

# Enhancing Workplace Communication Through Active Listening and Applied Improvisation

**The Power of Active Listening to  
Boost Performance, Productivity and  
Profitability**

**Prepared for: HR and Leadership  
Professionals**

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**REBOOTER GROUP**  
OUTCOMES THROUGH IMPROV

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## HOW TO USE THIS WHITE PAPER

This white paper is focusing on one of the main applied improvisation concepts, also used throughout society, active listening.

We will cover examples of poor communication, and then compare it to what is good communication, and that is through active listening. We give a case study and then we talk about the use of applied and provide helping grow the skills of active listening throughout an organisation staff cohort.

The aim of this paper is to make it easy and simple enough to be able to start your own initiative and build the active listening skills in the organisation without having too much experience with applied improvisation or other ways to build the skills of active listening.

At the end we hope that your teams will be communicating better and not just with each other but also with their customers, and the benefits of better active listening in the workplace, such as reduction of errors, fewer miscommunication around process, less conflict, more understanding,

## ABOUT REBOOTER GROUP

Rebooter Group (RG) is a human intelligence consultancy located in Sydney, Australia.

RG specialises in teaching individuals, teams, and organisations across the APAC region the art of non-judgmental listening to create highly agile and successful organisations, primarily through the methodology of applied improvisation.

RG has developed a proprietary relational assessment tool, relateEQ™. This subsequent analysis allows me to customise a program which delivers the conditions that result in an increase in profitability, and improves the working environment you're looking for.

This process strengthens internal trust and connection, with the aim to change the way organisations do business with their internal and external customers.

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Effective communication is a cornerstone of successful workplace interactions. However, poor communication is a far more common occurrence.

There are many reasons for this, two of which are mentioned on page 3: overwork and poor communication creating inefficiencies within the team, with a corresponding lack of 'being heard'. Figure 1 illustrates how this is central to health interaction.

This white paper focuses on the pathway to more active listening in daily life by featuring one applied improvisation technique (the 'yes, and' activity). The aim is to grow and integrate overall communication skills.

With this employees can cultivate better relationships, improve problem-solving abilities, and create a more collaborative work environment. And it is the ongoing practice of following any methodology that allows the overall culture and pool of active listening skills to change.

## WHAT IS ACTIVE LISTENING?

Active listening is a communication technique that requires the listener to fully concentrate, understand, respond, and then remember what is said. Unlike passive listening, active listening involves engaging with the speaker through verbal and non-verbal cues, reflecting on their message, and providing feedback.

Five key areas can help improve communication across diverse teams:

1. Empathy: Understand the perspective of others.
2. Patience: Allow time for clarity.
3. Observation: Pay attention to non-verbal cues and the impact of setting on communication.
4. Introspection: Reflect on personal biases and assumptions.
5. Openness: Encourage feedback and integrate it into communication strategies.

Building trust is fundamental for effective communication. By gauging the level of trust in your relationships, you can better assess the effectiveness of your communication efforts.

## WHY IS ACTIVE LISTENING HARD TO CONSTANTLY ACHIEVE?

Several factors contribute to the difficulty of achieving consistent active listening at work:

1. Distractions (internal and external, including tech).
2. Emotional and psychological barriers.
3. Cultural and language differences.
4. Time pressures, poor guidelines, vague job descriptions and other stresses on the job.
5. Disinterest, disengagement, biases, grudges or potential or active conflict.

However, often, the greatest barrier to active listening is a lack of training and life practice, and often, the absence of focus on active listening from management.

**Case Studies  
and Articles  
Illustrating  
Problems  
Surrounding  
ACTIVE  
LISTENING**

### **Negative Results of Poor Communication**

Poor communication in healthcare can lead to malpractice cases, resulting in preventable deaths and billions of dollars in costs. In the construction industry, miscommunication causes billions of dollars in rework and significant loss of productivity due to avoidable issues and searching for information.<sup>②</sup>

### **Reducing Information Overload in Your Organisation**

This article addresses the issue of information overload, which is a form of poor communication. It reveals that excessive communication can lead to employee disengagement and poor decision-making. The study by Gartner cited in the article found that 38% of employees felt overwhelmed by the amount of communication they received, which negatively impacted their productivity and engagement.

