



The Open  
University

Business School

# The Professional Certificate in Management

Information and sample module material



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# Set your course for success

We're delighted that you're thinking of studying with The Open University Business School. The Professional Certificate in Management (C31) offers an innovative, accessible and stimulating insight into the world of business and management.

This booklet will give you a flavour of what to expect from the certificate. It will help you decide if it's the correct qualification for you, and the right level to start your studies.

You should find the answers to your questions here. However, if there's anything you're unsure of or if you'd like to discuss your options, our specialist advisers are on hand to help.

Call us on **+44 (0)845 366 6035** or visit our website at **[www.oubs.open.ac.uk](http://www.oubs.open.ac.uk)**.

Read on and discover all you need to know about the certificate.

## What this booklet will do for you

We start by setting out how we will work with you, and the ground you will cover in the certificate. We've included quotations from students and employers to show you what's in store and how valued the qualification is. We'll show you how a module is structured week by week, and how much time you'll need to commit as you progress. We've taken special care to tell you about our unique tutoring system which gives you access to expert guidance from a dedicated tutor throughout the qualification. The last section of the booklet is devoted to a sample of material for you to work through.

We hope that you will enjoy the material and that it will convince you that the Professional Certificate in Management is the appropriate qualification for you.



# What you'll study. What you'll gain

## What is the Professional Certificate in Management?

The Professional Certificate in Management is an internationally recognised professional qualification for managers, designed to increase your knowledge, competence and confidence as a new, general or middle manager.

Crucially, there are no entry requirements. The Professional Certificate in Management is accessible to you whatever your educational and training background.

As well as being a recognised professional qualification in its own right, the Professional Certificate in Management is also a foundation for further study at undergraduate and postgraduate level. It can count towards the BA (Hons) Business Studies (B04) or the BA (Hons) Leadership and Management (B54) degrees. It's also the first step to a prestigious MBA or other postgraduate qualification.

## Who is it for?

The programme appeals to a wide range of people. It's of particular value to:

- newly appointed or recently promoted managers
- managers at any level who have had little or no formal management training and want to strengthen their managerial capabilities
- technical, scientific and other specialists who want to broaden their knowledge and improve their career prospects
- those who want a taught programme before undertaking assessment for an N/SVQ in management.

You are expected to have some personal knowledge and experience of managing in an organisation, but you need not be currently employed as a manager.

You will need to be able to commit around 12 hours study time on a weekly basis.

## What will it give you?

You'll look at your role and how to develop it within an organisational context, learning to recognise your strengths and overcome your weaknesses. You'll learn how to work more effectively with colleagues and staff, covering issues of recruitment, motivation, teamwork and leadership. You'll explore marketing concepts to help you add value for your customers, understanding and satisfying their needs and communicating with them. You'll also learn how to use and interpret financial information. Finally, you will learn how to use all this knowledge to solve real-life issues and problems.

The programme will help you to perform more effectively as a manager, both as an individual and as a team player, as it:

- is a practical qualification for practising managers
- teaches how to manage, rather than about management, with an emphasis on doing rather than wholly on theory
- is problem based enabling you to investigate workplace situations and how to improve them
- allows you to take your solutions and improvements and immediately apply them to the workplace
- develops key management skills such as managing people, effective planning and decision making
- is an opportunity to learn with and from other managers; sharing and comparing experiences and knowledge to understand the different contexts in which managers work and the challenges they face.

But that's only part of the picture. You'll also develop the essential skills for lifelong learning – from study skills and transferable intellectual skills to improved self-awareness and personal development.

So whether you decide to remain in your present role or move on, continue studying or travel the world – you'll be able to draw from and build on your learning, wherever life takes you.

## The Professor Derek Pugh Award

This is awarded annually to the most outstanding student who has completed the certificate programme in the preceding year.

Derek Pugh, Professor Emeritus of International Management at The Open University Business School, has been one of the most influential figures in the research and understanding of management in organisations over the last fifty years. For example, many certificate concepts about organisation structure and contingency theory have developed out of the work of Derek and his 'Aston group' colleagues. Derek has always recognised the importance and impact of certificate-level management development in improving the practice of management in organisations.

# Why study with The Open University Business School?

## Quality

You'll be joining one of the most highly regarded business schools in the world.

The Open University Business School is the largest in Europe, with a population of over 30,000 students. You'll find our graduates in a wide range of senior positions throughout the commercial, public and voluntary sectors. Many students are sponsored by their organisations – including companies such as First Group, BT and Unilever. If you'd like help securing sponsorship from your employer, call our Corporate Employer Services team on **+44 (0)1908 655767**.

We are among a select group of schools worldwide to be accredited by the leading international management education associations and industry bodies for our high standards of programmes and teaching.

## Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business (AACSB)

We were the first exclusively distance learning school to be awarded international accreditation by the AACSB – the leading USA-based accreditation body. The association only grants this award to business schools meeting the wide-ranging quality standards valued by business and academic communities. These include Harvard University, London Business School and Stanford University.

## European Quality Improvement System (EQUIS)

We've been awarded the prestigious European quality kitemark EQUIS by the European Foundation for Management Development (EFMD). The EQUIS award is an international standard for the auditing and accreditation of higher-education institutions in management and business administration.

## The Association of MBAs (AMBA)

Our MBA programme is accredited by the Association of MBAs (AMBA). AMBA is unique in representing the interests of MBA students and graduates, leading business schools and MBA employers. The AMBA accreditation service has international credibility.

## The leaders in management development for busy professionals

The Open University Business School is dedicated to high-quality, practice-based learning in business and management.

