

**A sample activity from the
Fenman trainer's resource:**

Communication Skills

Written by Sarah Cook

Thank you for downloading this sample activity. You are welcome to use this material in your courses.

This sample activity is just one of 22 contained in the trainer's activity pack '*Communication Skills*', published by Fenman. Details of the other activities are given at the end of this document.

Communication Skills

Contents:

- Introduction
- Activity 2: Networking
- Full contents listing: 22 activities
- About this resource

Introduction:

No more last-minute searches for a listening skills activity that you know will work. Forget late nights preparing exercises on assertiveness. Impress colleagues by delivering up-to-date training on the use of email in your organisation.

With *Communication Skills*, you've got all the essential skills of communication covered – including much-needed skills development for the modern channels of communication that are becoming part of everyday working life.

Whether you are seeking ideas to boost your existing communication skills sessions, or building a new programme from scratch, this is your ready-to-run goldmine of 22 communication training activities.

Contact details:

Fenman Ltd, Clive House, The Business Park
Ely. Cambridgeshire, CB7 4 EH

Tel: 01353 665533, Fax: 01353 663644, Email: service@fenman.co.uk

Activity 2

Networking

Purpose

To encourage participants to identify ways of creating and growing informal communication networks.

FOR PREVIEW ONLY

Activity 2

Networking

2

Introduction

Communication in organisations runs via two networks: formal and informal, sometimes called the skeleton and the nervous system. Whatever role people have within an organisation, there are great benefits in creating and growing informal networks in the business environment, both within and outside the organisation. This activity allows participants to explore ways of doing this.

Purpose

To encourage participants to identify ways of creating and growing informal communication networks.

Application

This activity can be used as a stand-alone training session or as part of a workshop on communication skills, coaching and mentoring and team-building skills.

What happens

You introduce the session and ask participants to discuss what a network is and the benefits in creating networks both inside and outside the organisation. Next, participants undertake an exercise to help them establish their current and potential networking partners. They then discuss how the best networking partners act and ways of building future networking opportunities.

Time

Overall time required: 1 hour 20 minutes

- What is a network?: 15 minutes
- Network partners – exercise: 20 minutes
- Finding the connections: 15 minutes
- How the best network partners act: 10 minutes
- Building network opportunities: 15 minutes
- Review: 5 minutes

Materials & resources

- 2 OHT masters:
 - 2.1 *Informal networks*
 - 2.2 *Developing strong informal networks*
- 2 Handout masters:
 - 2.3 *Finding the connections*
 - 2.4 *Developing informal networks*

- Overhead projector and screen
- Flipchart and stand or whiteboard
- Marker pens for trainer
- Paper and pens for participants
- Several hard-boiled eggs
- A soft ball
- Space for small-group work

Recommended group size

Eight to twelve people.

How do I do it?

WHAT IS A NETWORK?

Introduce the session. Explain that in business today there are two types of networks. The first are those formal networks created by management which chart the upwards, downwards and horizontal communication that takes place in an organisation. These are sometimes called the skeleton of the organisation. The second are informal communication networks. These are the patterns of interactions which take place within and across organisations based on shared personal or career interests, friendship and close physical proximity between people. For example, you may cultivate an informal network with a person from another department you meet regularly at the photocopier, the friend who works in a similar organisation, the acquaintance you meet at a conference forum. These are known as the nervous system of the organisation.

Point out that informal networks work in very different ways to formal ones. Ask participants if they can come up with examples of how they differ. Take feedback from the group and write this on a flipchart. Here are some possible examples:

- Information often travels faster via informal than formal networks.
- Informal networks can confirm or contradict official messages.
- Informal networks can help you get round things, short-circuit the system or 'pull strings'.
- Informal networks can provide you with a more complete picture of a situation.
- Informal networks can sometimes be more dependable than formal networks.



This OHT summarises these points and illustrates how informal networking can work between two departments.

Ask participants to give you examples of instances when they have personally taken advantage of informal networks. Point out that this can be with people outside the organisation as well as within, such as friends, neighbours, members of the community and professional bodies.

Mention that large or small, informal networks can offer useful information and contacts. Studies show that successful managers seem to cultivate contacts at all levels throughout the business. One piece of research showed that they go out of their way to spend time with people who are outside their direct reporting group, their colleagues or their managers.

Ask participants to sum up what they see as the benefits of creating effective informal networks both within and outside the organisation. Take feedback and write this on a flipchart. Possible responses could be:

- the ability to share experiences and concerns
- a wider understanding of issues
- greater availability of information and advice
- better, more informed decision making.

