilities.

The most prevalent and promising theoretical perspective to the study of effective small group communication is "system theory" (Beebe & Masterson, 2009). This theory views the small group as an open system that is comprised of interdependent variables. This system can receive input and then processes it. Following this processing, the small group produces an output. Being a system, the small group also exhibits properties such as synergy, entropy and "equifinality". In simple words, the small group as an open system does not operate in isolation, but connected to the environment and is influenced by the environmental demands. As members come and go the small group changes and develop in terms of in-group climate. Also, in conceptualizing the small group as an open system, you need to keep in mind the input variables (Brilliant, 1995), that is resources (including human resources) the knowledge and tools it possesses as well as the process variables, which describe the procedures of decision making and finally, the output variables, that is, the solutions and decisions of the group.

Three properties of the group mentioned earlier are synergy, entropy and "equifinality". These terms are explained here. The term synergy implies the magnitude of the group, that is, as the group is comprised of people, the whole of it is greater than the sum of its' parts. Their collaboration creates something that exceeds the powers of each person on its' own. The term Entropy implies the natural tendency of the system to decay if some procedures cease to exist, such as frequent communication. The systems' final state and product can be reached by a variety of routes, as well as from different departure points. The goal can be reached from more than one ways. This is what the term Equifinality means.

In more scientific terms, communication is a complex phenomenon that requires the understanding of the several interconnected elements it is comprised of. These elements are, broadly speaking, the following: Leadership, Situation, Individual and Group Goals, Norms, Roles and Cohesiveness (Beebe & Masterson, 2009, p. 47-49). Leadership is the behaviour with which power over the group is exerted. Situation is the context in which the group communication occurs. Goals can be individual or group goals; that is, the reason why

the group was formed and the reason why participants are there. Norms are the standards, the procedures adopted by the group. Roles can be assigned or claimed through interaction, and they are the expectations of each of the group members. Subsequently, they influence the behaviour of group members. Cohesiveness refers to the degree of attraction between group members when they are in communication.

Definitions of Terms:

To have a better understanding of the content, it would be interesting to define some of the key concepts before getting started.

Communication: "The imparting or exchanging of information by speaking, writing, or using some other medium." (Lexico - Oxford Dictionary) There are several communication theories in the field, but certainly, the simple model described by Aristotle a few thousands of years ago refers to a handful of key elements to communication. Although it has been criticised as "too simplistic", it has been important toward the development of the field throughout the millennia. The key elements of communication, according to this model, are the source, the message, the receiver and the channel.

Human Communication: As defined by Beebe, Beebe & Redmond (2008), human communication "is the process of making sense out of the world and sharing that sense with others by creating meaning through the use of verbal and nonverbal messages."

Small-Group Communication: According to Beebe & Masterson (2009, p. 3) small group communication is "communication among a small group of people who share a common purpose, who feel a sense of belonging to the group, and who exert influence on one another."

Skill: Skill is the ability to do something well, that is, expertise in doing something. The definition itself implies that you can improve in doing something, because skills are not inherent, but learned.

Conflict: In effective communication, some disagreement of opinion is beneficial. However, conflict can interfere with task completion, with the quality of the groups' decision, thus with the groups' productivity and also, it might even threaten the existence of the group (Burgoon, Heston, & McCroskey, 1974). There are four elements that make up a conflict, and these are: (1) there is an expressed struggle, (2) it exists between two or more interdependent individuals, (3) who believe that between them there are incompatible goals, very few resources and interference from others, (4) in an effort to achieve specific goals. (Wilmot & Hocker, 2007, p. 8).

Unit 3.1: Non-Violent Communication

The title of the third module is "Effective Communication". We understand **effective communication** as *the process through which a message is transmitted through a sender to a receiver via a mode of interaction.* Therefore, we understand how the elements that makeup communication each play an important role in creating effective communication. The main purpose of this unit is to describe compassionate communication, also known as Nonviolent Communication (or NVC).

Earlier on, we have seen a simple definition of **conflict**. In fact, all groups go through a phase in which conflict is prevalent. This is part of the groups' development and is neither

good nor bad, as such (Jehn & Mannix, 2001). The cause of conflict is naturally, the variety of interconnected elements in communication between a small group of people. However, it is important that groups handle or manage the conflict well when it arises. To understand this better, you can connect it to the previously mentioned term of Entropy (natural group decay in the absence of support) as well as one of the nine core competencies, Relational competency and managing conflict to be more precise.

Conflict mediation depends on the type of conflict the group is faced with. In a study of interpersonal communication, Miller and Steinberg (1975) have identified three types of conflict and have suggested the most optimal mediation strategies.

1. Through their study, we learn that sometimes people agree on the bottom line, but due to poor communication, they seem to disagree on the surface. This is termed as "Pseudo-conflict" and is best mediated by clarifying each person's terms and the meaning of the phrases they use, establishing a supportive rather than a defensive climate in the group and applying active listening skills.

