
UNIT 11 ORGANISATION COMMUNICATION PROCESSES

Objectives

The purpose of this unit is to explain:

- the meaning and purpose of communication
- the process of communication
- the media and channels of organisational communication
- the intentional or unintentional barriers that prevent organisational communication to be effective
- what a manager should do to make his communication effective

Structure

- 11.1 Communication: Meaning and Purpose
- 11.2 Importance of Communication
- 11.3 Communication Process
- 11.4 Verbal and Non-verbal Communication
- 11.5 Channels of Communication
- 11.6 Barriers to Communication
- 11.7 Making Communication Effective
- 11.8 Summary
- 11.9 Self-assessment Test
- 11.10 References/ Further Readings

11.1 COMMUNICATION: MEANING AND PURPOSE

Communication refers to sharing of ideas, facts, opinions, information and understanding. Simply stated, communication can be said to be the passing of information and understanding from one person to another. It will be seen that there are at least three elements involved here, the sender at one end, the receiver at the other, and in between is the message or information that is to be passed on from one end to the other. The information is passed from the sender to the receiver, and the knowledge of its effects is passed from the receiver to the sender in the form of a feedback. Whether the effect produced is the desired one will depend upon how well the receiver understands the meaning of the information. Communication can, therefore, be aptly said to be the transmission of meaning.

11.2 IMPORTANCE OF COMMUNICATION

One of the important roles of the manager is the informational role wherein a manager seeks information from his peers, subordinates and others about anything relating to their jobs and responsibilities. At the same time a disseminator of information about job and the organisation to those who are concerned with it. As such a considerable part of time is devoted to receiving or disseminating information, i. e. in communication inside or outside the organisation. Some of the studies made in the USA show that between 40 to 60 per cent of the work time in a typical manufacturing plant is involved in some phase of communication. Further, the top and middle level managers typically devote 60 to 80 per cent of their total working hours to communicating.

According to Peter Drucker, good communication is the foundation for sound management. The managerial functions of planning, organising, directing and controlling depend on communication in an enterprise. For planning to be realistic, it is essential that it is based on sound information which is not possible without a good system of communication existing in an enterprise. The latest developments in the market may not be communicated to the planners, making their future plans totally meaningless. Adaptation to external environment on which rests the survival of the business may not be possible without good communication. Again in order to reach the objectives, it is necessary that leadership is exercised, decisions made, efforts coordinated, people motivated and operations controlled. Each of these functions involves interaction with the people in the organisation and leads to communication. The important fact of organisational life for a manager is communication, and success will depend upon how effectively one can communicate with others in the organisation; in other words, how successfully one can put ideas across to those who work with and thereby, persuade others to work in the direction of the achievements of goals of the organisation.

Let us take a relevant example. What is our objective in preparing lessons like these. Simply stated, it is to put across your mind the essence of managerial functions and enable you to understand how these can be discharged effectively. In other words, we are trying to communicate to you the concepts of management, and whether we have been successful in meeting our objective will depend upon the extent to which you are able to 'understand' what we are trying to communicate to you. Communication, therefore, aims at developing understanding.

11.3 COMMUNICATION PROCESS

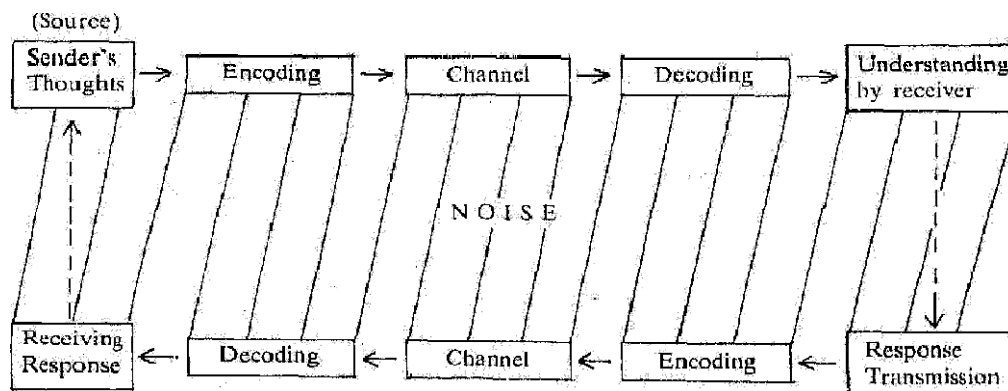
The simplest model of the communication process can be:

Sender > Message.....> Receiver

The model indicates the essential elements of communication, viz., the sender and the receiver, and the message that is exchanged between them. If any one of the three elements is missing, communication does not take place.

However, the process of communication is a much more complex phenomenon consisting of at least five elements which are subject to various influences. The model can be put as follows:

Fig. 1: Model of Communication Process



We shall see briefly what the various elements of this model mean.

Source

In this model the first element is the source of the communication from where the communication originates. The source or sender can be a person, a number of persons, or even a machine. The sender initiates communication because there is a need, thought, idea or information that wishes to convey to the other person, persons or machine. If, for example, an accidental fire has broken out in a part of godown of the factory, the security officer (source) will need to convey the message immediately to the fire station, (receiver). Fire alarm (machine) will do the same as of the security officer.

Encoding Message

The next element in the process is that of encoding the information to be transmitted. Encoding enables the thoughts to be put in the form of symbols. Normally language provides the symbols that are used in the transmission of thoughts to another person. However language is not the only means to convey the thoughts, needs or information. There are non-verbal means, e.g., gestures, which provide another form through which thoughts can be transmitted. The more complex the ideas, needs or information to be communicated, the more complex becomes the process of encoding them. While an involuntary shriek may adequately convey the degree of alarm felt by the victim, even a carefully worded statement or letter may fail to convey the essential purpose of the communication. This can happen if the language or symbols used convey different meanings to the sender and the receiver.