We aim to provide our students with the opportunity to gain knowledge and skills essential to the managers and leaders of tomorrow's economically dynamic, socially and environmentally responsible organisations.

We offer a comprehensive range of first-rate business modules and qualifications, delivered through our unique blend of learning techniques.



## The benefits of learning with The Open University Business School

### Practical

Study alongside your current job, so you don't have to put your career on hold.

### Relevant

Apply your learning to your own role as you study – really making the connection between theory and practice.

### Flexible

Study at your own pace, within guidelines, when and where you choose, giving you the opportunity to balance your studies with work or family commitments.

### Innovative

We offer cutting-edge teaching methods and learning materials – including electronic and online resources.

### Supportive

You'll have a personal tutor to assess and comment on your progress as well as advisory staff on hand throughout your studies. You can also participate in optional group tutorials which provide the opportunity to swap experiences and ideas with other students.

### Integrated learning

The final part of the certificate offers the opportunity to work with fellow students from a wide range of management backgrounds at a residential school. This will allow you to consolidate your learning and acquire further skills. If you are unable to attend the residential school there is an alternative learning experience offered. The residential school module culminates in an examination based on a pre-issued case study.

### Respected

Employers worldwide recognise the value of an Open University Business School qualification. In 2008, around 1600 employers sponsored students on our business and management modules.



# The certificate in outline: a guide to what's covered

**The Professional Certificate in Management consists of two 30-credit modules, lasting six months each, and one 10-credit module.**

You are advised to sign up for the 30-credit modules one at a time. Each of these modules covers two subject areas. You will be required to complete one assignment per subject area and one final end of module assessment covering the whole module. If you just want to learn about a particular area of management (e.g. people management), or count one of the modules towards another qualification, you can study them individually. But completion of this certificate will give you an overall picture of issues and problems managers face and how to deal with them.

After completion of both modules, or towards the end of the study period of the second module, you will be required to take part in the final 10-credit module, the 2.5 day residential school (or our 18-day online alternative) which is followed by a final examination.

The 30-credit modules can be taken in either order, but the final 10-credit module should be taken last or alongside your second 30-credit module. This means that if you wish you could take longer than 12 months to complete the certificate, with a break in between each module. Credits are applied on each module, but the award of Professional Certificate in Management is only conferred once the 10-credit module is successfully completed.

The two 30-credit modules cover four areas of management: managing in organisations, managing people, marketing and finance.



## Managing 1: organisations and people (B628 or BZX628)

This module looks at what managers do, concentrating on four key components of management:

- communication
- making decisions and solving problems
- planning, controlling, monitoring and evaluating
- the receipt and processing of information.

It looks at the human resource cycle, focusing on soft management skills such as motivating people, exercising power, influence and leadership and working in teams, as well as looking at recruitment, induction, performance, and staff development. It allows you, the manager, to look at all these areas in the context of the organisation in which you work while taking account of what is happening in the external environment. Finally, it considers how you, the manager, can act as an agent of change to enable your organisation to anticipate and respond to the changing world in which it operates.

*This module is offered with a combination of face-to-face and online tuition. If you would prefer entirely online tuition please use the module code BZX628.*

## Managing 2: marketing and finance (B629 or BZX629)

This practical module is the second of three leading to the Professional Certificate in Management. It responds to the practical needs of aspiring and first-line managers, team leaders and supervisors, many of whom may not be directly involved in marketing or finance. It uses activities and problem solving to investigate topics such as the external environment; consumer relationships; market research; product/service analysis; price, promotion and delivery; quality; consumer expectations and satisfaction; financial planning and monitoring through budgets; cashflow; profit and loss. You will focus on scenarios, case studies and your own role, whether in the commercial, public or voluntary sector.

*This module is offered with a combination of face-to-face and online tuition. If you would prefer entirely online tuition please use the module code BZX629.*

**To be awarded the Professional Certificate in Management you must successfully complete:**

## Managing 3: the integration challenge (B690)

No manager would be able to operate effectively unless he or she had a holistic view of the job and was able to understand how each function impacts on the other. To complete your study of the Professional Certificate in Management, you are required to attend a residential school and take a three-hour examination which examines your ability to make connections across the four management areas studied in the previous two modules.

The residential programme is run either over a weekend or midweek (or over 18 days if taken online). At the school you get the opportunity to look at a business case created to help you integrate the knowledge you have gained on the other two modules. It is designed specifically to help you prepare for the examination.

The school develops:

- core interpersonal management skills
- team working
- negotiation
- self-evaluation of skills and behaviours.

To complete the Professional Certificate in Management you will need to pass the two modules, participate in the residential school, and sit the examination. It is strongly recommended that you study both 30-credit modules before taking part in the residential school as you'll need to draw on knowledge of these to pass the examination.

# Study routes

In order to complete the certificate in 12 months you can register to study *Managing 3: the integration challenge* (B690) alongside your second 30-credit module. The residential school and the examination do not take place until after you have completed your final end-of-module assignment on the second 30-credit module.

## To complete the Professional Certificate in Management in 12 months

0–6 months

First 30-credit module (B628/BZX628 or B629/BZX629)

6–12 months

Second 30-credit module

*Managing 3: the integration challenge* (B690)

Qualification awarded:  
Professional Certificate in Management (C31)

If you so wish, you can take longer to complete the certificate taking a break in between each module, or you can complete your studies within 18 months, studying each module in turn.

