

What is Communication?

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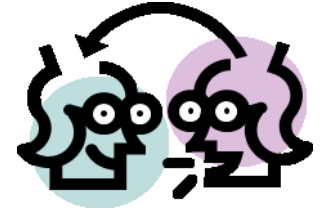
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What is Communication?

- Communication is simply the act of **transferring information** from one place to another.
- Although this is a simple definition, when we think about how we may communicate the subject becomes a lot more complex.
- There are **various categories of communication** and more than one may occur at any time.

The Communication Process (1)



- A message or communication is sent by the **sender** through a **communication channel** to a **receiver**, or to multiple receivers.
- The sender must **encode** the message (the information being conveyed) into a **form that is appropriate** to the communication channel, and the receiver(s) then **decodes** the message to understand its meaning and significance.
- Misunderstanding can occur at any stage of the communication process.
- Effective communication involves minimising potential misunderstanding and overcoming any barriers to communication at each stage in the communication process.

The Communication Process (2)

An effective communicator understands their audience, chooses an appropriate communication channel, hones their message to this channel and encodes the message to **reduce misunderstanding** by the receiver(s).

They will also seek out feedback from the receiver(s) as to how the message is understood and attempt to correct any misunderstanding or confusion as soon as possible.

Receivers can use **clarification and reflection** as effective ways to ensure that the message sent has been understood correctly.

Communication Channels

- Communication theory states that communication involves a **sender** and a **receiver** (or receivers) conveying information through a communication channel.

Communication Channels is the term given to the way in which we communicate.

- There are multiple communication channels available to us today, for example face-to-face conversations, telephone calls, text messages, email, the Internet (including social media such as Facebook and Twitter), radio and TV, written letters, brochures and reports to name just a few.

Appropriate communication channel

- **Choosing an appropriate communication channel** is vital for effective communication as each communication channel has different strengths and weaknesses.
- For example, broadcasting news of an upcoming event via a written letter might convey the message clearly to one or two individuals but will not be a time or cost effective way to broadcast the message to a large number of people.
- On the other hand, conveying complex, technical information is better done via a printed document than via a spoken message since the receiver is able to assimilate the information at their own pace and revisit items that they do not fully understand.
- Written communication is also useful as a way of recording what has been said, for example taking minutes in a meeting.

Encoding Messages

- All messages must be encoded into a form that can be conveyed by the communication channel chosen for the message.
- We all do this every day when transferring abstract thoughts into spoken words or a written form.
- However, other communication channels require different forms of encoding, e.g. text written for a report will not work well if broadcast via a radio programme, and the short, abbreviated text used in text messages would be inappropriate if sent via a letter.
- Complex data may be best communicated using a graph or chart or other visualisation.
- Effective communicators encode their messages with their intended audience in mind as well as the communication channel. This involves an appropriate use of language, conveying the information simply and clearly, anticipating and eliminating likely causes of confusion and misunderstanding, and knowing the receivers' experience in decoding other similar communications.
- Successful encoding of messages is a vital skill in effective communication.

Decoding Messages

- Once received, the receivers need to decode the message, and successful decoding is also a **vital skill**.
- Individuals will decode and understand messages in different ways based upon any **barriers to communication** which might be present, their experience and understanding of the context of the message, their psychological state, and the time and place of receipt as well as many other potential factors.
- **Understanding** how the message will be decoded, and anticipating as many of the potential sources of misunderstanding as possible, is the art of a successful communicator.

Feedback

- Receivers of messages are likely to provide feedback on how they have understood the messages through both verbal and non-verbal reactions.
- Effective communicators should pay close attention to this feedback as it is the only way to assess whether the message has been understood as intended, and it allows any confusion to be corrected.
- Bear in mind that the extent and form of feedback will vary according to the communication channel used:

for example feedback during a face-to-face or telephone conversation will be immediate and direct, whilst feedback to messages conveyed via TV or radio will be indirect and may be delayed, or even conveyed through other media such as the Internet.

The different categories of communication

Spoken or verbal communication: face-to-face, telephone, radio or television and other media.

Non- verbal communication: body language, gestures, how we dress or act - even our scent.

Written communication: letters, e-mails, books, magazines, the Internet or via other media.

Visualizations: graphs and charts, maps, logos and other visualizations can communicate messages.

The goal of all categories of communication

The desired outcome or goal of any communication process is understanding!!!

