

HOW TO COLLABORATE



mindapples
BITESIZE

Communicate effectively, form effective teams and work better with others

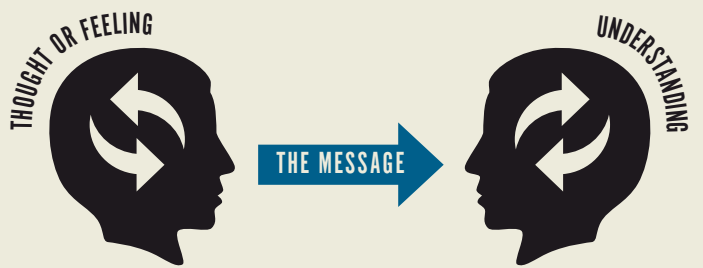
FROM ONE MIND TO ANOTHER

Many different species communicate, from bird song to bee dances, but humans are uniquely good at it, because we have evolved language. We convert our thoughts into words and symbols, and share them with others.

Language is like a code: we have a thought or feeling in mind, 'encode' it as a message and transmit it to the other person. The recipient then 'decodes' it, and hopefully understands.

To overcome the limitations of language, our minds fill in the gaps in what other people say, plugging them with our own knowledge, shared concepts and reference points, guessing at what they might mean.

Our minds haven't evolved to be literal. They are machines for making meaning.



MINDFUL COMMUNICATION

MIND YOUR LANGUAGE

Mindful communication involves being more aware of all the ideas, feelings, judgements and other messages you send out.

Sometimes the words you say can trigger thoughts you didn't expect. Identify and address any beliefs or assumptions that are stopping people from hearing your argument, and avoid loaded terms that could be misinterpreted.

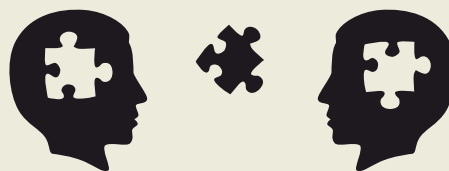
Think about the knowledge of your audience too. If they don't have the same set of shared reference points as you, you may need to work harder to get concepts across. Define important words and explain unusual concepts so everyone has a shared understanding.

MORE THAN WORDS

People will often say that communication is mostly non-verbal signals. This isn't quite true: non-verbal signals show us **the feelings behind the words**.

Whether we like someone, or believe what they're saying, is influenced by tone of voice and body language. But words still matter; it's very difficult to explain complex concepts through dance.

This is a particular problem with technology. Emails and text messages miss out the non-verbal signals, so be careful not to jump to conclusions about someone's tone, mood or state of mind.



SAY WHAT YOU MEAN

You can use a few techniques to avoid misunderstandings:

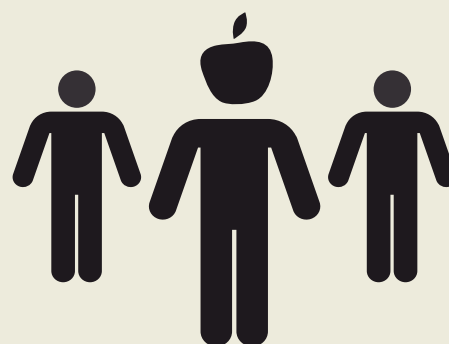
- 1. Use I statements.** Avoid statements about the other person or the world, talk from your own experience instead.
- 2. Facts vs judgements.** Don't mix up shared facts with personal judgements. Ask yourself what actually happened, and then what did you make it mean?
- 3. Ask open questions.** Questions are chances to find out what's in someone else's mind, not ways to give instructions.
- 4. Listen.** Communication is a two-way street, so keep checking whether people are still following you.
- 5. Be nice.** Your listeners must do some work too, so respect their efforts.

THE SUM OF OUR PARTS

The goal of collaboration is to tap into the skills of many different minds to achieve more together. When groups work, they combine the knowledge and skills of participants and outperform individual experts.

Collaboration isn't easy though. A person is smart, but people together can be stupid. Groups tend to be worse on average at answering factual questions than their members, and groups tend to polarise and reinforce their members' prejudices rather than moderating each other's views. In extreme forms, this is known as **groupthink**.

Other people:
the cause of and
solution to all of
life's problems



Here are a few ways to run teams and avoid groupthink:

- Psychological safety.** If people don't feel able to say what they really think, you will miss valuable insights.
- Share new information.** Groups often ignore vital data, so summarise key information for the group.
- Keep energy levels up.** Put the most difficult and important items first, when people have more energy, and build in regular breaks.
- Keep meetings small.** When groups get too big, it is hard for everyone to be heard and ideas get lost.
- Have a clear purpose.** Make sure people know what they are supposed to be talking about or deciding on.

This free tip sheet was created by Mindapples to support people during the COVID-19 pandemic. To find out more about our apps, e-learning, webinars, face-to-face training and charitable work, visit www.mindapples.org.