

UNIT 1

THE COMMUNICATION PROCESS

INTRODUCTION

Communication is the process of transmitting or receiving information. In our everyday lives, we are constantly giving out information or receiving same. This activity that is so universal to all living beings is known simply as communication. In this unit, we shall learn the purposes of communication, its types, why and how we communicate and even the factors that constitute effective constraints of communication.

Learning outcomes

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

- Understand why we communicate
- Know how we communicate
- Know the constraints of communication

Why we communicate

Let us begin our discussion with a question. Why is it important for us to communicate at all?

Communication, as I have already mentioned is a process of giving out information and receiving information. There are three (3) basic reasons why we communicate. We communicate:

1. To initiate some action

(a) By either expressing your needs and requirements
or

(b) By persuading & motivating others.

Expressing needs and requirements may be done through conversations, speeches, letters, briefings, instructions, procedures and manuals. We persuade people in order to win them over to our viewpoint and when they are convinced they continues to do what he is doing. That is why business outlets are always bombarding us with advertisements to persuade and motivate us to buy their brand and not the other one.

2. To impart information, ideas, opinions, attitudes, biases, beliefs or feelings/emotions, etc, etc.

All these – information, ideas, attitudes, biases, beliefs, feelings or emotions may have any number of specific purposes such as

i. Persuading others to appreciate, and be convinced and probably share your viewpoint.

You might, for example, give people information either through the print or electronic media on your views on how tertiary education should or ought to be funded in this country. Your aim is to encourage your audience to agree with you about its merits or demerits.

ii. Creating awareness by advertising your products or services or even requirements.

This is what all the advertisements in the print and electronic media are about – to showcase their products or services as the best.

iii. Creating understanding through the use of explanations and descriptions, summaries, analyses, and illustrations. These are all ways of communicating information in a way that enhances the perception and understanding of your audience regarding your subject or point of view, or product or service.

iv. Influencing others — a person becomes influenced only after awareness has dawned on him/her and after he/she has been persuaded to understand and become convinced by your information. It is only then that he/she is predisposed to change his/her attitude or behaviour. As a communicator it is important to know this.

3. To establish, acknowledge or maintain links or relations with other people

One of the most vital functions of communication is to establish, acknowledge and maintain relations with other people. This may involve non-verbal communication such as a nod, a smile, a hug, a wink or a wave of the hand at a person to show that you recognize him/her from others or from a previous encounter or you are acknowledging his presence even if you have not met before. To maintain good relations or rapport, your reactions in these situations should or ought to be spontaneous. However, in business or formal situations or contexts things are quite different. In

such situations, social instincts are restrained by time, by formalities of protocol and even by the setting. You cannot for example at a formal banquet where your former classmate who is now a Head of State is present call out his nickname "Irresponsible" as you used to. That would be against protocol. People would think you are mad and you would be lucky to escape a visit from the psychiatrist.

But have you ever paused to ask yourself why we receive or accept information or communication for that matter?

We are most likely to attend to and accept a message if it has credibility and congeniality. When a message is credible, it inspires trust and belief in the recipient and when it is congenial; it appeals to the recipient's need for satisfaction or confirmation, and his desire to avoid unpleasantness, difficulty or dissatisfaction.

Credibility stems from two main sources: perceived authority and perceived intention. **Perceived authority** manifests itself when we tend to accept information or opinions from someone who is seen to have the right or authority to give out such information on the basis of his position or status in the establishment or organisation or on the basis of his prestige or reputation and/or on the basis of his knowledge, skills, expertise or experience. If the registrar of a university, or a headmaster or headmistress of a school causes an advertisement to be published in newspapers or announces over the radio or TV, re-opening dates of the institution, we are most likely to accept that information as more authentic than when such an announcement or publication comes from someone else. We believe the message by virtue of the status or authority of the source/originator. Also if, we attend a particular hospital for medical attention, we do so on the basis of the reputation of that hospital or the expertise or knowledge of its medical staff.

Perceived intention on the other hand occurs when the information given out is ambiguous to the extent that recipients of the information or message tend to read different meanings into it. To avoid this and gain greater credibility, the source or originator of the information ought to:

- appear honest and straight forward. This is achieved by presenting both sides of the argument.
- appear to be an objective and an unbiased expert and
- appear to be acting against his/her own best interests.

Let me explain point (c) above. The principle of disinterestedness means having nothing to gain; it does not mean lack of interest. When you appear disinterested in giving out information, you are in fact protecting your interests by being objective.

Therefore the elements of perceived authority and perceived intention are important in gaining credibility for your message or information.

Congeniality is a state of pleasantness when one's tastes are in agreement with nature. By implication therefore, if things or people are congenial, then they are,

- a) friendly, pleasant or agreeable and
- b) compatible. When things are compatible then they have similar dispositions, tastes or attitudes etc.

Therefore congeniality in communication implies the acceptability of the message based on its appeal to the values, attitudes, beliefs and expectations the receiver already holds and/or finds attractive.

But congeniality in effect creates bias. This is so because the receiver has invested psychological interest in accepting a congenial message or source over an uncongenial one. That is why the experience of being proved right after being wrongly accused or being confirmed in one's own beliefs is such a psychologically satisfying or pleasing experience. That is also why we tend to relish being talked to, or being recognized in a crowd by an important or famous personality.

Activity 1.0 10 minutes
Discuss how credible and congenial you find the following advertisement.

Nana Owusu and Sons Ltd
Dealers in building materials)
EST. 1970.

Location: Bremen Junction, Kumasi
Tel: 051:27125

Dear Landlord,

My name is Nana Owusu. I sell cement, nails, iron rods, roofing materials and plywood of all sizes for a living. I came from Apowa in 1970 and has been in this business in this area ever since. I won't go into a big sales talk beyond this.

- A business is as good as its owner
- I'm a straight guy
- I was raised on hard work and honest dealings

Please call personally at my stores or ring 051-27125 for a solution to your building problems.

Nana Owusu
(Manager)

TYPES OF COMMUNICATION

Communication is simply the imparting or exchange of information, ideas or feelings/emotions. There are basically two types:

- Verbal
- Non-verbal

Verbal communication is communication through words (in oral or written form) while Non-Verbal communication is basically communication without words; by body language graphics or artefacts, symbols, signs, colour, etc. By body language we refer to gestures and expressions such as nodding, smiling, winking, shuffling and such other actions or inactions. Sometimes these actions or inactions are open to different interpretations because of different cultures or cultural backgrounds.

Graphics is simply the use of illustrations/drawings as supplements to the words. As you read this handbook, you would know how to classify each unit – whether it is verbal or non-verbal. However some Units such as Five & Six may straddle both types of communication. Look out for them.

VERBAL COMMUNICATION

Verbal communication has three (3) levels

1. Interpersonal Communication

Interpersonal communication refers to the concrete act of transferring or processing information. Where communication is between two individuals (one-on-one communication) or between one individual and a group (where there is a need to address a group as a whole since they may adopt attitudes and behaviours different to those of their individual members) or when communication is between a group and an individual (where a message transmitted on behalf of an organisation, institution or corporation may take on the authority of that organisation, institution or corporation, say for example, in requesting a pay rise or in carrying out disciplinary procedures, it is interpersonal communication. Interpersonal communication is direct communication between the source (sender) and the specific receiver(s) with a high potential for feedback and interaction. The face, phone calls or postal systems or even notice boards and circulars. It thus involves monolineal forms (giving information, commands directives), bilineal forms (conversations, questioner and answer, defense and prosecutions and multineal forms (interviews, meetings, discussions etc.)

2. Intrapersonal communication

This is communication with oneself. This may sound odd to you because you are the sender and receiver of the message at the same time. But if you want for example, to remind yourself to do something, the question of a medium or channel will still arise; the message will still require decoding and you can even give yourself feedback by taking appropriate action or simply registering in your mind the recognition of your own message. Take for example a schedule or a list of things you plan doing next week. You can write down in your desk diary or planner the following: **Monday** – Board Meeting at 10 am., **Tuesday** – Give lecture on the importance of communication skills to Business Executives at EMPRETEC forum at KNUST Great Hall at 9 am., **Wednesday** – Dinner Dance at City Hotel, 10 p.m. etc. At the end of each event or each day, you would have completed the cycle for which you would have been sender and receiver.

