



CAR Master training

CONTENT UNIT 6

PROFESSIONAL COMMUNICATION



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6 Professional communication

6.1 The introduction

The topic

Whether in family life, at work or among friends, communication is omnipresent. Almost all interpersonal interactions are based on communication. But what seems so self-evident is not always so simple. Far too quickly, our counterpart can interpret our communication intention quite differently from what we meant, and we are already faced with a communicative misunderstanding. To avoid or solve these, the following learning unit will provide you with strategies.

After completing this unit, you will have the following knowledge:

- You understand how communication processes are structured.
- You can explain how communication works according to the sender-receiver model.
- You know possible reasons for communicative misunderstandings.
- You can explain which goals can be pursued with questioning techniques.
- You can explain when a conflict exists and what the basic characteristics are.
- You can name the basic characteristics of an escalation.
- You know the basic patterns of conflict resolution.
- You know potential subjects of dispute which can further lead to conflicts.
- You know tools for difficult communication situations.
- You can explain possible meeting objectives.
- You know the rules of meeting preparation.

6.2 Theories of communication

"You cannot not communicate", the Austrian communication scientist Paul Watzlawick already stated. "But we don't talk non-stop," you may be thinking now. That's true because communication involves much more than just talking. Just think of body language, our facial expressions, or the movement of our hands. That, too, is communication. We can state:

Definition

Communication = the **exchange of information**. This information can consist of spoken words, but also of pictures, texts or the gestures and facial expressions of our body.

We will now take a detailed look at how communication works, what needs to be considered and how a communication process is structured.

As we have established, communication is an exchange and sharing of information. Of course, to share something, there need to be at least two people involved in the communication process. These two people are called the sender and the receiver. For communication to work, different steps need to be gone through.

Let us now look at the individual steps of the communication process:



Let's take a closer look at the communication process with a concrete example:

Example

1. **Intention:** You want to buy 2 parking sensors at the car shop.
2. **Translate:** You look for suitable words for this intention.
3. **Send:** Good morning, I would like 2 parking sensors.
4. **Transmit:** The counterpart at the counter hears the spoken words as long as the communication is not disturbed. (E.g., by loud noises).
5. **Receiving:** The counterpart perceives the spoken words.
6. **Translating:** The words heard are translated.
7. **Understanding:** The counterpart understands that you would like 2 parking sensors and must act.
8. **Reaction:** The counterpart answers: "Yes, of course, coming right up."

Note

In **communication, there is no beginning and no end**, but it always **takes place in a circle**. Because every situation is embedded between preceding and following communication situations.

Let us now take a look at the role of the sender and receiver. This is particularly clear in Shannon and Weaver's **sender-receiver model**. It was developed in 1949 and is still the basis for many other communication models today. As the name suggests, this model focuses on the sending and receiving person. Content and its meaning are not relevant to this model.

In the sender-receiver model, the first step is for the sender to encode a message, i.e., make it verbal, and then pass it on as a signal to the receiver. This forwarding takes place via a transmission channel, for example, the air or the internet. In the process, various types of interference can occur that can distort the message or even prevent transmission. For example, loud music during a conversation can be a source of interference. In a further step, the message is then decoded and interpreted by the receiving person once it has arrived. For communication to be successful, the sending and receiving person must use the same code for the message so that the message is the same after encoding and decoding. If this is not the case, misunderstandings and communication problems easily occur.

Let us now look at the implementation of the sender-receiver model with a concrete example:

Example

You want to write an e-mail to someone. You, as the sender, compose the e-mail and then press "send". As soon as you have done this, your e-mail is encoded by the software and sent via the transmission channel (the Internet) to the e-mail provider (e.g., Gmail or GMX). If there are no technical faults during the transmission, the receiving person can retrieve the e-mail in his or her e-mail programme. After decoding by the software, the software can now read the e-mail. The content of the e-mail plays no role in this model.

Communication, and interpersonal communication, is, therefore, a very complex process that is influenced by numerous internal and external factors. All these factors can affect communication, distort the content and, in the worst case, lead to misunderstandings. So, what are these factors that influence a conversation?

The following is an overview of the most common causes that can lead to a communicative misunderstanding and strategies to help you prevent misunderstandings.

