

Leadership and Strategic Management for TB Control Managers

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Leadership and Strategic Management for TB Control Managers

Module 6 | **Communication Skills**





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Introduction

Communication is part of every function of management, including management of health services.

Good communication enhances managerial and leadership skills, as well as personal and role effectiveness. It promotes transparency and harmony in the work environment, leading to greater involvement of staff and effective team and partnership building.

Communication goes beyond simply sending information and ideas from one person to another. It involves both transmitting and understanding the meaning of the message conveyed, and is often directed at changing perceptions and behaviours.

As a TB Programme Manager, you will need to communicate with a variety of people both within as well as outside the TB programme. This module focuses largely on interpersonal communication with your staff to ensure that the work is carried out effectively. It helps you to understand the communication process, the different channels of interpersonal communication, the barriers that may make communication unnecessarily difficult, and ways to improve your own communication skills.

Learning objectives

After completion of this module you should be able to:

1. Define communication;
2. Describe the components of the communication process;
3. Describe the different channels of interpersonal communication;
4. Identify the barriers to effective communication, and
5. Improve your communication skills.

Summary of exercises

This module has three exercises. Plenary discussions will follow each exercise.

1. Brainstorming: identify communication channels
2. Role Play followed by group discussion: demonstrate your communication skills
3. Game: follow instructions
4. Individual written exercise followed by group discussion: Apply your learnt communication skills

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Communication

Communication is the process by which we interact with each other.

It is the flow (transmission and reception) of information, ideas, feelings, attitudes, perception and understanding, both verbally and non-verbally, between two or more parties.

Communication is much more than the use of words, either spoken or written.

It embodies attitudes, behaviour, dress, body language, style and method of presentation, quality of listening and perceptions and interpretations.

It includes all the methods, means, and media of communication (communication technology), all channels, networks, and systems of communication (organizational structures), all person-to-person interactions (interpersonal communication). All aspects of upward, downward and lateral communication and also all kinds of intra-organizational and inter-organizational communication, which may be through speaking, listening, writing and reading are also included.

To communicate effectively, a person or a group has to try to see and feel as the other person or group sees and feels. This does not mean that people or groups always agree. However they can understand each other's point of view. In all cases, good communication can take place only when both parties feel at ease and understand each other.

