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Communication: The Lifeline

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Abstract

We are born with the capacity to communicate. We spend more time in communicating than doing anything else. From birth to death, communication is central to our personal, professional, and social lives. The word 'Communication' has been derived from the latin word 'Communicare' or 'Communis' which means to join, to unite, to share or to have things in common. Communication is the art of creating and sharing ideas and the richness of those ideas make the communication process effective. People communicate with each other in different ways that depend upon the message and its context in which it is being sent. All human interactions are a form of communication. A human being's need for communication is as strong and as basic as the need to drink, eat, love and sleep. Communication is truly a remarkable process. It is not only the basis of human thought; it is the lifeline of every relationship whether personal, professional or social.

Keywords: Communication, communicate, encoding, decoding, feedback, barriers, importance

Introduction

We are born with the capacity to communicate. We are capable of making utterances and gestures that enable us to send messages to other people. Being able to communicate well is, however, a skill. We spend more time in communicating than doing anything else. We listen, think, talk, share secrets with inmates, participate on teams, ask and answer questions, exchange information with colleagues, attend public performances, watch television programmes and so on. From birth to death, communication is central to our personal, professional, and social lives.

Meaning of Communication

The word 'Communication' has been derived from the latin word 'Communicare' or 'Communis' which means to join, to unite, to share or to have things in common (*Communicative English For Engineers And Professionals*, p. 1). When asked to define communication, most people relate to the forms of communication- talking or listening. A definition is a useful and logical place to start our exploration of communication. Definition clarifies concepts by indicating their boundaries. They focus attention on what is important about whatever it is we are defining. Unfortunately, no single definition of communication does this to everyone's satisfaction. However, different writers have different perspectives about communication.

According to Newstrom & Keith Davis, "Communication is the transfer of information from one person to another. It is a way of reaching others by transmitting ideas, feelings, thoughts, facts and values."

Megginson said, "Communication is the process of transmitting meanings, ideas and understanding of a person or a group to another person or group."

According to Fred G. Meyer, "Communication is the intercourse by words, letters or messages".

Theo Haiman said, "Communication means the process of passing information and understanding from one person to another."

According to William Rice-Johnson, "Communication takes place when one individual, a sender, displays, transmits or otherwise directs a set of symbols to another individual, a receiver, with the aim of changing something the receiver is doing (or not doing) or changing

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his or her world view. This set of symbols is typically described as a message”.

Communication is the art of creating and sharing ideas and the richness of those ideas make the communication process effective. It is communication process which allows us to interact with others; without it, we would not be able to share knowledge or experiences with other people. It is the act of transmitting verbal and non-verbal information and understanding between sender and receiver. It is the process by which information, ideas and feelings are shared by people through an exchange of verbal and non-verbal messages. So, it can be concluded that communication is the process of exchanging feelings, emotions, ideas, thoughts and information through speech, gestures, words, symbols, signals, writing, behavior etc. According to a survey, an average person spends as much as 75 per cent of the day in communicating and those who are in technical jobs are estimated to spend between 50 per cent and 90 per cent of their day in communicating. In the words of Walter Loban:

‘We listen a book a day; we speak a book a week, read the equivalent of a book a month, and write the equivalent of a book a year.’

Nature of Communication

1. Two-way process: Communication is a two-way process of understanding between two or more persons – sender and receiver.
2. Continuous process: Exchange of ideas and opinion amongst people is an on-going process in business and non-business organisations. Continuous interaction promotes understanding and exchange of information relevant for decision-making.
3. Dynamic process: Communication between sender and receiver takes different forms and medium depending upon their moods and behaviour. It is, thus, a dynamic process that keeps changing in different situations.
4. Pervasive: Communication is a pervasive activity. It takes place at all levels (top, middle, low) in all functional areas (production, finance, personnel, sales) of a business organisation.
5. Two people: A minimum of two persons — sender and receiver — must be present for communication to take place. It may be between superiors, subordinates and peer group, intra or inter se.
6. Exchange: Communication involves exchange of ideas and opinions. People interact and develop understanding for each other.
7. Means of unifying organisational activities: Communication unifies internal organisational environment with its external environment. It also integrates the human and physical resources and converts them into organisational output.
8. Verbal and non-verbal: Though words are active carriers of information, gestures can sometimes be more powerful than words. Facial expressions, sounds, signs and symbols are the non-verbal forms of communication.
9. Mutual understanding: Communication is effective when sender and receiver develop mutual understanding of the subject. Messages conveyed should be understood by the receiver in the desired sense.

