

SESSION 2

INTRODUCTION TO PROFESSIONAL COMMUNICATIONS

Unit Structure

- 1.0 Overview**
- 1.1 Learning Outcomes**
- 1.2 Professional Communication**
 - 1.2.1 What is Professional communication?**
 - 1.2.2 The Importance of Professional Communication Skills**
 - 1.2.3 Challenges**
- 1.3 Elements or Components of the Communication Process**
 - 1.3.1 Communicators or Participants in Communication**
 - 1.3.2 Message and Meaning**
 - 1.3.3 Code/Sign Systems and Channel**
 - 1.3.4 Noise**
 - 1.3.4.1.1 Mechanical Noise**
 - 1.3.4.1.2 Environmental Noise**
 - 1.3.4.1.3 Internal Noise**
 - 1.3.4.1.4 Semantic Noise**
 - 1.3.5 Feedback**
- 1.4 Communication Settings or Contexts**
 - 1.4.1 Intrapersonal communication**
 - 1.4.2 Interpersonal: Dyadic and Small-Group**
 - 1.4.3 Institutional or Organisational Communication**
 - 1.4.4 Public Communication**
 - 1.4.4.1 Mass-Mediated Communication**
- 1.5 A Few Points to Remember**
- 1.6 Answers to Activities**

1.0 OVERVIEW

This Unit introduces one*of the two main components of the manual, Professional Communication or Communication for the Workplace. Some main elements of the communication process and different levels of communication will be examined and certain key aspects pertaining to communication effectiveness will be introduced.

(* The other component, academic writing skills, will be developed in the units to come)

1.1 LEARNING OUTCOMES

By the end of this unit, you should be able to do the following:

1. Define professional communication;
2. Explain the importance of communication skills in today's work setting;
3. Identify communication challenges facing professionals in the work context ;
4. Gain awareness of certain general principles and aspects of effective and appropriate communication in the professional context;
5. Learn about different components and levels of communication and their specific nature;
6. Assess your strengths and weaknesses in professional communication skills;
7. Practise principles of effective communication and other knowledge gained to improve communication competency.

1.2 PROFESSIONAL COMMUNICATION

1.2.1 What is Professional Communication?

Communication in the work context or for work settings can be termed “Professional Communication”. This term encompasses a variety of workplace situations and forms, amongst others:- technical writing; organisational communication; marketing; public relations; corporate communication; print and video production; crisis communication management; communication

involving scientific or technical professionals on one hand, and others within or outside the organisation or institution, on the other hand.

Professional communication in this module will focus on the latter, that is, communication of expert practitioners in scientific and technical fields, in different settings and situations, with people from diverse backgrounds: technical or scientific peers or professionals in the same field; or with different training and experience; other professionals not in the same technical arena; non-technical and non-scientific colleagues; laypersons; people from the same country or not, etc.

This communication skills module will not examine nor discuss specialised communication knowledge or skills.

Communication skills and standards explained in this manual will be of a general nature, trying to meet the needs of scientific and technical experts who need to improve their communication competency in the work context. Class interaction and assignments can supplement the needs of specific fields.

Communication in the work context involves a whole range of ways in which people convey or receive information or messages. Communication for the workplace encompasses written, oral, visual and digital communication. It is important to point out that the ways and means of sending and receiving is not a matter of personal choice or merely of aesthetics; they have to be appropriate (for instance you may be required to present a project orally in 5 minutes using a few slides to convince a partner institution to work with your organisation on a project) and as effective as possible.

In the rest of this manual, specific units focus more on written language, namely Units 2, 3 and 10, while the others focus more on oral communication (including visual and digital media). However, the information or skills contained in all units often apply to both oral and written communication.

