

# The Dynamics of Communication

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## INTRODUCTION

Communication is the most vital element of any organization. Without communication an organization would only be an assembly of men, material and processes which are inoperative. Organizational effectiveness depends upon the quality of communication. Managers have to communicate with subordinates and superiors. They spend more than 75% of their effective time in communicating. It is communication which gives life to organizational structure. It is a thread that holds all the units, sub units, processes, systems, culture together. If communication stops, the organization will cease to exist. Communication is vital for the very existence of the organization. Organizations have to communicate with external organizations, agencies and incorporate various inputs for survival and growth. Communication not only integrates various sub units but shifts information of value acquired from the environment to various departments, groups and individuals. An effective communication is an essence of successful managers. As the organization grows, the role of communication becomes more critical. Therefore there is a need for adjustment in the communication systems according to shape, size, performance, location and the services that the organization offers.

Effective management is an output of effective communication. Poor communication or ineffective communication is a source of frustration, interpersonal conflict and stress. It plays an important role in strengthening relationship between friends, relatives and family members since we spend nearly seventy percent of our time interacting with them by way of speaking, listening, reading and writing. Poor communication leads to unpleasant situations and breaking up of relationships. Oral and written communication is very important not only to get a job but to retain it. Oral communication is the most effective way of communication and considered to be the most important skill that an individual possesses. Effective communication is essential for management to successfully perform its functions. It is an essential ingredient in management – employee relationship. The best business plan is meaningless unless everyone is aware of it and is willing to put energy together to achieve its objectives. Communication is essential to keep entire organization functioning at optimum levels and to achieve maximum output of our greatest management resource – the people.

Management needs to take employees in confidence and make them aware of organizational policies, problems and vision. Following points need interaction with employees for successful running of an organization

- (a) Organizations policy and future plans
- (b) Results achieved vis-vis the industry performance
- (c) Achievement of higher productivity
- (d) Industrial safety, health and welfare measures
- (e) Technical developments
- (f) Personal growth prospects

It is the responsibility of the management to keep employees posted with latest information about the above factors by resorting to greater interaction with them.

Chester Barnard (1930) highlighted communication as a dynamic force in shaping organizational behaviour. He considered it as one of the three important elements of an organization along with common purpose and willingness to serve. He also linked communication with the concept of 'authority' which flows down through channels of communication, in a classical organization. The authority can lose its meaning if channels of communication are blocked or if the communication is misunderstood or if the strength of communication is diluted. Accordingly, he proposed seven communication factors which are indeed functions of objective authority. These are as under

- (a) The channels of communication must be clearly set and be known to all.
- (b) Every member of the organization should be reached by some channel of communication.
- (c) The line of communication should be as direct as possible.
- (d) There should be no blockage in the line of communication and formal line should be used.
- (e) The communicator should be highly skilled in the art of communication.
- (f) The line of communication should be constantly kept open.
- (g) Every communication should be authenticated.

### **Objectives of Communication**

- (a) To keep employees abreast with external and internal environment.
- (b) Develop understanding and cordial relationship with management.
- (c) Development of team spirit, group task resolution and psychological bent of mind.
- (d) Promote creativity and innovativeness.
- (e) Develop social commitment among employees.
- (f) Make them aware of their rights, entitlements, and responsibilities.
- (g) Prepare employees to accept and implement change.
- (h) Prevent mis-information and counter rumors.
- (i) Promote participative type of leadership model.
- (j) Motivate employees by displaying an attitude of commitment.
- (k) Knowledge management.

## COMMUNICATION PROCESS

Communication can be described as an impersonal process of sending and receiving symbols with meaning attached to them. When you make a communication there is a person called sender (source) who sends the message to another person who receives it (the receiver). The message is sent through a medium. Medium can be (a) written message (b) a verbal message (c) a message sent through some physical gestures or signs. When a message is sent there is an element of disturbance called 'noise'. Strictly speaking the receiver must receive a message as sender thinks he should and lastly the feedback. The communication process is shown in Figure 13.1 below:

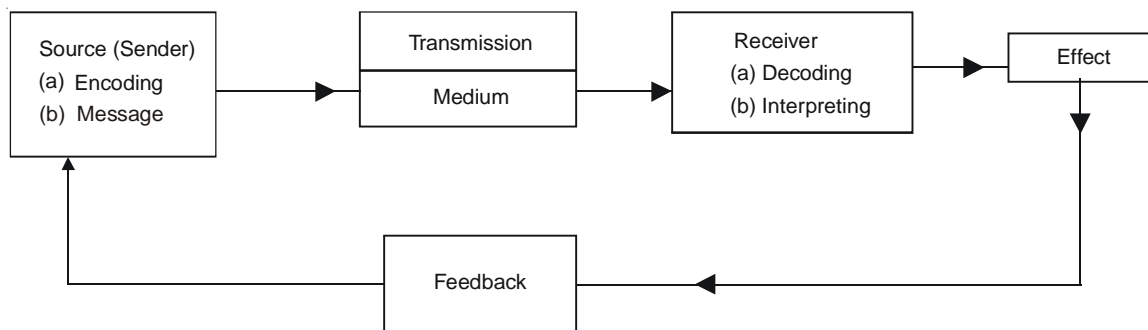


Fig. 13.1. Communication Process

### Source

Source is an initiator of a message. He may be an individual or group or even an organization. Sender is a person who represents source. When source decides to convey something – a message to the other party (receiver). Message is an item of information. Message is required to be encoded that will depend upon distance, the receiver, time available (urgency) and availability of channel.

### Message

Message is an information and may be in the form of script. Message is what the communication is all about. Message may be composed of symbols like Dollar \$. Encoding is a process of selecting an appropriate channel. Message had to be sent by Morse code in the Navy. That is even done today. For maintaining secrecy they can be ciphered. When such messages are received, they are decoded by the receiver. Obviously, the sender and receiver must have an identical code so that a correct meaning is assigned to the message by the receiver.

### Medium

Medium is also called channels through which a message is transmitted. It is the path through which the message is physically sent to the receiver. It may be face to face communication where sender sends a message through some gestures. Telephone, teleprinter, computer network, Mobile phones and radio sets are used as medium for transmitting the messages. What is important is the compatibility of the sender and the receiver to use the medium.

**Receiver**

The message is received by a person called a receiver. Receiver is an individual who receives the message individually if it is meant for him or receives it on behalf of the group or organization for which he is working. Receiver is also responsible to decode the message and interpret it in an appropriate manner. He must assign correct meaning to various symbols, gestures, words as is intended by the sender.

**Effect**

Effect is the change in behaviour of receiver. He may pass on the message to the department who is to take action. He may ignore it. He may store the information. This will depend upon the perception, attitude and the skill of an individual. A message may contain simple information or it may affect value which will lead to a reaction or generation of a new message for sender. It must be remembered that messages are for action or for information. Action messages are acted upon and information messages are acted upon for wide circulation as information only. It is further stated that the principle of "need to know" must be kept in mind while transmitting.

**Feedback**

Once the message is received by the receiver, he has to either act upon it or prepare a reply message to the originator. Feedback determines that the message is clearly understood and action taken. In a real organizational situation, it may be difficult to locate the original source of a communication. A single communication may generate so many communication. It is therefore a network and a single identifiable event. It is synergistic process in which elements operate in an independent and intricately interwoven fashion. Communication generally takes the form of vertical and horizontal pattern. It is dependent on the form of organizational structure. Communication is superimposed on various appointments and related to the job. Psychological make up of the sender and the receiver is important so that positive outcome is achieved and thus organizational objectives are fulfilled.

**Means of Communication**

There are three primary methods of communication. These are written, verbal and non verbal form of communication. The choice as to which method to adopt would largely depend upon the location of the sender and receiver, ability, the nature of the message, urgency with which the information is required to be passed on and the cost involved in passing or receiving the information.

**1. Written Communication**

Written communication is generally in the form of standing orders, policy documents, orders, instructions, notes, memos, formal letters, demi official letters etc. These contain information of a permanent nature. Employees refer to these instructions as a basic document. Written communication is important to ensure the uniformity of action and future plans and it provides a permanent record for further reference. Written documents can be saved and stored. Because of the introduction of computers and other electronic equipment, information of very large size can be stored, and the required information can be retrieved in the fastest possible time. It is a great revolution. Volumes of information

can just be stored in a single disc. Messages can be passed the world over in a fraction of a second with hundred percent accuracy with the help of electronic media. Written communication is lengthy, time consuming and has a high probability of leakage in respect of confidential documents.

## 2. Oral Communication

Oral communication is the most common form of communication. Oral communication is used when both (sender and receiver) are present. It is face to face communication. It is more effective than written communication because the receiver not only hears the contents of the message but also is influenced by the tone, pitch, gestures, speed and even volume of conversation. Oral communication is the best way of transforming an individual with particular reference to attitude, beliefs, trust and faith. Most of the education system uses oral communication in learning. Leaders use oral communication in public address system to convey their point of view. Oral communication can also be used by using electronic media like audio-visual conferencing, where people can converse with each other even while being away. It is a direct, simple form of communication which is the least expensive and yet the most effective. Feedback is spontaneous and any error in the message is corrected immediately.

