

Achieving Shared Understanding Facilitator Guide

Leader Professional Development
United States Army
Center for Army Leadership



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Introduction

WHO IS CAL

The Center for Army Leadership (CAL) is the Army's designated action agent for Leader Development and Leadership in the areas of research, assessment, doctrine, initiative management, and quality assurance to sustain excellence in the Army's core competency of growing leaders.

INTENT OF THE LEADER PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT KITS

Leadership is the unifying and multiplying element of combat power (ADP 6-0). Leader development programs are a proven method organizations can use to ensure regular improvement and refinement of critical leadership skills. In 2022, CAL began the design and development of a collection of ready-made Leader Professional Development (LPD) kits that you can use to deliver professional development sessions. These LPD sessions are designed to address topics of need; educate you on the Army Leadership Requirements Model (ADP 6-22); generate group discussion by asking thought-provoking questions; help you identify gaps in your unit, team, or organization; and determine actions leaders can take to improve the gaps.

It takes a lot of effort to create slides and briefing materials. Knowing that every Soldier's time is valuable, CAL created a pre-packaged set of materials (slides, facilitator guide, etc.) with everything you need to conduct an LPD. Now you can focus on learning and presenting the materials. Use this LPD kit as an opportunity to have a leader development discussion with others. The intent isn't for you to lecture for an entire session or read slides verbatim. Instead, think about the content, put it in the context of your unit, and get your audience talking about how to improve as Army leaders and a team.

CONTACT DETAILS

If you have any questions about the LPD kits or have suggestions for additional topics, please contact CAL at usarmy.leavenworth.tradoc.mbx.cal@army.mil.

You can also connect with CAL in the following ways:

- On the web: <https://cal.army.mil/>
- On Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/USArmyCAL>
- On Instagram: <https://www.instagram.com/usarmycal>
- On Twitter: <https://twitter.com/USArmyCAL>
- On YouTube: <https://www.youtube.com/@USArmyCAL>

You can find the materials for this LPD, as well as others, at the CAL website at <https://cal.army.mil>.

Overview

PURPOSE OF THIS SESSION

The goal of this session is to teach Army leaders methods for achieving a shared understanding when communicating with superiors, peers, and subordinates.

The specific learning objectives for this session include:

- Describe the importance of shared understanding.
- Discuss methods for achieving a shared understanding.
- Discuss how to determine whether you've achieved a shared understanding.

TARGET AUDIENCE

The target audience encompasses all Army leaders.

The optimal facilitator-to-learners ratio for this LPD session is one facilitator to approximately 20 participants. If the anticipated audience is to be more than 20 participants, those organizing the session should consider having multiple facilitators.

NOTE: If the anticipated audience is greater than 50 participants, some features of this Facilitator Guide will have to be adapted. For example, instead of conducting whole group discussions, you may need to split the audience into smaller groups to ensure everyone has an opportunity to contribute. To facilitate group discussions, the allotted time may also need to be increased.

RECOMMENDED MATERIALS

The following table lists recommended materials and equipment for facilitating this session. While these are recommended, not all of the listed equipment is required. For example, if you deliver the session out in the field and do not have access to a computer, monitor, or projector, you can still facilitate the session using just this facilitator guide and participant packets.

Materials	Quantity
Quick Start Guide	1 per facilitator
This Facilitator Guide	1 per facilitator
Participant Packet <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • After Action Review Form 	1 per participant
PowerPoint Slides	1 per facilitator
PC Computer or Laptop	1 per facilitator
Monitor or Projector and A/V cables	1 per room
Screen (if projecting)	1 per room
Chart Paper and Markers or White Board and Dry Erase Markers	1 per room

Documents can be accessed on the CAL website here: <https://cal.army.mil>

AGENDA

The session is designed to be presented in a 48-minute block of time. Later in this guide, you will see the suggested timing for each individual slide, from which the below duration times were calculated.

Segments	Duration
Session Opening	2.5 mins
The Importance of Shared Understanding	6 mins
How to Achieve a Shared Understanding	22.5 mins
Determining Whether You've Achieved a Shared Understanding	14 mins
Session Closing	3 mins
Total Duration	48 mins







PREPARING FOR YOUR LPD SESSION

This facilitator guide aims to provide all of the information necessary to lead a successful session and discussion on this topic. To that aim, here are steps that you should take before the session.