## To complete the Professional Certificate in Management in 18 months

0–6 months

First 30-credit module (B628/BZX628 or B629/BZX629)

6–12 months

Second 30-credit module

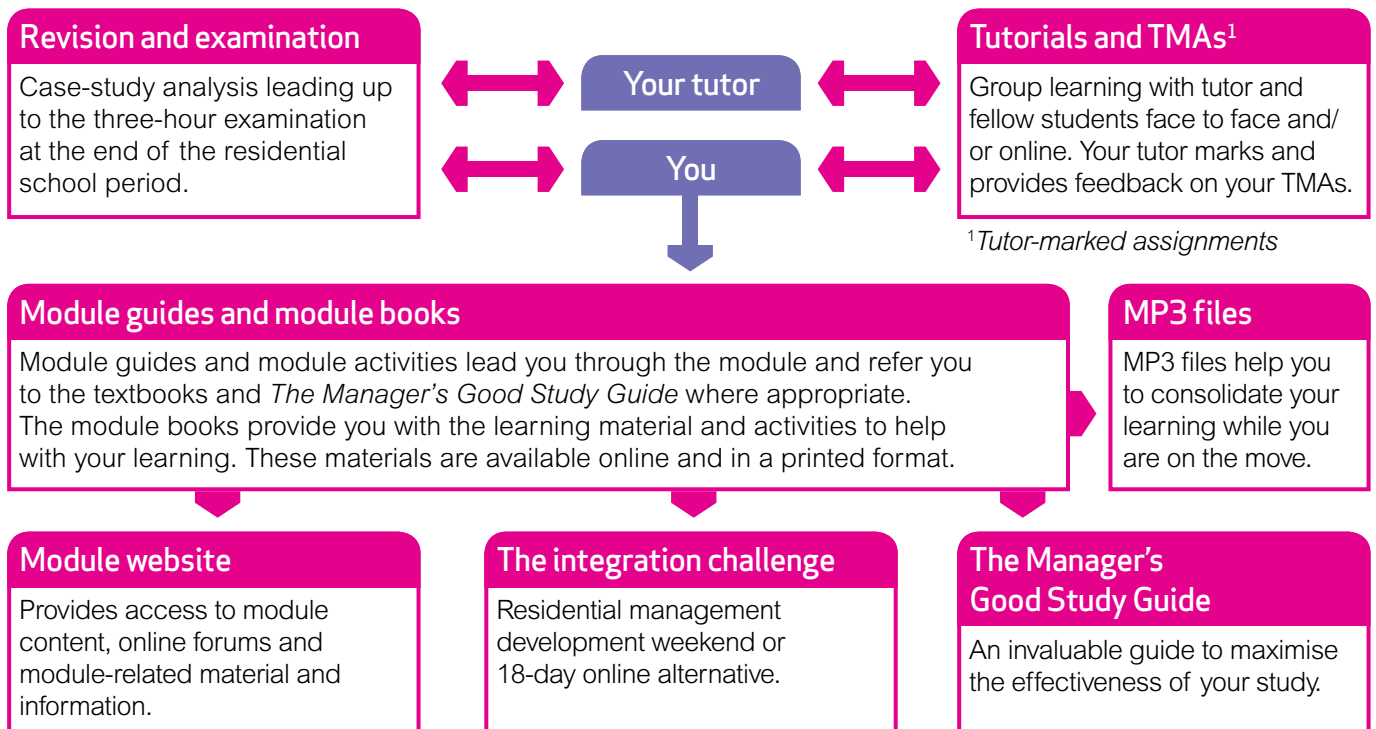
12–18 months

*Managing 3: the integration challenge* (B690)

Qualification awarded:  
Professional Certificate in Management (C31)



# Key study components



## Themes

There are three main themes running through the qualification:

**Ethics**, which covers the moral principles that shape and influence a person's behaviour and corporate social responsibility.

**Sustainability**, which requires that human activity only uses nature's resources at a rate at which they can be replenished naturally.

**Climate change and management** explores change in climate caused by human and organisational activity and is closely related with sustainability.

All three themes are related and overlap, but managers' actions and behaviours have a great influence on how the world will tackle these issues. As you gain a deeper understanding of the context and complexity of management issues and management in general, we expect you to include ethics and sustainability as issues in developing solutions.

## The problem-based approach to management learning

One important difference between this programme and other management programmes that you may have considered or studied is that it is problem based. Many management qualifications provide a clear academic understanding of management issues, and this is useful. But being a successful manager requires more than this. Our approach combines academic understanding with practical application. During your studies you will regularly solve management problems by applying relevant management knowledge. You learn not just 'what' but 'how' (as well as 'why', 'when', 'where' and 'who').

A problem is simply an opportunity to improve or do something differently. Problem solving is applied to difficult and negative situations, and also to any situation where we want to do something differently and perhaps better than at present. You will work on two types of problem, using either your own work situations to think about how you could make a change or improvement, or scenarios (problem-solving case studies) which are similar to real work situations. As you go through the modules, you will be able to use more learning in each problem, thus integrating through application what you have learned earlier in the module.

# Resourcing your success – module components

Learning with The Open University Business School uses a combination of different media in order to suit the various ways in which people learn, and the particular strengths of each form of teaching. During the life of each study block you will use the following resources in more or less this sequence. All your books are accessible via the module website and in printed form.

## Module books

The essential material for each 30-credit module is delivered in four books.

## Module guide

Each module is accompanied by a module guide which ties the various module components together and ensures you navigate your way through your learning with maximum efficiency. As well as mapping your progress, the guides contain invaluable advice on completing and presenting your written work, and offer indispensable assistance on preparing for the examination.

## Module activities

Activities are your starting point every time you sit down to study. It guides you to which texts you need to read and the activities you need to undertake week by week.

## Module textbooks

Each module has two textbooks:

### Module materials

This contains all the reading you will need to do to understand the necessary management concepts, ideas, models and processes.