Oral communication promotes better relationship due to its personalized nature. However oral communication suffers from various disadvantages like lack of records, misinterpretation of message by the receiver, filtration, distortions and giving the meaning to the communication which suits the receiver best. Oral communication, to be effective, must be specific, short, to the point and devoid of ambiguity of any sort. "Grapevine" is also a very powerful medium of communication where messages are passed by word of month. Grapevine is an informal way of transmitting information to maximum number of employees in a minimum possible time. Grapevine travels like a wild fire. Management can use grapevine in a productive manner to convey a particular message. The greater the quantity of information that passes through the grapevine the less accurate it usually is.

## 3. Non Verbal Communication

Nonverbal messages are transmitted through gestures, facial expressions and through body language. It can also be expressed how one designs one's office and through official protocols. According to Tipkins and McCarter<sup>1</sup> facial expressions can be categorized as (1) interest – excitement, (2) enjoyment – joy, (3) surprise – startle, (4) distress – Anguish, (5) fear – terror, (6) shame – humiliation, (7) contempt – disgust, and (8) anger – rage.

Body language is known a "Kinesics". A handshake is probably the most common form of body language which conveys a lot about a persons personality. Eyes are the most expressive component of facial expressions, a glance, a stare, a smile or some provocative movement of the body conveys a lot. Facial expression can convey frustration, anger, arrogance, shyness, fear and other characteristics of a person that cannot be expressed through written or oral communication. Shrugging of shoulders expresses indifference, wink of eye an intimacy, and a palm on the forehead for forgetfulness. Knowledge of body language is very important and that should be carefully displayed. Managers should acquire adequate knowledge of non verbal communication to enable them to know their subordinates.

## Structure of Communication

### 1. Downward Communication

Communication has a structure that is based on two things. *First*, the organizational structure and *second* the purpose the communication is intended to achieve. In hierarchical structure where there are various organizational levels the communication is from top to bottom. In this pattern the communication flows from superior to subordinates. It is in the written form like policy letters, standing orders, staff regulations, handbooks, procedure, manuals and the like. When it is verbal, it pertains to passing information about day to day functioning and operations. Verbal communication is as important as written communication and should be weighed on an equal footing. The communication to be effective must be clear, simple and specific. Superior should appreciate and understand the ability of recipient and keep in mind the language and the level of perception.

### 2. Upward Communication

Upward communication relates to communication being made by Junior person to senior. This generally follows the reporting channel of command. The communication relates to reporting production levels, sales performance, reaction to certain orders and instructions. The communication reflects motivational condition of the employees. The flow of information from bottom to top helps the top management to know the actions, attitude, opinion and feelings of people. Upward communication indicates the reaction of employee to the policies of the organization. It is therefore necessary to ensure effective communication. Sharma (1997)<sup>2</sup> suggests “Research also notes the tendency, at times of subordinates or for fear of appraisals or for seeking undeserved rewards, place only that particular information before the superior which he would like. They try to check the flow of such information which goes against them or which the superior is not likely to appreciate”. Organizations must provide a climate and an incentive system that encourage upward communication. Management must evolve an “Open door” system and employees should feel that their superiors are always available to share their opinion, ideas and views that can be effectively used for decision making. Effective communication promotes “We” feeling among workers.

### 3. Horizontal or Lateral Communication

This type of communication refers to communication across departments or between people within different departments. It does not have a superior – subordinate relationship as downward and upward communication has. It is more informal in nature and is necessary in promoting a supportive organizational climate. It provides the means by which supervisors, grass root level workers and managers organize and coordinate their activities without referring the matters to their respective seniors. Generally, people prefer accomplishment of work smoothly and therefore like to refer laterally. Production manager and marketing manager have to be in constant touch with each other to know the consumer expectations, market share vis-vis production levels. In the present liberalised market scenario lateral communication is not only restricted to the internal departments of a particular organization but spread to other organizations, government agencies who have to play a role in the business and even may extend to national and International levels.

## Types of Communication

### 1. Formal Communication

Upward, downward and lateral communication follow the established routes of communication in the organization. Lateral communication is encouraged by organizations as it cuts down delays. Lines of such communication are formally laid down. The communication may take written or verbal form that will depend upon the relationship, time available, importance of the issue etc. This type of communication is called formal communication.

### 2. Informal Communication

Informal communication is not planned by the organization, hence no lines of communication exist. This type of communication takes place due to sheer desire of an individual to communicate with others. It is an outcome of social interaction. Small groups are formed and they not only communicate and discuss personal issues, but also express their candid views on other related official matters. This type of communication takes place during lunch, or coffee/tea breaks and during social gatherings. If the organizational climate is healthy, this type of communication lends speed to the organizational problem solving. When management wants to convey something to the employees and does not wish to use an official channel, it is passed on to the employees informally. This type of communication is also called “grapevine”. It is important to note that there is a likelihood of rumours being spread in the organization through informal communication channels, which should be guarded against.

