Components of Business Communication

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As you learned in the previous chapter, communication is a very complex process. Several components have to work together for a communication cycle to complete. Recognition of these components helps us understand the communication process, that is, what exactly happens when we communicate. However, elements that are involved in the communication process remain the fundamental components of business communication.

Environment

Communication cannot happen in a vacuum; it takes place in and against a certain background. We can call it an 'environment', which is composed of all the things that surround us. It could be physical, mental, or emotional; it is something that stimulates us to communicate or say something. Lesikar, Pettit, and Flately consider it to be "a sensory environment in which communication occurs; where the sensory environment is the real world surrounding us which our senses can detect."[11] Without sense perception, communication is almost impossible. When we see, hear, smell, feel, or touch something, the sensory experience urges us to communicate. Additionally, mental states such as anger, happiness, and fear also constitute the environment of communication. It can be favorable or adverse, formal or informal. The way we communicate depends on what kind of communication environment we experience at the moment.

Source or Sender

The sender initiates the communication process. In face-to-face communication, for example, if you say "hello" to somebody, you assume the role of the sender. If the person replies, then the roles are reversed. The sender could be a person, a group, or an organization. The sender is responsible for selecting the message, identifying the receiver, selecting the channel, and removing potential barriers to facilitate the communication. Once the sender has an idea or information, he or she selects appropriate symbols, gestures, or words that best carry the message. Then, he or she sends the message using an appropriate channel or medium such as telephone, internet, or voice mail to reach the intended receiver. The sender also expects and encourages feedback to make sure that the communication cycle is completed. In communication, the nature of the sender, his or her character, personality, knowledge, education, and culture impact the effectiveness of communication.

Message

The message is the content or substance of communication. Symbols, words, gestures, and body language that the receiver perceives are not messages in themselves; rather, the message is the meaning or idea that the receiver gets out of them. The red traffic light at the road intersection, for example, is only a symbol. Red is the color that the driver sees or perceives. But the driver understands its meaning as "stop." Thus, the language, gestures, visuals, and symbols, using which

we communicate, are not the meaning in themselves but they carry the intended meaning. The message elicits a reaction or feedback from the receiver. In business communication, understanding the type and nature of the message is very important. Our communication strategy will also depend on whether a message is a sensitive, complex, or routine one.

Channel

A channel is the medium or a means through which the message is conveyed to the receiver. It can be oral, written, or visual. Face-to-face conversations, speeches, telephone, and radio are examples of oral media. Written media include letters, memos, reports, emails, instant messages, blogs, social media posts, newspapers, magazines, and newsletters. Similarly, videos, graphics, photos, images, charts, diagrams, drawings, and illustrations can be taken as examples of visual media or channels. Thanks to the innovation in communication technologies, we have a variety of media available to choose from. The selection of a channel, however, depends on the type and content of the message as well as the receiver's access to and preference of the media.

Receiver or Audience

The receiver or the audience is the person who receives the message, interprets it, and responds in the form of feedback. Since the receiver has to interpret and analyze the message to understand the intended meaning, it is likely that the receiver may not get the intended meaning. The receiver or the audience's perspective, knowledge, and culture impact the way the message is interpreted. This opens up the possibility of misunderstanding. To minimize possible miscommunication, the sender has to take the audience into consideration. This is why adapting a message to the audience's perspective is crucial in business communication.

Feedback

Receivers do not just passively absorb the message; they react to it, comment, or respond. The receiver's response to the sender's message is called feedback. Feedback can be verbal (written or spoken), nonverbal (gestures, body language) or visual (images, graphics). In face-to-face conversation, the audience provides feedback through nonverbal cues such as facial expression, gestures, and eye contact. Feedback is an important component of communication as it signals the completion of the communication cycle. Moreover, feedback helps the communicator revise the message, add details, and explain ideas to make it more effective.

Noise

In communication, noise refers to any interference that comes between the sender and the receiver, obstructing the smooth process of communication. Noise can be related to the channel and the message. The use of words and sentences that are difficult to understand is an example of noise related to language. Noise can also be physical and psychological. Physical noise includes background sounds and disturbances, whereas the communicators' mental and emotional states such as anger, frustration, and lack of motivation are a part of psychological noise. According to Alan Jay Zaremba, noise is a factor that reduces the chances of successful communication but does not lead to a total failure of communication.[12] Communicators should try minimizing noise to increase the chances of successful communication.

