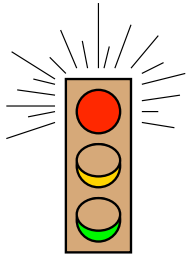


Requirements:

Eliciting Customers Needs: Getting the Intake Right



March 2010

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Who Am I?

Judy Bamberger has 25 years' experience developing software, leading teams, teaching, and developing organisation-wide leaders. An independent consultant, she specializes in project management, process definition and improvement, quality techniques (e.g., formal inspections, metrics), team building, facilitation, and managing change.

Ms Bamberger has:

- Performed numerous assessments (SPA, CBA-IPI, ARC Class C / B, ISO9001, custom-tailored) and worked with organisations around the world and at all maturity levels.
- Created a CMM / CMMI gap analysis method that is highly reliable and cost-effective. This enables her clients to review their strengths and weaknesses against the practices of the CMM / CMMI, provides a likely maturity/capability level rating, and summarises opportunities for improvement - at a fraction of the time and cost of an appraisal. The CMMI gap analysis method complies with ARC Class B/C requirements.
- Assisted her clients with improvement plans based on assessment results, which enabled them to meet their strategic business goals and increase their maturity levels.
- Trained and coached internal change agents in: basic quality tools, communication skills, managing change and resistance, effective improvement planning, and transition. This enabled her clients to create lasting, positive changes.

A key author of CMM, Ms Bamberger is one of the original Authorised Lead Assessors.

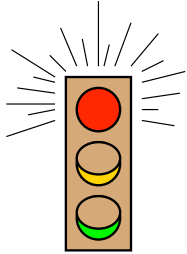
Ms Bamberger teaches project management and an award-winning course that has the students apply basic quality tools in the contexts of a real team, project, and organization. She provides workshops and on-site mentoring in the CMMI, Personal Software Process, peer reviews, process improvement, and other software engineering, management, and leadership subjects.

Abstract

- Getting the requirements "right" depends on effective communication - including the ability to ask the "right" questions and ask the "right" people. Just as important to asking is capturing and understanding the responses - visual, oral, physical - any mode of responses.
- This presentation uses one communication model to illustrate several techniques that help us ask the right questions and to validate our understanding of the responses. The model and techniques may well be familiar to many attendees in other contexts; this presentation provides an opportunity to consider communication skills and their critical importance to effective requirements elicitation.
- This presentation emphasises our professional responsibility to communicate effectively about requirements throughout the life of the project.



Requirements:



Eliciting Customers Needs: Getting the Intake Right

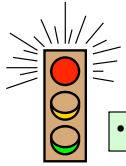
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Acknowledgements (1)

- This presentation supplements:
 - Requirements: From Stop Light to Guiding Light, presented at the Systems and Software Technology Conference 2009
 - Authors: Joe Thiessens (ITT SENSOR contract), Joe Hanson (ITT SENSOR contract), Judy Bamberger (Process Solutions), David Cook (AEgis Technologies)
- Together, Joe, Joe, Judy, and David have more than a century of hands-on practice with requirements (producing, reviewing, using, verifying, delivering)
 - The original workshop collected their "lessons learned" to benefit those just getting started and those with experience who want to "stand on the shoulders of others"

Acknowledgements (2)

- Thanks also to Bram van Oosterhout, who elicited the most important requirement from me nine years ago ...
... and who, by virtue of excellent peer reviews, ensures each presentation satisfies the 5Cs and is SMART



Topics for Today *

- Introduction and context setting 10 min
- Eliciting customer needs 35 min



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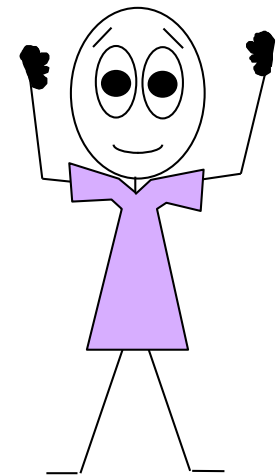
Top Ten Reasons for *not* doing Requirements

- (10) We don't need requirements, we're using objects / java / web / ...
- (9) The users don't know what they want
- (8) We already know what the users want
- (7) Who cares what the users want?
- (6) We don't have time to do requirements
- (5) It's too hard to do requirements
- (4) My boss frowns when I write requirements
- (3) The problem is too complex to write requirements
- (2) It's easier to change the system later than to do the requirements up front



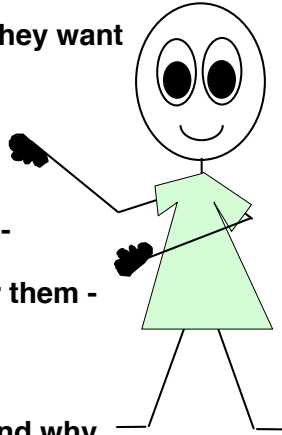
Top Ten Reasons for *not* doing Requirements

- (1) We have already started writing code, and we don't want to spoil it



Reason #12 for *not* doing Requirements

- Corollary to:
 - (9) The users don't know what they want
 - (8) We already know what the users want
 - (7) Who cares what the users want?
 - (11) We know who our users are - our stakeholders; and we know what's best for them - and why
 - (12) We know who our users are - our stakeholders; and we know what's best for them - and why



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Objectives

- In this module, we will:
 - Discover or review one key activity related to effective requirements engineering
 - Explore one model of communication that enables more effective requirements elicitation
 - Describe how elicitation and validation are co-activities from the beginning of requirements elicitation
 - Discuss our responsibilities as professionals to ensure that we communicate effectively when eliciting requirements

Definition: "Requirements Engineering"

- The process of establishing:
 - The services that are required
 - What / who provides those services
E.g., the system, the people using the system
 - The constraints under which the system is developed and the system and people operate
- The requirements themselves are the description of both of these items

Definition: "Operational Concepts"

- Describes "a day in the life of the desired product / service"
 - For nominal and off-nominal conditions

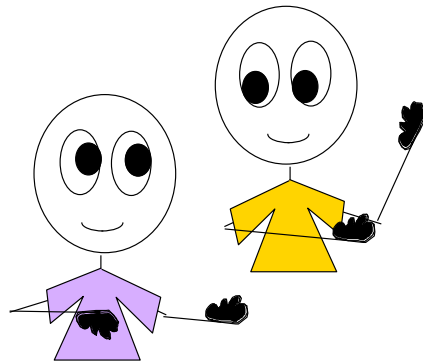


Operational Concepts: Eliciting Nominal and Off-Nominal Conditions

- Discuss "what-if?" cases
 - What should happen and under what conditions?
 - What should not happen and under what conditions?
- For each of the above:
 - How should the system / product / service react and why / not?
 - How should the system / product / service not react and why / not?
 - What does the stakeholder really want to happen and why / not?
 - What does the stakeholder really want to not happen and why / not?

