

PART I

INTRODUCTION TO COMMUNICATION

Introduction

This topic introduces you to a better understanding of the basics of communication and why these skills are important.

Objectives

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

- Appreciate the importance of studying communication.
- Differentiate between Communication and Effective communication.
- Identify the purpose of communication.
- Indicate the value of effective communication.
- Identify the effects of negative communication.
- Assess your current communication skills.

Topic Resources

Sen, L. (2006). *Communication Skills*; New Delhi: Prentice-Hall.

Hargie (2006). *Handbook of Communication skills*. UK: Psychology Press.

Owen, H., (2018). *The Handbook of Communication Skills*. Taylor & Francis Publisher.

1.0 What is Communication?

The term communication comes from a Latin word '*communicare*' which means to make common or share. Therefore, communication is **a process** by which **meaning is exchanged** between individuals or an individual and a group through **a common system of symbols, signs and behavior**.

Key phrases of definition.

- a) **Communication is a process:** it is an activity that is an exchange of meaning that is dynamic. Communication is therefore not static.
- b) **Communication involves meaning:** meaning is shared understanding of messages. The understanding of the meaning of another person's message only occurs when you elicit common meanings for words, phrases, and non-verbal messages.
- c) **Communication is a system of symbols, signs, and behavior:** the system may be in form of language, gesture, demeanor, facial expressions etc.

1.2 Purpose of Communication.

Why communicate?

Effective communication is achieved when we speak, write or express ourselves through body actions; visual symbols to achieve the intended purpose. When we write, speak, persuade, inform, entertain, explain, convince or educate, we strive to achieve one or more of the following objectives:

- ✓ To be heard and to be understood,
- ✓ To read and comprehend,
- ✓ To be acceptable,
- ✓ To have action taken.

As noted above, we always have an objective when communicating.

Note: *The terms 'Communication' and 'effective communication' are distinctly different. One can communicate without effectively communicating the message. The main goal of communication is to ensure that there is effective communication.*

1.3 Effective Communication.

What is effective communication?

- i. This is a process through which the sender conveys a message that the receiver **readily receives** and **understands**. It is a two-way process instead of a one-way process.
- ii. It is a two-way information-sharing process that involves one party sending a message that is **easily understood** by the receiving party.
- iii. It is the process through which a message is passed to the intended recipient and it is **understood** by him or her, thus **eliciting** the required **response**. It involves the use of body language, gestures, listening **skills, and emotional awareness**

Note: *The ability to communicate effectively is an art that can be used in many areas of your life, from employment and education to parenting and relationships. An effective communicator considers the audience or listener receiving the message and communicates accordingly.*

1.4 Importance of Effective Communication

Effective communication will enable you to:

- Get the job you want.
- Boost your chances for promotion.
- Help others get things done.
- Benefit your business.
- Improve your grades.
- Advance socially.

- Ensure a bright future.
- Enhance other skills.
- Helping others get ahead.

The Value of Effective Communication in the Workplace

Good communication provides many benefits in the workplace. Businesses consist of people working in conjunction to produce a product or offer a service. They also engage in interaction with customers, partners, and other external organizations. Communication thus becomes vital to running an effective business and indeed some employees, particularly managers, do their job solely by acting as good communicators. The benefits of employees, managers, and owners communicating effectively translate into huge rewards for the business itself.

a) Saving Money many businesses including state departments spend more than Ksh3 billion every year training their workers to write and communicate (customer care) more effectively. A business can save such costs if employees already know how to communicate well. Communication speeds up the production process: informing managers of looming problems, and allowing coordinated responses to unforeseen situations. It allows salesmen to convey the benefits of the product or service to potential customers and secure sales more readily. Your employees work together more readily, which ensures smooth operation and in turn, prevents time lost needlessly, and therefore money.

b) Securing Customers communication with potential customers means more than just explaining the benefits of the product or service. It means listening to the customers express their needs and the problems they wish to solve with your product. It also means gauging their satisfaction with the product and determining any needs they might have for which your business can provide solutions. Communicating effectively with customers helps you retain their **loyalty** by meeting their needs and more importantly, by treating them as valued people rather than walking objects.

c) Esprit de Corps communicating effectively increases the **bonds** between employees. They feel more productive and don't become frustrated by managers or co-workers who don't understand what they're saying. Furthermore, good communication helps employees understand their jobs better, and keeps them informed of the status of important projects. All of that helps create a more pleasant working environment and fosters a sense of camaraderie among all the team members: reducing conflict and improving **loyalty** among employees.

