Communication Process

Communication process model

Communication process can be defined as a process of message transmission from a sender to a receiver in understandable way. It is very important to master communication skills in our professional as well as personal lives.

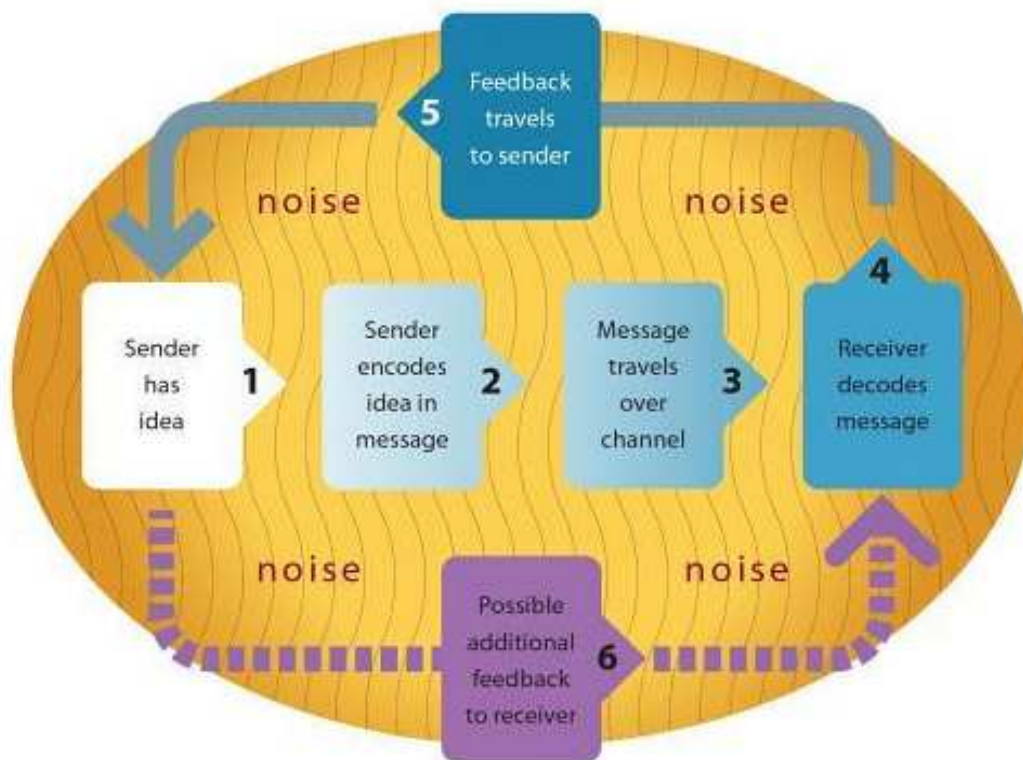The communication process model is shown in the Figure 1.

Figure 1. Communication process *(Source: GUFFEY, Mary Ellen and LOWELY, Dana. Essentials of Business Communication. 9th edition. Mason, USA: Cengage Learning, 2013. p.10)*

Communication process consists of five key steps:

1. Idea formation
2. Message encoding
3. Message transmission (through communication channel)
4. Message decoding
5. Feedback (not necessarily present in a communication process)

Further, we will consider each step separately.

A sender (individual, group or organization) is the one who initiates the communication process. It usually starts when the sender generates an idea of the message he/she would like to communicate to a receiver.

The next step of communication is message encoding process. Encoding here means converting the sender's idea into words and/or gestures with the purpose to convey its meaning to the receiver. In case of verbal communication, the main problem is the tendency of some words to have different meaning for different people.

It is important to remember that the idea creation and encoding process are influenced by professional and cultural background, his/her knowledge, experience, and skills, as well as the context of the situation and mood.

Then the encoded message is sent to the receiver through communication channel. The communication channel is a medium for transmitting the message. The channels are usually oral (talk, oral report, telephone talk, etc.) and written (letter, e-mail, fax, etc.). Although with current technology development, visual channels (like video conferences and presentations) became widely used.

The effectiveness and efficiency of various channels depends on the characteristics of a communication. When immediate feedback is necessary, it is useful to choose oral communication channels. On the other side, when reaching several recipients, using e-mail or other written channel is more appropriate.

