Unit 2

The Communication Process

1.   INTRODUCTION

> Emperor Frederick, the 13th century ruler of the Holy Roman Empire wanted to know what language had been spoken at the birth of mankind in the Garden of Eden. Was it Hebrew, Greek or Latin? He ordered an experiment in which the original circumstances would be recreated as closely as possible. A group of infants were to be isolated from hearing human speech from the moment of birth until they spoke their language. The babies were to be raised by nurses who were strictly charged to maintain complete silence when with the babies. The result? Every one of the babies died. The lack of communication can be lethal.
>
> *From Robert Bolton, People Skills*

Whenever people are together, they communicate. We cannot avoid communicating when we are with others, because they interpret what we do and say as well as what we do not do and do not say. Even if we choose to be silent, we are communicating. What we mean by silence and how others interpret it depend on cultural backgrounds.

With current communication technologies and the influx of emerging ones, the world is definitely getting smaller. Paradoxically, while communication is getting more convenient, the opportunities for miscommunication are increased. It is thus imperative that we learn how to communicate effectively to ensure our intended message is the one understood by the intended recipient. Ineffective communication causes loneliness, conflicts, family problems, professional dissatisfactions, psychological stress, physical illness and even death, when communication breaks down.

2.   DEFINITION OF COMMUNICATION

Communication is a process involving the sorting, selecting and sending of symbols (or encoding) in such a way as to help a listener (or receiver) perceive in his own mind (or decode) the meaning (or message) contained in the mind of the communicator (or sender)

Raymond Ross
"Speech Communication", 6th Edition
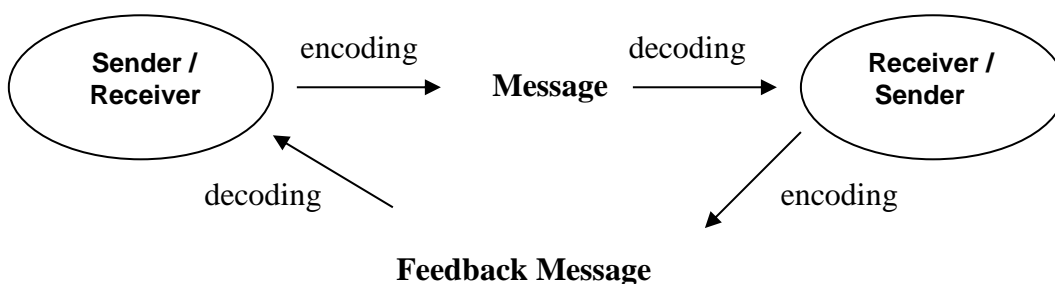
3.   ELEMENTS OF THE COMMUNICATION PROCESS

The communication process takes place in various situations for different reasons with the potential for many interpretations. A typical communication process involves the following elements:

Sender	• Communication begins with the sender. • He is the person who sends the information/message – e.g. a person talking to a friend in a social situation. • The sender encodes an idea or feeling in words or signs that the receiver will recognize and transmits this message to the receiver.
Receiver	• The receiver is the person who receives the message/information – e.g. students in a classroom/lecture setting. • The receiver decodes or interprets the message to understand it.
Message	• The message is the information/idea/feeling that is transmitted from the sender to the receiver. • The message can be sent through verbal or nonverbal channels or both.
Purpose	• People communicate for a reason. • When the sender's purpose for communicating is different from the receiver's, a conflict of purpose will occur. • This can create a barrier to communication.
Feedback	• The one who receives the message responds to the sender. This is called feedback. • It is an essential part of effective communication as it provides continuity in the communication process. • It indicates understanding or misunderstanding of the message. Therefore both the sender and the receiver need feedback.
Climate	• In social situations, we develop positive, neutral or negative attitudes towards the situation and the people in it. • These orientations are called the "climate" of the situation. • If we are comfortable with someone, it is easy to communicate with that person and vice versa.
Channel	• A communication channel is the means or technique used to send a message. • Some examples are: a conversation, a telephone call, e-mail, ICQ chat-lines and letters.

3.   THE NATURE AND FORMS OF COMMUNICATION

3.1   Forms of Communication

Human interaction is extremely complex. In any organization there are many potential communication contexts.

A context is the situation or setting in which communication takes place, for example, communication at a conference, a seminar, over lunch or at any informal gathering.

So then, must communication always be verbal? The basic system of human communication does not just involve the organs of speech and hearing. It also includes the eyes, facial muscles, hands, arms, the brain, and in many aspects, the entire body.

