

## **EFFECTIVE VERBAL COMMUNICATION**

### **Opening Communication**

**In many interpersonal encounters, the first impressions have a significant impact on the success of further communication.**

Everyone has expectations and norms as to how initial meetings should proceed and people tend to behave according to these expectations. If these expectations are mismatched, communication will not be effective or run smoothly, and some form of **negotiation** will be needed if relations are to continue.

At a first meeting, formalities and appropriate greetings are usually expected. A friendly disposition and smiling face are much more likely to encourage communication than a blank face, inattention or disinterested reception.

### **Reinforcement**

**The use of encouraging words alongside non-verbal gestures are more likely to reinforce openness in others.**

The use of encouragement and positive reinforcement can:

- Encourage others to participate in discussion (particularly in group work).
- Signify interest in what other people have to say.
- Pave the way for development and/or maintenance of a relationship.
- Allay fears and give reassurance.
- Show warmth and openness.
- Reduce shyness or nervousness in ourselves and others.

### **Effective Listening (see its section in the learning unit)**

### **Questioning**

**Effective questioning is an essential skill. Questioning can be used to:**

- Obtain information.
- Start a conversation.
- Test understanding.
- Draw someone into a conversation.
- Show interest in a person.
- Seek support or agreement.

**Closed questions** tend to seek only a one or two word answer (often simply 'yes' or 'no') and, in doing so, limit the scope of the response. For examples, "*Did you travel by car today?*" These types of question mean control of the communication is maintained by the questioner yet this is often not the desired outcome when trying to encourage verbal communication. Nevertheless, closed questions can be useful for focusing discussion and obtaining clear, concise answers when needed.

**Open questions** broaden the scope for response since they demand further discussion and elaboration. For example, "*What was the traffic like this morning?*" Open questions will take longer to answer, but they do give the other person far more scope for self-expression and encourage involvement in the conversation.

## **Reflecting and Clarifying**

**Reflecting is the process of feeding-back to another person your understanding of what has been said.**

Reflecting often involves paraphrasing the message communicated to you by the speaker in your own words, capturing the essence of the facts and feelings expressed, and communicating your understanding back to the speaker. It is a useful skill because:

- You can check that you have understood the message clearly.
- The speaker gets feedback as to how the message is received.
- It shows interest in, and respect for, what the other person has to say.
- You are demonstrating that you are considering the other person's viewpoint.

## **Summarising**

A summary is an overview of the main points or issues raised. Summarising can also serve the same purpose as 'reflecting'. However, summarising allows both parties to review and agree the communication exchanged between them up to that point in time. When used effectively, summaries may also serve as a guide to the next steps forward.

## **Closing Communication**

**The way a communication is closed or ended will, at least in part, determine the way a conversation is remembered.**

A range of subtle, or sometimes not so subtle, signals are used to end an interaction. For example, some people may avoid eye contact. This kind of non-verbal actions indicate to the other person that the initiator wishes to end the communication.

The closure of an interaction is a good time to make any future arrangements. Last, but not least, this time will no doubt be accompanied by a number of socially acceptable parting gestures.