10. Goal-oriented: Communication is goal-oriented. Unless the receiver and sender know the purpose they intend to achieve through communication, it has little practical utility.
11. Foundation of management: Though communication is a directing function, it is important for other managerial functions also. Designing plans and organisation structures, motivating people to accomplish goals and controlling organisational activities; all require communication amongst managers at various levels.
12. A means, not an end: Communication is not an end. Effective communication is a means towards achieving the end, that is, goal accomplishment. It smoothen managerial operations by facilitating planning, organising, staffing, directing and controlling functions.
13. Human activity: Since communication makes accomplishment of organisational goals possible, it is essential that people understand and like each other. If people do not understand each other’s viewpoint, there cannot be effective communication.
14. Inter-disciplinary: Communication is the art of how communicators use knowledge of different fields of study like anthropology, psychology and sociology. Making best use of these disciplines makes communication effective. It is, thus, an inter-disciplinary area of management.

Types of Communication

People communicate with each other in different ways that depend upon the message and its context in which it is being sent.

On the basis of channels, communication is of two types i.e. Verbal (Oral and Written) and Non-verbal (Kinesics, Proxemics and Paralanguage).

Based on purpose and style, communication is of two types i.e. Formal, usually in a professional setting (Upward, Downward and Horizontal) and Informal, usually with family and friends.

On the basis of attitude and behaviour, it is of two types i.e. Defensive (aggressive, attacking, angry, passive or withdrawing) and Non-defensive (assertive, direct and powerful).

Based on the number of people involved, communication is of four types i.e. Intrapersonal (communicating within yourself), Interpersonal (interaction of two or more people), Group and Mass communication.

Communication Process

It involves multiple parts and stages. These are:

1. Sender: The source of the message is the sender. The sender must know why the communication is necessary and why result is needed. Sender can be writer, speaker, and encoder.
2. Message: The message is simply the information that we want to communicate. Without a message, there is no cause for communicating.
3. Encoding: It is the process in which the speaker attempts to translate his or her thoughts and perceptions into words.
4. Channel: The message sent travels to the receiver via a channel, (i.e. sound waves, sign language, or video recording, and so forth).

5. **Decoding:** A process in which the listener attempts to understand and interpret what the speaker has encoded in his or her message.
6. **Receiver:** It can be a reader, listener, perceiver, and decoder of the message sent by the sender.
7. **Feedback:** It is receiver's response to sender's message. The receiver communicates his reaction to the sender through words, symbols or gestures. It is the reversal of communication process where receiver becomes the sender and sender becomes the receiver. Unless the receiver responds to the message, communication process is incomplete.
8. **Context:** It involves things such as our relationship with the audience, the culture of organisation and general environment.

The human communication system can be compared with a radio or telephone circuit. Just as in radio transmissions, where distortion can occur at any point along the circuit (channel), there can be similar barriers in human communication. Barriers are any difficulties or obstacles that come in the way of communication. Barriers in communication consist of language differences, cultural differences, inattention, disinterest, distrust or insecurity, physical disabilities such as hearing problem and speech disability, use of jargon, unclarified assumptions, taboos, differences in perception and viewpoints, physical barriers, faulty translation, unfamiliar accent, emotional or psychological barriers, poor retention, premature evaluation, linguistic chaos, symbols or words with different meanings, status, lack of confidence, lack of facilities, lack of proper incentive, lack of feedback, lack of interest in the subject matter, prejudices, fear, expectations, adverse environment, distance, ignorance of medium, noise, role, misinterpretation, gender biasedness, individual differences, perceptual barriers, mechanical barriers, poor expression, inference, distractions, inconsistency, poor appearance of speaker or words, poor listening skills, past experiences, time pressure and inadequate knowledge.

Communication: The Lifeline

All human interactions are a form of communication. A human being's need for communication is as strong and as basic as the need to drink, eat, love and sleep. It is both an individual and a social need. It is both a natural demand and a requirement of social existence to use communication resources for a successful life. It involves active interactions with physical, biological and social environments. Deprived of this interaction, we would not be aware of whether we are safe or in danger, whether hungry or satisfied, or loved or hated.

The basic human need for communication can perhaps be traced to the process of the evolution of mankind from lower species. Animals, for instance, have to be in sensory communication with their biological and physical surroundings to find food, shelter, reproduce their species and protect themselves such as the inability to hear a predator can mean loss of life. Those who have been isolated for a period of time from human company are known to have experienced nightmarish hallucinations. It is estimated that an individual without close friends run two or three times the risk of developing heart disease as other sociable individuals.

In a survey conducted by the Katz Business School at the

University of Pittsburgh, organizations rated good communication as the most important factor used in selecting their management staff. As per this survey, the written and oral communication skills were vital in predicting job success, as was the ability to communicate well with others in the workplace.

