MACHINING

Level - III

Learning Guide 14

Unit of Competence: Lead Workplace Communication

Module Title: Leading Workplace Communication

LG Code: <u>IND MAC3 14 0217</u>

Instruction Sheet	Learning Guide #1

This learning guide is developed to provide you the necessary information regarding the following **content coverage** and topics:

- Communicate information about workplace processes
- Lead workplace discussion
- Identify and communicate issues arising in the workplace

This guide will also assist you to attain the learning outcome stated in the cover page. Specifically, **upon completion of this Learning Guide, you will be able to**:

- Selected communication method.
- Response to workplace issues are provided immediately.
- Information regarding problems and issues are organized coherently to ensure clear and effective communication.

   Learning Instructions:

1. Read the specific objectives of this Learning Guide.
2. Follow the instructions described below 3 to 26.
3. Read the information written in the information "Sheet.
4. Accomplish the "Self-check.
5. Do the "LAP test".

Information Sheet	LO1: Communicate information about workplace processes

1. Communicate information about workplace processes

Introduction

- The ability to effectively communicate with others is one of the most powerful tools for personal and/or professional success.
- Most people are challenged by the many day-to-day interactions with co-workers, family, and friends.
- Emotion, communication and conflict are present in all human interactions and affect each of us in different ways.
- Everyone manages emotion, communication and conflict from habit – patterns and styles developed early in life and over time.
- 80% of problems in the workplace are communication related
- One of the quickest ways to alienate (disaffect) you from other people is to communicate unsuccessfully.
- Effective communication empowers you to influence others.
- Your capacity to communicate is often seen as an indicator of your ability and   intelligence

☞ **Leading workplace communication involves:**

➢ Understanding methods of communication,
➢ communication skills,
➢ leading discussions,
➢ identifying problems and
➢ Tactical way of solving problems.

☞ In general, to become good leader, one should bear in mind the tactical way of handling employees before the matter gets worse.

   ➢ In order to do this, some skills have to be mastered i.e.

      ✓ Speaking skills,
      ✓ listening skills,
      ✓ presentation skill and
      ✓ Leading discussions are some of the skills required in the area.

- **Listening** is a fundamental communication skill for understanding both the verbal content and the underlying feelings embedded in the message.
- **Listening is** an important skill for leaders.

- **Listening** while showing empathy for and understanding of the speaker's perspective, even if it is different from the leader's own position is an important attribute of leaders.
- Using good and organized questioning one can extract valuable information which can be applied to resolve conflict and manage workplace communication. Open or closed type of questions can forwarded depending on the information needed.
- This handout was prepared by a group of experts during the curriculum development workshop as a handout for both the learner and trainer; hence by no means this document serves as a standard reference for the module. So the trainer is expected to prepare and provide and intensive learning and teaching material as required.

Past Experiences Shape Communication Style

- Communication doesn't just happen; your style is based on your experiences that over time have developed into a pattern of attitudes and actions.
- It is a continuous cycle. Your experiences influence your thoughts. Your thoughts, over time, become your attitudes. These attitudes become the blueprint for new experiences, which develop into patterns of behavior.
- An awareness of your personal style is critical to begin to transform negative attitudes and behaviors into positive ones.

- It is key to empowering you to establish personal responsibility and accountability in the midst of changing your behavior. *Remember, the only person you can ever really control or change is yourself.*
- Discover your own level of interpersonal communication skills.
- Activity: Click on the link below and read the statements carefully, then indicate the degree to which they apply to you. After finishing the Communication Skills Test, you will receive a free basic report.
- NOTE: Do not feel pressured to purchase the detailed report for a fee.

Nine Steps to Effective Listening

1. Face the speaker and maintain eye contact.
2. Be attentive, yet relaxed.
3. Keep an open mind to the speaker's message – try to feel what the speaker is feeling.

4. Listen to the words and try to picture what the speaker is saying.

5. Do not interrupt and do not impose your "solutions."

6. Wait for the speaker to pause to ask clarifying questions - ask questions only to ensure understanding of something that has been said (avoiding questions that disrupt the speaker's train of thought).

7. Give the speaker regular feedback, e.g., summarize, reflect feelings, or simply say "uh huh."

8. Pay attention to nonverbal cues -to feelings, tone of voice, inflection, facial expressions, gestures, posture.

9. Be aware of potential barriers that impact your ability to listen effectively.

1.1 Select appropriate *communication method*

METHODS OF COMMUNICATION

1.1.1. Non – verbal communication

☞ Effective communication involves more than words.

☞ Nonverbal communication is sending and decoding messages with emotional content.

- Friendliness,
- respect,
- acceptance,
- rejection,
- Dominance,
- submissiveness,
- anger,
- Fear and humor are conveyed primarily by nonverbal signals.