Encoding of the thoughts produces a message which can be either verbal or non-verbal. Verbal message is in the form of words and language, while non-verbal would be in the form of body gestures like wink, smile, grunt, frown, wave of hand, etc.

Channel

The next element in the process of communication is the channel through which the communication is transmitted. It is the link that joins the sender and the receiver. The most commonly used channels are sight and sound. In the organisational environment, the channel could take the form of face-to-face conversation, written memos, telephonic exchanges, group meetings, etc. Outside the organisation, the channels could be letters or circulars, magazines, radio programmes or TV shows, etc. For communication to be effective the channel used should be appropriate for the message as well as the receiver. For an urgent message mobile, telephone or mail would be the appropriate channel. Again, the channel chosen would be influenced by the consideration as to whom the message is being directed.

Activity A

List the various channels of communication that you use while communicating with

Your Boss		Your Subordinate	
1	.....	1	.....
2	.....	2	.....
3	.....	3	.....
4	.....	4	.....
5	.....	5	.....
6	.....	6	.....

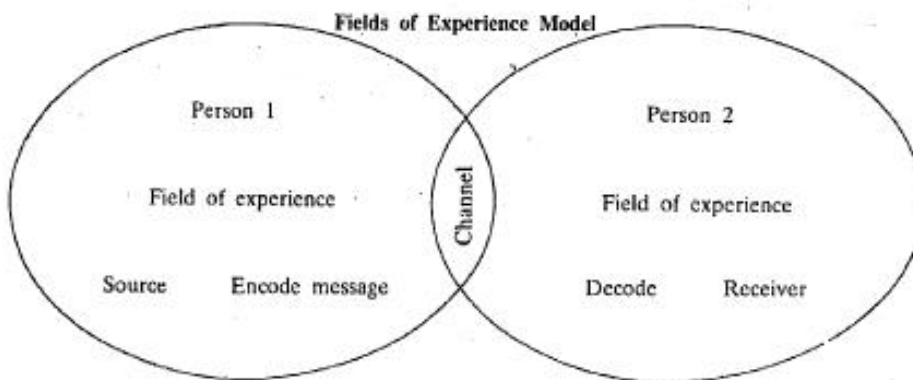
Decoding

Decoding and understanding the message constitute the last two elements in the process of communicating from sender to receiver. The receiver in the first instance receives the message and decodes it, that is to say, interprets and translates it into thoughts, understanding and desired response. A successful communication occurs when the receiver decodes the message and attaches a meaning to it which very nearly approximates the idea, thoughts or information the sender wished to transmit.

Decoding and understanding are affected by several factors. For example, a receiver cannot decode a message which is in a language not known to him. This applies to symbols also. The same symbol may carry a different meaning to the receiver. Again, the receiver's past experience, as well as his expectations colour the meaning that is attached to the message. All this tends to bring about a divergence between the 'intended' meaning and 'perceived' meaning.

In order that this does not happen, it is necessary to develop greater degree of homogeneity between the sender and the receiver, both of whom have their own fields of experience. The field of experience constitutes an individual's attitudes, experience, knowledge, environment, and socio-cultural background. The greater the overlap of the source and receiver's fields of experience, the greater the probability of successful communication. In other words, they have things in common that facilitate better communication. An

individual engaged in communication with another person of a significantly different educational or cultural background will have to put in greater effort to ensure successful communication. A model of communication credited to Wilbur Schramm illustrates this point.



The greater the overlap of the two persons' fields of experience, the higher is the probability of successful communication. The shaded area shows the overlap.

Feedback

Response and feedback complete the two-way process of communication. It is through the feedback that the source (sender) comes to know if the message was correctly received and understood. In case it is found that the message has been received incorrectly, it is possible to make corrections subsequently if response is timely.

Sender's efforts to communicate are aimed at eliciting the desired response. However, a communication may result in producing any of the three outcomes: a desired change may occur, an undesired change may occur or no change may take place. We consider communication as successful only when it produces the desired response.

Noise

Surrounding the entire spectrum of communication is the noise that affects the accuracy and fidelity of the message communicated. Noise is any factor that disturbs, confuses or otherwise interferes with communication. It can arise at any stage in the communication process. The sender may not be able to encode the message properly or the message may not be properly audible. The message may get distorted by other sounds in the environment. The receiver may not hear the message, or comprehend it in a manner not entirely intended by the sender of the message. The channel also may create interference by 'filtering', i.e. allowing some information to pass through and disallowing others. In any case, there is so much of noise or interference in the entire process that there is every possibility of the communication being distorted. We will see later in this unit why distortion takes place and what can be done to minimise the distortion of communication.

11.4 VERBAL AND NON-VERBAL COMMUNICATION

A communication in which words are used can be called verbal communication. Communication over long distance takes place usually through verbal communication. As an adjunct to this is the non-verbal communication which refers to the use of 'body language' in communicating ideas from the sender to the receiver. Non-verbal communication most often takes place unconsciously, and it may either fortify or supplement the verbal communication, or may at times negate the very purpose of verbal communication.

Let us examine each of these one by one.

The main characteristics of verbal communication is the use of words, either written or spoken.

Written communications include personal letters, memoranda, policy and procedure manuals, and notices placed on the notice boards.

Examples of oral communications are conferences, committee meetings, telephone conversation, announcements, etc.

Both written and oral communication have their merits and demerits.