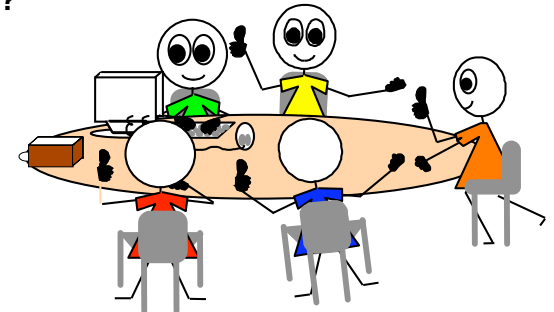
Key Questions to Derive Operational Concepts

- Not just the usual
 - Who ... ?
 - What ... ?
 - When ... ?
 - Where ... ?
 - Why ... ?
 - How ... ?



Key Questions to Derive Operational Concepts

- Could you please describe / show me what you do now?
- Could you please describe / show me what you want to do differently?
- And ...



Key Questions to Derive Operational Concepts

- Could you please describe / show me what you do now?
- Could you please describe / show me what you want to do differently?
- And ...

- Could you please tell me what benefits you get from that? How that helps you?
- Could you please tell me the problems that causes you? And why you want to change it?

Key Questions to Derive Operational Concepts

- Could you please describe / show me what you do now?
- Could you please describe / show me what you want to do differently?
- And ...

- Could you please tell me what benefits you get from that? How that helps you?
- Could you please tell me the problems that causes you? And why you want to change it?

- Need to get to the "root rationale" of the requirement
 - The "so what?"
 - The "what's in it for me?"

Some "Best Practices"

- Ensure the "right" people are involved:
 - Project-side: Eliciting information
 - * Good communication skills; sufficient domain knowledge
 - Stakeholder-side: Providing information
 - * Knowledgeable enough to answer questions
 - * Empowered to speak for the stakeholder group
- Balance this activity with other activities and outputs
 - Do not need 100% consistency at this point
 - Resolve obvious ambiguities (e.g., "user-friendly") while being aware of over-kill
 - Identify "TBDs" (to be determined) and re-open issues when / as needed

Methods for Eliciting Information

- Analysis of documentation
- SOW / task definition
- Group brainstorming
- Observation
- Questionnaires and / or surveys
- Prototyping
- Modeling
- Rapid Application Development (RAD)
- Joint Application Development (JAD)
- Cognitive (examining usability)
- Interviews (e.g., contextual interviewing)

Stakeholder: Definitions

- "Stakeholder"
 - Anyone who, or any organisation that, is affected in some way as a result of a project and / or the resulting product produced or service provided ...
... before or after the project is completed
 - A "Pandora's Box" of stakeholder possibilities!
- "Stakeholder analysis"
 - Activity to identify stakeholders, classify them in various dimensions, identify their "value propositions" ("what's in it for me?")

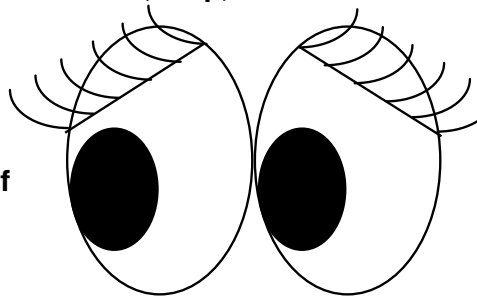
[this entire section is derived from
COMP 3120, The Australian National University,
Clive Boughton and Judy Bamberger, © 2000]

Definition: "Benefit"

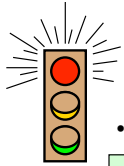
- For this discussion:
 - **Benefit:** "Something gained from the project and / or the resulting product and / or service"
 - Many (most?) "benefits" can be demonstrated objectively

Definition: "Value"

- For this discussion:
 - **Value:** "How someone feels about what they gain (lose) from the project and / or the resulting product and / or service"
- We can train, show, demonstrate, help, communicate, etc ...
 - It is much harder to "create value"
 - Value is personal
 - Value is in the eye of the beholder



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Topics for Today *

- Introduction and context setting 10 min
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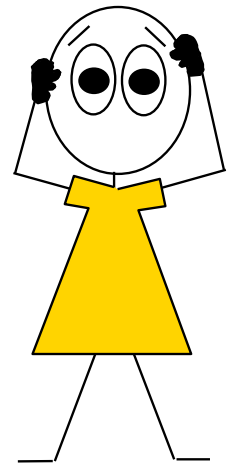
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One Model of Communication

- Getting requirements "right" depends on effective communication
 - Asking the "right" questions
 - * Overview was provided in "Introduction and Context Setting: Operational Concepts"
 - Asking the "right" people
 - * Discussion and practice occurred in "Identifying Stakeholders"
 - Understanding the responses
 - * Visually (e.g., demonstrations, reading)
 - * Orally (e.g., listening)
 - ➔ The focus of this module

Communication

"The greatest problem of communication is the illusion that it has been accomplished."



George Bernard Shaw

Communication: Example #1

- Matt's story ... ANU tutorial ...



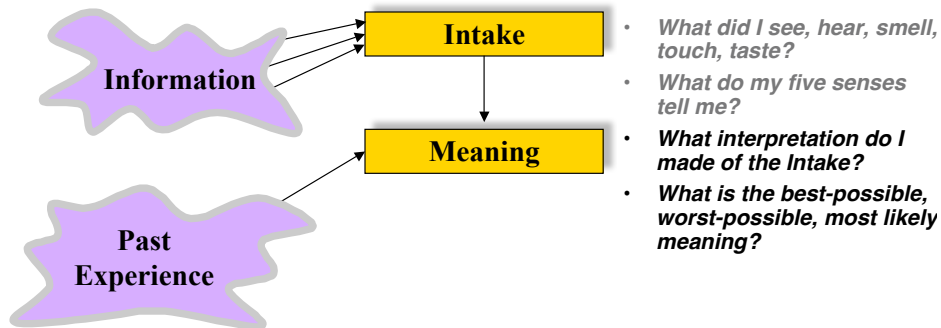
- What was Matt trying to communicate?
To whom?