❋ When the verbal and nonverbal messages disagree, the receiver is likely to discount the verbal message and believe the nonverbal message. For example, a sender who verbally promises to act in good faith but does not make eye contact and keeps glancing at a wristwatch (watch) is indicating lack of respect for the receiver.

❋ Important dimensions of nonverbal communication include

- Body movements and gestures,
- eye contact,
- touch,
- facial expressions, and

> Tone of voice.

Body Movements and Gestures

☞ Posture can indicate attentiveness or lack of interest in a conversation.

☞ Gestures can add or detract from the verbal message. Hands gestures help emphasize points, but restlessness sends the message that the speaker is nervous and lacks of confidence. Different cultures place different meanings on gestures.

Eye Contact

☞ Attentiveness or lack of interest on the part of the sender or receiver in face-to-face communication is conveyed by eye contact.

☞ In business communication, it is important for both parties to make some eye contact, but prolonged eye contact may be interpreted as aggressiveness or inappropriate intimacy. Use eye contact carefully in business conversations.

Touch

☞ A firm handshake is an enthusiastic (excited) greeting, but a weak handshake sends a negative signal, indicating low enthusiasm.

☞ Touch signals liking, acceptance, and friendship. Even more than eye contact, touch should be used sparingly in business situations.

Facial Expressions

☞ Emotions such as happiness, satisfaction, anger, fear, and confusion are signaled by facial expressions.

☞ A confused look is feedback that the verbal message was not clearly received.

☞ Smiling conveys happiness and warmth. Along with the handshake, a smile is probably one of the most effective ways to establish a positive connection with a new acquaintance.

1.1.2. Verbal communication

Written communication

☞ Written communication includes

> Memos,
> policy manuals,

- ➢ employee handbooks,
- ➢ company newsletters,
- ➢ bulletin boards,
- ➢ Letters and fliers.

☞ Written documents have an advantage over face-to-face communication, because messages can be revised, stored and made available when needed, and disseminated in identical copies so the same message is received by all.

☞ Written communication can be personalized for a small audience or written a generic style that accommodates a larger audience.

☞ The limitations of written communication are that there are no provisions for feedback, and the sender may not be certain if the message was received, read, and/or understood.

Two popular forms of written communication are memos and letter & newsletter.

☞ **A MEMO (Office Memorandum)** is a short business messages that provide information to employees are sent in memos. They can be used to inform employees about the agenda, time, and place of a meeting; to schedule work; or to describe a change in an employment policy.

- ➢ A memo should be brief and to the point. Also,
- • Make sure that the heading indicates:
  - (1) The intended audience;
  - (2) The subject of the memo;
  - (3) The name of the sender; and
  - (4) The date that the memo was written.
- • Revise and edit the memo to eliminate misspellings and poor grammar. Make sure the message is clear and unambiguous.
- • Add the names of people who need to be aware of the communication to a copy list at the end of the memo.
- • Avoid sending memos to people who do not need to know about the content. Employees should not waste time reading memos that are not important.

☞ **A LETTER** is the most used form of written communication and mostly used for external communication.

Letter should be:

- Well presented
- Brief and to the point
- Accurate
- Easy to read and understand

☞ When writing a letter decide first on the purpose of your letter and what you want to achieve. Then make a short list of the points to be covered and prepare a rough draft. Start a new paragraph for each new topic.

☞ Your letter should contain an opening paragraph which sets the scene of the rest of the letter. The main Points to be covered should be sub-divided into further paragraphs. The final paragraph normally contains a summing- up of the contents and any recommendations. Try not to make your sentences paragraph too long.

☞ **Notice** is required to inform the whole works in the organization or company and most common method of mass communication. It should be simple, short and understandable for every worker. It must contain all relevant information, appropriately worded and any action to be taken should be clearly explained.

NEWS LETTERS

☞ Many companies have short monthly or quarterly publications designed to keep employees informed of important events, meetings, and transitions and to provide inspirational stories about employee and team contributions to the business.

☞ Newsletters help foster community spirit by keeping everybody informed about what others are doing.

ELECTRONIC COMMUNICATION

☞ Advances in electronic technology make interactive communication possible between senders and receivers, even when they are separated by physical distance and busy schedules.

☞ Electronic communication channels vary in the richness of the information that is transmitted and can include text, voice, graphics, or video.

Two important forms of electronic communication are voice mail and e-mail.

THE INTERNET

The Internet is a computer network with multimedia communication capabilities. A combination of text, voice, graphics, and video can be sent to a receiver over the Web. Companies' sites On the World Wide Web are places where potential customers can learn about products and services and place orders. The use of the Internet makes it possible for companies to serve international customers.

1.1.3. Face to face communication

☞ **Rich information content** is possible in face-to-face communication, because there is a high level of interactivity between the sender and the receiver.

☞ Job interviews are likely to be done face-to-face. One of the most important types of face-to-face communication is the meeting.

