

Communication Skills

Vineesha Gupta

This reference book can be useful for
BBA, MBA, B.Com, BMS, M.Com, BCA, MCA
and many more courses for Various Universities



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Sample Preview of The Chapter

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COMMUNICATION SKILLS

The Process of Communication

1

INTRODUCTION

What is Communication?

The word '*communication*' is derived from the latin term '*communicare*' or '*communico*', both of which means '*common*'. But communication is not merely transmission of meaning from one person to another through symbols. It implies that the system of communication is commonly owned, accepted and recognised by the members of a community. It enables them to acquire, exchange, store, retrieve and process information. Communication is thus essentially a social affair.

Hundreds of explicit and implicit definitions of communication have been published in related literatures for use by scholars, students and practitioners trying to describe, predict and understand communicative phenomena. These definitions vary around the common language definitions, with variations depending on individual scholarly interests and general scholarly trends. The diverse definitions of communication are offered to serve as a representative, sample of ideas about communication from a wide range of disciplines.

The author would like to put the definitions of communication as below:

- (i) Communication occurs if, and only if, information moves from the input to one process to the output from a second process, the latter process being the inverse of the first process.
- (ii) We can refer to the information at the output of this inverse, receiving, process, as a communication. Communication is more complex than information; communication processes are composed of multiple complementary informative processes.
- (iii) Communication is something that is communicated by or to or between people or groups.
- (iv) The act of transmitting verbal and non-verbal information and the understanding between seller and buyer.
- (v) The process by which information and feelings are shared by people through an exchange of verbal and non-verbal messages.
In the context of medical education, its primary function is to establish understanding between patient and doctor. In an atmosphere of effective communication, patients improve faster, cope better with post-operative pain, requires less psychotropic drugs, and experience numerous other health benefits.
- (vi) The successful transmission of information through a common system of symbols, signs, behaviour, speech, writing or signals.

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(vii) A process by which information is transferred between at least two parties.

(viii) Transmission of intelligence between two points (origin and reception) without alteration of sequence or structure of the information content.

The creation of shared understanding through interaction among two or more agents. Communication depends upon interpretation of some message by the listener. Shared understanding is constructed through the detection and repair of misunderstandings (as opposed to a one-way transmission of data). The understanding created through communication can never be absolute or complete, but instead is an interactive and ongoing process in which common ground, *i.e.*, assumed mutual beliefs and mutual knowledge, is accumulated and updated.

In simple words, authors put the definition of communication as “the process of passing information and understanding from one person to another.”

Communication has the following characteristics:

1. Communication is characterised by information transfer,
2. Processing takes place in communication systems,
3. Both the sender and the receiver are actively involved in a communication system, and
4. The quality of communication varies.

Not all information transmitted represents communication. Given communication is defined in terms of inverse processes, the page you are reading isn't communicating with you. You are receiving the information that is on the page because of visual processes. The author is communicating with you through process that first took ideas resulting in written text, and an inverse process within the reader is taking written text and transforming it back into thoughts. Similarly, if one person is talking to another and is nervous, the nervousness may be communicated to anyone who can translate observed perspiring or a quivering voice or shaking hands into an understanding that the first person is nervous.

THE PROCESS OF COMMUNICATION

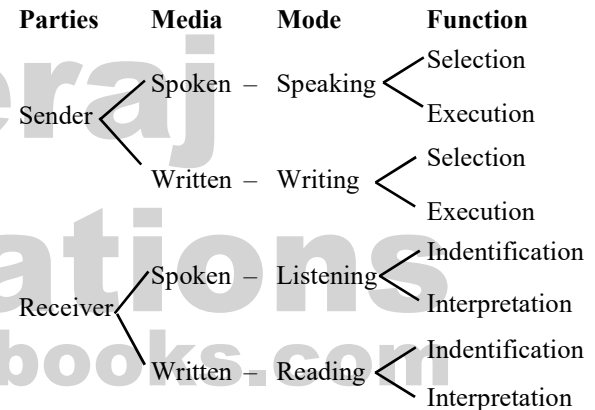
As we defined communication, we may define a communication channel as the set of components in the universe that implement the functionality needed for the communication process to take place. Because communication requires two or more information processes, a communication channel always consists of two or more information channels in series. By using

the word ‘needed’, we refer only to those components that directly and obviously contribute to the operation of the channel, ignoring the fact that a butterfly moving on the other side of the world, does affect the performance of a communication system on the reader’s side of the world.