The Satir Interaction Model (1)



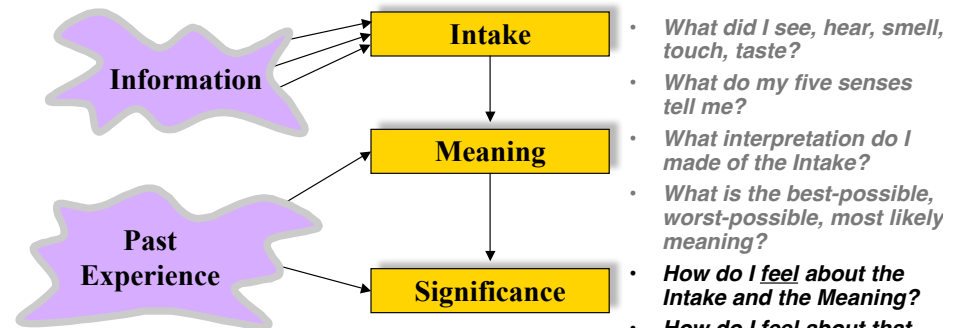
- *What did I see, hear, smell, touch, taste?*
- *What do my five senses tell me?*

The Satir Interaction Model (2)



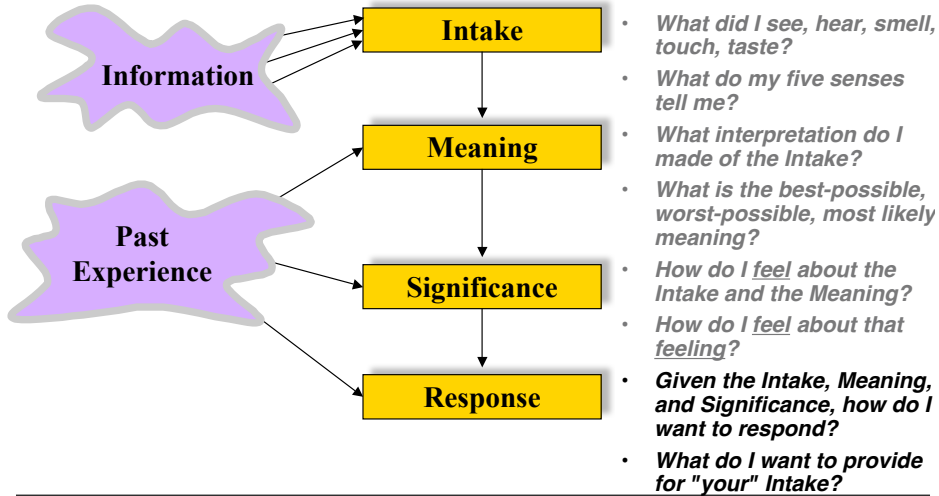
- *What did I see, hear, smell, touch, taste?*
- *What do my five senses tell me?*
- *What interpretation do I made of the Intake?*
- *What is the best-possible, worst-possible, most likely meaning?*

The Satir Interaction Model (3)

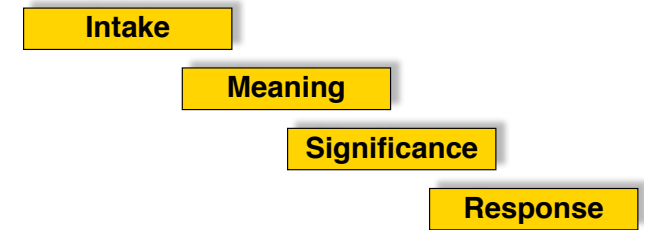


- *What did I see, hear, smell, touch, taste?*
- *What do my five senses tell me?*
- *What interpretation do I made of the Intake?*
- *What is the best-possible, worst-possible, most likely meaning?*
- *How do I feel about the Intake and the Meaning?*
- *How do I feel about that feeling?*

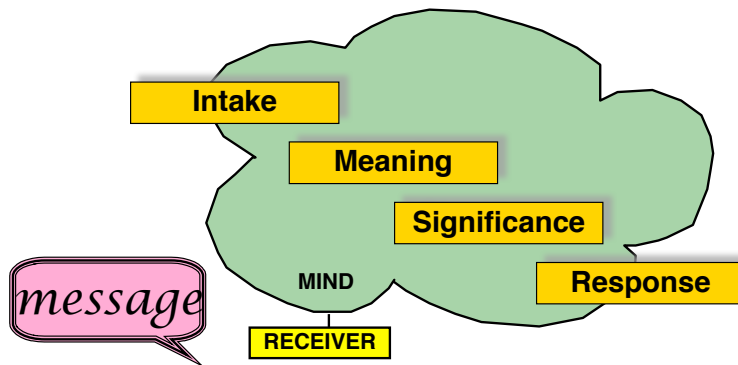
The Satir Interaction Model (4)



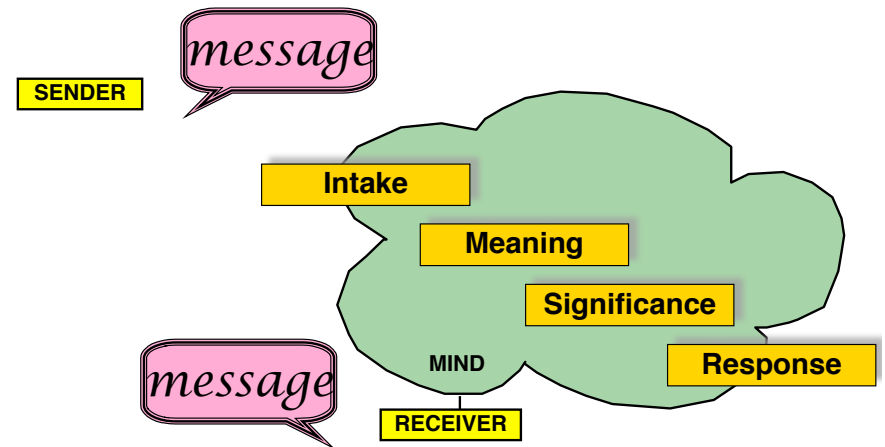
The Satir Interaction Model in Context (1)



