

## Lesson 8

### Communication Models

**Contents: Introduction- why do we need to study communication models? What are the basic models of communication, Aristotle's model and Laswell' model of communication.**

#### **Learning Objectives:**

- ❖ **To understand the flow of communication with help of different models.**
- ❖ **To understand the three basic concepts of Aristotle's model.**
- ❖ **To understand basic concepts of Lasswell's model.**

#### **Introduction:**

Technically communication is a process where a sender sends the message to a receiver through the various channels and with the same or the other channel sender gets the feedback from receiver. In our previous lessons we learned about the different types of communication, i.e., intrapersonal,

interpersonal, group and mass communication. Each type of communication includes few basic elements namely- sender, receiver, message, channel, feedback and barrier. To simplify and understand the process of communication different models are interpreted. A model is a representation of real world phenomenon in more abstract terms, which can be applied to different forms. Students of communication often use models to try to present a simplified version of communication, containing the essential 'ingredients' only. With a bit of luck, these models should help us to tease out the factors, which are common to all forms of communication. Communication theory models offer a convenient way to think about communication, providing a graphical checklist, which one can use to create anything from a speech to a major advertising campaign. Communication models are visualizations of communication process. They are basic theories concerning the elements of communication and how they operate and interact.

3 basic components that are part of all communication models:

SOURCE MESSAGE RECEIVER  
S -----> M -----> R (linear)

### **Aristotle's model of communication**

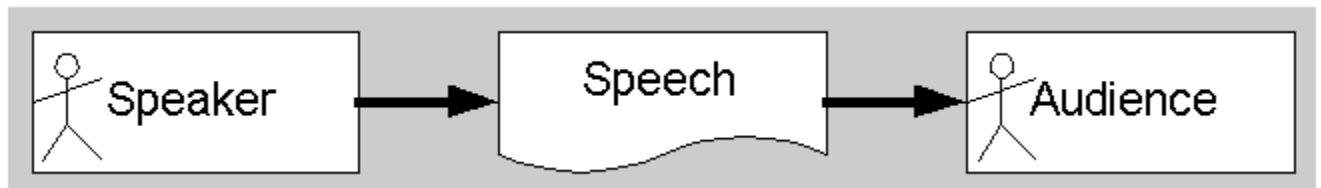
Formal communication theory (rhetorical theory) goes back 2500 years ago to Classical Greece when Plato, Aristotle, and the Sophists were speech teachers. Classical Rhetoric . Early Greek society (Plato, Aristotle) began the study of communication. The social context, the society's structure leads to a certain picture of communication. The study of communication in Greek society was called RHETORIC, and this was how Greek philosophers thought about communication. Most politics then were based on the oral tradition, you had to defend yourself before a court of law, and nothing was really written. Public speaking was the basis of society and effective public speaking was important. The word SOPHIST (or applied communicator) comes from these times. These were clever people who were very effective debaters (nowadays it means someone who can trick you in a debate, someone sophisticated).

The Greek tradition was continued and improved upon by the Romans, after which it remained static until the twentieth century. Indeed, Classical Rhetoric was and still is being taught today. However, as

a result of the proliferation of mass communications via radio, movies, and television, and of empirical scientific methods, communication theory changed in the latter part of the twentieth century.

The model proposed by Aristotle is a linear one. In his *Rhetoric*, Aristotle tells us that we must consider three elements in communication:

- ❖ The speaker
- ❖ The speech
- ❖ The audience



This is a model that focuses principally on public speaking; we will turn next to explore the Rhetorical Situation. This model will also provide a basis for judging how effectively a speaker responds to the requirements of a speaking situation. Aristotle's model has a Speaker, so the emphasis is on personal debate. Rhetoric or persuasive communication is based on the Greek model. Many models and theories of communication stem from this early one. If you just think for a moment about the variety of communication acts, you shouldn't have too much difficulty seeing those elements. In some cases, of course, Aristotle's vocabulary doesn't quite fit. In the example of you reading the newspaper, no one is actually 'speaking' as such, but if we use, say, the terms 'writer' and 'text', then Aristotle's elements can still be found.

