

# Exploring Leadership

## COMMUNICATION: VIRTUAL COMMUNICATION

Virtual communication takes many forms: phone calls, texts, e-mail, video calls, etc.. New digital tools spring up all the time, but humans evolved to communicate face-to-face. This can easily lead to misunderstandings because the feedback we experience in face-to-face communication is unavailable. We cannot “read between the lines” or see body language. We may not be able to interpret someone’s tone of voice.

### CONVERSATION STARTER:

“lol”=laughing out loud, but how many times have you seen this in a text message and you were pretty sure the person wasn’t actually laughing out loud? Sometimes, “lol” seems like a completely inappropriate response. Many of us default to it or the use of emojis to express the feeling that is lacking in most forms of virtual communication.

We have entered a new world of virtual communication, but we as humans still communicate in real-world ways. In order to communicate effectively with digital tools, we need to adjust our methods. Let the purpose of the message determine the tool that is used.

### KEY OBJECTIVES:

- Identify ways virtual communication is different from in-person communication.
- Determine which method of virtual communication is best for particular circumstances.

### WHAT YOU'LL NEED:

- Copies of virtual communication Scenarios Handout (See appendix.)
- Pens/Pencils
- Computer/Projector to show YouTube video

## EXPLORATION ACTIVITY:

Show [this YouTube video](#).

Give every participant a copy of the virtual communication scenarios and let them match the situation to the appropriate form of virtual communication.

- Pair up participants to discuss their choices and establish the best responses.
- As a pair, have them develop a reason or explanation for each choice they have made. (E.g., If they indicated a personal phone call is best when delivering bad news, WHY is it better than any of the other methods?)
- Reconvene with the entire group and share reasons. Discuss differences.

### FACILITATOR TIP:

You may want to tell participants that the YouTube video is specific to business needs, but the same rules apply to personal communication. We should always consider the purpose of the message before deciding which digital tool to use.



## REFLECTION QUESTIONS:

- Did you agree with your partner about which forms of virtual communication were appropriate in each scenario? How did you determine your reasons?
- Have you ever used the wrong digital tool to share information? What happened?
- Have you ever been confused by someone else's digital message? What happened?

## APPLICATION DISCUSSION:

- What did you learn today that you can apply in your own virtual communication?
- Can you think of any times when virtual communication is preferable to in-person communication?



## CONCLUSION:

Virtual communication is everywhere, and there will be more of it in the future, but it is important that we make sure our use of virtual communication suits our purpose so that we maintain our humanity.

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## REFERENCES

- [https://www.leadershipnow.com/leadingblog/2018/12/five\\_problems\\_with\\_virtual\\_com.html](https://www.leadershipnow.com/leadingblog/2018/12/five_problems_with_virtual_com.html)
- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eisfFx20FdI>



# APPENDIX A: VIRTUAL COMMUNICATION SCENARIOS

We've all sent an email or a text where we meant one thing and the recipient took it in a completely different way. They never saw the smile on our face, our look of concern, or any of the other body language or feedback that is present when we communicate in-person. The emotions we take for granted in the real world don't exist in the virtual world, so we have to gauge our purpose carefully before deciding which digital tool to use.

Match the form of communication in the left column to the situation in the right column where it would be most appropriate. Let the purpose of the message determine the method.

## DIGITAL TOOL

Personal Phone Call
Group Phone Call
Text Message
Personal E-mail
Group E-mail
Personal Video Call
Group Video Call

## SITUATION/PURPOSE

You have to announce a flu-shot clinic next Monday morning. Anyone who is interested can get a free flu shot.
You want to tell your boss, who is already in a meeting, that the online presentation she asked you to finish is ready to be shared with the other people in the meeting.
Your grandma got a new laptop and hasn't seen you in more than a year. You want to let her know you miss her.
You are helping your cousin revise her college application essay, and she wants you to look at it one more time before she submits it.
You are delivering a presentation that includes a short video clip to an online class.
You have to deliver some hard news, like firing or breaking up with someone.
Your team just won a special recognition for excellent work, and you want to quickly tell them the good news.