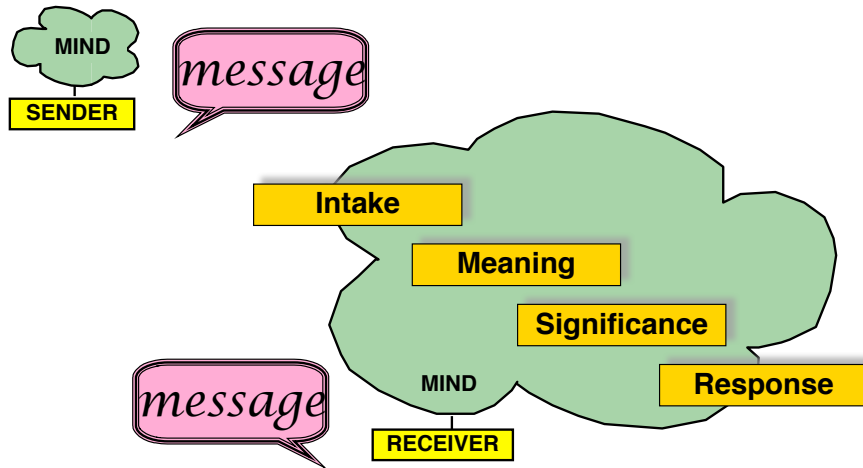
The Satir Interaction Model in Context (2)



The Satir Interaction Model in Context (3)



The Satir Interaction Model in Context (4)



Definition of Communication

- Communication is a process that moves an idea from one mind to another, keeping that idea intact
- Two minds are necessary in the process
 - There is no such thing as "mindless communication"

Tests of Effective Communication

- Test #1
 - Receiver understands message Sender intended to send
- Test #2
 - Sender's message congruent with outcome she / he wants to achieve, and understood by Receiver

Other Communication Tools: The Data Question

- Ask yourself, "What did I see and hear?"
 - This helps verify, "Did I get the Intake right?"
- Focus on information taken in through the five senses
- Separate observation from interpretation

[Weinberg 1993]

Other Communication Tools:
The Rule of Three Interpretations

- If I cannot think of at least three different interpretations of what I received, I have not thought enough about what it might mean
- Ask the "Do you mean ... ?" question to validate Intake and Meaning

[Weinberg 1993]

Other Communication Tools:
Miller's Law

- In order to understand what another person is saying, you have to assume that it is true, and try to imagine what it could be true of

[George Miller, quoted in Elgin 1995]

Applying Miller's Law

- Ask yourself:
 - Under what circumstances would the person's statement be true?
 - What else would have to be true if the person's words are not false and outrageous and ridiculous?

[Elgin 1995]

Using the Communication Tools

- Test whether you understand the other person
 - What did I see and hear?
 - What three meanings can I make?
 - What else would have to be true?
 - "Do you mean ...?"
- Test whether the other person understands you
 - "I'm not sure what you heard me say. Can you repeat it for me?"
 - "Can you paraphrase it in your own words?"

When Things Go Wrong ... (1)

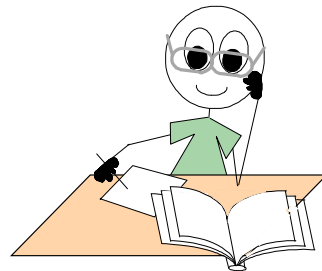
- **Check the Intake first!**
 - I didn't see / hear ...
 - Could you please repeat that?
 - I am not sure that I am following you ...
 - Did you say < and paraphrase > ?
- **If you did not see / hear / etc correctly, it is extremely easy to give an inappropriate Response**
 - Because the Meaning may be wrong ...
 - Causing Significance to be inappropriate ...

When Things Go Wrong ... (2)

- **Check the Meaning next**
 - I don't understand ...
 - Do you mean ... ?
 - Let me see if I understand what you mean < and paraphrase > ...
- **Check the Significance next**
 - Focus on the here-and-now, this interaction
 - Do not focus on could, should, maybe, possibly, past history
 - Breathe deeply
 - Give yourself permission to feel whatever you are feeling
- **Check the Response next**
 - Speak congruently - honour your own needs, the other person, your environment
 - Give yourself permission to defer responding until you are more OK
 - Speak from the heart and from the head

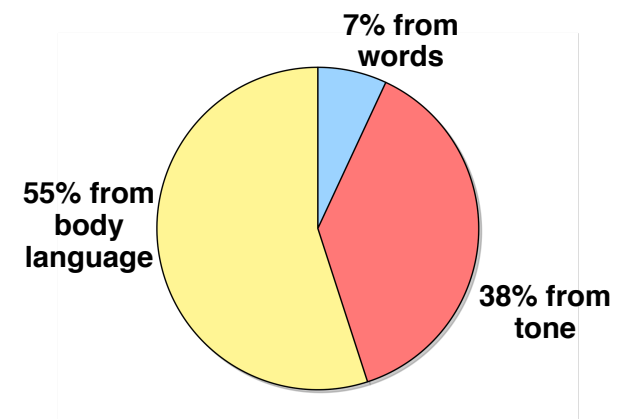
Communication: Example #2

- Judy's story ... Company X meeting ...



- **What was Judy trying to communicate?
To whom?**

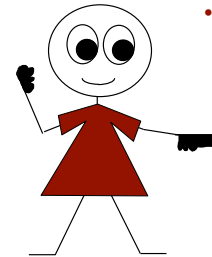
Meaning Comes From ...



Elicitation "Best Practices"

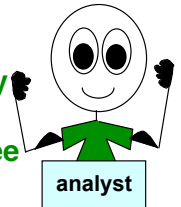
- "Active listening"
 - Paraphrasing
 - Checking and re-checking
 - "Do you mean ... ?"
- Verifying, validating
- Prototyping
 - With automated tools
 - With pencil and paper
 - With whiteboards, stickies, etc ...
- And ... there are numerous "specific techniques"
 - Including those listed in "Operational Concepts"

Requirements Cover "What" not "How"



- **Customer:** "The aircraft shall have three engines." *

- **Analyst:** "Three engines? That's new. What are you trying to achieve by having three engines? Why three engines?"

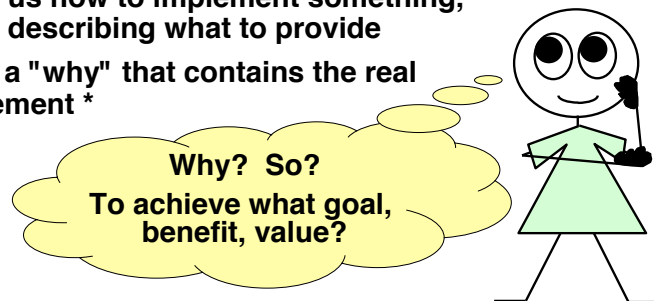


- **Customer:** "We need to ensure that the aircraft will meet all operational requirements with a single engine out."

