

Bridge the Gap to a Better Workplace Culture

How Human Resources and Learning & Development Leaders
Can Overcome **5 Common Communication Pitfalls**



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Effective Communication Is the Framework of a Strong Company Culture

How well do you think your executives, managers and staff communicate?

Hopefully, you would rate them a 10 out of 10 – where information passes equitably between groups, feedback is appreciated and delivered thoughtfully, transactional and relational conversations are valued, and messages are clearly and accurately understood.



Communication is rarely so perfect, which creates challenges for Human Resources (HR) and Learning & Development (L&D) professionals who are tasked with supporting an engaging employee experience. From the statistics alone, it's clear that effective information sharing has a significant impact on culture and the bottom line.

- Businesses with effective communication are 50% more likely to have lower turnover ([Clear Company](#)).
- 85% of employees say they're most motivated when management offers regular updates on company news ([Trade Press Services](#)).
- Miscommunication costs companies between \$4,000 - \$6,000 per person per year ([SHRM](#)).

With the shift for many to the digital workplace the expectations of employees have been elevated. People are used to having real-time access to information given the influence of technology, yet virtual and hybrid work environments are ripe with opportunities for disconnection and misalignment.

Regardless of where your employees are working, finding ways to keep individuals connected and informed is essential. And HR and L&D can play a vital role in supporting effective and engaging communication.

These teams are often responsible for creating productive workplace climates and developing staff to have the skills to succeed in the organization. By empowering people with the capabilities and tools to connect with others effectively, HR and L&D teams can build bridges across communication gaps and reshape the employee experience for the better.

To reframe the way your people connect with one another, start by considering five common gaps.

Information
Inequity

One-way
Traffic

Relational
Rifts

Feedback
Fractures

Intent-
impact Gaps

Information Inequity

A hybrid workplace may contribute to division as individuals forget to share important updates with one another and remote workers fall prey to being out of sight, out of mind. Even when people are in the same physical location – let alone multiple spaces – silos may unintentionally arise, which can be detrimental to efficiency if staff are operating with different information. Information inequity may also cause a rift that demoralizes and disempowers individuals if they feel like they are excluded from conversations that impact their role.

To establish a stimulating, connected culture, leaders need to be mindful that they do not generate disparities by creating groups of employees who are “in the know” and those who are “out of the loop.” The conditions need to be set so that individuals receive and can contribute to a free flow of ideas and information.



Connecting Information to All

To flatten knowledge hierarchies in your organization, HR and L&D teams can respond by focusing on any of the priorities below.

BUILD VIRTUAL WATER COOLERS

Creating open channels to encourage interaction can be powerful. By effectively utilizing chat systems, project management platforms and meetings, you can promote greater information sharing across the organization and stimulate discussion. Evaluate your existing platforms and be sure to have some channels designed for innovation and fun in addition to business- or task-focused updates. Individuals may also benefit from receiving rules of engagement for internal communications so that they know why, when and how to employ various channels.



RETHINK MANAGER NORMS

Team leaders are often tasked as the conduit between executives and direct reports as well as from team to team. Empower them with best practices to succeed in these responsibilities. As an example, you may identify recommended meeting schedules with direct reports and teams. You can also deliver resources including email templates or provide them access to new tools to support day-to-day communication needs. When managers are asked to give all-hands or team updates, consider equipping them with talking points and answers to anticipated questions.



INCREASE EXECUTIVE ACCESSIBILITY

Information gaps can become wider when leadership seems inaccessible to employees. To mitigate this challenge, partner with your executives to identify ideas, forums and best practices that increase transparency and offer opportunities for connection. Consider concepts like implementing virtual and physical open-door policies, hosting ask me anything events with different teams and leaders or initiating casual coffee chats between executives and staff.



Shape Your Next Steps

As you limit information access disparities, consider the following questions:

1. What indicators would suggest that communication inequality exists in your organization?

2. Does information access differ between in-office and remote staff, or between certain groups or levels within the organization? How so?

3. How and where are company and project updates disseminated across the organization, cross-functionally and within teams? What gaps exist?

4. What new technologies or resources could help you expand information access in your organization?

5. What expectations, tools and resources do managers have when it comes to information sharing with their direct reports and teams?

6. What is the perception of your executive team today? How can you better facilitate their connection with staff?

One-way Traffic

Sometimes, one-way messaging is appropriate, especially when a person's sole intention is to inform or direct. However, it should not be the norm. When communication only goes in one direction, staff may hesitate to ask questions or offer suggestions. If they feel isolated and unable to contribute, it can engender disengagement and make employees feel like they have little agency.

