

## **Lesson 3**

### **The Process of Communication**

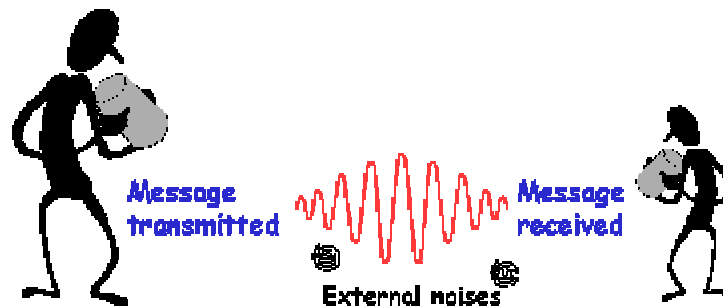
**Contents: Introduction, Communication process, Basic elements involved in communication process- Sender, Encoding, Message, Channel, Receiver, Decoding, Feedback, Barriers, Context or Situation.**

**Learning Objectives:**

- ❖ **To learn about the flow of communication**
- ❖ **To get familiar with the basic elements of communication process**
- ❖ **To know what are the barriers and disturbances in communication process**
- ❖ **To know different techniques to reduce the disturbances for effective communication.**

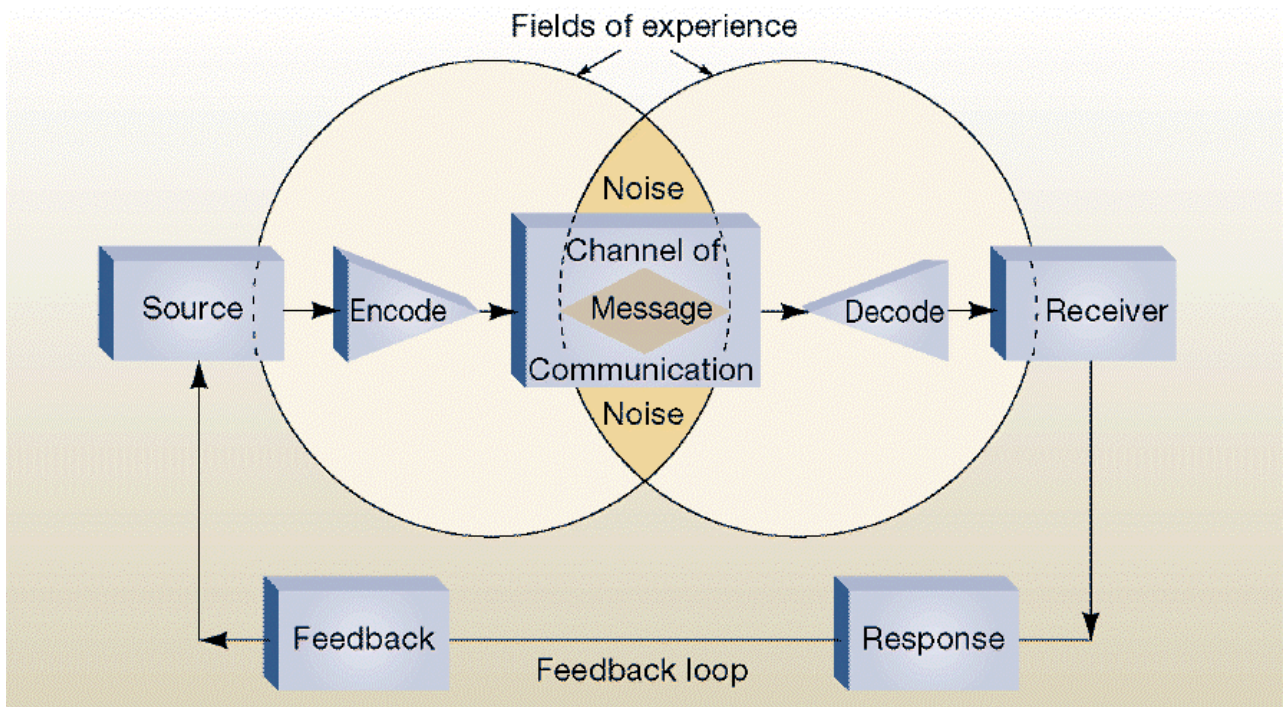
## Communication Process

There have been several attempts by scholars to explain the process of communication. Depending on their background and objectives, different scholars have viewed the process of communication differently and have developed different models. You may have formed the impression that communication is difficult, if not impossible, to study and understand. If it is ongoing, how do we stop it? If it has no beginning or end, how do we get hold of it? Although the task is difficult, it is possible.



