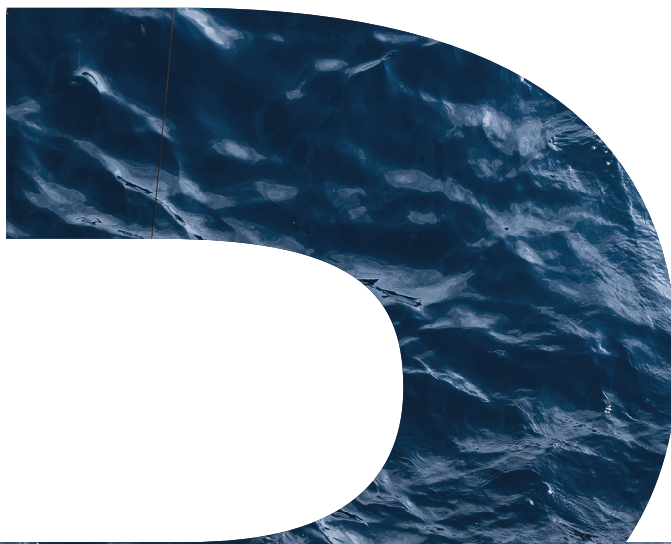


ENHANCING DECISION-MAKING
AND SAFETY THROUGH **EFFECTIVE
COMMUNICATION AND FEEDBACK**



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2

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COMMUNICATION LIES AT THE HEART OF A RESILIENT SAFETY CULTURE, ENABLING SEAMLESS INFORMATION EXCHANGE, COLLABORATIVE DECISION-MAKING, AND A SHARED COMMITMENT TO SAFETY ON BOARD.

In Guide 3, we'll take a deep dive into diverse communication strategies. Our aim is to equip individuals with the skills they need to communicate clearly and confidently, even in the most challenging situations. A strong communication culture serves as the bedrock for psychological safety, ensuring that during emergencies, crew members feel empowered to speak up, contribute to decision-making, and actively support initiatives to manage the crisis. We will also explore the importance of nurturing a culture where constructive feedback is welcomed and open communication is actively encouraged.

We will start with a case involving some of the psychological aspects addressed in the other guides and also some communication aspects.

CASE EXAMPLE

HATCH COVER DAMAGE

The water ballast in the cargo hold is about to be pumped out. The chief officer is responsible for executing this operation. They are assisted on deck by the bosun and other ratings.

For this, a number of preparations are required. One of the necessary steps is to open the vents which connect the cargo hold with atmosphere. These vents are only used when the cargo hold is ballasted, which on this ship is a rare occurrence.

These vents are large, and opening them means significant work for 1-2 people for about an hour because of how they are constructed. This is different from the operation of any other ballast tanks, which (apart from the awareness and taking soundings) do not require extensive participation of the deck crew. It is also why this job was postponed by the bosun because of other immediate matters.

The chief officer is working on a schedule (for the operation to be completed by a certain time). Because deballasting the hold takes a very long time, they need to start early enough. They discussed the deballasting with the bosun beforehand and at that time they were both aware the vents would need opening. However, with all other business, the chief officer never verifies if it has actually been done.

The chief officer assumes all is ready and starts pumping the hold out. After a while, they request one of the ratings to take the sounding, to check if deballasting progresses as planned. At that time the bosun realises the vents have not been opened but it is too late. The pressure causes the hatch cover to collapse along with a part of the hold coaming, and results in structural damage to the ship which requires shipyard repair removing the ship from service for 2 months.

The decision-making in this situation led to an unfortunate result, influenced by a range of psychological, cognitive, and situational elements, as well as issues in communication. This was similarly discussed in our earlier guide. Let's delve into some of these key factors again and also examine the quality of communication on board.

In summary, this unfortunate event appears to be the result of a series of cognitive and situational factors that led to poor decision-making. These include cognitive biases, time pressures, lack of effective communication, and task complexity, among others. It serves as an important lesson in the complexities of human decision-making, particularly in environments that require meticulous attention to detail and coordination. Communication can improve the team's awareness and understanding of these elements.

OVERCONFIDENCE BIAS

The Chief Officer and the Bosun were both aware that the vents needed to be opened for deballasting. The Chief Officer's failure to verify whether the task had been completed may indicate overconfidence in their assumptions and reliance on initial planning.