The basic principles of professional communication skills are much the same as for social communication skills (or communication skills in social context). Therefore, the effective communication skills pertaining to professional contexts as discussed in this manual often apply to social contexts as well. However, social contexts are usually informal and more flexible than the work context where there are norms and requirements that one has to meet. Each person usually communicates in his/her own style and in ways in which (s)he usually feels more comfortable. At the workplace, although you might be more comfortable with writing and making elaborate drawings of your work, you may often be required to present your work orally at meetings with partners, funding representatives, etc. This will require that you become more proficient in oral communication skills, where you will be required to talk clearly and confidently, to summarise a project or situation, etc.

Trained professionals need to be skilled communicators. Some people are inherently an effective communicator but others can learn to be one. Improving your communication skills is an excellent investment in yourself.

1.2.2 The Importance of Professional Communication Skills

Effective Communication skills constitute a fundamental skill for:

- **employability of future graduates**: to secure work placements and to enter the workforce;
- **job performance**: the work environment in which you will find yourself often calls for exchange/communication with peers who may be from different disciplines, backgrounds, countries. Effective Communication enhances professional performance;
- **the competitive advantage of the organisation** to which as an individual you contribute. The professional and organisational communication responsibilities of the scientific or technical specialists today include communication with internal and external customers (convincing others about your ideas and programmes, internal and external funding sources, etc);
- **career advancement**; it can mean furthering one's career within the same organisation or being able to change jobs within and across industries.

Today, higher professional standards of scientific and technical experts necessarily include high communication efficiency in the work context. Amidst a sea of ever-increasing information and communication, organisations/institutions and professionals have to be proficient and efficient both in processing information and in communicating with different partners or stakeholders. Communication efficiency helps improve general efficacy at the workplace.

Reflect on the following two statements:

Whether in social contexts or at the workplace:

- | | | |
|-----------------------------------|---|----------------------|
| 1) we all communicate | → | TRUE |
| 2) we all communicate efficiently | → | NOT NECESSARILY TRUE |

We all communicate but we are not always effective in our communication.

1.2.3 Challenges

One of the most important challenges facing professionals and organisations in the business world today is considered to be effective communication. The professional environment is a competitive environment where effective communication skills increase your ability to compete. Poor communication can have a very negative impact on the performance of the individual and on the results of the organisation.

Today, communication is considered to be potentially one of the greatest strengths of an organisation or one of its biggest weaknesses. The work environment demands increasing and more intensive collaboration and consultations with one another, not only in critical communication situations, but on a day-to-day basis.

As an individual, your communication competence contributes to the general efficacy and image of the organisation. Very few technical and scientific professionals can afford to work with little

or hardly any interaction with others. Without effective communication skills, it is increasingly difficult to perform the scientific and technical tasks with peers at work. Sharing technical information with non-technical people as well is becoming an increasing necessity.

Communication must be precise, concise and timely.

Working within deadlines, submitting information requested as and when it is needed, responding with factual and useful information in a crisis situation, etc are examples of situations where you cannot afford to be late. Inappropriate timing can have serious consequences. Forgetting to mention an essential piece of information about a procedure, a requirement, or expecting that the partner/peer/counterpart will necessarily “know” or fill in the implicit information may result in loss of precious time.

<p><i>The risks and possible consequences of miscommunication can be very damaging.</i></p>
--

People do not always have the same understanding of the terms or phrases as these are sometimes equivocal.

A simple example can be taken from a Children’s activity book in which stickers have to be stuck on specific pages. One instruction/activity reads as follows: “*Pour empêcher Chipeur* de chiper le collier de sirène de Dora, accrochez 2 homards bleus à sa queue !*”

In the said activity, it is not clear whether “*sa queue*” refers to Dora the mermaid’s tail or Chipeur the fox’s tail. But, in this case, whether the child chooses one or the other does not entail any serious consequence.

[SOURCE: **“Dora L’exploratrice - Mes aventures à la mer Hors-serie no 2, Viacom International Inc, p. 9”*]

The possible consequences are more costly and dramatic when in the professional fields - especially in highly technical or scientific fields - people misunderstand a message or an information.

