



Receiving and communicating information from inmates

Training for trainee prison officers in secure facilities



Support apprenants

Département Gestion et Management

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Foreword

It is a particularly important moment – one that can only succeed if proper communication is established. An interview is a dialogue in which one person seeks to obtain information from another, with the latter's consent.

Proper communication means being able to express your objectives, expectations, and questions sincerely. This also means creating the right conditions for a calm relationship. Finally, it means knowing how to listen, understand and respect.

During the interview, we look at the individual as a whole, his feelings and his environment. The aim is to analyse the needs, aspirations, values, and representations of individuals. We must not try to influence or change their opinions, except in exceptional circumstances. The supervisor conducting the interview must remain neutral.

1. DEFINITION OF COMMUNICATION

To communicate comes from the Latin *communicare*, which means 'to be in contact with'.

Definition: Communication is the act of establishing a relationship with someone.

Communicating means sharing, having a dialogue, and exchanging in order to act, learn, cooperate, and create together.

This means establishing and maintaining a relationship with the other person. The relationship is built up over time, with each instance of communication helping the relationship to evolve.

2. THE THREE MODES OF COMMUNICATION

Written communication:

In written communication, the recipient is at a distance. The message must therefore be complete and legible.

Grammar, punctuation, and spelling must reflect correct usage. Vocabulary is generally more developed than in spoken language.

First and foremost, written communication is distinguished by a certain concern for the recipient's comprehension, as the message cannot always be explained a second time.

Non-verbal communication:

Non-verbal communication is communication that does not use words, in other words, communication that does not use the linguistic elements of verbal language.

<u>Verbal communication</u>: Verbal communication involves the spoken word. From an ethnological point of view, verbal communication is a set of sounds made with the aim of establishing communication with others.

Paradoxically, verbal communication represents only 5% of what an individual perceives, far behind non-verbal communication (movements, expression, tone of voice, eye contact, etc.).

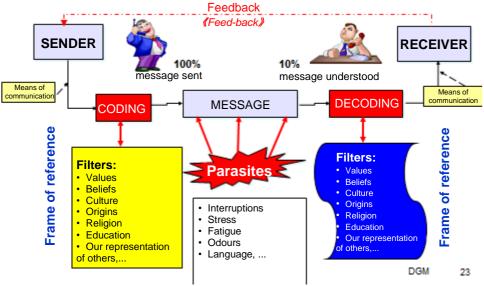
Halfway between verbal and non-verbal communication is paralanguage. This refers to all non-verbal elements used in interpersonal communication: attitude, gestures, behaviour, facial expressions, eye contact, tone of voice, clothing, accessories (jewellery, perfume, glasses), etc.

We pay less attention to our gestures than our language. Studies show that when it comes to understanding a message, the meaning of words accounts for 7%, intonation for 38%, and body language for 55%. It is in our interest to take this into account when we express ourselves and when we try to find out whom we are communicating with.

3. A COMMUNICATION DIAGRAM

3.1. The diagram





3.2. The sender and the receiver

For communication to exist, there must be a sender: the person who sends the message, as well as a receiver: the person who receives it. The message itself corresponds to all signs and signals that the sender sends to the receiver (sounds, visual cues, gestures, etc.)

We are never sure how the message we want to convey will be perceived.

There is often a difference between:

- What we think.
 - What we mean.
 - What we say.

Then, at the end of the chain, between:

- · Which is heard.
 - Which is understood.
 - What is remembered.

This is known as information distortion.

The best illustration of information distortion is the children's game known as *Chinese whispers*, or simply *telephone*. In the game, the first in a line or circle of people comes up with a sentence, which is then whispered from one player to the next, until the last player repeats what they heard in a loud voice. The point of the game is to compare the final version of the sentence with the original.

3.3. Frame of reference, coding and decoding

What is frame of reference?

It represents <u>our perception of the world</u>. Perception consists of all the ideas, beliefs, values and knowledge possessed by an individual. Perception gives meaning to messages. The frame of reference can be summed up as <u>an organised system of values</u>.

It is through our frame of reference that we <u>encode</u> and <u>decode</u> messages that are transmitted and/or received.