☞ *Meetings,* or gatherings of organizational members, are held to inform and train participants, solve problems, monitor and coordinate activities, delegate tasks, and create social bonds between diverse organization members.

☞ *Staff meetings* allow managers to coordinate activities with subordinates.

☞ *Corporate or business-unit meetings* address strategic issues and involve executives who formulate long-range goals.

☞ *Task force meetings* are held to discuss goals that affect a broad range of employees such as diversity in the workplace or safety.

☞ *Team meetings* are used to coordinate the work activities of members of a self-managed team, including performance goals, training new members, scheduling work, and suggesting improvements in work methods. The application of multimedia technologies that transmit video, voice, and text over Satellite networks have made face-to-face meetings with globally dispersed people possible.

1.1.4. Formal/Informal communication

Formal Communication

☞ The formal channel, as the name implies, is deliberately, officially prescribed path for flow of communication among the various positions in the organization.

☞ It is a deliberate attempt to regulate the follow of organizational communication so as to make it orderly and thereby to ensure that information flows **smoothly, accurately** and **timely** to the points to which it is required .

☞ The channel of communication under this system is, no doubt, narrow, but ordinarily, it does allow for flow of essential information.

➤ Besides, it is easy to maintain, supports the authority of the superiors and provides for closeness of contact thereby reducing channels of miscommunication. It helps in exercising control over subordinates and in fixation of responsibility in respect of activities carried out by a person in the organization.

☞ **It has certain basic limitations** as well such as, bottlenecks in the flow, enhancing organizational distance, greater possibilities of transmission errors, screening at various filtering points, etc.

☞ These limitations can be overcome by providing a number of communicating channels linking one position with various other positions, the system of multiple channels.

☞ An unlimited use of this system may however cause confusion and also undermine the superior's authority.

Informal Communication gossip

☞ The informal channel of communication, also known as **grapevine (hearsay), (rumor)**, is the result of the operation of social forces at work place.

☞ While formal communication exists to meet the utilitarian needs of the organization, informal communication is the method by which people carry on social, non-programmed activities within the formal boundaries of the system.
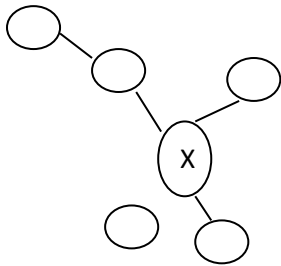
Types of Grapevine

• **Single strand network** -the individual communicates with other individuals' through intervening persons.
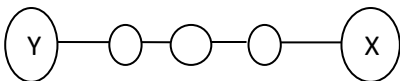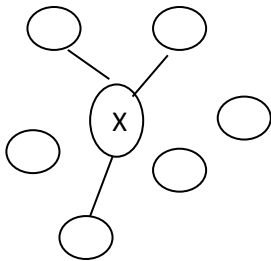

• **gossip network**- the individual communicates non-selectively
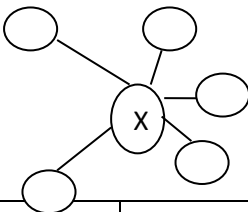
- **probability network** -the individual communicates randomly with other individuals according to the law of probability

- **cluster network the** -individual communicates with only those individuals whom he trusts

1.2. Communication skills are maintained in all situations
1.2.1. Communication skills

One of best to ways to ensure effective communication is to provide opportunity for employees to develop communication skills. Skill in sending and receiving message greatly reduces the possibility that a distorted message will be transmitted. The following are the four key communication skills:

- Assertive communication skills
- Presentations skills
- Nonverbal communication skills and Listening skills

1.2.1.1. Assertive communication skills

☞ **Assertive communication skills** enable an individual to communicate in ways that meet her or his own needs while at the same time respecting the needs and right of others.

☞ A person who displays these skills states exactly what is wanted or needed from individuals being targeted for the message.

☞ Speaking calmly, directly and confidently without instilling fear or anger in the other person is being assertive.

☞ **The goal is to respond directly and outwardly to a problem.**

☞ A person who communicates assertively sticks to the fact, and does not communicate in critical, subjective way.

☞ Assertive communication involves:

> ➢ Giving facts,
> ➢ Feedback or information that makes clear the communicator's wishes,
> ➢ needs,
> ➢ wants,
> ➢ beliefs,
> ➢ Or feelings.

☞ Here are some examples of speaking directly in a factual manner.

- "I would like you here eight o'clock."
- "I am quite pleased with the way the situation has been resolved."

☞ Assertive communication includes obtaining honest feedback from others. The individual will ask direct questions or make direct statements to find out the other person's views, wants, and feelings to make sure there is no misunderstanding between the two parties.

> ✦ Here are some examples of ways to receive direct feedback:
> - "What would you prefer to do?"
> - "I would like to hear your views on this."
> - "What are the pro and cons on this idea from your point of view?"

