

Technical Communication/Theory of Communication

Communication- Definition:

Communication can be defined as “the effective transmission of message from one person or body to another (receiver). The means through which the message is conveyed is called ‘medium’.

The term communication comes from the Latin word “communis” which means ‘common’. Communication refers to the commonness of sharing of information, ideas, facts, opinions, attitudes and understanding. Communication essentially means transmission of commonly meaningful information.

Importance of Communication

Functions of Communications:

The importance of communication in an organization can be summarized as follows:

1. Communication **promotes motivation** by informing and clarifying the employees about the task to be done, the manner they are performing the task, and how to improve their performance if it is not up to the mark.
2. Communication is a **source of information** to the organizational members for decision-making process as it helps identifying and assessing alternative course of actions.
3. Communication also plays a crucial role in **altering individual’s attitudes**, i.e., a well informed individual will have better attitude than a less-informed individual. Organizational magazines, journals, meetings and various other forms of oral and written communication help in moulding employee’s attitudes.
4. Communication also **helps in socializing**. In today’s life the only presence of another individual fosters communication. It is also said that one cannot survive without communication.
5. Communication also assists in **controlling process**. It helps controlling organizational member’s behaviour in various ways. There are various levels of hierarchy and certain principles and guidelines that employees must follow in an organization. They must comply with organizational policies, perform their job role efficiently and communicate any work problem and grievance to their superiors. Thus, communication helps in controlling function of management.

Elements of Communication

Seven major elements of communication process are: (1) sender (2) ideas (3) encoding (4) communication channel (5) receiver (6) decoding and (7) feedback.

Communication may be defined as a process concerning exchange of facts or ideas between persons holding different positions in an organisation to achieve mutual harmony. The communication process is dynamic in nature rather than a static phenomenon.

Communication process as such must be considered a continuous and dynamic inter-action, both affecting and being affected by many variables.

(1) Sender:

The person who intends to convey the message with the intention of passing information and ideas to others is known as sender or communicator.

(2) Ideas:

This is the subject matter of the communication. This may be an opinion, attitude, feelings, views, orders, or suggestions.

(3) Encoding:

Since the subject matter of communication is theoretical and intangible, its further passing requires use of certain symbols such as words, actions or pictures etc. Conversion of subject matter into these symbols is the process of encoding.

(4) Communication Channel:

The person who is interested in communicating has to choose the channel for sending the required information, ideas etc. This information is transmitted to the receiver through certain channels which may be either formal or informal.

(5) Receiver:

Prepared by Reetoja Taj

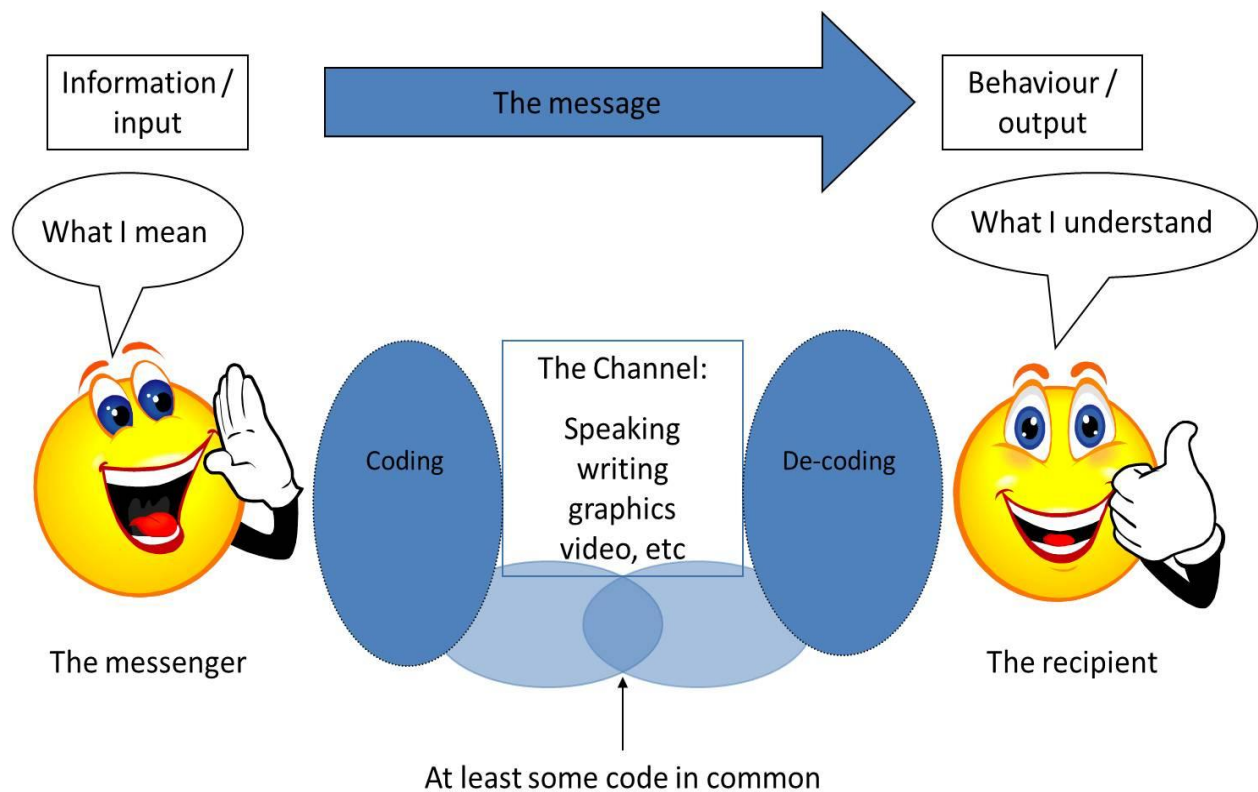
Receiver is the person who receives the message or for whom the message is meant for. It is the receiver who tries to understand the message in the best possible manner in achieving the desired objectives.

(6) Decoding:

The person who receives the message or symbol from the communicator tries to convert the same in such a way so that he may extract its meaning to his complete understanding.

(7) Feedback:

Feedback is the process of ensuring that the receiver has received the message and understood in the same sense as sender meant it.



7 Cs of Communication

There are **7 C's of effective communication** which are applicable to both written as well as oral communication. These are as follows:

1. **Completeness** - The communication must be complete. It should convey all facts required by the audience. The sender of the message must take into consideration the receiver's mind set and convey the message accordingly
2. **Conciseness** - Conciseness means wordiness, i.e, communicating what you want to convey in least possible words without forgoing the other C's of communication. Conciseness is a necessity for effective communication.
3. **Consideration** - Consideration implies "stepping into the shoes of others". Effective communication must take the audience into consideration, i.e, the audience's view points, background, mind-set, education level, etc. Make an attempt to envisage your audience, their requirements, emotions as well as problems. Ensure that the self-respect of the audience is maintained and their emotions are not at harm. Modify your words in message to suit the audience's needs while making your message complete
4. **Clarity** - Clarity implies emphasizing on a specific message or goal at a time, rather than trying to achieve too much at once
5. **Concreteness** - Concrete communication implies being particular and clear rather than fuzzy and general. Concreteness strengthens the confidence.
6. **Courtesy** - Courtesy in message implies the message should show the sender's expression as well as should respect the receiver. The sender of the message should be sincerely polite, judicious, reflective and enthusiastic
7. **Correctness** - Correctness in communication implies that there are no grammatical errors in communication.