**Evolution of Communication :** In earlier era (Classicists View – An Organizational Thinking) communication was not so important. Management used to issue orders and instructions (downward communication) to various employees who used to complete their day’s work. Upward communication was either non existent or discouraged. Blind obedience to orders was expected. There was break down in communication when subordinate crossed the channels of communication and narrow span of management concept of organizational structure was operative. Neo – classicists view communication as an important function of the organization. It should be aimed at need satisfaction, social interaction and a tool for participation in decision making. They recommend vertical and horizontal communication. Neo – classicists feel informal communication is as important as the formal communication as it fills the gap that may occur in formal communication. The modernists view communication as the most important function of any organization. They adopt the behavioural view. Communication must aim at *firstly* improvement of human relation within the units and sub-units, *two* obtain, store, process and shift required information for decision making and interact with various agencies that exist in the external environment so that organizations not only survive but grow. They feel overload, distortion and filtration are the basic drawbacks in the communication system that must be guarded against.

## COMMUNICATION NETWORK

As stated earlier, it is the organizational structure that will, to a great extent determine the communication network. In a typical centrally controlled organization, communication

generally revolves around a pivotal person. Like in a production unit, the production manager would be a pivotal person and all communication will flow down to supervisors (downward communication) and to the CEO/President/ Vice president (upward communication). Various type of communication is shown in Figure 13.2 below.

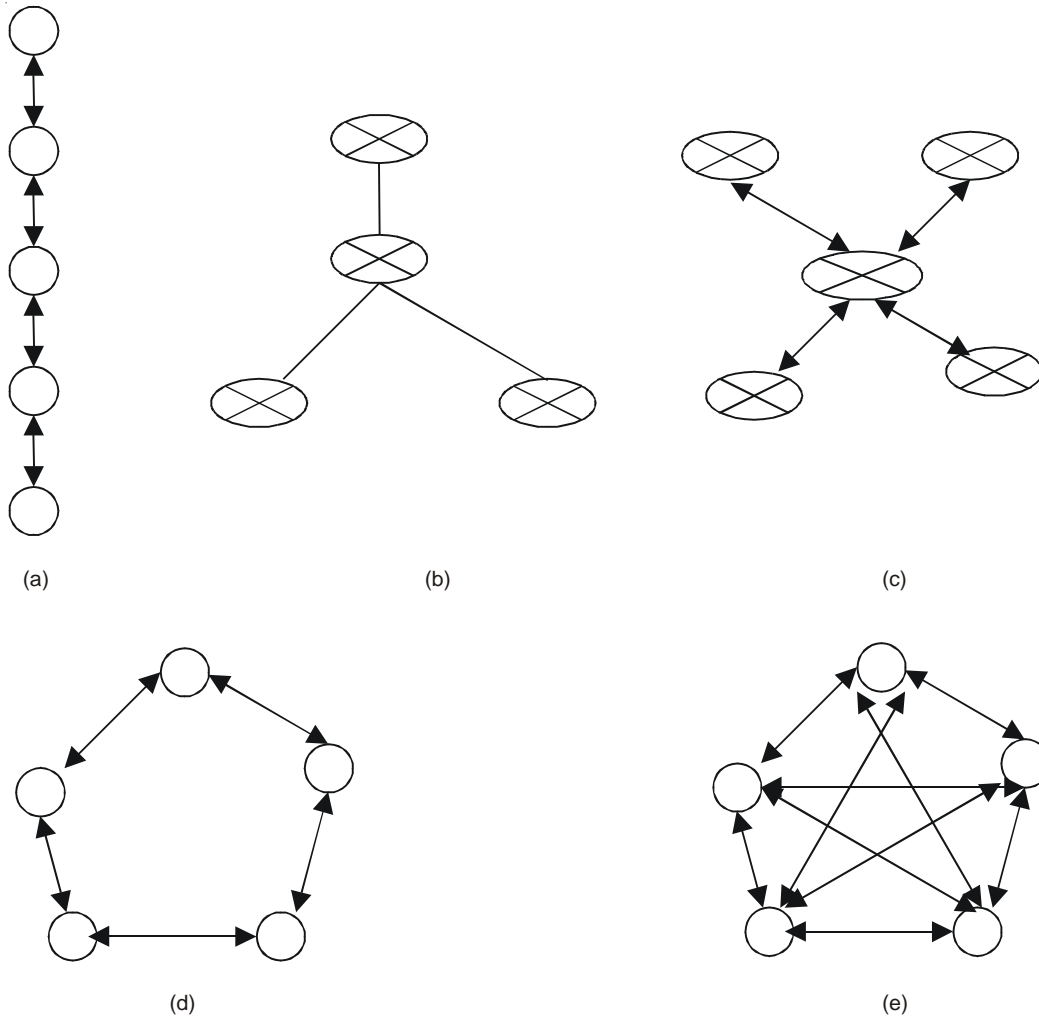


Fig. 13.2. Various types of communication

Chain, Inverted 'Y' and 'wheel' type of communication is used in centralized organization. Chain type of communication is used where information flows upward and downward in a hierarchical manner. There is no lateral communication. This type of communication is best suited for organizations where reporting is strict and jobs are well defined. Lot of written communication takes place in the form of orders, instructions, etc. Inverted Y type of communication represents one person having two subordinates. They report to the designated boss. 'Wheel' type of communication represents manager in the center having control over two superior officers. Wheel type of communication is very commonly used in