The frame of reference is unique and individual. It may lead to differences in understanding a message.

These differences may result from:

- the ambiguity of the words and phrases used, which may take on several meanings depending on each individual's perception of the world.
- context. The sender and receiver may have different personal and professional environments.
- each individual's perception, affected by their own filters (individual frame of reference), past experiences, expectations and individual needs, the projection of their feelings and standards, their own unconscious value judgements.
- the social, cultural, religious, educational, etc., environment of each individual.

3.4. Parasites

In addition to the difficulties we experience in expressing our thoughts (encoding a message) or deciphering what our interlocutor is saying (decoding a message), there are parasites that can disrupt and alter communication.

These parasites may be found in the auditory environment (noise), the olfactory environment (smells), or in emotional factors such as stress, fatigue, etc.

3.5. Feedback

To ensure that the message is well received, it is important to obtain feedback from the other party. We may obtain feedback by asking our interlocutor if we have been clear, offering to rephrase what we've just said. In the same way, we may reformulate what we just understood as a receiver. The aim is to avoid information distortion.

4. METHODS OF COMMUNICATION:

Conducting an interview means accounting for and evaluating the people involved. There are two factors to take into account:

- You (your own unprompted attitudes)
- The Interlocutor

5.ATTITUDES AND BEHAVIOURS THAT ENCOURAGE LISTENING

As we have said, proper communication means managers must be able to express their objectives, expectations, and questions sincerely. This also means creating the right conditions for a calm relationship. Finally, it means managers must know how to listen to their colleagues, understand them, and respect their opinions.

A number of attitudes and behaviours can help create these favourable conditions. Managers must take care to implement them during their interviews: Active listening Empathy
Asking questions
Being assertive

5.1. Active listening:

Active listening does not happen on its own. It's not easy to do. Listening means not speaking while the other person is speaking.

There is no simultaneous communication, only alternating communication.

- Be silent;
- Show that you are paying attention, using expressions like:
- "I see..."

"That's it...",

- "I understand...", or nodding your head.
- Express incomprehension when necessary: "Could you explain to me what you've just said?"
- Ask for further information: "I've heard that this change is important for you, but what I didn't understand is...".

There are 4 types of active listening:

5.1.1. Reformulation:

This means being able to clearly express the message you have received.

Reformulation invites you to an important point made earlier. The point is raised again to make it easier to understand each other.

Rephrasing means expressing what you understood in the first person, using "I". It's not about repeating what was said verbatim.

The failure to reformulate can lead to misunderstanding and/or conflict.

To clarify a situation means to check that the information is reciprocal to ensure better understanding. Reformulation is a necessary element in all communication situations, particularly interviews.

- Repeat your interlocutor's words as an interrogative
- Every time you repeat their words:
 - you adopt their concerns and preoccupations,
 - you show that you value them
 - you invite them to go further
 - you show that you understand them
 - and sometimes you gain time to reflect

5.1.2. Partial summary:

- Structure and summarise what the other person said, without distorting it.
- Every time you summarise what they said:
 - you allow them to see what they've said
 - you allow them to go further in their reasoning

5.1.3. Silence:

- Waiting for the right moment to speak
- Being aware: "I'm keeping my mouth shut on purpose. I feel I shouldn't be talking at this precise moment"
- Let the other person have their say, but beware of digressions or small talk, which can serve as a screen and delay the real questions.

5.1.4. Observation:

You have to pay constant attention to the other person's behaviour and body language, and the shape of the situation:

- They either look at me or they don't
- They express emotion, get excited, smile

- They are aggressive and reactionary
- They search for words, stammer
- They gesticulate or remain still

5.1.5. Non-verbal

Active listening also involves positive non-verbal signs of recognition:

- Nodding the head
- Looking the person in the eye
- Using onomatopoeia to validate what they are saying: (hum) or little words: Ok, yes, fine.

5.2. Empathy

The term empathy was coined by German philosopher Robert Vischer (1847-1933)

Empathy is what we might call a "state of being". In practical terms, it means trying to understand another person's needs and emotions from their point of view: we are not the other person, we are not in their place, we cannot think for them. We try to understand them, to know what they are feeling, what they want to express. No judgement, just constructive communication.

