

PRAESTA

Listening Is An Art

When working at top speed, and switching between meetings, is there a risk you miss key insights? Have you sometimes looked back on a project and wished you had listened more actively to what others were trying to tell you?

Listening is an art. It is about giving our attention to what someone else is trying to articulate. It makes us better informed; it leads to more trusting and effective relationships; and it is sometimes the key ingredient for a project's success.

When you want to influence stakeholders might it help to:

- Be curious about why they think as they do, and where your interests could be aligned
- Use open questions to explore what they care about, and ask for clarification rather than assuming you know what they mean
- Focus your attention on what you are learning from the other person, rather than what you are going to say next
- Be aware of your emotional reactions to others' body language or tone of voice, and then consciously set those reactions aside so you can listen calmly
- Remember that someone who feels listened to is more likely to listen back.

When seeking to draw the best from your teams:

- Don't make a show of listening, then press on regardless
- If you ask a question, give the person time to think before they reply. Avoid the temptation to fill a silence with another question.
- Try the question: "What should I be asking you about this, and haven't?"
- Listen for meaning, and with a genuine desire to understand
- Remember that innovation flourishes best where people know they will be heard.
- Coach everyone to listen to each other and leave fixed views behind.

We know a leader who worked in another language for a year. When he returned to the UK, he recruited one of the managers from the other country to join his team. This person noted that the leader had been a better listener when he was working in his second language, and people had felt more motivated to deliver for him.