most of the organization as it provides faster problem solving. This type communication displays lack of flexibility and shows lowest job satisfaction.

'Circle' type of communication is used by a member to adjoining member only. Communication is lateral. While "all channel" type of communication is used by a member to any member of the organization. There is no leader but a person may assume leadership. Members experience a greater level of satisfaction. This is prevalent in decentralized organizations. More the centralization, poorer the satisfaction of employees.

Decentralized networks are suitable to the organizations where jobs are complex and members have to interact with various departments. When the tasks are comparatively simple and of routine nature, centralized communication (Chain, Y, Wheel) is recommended.

### Barriers to Effective Communication

When a communication is made by a sender, it must be received correctly by the receiver. Message must be interpreted by the receiver as has been intended by the sender. There are various problems like the message does not reach the receiver, problems of encoding and decoding, faulty selection of channel, wrong language or the interpretation of the message. The list can be long and unending. These problems are called 'Noise' in communication. These problems can be classified as various barriers such as physical distance, noise, attitude and sentiments of sender and receiver.

#### Physical Barrier

- (a) **Poor Timing:** A person must evaluate the timing of sending a message. Receiver must get adequate time to implement the instruction given in the communication. If the action on the message is required to be taken in a distant future, there is a possibility that receiver may forget the content of the message. Inadequacy of timing and a last minute communication is likely to put too much pressure on the receiver. Message therefore should be sent at an appropriate time.
- (b) **Choice of Channel:** Message can be sent in written, verbal instruction (face to face) or conveyed by electronic media, on line by telephone or using combinations. Routine messages should be passed on verbally to subordinates and boss. Important messages should be followed in writing as a confirmation to verbal conversation. Face to face communication is more effective because of the body language of sender and receiver. It provides spontaneous solutions to misunderstanding.
- (c) **Inadequate Information:** Too much or too little information is dangerous. Information must be of value, meaningful and related to the job of the receiver. Volumes of information can be quickly sent any where around the globe. Information carries value if it is in the desired format and to the point.
- (d) **Organizational Structure :** Every individual in the organization must know the channels of command and communication. They must also know the power centers. Authority and responsibility must be clearly defined so that the communication is directed towards the correct person and quick decision making is achieved. Information overload is dangerous. Secretary to the various managers must maintain a log book in which incoming and out going messages are recorded. Professional jealousy must not be allowed to interfere with various communication.
- (e) **Information Overload:** Information may be passed to concerning individuals as

it is needed. Excessive information causes information overload. Though lot of information now can be handled by the individual due to computers. Excessive information causes confusion and may not be required. Network breakdown may also take place due to information overload.

### Interpersonal Barriers

Effective communication largely depends upon the sender and receiver and their personal bent of mind, commitment to organizational effectiveness and the relationship they enjoy. Some of the important interpersonal barriers are discussed in the succeeding paragraphs.

- (a) **Filtration:** Filtration is a process when sender deliberately wants to withhold information from reaching the receiver. It is done by manipulating the information either because the sender believes that all the information is not required or that the receiver is better off not knowing certain aspects of the information. Filtration takes place when subordinates send information to superiors based on the liking of the latter. Boss is told what he likes to hear. Therefore the information may be far from the truth.
- (b) **Perception:** Perceptual process that operate in a situation may heavily influence the communication process related to receiving the information from the environment and interpreting and giving meaning to such information. It is human tendency to hear what he wants to hear and ignore the information that conflicts with his thought process. This type of communication totally distorts the intent and contents of the message. Some of the perceptual situations are as under
  - (i) **Stereotype effect:** Manager may perceive people who belong to one category or another as stereotypes. It is general perception that old employees are not hard working, even if some of the old employees work hard. Individuals therefore must be treated distinctly as a separate individuals and their performance assessed accordingly.
  - (ii) Individuals generally assess their subordinates based on one particular trait that he likes. If an individual is punctual, he may create a favourable perception because he likes punctuality. The other employee may be efficient in his job but he is not considered favourably in his performance appraisal. It should be ensured that an individual is evaluated according to laid down standards and not based on individual liking.
  - (iii) It is human tendency that a person expects his subordinates to act, think and behave as he does. If a manager works overtime, he expects his subordinates to stay longer. This limits the manager's ability to effectively deal with different situations and individuals.