With two-way communication, people listen to updates and have a chance to convey their thoughts. By creating more feedback loops and encouraging leaders to take inputs from across the organization, companies can benefit from a wide range of ideas while strengthening the employee experience.



Paving the Path for Two-Way Communication

To make sure that information flows both ways in your organization, HR and L&D leaders have a few possibilities to contemplate.



OFFER MULTIPLE CHANNELS

Your people will have different preferences when it comes to how they process and share information, so it's important to get input through different avenues. Reflect on the formal and informal avenues your company currently utilizes to solicit employee voice and make sure you have something that appeals to internal and external processors (or what we at Emergenetics® refer to as the Expressiveness spectrum). To design systems that resonate for all staff, implement a mix of channels, such as chat options, surveys or town hall events.

DEVELOP LISTENING AND EVALUATION SKILLS

Providing outlets for interaction won't be enough. It's also important that executives, managers and staff have strong listening and critical thinking capacities to take in input, ask relevant questions and determine appropriate next steps. Evaluate your existing trainings to understand how you could expand these capabilities. Also, examine what sort of just-in-time resources or coaching could be delivered to help your leaders integrate these skills in their daily interactions.



ENCOURAGE MENTORSHIP

Depending on the structure of your organization – or simply the location of team members – some individuals may never organically have a chance to connect with one another and learn about their work. While it may be the nature of their roles, a lack of cohesion could cause your company to miss out on valuable insights, suggestions and knowledge sharing. To inspire more discussion and ideation across the organization, create opportunities for dialogue through peer coaching or cross-functional mentorship programs.



Shape Your Next Steps

As you lay the foundation for two-way communication, reflect on the following questions:

1. What metrics would suggest that you are seeing an increase in two-way communication?

2. What aspects of your culture encourage employee voice? What is deterring from it?

3. What channels and mechanisms are in place to gather employee inputs? Are there disparities to address to better serve staff who prefer to process internally and those who process externally?

4. What trainings or on-the-job learning do you currently offer to enhance your people's listening and critical thinking capacities? How can you make this sort of skill building more accessible?

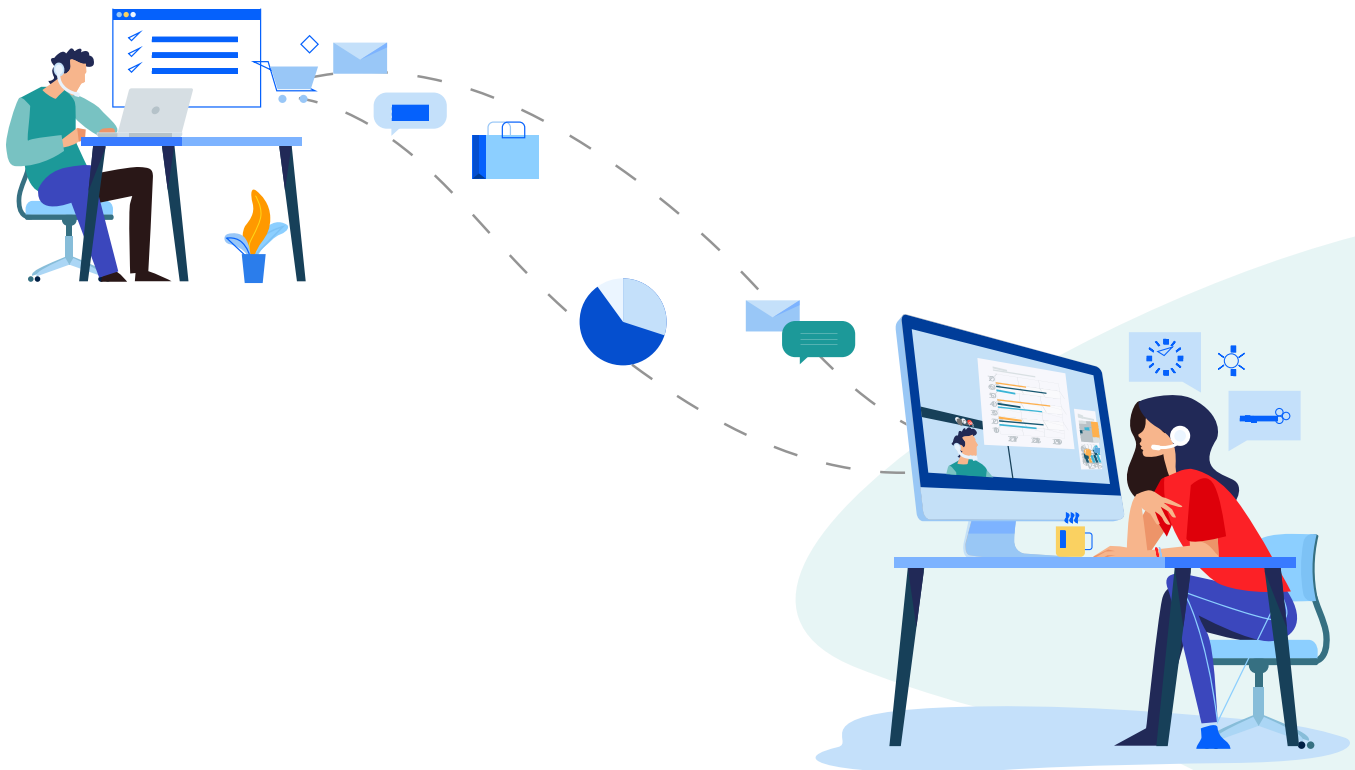
5. What initiatives or programs are in place that allow staff to connect with coworkers across the organization? How could you facilitate more interaction between levels and teams?