[* DC-3 initial requirements]

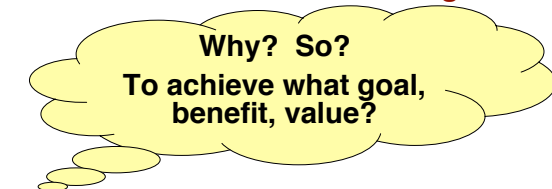
Requirements Checklist: "What" versus "How"

- For each requirement, verify it is not:
 - A prescribed implementation
 - Constraining options prematurely
 - Telling us how to implement something, versus describing what to provide
 - Hiding a "why" that contains the real requirement *



Re-Writing Requirements: Create "What" from "How" (1)

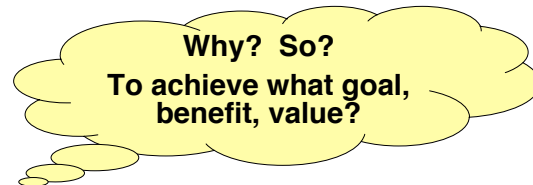
- Original requirement statement:
 - How
 - * "The aircraft shall have three engines."



- Re-written requirement statement:
 - What
 - * "The aircraft shall meet each operational requirement with a single engine not-operational."

Re-Writing Requirements: Create "What" from "How" (2)

- Original requirement statement:
 - How
 - * **"The System shall include flight performance instrumentation."**



- Re-written requirement statement:
 - What
 - * **"The System shall measure its flight performance."**

Our Responsibility as IT Professionals

- If we treat our stakeholders' requirements as Intake ...
 - If we and our stakeholders do not get the requirements - the Intake - right at some point:
 - * The analysts, designers, coders, testers, documenters, etc-ers are all free to make whatever Meaning they wish
 - * Their feelings - Significance - may vary depending on their feelings of the moment, and about the customer, and about many other things
 - So our Response - the system / product / service we deliver - may bear no resemblance to what the stakeholders wanted in the first place!
- We are responsible for getting the Intake - the requirements - right
 - And that involves effective communication ...

The Implication for Us as IT Professionals

- Focus on getting those requirements - Intake - right
 - At the beginning
 - * As much as possible
 - Incrementally
 - * Because some requirements are more certain than others
 - Throughout the life of the project
 - * Because requirements always change
 - Among all stakeholders
 - * Because everybody has a slightly different point of view and need
 - Documenting what is clear and what remains to be clarified
 - Following through to get those clarifications
 - Building that which is clear
 - Prototyping / storyboarding / clarifying that which is unclear until it is clear enough to build
- This is what the most successful professionals do

Eliciting Requirements: Summary

- Effective communication is the cornerstone to effective requirements elicitation - whatever method / technique is used
 - Asking
 - Listening
 - Responding
 - Validating
- The Satir Interaction Model* and related tools are highly useful for eliciting requirements

[* See also *Helpful Hints: The Satir Interaction Model!*]

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The Satir Interaction Model

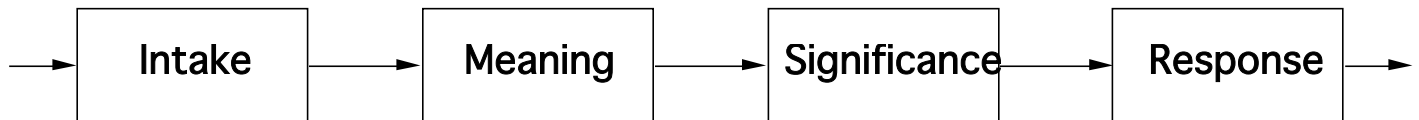
Purpose

- To understand what goes on within each one of us during communication
- To provide insight into what might be happening when a person's response is not what is expected

There are two roles in communication: the Sender sends a message; the Receiver receives it and returns with a response.

The Satir Interaction Model examines what happens within the Receiver: how the Receiver processes the message from the Sender and formulates a response to the Sender.

There are four steps to this model:



When communication "works," the Receiver's Response is within the bounds of the Sender's expectations; the Sender/Receiver continue communicating rapidly, effectively, and these steps are invisible.

When communication "goes wrong," the Receiver's Response is beyond the bounds of the Sender's expectations. Often, these steps are invisible to the Receiver, and the Sender may be puzzled, hurt, confused by the Receiver's response. The Satir Interaction Model can be used to "dissect" the communication, to identify what went wrong, and to try to resolve the "gone wrong" communication immediately.

When communication is "at risk of going wrong," the Receiver can recognise and use the Satir Interaction Model in an attempt to "right the wrong" before it actually does go wrong.

Doing This

In the following discussion, "we" and "our" refers to our role as the Receiver.

INTAKE

- What we see, hear, taste, touch, smell ...
- What we take-in with our five senses
- What the Sender sends and the 5-sensory environment in which the Sender is sending

What could go wrong?

- We do not see or hear or otherwise observe what the Sender sent; we do not receive the Intake
- The Intake is obscured by something in the environment, and we only receive a part of it (e.g., too much noise, so we do not hear everything; our view is obstructed)

- Something about our relationship with the Sender influences the accuracy of our Intake (e.g., our friend talks a lot and says very little, so we "filter out" most of what he says)
- We do not understand the Sender (e.g., the Sender has an accent or uses terms not familiar to us)
- One sensory Intake overwhelms another (e.g., the aroma from the kitchen causes us to focus on dinner, not what the person is saying to us)
- We have learned to ignore certain Intake (e.g., we may have been trained to turn away from those things that are "painful" to our culture, such as the homeless)
- We have finite brain capacity; in order to survive and be effective in this world, we learn to discriminate early in life, and pay attention to some Intake, and just ignore others; we just "miss" things as a normal, natural part of living
- We are feeling "not-OK" to begin with (e.g., we are tired, ill, distressed about other matters, worried, etc), and we are pre-disposed to mis-interpret (or even miss) the Intake

How to recover?

Check your Intake against what the Sender sent, using "I" messages.

