

<i>900 exercises for Vocational Communication</i>	Notes for teachers	E3 / 42
<i>General aim</i>	E: Evaluate a message	
<i>Level of difficulty</i>	3	
<i>Intermediate aim</i>	4: Pass judgement on a simple message	
<i>Operational aim</i>	1: State the shared attitudes and the differences of opinion, and suggest a common ground for the differences.	
<i>Pre-requirements</i>	None	
<i>Number of exercises</i>		
<i>Summing-up exercise</i>	E3/42 - 1.5	
<i>Applications (examples)</i>		
<i>Comments</i>	These situations can also be acted out. The students can imagine the dialogues and role-play them. They can then role-play the possible outcomes they have found. This exercise is therefore better done in groups.	

In any given situation involving people, there will almost inevitably be some elements of discord, where people disagree with each other, and some elements in common, where people find things they agree with, or shared attitudes.

In these exercises, you will read the situations and then list the elements in common. You will then list the differences of opinion, and see if you can suggest a common ground, somewhere they can 'meet' rather than totally disagreeing.

When you have done this, if you work in a group, try to imagine the dialogues and then act them out.

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Mike's birthday

The situation as seen by Mr Henderson

You've been working with Mike for 23 years now in your company. He's more than just an employee. He's an old friend you like very much, and you both help each other along. You've got into the habit of celebrating his birthday on the occasion of the office party. It's on July 31st and the factory closes in August, so it's become a good excuse for a party that sometimes lasts well into the night.

This year, business hasn't been so good. You weren't able to give the usual Christmas bonus, or not such a big one. Your employees work hard, leave late, and now you've had to ask them not to charge for overtime.

They accepted, but not without complaining. They know the situation, but it's never easy to accept a lower salary, especially for more work.

Mike protested quite loudly at the time, saying it was unhealthy for a company to make its employees work without pay. But then, he's been less friendly lately. And he seems tired.

So to make it up to him, you're going to make this birthday party extra special. That will strengthen the bonds that link the team, and it's worth it: there are better days to come.

The situation as seen by Mike

You've been working in Henderson's firm now for over 20 years. He's the boss, but more than that, he's an old friend. Someone you can count on. Your birthday has always coincided with the summer break. It's now become a tradition to have a big party with a lot of friends, and the parties get better each year.

Traditions are good, but there are times when you've had enough. For example, at the moment you're enjoying a fling with Charlotte, the young secretary in the sales department.

It's not that you make any secret of your age, nor of your feelings. But in the present circumstances, you really don't want to blow out 56 candles in front of your new girlfriend. Nor can you face the dubious jokes of a group of old friends that are never very flattering at the best of times. Especially since rumours are now spreading about you.

So basically, if this party didn't actually take place, you wouldn't be disappointed. There's not enough money, and we spend enough time at work as it is. So why not save the money and just go home? Especially since it's quite fun at home nowadays...

This morning, you're going to suggest to Henderson that he drop the idea of the party, but if possible, without going into too much detail. You don't like people getting too curious about your private life, especially if it's to laugh at you. And his jokes are a bit on the heavy side.

<i>900 exercises for Vocational Communication</i>	Exercise	E3 / 42 – 1.2
		Eval.:

What are the differences of opinion here?

Are there any shared attitudes?

What common ground could you suggest to settle their differences?

Look at the suggested answers on the next page.

What are the differences of opinion here?

Mr Henderson wants to have the party as usual. Especially since the company is not doing too well, and he thinks they all need a good party and a good laugh.

Mike does not want the party to be for his birthday in particular. He really wants to be left alone and not be reminded of his age. Neither does he want to confide in Henderson about his private life. He hates people prying into his affairs – especially his love affairs. Especially if it's to laugh at him. And Henderson's sense of humour is not very subtle.

Are there any shared attitudes?

Mike is willing to go along with whatever Henderson decides, as long as he leaves him in peace to enjoy his relationship with young Charlotte. And he doesn't want to confide in Henderson.

What common ground could you suggest to settle their differences?

- 1. Mike could tell Henderson that, for reasons he prefers not to divulge, he does not want to celebrate his birthday this year.*
- 2. But on the other hand, he would like there to be a party. He would even take part if necessary, but no more than the other employees. (Perhaps Henderson might then realise that he has got carried away with his company, and rather lost touch with his "old friend Mike".)*
- 3. The solution could be to have a party right before the holidays, or to celebrate the anniversary of the founding of the company.*

Liam and the lawnmower

The situation as seen by Thomas

You are the leader of a small team of maintenance workers for the general upkeep of a small town: road and pavements, parks and gardens, and various repairs.