You will need about 15 minutes for this part of the activity.

NETWORK PARTNERS – EXERCISE

Explain that a network partner is anyone you know who will share their information with you and with whom you can share yours.

To illustrate this point in a fun way, tell participants that they will now take part in an exercise. Divide them into three teams of equal numbers. Ask two of the groups to leave the room. Invite the group remaining in the room to form a circle in their team. The circle should be roughly 2 metres in diameter. Issue the team with a soft ball. Explain that their task is to throw the ball to other people in the team. As they throw the ball, they must shout out the name of the person they are throwing the ball to. When this person catches it, they must then throw it on to someone else and shout out that person's name.

Ask the first team to start the exercise and continue it for 2 to 3 minutes. When you stop the exercise tell this team that they are the lucky ones because the next team is going to throw a hard-boiled egg and the third team a raw egg. Ask them not to mention this when they go out of the room.

Take this group out of the room, leave the third group there with them and then bring the second team into the room. Invite the second group to form a circle in their team. Again, the circle should be roughly 2 metres in diameter. Issue the team with a soft ball. Tell them that you were going to give them an egg to throw but that you have saved this for the last team, Team 3, when they come in. Ask them not to mention this when they go out of the room after the exercise.

Explain that the group's task is to throw the soft ball to other people in the team. As they throw the ball, they must shout out the name of the person they are throwing the ball to. When this person catches it, they must then throw it on to someone else and shout out that person's name.

Stop the exercise after 2 to 3 minutes. Take the second team out of the room and call in the third group. Invite the third group to form a circle in their team, roughly 2 metres in diameter as before. Take an egg (that you have boiled previously) and hidden out of sight until now. Explain that you were going to give them a raw egg to throw but that you have hard-boiled this one instead.

Look for the reaction to this statement: do they believe what you have said or not? (Normally the people in the third group have been told by the other groups that they are going to throw a raw egg.)

If the group are willing to throw the egg, repeat the throwing exercise for a minute or so.

Bring all three groups back together. Ask them to tell you about the informal networks that there are within this room. Who was whose network partner? Invariably in this exercise someone has told or intimated to a member of another group that something is up.

Point out that this activity is not designed to show people up, rather to indicate that in any group there are informal connections.

You will need about 20 minutes for this exercise.

FINDING THE CONNECTIONS



Distribute Handout 2.3
Finding the connections

Ask participants to write on the handout the people that they have informal contact with at work. These can be the obvious, such as the people they work directly with and the less obvious, such as the receptionist or a manager with whom they go to the gym. The objective is to discover as many informal connections as possible. Point out that it does not count to write the words: 'everyone in the company'. Encourage participants to look outside the organisation as well as within it. They will probably need to draw more circles on the handout to accommodate this. Tell them that they will not be asked to share the information with anyone else. Allow approximately 15 minutes for this.

Now instruct them to put a tick by the names of those people with whom they currently have the most effective informal contact and a question mark beside the ones with whom they feel they would benefit from more contact.

HOW THE BEST NETWORK PARTNERS ACT

Ask participants to identify the characteristics of their interactions with the people with whom they currently have the most effective informal contact. Allow them 3 or 4 minutes to think about this, then ask for feedback. Write this on a flipchart. Examples could be that people:

- Communicate regularly
- Ask questions
- Take time with each other
- Co-operate
- Help each other.

Write CATCH on a flipchart. Explain that in other words, the best network partners are those who can catch information, just as people in the groups were able to throw and catch a ball.

This will take about 10 minutes in all.

BUILDING NETWORK OPPORTUNITIES

Point out that developing a strong informal communication network is not all coincidence.



Show OHT 2.2

Developing strong informal networks

2

Explain that people should take opportunities to make contact with others at all levels in the organisation: don't just seek favour with managers. Other people can be a useful source of information and help.

Suggest that they should make use of opportunities to meet with external contacts, by attending conferences and forums for instance, or joining professional and trade associations.

Remind participants to treat everyone with respect: be thoughtful and courteous. Ask about people's leisure pursuits and hobbies, remember their birthdays and show an interest.

Encourage them to ask: 'Who can help me?'. Personal contacts can often point people in the direction of others who can offer the advice they need.

Say that participants should consider seeking a mentor who can guide and advise them from within the organisation. Explain, however, that they should not blatantly flaunt their connections as it will only annoy their co-workers.



