Communication skills: SOLVING FORKFLOW PROBLEMS

Lead-in

1A **In pairs, discuss which of the following people create the biggest problems for others at work.**

1 People who don't answer their email.
2 People who don't return phone calls.
3 People who don't meet deadlines.
4 People who don't work well in teams.



B **Read the definition of *workflow*. In pairs, discuss what kind of workflow problems the people in Exercise 1A can cause. The following phrases may help you.**

workflow (noun) – the steps people in a work-group need to take to complete a task successfully and on schedule

miss deadlines	waste time	fall behind schedule	hold things/people up

What is a problem/issue/fuck-up/matter/trouble/disaster?

2A 3.3.1 **Watch Thiago explaining a problem he's having to Azra and answer the questions.**

1 What is Thiago worried about? Why?
2 What does Azra suggest Thiago should do? Does it seem like good advice?
3 How did Shaun react the last time Thiago had a similar problem?

B **Why might it not be a good idea for Thiago to avoid Shaun?**

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3A Watch Shaun and Thiago discussing the problem. Answer the questions.

1 Who asks for the meeting – Thiago or Shaun? How does this give him an advantage in the conversation?

2 Thiago tries to explain why his report is late. Does Shaun a) reject his explanations as excuses or b) listen and try to think of ways to help?

3 Does Shaun blame Thiago for creating a workflow problem?

4 How do Shaun and Thiago suggest the report can be finished? Do they agree on how to do this?

5 Who is happier with the final outcome of the meeting?

B What could Thiago and Shaun do differently to get a better outcome?

C Watch a different version of the conversation and answer the same questions you answered in Exercise 3A.

LIVEWORKSHEETS

4A Think about the two versions of the meeting you just watched. When someone, like Thiago, is causing workflow problems for others in their team, which of the following questions is the most important to ask?

1 What's going wrong?
2 Whose fault is it?
3 How can we fix it?

B Can the other questions in Exercise 4A sometimes be useful, too? If so, when?

5 3.3.4 Watch the Conclusions section of the video and compare the advice with your answers in Exercise 4.

6 Do you focus more on problems or solutions when you make decisions in life and at work? Would you like to change your approach? What steps could you take to do this?

LIVEWORKSHEETS

Functional language

Solving problems

a Get the person's attention.

b Check he/she is free to talk.

c Ask about progress.

7 **The diagram on the left shows three steps for asking someone about their progress with a task. Match 1–6 below with the correct step (a–c).**

1 Have you got a moment?
2 How are you doing with that report?
3 Just the person I was looking for!
4 Do you have a minute?
5 Any progress with that report?
6 Ah, there you are!

8A **Use phrases from the box to complete the sentences.**

How about	I'll see	Let me	What else	What if	Why don't I

1 _____ deal with Accounts.
2 _____ if I can get [someone] to share some of your workload.
3 _____ can we do to get this report finished?
4 _____ I bring in [someone] to help you out?
5 _____ asking [someone] to help you with some of the figures?
6 _____ just write an executive summary of the main points?

B **Use the same phrases from Exercise 8A to make two more sentences.**

1 _____ **a** see what I can do. **b** try and get you some IT support.
2 _____ **a** if we can increase the budget. **b** if there's any flexibility in the budget.
3 _____ **a** can I do to help? **b** do we need to do?
4 _____ **a** we make the deadline later? **b** I give you an extension?
5 _____ **a** rethinking the schedule? **b** adding more people to the project team?
6 _____ **a** get you some help? **b** give you an assistant?

C **Match the responses with the correct suggestions in Exercises 8A and 8B. Some match more than one suggestion.**

1 Thanks, **I'm not great with** numbers!
2 **Someone to assist with** the paperwork **would be a big help**.
3 **Having** a couple more people on the team **would really speed things up**.
4 Good, **I'm having problems with** some of the software.
5 Great, **another** five days **should be enough**.
6 **An extra** 10 percent **would make a big difference**.

9 **Work in pairs. Read the information and decide which of you is Speaker 1 (S1) and Speaker 2 (S2) in each situation. Roleplay the situations.**

Situation 1 S1 is giving an important conference presentation in Montreal six days from now. Ten days ago S1 asked S2 to prepare some slides for the presentation. The deadline for getting the slides ready is tomorrow, to give S1 time to practise the presentation. Unfortunately, S2 is having problems, so he/she needs to find a solution as quickly as possible.