There are a few disagreements between the people in the team, particularly between Liam and Jonathan who are always quarrelling. It never goes any further than verbal arguments, but they ruin the atmosphere and hinder the work of the team in general. They're both good workers, but Jonathan is much calmer. Liam is younger and a little unpredictable.

Last week Liam burnt out the motor of one of the lawnmowers by running it on rough ground on a slope. Jonathan has made a lot of fuss about this, and keeps mentioning it as often as he can. So much so, in fact, that you have decided to have the machine repaired yourself, just so everyone can stop talking about it.

You have decided not to allow this sort of behaviour in the future.

Ah, and here's Jonathan right now...

The exercise continues on the next page.

The situation as seen by Jonathan

You have been working in the maintenance of the town for eight years now.

Your work is pleasant and varied. Your colleagues are friendly and fun to be with, for the most part. The only person you don't get on too well with is Liam. He's your ex-brother-in-law, but no one needs to know that. He's not a good person: lazy, a bit of a womaniser, and good-for-nothing. Last week he busted the new lawnmower playing the idiot, as usual.

Thomas, the manager, is not a bad guy, except when he plays the big boss a bit.

This morning, someone lost the key of the shed, and you are pretty sure there's a spare one on the key ring of the lawnmower that has to be repaired.

You go into the office, looking for the key, when you meet Thomas.

The exercise continues on the next page.

The situation as seen by Liam

You have been working for two years with the park maintenance department in your town.

There are moments in life when everything goes just fine, and then wham! it all goes pear-shaped. Now is one of those bad times. Money problems, house problems, the family moving here there and everywhere. Even health problems, with the old stomach ulcer flaring up again.

Really, all you need to do is get through the next two months. Josie, your wife, will have her permanent position, and you can get a proper flat. From then on, it's plain sailing. Your mother can look after the kid, you'll save money on a child minder, and the hotel you have to pay for at the moment, and that will be the end of the 14-hour days with all the public transport and no money at the end of the month. In such circumstances, it's not surprising you're losing it.

With a bit of luck, and with no hiccups, things should turn out all right. But nothing's guaranteed. And of course, at work things aren't looking too good. You're accumulating blunders and careless mistakes of all sorts. Luckily the mates are there to soften the blow a bit, because some people would drop you in it without hesitating. Like Thomas, your ex-brother-in-law, for example. It's true, you weren't exactly the greatest of husbands, but after all, it's none of his business, and in the last five years a lot of water has run under the bridge.

In fact, the nice one in all that is Alice. Even so, when you divorced it was all out war, especially because of your little girl. Then things worked themselves out when she got her new man, and now everything's okay.

But there's still Jonathan, and he just won't let it go.

The exercise continues on the next page.

<i>900 exercises for Vocational Communication</i>	Exercise	E3 / 42 – 1.3
		Eval.:

Which two characters are in conflict here?

What are the differences of opinion?

What are the shared opinions?

What solutions might be suggested to find a common ground?

Look at the suggested answers on the next page.

Which two characters are in conflict here?

Jonathan and Liam are the two people in conflict. (Thomas doesn't really like conflict, and tries to avoid it.)

What are the differences of opinion?

Jonathan reproaches Liam for divorcing his sister. He also doesn't like his temperament.

Thomas reproaches Jonathan, and to a lesser degree Liam, for stirring up trouble and ruining the relationships within the team.

What are the shared opinions?

The three characters think they have to work in peace, and do it well.

They all think that Liam could work harder. Thomas thinks he's a good worker, but unpredictable and inexperienced. Jonathan, who can't stand him, describes him as a lazy good-for-nothing who just mucks about.

Jonathan and Liam think that Liam's past behaviour was largely responsible for his divorce from Alice.

Liam and Thomas think that Jonathan should calm down a bit.

What solutions might be suggested to find a common ground?

Thomas could play his role as boss and get Jonathan and Liam to talk it over. Liam would probably talk about the old bitterness about the divorce, and Thomas would tell Jonathan that your private life should not interfere with work life.

However, Thomas is not very good at dealing with conflict. (He's having the lawnmower repaired himself to avoid problems.)

The situation will probably resolve itself with the help of the colleagues who like Liam. If Liam's situation continues to improve and he becomes more at ease in his work, Jonathan's anger should calm down. Otherwise his position regarding the team would be difficult to understand.

It is also possible to imagine that Jonathan and Liam could talk it out between them. After all, they agree on most points, including Liam's responsibility for the divorce.

<i>900 exercises for Vocational Communication</i>	Exercise	E3 / 42 – 1.4
		Eval.:

In the factory

The factory workers: This morning it's so cold in the factory that we can't work in the right conditions.

12° Centigrade is just not enough. People are getting ill and if nothing is done about it, more will be off sick tomorrow.