Context

Context is the situation or setting in which communication takes place. It influences the content, the quality, and the effectiveness of communication. Differences in the context affect our selection of channels—oral, written, electronic or visual. Context in business communication can be internal and external. The overall culture within the organization provides the internal context of communication. Broader social rules, modes of behavior, dress, language and the community culture also function as context.

Types of Business Communication

Based on various dimensions, business communication can be categorized into many types. The following are the major ones.

Intrapersonal Communication

Before we externalize the message intended for an audience, we often communicate to ourselves. This is basically the idea formulation stage. In fact, all forms of communication originate within us. In our mind, we question, reflect over an issue, and think over what we want to communicate. Effective communicators tend to have a strong sense of interpersonal communication. This allows them to control emotions, project a positive self-image, and express themselves thoughtfully. Your awareness of this dimension of communication will help you become a strategic communicator.

Interpersonal Communication

As the name suggests, interpersonal communication takes place between individuals and can encompass spoken, written, and nonverbal forms of communication. However, all forms of communication between individuals cannot be taken as instances of interpersonal communication. To be interpersonal communication, it has to have humane and personal elements in it. That is, interpersonal communication primarily involves emotions and attitudes. For example, if you talk to a waiter in a restaurant to order food, it may not be considered as interpersonal communication. But, if you talk to the waiter about his or her personal well-being and build a personal rapport, then it can be termed as interpersonal communication. Interpersonal communication is the basis of building relations and maintaining goodwill.

Intra-organizational Communication

Intra-organizational communication refers to communication that take place between individuals within an organization. It may take the form of written, spoken, or audio-visual modes. Face-to-face communication, presentations, meetings, briefings, emails, letters, memos, notices, circulars, SMS, and blogs are some examples of intra-organizational communication. Factors such as organizational culture, interpersonal relationships, organizational politics, and communication policies of an organization impact and shape the scope of intra-organizational communication.

Inter-organizational Communication

Communication that an organization has with external stakeholders, clients, customers, institutions, the press, and government agencies is called inter-organizational communication. It involves a variety of media—oral, written, and electronic. Client meetings, presentations, proposals, promotional videos, advertisements, press releases, etc. are the main forms of inter-organizational communication. This type of communication is instrumental in promoting and branding products and enhancing the company's image in the public.

Intercultural Communication

With the increased diversification of the workplace, intercultural communication has become a prominent part of business communication. Any form of communication that takes place between individuals who belong to different culture is called intercultural communication. An awareness and recognition of cultural differences is the prerequisite of successful intercultural communication. It requires a high level of cultural sensitivity and an avoidance of biased language, stereotyping, and ethnocentrism (see chapter 4).

Principles of Effective Business Communication

As you must have understood by now, effective communication is the key to being successful in your profession. Excellent interpersonal communication skills on the job not only improve your performance but also help you forge meaningful relationships. Effective communication within the organization leads to increased productivity, quick decision-making and positive self-image. Then, what constitutes effective communication? If the communication achieves its purpose, it can be considered to be effective. The following principles underscore effective business communication.

Principle of Clarity

The goal is to communicate the message in a way that the audience clearly understands the intended meaning. The principle of clarity applies to idea, expression, and the selection of channels. That is, the sender first needs to clearly identify the purpose and content of the message. Then, using plain and commonly used language to communicate that idea is the key to bringing overall clarity in the message. This means that we must avoid ambiguous and vague words, jargons, and overtly technical words. We should ask—what is the purpose of the message? What is it to be communicated? Which medium/ channel can best communicate the

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> ✓ Use short and concrete words.
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message?—before preparing the message. We can use visual aids such as slides, graphics, and charts to communicate complex ideas, data, and information. In oral communication, matching non-verbal cues with verbal message helps achieve clarity.

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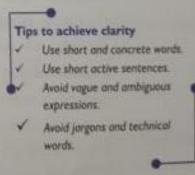
Tips to achieve clarity
- ✓ Use short and concrete words.
- ✓ Use short active sentences.
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- ✓ Avoid jargons and technical words.

Principle of Completeness

Let us imagine buying clothes from an online store. If you did not provide the complete information such as size, color, and fabric quality, you would not receive the clothes you wanted. A complete message contains all the information and facts needed for the audience to act upon the message. An incomplete message not only confuses the audience but also consumes time, as further messages will have to be sent to clarify the confusion. For example, if you are sending a message to invite colleagues to a meeting, you need to clearly state the time (when), agenda (what/why), place of meeting (where), and the participants (who). Before sending out the message, you should ask yourself whether you have included all the needed information or whether you have

Tips for creating concise messages
- ✓ Does it meet the established purpose?
- ✓ Does it address the audience's needs?
- ✓ Does it follow the agreed upon outline and format?
- ✓ Is there consistency in terms of style, format and tone of voice?
- ✓ Is the content thorough and compete?
- ✓ Does it contain any technical errors?
- ✓ Are the details and examples appropriate and adequate to support the main points?

answered all the questions. Drawing a quick outline or preparing a checklist of information helps compose a focused and complete message.