1. Read through this facilitator guide and review the PowerPoint slides. Make sure you feel comfortable speaking to the key points and leading the discussion(s). Based on the audience, prepare to modify discussion questions to ensure they are meaningful and apply to your specific unit/organization. The more you can get the audience discussing how they can improve the organization by applying the material, the better.
2. Be prepared to include personal experiences related to the topic or familiarize yourself with examples you can reference throughout the session. Real-life examples help tie together the individual segments, engage the audience, and enable learners to connect the content to their day-to-day jobs. Feel free to add short video clips or other materials you think the audience would find engaging.
3. Familiarize yourself with the suggested timing of slides and discussion activities.
4. Determine the anticipated audience size. Recruit additional facilitators or plan for modifications to the session if the audience size exceeds 20 participants.
5. Invite the commanding officer or organization director to speak at the beginning of the session to introduce the purpose/intent of the session. This will increase audience engagement and attention.
6. Review the additional resources so you can direct the audience to the appropriate information. Share the resources electronically via email before the session. Print participant packets ahead of the session.

HOW TO USE THIS GUIDE

The facilitator guide contains PowerPoint slides embedded with facilitation notes and discussion questions to guide you through the session. The facilitation notes include icon cues that are designed to provide visual references for you as to the type of action required, operational instructions, or other special points (e.g., discussion). Each icon is described below.

Icons	Icon Name	Descriptions
	Slide	This icon indicates that a slide should be presented. An image of each slide in the associated PowerPoint is provided. These slides help you identify which slide goes with each instructional strategy, duration, and key points.
	Duration	This icon indicates the suggested amount of time to spend on each slide.
	Key Points	This icon indicates the key points that should be covered. Although you should not read the key points verbatim during the session, you can read through it beforehand to familiarize yourself with the content.
	Discussion	This icon indicates that a discussion should be facilitated.
	Activity	This icon indicates that an activity should be facilitated.
	Resources	This icon indicates when any resource (handout, case study, example, article, etc.) should be used.

How to Facilitate This LPD Session

This section provides you with details on how to facilitate each slide in the session.

SESSION OPENING – SLIDE 1

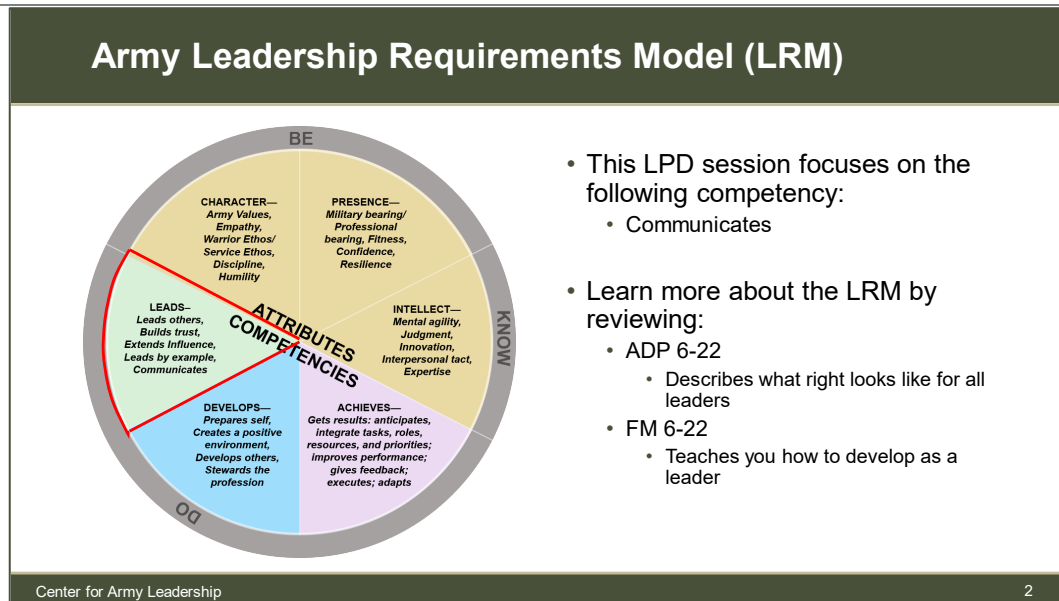


1 minute



- Welcome participants to this session on Achieving Shared Understanding. This session is part of the Leader Professional Development series designed to address and generate discussion about various topics of importance and determine actions you can take to improve your organizations.
- Explain that in today's Army, with its lightning fast OPTEMPO, it's important to ensure that the orders you receive and give are clearly understood by all. With the cost of misunderstanding potentially great, it benefits every leader to ensure that they're achieving a shared understanding up and down their chain of command. When members have a shared understanding, their units or organizations are more likely to achieve mission success.
- Explain that in this session, you will learn methods for achieving a shared understanding when communicating with superiors, peers, and subordinates.