- "Could you please repeat ... I could not hear ... "
- "I cannot see what you are pointing to ... "
- "I was distracted by that delicious smell of chocolate ... what did you say?" (Or, "Those cookies are just too distracting; let's take a cookie break, and then discuss this problem.")
- "I'm not sure I understood you; could you please slower/more clearly?"
- "I am not familiar with the technical jargon you are using; could you try to simplify your explanation a little bit?"
- "Let me check if I heard you correctly ... did you say xxx?"
- "I'm sorry; I'm not able to cope right now ... can we do this later?"

MEANING

- How we interpret the totality of the Intake we received - what we saw, heard, tasted, touched, smelled

What could go wrong?

- We make a Meaning that is different from what the Sender intended
- We make the worst possible Meaning
- We make the best possible Meaning
- The Meaning we make is influenced by something in the environment vs what the Sender sent (e.g., multiple Intakes and an un-specific message: if we are at a party with music, drink, and chocolate, and the Sender says, "isn't this grand?" we may think the Sender is referring to the music, while the Sender means the chocolate)
- Something in our relationship with the Sender influences the interpretation we make (e.g., if we do not trust the Sender, we may assume the worst possible Meaning)

- We have learned to make certain Meanings from certain symbols/Intake (e.g., if the Sender is wearing flashy clothing, the Sender must be frivolous)
- We have finite experience, and the Meanings we make derive from our experiences, and so we may make the wrong Meaning.
- We may recognise that we do not know what the Sender means, and we choose not to check
- We are feeling "not-OK" to begin with (e.g., we are tired, ill, distressed about other matters, worried, etc), and we are pre-disposed to make the worst possible Meaning
- We got the Intake wrong or incompletely, so we are at risk of making an incorrect interpretation

How to recover?

Check your Meaning against what the Sender intends, using "I" messages.

- "I'm not sure I understand what you mean ... "
- "Let me see if I understand ... did you mean xxx?"
- "I'm totally confused; I'm not following your explanation ... "
- "I am not familiar with yyy; could you use another example?"
- "I am surprised to hear you say that; that's not what I would have expected ... maybe I misunderstood ... "
- Think of at least three possible Meanings, and check each one ... "I am confused; let me check a few things with you ... Do you mean xxx?" ... if you are right three times in a row, you more than likely have made a correct interpretation (this works well if what the Sender has sent is complex)
- Try the three possible Meanings with a twist: "I am confused ... here is the best possible Meaning I could make ... here is the worst possible Meaning I could make ... and here is what I think is most likely ... I'm guessing what you mean is somewhere in here ... "
- "I'm sorry; I'm not able to cope right now ... can we do this later?"
- Go back and check the Intake; if that is wrong, the Meaning is most likely wrong

SIGNIFICANCE

- How we feel about the Meaning(s)/interpretations we have made of the Intake
- How we feel about that feeling (OK? hurt? angry? joyous? confused?)

What could go wrong?

- We feel bad/negatively about the Meaning we have made
- Our feelings about the Meaning are influenced by something in the environment vs the Meaning we made (e.g., if we are feeling sad already, the message from the Sender may trigger a much greater sadness than if we were not feeling sad)
- Something in our relationship with the Sender influences how we feel about the Meaning (e.g., if we do not trust the Sender, we may feel angry or belittled by whatever the Sender sent, especially if we have made the worst possible Meaning already)

- We have learned that we should feel certain ways about certain Meanings (e.g., Intake is young person drinking from a bottle in a brown paper bag at a bus stop; Meaning is person is drinking alcohol and is under-age; Significance/feeling is anger at the person for doing something illegal; Significance/feeling about the feeling is not-OK; we have been trained that drinking in public is not-OK)
- We are feeling "not-OK" to begin with (e.g., we are tired, ill, distressed about other matters, worried, etc), and we are pre-disposed to feel even "less OK"
- We got the Intake wrong or incompletely, or we made a Meaning that does not match what the Sender intended, so we are at risk of feeling not-OK with the communication

How to recover?

Check your Significance - your feelings, and your feelings about those feelings. Try to get to an "OK" or better position before responding, and then respond. Otherwise, try to defer a response until you can be OK, and offer an "I" message.

- "I'm not comfortable, and I'd rather not continue/respond."
- "I'm really upset, and if I respond right now, I might regret what I say later."
- "I just don't know how to respond to you ... "
- "I cannot consider what you're asking of me; it doesn't seem right to me ... "
- "I'd like more time before responding, OK?"
- "I need to give this more consideration; it just doesn't feel right to me."
- "I'm sorry; I'm not able to cope right now ... can we do this later?"
- Go back and check the Meaning and the Intake; if they are wrong, the Significance is most likely wrong

RESPONSE

- How we choose to respond to the Sender, based on the Intake we observed, the Meaning we made, and the Significance we felt

What could go wrong?

- We do feel not-OK, and we feel not-OK about that (Significance)
- Our Responses are guided by something in the environment (e.g., in a meeting with the customer, we choose not to point out when our colleague made an error)
- Something in our relationship with the Sender influences how we choose to respond (e.g., even if we know we are right, we choose not to disagree with our teachers, because teachers should be honoured, always)
- We have learned that we should respond certain ways to certain Intakes, Meanings, Significances (e.g., we learned that "boys don't cry" and "girls should not act too smart" and "always defer to your elders" and "never disagree in front of the customer" and "the teacher is always right"); these are our "rules for responding"
- We are feeling "not-OK" to begin with (e.g., we are tired, ill, distressed about other matters, worried, etc), and we are pre-disposed to feel even "less OK"

- We got the Intake wrong or incompletely, or we made a Meaning that does not match what the Sender intended, or the Significance we feel does not match what the Sender might expect, so we are at risk of providing a Response that does not match the expectations of the Sender

How to recover?

Check your Significance - your feelings, and your feelings about those feelings. Try to get to an "OK" or better position before responding, and then respond. Otherwise, try to defer a response until you can be OK, and offer an "I" message.

- "I cannot respond right now; let me get back with you."
- "I need more time before I can respond."
- "I need to think this through, when I'm more clear-headed."
- "This is really difficult for me, and I'm not sure what I say really reflects how I feel."
- "I don't quite have the right words, so if you want an answer right now, what I say might be 'tougher' than I really mean."
- "I'm sorry; I'm not able to cope right now ... can we do this later?"
- Go back and check the Significance, the Meaning, and the Intake; if they are wrong, the Response is most likely wrong

An Example: Communication "Gone Wrong"

The Intake in this example is real. In fact, it happened when I was teaching communication skills. This example proved so useful in illustrating the Satir Interaction Model, that we used to focus the discussion it in all five class sessions.