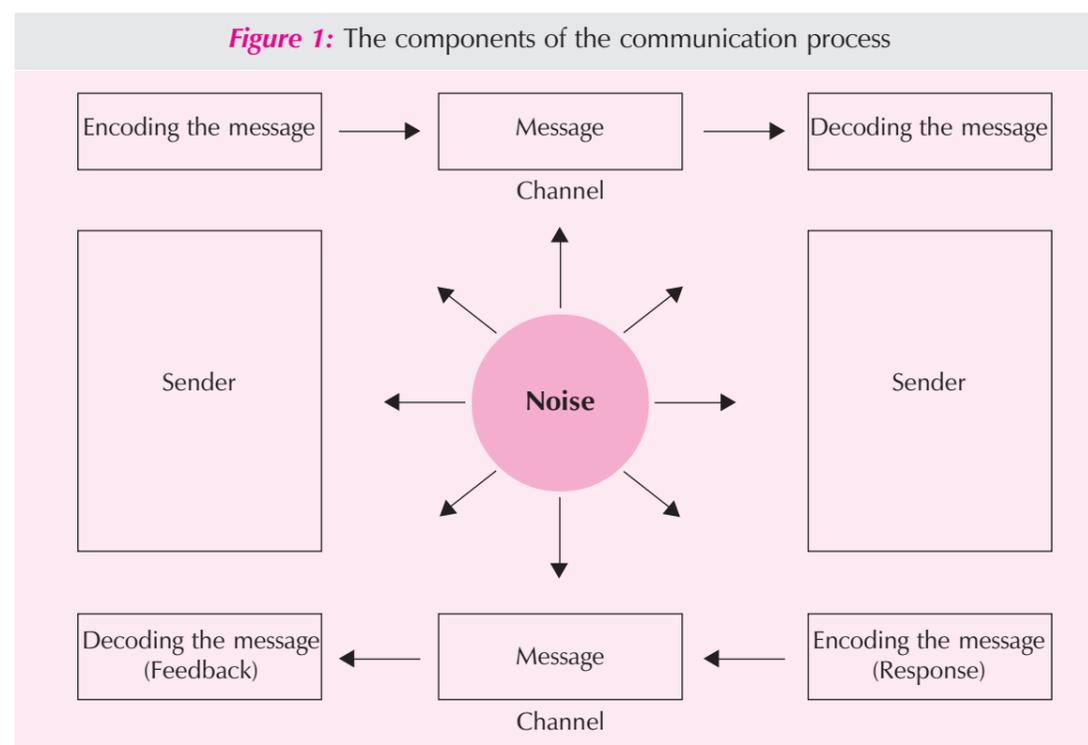
The communication process

Communication involves at least two people – a sender or source and a receiver. Communication takes place for a purpose, is expressed as a message and sent through a channel (for example through a letter or through spoken words) from a source to a receiver. The receiver picks up the message, interprets it and then responds. Communication can be thought of as a process or flow; communication problems occur when there are blocks in that flow.

Understanding can occur only in the receiver's mind. A person may be listening, but not necessarily understanding what is being said. Many employers overlook this fact when giving instructions or explanations. They think that telling someone is sufficient. However communication is only truly successful when the message received is also properly interpreted and understood.

A model for the communication process should answer the following questions: who will say what, how, (through which channel), to whom, and with what effect.

Figure 1 illustrates a model with nine elements that address these questions. Two elements are the major players in a communication, the sender and the receiver; two elements represent the major communication tools, the message and the channel; four elements relate to the major communication functions, encoding, decoding, response and feedback. The last element is "noise" in the communication process.



The nine elements are defined as follows:

The Sender, also called the source of communication, is the person or persons sending a message to another person/s. People are exposed to communications from many different sources and are more likely to believe communication from a person or an organization that they trust. Some factors that build trust are: credibility, age and sex, culture, language, education and communication skills.

Encoding is the process of putting thoughts into symbolic form. The symbols could be in the form of words, images, sounds, smells and even touch. You could use a combination of symbols like text and visuals to convey a particular thought.

The **Message** is a set of symbols that the sender then transmits. The message consists of what is actually communicated including the words, pictures and sounds that are used to get your ideas across. The effectiveness of a message (whether its purpose is achieved) depends upon the way in which the content of the message is organized. The message is **what** you convey.

Presentation is the way a message is constructed to be sent, including the wording, images and the non-verbal signals that are sent out – in short, the way the message is delivered. The way a message is presented depends on attitudes, knowledge and presentation skills. It reflects **how** you convey the message.

Channels refer to mechanisms through which the message moves from the sender to the receiver. There are two main channels, interpersonal and mass media. Interpersonal communication involves all forms of direct interaction between the sender and the receiver including conversations, letters, telephone calls and e-mails, etc. Mass media includes TV, radio and newspapers, etc. Formal channels such as the use of memos are established by organizations to transmit messages that pertain to job-related activities of members.

Decoding is the process by which the receiver assigns meaning to symbols transmitted by the sender. For effective communication to take place, it is important that the decoding process matches that of the encoding process.

The greater the match between encoding and decoding, and the more the receiver understands the sender's purpose in communicating the message, the nature and content of the message, the more effective the communication will be.

The **Receiver**, also called the audience, is the person/persons receiving the message sent by the sender. The first step in planning any communication is to consider the intended audience. All communicators must keep in mind the levels of education and visual literacy, use of media, habits, prevailing culture, interests, age and sex of the receiver, while designing and communicating messages. A method that will be effective with one audience might not be effective with another. For example two people may attend the same sessions at a meeting and see the same poster, but interpret these differently.

Response is a set of reactions on the part of the receiver after receiving the message.

Feedback is part of the receiver's response, that the receiver communicates back to the sender. This usually determines whether a communication has been successful or not. The response

given by the receiver is a measure of how successfully the original message that was sent was conveyed and understood.

Noise is the unplanned distraction/distortion during the communication process, resulting in the receiver receiving a different message from that which the sender sent. Since humans receive a lot of messages simultaneously, it is possible that an important message is left out simply because the human brain filters it away, deciding to pay attention to something else, ignoring this one.

Communication is a process that goes from the sender to the receiver and back.

STOP

Now do Exercise 1

When you have reached this point in the module, you are ready to do Exercise 1. Tell your facilitator when you have reached this point. While you are waiting, read the instructions for Exercise 1 beginning on the next page of this module.