*“Information overload is the inevitable result of the modern organization’s always-on, more-is-better approach to communication. Unfortunately, it is also a driver of employees’ disengagement and poor decision making. While we are all, as employees and leaders, affected by this reality, the onus is on the company communicators themselves to craft a low-burden culture. It will require energy, expertise and coordination to architect and reinforce more human-centric communication practices.”<sup>③</sup>*

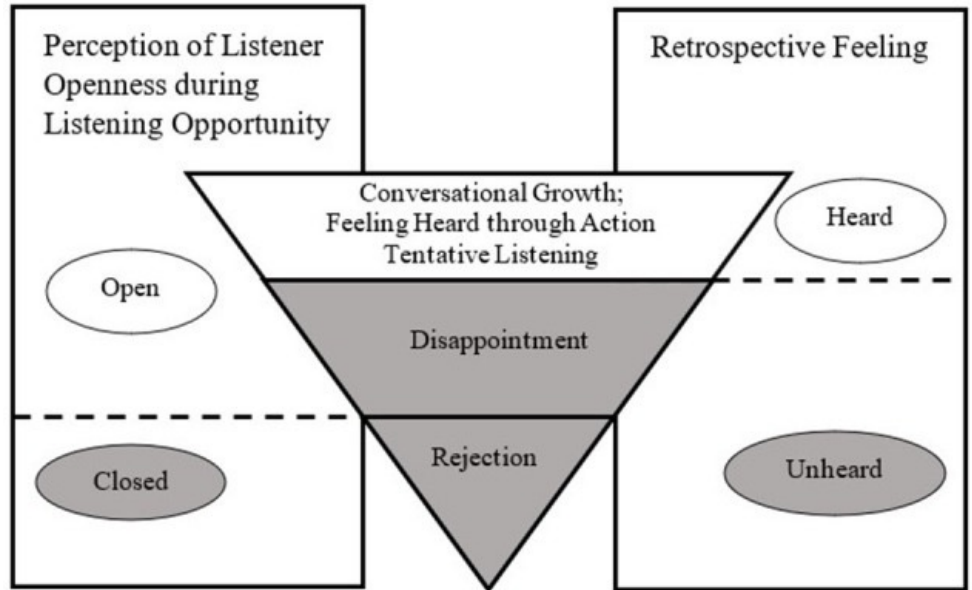
### **Poor Communication May Be Slowing Down Your Team**

Another article from Harvard Business Review discusses how poor communication, especially in remote and hybrid work environments, can significantly hinder team performance and productivity. It highlights the importance of clear, consistent communication and provides strategies for improving communication within teams, such as establishing communication guidelines and conducting regular debriefs.

*“Communication is not just a soft skill; it’s the linchpin of effective management. Yet, surveys reveal that employees are frustrated by unclear communication from their bosses. Some of these challenges certainly come from the more siloed communication environment created by remote and hybrid work. When managers are unclear in their communication, it can rob teams of their focus, diluting the overall quality of their output. It’s important for managers to realize that clear, consistent communication isn’t an option; it’s imperative. Here’s how to improve your communication.”<sup>④</sup>*

## Illustration of Issue

Figure 1: How speaker experiences can shift over the course of interaction(s) to result in feeling heard or unheard.



Tiffany D. Kriz, Avraham N. Kluger, and Christopher J. Lyddy (2021), 'Feeling Heard: Experiences of Listening (or Not) at Work', *Frontiers in Psychology*, <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC8350774/>

Figure 1 illustrates how listening story paths result in feeling either heard or unheard. When conversation is Open, you get Growth, and you feel Heard. Closed conversation leads to rejection and feeling Unheard

## ABOUT APPLIED IMPROVISATION METHODOLOGY (AIM)

Applied improvisation involves using 'improv' theater techniques in non-theatrical settings to improve various skills, including communication, creativity, and adaptability.