Levels of Communication:

Interpersonal: human Being ↔ Human Being

Intrapersonal: within Self

Extrapersonal: Human Being ↔ other living creature

Types & Flow of Communication

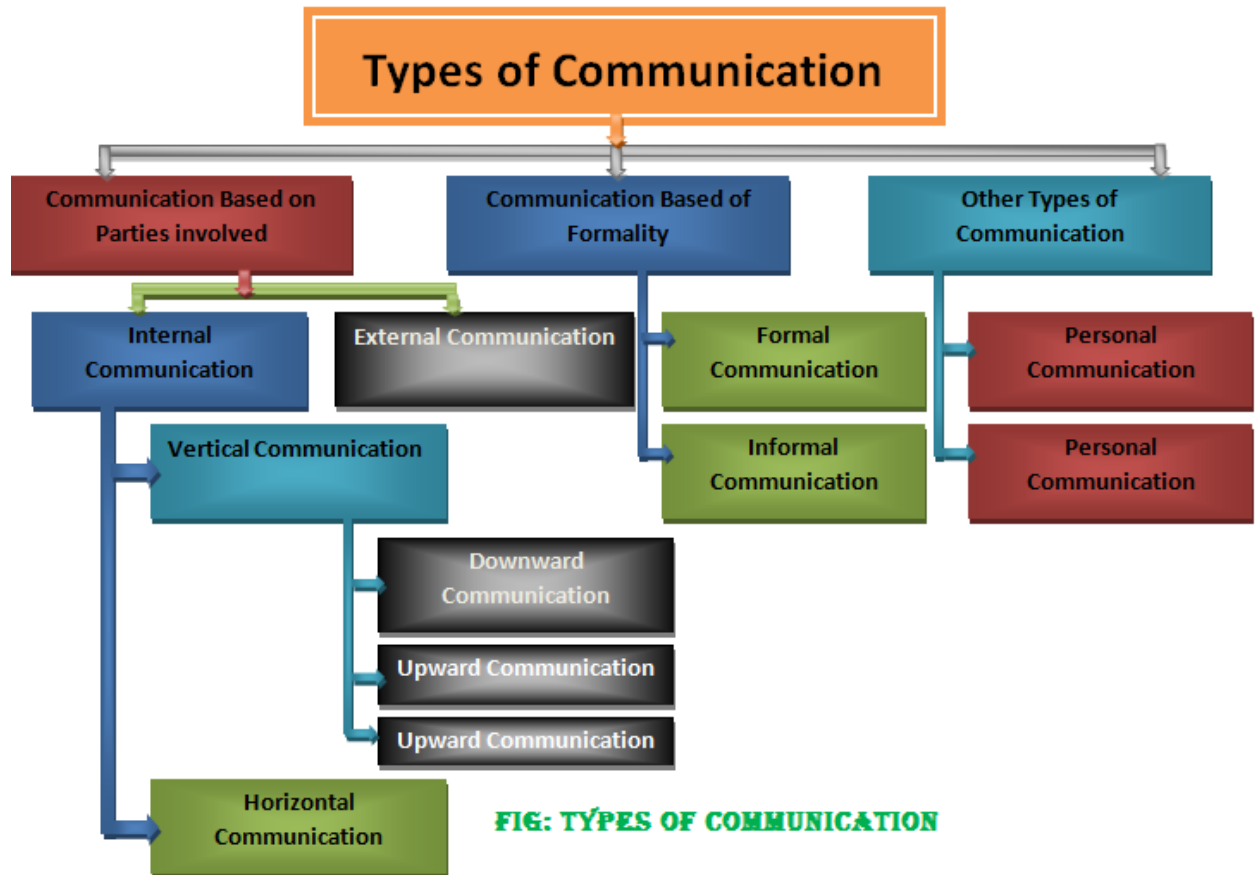


FIG: TYPES OF COMMUNICATION

Vardman* describes a design for effective communication and says "Effective communication is purposive symbolic interchange resulting in workable understanding and agreement between the sender and the receiver".

Three points deserve attention in this definition. First, effective communication is purposive. This means that it is deliberately designed to achieve a conscious end or objective. In other words, the communicator knows what he is after and plans his approach accordingly. Second, communication is the interchange of symbols between persons. Thus, ideas or thoughts or feelings get signalled through symbolic "coding". Third, effective communication results in workable understanding and agreement between the sender and the receiver. This is a most important element. Effective communication is to produce a sufficient degree of meaning between the sender and the receiver together with enough acceptance by both parties to get desired results.