Channels of communication

The most commonly used channels to communicate with staff are as follows:

4.1 Organizational channels

- **Written communication:** Written communication becomes important when certain guidelines/procedures need to be followed. Written communication is also important where there is a need to record certain proceedings or instructions.
- **Notice boards:** Notice boards are useful to communicate messages and instructions where there is no need to have reactions from staff, and to convey routine information.
- **Staff meetings:** Meetings may be called to give staff an opportunity to exchange information, solve problems or to give instructions about a new skill that may need a detailed explanation or demonstration. Meetings do not always have a single purpose or message.
- **Seminars/lectures:** These are held to introduce and explain new concepts, procedures, etc.
- **Training courses:** These are held to update the knowledge and skills of staff.
- **Newsletters:** These can be used to inform people about the progress of the organization. They can also be used to convey information about work in related fields being carried out by other organizations and as a channel for interaction between members of an organization, for example, letters to the editor.

4.2 Interpersonal channels

Managers often communicate orally with staff members on a one-to-one basis, to discuss good or poor performance, to motivate and counsel them, to discuss and solve problems arising at the workplace and to better understand the individual problems of their staff.

They may also communicate in writing with their individual staff members, to give instructions and/or get suggestions.

The channel of communication used depends on the nature and purpose of the message.

Interpersonal communication includes all forms of communication that involve direct interaction between the sender and the receiver.

The most commonly used channels to communicate with staff are through words, both spoken and written. The spoken word (oral communication) is used when managers communicate

face to face with their staff either on a one-to-one basis, or as a group. The main advantages are that it creates opportunities for clarifications, questions, discussion and feedback.

To use this channel effectively, it is important that the talk is brief or only as long as it needs to be and is prepared and structured in advance to include all the points that must be said. This may not be possible all the time, especially when communication takes place spontaneously, or when there is need to issue urgent instructions.

A TB programme manager is also called upon to communicate with the staff through the written word. This arises when communications have to be made related to rules and regulations, notices of meetings and other events, issuance of circulars, memoranda, and communications on confidential matters and other such communications. Some of these are intended to be pinned on office notice boards; others are meant to be more personalized, as in the case of memoranda or confidential notes.

When communications are sent through e-mail, you must be careful to check who else the message is copied to, in order to avoid embarrassment or breach of confidentiality.

Unlike oral communications, feedback on written communication is rarely instant. In fact there may be long delays in seeking clarifications. It is therefore important that the messages conveyed through the written word are clear and unambiguous, concise and to the point.

In general, the language used must lend itself to easy comprehension and spoken or written in a manner that reflects an understanding of sensitivities of the receiver.

In addition to the above, interpersonal communication can also take place through non-verbal means, for example, through body language. Your facial expression, how you sit, the gestures you make, the tone of your voice, all have an influence on the way that the people you are talking to, interpret what you are saying. Agreement, impatience, anger, compassion, disinterest, suspicion and many other feelings, are expressed, often involuntarily, through body language. It is extremely important to recognize this and the impact it can have on your staff.

Barriers to communication

The process of communication is very complex with its various elements and variables. For each of the elements, there are a number of barriers that impede effective communication. They can come up at the level of the sender, the message, the channels of communication or the receiver.

Communication barriers can exist both at the organization level and at interpersonal level.

5.1 Communication barriers at organization level

Physical distance

An important barrier to effective communication, particularly in large organizations, is the distance between people, making messages difficult to send and/or to receive.

Organizational policy and culture

Organizational policy and climate also determine in what manner an employee is expected to communicate. Staff at lower levels within the organization may not communicate easily with staff at higher levels. Conversely, staff at the highest level may not have opportunities to communicate easily with middle-and lower-level staff. This is often the result of policy, specific written orders or, as is more often the case, just be the culture and tradition of the organization.

Attitude of the boss

One common barrier that employees often identify is the 'boss', the top person in the organization. If the boss is unwilling to communicate, all channels of communication are choked. Some bosses consider suggestions from their staff a challenge to their authority. Bosses can also tend to be highly opinionated and not tolerate any deviation from orders issued by them.

Structural Barriers

Each organization develops structures, rules and regulations for achieving its objectives. This involves basic determination of "who says what, who does what job, who makes what decision, who tells what to whom." There is a chain of command for reporting at various levels of authority, based on the principle of unity of command. Rules and regulations prescribe that all upward communication should flow through proper channels and generally, senior staff insist on the strict observance of this procedure.