ATTENTIONAL RESOURCES AND COGNITIVE LOAD

Both the Chief Officer and Bosun were preoccupied with multiple tasks, which could lead to a high cognitive load. When people are trying to manage multiple tasks or pieces of information, they are more prone to make errors or overlook important details.

TEMPORAL PRESSURE

While the situation was not 'urgent,' the Chief Officer was under a self-imposed or perhaps operationally imposed time constraint to complete the deballasting. Time pressure can impact decision quality, potentially causing individuals to skip steps or ignore safety checks.

GROUPTHINK OR ASSUMED CONSENSUS

It could be that since both the chief officer and the bosun were aware of the need to open the vents, the task would be completed without the need for verification. This kind of assumed consensus can occur in teams and lead to poor decision outcomes.

MEMORY AND FORGETTING CURVE

Days passed between the planning and the actual event. Human memory is susceptible to decay over time, especially with the presence of 'interference' (other tasks and responsibilities). It is possible that the Bosun, the Chief Officer, or both simply forgot the requirement because of the time gap and other intervening activities.

COMMUNICATION GAPS

Effective communication is essential for teamwork. The absence of clear, ongoing communication between the Chief Officer and Bosun contributed to the failure of verifying whether the critical task of opening the vents had been completed. Better communication might have mitigated some of the other contributing issues.

TASK COMPLEXITY AND UNFAMILIARITY

The vents were only used during rare occasions of ballasting, making the task unfamiliar and complex, requiring significant effort. The unfamiliarity could contribute to the oversight as the task is not part of routine operations, and therefore not top-of-mind.

HINDSIGHT BIAS

It is easy to look back on the situation after the fact and pinpoint where decisions could have been better. However, in the moment, under various pressures and constraints, the decision-making process is often far from perfect.

SUNK COST FALLACY

Once the deballasting process was started, stopping it to double-check might have felt like an admission of poor planning or wasted effort, potentially leading to a reluctance to halt and verify.

IN SAFETY-CRITICAL ENVIRONMENTS, EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION IS THE LIFEBLOOD THAT SUSTAINS THE SMOOTH OPERATION OF MARITIME ACTIVITIES.

The ability to exchange information accurately, transparently, and promptly is fundamental to making well-informed decisions and preventing incidents as in the previous case. However, various other barriers can hinder the flow of communication, including language barriers, cultural differences, noise levels, hierarchical structures, and even individual communication styles.

To enhance communication, we can draw insights from communication theories such as the Transactional Model of Communication, which emphasises the dynamic exchange of messages between sender and receiver. Understanding how information can be misinterpreted or distorted during this process can guide us in being more precise and attentive communicators. Additionally, the Social Identity Theory underscores the significance of a shared identity and camaraderie among crew members, highlighting the importance of fostering a sense of belonging and care that encourages open communication.

REFLECTION

Take a moment to reflect on a past incident or challenging situation where communication breakdowns may have contributed to the outcome. What were the barriers to clear communication, and how could they have been addressed differently?

EXAMPLE

During a routine maintenance procedure, the chief engineer instructs a junior crew member to carry out a task without confirming if they understood the procedure. Due to the noise in the engine room, the junior crew member misinterprets the instructions and performs the task incorrectly, leading to minor equipment damage. In this case, the communication barrier was the noise level in the engine room, and clearer communication through closed-loop confirmation could have averted the incident.

THE TRANSACTIONAL MODEL OF COMMUNICATION

In the Transactional Model of Communication, communication is perceived as a dynamic and interactive exchange of messages between the sender and receiver, where both parties actively participate in the process. Key elements of the Transactional Model of Communication:

1. SIMULTANEOUS PROCESS

In the Transactional Model, communication is seen as a simultaneous process where both the sender and receiver are sending and receiving messages at the same time. There is no strict sequence of sender-message-receiver; instead, communication occurs in a continuous loop.

2. MUTUAL INFLUENCE

Unlike traditional models, where communication flows in one direction, the Transactional Model emphasises mutual influence. Both the sender and receiver can influence and be influenced by each other's messages, attitudes, and emotions during the interaction.