Looked at more closely, what is essential for the communication to occur is the cooperation between two parties, one active or at the giving end and the other passive or at the receiving end.

The sender selects appropriate symbols to suit the situation and realises the meaning through speech or writing depending upon the socially regulated requirements or self-perceived needs. At the receiving end the symbols are identified and identification obviously implies recognition and realisation of meaning through the interpretive process.

Both these processes may be summarised as follows:

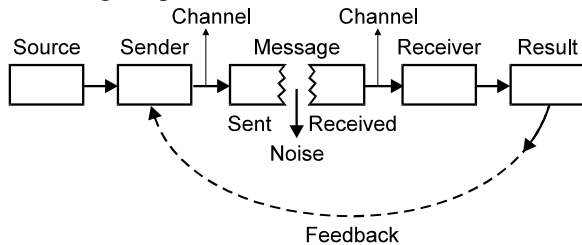


Communication is thus a network of interactions and naturally the sender and the receiver keep on changing their roles.

Another aspect of communication is the deployment of a code consisting of arbitrarily evolved symbols and the determination of the appropriateness of their use in given situations, leading to the emergence of diverse communication patterns. Some of these are tangible (*e.g.* physical setting) and others intangible such as intellectual, psychological and emotional. Communication cannot therefore always be regarded as a momentary event. In fact, it often is a momentary intensification of a continuing, cumulative process that starts before the actual communicative event takes place and continues after it has occurred. The communicator, therefore must acquire a true perspective of not only

the present requirements of the situation, but also its relationship with the past and its impact on the future.

A clear understanding of the various components and their interrelationship is shown in following Fig., indicating the process of communication:



**Components of Communication or
Process of Communication**

It would be observed that the entire event takes place within a common frame of reference, also called communication environment. The source refers to the point of origin of a message which is encoded by the sender and transmitted through the channel to the receiver. The receipt of the message exercises an impact in communication environment leading to some result. The observance of the result by the sender is called 'feedback'. The message sent is not the same as the message received. For this a number of factors which may be collectively termed as 'noise' are responsible. It is also to be noted that all the messages do not produce the intended result. Thus, the success of communication is measured in terms of not only the effective transmission of the message, but also the achievement of the intended result. Fig. indicates the processes of initiation and reaction on the part of the sender and receiver respectively. The choice of channel is determined by socio-physical factors.

MACRO FUNCTIONS OF COMMUNICATION

The macro functions of communication are listed below:

1. *The emotive function:* It is to communicate the inner states and emotions. *e.g.* Sorry!; Thank God!; Oh No!
2. *The directive function:* It seeks to affect the behaviour of others. *e.g.* Close the door, please; Please call up Mr. Sharma.
3. *The phatic function:* Opening the channel or checking that it is working. *e.g.* Hello, are you online?; Can you hear me?
4. *The peotic function:* The particular form chosen is the essence of the message. This refers to the aesthetic function of language.
5. *The referential information:* To carry information.

6. *The metalinguistic function:* Focusing attention on the code itself.

7. *The contextual function:* Creating a particular kind of context. *e.g.* OK! Let's begin the meeting now.

BARRIERS TO COMMUNICATION

There are a number of barriers which produce noise and prevent the achievement of the desired result. Some of these are—absence of a common frame of reference, badly encoded messages, disturbance in the transmission channel, poor retention (especially in face to face communication), inattention by the receiver, premature evaluation of the message, different perceptions of reality, semantic difficulties, vagueness about the objectives to be achieved, misinterpretation of the message, clash of attitudinal nuances of the sender and the receiver, psycho-physical factors, and selection of a wrong variety of language.

Most of the barriers mentioned above are self-explanatory; a few however need clarification. The common frame of reference implies the social context in which communication takes place. Both the sender and the receiver would be able to focus their mind meaningfully on the message if the context is well-defined. The semantic difficulties arise when the sender uses ambiguous expressions or highly specialist vocabulary inappropriate to the situation. Every sender superimposes his attitudes on what he communicates. A message is therefore not just organised language, but a verbal means of realisation of an intention. Sometimes the attitude of the sender is at variance with that of the receiver and when this attitudinal clash occurs, communication suffers. Sometimes one is unable to communicate effectively because of mental or physical fatigue or when psychologically one is out of tune, with oneself. Some persons, because of previous unpleasant experience in similar situations, may find it difficult to communicate effectively. In oral communication situations, some persons may be reluctant to speak because they are afraid of being evaluated by their peers, superiors, etc. All such factors are termed as psycho-physical factors. Each language has a number of varieties determined on the basis of the place a person belongs to, the social status he enjoys, the profession he is engaged in or the activity he is performing. If an inappropriate variety is used, communication suffers. For example, a lawyer's use of legal language to explain to his family a case he argued in a court of law would certainly be a barrier to communication. We must remember that, contrary to the popular belief, redundancy is not always a barrier to communication.

