

Health and Safety Essentials

Lecture 18 – Communication and Consultation in OHS

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Undergraduate Diploma in
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Recap Question 1

A company provides annual generic training on manual handling, chemicals, and work at height using standard presentations purchased from an external provider. The training covers general theory and legal requirements but does not refer to the specific equipment, substances, or tasks workers actually perform in the workplace.

Despite regular training sessions, supervisors report that workers continue to take unsafe shortcuts and show little engagement during training.

Which of the following BEST explains this outcome?

- A. Workers are generally resistant to health and safety training regardless of content
- B. Training effectiveness depends primarily on training duration rather than content
- C. Health and safety training mainly serves a legal compliance function rather than behavioural one
- D. Training that is not based on the organisation's specific risks and tasks is less effective

Recap Question 2

Which statement BEST explains the difference between training and competence in occupational health and safety?

- A. Training automatically ensures competence in all situations
- B. Competence refers only to experience gained at work
- C. Training provides knowledge and skills, while competence also requires experience, supervision, and correct application in practice 
- D. Competence only applies to managers and supervisors

Recap Question 3

According to the Kirkpatrick Model for evaluating training, which level assesses whether workers are actually applying what they learned in the workplace?

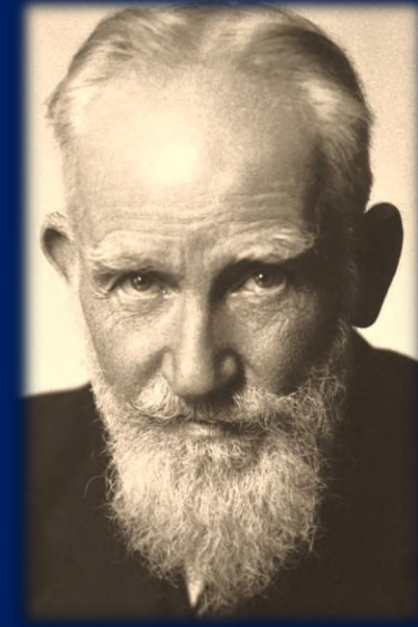
- A. Behaviour 
- B. Reaction
- C. Learning
- D. Results

Learning Objectives

- ✓ Explain why effective communication matters in OHS.
- ✓ Identify legal obligations under *Maltese law* for OHS consultation.
- ✓ Recognise barriers to communication and strategies to overcome them.
- ✓ Apply best practices for worker consultation and hazard reporting.
- ✓ Analyse case studies of successful and failed safety communication.

**“The single biggest problem
in communication is the
illusion that it has taken
place.”**

George Bernard Shaw



Consequences of poor communication

- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JCvSGYbDtaA>



This was funny, but it can also be catastrophic!

The Role of Communication in OHS

- Clear and timely communication ensures workers understand risks and safety protocols.
- Consultation prevents accidents by allowing workers to contribute to safety measures.
- Two-way communication creates a culture where workers feel safe to report hazards.
- Poor communication has contributed to major industrial disasters (e.g., Deepwater Horizon, Piper Alpha).



Types of OHS Communication

Formal Communication:

- Written policies, procedures, and OHS manuals.
- Safety meetings and toolbox talks.
- Incident reports and risk assessments.

Informal Communication:

- Supervisor feedback and coaching.
 - Peer discussions and knowledge-sharing.
 - Anonymous safety concern submissions.
-  Best Practice: A combination of both formal and informal communication is most effective in workplace safety.

The Communication Process in OHS

1. *Message* – Safety information must be clear and well-structured.
2. *Medium* – Use posters, emails, meetings, and digital tools.
3. *Receiver* – Workers must understand and act on safety messages.
4. *Feedback* – Workers should be able to ask questions and provide input.

💡 Discussion: What are the most effective communication channels in your workplace?



Legal Obligations for Communication & Consultation

- 📄 Cap. 646 – Occupational Health and Safety Authority Act
 - Employers must inform workers about workplace hazards and preventive measures.
 - Workers have the right to be consulted on safety matters.

📄 S.L. 646.11 – General Provisions for Health and Safety at Work Places Regulations

- Regulation 7: Employers must coordinate safety efforts in shared workplaces.
- Regulation 13: Workers must be given a voice in OHS decisions.
- Regulation 12: Employers must provide workers with clear and accessible safety information.

💡
ch Case Study Discussion: A company introduces new hazardous without consulting workers. What are the risks here?

The Leading Cause of Workplace Failures & Poor Communication

“According to the latest communications statistics, a staggering 86% of employees cite ineffective communication and poor internal communication skills for workplace failures.”