In the study of inter-personal relations, empathy is often distinguished from sympathy or compassion by the fact that the empathic response to the affective states of others occurs without the individual experiencing the same emotion or any emotion whatsoever. Strictly speaking, unlike sympathy, emotional empathy may not be oriented towards the well-being of others at all.

There are various forms of empathy. This is a complex concept which is the subject of several studies. We will focus here only on the notion of <u>emotional empathy</u>.

Definition: empathy is the ability to understand the emotional states of others.

Having an empathetic attitude means:

- taking an interest in our interlocutor:
- having a non-judgemental attitude;
- having a non-directive attitude;
- intending to understand their needs and emotions;
- being part of a constructive communication process.

5.3. Asking questions

A) Questions about the facts:

allow us to remain objective and avoid the trap of subjectivity

- encourage our interlocutor to respond with a story, a description
- allow us to ascertain what really happened

B) Open-ended questions allow us to:

- open up and strengthen the dialogue, obtain information
- make our interlocutor reflect and give them "space to speak"
- These are all questions that require an answer other than yes or no
 These are the questions that begin with:
 - What do you think of...?
 - What is your opinion on...?
 - What do you mean by...?
 - How do you see…?

C) Neutral questions:

- leave our interlocutor free to respond without influencing or inducing a response,
- let them express themselves widely on a subject (neutral and open),
- allow us to obtain precise information (closed and neutral). These are the questions that begin with:
 - What do you think of...?
 - Why are you interested in...?
 - Are you...?
 - How would you assess…?

5.4. Being assertive

Assertiveness:

The ability to express one's options without infringing on the rights of others. It is the ability to express oneself calmly and constructively, to give one's opinion unreservedly, even when faced with hostile interlocutors.

The concept of assertiveness was developed by psychologists in the United States. It consists of enabling an individual to assert themselves in harmony with others:

- defending your point of view without attacking others
- expressing feelings freely

- building relationships based on trust, not domination.

ASSERTIVE

Encourage communication
Asserting one's rights and limits
Respect differences of opinion
Criticise behaviours without judging people
Achieve your goals while preserving relationships

AGGRESSIVE

Devalue
Criticise, attack
Mock
Belittle
Sabotage

Frighten

SUBMISSIVE

Be silent
Be devoted
Flee or avoid
Be passive

MANIPULATIVE

Menace
Manipulate
Deceive
Lie
Manipulate
Simulate

6. INTERVIEW METHODS

There are three types of interview:

Structured interviews

You invite the interviewee to discuss the topics that interest you, that you have defined in advance, or that come up in the course of the discussion.

Non-structured interviews

There is open dialogue.

Semi-structured interviews

You don't limit the interviewee to predefined questions or impose an overly rigid framework. On the contrary, you give them the opportunity to develop and direct their comments freely. Your interview is not a questionnaire (a series of questions and answers). It's more of a dialogue in which you retain some control over the themes you wish to address.

It is rare that only one of these modes is used exclusively during an interview; it is more common to use a mixture, switching from one to another depending on your objectives.

In addition to these methods, there is a wide variety of interview types, each with its own specific features. However, it is possible to specify the basic principles that apply to all interviews.

7. THE STRUCTURE OF AN INTERVIEW

7.1. Preparing for the interview

All too often, this step is not paid due attention. Preparation is essential. It determines the quality of the interview over the long term.

In preparing for an interview, you should address the following points:

- WHY?
 - o What do you expect?
 - O What do you want to achieve?
- WHAT?
 - o What do you mean by that?
- WHO?
 - o What do they expect from the interview?
- HOW?
 - o What is essential/secondary?
 - o How do you introduce it?
 - o What examples should you give?
- WHEN? WHERE? If this affects the interview

The answers to these questions will determine the framework and limits of your interview.

Method

Clearly define the objective of the interview.