6. What policies, systems or practices do you use that promote idea sharing? How can they be optimized?

Relational Rifts

Particularly in a remote setting, it's easy for staff to focus on emails and to do's without ever taking a moment to speak with colleagues on a personal level. Although it may be more straightforward to get to know teammates in person, bonding still requires time and attention even from a shared location. While one might expect that focusing solely on their job function would inspire efficiency, purely transactional relationships create voids that are detrimental to business.

When team members feel connected to one another, it fuels performance and employee engagement. That's because people who have strong ties to their colleagues tend to work more collaboratively and productively. They will also give others the benefit of the doubt when challenges arise. To design a culture where staff feel aligned and supported, it's essential to spend time communicating on a relational level.



Cultivating Meaningful Relationships

To bridge the division between transactional and relational conversations, you can examine the following priorities.

INVEST IN TEAM BUILDING

Team building may have a mixed reputation; however, it can play an important role in setting the foundation for connection amongst colleagues. Schedule some all-staff gatherings, so employees from across the organization get to know each other on a personal level through virtual events, meetings or coworking spaces. To assist individual teams and managers in developing stronger connections, provide resources with easy-to-implement ideas that promote bonding such as check-in questions, group activities or learning opportunities.



EXPAND EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE (EQ)

Constructing positive coworker relationships doesn't always require an event. By expanding their EQ, employees mitigate the risks of a purely transactional focus to work. When managers and staff are equipped with empathy, they are more inclined take time to understand one another, which results in stronger, more affirming interactions. In addition to delivering trainings or psychometric assessments like Emergenetics to develop EQ, you can also source and share blogs, articles or recommendations to help individuals bring this skillset to life.



PRIORITIZE BELONGING

To feel comfortable talking about more than projects and tasks, people need to feel like they are a valued part of the team. HR and L&D groups can nurture a welcoming environment by creating a culture where everyone feels they belong. That starts by offering programs, such as our [Essential Workshops](#), to help staff members understand and appreciate their different perspectives. You may also develop company-wide initiatives to recognize people for their contributions. Lastly, consider employee resource groups where coworkers can share their experiences.



Shape Your Next Steps

As you construct better working relationships across your employee population, ponder the prompts below:

1. What are the drivers of relational trust and connection? What steps can you take to bolster these drivers in your organization?

2. Which teams are your most cohesive? What best practices can you glean from their experiences and norms?

3. What templates, activities or workshops do you offer to managers to support team building and team dynamics?

4. What systems, traditions or technologies promote connection and community across the organization? How could they be improved?