A written communication has the advantage of being easily verified and of being more precisely defined if there arises a need for subsequent correction. Spoken messages cannot always be verified so easily.

Secondly, because a written communication is likely to be a permanent record, we are more particular in making it precise and accurate.

Thirdly, lengthy and complicated messages are better understood if they are put in writing. It would be difficult to understand and retain a lengthy message if it were only in oral form.

Together with these advantages, written communications have some drawbacks also.

Some of these are:

Firstly, it is a slower method of communication if we consider the total amount of time involved from the formulation of idea by the sender to the understanding of the idea by the receiver. A written communication competes with all other written material that reaches the desk of an executive. As such there can be a gap between the time when a communication reaches the manager's desk and the time when he reads it. Moreover, if clarifications are needed because the message is not clear to the receiver, further delay would take place.

Secondly, despite the fact that a greater degree of preciseness is aimed at while preparing a written communication, there is always a possibility of ambiguity or lack of clarity creeping in leading to misunderstanding on the part of the receiver. Clarifications naturally mean delay.

Lastly, over-reliance on written communication can lead to too much of paper-work in the organisation. This not only consumes time, money and energy, but also indicates a lack of trust among the employees of the organisation. It has been observed that when trust is low and suspicions are high in an organisation, an over-reliance on written communication is likely to occur.

Oral Communication

Although an organisation cannot function without written communications of various kinds, yet by far the greater percentage of information is communicated orally. It has been observed that managers spend 60 to 80 per cent of their work time in oral communication. Oral communication has the merit of being more rapid. Generally, the spoken word is a quicker and less complicated way of getting one's ideas across another person. Again, it offers the potential of two-way information flow, and therefore less possibility of misunderstanding the communication. The creation of a less formal atmosphere and generation of fellow feelings are the additional advantages brought about through oral communication.

However, the oral communication is not entirely free from defects. It is less effective as a means of presenting complicated and lengthy data. It is also subject to misinterpretation and the effects of barriers arising from interpersonal relationships.

Can you determine which of the two, oral or written; is a better means of communication? You will see that the choice between the two is, generally speaking, determined by the situation. However, the use of both together will very often strengthen and reinforce a message.

Take your own case. The material in your hand is the written communication which will be fortified subsequently through oral communication in the contact classes or educational TV programmes. The two together, we hope, will further increase your understanding of the concepts and application of management.

Choosing Your Words

You have read earlier that communication refers to the transmission of meaning from the sender to the receiver. Such transmission takes place through the use of symbols, whether verbal or non-verbal. In verbal communication the symbol is a word. In order that the transmission of meaning takes place it is important that the particular symbol (word) used must create within the mind of the receiver the same image which was in the mind of the sender of the communication. It is only then that the basic purpose of communication which is to influence the behaviour of the receiver will be achieved. It has been found that words do not necessarily have commonly understood meanings. The abstract words like "participation" or "democracy" or "satisfactory" suffer from the difficulty that different people are likely to attach different meanings to these words. The greater the use of such abstract words, the bigger the difficulty in bringing about an understanding of the message and a change in behaviour through communication.

Keith Davis in his well known book "**Human Behaviour at Work: Organisational Behaviour**", has suggested a few guidelines for making verbal communication more effective. These are:

- Use simple words and phrases.
- Use short and familiar words.
- Use personal pronouns (such as "you") whenever appropriate.
- Give illustrations and examples.
- Use short sentences and paragraphs.
- Use active verbs such as in "The manager plans".
- Economise on adjectives.
- Express thoughts logically and in a direct way.
- Avoid unnecessary words.

Use of Body Language

In determining the effectiveness of communication, in the sense of effecting a change in behaviour, non-verbal communication has an important role to play. Experts in the field of human communication have found that, in a typical message between two persons, only about 7 per cent of the meaning or content of the message is carried by the actual words being used. Another 38 per cent of the message is carried by one's tone of voice (which includes pacing, timing, pauses, accents). The major part of 55 per cent of the content of the message is in non-verbal form, in other words, in the form of our physical attitude going along with our verbal message. The physical attitude is also referred to as body language.

Non-verbal communication can take place with our actions or with our body gestures. For example, a manager who pounds his fist on the table while announcing that from now on participative management will be practised in his organisation creates a credibility gap between what he says and what he practises. A manager who says that he believes in an open door policy for all his employees but is busy with his own files while an employee is giving him certain suggestions towards improvement in work environment, is making non-verbal communication quite in conflict with his verbal communication. In such situations the non-verbal message is the stronger one and the verbal message will cease to be effective.

Body gestures that "communicate" may relate to your handshake, your smile, your eye-contact, your posture while standing or sitting, your facial expression while listening, the shrug of your shoulders, indeed, the movement of any part of your body. You must, therefore, be watchful of your body language so that it does not contradict your verbal message. This is indeed difficult because the body language is so involuntary that we are not even aware of it.

Some of the non-verbal actions which assist communication include:

1. Maintaining eye contact
2. Occasionally nodding the head in agreement
3. Smiling and showing animation
4. Leaning towards the speaker
5. Speaking at a moderate rate, in a quiet tone

Some of the non-verbal actions that **impede** the communication are:

1. Looking away or turning away from the speaker
2. Sneering or using other contemptuous gestures
3. Closing your eyes
4. Using an unpleasant tone of voice
5. Speaking too slow or too fast

11.5 CHANNELS OF COMMUNICATION

An organisation structure provides channels for the flow of information on which the decisions of the organisation will be based. As such an organisation can be described as the network of communication channels. These channels can be either intentionally designed, or they may develop of their own accord. When a channel is intentionally prescribed for the flow of communication in the organisation, we call it a formal channel, and the communication passing through that channel as formal communication. On the other hand, when communication takes place through channels not intentionally designed, in other words, outside the formal channels, such channels are referred to as informal channels, and the communication as informal communication.