It is important for managers to evaluate situations independently and take decision on the merit of the case. The perceptual skill must be applied carefully and each individual treated separately without any perceptual bias so that the credibility of the manager is increased. One must communicate facts, keep up to commitments made and eliminate negativity in perception.

- (c) **Semantic Barriers:** Semantic barriers refer to the interpretation of words, abbreviations and symbols used by the sender and perceived by the receiver. If a

receiver is likely to misunderstand symbol of dollar,(\$) it is better that “dollar” is written in the script. Universally accepted symbols should generally be used in the written communication. Choice of wrong word or a comma at wrong place can change the meaning as to what is intended to be communicated and interpreted by the receiver. It is always desirable to repeat an important part of the message and ensure confirmation from the receiver.

- (d) **Power Position:** Authority, power and status of an individual in an organization affect communication with people interacting at various levels of hierarchy. While authority makes communication more authentic but may create social distance and therefore restrict communication due to ‘gap’ that may be created. ‘Power centres’ may not allow views of lesser powerful individuals in decision making process. Thus free flow of information may not exist in the organization which is counter-productive for growth.
- (e) **Cultural Barriers:** Cultural differences can adversely affect the communication effectiveness. Due to liberalization multinational players are operating in India. It is therefore necessary to understand ethnic backgrounds and cultures of various employees working in the organization. Religious sentiments of the employees must be protected while communicating. Norms play an important role like working on Friday for Muslims, Wearing of White clothes by Hindu women in India etc. In some countries punctuality is not considered important as long as targets are met. Accordingly the communicator must identify these barriers and identify cultural differences so that an all out effort is made to ensure effectiveness of communication.
- (f) **Sender Credibility:** If a sender’s credibility is high, the receiver will take and interpret message favourably. Conversely, if sender is not trusted receiver may try and interpret the message wrongly by deliberately giving hidden meaning to various words and may even distort the complete message. The communication of an expert is generally taken seriously and acted upon favourably. Emotions also play an important role in communication. If the receiver is happy and in a fine mood, he will receive and interpret message as intended by the sender but if the receiver is angry, frustrated and not in a pleasant mood the communication can be heavily distorted.

### Feedback

Feedback completes the total communication process. Feedback is important to ascertain if the message is understood and acted upon correctly. Lack of it or wrong feedback is counter productive to effective communication. In defence services there is a procedure to repeat the message by the receiver so that the sender knows that the message is being correctly received. Wrong reception is instantaneously corrected and an acknowledgement sought. This is generally implemented when long distance weapon system is being used. Safety of own troops and maximum destruction of the enemy forces is sought. For example ground to air communication involved for guiding strike aircraft in support of ground forces.

Wofford, Gerloff and Cummins<sup>3</sup> point out that the greatest barrier to communication is the style of communication used by the manager. When a manager sends a message in a way that provokes defensiveness, he or she contributes to the “poor” interpersonal

relationship. If relations are already strained, the chances of experiencing communication breakdown are greatly enhanced.

To conclude the message must be received with the same spirit as is being sent. The message may be vitiated in many ways. It may be distortion, omission or filtration. Distortion takes place due to motive, attitude and sentiments of both sender and receiver. Filtration takes place when message is passed on by reducing it based on the liking of receiver, or by retaining information for bargaining purpose. Omission is related to deletion of a part of a message.

### Overcoming Communication Barriers

1. **Improve Listening Skills:** An individual must be a good listener. Listening is 'half' of whole communication. When one listens he also carries out concurrent mental interpretation of what he is hearing. Positive outlook goes a long way to ensure effective communication. Important points for good listener are as under:
  - (a) Do not have preconceived ideas about a subject matter.
  - (b) Pay full attention to what the sender is saying.
  - (c) Think as the sender thinks.
  - (d) Check back as to what you have received.
  - (e) Give time to take feedback on action taken on the message received.
  - (f) Keep the principle of "need to know" in mind to avoid information overload.
  - (g) Do not jump to conclusions.
  - (h) Do not have a prejudiced mind and take every message independently.
2. **Improve Written Skills:** When a message is intended to be sent, it is necessary to identify action addresses and information addresses. The text of the message should be simple and should clearly indicate as to what actions are required to be taken by the receiver. A well written communication in simple language has negligible chances of misinterpretation. Writing good message is an art and it must be practiced overtime. Basic principles of good written message are brevity, clarity and simplicity.
3. **Maintain Unity of Command Principle:** Most of communication problems arise when channels of command and control are not followed strictly. One must receive orders from a specific authority and should be answerable to the same authority. In a typical hierarchical organizations, chains of reporting are laid down and should be followed. Because of the multiplicity of organizational functions lateral and diagonal communication is necessary, the same should be undertaken on an even level. Creation of power blocks should be discouraged. The object of communication is not only to carryout assigned task but create an atmosphere of trust and understanding among all members of the organization. It is only possible when management is not only sensitive to the workers demand but keeps their promises. According to Luft<sup>4</sup>, openness and an atmosphere of trust builds healthy relationship and closes credibility gaps thus contributing to communication effectiveness and enhancement.