The following is an example of catastrophic miscommunication:

The NASA Mars Climate Orbiter lost in September 1999.

“The \$ 125 million dollar spacecraft malfunctioned and was destroyed because of a basic and catastrophic miscommunication. NASA navigators assumed a contractor was using metric measurements when in fact English units had been used. NASA converted to the metric system in 1996, and apparently this change of standard was not effectively communicated to every person and organization involved in this mission.” (Chambers, 2000, p. 6)

Activity 1

Form groups of 3 to 4 persons. Each group must come up with a few examples of communication situations (experienced personally or by others) that have led or can lead to misunderstanding, conflict, or other serious consequences.

The group must also try to identify the root of the problem.

1.3 ELEMENTS OF THE COMMUNICATION PROCESS

Communication concerns the sending and receiving of messages and meanings. By examining the elements or components of the communication process, we can understand better what happens during communication and this can help to improve the effectiveness of communication.

1.3.1 The Communicators or Participants: Source/Sender and Receiver/Recipient/Audience

Although there usually is an original source or sender, i.e., one party who initiates communication, in most communication situations, the persons who communicate are both sender and receiver. For example, in oral face to face communication situations, usually one is sending and receiving messages simultaneously. While the “original source” or sender is talking,

the “receiver” or recipient or audience is often “sending” silent messages for instance by nodding (which can mean “I understand” or “I agree”) or smiling (which can mean “I am amused by what you are saying”) or frowning (which can mean “your explanation is not very clear to me”). When the “original receiver” in turn becomes the “speaker”, the same silent messages are often sent by the one who is then listening.

The communicators can be in each other’s presence, or separated both in space and time (e.g., an email you send to a counterpart abroad, whose time zone is 4 or 8 hours behind). The communication can take the form of a one-to-one or one-to-many (an internal survey carried out by the Human Resource Officer and involving all staff).

The communicators may or may not know one another personally e.g., an individual filling in a form of application for funds which is then sent to an “institution” (one or more persons at the receiving end responding, and doing the follow up).

The original source can be the Management of an organisation which, with the help of an advertising agency, sends out a message in the form of an advertisement using radio and television, to try to persuade the general public to buy a product.

In the workplace context, the communicators, purpose of communication and nature of communication can take various forms, and the types of exchange are of varying degrees of complexity.

1.3.2 Message and Meaning

The message is the physical written, visual or oral product that is transmitted,

- (a) e.g., “a letter inviting you to attend a meeting to discuss a project”.
- (b) e.g., a graph or table circulated to all members of the organisation and which shows the high revenue generated by a specific department.
- (c) an advertisement aired on television.

Because individuals have different life histories, educational and social backgrounds, experience, etc, the message sent is not received/understood in identical ways. The meaning received is not the same for everyone. For instance, in case (a) above, the letter sent is welcomed by one colleague/counterpart as an interesting initiative in which to participate whereas the same letter can be received/interpreted by another colleague/counterpart as an inferior being summoned to join in a project already decided upon by “others”.

The case of (b) above can be interpreted by members of another department (X) as management favouring the specific department (Y) when highlighting its good results whereas results of department X which were almost as good in the previous year did not get the same recognition.

Case (c) above of a message in the form of an advertisement aired on television can make a good impression upon many members of the audience, make them smile and incite them to try the product advertised. However, some other members of the audience may interpret the meaning very differently; they may find the language used or the portrayal of a character derogatory and this may even discourage them from buying the product.

It is important to remember that the meaning intended is not necessarily what is received, and meanings conveyed can sometimes be unintentional. Hence, the *Sender* and the *Receiver* need to be cautious about the messages sent and received, about the different forms or codes that are used to communicate.

1.3.3 Code/Sign Systems and Channel/Medium

To convey messages and meanings to one another, human beings use *signs and codes*. Human beings do not transfer messages and meanings directly from one mind to another.

