

8. Communication

Understanding Key Concept

- Communication is the process of sending and receiving symbols with attached meanings.
- Noise is anything that interferes with the effectiveness of communication.
- Communication channels are the pathways through which messages are communicated.
- Feedback communicates how one feels about something another person has done or said.
- Effective communication is when the intended meaning equals the perceived meaning.
- Efficient communication is low cost in its use of resources.
- Nonverbal communication occurs by facial expressions, body motions, eye contact, and other physical gestures.
- Active listening encourages people to say what they really mean.
- The KISS principle stands for “keep it short and simple.”
- Mixed messages occur when words say one thing while nonverbal cues say something else.
- The MUM effect occurs when people are reluctant to communicate bad news.
- MBWA involves getting out of the office to directly communicate with others.
- Organizational communication is the process by which information is exchanged in the organizational setting.
- Formal channels follow the official chain of command.
- Informal channels do not follow the chain of command.
- A grapevine transfers information through networks of friendships and acquaintances.
- Decentralized communication networks link all group members directly with one another.
- Centralized communication networks link group members through a central control point.
- Restricted communication networks link subgroups that disagree with one another’s positions.

The Nature of Communication

Lucent Technologies, one of the major technology companies of our day, opened a recent annual report with these words: “There is a revolution going on in the communications industry.” The report went on to note that over 900 million voice-mail messages are now exchanged every day, 2.7 trillion E-mails are sent in a year—some 5 million per minute—100 million Internet users come online in a year, and Internet traffic doubles every 100 days. The figures are amazing, and the implications are clear. Appetites for information are growing by leaps and bounds, and the future of organizations is increasingly depending on their abilities to harness information and information technology for competitive advantage. At the center of all this stands the great demands and opportunities of the process we know as “communication.”

THE COMMUNICATION PROCESS

It is useful to think of communication as a process of sending and receiving messages with attached meanings. The key elements in the communication process are illustrated in Figure 4.4. They include a source, who encodes an intended meaning into a message, and a receiver, who decodes the message into a perceived meaning. The receiver may or may not give feedback to the source. Although this process may appear to be very elementary, it is not quite as simple as it looks. Noise is the term used to describe any disturbance that disrupts it and interferes with the transference of messages within the communication process.

The information source is a person or group trying to communicate with someone else. The source seeks to communicate, in part, to change the attitudes, knowledge, or behavior of the receiver. A team leader, for example, may want to communicate with a division manager in order to explain why the team needs more time or resources to finish an assigned project. This involves encoding—the process of translating an idea or thought into a message consisting of verbal, written, or nonverbal symbols (such as gestures), or some combination of them. Such messages are transmitted through various communication channels, such as face-to-face meetings, electronic mail and other forms, written letters or memorandums, and telephone communications or voice-mail, among others. The choice of channel can have an important impact on the communication process. Some people are better at using certain channels over others, and some messages are better handled by specific channels. In the earlier case of the team leader communicating with the division manager, for example, it can make quite a difference whether the message is sent face to face, in a written memo, by voice-mail, or by E-mail.

The communication process is not completed just because a message is sent. The receiver is the individual or group of individuals to whom a message is directed. In order for meaning to be assigned to any received message, its contents must be interpreted through decoding. This process

of translation is complicated by many factors, including the knowledge and experience of the receiver and his or her relationship with the sender. A message may also be interpreted with the added influence of other points of view, such as those offered by friends, coworkers, or organizational superiors. Ultimately, the decoding may result in the receiver interpreting a message in a way that is different from that originally intended by the source.

FEEDBACK AND COMMUNICATION

Most receivers are well aware of the potential gap between the intended message of the source and the perceived meaning assigned to it by the recipient. One way in which these gaps are identified is through feedback, the process through which the receiver communicates with the sender by returning another message. The exchange of information through feedback can be very helpful in improving the communication process, and the popular advice to always “keep the feedback channels open” is good to remember.

In practice, giving “feedback” is often associated with one person communicating an evaluation of what another person has said or done. There is an art to giving this special type of feedback so that the receiver accepts it and uses it constructively (see *The Effective Manager* 4.2). Words that are intended to be polite and helpful can easily end up being perceived as unpleasant and even hostile. This risk is particularly evident in the performance appraisal process. A manager or team leader must be able to do more than just complete a written appraisal to document another person’s performance for the record. To serve the person’s developmental needs, feedback regarding the results of the appraisal—both the praise and the criticism, must be well communicated.