Kojic, M. (2026) *Workplace communication statistics in 2026*. Pumble Learn.
Available at: <https://pumble.com/learn/communication/communication-statistics/>



The Consequences of Poor Safety Communication

-  Common Communication Failures:
-  Misinterpreted safety instructions.
 -  Workers unaware of hazards.
 -  Delayed response to emergencies.
 -  Increased accident and injury rates.

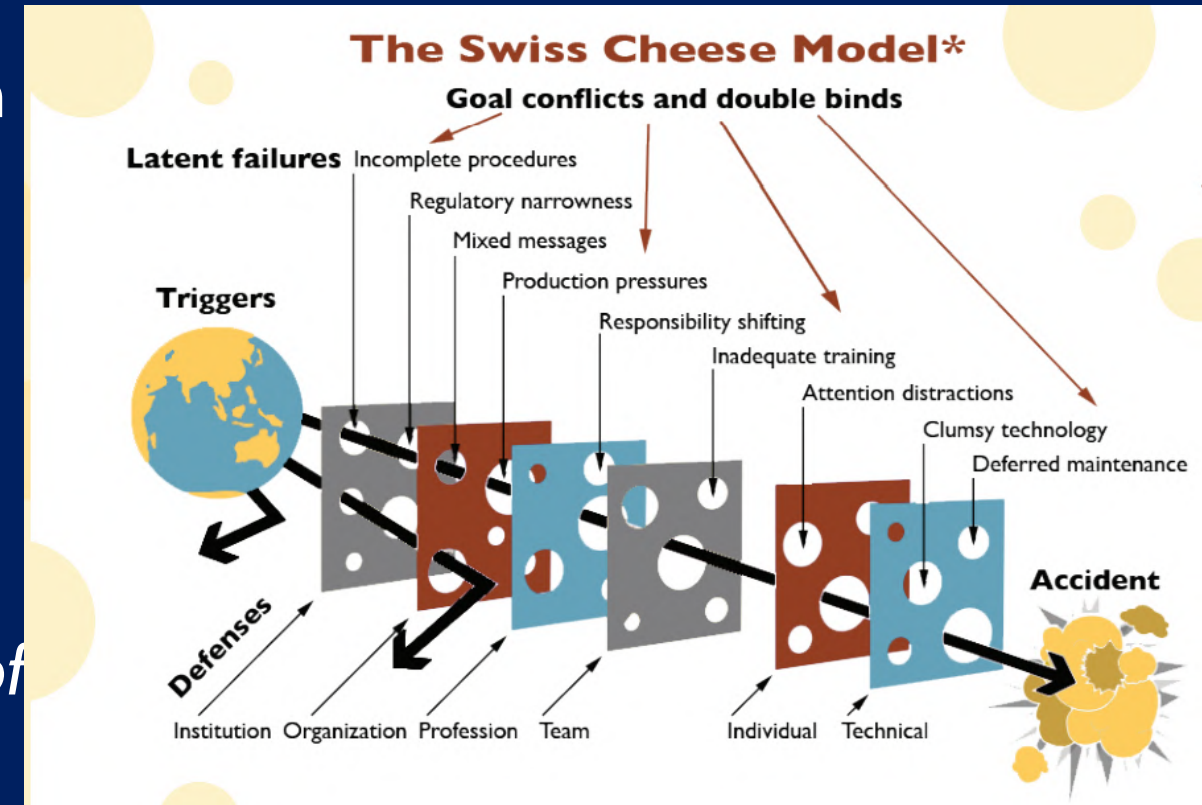
-  Case Studies:
- Piper Alpha Disaster (1988): A failure to communicate maintenance permit communication led to an explosion that killed 167 people.
 - Deepwater Horizon (2010): Workers were not properly informed about well pressure changes, leading to a massive oil spill.

 Discussion: What happens when safety information is not communicated effectively?

The Swiss Cheese Model....Again!

Poor communication is widely recognised as a contributing factor in major accidents and organisational failures. Breakdowns in communication between different organisational levels can allow hazards to go unnoticed or unresolved (Reason, 1997).

Reason, J. (1997) *Managing the Risks of Organisational Accidents*. Aldershot: Ashgate.