3. Impersonal Communication

In impersonal or mass public communication, the message is directed to a large, diffuse audience with no direct contact between source and receiver. Like interpersonal communication, it can be oral, written, visual, graphic or simulated. Channels that are most suitable for mass or impersonal communication include television, film, radio, newspapers, magazines, posters, billboards etc. Through these, individuals and groups that the source wishes to inform or persuade are vigorously targeted. In this level of communication too, feedback is very important in order to gauge the effectiveness of the message. Achieving this would be very difficult since there is no direct contact between Source and Target Audience. However feedback can be solicited by using:

- i. Response mechanisms such as coupon returns, write-in offers and phone-in offers, etc.
- ii. Customer suggested or query or complaint boxes, hotlines, departments or sections.
- iii. Interactive devices such as television polls, draws or promotions inviting immediate feedback by phone or fax or e-mail or even over the Internet.

You can see from our discussion above that it is absolutely important to know the level of Communication one is using during communication.

NON-VERBAL COMMUNICATION

Non-verbal communication is simply anything that conveys a message without using words. It may be linked to words through which meaning is added over and above what the sender is saying in the words themselves. This is called "meta-communication" (from the Greek "meta" meaning 'beyond'; in addition to'). It may be a tone of voice or vocalics or a facial expression, body movement or (Kinesics) or it may be through eye-contact (oculesics) or even through touch (haptics) that adds to or adjusts the meaning of the words, or simply the implications (real or imagined) of the content. For example, I might say, "Really, I feel fine", while my lips are quivering like a tuning fork, my face looks pale and I am covered up in thick blankets. What this means is that I am very ill but I am pretending and putting up a brave face. Or I might say, "Correct me if I am wrong" while smiling patronizingly or sarcastically at you. What I am really saying is that "you know as well as I do, that I am right"

Non-verbal communication can also be independent of any verbal message. In this instance, meaning is conveyed by non-verbal cues which embrace a wide range of possibilities - some visible or audible others inferred. If for example, you forget to send a birthday card or a valentine card on Valentine's Day, to a friend, you have effectively told him or her that you do not care irrespective of whether you have seen each other or heard from one another. The message has already been sent through your inaction.

Because of its complexity, Non-Verbal communication is open to misunderstanding and misinterpretation. To minimize these problems, non-verbal communication can be controlled and directed to:

- Create the desired impression - through a smile, a handshake, decent clothes, an attentive posture, a respectful distance.
- Provide appropriate feedback - an applause, a yawn, clenched fists, a thumbs-up etc.
- Reinforce a spoken message(s) with appropriate indications of how our interests or feelings are engaged - a firm handshake, sparkling eyes, or disapproving looks etc.

If we know how to control and direct non-verbal communication, then we can also:

- receive non-verbal feedback from a listener and interpret the message accordingly.

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- 'read' situations in order to modify our communication strategies. If for example, you are conversing with your boss and he abruptly stops laughing and glares at you at a remark you have just carelessly made, you can immediately modify your communication strategy.
- recognize people's true feelings when their actions are not constrained by formal courtesies. If for example, you are a lady secretary who has turned down a superior officer's advances then be on your guard. Those smiles and pats are a disguise. He may or may not be behaving courteously; so do not find yourself in a compromising situation with him alone.

You would have noticed by now that all these signals of non-verbal communication are from the body - face, eyes, mouth, head, hands and legs etc. Through them, we give and receive messages. This is known as body language. Gestures and facial expressions are the best known sources of body language. However, it is important to keep in mind that body language is open to a wide variety of possible interpretations - depending on the cultural context. While for example, a handshake or a clenched fist may have common meanings within a specific culture, they may have different meanings in another.

Facial expressions are in a similar situation since different races and cultures have different facial characteristics. The eyes are particularly expressive. You can widen, narrow, or even close them to signal the sending or receiving of a message. What interpretation for example, would you give to these actions below? Write them down very quickly.

Wide-eyed:
Narrowed-eyes:
Closed eyes:

It is very likely that our answers will vary because of our different cultural backgrounds.

Besides facial expressions and gestures, there are other non-verbal cues. These include:

Posture or positioning and orientation. Posture includes conscious or unconscious decisions about whether you stand or sit, walk or lie down and how; standing straight, lounging, slouching, sitting ramrod etc. All these postures are open to different interpretations - alertness, relaxation or even fear. The way we position our bodies may reflect psychological factors - self-confidence, timidity, shyness, hostility, arrogance etc. Orientation simply means which way you are facing - away from the speaker or face-to-face? Orientation could suggest co-operation or confrontation.

Movement and stillness- Watch how people move or remain still, at what pace and for what purpose or effect. While they are communicating, someone who walks briskly suggests determination, or purposefulness; someone who remains calm or still may on the other hand suggest thoughtfulness, self-possession or even shyness.

Proximity and contact - Proximity means nearness. How near or distant you are from a person during a conversation depends on your relationship. The amount of space between you will therefore be close or wide depending on your attitude to him/her. Contact occurs when the space between you is bridged. Patting on the back, hugging, nudging, embracing and prodding are all examples of contact.

Silence and sound - silence may be a deliberate message: a refusal to communicate or give feedback, a show of hostility and rejection or it may be a pause for reflection or a signal of acceptance. Sound such as a murmur of agreement or disagreement, a grunt or a sigh are signals to meaning and are therefore useful cues.

Personal appearance - This is a high profile visual cue which forms a basis for first impressions, generalizations and attitudes. Your stature and demeanor reveal a lot about your personality. Depending on these a person seeing you for the first time might judge you as being intelligent, trustworthy, boorish or secretive sly etc.

Your grooming and dress code are a potent index to your personality. Your tone of voice in different situations, and the type of dress or attire you choose to wear and where to wear it reveals your character. You may come across as cultured or boorish or gentle or uncouth. You may also come across as a slut or a lady, or as a pompous braggart.

Response to roles, norms and expectations - This means how we respond to certain roles assigned to us by virtue of our culture or our position in society. A chief for example can only behave in a particular way. If he does not, he will be seen as giving the wrong signals. Our roles therefore are circumscribed by society's expectations and norms. Thus if your attitude, behaviour and dress do not conform to the norm then you are effectively communicating insensitivity, or a challenge or disrespect.

HOW WE COMMUNICATE

Now that we know why we communicate, how do we go about doing this?

Activity 1.1

List at least five ways through which we can communicate and compare notes/answers as the lesson progresses

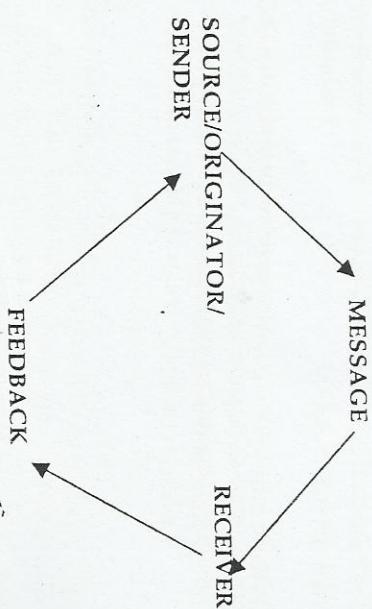
5 minutes

1.
2.
3.
4.
5.

In this section we shall learn about the communication cycle, the levels of communication, and the potential problems in the communication process. By the end of this section you should be able to:
demonstrate your knowledge of the communication cycle by being able to draw it.
appreciate the problems involved in the communication process.

Now, let us begin our discussion with the communication cycle. Effective communication is a two-way process, a sort of 'to and fro' (↔) motion. It could be intentional and unintentional when you consciously decide to communicate with a particular person and unintentional when you receive information not meant for you. Perhaps communication is best expressed as a cycle where signals or messages are sent by the communicator and received by the other party who 'sends' back some form of confirmation that the 'message' has been received and understood. This process of sending back some form of communication is called 'feedback' or reaction.

The diagram below illustrates this process very clearly.



This is like sending a letter or phone call or an electronic mail (e-mail) and receiving an acknowledgement from the recipient. But the communication cycle can even be expressed in greater detail in the following form.

