

Evidence-Base: Communication Teamwork

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A tremendous amount of evidence exists to support the efficacy of good communication skills for effective teamwork. For example, Cannon-Bowers et al. found that communication is comprised of two critical sub-skills: exchanging information and consulting with others.²

Information exchange was defined by such behaviors as closed-loop communication, information sharing, procedural talk, and volunteering and requesting information. Consulting with others consisted of effective influence, open exchange of relevant interpretations, and evaluative interchange.² Likewise, Dickinson and McIntyre found that effective communication required that information be exchanged in a set manner using proper terminology and acknowledgement of the information received.³

Communication is an important component of team process, by serving as a coordinating mechanism, or supporting structure, for teamwork.⁴ Communication skills interplay directly with leadership, situation monitoring, and mutual support. Team leaders provide guidance through verbal feedback. Leaders also promote interaction among team members by clarifying team roles and defining team norms for conflict resolution. Effective communication skills are needed to clearly convey information, provide awareness of roles and responsibilities, or how performance impacted outcomes.

Good communication facilitates development of mutual trust and shared mental models, enabling teams to quickly adapt to changing situations. Sims, Salas, and Burke note, “Communication is especially important as the environment increases in complexity (e.g., emergency situations) as it not only distributes needed information to other team members but also facilitates the continuous updating of the team’s shared mental model and their engagement in [other team activities].”⁴

Communication is a critical skill possessed by team members, for effective teamwork to occur. Team members that possess good communication skills are able to:

- Communicate accurate and complete information in a clear and concise manner
- Seek information from all available sources
- Readily anticipate and share the information needs of other team members
- Provide status updates
- Verify information received

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References

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