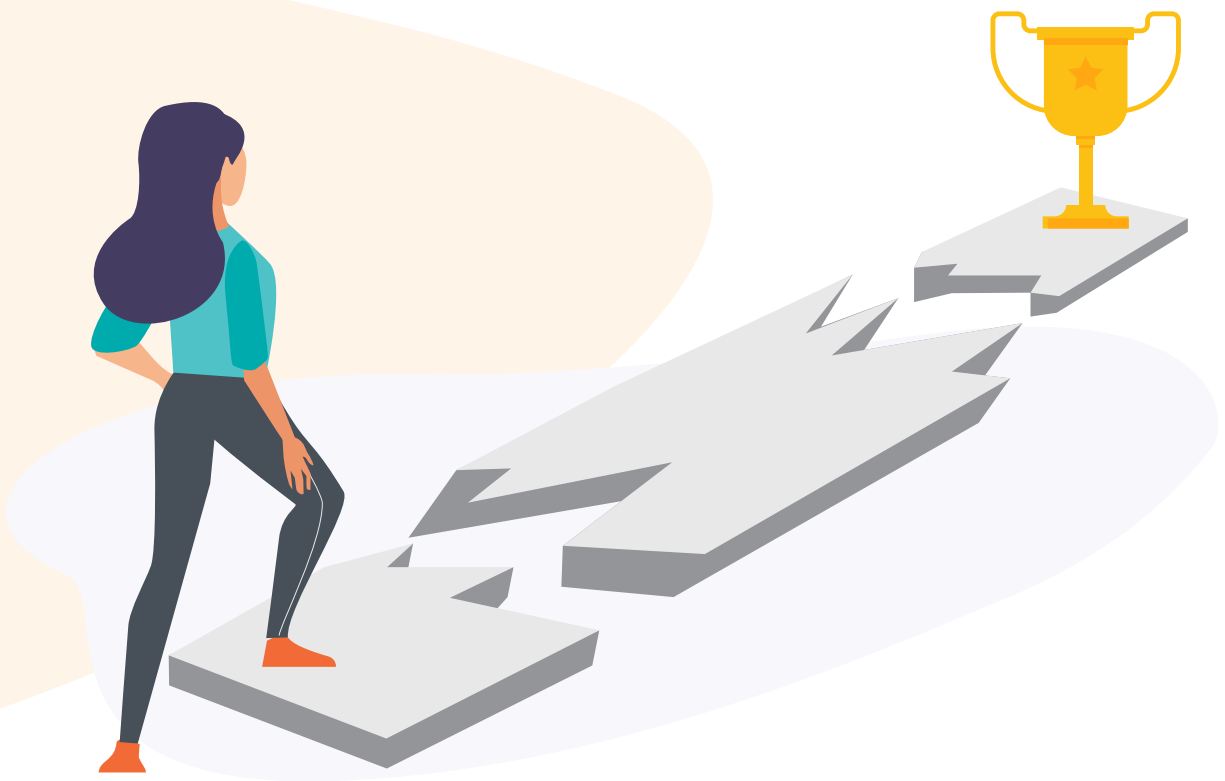
5. How are you currently empowering staff to enhance their EQ skills? What formal and informal trainings and mechanisms could reinforce your efforts?

6. What opportunities or new initiatives could you implement to foster a greater sense of belonging?

Feedback Fractures

Feedback, positive and constructive, can cause emotional reactions. While some staff members see it as a great way to learn where they are excelling and where they could improve, it may cause others' stomachs to churn. And there are many employees who walk into an annual review with no idea what they will hear because that yearly meeting is the only time performance is discussed.

Cracks start to form when staff experience a lack of feedback or poor delivery (or both). If employees don't receive consistent information about their performance, they may misunderstand what they are doing well and where they can do better. Those missed opportunities can lead to a disconnect between the individual's desired and actual work product, as well as their short- and long-term development. To inspire employee success, it's essential to provide staff with the tools to have constructive discussions.



Building Feedback Loops

To support employee performance and development, HR and L&D leaders can facilitate any of the programs below.



SUPPORT COLLEGIAL COACHING

Many organizations teach managers how to deliver performance feedback, which is useful, and when all team members are equipped to give suggestions, celebrations and ideas for improvement, that can be even more valuable. By ensuring every person in your company feels empowered and encouraged to share their perspectives, on-the-job learning increases and leads to great results. Take time to evaluate and identify trainings and available resources as well as use insights into a person's communication preferences through Emergenetics to help employees share feedback respectfully.

REFINE PERFORMANCE EVALUATIONS

Discussing performance and career trajectory should be a frequent conversation between managers and their direct reports. Audit your current performance management systems and expectations to determine if they are producing the desired results or could be improved upon. You can also provide tips or guidelines to people leaders to help them identify and implement growth assignments with their staff. When your managers understand how they can support skill building and employee development on an ongoing basis, everyone's workplace experience will be improved.



DEVELOP RECOGNITION PROGRAMS

Positive feedback is incredibly important to promoting engagement. At Emergenetics, we've found that by taking a strengths-based approach, you can fuel motivation and help individuals lean into their brilliances to drive personal success. Review your existing recognition initiatives to understand what is working well and what could be strengthened. Try personalizing acknowledgments and give employees choice in how they are rewarded. You can also solicit direct input from your staff to discover how to adapt your programs to make them even better.

Shape Your Next Steps

As you bolster feedback channels within your company, review the questions below to identify easy fixes or potential roadblocks:

1. What impact does management feedback currently have on performance? Are there any managers who excel in this area and from whom you could glean best practices?