There are therefore five steps in the communication process. Let me first of all explain the sender's actions:

The impulse to communicate.

The first stage of communication is when the sender decides to communicate and what message to communicate. You might for example,

- Conceive the idea that you need a house of your own. You might then ponder over it for a while and finally decide on how to achieve your objective methodically or

- You might chance open a thief in your room. Your immediate reaction impulse is to blurt out or shout for help or attack the thief or even open wide your mouth in amazement. These actions are involuntary.

Ideally a message must first be conceived, reviewed, packaged and then transmitted. This includes planning – very much like writing, editing and re-writing. Thus planning is very essential to efficient and effective communication.

Encoding of message

Encoding of message simply refers to the form in which a message is to be transmitted. Both the sender and receiver must understand this form. The form must also be in such a way that the receiver can correctly interpret the message. Words, pictures, figures, numbers and even gestures for example turn the idea or opinion in your brain into a message. This can then be

- | | |
|----------------------------------|--|
| SOURCE'S/SENDER'S ACTIONS | - Have the desire/Impulse to communicate |
| | - Have the Encoding of message. |
| | - Have the ability to encode or package the message/information. |
| | - Have a channel to relay/transmit/send the message |

- | | |
|---------------------------|--|
| RECEIVER'S ACTIONS | - DECODING OF MESSAGE. Have the ability to decode/decipher the message |
| | - SENDING FEEDBACK. Have the willingness to send feedback |

transmitted in whatever form you choose – orally, graphically or written. Encoding a message is also very much like a code in the sense that the words or figures, gestures or graphics that we use are only symbols representing our idea or ideas. For the receiver to understand our idea or message he must be able to "break" the code. That is to say, he must be able to decipher or translate the message back into the idea. If he does this successfully then communication has taken place since both of you (the sender and the receiver) have shared meaning of the message.

However we must remember that symbols may not be universally understood. A symbol that you understand and use may be ambiguous or subject to different interpretations by some one of a different nationality, age, race, education, experience, religious belief or inclination. The Twi word "Nana" for example refers to a chief or an important person, but in Guyana and Jamaica it means "chamber pot" and in informal French it refers to a girl, a concubine or mistress.

Relying the message

Relying the message to the receiver is the sender's last activity. Once the idea has been encoded as a message, then the sender has to choose which channel or medium he would use to transmit that message. He can make a choice from an array of choices such as

- Visual communication – body language (gestures, nods, winks), charts, maps, graphics, films etc.)
- Written communication – (letters, memoranda, notes, reports, briefs etc.)
- Oral communication – (by mouth, - face-to-face dialogue, telephone, etc.)

The choice of the medium or media or channel of transmitting the message will depend on several factors such as:

The time for chronemics required to prepare and transmit the message.

The level of complexity of the message i.e. the channel of communication that will let it be readily understood.

The physical distance or the proxemics between the sender and receiver
– how far are you from each other? This will affect the condition in which the message will be when it finally arrives.

The cost or the economic involved – how much will it cost? Which channel will be cheaper, faster and most reliable?

The desire for confidentiality or conversely the dissemination of the message to as many people as possible.

The notion of sensitivity – what effect will the message have on the receiver? Will it anger him, please him, or incite him? What is the core objective of your message?

The emotional distance between sender and receiver – how close is the relationship? – relatives, friends, lovers? Distant hence impersonal, cold or cool?

The need for interaction – will 'feedback' be immediate or delayed? These and other factors you might have thought of by now are important in the choice of a transmission channel or medium.

Now let us quickly go through the following activity as a form of recall of this segment of the unit.

Activity 1.2 (S.A.Q.s)

5 minutes

What medium or channel would you choose if your message:

- (i) *Contained urgent bad news for one person you know very well and who lives far away from you?*

- (ii) *Is to be given to a large number of people within your area with interactive questions and answers?*

Let us now turn our attention to the activities of the Receiver or recipient of the message.

The obvious first step in communication from the receiver's point of view is to decode the message - to understand it for what it is. The receiver does thus by

Grasping the meanings of the words or symbols used by the sender. If he does so, then he has the 'key' to the message.

Interpreting the message as one whole piece. This includes 'reading in between the lines' to decipher hidden meanings disguised in the form of flattery, sarcasm or patronage. What a message 'says' may not necessarily be what it "means" so one must seek to arrive at the kernel of the message.

The receiver's second and final task is to send a feedback to the sender. A feedback is simply an indicator that the message has been successfully received or has not been received successfully, understood and interpreted. A feedback may be one of the following. It may either be:

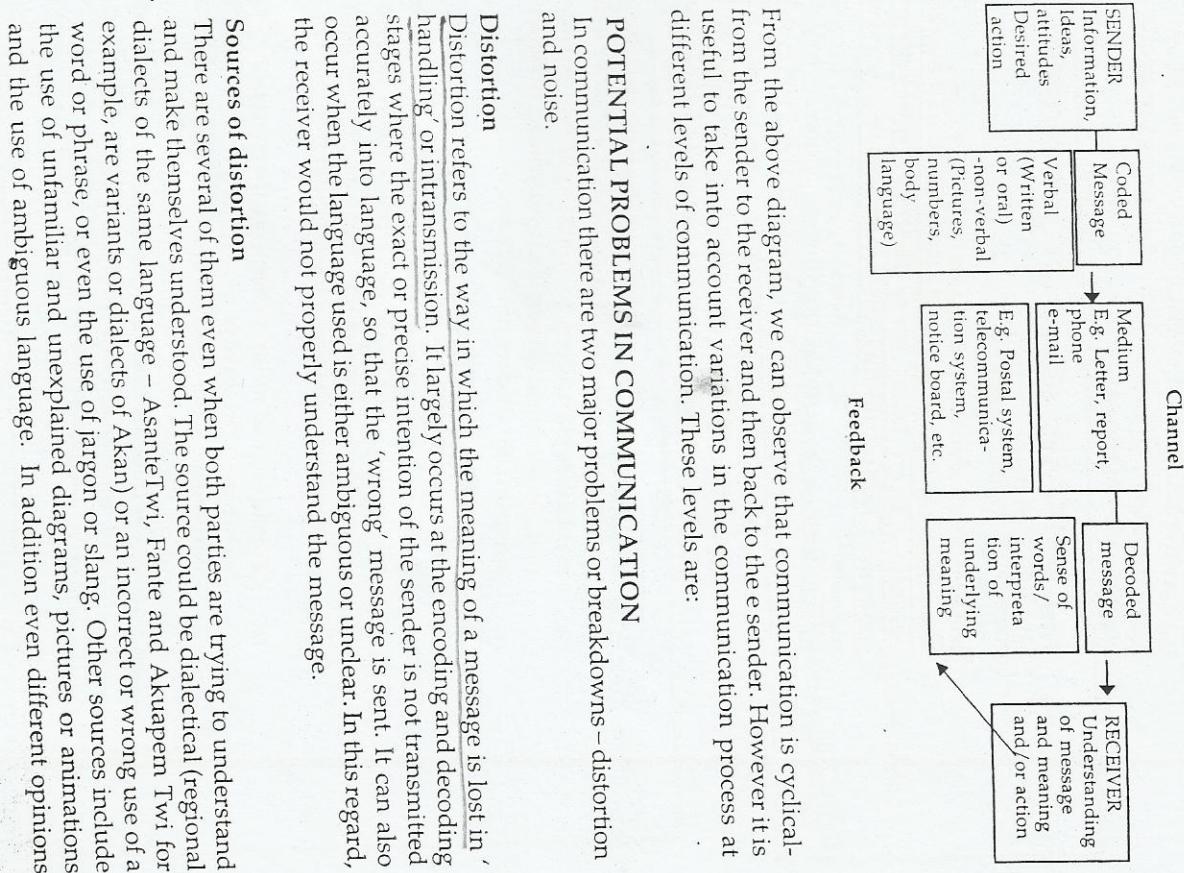
POSITIVE in which case
Action is taken as requested whereby a letter, memo or note or a smile, a wink or a thumbs - up sign or phone call or e-mail etc. is sent confirming receipt of message.

OR

NEGATIVE in which case

No action or wrong action is taken.