- Based on this, determine: the topic to be addressed (semi-structured) or the specific questions to be asked (structured); plan what you will say.
- If there is an accompanying form or questionnaire, study it in advance (e.g., when receiving new arrivals)

Provide a suitable location and appropriate furnishings (noise, chairs, an agenda (in some cases), desk, a note-taker, necessary documents, etc.)

Allow enough time to complete the interview (estimate the time required).

Inform the person of the interview (time, place, purpose).

Find out the necessary information about your interlocutor (to avoid making serious mistakes).

7.2. Opening the interview

Be on time for your appointment.

Establishing an environment conducive to communication

Prepare the interview location. Introduce the interview and welcome the person:

"Good morning Mr/Ms..." (Call the person by their surname).

"Please, take a seat..."

Feel free to introduce yourself (name, position, etc.) if necessary:

"I am..."

State the purpose of the interview.

Prepare an introductory sentence that clearly states the objective and importance of the exchange.

"The purpose of our interview is to..."

If the person wants to talk about another subject related to the context, agree to talk about it for a limited time.

If necessary, specify the estimated time for the interview.

Announcing the time limit is not obligatory.

Watch out for mistakes like: "I have ten minutes for you".

Choose less restrictive and more open statements such as:

"I have a limit that won't allow me to go beyond..."

State your expectations.

Before getting to the content, state your expectations:

"I need to talk to you about... or I need information about..."

Or: "I'm going to ask you some questions about..."

Don't let yourself be distracted.

If your interlocutor objects at this stage, it's probably because they are anxious

and don't understand the context or the purpose of the interview. In this case, you should help them clarify what they don't understand (to do this, take the time to prepare a summary of the facts relating to your interview).

Make sure you stay focused on the purpose of the interview.

<u>Do not</u> let yourself be distracted. In this case, you might ask:

"What are you getting at?

Or "What are you trying to tell me?"

7.3. The body of the interview

7.3.1. The golden rules of interviewing

Try to understand the other person before making yourself understood.

Your interlocutor also has information to give you.

Keep your mouth shut. Conducting an interview doesn't mean talking non-stop.

Adopt behaviours and attitudes that encourage listening.

7.3.2. During the interview.

State the information in a concise and structured manner right to the end, without letting yourself be interrupted. Have your interlocutor rephrase the key points.

Ask the questions and rephrase the answers.

Specify the purpose of the interview so that it forms part of a global, objective, and coherent approach.

Try to translate the other person's words objectively. Refer to facts, or ask your interlocutor to provide their own.

This will allow you to gauge the level of involvement and understanding of your interlocutor: everyone understands things at their own pace.

Give and receive feedback.

If there are any objections, say that you will address them in a moment. Make sure you indeed understand each other, to avoid any misunderstandings about the above.

7.3.3. Dealing with objections

Never reject an objection.

Use positive language (without negative phrasing).

Deal with the objection at the end:

"We'll talk more about that in a few minutes, but let's get back to the subject for now...".

Deal with the objection using the principle of: "Accepting what the other person has to say".

Accept what the other person has to say and try to translate it objectively by referring to facts or asking them to provide their own.

7.4. Concluding the interview

Concluding the interview involves ensuring that the communication will continue.

Summarising the key points

The initial objective:

"That's good, we've talked about..."

Summarise what was said:

"We discussed (this point... that point...)"

Formalise any commitments.

The individual's commitments:

'On your side, you told me you would do this ...'

Your commitments:

'For my part, I will...'

Formalise your disagreements (if any):

"On the other hand, we still don't agree on ..."

Set out the next stages of meetings and exchanges (plan).

Escort your interlocutor in a courteous manner.

7.5. Summary of the basic principles of interviewing

- Prepare

- Introduce

- Establish a friendly atmosphere conducive to exchange.
- State the purpose of the interview

- Develop

- Use a common language.
- Use simple, clear, precise words that will be understood without ambiguity.
- o Follow a plan with key stages and important messages.
- Adapt the explanations if necessary.
- Use examples and specific facts.

- Conclude

- o Review the initial objective.
- Summarise what was said.
- o Formalise any commitments.

8. COMMUNICATION TECHNIQUE

8.1. DESC mnemonic system

The DESC mnemonic system can summarise the very principles of the reframing interview. This allows you to handle problems and assert yourself without being aggressive.

