**Definition of Communication**

There are as many definition of communication as there are writers in the field.

In 1976 Frank Dance and Carl Larson published a listing of well over 100 definitions with no attempt to be exhaustive. Since then others have undoubtedly appeared.

Most theorists however seem to agree that **communication is a process that involves senders and receivers transmitting and receiving messages and producing some effect.**

The definitions of communication may be divided into two:

1. Source-oriented
2. Receiver-oriented.

Source-oriented Definitions

1. Bernard Berelson and Gary A. Steiner proposed the following definition:

**Communication is the transmission of information, ideas, emotions, skills etc. by the use of symbols, words, pictures, graphs etc. It is the act or process of transmission that is usually called communication**.

This definition fails to place much or any emphasis on the role of the receiver in the communication process.

1. Stanley Schacter (1951) describes communication as:

**a tool of the source, a means at the source’s disposal for affecting another.**

This definition also clearly puts the emphasis on the source of information.

1. Malcom Willey and Stuart Rice(1993) describe communication as:

**The act of transmitting meaningful symbols from individual to individual**

Here again emphasis is being placed on the source without much apparent recognition of the receiver’s vital role in the communication process.

**Receiver-oriented definitions**

1. Goyer says that:

**In terms of the vicarious sharing of experience, communication occurs with reference to G (generator of the message) and P(receiver of a message) Whenever the response of P to a sign/symbol/stimulus projected by G, is consistent or correlated with the response intended by G.**

This definition tends to place great emphasis on receiver response as a necessary condition for communication.

1. Whiteman and Boas (1983) identify four types of social contexts:
2. An interpersonal social context (dyadic) –communication between two people.
3. Small group communication
4. Public speaking
5. An organizational context.

According to Whiteman and Boas (1983), in whatever context of communication, **individuals never behave exclusively as sources or receivers, but act simultaneously in both roles. Hence the term source-receiver.**

They therefore suggest that **no component should be emphasized at the expense of the other.**

They conclude that **no single definition of communication is always most appropriate.**

The **propriety of a definition** is obviously determined by the **purpose we see or the outcomes we expect of the various kinds of communication in differing ‘social contexts’.**

When we are studying public speaking, definitions of communication that stress source-influence may be less important. Outcomes such as persuasion, manipulation and influence are not expected or even desirable with the domain of those concerned with relational communication.

**Communication Perspectives (Views)**

Speech communication as a discipline evolved as a result of many

influences. Such influences have promoted differing perspectives of how the study of communications might be regarded.

**Perspective** means the **view or opinion** that a particular individual might have about how the various aspects of a discipline relate to each other and as a whole.

The three perspectives are:

1. Rhetorical perspective
2. The communicative theory
3. Relational(or interpersonal) perspective

**The Rhetorical Perspective**

Much of the contemporary public speaking is based on the works of ancient Greeks and Romans who articulated an especially insightful system of rhetoric or public speaking.

The origin of public speaking can be traced to Greece during the 5th c BC. This according to **Thornssen and Baird (1948)** was a time in which there were **wars to be waged**, **men to be inspired**, and **civic wars to be administered.**

It was a time when people discovered that **spoken discourse** might serve **to bring persons together to consolidate their hopes, attitudes, ambitions, and desires and to inspire them to action.**

It was a time that was ripe for the development of a systematic treatise or theory on the art of rhetoric or speechmaking.

Because of the demands of the time and the needs of the people, it was natural that teachers and theoreticians of rhetoric or persuasive discourse would emerge. Perhaps the greatest of the teacher-theoreticians was Aristotle (348-322 BC).

His rhetoric is considered by many as the most significant work in the literature of speechmaking. It is one of the earliest systematic studies of speechmaking.

It is one of the earliest systematic studies of public speaking.

It is in this book that we are introduced to the modes of persuasion or more specifically to the forms of **artistic proof**- **ethos, pathos and logos.**

Aristotle maintained that proof can be achieved in three ways:

1. In some circumstances, the perceived moral character of the speaker alone promotes persuasion. We believe because we perceive the speaker to be intelligent, of good character and a person of good will. This is ethos or ethical proof.

2. On other occasions belief is brought about by arousing the emotions or the audience. (This is pathos or emotional proof)

3. Finally, Aristotle emphasizes the most sophisticated form of persuasion through the presentation of evidence and reasoning from evidence( This is logos or logical proof.

**COMMUNICATION THEORY PERSPECTIVE**

In 1949 Claude Shannon and Warren Weaver proposed one of the first schematics or models of communication process.

**A model is a representation in three dimensions of an existing person or thing or of a proposed structure.**

All models whether they be computer-generated, simulations, scaled down working models of a piece of machinery, flow charts, or diagrammatic representations, share the same purposes.

1. They seek to capture all the essential features of real life situations in a simplified form which allows it to be described, explained and understood more easily.
2. They allow us to manipulate some of the aspects of the situation in order to predict what might happen if these aspects were changed.
3. We can use the information provided by the model to test out theories to find out whether they might work in practice and to stimulate further research.