Distribute Handout 2.4

Developing informal networks

Ask participants to consider those people on their charts with whom they feel they would benefit from more contact. Ask them also to think about the contacts that may be of benefit to them in the future. Then they should complete the handout. Again, emphasise that this is for their eyes only.

Allow participants 10 minutes for completion, so 15 minutes in all.

REVIEW

Explain that in this session participants have discussed the importance of informal networks as a source of information and knowledge. They have had an opportunity to consider the networks that they currently cultivate and the need to CATCH information. Finally, participants have developed a plan of action for strengthening their networks, now and in the future.

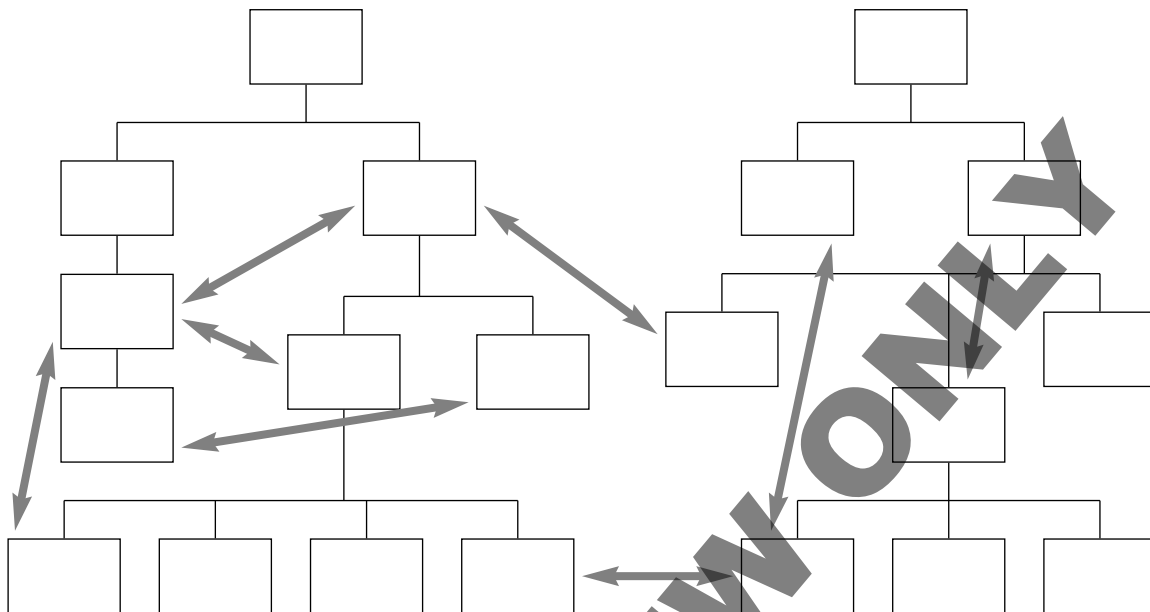
Close by explaining that if there are any points participants want to raise on a one-to-one basis, you will be happy to do this after the session. This review and close should only take about 5 minutes.

FOR PREVIEW ONLY

Informal networks

2.1

2



These charts illustrate how internal networking can work between two departments of an organisation.

- Information often travels faster via informal than formal networks.
- Can confirm or contradict official messages.
- Can help you get round things, short-circuit the system or 'pull strings'.
- Can provide a more complete picture of events.
- Can be more dependable than formal networks.