d) Team Building. Effective communication in the workplace helps employees and managers form highly efficient teams. Employees are able to **trust** each other and management. Effective communication reduces **unnecessary competition** within departments and helps employees work together harmoniously. The result of a team that works together is **high productivity, integrity, and responsibility**. Employees know **their roles** on the team and know they **are valued**. Managers are able to **correct employees'** mistakes without

creating a hostile work environment. A manager who **openly** communicates with his subordinates can **foster positive** relationships that benefit the company as a whole.

e) **Employee Morale.** An improvement in employee morale can result from effective communication. Although pay is a concern for many workers, it is not their only concern. Employees appreciate good communication coming from management. It produces a healthy work environment. When employees are satisfied with their jobs, they are able to efficiently perform their duties with a positive attitude. Failing to communicate effectively in a workplace leads to frustration and confusion among employees. However, managers can alleviate such problems by keeping the lines of communication open.

1.5 Effects of Negative Communication (in the Workplace):

Common elements of negative communication include rumors, misinformation, misinterpretation, incomplete information, and employee slander. While many of the elements are purposely initiated -- for example, employee slander (grapevine) other elements occur without any intent of malice, such as unknowingly relaying incomplete information. Communication is essential for maintaining a productive workplace. By understanding the effects of negative communication in the workplace, you can develop policies that help to decrease the problem and encourage positive communication.

(a) **Conflict.** A negative side effect of negative communication is workplace conflict. When an employee **spreads false rumors** about another staff member, the result can often be a verbal or physical altercation between the two parties. But conflict resulting from negative communication is often **not that straightforward**. For example, if an Administrative Assistant relays instruction from her manager that are **incomplete**, but she does not realize they are incomplete, then any anger resulting from the incomplete instructions would be directed at the assistant, but she would not understand why the conflict started.

(b) **Morale.** Negative communication, whether intended or not, can have an **effect** on staff morale. Persistent intended negative communication can **add stress** to the workplace which makes it difficult to develop a productive work environment. Unintentional negative communication can be forgiven up to a point, but when it becomes habitual, it can lead to a drop in staff confidence in the company.

(c) **Structure.** When there is a culture of negative communication in the workplace, it tends to have an effect on **organizational structure**. Communication between departments and other parts of the company **breaks down** because the negative communication has degraded organizational communication to the point where it is no **longer functional**. This will leave departments and work groups on their own to answer their own questions and develop their own methods of getting the job done. In the end, the structure of the organization starts to break down.

(d) **Recovery.** An atmosphere of negative communication can be extremely difficult for a

workplace **to recover** from. Intentional and unintentional negative communication **erodes trust**, and it pervades discourse to the point where information must be **checked several times** before it is acted upon. The longer negative communication is allowed to degrade the quality of communication and teamwork in the workplace, the longer it takes for the workplace to recover and become productive.

1.6 What is the importance of studying communication?

Communication is central to human life. You cannot avoid communication and you will engage in communication nearly every minute of every day in your life. In addition, communication plays a major role in every aspect of your life. Effective communication therefore both enhances your daily life and at the same time solves problems in your professional and personal life. Communication experts believe that poor communication is at the root of many of our problems.

Therefore, there are various reasons why studying communication is important:

- a) **Studying communication improves our self-awareness.** Self-awareness is the way we see ourselves. Most of our self-knowledge comes from communication with ourselves (intrapersonal communication) and communication with other people (interpersonal communication). The message and feedback we receive from others helps improve our self-concept.
- b) Studying communication and using it effectively can lead to more positive feelings of ourselves. **Effective communication can improve our self-worth** by enabling us to positively project ourselves in what is called **image management**.
- c) Studying communication can **increase our knowledge about human relationships** because studying communication includes learning about how people relate with one another and about what communication is appropriate for a given situation.
- d) Studying communication can **teach us important life skills**. For instance, it can help us **acquire problem solving skills**. Studying communication is also instrumental in helping us acquire important life skills such as **decision-making skills, public speaking** etc. All these skills are important in academic and career development.
- e) Studying communication **can help us succeed professionally**. Employers regard highly written, oral and other communication competencies. The ability to listen and analyze messages is usually considered an essential professional skill. Entrepreneurs too regard communication skills as top priority skills for success.
- f) Poor communication may lead to misunderstanding, frustration, being ignored by others, unsuccessful careers, among many other negative consequences.