*The Audience includes those who are listening to your speech.* Yet, not all audiences are the same. An astute speaker will carefully assess the nature of the audience at hand to determine the best ways to address the audience. In thinking about the audience who will be listening to your speech, consider some of the following audience demographics:

- age
- sex
- family affiliation
- sexual orientation
- cultural diversity
- racial background
- economic and social standing
- political identification
- religious or philosophical orientation

Depending on who makes up your audience, you will select and shape your topic. To be responsive to the unique audience gathered for your speech you will need to take into account how your audience is predisposed on an emotional and psychological level to respond to you or your topic.

It is also meaningful to consider the attitudes, beliefs and values of the audience that constitute the frame of reference members of the audience bring to the situation:

- An attitude is the predisposition to respond favorably or unfavorably toward a topic.
- A belief is a position or standard that audience members hold as valid or truthful.
- A value is a deeply seated attitude commonly rooted in core beliefs, usually about the intrinsic worth of something.

Aristotle speaks of a communication process composed of a speaker, a message and a listener. Note, he points out that the person at the end of the communication process holds the key to whether or not communication takes place. Our failure to recognize what Aristotle grasped thousands of years ago is a primary cause, if not the primary one, for communication failure. We fail to recognize the importance of the audience at the end of the communication chain. We tend to be more concerned about ourselves as the communications source, about our message, and even the channel we are going to use. Too often, the listener, viewer, reader fails to get any consideration at all. Aristotle's words underscore the long interest in communication. They also indicate that man has had a good grasp of what is involved in communication for a long while. So we might even wonder: If we know so much about the communication process, and if we've known it for so long, why do we still have communications problems? It's unlikely we will ever achieve perfect communication. The best we can hope for is to provide improved communication. Hopefully, we'll be more aware of the process and work harder to minimize problems with communications.



### Lasswell's model (1948)

Harold Lasswell a political scientist studied very carefully the American presidential Elections (1948). Based on his studies on the process of political campaigning and propogandas he introduced an important model, elements of which survive in more developed modern models.

- Who
- Says What
- In Which Channel
- To Whom
- To What Effect



As we see, Lasswell's communication model is similar to the other models we will discuss. The "Who" is the "Source;" "Says What", the message; and "To Whom", the destination. Communications have a source that communicates a message through a channel or medium to a destination (audience) that, hopefully, creates the desired effect. Claude Shannon's model is similar, but more graphical.

Main characteristics of the model are:

It is based on effect of the sender's message on receiver.

There is no feedback for the message.

It is very linear in nature (researchers say communication is always in circular motion because of feedback element)

It presents communication as more of persuasive process rather than an informative.

Lasswell's model sees communication as the transmission of messages: it raises the issue of 'effect' rather than meaning. 'Effect' implies an observable and measurable change in the receiver that is caused by identifiable elements in the process. Changing one of these elements will change the effect: we change the sender, we change the message, we change the channel: each one of these changes should produce the appropriate change in the effect.

Lasswell's was primarily concerned with mass communication. In every form of communication, though, there must be someone (or something) that communicates.

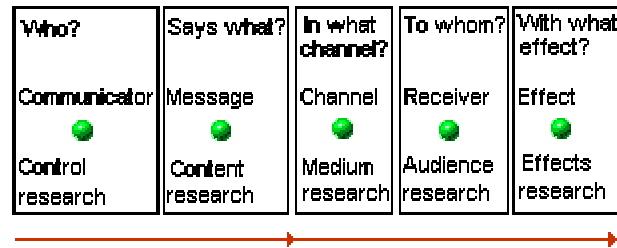
Being concerned with the mass media, Lasswell was particularly concerned with the messages present in the media. This relates to an area of study known as content research. Typically, content research is applied to questions of representation, for example: how are women represented in the tabloid press? or: how are blacks represented on television? Or: how is our society represented to us in the movies? Content research will often be a matter of counting the number of occurrences of a particular representation (for example, the housewife and mother who does not work outside the home) and comparing that with some kind of 'objective' measure, such as official statistics.

