

# Ombuds Outlook March

UNM Ombuds Services for Faculty  
Dispute Resolution

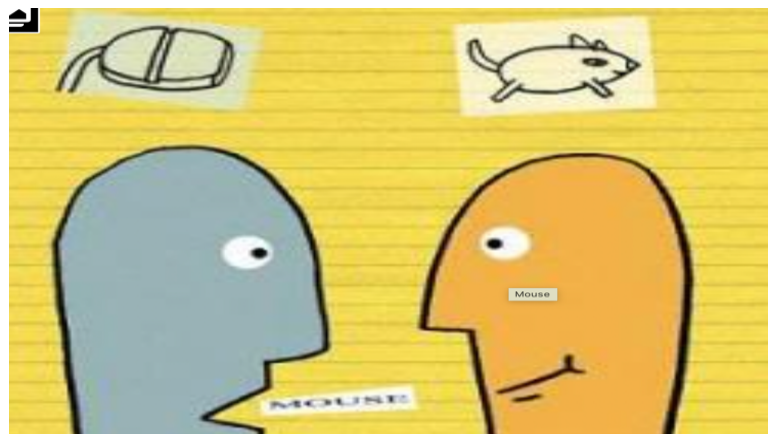


There is no doubt that language, including non-verbal communication, can make a critical difference between successful advancement and debilitating discouragement. When I wrote these words, I was thinking of communication in the academic setting. However, as we prepared this issue of our *Ombuds Outlook*, Russia invaded Ukraine. Our newsletter remains focused on the academic setting, as it should, but it might be useful for us each to extrapolate the consequences language can have in our professional lives to what can happen in the broader world. I attended a webinar/seminar on Wednesday in which the speakers repeatedly mentioned the need for providing the leaders of both countries, but especially of Russia, with a way to save face and back away from the increasingly appalling destruction already caused by this war.

Knowing when and how to offer encouragement is critical, particularly in the current climate where divisiveness and harsh words seem to be the order of the day. Who has not had the experience of someone offering encouragement during a difficult moment? And who has not had the experience of someone throwing cold water on a project or career path that you may have regretted not pursuing ever since? We each stand in a place to influence others daily, whether our influence is intentional or unintentional. In this issue of our *Ombuds Outlook*, we discuss factors that can encourage a person to be motivated as well as the ways in which an intended encouragement can go awry due to factors such as differences in culture or in experiences.

Our GAs, Chalon Johnson and Aasma Batool, will be presenting one of our lunchtime webinars on 25 March to describe, discuss, and work with you on this timely topic. Contact Margaret at [ombudsfac \[at\] unm.edu](mailto:ombudsfac@unm.edu) for details and for the link to this presentation.

We encourage you to share our newsletter; it is publicly available at our website. We also welcome any suggestions you might have for us related to mediation/dispute resolution/communication topics you're interested in. §

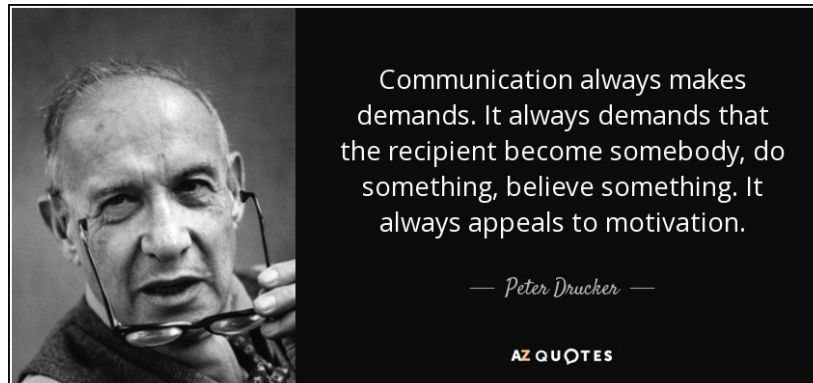


<https://www.worldpulse.com/community/users/sampaguital-flores/posts/13531>

## Motivational Communication

Chalon Johnson, ODR Graduate Assistant

Everyone likes to be motivated, especially in the workplace and in an education setting. Motivation can impact our efforts, attitude, and decisions in work and, generally, in life. Have you ever wondered how we can communicate with our co-workers or students in a way that leads to an increase in motivation? Fortunately, there are research studies and articles that tell us some clear and easy steps to start using motivational communication techniques.