### The Manager's Good Study Guide

This contains information on learning and management skills (as well as a compact summary of key management ideas).

## The media mix

The textbooks and module activities are available in print and on the module website and are also available as MP3 files. The assignments are on the website. Topical material is also posted on the website so that we can keep you up to date with current management ideas.

## Face-to-face tutorials

Unless you have opted to study the certificate in its online version (where tutorial exercises are held electronically), tutorials are your chance to learn face to face with other students and your tutor. Exercises, case studies and discussion help reinforce your grasp of essential concepts.

## Online support

As well as meeting them face to face, you can learn with your fellow students online by means of a tutor group forum. This is an online forum overseen by your tutor which is exclusive to your group. Use it to share information and ideas, and ask questions. Some forums are synchronous; for these you will need a headset.

There's also a module website containing module and assessment materials, useful resources and the module calendar which drives your activities throughout your study.

## Assessment

Electronic tutor-marked assignments (eTMAs) are written assignments on which you receive detailed comment and a mark from your tutor. They are submitted electronically. On each 30-credit module there are two. You will also be required to submit an end-of-module assignment (EMA) which is also submitted electronically.

# The student experience

## How it's organised

With 40 years' experience of helping busy people manage part-time study, we have a clear philosophy about the importance of planning.

Here's how the first module (*Managing 1: organisations and people* (B628)) is planned across 22 weeks.

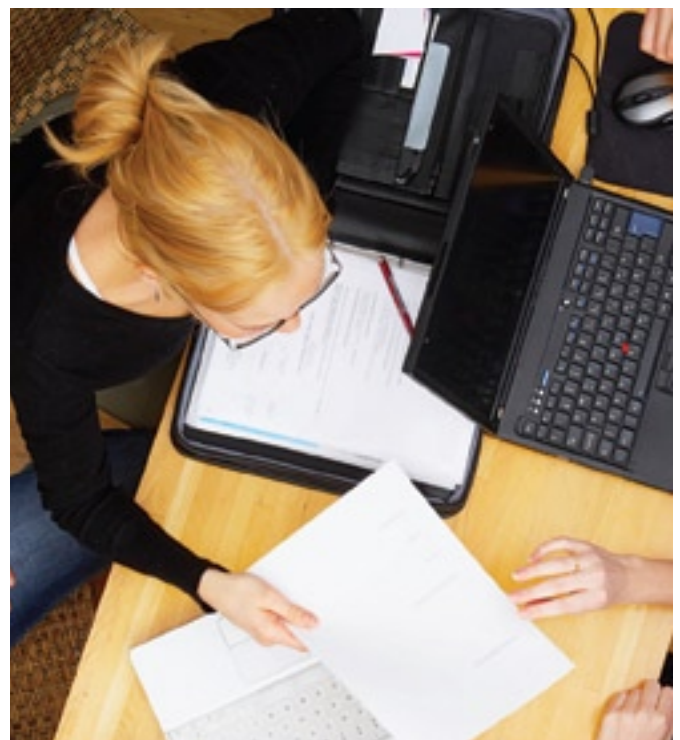
Study week	Study area	Activity
1	What do managers do?	
2	Communicating and managing communication	
3	Problem solving and decision making	First day school
4	Planning and controlling activities	
5	Managing information	Alternative online tutorial
6	TMA 01 preparation	
7	Understanding and motivating staff	
8	Leading, influencing and persuading others	First TMA due
9	Working with groups and teams	
10	Recruiting and selecting staff (1)	
11	Recruiting and selecting staff (2)	
12	Managing performance	
13	Performance appraisals	Second day school
14	Developing others	Alternative online tutorial
15	TMA 02 preparation	
16	Understanding organisational culture	
17	Understanding the external environment and its impact	
18	Managing change (1)	
19	Managing change (2)	Second TMA due
20	EMA preparation	
21	EMA preparation	
22		EMA due

## The integration challenge – revision and examination

The final part of the certificate, *The integration challenge*, takes place over a period of six months and culminates in the final examination.

You will prepare for this examination over a five month period, during which time you will consolidate your learning from your previous study and work with other managers from various backgrounds, giving you the opportunity to share your ideas. This module includes a 2.5-day residential school (or our 18-day online alternative) which focuses on the integration of management disciplines and problem-based decision making.

The examination is based on a pre-issued case study for which you will be supplied revision and examination preparation.



# Your tutor. The human face of distance learning

**Your tutor is central to your learning. He or she will provide tuition to your tutor group for the two 30-credit modules either face to face, or, if you opt for the online version, will host the equivalent activities through online forums.**

Your tutor will manage the online activities which link your tutor group, whichever version of the modules you take, and act as a continuous point of reference for issues and questions you wish to raise by email or telephone.

Your tutor also marks and gives detailed feedback on your eTMAs. These are an essential part of your learning.

Tutorial groups are formed on a geographical basis and based on student numbers, drawing on The Open University's national and international infrastructure of regional offices. While The Open University Business School is famous for distance learning, our tutors make sure that help is always close at hand.

Your tutor will provide a total of 30 hours' support, either face to face or online.

Open University Business School tutors are selected for their subject expertise as well as the currency of their practical experience. A network of nearly 1000 individuals, they come from a variety of professional backgrounds. Many hold senior management positions or are active in consultancy. Their experience spans organisations large and small in the commercial and not-for-profit sectors. All will have relevant insights to share with you whatever your work involves.

The Open University Business School invests substantial resources in training and developing each tutor in order to guarantee you the best in tutorial support. Each tutor participates in rigorous quality control processes so that you can be confident of teaching standards. Student feedback consistently rates tutors as amongst the most popular and highly appreciated aspects of what we provide.