There are basically two forms of communication. They are:

i) Verbal Communication
ii) Non-verbal Communication

3.2   Verbal Communication

Once you have a message to impart, the first thing you need to do is to decide between spoken or written communication.

3.2.1   Spoken Communication

Some people find it easier to speak than to express themselves in writing.
When is spoken communication a good idea?
* When you want to appear more personal
* When you want to invite suggestions, ideas, feedback and generate discussion
* When people need clarification as you go along, especially if you are explaining something complex
* When the subject is highly confidential and you cannot risk it being put down in writing

Chit chats and telephone conversations are examples of informal speech events. The following are six formal speech events.

   a. meetings

   b. corporate briefings

   c. public speaking

   d. presentations

   e. interviews

   f. speeches

3.2.2 Written Communication

Compared with speaking, written communication is:
- more formal
- more permanent
- better if you want to be sure you choose the right words
- less confidential

Written communication expresses ideas, thoughts and feelings in writing.

Below are some examples and features of **written** communication.

a.   Letters: It is personal, private and lends weight to its subject.

b.   Memos: Not confidential, less formal than a letter, more likely to be read and thrown away.

c.   Email: It is private, less formal than a letter, and less likely to be kept than a letter.

d.   Notice-board: May never be read.

e.   Newsletter: It is public, not suitable for bad news but most suitable for minor but necessary news

3.3   Non-verbal Communication

Professor Albert Mehrabian says the messages we send through our posture, gestures, facial expression, and spatial distance account for 55% of what is perceived and understood by others. In fact, through our body language we are always communicating, whether we want to or not!

Dr Albert Mehrabian's Elements in a Message:

Source: Dr. Albert Mehrabian "Elements in Message"

Facial Expression 55%

Voice Tone 38%
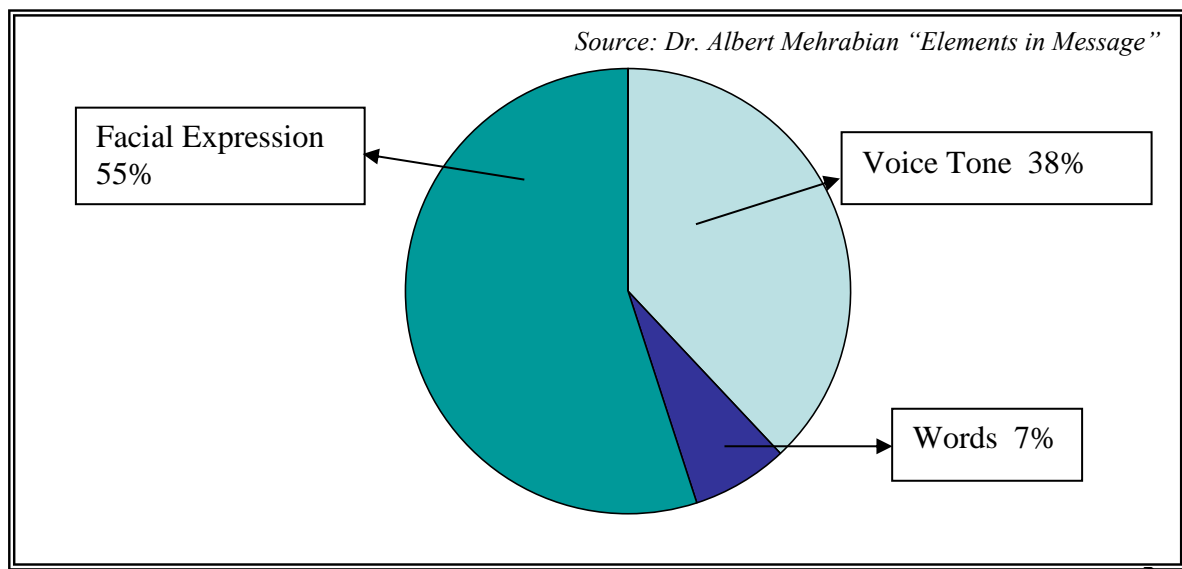
Words 7%

Research has shown that non-verbal cues are particularly important for communicating feelings and attitude. If words disagree with the tone of voice or facial expression, people tend to believe the tonality and facial expression. Actions speak louder than words.