We have almost come to the end of this section. Nothing is better than summarizing the communication cycle with a more complex illustration as follows:



and attitudes, inattentiveness or uncooperativeness can be formidable barriers to communication. Either party may simply decide deliberately to make the meaning unclear or by choosing to understand only what they want the message to say.

There is however a second barrier to communication. It is Noise. Let us take a look at it.

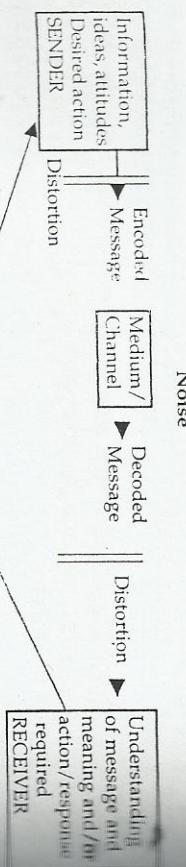
Noise

Noise refers to distractions and interferences in the environment in which communication takes place thereby obstructing the process of communication by affecting the accuracy, clarity or even the arrival of the message.

Like Distortion, Noise also has different sources. They may include:

- i. Physical noise such as other people talking in the room, or around the phone booth, passing traffic, the clatter of machinery or even the crying of babies or barking of dogs. All these and many others can prevent a message from being heard or heard clearly.
- ii. Social noise. This is interference created by difference in the personality, cultures, religion or outlook of the sender and recipient. It includes difficulties in communication experienced by members of different social classes, old and young, male and female, boss and subordinate, student and lecturer etc.
- iii. Technical noise. Technical noise is a failure or a breakdown of the medium or channel of communication while the message is being transmitted. For example, a breakdown in a computer printer, a crackle on a phone line or even very bad handwriting may prevent an effective exchange of information from taking place.
- iv. Psychological noise. When you are emotionally charged either with excitement or sorrow or with anger or fear or with prejudice or nervousness, the transmission of your message is likely to effectively affect the meaning of your message. For example, your message is likely to be clouded by this irrelevant show of emotion or attitude and may reach the recipient in a distorted version. This is psychological noise.

Below is a diagram illustrating barriers to effective communication.



A solution to the problem of Noise is redundancy. Redundancy simply means using more than one channel of communication so that if a message fails to get through by one medium or channel, it might succeed by another. The alternative channel thus serves as a back up.

A discussion in the office can be backed-up later by a phone call or a decision on when to hold a meeting can be followed up by issuing a circular.

Besides Distortion and Noise there are other barriers to effective communication such as differences in personality, cultural differences and even differences in language. Let me explain them.

Personal differences

There are many factors in an individual's personality, mentality, experience and environment, which make him distinct from others. This uniqueness can be a big problem in communication because these shape his attitudes and behaviour. He may be humble and respectful or he may be brash and disrespectful. He may also have different interests or perceptions. All these come into play during the process of communication and can effectively be a barrier to communication.

Cultural differences

Since we come from different cultural backgrounds our perceptions and attitudes vary.

What may be considered polite in one culture may be classified as rude in another. What may be considered a taboo in one culture may be seen as perfectly normal in another. All these negatively affect the communication process.

Language itself becomes a formidable barrier to effective communication when people from different countries or even regions try to communicate. In Ghana for instance, our many languages, dialects and even idiolects create numerous problems when we meet. Even though English is our national language, not all of us are at home with it. Other potential problems in the communication process are:

- Lack of credibility due to poor preparation and presentation (packaging) of the message.
- Poor listening and / or reading skills, inattention, loss of concentration, or passive uncritical reception.
- Perceptual bias or selectivity – where the recipient decides to hear only what he wants to hear.
- Not communicating – deciding to keep quiet at certain times. These so called 'tactful' or 'thoughtful' silences are open to several misinterpretations.
- Sending the 'wrong' message – one that is meaningless or irrelevant or unsuitable for the purpose.
- Over loading – giving the recipient more than what he can digest in the time available.
- Non-verbal signals such as gestures, facial expressions, appearance, posture or poise contradicting the verbal message thereby confusing the recipient.
- Failure to seek or offer feedback or even ignoring the feedback given.
- Choosing an unsuitable channel or medium of communication etc.

Activity 1.3

10 minutes

1. Give four reasons why we impart information to others.
2. What factors make a source credible to the audience?
3. What are the five steps of the communication process?
4. What is feedback? Give examples of positive and negative feedback.
5. List four types of noise.
6. Give at least ten problems/barriers to effective communication.

Write your answers in the space provided below and submit your course book to your lecturer for marking.

UNIT 2

COMMUNICATION IN THE OFFICE

INTRODUCTION

There is virtually no institution, church, organisation, or business firm without an office. The office is the central point where all activities of the firm, church, organisation or institution are organised and co-ordinated. It is therefore the hub from which all the spooks of activities radiate.

OBJECTIVES

- The objectives of this unit are to

Predispose you to types of offices, their layout and the personnel who work in them.
- Teach you the skills of office communication and to
- Expose you to leadership skills.

Types of Offices

The office is an integral part of every human institution be it a school, business firm or church. It is the nerve centre where management decisions are made, where information is gathered, processed and disseminated. It is where information is also collated through letters, faxes, e-mails and daily operations of the organisation.

Offices come in various shapes and sizes but there are basically two main types: - the open office and the private or closed office. Usually the open office is a large hall accommodating so many workers while the private or closed one is partitioned into single rooms accommodating ideally, one worker.

The Open Office

This type is often used by small companies or institutions where they are called 'general office'. While the banks call theirs the banking hall, the Customs, Excise and Preventive Service, (CEPS), and the Driver, Vehicle and Licensing Office (DVLA) call theirs Long Rooms.

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Shipping and Insurance Agencies and the Universities on the other hand call theirs Registries. With this type of office, all your business is transacted there and then. The open office has many advantages going in its name. For example, it makes for greater freedom of movement by the members of staff, and promotes personal interactions between the supervisor, the workers and the customers / clientele. Through these interactions, the fortunes of the organisation are forged. In such an office no one seems ready to bear a check on untoward behaviour. Though the open office has the added advantage of being cheaper to build, manage and maintain, it has several limitations.

Limitations

The open office is too noisy, distractive, crowded and sometimes disruptive. It also lacks privacy.

The Private or Closed Office on the other hand, is often an individual room occupied by one or two people. Usually, it bears the name and / or designation of the occupant on the door. Though it provides privacy it is sometimes costly to furnish and maintain.

Office Organisation

Every organisation or institution must organise its office(s) in such a manner that its objectives are achievable otherwise it will fold up in no time. It must provide the structure within which the individual members act, both in terms of their personal individual responsibilities for the organisation's or institution's activities and also in their relationships with one another. To organise an office is to re-arrange, re-align and re-orient the various parts so that the whole office works smoothly and efficiently as one holistic and integrated body. When an organisation knows the principles of human resource management (Unit3), the sky is the limit!

But an office is nothing without the personnel who work in it. Let us meet them. In today's office the core personnel are likely to be the head/boss/manager, the supervisor or the administrator/administrative assistant, the secretary, the accounts clerk, the typist, the general clerk, the receptionist, the messenger/cleaner and sometimes the driver.

The level of communication skills these personnel possess either individually or collectively is an index to the efficiency of that organisation.

Where personnel are motivated, focused and happy, that office is a haven of peace and efficiency but where personnel are underpaid and overworked, overlooked and ignored they tend to be rude and snappy.

Every office worker - from the messenger to the head or boss, must possess good personal attributes if that organisation is to achieve its vision and mission. These include:

Punctuality - Always arrive before work starts. In this way, you are relaxed, calm and well psych'd for the day. Lateness always disorients and has the tendency of making you disorganized for the day. Do not play truant and blame your lateness on the poor transportation system.

Good grooming - Good grooming means dressing smartly and neatly. It means being fresh and looking healthy thereby creating an aura of neatness and purposefulness. Look good and feel good; not sickly and morose or mournful.

Orderliness - Keep your work area neat and tidy. A cluttered table is an index to slothfulness and carelessness. Be organised otherwise you would be giving wrong signals to your visitors.

Loyalty - A good employee must be loyal to his head / leader or employer no matter whether he likes the shape of his or her nose. What this means is that you do not discuss what you consider to be his faults or limitations with anyone. Do so to him or her on a one-on-one basis. No insubordination here please!