A **sign** is a symbol, letter, written word, sound, etc., which alone or combined with others, conveys meanings, not by any law of nature but through conventions.

A **code** is a set of signs which are organised and structured in a certain fashion to carry meaning, and which functions as a system. The driving code is a set of signs (which include symbols like

the red, orange and green lights, yellow or white lines drawn on the ground, words like STOP, NO PARKING, etc) to convey meanings.

The most common codes that we use in everyday life or at the workplace are written or spoken languages: English, French, Creole, Hindi, etc.

When you write in the course of your University studies at the University of Mauritius or for the workplace, you usually use the English language (written) code. When writing a report or presenting results of a study, we often include lists of figures which we present in the form of graphs and tables. This is another code which we agree - by convention - to use and draw in a certain fashion.

Channel or Medium

Signs and codes are conveyed through a **channel** or **medium**¹.

The Channel is the physical medium or means that transports or transmits the messages to be conveyed. The channel can be face to face oral communication, or mediated communication through a written letter or other written/printed documents, the internet (email, website, social media, etc) or intranet, traditional telephone, mobile phones using the latest technologies and applications, etc.

The same message using one or more codes can be conveyed using different channels. For example, an organisation has decided to “rebrand” its image or to communicate its new vision and strategy to its staff, partners and external customers. This will probably require the use of different channels (and codes) to reach each segment of the audience targeted in the most effective way possible: for instance a face to face oral presentation (oral explanation supported by a slideshow projecting written words and pictures) for its staff at the main plant; a video- conference with the staff in distant places where telecommunications facilities are readily

¹ Strictly speaking, the terms channel and medium do not necessarily mean exactly the same thing. Here they are considered as equivalent.

available at a reasonable cost; a communication campaign using the main traditional media (print, radio, television) and the new media (e.g. social media) targeting the general public; a dinner-conference for its strategic partners; etc.

Different channels of communication or medium (or media) have different qualities or advantages as well as limitations. Usually, the cost and availability, the original sender or source, the recipients/receivers, the purpose of the communication, etc will determine the channels selected. This choice must be made as far as possible with a view to be as effective as possible.

Activity 2

An organisation involved in a very highly technical field has decided to show its commitment to the district in which its main plant is located, and especially to environmental matters.

Form groups of 4-5 students. Each group must come up with:-

- (i) a main message that the organisation wants to convey (to its staff, partners, and the general public).
- (ii) the different channels and codes to be used to reach the different target audiences (adapting the message in each case).

1.3.4 Noise

Noise is any factor or stimulus that impedes the communication process especially at the level of delivery or reception. It is much more than mere sounds and can take other forms.

We can distinguish four main types of *noise*, although there can be some overlapping between them.

1.3.4.1 Mechanical Noise

This usually occurs when a physical device used to send and/or receive the message is the source of disturbance or hindrance.

For example,

- a) during a telephone conversation, the telephone apparatus may be faulty and prevent the communicators from hearing one another clearly;
- b) while using the internet or mobile telephone to talk or chat, communication is hampered because the communicators cannot hear each other very well, or the conversation is frequently interrupted due to faulty connection, or given that the sound waves being transmitted are so unclear that the message is distorted.

1.3.4.2 Environmental Noise

This refers to stimuli in the environment that distract the attention of the receiver, preventing one from “receiving” fully what is being communicated. This can be in the form of sounds, sight or other stimuli.

Examples are:

- a) too many people sitting in front of you in a conference room and this prevents you from seeing the slides being shown to illustrate an exposé;
- b) in a restaurant, the other people in the surroundings are all talking and making so much noise that it is difficult for you to hear your counterpart;
- c) a distracting sight such as an insect crawling up the sleeve of the person interviewing you;
- d) a bad odour, a place that is too cold, etc.