ARMY LEADERSHIP REQUIREMENTS MODEL (LRM) – SLIDE 2



- This LPD session focuses on the following competency:
 - Communicates
- Learn more about the LRM by reviewing:
 - ADP 6-22
 - Describes what right looks like for all leaders
 - FM 6-22
 - Teaches you how to develop as a leader



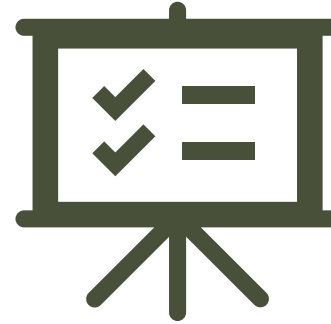
30 seconds



- Explain that it's important that everyone be familiar with the Army Leadership Requirements Model, which lays out the core set of requirements of what the Army expects all leaders to be, to know, and to do. By understanding these expectations, you will be better prepared to deal with a range and variety of situations. Soldiers who regularly and successfully apply these expectations have better trained units, command climates, and leaders who possess the necessary skills to win the fight. The Leadership Requirements Model can be found in ADP 6-22 and FM 6-22, which you should also take some time to check out if you haven't already. ADP 6-22 describes what right looks like for all leaders, and FM 6-22 tells you how to develop as a leader.
- Point out that this leader professional development session ties directly to the Communicates competency under the Leads section of the model. The key to effective communication is ensuring you have a shared understanding with whomever you're communicating.

SESSION OBJECTIVES – SLIDE 3**Session Objectives**

- Describe the importance of shared understanding.
- Discuss methods for achieving a shared understanding.
- Discuss how to determine whether you've achieved a shared understanding.



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5 minutes



- Explain that by the end of this session, you will be able to:
 - Describe the importance of shared understanding.
 - Discuss methods for achieving a shared understanding.
 - Discuss how to determine whether you've achieved a shared understanding.
- To help make this session as impactful as possible, encourage participants to contribute to the discussions with their own perspectives, reflections, and experiences.

THE IMPORTANCE OF SHARED UNDERSTANDING – SLIDE 4

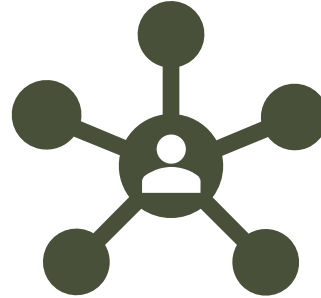
30 seconds



- Explain that in this section, we will talk about why shared understanding is important.

WHAT IS SHARED UNDERSTANDING – SLIDE 5**What Is Shared Understanding**

- Ensuring everyone has the same interpretation of information being communicated



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1 minute



- Explain that shared understanding means ensuring all parties have the same interpretation of events, interpret the communication engagement in a common manner, and are striving toward the same goal or goals.

BENEFITS OF ACHIEVING SHARED UNDERSTANDING – SLIDE 6**Benefits of Achieving Shared Understanding**

Increases mission effectiveness



Builds trust with those under your command



Reduces stress within your unit/organization

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2 minutes



- Explain that the benefits of having a shared understanding between you and your superiors, peers, and subordinates cannot be overstated.
 - **Increases mission effectiveness** – As a leader, it's your responsibility to ensure that everyone under your command understands your vision, intent, and purpose. With this shared understanding, the team will feel committed to and have personal ownership over the mission and will be able to work together toward a common goal. Shared understanding also helps to improve communication within the unit. Your Soldiers can spend less time trying to get a sense of what you want and more time executing the mission.
 - **Builds trust with those under your command** – Ensuring that everyone clearly understands what is expected of them and what they can expect from you helps to build trust. You can also build trust by asking questions and actively listening to your team to show that you value their input. Another way to build trust is to be open and honest with your team. You can demonstrate these characteristics by making sure your team knows the rationale for your point of view and your interpretation of the mission goals.
 - **Reduces stress within your unit/organization** – We all know what happens when subordinates don't have the full story. The vacuum caused by a lack of shared understanding is often filled with false information, which can cause a great deal of confusion and stress within the unit. Shared understanding results in all of your Soldiers having the necessary facts and information they need to make good decisions and take the right courses of action.