For choosing the right communication channel the sender should ask him/herself different questions, like:

- Is the message urgent?
- Is immediate feedback needed?
- Is documentation or a permanent record required?
- Is the content complicated, controversial, or private?
- Is the message going to someone inside or outside the organization?
- What oral and written communication skills does the receiver possess?

(Source: SANCHEZ, Nick. Communication Process. Lecture. Available on < http://web.njit.edu/~lipuma/352comproc/comproc.htm>)

When the message is transmitted to the receiver the decoding stage of the communication process begins. Decoding process involves accepting and interpreting the message by the receiver. Successful communication takes place when the receiver correctly understands the meaning of sender's message. This is very hard to achieve, not only due to noises in communication channels, but primarily due sender and the receiver having various backgrounds, knowledge, experience, etc.

Feedback is the final stage of the communication process. It can take either verbal (spoken comment) or written (written message), or non-verbal (smile, sigh, etc.) form. The feedback is very important component of communication process, because it allows the sender to evaluate whether the message was interpreted correctly by the receiver or not. The sender can also encourage feedback from the receiver by asking questions, such as "Is what I said clear for you?", "Do you understand what I meant by...?" etc.

Certain barriers can appear during communication process. The barriers negatively affect the communication. These are some examples of common barriers:

- the use of an inappropriate medium (channel),
- incorrect grammar,
- inflammatory words,
- words that conflict with body language,
- technical jargon

(Source: SANCHEZ, Nick. Communication Process. Lecture. Available on < http://web.njit.edu/~lipuma/352comproc/comproc.htm>)

Forms of communication

It is widely considered that people communicate verbally and non-verbally.

Verbal and nonverbal components of communication can be mutually consistent, but may also be inconsistent or even contradictory (for example, if a person says "I'll gladly take care of it", but the tone of his/her voice doesn't show any willingness). If a person communicates verbally and non-verbally in a contradictory way, it causes complications to an information recipient. As a result, a spoken message is perceived as untrustworthy, confusing and incomprehensible. In case the recipient is exposed to such inconsistent communication repeatedly, the communication process would become very frustrating for him/her.

It is important to mention that verbal and non-verbal are not the only ways people communicate. Certain information is communicated through behaviour (whether a person answers a question or not, or whether he/she greets you or not, etc.) and appearance (whether he/she is dressed for a particular occasion, etc.). So, from a broader perspective, a person communicates through his/her behaviour and appearance as well.

Semantic structure of communication process

To understand better the communication process it is necessary to understand its semantic structure. Semantic structure of communication process includes five basic components:

1. **The intention, the goal of communication** – the speaker usually has a purpose. With what he/she says, the speaker tries to achieve something, even though sometimes not consciously.
2. **The meaning of communication for the speaker** –the speaker wants to convey his/her understanding of meaning of individual words and the communication as a whole to the receiver.
3. **The factual content of communication**
4. **The meaning of communication for the receiver** – how the receiver understands what was said, his/her understanding of the meaning of individual words and the communication as a whole.
5. **The effect of communication on the receiver of the message** – what is the result or consequence of what was said.

Usually no participant of the communication (neither the sender, nor the receiver) understands and controls all five components of sematic structure. The speaker can clarify his/her motivation and knows the meaning of individual words he/she uses, but can't define properly the meaning of the message, perceived by the receiver and effect of the communication on him/her.

The receiver, on the other hand, subjectively interprets meanings of the words and sentences. So, the result can be different from the sender's idea. Additionally, the receiver doesn't have to understand an effect the communication has on him/her, especially in the beginning of the communication process. Sometimes only after the effect accumulates by aggregating several messages carrying similar meaning, the receiver realizes the impact communication has on him/her.

Semantic aspects of interpersonal communication

There are defined two aspects of interpersonal communication:

- **Factual** – factual content of communication, information expressed in words
- **Attitudinal** – person's attitude towards the things which he/she talks about; attitude to the person he/she speaks with; his/her current feelings, self- perception.

People usually don't express their attitudes verbally. So, they are usually communicated indirectly through non-verbal expressions.

Although the factual side of the communication should be primary in business relationships, the attitudinal aspects are something that cannot be ignored in a workplace. An atmosphere in a workplace significantly affects quality of employees work and the efficiency of the organization. Mutual understanding of attitudinal aspects is very important for overall functioning of communication process within the organization.