There are several less effective communication styles that people use in work place. This is because the communicator is either indirect or is not mindful of the needs of others or of her or his own needs.

These dysfunctional communication styles include:

(1) Passive,

(2) Aggressive, and

(3) passive-aggressive communication.

An individual who engages in **passive communication** does not let others know directly what he or she wants or needs. A passive communicator hopes that his or her needs will be met without asking. Others are expected to figure out what is needed, and, if they fail, the passive communicator becomes resentful.

An aggressive communication style is a forceful approach to communicate with others which expresses dominance and even anger. An aggressive communicator ignores the needs and rights of others, and loudly proclaims what he or she wants. The aggressive communicator may coerce others by using threatening words until he or she gets what is wanted.

A passive-aggressive communication style avoids giving direct responses to others' requests or feedback. Instead the passive-aggressive communicator tries to "get even" with others later for real or imagined injustices. This individual fears giving direct feedback to others for the same reasons that the passive communicator does.

If a person becomes aware of a tendency to communicate in one of these three dysfunctional styles, he or she should learn and practice honest, assertive communication skills.

1.2.1.2.   Presentation Skills

☞ Presentation skills are critical in almost every job. Engineers need to present ideas persuasively to the managers who control funding. Managers must present performance results to executives, and team members may need to present ideas for quality improvement at staff meetings. Managers and team leaders often need to persuade the team or employees to do something or to accept a new policy. Basic guidelines for developing effective presentation skills include the following:

☞ *Prepare objectives* for your presentation. Know what you want the audience to do. Do you want them to buy a product? Invest in a new technology? Implement a new policy that controls travel expenses?

☞ *Organize the presentation* into several key ideas, no more than five that will persuade the audience to act in the way you want them to. Organize your ideas in a logical sequence based on the relative importance of each idea. Use a mix of information to support your ideas, including publications, statistics, quotes from famous people, and personal stories that you share with the audience.

☞ *Structure the presentation* into three parts: introduction, body, and conclusion.

- The *introduction* tells the audience what the presentation is about and what benefits they should get out of it. It should begin with a good opening, such as a story or declarative statement that grabs the audience's attention and sustains it through the rest of the presentation.
- The *body* is the main message and idea of the presentation.
- The *conclusion* summarizes the key takeaway points that the speaker wants to emphasize so that the audience will be persuaded to act.

☞ *Tailor the presentation* to the needs of the audience. Find out in advance who will be attending the meeting, anticipate the motivations and interests of the audience, and design the presentation to meet some of those needs and interests.

☞ *Establish your credibility* if the audience is not familiar with your credentials. An effective leader will introduce the speaker to establish the speaker's credentials.

☞ *Speak in a responsive and conversational style* that engages listeners. Nobody wants to hear a speaker read aloud or make a programmed presentation that sounds like it was memorized. Treat the audience as if you developed the presentation just for their benefit.

☞ *Use visual aids* such as overhead slides, charts, exhibits, or colorful posters that reinforce the verbal message. Computer programs that combine text, graphics, and color to make overhead slices are a basic part of the professional's toolkit.

☞ *Practice your presentation skills,* which, as all performance skills, improve with effort and practice. Look for opportunities to make presentations and receive feedback. Making a presentation to a school group or a social organization or teaching a class is a good way to get additional experience.

☞ *Restate the key ideas* you want the audience to remember when concluding the presentation. Summarize the objectives and purpose of the talk. End the presentation with an audience appeal for action if appropriate.

1.2.1.3. Nonverbal communication skills

☞ Nonverbal communication is sending and decoding messages with emotional content.

☞ Friendliness, respect, acceptance, rejection, dominance, submissiveness, anger, fear, and humor

are conveyed primarily by nonverbal signals.

1.2.1.4. Listening skills

☞ Listening is a fundamental communication skill for understanding both the verbal content and the underlying feelings embedded in the message.

☞ **Listening is an active, not a passive activity**. It requires the listener to be involved in the communication process.

☞ The listener should try to avoid judging the speaker or the message being given. Instead, the listener should focus attention on trying to understand the content of the message.

☞ An active listener indicates both verbally and nonverbally that he or she is engaged in the conversation. When the speaker is communicating a feeling, the listener can restate what the speaker is expressing, asking for confirmation. The speaker will either confirm the impression or clarify it.

☞ In either case, the speaker will be encouraged to continue the conversation. Also, by using nonverbal indicators of listening-making eye contact, nodding the head, and leaning forward, for example-the listener is encouraging the speaker to continue.

☞ Lack of feedback from the listener can discourage the speaker from sharing opinions or feelings.

☞ *Passively listening may unintentionally short-circuit a conversation.*

☞ **When listening to another person, the speaker's tone of voice often discloses his or her emotional state, which helps the listener understand the feelings behind the words**.

☞ Aspects of the speaker's tone of voice to listen for include
  ➢ The pitch,
  ➢ loudness, and
  ➢ Speed of the verbal message.