Cause	Description	Strategy
Indirect communication	Messages are often communicated indirectly out of politeness. The other person must therefore actually read between the lines and naturally has different ways of interpreting a message. The sentence: "The traffic light is green!" could, on a factual level, simply contain information about the colour of the traffic light. Interpreted differently, however, the person sending the message could also want to encourage people to drive off.	Try to communicate clearly, thus reducing the chance that the message will be misinterpreted. It can also be helpful to repeat or emphasize the most important information, for example by raising your voice at important points, emphasizing keywords or underlining them with appropriate gestures and facial expressions.
Written communication	As practical as e-mails or WhatsApp messages are, they are also prone to communicative misunderstandings. The reason for this is the lack of important non-verbal elements, such as gestures, facial expressions, or tone of voice, which help us to understand how the message is meant in personal communication.	Therefore, try to communicate as clearly and concisely as possible, especially in written communication, and avoid irony or ambiguity. The use of emojis can (but does not have to) be helpful.
Subjective perspective	Each person brings to a conversation certain prior experience that help to interpret what is heard or perceived. We compare what we hear with what we know from our experience. So, in	So always try to reflect your perspective in communication. Also, pay attention to the body language of your counterpart. Pay particular attention

	a conversation, we can only guess what our counterpart might mean and react depending on how we interpret what is said.	to whether the body language matches the words or deviates from them. Ask your counterpart if there are any discrepancies.
Lack of Listening	Simple but often the cause of misunderstandings is a lack of listening because active listening also has to be learned. If we are distracted or unfocused, we often miss important information in communication and misinterpret it.	So, turn off distracting factors such as the mobile phone, music or notification sounds during communication and consciously concentrate on the message.

Now that you have learned tips to avoid misunderstandings in communication, let's look at another strategy for successful communication. And that is **targeted questioning techniques**. There is hardly any other communication technique that opens up as many possibilities as the questioning technique. After all, questions are one of the most important components of any conversation.

Let's take a closer look at the possibilities that questioning techniques offer us:

- **Steering conversations.** With the right questions, you can address certain topics, move on to a new topic and thus steer the direction of the conversation.
- **Show interest:** If you regularly ask your counterpart questions during the conversation.
If you regularly ask your counterpart questions during the conversation, you show that you are interested in the other person and the topic of the conversation.
- **Receive or pass on information:** With targeted questions, you obtain information from your counterpart that might otherwise have remained hidden from you.
- **Manipulate:** Through questioning techniques, you can specifically influence your counterpart and steer them in the desired direction.
- **Identify problems:** Questioning techniques also open up the possibility for you to look at issues from different perspectives and thereby find solutions.
- **Avoid misunderstandings:** Misunderstandings and conflicts can also be avoided or clarified through targeted questioning or enquiries in case of ambiguities.
- **Reflect perspectives:** Questioning techniques can also bring about a change of perspective so that previously different perspectives are suddenly compatible.
- **Silencing the counterpart:** Questioning techniques can also be used when you want to banish your counterpart from the communication process.

You now know different strategies for successful communication, avoiding misunderstandings and guiding the communication processes. If a conflict does arise, you should be prepared for it. Let's first take a look at what the typical characteristics of a conflict are, how you can recognize potential subjects of dispute and, of course, above all, how you can resolve conflicts professionally.

6.3 Conflict management

We encounter conflicts everywhere. Be it at the playground, in a partnership, at work or in society. But conflicts are not automatically bad, on the contrary: they can even be extremely relevant and bring about important changes. The golden rule here is the right way to deal with conflicts.

Before we look at how we can deal with and resolve conflicts constructively, we want to find out what conflicts are.

Definition

Conflict is defined as a **situation of tension between two or more parties** (individuals, organizations, groups, etc.) whose interests and goals are perceived as mutually incompatible.

A conflict is thus typically characterized by the following features:

- There is an interaction between the parties
- It is sufficient if only one party perceives the interests as incompatible
- Incompatibility can also include thinking, perceiving, and imagining,
- At least one of the parties blames the other party for the conflict. The blame is thus placed on the other parties and not on oneself.

Sometimes, however, it does not remain a mere conflict. Because any conflict can escalate. This happens especially when the conflicting parties no longer remain on the factual level but move to the relational level. In doing so, the conflict parties try to demonstrate their superiority and suppress the other party. In the worst case, they may even resort to violence to assert their position. This moving away from the original conflict topic and hardening of the conflict is called **escalation**.