1.3.4.3 Internal Noise

This usually occurs inside the mind of the receiver and prevents the latter from receiving fully the information sent. This can be due to:

- a) **Selective attention** caused for example by daydreaming, physical pain or worry, feelings of happiness or depression, or one's attention focused on stimuli other than those of the communication situation. This kind of situation prevents the receiver from paying attention to all the stimuli sent. The receiver may miss an important information.
- b) **Selective distortion** occurs when receivers twist the message to hear what they "want" to hear. People often have set attitudes and expectations about what they will hear or see due to stereotyping, prejudices and bias. They will thus distort the message received so that it fits into their belief system.
- c) **Selective retention** refers to receivers retaining only a fraction of the message that reaches them and neglecting or "forgetting" other aspects of the message.

1.3.4.4 Semantic Noise

Semantics refers to meaning. Semantic noise occurs when people involved in a communication have different meanings for the same words and phrases, when certain words or phrases are ambiguous (can mean different things) or when people do not understand the meaning of certain words due to jargon and technical terms used in a specific field.

The source of interference is the difference in the meaning, the ambiguity of words, the ignorance of the meaning, or the misunderstanding or difficulties that result in the communication process.

Semantic noise can also be caused by meanings that are too closely associated with certain words. The activity below is one example of this type of noise. Try it and read the remarks in the section “Answers to Activities” at the end of the unit.

Activity 3

Write on a sheet of paper the names of the different colours indicated below, using a pen of a different colour from that referred to in the word.

White **black** **red** (*using red, blue and green respectively*)

Grey **blue** **yellow** (*using blue, green and red respectively*)

Now, show your list of words to a person fluent in English and ask the person to name, in the horizontal order and in quick succession, the colour of the ink or pen used to write each word. What do you notice?

1.3.5 Feedback

“Feedback is the receiver’s verbal and non-verbal response to the source’s message” (Pearson & Nelson, 1994:13).

In communication situations, feedback is important as it helps to ensure the accurate comprehension of the message sent, and it allows the Sender to adjust or modify the message initially sent. As Senders are simultaneously or successively Receivers and vice versa, therefore feedback allows the communicators to mutually adjust their messages. Hence, feedback helps improve communication effectiveness.

“Feedback is very important to communication because it lets the participants in the communication setting see whether ideas and feelings have been shared in the way they were intended” (Weaver, 1949).

Feedback can be positive or negative:

- Examples of positive feedback are smiles or nods while a person is talking. Positive feedback does not necessarily mean approval. It usually encourages the speaker to go on speaking and shows the speaker that the receiver is listening and able to follow.
- An example of negative feedback is a raised eyebrow, a bored expression on the face, or frowning to show difficulty in understanding.

The above examples of feedback are non-verbal (without the use of words). Feedback can also be verbal (use of words). Examples of verbal feedback are questions asked while someone is talking or afterwards; or sarcastic remarks to show that one does not approve of a project being discussed (negative feedback in this case).

Feedback can be immediate or delayed, direct or indirect.

- An example of immediate feedback is an interaction between a Head of Department (HOD) and an officer of the department where the latter asks a question regarding an instruction given by the HOD. A delayed feedback is, for example, when a viewer writes and posts a letter to congratulate the producer of a TV show after it has been aired.
- Indirect feedback can be in the form of accounts from other people about how pleased the HOD was, regarding the work done by the Officer to whom (s)he gave instructions.

Feedback also acts as a regulator in the case of sources of noise that interfere with the transmission of the message. For instance, in the case of semantic noise, the receiver’s reactions or feedback gives an important indication to the sender. With the raised eyebrows or puzzled reply, the sender becomes aware that the message did not get across properly: s/he will then adjust by finding new ways to send the message anew or by using alternative means.

Feedback can be misleading. For example, all students respond positively when the teacher asks if the lesson just presented has been well understood. However, a question to the class, on the lesson just discussed, immediately after, reveals that this is in fact not the case.

It is useful to remember that communication involves more than sending a message.

