

Communication cycle: Definition, process, models and examples

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Abstract: Communication is the act of conveying information for the purpose of creating a shared understanding. It's something that humans do every day. In other words, Communication is the activity of conveying information through the exchange of thoughts, messages, or information, as by speech, visuals, signals, writing, or behaviour. Pragmatics defines communication as any sign-mediated interaction that follows combinatorial, context-specific and content-coherent rules.

Key-words: Communication, information, linguistic, non-linguistic forms, sender, message, recipient, receivers attitude, psychological noise, diagonal communication.

1. Introduction: The Definition of Communication

The term "communication" has been derived from the Latin "communis," that means "common"¹. Thus "to communicate" means "to make common" or "to make known", "to share" and includes verbal, non-verbal and electronic means of human interaction. Scholars who study communication analyze the development of communication skills in humans and theorize about how communication can be made more effective.

It is the meaningful exchange of information between two or a group of people. Communicative competence designates the capability to install intersubjective interactions, which means that communication is an inherent social interaction².

One definition of communication is "any act by which one person gives to or receives from another person information about that person's needs, desires, perceptions, knowledge, or affective states. Communication may be intentional or unintentional, may involve conventional or unconventional signals, may take linguistic or non-linguistic forms, and may occur through spoken or other modes."³

This act of making common and known is carried out through exchange of thoughts, ideas or the like. The exchange of thoughts and ideas can be had by gestures, signs, signals, speech or writing. People are said to be in communication when they discuss some matter, or when they talk on telephone, or when they exchange information through letters.

Basically, communication is sharing information, whether in writing or orally⁴.

Humans convey information through a variety of methods: speaking, telephones, email, blogs, TV, art, hand gestures, facial expressions, body language and even social contexts⁵. Communication can occur instantaneously in closed, intimate settings or over great periods of time in large public forums, like the Internet. However, all forms of communication require the same basic elements: a speaker or sender of information, a message, and an audience or recipient. The sender and recipient must also share a common language or means of understanding each other for communication to be successful. As such, a study of communication often examines the development and structure of language, including the mathematical languages used in computer programming.

The act of communicating draws on several interpersonal and intrapersonal skills. These include speaking, listening, observing, questioning, processing, analyzing and evaluating. Recipients of a message must be able to identify the sender's intent, take into account the message's context, resolve any misunderstandings, accurately decode the information and decide how to act on it. Such skills are essential to learning, forming healthy relationships, creating a sense of community and achieving success in the workplace.

As a field of study, communication spans a broad, rich array of subjects, including sociology, psychology, philosophy, political science, linguistics, history, literature, criticism and rhetoric. Although much of the field's subject matter is theoretical in nature, communication studies have proven applicable to business, film, theatre, composition, advertising, education, foreign policy and computer science.

In today's globalized, media-driven world, communication studies have become more relevant and exciting than ever. Web developers seek new, inventive ways to draw Internet users to their websites. Public policy writers debate society's most pressing issues. Through linguistics, computer scientists are developing programming languages that may someday allow humans to interact directly with computers. Students who earn degrees in communica-

tion often hold highly influential positions as journalists, editors, university professors, public relations officers, marketing consultants, speech writers, filmmakers, motivational speakers and political campaign managers. To communicate is to shape the world.

Communication requires a sender, a message, and a recipient, although the receiver doesn't have to be present or aware of the sender's intent to communicate at the time of communication; thus communication can occur across vast distances in time and space. Communication requires that the communicating parties share an area of communicative commonality⁶. The communication process is complete once the receiver has understood the message of the sender⁷.

Language issues and Cultural Differences: the receiver(s) may not (fully) understand the language used by the transmitter. This may occur if the transmitter's language is foreign to the receiver. There may also be language problems (that the communication process) if the message contains technical information and the receiver's is not familiar with the technical terms used. Cultural differences created by an individual's background and experience affect their perception of the world. Such cultural differences may affect the interpretation (decoding) of the message sent⁸.

Environmental issues: If the environment that the transmitter or receiver are in, is noisy and full of sound, the sounds may prevent the message being fully understood. Background noise is often created by colleagues or machinery⁹.

Channel issues: If the channel used to transfer the information is poor it may prevent all or some of the information being transferred. Examples include a faulty fax machine, a crackling phone, handwriting that cannot be read or in the case of oral messages incorrect facial gestures.