Describe the facts (and nothing but the facts...)

"You are late for the third time..." Specify the dates (with supporting evidence).

Express your feelings (of a strictly professional nature) "I'm very unhappy. Why can't you arrive on time? Why? "ALWAYS let the other person express themselves

Suggest a solution (or have the other person suggest one) I'll take your comments into account... (bearing in mind that I don't want any more disruptions) ... On the other hand, don't you think that if you... (arrived on time you might not be called here again?)

Conclude with the action taken or commitment made

"So we're in agreement: you'll be on time from now on! (Follow up by indicating that another interview will be held to see if trust has been restored).

9. SPECIFIC FEATURES OF VARIOUS INTERVIEWS

Each interview situation is specific and has different goals. Each therefore requires the right techniques and attitudes.

9.1. Intake interviews

Objectives of the interview:

Inform
Gather information

Specifics of the interview:

Complete a paper or digital form (which may be given to the person in advance so that they can complete it themselves (you will use it to conduct your interview).

It will enable you to assess the person's personality.

Gather information in advance from the institution's departments (QA, registry, search, etc.)

- "How did the night's detention go?"
- o Find out whether the USMP and CPIP interviews have already taken place.

Avoid:

Any prejudice or value judgements (to be avoided). Filling in the forms during the interview. This practice, though widespread, can show your interlocutor that you're not listening.

9.2. Informational interviews

1. Top-down information

Objective: to transmit information to interviewees

Risk: the message does not get through completely → ask for feedback.

2. Bottom-up information

Objective: to encourage interviewees to express themselves

Active listening (questions, rephrasing)

Remain neutral: no judgement or interpretation of the information gathered.

More or less prescriptive, depending on whether you need more or less targeted information.

3. Exchange of views

Objective: to exchange opinions and information.

In these three types of interview, the aim is not to make a decision, but to:

- Provide
- Collect
- Exchange information

9.3. Reframing interviews

Reframing means "putting things back into perspective". It involves discussing a situation or action that does not correspond to what the rule (the framework) requires.

This is not an interview in which authority is expressed through aggressive behaviours and attitudes on the part of the interviewer. A firm but open attitude should be favoured.

Preparing for this interview is essential.

Objectives of the interview:

Pointing out the interlocutor's deficiencies and enabling them to remedy them.

Method:

- 1. Preparation: the facts
- What is the situation?
- On what precise facts can you base your intervention (nature of the error or deficiency, dates, places, quantities/measurements, etc.)?
- What were the consequences of the deficiency?

- What previous actions have been taken to avoid your current intervention?
- What support can you give them now to help them progress?
- 2. Welcome and opening
- Neither too dramatic nor too relaxed
- Get to the subject of the interview quickly and precisely
- Give a concise, clear, and complete summary of the facts and their consequences
- Express your dissatisfaction (without anger or excess)
- Leave a moment for silence
- 3. Explaining the facts
- Seek explanations (not justifications) from your interlocutor (with an attitude corresponding to a bottom-up information phase: neutrality).

4. Improvement plan

- Get your interlocutor to consider how to improve the situation (guide them without imposing, so that they may take responsibility)
- Agree on the action plan and define the necessary resources (deadlines, methods, control points, etc.)
- 5. Conclusion
- Summarise the decisions taken
- Highlight your interviewer's strengths (to encourage and re-motivate them)

9.4. Problem-solving interviews

Objectives of the interview:

Find a solution to a problem (the interests of the parties involved are not necessarily contradictory)

Method:

- Clear and complete **presentation** of the problem (top-down information). Specify who will take the decision (you, your interlocutor, a third party, etc.)
- 2. **Research the causes** of the problem (bottom-up information)
- 3. **Find solutions** to the causes of the problem
- 4. **Discussion arguments** for each of the solutions considered (everyone gives their opinion)
- 5. **Decision** and implementation of the chosen solution(s)
- 6. **Follow-up** (if you are responsible)

10. TO LEARN MORE

HOW TO UNLOCK DIFFICULT INTERVIEWS

Interviews conducted in prisons can have specific features related to the characteristics of the interviewees. Apart from the fact that an interview can cause stress and anxiety for staff, statistics show that over thirty-five per cent of the prison population have one or more behavioural disorders.