REFLECTION

Consider your recent communication experiences using the Transactional Model lens. Notice how communication is a reciprocal and interactive process, where both you and the other party influence each other's messages. Reflect on how your active participation in conversations affects the flow and dynamics of the interaction.

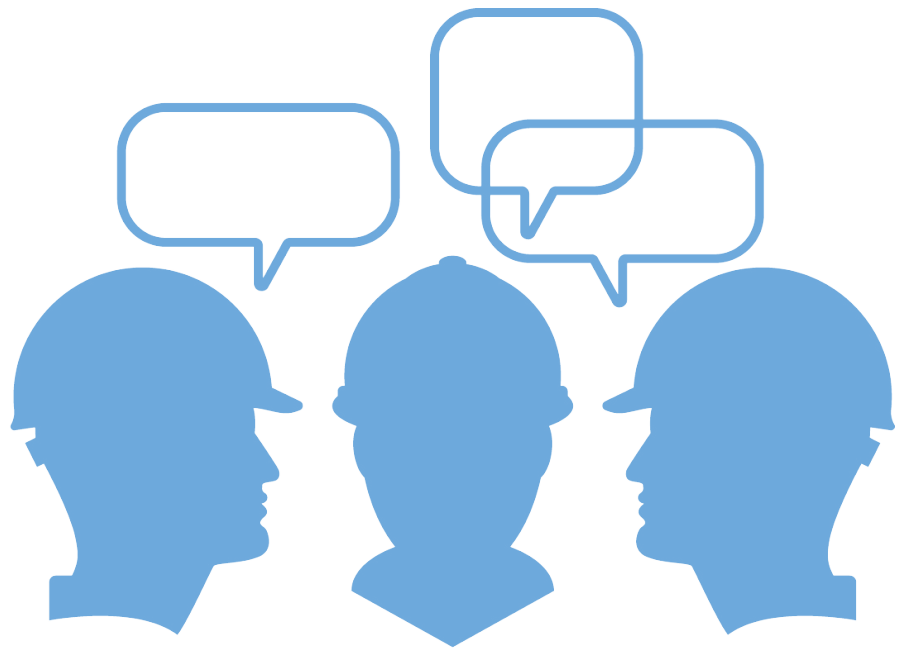
ARE YOU ENGAGING IN GENUINE TWO-WAY COMMUNICATION, ACKNOWLEDGING FEEDBACK, AND BEING RECEPTIVE TO THE INFLUENCE OF OTHERS?

If you find any imbalances in your communication style, such as dominating the conversation or not actively listening, explore ways to adjust and create a more equitable exchange. Emphasising mutual participation and genuine feedback can lead to more meaningful and effective communication with others.

IN YOUR EXPERIENCE HOW IS EMERGENCY COMMUNICATION DIFFERENT?

3. FEEDBACK

Feedback is an essential component of the Transactional Model. Both the sender and receiver provide feedback to each other during the communication process, indicating that they have received and understood the message. Feedback allows for clarification, confirmation, and adjustment of the message.



4. NOISE

The Transactional Model recognises that various factors can interfere with effective communication, known as noise. Noise can be physical, psychological, or semantic, and it can distort or disrupt the communication process. Noise can affect both the sender and receiver, impacting the accuracy of message transmission.

5. FIELDS OF EXPERIENCE

The Transactional Model considers that both the sender and receiver have unique fields of experience, which encompass their individual backgrounds, cultures, beliefs, and knowledge. These fields of experience influence how messages are encoded, transmitted, and decoded.

6. CONTINUOUS AND ONGOING PROCESS

Communication in the Transactional Model is not limited to a specific moment or interaction. It is viewed as a continuous and ongoing process that is shaped by previous interactions and future expectations.

Overall, the Transactional Model of Communication emphasises the dynamic nature of communication and highlights the active roles of both the sender and receiver. This model recognises that effective communication is more than just transmitting information but involves understanding and responding to the feedback and influence of both parties involved.

NAVIGATING HIERARCHICAL AND TRANSACTIONAL COMMUNICATION IN EMERGENCY SITUATIONS

In emergency situations, communication often becomes more hierarchical and directive rather than transactional, due to the need for quick, clear decisions and actions. However, elements of the transactional model, which emphasises the two-way nature of communication, can still be useful in ensuring clarity and mutual understanding.

