

# Principles of Effective Communication

**“Tool kit” for Secretaries**

**Soft Skills Training**

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Part 2: Learning forum for Secretaries of Economic and Social Councils  
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# Relevance of effective Communication

*According to recent study by Harvard Business Review\*:*

- *2.1 hours a week are spent dealing with conflict at the workplace*
- *67% of employees have witnessed delays in work deliveries due to miscommunication*
- *27% have said their team tends to adopt a rather problem focused mindset.*

*Understanding what effective communication is about, why it can be useful and how to manage it is an essential skill in the professional life, whether you are an employee or CEO.*

*If a problem focused approach coupled with non-effective communication dominates the workplace, people engage in any of the following behaviours: avoidance, aggression (both passive and active), sabotage and spread of rumours; withholding information and lying; getting sick or all the way to burnout and depression.*

On the importance of effective communication:

*„Do not say a little in many words, but a great deal in a few.“*

- Pythagoras



# Read this Job posting from LinkedIn:

*We are looking to expand our group of specialists within People Solutions, the management training branch of our organisation. Training and organisational consultants (internally referred to as People Solutions specialists) work with our clients to provide a foundation for the sustainability of improved business practices and employee and management behaviours.*

*We do this by aligning and engaging people in cutting edge communications, change management, education, training and coaching to support our project architecture and pursuit of measurable results.*

*These solutions are customised to our client workplace, designed specifically for the client need at hand, ultimately engaging the hearts and minds of people to establish buy-in and maintain their involvement throughout and beyond our intervention. This, coupled with creative learning processes and tools, provides the basis for accelerated change.*

# Effective communication : Essential on your Workplace

## 3 Essential Qualities of Effective Communicators:

- 1) Identify **purpose** + **direction** + **achievable outcome** of communication
- 2) Visualise what they will **see**, **hear** and **feel** when outcome is achieved
- 3) Flexibility: high capacity to **change** and **adjust** to achieve **desired outcome**

# Exercise 1

# Exercise 1: Identify a Communication Challenge

## Step 1

- Write down a challenging/conflictual conversation you have had with other members of the ESC
- What were major obstacles? Provide concrete examples and context

## Step 2

Discuss how each side in a conflict has expectations, needs and frustrations

# Thinking about a Communication Challenge

## **When you were re-thinking your recent communication challenge:**

- Were you focused on the problem and the reasons **WHY** the problem emerged?
- Were you thinking of possible **solutions** to the problem?

## **→ Problem vs. Solution Focused Thinking**

- When is Problem Focused Thinking **useful**?
- What are the **Limits** of Problem Focused Thinking?



# Typical Problem Focused Thinking at the Workplace:

- In order to justify a EU grant your organization has received, you need to write lengthy report including all the details of last year's activities and expenses
- By experience, you know this report will actually not be read by any of the donors
- You are on a tight deadline and need to urgently finalize other important projects
- In order to receive other grants in future, the report needs to be written and prepared

Typical Problem Focused Thinking  
at the Workplace:

How would you approach this challenge in a  
**problem-oriented** way?

# Typical Problem Focused Thinking at the Workplace:

Approaching this challenge in a **problem-oriented** way means:

- Asking “Why am I wasting time writing a report nobody will read?”
- Discussing with your colleagues about the uselessness of this report, which might strain your relationship with the donor
- Wasting a lot of time and energy that will not go into report writing, even though the task has to be completed

# Typical Problem Focused Thinking at the Workplace

Further examples of **problem-oriented** ways of thinking:

- Asking “Why am I wasting time writing a report nobody will read?”
- Discussing with your colleagues about the uselessness of this report, which might strain your relationship with the donor
- Wasting a lot of time and energy that will not go into report writing, even though the task has to be completed

# Typical Problem Focused Thinking at the Workplace

Further examples of **problem-oriented** ways of thinking:

*How long do you have this problem?*

*When did your problem start?*

*Who's fault was it? Whom would you accuse?*

*What is the worst about your problem?*

*What happens if you do not solve the problem?*

*How bad is it by now?*

*What are negative consequences of this problem?*

# Typical Problem Focused Thinking

## By Paul Watzlawick

*“A man wants to hang a painting. He has nails, but no hammer. His neighbour does have one. Therefore, the man decides to go to him to borrow it. However, at that moment he begins to have doubts. Imagine that the neighbour does not want to lend me his hammer? Yesterday when he greeted me he also was a bit short. Maybe he was in a hurry. Or maybe he just pretended and he really has something against me. What then? I’ve never done anything to him; who does he think he is. If somebody would want to borrow my tools, I would lend them to him right away. Why wouldn’t he? People like that guy make your life miserable. And I’m sure he imagines that I am dependent on him, just because he has a hammer. That does it! The man storms over to the neighbour’s door, rings the doorbell, but even before he has had a chance of saying “Good morning”, the man yells at him, “You can keep your hammer, you jerk!””*