From the gathered sources, and in my opinion, the major communication technique to increase motivation is having honest and frequent communication. Whether interacting with your students or sending out an email to your co-workers, keeping everyone in the loop invites a transparency that fosters trust. When you communicate fairly and openly to everyone, their efforts on the task at hand will often improve. Giving honest feedback is closely related to increasing motivation. When you give constructive and detailed feedback it shows effort on your part and will likely lead to an increase in motivation to listen to the feedback and improve.

An example of this technique could be a professor explaining why they structured a test with open-ended questions instead of multiple choices. The professor can explain that the material is better suited to those types of questions and that students have done better previously with those question types. This might sound like an insignificant example; however, as a student, it can be confusing and overwhelming to be confronted with an array of different testing options. There are different ways to prepare for exams; so, if a professor explains why a particular type of question works better with this material and for evaluating student progress, it can lead to acceptance and to more motivation to study and prepare for the exam.

Another thing to keep in mind, especially when there are parts of the university which are online still, is to be inclusive and thoughtful with your email or course-based communication. Providing important information by multiple methods (in person, email, text) can provide critical, timely reminders that keep the recipients motivated. None of us can meet in-person or have access to Wi-Fi 24/7 and last minute communications can cause unnecessary stress.

As a student, I think that when a professor or fellow co-worker takes advantage of these communication skills, it personally makes me more motivated for the task or assignment. In conclusion, being effective in your communication with frequency, honesty, and inclusion can benefit everyone with an increase in motivation. §

**Resources:**

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

<https://www.inc.com/ami-kassar/supply-chain-asset-based-line-of-credit-emergencies-opportunities.html>

<https://www.azquotes.com/quote/704822>

## Miscommunication Between Faculty and Students Due to Cultural Differences

Aasma Batool, ODR Graduate Assistant

**Communication:** [Merriam-Webster Dictionary](#) definition: “the act or process of using words, sounds, signs, or behaviors to express or exchange information or to express your ideas, thoughts, feelings, etc., to someone else.”

An international person’s ability to succeed in their many responsibilities with supervisors, coworkers, and students is dependent on their awareness of cultural differences. When people from various cultural backgrounds interact, they will have different expectations of how others behave and communicate, which can lead to miscommunication. Knowledge of the host country’s cultural background can transform potentially unpleasant misunderstandings into opportunities for deep learning. This is practically true for faculty and students in the university setting.



In some cultures, asking a supervisor/instructor for clarification, having eye contact, calling instructors by their first names, even having an informal environment in the classroom would all be considered impolite because it implies that students don’t have respect for the instructor. In contrast, it is expected in English-speaking countries that if someone does not understand something, they will ask for clarification through questions and positive arguments/discussion. Many times, these cultural differences create confusion for international students as they are not used to this kind of classroom environment. Not surprisingly, this causes communication problems between advisors and students.

A graduate student's success at university is dependent on the supervisor-student relationship. Platt (1989) also points out that the interpersonal relationships which arise as a result of communication tactics are frequently just as significant as the messages that are communicated. The student's linguistic skill is one of the factors that contributes to successful communication and relationship building between an overseas graduate student and his or her supervisor. The difficulty is not in using proper syntax or pronouncing words correctly; rather, it is in striking a balance between being and seeming adequately polite and submissive while yet demonstrating a sufficient level of initiative.

*“Culture [is] those deep, common, unstated experiences which members of a given culture share, which they communicate without knowing, and which form the backdrop against which all other events are judged.”*

Edward T. Hall

Work ethics are also different in different cultures. This can cause significant miscommunication between faculty and students. The American Protestant work ethic, also known as the Calvinist work ethic or the Puritan work ethic, is a work ethic concept in theology, sociology, economics, and history which emphasizes that diligence, discipline,

and frugality are a result of a person's subscription to the values espoused by the Protestant faith. Because international students who come to the United States from different cultural backgrounds and work ethics are not aware of this Puritan work ethic, many times they find themselves in overwhelming situations. Sometimes advisors assume that graduate students know everything about courses and their work responsibilities as a TA or RA. Based on their expectations for graduate students at a US institution, the advisors often don't identify expectations explicitly, which also creates miscommunication and a stressful work environment for the international student.