Communication becomes a critical element that can significantly influence the outcome. While the Transactional Model of Communication provides a framework that highlights the mutual influence of the sender and receiver in a communicative setting, emergency situations add layers of complexity.

ADDITIONAL COMPONENTS IN EMERGENCY COMMUNICATION

1. URGENCY AND TIME SENSITIVITY

Unlike in standard situations, the element of time becomes a vital factor. Messages need to be conveyed quickly, and any misunderstanding can lead to delays and potentially risky outcomes.

2. HIGH EMOTIONAL STATES

Elevated stress levels can impact both the sender's ability to communicate clearly and the receiver's ability to understand the message, affecting the transactional loop.

3. NOISE AND INTERFERENCE

In emergencies, environmental noise (like alarms, other people shouting, etc.) can act as potent barriers in the transactional model, distorting the message between sender and receiver.

4. CRITICAL INFORMATION LOAD

In emergencies, the information being transmitted often holds higher stakes and is dense in critical details, making the role of feedback in the transactional model even more important for confirming comprehension.

5. CHAIN OF COMMAND

Hierarchical structures often exist in settings like maritime vessels. Understanding how the chain of command fits into the transactional model can be crucial, as orders often have to pass through multiple channels.

STRATEGIES TO COMPLEMENT THE TRANSACTIONAL MODEL IN EMERGENCIES

1. UTILISING STANDARDISED TERMINOLOGY

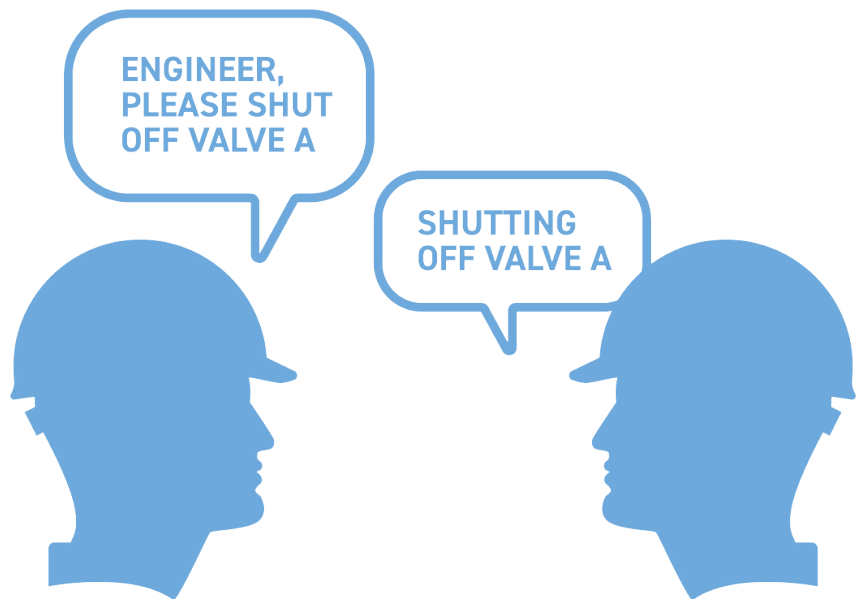
Standardised terminology is essential in safety-critical environments to avoid misunderstandings and confusion. Using clear and agreed-upon language helps ensure that everyone understands instructions and information accurately. This practice is particularly crucial in emergency situations where quick and decisive action is required.

EXAMPLE

During a fire incident, crew members are trained to use standardised firefighting terminology, such as "Fire team to deck 4, starboard side" or "Deploy fire hose A." This consistency ensures that all crew members understand the location and actions required, minimising confusion and improving response time.