One of the core principles of improvisation is the '**yes, and**' technique, which encourages participants to accept and build on each other's ideas.

### 1. By learning listening skills...

• **Enhanced Whole-Body Listening Skills:** AIM requires participants to listen attentively to respond appropriately, improving active listening skills. AIM teaches the importance of listening with the whole body, including paying attention to non-verbal cues like eye contact and body language.

### 2. You understand more ...

• **Decoding Subtext:** AIM helps in understanding the subtext of communication, which includes interpreting non-verbal signals and the true meaning behind words.

• **Improved Communication Quality:** By practicing AIM, individuals can enhance the quality of their communication, making it clearer and more effective.

• **More Rewarding Conversations:** Engaging in AIM makes conversations more rewarding for both the speaker and the listener.

• **Enhanced Empathy and Perspective-Taking:** AIM encourages individuals to understand and consider others' perspectives, which can lead to better empathy and collaboration.

### 3. Which results in ...

- Increased creativity and innovation.
- Increased problem-Solving Capabilities
- Becoming more comfortable with uncertainty and change.
- Stronger teamwork and team dynamics through building trust and cooperation among staff.
- Increased relaxation and quick thinking in high pressure situations.
- Improved responsiveness by focusing on the moment and listening actively, individuals can respond better and more appropriately in conversations.
- Improved psychological safety.
- Enhanced employee engagement.
- Better conflict resolution.
- Increased self-confidence.
- Stress relief and well-being through creating a playful and supportive environment.

## Applied Improvisation Solution

### **Activity Name:** “Yes-And”

**How It Works:** Pair up participants and have them engage in a conversation where each person must respond to the other's statements with 'yes, and'.

One person starts with a statement, and the other responds with 'yes, and', adding their own idea. This continues back and forth.

### **How It Helps:**

- You need to be able to listen and accept to then build on the previous person's suggestion.
- It moves people away from the habit of using “yes-but” to each other's suggestions, which is an idea and solution-killer. “yes-but” also functions as a hierarchy reinforcer of who contributes and has the floor.
- It promotes a collaborative mindset and helps teams adapt to the flexible nature of remote work.
- Encourages a collaborative and adaptive mindset, which is crucial for managing geographically dispersed teams. By building on each other's ideas, participants can develop innovative strategies for maintaining productivity, engagement, and a sense of connection in a remote or hybrid work environment.

### EVIDENCE FOR THE IMPACT OF APPLIED IMPROVISATION

↑ 21%

Profitability within the team

Naz Beheshti (16/6/2019), '10 Timely Statistics About The Connection Between Employee Engagement And Wellness', *Forbes*,  
<https://www.forbes.com/sites/nazbeheshti/2019/01/16/10-timely-statistics-about-the-connection-between-employee-engagement-and-wellness/#143015a422a0>

**Case Studies:  
Example of  
Applied  
Improvisation  
Used to  
Improve  
ACTIVE  
LISTENING**

**Case Study, Courtney Williams, scientist**

“Doing Improv has helped me to be more relaxed. And think on my feet when attending scientific conferences, where I often have to speak to hundreds of people over several days about the work my organisation does. This is not something I'm naturally good at. But improv has helped me fake it to some extent. Because now I focus more on listening to people and what they are contributing. Rather than freezing up or following a mental script. It helps me to respond better to the moment. But more than that, these conversations are a lot more rewarding for me now to and hopefully also for those I'm speaking to.

Rule three, listen with your whole body. Clearly, we listen with our ears, we want to pay attention to another person's words and also their tone. But when it comes to decoding, meaning our ears adjust one input of many that help us truly understand a piece of communication to grasp the subtext. Eye contact makes a huge difference to the quality of our listening. Not only does looking someone in the eye, keep us connected with them. It also allows us to take in the myriad nonverbal clues that are present in any spoken communication. For example, if someone says they're really excited about their new job, but they're looking at the floor when they say it, that tells you an awful lot more about the truth of the situation than the words they used.”<sup>①</sup>

**Response from one hotel staff participant during our  
*NeuroPlay* program around an activity based on listening**

*“You want to really put your effort into adding their words into what you say. You're listening for what really matches and you're adding that in Instead of a quick fix like, “I don't like the room, oh, we'll give you a new one,” Okay, that's when we really learn, like, that's easy to solve. So use this as a chance to, to listen in.”*



## CONCLUSION

### The Critical Role of Active Listening in Organisational Success

Poor communication, often resulting from inadequate active listening, is a significant barrier to organisational growth and profitability. Research consistently shows that businesses prioritising the enhancement of listening skills among their workforce see substantial improvements across key performance indicators.