## SUMMARY

Effective communication is essential for the growth of the organization. Communication relates to exchange of ideas, facts, opinion and feelings. It involves two parties and a message. Message may be verbally passed or sent through a written mode. It can even be by gestures, signals and symbols. Communication is a continuous process. It involves 1. sender 2. encoding 3. message 4. Medium of dispatch 5. decoding 6. receiver 7. action and 8. feedback. Communication should be upward, downward horizontal and diagonal. Formal communication is undertaken by superior-subordinates strictly as per the hierarchical structure of the organization. Informal communication on the other hand is predominantly an outcome of social interaction with fellow workers. Communication has different patterns namely, chain, inverted Y, wheel, circle and all channel. Communication can never be smooth, it is affected by sender's and receiver's motives, attitudes and sentiments. Apart from the above, poor timings of dispatch of communication, poor choice of media/ channel, incomplete information, organizational structure and related authority-responsibility relationship can distort communication to a large extent. Perception and motives play a vital role in interpretation of communication. Cultural diversity of employees, power position enjoyed by a person and his credibility add new dimensions to the communication effectiveness. Filtration, language, physical separation, status difference are also communication barriers. For effective communication a person must improve upon listening skill, written skill and have simplicity, brevity and clarity while interacting with people.

## TEXT QUESTIONS

1. Define communication. Why is communication important to the organization?
2. Explain in detail the communication process.
3. What is 'noise' in communication?
4. What are the various communication barriers? How can they be eliminated?
5. What is communication network? Explain.
6. The key to good communication is "The principles of brevity, clarity and simplicity" explain above statement.
7. Write notes on:
  - (a) Downward & upward examination.
  - (b) Formal communication.
  - (c) Informal communication.
  - (d) Language barrier.
  - (e) Communication channels.

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## Case

### COMMUNICATION FAILURES AT BHOPAL

All the safety features had failed – that much was abundantly clear. What Warren Anderson could not find out was *why*. As CEO of Union Carbide, he needed to know exactly what had happened in Bhopal that night for a number of reasons. He knew that he would have to explain a tragic accident to employees, to government officials in both the United States and India, to the courts, and to the people. Yet he could not get answers to his own preliminary and personal questions. When telephone contact failed to yield answers. Anderson got on a plane and flew to India, where he was immediately placed under house arrest – unable to attend to the very business that had brought him there. His plant managers had also been arrested and were not allowed to talk to anyone. Indian government officials had closed the plant in order to prevent “tampering with evidence”.

The basic facts that Anderson could not determine on December 3, 1984, were really quite simple. A runaway reaction had occurred in a storage tank of methylisocyanate (MIC), which was used to manufacture a pesticide. The valves on the tank had burst and a cloud of poisonous gas had escaped. Climatic conditions kept the gas from dissipating, and the winds carried it to nearby shanty towns and the populous city of Bhopal, where many people either died in their sleep or woke and died while fleeing. Those who survived suffered from burning eyes and lungs. Local medical facilities were not equipped for the disaster, and over the next few weeks thousands more died.

The Bhopal plant was operated by Union Carbide India Limited (UCIL), with the parent company, Union Carbide, owning roughly 51 per cent. After installing the plant and training its first staff, Union Carbide withdrew from the daily operation of the plant, as it was required to do by the Indian government. Union Carbide did participate in the inspections and responded to official questions and concerns, but no U.S. official of the company was on-site in Bhopal.

Before the accident, the plant had under a great deal of pressure to cut costs. Because of production problems, it was unable to run at more than 50 per cent capacity, and meeting its original profit predications had become impossible. Thus, a number of shortcuts had been taken in such matters as crew training, staffing patterns, and maintenance schedules. Although the plant had been virtually shut down for weeks for extensive maintenance and cleaning, a number of important safety features remained inoperable – and there is some doubt whether they would have been adequate even if they had been working!

Perhaps most importantly, the staff did not realize the danger of the situation – they even took a tea break after the leak had been noticed, thinking they would have plenty of time to fix it. The operator in the control room did not notify his supervisor when the temperature began to rise inside the tank, and the entire situation went unattended for at least an hour. The original procedures called for up to two years of training for employees in critical superintendent capacities, but these men had received only about a month, using classroom materials developed in the United States and printed in English.