When I first came to America as an international graduate student, it was not an easy journey. It was not easy to apply for admission, get a visa, move, and leave your country, let alone deal with all the cultural shocks that came with coming to the United States. Understanding and considering these cultural differences as an important subject to be discussed in every department at least once in the beginning of the semester is critical and urgent at this time. §

#### Resources:

Platt, J. (1989). Some types of communicative strategies across cultures: Sense and sensitivity. *English across cultures, cultures across English: A reader in cross-cultural communication*, 13-30.

<https://teaching.uwo.ca/pdf/research/CSIGS.pdf> (This is such a valuable resource for the international students and the cultural differences they face in English speaking countries. Major part of my article is taken/based on this article).

[https://www.google.com/search?q=miscommunication&tbm=isch&hl=en-GB&chips=q:miscommunication,g\\_1:cultural:rMyoD4XRIQ8%3D&client=safari&prmd=inbv&sa=X&ved=2ahUKEwimx8am7qH2AhUVE80KHSYiDzoQ4IYoAnoECAEQHw&biw=1230&bih=720#imgrc=ZxI0j4ZG54RzVM](https://www.google.com/search?q=miscommunication&tbm=isch&hl=en-GB&chips=q:miscommunication,g_1:cultural:rMyoD4XRIQ8%3D&client=safari&prmd=inbv&sa=X&ved=2ahUKEwimx8am7qH2AhUVE80KHSYiDzoQ4IYoAnoECAEQHw&biw=1230&bih=720#imgrc=ZxI0j4ZG54RzVM) (Picture resource)

## Motivation in a Culturally Diverse Environment

Margaret Ménache, ODR Interim Director  
Ombudsperson for Faculty

We assume that certain words and behaviors will be motivating for others because we find them motivating for ourselves or because we have been told they are motivating. And then there's what's often the flip side of motivation - the expression of disapproval for a job not well done - the harsh words of discouragement. Motivational communication, then, must balance getting a job done "properly" with communication that encourages the person to complete the job "successfully."

Being motivated and motivating others has everything to do with assumptions. In critical thinking an assumption is defined as "an unexamined belief, the things we think without realizing that we think them" (e.g. [University of Louisville](#)). It makes evaluating our assumptions tricky at best. I am most aware that I have an assumption, and that it has been violated, when something doesn't turn out the way I expected.

Understanding what motivates you can be a first step in understanding your assumptions about what motivates others. There are likely a billion online tests that are quick, fun, and mostly professionally unvalidated. Still, they offer an opportunity to reflect on your own motivation, and perhaps tease out some of your assumptions about what should motivate others. An interesting resource that provides quite a few tests (most of which *are* validated) may be found [here](#).

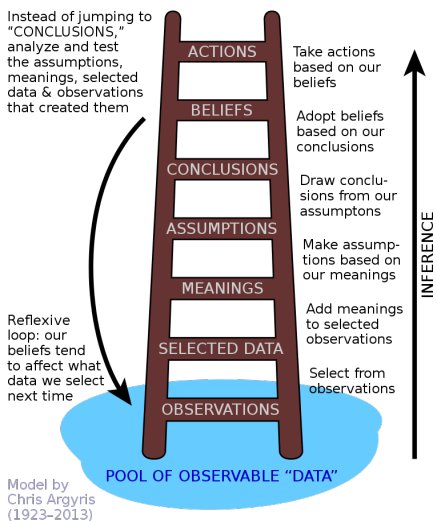
While you might be clear about what motivates you, what motivates others may be completely different. One [online source](#) provides a laundry list of theories of motivation and states that, essentially, motivation can be described as "the force that initiates, guides, and maintains goal-oriented behaviors." If you're not familiar with theories of motivation and want to learn more, theories range from instincts (William James) to humanistic (Abraham Maslow) to expectancy theory (Victor Vroom).

