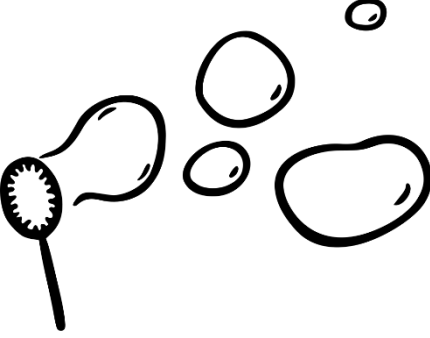


Communicating in Circles

Short description	<p>An interactive communication exercise in which participants rotate in two circles (inner and outer) and repeatedly talk with a new partner. Each round has a different communication task (e.g., active listening, disrupting, reading between the lines). The activity helps participants experience how verbal and non-verbal communication influence conversations and gives the moderator opportunities to observe and guide group dynamics.</p>
Objectives	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increase awareness of verbal and non-verbal communication • Experience different listening styles (active, passive, manipulative, interpretive) • Reflect on how conversations can be steered consciously or unconsciously • Strengthen empathy and perspective-taking • Practice giving and receiving feedback • Support moderator observation skills in group interaction
Duration	<p>Approx. 20 minutes total, 25 – 30 minutes if including the optional third round and debriefing discussion</p>
Social form	<p>Group work</p>
Materials and organisation	<p>Materials</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Timer or stopwatch • Bell or signal sound (optional) • Flipchart or whiteboard (optional for debrief) <p>Organisation</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Arrange participants in two circles: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Inner circle facing outward ○ Outer circle facing inward • Ensure enough space for easy rotation
Preparation	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Prepare the room so participants can stand (or sit) two circles. 2. Decide whether to include the optional third round. 3. Brief participants: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. The goal is not performance but observation and experience. b. Some tasks may feel uncomfortable — that is intentional. 4. Ask participants not to reveal their task instructions during the round.

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Step-by-step description

	<p>Round 1 – Active listening</p> <p>Inner circle task: Describe your ideal holiday for 2 minutes (where, with whom, what you do, atmosphere, etc.).</p> <p>Outer circle task: Listen attentively. Ask questions only if the conversation stops.</p> <p>After 2 minutes:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Trainer stops the conversation. 2. Outer circle shares observations about non-verbal communication (posture, eye contact, tone, enthusiasm). 3. After about 1,5 minutes, stop feedback. 4. Inner circle rotates one position clockwise. <p>Round 2 – Steering a conversation</p> <p>Outer circle task: Talk for 2 minutes about what you used to do on Sundays as a child. Include many details.</p> <p>Inner circle task: Subtly try to take control of the conversation or move it off topic.</p> <p>After 2 minutes:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Stop conversation. 2. Pairs discuss experience together: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> o Was it easy to derail the topic? o Did it feel annoying? o How did you steer the conversation? 3. After 2 minutes, stop the feedback. 4. Inner circle rotates one position clockwise. <p>Round 3 (Optional) – Listening between the lines</p> <p>Inner circle task: Who is your hero or someone you admire and why?</p> <p>Outer circle task: Listen for what is implied rather than said (“between the lines”).</p> <p>After 2 minutes:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Stop conversation. 2. Outer circle shares interpretations of underlying values, emotions, or motivations. 3. Stop after 2 minutes.
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Variations and differentiation

- **Short version:** Do only rounds 1 and 2.
- **Large groups:** Run multiple circle sets simultaneously.
- **Advanced groups:** Add a fourth round where both participants intentionally misinterpret each other.
- **Introverted participants:** Allow note-taking during listening tasks.
- **Youth groups:** Replace questions with lighter topics (favourite game, dream superpower, favourite food).
- **Professional training:** Link each round to workplace situations (meetings, client talks, feedback conversations).
- **Topics-related:** you can use this method in order to collect opinions about a specific topic from participants

Practical notes

This activity can trigger discomfort because participants intentionally manipulate or analyse conversations. Always include a short group reflection afterward to normalise feelings and connect experiences to real-life communication patterns. Emphasise that the goal is awareness, not judging communication skills.

References | Sources

Van den Ouden, L. (2016). *Werkvormenboek: 100 werkvormen om iedere bijeenkomst tot een succes te maken – Alles begint met een open mind* (1e druk). ICM Publishing.

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