Essentials of Interpersonal Communication

Organizations today are information rich. They are also increasingly “high-tech.” But, we always need to remember that people still drive the system. And if people are to work together well and commit their mutual talents and energies to create high performance organizations, they must excel at interpersonal communication.

EFFECTIVE AND EFFICIENT COMMUNICATION

When people communicate with one another, at least two important things are at issue. One is the accuracy of the communication—an issue of effectiveness; the other is its cost—an issue of efficiency.

Effective communication occurs when the intended meaning of the source and the perceived

meaning of the receiver are virtually the same. Although this should be the goal in any communication, it is not always achieved. Even now, we worry about whether or not you are interpreting these written words exactly as we intend. Our confidence would be higher if we were face to face in class together and you could ask clarifying questions. Opportunities to offer feedback and ask questions are important ways of increasing the effectiveness of communication.

Efficient communication occurs at minimum cost in terms of resources expended. Time, for example, is an important resource. Picture your instructor taking the time to communicate individually with each student in your class about the course subject matter. It would be virtually impossible to do so. Even if it were possible, it would be very costly in terms of time. People at work often choose not to visit one another personally to communicate messages. Instead, they rely on the efficiency of written memos, posted bulletins, group meetings, E-mail, or voice-mail.

As efficient as these forms of communication may be, they are not always effective. A change in policy posted by efficient E-mail may save time for the sender, but it may not achieve the desired interpretations and responses. Similarly, an effective communication may not be efficient. For a business manager to visit each employee and explain a new change in procedures may guarantee that everyone understands the change, but it may also be prohibitively expensive in terms of the required time expenditure.

NONVERBAL COMMUNICATION

We all know that people communicate in ways other than the spoken or written word. Indeed, nonverbal communication that takes place through facial expressions, body position, eye contact, and other physical gestures is important both to understand and master. It is basically the act of speaking without using words. Kinesics, the study of gestures and body postures, has achieved a rightful place in communication theory and research. The nonverbal side to communication can often hold the key to what someone is really thinking or meaning. It can also affect the impressions we make on others. Interviewers, for example, tend to respond more favorably to job candidates whose nonverbal cues, such as eye contact and erect posture, are positive than to those displaying negative nonverbal cues, such as looking down or slouching. The art of impression management during interviews and in other situations requires careful attention to both verbal and nonverbal aspects of communication, including one's dress, timeliness, and demeanor.

Nonverbal communication can also take place through the physical arrangement of space, such as that found in various office layouts. Proxemics, the study of the way space is utilized, is important to communication. Figure 4.5 shows three different office arrangements and the messages they may communicate to visitors. Check the diagrams against the furniture

arrangement in your office or that of your instructor or a person with whom you are familiar. What are you/they saying to visitors by the choice of furniture placement?

ACTIVE LISTENING

The ability to listen well is a distinct asset to anyone whose job involves a large proportion of time spent “communicating” with other people. After all, there are always two sides to the communication process: (1) sending a message, or “telling,” and (2) receiving a message, or “listening.” There is legitimate concern that too many people emphasize the telling and neglect the listening. Everyone in the new workplace should develop good skills in active listening—the ability to help the source of a message say what he or she really means. The concept comes from the work of counselors and therapists, who are trained to help people express themselves and talk about things that are important to them. Take a moment to more thoroughly consider the guidelines for active listening shown in *The Effective Manager* 4.3. Then read the conversations below. One involves active listening on the part of the branch manager; the other does not. How would you feel as the group leader in each case?

Example 1

Group leader: Hey, Sal, I don’t get this work order. We can’t handle this today.

What do they think we are?

Branch manager: But that’s the order. So get it out as soon as you can. We’re under terrific pressure this week.

Group Leader: Don’t they know we’re behind schedule already because of that software problem?

Branch manager: Look, I don’t decide what goes on upstairs. I just have to see that the work gets out, and that’s what I’m going to do.

Group leader: The team won’t like this.

Branch manager: That’s something you’ll have to work out with them, not me.

