qualities of a communicating group
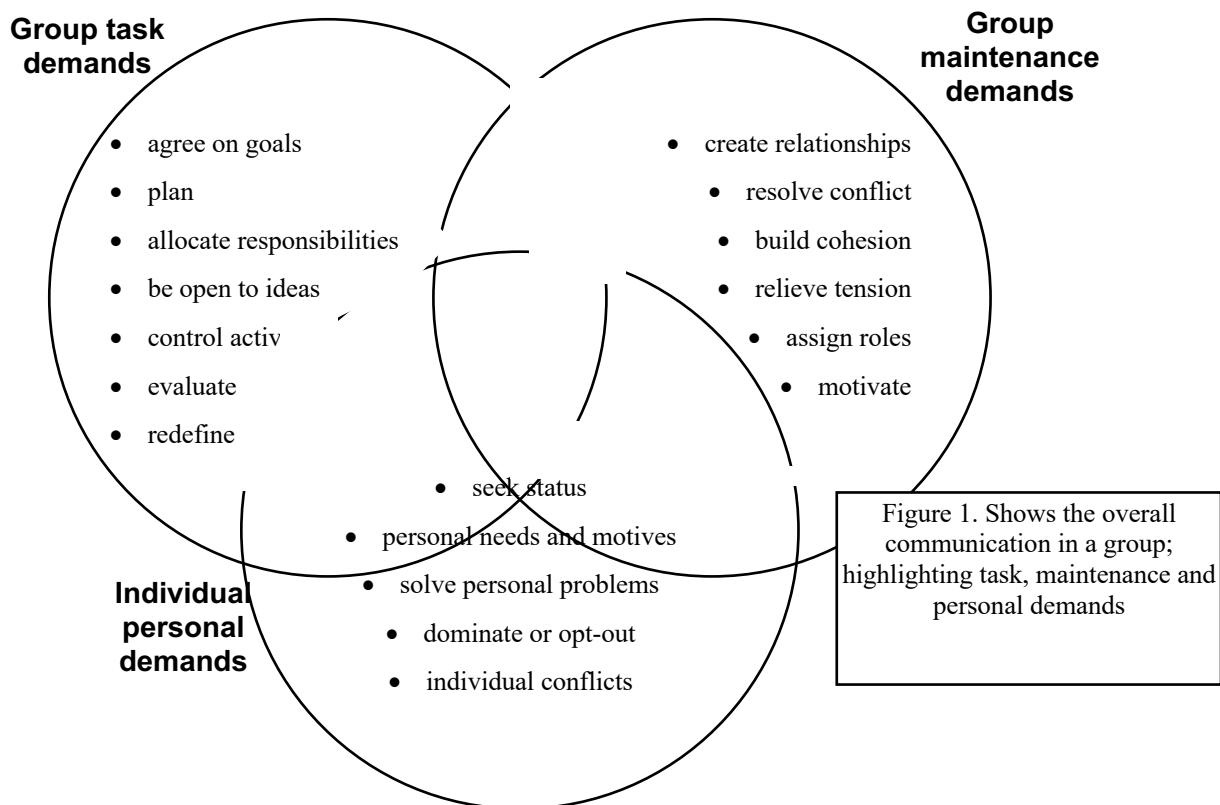
The members of a group which is communicating effectively will:

- use communication in order to achieve an understanding of one another

- influence and be influenced by others

- develop a sense of mutual trust and openness

- correct distortions in communication between group members, with constructive feedback

Aspects of communication within groups

Communications within small groups have three inter-dependent demands:

- group task demands – which involves understanding what the group wants to achieve

- group maintenance demands – which involves assigning tasks to group members and creating relationships

- individual personal demands – which involves resolving individual roles within the group: for instance, who wants to be the leader or motivator of the group (see Fig 1 below).

Group task demands

- agree on goals
- plan
- allocate responsibilities
- be open to ideas
- control activ
- evaluate
- redefine

Group maintenance demands

- create relationships
- resolve conflict
- build cohesion
- relieve tension
- assign roles
- motivate

Individual personal demands

- seek status
- personal needs and motives
- solve personal problems
- dominate or opt-out
- individual conflicts

Figure 1. Shows the overall communication in a group; highlighting task, maintenance and personal demands

johari window on reality

("Joe and Harry", Self and Other)

	Known to Self	**Unknown to Self**
Known to Others	**Arena / Candidness**	**Blind spot**
Unknown to Others	**Facade /** **Hidden Agenda**	**Unknown**

An example of a blind spot would be someone not taking the lead when they are the most qualified member of a group for a task. When a person has a blind spot, communication is impossible until the blind spot is removed.