## What do our students say about the Professional Certificate in Management?

“ Great qualification which I thoroughly enjoyed. I thought the books were well written and presented – I could study on the train and make notes at the same time. The level of learning was right for me – lots of new concepts but some similar ground having been a practising manager for some years. ”

“ I found the qualification beneficial and the concepts and techniques I have learnt have added value to my day-to-day management duties. ”

“ I recommend this qualification to anyone wishing to gain a comprehensive grounding in management. ”

“ I enjoyed the TMAs as they were all based on my real-life work environment and I was able to apply concepts to work problems. I liked the fact that there was collaboration with other managers so we learned about different industries. The electronic TMA system was great. Definitely recommend it. ”

“ My sponsor (Managing Director of my company) has expressed his admiration for the depth and range of issues studied and the way they have been applied to work situations. ”

## What do employers say about the Professional Certificate in Management?

“ The Professional Certificate in Management qualification is fundamental to the success of the company. If I am in a workshop, I can identify the people that have done this qualification immediately from the way they organise themselves and address the problem in a methodical and logical manner. ”

# Sample module material

This section attempts to show you a little of what you might be expected to do during a week's study period. Here we have chosen the subject of communication which is covered in week 2 of *Managing 1: organisations and people* (B628).

The next four pages provide the background information you will need to read before attempting the activity on page 18.

## Communication

Communication is a core management skill. But what does it mean to communicate effectively and is there one best way that will work in every situation? What skills do we need? How can we communicate about technical matters whilst, at the same time, help our people to feel valued and motivated? Communication skills and knowledge vary considerably between individuals, as do communication problems in different organisations. For this reason, in presenting the topic of communication, we have covered a range of sub-topics from interpersonal skills to the use of new technology.

When people are asked about what is done well and less well in their organisation, the most frequent criticism is about communications. They often criticise the quality of senior managers' communications with those at lower levels of the organisation. But communication can be managed well and the materials here should help you to achieve this.

## Theories of communication

1. A magazine advertisement for a broadband service claims that it will enable 'much faster communication' between your computer and the internet. It states a precise data transfer rate as a measure of this 'improved' communication.
2. At a company's annual shareholder meeting the audience watches a video, hears speeches and receives brochures. After the meeting the director and the head of corporate communications congratulate each other. 'We're really communicating the message to stakeholders,' the director says.
3. Two people are sitting in adjacent seats on an aeroplane. One person is talkative; the other person pretends to sleep to avoid a conversation.
4. Danja didn't like Tabitha but it was important not to show it in front of her boss, Sam. When the three of them met Danja smiled at Tabitha as she greeted her. In an instant, Sam saw that Danja's smile wasn't genuine. 'Those two don't get along with each other,' she thought.

In the first example, the communication is not 'human': computers and servers exchanging information have no awareness that they are sending or receiving electronic symbols and no understanding of where the data came from (or went to). They cannot understand what it means. In the second example, the company seems to be 'communicating' a one-way flow of information from the company to the shareholders. Was anyone listening, watching, reading? In the third example, the 'sleeper' is saying nothing but is communicating the message: 'I don't want to talk to you now'. The person is simply using non-verbal communication. The example also shows that it's hard not to communicate – even silence communicates something! In the fourth example, Danja communicated the message she intended not to. So, the view of communication we are proposing is wide. It is very inclusive and allows consideration of issues such as interpretation, intention, context and meaning.

We all communicate but the basis for improving communication skills is knowing something about how communication 'works'. A general definition of communication is 'social interaction through messages'. As the examples show, people use the term communication in many ways ranging from the speed of transmission of information through a channel, to interactions that involve intention and understanding.

## Understanding communication

Interpersonal communication is complex. Generally, we communicate far more meaning than just the words we speak, and what is understood by the person with whom we are speaking may not be what we intended. Understanding how *misunderstanding* can occur equips us better to improve our own communication. We consider three main approaches to understanding verbal (and written) communication which provide insight.

The first of these three approaches is that of John Austin (1962) who introduced the idea of language use as 'speech acts' in which it is possible to distinguish between:

- the literal or 'dictionary meaning' of words (locution)
- the intention of the speaker (illocution)
- how the utterance was received by the listener, or the consequence for the listener (perlocution) which may or may not be unintended.

Austin proposed that language is not a fixed system of rules with sentences delivering 'facts' whose truth or falsity can be judged. His idea was that language involves actions, context, situation and audience.

The same words can be used for different purposes (intentions) – so the illocution can be hidden within the locution. Consider the statement: 'Tom is very thorough'. Depending on context, the statement can be meant positively ('Tom's good at his job') or negatively ('Tom is being very slow; anyone else would have finished the job a long time ago'). Speakers' intentions are said to fall into one of five categories:

- to describe something
- to influence someone
- to express feelings or attitudes
- to make a commitment
- to try to achieve something.

(Source: Deaux et al., 1993).

Here is an example of Austin's distinction, adapted from a study of managers' communications and people's reactions at a Californian ski resort by Guild (2002). It is also an example of how misunderstanding can occur (in this case, through poor communication by senior managers). The senior managers had to reduce the number of seasonal workers because of lack of snow. However, the managers gave as their reason, not 'lack of snow' but 'to maximise shareholder value'. This 'message' upset the employees who remained after the staff reduction because the company had often communicated to them its core values such as 'people are important' and 'we are responsive to our customers and each other'. The reaction of the remaining staff was that the company was 'greedy'. When snow returned three weeks later, and the company tried to re-employ some of the staff who has been dismissed they declined, even though they had not found other work. As a result, customer service suffered.

