



## The Challenge of Communication

Recently I was coaching a senior manager at a multinational company. He was frustrated that his culturally and linguistically diverse team of engineers couldn't communicate effectively. Rather than signing off on their recommendations, his valuable time was spent synthesizing their data ("millions of pieces" as he put it) into something usable for himself and his peers.

Similarly, the managers had their own trouble communicating with the engineers. He said, "When we tell them that we're going to explain it from a top-down perspective, they think we're yelling at them."

Why is communication such a challenge? A professor of mine had a saying: "People don't think they understand anatomy just because they have a body, but they think speaking a language confers expertise in linguistics." Substitute the word "communication" for "linguistics" and the problem becomes clear.

But the fact remains that few people innately understand how to communicate in a corporate setting. And it is not realistic to expect that hundreds of people from different backgrounds, languages, and positions will know how to communicate with one another.

The good news is that communication is a teachable skill—one that training can sharpen in a very short time.

Imagine that all employees in the organization did the task they were responsible for and then clearly reported it in speech or writing to managers who decided what action to take next. This kind of alignment may sound like wishful thinking, but it is possible with effective communication.