Fears

Organizational communication is also hindered because of the fear among staff as to how their message will be received. Other barriers include fear of exposing a lack of knowledge, having too little to offer, or even fear of punishment, especially when offering frank criticism or expressing a grievance.

Lack of confidence

Lack of confidence can be the result of some of the barriers already mentioned. There might also be groups in an organization who create a feeling of insecurity among those individuals who do not join such groups. The situation is further complicated by a clash of interests, real or otherwise, between various groups and individuals.

5.2 Communication barriers at interpersonal level

There are various obstacles to communication at the interpersonal level due to perceptions, judgements, emotions, social values and language problems of people.

Barriers at the sender's level

- **Ignorance about the receiver** – if we are not well acquainted with the personality profile, needs, value system and the background of the receiver, the chances are that we may not communicate at the same level of understanding as the receiver.
- **Inadequate knowledge of the topic/subject** – if we do not know the topic/subject well, our presentation may be poor. We may also not be able to clarify any doubts or misconceptions.
- **Inappropriate use of language** – words are the principal tools in our interaction with people. Improper selection of words is a big barrier to communication. In addition words that we use do not mean the same thing to different people.
- **Inadequate talking and listening skills**
Poor talking skills will affect the quality of a presentation. Poor listening skills will also affect our communication. If we do not listen properly to what the receiver is saying in his or her feedback, we will not be able to find out if the message has been properly interpreted. The receiver, in turn, may also stop listening.
- **Wrong volume** – the volume of our voices could also be a barrier to communication, being too low or too loud.
- **Inappropriate timing** – choosing the proper timing for conveying a message, selling an idea, or making a presentation, is essential.
- **Limited perception** – we communicate our messages whether verbally or non-verbally, in the way we perceive them. This may not match the receiver's perception unless care is taken to avoid misunderstandings that could occur.
- **Wrong assumptions** – there are times when we assume that the other person we are talking to is aware of the problem and we start with discussing the solution. This can lead to a complete breakdown in communication, if the person does not even know that there is a problem at all.
- **Negative attitudes** – lack of respect, trust, or sensitivity can cause the receiver to become defensive or hostile, and this can lead to a breakdown in communication. We need to be open and create an atmosphere where the receiver is encouraged to seek clarifications.
- **Poor questioning skills** – Asking proper questions at the proper time can help ensure that the message is interpreted correctly and can help clarify doubts.

- **Situational constraints** – situational factors also cause barriers to interpersonal communication. In a formal setting, people may not speak openly; junior staff, for example, may maintain a certain reserve in an office meeting.
- **Gender insensitivity** – gender insensitive attitudes and behaviour are reflected in the way people communicate, especially in the language they use. This is increasingly being recognized as an important deterrent to effective communication.
- **Insensitivity to non-verbal communication** – if we fail to observe the non-verbal cues that the receiver is sending through body language, we will not be sensitive to his/her needs.
- **Insensitivity to feedback** – the importance of feedback in communication has already been explained. If a sender is insensitive to the feedback given by the receiver, the communication is unlikely to be effective. This feedback may be non-verbal, as is the usual practice, or may be no response at all. However, if the sender does not pick up this feedback and take necessary action, the receiver may soon stop listening.

Barriers at the message level

- **Incoherence** – if the message lacks coherence the receiver is likely to be confused. A long, rambling, disorganized message with lack of clarity and focus, will confuse the receiver. The message needs to be brief, to the point, organized and on the “need-to-know” basis.
- **Attenuation** – in the process of transmission, particularly through hierarchical channels, there is often some loss of content of the original message.
- **Delay** – one of the most serious problems is the time lapse between the transmission of message and completion of the communication loop.
- **Inappropriate language** – Assumptions, use of jargon, code words and acronyms unfamiliar to the receiver can lead to confusion. Judgemental language may make the receiver distrustful and aggressive.
- **Poor non-verbal presentation** is when we are not aware of the messages we might be sending through body language. Our postures, gestures, facial expressions and eye contact with the receiver, all send non-verbal messages. Non-verbal messages should be consistent with verbal messages, for communication to be effective.