Receivers Attitude and behaviour: If the receiver(s) is not interested in the message (or unable to give their full attention to decoding) this may reduce the amount of information received or the accuracy of the information transmitted to them. Similarly the receiver(s) may misinterpret the message

by "jumping to conclusions" or reading the message in a manner that suits their own interests/objectives and distort the true meaning of the message¹⁰.

Transmission journey: i.e. steps in the message. If the message is complicated or there are lots of steps taken to transfer the message it may affect the accuracy or interpretation¹¹. Comparing with the leaky bucket if the leaky bucket has to carry water over a longer distance more water will probably be lost than if the journey was shorter.

2. Interpersonal Communication

This is defined as communication between two or more people and involves the transfer of information (or message) from one person to the other(s). The person transferring the information is called the sender or transmitter. The people receiving the message are known as receivers. The transmitter will need to send the information in a format that the receiver(s) will understand. Converting the information into a format that the receivers will understand is known as Encoding.

Messages can be encoded into a variety of formats oral, written or visual. After encoding the message is transferred via a medium called a channel, for example a letter, fax, phone call, or e-mail. After transmission the information will need to be interpreted by the receiver. This process of interpretation is known as decoding. Finally the receiver will send a message back to the transmitter confirming whether the information sent has been understood. This back check is known as feedback¹².

3. Internal / Organisational Communication

This is communication that takes place within (or across) an organisation. In addition to the usual face to face, telephone, fax or mail; modern organisations may use technology to communicate internally. Technology may be used for e-mails or a linked internal communication system such as the intranet which is an internet system designed solely for use by those working for the organisation¹³.

4. External communications

Conversely external communication is communication between the organisation and those outside the organisation. Modern organisations may design technological systems so that they can communicate with customers and undertake e-Commerce. Alternatively they communicate with other businesses through the internet or similar systems and undertake e-Business.

5. Functions of Internal and External Communications

Technology has rapidly expanded the types of internal and external communication available to organisations. The diagram illustrates the vast array of internal and external communication available¹⁴.

Combined together internal and external types of communications allow various sectors of the local, national and international community to interact, liaise and conduct business¹⁵.

External communication	Internal communication
Letters	Team briefings
Fax	Notices
Direct mail	Reports
Internet	Memos
Video	Face to Face
Telephone	Email
Advertisement	
Websites	

6. Formal and Informal Communications

Formal communication is defined as communication which occurs through the official organisational channels or is undertaken by an employee to do their job. For example official meetings, letters and a manager asking an employee to carry out a particular task. Conversely informal communication is that which occurs outside the recognised communication networks such as talking in the lunchroom or hallways between employees. Informal communication can be productive or negative. It has the potential to build teams, improve working relationships and generate ideas as employees are in a relaxed environment.

7. Upward and Downward Communications

Downward communication is communication created by directors and managers and passed down the hierarchy of workers in the organisation. In traditional organisations this is the preferred method of communication i.e. Managers decide what the systems, rules and procedures will be and then they pass these down to employees they manage and supervise. Downward Communication can increase efficiency by synchronising organisational procedures and can ensure that everybody is working towards the same overall aims and objectives. Types of downward communication include job descriptions, appraisals / evaluations, organisational policy, and organisational systems¹⁶.

Although there are advantages to downward communication organisations have begun to encourage upward communication. This is communication which originates at the lower level of the employment hierarchy and is then communicated up through the line. Organisations encouraging upward communication believe that everybody is capable of generating thoughts and ideas which may help the organisation to progress, particularly when they are working closely in the area that the idea applies to. Upward communication may increase motivation and make employees feel valued and respected whilst enabling managers to understand how employees are feeling. Furthermore if problems occur at they are more likely to be identified earlier by those working closely in the area that they occur. Types of upward communications include suggestion schemes, feedback forums / surveys, grievance procedures and employee-manager discussions.

8. Lateral Communication

This is communication that occurs between employees on the same level in the organisation. As this can involve decision making it can create efficiency as employees do not have to wait for managerial approval. On the other hand if the manager is not kept informed or if the manager fails to set boundaries there is potential for conflict.

9. Diagonal Communication

This occurs when communication occurs between workers in a different section of the organisation and where one of the workers involved is on a higher level in the organisation. For example in a bank diagonal communication will occur when a department manager in head office converses with a cashier in a branch of the bank based on the high street.