DISCUSSION – SLIDE 7



Discussion



- Share examples of both good and bad personal experiences you've had with shared understanding.

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3 minutes



- Ask participants:
 - Share examples of both good and bad personal experiences you've had with shared understanding.

Responses will vary.

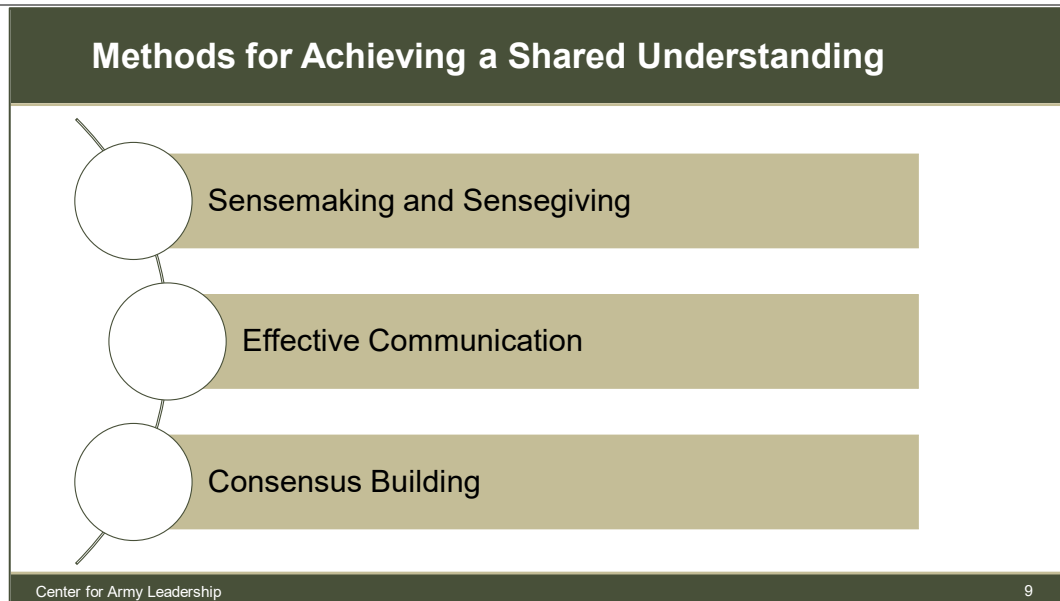
HOW TO ACHIEVE SHARED UNDERSTANDING – SLIDE 8



30 seconds



- Explain that now that you know the benefits, let's talk about how to achieve shared understanding.
-

METHODS FOR ACHIEVING A SHARED UNDERSTANDING – SLIDE 9

1 minute



- Explain that a large part of achieving shared understanding is the ability to effectively communicate; however, this is only a part of the overall task of attaining a common understanding.
- Explain that this LPD covers three primary methods for achieving shared understanding: sensemaking and sensegiving, effective communication, and consensus building. We'll discuss each of these methods in more detail in the upcoming slides.
- Point out that different methods work better in varying situations. You can use a single method or use a combination of methods to help you achieve shared understanding.

SENSEMAKING AND SENSEGIVING – SLIDE 10



Sensemaking and Sensegiving

Sensemaking =
Interpreting events to
understand their
meaning

Sensegiving = Helping
another individual or
group make sense of a
concept or event

