

Session Objectives:

The objective of this session is to understand:

- The importance of communication
- The basic forms of communication
- The process of communication
- Barriers to communication
- Dealing with communication barriers

Definition of Communication

Communication is a process in which information is exchanged between and among individuals using common symbols, signs and behavior.

Importance of Communication

Communication skills supplement technical competence, academic background and work experience of an individual

Regardless of how knowledgeable an individual is, it is necessary for him/her to possess good communication skills. Communication skills enable an individual to express his/her thoughts clearly so that the message has the desired impact on the audience. According to a survey conducted by Harvard Business Review, the ability to communicate is a critical factor for an executive to be considered for promotion. This skill scores over ambition, educational qualifications of the individual and his capacity for hard work.

Example: A person may be technically well qualified for a particular post in an organization. However, due to his poor communication skills, he/she may fail to convince the panel of interviewers and the panel may reject the candidate.

Communication skills determine the success or failure of managers

It is estimated that managers spend 75-80% of their time communicating with others. Hence, managers need to possess good communication skills. From an organization's point of view, communication skills are also important because they help determine the ability of managers to receive, evaluate, use and pass on the information gathered from within and outside the organization. This, in turn, helps to enhance the effectiveness of the organization.

Example: It is believed that the ability of Jack Welch to effectively communicate his vision across the organization was the main factor which brought about a marked transformation in General Electric (GE).

Basic Forms of Communication

Communication is primarily of two types – nonverbal and verbal communication.

Non-verbal Communication: It includes cues, gestures, vocal qualities, spatial relationships etc. It is less structured than verbal communication and often unintentional and spontaneous. Non-verbal communication is more reliable form of communication and reflects the true feelings of the individual.

It is more effective than verbal communication alone.

Example: Non verbal cues such as body language, facial expressions and vocal characteristics.

Verbal Communication: Verbal communication consists of arranging words in a meaningful pattern and includes speaking, writing, listening and reading.

Example: Writing memos and letters

The Process of Communication

It consists of the following elements:

Sender: The 'sender' initiates the process of communication by sending a message. The sender is sometimes also known as 'encoder.'

Encoding: Encoding is the process wherein the sender selects and organizes the message using appropriate words and nonverbal signals (gestures, tone of voice, etc.) Encoding is done keeping in mind the composition of the audience.

Message: Message comprises the information that is being transmitted. The composition of the audience determines the style, language, length and tone of the message.

Communication channel/medium: The channels used for communication may be verbal or non-verbal channels. The various media used for communication may be telephone, fax, computer, memos, letters, etc. The choice of the channel and the medium depends on the message, location of the audience, the speed at which the message is required to be transmitted and the formality of the situation.

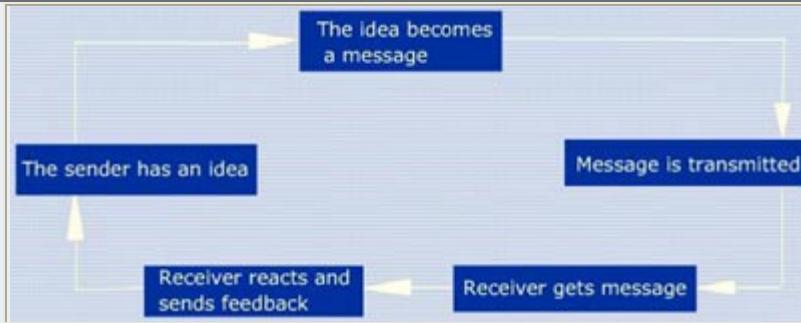
Receiver: The person who receives and interprets the message is known as the receiver.

Decoding: Decoding is the process in which the receiver interprets the message transmitted by the sender. If the message is decoded correctly, it means that the receiver in the manner in which the sender intended it to be conveyed has interpreted the message.

Feedback: It is the receiver's response to the message. This is the final stage in the communication process and may be verbal or nonverbal in nature. The response in verbal feedback may be intended to obtain further information or to provide closure to the communication process. Nonverbal feedback may be in the form of gestures (nodding one's head) and facial expressions.

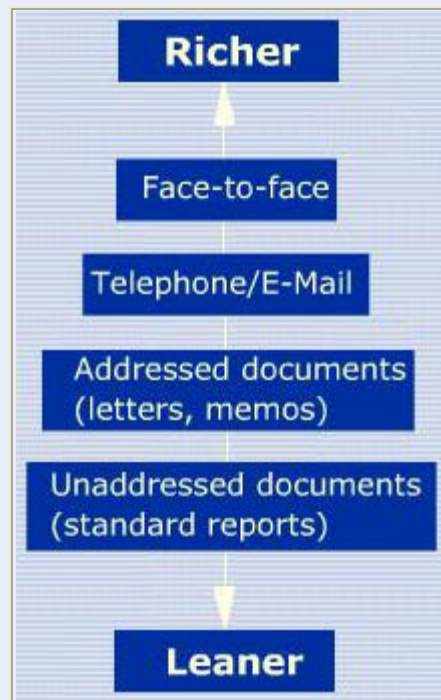
Example: A message is sent by the 'Company Secretary' (sender) to General Managers saying that 'There will be an annual general meeting on 25th March 2003 and all GMs are requested to send all relevant documents at the earliest' (encoding) . This message is sent via 'the intranet' (channel of communication) to 'the GMs' (receivers). 'They read the mail and understood it' (decoding). 'They then send back a message saying that all relevant reports will be sent to him in a day's time' (feedback).