# From **Problem** to **Solution** Oriented Thinking

## **Solution Oriented Thinking =**

- Becoming aware that we cannot change certain facts/problems/ realities (eg. report writing)
- Acknowledging the inefficiency of seeking reasons for this situation/problem
- Clarifying how the task we are facing is important/essential (e.g. getting more grants)

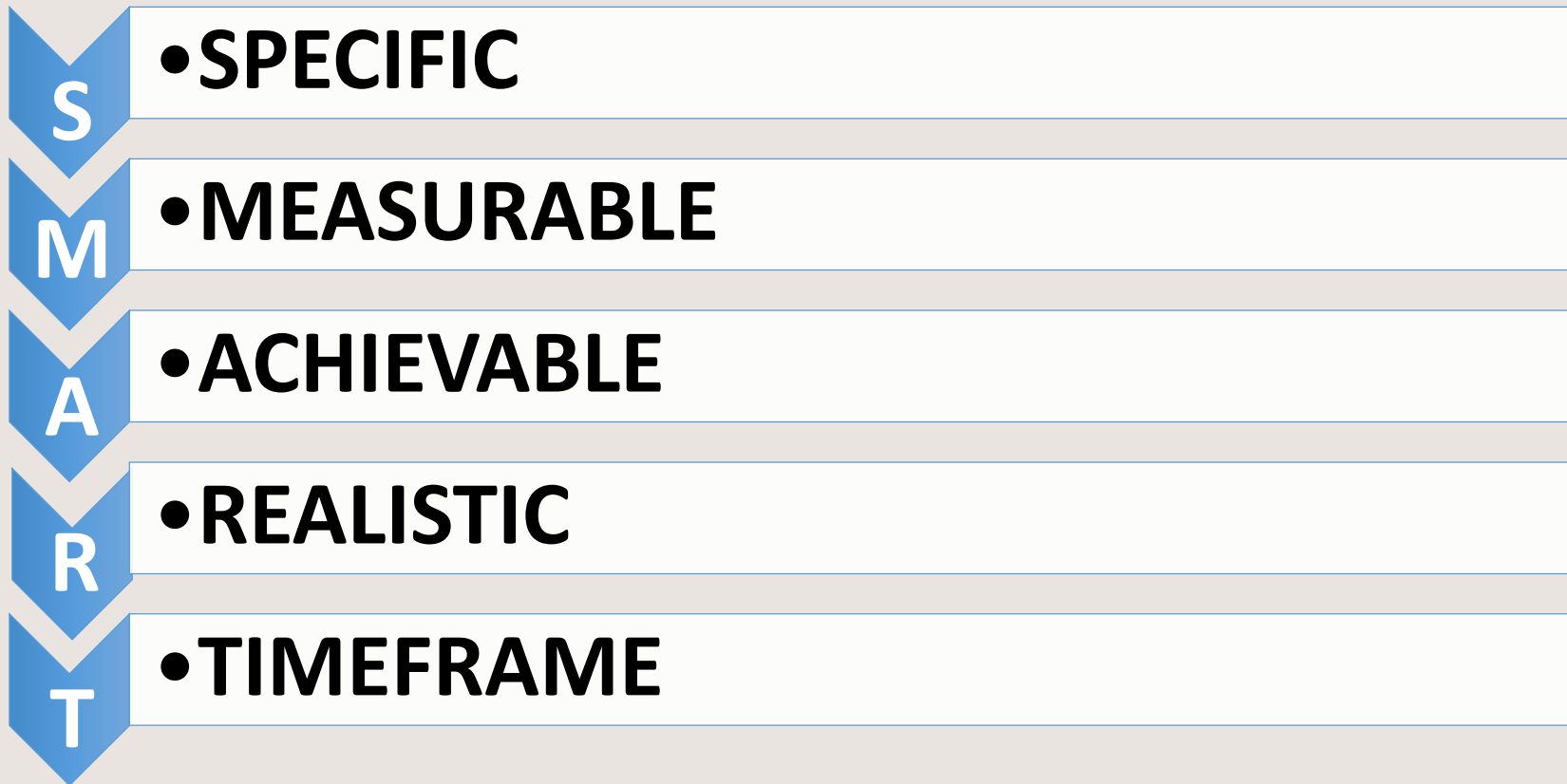
# From **Problem** to **Solution** Oriented Thinking