What matters in the academic environment is that we work with communication tools to motivate our students and colleagues to attain a variety of goals. And, we hope to be encouraged by others in our own efforts to attain our goals. I was struck by Chalon's and Aasma's articles with their identification of the importance of clarity in communication so students can best understand what is expected of them.

This is consistent with much of the literature. An online article from the [University of Wisconsin](#) includes general strategies, instructional behaviors, and course structuring. A common thread that runs through the various approaches is clarity and engagement. The article is a quick read and provides references for those who want to work more deeply on improving student outcomes. Vanderbilt University also has information on motivating students on their website. This [link](#) is to a longish article that presents three motivational models as well as some additional strategies for motivating students. There are, of course, also resources available from UNM. [Dr. Gary Smith](#) has been teaching professional learning programs at UNM since 2006. I have benefited from his workshops in the past and highly recommend that you be on the lookout for any opportunity to learn from him or his group.

Layered on top of the issue of motivation itself is the variety of factors, including cultural differences, that cause individuals to interpret the words and expectations of others differently. Rather interestingly, this was not addressed overtly in any of the material I have mentioned above. Yet, the role of cultural differences on a student's academic success and how motivational language is understood should not be

## LADDER OF INFERENCE



The ladder of inference is metaphorical model, created by [Chris Argyris](#) (1923–2013), of how people take action based on an often unconscious process of [inference](#) from the flux or pool of observable "data". Argyris's original ladder had fewer rungs with different names. The names of the rungs of the ladder used here are the same as those found in, e.g.: Ross, Rick (1994). "The ladder of inference". In: Senge, Peter M.; Kleiner, Art; Roberts, Charlotte; Ross, Rick; & Smith, Bryan (eds.), *The fifth discipline fieldbook: strategies and tools for building a learning organization*

minimized. Chris Argyris was a business theorist and co-founder of organization development. He was interested in what he called "learning organizations," essentially the ways in which organizations learn and evolve to meet changing environments. The image on the left is a commonly used ladder showing how individuals act and react when faced with information. Based on one's assumptions and cultural background, a person selects "important" information from the vast array of data that is there and makes decisions on that basis. In some cases, the error has serious consequences, as when an action that is considered respectful in one culture (i.e., not speaking up to a supervisor) is interpreted as poor performance in another.

Differences in interpretation of an expression can have unintended consequences. Railroad metaphors are fairly common in the United States: the light at the end of the tunnel, don't get side-tracked, just the ticket, to name a few. While one person might consider a statement to the effect of "just keep going, you can see the light at the end of the tunnel" to be encouraging and motivating, a person from a different cultural background might have very different imagery associated with trains. I read an article somewhere, that I can no longer find, that suggested that Chinese Americans with family members who worked on the first transcontinental line in the US, Jewish people who lost family members in the concentration camps, Native Americans who watched the destruction of the buffalo as well as the continued losses of their lands, and Indians who recall family

members involved in the uprising against the British Raj, might all find railroad metaphors and analogies unsettling and not motivating at all.

Words and actions that motivate are crucial tools to encourage academic success for ourselves, our fellow faculty members, and our students as well as all the other people with whom we interact on campus and in all areas of our lives. If you are doing something that you think should be encouraging but it seems not to be working that way, you might be able to shift the relationship and the outcomes by looking differently at your mutual expectations from your interactions. §

### Resources:

- Cherry, Kendra. What Motivation Theory Can Tell Us About Human Behavior. Accessed 25 February 2022. <https://www.verywellmind.com/theories-of-motivation-2795720>
- Souders, Beata. 17 Motivation Tools, Worksheets and Activities for You and Your Clients. Accessed 25 February 2022. <https://www.verywellmind.com/theories-of-motivation-2795720>.
- University of Louisville, Ekstrom Library. Critical Thinking and Academic Research: Assumptions. Accessed 25 February 2022. <https://library.louisville.edu/ekstrom/criticalthinking/assumptions>
- University of Wisconsin. Motivating Students. Accessed 25 February 2022. <https://www.uwm.edu/learn/restiptool/motivating-students>
- Yarborough, C. B., & Fedesco, H. N. (2020). Motivating students. Vanderbilt University Center for Teaching. Accessed 25 February 2022. <https://cft.vanderbilt.edu/cft/guides-sub-pages/motivating-students/>