COMMUNICATION DERAILED
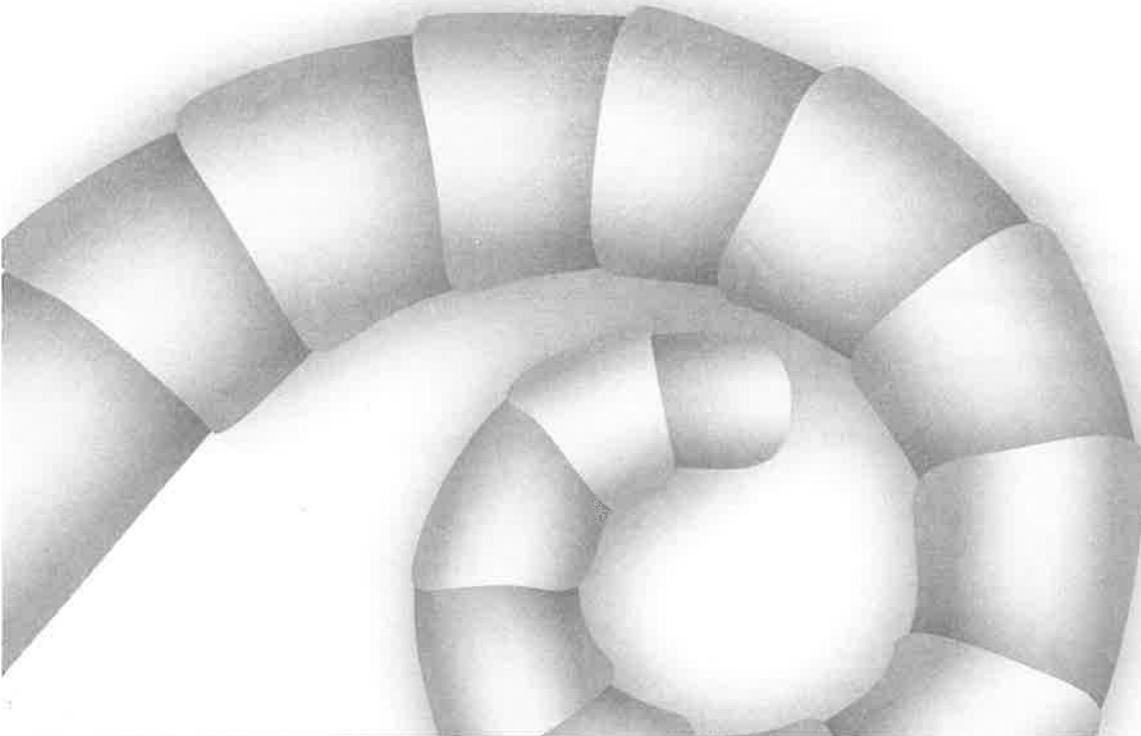
Hands-On Games to Get People Back on Track

HRDQ

FACILITATOR GUIDE

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SECOND EDITION

General Guidelines

Introduction

Communication lies at the heart of organizational work. Almost all organizational systems are dependent on effective communication, and within team-based organizations and organizations with fewer layers of management, effective communication is even more important. Still, sorting out how communication has an impact on organizations can be difficult. We often overlook it as a source of problems. In *Communication Derailed*, participants will discover the powerful results of both ineffective and effective communication within an organization.

The communication problems that your participants are experiencing may vary. In *Communication Derailed*, we have developed activities around three of the most well-documented communication problems in contemporary organizations: communication within teams, communication among teams, and communication during organizational stress. A separate module exists for each.

Organization of the Facilitator Guide

This Facilitator Guide is set up so each module is self-contained. This preliminary section provides the overall framework for the game, theoretical background, and general setup guidelines. The tabbed sections are devoted to the individual modules, each with its own Facilitator Guidelines, Participant Materials, and Transparency Masters. A Powerpoint presentation for each module is included on the accompanying CD-ROM, as well as pdf files of the Participant Materials.

The modules can be run independently or in a series. The following chart details the content, number of participants, and time required for each module.

Module	How Communication Is Derailed	Number of Participants	Time Needed
1: Within A Team	Individual problematic communication behavior coupled with varied interpretations of the task	Up to 3 teams of 4 to 7 participants	2 hours minimum
2: Among Teams	Conflicting needs, expectations, and communication norms break down among groups and between groups and management	2 or 4 teams with 4 to 6 participants per team	2 hours minimum
3: Organizational Stress	Improper methods, timing, and content of information intensifies as stress increases	Up to 3 teams of 5 to 7 participants	2 hours minimum

Target Audience

Communication Derailed is appropriate for individuals at any level of the organization. Because communication problems are so pervasive within organizations, the applicability of this game is widespread.

Module 1 This module can be run with new teams (to give them an idea of the communication issues they may face) and existing teams (to expose and identify communication problems). This module can also be used for general team communication skill-building with participants who do not work together.