Diagrammatic Representation of the Communication Process



This diagram illustrates the communication process. Here, the message originates from the sender, encoded and then passed on through the communication channel. The receiver who then gives a feedback to the sender then decodes the message.

Diagrammatic Representation of Continuum of Media richness



This diagram illustrates the richer and leaner media of communication. Face-to-face communication is the richest medium of communication while un addressed documents form the leanest medium of communication.

Barriers to communication

The various types of communication barriers are grouped into four categories:

- Problems caused by the sender
- Problems in message transmission

- Problems in reception
- Problems in receiver comprehension and perception

Problems caused by the sender

Inadequate amount of information – If the sender of the message is himself not adequately equipped with the requisite information, he will be unable to communicate the information effectively.

Excessive knowledge about the subject – If the sender has excessive knowledge about the subject, he may decide to explain the message too much in detail and make it highly complex and confusing.

Indecision regarding selection of information – The sender may sometimes be unable to decide what information to include and what information to exclude from the message. This inability of the sender to decide on the selection of information may hamper communication.

Order of presentation – Quite often, people are unable to decide on the order in which to present their ideas. The inability to decide on the order of presentation hinders effective communication.

Lack of familiarity with the audience – While communicating, the sender of the message should have some knowledge about his audience. This will allow him to structure his message appropriately so as to suit the needs of his audience. If the audience has no knowledge about the topic being communicated, the sender should provide some background information about the topic to enable them to understand the message. On the other hand, if the audience is knowledgeable and learned, the sender need not give any background information and can directly begin with information on the topic.

Lack of experience in speaking or writing – If the sender is not learned enough or is not properly trained on how to communicate, there is a scope for wrong choice of words, grammatical errors, and improper punctuation in his communication.

Problems in Message transmission

Number of transmission links – The process of communication consists of the message passing from one person to another till it reaches the final destination. The more the number of people involved in the communication process, the greater the chances of distortion of communication.

Transmission of unclear or conflicting messages – Sometimes, messages may consist of two or more parts which may not convey the same information. In such a case, the receiver is faced with a dilemma as to which part of the message to accept.

Problems in Reception

Problems in reception often give rise to communication problems. The factors that interfere with the exchange of messages are termed as "noise". Noise may be of several types. Physical noise refers to the external sounds that distract communicators. Physiological noise are the physiological factors that impede reception of the message. This may include hearing disorders, illnesses, disability, etc. Psychological noise refers to the forces within the receiver that interfere with his or her understanding. These include preoccupation, fear, hostility, egotism, etc.

Problems in Receiver comprehension and Perception

Many times, the receivers have difficulty in comprehending the message they have received. One of the reasons for this happening is the inability of the receiver to understand some of the words that are being used in the message. The use of technical terms in the message makes it difficult for people from non technical background to understand the message. Another reason for failure of the receiver comprehending the message is the involvement of personal interests. Many times, receivers comprehend what was not intended in the message and fail to comprehend the actual meaning. This is

especially true when the message affects the personal interests of the receiver.

Dealing with Communication Barriers:

- **Know your subject**

Before you deliver a speech, presentation or lecture, it is essential that you should know all the details of the topic that is going to be handled by you. Extensive research and preparation are critical for making a successful presentation. All the important points should be chosen and explained clearly rather than attempting to convey too many details within the limited time available.

- **Focus on the purpose**

Focus on the purpose of your message. Knowing the purpose of the message helps in presenting essential facts to the audience in an interesting manner. Do not beat around the bush and confuse the receiver of the message.

- **Know your audience**

In order to effectively communicate a message, you should know about your target audience and should understand them. Knowledge about the age, sex, social status, etc. of the audience will help you create an effective message. The organization of the content, the style and tone of the message will depend on the knowledge level of the audience. By understanding the audience, you will be able to anticipate problems that are likely to be encountered and take steps to minimize them.

- **Be organized**

The message has to be organized in a proper manner to be effective. Knowledge about the subject, purpose, and audience will help you to organize the information such that it effectively communicates your message. The message should be properly structured so that it is easy to understand and comprehend.

Summary

Communication can be verbal or nonverbal in nature. Not only individuals but organizations also benefit from effective communication.

Process of Communication-Sender, encoding, message, Decoding, Receiver, Feedback.

Understanding the barriers to communication helps the communicator overcome them and enables him to make his communication powerful and effective.