From the standpoint of the management, communication has been defined as a process which involves the transmission and accurate purporting to stimulate actions to attain organizational goals.**

This definition emphasises four important points :

- (i) The process of communication involves the communication of ideas
- (ii) The ideas should be accurately replicated (reproduced) in the receiver's mind, i.e. the receiver should get exactly the same ideas as were transmitted. Communication's goal is to convey ideas without distortion or bias.
- (iii) The transmitter is assured of the accurate replication of the ideas by feedback i.e., by the receiver's response which is communicated back to the transmitter. Thus, communication is a two-way process including transmission of feedback. Feedback is an essential aspect of communication.
- (iv) The purpose of all communication is to elicit action.

The following definition of communication by Vardman and Halterman provides a very comprehensive nature of communication : "By communication, we mean the flow of material, information, perception and understanding between various parts and members of an organization all the methods,

* Vardman, George T. "Effective Communication of Ideas". Van Nostrand Reinhold Company, New York. 1970. page 3.

** Scott, William G. Organization Theory. Home Wood, Ill, Richard D. Irwin Inc. 1967, page 153

means and media of communication (communications technology), all the channels, network and systems of communication (organizational structure) all the person-to-person interchange (inter personal communication).... it includes all aspects of communication : up, down, lateral, speaking, writing, listening, reading, methods, media, modes, channels, networks, flow, interpersonal, inter-organizational".*

Baird views communication as "the process involving the transmission and reception of symbols eliciting meaning in the minds of the participants by making common their life experiences".**

For Koontz and O'Donnell, communication is the "means by which organised activity is unified". They are of the view that communication is a social energetic input which is fed into social systems. They further explain communication as a social and psychological contribution to the welfare of an organization.

From management point of view, communication is best described as, "the means by which management gets its job done". Accordingly, communication can be defined as "purposive interchange of ideas, opinions, instructions and the like, presented personally or impersonally by symbol or signal as to attain the goals of the organisation".

It has been observed that a great variety of definitions are available in literature on communications. Various writers, social scientists, mathematicians, statisticians, novelists, management associations etc. have defined communication in so many ways. A standard definition of communication does not exist.

Obviously, one need not wonder when Peter Little** calls communication as a "chameleon word" one that changes its meaning and application with each person who uses it.

Nature of communication is complex and its scope is very broad. If the study of communication is enlarged to provide a deep and insightful knowledge, it would include the entire gamut of psychological sub-disciplines like perception, cognition, linguistics, motivation etc. It would also extend into organisational areas such as structure, hierarchy, authority and management functions".

* Vardman George T and carroll c Halterman : Management Control Through Communication John wilen and sons, New York. 1968.

** Baird Jr. John E. : "The Dynamics of Organizational Communication," Harper and Row, New York. 1977.

Effective upward communication requires an environment in which subordinates feel free to communicate. The responsibility for a free flow of upward communication rests with superiors to a large extent.

"Upward" and "Downward" communication constitute "Internal Vertical Communication".

2.11.5. Lateral Communication :

Lateral communication provides team work. It takes place between people on the same level of the hierarchy. The most common reason for the communication flow is to promote co-ordination and team work. This is also known as horizontal flow of communication.

Usually this is carried on through face-to-face discussions, telephonic talks, periodic meetings, memos etc. Effective lateral communication promotes understanding.

"Lateral" and "Diagonal" communication constitute Internal Horizontal Communication.

2.11.6. Diagonal Communication :

Diagonal communication facilitates efficiency. It occurs between people who are neither in the same department nor on the same level of hierarchy. The diagonal flow among persons at different levels who have no direct reporting relationships with one another, is used to exchange information speedily for the sake of efficiency.

The diagonal communication as well as lateral communication both carry messages horizontally from one department to another.

The amount of "Criss-cross" or "horizontal" communication that occurs through formal channels depends on the degree of interdependence among departments. If the business requires co-ordinated action by its organizational units, horizontal communication may be frequent and intense. But if each department operates independently, official horizontal communication is minimal.