Communication establishes relationships and makes organizing possible. Every message has a purpose or objective. The sender intends -- whether consciously or unconsciously -- to accomplish something by communicating. In organizational contexts, messages typically have a definite objective: to motivate, to inform, to teach, to persuade, to entertain, or to inspire. This definite purpose is, in fact, one of the principal differences between casual conversation and managerial communication. Effective communication in the organization centers on well-defined objectives that support the organization's goals and mission. Communication is the process of passing information and understanding from one person to another. The communication process is a system that involves an interrelated, interdependent group of elements working together as a whole to achieve a desired outcome or goal. We can study communication in much the same way we study biological systems within our own bodies.

We can determine the elements involved (circulatory and digestive systems, for example), analyze how those elements affect one another, and thus determine the nature of the process as a whole. Applying this approach to the communication process, we find eight elements (1) a **source**/encoder of communication, which sends (2) a **message** (3) through a **channel** to (4) a **receiver**/decoder, which (5) responds via **feedback** with (6) possibilities of communication breakdowns (**Barrier**) in each stage of communication. However, these elements must be understood and analyzed in relation to (7) the **situation** or context, and (8) the **system** (such as relationship), which is created and maintained at some level by the communicators.



### The Source/Encoder

The sender begins the communication process by forming the ideas, intentions and feelings that will be transmitted. As the sender, you are required to filter out the details that are unimportant and focus your energy on the most relevant information. The source, or encoder, makes the decision to communicate. The source also determines what the purpose of the message will be to inform, persuade, or entertain. You may ask how the message gets from the source to the receiver. First, the source must encode, or create, a message. That is, the information that the source wishes to convey must be put into a form that can be sent to the receiver. The source generates a message through his or her past experiences, perceptions, thoughts, and feelings. Every ounce of your being may tell you that you are in love, but until you code those feelings into a form that can be sent to the person you love, communication cannot take place.

## **Message**

The second element of the communication process is the message, or that information which is being communicated. The source encodes an idea and then determines whether or not to inform, persuade, or entertain. After deciding what message to send, the source uses symbols to get the message across to others. These symbols stand for other things. The eagle, the flag, and Uncle Sam are all symbols of the United States, for example. But the most important symbols are words, which can represent objects, ideas, and feelings. These words permit us to share our thoughts with other members of our species. Important as words are to us, they can be tricky. We must remember that words are symbols. They represent things, but are not the things themselves. That lanky, bearded old man we call Uncle Sam represents the United States, but he is *not* the United States—in fact, he doesn't even exist. The letters *a-p-p-l-e p-i-e* represents an All-American pastry, but they are *not* an apple pie.

To increase the likelihood of successful communication, the source must try to encode in a way that the receiver understands, so that the receiver can properly decode (interpret) the message. For example, many American tourists in Paris have discovered that even though their command of French is minimal, it is sometimes easier to communicate in halting French than in English. Some Parisians, despite their fluent knowledge of English, refuse to decode an “inferior” tongue.

## **Channel**

Channels are the means (that is, pathways or devices) by which messages are communicated. Channels may be described and analyzed in two different ways. The first involves the form in which messages are sent to receivers. Forms include both verbal and nonverbal channels of communication. We use our five senses to receive messages from others. We may hear a call-in talk show on the radio, watch a soccer match on television, smell fresh bread baking as we drive past the local bread industry, taste the flavors in a fresh cappuccino, or hug a friend to console him when his dog died.