Formal Communication

An organisation chart shows the direction of formal communication flow in an organisation. It identifies the various transmitters and receivers, and the channels through which they must communicate. The authority relationships indicate the direction of communication flow in an organisation. A formal communication takes place between a superior and subordinate in the form of instructions and directions. Such a flow takes place in the downward direction.

Another formal communication takes place between subordinate and superior when reporting on performance is made by the subordinate. Since the subordinate initiates communication to the superior, the flow is upward. We call this upward communication. The upward communication can take the form of progress reports, budget reports, profit and loss statements, requests for grants, etc.

Again formal communication may take place between one division of an organisation and another. This could be either lateral or diagonal. There is substantial formal communication between production foreman and

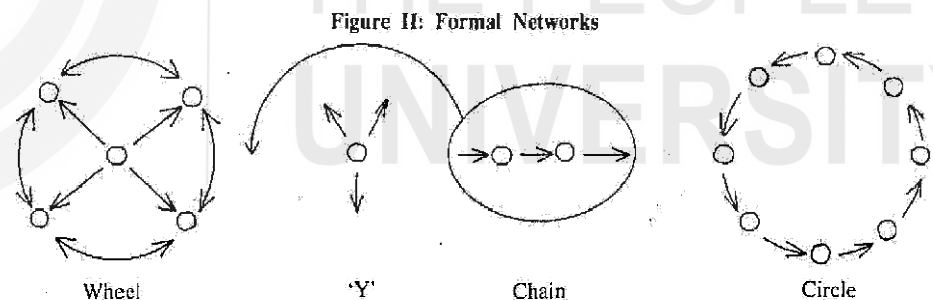
maintenance foreman, or, between production manager and quality control manager. Formal communication may pass across organisational levels also: for example, communication between line and staff units takes place very frequently across organisational levels. Such communication helps tremendously in the coordination of activity.

Finally, formal communication may also arise between the organisation and outside parties, e.g., suppliers, customers, Government, etc. This may happen when the management is required to provide information on certain aspects of working of the organisation. Communication of this kind is usually one-way.

Networks in Formal Communication

You have seen earlier how the formal organisational structure prescribes the channels through which communication flows take place. These channels are designed to keep the flow of information in an orderly manner and to protect the higher level managers from an overload of unnecessary information. However, the way in which these channels are designed and work can affect the speed and accuracy of information as well as the task performance and satisfaction of members of the group. As such, managers have to think of how best to design the organisational structure and the communication network which meets the requirements of the situation.

Some research in the design of communication networks has been carried out which indicates their relative merits for use in different situations. Although these networks can assume many forms, the most frequently discussed are four, known as the wheel, chain, 'Y', and circle, shown in the diagram below:



These forms can well be looked at as an organisational structure made up of five members.

The 'circle' network represents a three-level hierarchy in which there is communication between superiors and subordinates, with cross communication at the operative level.

The 'chain' can represent a five-level hierarchy, in which communication can take place only upward and downward, and across organisational lines.

The 'wheel' or 'star' represents an administrator and four subordinates with whom interacts. There is no interaction among the subordinates.

In the 'Y' network two subordinates report to the superior. It may be regarded as a four-level hierarchy.

To test the effect of various communication structures, a series of experiments involving simple as well as complex problems were conducted. The studies demonstrated that network centrality was the critical feature that determined whether a particular communication pattern was effective and satisfying to the members for a particular type of task. An index of relative centrality was developed for this purpose in order to determine who occupied the central position in each network. It was found that 'Y' and 'star' networks are highly centralised, with C occupying the central position. The 'circle' and 'chain' networks were found to be decentralised with no member being able to influence all other members.

Further experiments to determine how performance and attitudes were affected by different communication networks showed that centralised networks performed faster and more accurately than decentralised networks, provided tasks were comparatively simple. For complex tasks, however, the decentralised networks were comparatively quicker and more accurate.

The emergence of a leader and the satisfaction of group members was also affected by the centrality of networks. In centralised groups whether the tasks were simple or complex, one person who occupied the central position by virtue of the control of information emerged as the leader. In decentralised networks no one position could emerge as the leadership position.

As far as the satisfaction of group members is concerned, it was found to be higher in decentralised networks in all types of tasks. Satisfaction was higher in the 'circle', highest in the 'chain', lower in 'Y' and the least in the 'star' pattern. The reason for higher satisfaction in decentralised networks was that members of those networks could participate in problem-solving.

These experiments have certain implications for the design of organisational structure and the communication network:

Firstly, an organisation with mostly routine, simple tasks is likely to work more efficiently with a formally centralised network of communication, while more complicated tasks would require decentralised networks.

Secondly, the problem-solving objectives of speed and flexibility cannot be achieved by the same pattern of communication. Rather, speed in problem-solving can be achieved at the expense of flexibility, and vice-versa. As such the communication pattern should be designed with reference to the objective that is regarded as most important.

Thirdly, the pattern that leads to highest average morale and greatest flexibility in adapting to changed conditions is the one in which there are a large number of active participants in decision-making process.

Lastly, access to information is an important source of power in organisations.

We were so far explaining to you the communication patterns that are made

use of for formal communication in an organisation. You are, of course, aware that along the formal organisation exists another organisation known as informal organisation which has its own channels for communication. We shall now have a look at the informal communication and its channels.

