



S-420 Unit 4: Communication

Summary:

To help students understand the importance of creating a positive team climate and the ways that such a climate can enhance communication and enable a common operating picture.

Objectives:

Students will be able to:

- Describe how a positive team climate can establish the foundation for effective communication and ensure a common operating picture.
- Demonstrate communication strategies (team and personal) that promote a common operating picture.

Unit at a Glance:

Topics	Method	Duration
How are Team Climate, Communication, and Common Operating Picture Related?	Presentation	5 Minutes
Communication Diagram	Exercise	15 Minutes
Strategies to Enhance Team Communication	Presentation	10 Minutes
Strategies to Enhance Personal Communication	Presentation	10 Minutes
Communication in High Stress Environments	Presentation	10 Minutes
Communication Barriers	Exercise	10 Minutes
Total Unit Duration		1 Hour

Materials:

- Flip chart, paper, markers-one per group.
- Handout:
 - HO_04_Descriptive_Design.
- Ability to display images and video on large screen.
- White board or easel access for group breakout.

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- Review unit objectives.

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Team Climate Affects Communication

A positive team climate (behaviors, attitudes, and feelings that characterize the team) is the foundation for effective communication.

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- A leader wants to create a positive team environment because team members have to feel comfortable enough to ask questions, to feel safe to express a different opinion, and to confront other team members. Otherwise, team members may not share as much information.

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Effective Communication

Communication Affects the Common Operating Picture

Common: All involved
Operating: Actual, real-time
Picture: Single vision

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- Effective communication is the foundation for the team having a common operating picture.
- When everyone on the team is on the same page or functioning from the same vision, the team has a common operating picture.
- When a team does not have a common operating picture, communication breakdowns are often the cause.

Discussion

- Refer to the Command vs. Team Structure poster and ask students:
 - How does communication differ between command structure and team structure? Discuss how communication flows in a command structure compared to a team structure.
 - If you remove any of those lines, who is missing what information? How does that affect the common operating picture?

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Communication Diagram Activity

1. On a flipchart, draw 8 circles arranged in a circular pattern. Inside each circle, write the following position acronyms: ICT2, SOF2, OSC2, PSC2, LSC2, FSC2, PIO2, and LOFR.
2. Draw an arrow from one circle (position) to another circle (position) and write on that arrow one reason why the originating position would need to communicate with the other position. Continue to draw and label arrows from the first circle to all of the other circles.
3. Complete the arrows and labeling for all 8 circles.

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Exercise: Communication Diagram

Purpose: To demonstrate the inter-connectedness of the various functional areas of an IMT and the importance of effective communication.

- Have each team create an IMT communication diagram.
- Facilitates a class discussion about what the students learned, for example:
 - There is a tremendous amount of intra-team communication.
 - There is ongoing, continuous communication within the team.
 - The actions of one functional area impacts all the functional areas.
 - A breakdown in one communication can impact multiple areas.
 - Define and discuss “closing loops.” Follow up and closing loops is important.

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Strategies to Enhance Team Communication

- Share Leader's Intent, *Incident Response Pocket Guide*, (IRPG), PMS 431.
- Apply the Five Communication Responsibilities found in the IRPG.
- Define team culture.
- Conduct effective meetings, briefings, and debriefings.
- Post objectives to help keep people in the team focused.
- Use checklists and close loops.
- Take team tactical pauses.

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- The wildland fire community already has a powerful tool to enhance team communication, the three elements of leader's intent (task, purpose, and end-state).
- "Purpose" is a vital part of leader's intent. It is the "why" – if people know the why it allows them to alter the tools and techniques as long as they get to the end state. It is also the emotional connection and it gets peoples' attention.
- A leader's ability to accurately convey their intent will determine the success of the team.
- The Five Communication Responsibilities is another existing tool that enhances team communication.
 - Brief others as needed.
 - Debrief your actions.
 - Communicate hazards to others.
 - Acknowledge messages.
 - Ask if you do not know.
- Define team culture (team norms, ground rules, standard-operating procedures and so on) to help team members know the common framework and requirements.
- Conduct effective meetings (purpose, agenda, audience, timely, and so on); briefings and debriefings. [These topics are discussed in more detail later in the course.]
- Define and discuss tactical pauses.

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Personal Communication

Communication has three parts:

- The message
- The sender
- The receiver

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- Strategies to enhance personal communication.
- Both the sender and the receiver have responsibilities and should develop the skills necessary to minimize communication breakdowns.