2. However, sometimes group members really do disagree on matters. This occurs when one person supports an idea that is incompatible with the idea another person supports and is called "Simple Conflict" (Miller & Steinberg, 1975). Apart from employing the standard procedure mentioned earlier, you can also use a structured problem-solving approach to organize the discussion and reach a potential compromise between the two. This is done by Defining the problem, Analyzing the problem, identifying several solutions, evaluating the solutions and selecting the best one. Remember that a simple conflict is not just a problem between the two individuals in the discussion, but a group concern.

3. The most emotionally intense conflict groups experience is "Ego Conflict". As the term implies, it has to do with incompatible personalities. Hence, emotionality and defensiveness are more intense. Often, behind Ego conflict lie power struggles (Sell, Lovaglia, Mannix, Samuelson & Wilson, 2004). To manage the ego conflict, try to find common ground between the two parties. Encourage active listening and make the dispute a problem to be solved in the group. Allowing the disagreement to be verbalized is better kept balanced because it may escalate, so focus on nonverbal cues (tone and volume of voice) to communicate in a calm and nonjudgmental manner. It is a good practice to develop procedures or group rules that permit differences of opinion so that when the ego conflict appears, you can agree to disagree.

The model of Nonviolent Communication developed by Marshall Rosenberg PhD integrates four main components; to help in facilitating supportive environments and compassionate communication. These four components are (1) Consciousness, (2) Language, (3) Communication, (4) Means of Influence. Upon closer inspection, **Consciousness** is the set of principles and perspectives that support living compassionately, with courage and in collaboration with others, while being authentic to ourselves. It affects our interactions with other people surrounding us. In turn, **Language** entails how we understand words that we or others use, whether we use this understanding to create or break connections, to help or hurt, to compromise or to conquer a situation. Regarding **Communication**, in this topic, it knows what to ask and when without threatening or demanding of others. **Means of Influence** has to do with sharing our power with others, instead of joining the war for conquering of a discussion.

The process of Nonviolent Communication, proposed by Marshall Rosenberg PhD, contains four components. We must first keep the neutral facts top of mind so that we have the foundation of knowing what it is that we are talking about. The next step is to become aware and sensitive to how our body and mind feel about the interaction we are presently faced with. This entails all the cultural factors that we may be baring. The next step is to look into the Unversal human needs of the interacting people. Doing so will bring you closer to identifying win-win solutions for conflict. The final step in Nonviolent Communication is Making Requests and - for now - this is defined as hearing the other person, taking in the new facts and being aware that you do, still, have a choice, in how to respond.

EXEMPLAR is about human relations and acting as multipliers. It is therefore important to know and reflect on how, why, when and with whom these interactions happen, so that EXEMPLAR's Leaders have a basic understanding of this sort of phenomena, which will allow them to maximise their impact and the impact of the project itself by promoting the participation of the people around them.

Unit 3.2: Communication Skills in Groups and Teams

This unit will serve as a transition from the overview of effective communication to the skills that play a big role when it comes to the praxis. In other words, we move from the theory to the practice.

Effective Communication Skills

Becoming an Effective Communicator requires practice in the environment in which you wish to become better because putting theory to practice is one of the most powerful tools of learning. Communication theorists have identified a few skills which induce improvement in doing so, and these are explained in the following paragraphs (Beebe & Masterson, 2009; Frey, 1999; Johnson & Bechler, 1998).

Listening: People usually hear the other person speak but only think of their response while the other person speaks. Take the time to thoroughly listen to the speaker, then take a moment to think of your response.

Active listening is a skill, and just like any other skill, it can be improved with practice. The steps that you can take to improve your active listening skill (Imhof, 2003) are the following: (1) Stop and put your thoughts aside, (2) Look for nonverbal clues, (3) Listen to the other person speaking, (4) Ask appropriate questions (for more information, for feelings, for clarification, or for verification and then, (5) Paraphrase Content to give a chance for improving your understanding and close with (6) Paraphrase Feelings, to verify your conclusion about how the other person feels.

People select and attend to the messages they receive, and there are different listening styles according to which messages we choose to put our attention to. Some people are oriented towards people, while others towards action, or content, or even time (Weaver, Watson & Barker, 1996). Each of these listening styles can potentially contribute positively to a group discussion, as long as there is a relevant role for the person that satisfies the criteria.

Nonverbal Communication: In simple words, behaviour that does not rely on written or spoken words (Beebe & Masterson, 2009). Body language is of high importance in a dialogue. This includes body posture and movement, eye contact, facial

expression, the selection of a specific seat, the personal appearance, how people use time and the tone of their voice (Feldman & Rime, 1991). While listening, or while speaking, it is important to make an effort to have eye contact because it keeps you both focused on the conversation. Also, your hand gestures can give a boost to the message or hide it completely if they are too intense. Your tone of voice should be balanced as well to help your message come through.