Best used in uncertain or ambiguous situations

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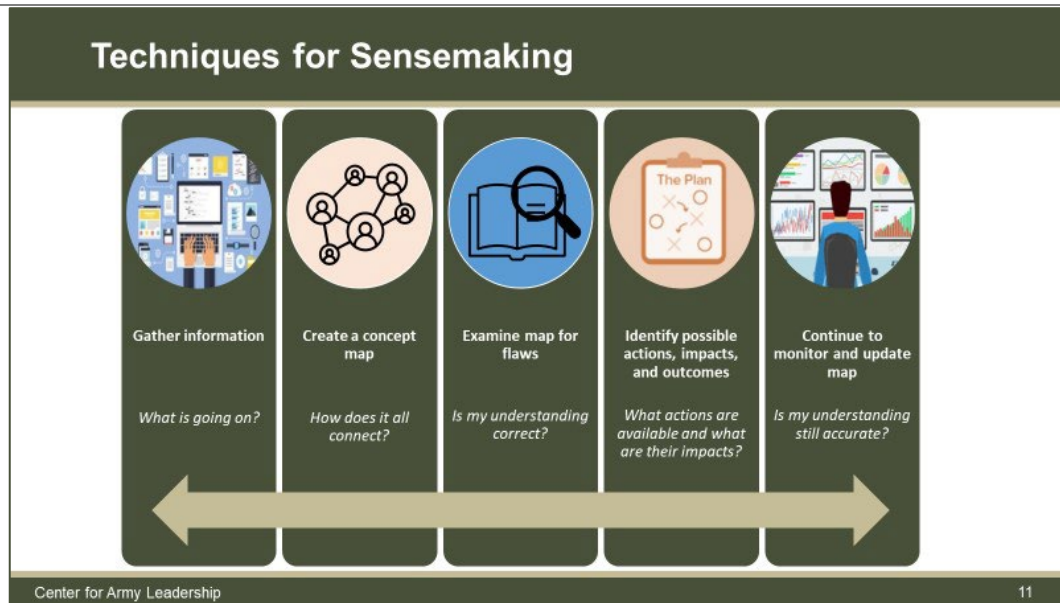


2.5 minutes



- Explain that **sensemaking** is the interpretation of events to understand their meaning and implications.
 - It's like putting together the pieces of a jigsaw puzzle in your brain. It involves assessing situations and drawing conclusions based on cues, given conditions, and context.
 - Usually when we perceive something in our environment, the meaning is obvious. For instance, if we see a traffic backup around a football stadium on Sunday, we'll likely conclude that fans are showing up for the game. However, sometimes the meaning behind a situation isn't clear; as a result, we have to actively work to find meaning to achieve an understanding of the situation.
- Explain that **sensegiving** is the flip side of sensemaking. Sensegiving involves helping another individual or group make sense of a concept or event.
 - For example, when you are new to an organization, you may complain about something because you don't understand why certain decisions were made. Someone with more experience needs to take you aside to explain that the CDR is doing this because of X, Y, and Z.
- Point out that sensemaking and sensegiving are best used in uncertain or ambiguous situations.