Barriers at the channel level

Use of inappropriate channel – For example, if a delicate matter has to be discussed with a staff member, you would possibly get a better response if you use the person-to-person verbal approach rather than sending a warning memo, posting your findings on the notice board or discussing the matter at an open meeting. On the other hand, if you intend to issue a long list of instructions, it would be more appropriate to communicate these through a written communication.

Barriers at the receiver’s level

- **Misperception or selective perception** – selective perception means seeing what one wants to see. In our day-to-day activities, we tend to see those things which we find

interesting, and to reject or ignore unpleasant things. Also, as noted earlier, the receiver's perception might be different from that of the sender.

- **Misinterpretation and language/semantic problem** – as already stated, words mean different things to different people. If we assume that the other person uses words in the same way as we do, we are likely to be misunderstood.
- **Preconceived ideas, cynicism and biases** – these build attitudes that do not easily accept the rationality of the messages being conveyed
- **Distrust** – if the listener does not trust the person who is talking, the entire effort in this regard may be counter-productive. Low levels of trust develop when people try to manipulate, filter information, are insincere, hypocritical or deliberately or unconsciously hold back relevant information.
- **Evaluation** – listeners often have a tendency to jump to conclusions even before getting the full message. Evaluating a message in this manner hinders communication.

Noise

- **Distracting environmental noises** – These act as barriers to interpersonal communication as they prevent or reduce the sending and receiving of messages.
- **Distracting "internal" noise** – Pre-occupation, mental worry, day dreaming etc. all act as internal noise and interfere with proper communication.
- **Interruption** – Constant irrelevant interruptions from external sources tend to destroy the communication process, as they use up the time necessary for the entire communication to take place.
- **Timeframe** – Sometimes the time available for transmitting information is too short, especially when one is required to explain an intricate subject in a matter of minutes to someone who knows nothing about it.
- **Distortion** – Communication is distorted as it passes from one person to another. The greater the number of people involved in transmitting the message, the greater the chances of distortion.

STOP

Now do Exercise 2

When you have reached this point in the module, you are ready to do Exercise 2. Tell your facilitator when you have reached this point. While you are waiting, read the instructions for Exercise 2 beginning on the next page of this module.



Exercise 2

Role-play followed by group discussion: Demonstrate your communication skills

For this exercise you will work in groups of three to enact a role play.

In the role-play, one person will act as a supervisor, one as a staff member, and one as an observer. Then you will change roles and repeat the role play. By repeating the role play several times, each person will eventually have a turn in each role.

Instructions for the manager

As a manager you have been noticing over some time that the quarterly reports from district A have been very late and that the analysis of data seems to be quite superficial. The district TB coordinator was also not available during your last supervisory visit. You have now scheduled a specific meeting with the district TB coordinator to discuss this problem. In this role play, you as the supervisor, will discuss the problem regarding delayed reports. Your goal is to use good communication skills, be supportive and solve the problem.

Instructions for the district TB coordinator

As the district TB coordinator, you should respond realistically to your supervisor. You know that your work has not been completely satisfactory lately, but you do not want to discuss with your supervisor and were therefore absent during his last visit.

Each role-play should last for about 10 minutes.

Instructions for the observer

Refer to the questions below as you observe the role-play. After the role-play, comment on what was done well and what could be improved.

- (1) What was the attitude of the sender? Did the sender show empathy, understanding and respect? Was there rapport and trust building?



(2) Was the message clear, to the point, and understandable (language used)?

(3) Was the channel used appropriate?

(4) Was the sender sensitive to feedback?

(5) Did the communication result in a positive reaction/response?

(6) Were there any barriers to communication?





(7) Were these overcome? If not, what could have been done?

Inform your facilitator when everyone in your group has had a turn playing the role of a supervisor in this exercise. When everyone is ready, there will be a group discussion.





Exercise 3

Game: Follow instructions

The purpose of this exercise is to practise following instructions in two different communication settings. Your facilitator will read out the instructions to you. Write down your answers – a drawing – in the space below.

