Improving communication skills

Staff management systems

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Factory Improvement Toolset

The Factory Improvement Toolset (FIT) is an innovative self-facilitated, activity-based learning approach designed by the International Labour Organization (ILO) to create more decent and sustainable employment. FIT supports manufacturers in global supply chains to improve productivity, competitiveness and working conditions by upgrading production systems and factory practices.

FIT has been developed to be a sustainable, time- and cost-efficient option for supporting factories to enhance productivity through improved business practices and working conditions. FIT focuses on areas of production improvement and actions to be taken specific to each participating factory. It can be utilized as stand-alone learning tools or to complement other training programmes.

With each module lasting no more than 2.5 hours, FIT enables factories to train personnel, whilst minimizing interference with production realities. The easy-to-use methodology makes it possible to rapidly scale the implementation to reach a large cohort of trainees across multiple production facilities.

Working in small groups, participants review real-life situations and engage in discussions to determine improvements to be made in factory without an external trainer or specialist. This self-facilitated, activity-based and highly participatory learning approach positions participants as both student and teacher and makes the toolset self-tailored to the needs and interests of each group.

About this module

This FIT module on Improving communication skills is a training for garment manufacturers to improve staff management systems. Participants will work on improving communication with / between workers and managers. This module takes about 2 hours to complete.

Upon completion of the training, participants should have:

- Understood the importance of effective communication.
- Improved their active listening skills.
- Discussed how to communicate meanings more clearly.
- Discussed how to build trust to further improve communication.

Guidelines for successfully using the training tool

Read out-loud

The FIT tool is designed for participants to take turns reading the instructions in the modules out loud to the group. At least one member of the group should be selected in the beginning of the session to take this responsibility.

Work as a group

Always work in groups of 5-7 during a FIT session. The programme will not be successful if participants work independently or do not collaborate with each other.

Be active

Encourage everyone in the group to actively contribute to the discussion. Ensure that no group member dominates the discussion or does not participate at all.

Monitor the time

Select one member of the group to monitor the time for each activity and remind the group when it is time to move to the next exercise.

Complete the action plan

Complete the action plan at the end of the session. This will help ensure that FIT results in improvements in the factory. Review the plan a while after the session to make sure that actions in the plan has been completed accordingly.

Icons

A set of icons is used throughout the modules to provide easy to recognize reference points for different tasks within each session and activity.

Read out loud
One member of the group should read out loud to the rest of group.

Knowledge link
Knowledge and skills are linked to other FIT learning resources and support.

Time allotted
Indicates how much time each sessions and activity should take.

Supplies needed
Indicates that supplies may be necessary to complete the session.

Begin step-by-step instructions
Indicates that the step-by-step instructions for an activity are beginning.

Think about it
Indicates additional information for the participants to think about.

Measuring your performance

Measuring operational efficiency is a key aspect of running a productive factory. The box(es) below guides you in understanding which measurement indicator(s) can be used to measure and evaluate the performance of your factory in relation to the topic of this FIT module.

Indicator 1	Turnover rate (%)
Definition	The amount of employees who leave the factory over a period of time and must be replaced, as a percentage of the total amount of employees.
Purpose	To understand how high your turnover rate is, set a turnover reduction target, and identify solutions to reduce turnover in your factory.
Calculation	(# of employees who left and must be replaced / average # of employees) x 100% Note: Average # of employees = (# of employees at the start of the time period + # of employees at the end of the time period) / 2
Frequency	Calculate monthly.
Responsible	HR manager

Indicator 2	Workers' perception of the quality of communication
Definition	Your workers' opinion on the quality of communication between workers, supervisors and managers.
Purpose	To understand your workers' opinion and situation, and identify what can be done to improve communication in your factory.
Calculation	Have your workers fill out the simple online survey (provided by the ILO – ask your FIT focal point for more information), and consult the results. Don't forget that surveys should be anonymous!
Frequency	Measure every 6 months, or once a year.
Responsible	HR manager

Session 1

Business case study

Goals

Preparing you for the type of discussions you will have with other group members throughout the learning module and understanding the benefits of being exposed to different perspectives.