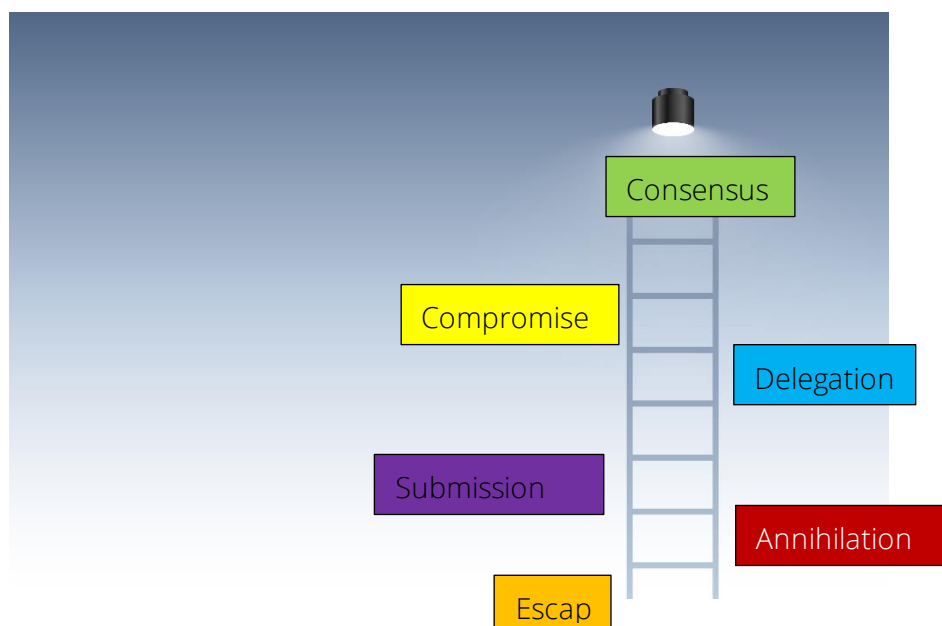
You can recognize whether it is a conflict or already an escalation by the following **characteristics** (if these are true, it is called an **escalation**):

- **Hardening:** At the beginning of the conflict, the conflict parties try to respond to the other party. This constructive attitude is no longer adopted in an escalation.

- **Determination:** The focus is on negative behaviour in all aspects that increase in the course of the escalation levels.
- **Striving for superiority:** Each party to the conflict tries to present its superiority and at the same time humiliate the other party.
- **Use of sharper means:** The focus is no longer on intellectual and verbal elements, but on pure actions.
- **Loss of norms and rules:** Rules and norms are no longer followed.
- **Demarcation:** The parties to the conflict are convinced that the conflict can only be resolved without the other party.
- **Irreversibility:** The fundamental goal is the destruction of the opponent. There is no turning back, i.e., no prospect of a peaceful solution.

Of course, we want to avoid all this. And indeed, in a conflict, there does not always have to be a winning and a losing party. Conflicts can also be resolved constructively. To do this, we need to know that the process of conflict resolution usually follows a certain pattern that is built up in stages. These basic patterns represent the different conflict resolution strategies that we use, often unconsciously, to resolve conflicts. The higher one climbs up the conflict resolution levels, the greater the chance for conflict resolution.

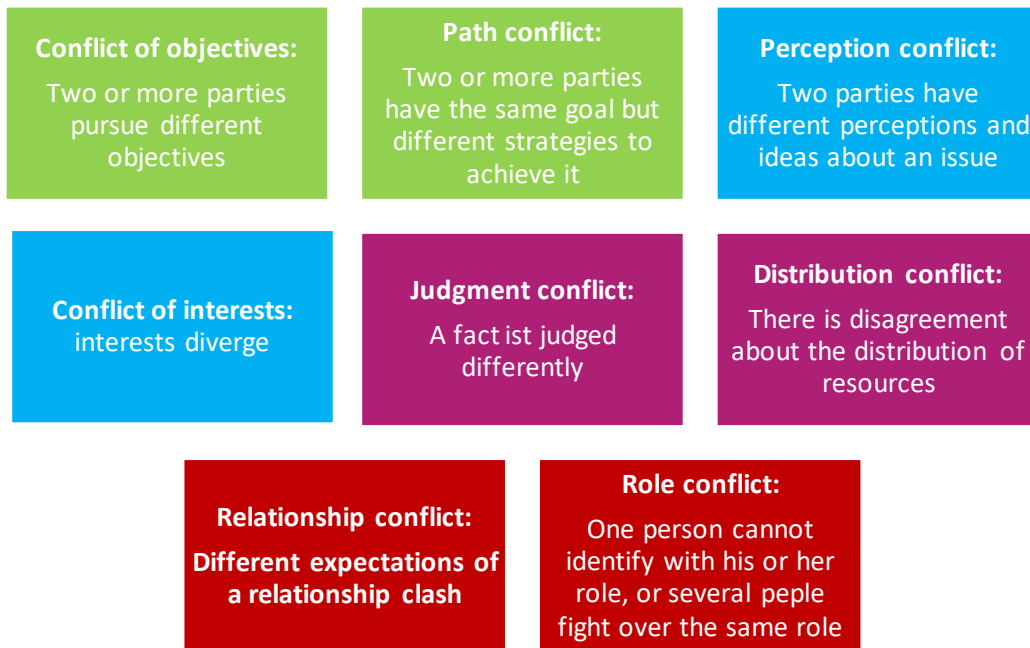
Let's take a closer look at these stages:



- The first stage is **escaping** and is usually characterized by avoidance or denial of conflicts. However, conflicts are not solved in this way, but only repressed.
- Next comes the stage of **annihilation**. This occurs when the conflict cannot be resolved by flight. We put ourselves in a fighting position to destroy our counterparts verbally or physically. This can involve social exclusion, mobbing, or in extreme cases even murder. This may lead to a quick and final victory for one party, but it also leaves no room for further development and change.
- If one decides against destroying the opponent, this usually results in the **submission of** one party. The weaker party thus realizes that the prospect of victory is very unlikely and subordinates itself to the other party, for example by taking over the opposite position, giving in, or even through bribery and intrigue. Here, too, we cannot yet speak of constructive conflict resolution.
- In the fourth stage, an attempt is made to cooperate with the other party using **delegation**. This means that a third authority, which has nothing to do with the conflict, decides on the conflict. This third instance is, for example, a certain authority, a commission, or the court, but also mediation. Here, conflicts can be resolved in a way that preserves objectivity and objectivity. However, the parties are deprived of their conflict and management competence and must accept the outside authority.
- The penultimate stage is that of **compromise**. Compromise means that an agreement can take place in certain sub-areas. This means that the goal of agreement can be achieved and the conflict parties act on their responsibility. At the same time, however, this means that no agreement has yet been reached in the remaining areas.
- If it is recognized that all previous conflict resolution strategies (flight, submission etc.) are not worthwhile, a **consensus** can be sought. The conflict parties work towards a common solution with which all parties are satisfied. Here, for the first time, a complete and long-term management of the conflict that takes into account the interests of all parties succeed. However, this strategy is of course very time-consuming.

It doesn't matter whether children are fighting over their toys, you are negotiating a salary increase with the management, you feel unappreciated by your team or you inherit less from your grandmother than your siblings. All these situations involve different **subjects of dispute**.

These subjects of dispute can be assigned to different types of conflicts:



So, there are countless reasons for the emergence of a conflict and thus also numerous different types of conflicts.

In addition, difficult communication situations can also lead to conflicts, as misunderstandings can easily arise that have conflict potential. Since we all find ourselves again and again in situations where we find it difficult to conduct a conversation, we now want to work out some **strategies that will help** you to deal with **difficult communication situations**.

Tools for difficult communication situations:

Strategy	Implementation
Active listening	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Give your counterpart your full attention and show this also with your body language (nodding, eye contact, facing posture) - Ask questions and thus show interest. - Send positive verbal signals ("Yes", "Mmh") - Avoid doing other things during communication (reading messages etc.)
Recognise punctuation	Be aware that different people interpret reality differently and be open to new perspectives and starting points.

Recognising vicious circles	You can recognize a vicious circle when you notice that an argument is moving in circles and you do not agree with your counterpart. Instead, the situation becomes more and more acute.
Breaking vicious circles	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Concentrate on the positive aspects of your counterpart - Behave accordingly and send positive verbal and non-verbal signals - Your counterpart will also be in a more positive mood and joint solutions can be sought.
Critically question interpretations	Question your interpretations and consider other possible interpretations.
Formulate I-messages	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Formulate your statements as neutrally as possible - Avoid accusations - Do not try to change your counterpart - Formulate clearly what you are about - Take responsibility
Conduct meta-communication	Leave the actual communication situation and look at it from an outside perspective. Look over your shoulder, so to speak, and analyse the situation. It can also be helpful to get help from coaches or mediators.

Example

You are discussing the causes of a vehicle symptom with your production team. They have spent much time troubleshooting and have not been successful in the automotive diagnostics. Apparently, it seems that there are different ideas, and connected with this, definitions of problem which affects the next steps in solving the issue. The perception of the condition depends not only on the knowledge of the vehicle, its parts and operation, but also on the experience in the work and the experience with that specific automobile model. In this case the tools for difficult communication situations will come in handy, and the team manager monitoring the outcomes of the conversations taking place on the production floor.