Here are examples of attitudinal aspects we should communicate within the organization:

An attitude towards things:

"I believe in what I say."

An attitude to the person with whom we speak:

"It is nice to work with you."

"I respect you."

Self-perception:

"I am an expert."

"I am a person who can be trusted."

"I am here to cooperate."

Control questions

1. Name and describe forms of communication.
2. Describe communication process model.
3. Describe semantic structure of a communication process.
4. What are the semantic aspects of interpersonal communication? Name and describe them.
5. Think about the reasons for communication failures. How can we prevent them?

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Effective Verbal Communication

Verbal skills, i.e. skills related to verbal communication, are an important prerequisite for successful work in any organization. However, these skills must not be confused with verbosity. Instead, verbal skills refer to a number of partial skills related to expressing oneself, which enable employees to gain and transfer information effectively, to be able to give comprehensible advice and if necessary to convince, to understand each other and communicate effectively.

The manner of verbal expression mainly has an impact on the matter-of-fact communication plane as it determines the effectiveness of negotiations and thus the effectiveness of the entire organization. It also has consequences on the relationship plane – it affects not only how the information recipient understands the information source but also the extent to which the information recipient will find the communicating employee likeable and trustworthy and how well potential cooperation will feel.

General rules of effective verbal communication

For verbal communication to be effective at work meetings and negotiations, we can generally recommend the following:

Be clear

Express what you want to say clearly, use clear expressions and statements. Do not use ambiguous words. In this way you will prevent misunderstanding, enhance the effectiveness of your message and support the serious impression created by your acts.

Be brief

Do not load your communication partners with a lot of words and information. Do not use long sentences. Use short sentences and communicate the information in parts. Your speech will thus gain relevance, accuracy and comprehensibility, the listeners will be able to follow and understand better.

Give information in a logical order

Give the information you want to communicate in a logical order. However, the logical order in your view may not be identical with a logical order as understood by your colleagues. Therefore, try to see yourself in their shoes, try to think as they think and adapt your communication to their views and way of thinking.

Do not forget the essential

Say everything that is important and necessary to understand your message. Remember that your colleagues from other department / subordinates / communication partners may not be as well informed as you are and may not have the same knowledge. What you take for granted (and may not feel urged to emphasize) can be essential information for others without which they may not clearly understand the content and sense of your message.

Emphasize the essential

Distinguish the main information from details and less important parts of the message – emphasize the essential. Your speech will be clearer for the message recipients, they will understand and remember better. Also the impression left after the dialogue will be better.

Be correct

Be correct: strictly distinguish facts from opinions and assumptions. Give facts as facts and your views as your views *("in my opinion ...")*, assumptions as assumptions *("I think that ... ")*.

Adjust yourself

Choice of words may essentially affect whether the others understand or not. Professional terminology is usually a very precise and accurate language for situations at work. However, it can be only effective if your communication partner knows the professional terms properly. If not, you have to choose a language of a common user. There is one important rule – adjust the language of your message to the information recipient.

You should also adjust the tempo of your speech to the message recipient. People usually like to listen to a speech in the tempo they use themselves. If your tempo is considerably different from your communication partners' tempo, they will feel uncomfortable. Moreover, if the message recipient's personal tempo is slow and yours is fast, their impression of you will not be favourable and, mainly, they will not be able to follow.

Ask questions, verify their comprehension

If you want to be sure that the listeners have understood your message as you meant it, verify their comprehension. It is mainly important when you are setting a task to do, delegating rights, etc. It is not enough to ask: "Do you understand?" This question is often answered by a simple "yes" without your colleague really understanding. The questions need to be entirely specific, or you can ask your colleague or subordinate to say what they are going to do or repeat what you have agreed on.

Never assume that your colleagues would ask if they did not understand. Sometimes they may not be motivated to do so, sometimes they are afraid to be embarrassed, sometimes they even do not know they did not understand well or missed a piece of important information.

However, it is necessary to verify comprehension even in the case you are the listener. Not everybody can communicate clearly and comprehensibly and if you want to prevent troubles it is up to you to provide the clarity. For this you can use control questions or paraphrasing, e.g., *"Do I understand well that you mean ...?"* or *"Are you of the opinion that the most suitable solution is ...?"*, etc. The answer to your control question will be a confirmation or precision of what has been said.

Control questions

1. Name the general rules of effective verbal communication. Explain the meaning of each rule.