3.3.1   Facial Expression

The face is perhaps the most important conveyor of emotional information. A face can light up with enthusiasm, energy, and approval, express confusion or boredom, and scowl with displeasure. The eyes are particularly expressive in telegraphing joy, sadness, anger, or confusion.
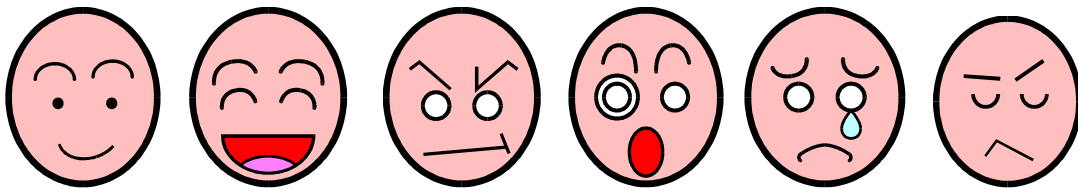
3.3.2   Postures and Gestures

 Our body postures can create a feeling of warm openness or cold rejection. For example, when someone faces us, sitting quietly with hands loosely folded in the lap, a feeling of anticipation and interest is created. A posture of arms crossed on the chest portrays a feeling of inflexibility. The action of gathering up one's materials and reaching for a purse signals a desire to end the conversation.
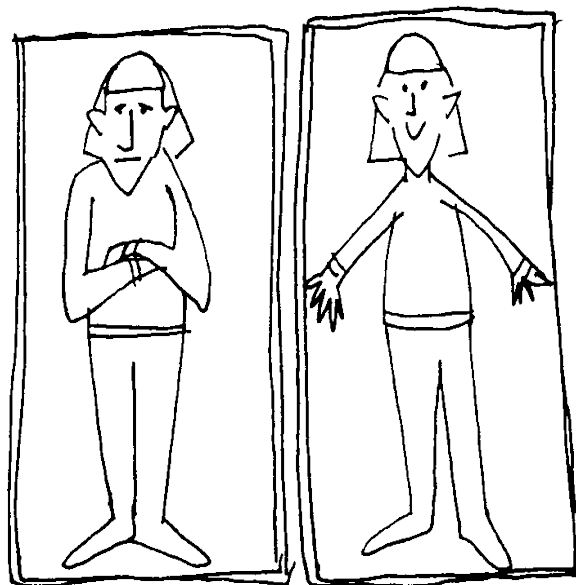
3.3.3   Positive Body Language

Positive body language is generally quite reliable as an indicator of a person's feelings. It signals interest in the other person and in the conversation.

Relaxed posture - Comfortably seated, relaxed breathing, no visible stiffness or abrupt movements. These indicate no major barriers to communication.

Arms relaxed - Uncrossed arms and hands open (palms up or otherwise visible to the other person) are signs of openness.

Good eye contact - Looking in the other person's eyes, particularly when they are speaking, indicates interest in that person. Proper eye contact involves looking away occasionally to avoid staring.

Nodding agreement - When nods are used to punctuate key things the other person has said, they signal agreement, interest and understanding. However, continual unconscious bobbing of the head usually indicates that the listener is tuning out.

Taking notes - Shows interest and involvement, particularly if notes are on what the other person is saying.

Smiling/adding humour - This is a very positive sign. It signals a warm personal relationship.

Leaning closer - Reducing the distance between two people, particularly when the other person is speaking. Indicates interest is up and barriers are down.

Gesturing warmly - Talking with hands, particularly with palms open, indicates involvement in the conversation and openness to the other person.

For all of these positive gestures, moderation is the rule. When they are exaggerated, they can become more negative than positive.

3.3.4   Negative Body Language

Negative body language is somewhat less reliable as an indicator of the person's comfort with the current conversation than positive body language. Actions that are generally considered negative may just be a matter of comfort for this person, may indicate that the person is tired, or may result from other matters that are weighing on this person's mind.

Body tense - Stiffness, wrinkled brow, jerky body motion, hands clasped in front or palms down on the table. These can indicate concern with the topic or dealing with the other person.

Arms folded in front - Creates a barrier; can express resistance to what is being said.

Hand on face - A hand over one's mouth is a closed gesture. Leaning on one's elbow with the chin in the hand can communicate boredom.

Fidgeting - Moving around a lot, playing with things and drumming fingers are usually a sign of boredom, nervousness or impatience.

Arms behind head, leaning back - In a well-established relationship this can be a relaxed gesture. In a new relationship, it is often used to express a desire for control or power.

Yawning - Boredom, confusion. The other person is talking too much or in too much technical detail.

Impatience - Trying to interrupt what the other person is saying, opening one's mouth frequently as if to speak.

Distraction - Eyes flicking about, blank stares, flipping through literature without really reading it, looking at others in the office, looking at the person's body or clothing.

Leaning away - Avoiding moving closer, even when something is handed to the person, is strongly negative.

Negative facial expressions - These include shaking head, eyes narrowed, scowling, frowning.

Body language is more meaningful when several expressions take place at the same time. For example, the combination of leaning forward, nodding and smiling is a strong indication of agreement and openness.