TECHNIQUES FOR SENSEMAKING – SLIDE 11

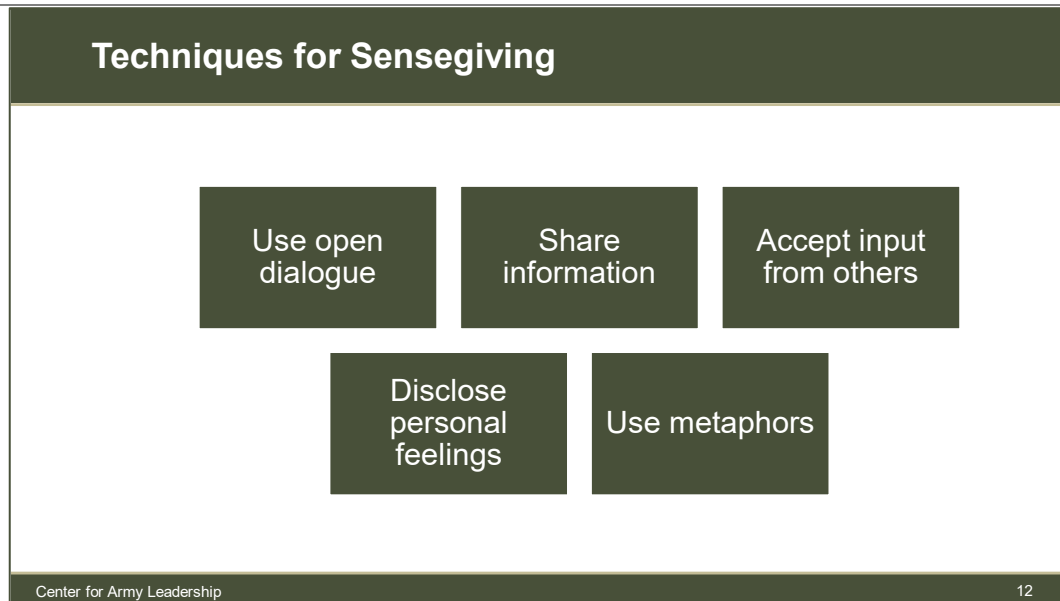


3 minutes



- Explain that sensemaking is a cyclical and continuous thought process that consists of five steps:
 - **Gather information** – The central question that needs to be answered is: What is going on? Information gathering is necessary to form an accurate understanding of the situation. You should start by identifying what you need to know to frame the situation. You can pull from your own observations, knowledge, and experience and verify your perspective with other sources. When identifying other sources of information, consider the credibility, knowledge, awareness, and objectivity of the source.
 - **Create a concept map** – The central question that needs to be answered is: How does it all connect? Concept maps are a graphical tool that are used to visualize meaningful relationships among aspects of a situation. The maps illustrate one's mental representation of situations. In other words, they provide an external picture of individuals' internal perceptions.
 - **Examine map for flaws** – The central question that needs to be answered is: Is my understanding correct? To answer this question, share your concept map with others to get their feedback.
 - **Identify possible actions, impacts, and outcomes** – The central question that needs to be answered is: What actions are available and what are their impacts? With the concept map in hand, determine what actions can be taken to resolve the situation.
 - **Continue to monitor and update map** – The central question that needs to be answered is: Is my understanding (and thus, the concept map) still accurate? To answer this question, you must stay alert to changes to the environment or situation. New information should continue to fit into the concept map. If it doesn't, the concept map needs to be updated.

TECHNIQUES FOR SENSEGIVING – SLIDE 12



3 minutes



- Explain that many methods of sensegiving are mirror images of sensemaking:
 - **Use open dialogue** – Sensegiving is a free exchange of ideas. Try not to use innuendo, jargon, or implication. Strive for transparency, which means allowing your subordinates to follow your train of thought and understand how you think. This behavior allows others to assess your competence and morality, which allows them to “buy in” to your understanding.
 - **Share information** – You cannot expect others to have the same understanding as you do if you hold back part of the information necessary to process the situation or issue. This is even more important in a joint, combined, or multinational operational environment.
 - **Accept input from others** – You learned in sensemaking that the best way to make sense of something is to involve others and gain their perspective. This is also true of sensegiving. Actively listen and accept input, questions, debate, and healthy skepticism from others, which helps them feel valued and part of the process.
 - **Disclose personal feelings** – Many of us are taught from a young age to hide our personal feelings when dealing with others. The opposite is true when using sensegiving to achieve a shared understanding. Don’t be afraid to disclose personal feelings, which helps develop transparency and build trust. Others get to know you better that way and how you think.
 - **Use metaphors** – Metaphors and analogies can be very useful in communicating an idea that helps lead to a shared understanding. For example, you can refer to solving the issue or problem at hand as “peeling back an onion” as you explore various layers of what you’re trying to give a sense of.

EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION – SLIDE 13**Effective Communication****Involves:**

- Setting the standards and goals for communicating with those from whom you seek a shared understanding
- Being clear and concise
- Actively listening to others

Can be used:

- Anytime you are trying to convey or obtain information from another person or group
- On its own or in conjunction with other methods discussed in this session

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1 minute



- Explain that another method you can use to achieve shared understanding is effective communication. This method involves setting the standards and goals for communicating with those from whom you seek a shared understanding, being clear and concise, and actively listening to others.
- Explain that effective communication can be used anytime you are trying to convey or obtain information from another person or group of people. Effective communication can be used on its own or in conjunction with the other methods discussed in this session.

TECHNIQUES FOR EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION – SLIDE 14



Techniques for Effective Communication

Planning

Set standards

Credibility

Clarity

Active Listening

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2 minutes



- Explain that the following effective communication techniques can help you achieve a shared understanding:
 - **Planning** – Proactively planning what you’re going to communicate helps boost shared understanding, increase efficiency, and minimize wasted effort. Provide information with sufficient detail for the purposes of the exchange. Avoid extraneous information.
 - **Set standards** – Setting standards for how you communicate within your unit will help ensure messages are clear and understood by all members.
 - **Credibility** – To be an effective communicator, you must establish your credibility. Don’t say anything you believe to be false or for which you lack sufficient evidence.
 - **Clarity** – Express your thoughts directly and clearly. Avoid ambiguity. Be relevant. Be orderly. Be brief.
 - **Active Listening** – Take the time to actively listen to your subordinates and help them achieve understanding. Do not interrupt the speaker. Paraphrase the speaker’s words. Observe the speaker’s behavior and body language. Note not only the content of the message but the feeling or attitude underlying the content.