## **Solution Oriented Questions =**

- What would you like to achieve?
- How would you realise that you achieved your goal?
- How could you solve the problem?
- How do you get the necessary information?
- What to do instead?
- How to approach it further? How to fix it?
- In which context would you like to change?
- Which possibilities could you think of in order to achieve your goals?
- Who could support you? Who could help you?



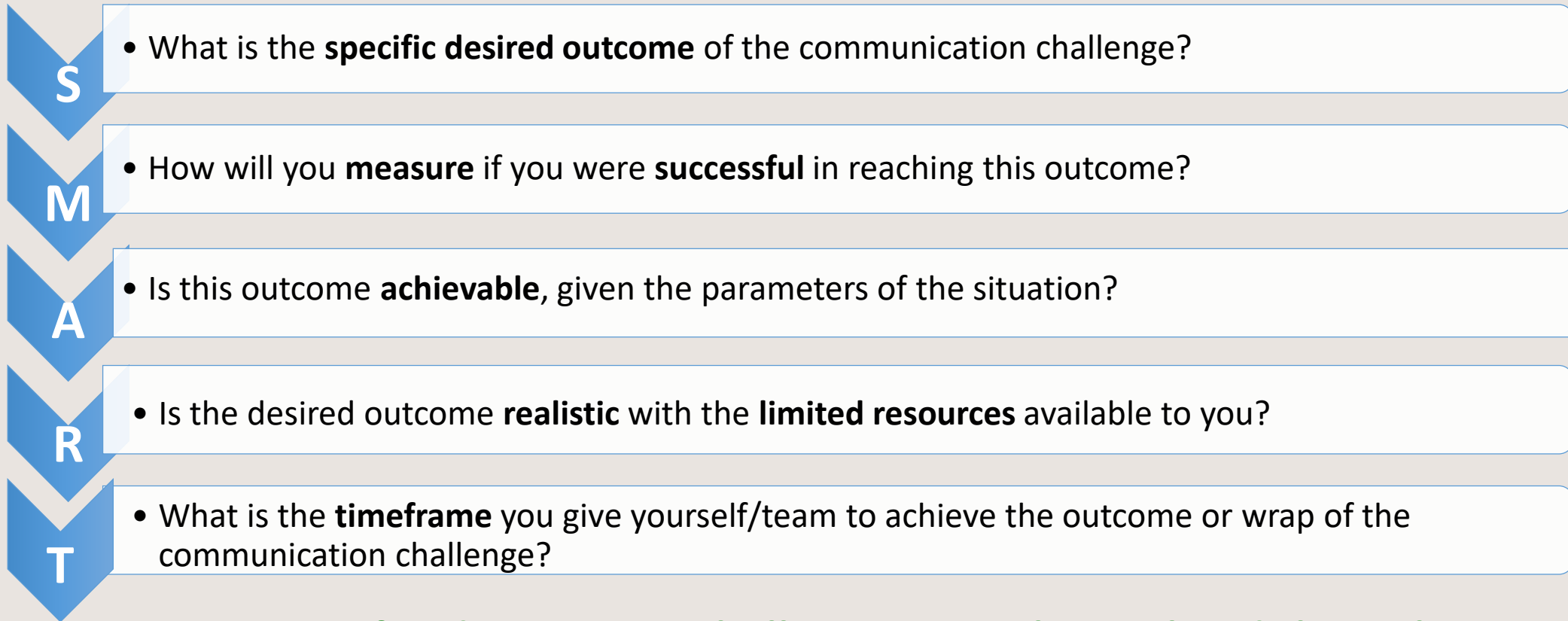
# The SMART Model is **Solution** Focused Identifying your Communication **Goal**



# Exercise 2

# Exercise 2:

## Reframing your **Communication Challenge** using the **SMART** Model



*In groups of 2, discuss your challenge using this tool and share the outcome with the entire group*

# Reframing your Goal in **Positive** Terms

In the previous exercise, was your objective framed **positively**?

