



Module 1.3 Active Listening (adapted from Langlois, 2015)

Developing effective listening skills is a basic competency for managing teams. Questioning and observing other team members facilitates sharing of important personal information. Talking without focus can be distracting. The more focused the listening process, the more likely team members will explore alternative ways for doing the project, making the team perform successfully, and discussing individual problems.

Active listening is a prerequisite for effective team management. When team members fail to listen, the team can become discouraged effecting self-exploration, discussions about pertinent issues, while creating impatience about having to discuss and analyze the task and team processes.

Active Listening consists of four listening skills that maintain constructive listening techniques. Active listing techniques support the successful formation of relationships and ultimately the effectiveness of the team's collaboration. Improving communication skills requires team members to "listen" to both verbal and nonverbal messages. Neutrality maximizes communication skills. Specifically, refrain from making judgments and giving advice, resist distractions, and avoid asking too many questions.

The following are examples of past students' comments when students observed their listening skills while trying to actively listen to another student when describing their project.

"By doing this exercise, I have realized how easily and how often my mind wanders when someone is talking to me. I am on my own time, and in my own one-track mind. But since I was forced to make a summary of what they were saying, I paid more attention, and had to ask more questions, and they had to help me along with my summary. It is important to be a good listener when you are a team leader, so I have found that I need to improve on that. I am also not that great at communication, because I don't speak enough in formal terms, I usually talk to friends and don't need to think that much and use that much vocabulary. But I was having a hard time explaining my experiment to Lilah in very clear and technical terms, I could only describe it very simply."

"Today's listening activity was more productive than I thought it would be. I was a little skeptical at first. But after actually making an attempt to listen with all my focus on the speaker, I realized that there is quite a big difference between conversational listening and active listening. The big difference being that in active listening I am paying attention to what the speaker is saying, trying to

remember it, and store it away. I think I should actively listen more when I'm in lecture, because that's the time when I find myself paying the least attention..."

"...The clarification step is the most useful in my opinion. Many times, we are told something and we think that we understand it, but actually don't understand it the way it's supposed to be understood or the way that the person who told us understands us to understand it. By repeating it back to them, or clarifying, we ensure that the message is understood in exactly the way that it was intended to be. Summarizing what you learned is also useful. I consider this to be mostly a supplement to the clarification step. I think that a great deal of summarizing goes on during the clarification step... I have a problem with active listening. I'm more of a passive listener and I often skip the clarification step, to the detriment of my understanding. Now that I know the problem, I can employ my new active listening skills to overcome the problem and to become competent in everyday activities related to basic communication."

Active Listening Skills consists of the following four stages. (Langlois, 2010)

1. Clarification: asking open-ended questions that help to clarify ambiguous words, phrases, or statements, e.g., "What do you mean by (ambiguous word)?" "Can you explain that a little more?"

Intended Purpose: To encourage more elaboration, check out the accuracy of what you heard being said, and clear up vague, confusing messages.

2. Paraphrase: deals with the content of the communication, rephrasing content as closely as possible to highlight message that was heard, and describes a situation, event, person or idea.

Intended Purpose: To help the speaker focus on the content of his/her message, and highlight content when attention to feelings is premature or self-defeating.

3. Reflection: deals with the feelings associated with the content; serves to label feelings correctly and to encourage further expression; refers to the affect part of the message.

Intended Purpose: To encourage speaker to express more of his/her feelings, experience feelings more intensely, become more aware of feelings that dominate him/her, help the speaker acknowledge and manage feelings and discriminate accurately among feelings.

4. Summarization: ties the whole communication together by restating both content [paraphrase] and feelings [reflection] in an integrated manner; conveys the impression that team member has been heard.

Intended Purpose: To tie together the multiple elements, identify a common theme or pattern, interrupt excessive rambling, and review progress.