**Communication models** may attempt to describe a particular theory, a process or part of a process, or a single communication event. The theories underlying the models have practical use in that they enable us to pinpoint some or the factors which can help us to communicate more effectively in practice.

In their book “ The Mathematical Theory of Communication” Claude Shannon and Warren Weaver concerned themselves with the abilities of a communicative system to produce “ out puts” that significantly correlated with “inputs”. They were concerned with the fidelity of a communicative system.

**Fidelity is the degree to which a communicator will get what he wants as a result of communicating.**

The model envisions an information source who creates a message and encodes it as a signal that is transmitted through a channel to a receiver who decodes ( interprets) the signal to a message before the final destination is reached.

A key ingredient in the model is that present within the channel is a noise source that can tend to distort the message.

Any stimulus interfering with or disrupting the accurate reception of a message

Any stimulus interfering with or disrupting the accurate reception of a message might well be considered noise whether the stimulus resides within the environment or within an individual. Eg.

1. A motorcycle roaring outside the classroom during a lecture can constitute noise.
2. At 12:30 p.m. you may miss a lecture because of those first pangs of hunger (this is noise). These internal stimuli are sources of noise. The y compete with the source/ message for attention, and when they receive attention, the system will suffer a loss of fidelity( ie communicator not getting what he wants)

In this model the terms transmitter and receiver refer to the instruments used in the process of transmission- e.g the human voice, ear, the telephone, letters sent by post etc.

Channel of communication refers to the physical method by which the information is transmitted and received- light waves sound waves, physical gestures etc.

Coding or encoding means putting the message to be sent into a form that is compatible with the channel of communication used. Eg. A message transmitted by means of a letter will use the post service as the channel of communication and the code will be that of the written word.

If the channel for transmission is sound transmitted by the human voice then, obviously the code is the spoken word, together with all the paralinguistic codes that accompany it.

**Shannon and Weaver Model of Communication**

Verbal-sound

Visual-sight

Pictorial-sight

Aural-hearing

**Information message Transmitter Signal Signal Receiver Message Destination**

**Source**

Noise

Source

An examination of the Shannon Weaver model reveals that the only link or connection between a message source and a message receiver is the **communication channel** through which the message must pass.

If the source and the receiver do not share a common channel, messages cannot be shared.

These models are not exhaustive and attempting to explain all communication-related events in terms of any single model is likely to produce some error.

**Model 2 The Wilbur Schramm Model of Communication**

Building on some of the same concepts as Shannon and Weaver, Wilbur Schramm, a mass communications theorist extends the model to include **a field of experience** as another linking mechanism between the individuals involved in communication.

To the extent they share a common field of experience, the fidelity of the message is enhanced.

Should there be complete incongruence of the fields of experience of the two individuals, messages passing form one individual to the other would lack completely in fidelity. E.g. sometimes you may hear certain instances of communication between husbands and wives. To the outsider some messages passing between spouses may seem devoid of meaning.

But the couples (who share a common field of experience) understand each other to a high degree.

e.g.

Spouse1: Hi! Have you decide?

Spouse 2: Well, not exactly.

Spouse1: You the children and I have been counting on it.

Spouse2: I know, but the book.

Spouse 1: But you need to get away.

Spouse2: If it goes OK tonight.

Such conversation makes little sense to those who have not shared the experiences of these individuals.

Spouse 2 is trying to complete a manuscript of a book that has been in progress for sometime.

Spouse 1 would like to have the family participate in an outing during the weekend and has made the proposal to spouse 1 who has promised to think it over.

Spouse 2 has reservation but gives approval with reservation that if adequate progress on the manuscript is not made, the outing will be cancelled.

The Schramm model accommodates the role played by common experience as a linkage between individuals.

Field of

Fifield of Experience

destination

source

Spppp SOOooo Sourse

**Model 3 David Barlo’s SMCR model of Communication**

Expanding the previous models and defining fidelity as the degree to which a communicator will get what he wants as a result of communicating, David Barlo depicts communication in what he terms the SMCR model of communication.

He expands previous models by identifying and including within his model those factors within the source, message and Receiver which affect fidelity.

He also broadens the concept of channel, defining a communication channel psychologically as the senses through which a decoder-receiver can perceive a message.

Berlo also emphasizes the process of communication – that it is ongoing, ever-changing, continuous and that the separate elements of the process are interactive, with changes or fluctuations in one of the elements affecting all remaining elements.

S M C R

Source Message Channel Receiver

Comm skills seeing comm skills

Attitudes hearing Attitudes

Knowledge El**ement**s **Structure** Touching K**now**ledge

Social system code Smelling Soc.system

r **content** **Treatment**

Culture Tasting Culture

**Model 4 Schramm’s Second Model of Communication**

Message

Encoder Decoder

Decoder Encoder

Message

It emphasizes that an individual can act simultaneously as both a source and a receiver within the same communicative situation.

The two individuals indicated within the model have both encoding and decoding capability.

Each partly generates messages(encodes)

One of the labeled messages may be feedback.

Feedback is considered a receiver response to a source-generated stimulus.