Channels may also be described according to the manner of presentation employed in communication. The source may speak face-to-face with the receiver, use a public address system to talk with a hundred listeners, or talk over radio or television to million of receivers. Each of these examples would demand different manners of presentation. Depending on the situation, the source would concentrate on verbal and/or nonverbal channels of communication. If the speaker were on radio, physical appearance wouldn't matter, but if he or she were performing on a cable network program or before a live audience, personal appearance could easily influence the reception of the message. For example, when we go to watch a circus, we expect the clowns to have painted faces and appropriate costumes. If they were dressed in regular street clothes, their performance wouldn't be as effective. Whatever channels of communication are used, the source must learn to adapt the message to make use of the most appropriate channels available for the situation.

### **Receiver/Decoder**

The person (or persons) who attends to the source's message is the receiver. The act of interpreting messages is called decoding. Receivers decode messages based on past experiences, perceptions, thoughts, and feelings. We receive messages through all our senses, but most often we decode messages by listening or seeing. We first have a physiological reception of stimuli (a noise causes sound waves to hit our eardrum or a movement catches our eye). We then pay attention to both the verbal and nonverbal stimuli and reduce all the stimuli bombarding us to one or two we can cope with more easily. Next, we try to understand the stimuli and interpret them into messages (we decide that the noise is a telephone bell or that the movement is a friend waving to us across campus). Finally, we store this information for later use so that next time we will be able to respond to the stimuli more quickly. It is important to remember that receivers make immediate decisions about what they will respond to in a given situation. During a lecture, an audience member may decide to take a nap. During an argument with your boyfriend or spouse, you may listen only to negative comments. During a crowded party you may watch the nonverbal behaviors of your date (yawning, standing off in a corner alone, and so on) to decide when it's time to leave. As sources of communication, we need to learn to analyze our prospective receivers to determine which communication messages will be most effective.

Of course, all of us are both encoders and decoders; that is, we are capable of both transmitting and receiving messages. When we receive a message, we must interpret it and then encode a response. The response may be silent, noisy, or somewhere in between, depending upon the situation and the existence of any barriers to communication.

### **Feedback**

Another element in the communication process is feedback. Each party in an interaction continuously sends messages back to the other. This return process is called feedback. Feedback tells the source how the receiver has interpreted each message. For example, if at the airport you ask your departing friend about his itinerary, and he replies that he didn't pack one, you know your message has not been understood. This kind of feedback, which conveys lack of understanding, is known as negative feedback. Positive feedback, on the other hand, indicates that the receiver has understood the source's message. It does not necessarily mean that he or she agrees with the source, just that the message was interpreted accurately. Feedback can also be ambiguous, not clearly positive or negative. "I see" and "mm-hmm" can be examples of ambiguous feedback. The effective communicator is always sensitive to feedback and constantly modifies his or her messages as a result of the feedback received. After a discreet pause, for example, you might ask your friend not about his "itinerary" but about the cities he plans to visit.

Feedback doesn't have to come from others. We can and do get feedback from our own messages. The fact that we can hear the words we speak and see the sentences we write sometimes lets us correct our own mistakes.

## **Barriers/Noise**

The human communication system can be compared with a radio or telephone circuit. Just as in radio transmissions, where distortion can occur at any point along the circuit (channel), there can be similar barriers in human communication. The source's information may be insufficient or unclear. Or the message can be ineffectively or inaccurately encoded. The wrong channel of communication may be used. The message may not be decoded the way it was encoded. Finally, the receiver may not be equipped to handle the decoded message in such a way as to produce the response (feedback) expected by the source.

'Barriers' are any obstacles or difficulties that come in the way of communication. They may be physical, mechanical, psychological, cultural or linguistic in nature. In business communication, for instance, the major obstacles arise because of the set-up of an organisation - the organizational barriers. The size of an organisation, the physical distance between employees of an organisation, the specialization of jobs and activities, and the power and status relationships, are the main organizational barriers. Besides, there are the barriers, raised by interpersonal relationships between individuals and groups, the prejudices of both individuals and groups and the channels they use to communicate. Barriers to communication also occur if the sender and receiver are not on the same "wavelength." This is as true in human communication as it is in radio transmission. On the human level, being on the same wavelength involves shared experiences. That is, the source can encode only in terms of the experiences he or she has had. This is why two people from completely different cultures may find it difficult, if not impossible, to communicate.