2. CONFIRMING CRITICAL INSTRUCTIONS THROUGH CLOSED-LOOP COMMUNICATION

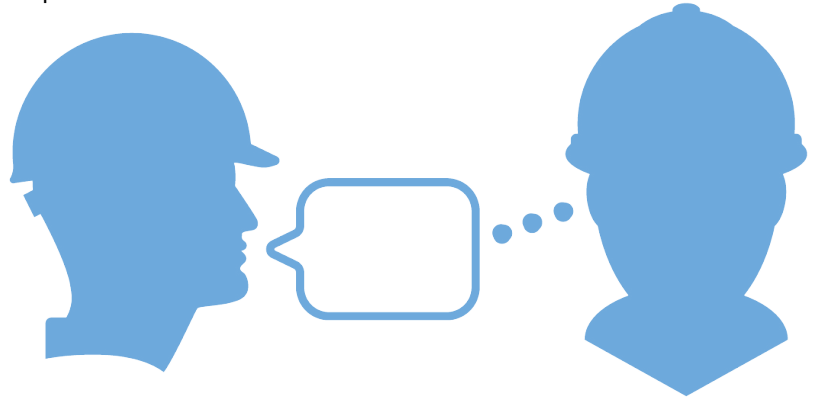
Closed-loop communication is a vital component of effective communication in high-pressure environments. It involves the sender confirming that the receiver has understood the message correctly. This confirmation ensures that crucial instructions are received and comprehended, reducing the risk of miscommunication and potential errors.



3. ACTIVE LISTENING AND TEAMWORK

Active listening is a fundamental skill that plays a crucial role in effective communication, especially in high-pressure environments where accurate information exchange is essential for safety and successful operations. Active listening involves not only hearing the words spoken but also fully understanding the message, empathising with the speaker's perspective, and providing appropriate responses.

Here are some key components of active listening and practical tips on how to implement it:



- **FOCUS AND AVOID DISTRACTIONS**

In high-pressure situations, it's easy to be overwhelmed by the intensity of the moment or surrounding noises. Active listening requires focusing your attention solely on the speaker and the message they are conveying. Minimise distractions and maintain eye contact to show your commitment to understanding the information being shared.

- **GIVE VERBAL AND NONVERBAL FEEDBACK**

Provide feedback to the speaker to let them know you are actively engaged in the conversation. Use verbal cues like nodding, saying "yes," or interjecting with short affirmations to indicate your attentiveness. Nonverbal cues such as facial expressions and body language also play a crucial role in showing that you are actively listening.

- **AVOID INTERRUPTING**

Resist the urge to interrupt or finish the speaker's sentences. Allow them to express their thoughts fully before responding. Interrupting can disrupt the flow of the conversation and prevent you from fully understanding the speaker's message.

- **CLARIFY AND PARAPHRASE**

To ensure accurate understanding, clarify any ambiguous points or ask questions for further elaboration. Paraphrasing what the speaker has said can also be beneficial. By restating the information in your own words, you confirm your comprehension and give the speaker an opportunity to correct any misunderstandings.

- **SHOW EMPATHY AND UNDERSTANDING**

In high-pressure environments, emotions can run high, and individuals may feel anxious or stressed. Demonstrate empathy by acknowledging the speaker's feelings and concerns. Understand that active listening is not just about the words spoken but also about recognising and addressing the emotions behind them.

- **STAY PATIENT AND COMPOSED**

In challenging situations, emotions may be heightened, and the pace of communication may accelerate. Maintain your composure and stay patient, even when faced with urgency. Being patient helps avoid misunderstandings and allows for clearer communication.

- **PRACTICE MINDFULNESS**

Mindfulness involves being fully present in the moment without judgment. Apply mindfulness techniques to enhance your active listening skills. Practice deep breathing and focus on the conversation at hand, setting aside other distractions or concerns.

- **SEEK FEEDBACK ON YOUR LISTENING SKILLS**

Ask for feedback from your colleagues on your active listening skills. Encourage open communication to learn how you can improve and ensure that your efforts to actively listen are effective.

By incorporating active listening into your communication style, you can foster a more collaborative and supportive work environment, strengthen relationships among crew members, and enhance safety-critical decision-making.

4. CLEAR ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

Having clear roles and responsibilities assigned to each crew member fosters effective communication. When everyone knows their tasks and responsibilities, they can focus on their specific roles, leading to smoother communication and execution of critical operations.

REFLECTION

As a crew member, do you have a clear understanding of your role and responsibilities during different emergency scenarios? How can role clarity improve overall communication on board? In what circumstances do you feel uncertain about your role or what your manager expects from you?

5. ADAPTING COMMUNICATION STYLES

Individuals may have different communication styles and preferences. Recognising and adapting to these styles can enhance communication effectiveness. Some crew members may prefer direct and concise instructions, while others may benefit from a more supportive and collaborative approach.

EXAMPLE

During a medical emergency, a crew member demonstrates empathy and supportive communication with an injured colleague, reassuring them while providing clear instructions for administering first aid.