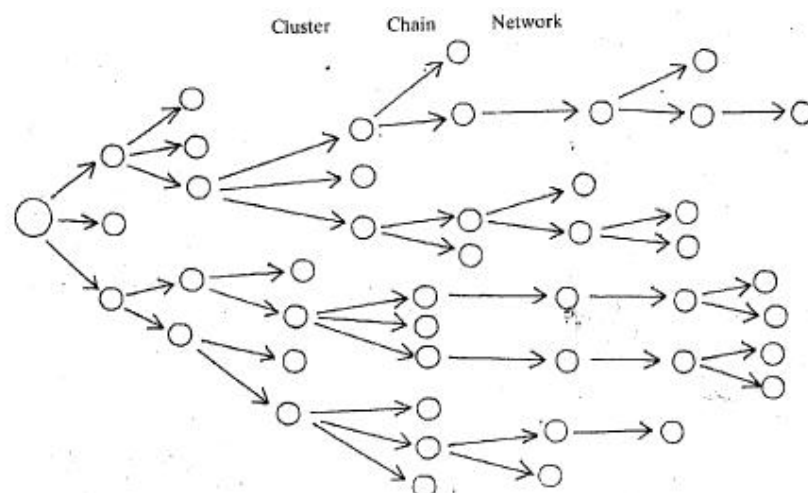
Informal Communication

Communication that takes place without following the formal lines of communication is said to be informal communication. This channel is not created by management and is usually not under the control of management. An informal system of communication is generally referred to as the 'grapevine' because it spreads throughout the organisation with its branches going out in all directions in utter disregard of the levels of authority and linking members of the organisation in any direction.

The informal communication arises as a result of employee needs for information which are not met by the formal channels. It has been observed that problems relating to work and unfavourable reactions to various organisational practices are transmitted through informal communication. Since the channels are flexible and establish contacts at personal levels among members of organisation at different hierarchical levels, the grapevine spreads information faster than the formal system of communication. As has been pointed out in the unit on Planning and Organising, about 10 to 40 per cent of employees receive information (or misinformation) about the organisation and its members through informal channels of communication.

In contrast to the formal communication which moves on slowly from one person at one hierarchical level to another at the next hierarchical level; the grapevine transmits information from one person to a group of persons much more rapidly in a cluster chain arrangement. The cluster chain is made up of individuals who act as information sources. Each individual passes the information to several others, some of whom repeat the message to others. Some of those who receive the message may not pass on the information to others but the information may lead to a change in their thinking on the subject and may sometimes affect their behaviour as well. The following diagram illustrates the cluster chain network of informal communication.

Figure: III



Though it has been found that informal communication carries accurate information about three-fourths of time, yet there are strong possibilities of its communications being distorted. This happens because of the process of 'filtering' whereby each member of the cluster chain acting as a kind of filter passes on only that part of communication which he regards as important. The receiver is left to fill in the gaps and complete the story according to his own imagination. This naturally leads to a very great distortion of the real situation and may at times cause serious problems in the organisation.

The characteristics of grapevine have been summarised by Keith Davis as follows:

1. People talk most when the news is recent.
2. People talk about things that affect their work.
3. People talk about people they know.
4. People working near each other are likely to be on the same grapevine.
5. People who contact each other in the chain of procedure tend to be on the same grapevine.

You have seen that the grapevine is a fast and a substantially accurate channel of communication. It has tremendous capacity to carry information both helpful and harmful to the formal organisation. In most cases it carries information which the formal channel may not or will not carry. The manager's responsibility, therefore, lies in utilising the positive aspects of the informal channels of communication and in minimising the negative aspects of this channel.

In order to do this, what the manager can do is to identify the members of the organisation who usually seek and spread information. It is possible that different individuals are active at different times but usually it will be found that some individuals tend to be more active carriers of information than the others. After identifying such people a manager can use them as sounding boards. If it is discovered that misleading rumours are circulating, it may be a desirable policy on the part of the manager to release the official information in order to clarify the situation. At times management may even find the informal communication channel more useful in transmitting information than the formal channel. A common method of using informal communication is by 'planned leaks', or strategically planned 'just between you and me' remarks, which would obviously reach all parts of the organisation much more quickly than any kind of communication through formal channels.

Activity B

Identify various types of communication networks found in your organisations. Which is the most effective one? Why?

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11.6 BARRIERS TO EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION

By now you are familiar with what communication is. You will recollect that in the earlier part of this unit, communication has been defined as the transmission of meaning or understanding. Yet by far, most of the communication in organisations or between persons fails to satisfy this criterion. Communication quite often fails to convey the meaning or develop an understanding of the communication sufficient enough to bring about a change in the behaviour of the recipient. According to Peter Drucker, "We have more attempts at communications today, that is, more attempts to talk to others, and a surfeit of communication media yet communication has proved as elusive as the Unicorn. The noise level has gone up so fast that no one can really listen any more to all that babble about communications. But clearly there is less and less of communicating. The communication gap within institutions and between groups in society has been widening steadily-to the point where it threatens to become an unbridgeable gulf of total misunderstanding." (Management Tasks, Responsibilities and Practices p. 481.)

One of the biggest dangers in communication is to assume that communication has taken place. Most of us indeed make a great effort in formulating ideas, and finding appropriate words for communicating them to others. In organisations, too, much money and energy is used to develop its system of communication. And yet, if you try to assess how far the system has led to effective communication in terms of the desired response, you will be surprised at the results. There is a fifty-fifty chance of the communication not being understood to the degree you would be satisfied with. This has been proved by a number of experiments and observations made by communication specialists. There is a story from the army which tells of an instruction starting at one end of the line as 'Send reinforcements' and ending up at the other end of the line as 'send three shillings and six pence'.