Developing strong informal networks

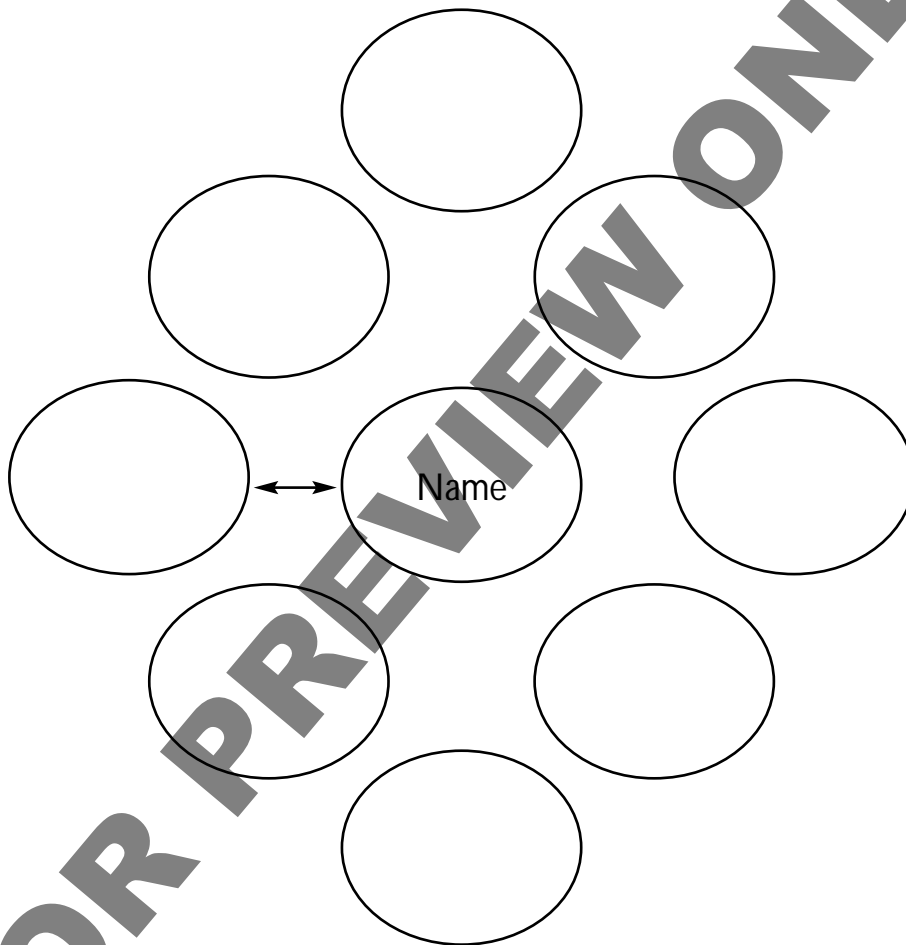
2.2

- Take opportunities to make contact with people at all levels in the organisation.
- Make use of opportunities to meet with external contacts too.
- Treat everyone with respect: be thoughtful and courteous. Ask about people's interests, remember their birthdays.
- Ask: 'Who can help me?' Personal contacts can often point you in the direction of people who can offer the advice you need.
- Consider seeking a mentor who can guide and advise you.
- Don't blatantly flaunt your connections: it will only annoy your co-workers.

Finding the connections

2.3

Put two-way arrows between all of the ovals.



Draw more ovals if required.

Developing informal networks

2.4

A. With whom would you like the opportunity to build an informal network now?

1.

2.

B. With whom would you like to build an informal network in the future?

1.

2.

C. As a result of today's session, what can you do to enhance your informal network relationships?

FOR PREVIEW ONLY

Contents

About this resource

A word about copyright

How to use this resource

Applications grid

Suggested training programmes

About the author

Related resources

1. Assertive communication skills

Assertive communication is the cornerstone of effective communication. This activity helps to increase participants' ability to communicate assertively with other people. It gives them practice and feedback in dealing with situations in an assertive manner.

2. Networking

Communication in businesses runs via two networks: formal and informal, sometimes called the skeleton and the nervous system. Whatever role people have within an organisation, there are great benefits in creating and growing informal networks in the business environment, both within and outside the organisation. This activity allows participants to explore ways of doing this.

3. How effective a communicator are you?

If people are to communicate effectively, they must both choose the right method and do so in a manner which builds positive relationships. This is an activity which helps participants understand the impact of their communication method and their communication styles.

4. Listening skills

We spend nearly half our waking hours listening but often we only hear, rather than truly listen. To listen actively is a key building block in developing effective relationships. This activity will help participants to develop their listening skills.

5. Questioning skills

This activity will enable participants to identify the different types of questions and the advantages and disadvantages of their use. It includes practical exercises and feedback to increase the effectiveness of participants' questioning styles.

6. Body language

Over half of the initial impression that people gain about other people is via their body language. Each individual has their own unique 'dance' or non-verbal language which can have a positive or a negative impact on others. This activity allows participants to explore the effect of body language and to identify ways in which they can improve their non-verbal behaviour.

7. The voice

This is a short activity designed to allow participants to evaluate how effectively they use their voice when communicating. They receive advice on the steps they can take to improve their voice.

8. Creating positive rapport

Whatever role people have within an organisation, there is a high probability that those people with whom they have the best working relationships are those with whom they feel they have the greatest rapport. This activity allows participants to identify what creates rapport amongst people and the steps they can take to build stronger relationships.