Here, the locution – what was said by the senior managers – was: You are being dismissed because we need to maximise shareholder value.

The illocution – what was meant by the senior managers – was: The lack of snow is resulting in an unsustainable reduction of income so we need to reduce staff (costs).

The perlocution – the unintended consequence or by-product for the staff – was: Remaining staff were upset; their view of the company changed from one that cared about staff to a company that was greedy. A further consequence was that dismissed workers refused to be re-employed by the company, harming customer service.

This approach provides insights into the ways in which we convey our messages, their consistency with prior messages and the need to consider the context and the knowledge, needs, concerns, values and situation of the message recipients. The example reveals one of the typical ways in which recipients of messages construct different meanings from those which managers intended to communicate.

A second approach to understanding communication is known as 'politeness' theory, originated by Erving Goffman (1967). Goffman's view was that a person needs to live up to his or her self-image, thus needs to 'save face' – that is, maintain self-respect. At the same time, a person needs also to maintain the 'face' of other people. Goffman maintained that face saving constituted the 'traffic rules of social interaction'. Everyone plays the game, which is based on a working acceptance of what people say rather than a 'real' acceptance. A person may want to save face because of pride or honour, or because of the status power he or she can exert over others. A person might want to save the 'face' of another person because of emotional attachment to the other person, because of the moral rights of the other person, or simply to avoid hostility. Each person's sub-culture and ethnic culture will have their own face-saving practices.

Essentially, Goffman sums up for us the meaning of 'tact': we might confess to a personal failing to avoid having to be inconsistent, that is, act in a friendly way while feeling negative to the person; we might suggest things, or use humour, or be ambiguous rather than choosing words which would be untactful. By doing this we are not seen to have 'officially' communicated the message. And recipients also can behave as if they haven't 'officially' received the message. For example, we may invite another person to speak at a meeting – 'You first' – conveying a 'modest' view of ourselves while complimenting the other person. In some group situations, a person will be dependent on others for supporting his or her 'face' and in some circumstances, a group may come to share 'a face'.

The implication is that we change our language based on our understanding of listeners to gain their cooperation. Brown and Levinson (1987) suggest there are two types of face: positive and negative.

Positive face is the need to be liked and is conveyed when we compliment others or show concern for them. A key feature of negative face is recognising that another person does not have to do what we want them to do. Using these ideas, it's possible to distinguish between the ways in which we might make a request:

*'Write this report by Wednesday.'* This is a bald directive that takes no account of the listener's 'face'.

*'It would be great if you could write that report by Wednesday.'* This is positive politeness which attempts to minimise threat to the listener's 'face.'

*'I know you're busy, but we're going to need that report on Wednesday. Will you be able to do it by then?'* This is negative politeness: the speaker knows he or she is imposing on the listener so the speaker acknowledges the autonomy of the listener.

*'We're going to need that report by Wednesday.'* This is also negative politeness, but the statement is not direct; the listener is being asked indirectly to do something. Such statements allow the listener the greatest autonomy.

The words we choose when we speak are said to be based on three factors: social distance between the speaker and listener, the relative power of the speaker, and the degree of imposition he/she is making (a consideration whenever requests are made). There will be cultural and gender differences, of course, in how 'politeness' is judged and performed; context and situation are likely to have an impact too.

An example of such behaviours is provided by Bremner (2006). It centres on a Middle Eastern university (where English is spoken) where a project was mounted to produce information on all courses in a common format. The project involved many staff: administrators, course writers, proposers of new courses and teams developing the courses. The study of email messages exchanged showed the ways in which those who hold power feel able to use language; the difficulties faced by those without power when making requests; and how the choice of words can affect the way a writer is perceived.

Consider the following messages and 'politeness' interpretations.

### Text 1

'Thank you for the great job you did during Stage One of the [...] for the new courses. As discussed at the last workshop [...] in order to facilitate the success of Stage Two a workshop has been planned [...]. Helen and Patrick join me in inviting you to this very important workshop. [...] It is imperative that those involved in stage Two [...] attend this workshop.'

We know that this is an extra commitment but need your assistance and support [...]. Could you please make the necessary arrangements to ensure that your classes are covered. [...] We look forward to seeing you on [...].'

### Comment

The message, from the university's second in command, thanks and invites the people to whom it is addressed. It makes requests for support and commitment and for arrangements to be made. However, there is little doubt that attendance at the workshop is mandatory, made clear by the word *imperative*. It is little short of a 'bald directive': Do this! Note also the use of *we* and *you/your*: they are designed to make the message seem inclusive, but don't really succeed – not helped by the formal language used elsewhere in the message. The writer of Text 1 has power, he can be confident that his demands will be met regardless of how 'nice' he is.



## Text 2

'Hello everyone again.

I'm coming under some pressure a little further up the line to provide an update on the status of the [project]. I'd be very grateful if you could send me [...].

Sorry to hassle you on this, but as there is a deadline [...] for getting the first section of all courses on, the sooner I have an idea of what's going on the sooner I can provide help where needed.

If you have already responded, thanks. If you haven't, or if I'm writing to the wrong person, please update me/ask me to remove your name from the list. That way you can avoid these increasingly desperate calls for information.

Thanks a lot.'

## Comment

This message was written by the manager of the project coordinator, neither of whom had power over academic colleagues. By the time this message was sent, deadlines were being missed, the task was more time consuming than had been expected and there was growing resistance to it among the academics. The text states that senior managers require this but note how the writer tries to separate himself from the senior managers' command ('...send me...') with the use of the words '*I'd be grateful if...*' – The writer attempts to be closer to the recipients of the message than to the senior managers. Note the use of informal language and the use of *I* and *you*; there is none of the 'forced inclusiveness' used in Text 1.