☞ By decoding the meaning of the speaker's tone of voice, the listener can provide feedback to the speaker that can improve the quality of communication between the two parties.

Here are some examples of how to interpret and respond to a speaker's tone of voice.

- If a speaker's pitch of voice is high and strained, it indicates feelings of nervousness. Calm, reassuring response from the listener encourages the speaker to proceed

speaking. On the other hand, a quick, jerky response from the listener may cut the speaker short and disrupt the speaker's train of thought. Speaking in a lower pitch that is unstrained indicates the speaker is feeling confident and has emotional composure.

- If the speaker's tone of voice is shaky and hesitant with numerous pauses, it indicates a lack of confidence and doubt. By maintaining eye contact and offering reassuring gestures such as nodding one's head, the listener encourages the speaker to go on and complete the message.

1.2.1.5. Developing Effective Feedback Skills

■ Focus on specific behaviors
■ Keep feedback impersonal
■ Keep feedback goal oriented
■ Make feedback well timed
■ Ensure understanding
■ Direct feedback toward behavior that is controllable by the recipient

1.3. Use Questions to gain extra information

☞ There are many types of questions that are useful for promoting discussions.

☞ In general,

➢ Open-ended questions encourage discussion,

➢ Whereas closed-ended questions (e.g., yes/no questions) tend to limit discussion.

☞ It is better to ask workers to discuss on each idea rather than to just ask them whether they agree or disagree with it.

☞ After someone has answered a question, it often is useful to ask follow-up questions to clarify the issues.

☞ When questions are addressed to the leader, they often should be redirected back to participants to promote discussion.

☞ Being asked a direct question by the leader can be a threatening experience that reduces discussion. Leaders 'should try to ask questions of the entire group whenever possible.

☞ After asking a question, the leader should remember to give the group members sufficient time to respond.

☞ The leader should reward participation by acknowledging responses. If no one responds, the leader should try rewording the question or going around the room and having everyone
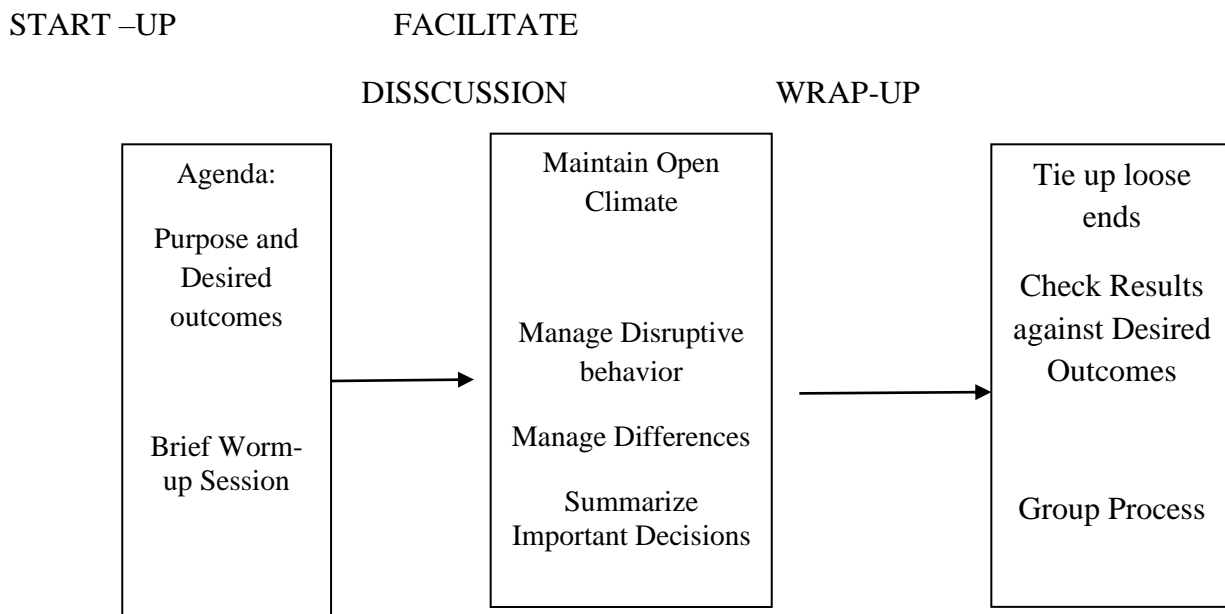
comment on it.

☞ **A lack of response might mean that the question has a bias or is putting some of group members on the defensive.**

1.4. Identify Correct sources of information

☞ The discussion starts with a review of the agenda and warm-up activities designed to get people talking socially.

☞ The main body of the discussion focuses on managing the communication process and making decisions. The discussion ends with a summary of decisions and assignments and an evaluation of how well the group is operating.