Communication vs Consultation

Communication

- Information flows from employer to workers.
- Typical examples include:
- Safety policies and procedures
- Risk assessment results
- Safety instructions and training
- Emergency procedures

→ Communication ensures workers receive safety information

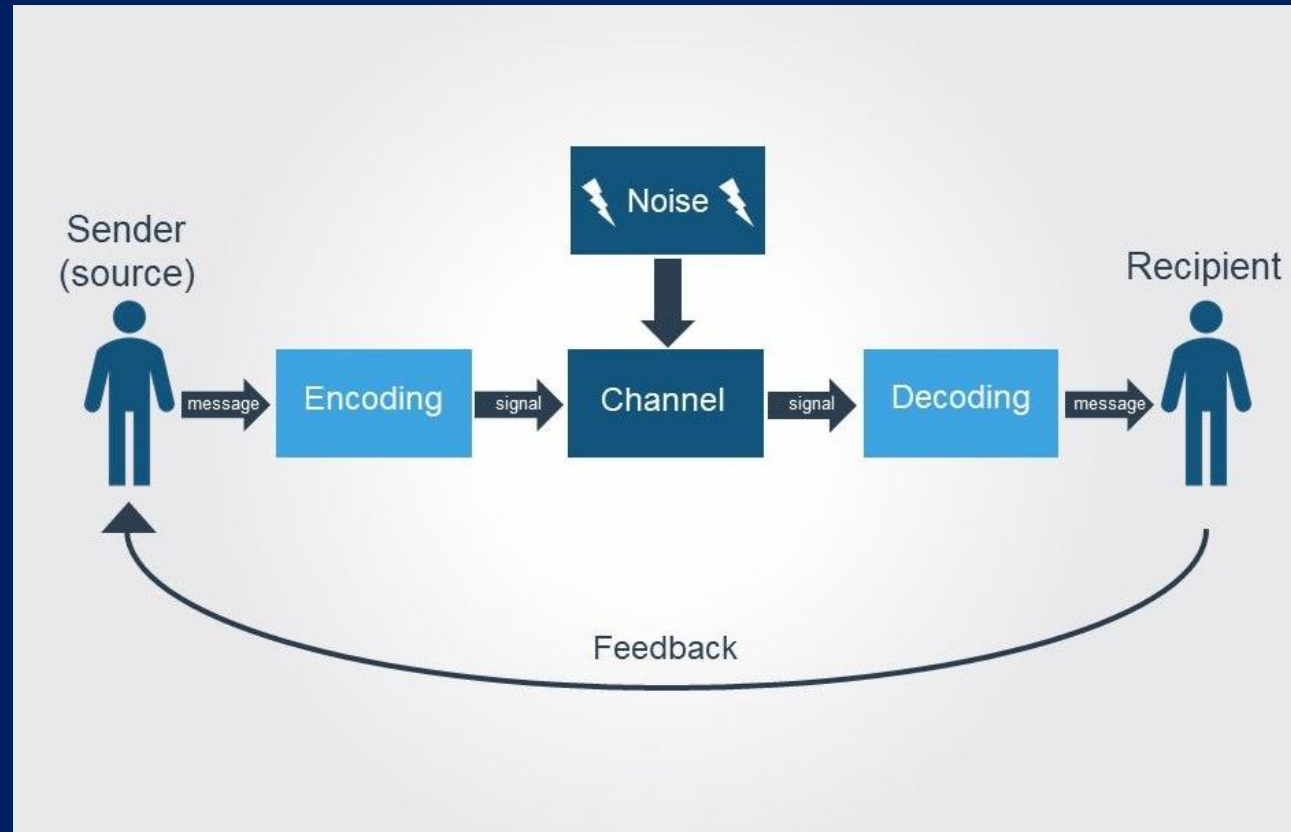


Consultation

- Information flows both ways between workers and management.
- Workers contribute to:
- Hazard identification
- Risk assessments
- Development of safety procedures
- Investigation of incidents

→ Consultation ensures workers participate in safety decisions

Shannon–Weaver Communication Model



- The Shannon–Weaver Model of Communication describes communication as a structured process where information is transmitted from a sender to a receiver through a communication channel (Shannon and Weaver 1949).

STAR Framework – A Method for Structured Communication

- ✓ Situation – What is happening? Clearly describe the context or issue.
- ✓ Task – What needs to be done? Outline the actions required.
- ✓ Action – What steps were taken or should be taken? Explain how the task was (or will be) executed.
- ✓ Result – What is the expected or achieved outcome? Ensure clarity on objectives or lessons learned.

- 📌 How it Improves OHS Communication:
- ✓ Reduces misunderstandings by ensuring all essential details are covered.
 - ✓ Helps in incident reporting by structuring clear, factual descriptions.
 - ✓ Improves worker safety briefings, ensuring clarity in roles and responsibilities.