CONSENSUS BUILDING – SLIDE 15**Consensus Building**

- Consensus building is the process of seeking agreement between two or more stakeholders.



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1 minute



- Explain that the third method that we'll discuss today for achieving a shared understanding is consensus building.
- Consensus building is the process of seeking agreement between two or more stakeholders. It involves getting everyone to agree that the selected solution is the best given the circumstances, even if it's not the best for each individual stakeholder. The goal is to get everyone to agree with the decision that is made, so there is a sense of ownership; everyone is a stakeholder in the decision.
- Point out that consensus building is useful in any group setting but especially for combined, joint, or multinational situations where you're apt to have many different points of view.

TECHNIQUES FOR CONSENSUS BUILDING – SLIDE 16



Techniques for Consensus Building

Use working groups

Verbalize your vision clearly

Link the present to the past

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1 minute



- Explain that some techniques to use when building consensus include the following:
 - **Use working groups** – Working together in a group brainstorming session encourages everyone to express their ideas and perspectives, which helps to build alignment and understanding between stakeholders.
 - **Verbalize your vision clearly** – To build consensus, you must get others to follow. Clearly verbalize your vision using labels and slogans. UPS uses the slogan, “We run the tightest ship in the shipping industry.” That slogan helps build consensus among UPS employees, as well as their stockholders and customers, as to what is important to the company. To build consensus, you may have to break down any physical, psychological, or structural gaps between you and your followers. To do that, you must know your audience.
 - **Link the present to the past** – Another technique that helps build consensus is to link present behaviors to past events by citing historical examples. You can also link the group’s values, identities, and behaviors with a vivid and positive vision of the future. Convince them of the wisdom of following the group’s direction by giving them a picture of what success will look like. Help them visualize the outcome.

DISCUSSION – SLIDE 17



Discussion



- What are some methods you've used to develop a shared understanding? Did some methods work better than others? Why?

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5 minutes



- Ask participants:
 - What are some methods you've used to develop a shared understanding? Did some methods work better than others? Why?

Responses will vary.

DETERMINING WHETHER YOU'VE ACHIEVED A SHARED UNDERSTANDING – SLIDE 18



30 seconds



- Explain that in this last section, we'll discuss strategies for assessing whether you've successfully achieved a shared understanding.

DISCUSSION – SLIDE 19



Discussion



- How do you know whether or not you've been successful in achieving a shared understanding? What are some of the signs?

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3 minutes



- Ask participants:

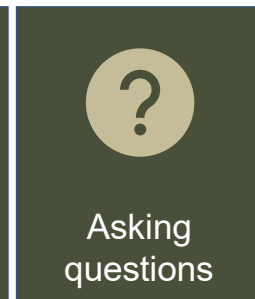
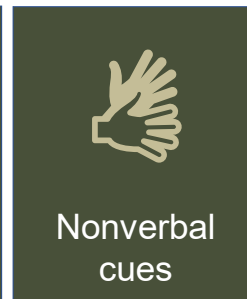
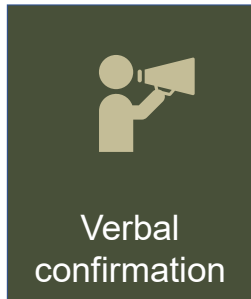
- How do you know whether or not you've been successful in achieving a shared understanding? What are some of the signs?

Responses will vary, but signs may include verbal confirmation, paraphrasing what you said, and nonverbal cues. We will learn more on the next slide.

INDICATORS OF SHARED UNDERSTANDING – SLIDE 20



Indicators of Shared Understanding



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2 minutes



- Explain that some indicators that you're reaching a shared understanding with someone may include:
 - **Verbal confirmation** – People may verbally confirm that they understand your message by saying things like "I understand," "I get it," or "That makes sense." This is a clear and direct way of indicating understanding.
 - **Paraphrasing** – When people paraphrase or repeat back what you said in their own words, it can be an indication that they have understood your message. This demonstrates that they have processed the information and are able to articulate it in their own words.
 - **Nonverbal cues** – People may also use nonverbal cues to indicate that they understand your message. For example, they may nod their head, maintain eye contact, or give a thumbs up. These cues suggest that they are engaged and receptive to what you are saying.
 - **Asking Questions** – If people ask questions to clarify your message or seek further information, it can indicate that they are actively processing the information and trying to understand it fully.

