

SITUATION

This explains the situation and introduces the main characters.

A**DISCUSS**

- 3 Complaint **a** is referring to telephone meetings and **d** is referring to any kind of virtual meeting. These rely on the technology being adequate so that everyone can hear (and see, in video conferences) clearly.
- 4 Other problems might include Internet links going down during the meeting, power cut, mistakes with time zones, etc.

VIEW

- 1 People being physically separated, making it difficult to take turns in the discussion and understand when others agree or disagree. Also, poor quality of technology.
- 2 Speak clearly; keep messages simple and structured; in virtual meetings, be aware that there is more risk of being misunderstood.

REFLECT

Possible additional tips – others may be added through discussion

Telephone conference calls	All meetings	Video conferences
Use the person's name when asking questions.	Ask questions if you do not understand.	Take turns to speak, as the microphone may only pick up one voice at a time, and ask the chair for permission to speak out of turn.
Ensure there is no background noise that might be distracting.	Give feedback to the speaker to show you have understood.	Have a procedure in place to follow in case of technical problems.

B**VIEW**

- 1 Simpler queries will be handled at Level 1, and more complex ones at Level 2. This will make the process more streamlined and therefore more efficient for customers.
- 2 Gabriella and Rachel are worried that the new system reduces levels of personal service for key clients.

REFLECT

Of those mentioned in Part A: participants speak one at a time; Rachel and Gabriella address Eric by name; everyone speaks clearly; Rachel maintains eye contact with the person she is speaking to. However, they don't have a clear turn-taking procedure or a procedure to follow when there is a technical problem; Gabriella and Rachel both interrupt Eric; no one asks comprehension questions or gives feedback when it's clear Eric has not heard everything.

C**VIEW**

- 1 People don't listen to each other very well and can be very quick to disagree with what they *think* they have heard the other person say.
- 2 People don't take into account the difficulties of the medium: they're just speaking as if it's a face-to-face meeting and as if everyone can, even at a basic level, hear what's going on. They're not spending enough time clarifying, summarising, etc.

REFLECT**Clarifying phrases**

What do you mean by ...?

Why do you say ...?

In other words, you think that ...

Am I right in saying that ...?

So you mean that ...

Summarising phrases

Just to summarise that, ...

So, if I understand you correctly, you mean that ...

So, just to check I got that, you're saying that ...

So, to sum up, ...

D

DISCUSS

- 1
 - a I'll just explain that a bit further.
I'd like to emphasise that ...
 - b You'll be happy to know that ...
I'm delighted to say that ...
 - c I know this is very important for you, isn't it?
I realise that ...
 - d But I'll stop there. Does anyone have any comments or more questions?
Would anyone like to add anything before I move on?
- 2 Possible additional expressions:
 - a Can I clarify that?
 - b It's excellent news that ...
 - c I understand what you're saying.
 - d Would anyone like me to repeat anything before we move on to the next point?

VIEW

- 1 He uses all four techniques.
- 2
 - a So let me say this explicitly.
 - b The good news is that ...
You'll be pleased to hear ...
 - c I understand that ...
I know, Gabriella, for you this is very important, yes?
 - d But let me stop there and see if you have any comments or more questions.
- 3 Other techniques:

Eric repeats key ideas for emphasis – saying things twice helps people to understand:
... they all see this as an increase in service. They're happy.

He slows down to account for the virtual environment:
Okay, look maybe I should slow down a little here. Obviously, I wasn't clear enough.

I should have said this little earlier, and in fact there's more.

REFLECT

Not all cultures value being open and explicit in the way Eric is. In some cultures it may be more typical to be more indirect and less open with information which is seen as very sensitive and/or can be seen to criticise others.

E

DISCUSS

Consider the way Rachel and Gabriella reacted to Eric and why they interrupted him in the first part of the video conference.

VIEW

- 1 Never assume anything.
- 2 He should have started with good news.
- 3 It's a problem with these kinds of virtual meetings; it's 'just me' (his approach/competence).

REFLECT

Consider what Eric felt most upset about:

- He didn't consider the different regional cultures represented in the meeting.
- He made assumptions.
- He didn't start with the good news.
- He didn't consider the virtual environment.

F

VIEW

Main learning points:

- The danger of assuming things, because assumptions generate misunderstanding. However, assuming that you will be misunderstood makes you work harder to be clearer.
- Focus on sending positive messages early, to overcome defensiveness and get people listening in the right frame of mind.
- Make communication interactive – let people participate or they may become confused or switch off.

REFLECT

Consider the tips from Part A. Are they any different now?

PRACTICE

You could use mobile phones for this, or fixed-line phones in different rooms if available. Otherwise stand back to back – it's important that you cannot see your partner, so that you are unable to read each other's body language.