A facade might occur when a job applicant pretends to be exactly what a job description calls for. This could work against both parties, because the person could be hired for a position he or she is unqualified for.

The "Unknown" might include a person's ability to deal with extreme stress or danger that has never happened in their life. When you put together a team for a task that may require abilities that people seldom test, how would you know that your team members have a good mix of those qualities?

Candidness is the area of greatest team effectiveness and personal satisfaction. However, it is also the area of greatest exposure and personal risk. The upper left window pane is the most desirable view of the world for teamwork. Many people

would also strive to live their lives with people they are comfortable with, which is the upper-left window.

With effort, the size of the Candidness window pane can be increased and the other window panes decreased. Team-building activities could include a questionnaire where people answer questions like: "Do you think <A> is attractive??" "Do you think <A> thinks they are attractive?" and "Do you think you are attractive?" If everyone in a small group answers these questions, you will have data on three of the four panes in the Johari window. Questionnaires of this nature have been developed. They often involve many questions before real value is gained, but they make an interesting activity.

Note: Mediated interaction increases the ease of deliberating building a facade or being unaware of some effect of your actions. A good example of this is the way in which people on faceless internet newsgroups may be outrageously inconsiderate and "flame" in their postings, but leave all their rude, angry words behind when they get together for any sort of face-to-face meetings.

giving clear feedback

Feedback is probably the most useful information you can give people, if it is done right. It gives them information about how well they did, and what they still need to improve. Clear and constructive feedback, given consistently is a powerful developmental tool. Remember, feedback can be either negative or positive and with both types, you need to be as constructive as possible. Feedback is only useful if the person getting the feedback can listen to it and not feel defensive.

TASK:

In pairs look at the feedback statements below and decide whether you think they are useful feedback, or not. Give reasons for your answer.

I hate it when you keep interrupting me.

At last night's meeting you really helped us to understand the different points of view. It helped us to avoid having a big fight.

I can never understand a word you say.

You are always late: last week you were late for the staff meeting. I have never had a report from you on time, and just now you were late for the start of this meeting.

You did a wonderful job, you're brilliant!

I really found your talk on the dangers of smoking very interesting. I learned a couple of new things about the effects of smoking, and it made me feel that I was right to give up smoking

We have all discussed it, and we agree that you are not very good at supporting people.

You never think before you say something!

You are very sexist. You have no respect for the women in this organisation.

When you say ... it makes me feel that you are a racist.

guidelines for giving useful feedback

1. Describe what you saw, or heard.

Describing means that you give information about what happened. In your description, stick to the facts. Do not use words of judgement.

Describe: You have not finished the work and the deadline was on Friday.

Not: You are totally lazy and unreliable.

2. Describe in very specific terms.

Speak about specific things that happened.

Specific: You were late with this report. Last month your report was a week late.

<u>Not</u>: You are always late.

3. Describe the consequence for you or the organisation.

Because the report is late, we have missed the deadline. It makes our radio station look very unprofessional.

When you interrupt me, I find it very difficult to make a point.

4. Make sure you give your feedback at the right time and place.

♦ Don't give negative feedback when you are very angry.

♦ Don't give negative feedback in front of other people.

♦ Give feedback as soon as possible (don't hold on to it for months and then dump it all when you have had enough).

5. Negative feedback should offer alternatives.

It is difficult to read your handwriting. Perhaps you could print on the flip chart paper.

guidelines for receiving useful feedback

1. Listen carefully.

2. Try not to get defensive.

3. Restate what you think you heard to check your perception.

4. Ask questions if necessary. Ask for examples in areas that are unclear. Restate what you think you heard.

5. Gather additional information by observing your behavior, both with the person who gave the feedback and with others.

6. Carefully evaluate the accuracy and potential value of what you observe and hear.

7. Do not overreact to the feedback, but, where desired, modify your behavior in suggested directions and then evaluate outcomes.