

# **NetWork Device Activity**

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## **Overview**

The client, a corporate furniture company, was interested in providing training in anticipation of having to deal with new dynamics resulting from the organization's rapid growth. Part of that training included a session designed to focus the employees on their communication skills, and ways to refine those skills.

### *The objectives:*

- ◆ To enable participants to get their ideas across to a wide audience of listeners ranging from co-workers, to salespeople to customers
  
- ◆ To identify ways in which to communicate so that time is used more efficiently to achieve the desired end result
  
- ◆ To present ideas in a manner that will achieve buy-in and add value to the organization

The population varied widely in terms of education, language proficiency, reading ability, and job skills. The NetWork device proved to be an excellent vehicle to engage everyone on an equal level while tackling the challenges this group faces in trying to communicate effectively and efficiently.

## ***Process***

1. The group was divided in two, approximately 16 people to a group
2. Half the group volunteered to operate the strings of the device, while the other half served as "communication partners". The "communication partners" were given written directions that were to be communicated verbally. The directions were not to be shown to the operators.
3. Rules were noted (no marking on line, only one finger controlling a string, etc.), and the operators were given a few minutes just to practice moving the strings.

4. The first round was stopped after approximately 3 minutes and operators were asked to identify the following:
  - *What were they doing well?*
  - *What would they like to do differently (emphasizing that this question didn't indicate error, but perhaps a growing awareness of the need to handle some aspect of the way they were communicating differently)*
  - *Who had responsibility for the communication and ultimately, the success of the task?*
5. The round was completed (or stopped depending on time) and the “communication partners” were asked:
  - *What was challenging for you in communicating with your person?*
  - *What do you think you did well?*
6. The second round used new directions, a new and more complex target, and the operators were asked to wear blindfolds. The operators were also asked to switch roles so operators now acted as ‘communication partners’. The blindfolds were put on before the new target was put in place.
7. Play was stopped at a mid point and the operators, with masks still in place, were asked to identify one thing about the communication that was challenging for them.
8. The play resumed with the facilitator asking each group to have only one person act as “communication partner” for each group.
9. When the round was completed the following debrief occurred:
  - *What new challenges were created as a result of the operators having to wear blindfolds?*
  - *How did having one source of communication help or hinder your effort?*
  - *Without the visual component, what other elements became more important (i.e., trust, clarity, rapport, etc.)?*

### **Key Points**

Because of the large diversity in this employee population, the NetWork Device was an excellent learning tool. These are people who are generally more comfortable working with their hands. Their own communication challenges often fell into one of two categories.

1. Problems with being understood because of accents or inability to convey clear information

## 2. Difficulties following directions because terms were unclear

Through activity and discussion, participants surfaced a greater awareness of the issues.

- They found it is often difficult to identify what is working well, and thus ensure it is repeated.
- Participants came to understand that some listeners like all the information at one time, while others are more comfortable getting it in smaller amounts.
- They agreed that the responsibility in any communication involves everyone.
- The blindfold created the need to listen more closely and made people much more sensitive to the noise and other distractions that were being experienced.
- Having one source of communication allowed everyone to hear the same information. When directions were given to a specific individual other participants slowed down and noticed how the action of one person affected the action of others.
- Participants were able to see how the activity translated into their work environment and what practices were needed to have better communication.

A three step process for improving communication was introduced and the insights developed during the debriefs of the two rounds were then tied into the specific steps to accelerate and reinforce the participants' learning.