3.3.5   Paraverbal Messages

Paraverbal communication refers to the messages that we transmit through the tone, pitch, and pacing of our voices. It is how we say something, not what we say. Professor Mehrabian states that the paraverbal message accounts for approximately 38% of what is communicated to someone. A sentence can convey entirely different meanings depending on the emphasis on words and the tone of voice. For example, the statement, "I didn't say you were lazy" has six different meanings, depending on which word is emphasized.

"I didn't SAY you were lazy."

"I didn't say YOU were lazy."

"I didn't say you were LAZY."

### 3.4   Relation between Verbal and Nonverbal Communication

It is often quite difficult to separate verbal and nonverbal communication, but how are they related to each other? Let's take a look:

- They may be redundant and duplicate each other.
  For example, if you wish to eat, you can do it without having to say, "I'm going to eat." Saying that is redundant.

- They can substitute or replace each other.
  For example, you can wave at someone to indicate goodbye. You do not necessarily have to use the word "goodbye."

- They can add emphasis to each other.
  For example, if you state you're angry at someone and you frown, your frowning adds emphasis to your words.

- They may contradict each other.
  You may say one thing, but if your body sends contradicting signals, then the final message may not be what you want to convey. For example, if prior to giving a presentation you are asked whether or not you are nervous, you might say, "No." However, your trembling hands may contradict your verbal message.

4.   EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION

Effective communication exists between two people when the receiver interprets the sender's message in the way that the sender intended it.

Johnson and Johnson
'Joining Together: Group Theory and Group Skills'
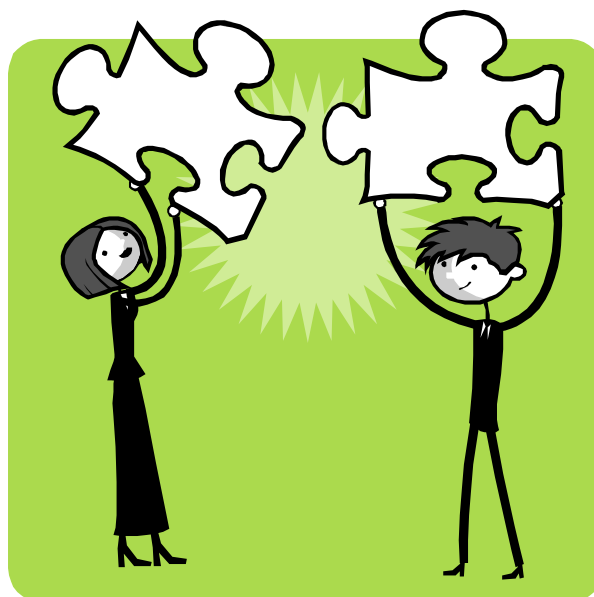
4.1   Types of Communication Barriers

Misinterpretation of message often happens when the message received is not the intended one and this leads to misunderstanding. Communication barriers can be caused by the sender, the receiver, lack of feedback, a poor choice of channel or any other element in the communication process.

	Description of barrier	Type
a	This deals with the language aspect of communication. Sometimes, the use of the language can cause misinterpretation. In the English language and in other languages, certain words have implied meanings. For example, the word "dense" has more than one meaning.	**Semantics**
b	The environmental noise around us causes difficulty in hearing and thus information is not transmitted successfully.	**Physical noise**
c	The physical distance between two persons results in less face-to-face communication. This can lead to misunderstanding, for example, in telephone conversations. The closer the physical distance between any two communicating parties, the more effective the communication.	**Distance**
d	People often see and interpret the same message in a different way owing to their differences in experiences, attitudes, values, opinions and background.	**Distortion**
e	When people are distracted during a conversation, then communication fails. This occurs when they are thinking of something else or are not interested in what the speaker is saying.	**Psychological Noise**
f	Several types of channels are available for communication purposes. However, communication often breaks down due to the inappropriate use of channels, for example, sending e-mail messages that are sensitive. This poor choice of channel can create communication barriers for the sender and the receiver.	**Failure to use proper channel**
g	People involved in a communication process have very different personalities. As such, people tend to pass judgement by telling others their reaction is wrong, insipid or stupid, thus denigrating their point of view. These judgements will create barriers to effective communication.	**Personality incompatibility**
h	A breakdown in communication occurs when people in a special discipline or job – doctors, lawyers, scientists – use their specialist terms or jargon.	**Lack of levelling**

i	When a large portion of information is left out intentionally or unintentionally, it leads to communication breakdown.	**Omission**
j	People refuse to listen to others for various reasons. They could be arrogant by nature or they feel small and inferior.	**Refusal to listen**

4.2   Ways to Overcome Barriers to Communication

Below are some suggestions in which you can overcome barriers to communication.