Alertness - Be alert, practical and down-to-earth. In other words, do not bite more than you can chew. Just do what you can without any fuss. See everything around you.

Tactfulness - Being tactful means being able to handle tricky or dicey situations. There are times your head/boss might not want to receive visitors. It would be your duty to keep them at bay but you must do so firmly but politely.

Ability to keep secrets - By never discussing confidential information of the office or its goings-on or your colleagues' personal lives with a second person, you are keeping secrets. Remember that "simple minds gossip about others", "Ordinary minds, discuss events" and "Great minds discuss ideas". Do not be a simple mind for secrets of the owl should not be known in daylight.

Enthusiasm and capacity for work - A good employee must be prepared to work beyond the official hours without asking for overtime wages.

Do not work - to - rule because it weakens the esprit de corps of the office or the organisation. Office personnel must be seen as a family.

Cheerfulness and cool - Always look cheerful and well composed. The office has no place for rude and short-tempered people. If you cannot manage your temper, you will never be happy in the office situation. Whenever you are irked control it and do not explode, otherwise you will ruin the place.

Ability to mix with people - An employee should be a team player; able to co-operate with his colleagues to achieve his office's set goals and able also to interact with people who come to the office. Do not let callers to your office go away thinking that you are stupid, or arrogant or rude.

Let them depart with a good impression about you and your office. What this means is that you must have good communication skills.

Our next step is to meet the office personnel individually. Let us begin with the receptionist.

Office Personnel

The Receptionist

The receptionist or front desk officer is normally found in big business firms or organisations, hotels, banks and institutions. You will normally see an instruction on such premises asking you to report at the "Reception" or "Enquiries" first.

The receptionist is a very important member of the firm or organisation because she is the first point of contact. She is the one visitors meet when entering the building. She is as it were, the silent public relations officer. She can either give a good or a bad name to the company or institution. Such a sensitive position should therefore be occupied by one with excellent communication skills.

The receptionist needs to be smart, polite, pleasing, pleasant, calm, well spoken and tactful. Her very appearance should be warm and welcoming; cheerful and confident. Above all she should have a thorough knowledge of the company and its personnel. In this way, she would be able to solve some of the problems of callers without recourse to the other personnel or target audience.

Though her duties vary from office to office, the basic ones include:

- operating the switchboard or telephone system
- typing and filing
- supervising messengers and cleaners
- dealing with small sales
- book-keeping and accepting deliveries
- petty cash duties
- serving tea or coffee to the head/boss and visitors

Usually, a good receptionist keeps an Appointment Diary and Visitors Book. In the Appointment Diary, she records the dates and time of up-coming events – functions to attend speeches to be delivered, visits to be undertaken, visitors to expect etc. She then reminds the boss/head of these items so that he can prepare for them. She therefore books all prospective appointments and can tell you at a glance through her Diary, when the boss is available. She is as it were, the gate-keeper. You can not see the target personnel you want without passing through her.

In the Visitors Book, she records the Date, the Callers Name, his Company's/ business address, the Name of the Officer wanted, the Purpose of the visit and time of arrival and departure of the caller.

Some visitors however, introduce themselves by presenting a business card instead of engaging in a conversation with the receptionist. At less busy times, the receptionist will then transfer the information into her Visitors Book or file the cards.

There is also another form of Visitors' Book. This type is reserved for important visitors to the office. In it, such visitors before departing are required to state their impressions of the office and the personnel and then sign off.

It is also the duty of the receptionist to regulate access to her head or boss. When she notices that her boss is overworked and tired, she can deny access to callers, with a polite excuse. But some receptionists become mother-hens and over-protective and turn away would-be valuable callers. I suggest they

consult the head on whether he/she would take in any more callers instead of acting ultra vires.

The Messenger/Cleaner

The messenger must have a pleasant personality and should be honest, smart, looking, truthful and respectful. He cleans the offices before work starts everyday. He is the first to come to the office and last to leave. He collects the keys from the security office and returns them everyday after work. If anything gets missing from the office, he is always the first suspect. He must therefore be trustworthy and reliable.

The messenger delivers and collects mail and other correspondence between the various offices or departments of the company or the institution or post office. In the absence of a secretary, he should keep a book in which he enters the subjects of all letters originating from his office and dispatched to whoever, and the dates of the dispatch. The messenger's duties do not end in cleaning the office. He should not disappear into thin air soon after cleaning the office but should remain in the general office and be on call throughout the day.

The Typist

Apart from possessing the attributes of smartness, honesty and good grooming, the typist must also be polite, courteous and honest. Her main duty is to type manuscripts, drafts or corrected typescripts neatly and correctly. This requires a good education with good spelling skills. She must have at least a typewriting speed of between 35 to 50 words per minute. The mark of a good typist is speed and accuracy not coquetry. She should also not expose whatever she types, to others to read. In other words, she should be circumspect.

The General Clerk

He is the 'mini' administrator because his work generally entails records keeping, filing and general correspondence. That is why he is called a clerical officer. In the absence of a secretary, the clerical officer handles incoming and outgoing mail. When a messenger from outside his department or office delivers mail to him, he is to sign for it and take delivery. Such mail together with what his own messenger delivers are then sorted into official / confidential and personal.

The official / confidential letters are passed on unopened to the head/ manager unless otherwise instructed. In most cases the manager/head after opening and reading them, returns them to the secretary or the clerk in the absence of a secretary. The clerk / secretary then stamps the "Received / Date" stamp on the letter, files it on the appropriate file and returns it to the manager /head for his further attention. The Received /Date stamp looks like this:

Name & Address
of organisation

RECEIVED
DATE.....

The private letters of course, should be delivered to the appropriate persons.

The job of a clerk often dovetails into that of a secretary and requires a great deal of interpersonal skills. In this regard let us now look at the secretary's role in the organisation.

The Secretary

The secretary is a versatile worker. Ideally he/she should have excellent typing and/or computer skills and administrative skills – a calm demeanour, courtesy, politeness, tactfulness, sound judgement, excellent writing skills and loyalty. Today's secretary is an administrator. That is why in some organisations they are called administrative secretaries. His/her duties go far beyond taking minutes at meetings and typing at high speed. Such a person should have a good sound education including high shorthand and typewriting speeds, a sound knowledge of office routine, secretarial duties as well as a knowledge of accounting practices.

A good secretary must be able to handle the correspondence of the organisation. He/she should be able to arrange meetings, take minutes and even solve some problems without recourse to the head/boss.

What secretaries often fail to notice is that they are the invisible or unseen rulers of the organisation. Heads come and go but the secretary remains. He/she has "seen it all" in the organisation and he/she can literally make the head succeed or fail. They are that powerful!

The secretary must be skilled in secretarial duties as I have already mentioned. Above all, he must be able to handle in-coming and out-going mail.

Handling in-coming mail

1. Sort in-coming mail into official/confidential and private.
2. Pass forward official/confidential mail unopened to the Head unless otherwise given permission to do so. Then distribute through the messenger, private mail to the appropriate persons.
3. Collect opened official letters from the Head and stamp them with the Received/Date stamp. Then record them into the incoming mail register in the following way. For example

Date	From	Subject/ Particulars	Ref	Date of letter	Our Ref	Remarks
18/12/ 02	NTCE	Recruitment of staff	NCTE/P/ Vol.1/12	16/12/02	CDE/P/ Vol. 4	We should do so
29/06/ 03	Mr. Aggor	Residential workshop for writers	NC/E Vol. 2/4	10/06/03	DOL/Vol .3/10	Rather expensive. Let's hold on till funds are available

Note that the 'Remarks' are the comments your head has minuted on the letters, for your further action.

1. Read through all letters now and sort them into the various sections: for example, "T&T claims" "Maintenance or Equipment", "Annual Leave", etc and file them on the appropriate files. If there are any enclosures in the letters, note them.
2. If action is to be taken on any letter, draft the appropriate reply with regard to the 'remarks' made on it, attach a slip with the word ACTION and return the file to your head. He/she would read through your reply and if he agrees with it, he will okay it. If not, he/she would make corrections or suggestions. You will then re-type the corrected version to your superior officer's satisfaction. When he/she is satisfied, he will sign it for you for dispatch.