Module 2 This module is particularly appropriate in organizations that require cross-team or cross-department work. Organizations with scaled-back levels of management will also benefit from this module.

Module 3 This module should be used in organizations that are about to be or are in the throes of organizational change. It also applies to fast-moving organizations under continual time pressure.

General Setup

Communication Derailed consists of three separate, but related, modules: Module I: Communication within Teams, Module II: Communication Among Teams, and Module III: Communication under Organizational Stress. The modules are related, but not redundant, so they may be used singly or sequentially. The modules are also self-contained, yet progressive, becoming increasingly demanding as the organizational circumstances become more complex.

In Module 1: Communication within Teams, participants are given different interpretations of a task. In addition, they are all given communication roles to play that inhibit effective communication.

In Module 2: Communication Among Teams, participants are divided into two teams—marketing and production. The teams have disparate communication norms, do not communicate with each other, and receive conflicting messages from management.

In Module 3: Communication under Organizational Stress, participants must complete a task under extreme time pressure. The details of the task are poorly communicated, individuals are given roles that result in poor communication behavior, and the facilitator, acting as CEO, continually interrupts the action with inappropriate communication.

In each module, participants work in groups to design and/or construct a toy. The duration of each module is about two hours. Each module follows the same general framework, which consists of five parts: (1) poor communication, (2) midpoint debrief, (3) effective communication, (4) final debrief, and (5) action planning.

1. **Poor Communication.** Participants are given a task and are led to communicate poorly through situation parameters and/or specific role sheets.

2. **Midpoint Debrief.** After participants reach the point where they have stopped making any progress (usually about fifteen minutes), the action is halted, and the facilitator conducts a midpoint debrief. Participants are asked to analyze why communication was so poor during the first half of the module. Then they are given effective communication norms and told how to apply those norms to their game situation.

3. **Effective Communication.** The action resumes with the same task, but participants are asked to practice and respond to effective communication norms. Participants complete the task.

4. **Final Debrief.** The facilitator debriefs the entire activity and asks those playing roles to share the contents of their role sheets with the rest of the group.

5. **Action Planning.** Participants complete detailed action plans to apply what they have experienced and learned to their own work situations.

Each part of the module takes participants a step closer to communicating effectively within their own organization. The "poor communication—debrief—effective communication" format was chosen so participants would have the opportunity to witness and relate to poor communication typical of current organizations, but also be trained in the skills to change that poor communication to effective communication.

Role of the Facilitator

As facilitator, you will play the role of the toy company's CEO. You will give the participants instructions in both the poor and effective communication portions of the activity, and lead the debrief and action-planning discussions. As the modules become increasingly demanding, your role will become more involved. In Module 1, you will give instructions and stand back, whereas in Module 3, you will intervene in the action several times to create stress. In all modules, your role is not to control the action, but to stimulate it.

It is tempting to help the action along when you feel that tension is too low in poor communication, or communication is not improving in effective communication. You should resist this temptation as long as possible. Groups tend to take a little while to warm up to the action, but they usually do. The more comfortable participants are playing a role, the smoother the action will progress. The benefit of a game like *Communication Derailed* is that participants learn from experiencing the effects of their own behavior. They will learn the most when they are free to react naturally to the communication situations.

As facilitator of the debriefs and action planning, you have the opportunity to show participants how their behaviors derailed communication or put it back on track. This is where the real learning takes place. Action planning is particularly important. Each question in this section relates directly to the principles in the debriefings, and allows participants to apply those principles to their work situations.

Facilitator Preparation

The instructions and materials needed to run each module are contained in the separate sections of this Facilitator Guide. Before conducting a session, you should read through the entire module. Each module contains:

1. **Facilitator Guidelines.** This section includes the theoretical background and step-by-step administration guidelines. The theoretical background includes the theory on which the module is based. As you witness participants' behavior in the poor and effective communication parts of the game, take note of how it relates to the research on contemporary communication in organizations. When you debrief the module, refer to the theoretical background section for more information.

   The step-by-step administration guidelines section details how to administer the module. It includes instructions on what to say, information on participant materials, facilitator tips, and an outline of the steps. It also provides alternate instructions for introducing the game depending on whether you are running the module as a stand-alone or in sequence with the other modules.

2. **Reproducible Participant Materials.** All participant materials in this Facilitator Guide are reproducible. A list of materials for each module (including the number of photocopies to make of each page) is found behind each Participant Materials tab.

3. **Reproducible Transparency Masters.** You may use transparencies to guide the participants through the midpoint debrief, or find the same information in the Powerpoint presentations on the accompanying CD-Rom.

CD-ROM

The CD-ROM included in this binder includes a Microsoft® PowerPoint® presentation for each module. Complete directions for accessing and running the slides are included in a README.TXT file. The CD-ROM also includes several resources to complete the training:

- Printable .PDF files of the participant materials

- Customizable Certificate of Achievement

- Customizable Evaluation Form