6. DEBRIEFING AND FEEDBACK

After high-pressure situations, conducting debriefs and providing constructive feedback are valuable practices. Debriefs offer an opportunity to discuss communication strengths and areas for improvement. Open feedback loops enable continuous learning and improvement in communication practices.

REFLECTION

After a high-pressure situation, how can we encourage open and constructive debriefing sessions? How can feedback be delivered in a way that promotes continuous learning and improvement without assigning blame? Provide some examples and discuss the impact of these.

CONSIDER A SCENARIO WHERE YOUR TEAM IS NAVIGATING THROUGH ADVERSE WEATHER CONDITIONS, AND THE CAPTAIN ISSUES CRITICAL INSTRUCTIONS FOR A COURSE CHANGE. REFLECT ON THE FOLLOWING QUESTIONS:

1. Did you, as a crew member, actively acknowledge the captain's instructions to ensure understanding?
2. Were you comfortable seeking clarification if any part of the instruction was unclear or if you had doubts?
3. How did the practice of closed-loop communication enhance the coordination and effectiveness of the team's response?
4. Were there any challenges or barriers that hindered closed-loop communication during the high-pressure situation, and how could these be addressed in the future?

By reflecting on your experiences with closed-loop communication, you can identify opportunities for improvement and enhance communication effectiveness during safety-critical operations.

COLLABORATIVE DECISION-MAKING

Effective communication is especially vital during collaborative decision-making processes. Collaborative decision-making involves harnessing the collective knowledge and expertise of the crew to arrive at the best possible solution. It promotes a culture of shared responsibility, where every team member is empowered to contribute their insights and perspectives.

A phenomenon that may arise during collaborative decision-making is known as "Groupthink." Groupthink occurs when a cohesive group prioritises harmony and consensus over critical evaluation of alternative viewpoints, resulting in flawed or hasty decisions. In such situations, the pressure to conform to the prevailing opinion can stifle dissenting voices and lead to an incomplete consideration of potential risks.

To guard against Groupthink, it is essential to create an environment that encourages open communication and diverse perspectives. Leaders should actively solicit input from all team members, creating a safe space for them to express their ideas and concerns. By embracing the principles of Groupthink theory, we can foster an atmosphere of constructive debate and critical thinking, where decisions are thoroughly examined, and risks are appropriately assessed.

Collaborative decision-making empowers crew members to actively engage in discussions and share their expertise. By valuing diverse perspectives within the team, we can tap into a wealth of knowledge and insights, leading to more well-rounded decisions and improved safety measures. Practice effective communication during drills and training exercises to enhance teamwork and ensure smooth coordination during critical operations.

EXAMPLE

During a navigation exercise, the bridge team encountered an unexpected navigational hazard. The captain quickly convened a brief meeting, encouraging input from all relevant team members. By leveraging their collective expertise, the team collaboratively charted a new course, avoiding the hazard and ensuring the safety of the vessel.

REFLECTION

Think about a time when a collaborative decision-making process led to a better outcome in a safety-critical situation. How did open communication and the inclusion of diverse perspectives lead to a more robust and comprehensive solution?

CONSTRUCTIVE FEEDBACK

EMPOWERING LEARNING AND GROWTH

Constructive feedback is a cornerstone of fostering a learning culture on board. As leaders, providing a safe and supportive environment for crew members to share their insights and experiences enables continuous improvement.

In safety-critical environments, where decisions have significant consequences, the ability to give and receive constructive feedback is essential to refine skills, enhance communication, and ensure crew members can perform at their best.

Feedback, when delivered effectively, offers valuable opportunities for learning and growth. It allows individuals to gain insights into their strengths, identify areas for improvement, and adapt their behaviours to optimise their performance. Constructive feedback is not about criticism or fault-finding; rather, it is a thoughtful and objective assessment of performance aimed at guiding individuals towards improvement.

When providing constructive feedback, it's essential to focus on the subject or issue at hand rather than targeting the individual. This approach helps to ensure that feedback is received in a positive, non-defensive manner. For example, instead of saying, 'You always forget to check the safety equipment,' one might say, 'It's crucial that the safety equipment is checked consistently to maintain onboard safety.' By depersonalising the feedback, we encourage a more open dialogue and reduce the potential for defensive or emotional reactions. This is especially important in safety-critical environments, where clear, unbiased communication is vital.