One of the earliest attempts to describe the communication process was Harold Lasswell's "Who says what to whom with what effect." (Given our definition of communication and the General Systems Theory, can you identify weakness in this model?). Lasswell was attempting to describe his observations about the process and effect of newspapers on readers. The newspaper reporter or editor is the "who," the story content is the "says what." The format and form of the newspaper item is the "in what way." The "to whom" is the reader and the "with what effect" refers to actions motivated in the reader from exposure to the newspaper item. Some people might say this model doesn't include any provision for feedback to determine the degree of understanding achieved in the process, an important component of our definition.

Think about this a minute. If someone were to stop you in the parking lot and ask you directions to the nearest restaurant, you might say, "Go down this street to the traffic light. Turn left for two blocks, then turn right." You have said something in a certain way to the person who asked you for directions. This is what Lasswell was describing. Then, he or she turns to leave. Can you determine the degree to which they understood your message?

You can, to some extent, as Lasswell suggested in the last component. If you observe the person beginning to follow your instructions, you might see him or her travel down the street to the traffic light. If he or she turns left, you can assume she or he understood your directions to some degree. If he or she turns right at the traffic light, you can assume he or she didn't understand or chose to ignore your direction. So by observation, you can detect some level of understanding and compliance.

The Lasswell Formula is typical of what are often referred to as transmission models of communication. For criticisms of such models, you should consult the section on criticisms of transmission models.



The sociologist, Harold Lasswell, tells us that in studying communication we should consider the elements in the graphic above.

Lasswell was primarily concerned with mass communication and propaganda, so his model is intended to direct us to the kinds of research we need to conduct to answer his questions ('control analysis', 'effects research' and so on). In fact, though, it is quite a useful model, whatever category of communication we are studying. Note, incidentally, that the Lasswell Formula consists of five major components, though this is by no means obligatory. You might be interested to look at the comments on Maletzke's model to see which components a selection of other researchers have considered essential.

### **Lasswell: Communicator**

Lasswell was primarily concerned with mass communication. In every form of communication, though, there must be someone (or something) that communicates.

How appropriate is the term *communicator*? You might say that you can't really talk about communication if the audience for the message don't respond appropriately. Maybe that's a reason that many communication specialists refer to the communicator as *source* or *transmitter* or *sender* of the message - at least that doesn't presuppose that communication does actually take place.

### Control analysis

Because of the application of Lasswell's Formula to the media, his question Who? has come to be associated mainly with *control analysis*:

- Who owns this newspaper?
- What are their aims?
- What are their political allegiances?
- Do they attempt to set the editorial policy?
- Does the fact that they are a republican account for the newspaper's repeated attacks on the Royal Family?
- Are they subject to any kind of legal constraints?
- How does the editor decide what to put in the paper?

and so on.

Can you see, though, how that sort of question can be applied to, say, interpersonal communication? You're asking a similar sort of question when, reflecting on a comment someone has just made.

### **Lasswell: The Message**

Being concerned with the mass media, Lasswell was particularly concerned with the messages present in the media. This relates to an area of study known as content research. Typically, content research is applied to questions of representation, for example: how are women represented in the tabloid press? or: how is lower caste represented on films? or: how is our society represented to us in the TV serials? Content research will often be a matter of counting the number of occurrences of a particular representation (for example, the housewife and mother who does not work outside the home) and comparing that with some kind of 'objective' measure, such as official statistics.

Interpersonal communication

What about our everyday communication, though? Do you spend much time thinking about how best to formulate your messages? In much of our everyday interpersonal communication with our friends, we probably are not all that conscious of thinking much about our messages. Still, you can probably think of certain messages you are communicating now to anyone passing by as you read through this.

Think about it for a minute -

- What clothes are you wearing?
- How is your hair done?
- Are you wearing specs?
- What about that deodorant?