Understanding better why promoting good communication skills is important in the factory.

Session 1
Overview

One member should read the full session out loud to the rest of group

15 minutes

Learning manual, pens, markers and poster paper

A business case study presents a real-life situation for learners to reflect on and discuss with other group members. By discussing the case, students learn from others' ideas and perspectives, and develop an understanding of the topic at hand within the workplace.

One group member reads the case study out loud

The whole group discusses the case study

Everyone develops a deeper understanding of the topic

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Activities

Case study review and respond

The case study below presents a situation that could happen in real life.

✏️ Instructions:

1) As a group, listen to one member read the case study below while following along in your learning module.

Thy is a new production manager at the HS garment factory. She sees communication problems between workers and supervisors. Supervisors do not communicate production targets clearly, as they do not have the time to do so. When communicated, targets are unrealistic, and workers do not get the occasion to give feedback on how to make them better. Workers feel that supervisors do not want to communicate with them or do not care about what they think. This lack of trust makes them feel uneasy sharing information or asking questions. Supervisors deal with this problem by avoiding talking and listening even more. As a result, some problems go unnoticed until they become major issues. Conflicts between workers and managers are frequent.

Thy decides to make some changes. She trains supervisors and workers in order for them to understand why communication is important in the factory. Supervisors and workers learn how to listen more actively, express themselves more clearly, and behave in a way that encourages others to share information and helps build trust in the factory.

Thanks to these changes, supervisors now communicate more clearly and frequently with workers. Workers appreciate this, and feel encouraged to share information in return. Supervisors listen to them, which improves trust between them and workers, which, in turn, further improves their communication!

2) Together, discuss Thy's situation by answering the three questions in table 1 on the next page.

Table 1. Questions about Thy's situation
1. What problems has Thy identified? What impact do these problems have on the factory and its workers?
2. What does Thy do or change in order to solve these problems?
3. What are the results of Thy's solutions for the factory and its workers?

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blank and can be used for note taking.

Session 2

Learning about the topic

Goals

Discussing and understanding effective communication and why it is important.

Practicing and improving your active listening skills.

Discussing reasons why communication fails, and identifying strategies to avoid miscommunication.

Understanding the importance of trust for communication, and identifying concrete ways to build it.

Session 2
Overview

One member should read the full session out loud to the rest of group

90 minutes

Learning manual, pens, and markers

This training module aims to help you improve the way you manage staff in the factory by focusing on communication. Communication is the transfer of a message from a sender to a receiver, who then interprets it. Effective communication is essential to help workers and managers understand and work with each other better, which in turn makes your factory more productive and better-functioning. Throughout this module, you will work on the three steps below.

Listening actively

Sending **clear** messages

Building **trust**

First, you will start by discussing what effective communication is. Then, you will learn how to improve your active listening skills, and discuss ways to communicate more clearly and precisely. In the last step, you will think about the importance of trust and how to build it in your factory.

Improving communication skills is only one part of improving communication in the factory. To keep on making improvements, ask for the "Improving communication channels" module!

Activities

Understanding communication

Communication is the transfer of a message from a sender to a receiver, using words, images, or gestures. The message is then interpreted by the receiver. In this activity, you will discuss what effective communication is and why it is important.

Instructions:

1) Together, discuss the four questions on communication in table 2.

2) Together, discuss the following questions:

- Would you say that the communication in your factory is good? Why, or why not?
- What are examples of good communication in your factory?

Table 2. Effective communication	
What?	What, according to you, is good and effective communication?
Who?	In your factory, who communicates with who?
How?	What are the different means of communication?
Why?	Why is it important to communicate well at the workplace?

Effective communication is a 2-way process. This means that messages are not only sent, but also received and clearly understood by everyone involved. So, it is important to make sure that workers and managers can both communicate, and understand each other's messages clearly.

Listening actively

To communicate effectively, it is important to also know how to listen to others in the workplace. **Active listening** means that you focus on what the other person is saying and encourage them to communicate their thoughts using both verbal and non-verbal communication. In this activity, you will learn what it means to listen actively.