If it carries on like this, we'll end up going on strike.

The worker in charge of the boiler: The boiler is working properly. But because the big sliding door is always open, it's the birds that get the benefit, not us. Good on them, I say.

The weather forecast: The cold wave is continuing all over the country. No change is expected before the end of next week.

The worker in charge of handling: There's no room to drive a lorry into the factory. So we have to leave the door open to load the things. The production has to leave the warehouse, or we might just as well close down and go home.

The boss: We're behind schedule on production. If there are more people off sick, we'll get even more behind.

The customer is not happy. If we lose him, we won't be able to pay the wages.

The lorry absolutely has to leave every morning before 8am to deliver the previous day's production.

The foreman: We can up the distribution of hot tea and coffee. We also have a few padded jackets, but not enough for everyone. Go and see the handling staff. They can look after it in their down time.

The customer: Oh, don't worry, I understand perfectly. It's quite simple: if you can't deliver the goods on time, I'll go elsewhere. Then you can all just go home and get warm.

<i>900 exercises for Vocational Communication</i>	Exercise	E3 / 42 – 1.4
		Eval.:

In the text on the previous page, you have different people giving their opinions. They are not all different, but there are also some completely opposing opinions.

What are the diverging opinions?

Are there any shared opinions?

What common ground could you suggest, where they could reach an agreement of some sort?

Look at the suggested answers on the next page.

In the text on the previous page, you have different people giving their opinions. They are not all different, but there are also some completely opposing opinions.

What are the diverging opinions?

The production workers say it's too cold.

The worker in charge of the boiler says the big door should be kept shut.

The worker in charge of handling says the door must be kept open.

Are there any shared opinions?

They all agree it's too cold.

The production has to be moved on out of the warehouse.

To do this, the door has to be open.

They also all agree that if they don't solve this problem, they risk losing the client, and if that happens, there will be no more pay!

What common ground could you suggest, where they could reach an agreement of some sort?

The production could be stored in the workshop and loading could take place during the tea breaks or lunch break, so that while the workers are working the door could be closed.

If the lorry has to leave at 8 o'clock, perhaps it could be loaded at night or very early in the morning.

Another solution, perhaps a little expensive, could be to install a double entrance door, or a hot-air curtain.

Different workers are finishing off a new apartment, doing the paintwork, the electricity, the windows and the carpets.

The carpet-layer: If you want my opinion, I reckon there aren't any more really conscientious workers around.

All the others: Yeah, that's true. I've been thinking that for ages. And it's getting worse all the time.

The carpet-layer: Sure, everyone's been saying it for a long time, but nothing changes. One day, people will have to have more respect for other people's work.

The painter: That's true enough. If I spatter paint, all you have to do is clean up the splashes. But when the electrician makes holes in the walls and then fills them, it ruins all my good work. Afterwards I have to start all over again. How can they take so little care?

The carpet-layer: The last time we handed over an apartment, the carpet was so covered in stains that we had to change it.

The glazier: What sort of stains?

The carpet-layer: All sorts of stains; paint, plaster, putty, shoe marks, everything! A real nightmare!

The painter: And yet I had covered the whole place with sheets. But when you sand the walls dust gets everywhere. It's inevitable.

The electrician: Yes, and I have to drill holes in the walls to pull the wires through. I also have to put the sockets and switches in. Of course I'm careful, but obviously the paintwork suffers. It makes dust and lumps of plaster. Unavoidable.

The carpet-layer: Unavoidable, unavoidable... and the putty from the windows that gets trodden in. Is that unavoidable too?

The glazier: No, of course not. But the carpet was already filthy when I arrived, so I didn't bother much about that.

<i>900 exercises for Vocational Communication</i>	Summing-up Exercise	E3 / 42 – 1.5
		Eval.:

In the text on the previous page, the people seem to start off with the same opinion. But they soon diverge, and the problem seems difficult to solve.

What are the differences of opinion?

What are the similarities?

What common ground could you suggest to solve the problems?

Look at the suggested answers on the next page.

In the text on the previous page, the people seem to start off with the same opinion. But they soon diverge, and the problem seems difficult to solve.

What are the differences of opinion?

The painter can't help leaving drips.

The electrician has to make holes in the walls. This damages the paintwork and produces dust.

The glazier didn't take very much care because the carpet was already ruined.

What are the similarities?

The quality of work is lower than it used to be, and this must stop.

People don't respect other people's work.

What common ground could you suggest to solve the problems?

It's never a bad idea to ask people to pay more attention to what they are doing and to try not to make a mess.

The work should also be organised differently. The different jobs should be in the following order:

- 1. the electrician*
- 2. the glazier*
- 3. the painter*
- 4. the carpet layer, with the floor being cleaned beforehand.*