There are a number of potential problems with diagonal and lateral communication. One is that they involve communication outside one's department or unit and can cause internal friction or misunderstanding. Secondly, these communications may undermine the authority of one's own boss by making promises or commitments that involve the department or unit. In the same way they can undermine the authority of a manager in the other unit.

Hence, three simple rules should be observed :

- (a) obtaining permission from one's direct supervisor before undertaking the communications.
- (b) refraining from making commitments beyond one's authority
- (c) informing the direct supervisor of any significant results of the cross communication, while also keeping them informed of important interdepartmental activities.

2.11.7. Limitations of Communication :

"Downward" Communication has some limitations which include :

- Under-communication or over-communication
- Distortion or modification in the message
- Loss of information
- Sequence of observance in presentation of messages.
- Status and reliability of the source
- Resentment by subordinate staff
- Lack of understanding by subordinates
- Delay :

"Upward" communication also suffers from certain limitations which include :

- Great possibility of distortion
- Status considerations
- Employees are reluctant to express themselves
- Employees fear that their criticism may be interpreted as a sign of their personal weakness
- By passed superiors feel insulted.

2.11.8. "Grapevine"-The Informal Pattern of Communication :

Every organization has one informal communication network - the "grapevine"- that supplements official channels. The informal flow of communication follows no set lines, nor any definite rules, but spreads like the grapevine, in any direction, anywhere, and spreads fast.

Grapevine has its origin in the social relationships inside and outside the organization. It is quite natural for a group of people to be interested in one another and talk about appointments, promotions, retrenchments, or even domestic affairs like the estranged relations of an individual with his wife or the romantic involvements of another. Information on most of these matters is supposed to be secret. But some people derive great pleasure from gathering such "secret" information and transmitting it to others. They are the leaders who control the grapevine. When one of them comes across any important or interesting information, he whispers it in a very mysterious manner to another exhorting to keep the information secret. The second person, just because he has been specifically instructed to keep it secret, does not feel relieved till he has whispered it into the ears of at least five more persons, in his turn imploring all of them to keep it secret. Soon this top secret spreads all over.

Thus, grape vine circulates a hotch potch of factual information, half-truths, rumours, private interpretations, scandals and things like that. Naturally, the talk is coloured by the ideas, prejudices and feelings of the persons engaged in it. Though the stories and information circulating in the grapevine are not quite accurate or true, they tend to become more powerful and influential than one might think. Many employees rely on the grapevine as their main source of information about the organization.

Although the grapevine is potential source of distortion, organizations can limit its negative effects by supplementing it with a free flow of official information.

The informal network has its own plus points. Peer-to-peer contacts and inter departmental interaction save the organization a great deal of time. It proves so helpful in providing additional social interaction and social satisfaction that goes a long way in improving the morale of organizational personnel. Grapevine provides emotional escape (or safety valve) valves, that help employees in maintaining and enhancing their individual dignity under formal pressures. As Chester Bernard* claims, informal organizations are necessary to the operation of formal organizations, as a means of communications, of cohesion, and of protecting the integrity of the individual.

Keith Davis rightly points out that a grapevine is more a product of the situation than it is of the person. Certain situations like insecurity of service, uncertainty over promotions, special increments to a particular employee, certain innovations in the organization likely to affect the job prospects of the employees are sure to activate the leaders of the grapevine so that very soon all kinds of rumours have spread in the organization.

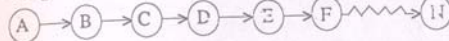
* Bernard, Chester : "The Functions of the Executive."

2.12. How The Grapevine Operates ?

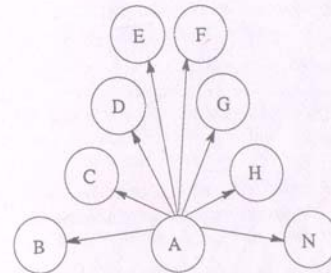
Keith Davis classifies the grapevine into four basic types : single strand, gossip, chain of probability and cluster.

- * Single Strand : It involves the passing of information through a long line of persons to the ultimate recipient.