In the 'jargon' of communication, all barriers whatever their nature are clubbed under a common label- 'noise'. A term from modern physics it denotes not only atmospheric or channel disturbance, but all barriers that distort communications in any manner.

## **Physical Barriers**

Four main kinds of distractions act as 'physical barriers' to the communication process. These are:

(1) The Competing Stimulus in the form of another conversation going on within hearing distance, or loud music or traffic noise in the background. The cawing of crows or a plane passing overhead can, for example, drown out messages altogether.

(2) Environmental Stress: A high temperature and humidity, poor ventilation, vibrations felt, a strong glare - all can contribute to distortions in the sending and receiving of messages.

(3) Subjective Stress: Sleeplessness, ill health, the effects of drugs and mood variations give rise to forms of subjective stress that often lead to great difficulties in listening and interpretation.

(4) Ignorance of the Medium: The various media for communication are: oral, written, audio, visual and audiovisual. The use of a medium with which the communicators are not familiar would turn the medium itself into a barrier.

### **Psychological Barriers**

Each of us has a certain 'frame of reference', a kind of window through which we look out at the world, at people, and events and situations. A frame of reference is a system of standards and values, usually implicit, underlying and to some extent controlling an action, or the expression of any belief, attitude or idea. No two individuals possess exactly similar frames of reference, even if they are identical twins. To a large extent our experiences, particularly our childhood experiences, and the cultural environment we have grown up in influence our frames of reference.

### **Linguistics and Cultural Barriers**

A language is the expression of the thoughts and experiences of people in terms of their cultural environment. When the same language is made use of in a different culture, it takes on another colour, another meaning.

### **Mechanical Barriers**

Mechanical barriers are those raised by the channels employed for interpersonal, group or mass communication. Channels become barrier when the message is interfered with by some disturbance, which (1) increased the difficulty in reception or (2) prevented some elements of the message reaching its destination or both. The absence communication facilities too would be a mechanical barrier.

This type of barrier includes any disturbance, which interferes with the fidelity of the physical transmission of the message. A telephone that is in poor working order, making demands on the yelling ability of Sender and Receiver, is a mechanical barrier in interpersonal communication. So also is 'cross-talk' often heard over an 'intercom' link in an office, or during long-distance calls. In Group Communication, a rundown or 'whistling microphone, and wrong placement of loudspeakers are disturbances which are mechanical in nature. (the communicator who stands too close or too far from the mike is another matter). In mass communication, mechanical barriers would include such disturbances as static on the radio, smeared ink in a newspaper, a rolling screen on television, a barely readable point-size, or a film projector or video that does not function perfectly.

## Review questions

- ❖ Identify and discuss the basic elements of communication process?
- ❖ Describe how the whole process of communication gets disturbed if any of the elements is changed or tampered?

## Exercise

- ❖ Construct a diagrammatic model of the essential elements and processes involved in one of the following communication situations. The model's primary function should be to describe what elements are involved and what processes are operative in the specific situation chosen. It may be useful to define the situation chosen in more detail before constructing the model.

Communication situation:

- Sitting silently in a bus.
- Watching TV commercial
- Conversing with a very close friend.
- Delivering a lecture to a class.
- Persuading an angry crowd to disband.
- Reading a newspaper.
- Telephonic conversation with bank representative.
- Window Shopping.

## Suggested Readings

- ❖ Sarah Trenholm: *Thinking Through Communication*, Second Edition, Allyn and Bacon
- ❖ Julia T Wood: *Communication Mosaics*, Second Edition, Wadsworth
- ❖ DeFleur/ Kearney/ Plax: *Fundamentals of Human Communication*, Mayfield Publishing Company
- ❖ Keval J kumar: *Mass Communication in India*, Jaico Publishing House
- ❖ C S Rayudu: *Communication*, Himalaya Publishing House
- ❖ Matthukutty M Monipally: *Business Communication Strategies*,
- ❖ Barker/ Gaut: *Communication*,