☞ Although the discussion leader is the primary facilitator of group discussion, all of the members have a responsibility to help facilitate group meetings. The following is a description of the five main communication activities of the facilitator.

START –UP   FACILITATE

                    DISSCUSSION   WRAP-UP

| Agenda:

Purpose and Desired outcomes

Brief Worm-up Session | Maintain Open Climate

Manage Disruptive behavior

Manage Differences

Summarize Important Decisions | Tie up loose ends

Check Results against Desired Outcomes

Group Process |

☞ *Maintain an open and collaborative climate*. When discussing the topics of the meeting, the discussion should focus on the issues, not on people's personalities or behaviors. Focusing on the behaviors of individuals rather than on issues can make the participators defensive and reduce communication.

☞ *Manage disruptive behaviors*. When participators are being disruptive, the leader needs to be firm but friendly in confrontations. Disruptive participators may be dominating the discussion, overly

talkative, or rude to other participators. All participators share responsibility for handling difficult members; it is not just the job of the leader to maintain the flow of the discussion. The leader should acknowledge and verbally reward acceptable behaviors.

☞ *Manage differences*. Differences can be a constructive force because they can encourage critical thinking, creativity, and healthy debate. Differences are constructive when issues (and not people) are attacked, team spirit is increased, understanding is enhanced, and achievement takes place. Differences also can be a destructive force. Differences can be managed by clarifying the various points of view, defining areas of agreement and disagreement, and taking steps to resolve differences through problem-solving techniques and consensus decision making.

1.5.   Select and organize Information correctly

☞ *Summarize important decisions*. The leader needs to keep the participators focused on the agenda topics. To help keep the group process flowing, the leader should stop after major agenda items and summarize participator's conclusions. This allows for a check on whether all participators agree with what has happened at the meeting.

☞ *Evaluate the group process*. The leader should hold a group process evaluation at the end of each group discussion to discuss how the discussion operated and areas for improvement. These group process evaluations provide feedback to the team about its performance. This helps to deal with problems before they get emotionally out of hand.

1.6.   Undertake Verbal and written reporting when required

In general, the method to proceed on any report is:

> ➢ Decide on the theme or main idea for the report.
> ➢ Gather data to support your findings.
> ➢ Organize the report (by making up some sort of outline in general) so that it will focus on the story you want to tell.
> ➢ Write the report or prepare the oral presentation per outline.

Most communications need to convey "the seven:"

> ➢ Who – will do, is doing, or has done work.
> ➢ What – will be, is, or has been done.
> ➢ Where – location of work (unless obvious, like engr. lab).
> ➢ When – Time frame.
> ➢ Why – What is unique about the opportunity.
> ➢ How – Scope, approach, etc.
> ➢ Impact – Reason we have got to do (or continue) this!

Emphasis depends on state of work.

- ➢ If proposed: Why, how, impact.
- ➢ If in work: Who, what, when.
- ➢ If complete: How, who, impact.

The Verbal Report

The information in a work area report needs to be provided by the individual who actually has observed the environment or had contact with the work regarding the report.

Intake personnel will want the following information, if available:

• Primary employee's (supervisors) name and address.

• Names and identifying information for all work area members,

• The address where the alleged incident happened, if different than the home address.

• History of the supervisors.

2. Lead workplace discussion
  2.1.   sought Response to workplace issues
HOW TO SOLICIT (Request) RESPONSE

☞ Important decisions are made with input from others. Leaders need to solicit input before making decisions for a variety of reasons:

- to obtain critical input,
- to build commitment in others,
- to develop others,
- to show respect for others' opinions, and
- To foster open communication and problem sharing.

☞ The following guidelines suggest ways to solicit input for the decision making process:

- When you first learn that you must make a decision, determine who has the information you need to make a good decision, which you need to involve getting buy-in, and who you think should be involved.
- You can involve others in any phase of the process: defining the problem or opportunity, identifying other ways of looking at the problem, generating optional approaches, selecting criteria for making a final decision, making the final call, or planning implementation. You may involve everyone in every phase or engage different people in each, depending on the decisions and input needed.

☞ Options for soliciting input include:
  – One-to-one conversations
  – Group discussions
  – Memos requesting input
  – Electronic mail discussion (internal communications on computer)

☞ When appropriate, pull people together as a group so that individuals can work together to define the opportunities goals, and best course of action.

2.2.   provide Response to workplace issues immediately

☞ If you anticipate that people will have difficulty working together:

- Talk with them individually first to solicit their cooperation.
- Deal respectfully with their concerns.
- Develop supporters in the group who will help you keep it focused and working constructively.

- Be clear about what you want, particularly with those you will rely upon as supporters.

  When interviewing others to gain information for problem solving:

- Use open-ended questions and active listening.
- Take care not to judge others' suggestions or to convey, verbally or nonverbally, that you disapprove of their ideas.
- If you do not remain open to the information you solicit, others will sense that their input is not really important and will stop communicating with you.