You can perhaps test it yourself. Try to recollect the news items of the previous evening's news telecast or broadcast. How many items can you recollect? Most likely less than half!

These examples indicate what happens to most of the communications between persons or within organisations. It is not only important that a communication be sent, it is much more important that it be understood. When an understanding of the communication does not take place, we can hardly expect a desired change in the behaviour of the receiver. What causes a failure of communication?

The failure in communication arises because of certain blockages or barriers between the sender and the receiver. In order to make a communication effective, it must be ensured that these barriers are removed. What the commercial media men these days try to achieve is to overcome the barriers and reach the target audience. What kind of barriers interfere with the effectiveness of communication? In the paragraphs that ' follow, we shall

discuss the various reasons which either prevent the communication from reaching the receiver or distort it in such a manner that it ends up either as non-communication or as miscommunication. Since a manager has to use communication as a means of getting the work done through his subordinates, he must ensure that barriers are minimised and effective communication takes place.

The barriers that interfere with the understanding of the, communication are of three kinds: semantic, psychological and organisational. We shall discuss them one by one.

Semantic Barriers

Most of the difficulties in communication arise because the same word or symbol means different things to different individuals. Perhaps you remember what happened to Shiny Abraham at the recent (1986) Asian Games at Seoul. Despite coming first by a very wide margin in the 800 m. race, she was disqualified and lost her gold medal for having crossed the track at the place where she should not have done. According to her she mistook the symbol, i.e. the colour of the flag. Whereas in our country the red flag indicates danger, in South Korea white flag is used for the same purpose. Misinterpreting the white flag which had been put up at that point, she crossed the track at the wrong place and suffered a setback.

Words, which are in reality symbols representing a thing, an action or a feeling, can have several meanings. As explained earlier, words which represent concrete things, e.g. car or house, tend to be understood in the same way, while abstract words like merit, effectiveness or responsibility, tend to be interpreted by different persons in different ways. Difficulty in understanding may arise even in the case of ordinary words which have different contextual meanings. Lately such difficulties are being experienced increasingly by people working in international development field. One such problem arose in interpreting the meaning of the word 'steps'. In a training programme of health workers relating to the family health in Jamaica when a question "What are some of the steps that a mother should take to make sure that her baby keeps healthy?" was asked, it was found that there was no response to it. The trainees who were accustomed to only one meaning of the word 'steps' based on their experience, could not just make any sense of the question.

Semantic difficulty may arise because of unfamiliarity with words, for example, a word of some foreign language of which the receiver has no knowledge. A technical word may also create such a problem-it may be beyond the ability of the receiver to understand it.

In order to make it effective, a communication must be put into words which are appropriate to the environment and mental framework of the receiver. This ensures the communication to be grasped properly and implemented effectively. A very interesting example of a communication made effective by the use of words appropriate to the environment in which they were used is provided by the following incident that took place in one of the agricultural states of the USA.

A proposal for raising the salaries of the faculty members of an agricultural college was under discussion. The farmers' bloc was totally against giving the raise to the college teachers-they could not see why they should pay those college teachers \$5,000 a year just for talking 12 or 15 hours a week. Faculty representatives made no headway in their negotiations until one of them who had some farming experience, got an inspiration.

"Gentlemen", he told the members of the administrative body, "a college teacher is a little like a bull. It's not the amount of time he spends. It's the importance of what he does!"

The faculty members got the raise.

Semantic barrier may further be created by body language being inconsistent with the verbal communication. A manager who praises the honesty and sincerity of his subordinate in a sarcastic tone creates doubts in the minds of the subordinate as to the course of action he should adopt in a given situation in future. The same kind of barrier is created by a divergence between the verbal language and the action language of the superiors. When action and language are used jointly, the actions often have more powerful influence on other's actions than do words. A management may, for example, profess its belief in being guided solely by the merit of employees while making promotions. Yet if employees observe that in actual practice promotions are made on considerations other than merit, the management's professed policy is bound to be affected by a semantic barrier-it is not likely to communicate anything, only the actions will communicate and what they communicate will be contrary to what had been said in so many words.

Psychological Barriers

Psychological barriers are the prime barriers in inter-personal communication. The meaning that is ascribed to a message depends upon the emotional or psychological status of both the parties concerned. As such the psychological barriers may be set up either by the receiver or the sender of the message.

You have already seen that the effectiveness of any communication depends upon the perception of the right meaning of the message on the part of the receiver. However the perception of meaning is very much affected by the mental frame of the receiver at the time the message is received. Emotions which dominate our mood at the time, e.g., anger, anxiety, fear, happiness, etc., will affect our interpretation of the message. The phrases 'viewing with coloured glasses' or 'seeing with jaundiced eyes' explain vividly how our inner feelings may vitiate our perception of the message or the situation. Past experience of the receiver in such situations would also lead to the same effect. The same thing may happen when different individuals interpret the same event or situation. For example, take the case of a supervisor watching a group of employees resting and gossiping on the lawns. How will this situation be perceived?

To the supervisor who believes that employees are basically lazy, the situation communicates to him that they are playing truant with their work, and therefore should be given more work to do and disciplined.

To the supervisor who believes that his workers are self-motivated and are sincere workers, the situation communicates that they are enjoying a well-earned rest.

To the supervisor who is personally insecure, the situation communicates that they are conspiring against him.

You will, therefore, see that a particular kind of situation, event, happening or words and symbols are capable of being interpreted by different people in different ways according to their own psychological states. A receiver who is suspicious or hostile, either as a consequence of his feeling of insecurity or because of his past experience with the sender of the communication, is more likely to start 'reading between the lines' and ascribe a distorted meaning to the message.