However, when a personal letter is opened by mistake, do not destroy it. Rather, return the letter to its envelope, staple it and write the sentence "Sorry, letter opened in error" and append your signature before delivering it to the appropriate owner.

Handling out going mail

Out going mail may be dispatched either by hand or by post or by fax. It is the responsibility of you the secretary to

- i. Check that all letters are without errors and that they are signed by the appropriate officer.
- ii. Check all letters for enclosures and staple them firmly.
- iii. Ensure that the address is correct in all respects
- iv. Ensure that the right letter goes into the right envelope
- v. Enter all out going mail into the "Dispatch Register."

For example:

Date of dispatch	Particulars of subject	Ref No	To whom dispatched	Postage
24/03/03	Request for funds	CDE/Acccts/ Vol.5/2	NCTE	EMS - €20.00
12/04/03	Purchase of computers	KNUST/F.O/2	Hp Ltd.	Stamps (€5.00)

However, mail to be delivered by hand within the organisation or nearby should be stamped "BY HAND" and given to the messenger who would in turn register it in a "Messenger Dispatch register" before sending it. The messenger dispatch register looks like this

Date of Dispatch	Particulars/ Subject of letter	Ref No.	Time and Date of receipt	Name and signature of recipient	Organisation/ Dept.
11/03/03	Annual General Meeting	ILMAD KNUST/ Alumni /5	2.01pm/ 11/03/03	Pro. Asuumi	Alumni Association
29/04/03	FUSAAG delegates conference.	Registry/ 101/10	11am/ 30/ 04/03	ECS Azumah	BRI

You can see from our discussion that the secretary has an onerous task. If he is to succeed as an efficient and effective secretary, he must in addition to all the attributes we have enumerated be circumspect. Being circumspect means never divulging any official secrets he deals with everyday to anybody. He/she should 'see' and 'hear' and not 'talk'. He/she should as it were, 'be dumb' on confidential material otherwise he/she would soon be entangled in a gossip web that would turn disastrous to him/her. But what of the Accounts officer?

The Accounts Officer

The Account Officer is the 'minister of finance' of the organisation or office and in conjunction with the Head, manages the finances of the office/organisation. We are all familiar with the saying that 'money is the root of all evil'. If that is so, then we need someone who is good enough to combat the suspected evil inherent in money. That person would not be an angel but a human being.

Money is seen as evil when we allow ourselves to be controlled by it. There is a wide gap between "office money and your own money and whoever handles public money must know that he/she is holding it in trust for that public.

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Unfortunately, it is often difficult for most accounts personnel to appreciate this. Some live lifestyles far above their incomes to the extent that they draw suspicions onto themselves. You see, money cannot hide. Money cannot hide because when you have it, it will reflect in your life style.

So who qualifies to be an accounts officer? I am not concerned here with academic and professional qualifications. My concern is with his/her personal attributes and communication skills. The accounts officer must be:

- Nakedly honest. There should be no doubts about his/her honesty.
- Truthful and God-fearing so that he can be principled in his life.
- Fair in his dealings with all manner of people. Sometimes accounting personnel are selective in giving out loans to employees. In other words, some employees feel discriminated against in such matters of loans, settlement of health bills and travelling and transport (T&T) claims, etc.
- Respectful and Courteous. Respect and courtesy are very important personal attributes. Accounting personnel should therefore show respect to all manner of people and be courteous to them for one good reason. People might misconstrue that it is because of the money they handle that blinds them from respecting others.
- Trustful and trusted – Trust stems from confidence in one's ability to perform creditably. If you carry out your duties confidently and calmly you are being trustful to yourself and be trusted by others.
- Loyalty. Loyalty to the company, institution, office or church and your Head is absolutely important. Do not forget that you are holding the finances in trust for that company/office/church. You must therefore exhibit good accounting practices otherwise you will expose yourself to suspicion of cooking the books. It is your duty to advise your Head on financial matters. Even in situations where your advice is ignored, do not show dissent.

Being a 'good' accounting officer is a tall order but you can succeed if you want to.

The Driver

He is the person who drives the Head including the personnel of the office during official working hours and other times at the discretion of the Head.

The office vehicle ought to be available at all times within working hours. Though some institutions, businesses and banking institutions have Transport Sections, the ultimate control of vehicular movements devolves on the Head. Unfortunately, some office staff including messengers erroneously think that the official vehicle is theirs at all times to run their errands both private and official.

Qualities of a good driver
A good driver besides his professional qualifications must possess the following attributes:

1. He must be very polite to all manner of persons at all times.
2. He must be loyal to his Head. (Can you recollect our definition of loyalty)
3. He must be punctual to work and dutiful and must be prepared to work over time without grumbling.

4. A good driver must neither be a talebearer nor a blackmailer. What we mean is that he should not talk to his Head's spouse about visits to friends, relatives and acquaintances of whom he is not very sure of the relationship between them and his Head. (Drivers have been known to have broken up marriages either unknowingly or knowingly by reporting visits he and his Head undertook to people he was not sure of the relationship with the Boss?)

Allied to this, is the problem of the driver blackmailing his Head after such visits. It is always better for Heads to be honest to their spouses and tell them the people he/she visited out of office hours.

Some drivers are however malicious especially when you are on trek.

This is how they start.
• They expect you to pay for their accommodation and feed them even though they also receive night allowances just as you do.

If you fail to do so,

- They drop hints that the person you visited or the person visiting is neither your spouse nor a relative, but a girl friend or boy friend.
- Next they subtly ask for money or other favours from the Head
- When all these fail, they wait for an opportune moment when the Head is in conversation with the spouse probably when they (he/she and driver)

have just returned from a trek and binges in with a mute "Master/Madam, do you remember that girl/man who came to you yesterday?" "That girl was nice oh!, Master"

Our advice is that the Head should never find himself/herself in such a compromising position in the first instance. When you do compromise yourself, you have only yourself to blame. But in all cases, do not as a matter of principle give in to a blackmailer.

5. A good driver should above all else forge a close working relationship with his Head and stand shoulder to shoulder with him/her at all times. The two are one another's keeper as it were, especially as they are always travelling together. Both share "one life" and are likely to share the same fate when there is an accident.

6. Finally, a good professional driver in the office setting as a matter of respect and decorum, does not share the same table with his Head wherever they find themselves. He should not be resentful about this and harbour negative thoughts about his Head, because that is the way of the world. There will always be a Head and a driver. If he cannot stand the guts of his Head, he better relocates.

Head/Boss/Manager

Finally, we come to the Head of Office. There are several names for the same position. How do you call yours?..... Whether you call him boss, manager, director, managing director, head pastor, bishop, chief executive or whatever name, he/she is simply the leader of that office or company or church. Leadership does not come easy. While there are natural or born leaders the vast majority have to learn how to be good leaders. Being a leader requires a wide knowledge of leadership skills – training and experience. To be a good leader it is imperative that you have vision and mission. To have vision means to have the intelligence to project into the future the fortunes of your office or company. To set as it were, projections as to where you are going. To have a mission is to have drive and a sense of purpose as to how you intend to achieve your vision. The vision of the KNUST for example, is to be the cutting edge of science and technology education in Ghana and its mission is to provide quality education through quality teaching and research. Every good leader must have a sense of purpose, initiative and mission.

It is also important that a good leader must have a thorough knowledge of his organisation, firm, institution or church. He must 'know' how to lead the rest in order to command their respect.

The leader ought to possess excellent interpersonal skills – charm, tact, thoughtfulness, calmness, honesty and humility. He/she must exude confidence, reliability and trustworthiness. An old adage says "whenever you lose respect for your superior, leave him, because he will no longer inspire confidence and trust in you."

A good leader is humbled by the position. The enormity of the weight of responsibilities of the institution, company or firm should humble him and not make him arrogant. As leader, the fortunes of thousands of people are in your hands to manage or mismanage. The mere thought of failing all these people is humbling. Unfortunately, some leaders on assumption of duty become tin-gods and expect to be worshipped.