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On the other hand, redundancy, the repetition of the elements of a message, may prove to be an aid to communication in certain situations.

DIFFERENT TYPES OF COMMUNICATION

When individuals interact, they transmit a variety of verbal and non-verbal signals to each-other. While some of these signals are intentional, others are accidental. These signals are of two types: visual (non-verbal) and audible (verbal) and are also referred to as types of communication.

Non-verbal Communication: Non-verbal communication includes proximity, posture, physical appearance, gestures, facial expressions and direction of gaze.

(i) Proximity or Space Distancing varies from situation to situation. In a party, physical proximity in a limited space with background music and dim lighting facilitates the process of 'getting to know each-other.' But this is unlikely to occur in union-management negotiations for awards. Proximity will be replaced by distance and barriers to tactile communication (*i.e.*, tables and chairs) will rule out the opportunities for touching.

Each communicator maintains a personal territory around himself. He normally does not allow it to be invaded at the time of communication unless the relationship between him and the listener is very friendly or intimate. In social intercourse, normally, a zone ranging from 4 to 12 feet is maintained, when the situation is formal. This is termed as social distance. This term also includes a reference to the standing-seated position. The person who is in the superior or commanding position, usually stands and the others remain seated. For example, it may be difficult to control the class if the teacher does not communicate in a standing position. Thus, in a large group discussion one can prove more effective if one stands while speaking.

(ii) Posture: It conveys a wealth of meaning in an economical way. It is an important part of body language and generally refers to the way one stands, sits and walks. The movement of the body, the position of hands and legs and other parts of the body reveal an individual's personality—whether he is vibrant, alive and dynamic, nervous and jittery, confident and self-assured, etc. A good speaker stands tall, feet together with the weight directly over the instep keeping his chin on a line parallel to the floor or at right angles to the backbone. Standing in this posture before a group is in fact one of the first essentials for success in speaking. A drooping shoulder and a protruding stomach indicate that the speaker is discouraged, tired and worn out. The

posture of sitting may exude an air of optimism, or dependency, or be indicative of a sense of failure or of inattentiveness. To some extent a speaker can gauge the measure of success of his communication by observing the posture of the listener.

The communication situation and the specific purpose which one has to achieve determine the way one sits. For example, a subordinate while selling an idea to his boss or explaining an important point would not recline in his chair. In a group discussion the person who takes a turn to speak changes his posture when he starts communicating. A prospective speaker on the dais is watched by the audience which tries to guess the kind of man he is from the way he sits. Thus, different situations demand different sitting or standing postures and this gives an idea about the person's success in life or his personality.

(iii) Physical Appearance: The first impact on the audience or listener is created by the physical appearance of the speaker. Even before the speaker utters the first syllable we begin to form an opinion about him and visualise the way he is going to talk. Physical appearance provides varied clues from culture to culture. In every culture, people form a picture of attractive physical appearance. The picture may relate to height, physique, face, hair, hands and allied parts of the body. On the basis of this picture, the individual tends to make behavioural predictions, for example, people with long hands are forthright, fat people are lazy, etc.

One's appearance may put the audience into a resistant or even a hostile attitude or induce in them a receptive mood which is essential for the success of communication. It is partly because of this that uniforms have been prescribed by certain organisations as also the kind of dress that should be worn on certain specified occasions. A uniform may indicate the kind of work one does or instil a sense of oneness or be a marker of status. In fact, the conventions have been established in regard to the use of dress and general physical appearance in respect of certain communication situations such as interview, convocation, state banquet, etc. We are all accustomed to looking for clues about the personality of an individual.

(iv) Gestures: Gestures, too, play a significant role in making the communication effective. Gestures may reinforce verbal signals as well as convey additional information. A well-timed gesture can drive a point home. Similarly, playing with a ring, twisting a key chain, or clasping one's hand tightly rob a speaker of the effectiveness of his communication. Sometimes