To the receiver's mind a communication gets tied up with the personality of the source. This is what some people call the halo effect. Thus if we receive a message from a person we admire, we are more likely to agree with it and act accordingly. On the other hand, our immediate reaction will be one of disagreement with a message that has been received from a person we do not like or trust. Thus our perception of meaning of the communication is coloured by our own value judgments about the source of the communication.

A receiver of the communication suffers from another problem which psychologists refer to as cognitive dissonance. Since an individual tends to be fed with too much of information from different sources, which is commonly the case in an organisational setting, he becomes selective in receiving and responding to the communications. He is most likely to 'hear' only those messages that conform to his own beliefs, attitudes and judgement. Communications that conflict with his own viewpoint tend to be ignored. Often the 'other' point of view may not only be ignored, it might indeed be regarded as unfriendly or even hostile. If this happens frequently, subordinates may start questioning whether their superior really wants to hear the 'bad' news, i.e., opinions contrary to his own. As a consequence, much of the unfavourable news in an organisation would never get reported to higher levels until the problem has assumed the form of a crisis.

One common phenomenon with all communications is the effect of filtering. This effect is produced when the communication passes through a large number of persons. Each individual through whom the information is passed interprets facts differently, judges from one's own point of view what is important or relevant, and passes it on with own interpretations, with the result that the original communication gets altered in the process. The process of filtering involves a biased choice of what is communicated, on the part of either the sender or the receiver. Thus filtering refers to the process of 'selective telling' or 'selective listening'. For example, a subordinate may tell the boss what he (the boss) wants to hear. Similarly, though several factors affecting productivity in the organisation may have been identified by the staff, yet the manager may hear and respond only to those factors that fit his preconceived view of the situation. In either case selectivity is introduced in the process of communication leading to a distortion in communication.

Organisations are particularly prone to the effect of filtering. In large organisations where there are several levels through which a communication must pass, filtering takes place at each level. In order to save the time of the busy executive and to save information overload, it is common in organisations for subordinates to prepare notes or abstracts of the communication before passing it on to the superior. The higher information has to travel the higher is the degree of abstraction, with the possibility that significant pieces of information may be entirely missed or their significance diluted or distorted. The larger the number of filtering points in an organisation the greater is the chances of distortion. This may happen even outside an organisation when communication is passed on verbally from one to another, as in a grapevine.

Organisational Barriers

Organisations provide a formal framework through which communication is designed to flow. The structuring of the flow itself tends to act as a barrier against freer flow of communication between persons and levels in the organisation. Rules may prescribe how communications are to move from one level to another in upward or downward directions. Not only is there a possibility of delay in the communication reaching its destination, but also there is every possibility of communication getting distorted through the process of filtering described in the previous paragraphs. It has been found that when information is channelled through different levels of organisation, it became altered as people interpreted facts differently. In an organisational setting this can be a very big problem since senior level executives who work through others have to depend more and more on the information and interpretations of their subordinates. Critical information that has lost its criticality because of the actions of the intervening levels may jeopardise the position of the manager as well as the organisation itself.

It has been observed that the upward communication is particularly subject to the influence of filtering in large organisations. Upward communication serves essentially two purposes in an organisation. First, it helps in coordinating and controlling the activities of the organisation. Second, it enables the superior to appraise the performance of his subordinates. While the former does not create any problems, the latter has behavioural implications. It is human nature to show one's performance in a better light than what it actually is. This tendency of an individual naturally brings about a filtering through conscious or unconscious altering, withholding or interpreting facts to be transmitted upward.

Dependency syndrome of the subordinate heightens the tendency to filter information. In a superior-subordinate relationship, the subordinate is, generally speaking, dependent on the superior for the advancement. Studies show that the greater the dependency of the subordinate on his superiors for the satisfaction of his needs, the more his tendency to filter information of an unfavourable kind. It has been found that subordinates are generally unwilling to communicate unfavourable information when they feel that their superior has the power to punish them in some way. Only positive aspects of performance are likely to be communicated upwards.

Another barrier in organisational setting is created by the superior-subordinate relationship itself which develops a distance between the two. People are more comfortable in communicating with persons of similar status as their own. Communication with persons of higher or lower status is likely to be formal and reticent rather than informal and free. The distance between the superior and subordinate and the difficulty in freer communication between them tends to be heightened through status symbols which might be used to show the hierarchical status of the person concerned. Status symbols within an organisation may be in the form of separate parking space, separate bathrooms, separate refreshment rooms, cabins with stylised furniture, carpets, etc. Such symbols accentuate the distance between the different hierarchical levels and tend to widen the communication gap. Perhaps you may have read that among the several characteristics of Japanese style of management is the removal of status symbols. For example, under the Japanese system there are no separate cabins for managers, uniforms for workers and managers are the same, they eat the same menu in the same cafeteria. All these are intended to reduce the distance between the workers and the managers, and bring about a better understanding of the problems of the organisation which is the chief objective of organisational communication.

You have read in the last few pages about the problems that crop up in communicating with others, whether inside or outside the organisation. These problems create an interference in the process of sharing of the meaning of a communication, and thus block its effectiveness. As a manager you will be continuously required to make use of your communication abilities in the performance of your job. Since your success as a manager will be judged in terms of the results that you produce, the effectiveness of your communication is, therefore, of prime importance to you. We shall explain to you in a few paragraphs below what you can do to make your communications effective.

Activity C

Identify the barriers that prevent the effectiveness of communication. What can both: of you do to remove these barriers between you and your boss ?