- * Single Strand

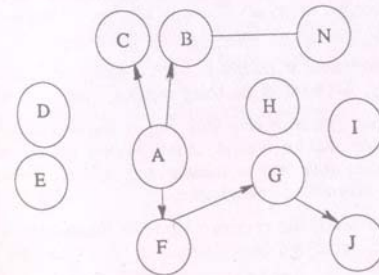


- * Gossip :



- * Gossip : In gossip chain, A actively seeks and tells everyone. Single individuals spreads the news.

- * Probability : Probability chain is a random process in which A transmits the information to others non selectively, in accordance with the laws of probability and then these others tell still others in a similar manner.



Management By Objectives (MBO), long term strategic objective setting and policy formulation, strategic planning and allied management aspects revolve around the communication system which provides a rationale for them. Moreover, the interest in organizational development and organizational effectiveness involves the network of the communication process in some kind of information system for the attainment of effective results. Even control process heavily relies on viable communication systems. Similarly communication and decision-making both the processes are interdependent and indispensable. Thus, communication has a broad scope in modern organizations and it is of utmost significance in managerial effectiveness.

1.3. Importance of Communication :

Communication is aptly described as the "Sap and life blood" of the organization. Communication is also identified as the "Nervous system" which makes organizations to cohere, and permits their members, to co-operate and co-ordinate. Without communication, there can be no direction and control. Communication acts as the unifying link and a binding and directing force in organization.

In organizations communication is important at least in three ways : it is necessary for the creation of warm and friendly social working relationships among the employees of the organization, the passing on of orders, policies and plans to subordinates in the downward communication that is necessary to modern industrial life, and the provision of information from lower levels in the upward communication to top executives that is necessary for decision making and policy formulation.

As for Keith Davis* organizations simply can not exist without communication. For without communication employees can not even know what the associates are doing. Management cannot receive information inputs nor give instructions, co-ordination of work is impossible and the organization will collapse for lack of it. Further more, co-operation also becomes impossible because people cannot communicate their needs and feelings to others. Again, without communication, there would not be any basis for answering questions, solving problems, obtaining feedback, or measuring results. Thus, communication is undoubtedly one of the most central elements in organizational life, and it is in fact its dynamic aspect. If management is the art and science of "getting things done through people", communication is the essence of it, as said earlier.

* Davis Keith op cit page. 399. 1993.

Luthans emphasises that communication is a pre-requisite to effective management. All managerial actions pass through the bottleneck of communication and in practice effective communication is most crucial for the attainment of organizational goals. Yet, if poorly managed, communication is cited as being at the root of practically all the problems of the world.

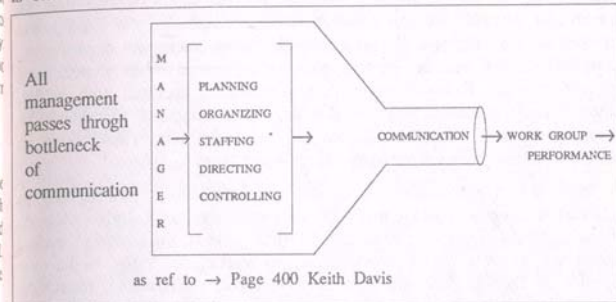


Fig. 1.1.

Communication plays highly significant role in the process of change. In many cases resistance to change comes merely because of poor communication. Communication is essential to improve support for change. If employees feel better informed, their attitudes on every score tend to be better. In fact, good communication and favourable employee attitudes go hand in hand.

In essence, communication is one of the most vital processes that keeps the wheels of the organization running smoothly. It is the artery of the organization and has to be kept healthy and free flowing so that the system can function efficiently. Efficient and effective communication must receive highest priority in organizational life.

1.4. Scope of Communication :

The scope of communication is very wide and comprehensive. It is a subject of almost unlimited dimensions and is interdisciplinary one. It is a two-way process involving both transmission as well as reception. It is a continuous process of exchange of facts, ideas, feelings, attitudes, opinions, figures, and interactions with others. In the process it uses a set of symbols. Symbols may be words, actions, pictures, figures, drawings, charts, cartoons etc.