Principle of Conciseness

Long messages with irrelevant information waste time. Brevity, therefore, is one of the main principles of business communication. Brevity, however, should not override the completeness and clarity of the message. We can create effective business messages by sticking to the main points, focusing on the purpose and the audience's needs. There is no prescribed length of a message such as a business letter. It depends on whether the message carries all the necessary information or not. While writing a message, you should check whether it says more than required, whether it uses too many words to express an idea.

Principle of Consideration

Effective business communication must take the audience's needs into consideration. To be considerate towards the audience, one needs to see the situation from the audience's perspective. That is, we have to choose words and expressions that are likely to bring favorable responses from the audience. Before sending out the message, we should assess how the message will be received by the audience. Moreover, effective business messages show sincerity and a positive attitude towards the audience.

Tips for audience consideration
- ✓ Be sensitive to the audience's needs.
- ✓ Use a you-view point rather than an I-view point.
- ✓ Use positive expressions.
- ✓ Control emotions, negative tone of voice and style.
- ✓ Avoid biased and discriminatory language—sexism, gender, age, and regional biases.

Principle of Ethical Communication

Ethical communication is the key to building trust and relationships within and outside the organization. When we communicate, we take the responsibility of the message and its consequences. Ethical communication requires us to be truthful to our own value system. Transmitting false and distorted information constitutes unethical communication. Even using a channel that limits the access of the intended audience can also be considered unethical. Any misleading and manipulative message is a violation of the principle of ethical communication that includes the use of abusive and discriminatory language.

Tips for ethical communication
- ✓ The message should be truthful, factual, and evidence-based.
- ✓ The communicator should ensure access to information and channel.
- ✓ Organizations should value the freedom of expression and diversity of opinions.
- ✓ Should avoid abusive language.
- ✓ Avoid distortion and falsification of facts and information.

Principle of Correctness

The principle of correctness requires that we communicate correct facts in the correct language/ style at an opportune time. The transmission of incorrect facts and information not only leads to misunderstanding, it is also unethical. An erroneously written message loses credibility; it also fails to convey the intended meaning. The timing of the message is also crucial. Any message that contains outdated facts and information is totally useless; it is a sheer wastage of time and resources.

Principle of Courtesy

Communication is a means of social interactions. Through effective communication people develop and create networks of relations. Businesses thrive on forging such relationships. As a result, effective business communication is about winning friendships and influencing people. For this, we need to show a friendly disposition towards the audience and maintain a courteous tone and attitude. Courteous communication involves respecting the audience, being sincere and polite, apologizing for mistakes, and being thankful to others' contribution. Additionally, courtesy in business communication includes replying or acknowledging messages promptly, responding to questions, and avoiding unpleasant, hurtful and sarcastic expressions.

Challenges of Business Communication

As we discussed in the first chapter, employers highly value excellent communication skills in their employees. This has especially been true in recent times mainly because of the diversity in the workplace, greater competitive pressure, use of innovative technologies, and increased demand for quality and service. While these factors can be considered as opportunities to excel, they also pose serious challenges for business communication. The following are the major challenges business communication faces in today's work environment.

Diversity in the Workplace

With globalization, companies are no longer confined within a national territory; a company based in one country can operate in multiple countries simultaneously. This requires people from different cultures, nations, ethnicity, who speak different languages to work together. Besides, today's workplaces are marked by other forms of diversity—gender, age, religion, etc. In such a situation, it is highly challenging to effectively communicate across cultures and overcome language and culture barriers.

Technology

Advanced technologies such as email, social media, blogs, and virtual workplaces have made it easier to communicate with people around the world. However, technology can also present challenges. On one hand, many organizations are very slow to adopt new technologies and still heavily rely on communication known as the print mindset. In a country like Nepal, for example, internet based communication

such as IMs and emails are yet to become the mainstream due to the lack of regulatory provisions and easy accessibility. This means that companies that use technologically-enabled communication will have to face challenges while communicating with companies and government agencies that are yet to adopt modern communication technologies. On the other hand, technologically-enabled communication, unlike face-to-face communication, lacks non-verbal communication cues and makes it difficult for the audience to interpret the message. Information posted online can be taken out of context, and the sender may not be able to clarify a message quickly.