TECHNIQUES FOR ASSESSING SHARED UNDERSTANDING – SLIDE 21



Techniques for Assessing Shared Understanding

Back briefs

Observation of practice and rehearsal

Battlefield circulation

Interpreting feedback

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2 minutes



- Explain that methods you can use to assess shared understanding are through:
 - **Back briefs** – The person or people receiving the instructions give a synopsis of the instructions they just received. The person originally giving the instructions can then determine whether the message was received properly.
 - **Observation of practice and rehearsal** – Observe your Soldiers while they rehearse and practice drills and exercises to help you determine if Soldiers understood your intent, commander's intent, etc.
 - **Battlefield circulation** – You won't have a clear picture of whether your message was received and understood until you get out with your troops. Get out and walk around the motor pool, the hangar, etc. You can get a first-hand assessment of whether your Soldiers truly understand your message and are executing it correctly. It's also an excellent way to get immediate feedback.
 - **Interpreting feedback** – Watching for both verbal and nonverbal cues will help you determine whether you've been successful at reaching a shared understanding with members of your unit/organization.

DISCUSSION – SLIDE 22



Discussion



- What is one thing you can do to try to improve shared understanding in your unit/organization?
- As the Army moves toward Large Scale Combat Operations (LCSO), how important do you think achieving understanding is? Explain.

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5 minutes



- Ask participants:
 - What is one thing you can do to try to improve shared understanding in your unit/organization?
Responses will vary.
 - As the Army moves toward Large Scale Combat Operations (LCSO), how will achieving shared understanding become even more important?
Responses will vary.

WANT TO LEARN MORE? – SLIDE 23**Want to Learn More?**

<https://cal.army.mil>

**Doctrine**

Provides leader expectations

- ADP 6-22
 - Paragraphs 5-73 through 5-80
- FM 6-22
 - Paragraph 4-79
 - Table 4-46

**Self-paced Online Lessons**

Provide additional content and real-world examples/scenarios

- Achieving Shared Understanding

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23



1 minute



- Point out that, given the time constraints, we weren't able to cover everything in detail. To learn more about [topic], go to the CAL site and check out these resources.

AFTER ACTION REVIEW – SLIDE 24**After Action Review**

- Complete the AAR form in your Participant Packet and return it to the facilitator.
 - The form allows you to provide feedback about this session.
 - Your feedback will be used to improve future deliveries of this session.

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1 minute



- At the end of the session, tell participants to complete the AAR form in their Participant Packet (also on the next page for your reference) and to return it to you before they leave.



- Tell participants that:
 - The form allows them to provide feedback about the session.
 - Their feedback will be used to improve future deliveries of the session.

Achieving Shared Understanding After Action Review Form

Purpose

The purpose of this After Action Review (AAR) is to help your organization improve its Leader Professional Development (LPD) program. Your feedback will help identify areas of this session that went well and areas that could be improved.

Session Goals

The goal of this session was to teach Army leaders methods for achieving a shared understanding when communicating with superiors, peers, and subordinates.

After you participate in this session, it is expected that you will be able to:

- Describe the importance of shared understanding.
- Discuss methods for achieving a shared understanding.
- Discuss how to determine whether you've achieved a shared understanding.

Your Feedback

Answer the following question below:

Question	Your Feedback
<p>Were the goals of this session met? If not, explain why.</p>	
<p>What went well during this session?</p>	
<p>Are there any areas in which the session could be improved? If so, please specify.</p>	

LET'S CONNECT – SLIDE 25**Let's Connect**

- On the web: cal.army.mil
- On Facebook: [USArmyCAL](https://www.facebook.com/USArmyCAL)
- On Instagram: [@usarmycal](https://www.instagram.com/usarmycal)
- On Twitter: [@USArmyCAL](https://twitter.com/USArmyCAL)
- On YouTube: [@USArmyCAL](https://www.youtube.com/USArmyCAL)

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1 minute



- Display this slide while participants are completing their After Action Review.