10. Oral communication

Human spoken and pictorial languages can be described as a system of symbols¹⁷ (sometimes

known as lexemes) and the grammars (rules) by which the symbols are manipulated. The word "language" also refers to common properties of languages. Language learning normally occurs most intensively during human childhood. Most of the thousands of human languages use patterns of sound or gesture for symbols which enable communication with others around them. Languages seem to share certain properties although many of these include exceptions. There is no defined line between a language and a dialect. Constructed languages such as Esperanto, programming languages, and various mathematical formalisms are not necessarily restricted to the properties shared by human languages. Communication is the flow or exchange of information within people or a group of people¹⁸.

A variety of verbal and non-verbal means of communicating exists such as body language, eye contact, sign language, haptic communication, chronemics, and media content such as pictures, graphics, sound, and writing.

Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities also defines the communication to include the display of text, Braille, tactile communication, large print, accessible multimedia, as well as written and plain language, human-reader, augmentative and alternative modes, means and formats of communication, including accessible information and communication technology¹⁹. Feedback is critical to effective communication between participants.

11. Nonverbal communication

Nonverbal communication describes the process of conveying meaning in the form of non-word messages. Some forms of non verbal communication in-

clude chronemics, haptics, gesture, body language or posture, facial expression and eye contact, object communication such as clothing, hairstyles, architecture, symbols, infographics, and tone of voice, as well as through an aggregate of the above. Speech also contains nonverbal elements known as paralinguage. These include voice lesson quality, emotion and speaking style as well as prosodic features such as rhythm, intonation and stress. Research has shown that up to 55% of spoken communication may occur through non verbal facial expressions, and a further 38% through paralinguage. Likewise, written texts include nonverbal elements such as handwriting style, spatial arrangement of words and the use of emoticons to convey emotional expressions in pictorial form.

12. Oral communication

"The ability to communicate effectively through speaking as well as writing is highly valued and demanded in business." Oral communication, while primarily referring to spoken verbal communication, can also employ visual aids and non-verbal elements to support the conveyance of meaning. Oral communication includes speeches, presentations, discussions, and aspects of interpersonal communication. As a type of face-to-face communication, body language and choice tonality play a significant role, and may have a greater impact upon the listener than informational content²⁰. This type of communication also garners immediate feedback²¹.

13. Business communication

A business can flourish when all objectives of the organization are achieved effectively. For efficiency in an organization, all the people of the organization must be able to convey their message properly

14. Written communication and its historical development

Over time the forms of and ideas about communication have evolved through the continuing progression of technology. Advances include communications psychology and media psychology, an emerging field of study.

The progression of written communication can be divided into three revolutionary stages called "Information Communication Revolutions".

During the first stage, written communication first emerged through the use of pictographs. The pictograms were made in stone, hence written communication was not yet mobile. During the second stage, writing began to appear on paper, papyrus, clay, wax, etc. with common alphabets. The third stage is characterized by the transfer of information through controlled waves of electromagnetic radiation (i.e., radio, microwave, infrared) and other electronic signals.

The medium most widely used for communication affects what people think about themselves and how they perceive other people, so this can be used to divide the civilizations of world history into five "ages" or epochs: Ideographic writing produced the first civilization; alphabetic writing produced the second civilization; printing produced the third civilization; electronic recording and broadcasting produced the fourth civilization; and computer communication produced the fifth civilization.

Communication is thus a process by which meaning is assigned and conveyed in an attempt to create shared understanding. This process, which requires a vast repertoire of skills in interpersonal processing, listening, observing, speaking, question-

ing, analyzing, gestures, and evaluating enables collaboration and cooperation²².

Misunderstandings can be anticipated and solved through formulations, questions and answers, paraphrasing, examples, and stories of strategic talk. Written communication can be clarified by planning follow-up talks on critical written communication as part of the every-day way of doing business. A few minutes spent talking in the present will save valuable time later by avoiding misunderstandings in advance. A frequent method for this purpose is reiterating what one heard in one's own words and asking the other person if that really was what was meant.

15. Effective communication

15.1. The meaning

Effective communication occurs when a desired effect is the result of intentional or unintentional information sharing, which is interpreted between multiple entities and acted on in a desired way. This effect also ensures the message is not distorted during the communication process. Effective communication should generate the desired effect and maintain the effect, with the potential to increase the effect of the message. Therefore, effective communication serves the purpose for which it was planned or designed. Possible purposes might be to elicit change, generate action, create understanding, inform or communicate a certain idea or point of view. When the desired effect is not achieved, factors such as barriers to communication are explored, with the intention being to discover how the communication has been ineffective.

Effective communication involves talking and listening.