The answers to those questions may not be the result of a lot of thought before you left home this morning, but they are the result of a variety of decisions about the image you want to project of yourself - the messages about you, your personality, your tastes in music etc.

No doubt also during the day, there'll be certain messages you will think about more carefully - that thank you letter you've got to send; that excuse you've got to find for not handing in your essay; that way of telling that person you wish they'd really leave you alone.

### **Lasswell: Channel**

The channel is what carries the message. If I speak to you my words are carried via the channel of airwaves, the radio news is carried by both airwaves and radio waves. I could tap out a message on the back of your head in Morse code, in which case the channel is touch. In simple terms, messages can be sent in channels corresponding to your five senses.

This use of the word 'channel' is similar to the use of the word medium when we talk about communication. The words are sometimes used interchangeably. However, strictly speaking, we often use the word medium to refer to a combination of different channels. Television for example uses both the auditory channel (sound) and visual channel (sight).

### *Media analysis*

The question of which channel or medium to use to carry the message is a vitally important one in all communication. Can you think of any examples of when you might have chosen the wrong channel to communicate with someone? An obvious example of the possible pitfalls would be trying to use the

telephone to communicate with a profoundly deaf person. For some time I taught a blind person how to use a computer. As you can probably imagine, it was incredibly difficult to use the auditory channel only.

The choice of medium for your practical work

You could, for example, produce very polished videotape for your practical work, but is it appropriate? Can you think why it might be the wrong medium? If you don't know how to distribute it to the intended audience, or if your audience can't afford to buy it, you could well have wasted your time. You might well have been better advised to produce a leaflet - less impressive perhaps, but cheaper and easier to distribute. Video is also a very linear medium - you start at the beginning and work your way through to the end - if you're communicating information which your audience already know a lot of, maybe they would have been better off with a booklet that they can skim through to find something they don't already know. Video isn't easily portable either - if your audience need to refer back to your information, then a booklet they can stuff in their pocket might be a better bet.

When you produce your practical work, you'll have to investigate the possible media available for the message you want to communicate, asking questions like:

- What are the conventions of this medium?
- Is this medium appropriate to my audience?
- Does it appeal to them?
- How will they get hold of it?
- Can they afford it?
- Is this medium appropriate to my message?
- Can it explain what I want it to explain?
- Do I need to show this in pictures or words?

and so on.

These are all questions of 'media analysis'. Advertising agencies employ Media Buyers who decide what is the most suitable medium, or combination of media (newspapers, billboards, flyers, TV ads etc.) for the type of message they want to communicate. They will also have decided on a particular target audience they want to communicate it to and so, using, say the TGI, the NRS etc., will decide what is the most appropriate magazine, newspaper to reach that audience.

A classic example of using the wrong channel is that of research conducted by an American newspaper on the eve of the Presidential elections in the 1940's. The message was simple: Who will you vote for? The audience was easy to define: a random sample of voters. The newspaper duly conducted a telephone poll of voters chosen at random from the phone book and announced that the Republicans would win. In fact the Democrats won with a massive victory. The reason they got it wrong was quite simple: at that time only the wealthier members of society would have telephones and the wealthier members of society would vote Republican.

You should also give some thought to the notion of channel capacity, which is quite clearly defined in information theory, but less clear in everyday communication. Certainly, though, it's clear that there are limits to the information which can be carried in a single channel - hence the need to think about channel redundancy as a means of carrying more of the message of your practical work.

### **Lasswell: The Receiver**

Many Communication scholars use the rather technological-sounding terms: *sender*, *source* or *transmitter* to refer to the Communicator. You'll also come across the technological *receiver* to refer to



what we might ordinarily call audience or readership. This whole question of audience is vitally important to successful communication.

#### Audience research

Professional broadcasters use the ratings figures and other data from TRP and advertisers in the print media use information from IRS & NRS and a range of other sources to find out as much as they possibly can about their audiences.

#### Audience research and your practical work

When you come to do your practical work, you'll probably need to demonstrate that you have found out as much as you reasonably can about your audience, using the appropriate techniques. Because it's so important, we have a unit devoted entirely to Researching Your Audience.