6.4 Effective team meeting

Lastly, we would like to address the question of how you can plan professional meetings and meetings and set the objectives of the meeting.

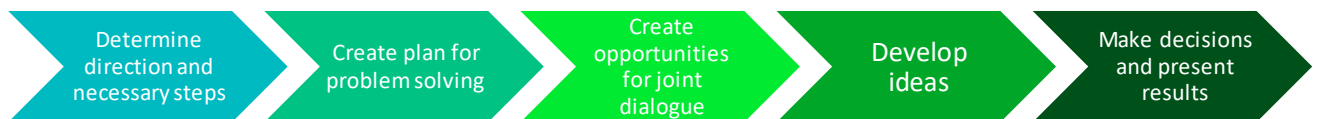
You're probably all familiar with them: the never-ending conferences at work where you're just waiting for them to be over again. But it doesn't have to be like that. If you keep a few things in mind, a meeting can be much more exciting and efficient.



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When planning or conducting a meeting, rule number one is always to set the meeting objectives. So, clarify the objectives of the meeting before you start.

Possible **goals of a meeting** can be:



Note

The basic rule is to formulate the goals as precisely as possible and to choose the goals in such a way that they are achievable within the framework of the meeting.

Once you have set concrete goals and decided to hold a meeting, it is time to plan the meeting so that everything goes well. Let's take a detailed look at the individual steps in the **planning phase**:

- Hire a professional to run the meeting if you do not do it yourself.
- Set a date that is convenient for as many participants as possible.

- Determine the beginning and the end of the meeting. This prevents meetings from seeming endless and allows you to concentrate on the essentials.
- Organize a suitable location that offers sufficient space.
- Plan sufficient breaks, especially for longer meetings, to maintain the participants' concentration and to create space for exchange.
- Make sure the agenda (date, duration, location, topic/objectives, and chair of the meeting) is announced in time. This will allow participants to prepare for the meeting and get information in advance.
- Organize the topics according to priority and into the areas of information, discussion and decision. This gives the meeting a structure to follow from the beginning and ensures that the most relevant points are discussed right at the start.

You see, planning is sometimes half the battle. So already follow these tips when planning and you will see how efficient and productive the meeting will suddenly be.

Example

When we are considering the automotive industry, teamworking in different plants will be organized in different ways. This not only depends on the size of the company, but also the managerial practices following agreements on internal procedures. Some teams meet on a regular basis, others meet from time to time when there is an issue or problem to solve, for the organization of a new process or upon an external visitation, among others. Workers on a traditional assembly line are subdivided into teams, therefore they will be participating in meetings with their master workman. We are now speaking about the self-organization of teams, which is a recognized good practice among master workman who monitor the work and evaluate their teams supporting their semi-autonomy towards the tasks at the workplace they are assigned to. This leads to increased appreciation, as well as their motivation and commitment to the job.

What do you think about these two practices?

Opel Werk Eisenach manufacturing company organizes monthly meetings outside regular working hours paid as overtime. Topics can be proposed by employees.

Vauxhall Luton Factory, car manufacturer, organizes team meetings that last below half an hour and when the need arises. On the other hand, daily meetings for the specialists and focus on the Kaizen concept which is their team responsibility.

6.5 The summary

Save knowledge

"So, we cannot not communicate", we have established with the help of Paul Watzlawick and now know about the importance of communication.

You have seen in the learning unit how a communication process is designed and know that the intention of the receiving and sending person must match as much as possible for communication to be successful. However, it can happen too easily that communication does not work, and misunderstandings arise. This can be caused, among other things, by too indirect communication, a subjective perspective, but also by a lack of listening. To avoid misunderstandings, you have various tools at your disposal after working through the learning unit. Specific questioning techniques can also be helpful for successful communication.

Furthermore, you now know that like communication, conflicts are also omnipresent and involve different subjects of dispute. So, there are many different types, such as role conflicts, goal conflicts or path conflicts. However, we have found that conflicts are not always negative, but offer important opportunities for development. The right way of dealing with conflicts is central. Because if conflicts are not dealt with, they harden and in the worst case escalate. You are now familiar with the classic step-by-step conflict resolution process that leads from flight, destruction, submission, and delegation to compromise and consensus and know-how conflicts can be resolved.

Finally, you have learnt about the possible goals of an effective team meeting and can now plan a meeting professionally so that in practice it is no longer long-winded and boring for the participants, but productive, efficient, and exciting.

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