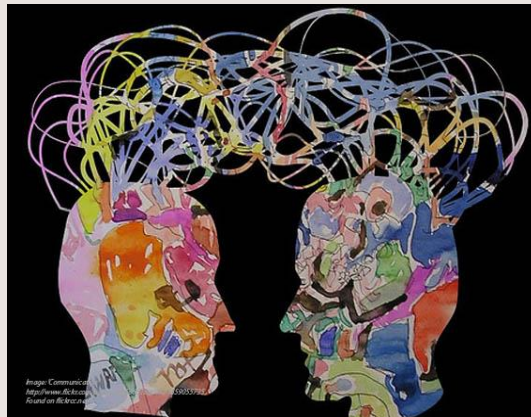
- Was your goal set to avoid something?
- Did your framing include negative formulations (DON'Ts)?

Research in Neuro-Linguistic Programing (NLP) shows that the mind is not efficient at processing negative demands:

**Do not think of an elephant!**

# The role of your **mind set** in effective communication

- When communicating, always think of a **positive** image you wish to create in your and your interlocutor's mind
- The focus is brought on what you **want** to achieve and not on what you **do not want**
- As a result, you will also increase the your and your interlocutors' **motivation** to work together towards the same goal



# Exercise 3

## Exercise 3:

# Reframing a challenging situation **positively**

### Step 1

- Individually, think of another recent challenge you had to face on your workplace
- Write down all the positive things that come up to your mind about this challenge.
- What went well? What worked out? What were the positive components?

### Step 2

Discuss and exchange orally with another person about the positive components of the challenge?  
Can the other person also help you think of more positive aspects?

# Identifying **resources** in effective communication

Effective Communication also takes into account the resources you will need to achieve your goal. To help you identify the required resources, consider the following questions:

- Is it the first I attempt anything of the sort? Have I done it before?
- What worked successfully last time?
- If not, do I know someone else who has been successful? What did they do differently?



# Evaluation vs. Observation in Effective Communication

Ineffective Communication is often based on:

- **Evaluating** rather than **observing** situations
- Expressing **blame** instead of clearly communicating **requests**
- **Evaluation** is based on judgments and comparisons to others
- **Observation** is based on facts about situations and behaviors

# Exercise 4

## Exercise 4:

# Imagining a conflictual, non-cooperative conversation

### Step 1

- In groups of 2, write down an imaginary dialogue between two co-workers
- The dialogue is conflictual, does not focus on concrete, positive outcomes
- Give specifics about negative vocabulary used

### Step 2

Share the dialogue with other groups  
When listening to other examples, pay attention to negative framing, blaming and the lack of SMART goals

# Exercise 5

# Exercise 5:

## Distinguish between **Evaluation** & **Observation**

- “Emina was rude with me yesterday for no reason.”
- “Today Blerim has taken the minutes during the team meeting.”
- “Amira didn’t ask for my opinion during the meeting.”
- “My boss is a good man.”
- “Ivana works too much.”
- “Bojan is aggressive.”
- “Milan was first at work every day this week.”
- “My colleague never shares the agenda with me.”
- “Miloš told me I didn’t look good in yellow.”
- “My colleague complains when I talk with her.”

# Exercise 6

## Exercise 6:

Identify the statements that are clear Requests

- “I want you to understand me.”
- “I’d appreciate to receive the agenda by this afternoon.”
- “I’d like you to feel more confidence in yourself.”
- “I want you to stop calling me outside of office hours.”
- “I want you to stop smoking.”
- “I’d like you to be honest with me about yesterday’s meeting.”
- “I would like you to respond to Harun’s e-mail this afternoon.”
- “I’d like to get to know you better.”
- “I would like you to be on time tomorrow morning.”
- “I’d like you to present at our team meetings more often.”

# The Need for Control: Letting go of the Outcome

You have set yourself a SMART goal and framed it positively, however:

**Are you the only actor in control of the outcome?**

- Remember that you cannot control other people
- What is in your control is your reaction to their behaviour and actions
- Did you consider if your desired goal also fits the expectations and limitations of others?
- What are you willing to give up in order to achieve a positive result?



# Exercise 7

## Exercise 7:

**Reframe** the dialogue as a cooperative, effective conversation

### Step 1

- In groups of 2, rewrite the imaginary dialogue of exercise 6 between two co-workers
- Focus on observations, positive framing and formulating clear requests

### Step 2

- Share the dialogue with other groups
- When listening to other examples, pay attention to positive framing, requests highlighting actions and identifying SMART goals

# Effective communication skills

**Watch the Video:**



Questions?



# Soft Skills Training

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