Example 2

Group leader: Hey, Kelley, I don’t get this work order. We can’t handle this today.

What do they think we are?

Branch manager: Sounds like you’re pretty sore about it.

Group leader: I sure am. We’re just about getting back to schedule while fighting that software breakdown. Now this comes along.

Branch manager: As if you didn’t have enough work to do?

Group leader: Right, I don’t know how to tell the team about this. They’re under a real strain today. Seems like everything we do around here is rush, rush, rush.

Branch manager: I guess you feel like it’s unfair to load anything more on them.

Group leader: Well, yes. But I know there must be plenty of pressure on everybody up the line. If that’s the way it is, I’ll get the word to them. Branch manager: Thanks. If you’ll give it a try, I’ll do my best

to hold with the schedule in the future.

The branch manager in Example 2 possesses active listening skills. She responded to the group leader's communication in a way that increased the flow of information. The manager learned more about the situation. The group leader felt better after having been able to really say what she thought, and after being heard!

Communication Barriers

It is important to understand six sources of noise that are common to most interpersonal exchanges: physical distractions, semantic problems, mixed messages, cultural differences, absence of feedback, and status effects. They were shown earlier in Figure 4.4 as potential threats to the communication process.

PHYSICAL DISTRACTIONS

Any number of physical distractions can interfere with the effectiveness of a communication attempt. Some of these distractions are evident in the following conversation between an employee, George, and his manager.

Okay, George, let's hear your problem (phone rings, boss picks it up, promises to deliver the report, "just as soon as I can get it done"). Uh, now, where were we—oh, you're having a problem with marketing. They (the manager's secretary brings in some papers that need immediate signatures; he scribbles his name and the secretary leaves)···you say they're not cooperative? I tell you what, George, why don't you (phone rings again, lunch partner drops by)···uh, take a stab at handling it yourself. I've got to go now.

Besides what may have been poor intentions in the first place, George's manager allowed physical distractions to create information overload. As a result, the communication with George suffered. This mistake can be eliminated by setting priorities and planning. If George has something to say, his manager should set aside adequate time for the meeting. In addition, interruptions such as telephone calls, drop-in visitors, and the like, should be prevented. At a minimum, George's manager could start by closing the door to the office and instructing his secretary not to disturb them.

SEMANTIC PROBLEMS

Semantic barriers to communication involve a poor choice or use of words and mixed messages. The following illustrations of the "bafflegab" that once tried to pass as actual "executive

communication” are a case in point.

A. “We solicit any recommendations that you wish to make, and you may be assured that any such recommendations will be given our careful consideration.”

B. “Consumer elements are continuing to stress the fundamental necessity of a stabilization of the price structure at a lower level than exists at the present time.”

One has to wonder why these messages were not stated more simply as: (A) “Send us your recommendations. They will be carefully considered,” and (B) “Consumers want lower prices.” In this regard, the popular KISS principle of communication is always worth remembering: “Keep it short and simple.”

MIXED MESSAGES

Mixed messages occur when a person’s words communicate one thing while actions or “body language” communicate another. They are important to spot since non-verbals can add important insight into what is really being said in face-to-face communication. For instance, someone may voice a cautious “Yes” during a business meeting at the same time that her facial expression shows stress and she begins to lean back in her chair. The body language in this case may suggest the existence of important reservations, even though the words indicate agreement.

CULTURAL DIFFERENCES

People must always exercise caution when they are involved in cross-cultural communication—whether between persons of different geographical or ethnic groupings within one country, or between persons of different national cultures. A common problem is ethnocentrism—the tendency to believe one’s culture and its values are superior to those of others. It is often accompanied by an unwillingness to try to understand alternative points of view and to take the values they represent seriously. This mindset can easily create communication problems among people of diverse backgrounds.

The difficulties with cross-cultural communication are perhaps most obvious in respect to language differences. Advertising messages, for example, may work well in one country but encounter difficulty when translated into the language of another. Problems may accompany with the introduction of Ford’s European model, the “Ka,” in Japan. In Japanese, Ka means mosquito and analysts wonder if a car that is named for a disease-carrying pest can ever sell well. Gestures may also be used quite differently in the various cultures of the world. For example, crossed legs in the United Kingdom are quite acceptable, but are rude in Saudia Arabia if the sole of the foot is directed toward someone. Pointing at someone to get their attention may be acceptable in Canada, but in Asia it is considered inappropriate.