	Ways to overcome barriers to communication	**Phrase/word that best describes the ways**
a	Members of any organisation must have a working knowledge of the concept of communication. These are knowing the meaning of communication, types of communication, the communication network, types of media available for communication purposes and so on.	**A working knowledge**
b	This is an effective technique in improving communication. Saying the message several times using different words and phrases also enhances communication.	**Repetition**
c	Try to avoid using sophisticated words and technical jargon. This will ensure that the message can be easily understood.	**Use simple and direct language**
d	The communicator should not assume a great deal about the recipient of the communication. S/he should not assume that the recipient is willing to listen, that the recipient's role is known and that the recipient's capacity and interests are known.	**Do not make assumptions**
e	To encourage communication, the communicator must practice what s/he preaches. S/he must be able to handle the emotions of people he comes into contact with calmly and patiently.	**Create a supportive, trustworthy and honest organization climate**
f	For example, after sending a written memo (a channel) the sender can use a phone call or face-to-face conversation (another channel) to make sure that the message has been conveyed.	**Rely on more than one channel**
g	Always ask yourself, "Do I have a message?" In other words, pinpoint the purpose of your message.	**Focus**

h	This is an important aspect of any communication system and would enhance the effectiveness of communication. The sender is able to check whether his/her message has been understood and help the receiver if there are any difficulties.	**Feedback**

5.   COMMUNICATING VIA SOCIAL MEDIA

On a Friday afternoon, a mother 'tweeted" with her daughter who was in college. They 'chatted' and the mother asked how things were going and daughter answered with positive statements followed by emoticons showing smiles and hearts. Later that night, her daughter attempted suicide. In the days that followed, it came to light that her daughter had been holed up in her dormitory room, crying and showing signs of depression — a completely different reality from the one that she conveyed in texts, Facebook posts and tweets.

Social media can be defined as any type of shared social interaction between individuals, groups, and companies via the Internet. It includes blogging and podcasting, using social networks such as Facebook, MySpace, and Twitter, sharing videos on YouTube and photos on Flickr.

5.1   Effects of Social Media on How we Communicate

With social media, is the focus on communication quantity versus quality? Superficiality versus authenticity? Are we really communicating?

Social media has changed drastically how we communicate, both by reducing the average amount of time spent in face to face communication as well as the language we use. Social technologies have broken the barriers of space and time, enabling us to

interact 24/7 with more people than ever before. People are more open about their personal lives and want to communicate with others. They freely like or dislike anything and everything, provide an array of details and images from their private lives, and overshare a variety of information that was once unthinkable for public consumption. Opinions are shared readily, relationships are publicly broadcasted and news travels at the speed of light.

Dr. Albert Mehrabian's study has indicated that 93% of a message pertaining to feelings and attitudes is in the non-verbal cues such as facial expression and tone of voice. Indeed, it is only when we can hear a tone of voice or look into someone's eyes that we are able to know when "I'm fine" doesn't mean they are fine at all… or when "I agree" doesn't mean they are bought in at all. In using social media as a form of communication, anyone can hide behind the text, the Facebook post or the tweet, projecting any image they want and creating an illusion of their choice. They can be whatever they want to be.

5.2   Guidelines on Effective Communication in Social Media

Like any other form of communication, social media is just another tool to interact with others. Therefore, rather than branding it as good or bad, the focus should be on how to make communication through social media effective in promoting ourselves favourably and building lasting relationships. Here are two basic guidelines:

5.2.1   Tone Down Your Language

Don't say anything online that you wouldn't be willing to say to someone face-to-face. Just as normally nice people occasionally turn into rude drivers, normally nice people occasionally turn into rude communicators when they go online. People often ignore one another's feelings and refuse to treat one another with dignity and respect. This severe lack of common courtesy is especially acute online. Avoid the use of strong or offensive language, excessive use of exclamation marks and use of capital letters for entire text.

5.2.2.   Watch what you Say

Don't say highly negative, insulting or disparaging things about certain issues or people. . Avoid starting any kind of conflict online. Watch what you say, type or post, as you may find yourself in hot soup. It may seem 'cool' or 'hip' but at the end of the day, what you say (about others) "speaks" volumes about your character.

Communicating online can be quite effective and enjoyable if you remain aware that it is a written medium, observe proper netiquette and use specific language 'behaviours' to indicate a sense of who you are. Lastly, don't let online social networking take over all other methods of communication.