Situation 1: One-way communication:

Situation 2: Two-way communication:



Ways to improve communication

Once you are aware of all the aspects influencing effective communication, you can start improving your own communication skills. The following suggestions will help you to improve your communication skills and overcome any communication barriers in conveying your messages:

- **Know what you are talking about** – Be clear about the subject and stick to the main theme of the topic when explaining it to someone else. Prepare yourself before communicating with another person.
- **Know your receiver/audience** – To keep the receiver involved in the subject or discussion, and to communicate at the same level of understanding, you need to be familiar with the background, personality, needs and value systems of the receiver.
- **Establish rapport** – People communicate effectively when they are at ease with one another. Communication is an ongoing process that involves the active participation of all concerned. Show interest in the other person, as this is the best way of getting their attention and acceptance.
- **Encourage audience participation** – This is especially essential when unfamiliar or difficult issues are being discussed and collective decisions sought.
- **Build trust** – To build trust, it is important to create an atmosphere of confidentiality; one in which people are able to speak openly.
- **Do not antagonize people** – Take care of the feelings of people while talking to them. Avoid using emotionally loaded words that may offend. Talk to people as equals and not as seniors or juniors. Respect cultural sensitivities and religious sentiments.
- **Avoid ambiguity** – Be specific while giving instructions or explanations. Avoid vague statements such as “take appropriate action” or “make suitable arrangements”. State exactly what needs to be done, as for example “put up all the posters we have on DOTS”, “update all our record books”, “keep at least three patients for the doctor to see and talk to”.
- **Be brief** – It is best to be direct and to the point. Reinforce the main points with examples if necessary.
- **Be aware of language** – Explain special terms that may be unfamiliar to the listener. Avoid using jargon or speaking in a way to impress the listener. If the language being used to communicate is a foreign or second language, it is best to use simple words and sentences.
- **Integrate your words, gestures and tone** – The way you say something is just as important as what you say. Remember to adjust your tone and volume (not too loud, not too soft). A cheerful “good morning” delivered with a smile is likely to get in return, an equally cheerful response, certainly more readily than a greeting muttered with a frowning face.

- **Listen to yourself** – If people do not understand you, the trouble may be in the way you speak. It is important to pronounce words clearly and slowly to be well understood.
- **Develop listening skills** – As communication is a two-way process, it is as important to listen as it is to speak properly. Sometimes we do not listen properly for a number of reasons, such as boredom, bias, fear of being influenced, interruptions, etc.
- **Be sensitive to feedback** – Feedback from the listener needs to be recognized by the sender, even when it is non-verbal (example yawning, being distracted, etc.). If what you are saying is not being registered or has the wrong effect, change your communication approach.
- **Choose a proper timing and situation** – Ensure that enough time is available and that there are no unnecessary interruptions.
- **Ask questions** to verify if your communication has been received in the way it was intended.
- **Encourage questions** – This will help to clarify doubts and misconceptions. The message will then be understood better.

STOP

Now do Exercise 4

When you have reached this point in the module, you are ready to do Exercise 4. Tell your facilitator when you have reached this point. While you are waiting, read the instructions for Exercise 4 beginning on the next page of this module.



Exercise 4

Individual written exercise followed by group discussion: Apply the communication skills that you have learnt

In this exercise you will, in your small group, apply the communication skills that we have just learnt about.

Two situations are listed below. Read them carefully and fill in the columns your responses in the worksheet provided on the next page.

Share your responses in the group discussion that will follow.

Situation 1

During your visits to the field as the district TB officer, you discover that the DOTS provider is seldom found in the villages covered by him. You are upset about this and on your return to your office, meet with concerned staff to deal with the problem.

Situation 2

You have recently taken over as the state/province TB Programme Manager. On your rounds of some of the districts you are told that there is a rising trend among people to go to private practitioners for treatment instead of to government clinics. You want to know the reasons for this and meet with concerned staff in your office to address the problem.



Exercise 3

Worksheet

Situation 1

The problem	What would you communicate?	To whom?	What channel would you use?	What are the possible communication barriers?	What skills will you apply to overcome these barriers?

Situation 2

The problem	What would you communicate?	To whom?	What channel would you use?	What are the possible communication barriers?	What skills will you apply to overcome these barriers?

Let your facilitator know when you have finished this exercise.

Summary of important points

- Communication is a two-way process through which we interact with each other.
- Effective interpersonal communication is essential for TB control managers and is important for every aspect of their role/functions.
- Good communication enhances managerial and leadership skills, personal and role effectiveness, and helps in team and partnership building.
- The nine elements in the communication process are: sender, encoding, message, channel, decoding, receiver, noise, response and feedback.
- These elements form a flow of communication and any blocks in any of the elements can result in a barrier to communication.
- One can improve one's interpersonal communication by being aware of all the above elements and by practising them to avoid any obstacles in communication.