These elements can quickly render an interview "unproductive" and may be difficult to use afterwards.

There are three specific types of interview: Closed interviews, wandering interviews and "rehearsed" interviews.

The challenge is to be able to quickly identify the specific type of interview so that you can adapt your own communication to avoid a situation where the interlocutor may refuse to communicate.

To identify these types of interview, in addition to indicators in non-verbal communication, there are clues from paralanguage.

Statement duration¹

This corresponds to the duration of the interviewee's response to a question, the length of their answer.

Response latency and interruption percentage²

This represents the amount of time required for the interviewee to respond to a question. The interruption percentage provides information on the interviewee's propensity to interrupt the interviewer's questions.

10.1. The closed interview.

¹ The term "duration of statement" is used in medical and psychiatric terminology

² The expression "Response latency and interruption percentage" is used in medical and psychiatric terminology

In a closed interview, the interviewee presents a short statement duration and a long response latency, usually accompanied by various body language cues, in particular a shifting gaze – a clear sign that things are not going well.

Unlocking closed interviews

- Make extensive use of open questions and gentle commands.
- Follow up on any subject that your interlocutor seems even remotely interested in talking about (all subjects that give rise to a longer statement duration).
- Avoid difficult or sensitive subjects: death, drug addiction, alcoholism, sexual problems.
- Avoid questions such as
 - o "Can you tell me..."
 - "Please tell me more about..."

These are easily met with silence. Prefer gentle commands.

- Encourage the interviewee to look at you and to express themselves more (facilitative wording, empathy).
- Avoid intersecting the interviewee's questions with long silences. This may aggravate resistance and resentment.

10.2. Wandering interview.

In a wandering interview, the interviewee expresses irrelevant and circumstantial thoughts. These digressive remarks swallow up the interviewer's questions. Rushed speech with a long statement duration. Each question gives rise to a new verbal outburst. There is also a short response latency associated with direct eye contact.

This type of interview may be encouraged when the interviewer provides a framework, for example by taking notes: "what you say is important, the proof is in the pudding, go on".

This type of interview may be caused by the interviewer's anxiety.

Unlocking wandering interviews

- Increase the number of closed questions and decrease the number of open questions.
- Avoid reinforcing the digressions with encouraging non-verbal language.
 - Nodding of the head
 - Facilitating phrases
 - Note-taking
- Start gently structuring by returning immediately to the question that caused the wandering.
- Failing that, more refocusing.
 - "Please focus on my question."
 - o "This is an important issue for me. "
- Failing that, continue refocusing by more indirect means
 - "We don't have much time. Please answer my last question so that we can [better define the problem] [better understand your situation] [really be able to find a solution...".
 - Cut the other person off. "You (still) aren't answering my question"
 "I've noticed that when I ask you a question, you quickly digress.
 What's going on?"

Make sure you don't give too much structure to an interview that seems to be wandering, as there's a real risk of it turning into a closed interview. First, let your interlocutor express themselves as they wish, so as to reduce their anxiety if necessary.

10.3. Rehearsed interview.

Rehearsed interviews generally involve what we might call "regulars". In fact, they aren't interviews, but monologues. All questions and perspectives are swept aside so quickly that the interviewee seems to take the wind out of the interviewer's sails, discouraging them from asking further questions.

Unlocking a rehearsed interview

You must react very quickly, as while it's true that you can get back to the

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questions, there's a real risk of switching to a close interview on the pretext that you've already got the information you asked for. "I've already answered your question... [You weren't listening to me.... [Why answer when I've told you everything..."

- You need to quickly disrupt the interviewee's flow and return to the first question.
- A second technique involves interrupting the narrative by leading the interviewee on:
 - o To subjects they hadn't even thought of.
 - "Do you drive a Logan and are you happy with it?"
 - On emotional subjects
 - "How is your family?"
 - "How are you feeling...?"

11. SOURCES

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