Receiver response might be perceived by a source as favorable (positive) nodding of the head, smiles, applause, laughter etc.), unfavorable ( frowns, inattention, yawns etc.), or ambiguous( the situation produced when the lecturer ask if there are any questions following a particular complex lecture and there are none.

Feedback is thought to have a shaping or corrective function within communication situations. It is through feedback that a message receiver or audience member reveals understanding confusion, agreement, pleasure and other reactions.

The astute message source or speaker decodes and interprets those reactions simultaneously with the generation of additional message.

Consequently, the instructor who perceives a lack of understanding might try a different approach to a difficult concept before moving on to cover additional materials in her lecture.

She might ask questions to confirm her perceptions or interpretation of the feedback.

In the language of the rhetorical perspective, we might say that the ideal speech results in a ‘circular response’. i.e. the speaker interpretes audience response and adjusts his approach to the audience in a manner designed to elicit subsequent favorable audience reaction.

**Relational Perspective**

The relational or interpersonal perspective is applied to communication contexts involving a limited number of individuals.

The researcher-student approaching the study of communication from the interpersonal perspective would be most concerned with how people relate to one another in one-to-one communicative situations.

This perspective rose to prominence in the 1960’s in America.

It was a blending of the human potential movement, humanistic psychology, psychiatry philosophy, and theology.

Like the previous two perspectives, interpersonal perspective was a natural outgrowth of the social milieu (environment) of the times.

**Rhetoric** which sprang from the Greek and Roman concern with democracy and law made persuasion the key concept.

Communication theory received its stimulus from a renewed interest in science, prompted by the launching of the **Russian Sputnik( a satellite to the moon. It triggered space race and a part of the cold war**) and the determination to win the race to the moon.

The interpersonal perspective followed hard on the heels of the rising prominence of communication theorists.

The scientific explosion of the 1950 and 1960s was also linked to social and personal upheavals.

These years were distressing ones for America- the country was involved in a seemingly endless and ever-escalating war in Vietnam, a war that became more and more unpopular as the decade progressed.

It was a period characterized by rebellion against authority.

From the college to the Chicago Democratic National Convention of 1968, Youth and others expressed their dissatisfaction with authority, whether the authority was a college professor or the president of the United States.

Throughout this decade a view of the world emerged that had as its goal the development of the individual.

A view that stressed self- actualization and the need for people to relate to and be more understanding to one another.

Persuasion was rejected as a major goal of communication; It was viewed as a manipulation rather than an “authentic communicative activity.

For many people in the 1960s communication was viewed as a natural and appropriate mechanism for bringing self-actualization goals to fruition.

Within the interpersonal perspective considerable emphasis is placed on the importance of self-, of developing a genuine and complete understanding of who one is, the many roles an individual plays, and how others help to define who we are.

Certain forms of self-disclosure are seen as necessary and desirable n the development of relationships

As one <John Kelner observes” To communicate better , we must understand each other better. To understand each other better we must reveal more of ourselves through speech and speech communication events.

Some authorities reject the idea that “all behavior in an interactional situation has message value.

From interpersonal perspective, it is impossible to avoid communication, non-verbal behaviors, the messages sent by our dress, our posture, our use of objects, paralinguistic language cues, and a multitude of other non-verbal behaviors have message values.

From interpersonal perspective it is impossible to avoid nonverbal behaviors**, the ‘messages’ sent by our dress, our posture, our use of objects, paralinguistic language cues, and a multitude of other non-verbal behaviors have message values.**

The outcomes of communication within the interpersonal perspective are to a large extent **affective or emotional in nature,** **related to how we feel about ourselves and about another person as a function of a communicative event.**

Much attention is devoted to the manner in which relationships between people are initiated, nurtured and maintained.

Also emphasized within this perspective is the transactional view of communication. Such a view holds that individuals do not act exclusively as either a source or receiver of a message.

This view stresses that communication involves in John Stewart’s words “ not just action but action and reaction, not just stimulus but stimulus and response.

Stewart suggests that the good communicator is one who not only carefully prepares, and delivers messages but also adapts, based on the responses of others to the message.

**Conclusion.**

Whereas the rhetorical perspective seems to identify one individual ass a speaker who is attempting to influence an audience, the communication theory perspective takes the position that a single individual can act simultaneously as both a source and a receiver within the same communicative situation.

No single definition of communication is always most appropriate.

The **propriety** (correctness of social or moral behavior) of a definition is obviously determined by the purposes we see or the outcomes we expect of the various kinds of communication in differing social contexts.

When we are studying **public speaking,** definitions of communication that stress **source-influence might be appropriate**.

On the other hand, when we are exploring the **interpersonal social context**, **source-influence may be less important**, outcomes e.g. personal manipulation and influence are not expected or even desirable within the domain of those concerned with relational communication.

Each of the perspectives that have been presented requires a different definition of communication.

Each of the perspectives was a natural outgrowth of the social environment of the times. E.g. Rhetorical perspective sprang from the Greek and Roman concern with democracy, politics, and law which made persuasion the key concept. Hence the source-oriented definitions which emphasize the source and not the receiver.

Communication theory received its stimulus from a renewed interest in science prompted by the launching of the Russian Sputnik and the determination to win the race to the moon.