The leader must also have excellent communication skills – both oral and written otherwise he will find it difficult to lead. A leader is not vindictive and ever ready to pay back past wrongs whether imaginary or real. A leader is patient and tolerant. A leader does not take advantage of his subordinates. A leader is like the Good Shepherd – gentle, meek and humble. A leader is neither a gossip nor divisive. People in leadership positions show favouritism to some of their subordinates either on the basis of tribe or family ties. This is unethical. When this happens, you are effectively dividing up the place into factions – those who belong and those who do not. A leader should be a unifying force not a factional leader. The leader is as it were, a father figure; he gives praise where it is due and punishes where appropriate. Fairness and firmness are his/her keywords, not discrimination and vindictiveness. A good leader is not autocratic/authoritarian or laisse-faire. He is a team player.

Since humanity is not perfect, we are not expecting perfect leaders. The leader after all, is a mere human being with all his strengths and weaknesses. What we are looking for is someone who recognises his humanity and strives to achieve a measure of balance and sobriety in his life.

Though your answers may not be exact copies of one another, those that say that an organisation is a group of people working together towards the achievement of a common goal, are correct. In fact an organisation is defined as "the rational co-ordination of the activities of a number of people for the achievement of some common explicit purpose or goal, through division of labour and function, and through a hierarchy of authority and responsibility.

This definition suggests that the co-ordination of activities on any scale requires;

- a. division of labour and function and
- b. a hierarchy of authority.

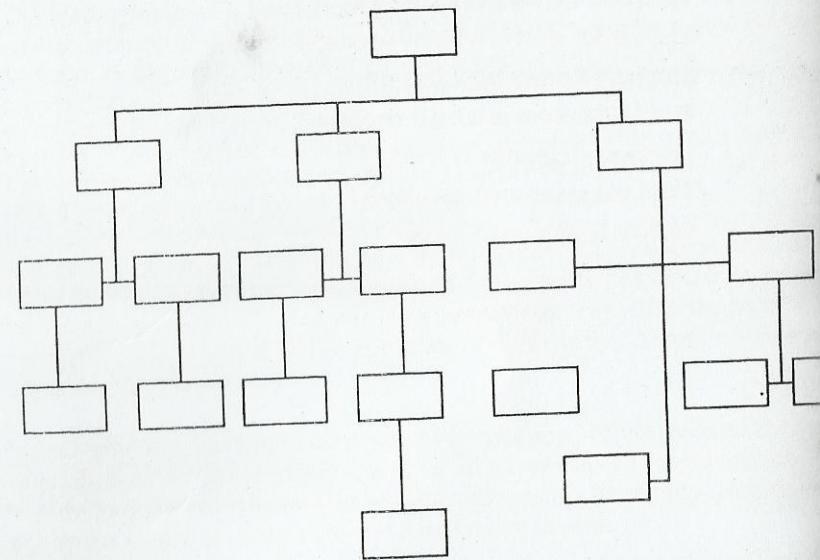
These two aspects determine the structure of every formal organisation and define that organisation's communication routes. By division of labour we are referring to the sharing of tasks according to the volume of work and the number of people available to do that work or perform that task. Division of function on the other hand is a way in which labour can be carried out sensibly and systematically throughout the organisation by considering how tasks can be logically grouped together. We refer to this as the structures of the organisation. Some organisations may have separate departments or sections for say, production, sales, personnel, finance, research and training development or even customer service.

Others may be based on geographical area. This occurs where the company's or organisation's activities are carried out in widely spread locations to cut down on travel and communication costs and resources. Mining companies such as Ashanti Goldfields Limited and Boute Gold mines Limited are clear examples. Then there are also those organisations whose structure is based on the product, production lines, brands, marketing, procurement, promotion etc. Though functional division still remains in this type of organisational structure, overall control is the concern of the Production Manager, Brands Manager, or Marketing Manager etc. Lever Brothers Ltd (Ghana) is one such organisation.

The smooth running of any organisation requires a hierarchy of authority and responsibility. What we are saying is that the principle to perform the task or make the decision assigned to him. This is known as delegation or delegation of authority.

of division of labour presupposes that a manager has to pass on to someone else the authority conferred on him by the organisation. What this means in essence is that, depending on the volume and complexity of the work, the manager's own capabilities or abilities and the number of personnel available to him, that manager may pass on part of his delegated authority to others. In the University setting for example, the Vice Chancellor delegates his authority in academic matters to the Dean of Faculties and Directors of Institutes and Centres, who in turn delegate to Heads of Departments under them who ensure that academic work goes on smoothly. It is this that creates the tiers or hierarchy of the organisation's structure with its lines' of authority or 'chains' of command.

Figure one below, illustrates a typical organisational chart.



Notice that the lines flow downwards from the top and since each superior might delegate to a number of subordinates, the tiers get wider as you get lower creating an organisational pyramid. However the superior who has delegated authority to his subordinate must stay in control over whatever is happening because the work was delegated to him by his own superior in the first instance. He therefore remains accountable to his superior for the ultimate execution of the task. What happens in practice therefore is a flow of information from the bottom upwards because subordinates will be reporting to superiors on the results of their activities and how they fulfilled their responsibilities. This downward and upward flow of information creates what we call the formal communication system of an organisation.

Let us now sum up our discussion of the organisational chart with this short activity.

Activity 3.1

5 minutes

Draw the organisational chart of an organisation you know, or in which you work, or have worked in.

Name the organisation

Communication Systems

In this second segment of this Unit, we discuss the importance of information in organisations. No organisation can achieve its set goals if there is no constant flow of information downwards, upwards, horizontally and even diagonally. Downward and upward communication can be classified as vertical communication. These information movements are known as communication systems or routes.

Shall we begin with the direction of communication in organisations? Okay, let's get it on. In organisations, communication flow is mostly downward, upward and horizontal.

Communication downwards (from superior to subordinate). This may be one of several things.

It may be:

- Delegation of authority involving giving information about instructions, or job schedules.
- An induction or orientation—giving information about procedures and practices in the organisation.
- An appraisal - informing the subordinate about how well; or badly he is performing his duties.
- A job description - informing the subordinate about what role his job plays in the realization of the organisation's objectives.
- Indoctrination - instilling in the employees, the company's culture, goals and customs.

Upward communication (from subordinate to superior). This may on the one hand be:

- information from a subordinate about his problems and fears, his performance and prospects etc.
- a report from a subordinate on a task he has been assigned to perform.
- a comment about the organisation's policies or practices by a subordinate.
- information about his colleagues - their attitude to work and their problems.
- a suggestion about what needs to be done and how it is to be done.

The third direction in which communication flows in an organisation is horizontal. This is communication between people at the same hierarchical level in the organisation.

Horizontal communication is important in two ways.

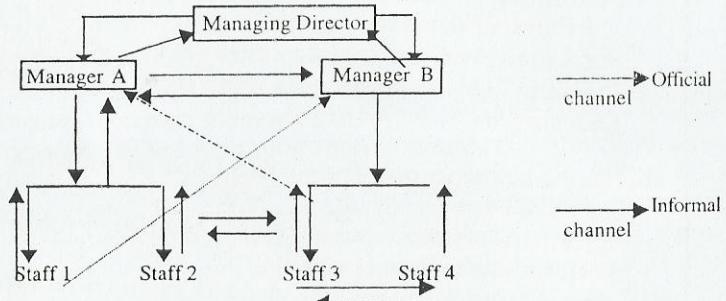
- Formally, it allows people to co-operate and co-ordinate their activities or tasks towards achieving the set goals of the organisation. This could take the form of inter-departmental or inter-sectional meetings.
- Informally, it establishes and enhances emotional and social support (fellow-feeling) among colleagues on the same level.

Diagonal communication is one with someone at a different level of the hierarchy and in a different section or department. This type of communication is generally discouraged in most organisations.

In every organisation, individuals are encouraged to follow the normal or official channel of communication with its norms and procedures. This means that communication should follow the line of command- a superior will deal only with his own immediate subordinates and vice-versa.

The diagram below illustrates the communication lines or routes in any organisation.

Fig. 2



Passing through these official channels can be time consuming and frustrating at most times. This is what creates inertia in organisations or institutions. "It is still in the pipeline," "We are looking into it", "It is receiving attention" etc, are utterances you often hear. Nothing can be more frustrating than this.

In some organisations however, information flow is faster than others. This is largely due to the communication style they have. Some organisations are very officious and more formal than others, and are in no hurry to cut corners. But there are others which do.