2. What skills are needed to give effective feedback? How are you building those talents?

3. In what ways do staff typically receive feedback? What norms, trainings or policies can you provide to encourage regular growth conversations?

4. What performance evaluation systems and procedures is your company using? Do they have any weaknesses that could be improved upon?

5. What does career pathing and internal mobility look like within your company? How could it be strengthened?

6. What formal and informal programs, initiatives or tools do you use to recognize employees and celebrate their accomplishments? What quick wins could enhance your offerings?

Intent-Impact Gaps

The intent-impact gap is one of the most common ones that employees face on a day-to-day basis, and it occurs when a person delivers a message with one intention and the recipient walks away with a different interpretation. Sometimes, it can be a simple misunderstanding of the objective, which could impact productivity. At other times, the recipient may feel hurt or slighted, which could negatively impact collegial relationships. While the gap is nothing new, it can widen as we become more reliant on the digital workplace where it's harder to judge tone.

Employees need to be equipped to deliver information in a way that is easily understood and appreciated by their colleagues to minimize the divide between their intent and resulting impact. By hosting relevant training and developing a culture that appreciates diverse perspectives, companies can bridge communication discrepancies.



Matching Intent and Impact

To empower team members to communicate effectually, HR and L&D leaders can utilize three priorities.

REVEAL THINKING & BEHAVIORAL STYLES

When staff understand how their colleagues prefer to think and behave, it's much easier to learn how to optimize communication. For example, by recognizing that one coworker needs to know the why, while another wants to imagine the what if's, individuals can adapt their approach to better meet the listener's interests. Using a psychometric assessment like Emergenetics, you can empower employees to easily describe one another's thinking and behavioral patterns, which can contribute to greater self-awareness as well as a better understanding and appreciation of others.



EMBRACE PRODUCTIVE CONFLICT

When organizations build a culture where individuals are encouraged to question one another and seek clarity – respectfully – it minimizes intent-impact gaps. By actively pursuing greater understanding, employees are less likely to feel defensive or misconstrue their colleagues' intentions when they share new or opposing perspectives. It's simply part of your company's ethos! You can nurture productive disagreement by training on conflict resolution and facilitation techniques as well as crafting company or team norms that promote questioning.



SUPPORT PSYCHOLOGICAL SAFETY

When team members feel comfortable expressing differing opinions and know they will not be judged, you often limit the negative side effects of intent-impact gaps. In this sort of atmosphere, coworkers will assume positive intent, rather than jump to conclusions. Focus on promoting psychological safety by developing systems and spaces to share new concepts and coaching managers on how to embrace mistakes as learning experiences. You can also provide trainings and follow-on resources to promote and celebrate diversity, so employees feel appreciated for being exactly who they are.



Shape Your Next Steps

As you commit to closing intent-impact gaps, answer the following questions:

1. How are leaders, managers and staff trained to recognize and adapt to different communication and thinking styles? What initiatives or resources could you introduce to enhance those skills?

2. What aspects of your HR and L&D programs support empathy and active listening? What would you like to do differently?

3. What systemic factors tend to exacerbate misunderstandings? What technologies, tools or best practices could you introduce to reduce miscommunication?

4. How is conflict treated in your organization? What small steps could you take to help individuals embrace productive disagreement?

5. What are the drivers of psychological safety? What could your team be doing differently to reinforce these drivers?

6. What skills are needed to lessen intent-impact gaps? How can you support staff in building those capacities?

Amplifying Your Communication Practices

The way your leaders, managers and staff communicate will directly affect your company culture. By evaluating and optimizing your HR and L&D offerings, you can create the systems, trainings and on-the-job support that your people need to connect meaningfully, reduce discord and design a positive employee experience.

And, you don't have to do it alone! At Emergenetics, we've helped thousands of organizations across the globe improve the way they interact by:

1. **Providing an easy-to-remember assessment that clearly describes a person's preferred ways of thinking and behaving, and its implications for communication.**
2. **Delivering workshops that empower staff to appreciate cognitive diversity, enhance team relationships and gain practical strategies to converse and collaborate effectively.**
3. **Offering follow-up activities, dynamic mobile app resources and templates to help individuals limit intent-impact gaps, give feedback, match rapport, address conflict and more.**
4. **Supporting HR and L&D teams in creating an Emergenetics company-wide rollout to enhance communication, leadership development and employee engagement.**
5. **Certifying Associates to expertly apply Emergenetics to address organizational challenges, improve group dynamics and strengthen their talent development trainings and initiatives.**

Discover why more than **95% of our clients** agree that Emergenetics improves communication.



Learn more about our essential workshops



Connect with one of our team members