Interpersonal communication



- The process of **interpersonal communication** cannot be regarded as a phenomenon which simply 'happens', but should be seen as a process which involves participants negotiating their role in this process, whether consciously or unconsciously.
- **Senders and receivers** are of course vital in communication.
- In **face-to-face communication** the roles of the sender and receiver are not distinct as both parties communicate with each other, even if in very subtle ways such as through eye-contact (or lack of) and general body language.
- There are many other subtle ways that we communicate (perhaps even unintentionally) with others, for example the tone of our voice can give clues to our mood or emotional state, whilst hand signals or gestures can add to a spoken message.
- In **written communication** the sender and receiver are more distinct. Until recent times, relatively few writers and publishers were very powerful when it came to communicating the written word.
- Today we can all write and publish our ideas on the Internet, which has led to an explosion of information and communication possibilities.
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Principles of Interpersonal Communication

- Common to all interpersonal communications are some basic principles.
- These principles govern the effectiveness of our communications; they may be simple to understand but can take a lifetime to master.

Interpersonal Communication is not Optional

- We may, at times, try not to communicate; but not communicating is not an option.
- In fact the harder we try not to communicate, the more we do! By not communicating we are communicating something: perhaps that we are shy, perhaps that we are angry or sulking, perhaps that we are too busy. Ignoring somebody is communicating with them, we may not tell them we are ignoring them but through non-verbal communication we hope to make that apparent.
- **We communicate far more and far more honestly with non-verbal communication than we do with words.** Our body posture and position, eye-contact (or lack of it), the smallest and most subtle of mannerisms are all ways of communicating with others. Furthermore we are constantly being communicated to, we pick up signals from others and interpret them in certain ways and whether or not we understand is based on how skilled we are at interpreting interpersonal communication.

Once it's Out, it's Out.

- The process of Interpersonal Communication is irreversible, you can wish you hadn't said something and you can apologise for something you said and later regret - but you can't take it back.
- We often behave and therefore communicate to others based on previous communication encounters. These encounters may or may not be appropriate points of reference. We stereotype people, often subconsciously, maybe by gender, social standing, religion, race, age and other factors – stereotypes are generalisations, often exaggerated.
- Because of these stereotypes, when we communicate with people we can carry with us certain preconceptions of what they are thinking or how they are likely to behave, we may have ideas about the outcome of the conversation.
- These preconceptions affect how we speak to others, the words we use and the tone of voice. We naturally communicate in a way that we think is most appropriate for the person we are talking to. Unfortunately our preconceptions of others are often incorrect. This can mean that our communication is inappropriate and therefore more likely to be misunderstood. As the goal to all communication has to be understanding it can be said that we have failed to communicate. By communicating in this way, being influenced by preconceived ideas, we feedback further stereotypes to the person we are speaking to, thus exasperating the problem.
- Start all interpersonal communication with an open mind; listen to what is being said rather than hearing what you expect to hear. You are then less likely to be misunderstood or say things that you regret later.
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Endless Complexity

- No form of communication is simple, there are many reasons why communication is taking place, how it is taking place and how messages are being broadcast and received.
- Variables in communication, such as language, environment and distraction as well as the individuals involved in communicating all have an effect on how messages are sent, received and interpreted.
- When we communicate verbally we swap words - words that have, maybe subtly, different meanings to different people in different contexts. It could be argued that words are in fact just tokens we exchange with each other and that they have no inherent meaning at all hearted discussion in this area. We can communicate the same thing to different individuals but each person may have a different understanding or interpretation of the message.
- At any point in communication any misunderstanding, regardless of how small it may seem, will have an effect on the message that is being received.
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The Context of Communication

- All communication has a context; communication happens for a reason.
- Communication can fail because one or more of the participants overlook the context. To help avoid misunderstandings, and therefore communicate more effectively, it is important that the context of the communication is understood by all.
- Why is the communication happening?
- It is important that participants are on the same 'wavelength' so that they understand why the communication is occurring. It may be useful to start a larger conversation by explaining why it is happening.

Problems that affect the context of the communication

- Knowing why communication is occurring is an important first step - there are however problems that affect the context of the communication:
 - **Timing**
 - **Location**
 - **Misconceptions**

Timing

- Timing is fundamental to successful communication as well as considering a suitable time to hold a conversation you should make sure that there is enough time to cover all that is needed, including time to clarify and negotiate.
- Talking to an employee about a strategic decision five minutes before they have to leave the office for the day, for example, would probably not be as successful as having the same conversation the following morning.

Location

- It should be fairly obvious that communication is going to be less effective if it is conducted in a noisy, uncomfortable or busy place.
- Such places have many distractions and often a lack of privacy.

Misconceptions

- **The context of communication is also governed by our own feelings about it.**
- As already discussed, we stereotype people and therefore can develop inaccurate misconceptions and false assumptions.
- When communicating we may assume that: all parties know what we are talking about; we know the other person's views and opinions of the situation; we should not show any emotion; we are right, they are wrong.
- There are many other examples of misconceptions highlighting the importance of careful reflection and clarification in all communication.

- Thank you for your attention.