The importance of active listening has only grown since 2019, as evidenced by numerous studies and expert opinions. Organisations that neglect to invest in communication and active listening training frequently suffer financially, structurally, or in terms of employee retention.

With a new generation of employees entering the workforce, increasing demands for psychologically safe workplaces, and a growing emphasis on organisational purpose, the traditional command-and-control model is becoming unsustainable. Organisations that resist change struggle to retain talent, as employees increasingly seek environments that value their input and well-being.

Rebooter Group has found that applied improvisation is a highly effective method for cultivating active listening skills, fostering immediate and sustained engagement. However, the effectiveness of any methodology depends on the commitment of participants to integrate these skills into their daily practices and overall organisational culture.

### To foster a culture of active listening, we recommend the following general steps for implementing any solution on the market.

1. Conduct a thorough assessment of current listening practices among staff and management.
2. Based on the assessment, implement targeted training programs led by experienced professionals to address identified weaknesses. Prioritise programs that offer ongoing support, observation, and measurement to ensure sustained improvement.
3. Ensure that training programs are inclusive and address the needs of all staff members, promoting a shared responsibility for improving communication. Avoid blaming individuals or groups for the state of the culture. Focus instead on collaborative learning and growth.
4. Incorporate opportunities for individual coaching within the training program, allowing facilitators to actively listen to and address the specific concerns of each employee.

By investing in active listening skills and fostering a culture of open communication, organisations can unlock their full potential, improve employee satisfaction and retention, and achieve lasting success.

## REFERENCES

- ① Max Dickins (14/7/2021), 'Improvise!: Use the Secrets of Improv to Achieve Extraordinary Results at Work - Chapter 2: listening', *Icon Book*, PDF
- ② Adam Bazer, MPD (16/2/2023), 'Poor communication skills are costing us billions', *Health Facilities Magazine*, <https://www.hfmmagazine.com/articles/4669-poor-communication-skills-are-costing-us-billions>
- ③ Gleb Tsipursky, 18/4/2023, "Poor Communication May Be Slowing Down Your Team", <https://hbr.org/2023/10/poor-communication-may-be-slowing-down-your-team>
- ④ LK Klein, Emily Earl, and Dorian Cundick, 1/5/2023, "Reducing Information Overload in Your Organization", <https://hbr.org/2023/05/reducing-information-overload-in-your-organization>

# THINK DIFFERENTLY.

USE THE APPLIED IMPROVISATION “YES,  
AND” MINDSET TO INCREASE ACTIVE  
LISTENING AND HELP POSTPONE  
JUDGEMENT TO WHERE IT IS EFFECTIVE.

SEE YOUR TEAMS' COMMUNICATION,  
PRODUCTIVITY AND PERFORMANCE RISE  
TO THE NEXT LEVEL.

When employees consistently feel heard, respected, and trusted, they naturally reciprocate by going above and beyond.

We specialise in helping organisations cultivate and sustain this culture of empowerment in staff and management.

Our tailored training programs, inspired by the improvisational techniques of shows like "Whose Line Is It Anyway?" and "Thank God You're Here," unlock the full potential of your team, leading to increased profitability.

Using our proprietary relational assessment tool, relateEQ™, we design programs that cultivate stronger connections, resolve conflicts effectively.

The result? Increased job satisfaction, a more desirable workplace, and a noticeable difference in client interactions.

**Invest in your people, and start to seriously change mindsets and unlock the full potential of your team and organisation within weeks.**

**Talk to us about how this can become your reality.**



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