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11.7 MAKING COMMUNICATION EFFECTIVE

In order to make your inter-personal communication more effective, the following are some of the points that you should bear in mind:

Use direct, simple language and avoid words which can have ambiguous meanings:

Keep the receiver (audience) in mind while choosing the words and phrases. Your communication will be effective if the words you use are appropriate for the level of receivers for whom the communication is aimed at.

If you look through history, you will find that the great messages have been simple and short. Moses had only ten commandments and they hardly add up to sixty words, and the 17 Rock Edicts of Ashoka are equally brief and to the point.

Use face-to-face communication: Face-to-face communication allows more accurate feedback to be achieved through two-way communication. Generally speaking, people express themselves more freely while talking rather than through writing. Face-to-face communication permits a manager to see and understand the non-verbal signs also.

Use feedback: Feedback enables the sender to judge whether his ideas have been received in the manner as they were originally intended. Most often it is assumed that communication has taken place because a notice has been put on the notice board, or an order issued. You must devise ways to separate fact from distortion.

Listen with understanding: The biggest block to interpersonal communication is said to be the inability to listen intelligently, understandingly and skillfully to another person. We tend to confuse listening with hearing, which is a physical process. Listening actually is much more than hearing, it involves understanding. Real communication takes place when the listener truly hears and understands the position and intent of the speaker. Most managers are, however, poor listeners. Apart from other reasons for poor listening performance, the main reason is the discrepancy in the speeds of speaking and of listening. While an average person can speak at the rate of 150 words per minute, one can listen and think at the rate of over 1,000 words per minute. The difference obviously leaves idle time for the mind to wander about and lose some part of the message that is sought to be conveyed. In order to be a successful manager you must attempt to develop your listening ability by utilizing your idle time in projecting yourself into the mind of the other party and understanding the factual and emotional content of the message, without making any attempt at criticising, approving or disapproving it until after you have fully heard and understood the remarks. The empathetic listening, as it is called, vastly improves the understanding of both the parties, bringing in its wake improved interpersonal relationship in the organisation.

Create constructive environment for the expression of ideas: If you can create a climate in which people can be confident that what they say will be

listened to with sympathy and considered constructively, you can be sure of a successful and creative communication. This is, however, possible only in an environment of trust which has to be generated by management through its policies and actions.

Be careful about your non-verbal communication: Because you hold a status higher than your subordinates, your gestures are observed and 'felt' by your subordinates. Your body language, therefore, must be supportive of your communication through words. One of the powerful means of communication are your actions which speak louder than words. If you expect your communication to be effective, ensure that your actions are consistent with your words.

Develop and use organisational structures which minimise the chances of filtering the communication: Decentralisation of authority and broadening of span of control can be attempted to reduce the levels in the organisation and minimise the authority filters.

The American Management Association has developed a set of ten suggestions for improving communication, referred to as "The Ten Commandments of Good Communication". Briefly, these suggestions are:

- Clarify before attempting to communicate.
- Examine the purpose of communication.
- Understand the physical and human environment when communicating.
- In planning communication, consult others to obtain their support, as well as the facts.
- Consider the content and the overtones of the message.
- Whenever possible, communicate something that helps, or is valued by the receiver.
- Communication, to be effective, requires following up.
- Communicate messages that are of short-run and long-run importance.
- Actions must be congruent with communication.
- Be a good listener.

11.8 SUMMARY

Communication is the transfer of information from one person to another. Successful communication is much more than mere transfer of information-it is the transfer of meaning and understanding between two persons.

Communication has paved the way for modern civilisation and good communication is the foundation for sound management. No managerial activity is possible without communication of some kind, and the major part of a manager's working time is devoted to communicating.

Communication is accomplished through a process in which the sender

encodes an idea which is transmitted through a channel to a receiver who decodes the message and gains an understanding of the idea of the sender. The reverse process of feedback also follows the same pattern. During the entire process, interference is created by 'noise' which can lead to distortion of the communication.

Communication takes place either orally or in writing. It could be just one-way or two-way, which allows the sender and receiver to interact with each other. A two-way communication is regarded better, as it brings about understanding through clarity of the message. In an organisation, communication may take place in several directions-upward, downward, lateral and diagonal.

Words either written or oral convey a very small part of the communication: most of it is transmitted through non-verbal gestures. A manager ought to be careful lest his non-verbal gestures contradict his verbal message.

Communication within an organisation flows either through formally designed authority channels or through informal channels spontaneously formed and cutting across authority levels. Informal channels can have both positive and negative sides. Cluster chain network of informal communication permits a rapid flow of information through the formation of a grapevine. Formal communication is transmitted through several kinds of networks. The choice of a network will depend upon considerations of the complexity of a task, speed in decision-making in order to adapt to a change, and the satisfaction of members desired.

Interference in communication is caused by semantic, psychological and organisational barriers. In order to achieve effectiveness in communication, managers should consciously try to lower these barriers.

11.9 SELF-ASSESSMENT TEST

1. Why is effective communication important to the manager?
2. Explain the elements of the communication process.
3. What is 'noise' in communication? What factors in the organisational environment cause noise?
4. What purposes are served through vertical communication?
5. What problems are encountered in vertical communication?
6. Why is informal channel of communication called, a grapevine? Should managers use the grapevine or rely on formal channels?
7. Explain the significance of body messages in communication effectiveness.
8. Explain the statement, "Words are symbols and meaning exists in the mind".
9. Think of a situation at home or at work, and identify communication problems you observed or experienced.

11.10 REFERENCES/ FURTHER READINGS

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