#### Suggested Analysis

Obviously, Warren Anderson, the individual, faced a severe communication problem. Even more important, Union Carbide, the organization, experienced a tragic breakdown in its

ability to communicate with its internal and external stakeholders – a breakdown it tried to fix while a horrified world watched the devastation on the nightly news. Ultimately, this breakdown raised questions about ethics, technical difficulties, and cultural differences, as well as Union Carbide's strategy for communicating with the Bhopal plant.

Most organizational communication problems are not this severe, of course, but the tragedy at Bhopal reminds us of how important communication is to the manager's job. Clearly, Anderson and Union Carbide had a significant communication problem. First of all, there was simply a lot of confusion over the facts. Even today, no one is clear as to exactly what sequence of events led to the disaster. Each party has a different interpretation of the "facts" that have come to light, and the resulting legal battles promise to be long. Of course, there were a number of barriers to effective communication in the immediate aftermath of the event. Various parties gave voice to differing perceptions of the "facts", and the high pitch of emotion amounted to a form of noise interfering with the communications channels.

In addition, Anderson had to communicate in multiple ways in the wake of the disaster – all of which were hampered by subsequent events and circumstances. The whole world was watching to see what Union Carbide would do. Anderson made the symbolic move of going to India to show his concern, but his subsequent arrest made any form of communication virtually impossible. Ultimately, he needed to have a policy of one-way communication in order to state what Union Carbide was going to do, but before that he needed to engage in multiple-party communication to determine exactly what had happened. Both channels of communication had been effectively shut down.

There also remained the little-publicized but important issue of Anderson's communication with other Union Carbide employees. After all, some of them worked in facilities very much like the one in Bhopal.

The Bhopal disaster is a prime example of the necessary for the pitfalls of communication. Many managers do indeed complain of "communication problems", and as Bhopal shows, the management process is subject not only to inefficiency and frustration, but even complete breakdown, if it fails to plan for effective communication. Communication consists of more than memos, phone calls, face-to-face meetings, and elaborate systems of "networking". It is a central feature of organizational culture : It concerns what we *say* and what we *mean*, as well as *how* we say and mean it.

As the Bhopal story continues to unfold, it will have different meanings for a variety of groups, and perhaps there can never be one conclusive story with a hard-and-fast moral to be learned from it. There are multiple lessons to be learned from the tragic story of Bhopal – lessons about planning, organizing, leading and controlling, and the theme of communication will be among all the lessons taught in each of these management classes.

Such was the case for Union Carbide on the morning on December 3, 1984, when its pesticide plant in Bhopal leaked tons of lethal methylisocyanate gas into an overcrowded city of 700,000 people. By the time that death-toll reports reached the company's headquarters in Danbury, Connecticut, climbing first from 200 and 300 and ultimately to 2,000 with over 100,000 injured, Carbide's options for immediate reactive response had already been severely limited. There were only two telephone lines into the Bhopal area, and management in Connecticut had to rely on fragments of information funnelled out its Bombay subsidiary. The plant's supervisors had been placed under arrest, and when Carbide chairman Warren Anderson arrived to assess the situation and offer whatever resources

were at the company's immediate disposal, he, too, was taken into custody. Freed on bail, Anderson was then informed that the Indian government expected Carbide to pay compensation damages that threatened to become astronomical – far beyond resources of Carbide's reported \$200 million in insurance.

Carbide immediately ceased its worldwide production of methlisocyanate gas, but its problems in taking quick reactive measures were far from being under the company's managerial control. In addition to having to stem the leakage of toxic fumes with an under trained work force, Carbide found the city of Bhopal strewn with mass graves and hospitals reporting deaths at the rate of one every 60 seconds. The city's foliage withered, and the dying, writhing in pain from the inhalation of gas that swells lung tissue and drowns victims in internal fluids, scurried through shanty town streets littered with animal carcasses and teeming with flies.

The long-term outlook was no better. Carbide lost over \$800 million in market value in a single week, and the company could look forward to lengthy and intensive scrutiny of its safety policies and procedures. Why, for example, had no computerized warning system been installed at the Bhopal plant? Moreover, the company could expect to find itself at the center of a long and volatile debate about the practices of U.S. firms engaged in risky ventures in underdeveloped nations - a fact that will no doubt hamper Carbide's efforts to defend both its ethical practices and its financial stability among present and potential investors for some time to come. Finally, every one of the company's problems is exacerbated by public-relations issues that will have to be addressed by intricate, long-term strategies for which it had not planned.

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*Case adopted from the book titled "The Process of Management" by Dr. M.L. Bhasin published by Global Business Press, Abhinav Publishing Industries Pvt. Ltd, New Delhi, 1994.*

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