Creating a feedback culture requires active engagement from both leaders and team members. Leaders should initiate regular feedback sessions, making themselves approachable and receptive to crew members' concerns and ideas. At the same time, crew members should also be encouraged to give feedback to their superiors, fostering a culture of mutual respect and continuous improvement.

REFLECTION

Reflect on a time when you received constructive feedback that led to a positive change in your approach or performance. How did this feedback impact your self-awareness and subsequent actions?

What elements were important for this to happen?

EXAMPLE

After a particularly challenging emergency drill, the deck crew provided the safety officer with feedback on the clarity of instructions during the exercise. The safety officer acknowledged their input and actively sought suggestions on how to improve future drills. By openly addressing their concerns and implementing some of their suggestions, the safety officer demonstrated the value of constructive feedback, fostering a sense of ownership and collaboration among the crew.

In the following sections, we will explore further aspects of communication in high-pressure environments, strategies for navigating challenging conversations, and the impact of communication on organisational culture.

GOOD COMMUNICATION IS KEY TO SOLVING DIFFICULT ISSUES, ESPECIALLY ON A SHIP WHERE SAFETY IS CRUCIAL.

Talking about sensitive topics can be hard because we may have fears or concerns that hold us back. Overcoming these challenges is vital for creating an open, learning-focused culture on board.

WHY DIFFICULT TALKS ARE HARD

1. FEAR OF CONFLICT

People often avoid difficult conversations because they fear confrontation or negative reactions. They may worry that addressing issues directly could escalate tensions and damage relationships.

2. LACK OF CONFIDENCE

Some crew members may hesitate to engage in challenging conversations because they worry that they lack sufficient communication skills or have concerns about being misunderstood.

3. AVOIDANCE OF DISCOMFORT

Difficult conversations can be uncomfortable, and some may prefer to avoid discomfort by ignoring the issue or hoping it will resolve on its own.

4. ASSUMPTIONS AND PRECONCEPTIONS

We might assume the other person won't be open to what we have to say, making it easier to avoid the conversation.

OVERCOMING THESE BARRIERS TO DIFFICULT CONVERSATIONS IS CRUCIAL FOR SEVERAL REASONS:

1. SAFETY IMPROVEMENT

Addressing safety concerns directly and constructively leads to more effective safety improvements and risk mitigation.

2. COLLABORATIVE PROBLEM-SOLVING

Open conversations foster collaboration and allow diverse perspectives to contribute to finding better solutions.

3. RELATIONSHIP BUILDING

Handling difficult conversations with empathy and respect strengthens working relationships and fosters a positive team culture.

Navigating challenging conversations in safety-critical maritime settings requires a willingness to be curious and address one's personal barriers and defences that might hinder constructive dialogue.

STRATEGIES FOR OVERCOMING BARRIERS

1. PSYCHOLOGICAL SAFETY

Make sure everyone feels comfortable speaking their mind without worrying about negative reactions.

2. ACTIVE LISTENING

Pay full attention to what the other person is saying. Don't interrupt or jump to conclusions. Earlier in this guide, you can find more information on the topic of active listening.

3. EMPATHY AND RESPECT

Treat the other person's views as important and valid.

4. FOCUS ON SOLUTIONS

Don't blame; instead, work together to find ways to improve.

EXAMPLE - FEAR OF CONFLICT

OVERCOMING STRATEGY - CREATE A SAFE SPACE

Crew members can overcome the fear of conflict by creating a safe space for the conversation. Choose an appropriate setting and time where both parties can discuss the issue without distractions. Focus on expressing concerns calmly and constructively while assuring the other person that the conversation is aimed at improvement rather than criticism.

By recognising and actively addressing their own barriers and defences, crew members can build the skills and confidence needed to engage in challenging conversations. Overcoming these barriers contributes to a culture of open communication, continuous learning, and improved safety practices.

By recognising the impact of fear, lack of confidence, discomfort, and assumptions on difficult conversations, crew members can take proactive steps to overcome these hurdles. Embracing these strategies empowers individuals to engage in challenging discussions effectively.