15.2. Components

The act of communication begins with internal processing about information or feelings you want to share with someone else (called encoding). After encoding, the message is sent through either spoken

or written words, which completes encoding. At the other end of communication is receiving and interpreting what was sent (called decoding). The recipient can and should confirm receipt to the sender to close the communication loop.

15.3. Context

Considering the context of communication improves its effectiveness. Context takes into consideration the age, region, sex and intellectual abilities of the recipient. It is also useful to assess receptivity and the emotional state of the sender and receiver at the time of communication. For example, when speaking to an elementary school child about the importance of brushing teeth, you should choose different words and examples than you would when talking to a teenager or an adult.

15.4. Body language

Also called nonverbal communication, body language includes posture, position of hands and arms, eye contact and facial expression. Children learn to read body language as a way to enhance understanding of the speaker's intent. Body language that is consonant with the verbal content improves understanding.

Body language that is inconsistent with content creates a question in the mind of the listener about the real message. For example, someone may be saying, "I really want to hear your opinion on this." However if the person is looking away, has his arms folded or is typing a text message at the same time, his body language communicates an entirely different message.

Effective communication requires that content and body language give the same message.

15.5. Interference

Emotions can interfere with effective communication. If the sender is angry, his ability to send effective messages may be negatively affected. In the same way, if the recipient is upset or disagrees with the message or the sender, he may hear something different than what was intended by the sender. Considering emotions, language and conceptual barriers is essential to effective communication.

15.6. Active listening

Effective communication is a reciprocal process that includes listening. Successful listening requires eye contact, objective processing and feedback to the speaker. Active listening may involve asking clarifying questions or restating what was heard to assure that the intent of the message sent was correctly received. Active listening becomes particularly important when the communication includes emotional content.

15.7. Barriers to effective human communication

At each stage in the process encoding, transferrence, and decoding there is the possibility of interference which may hinder the communication process. This interference is known as noise. Often a comparison is made between communication and a leaky bucket. If you use a leaky bucket to carry water, water will be lost at various points in your jour-

ney from the water tap to your destination. It is not possible to stop losing water because the bucket contains holes. The amount of water you will lose will be determined by the number of holes in the bucket, the size of the holes, the route you take to your final destination and length of time it takes you to get to your destination. There may also be other events that occur during your journey which increase the amount of water lost.

Similarly when information is transferred from the transmitter to the receiver not all of the information may be received by the receiver because of holes called noise. Each of the noise may affect the amount of information transferred. Just as in a leaky bucket, more holes decrease the amount of water, more noise decreases the amount of correct information received. Noise can take a variety of forms including.

Barriers to effective communication can retard or distort the message and intention of the message being conveyed which may result in failure of the communication process or an effect that is undesirable. These include filtering, selective perception, information overload, emotions, language, silence, communication apprehension, gender differences and political correctness²³.

This also includes a lack of expressing "knowledge-appropriate" communication, which occurs when a person uses ambiguous or complex legal words, medical jargon, or descriptions of a situation or environment that is not understood by the recipient.

15.7.1. Physical barriers

Physical barriers are often due to the nature of the environment. An example of this is the natural barrier which exists if staff are located in different buildings or on different sites. Likewise, poor or outdated equipment, particularly the failure of management to introduce new technology, may also cause problems. Staff shortages are another factor which frequently causes communication difficulties for an organization. While distractions like background noise, poor lighting or an environment

which is too hot or cold can all affect people's morale and concentration, which in turn interfere with effective communication.

15.7.2. System design

System design faults refer to problems with the structures or systems in place in an organization. Examples might include an organizational structure which is unclear and therefore makes it confusing to know whom to communicate with. Other examples could be inefficient or inappropriate information systems, a lack of supervision or training, and a lack of clarity in roles and responsibilities which can lead to staff being uncertain about what is expected of them.

15.7.3. Attitudinal barriers

Attitudinal barriers come about as a result of problems with staff in an organization. These may be brought about, for example, by such factors as poor management, lack of consultation with employees, personality conflicts which can result in people delaying or refusing to communicate, the personal attitudes of individual employees which may be due to lack of motivation or dissatisfaction at work, brought about by insufficient training to enable them to carry out particular tasks, or just resistance to change due to entrenched attitudes and ideas, it may be as a result delay in payment at the end of the month.

16. Ambiguity of words / phrases

Words sounding the same but having different meaning can convey a different meaning altogether. Hence the communicator must ensure that the receiver receives the same meaning. It is better if such words are avoided by using alternatives whenever possible.