✎ Instructions:

1) Have a participant read aloud the eight tips of verbal communication for active listening in table 3. Then, discuss:

- One time when you did not feel listened to at work. Why?
- How did the experience make you feel?
- If you were the other person, what would you have done differently?

2) Together, look at table 4 listing examples of non-verbal communication, and decide for each example whether it is good or bad for active listening by putting a ✓ in the right column.

3) Together, discuss: Do you have the habit of using some of the "bad" behaviours in table 4 when talking to others?

4) In pairs, take turns to share two things you are interested in. During the 1st presentation, the listener should use bad body language. During the 2nd presentation, he/she should use good body language. Once you finished presenting, discuss how the other person's non-verbal communication made you feel.

Table 3. Tips for Active Listening (verbal communication)
1. Start by greeting the other person appropriately, and by their name.
2. Talk less! Try to limit your talking time.
3. Be patient. Let the other take the time to think and express their thoughts.
4. Focus on what the other person is saying and doing.
5. Try to understand how the other person is feeling (angry, nervous?)
6. Encourage the other person to express themselves.
7. Avoid interrupting them, even if to help them complete a sentence.
8. Ask relevant questions only when the person is done speaking.

Table 4. Non-verbal communication (body language)	☺ Good	☹ Bad
Making appropriate eye contact		
Staring at the ceiling		
Pacing or stamping your feet to show impatience		
Nodding your head		
Looking at your phone or elsewhere		
Rolling eyes		
Writing on your phone/computer at the same time		
Standing at an appropriate distance		
Yawning		
Sleeping or dozing off		
Frowning		
Sitting or standing straight		
Smiling at the other		
Talking to someone else on the side at the same time		
Offering handshake or other greeting		

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Sending clear messages

Effective communication includes making sure that your message is **clearly understood** by others. This requires you to be clear and precise in your communications. In this activity, you will discuss why communication sometimes fails, and come up with solutions.

✏️ Instructions:

1) Together, discuss:

- Have you ever been in a situation when you did not understand someone or you were not understood?
- What did you do to solve the problem and communicate effectively? What was the result?

2) Together, read the list of reasons why messages sometimes are not understood in table 5.

3) Together, brainstorm: How can you avoid the situations listed in step 1), and make sure others understand you well? Write down your ideas in table 6. Tip: Use table 5 to guide you.

Table 5. Reasons why communication fails
1. The manager uses too many technical or difficult words.
2. The manager/worker speaks too quickly.
3. The manager/worker uses an interpreter that does not translate the meaning well.
4. The manager/worker uses offensive or rude language.
5. Workers cannot read, or have a hearing problem.
6. Workers/managers did not focus or listen properly to what was being said.
7. Workers/managers make assumptions about what the other wants to say before hearing it completely.
8. Workers/managers misinterpret the meaning because they are in a conflict.

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Table 6. Brainstorming solutions

How can you make sure others understand you well?

Example: Rephrasing what you said in a different way.

Building trust

The level of **trust** at the workplace influences how willing people are to communicate effectively and work together, so it is important to build trust in order to improve communication. In this activity, you will discuss the importance of trust and how to build it better in the factory.

Instructions:

1) Together, discuss: Would you say there is trust between workers and managers in your factory? Why or why not?

2) Together, read the list of reasons for building trust in table 7, and put a ✓ in the column on the right if you think it is important. If you can think of other reasons, add them to the table as well.

3) One by one, select the reason that you think is most important, then share with the group and explain why you chose this reason.

4) Have a participant read aloud the examples of how to build trust in table 8, then brainstorm other ways, and add them to the table. Tip: Think about how you built trust with friends or co-workers.

Table 7. Why build trust?	
Reasons	**Important?**
To strengthen relationships between workers and managers.	
To make changes easier.	
To encourage workers to take an active part in improving the factory.	
To make workers and managers more willing to share information.	
To avoid managers controlling workers down to every detail.	
To make workers more committed to work in the factory.	
To help workers and managers solve problems together.	
To help workers and managers work and achieve goals together.	