The apparent "slowness" of communication downwards or upwards may be due to several factors.

Communication downwards may be slow if management:

- Does not have the information or know the answers to problems. This is particularly so with middle level management if communication downward to them is poor. If this is so, they will be unable to communicate effectively downwards to their subordinates. We say in Latin "*Nemo dat quid non habet*". - To wit "No one gives what he does not own".
- Assumes that employees are not interested in the bigger issues of the organisation such as recruitment of new staff, budget allocation, profits etc. and thus ignores to inform them.
- Assumes that subordinates are daft and have no solutions to the organisation's problems and keeps them in the dark.
- Is not skilled, trained or confident either jointly or severally in communication skills. Where this is so, they feel unfortunately, that their authority is being undermined if they share information with subordinates. Others think that delegating authority to a subordinate with higher academic qualifications will allow that subordinate to know more about his job. He feels threatened by this and will never delegate. If he is not there, "no show".

How do we overcome these problems and improve downward communication in organisations?

We can achieve this by:

- Instituting systems and mechanisms such as holding fora, issuing bulletins, giving briefings, holding meetings/interviews, publishing house journals/newsletters, running in-services courses etc. for the staff.

- Establishing in each organisation a culture of communication- learn to exchange pleasantries, views and opinions. Having very brief morning prayers together just before work starts everyday. Give birthday cards to one another, pay "flying visits to one another. etc. When this is done over a period of time it becomes the tradition of that organisation. We can add to this culture of good communication by
- encouraging top level management to be role models by setting good examples.
- training and coaching managers to communicate more effectively using the organisation's house style.
- encouraging informal 'news swapping' by providing opportunities and settings for social interactions in the work place. For example, - tea/ coffee breaks, monthly parties, end-of-year dinners, picnics etc.
- insisting on good communication skills as a criterion for recruitment, appraisal of work and promotion.
- encouraging staff to communicate confidently without fear of victimisation.

We can achieve this by recognising and rewarding those who communicate well, by not punishing those who err in the first instance and by instituting policies and procedures to promote communication skills which can instil self-confidence in the staff and by discouraging excessive status-consciousness among managers) "Don't you know I am the boss here, who are you?" or having separate canteens for managers and subordinates. These discourage interactions between management and subordinates.)

Now that we know how downward communication can be improved, what can we say about upward communication?

In the first place, communication upwards can pose many problems. For example, subordinates;

- think that management will not understand their concerns (which may be different from those of management) e.g., - wage increases, allowances, housing schemes, loan schemes end of service benefits, Christmas bonuses etc.
- may assume that managers are too busy or appear to be busy to attend to the problems they encounter with their schedules.

may be convinced that managers may not be interested in their personal problems, views and/or opinions or even information because of their status or position in the organisation. They may fear the consequences of communicating upwards. The fear that what he has to say might be rejected and he would appear stupid; the fear that he might be blamed for having the nerves to do so, the fear of being victimised; the fear that he might be termed a quisling and shunned by his colleagues, etc are formidable and real. It would take a courageous or careless or fool hardy subordinate to attempt communicating upwards.

To improve upward communication, organisations ought in the first instance to have CBAs'-Collective Bargaining Agreements to offer their employees channels for complaints, comments and suggestions as to work schedules and their executions, terms and conditions of service and trade union negotiations etc.

There are several ways organisations, institutions, co-operatives, Boards etc. can achieve this. For example, by:

- Holding regular non-negotiator meetings with representatives of workers.
- Instituting quality assurance or service units in which representatives of management and workers meet regularly to discuss issues relating to their welfare.
- Introducing 'suggestion boxes' where staff can write their suggestions, comments, or complaints on pieces of paper and drop them inside the boxes and
- By operating an open-door policy where management is accessible to even the most junior member of staff. If the manager or head does not act immortal, or King Solomonic staff will come to him with problems or solutions to certain nagging issues in the organisation of which he has no clue.

Let us summarize upward communication with the following exercise.

Activity 3.2

10 minutes

In your opinion, what can management do to change employee's perceptions of them?

Discuss your answer with your study group.

The next logical step after this exercise, is to discuss how to improve horizontal communication in organisations.

Improving horizontal communication

Horizontal communication, that is, communication between peers or peer groups is normally easier and more straight-forward than vertical (downward and upward) communication largely because it is less inhibited. As peers they are at the same level and are therefore less likely to consider their relative positions or status in the organisation during communication. In spite of this relative equality however, there can still be problems associated with office politics, professional or territorial rivalry and even power struggles.

For example, officers such as accountants and personnel/human resource managers on analogous grades may resist the expert authority of other officers when they feel their 'domain' is being invaded by an "outsider" who knows 'nothing' about their jobs. A manager or departmental head or even a whole department or section might feel rightly or wrongly that another head or department is encroaching on his/their area of jurisdiction or authority and will vigorously resist co-operating with that department. There may also exist conflicts of interests between individuals or groups because of widely different work habits, attitudes and perceptions. They see each other as rivals and will refuse to co-operate to co-ordinate efforts. Indeed, some may go to the extent of sabotaging one another to the detriment of the individual institution or company. This is what is known as professional rivalry.

These problems may be formidable but they are by no means insurmountable. We can improve horizontal communication if we

- Institute inter-sectional or inter-departmental work teams or committees (joint consultative committees and task them to hold regular meetings to discuss issues or problems as where and when they crop up.
- Rotate jobs thereby allowing each individual manager/officer to experience the job of the other.
- Encourage peer counselling as a means of resolving conflicts.
- Appoint a communicator as a sort of liaison officer to promote communication between departments by issuing newsletters or bulletins relevant to all departments at appropriate times.

But the success of all these recommendations or suggestions lie in the existence of a work culture of tolerance for one another's views or opinions however weird, bizarre, or intelligent.

Importance of informal communication to an organisation

You would have noticed by now that downward, upward and horizontal communication are formal systems of communication in an organisation. No matter how good this system is, it will still have to be supplemented by a good reliable or accurate informal system. This takes the form of conversations in the staff canteen, the washroom, or at the bar or club house or even on the way home or to work. The grapevine exists in every organisation. The danger is that if it is not properly harnessed it might turn

destructive. It can be full of half-truths and/or wild speculations and if it is not cut short, it can destroy the organisation by making colleagues mistrust one another.

Managers/Heads/Bosses instead of stifling the grapevine can harness it towards achieving the set goals of the organisation by

- Hooking into it so as to know what is going on and what their subordinates think is going on.
- using it to feed information to the staff when it is realized that the formal system is mistrusted by the staff.

Management can also supplement the use of the grapevine if it encourages and offers opportunities for "networking". A network is simply a collection of people usually with a shared interest who tend to keep in touch in order to exchange informal information.

Any form of information must not be stifled because it is important to the survival of the organisation. Employees including managers need information for a variety of purposes.

They include the need to/for;

- Perform or execute given tasks or jobs more efficiently and effectively. They will need to know about work schedules, the resources available, the state of machinery, their safety while at work etc. This kind of information may be provided through briefings, job descriptions, specific memos, notices, meetings, procedures, manuals or even duty rosters or schedules.
- Fulfil societal needs through regular interaction with colleagues and superiors at the work place. Interpersonal relations can be built and strengthened through this process.

Enhance job satisfaction. Employees may feel more trusted and part of the team if information is given freely to them. An employee feels that what he is doing is relevant and important if he is involved in the task. By Management recognizing this role, engenders a sense of achievement dawns on him and his sense of self-esteem. Such an employee gets job satisfaction in him and he is prepared to sacrifice everything to ensure the survival of the organisation. But where he feels belittled and unimportant, and is always the last to know what is going on, he quickly becomes indifferent to the fortunes of the organisation.

Motivation, learning and personal development. Employees need to know what is expected of them - performance criteria or standards, promotion criteria, budget targets, rules and regulations etc. They will also need feedback on all these issues and if that information is not forthcoming confusion and suspicion can easily set in.

These information needs if satisfied will lead to satisfaction, reassurance, and a sense of belonging to the organisation.

Summary

In this Unit we have looked at

- The structure of an organisation
- The communication systems in an organisation and
- The information needs of employees in an organisation