9. Communicating on the telephone

This activity is designed to increase participants' competence and confidence in representing their organisation in a professional manner on the telephone when receiving incoming calls. It allows participants to practise techniques to control and manage these calls.

10. Communicating via e-mail

E-mail is increasingly being used as a communications medium. This activity allows participants to identify best practice in sending e-mail and provides a method for prioritising messages that they receive.

11. Audioconferencing

Audioconferencing allows two individuals or a group to hold a meeting or discussion without the need for physical contact. However, without proper training, audioconferencing can prove ineffective. This activity allows participants to investigate how best to use this medium.

12. Using voice-mail effectively

In today's business environment, increasing use is being made of voice-mail as a messaging system. This activity reminds participants how to use voice-mail effectively, either when the person is away from their desk or when they have to leave a message on a voice-mail.

13. Videoconferencing

As the cost of travel increases, more organisations are turning to videoconferencing as a method of communication between individuals who work at a distance. In this activity participants learn techniques for making the best use of videoconferencing.

14. Feedback skills

Letting people know how they are doing is essential in building a committed and motivated workforce. The way in which feedback is given is extremely important. This is an activity which helps participants to develop their ability to give feedback on performance.

FOR PREVIEW ONLY

15. Leading a successful meeting

In many organisations meetings are neither time nor cost effective. This activity helps participants to plan, prepare and lead effective meetings; also to receive feedback on their effectiveness in managing a meeting.

16. Presentation skills

On a formal or informal basis, the ability to portray information in a confident, clear and persuasive fashion is essential. This activity helps participants to plan, prepare and present in an effective and confident manner.

17. Team communication skills

Communication has to be effective in a team in order for it to function well. In this activity participants have an opportunity to diagnose the effectiveness of their team communication and to identify ways in which they can communicate more effectively.

18. Influencing skills

There are always times in people's business lives when they need to exert some influence over others to shape events. This activity helps individuals to recognise the power they have in influencing others and provides them with an opportunity to test their influencing skills.

19. Handling difficult situations

Everyone is going to encounter difficulties at some time in dealing with customers, suppliers, direct reports, colleagues or their managers. This activity provides a framework which will enable participants to tackle difficult situations in an effective manner.

20. Letter-writing skills

The style and manner of writing business letters says a lot about the individual and the organisation. This activity allows participants to identify best practice in letter writing and to receive feedback on the effectiveness of their letter-writing style.

21. Participating at a meeting

Participants at a meeting have a responsibility to make the meeting work as much as the leader. In this activity delegates consider the role of the participants and the part they have to play in making the meeting effective.

22. Report-writing skills

Having to write a report can seem very daunting to many managers. This activity allows participants to identify best practice in writing their report and to increase their skills and confidence in this area.

FOR PREVIEW ONLY

About this resource

Welcome to *Communication Skills*.

Research spanning several decades has consistently ranked communication skills as crucial for managers. This is hardly surprising when experts suggest that communication occupies more time than any other business activity. Its effectiveness makes the difference between the success and failure of the organisation as a whole and for its individual members.

The challenge for managers now and in the future is to make best use of the many channels of communication which technology provides – from the telephone to the intranet. Studies shows that as the communication options grow, greater emphasis will be placed on maintaining personal face-to-face communication.

This pack provides you with 22 practical activities for developing communication skills. Each activity can be used with both small and larger groups to bring an aspect of communication skills to life. All the activities are highly participative and use experiential learning techniques. They are designed to encourage group interaction as well as individual learning. Many of the activities include self-assessment tools. Others allow the trainer and participants to give feedback to individuals on the effectiveness of their communication skills and how these can be improved.

All the activities have been personally tried and tested with a wide range of managers and their teams.

Although the activities are numbered they can be used in any order, on their own or combined with other modules. Many of the activities can be put together to develop a full half-day, one-, two- or three-day programme. They range in duration from 30 minutes to about 2 hours 30 minutes.

Each activity contains full instructions on how to prepare and run the session. At the beginning of each activity there is a section describing:

- what the activity is about
- what its purpose is
- the approximate timing based on our experience of running the session
- materials and resources to be used
- recommended group size.

This information gives you an overview of the activity and an idea of how to prepare for it and use it.

Each activity also contains session notes which provide the necessary theoretical support, material and practical tips on how to run, debrief and close the activities.

Good communication skills are the touchstone of the effective manager. We hope that you find this resource useful and relevant and trust that it will inspire you with the confidence to run memorable communication skills programmes.

FOR PREVIEW ONLY