Table 8. How to build trust?

Examples of ways to build trust:
- Being honest when sharing information
- Showing workers/managers that you are open to communicating with them
- Treating workers/managers with respect
- Spending time with your team (e.g. having lunch together)

Write down the results of your brainstorming below:

Role-play practice

To communicate effectively, it is important listen actively, send clear messages, and build trust. In this activity, you will practice what you learnt in this module by completing a role-play.

Instructions:

1) In pairs, read the role-play script and instructions in table 9. Then, complete the role-play using everything you have learnt today about active listening (verbal & non-verbal), and sending clear messages.

2) In pairs, give each other feedback on the role-play by discussing the following questions: What did the other person do or say…

- That made you feel listened to / not listened to?
- That made the message clear or unclear?
- That made you feel like you could trust her/him?

Table 9. Role-play script

Script: S has a daily line meeting with her team of workers. W is a worker in S's team:

- S and W greet each other. S explains the results of yesterday's production and today's production targets. The factory did not meet the target yesterday, and W will have to work harder today to complete the customer order on time.
- W explains that they cannot work faster as some workers are sick, and one machine is malfunctioning. S and W communicate, and agree that workers who want to can do paid overtime to complete the order.
- S explains that quality standards have changed, and that workers will need to take a quality training next week. W is worried whether it will affect her pay as it takes time off from work (W is a piece-rate worker).
- S explains that pay will now be calculated based on piece rate rather on hours during the training. W does not understand this explanation and does not listen properly because she is worried about the impact this will have on her pay. S calms her down and explains what the changes will entail in detail.
- S asks W if they have any other questions, thanks them for the meeting, and reminds W they can come talk to her during breaks if there is any question/issue.

Instructions: In this role-play, you will play the role of a line supervisor (S), and a worker (W). You can choose who plays who. Listen to each other actively using verbal and non-verbal communication, and make messages as clear as possible.

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Session 3

Your action plan

Goals

Summarizing and revising the new knowledge gained.

Identifying concrete applications of the new knowledge that benefit your factory.

Session 3
Overview

One member should read the full session out loud to the rest of group

20 minutes

Learning manual, pens, and markers

Throughout this module, you gained new knowledge on how to communicate more effectively.

Listening actively

Sending **clear** messages

Building **trust**

In this session, you will think of ways to apply your new knowledge to improve the way you communicate in the factory by reviewing best practices and drafting your own action plan.

Activities

Best practices checklist

In this activity, you will review best communication practices as a next step for evaluating your own and implementing improvements.

✏. **Instructions:**

1) Together, look at the list of best practices in table 10, and put a ✓ in the column on the right if you use these practices in your factory.

Table 10. Communicating in the factory	
Best practices	**✓**
1. Managers / workers communicate information effectively to other workers / managers in the factory.	
2. Managers and workers listen to each other actively.	
3. Managers and the factory encourage workers to communicate with them – formally and informally.	
4. Managers / workers communicate messages clearly and precisely, and make sure that workers / managers understand their message clearly.	
5. Managers and workers actively try to build trust with each other in the factory.	

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Your action plan

In this activity, you will think of ways to apply your new knowledge to improve your communication skills by drafting your own action plan.

✎. Instructions:

1) Together, fill in the action plan (table 11) on the next page. Identify a key problem that you want to solve and write down the solutions you identified while working on this module.

Table 11. Improving communication skills – Action Plan				
Problem identified				
Solutions identified	**Action(s) to be taken**	**Person responsible**	**By when?**	**How will improvements be measured?**

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Improving communication skills

The Factory Improvement Toolset (FIT) is an innovative self-facilitated, activity-based learning approach designed by the International Labour Organization (ILO) to create more decent and sustainable employment. FIT supports manufacturers in global supply chains to improve productivity, competitiveness and working conditions by upgrading production systems and factory practices.

FIT is being piloted in Asia under the regional Decent Work in the Garment Sector Supply Chains in Asia project funded by the Government of Sweden.