In the business world, nothing can be achieved without effectively communicating with employers, employees, customers, suppliers and clients. If we look at the most successful people in the world, we will see people who have mastered the art of communication. And there lies the difference between a communicator and a good communicator. It requires finesse, practice and a skill set that goes beyond those that the average person possesses.

Communication is the basis for planning. Planning is the basic function of management. If plans are well designed and communicated for their implementation, it leads to organisational success. Planning requires extensive environmental scanning and information about internal and external organisation elements. An effective system of communication helps in obtaining this information. Implementing the plans requires communicating them to everybody in the organisation. Communication is, thus, the basis of planning.

Communication serves as a commitment to organisational objectives.

Managers who follow an effective system of communication understand employees' needs, adopt suitable motivators to satisfy them, appraise their performance and provide them regular feedback. The employees also work with commitment towards organisational objectives.

Exchange of information develops trust, confidence and faith amongst managers and subordinates. They understand their job positions better and, thus, perform better. People are committed to organisational objectives which promotes job satisfaction.

Communication coordinates organisational resources (human and non-human), individual goals with organisational goals and internal environment with external environment. Coordination is the key to organisational success and communication is an active contributor to coordination.

Employees are motivated to work if their needs are satisfied. Communication helps managers know needs of their employees so that they can adopt suitable motivators and inspire them to develop positive attitude towards the work environment.

Communication helps in performing managerial roles.

According to Henry Mintzberg, managers perform three major roles – interpersonal, informational and decisional. Managers perform three major roles – interpersonal, informational and decisional (*The Nature of Managerial Work*, 173). Communication helps managers in performing these roles effectively. In interpersonal roles, managers interact with superiors, peers and subordinates; in informational roles they receive and give information to people inside and outside the organization and in decisional roles, they take important decisions and communicate them to organisational members for their effective implementation.

Good communication facilitates leadership.

Effective leaders interact with followers, guide and inspire them to perform the individual and organisational goals.

Effective communication process facilitates leaders to carry out the leadership functions.

Good communication inculcates adaptability to external environment:

In order to survive in the changing, dynamic environment, managers continuously interact with external parties like government, suppliers, customers, etc. This requires effective communication system in the organisation.

Managers interact with parties internal to business enterprises. They constantly obtain and provide information to them. More effective the communication system, more accurate will be the information.

Communication helps in maintaining healthy industrial relations.

Satisfied workers contribute to healthy organisations. Communication brings managers and trade unions closer, develops mutual understanding and promotes industrial peace and harmony. This increases industrial production.

Communication facilitates control in any organisation.

Planning is effective if accompanied by an effective control system. Control is possible when managers assess subordinates' performance, correct and prevent deviations and provide them regular feedback of performance. Control function largely depends upon communication system of the organisation. How effectively manager's control organisational activities depends upon how effective is the communication system.

Imparting training and development facilities to employees depends upon how well their superiors communicate with them. Trainers with good communication skills are better than those who have poor communication skills.

Communication helps to spread information and knowledge among people. For instance, authors write books to impart knowledge to the world, and teachers share this knowledge and their experiences with their students. Undoubtedly, the process of sharing information and knowledge cannot function without communication and as a result of it, humanity will be drowned in the abyss of ignorance.

Communication is a key foundation of all human relationships. Strangers meet, start communicating and getting to know each other, and then the relationships are formed when they have more interaction and communication. We build relations with others revealing our private identities, ask questions, listen to the answers, work out problems, remember shared history, and planning a future. The relationships that endure and those that collapse depend upon effective communication.

The importance of communication is obvious in our professional lives. Effective communication is central to the professions where talking and listening are vital such as teaching, counselling, law, marketing, business etc.

Communication is important for the health of our society. From telling stories to painting on the walls of caves and interacting on internet, people have found ways to communicate with each other to build a common social world. To be effective in a democracy, citizens must be able to express ideas and evaluate the logical and ethical strength of claims other people advance. Good communication is especially important for healthy and effective interaction in a socially diverse world.

God having designed Man for a sociable creature made him not only an inclination, and under a necessity to have fellowship with those of his own kind; but furnished him with language. To create meaning with language and to

interact with others, we follow rules of communication. The ability to use language and communicate allows human to create meaning in their lives.

Conclusion

Communication is truly a remarkable process. It is not only the basis of human thought; it is the lifeline of every relationship whether personal, professional or social. It is the means by which each of us develops an individual pattern of beliefs, attitudes, and values- the personal attitudes that bring us to understand, misunderstand, accept, or reject others who are like or unlike ourselves. Good communication is essential for personal relationships, professional lives and cultural and social well-being. So, communication is the key to a successful life; it is the lifeline and a fundamental part of life. Because communication is a cornerstone of human life, the decision to master it, serve us well.

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