Intake: Matt entered the classroom, where I was teaching. It was Tuesday, 10:00am; class was to begin at 10:05am. Matt took a seat toward the back of the room, put his arms on the table, crossed them, put his head on his arms, turned his head, closed his eyes, and had a semi-smile on his face. A few students looked at him.

For the sake of this example, let's assume that I'm not feeling very well, and that I have been annoyed with Matt in previous class sessions.

Meaning: Best possible meaning: Matt was relaxed, glad to be there, and getting ready to engage. Worst possible meaning: Matt was bored, sick of the class I was teaching, irritable and ready to be irritating, not respectful, and generally annoyed to have to be there. Most likely meaning: Matt had worked late the previous night, was tired, was comfortable enough with me and his classmates to exhibit his fatigue, and ready to participate actively, if needed.

Given my state of being (not well) and my past experience with Matt (annoyance), I unconsciously select the worst possible meaning.

Significance: I'm not feeling very good to start, and Matt's "antics" really get me angry. How dare he act so arrogantly in my class! If he doesn't want to be here, he should just go away! I feel angry! And I should not be angry at a student, after all, should I? So I feel badly about feeling angry!

Response: I ignore all the rules for responding (good people should never raise their voices!), and I yell at Matt, "Look - if you don't want to be here, if I bore you that much, then just don't bother coming to class!!!"

... and Matt suddenly sits up straight, hands down at his side; Matt's eyes open wide, his jaw drops ... is he shocked by my Response? Would my Response match his expectations? I do not believe so! Would this exchange contribute to a healthy relationship between us? I doubt it! Would it accomplish anything? Yes; I would let Matt know how I feel ... and probably lose his respect and the respect of the other students in this class (and rumours spread ...). I do not like these results, and then I'd feel worse about it all ...

An Example: Communication "Gone Better"

Intake: Same as above ... this is a real story.

And, in the real situation, I was a little tired but otherwise feeling fine; I was excited about teaching this module on communication, and Matt was a very attentive, good student, adding value and fun in class, and often stopping by my office to "just chat." Moreover, I was delighted, because Matt had, inadvertently, given me an absolutely perfect example to use!

Meaning: Knowing Matt, I suspected the most likely meaning: that he had worked late, was comfortable, and was ready to participate.

Significance: I felt sympathetic, and a little sad, that he was working so hard, so early in the term. I felt OK about those feelings.

Response (just before class began, officially): "Hey Matt - it looks like you had a long night again, eh? How ya doin'?"

... and Matt confirmed my "most likely meaning." And, after a brief exchange he was willing to let me use his "Intake" as an example.

Other Ideas

- If we get the Intake wrong, chances are very high that our Meaning and Significance are impacted, and our Response may be unexpected.
- What is going on, now, in the environment around us influences each step.
- What has gone on before, in our personal and cultural background and environment, influences each step.
- Our relationship, past and present, with the Sender influences each step.
- When we get stuck, going back to Intake, and getting agreement on Intake, is the best place to re-start.
- If we are not-OK at any point in the communication, the best thing may be to ask for a "time out."
- Two minds are necessary in the process; there is no such thing as "mindless communication."
- The following hypothesis links the four Myers-Briggs leadership styles with the different steps in the Satir Interaction Model:
 - SJ (planners, organisers): best at Intake

- NT (visionaries, innovators): best at Meaning
- NF (cheerleaders, motivators): best at Significance
- SP (jugglers, clowns): best at Response

In the best case, this might explain why different people may have very different views of the same situation. In the worst case, when under stress, people with different styles may get "stuck" in their preferred step of communication.

Related Activities

- Communication skills

References

- Bamberger, Judy. *Effective Meetings Helpful Hints*. 2000.
- Bolton, Robert. *People Skills - How to Assert Yourself, Listen to Others, and Resolve Conflicts*. New York NY: Simon & Schuster, 1979. ISBN: 0-671-62248-X. (Bolton uses the term "three-part assertion message" for what we call "gentle confrontation.")
- Satir, Virginia, John Banmen, Jane Gerber, and Maria Gomori. *The Satir Model, Family Therapy and Beyond*. Palo Alto CA: Science and Behavior Books, 1991. ISBN: 8314-0078-1.
- Weinberg, Gerald M. *Becoming a Technical Leader*. New York NY: Dorset House Publishing, 1986. ISBN: 0-932633-02-1. (This discusses the four leadership styles.)
- The connection between the steps in the Satir Interaction Model and the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator were introduced by Weinberg, McLendon, and Weinberg.

Communication

Contents. This “one pager” contains information about the following communication topics:

- Attending
- Open-ended questions
- Paraphrasing
- “I” messages
- Gentle confrontation

Purpose

- To communicate effectively, and to be perceived as communicating effectively

There are two roles in communication: the Sender sends a message; the Receiver receives it and returns with a response.

There are two tests for effective communication: (1) the Receiver understands the message that the Sender intended to send; and (2) the Sender’s message is congruent with the outcome she/he wants to achieve, and understood by the Receiver.

In terms of the Satir Interaction Model, when communication is effective:

- The *intake* that the Receiver receives is what the Sender sent (verbal, tone, facial and body language)
- The *meaning* that the Receiver interprets is what the Sender intended
- The *significance* that the Receiver attaches to this is “OK”
- The *response* that the Receiver returns to the Sender is congruent and consistent with what the Sender expects

Doing This

ATTENDING

- Receiver is looking at the Sender; eye contact is made and kept, as comfort indicates

In our experience, many people are uncomfortable eye-to-eye, and in some cultures, this is a sign of disrespect; the Sender needs to be sensitive to this

- Receiver’s body is facing the Sender, and is comfortable

In our experience, many people prefer side-to-side always or in some contexts; the Sender needs to be sensitive to this

- Receiver is focused on the Sender and what the Sender is saying (verbally, tone of voice) and doing (facial and body language); Receiver is not doing anything else, is not looking elsewhere, is not listening to anything else
- Receiver's facial and body language are "appropriate" to what the Sender is saying
- Receiver responds occasionally (e.g., with a nod, or a short "... and then what?") to indicate her/his "engaged listening" actively to the Sender

Why do this?

This lets the Sender know the Receiver is actively engaged with the conversation. This helps build and keep the "flow" of the discussion going, which makes more information available to both the Sender and the Receiver. This also demonstrates respect and honor of the Sender by the Receiver.