Often we use politeness strategies without much thought. However, by consciously considering the use of negative strategies, our requests are more likely to be accepted when we have little status power to insist.

The third approach to looking at discourse focuses on conversation between people as part of actions which are 'situated' in time, place and context. Such conversations are known as 'talk-in-interaction'. The central tool of the approach is conversation analysis which aims to reveal what a conversation is 'doing' as it develops. It was developed by Harvey Sacks, in the 1960s and 1970s and elaborated by Emanuel Schegloff and others. Sacks believed conversation, far from being disorganised, is highly structured. He considered, among other things, turn taking; how participants organise topics and how, in group settings, the next speaker is 'chosen'.

Gibson (2008) describes conversation as incrementally and progressively produced and subject to the 'rule' of one person speaking at a time. Conversation 'options' change as the conversation progresses: questions need immediate answers; the moment to make a complaint passes quickly; what can be said *right now* is constrained by what was said before. Speakers must also choose what they say from a number of things they *could* say, and quickly: hesitation invites someone else to speak. Moreover, the speaker can both select the next speaker, by posing a question to a particular person, and what the next speaker will talk about. In this way, obligations and expectations are set up.

A problem with the approach, according to Gibson, is that it does not respond to several factors we have argued to be important:

- non-verbal aspects of communication (a criticism which can be made of the other approaches too)
- what participants are like, including their formal status
- the relationships between participants
- how all these affect the content and course of conversation.

Gibson's idea is useful to managers. It asks us to think about features of conversation, the demands and constraints on participants, and the choices we have. It also suggests the skills required both to ensure the participation of others and to direct conversation when required.

All three approaches – those of Goffman, Sacks and Gibson – remind us of issues in communication such as:

- more than *facts* are communicated: values and opinions (including prejudices) may be part of communication content, and are likely to shape communication behaviour in a variety of other ways
- how others interpret what we say, based on their current knowledge and understanding, and what they will do as a result
- how status power is communicated through language
- the nature of the language used
- communication is a kind of 'game' in which everyone is allowed to save face
- participants in a conversation shape the nature of the conversation.

## Activity

- Allow 30 minutes for this activity

Here you are presented with a problem-solving activity. We ask you to identify a situation in which you would like to improve communication and work out what you need to do to make the improvement.

This activity is designed to build awareness of how you communicate by assessing a request you have made in writing to a more junior person. The requests may have been made by memo form or by email. We would prefer a written message so that you can see exactly the words that you used. If your requests are generally made verbally, recall what you said as accurately as possible. The request should be more substantial

than, for example, 'would it be convenient to move our Thursday meeting from 10:00 to 14:00?' but no more than 250 words long.

Identify three main features of the language used and record them in the proforma provided below. The main features are likely to be the degree of empathy used and 'politeness' factors, dependent on factors such as social distance, relative power and degree of imposition. Then say how the request might have been improved. The locution (what you said) and the illocution (what you intended) will be clear to you. However, if you had feedback on the perlocution – how your request was received and interpreted, then use this feedback to inform your suggested improvement.

Features of a request to a direct report/more junior person	
Who the request was made to, and their status, that is, their level in the hierarchy relative to your position:	
The wording of the request:	
Three key features of the language used in the message:	
1.	
2.	
3.	
How I would improve the message:	

This activity should have helped you to gain insight into the language you use, even if you couldn't see many ways of improving the request you made. One way of improving the wording of a request is to take the one you wrote to a more junior person and re-draft it to a more senior person, then analyse the differences.

A completed version of the table would be an output that you would save for inclusion into an assignment later in the module.

## Problem-based activity

Of course, completing an activity is only a small part per se of solving a problem. You are asked to complete much larger activities which entail more reading and reflection about a particular problem. We ask you to consider what action you might take to improve a situation.

By getting you to take further steps such as drawing conclusions, making recommendations, identifying strengths and weaknesses and considering their implications, we lead you to a solution for that particular problem. The module sets out a model for this type of problem solving which you will be asked to use throughout the module. An example of a completed pro-forma for this activity is shown opposite.

Communication improvement: an example	
Identification	Monthly project team meetings are unproductive. Decisions made are poor and one team member has a negative attitude, which causes conflict.
Analysis	Possible reasons for situation: 1. Long agendas and a lot of information to deliver, not all of which needs discussion. 2. Insufficient time to discuss important issues. Decisions are often reviewed at next month's meeting because people have second thoughts. 3. Presence of one member disruptive. 4. I am not good at managing this type of conflict.
Conclusion	Problem caused by insufficient attention to agenda. What can be delivered in advance? What needs discussing? Need to improve my skills in dealing with conflict.
SMART (Specific, Measurable, Agreed, Realistic and Timed) recommendations	1. Attend to agenda. 2. Identify items which need most consideration and circulate in advance. Invite comments by email. 3. Acknowledge ability of negative person to see the problem and involve her in possible solutions. 4. Agree changes with team members and review after two meetings.
Strengths (benefits), weaknesses and implications	<p><b>Strengths:</b></p> 1. Sending out information in advance saves time in meeting. 2. Allows time for solutions to be thought about prior to meeting and allows time for discussion in meeting.

Working on this type of problem is not easy but you should have an action plan to put into place to discuss and implement. The better your analysis, your solution and your scrutiny of the possible weaknesses and implications, the better you should be able to resolve issues and improve situations in such a way that they are not likely to recur. Keeping focus on the specific issues is hard work.

You may have also realised that there are a number of issues related to the one you identified. That's why managing is messy rather than technical and mechanistic. Can you identify a problem and solve it using a similar approach? This module aims to do just that.