To be an effective communicator implies one has to be open to feedback (receive feedback and adjust accordingly where possible or necessary).

1.4 COMMUNICATION SETTINGS OR CONTEXTS

“The number of people involved in communication affects the kind of communication that occurs”
[Pearson & Nelson, 1994: 14-5].

Communication occurs in different settings or contexts. Each setting or context involves a varying number of people. This in turn will determine the channels used, the degree of formality, the goals of communication, the expectations of communicators, the possibility of sharing roles as speaker/sender and listener/recipient, the opportunity for feedback, etc.

It is not always easy to draw the line between certain communication settings, and they are not mutually exclusive.

1.4.1 Intrapersonal Communication

“Intra” means within or inside. Hence, intra-personal communication refers to communication that occurs within the self. The individual is the speaker and listener at the same time. Examples of intra-personal communication are: talking to oneself, thinking, making a decision, planning your day, trying to make sense of the world around, self-congratulation, feeling regret for not having been able to help a friend, etc.

In intra-personal communication, messages circulate within one's brain with feedback to oneself: for example, you feel a lot of apprehension regarding the tasks given to you but you immediately tell yourself that you have no choice and you must complete the tasks to meet your employer's expectations...

Most often, intra-personal communication occurs unconsciously. It is the most intimate communication context. Since one is talking to oneself, there is no need for conscious formulation or pre-structuring of messages. But intra-personal communication is not restricted to moments when we are alone. It occurs even when and as we speak to others, e.g., you have almost completed your internship in an organisation, and during a conversation with your placement supervisor, you are saying to yourself: *"Shall I tell him/her now or later that I would like to stay on for a few more weeks if the organisation is willing to have me?"*

Intrapersonal communication (i.e. our thoughts, our decisions, our feelings, etc) has an impact on our interaction with others.

1.4.2 Interpersonal Communication

The term "inter" means "between". Hence, interpersonal communication refers to communication between two persons or more.

Small-group communication can be intra-group, i.e., communication occurring amongst members of the same group. Or, it can be inter-group, i.e., communication between members of different groups, e.g., a meeting involving a few members from two or more organisations.

Interpersonal communication involves verbal and non-verbal exchanges and a sharing of roles of speaker/sender and listener/receiver. A great deal of interaction and feedback can take place, and relationships can be established between individuals (which is less the case of *public communication* explained further in the section).

Interpersonal communication can be informal (e.g., involving friends, relatives) or formal (e.g., a job interview involving employer and prospective employee).

Some people are endowed with very good interpersonal skills, meaning that they can easily interact with other people. Good interpersonal skills require a high level of self-awareness. Interpersonal skills can be learnt and improved.

Understanding your personal style of communicating can help you create and maintain good relations with others.

At least three basic communication styles can be identified:

1. **Assertive Style:** The individual speaks clearly and firmly, using "I" statements, and shows respect for self and for others. He or she uses an upright confident body posture and a pleasant, firm voice for communicating with others.
2. **Passive Style:** The person is constantly hesitating or apologising and usually says nothing or easily gives in. Often, the person avoids eye contact and speaks in a shy or timid voice, or mumbles.
3. **Aggressive Style:** The communicator constantly interrupts, exaggerates, blames, makes demands or uses sarcasm. Voice volume can be very high and thus difficult to bear for the counterparts. Other people's feelings are not rated very high with the aggressive person.

The assertive style is the style one should strive to cultivate. However, very few people are all one or another style. In fact, the aggressive style is vital in some cases, for example, during emergencies (for rapid decision-making). Passiveness can also help, for example, when an issue is minor or when there are highly emotional situations demanding that we stay calm and take the time to regain perspective.

Activity 4

Identify your interpersonal style(s) with the help of the checklist below.

Answer: Do you have more: (υ) , (λ) or (ν) ?