Untrained Workforce

To communicate purposefully and strategically, one needs higher level language skills. With the use of sophisticated technologies now, companies need employees skilled at handling technologies as well. Moreover, the older generation of the workforce feels less comfortable working with new technology. In this context, the lack of a trained workforce has become a serious challenge for companies, especially small businesses. Communication-related tasks are usually handled by employees who are trained in other areas and who lack motivation and adequate skills to communicate effectively.

Information Overload

Thanks to the explosion of communication technology, especially social media, we are surrounded by images, news, and information. Additionally, with the use of multiple channels of communication and information flows moving in all the directions, employees constantly receive information that is irrelevant. With instant communication—emails, social media, IMs—in conjunction with an easy access to print and academic journals and books freely digitally distributed and shared via social media, information is being exchanged at an unimaginable rate. All this creates problems in communication.

Higher Cost of Communication

At a time when businesses are pressured to cut cost to remain competitive, putting a working internal and external communication system in place requires resources. In many cases, HR departments do not have adequate resources for developing their own internal communication system, thus leading to inconsistent communication practices.

Main-Point Summary and Exercises

- Effective communication skills ensure a successful career, workplace excellence, and enhanced productivity.
- Diversity in the workplace, democratic management styles, adaptation of innovative technology, and emphasis on knowledge and information have increased the importance of communication skills in today's business environment.
- Open-mindedness, positive self-image, honesty, and language competency are some of the desirable traits of a good communicator.
- The history of business communication goes as far as the beginning of commercial activities, and the records of businesses, trades, and transactions can be taken as examples of early forms of business communication.
- A more systematic model of communication was developed during and after the Industrial Revolution that emphasized providing precise job descriptions to employees to enhance efficiency and productivity.
- As we come to the modern period, an emphasis has been placed on a more democratic and participatory approach of business communication.
- The purposes of business communication are mainly informing, persuading, establishing credibility, and building goodwill.
- Factors that help establish credibility are: expertise and competence, professional image, control of emotions, personal ethics and integrity.
- One needs to establish credibility, provide a frame of common ground, provide reason and evidence, and connect emotionally to persuade the audience.
- Sharing information, motivating employees, controlling, and developing emotional connections are some important functions of internal communication.
- Creating brand awareness, connecting with the clients, and image building are some important functions of external communication.
- The principles of effective communication are: clarity, completeness, conciseness, consideration, and ethical adherence.
- Diversity in the workplace, technology, untrained workforce, information overload, and higher cost are the major challenges of business communication.

Exercises

Short-answer Questions

1. How would you define communication?
2. Describe some of the changes taking place in today's workplace.
3. What aspects of business communication did Henri Fayol emphasize in his famous 14 principles?
4. What factors have brought significant changes in business communication?
5. Make a list of communication technologies that you use on a daily basis.
6. How has technology impacted business communication?
7. What are some of the traits of a good communicator?
8. What are the four general purposes of communication? Explain one purpose that you think is the most important one.
9. List the major types of business communication.
10. What are internal and external functions of business communication? List them.

Essay-type Questions

1. Why are business communication skills important? What factors have contributed to the increased importance of communication skills?

2. How has business communication changed over the times? Present a brief outline of historical development of in business communication practices.

3. One of the important purposes of communication is to establish credibility. Explain the statement and also discuss ways of establishing credibility.

4. If you were to persuade someone who is very likely to disagree with your idea, how would you do it?

5. What are some important principles of effective communication? Briefly describe each of them.

6. What are some of the challenges of business communication? Can you suggest some ways of overcoming such challenges?

Write brief notes on the following:

1. Diversity in the workplace
2. Communicating to build goodwill
3. Principle of consideration
4. Information overload

Application Questions

1. Advertisements often have all the purposes of communication. Carefully study the ad featuring AsianPaints. Write an analysis discussing how the ad tries to—

   * inform the audience.
   * establish credibility.
   * persuade the customers to buy it.

   To what extent do you think the ad succeeds in achieving the main purposes of communication?

Communication in Organizations

3

Chapter

Learning Objectives

This chapter focuses on the dimensions of organizational communication, including communication structures, systems, networks, and information flows. It also discusses common models of organizational communication. After reading the chapter, students will be able to—

- understand the role and importance of communication within an organization,

- perceive the relationship between organizational structures and communication practices,

- recognize the various types of communication structures within an organization,

- comprehend the nature and directions of communication flows, and

- familiarize themselves with different models and styles of communication