Clear and concise speech: Choose your words carefully so that you don't need to speak for a long period. Make an effort not to monopolise the dialogue. Also, being concise will ensure that the listener does not tune out or get confused about what you are saying.

Friendliness: In all sorts of communication, make an effort to be nice and polite. It will help the receiver of the message relax and focus on your message, but also, encourage them to respond to your communication openly and with honesty.

Confidence: Maintain a nice balance between self-confidence and confidence in the other persons' ability to understand and respond to you. Another way to exude confidence is to make your statements straightforward and not in the form of questions. Use questions when seeking more information, not when trying to state something.

Open-Mindedness: Keep your mind open to whatever you might hear or see, so that you listen to others more efficiently. This will create an initial bond, a connection based on openness and honesty.

Respect: Convey respect to the other person and the ideas they carry. This can be done by using their name, your body language, active listening – as mentioned above – and avoiding distractions throughout the conversation.

Feedback: Rephrase what the other person is saying to ensure that the message they have sent to you has come across correct. Make your comments constructive and avoid assuming or judging in the process.

Empathy: Let the person you are talking with know that you understand them. In case you do not understand them, ask for clarifications and more questions; sometimes, the perspective of the other person is not easy to communicate.

Mode of Communication: Not all messages are effectively transmitted through face to face communication. Sometimes, an email or a phone call is more appropriate. Take the time to make this decision and let the other person know that you intend to reach out to them at a later time, through another mode of communication about the issue.

Nine core competencies of Small Group Communication

In this table, you will find information about the skills necessary for effective communicators. According to Spitzberg (1983), there are three elements in becoming a competent communicator, and these are Motivation, Knowledge and Skill. That is, you must be motivated enough, you must have the appropriate and relevant knowledge, and lastly, you must have the skill to act appropriately. We will now take a look at what this skill is comprised of.

The following table was adapted by Beebe and Masterson (2009, p. 26-28). Notice that there are two columns, one contains the behaviours exhibited by competent and effective

communicators, and the other contains the missing behaviours which ineffective communicators are missing out on.

	Effective Group Members	*Ineffective Group Members*
Problem-oriented Competencies	*Define the Problem:* • Ability to describe the problem thoroughly to be solved. • Identify the obstacles to overcome. *Analyze the Problem:* • Examine the causes. • Learn the history behind the problem. • Identify the symptoms. • Discern the significance of the problem.	**No definition of it.** **Inaccurate description of it.** **No clarification of the issues with which the group is confronted.** **Inappropriate analysis of the problem, or absolute absence of analysis.**
Solution-oriented Competencies	*Identify Criteria:* • Clear comments. • Identify the goal of the group. • Identify specific criteria. *Generate Solutions:* • Offer several solutions. • Identify potential strategies. *Evaluate Solutions:* • Evaluate the benefits and dangers. • Identify the most promising strategies • Make decisions for overcoming.	**Not certain about their role.** **No clarification of goal.** **No establishment of criteria.** **Identify no or few solutions.** **Make rush decisions.** **No consideration of options.** **No examination of the benefits and costs of a solution or a decision.**
Discussion-Management Competencies	*Maintain Task Focus:* • Stay on track. • Be mindful of goal. • Aim to complete the work. • Summarize. *Manage Interaction:* • Take turns in speaking. • Draw quiet members in. • Contributing fairly equally. • Encourage supportive dialogue.	**Lack of concentration.** **No commitment to a goal.** **No summary.** **Little effort to draw others in.** **No balanced interaction between group members** **Monopolize the conversation ≠ rarely contribute to it.**
Relational Competencies	*Manage Conflict:* • Seek to manage conflict • Focusing on information • Focusing on problems	**Focus on personalities.** **Insensitive to feelings of others.**

	• Focusing on evidence
	Maintain Climate:
	  • Look for support opportunities.
	  • Encourage other group members.
	  • Seek to improve the climate.
	  • Maintain positive relationships.
	  • Supportive Expressions.
		Criticism of others
		Non-supportive expressions.
		No use of Humour.
		Tensions remain tense.

Conclusion

The purpose of this module is to introduce to you the best practices in communicating effectively. Communication is the key to productivity when working in groups or teams. Aim to practice applying the knowledge you have gained in your everyday and professional situations so that you get the most out of this self-directed learning module. Combine and experiment with your style of communication, and you will see how much your communication skills can improve with effort. This module is fit for the EXEMPLAR Leaders as their role is crucial in mediating group communications in adverse and culturally diverse situations.

The fact that integration leaders need to be amidst the developmental phases of small groups of people puts them in a role in which they will get many opportunities to mediate conversations and teach effective communication by example. Therefore, it is a worthwhile lesson, to apply active listening and self-monitoring strategies because these are skills that will prove to be paramount in the mediation of effective communication in small groups with people who may or may not be knowledgeable regarding these matters and who, possibly have not had similar opportunities for gaining experience in putting theory to praxis.

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