CHECKLIST OF COMMUNICATION STYLES

1. Mottos and Beliefs

- υ I have rights and so do others." Believes self and others are valuable.
- λ "Don't make waves" and "Don't disagree"
- ν "I'm always right and others are just fools."

2. Communication Style

- ν Interrupts and monopolises attention, poor listener.
- υ Active listener, expresses self directly, honestly and checks on others feelings.
- λ Indirect, always seems to agree, doesn't speak up.

3. Characteristics

- λ Apologetic, self-conscious, doesn't express own feelings, allows others to make decisions for self.
- ν Domineering, bullying and patronising.
- υ Confident, trusts self and others, non-judgmental, sense of humour.

4. Behaviour

- ν Bossy and puts others down - know-it-all attitude.
- λ Self-effacing, complains without taking action, never takes sides in conflicts.
- υ Consistent, fair, just, operates from choice.

5. Non-verbal Cues

- υ Direct eye contact, open and natural gestures, varied rate of speech, interested facial expression.
- υ Critical, loud, yelling tone of voice with fast, clipped speech.
- λ Nods head often as if pleading, downcast eyes, low voice volume, rapid pace when anxious; slow and hesitant when doubtful.

6. Verbal Cues

- υ "What are my options?" "What alternatives do we have?"
- υ "You must (should, ought better)."
- λ "I can't..." "You have more experience than I do."

7. Confrontation and Problem-Solving

- υ Operates from win/lose position, Must win arguments.
- λ Sullen, withdrawn and silent, agrees externally, while disagreeing internally.
- υ Negotiates and compromises.

8. Feelings Felt

- υ Enthusiasm, even tempered, sense of well-being.
- υ Anger, hostility and frustration.
- λ Powerlessness, wonders why doesn't receive credit for good work.

9. Effects

- υ Forces compliance with resentment and provokes alienation from others or counter-aggression.
- υ Others know where they stand, increased self-esteem and self-confidence.
- λ Slowly loses self-esteem and builds dependency relationships.

1.4.3 Institutional or Organisational Communication

Institutional or organisational communication refers to the sets of communication flows occurring within an organisation or institution (including firms, non-profit organisations and governmental bodies).

Formal vs. Informal communication

In the internal communication flow of organisations and firms, there are at least two types of communication:

- **Formal communication:** This communication follows the lines of the firm's chart. The communication flows downwards (from managers to subordinates) and seldom upwards (from employees to employers). Formal downward communication leaves little room for feedback from employees.
- **Informal communication:** Informal communication entails no written documents. However rigid the structure, there will always be an informal network of information and communication inside an organisation. The main characteristic of informal communication is that there are no traces for record - the communication somehow has no permanent character, except in the minds of people. In fact, the more rigid an organisation is, the more chances there are that informal communication will develop with the rapid circulation of rumour and hearsay. This type of communication is essentially horizontal as compared to the vertical flow of communication imposed by hierarchical status.

1.4.4 Public Communication

The public communication setting generally involves one or more speakers identified or acknowledged as such, and a large number of listeners (one-to-many basis). Usually, this type of communication setting entails a rather formal communication.

The possibilities of sharing roles as speaker and listener, and of sending feedback, are controlled and limited. Simultaneous feedback (i.e., while the speaker is delivering the speech) is usually non-verbal (the audience laughs, claps, whistles, nods in agreement or may even leave). Verbal feedback (e.g. questions or remarks) if it is to occur at all must usually wait until after the “official” speaker has finished talking.

Public communication or public “speeches” usually call for pre-structuring of messages, or at least a conscious choice of ideas or points to be addressed. This implies at least some reflection or preparation beforehand regarding what the speaker will talk about. When face to face, the public communication takes place in a specific location and it can be a hall, lecture theatre, stadium or other wide open space where the mass of people can gather.

However, the speaker may sometimes decide to change the above parameters for public communication. For instance, the public speaker in a room may encourage listeners to become more active in order to obtain immediate feedback and inject more dynamism in the interaction. In this case, the communicator needs to have the following qualities: good coordination skills, excellent ability to manage crowds, capacity to process and adjust to feedback very rapidly.