2.3. Make Constructive contributions to workplace discussions on such issues as production, quality and safety

☞ Problem solving has been studied by looking at three different approaches:

- ♣ How one actually goes about solving their problems?
- ♣ What types of behavior contribute to effective problem solving? and
- ♣ What techniques can be used to improve problem solving.

☞ Supervisors should base their problem-solving approaches on a rational model of the process including six stages:

- problem definition
- evaluation of the problem
- generating alternatives
- selecting a solution
- implementation, and
- evaluation of the results

☞ *Factors that improve group problem solving*

An effective group should include intelligent problem solvers (or vigilant critical thinkers). The group should analyze the problem, develop alternatives, and select the best solution. The problem-solving process should be relatively free of social, emotional, and political factors that disrupt a rational approach to problem solving.

☞ **This can be taken as factors that improve group problem solving:**

- Skilled problem solvers view problems from a variety of viewpoints to better understand the problem.
- Rather than relying on its own opinions, an effective group gathers data and research a problem before making a decision.
- A successful group considers a variety of options or alternatives before selecting a

particular solution.

- An effective group manages both the task and relational aspects of problem solving. It does not let a problem damage the group's ability to function effectively in other areas.
- A successful group's discussion is focused on the problem. Too often, groups have difficulty in staying focused on the issues, especially when there are conflicts.
- An effective group listens to minority opinions. Often, the solution to a problem lies within the knowledge of a group member but is ignored because the group focuses on the opinions and ideas of the majority.
- Skilled problem solvers test alternative solutions relative to established criteria. The group defines what criteria a good solution must meet and uses those criteria when examining alternatives.

☞ *Factors that hurt group problem solving*

The groups do not discuss their problem-solving strategies or develop plans to follow. Typically, they try to apply solutions that have worked in the past. When groups spend time developing and following a structured approach to problem solving, their decisions are better and members are more satisfied with the problem-solving process.

☞ There are many reasons why groups do not follow a logical structured approach to problem solving.

- There may be constraints on the problem solving process such as
  - ➢ Limited time,
  - ➢ money, and
  - ➢ Information.
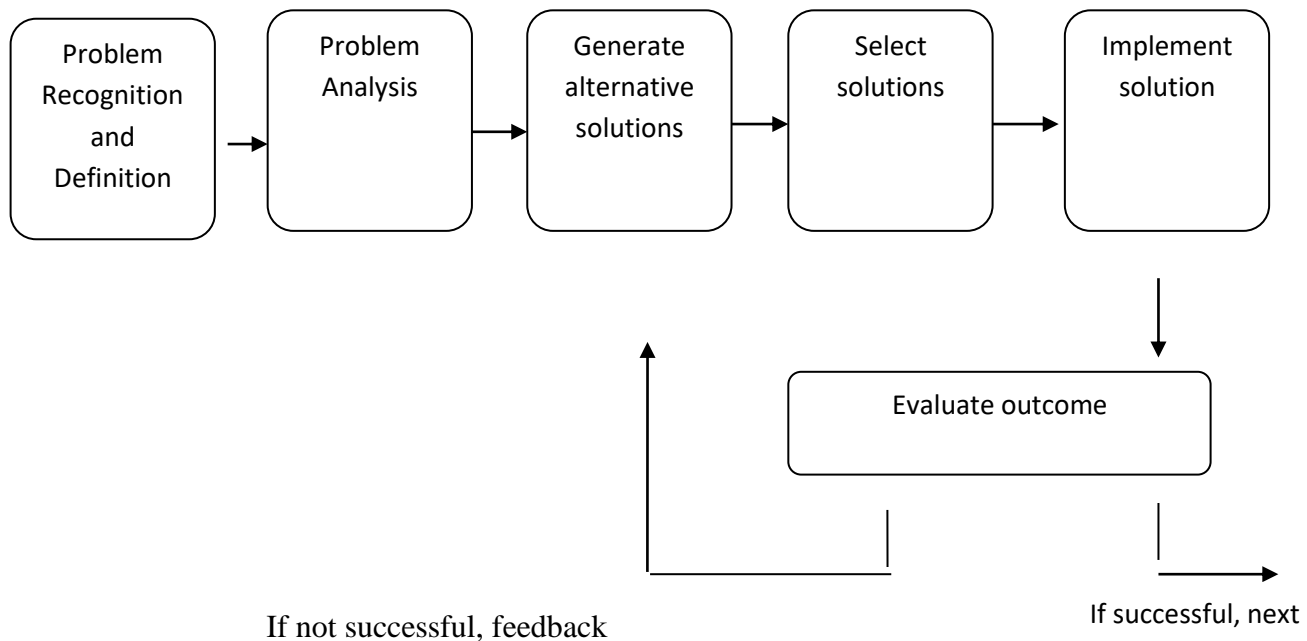- Because of these constraints, groups often seek "satisfying" solutions rather than optimal solutions.
- **Perfection** is expensive and time-consuming. Collecting all of the relevant information to solve problems may take longer than the time or resources available to groups.
- In most cases, groups try to find acceptable solutions (which meet their basic needs) given the time and information constraints of the situations.