SLAM Technique

SLAM is used in high-risk jobs to ensure that tasks are performed safely and efficiently:

- ✓ Stop – Pause and think before starting a task.
- ✓ Look – Assess the environment for hazards.
- ✓ Assess – Evaluate the risks and required controls.
- ✓ Manage – Take action to eliminate or minimise risks before proceeding.

📌 How it Enhances OHS Communication:

- ✓ Encourages workers to think before acting, reducing impulsive errors.
- ✓ Strengthens risk awareness, improving proactive safety culture.
- ✓ Enhances dynamic risk assessments, helping workers identify hazards in real-time.

💡 Example (SLAM in Action):

S – Stop: Before lifting a heavy object, the worker pauses to assess.

L – Look: Observes the workspace checking for trip hazards, unstable surfaces, and PPE

A – Assess: Determines if assistance or lifting equipment is needed.

M – Manage: Uses proper lifting techniques or seeks help before proceeding.

Break



Breakout Room Activity: Applying STAR & SLAM for Effective Safety Communication

Scenario 1: Using STAR for Incident Reporting

Situation:

A worker slips on an oil spill near a machine, resulting in a minor injury. The spill was reported verbally, but no written report was made.

Task:

Use the STAR Framework to structure a clear and concise incident report.

Guiding Questions:

- How would you describe the situation accurately?
- What steps should the worker have taken immediately?
- What actions should be implemented to prevent recurrence?

Breakout Room

Scenario 2: Using SLAM for Hazard Recognition

Situation:

A worker is about to operate a forklift in a congested warehouse where pedestrians and other machinery are moving.

Task:

Use the SLAM Technique to assess the risks before proceeding.

Guiding Questions:

- What hazards should the worker look for before starting the task?
- How can the worker manage the risks before operating the forklift?
- What actions can improve safe movement and communication in shared spaces?

Breakout Room

Scenario 3: STAR & SLAM Combined – Emergency Response

Situation:

A chemical leak is detected in a storage area. A worker is uncertain about the next steps but sees colleagues continuing work nearby.

Task:

- Use SLAM to assess the immediate risks before taking action.
- Use STAR to report the incident clearly to supervisors.

Guiding Questions:

- What hazards need to be assessed first before intervening?
- How can the worker effectively communicate the emergency using STAR?
- What preventive measures should be put in place for future incidents?

Group Presentations & Discussion

After the breakout session, each group presents their solutions.

- Discuss key takeaways from applying STAR and SLAM.
- Identify communication gaps and improvement opportunities.

Final Reflection:

- How did structured communication improve decision-making?
- How can STAR and SLAM be used daily in the workplace?

Electing Workers' Health and Safety Representatives (WHSRs)

Why Are WHSRs Important?

- They represent workers' voices on health and safety matters.
- Act as liaisons between employees and management.
- Required under Maltese OHS law (Cap. 646, Article 12 & S.L. 646.11, Regulation 13).

Election Process:

 Step 1: Employer announces the need for a WHSR.

 Step 2: Workers nominate candidates from their workforce.

 Step 3: A vote is held to elect the representative.

 Step 4: Employer recognises the elected WHSR and ensures they receive training.

 Discussion: How can employers ensure fair and transparent elections for WHSRs?

Responsibilities of Workers' Health and Safety Representatives (WHSRs)

What WHSRs Do:

-  Represent workers in safety consultations with employers.
-  Participate in workplace inspections and accident investigations.
-  Raise concerns about unsafe work conditions.
-  Ensure workers are informed about OHS risks and legal rights.
-  Assist in developing safety policies and training initiatives.

Legal Backing (S.L. 646.11, Regulation 13)

- WHSRs must be consulted on health and safety decisions.
- They have the right to access safety information.

 Discussion: What are the biggest challenges WHSRs face in their role?

Protection of WHSRs Under Maltese Law

Legal Protections (Cap. 646, Article 12 & S.L. 646.11, Regulation 13)

- ✓ WHSRs must not face discrimination, demotion, or retaliation for performing their duties.
- ✓ Employers must provide paid time off for WHSRs to attend training and safety meetings.
- ✓ WHSRs cannot be penalised for raising safety concerns.

Challenges Faced by WHSRs

- ✗ Lack of support from employers.
- ✗ Difficulty convincing workers to report hazards.
- ✗ Risk of being ignored by management.

 Discussion: How can employers encourage a supportive environment for WHSRs?

Why Should Workers Volunteer to Be WHSRs?

Why Workers Hesitate:

-  Not paid extra for the role.
-  Fear of conflict with management.
-  Concerns about extra workload.