ABSENCE OF FEEDBACK

One-way communication flows from sender to receiver only, as in the case of a written memo or a voice-mail message. There is no direct and immediate feedback from the recipient. Two-way communication, by contrast, goes from sender to receiver and back again. It is characterized by the normal interactive conversations in our daily experiences. Research indicates that two-way communication is more accurate and effective than is one-way communication, even though it is also more costly and time consuming. Because of their efficiency, however, oneway forms of communication—memos, letters, E-mail, voice-mail, and the like are frequently used in work settings. One-way messages are easy for the sender but often frustrating for the receiver, who may be left unsure of just what the sender means or wants done.

STATUS EFFECTS

Status differences in organizations create potential communication barriers between persons of higher and lower ranks. On the one hand, given the authority of their positions, managers may be inclined to do a lot of “telling” but not much “listening.” On the other hand, we know that communication is frequently biased when flowing upward in organizational hierarchies. Subordinates may filter information and tell their superiors only what they think the boss wants to hear. Whether the reason is a fear of retribution for bringing bad news, an unwillingness to identify personal mistakes, or just a general desire to please, the result is the same: The higher level decision maker may end up taking the wrong actions because of biased and inaccurate information supplied from below. This is sometimes called the MUM effect in reference to tendencies to sometimes keep “mum” from a desire to be polite and a reluctance to transmit bad news.

To avoid such problems, managers and group leaders must develop trust in their working relationships with subordinates and team members, and take advantage of all opportunities for face-to-face communications. Management by wandering around, or MBWA for short, is now popularly acclaimed as one way to achieve this trust. It simply means getting out of the office and talking to people regularly as they do their jobs. Managers who spend time walking around can greatly reduce the perceived “distance” between themselves and their subordinates. It helps to create an atmosphere of open and free-flowing communication between the ranks. As a result, more and better information is available for decision making, and the relevance of decisions to the needs of operating workers increases.

Self Assessment on 'Active Listening'¹⁾

Instructions

Think about when you listen others' talking. Please choose one of four choices - seldom, occasionally, frequently, and usually.

No	Question on Your Behavior	Seldom	Occasionally	Frequently	Usually	Score
1	I listen very well until others finish their talking.					
2	I feel not good when others have different opinion.					
3	I stick on my opinion when others show different opinion.					
4	People often give notice of me when I don't pay attention to others.					
5	I don't evaluate others until they finish their talking.					
6	It is difficult for me to pay attention to others when they explain for long time.					
7	I usually show my opinion rather than waiting others' opinion.					
8	I show my gesture when dialogue is exciting.					
9	I usually pay attention to others even though their talking is not exciting.					
10	I expect others ask me to summarize dialogue rather than an other does.					
11	I always speak "I got it" and "I understand" to show my good listening.					
12	I tend to pay attention when others talk, and to summarize their talking.					
13	I decide very quickly if other talkers' opinion is correct or not.					
14	I don't pay attention to others' talking which I already know.					
15	I don't show my opinion until I understand others' opinion clearly.					

Scoring

1step: Follow the formular of scoring below.

No. 3, 4, 6, 7, 10, 13	Score	No. 1, 2, 5, 8, 9, 11, 12, 14, 15	Score
Seldom	3	Seldom	0
Occasionally	2	Occasionally	1
Frequently	1	Frequently	2
Usually	0	Usually	3

1) Gi Bok Paik, *Organizational Behavior* (Changminsa, 2010). pp 293-294.

2 step: calculate by a category below

[AI] Avoiding Interruption	=	No. 3 + 7 + 15 =	_____
[MI] Maintaining Interest	=	No. 6 + 9 + 14 =	_____
[PE] Postponing Evaluation	=	No. 1 + 5 + 13 =	_____
[OI] Organizing Information	=	No. 2 + 10 + 12 =	_____
[SI] Showing Interest	=	No. 4 + 8 + 12 =	_____

Total Score: AI + MI + PE + OI + SI = _____

Interpretation

If you have higher than 7 score each category, you have strong tendency of given category.

If you have higher than 35 score, you are active listener.