OPEN-ENDED QUESTIONS

- Sender asks a question of a Receiver where the answer is descriptive, not simply a selection from a (typically small) finite set of responses (such as "yes or no")
- Such a question often begins with: "how do you ...", "would you please describe ...", "what do you think about ...", and so forth.

Why do this?

This lets the Receiver know that the Sender would like to hear a descriptive response, get more information than just a simple "yes or no" or other finite answer could provide. These types of questions make the information visible and accessible to both the Sender and Receiver, information that can be used in problem definition and problem solving.

In other words: the Sender controls the process and direction of the interaction; the Receiver determines the content of the interaction.

PARAPHRASING

- Receiver echoes, in her/his own words, the content and the feelings behind what the Receiver heard the Sender say

Paraphrasing the content reflects the Sender's words (intake, meaning); paraphrasing the feelings reflects the Sender's emotions (significance). Paraphrasing the words and the emotions should also reflect the Sender's facial and body language.

Why do this?

This is another technique for attending, and it lets the Sender know the Receiver is "tracking" along with her/him. It honors and affirms what the Sender is saying and feeling.

It also provides an opportunity for the Receiver to check her/his understanding of the communication, such as validating the intake ("did you say ...?"), the meaning ("did you mean ... by that?"), and the significance ("that ... sounds like it makes you feel ..."). This provides the opportunity for the Sender and Receiver to clear up any miscues at the earliest possible time.

All in all, paraphrasing helps keep the conversation going, and encourages more information to be shared.

"I" MESSAGES

- ❑ Sender speaks from the first person, and speaks about the intake, meaning, or significance to her/him

Messages encoded as "you" messages can often sound "blaming," as though the Sender is trying to place responsibility for the information on the Receiver. Messages encoded as "she/he/it/one/they" messages can often sound "super-reasonable" or "irrelevant," as though the Sender is trying to disassociate her/himself from the information or any impact the information may have.

For example, the "you" message, "Can't you follow the standards correctly?" could sound like the Sender is blaming the Receiver for not following the standards. The "it" message, "These standards are for everyone to follow." could sound like a philosophical or super-reasonable fact-of-life. However, the very specific "I" message, "I see here, on line 15, that the quality standard was not followed; and it is important to me that it is followed." provides the Receiver with a wealth of clear information, and to which the Receiver can formulate some appropriate response. This is not to mean that the standard on line 15 will always be followed; however, it does mean that the issue is known, and the impact to the Sender is known.

The Sender needs to beware of "encoded 'you' messages," "you" messages disguised with an "I" at the beginning. For example, "I don't think you are paying attention" is really "You are not paying attention" in disguise.

Often, such a message is a "projection" of some thoughts or feelings from inside the Sender, and it has nothing at all to do with the Receiver. In this example, the Sender might be projecting, "You did not respond the way I expected you to respond, so obviously, that must mean you are not paying attention." So, one real message here, from the Sender to the Receiver, could be, "I didn't get the response I was expecting; could we check to see if I made my request clear to you?"

Why do this?

Using "I" messages allows the Sender to share her/his views, thoughts, and feelings, and reflect the intake, meaning, and significance from her/his view. An "I" message keeps the ownership of the information with the person who is saying it: the Sender.

An "I" message shares the Sender's strength and power; it can also show the Sender's vulnerability and willingness to take a chance, to take risks, which itself can be a strong and powerful thing to do.

GENTLE CONFRONTATION

- ❑ The Sender describes the behavior or result she/he receives from the Receiver, describes its effect on her/him, and describes the feelings she/he has in response.

The Sender's initial description of the behavior or result (intake) is done with no judgements, no labels, no emotional or value-laden words; it is a paraphrasing of the intake.

The description of the effect (significance) asserts what the Sender feels about the intake; it is an "I" message that makes a clear separation between what was heard, seen, or observed and how the Sender ("I") feels about it.

The connection of the item with the Sender's feelings (meaning) describes the impact the intake has on the Sender; it is an "I" message that sets the stage for collaborative problem solving.

For example, "When you didn't give me a status report on that task ... I was concerned ... because then I had to drop what I was doing to get the necessary information ..." Intake: I received no status report; significance: I'm concerned; meaning (in this case, the meaning translates into a response): I had to do some extra work.

Another example, "When you tell me I'm not listening ... I get angry ... because I don't know how to demonstrate any better that I'm listening to you ..." Intake: you say I'm not listening; significance: I'm angry; meaning (in this case, the meaning translates into not knowing how to respond): I don't know what to do.

Why do this?

Gentle confrontation lays the foundation for effective communication. This is especially true in those situations (like the two above) where there is some "bad news" to share. It is equally true in the case when things are working well, as follows:

"When you get me your status reports on time each week ... I feel very happy ... because I can get the summary written and sent to our boss on time, and start addressing some of the other issues that are in our way ..." Intake: you get me status reports on time; significance: joy; meaning: I can do what I need to do and then work on other issues important to us.

At each step, the Receiver gains insight into possible errors in the communication. Again, this is especially true in the case of "bad news." At the first stage, where the Sender describes her/his intake (the behavior or result the Receiver provided), the Receiver learns how the Sender has "decoded" the Receiver's message (i.e., that behavior or result). At the second stage, where the Sender describes her/his feelings about the intake, the Receiver learns how significant the intake was to the Sender (positive, negative, neutral). At the third stage, where the Sender describes the impact of the intake, the Receiver learns if the meaning she/he intended was the meaning the Sender took. Here is an example (real life):

"When you said 'You sure did a great job!!!' (the Sender said with special emphasis) ... it sounded cynical to me ... and I was extremely hurt ... because I worked very hard on that task for you ..." The Receiver thought the Sender's emphasis on "You sure did a great job!!!" sounded cynical, so the Receiver checked with the Sender of this gentle confrontation, using paraphrasing, "It sounds like you thought I was being sarcastic in my praise ... is that right?" (The Sender nodded.) Thus, it became crystal clear to the Receiver that the "You sure did a great job!!!" message had failed miserably; the Receiver had intended it very sincerely, yet the Sender had not heard it that way at all! Once this information was visible, the Receiver now was able to work with the Sender to correct the interpretation (in this case, by providing specifics about what a "great job" meant), and after some give-and-take, the situation was mended.

Other Ideas

- Communication is a process that moves an idea from one mind to another, keeping that idea intact.
- Two minds are necessary in the process; there is no such thing as "mindless communication."
- The meaning of communication is the response it elicits.

Related Activities

- Congruence

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