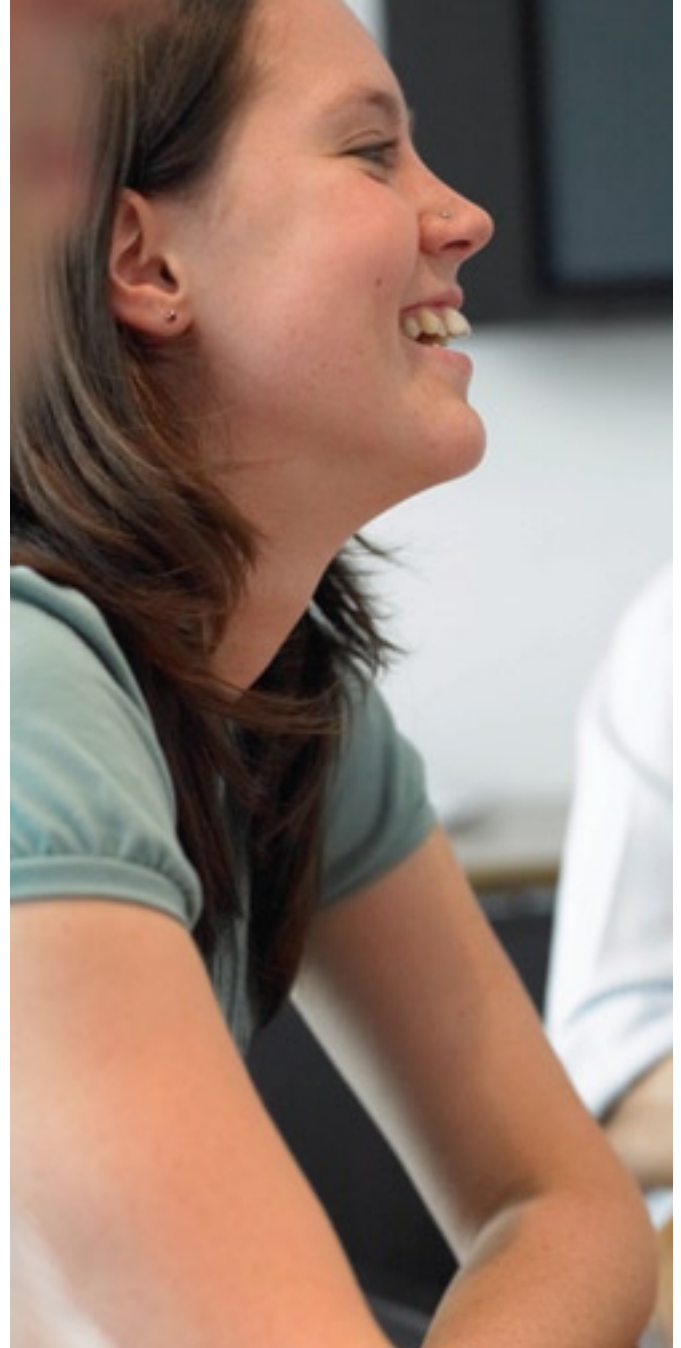
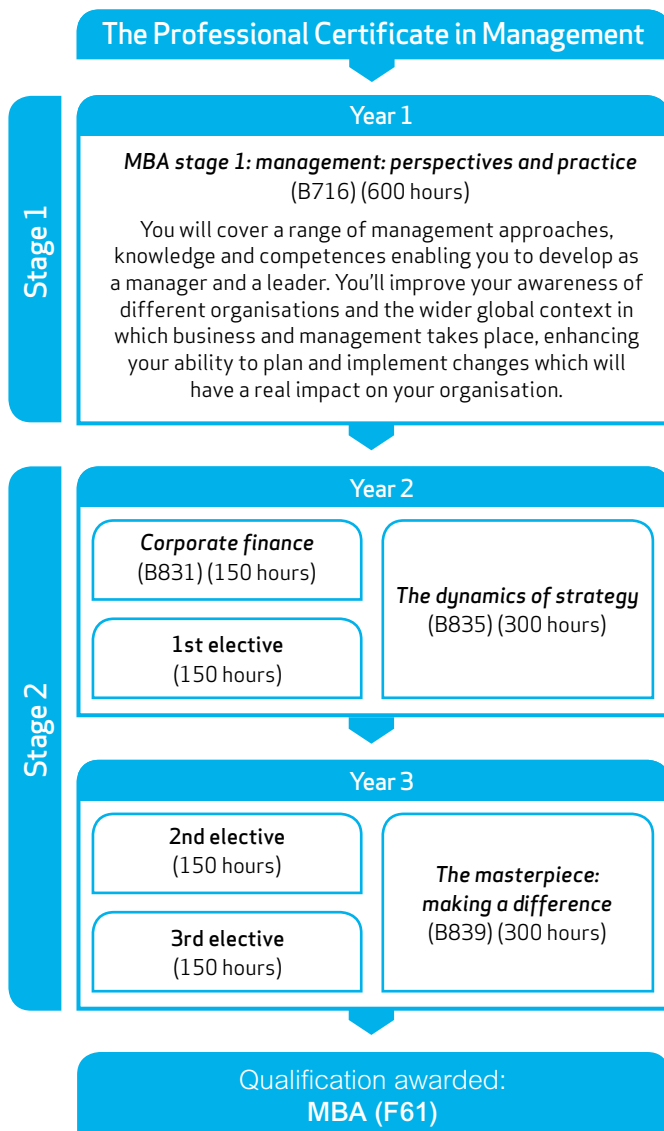
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