

FOUR PARTS OF SPEECH - EXERCISE

REFLECTING ON OUR USUAL SPEECH

Think of a colleague you need to speak with about an important matter. How would you naturally go about your conversation? Write down in your learning journal the different parts of your intervention and the process of your communication. Share with a partner and get their feedback.

PRACTICING THE FOUR PARTS OF SPEECH

Take some time to read the input and go through the resources for more details.

Look again at the speech you have initially drafted in part 1.

- Which of the four parts of speech were integrated in your message?
- Was there any part that overshadowed the others?
- Which parts did you miss?
- How would you reformulate your intervention to incorporate the four parts?
- How can you frame the context? If you were to begin with a reference to your intention from this conversation and your desired results, what would you say?
- How would you advocate or express your point, perspective, suggestion?
- What examples, stories, assumptions would you share to concretely illustrate your point?
- How can you inquire as to the other person's view, interest, agreement, position etc.

Share again with a partner and get their feedback.

What differences did you notice between the two approaches?

ADDITIONAL EXERCISES

FOUR PARTS OF SPEECH - INPUT

INTRODUCTION

In their book *Action Inquiry*, Bill Torbert et al. suggest in the Four Parts of Speech, a communication practice that generates mutuality and creates the connection needed for people to listen to each other, gain alignment and move forward. When thoroughly practiced and integrated in interpersonal communication, this tool develops trusting and productive interactions and helps build integrated teams.

MAIN IDEAS

Torbert suggests that productive conversations contain four parts:

1. **Framing.** This part is about providing context, background and purpose. It is often missed in spontaneous conversations but key to clarify our communications.
 - “I’ve been listening to our conversation and have noticed...”
 - “While I know that we have taken X approach in the past...”
 - “I have the sense that you are very passionate about the position you have taken”
 - “I have an assumption that I want to test with you all”
2. **Advocating.** This is the part where we explicitly make our point, express our feelings, share a proposal or strategy for action, etc. While this may be the center of our message, it is important that it does not take over the other parts.
 - “Given the fact that our usual method is not working as well as we’d like, I suggest we do X, Y, and Z.”
 - “As a matter of process, I think we have to slow down and take a step back...”
 - “I am a little out of my comfort zone here and need your help.”
 - “When you said A, I felt B.”
3. **Illustrating:** In the third part, we share concrete examples and stories that support our message, explaining reasons, sharing logic, expressing why we think or feel this way. This is about sharing our own perspective and at the same time remembering that while it may be true for us, it is only a part of the truth.
 - “I say this because I believe in quality and quantity.”
 - “We’ve been moving so fast that it’s been hard to keep track of our priorities.”
 - “I can handle my area, but I have to rely on you to support me.”
 - “I felt this way because what you said felt like an accusation to me.”
4. **Inquiring:** A real conversation is not only about the message we are personally advocating for, but also about seeking shared understanding. Here, we are asking the other person questions to ensure that we are understood, gain insights into their point of view and learn something from them. When we take the time to end our speech with the inquiry, we are showing that we care; this last part is where connection starts developing..

- “Does this suggestion resonate with you or am I missing something?”
- “How do others feel about this?”
- “Do I have any blind-spots here?”
- “Can you hear where I am coming from?”
- “Does this make sense?”

Take some time to read the following scenarios.

- **Scenario 1:** “You may be wondering why I have been a bit quiet over the last few days...I was a bit surprised, even a bit betrayed, when you questioned my judgment in front of our boss..I felt that way because I thought that we were a team and because you had never raised those same questions when we were preparing the project together. I assumed that we were aligned. I wonder if you can understand where I am coming from and how you would feel if I did the same thing to you?
- **Scenario 2:** “You know, I’ve noticed over the last few months that you seem to be avoiding me, and to be honest, I am feeling both frustrated and a little sad that we seem to have lost what I thought was a good working rapport. I say this because we’ve known each other for a long time, and I really value our friendship. And I prefer to work in a place where we can be both friends as well as professionals. I wonder, did I do anything that offended or hurt you? How do you feel about this?”

In the above conversations, how does each part of speech contribute in creating an effective interaction? Which part would you personally find most challenging for you to practice?

Mastering the art of communication demands intentionality, proficiency but most importantly a deep practice. As we learn to bring more intent to the way we speak and listen, as we frame our message, and share our assumptions our communication would be much clearer, our views would be put in perspective and our relationships would be more mutual and trusting.

EXPECTED LEARNINGS AND OUTCOMES

1. Developing the skill of using the Four Parts of Speech in a conversation
2. Understanding the importance of practicing intentionality and inquiry in communication

FOUR PARTS OF SPEECH- RESOURCES

GENERAL LEADERSHIP RESOURCES

Title	Author	Publisher	Year	Link
Action Inquiry: The Secret of Timely and Transforming Leadership	Bill Torbert and Associates	Berrett-Koehler	2004	Link
A Disciplined Way to Practice the Four Parts of Speech (excerpted from the book Action Inquiry - p.32-37)	Bill Torbert and Associates	Berrett-Koehler	2004	Link
Torbert's 4 Parts of Speech	Benito Teehankee		2017	Link
Characteristics of a Team Where a New Level of Trust is Possible	Being First	Youtube	2016	Link
The practice of action inquiry	William R. Torbert	SAGE publications	2001	Link
Bill Torbert on power, framing, and action	Amiel Handelsman	The Amiel Show	2014	Link
Action Inquiry and Dialogue	Cook-Greuter		2000	Link