For details, S1 look at page 133 and S2 look at page 139.

Situation 2 S2 has to complete a sales report six days from now. Ten days ago S2 asked S1 to produce performance charts for each of the company's sales units. The deadline for doing this is tomorrow to give S2 time to add the charts to the report. Unfortunately, S1 is having problems, so he/she needs to find a solution as quickly as possible.

For details, S1 look at page 129 and S2 look at page 131.

10 **When you have finished, discuss how the meetings went. How effectively did you:**

• avoid blaming anyone? • avoid making excuses? • develop a plan of action? • find out what the basic problems are? • remain calm? • suggest possible solutions?

Share your experience with the class.

LIVEWORKSHEETS

Situation 1, Student 1 (S1)

You're getting a little nervous about the presentation in Montreal because:

1. there will be a big audience of important people and Canada is a major market for you.
2. you will be using Apple Keynote software for the first time on your new MacBook Pro.
3. the presentation will be in English, but you're not sure if English will be everyone's first language. You've asked S2 to produce the slides in both English and French.

In your meeting with S2 make sure you:

1. find out why he/she's having problems, but try not to blame him/her.
2. ask him/her to suggest some solutions.
3. suggest some solutions of your own.

Here are a few ideas for suggestions you could make.

1. You didn't ask how well S2 knows Apple Keynote – he/she may need some IT support.
2. The situation is urgent, so you're prepared to pay S2 overtime to get the job done.
3. You could also give S2 a one-day extension to finish the slides if you have to, but not more – you fly to Montreal in three days' time!

You start: *Ah, there you are! Have you got a moment? How are you doing with those slides for my presentation?*

Situation 1, Student 2 (S2)

You're a little worried about meeting S1 because:

1. a colleague has been off work with illness, so you've been extra busy for the last two weeks. You've finished about three-quarters of the slides, but they won't be finished by tomorrow.
2. you've used Apple Keynote before, but you're much more familiar with PowerPoint, so it's taking longer than usual to prepare the slides.
3. S1 asked you to prepare slides in English and French for the Montreal audience, but your French is not perfect and this is holding things up.

In your meeting with S1 make sure you:

1. apologise for being behind schedule.
2. explain the problems you're having, but don't make excuses.
3. try to suggest some possible solutions.

Here are a few ideas for suggestions you could make.

1. PowerPoint works fine on Apple computers – you could convert your work on Apple Keynote into PowerPoint and finish the other slides a lot faster.
2. Because you're having difficulty translating the slides it may be quicker to email them to a colleague in the Paris office, who can check them.
3. If you can have a two-day extension, you're sure you can finish the job.

S1 will start the conversation.

Situation 2, Student 1 (S1)

You're a little worried about meeting S2 because:

1. several sales units have still not sent you their sales figures and you can't complete the performance charts S2 needs until you have these.
2. the company internet wasn't working for 24 hours this week, which has put you another day behind schedule.
3. the software you're using to produce the charts keeps crashing.

In your meeting with S2 make sure you:

1. apologise for being behind schedule.
2. explain the problems you're having, but don't make excuses.
3. try to suggest some possible solutions.

Here are a few ideas for suggestions you could make.

1. While you're waiting for some of the sales units to send you their figures, you could start adding the figures you have to S2's report.
2. You urgently need some IT support or new chart-making software.
3. If you can have a three-day extension as well, you're sure you can finish the job.

S2 will start the conversation.

Situation 2, Student 2 (S2)

You're getting a little nervous about the report you have to write because:

1. it was late last sales quarter and the directors were not happy – that's why you brought in S1 to help you this time.
2. with only six days to complete the report for this sales quarter, it could be late again!
3. the sales unit performance charts are perhaps the most important part of the report.

In your meeting with S1 make sure you:

1. find out why he/she's having problems, but try not to blame him/her.
2. ask him/her to suggest some solutions.
3. suggest some solutions of your own.

Here are a few ideas for suggestions you could make.

1. You know the sales units are sometimes slow to send their sales figures through. If S1 is still waiting for them, offer to contact the units directly.
2. You're happy to give S1 any technical assistance he/she needs, e.g. IT support, an assistant for a couple of days.
3. You could also give S1 a one-day extension to finish the charts if you have to, but not more – when you have the charts, you need at least four days to complete the report.

You start: *Ah, there you are! Have you got a moment? How are you doing with those performance charts?*

LIVEWORKSHEETS