DESC MODEL

One approach to navigate difficult conversations is the DESC Model (Describe, Express, Specify, and Consequences), which provides a structured framework for constructive dialogue without resorting to blame or personal attacks.

DESCRIBE THE SITUATION

Begin by neutrally describing the specific situation or behaviour you want to address. Use factual and objective language to avoid judgment or assumptions. For example, "During the fire drill this morning, I noticed that some crew members were not wearing the appropriate PPE."

EXPRESS YOUR EMOTIONS

Share your feelings about the situation without blaming others. Use "I" statements to convey your emotions and reactions. For example, "I felt concerned and uneasy when I observed crew members not wearing the proper PPE as it directly impacts our safety."

SPECIFY YOUR DESIRED OUTCOMES

Clearly state what you hope to achieve through the conversation. Focus on identifying solutions and positive changes. For example, "I believe it's crucial for all crew members to consistently wear the correct PPE during safety drills to ensure everyone's safety."

DISCUSS CONSEQUENCES

Address the potential consequences of not addressing the issue. Emphasise the impact on safety, operational efficiency, or team dynamics. For example, "If we continue to have inconsistent PPE compliance during drills, it may compromise our emergency response and put us at greater risk during real emergencies."

EXAMPLE using blame and accusations

"I can't believe you forgot to complete the safety checklist again! It's your responsibility, and you're jeopardising everyone's safety with your negligence!"

EXAMPLE using the DESC Model

1. DESCRIBE

"During the safety inspection this morning, I noticed that the safety checklist was incomplete."

2. EXPRESS

"I felt concerned and worried about the potential safety implications when I noticed the missing information."

3. SPECIFY

"It is essential for us to consistently complete the safety checklist to ensure our operations are conducted safely and effectively."

4. CONSEQUENCES

"If we overlook critical steps in the safety checklist, it might compromise our ability to identify and mitigate potential hazards."

By using the DESC Model, crew members can engage in constructive dialogue that focuses on addressing the issue at hand while fostering mutual understanding and respect. This approach is particularly valuable in safety-critical environments where clear communication is essential for maintaining safety standards and preventing incidents.

Fearing conflict or confrontation, some crew members may avoid difficult conversations altogether, assuming that the issue will resolve itself. Crew members who embrace open communication and approach challenging conversations with a growth mindset can initiate positive changes. By acknowledging concerns, providing constructive feedback, and working collaboratively towards solutions, they contribute to a culture of continuous improvement and safety.

REFLECTION

- Do you find it easy to start difficult conversations, or do you avoid them?
- What elements make the situation easier or more challenging? How confident are you in using models like the DESC Model to guide your talks?
- If you're avoiding difficult conversations, think about why this is and what impact it could have on safety or team morale.

EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION IS NOT ONLY INFLUENCED BY INDIVIDUAL SKILLS BUT ALSO DEEPLY IMPACTED BY THE OVERALL ORGANISATIONAL CULTURE.

A positive and safety-oriented organisational culture encourages open and transparent communication, fosters collaboration, and empowers all crew members to contribute to safety-critical discussions.

A culture that values safety, learning, and continuous improvement creates an atmosphere where crew members feel comfortable speaking up, sharing concerns, and providing feedback. On the other hand, a culture that emphasises hierarchy and punitive measures may inhibit open communication and hinder the flow of critical information.

To promote a culture of safety and effective communication, organisations should align their communication practices with safety objectives and core values. This involves:

- Establishing clear and consistent communication protocols for safety-critical situations.
- Encouraging proactive reporting of near-misses and safety concerns without fear of retribution.
- Providing training and resources to enhance communication skills, including active listening, and giving constructive feedback.

In safety-critical environments, communication should be seen as a shared responsibility among all crew members. Each individual plays a vital role in contributing to a safe working environment. Organisations can foster a culture of shared responsibility by:

- Recognising and rewarding open and proactive communication that contributes to safety.
- Promoting a blame-free environment where individuals are encouraged to take ownership of their actions and learn from mistakes.
- Facilitating regular safety meetings and forums to discuss communication challenges and improvement opportunities.

In the next guide, we will focus on the organisational perspective, exploring how leadership, power dynamics, and priorities influence decision-making in safety-critical situations. Understanding these organisational factors will provide valuable insights into building capacity for safety and supporting good decision-making within the maritime organisation.