☞ In addition, it often is difficult to determine what the best solution is. There are trade-offs such as cost versus effectiveness of the solution.

☞ Solutions differ according to their probabilities of success, the availability of resources to implement them, and the politics of actually implementing them.

☞ These trade-offs do not have correct answers; they rely on the judgments of the group members. This limits a group's ability to objectively select the best solution.

☞ A group's problem-solving process can be disrupted by a number of non-task-related factors. Group members may support a position because of their desire to reduce uncertainty or avoid social conflict.

☞ Groups are better able to solve problems when *power is relatively equal* among group members. This encourages more open communication and critical evaluation.

☞ Groups are better at problem solving when power is based on competence or knowledge rather than on formal authority or control of resources.

| Problem Recognition and Definition | → | Problem Analysis | → | Generate alternative solutions | → | Select solutions | → | Implement solution |

Evaluate outcome

If not successful, feedback   If successful, next

3. **Identify and communicate issues arising in the workplace**
   3.1. **Identify Issues and problems as they arise**

   Problem recognition, definition and analysis

☞ Problem recognition, definition, and analysis are key processes in effective problem solving.

☞ However, team often rushes through these stages of the problem-solving process.

☞ In their desire to develop solutions quickly, groups often focus on the symptoms of the problems rather than trying to understand the real causes of the problems.

☞ **Unfortunately**, even when a group takes the time to identify and analyze a problem, the group may misinterpret the problem and its causes.

☞ There are many things that can go wrong in the problem analysis process. The ability to successfully identify and analyze a problem depends on:

   ➢ characteristics of the problem,

   ➢ the group, and

   ➢ The environment.

☞ Problems vary in their levels of:

   ➢ Severity,

   ➢ familiarity, and

   ➢ Complexity.

☞ The more severe (harsh) a problem is, the more likely it is to be identified as a problem.

☞ Acute (sensitive) problems with identifiable and impacts often are recognized and addressed, whereas chronic problems that are less visible and more on going often are ignored.

☞ Problems that are familiar are more likely to be recognized by groups. Novel (new) problems are more difficult to interpret, and groups might assume that they are unique one-time events that will go away by themselves.

☞ Complex problems are difficult to analyze and interpret. It is common for a group to select just part of a complex problem to analyze and solve so as to simplify the situation (although this might not be an effective way in which to actually resolve the problem).

☞ Group performance also affects the problem identification process. Groups that are performing successfully sometimes will ignore problems. From the perspective of successful groups, the problems cannot be very important because the groups currently are successful.

☞ Unsuccessful groups also have a tendency to ignore problems. These groups must focus on their main performance problems, so they are less likely to see other problems that are affecting the group.

☞ The notion of *continuous improvement* is a teamwork concept designed to help deal with this issue. In continuous improvement, teams assume that part of their function is to improve their operations. In essence, successful and unsuccessful teams are required to identify problems and work to solve them on an ongoing basis.

☞ Characteristics of the environment also affect groups' ability to identify and analyze problems. Many modern environments (e.g., political, business, technological) have substantial amounts of change and uncertainty. The high amount of change creates the need to stay alert and prepare for future problems, whereas the amount of uncertainty makes this more difficult to do. Groups vary in their relations to the outside environment.

3.2. Organize Information regarding problems and issues coherently to ensure clear and effective communication

☞ A solution is not a good one unless it is implemented. This requires commitment from a group to support and enact its solution. One of the benefits of group decision making is that participation in the decision helps to create a sense of commitment to it.

☞ One of the obligations of a problem-solving group is to think about implementation issues when making a decision.

☞ It is not useful to agree on a solution that the group cannot implement. This means that the group should plan how the solution will be implemented.

☞ Planning includes consideration of the people, time, and resources needed to implement the solution. The group also needs to develop instructions on implementation and a rationale justifying its solution if the group will not be the implementers.

☞ It also may be useful to bring the people who will be affected by the decision into the decision-making process so as to encourage their acceptance of the solution.

☞ Evaluation requires examining how the solution was implemented and what the effects were (sometimes called process evaluation versus outcome evaluation). This often requires that the group provide a definition of a successful outcome, something that it should have done during the problem identification stage.

☞ Sometimes, even when the solution resolves the problem, the undesirable situation does not change significantly. This happens when a group solves only part of a larger problem, so the rest of the problem comes to the foreground because a part of it has been solved.

☞ By taking a larger perspective on the problem, the group might be able to determine the more critical parts of the problem that should be solved. The evaluation stage can help to provide information for future problem identification and solving.