#### Interpersonal communication

It's not only the mass media, though, where knowledge of our audience is vitally important. The same applies in everyday life in our contact with other people. In many cases, we don't have to know a lot about the person we're dealing with because we each act out the appropriate role. I don't have to know anything about the shop assistant who sells me a packet of fags - I ask for the fags, he gives me them, I give him the money, he gives me the change, we smile briefly, say 'Cheerio' and that's it. I don't need to know anything about him.

But there are numerous occasions when we do need to know more, or we make unjustified assumptions about what our audiences are like. Can you think of any examples from your everyday life where communication has broken down because you didn't know enough about your audience or because you made the wrong guess as to what they were like? What about the teacher who waffles on incomprehensibly because she makes the assumption that you know nearly as much about the subject as she does? Or that you actually remember what she told you last lesson? Or that you're actually interested in the subject?

### **Lasswell: Effects**

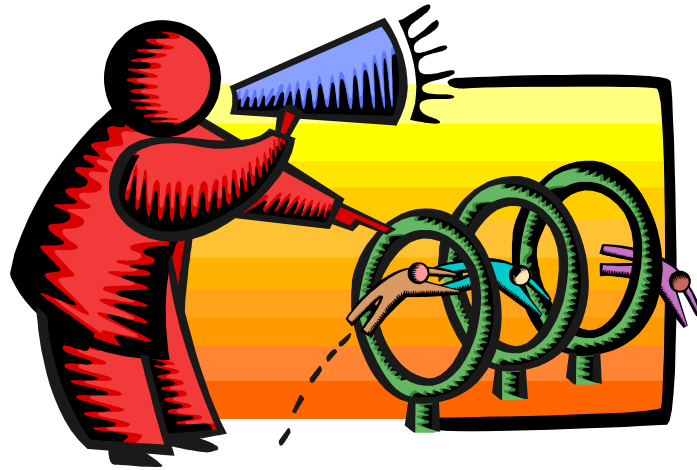
Lasswell's model also introduces us to the question of media effects. We don't communicate in a vacuum. We normally communicate because we want to achieve something. Even if we just pass someone in the corridor and say 'hello' without really thinking about it, we want to have the effect of reassuring them that we're still friends, we are nice people, and so on.

#### Practical work

Lasswell was concerned not with interpersonal communication, but with the effects of the mass media. The question of whether the media have any effect or not and, if so, how they affect their audiences, is not just a large chunk of most communication and media courses, it's also a question you have to answer about your practical work and, of course, it's a constantly topical issue in society.

#### Feedback

To find out what kind of effect our communication has, we need some kind of feedback. If I speak to you, I listen to your responses and watch for signs of interest, boredom etc. In other words, I use feedback from you to gauge the effect of my communication. If you give me *positive* feedback by showing interest, I'll continue in the same vein; if you give me *negative* feedback by showing boredom, I'll change the subject, or change my style, or stop speaking. When broadcasters transmit a programme, they use the services of research units to gain feedback in the form of ratings. Advertising agencies use a variety of services to find out whether their campaign has worked. These are all forms of feedback.



**The principle criticism** of the model is that it only describes one-way communication. The linear model is limited to explaining how messages are sent to a destination. While that may let us see how the speaker gets through to the listener, it does not account for the way that the listeners may affect the speaker. It thus does not deal in a realistic way with how communication is a two-way process of give and take between a speaker and an audience of listeners.

### Review Questions:

- ❖ Explain how do the models of communication help us in understanding the process of communication?
- ❖ What are salient features of Aristotle's model? Explain the drawbacks of the model.
- ❖ What is Laswell's model of communication?

### Suggested Readings

- ❖ Keval J kumar: *Mass Communication in India*, Jaico Publishing House
- ❖ Raymond Zeuschner: *Communicating Today*, Allyn and Bacon
- ❖ Barker/ Gaut: *Communication*, Allyn and Bacon