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Sender's Responsibilities

- Be aware of personal biases and assumptions.
- Use common terminology.
- Verify message was received.
- Communicate in a timely manner.
- Use appropriate mode of communication.

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- For the sender and the receiver, assumptions are a great barrier to communication.

Question: What are common assumptions we make when communicating?

Answer: The message was clear, message was received, and the receiver was ready for the message.

Question: What are examples of ways to deal with assumptions?

Answer: Verify that the message was heard and understood accurately.

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Receiver's Responsibilities

- Be aware of personal biases and assumptions.
- Acknowledge communication.
- Respond to communication.
- Ask clarifying questions.
- Listen actively.

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- Acknowledge communication was received.
 - For example, saying 'copy' or 'roger' may indicate message was received but does not indicate that message was understood. Receivers should repeat or paraphrase the message to demonstrate that it was received and to show how the receiver understood it.
- Listen actively.
 - Are you listening or just waiting to talk? Make sure you are emotionally ready to listen and listen with a purpose. Stop the monologue in your head. Let people finish before you formulate a response.

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Other Communication Skills

- Body language.
- Pace, rate, tone, and inflection .
- Use feedback appropriately.
- Check in with people verbally; don't always wait for them to check in with you.
- Taking a tactical pause, using checklists, and closing loops are helpful for both team and personal communication.

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- Pay attention to body language (non-verbal communication). What message are you sending to others with your body language?
 - Pay attention to:
 - Pace (how fast the information is given),
 - Rate (how much information is given in a specific period), and
 - Tone and inflection of the delivery (use these to make or accentuate a point).
- Use feedback appropriately. Feedback can be motivational and instructional and can reinforce performance.

Question: What are some guidelines when giving feedback?

Answer: Performance based not person-based, limit negative feedback, use common language.

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High Stress Environments

- Communication becomes more complicated and more important.
- Focus on making the message clear and concise. Repeat as necessary.

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Question: What happens to the body in a high stress environment and how does this affect a person's ability to communicate?

Answer: Stressful environment takes more energy and effort; understanding and remembering information is more difficult.

- Tie this discussion back to the Team Identity exercise in Unit 2. For example, relate stress and communication to the Storming and Forming phases.

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Communication Barriers Activity

1. Complete the activity in your team.
2. One member of the team will be the sender and the rest of the team will be the receivers. The sender and the receivers should sit so they *do not* look at each other.
3. Using the Descriptive Design handout, the *sender* needs to verbally describe the design and give instructions to the receivers on how to draw the design.
4. Receivers cannot use any form of communication during this activity – no talking, signals, or sounds.

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Exercise: Communication Barriers (10 minutes)

Purpose: For the students to experience communicating without visual contact (which often happens on wildland fires). It demonstrates how one message can be received in several different ways. The instructor will facilitate a short discussion on the communication barriers the students experienced.

- Students will complete the activity in their small groups (team).
- Assign one member of the team to be the sender and the rest of the team will be the receivers. The sender and the receivers should sit so they do not look at each other.
- Distribute the handout HO_04_Descriptive_Design to the sender.
- Using the Descriptive Design handout, the sender needs to verbally describe the design and give instructions to the receivers on how to draw the design.
- Provide the receivers with a pencil, a piece of paper and some sort of a writing surface (table or notebook). The receivers cannot use any form of communication during this activity – no talking, signals, or sounds.
- Give the sender 5 minutes to communicate to the receivers how to draw a design and for the receivers to recreate the design as accurately as possible (size, shape, location).
- Once the sender is done, the receivers can turn around and discuss what happened.
- Facilitate a classroom discussion about the teams' experience with the activity.

Discussion

- What communication barriers did you experience?
 - One-way communication.
 - No visual.
 - No way to verify that message was received.

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- Could not ask questions.
- Noise and distractions.
- What communication techniques were helpful?
 - Giving an overview of the design.
 - Starting with a common reference point.
 - Pace of delivery.
 - Repeating the message.
- Tie the discussion back to concepts taught earlier, for example:
 - What did you notice about pace, rate, or tone of delivery?
 - How do these barriers affect the common operating picture?
- Emphasize that it is not enough to identify the barriers (as the barriers are just distractions); that the important job is to figure out how to deal with the barriers and find solutions.

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Objectives

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- Review unit objectives.