



University of Dundee

Communication Exercise

Leverhulme Research Centre for Forensic Science at the University of Dundee; Alda Center for Communicating Science at Stony Brook University

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Communication Exercise: Finding Commonality with Multiple Audiences

Created by the Leverhulme
Research Centre for Forensic
Science at the University of
Dundee and the Alda Center for
Communicating Science at
Stony Brook University

investigate



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What is the purpose of this exercise?

This exercise asks participants to explore the multiple ways they define themselves. When we speak, especially in formal or professional settings, we have a tendency to only draw on one of the many answers we have to “Who am I?” – a forensic scientist.

In order to effectively connect with a different audience as well as with multiple audiences at once, we must consider tapping into the different “whos” we each are. Our audience is made up of people who also possess multiple identities. Often time we choose to censor certain of our own “whos” in certain contexts, and we should examine why this is.

The accessing of multiple identities may allow for additional empathy, analogies, or energy to emerge.

You can do this exercise in pairs, so it can be used for larger groups.

The estimated time taken for the exercise is 20-30 minutes including a debrief.

Finding Commonality with Multiple Audiences

Materials Needed

None

Space needed

A room where people can easily work in pairs.

Overview

This exercise is in three parts. Participants work in pairs, and each must take turns making a continuous chain of statements beginning with “I am...” for 1 minute. Then we will discuss some commonalities and they will do additional rounds beginning “Some people think I am...” and “I am____, but I am not____.” Then everyone will debrief on how these exercises made them feel and what they learned about commonality and communication.

The exercise

Participants will work in pairs. For one minute each, participants tell their partner ‘who’ they are with a very simple statement: I am _____. They should list as many facets of themselves as possible – such as *I am a sister, I am an introvert, I am creative, I am an athlete, I am a brunette*, etc. Facilitator should keep time and tell them to switch roles after about 1 minute. Partners, just listen.

Debrief about whether they found “whos” in common with their partner, whether they self-censored any whos and why, whether they had trouble filling a whole minute and why.

Participants should return to their partners and repeat the exercise using the phrase: Some people think I am____. Then the group will debrief again about whether this was easier/harder, why that might be and what kind of processing or self-awareness is at play in this round. Is imagining yourself as others see you difficult? Is it something you do often?

Participants should return to their partners and repeat the exercise using the phrase: I am____, but I am not____. Then the group will debrief again about whether this was easier/harder, why that might be and what kind of processing or self-awareness is at play in this round. Did you come up with the affirmative (I am) or the negation (I am not) first and fill in the other? Why might it be easier/harder for you to identify in opposition to something rather than assertively?

What did you learn?

1. People have a natural tendency to be drawn to those we perceive as similar to ourselves (it's called *Affinity Bias*). If we relate to someone, we like them, listen to them and trust them more. If we only see people as one thing and that thing is different than ourselves, we may make it harder for us to 'naturally' (easily, spontaneously) relate to them, i.e., communicate. This is called *Social Identity Theory*.
2. A relationship is a two-way street – your identity is not just who you are alone but who you are to others and who they are to you.
3. Identity in and out of the workplace are not as separate as we sometimes act like they are. We are one whole person, and we bring our whole selves to work.
4. There is likely more common ground with any audience than you think – use this to help you connect, to shape your language and analogies.

Some research and further reading on this topic

Scott, C. R. (2007). Communication and social identity theory: Existing and potential connections in organizational identification research. *Communication studies*, 58(2), 123-138.

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Horton, W. S., & Keysar, B. (1996). When do speakers take into account common ground?. *Cognition*, 59(1), 91-117.

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