Why Workers Should Step Up:

-  Improves workplace safety for everyone.
-  Gives workers a voice in decision-making.
-  Enhances leadership and professional skills.
-  Protected role under the law (Cap. 646, Article 12).

 Activity: What incentives or motivations could encourage workers to become WHSRs?

Employers with Shared Health and Safety Duties

When Do Employers Share OHS Duties?

- ✓ Same worksite – Construction projects, logistics hubs, factories.
- ✓ Same workers – Labour hire agencies, contractors, subcontractors.
- ✓ Supply chain – Businesses involved in the same production

process.

Legal Requirement (S.L. 646.11, Regulation 7)

- ✓ Employers must cooperate and exchange safety information.
- ✓ Duties cannot be transferred – every employer remains

responsible.

- ✓ Safety coordination must be documented and agreed upon.

 Discussion: How should employers define responsibilities in multi-employer environments?

Coordinating OHS Responsibilities in Multi-Employer Workplaces

 Best Practices for Employers with Shared Duties:

- ✓ Clear roles and responsibilities for each duty holder.
- ✓ Regular safety meetings between all companies on-site.
- ✓ Joint risk assessments to align safety controls.
- ✓ Defined procedures for reporting incidents across multiple employers.

 Failure to Coordinate Leads To:

- ✗ Inconsistent safety practices.
- ✗ Higher accident risks due to lack of accountability.
- ✗ Legal liability issues for non-compliance.

 Activity: Brainstorm a contractor management strategy for a shared worksite.

How Many WHSRs Should a Workplace Have?

- 📌 Legal Context (S.L. 646.11, Regulation 13)
 - The law mandates that WHSRs must be present in workplaces, but it does not specify a number.
 - Employers must ensure adequate representation, depending on workplace needs.
- 📌 Best Practices for Determining WHSR Numbers:
 - ✓ Workplace Size: Large facilities need multiple WHSRs to cover all areas.
 - ✓ Work Complexity: High-risk industries (e.g., construction, manufacturing, logistics) require more representatives.
 - ✓ Shift Patterns: Workplaces with multiple shifts should have at least one WHSR per shift.
 - ✓ Number of Departments: Different work areas may require separate WHSRs.
- 💡 Discussion: How many WHSRs would you recommend for a 500-worker factory?

Worker Consultation Methods

- 📌 Direct Consultation:
 - ✓ Open discussions between workers and supervisors.
 - ✓ Safety meetings and toolbox talks.
 - ✓ Feedback sessions on workplace risks.

- 📌 Representative Consultation:
 - ✓ Workers' Health and Safety Representatives (WHSRs).
 - ✓ Health and Safety Committees.
 - ✓ Joint safety decision-making forums.

The Kirkpatrick Model – Evaluating Communication

- 📌 Level 1: Reaction – Did recipients/workers find the communication useful and relevant?
- 📌 Level 2: Learning – Have recipients/workers acquired the necessary skills attended knowledge?
- 📌 Level 3: Behaviour – Are recipients/workers applying the communicated safety practices on the job?
- 📌 Level 4: Results – Has the communication achieved the intended outcome?

Overcoming Barriers to Effective Communication

 Barrier: Language differences.

 Solution: Use translated materials, pictograms, and multilingual trainers.

 Barrier: Lack of worker engagement.

 Solution: Encourage interactive discussions and two-way communication.

 Barrier: Overcomplicated safety messages.

 Solution: Use simple, straightforward language and visual aids.

 Group Activity: Identify the biggest communication barriers in your workplace and suggest solutions.

Keeping Records of Consultation & Communication

Why Keep Consultation Records?

- ✓ Demonstrates compliance with OHS laws.
- ✓ Helps prevent disputes over safety responsibilities.
- ✓ Assists in continuous safety improvements.

What Should Be Recorded?

- ✓ The topic discussed and the safety issue addressed.
- ✓ Who was consulted (including WHSRs).
- ✓ Decisions made and assigned responsibilities.
- ✓ Follow-up actions and deadlines.

 Best Practice: Well-documented consultation improves safety accountability.

Psychological Safety in OHS Communication & Worker Consultation

What is Psychological Safety?

- Workers feel safe to report hazards without fear of punishment.
- Encourages transparent and honest communication about risks.

How to Build Psychological Safety in OHS:

- ✓ Foster a blame-free culture.
- ✓ Encourage anonymous reporting options.
- ✓ Train managers to handle safety concerns positively.

 Discussion: Have you ever felt unsafe or hesitant about reporting a safety issue?



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