*“The meaning of any communication is the response it gets” Robert MacDonald*

Communicating Effectively

– Quick Guide

This short guide introduces you to the **McCarthy** **Model** of communication. This model:

* Gives you a clearer and more logical way to **plan** your message to achieve the result you want;
* Provides a clearer way to **communicate** this message so that you improve the results you get; and
* Ensures your **listeners** are motivated, clear on the content, know what actions they need to take, and have considered any barriers and how to get past them.

McCarthy suggests that any communication, whether it’s about a new scheme, a task or project, should cover 4 key elements: **Why, What, How** and **What If.**

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| **WHAT IF**  *Improve plan/*  *Contingencies* | **WHY**  *Motivation* |
| **HOW**  *Action* | **WHAT**  *Clarity* |

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| **‘Why’** | **‘Why’** is about the purpose, reasons and benefits behind the task or project. Covering this successfully means people can see the rationale behind your proposal and are more likely to be **motivated** to carry it out. The more you can paint a picture and link this to a bigger picture the better so that it becomes real for the person. |
| **‘What’** | **‘What’** is all about ensuring people are clear on the goal, what the task involves and have the relevant information they need. Covering this ensures people have **clarity** about the task/project – it reduces uncertainty. |
| **‘How’** | **‘How’** is all about the practicalities … how you’re going to carry out the task, things to bear in mind, the first steps and methods. Covering **‘how’** leads to **action**. |
| **‘What if’** | And finally covering **‘what if’** successfully means people see the potential in the task and the opportunities it may lead to. Looking at **‘what if’** scenarios also helps them understand potential risks and how to overcome these – this, in turn, leads to **improvements in the plan** or to **contingency** plans being made**.** |

**Mini what….**

Although the model starts with **‘why’**, launching straight into **‘why’** may cause confusion. So it’s handy to start with a ‘**mini what’** which puts the project into context.

**For example:**

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| Mini-what | ‘I’ve asked you all here today to tell you about the new software system’ |
| Why | ‘The reason we’re introducing this system is that it’s going to take all the drudgery out of your work ...’ |

The examples below demonstrate how to use the McCarthy model to successfully plan and communicate a project.

**Example 1 – Bank robbery**

Steve is going to rob a bank. In order to do so he must encourage his friends Bill and Janine to help.

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| **Mini what** | What I wanted to discuss with you is an idea I’ve got for us to get rich quick. |
| **Why** | The reason I’ve been thinking about this is – we’re broke. We want to be rich. We want to not have to work. We want to be able to just lie on a beach all day. |
| **What** | So what my plan is ... We’re going to rob a bank. The one at the corner of High Street. It’s going to be next Tuesday afternoon around 3.00 pm when the security deposit men come. By my reckoning we should get away with at least £500,000. |
| **How** | In practical terms how we’re going to do this is ... Bill’s going to drive the car. Janine’s going to distract the guards. I’ll do all the talking then snatch the money bags. |
| **What if** | So let’s look at what could go wrong ...  - What if someone recognises my voice? *We’ll overcome that by using a scrambler to distort the sound*  - What if the car won’t start? *Bill’s going to have the car serviced before the robbery to make sure it is running well.*  And what if we succeed? ... this time next week we’ll all be in the Bahamas lying on that beach! |

**Example 2 – Performance Review and Development (PR&D)**

You could adopt the same model when briefing your team on the PR&D scheme

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| **Mini what** | Explain you’re going to introduce the team to the new Performance Review and Development scheme |
| **Why** | Give the reasons – base these on ‘what’s in it for them’; what are the benefits as far as the team, the service and the organisation are concerned |
| **What** | Explain the process |
| **How** | Explain the first steps and, practically, what both you and the team will do next |
| **What if** | Talk through the ‘what ifs’ and answer any questions or concerns; paint a positive picture of the benefits for the team if the scheme is implemented successfully |



When using the McCarthy model, it’s important to ensure your communication uses a balance of each of the quadrants. For example:

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|  | **If you focus too much on this ...** | **If you don’t focus enough on this ...** |
| **Why** | It might come across as a ‘hard sell’ or ‘management speak’. | Your listeners might not fully understand the reasons behind the message so – while they may carry out the task mechanically – they won’t be bought into it or motivated enough to achieve it. |
| **What** | It might lead to information overload - especially at the early stages of communication. | It may lead to lack of understanding and therefore mistakes. |
| **How** | It may lead to a feeling of being micro-managed or carrying out a tick box exercise, rather than your listeners bringing their own enthusiasm and ideas to the task. | It could lead to inaction because no-one knows what to do … |
| **What if** | It may lead to paralysis or fear of progressing in the face of so many risks. Alternatively it could lead to a blasé approach in feeling that any contingency can be overcome. | It could lead to lack of forward planning and therefore disappointment and disengagement when problems do arise. |