

The objective of group problem-solving methods is to provide a focus to the conversation. This focus will help clarify the group problem-solving process and, therefore, the outcome of the discussion.

Despite each group member's best intent, clear communication does not always occur and individuals can end up talking past each other as indicated in Figure 1. As a result, group members will have a different recollection of the outcomes of the discussion although individual members may be certain that the group agreed on a specific goal.

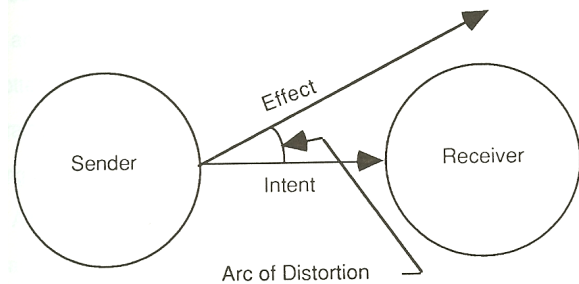


Figure 1. Communication Model

Also characteristic of problem-solving is the tendency to select the process before the TARGET is agreed-upon. This particular tendency is evident in individuals and groups. As an example, applying for a grant may be an appropriate strategy. However, without having the TARGET defined and agreed upon, it is impossible to determine if applying for a grant is an appropriate strategy in this particular circumstance.

The SITUATION-TARGET-PROCESS (STP) group problem-solving process is one of many methods that can help clarify the communication process and, therefore, the outcome(s) of any given discussion. The STP method is also one of the easiest methods to use and involves only 3 steps:

- 1) Define the current SITUATION;
- 2) Define the TARGET (agree on the TARGET before proceeding), and
- 3) Define the PROCESS, i.e., how to get from the SITUATION to the TARGET (and agree on the PROCESS before defining the Action Plan—who will do what by when).