1.4.4.1 Mass-Mediated Communication

Mass denotes great volume, range or extent. Mass-mediated communication implies large numbers of people who are scattered (geographically), heterogeneous and most of whom are anonymous (unknown to one another or to the speaker).

Public communication can be mass-mediated, i.e., mediated through mass communication technologies, traditional or newer ones. Traditional mass communication refers to radio, television, press, etc. and new forms of media refer to the combined use of information and telecommunication technologies. Today, a public speech can be sent and received through a website or through Facebook, using computers, mobile phones, etc.

The possibilities of feedback in the case of traditional mass communication used to be rather limited (for example, a delayed feedback by phone call or a letter sent to the media outlet after the public communication has taken place). However, today the possibilities of sending feedback - even for a public communication transmitted through traditional media- whether almost instantly or delayed, on the part of a greater number of people, has greatly increased due to new technologies. With new media and technologies, listening to or watching a public communication event after it has taken place is also a new feature of mass communication. In

fact, new communication technologies and new forms of media in recent years have added a new dimension to most communication contexts: from interpersonal setting to public communication.

Activity 5

Under what communication context or setting would you place the following examples of communication?

- i. The Prime Minister's address to the nation on television on the occasion of Independence and Republic Day.
- ii. A telephone conversation between two close friends.
- iii. A letter sent by the Financial Manager of a company asking employees to reduce wastage of stationery.
- iv. The mental notes a student makes to the following week's revision schedule.
- v. A commercial firm's advertising spot on radio.
- vi. A brainstorming session between five students who form part of a team for a project competition.
- vii. The conversations two colleagues have during lunch to share the latest "who dates whom in the office" news.
- viii. The leader of a new political party who decides to post a pre-recorded talk to the hundreds of "friends" on his/her Facebook page.

1.5 A FEW POINTS TO REMEMBER

1. We all communicate but we do not all communicate efficiently.
2. Professionals at work need to communicate effectively with both technical peers as well as non-technical people.
3. High professional standards include high communication efficiency.
4. Communicators need to adapt their communication to the needs and/or expectations and/or interests of their counterpart or audience.

5. Miscommunication can have serious consequences.
6. Awareness of the components of the communication process can help improve the effectiveness of communication.
7. The communication setting or context affects the kind of communication that occurs.

1.6 ANSWERS TO ACTIVITIES

Activity 1

To be done in class, followed by discussion and feedback.

Activity 2

To be done in class, followed by discussion and feedback.

Activity 3

Often, you will notice that the conflicting information caused by the ink colour and the word referred to leads to some confusion.

The reader tends to read the words although this is irrelevant to the activity of naming the colour of the ink/pen for each word.

Activity 4

v - Aggressive Style

λ - Passive Style

υ - Assertive Style

Activity 5

Communication contexts or settings:

- i. The Prime Minister's address to the nation on television on the occasion of Independence and Republic Day. → Mass Communication. Public Communication on Mass Media. Formal Speech.
- ii. A telephone conversation between two close friends. → Interpersonal Communication (intimate nature).
- iii. A letter sent by the Financial Manager of a company asking employees to reduce wastage of stationery. → Institutional Communication. Formal & downward (top to bottom).
- iv. The mental notes a student makes to the following week's revision schedule.
→
Intrapersonal Communication. Thought processes.
- v. A commercial firm's advertising spot on radio. → Mass Communication. Use of Mass Medium (TV).
- vi. A brainstorming session between five students who form part of a team for a project competition. → Intragroup Communication.
- vii. The conversations two colleagues have during lunch to share the latest "who dates whom in the office" news. → Interpersonal Communication. Institutional but Informal (rumour & hearsay).
- viii. The post of a pre-recorded talk on a Facebook page with public access
→ Public Communication/Mass Communication