

An Introduction to Communication Skills

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Abstract

Today communication skills play vital role in personal or professional life. Proficiency in communication skills is must for the students who are studying engineering course or any other degree course because they are very essential as they play crucial role in securing jobs, sustaining in jobs, getting promotions. Today most of the top multinational companies hire candidates with effective communication skills. Some companies hire candidates for only communication purpose. The changes the companies brought in on-campus or off-campus drive tests tell us the truth. The recruitment teams mostly concentrate on oral and written communication skills of the candidates. Communication skills are much needed for the employees also as they are very helpful in sustaining in the present jobs and in getting promoted to higher positions. There is no exaggeration in saying that the success of an employee depends not only on the skills and techniques related to their respective field but also on the excellence in communication skills. The authors of this paper illustrate the kinds of communication skills, barriers to communication and tips to overcome them and focus on explaining the

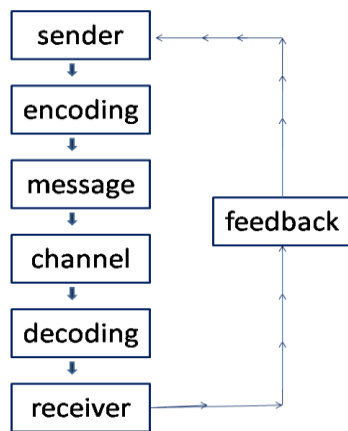
intricacies of communication skills as to improve them.

Keywords: communication, types of communication, non-verbal, oral, written communication, barriers, tips.

I. Introduction

Human beings are different from other species of life on this planet in many ways. The faculty of speaking is one of the major aspects that distinguishes man from other beings. Unlike other animals, man, to speak or communicate his feelings or thoughts, uses signs, symbols, sounds, letters and words. The use of all or any of these signs, symbols, sounds, letters and words to transform the information from one person to another person is called communication. Communication is 'the activity or process of expressing ideas and feelings or of giving people information.' (OALD) Communication is a process which is mainly done with the involvement of certain factors such as 1. Sender 2. Encoding 3. Text 4. Communication channel 5. Decoding 6. Receiver and 7. Feedback.

Communication Process



Sender: Sender, who is also called communicator, initiates the process of communication. He starts the process of communication with an intention of passing information to receiver.

Encoding: Encoding is a process of giving shape to the intended information; the sender tries to give a shape or form to the intended information in the form of words, signs, images, voice mails, audios or videos. This shaped or formed information is called message. This shape or form to the intended information is usually given according to the receiver's level of understanding it and his receiving abilities. In case of nonverbal information, the intended information is conveyed through body language: postures, gestures, face expressions, hand movements, head movements etc.

Message: Message can be a text or topic or an information or idea. It is a verbal or nonverbal one which is intended to send to or leave for a recipient. It is the content of the communication. Message is sent to a particular receiver by a sender.

Channel: Channel is a medium or system through which the information (message) is passed from a sender to a receiver. In human communication, the channel can be (word of mouth) a telephone, conference, mobile, email, twitter, whatsapp, website, blog, journal, magazine, newspaper, letters, report, memo, fax painting etc. The type of situation, context, time, place, facilities and/or receiver will decide the kind of channel.

Decoding: Decoding is an act of interpreting the received message. The receiver decodes or interprets the received message. The receiver tries to reconstruct the message by giving meanings to the words, signs, images, voice mails, audios or videos in it and he interprets the message as a whole. Sometimes the receiver's interpretation of the received message may mismatch with the sender's intention (message). This is called miscommunication. The whole communication fails if the receiver misunderstands the sent message.

Receiver: Receiver is the recipient of the message and the receiver can be a listener, reader, audience, decoder or observer. The receiver interprets the sent message by decoding it. The success of decoding depends on the receiver's ability of understanding things. It is not sure that the receiver can understand the received message as the sender intended.

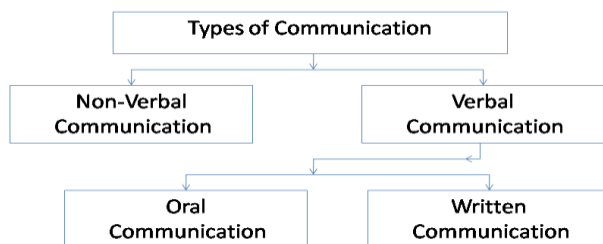
Feedback: Feedback plays a very key role in the process of communication and through feedback one comes to know that the message is reached in an expected manner

or not. It can be an assurance that the receiver receives the message as intended by the sender.

Context: Though context is not a major factor in the process of communication, it plays a vital role in a successful communication. Proper context, place and time are very important for the fulfillment of the process of communication. These factors help the sender in encoding the information into a message and in choosing the channel for communicating the message.

II. Types of Communication

Primarily human communication is classified into two types: 1. Non-verbal communication and 2. Verbal communication. This verbal communication further divided into two kinds such as oral communication and written communication. If verbal communication makes your message understood, nonverbal communication makes your attitude understood.



III. Non-verbal Communication

Non-verbal communication is also known as non-vocal language which is done through wordless clues. In non-verbal communication, the sender sends his message without using words or speech. The

wordless cues which help send a message in nonverbal communication, are many. Vocal cues, postures, gestures, facial expressions, space, touch, attire etc. are used to transmit information in non-verbal communication.

Vocal cues are known as paralinguistics and paralanguage, the elements of paralanguage including voice quality, rate, pitch, volume, and speaking style, as well as prosodic features such as rhythm, tone, intonation, stress, silence etc.

Postures include slouching, towering, legs spread, jaw thrust, shoulders forward, and arm crossing. The bodily stance of an individual communicates a variety of messages- be it good or bad. Postures of an individual convey his attention and involvement in a conversation. They reveal an individual's attitude towards the other participant in communication.

Gestures are the most effective aspects of non-verbal communication. Examples for communicative gestures are waving, saluting, handshakes, pointing, using figures, thumb up, thumb down etc. Gestures are not universal: one gesture stands for one meaning in one culture but the same gesture conveys the opposite or different meaning in another culture.

Facial expressions are common forms of non-verbal communication which communicate a lot of information. Facial expressions include smiling, frowning, crying, grimacing, eye rolling, making eye contact, half-shut eyes, rising eye brows, scowling, wavering lips, pouting lips etc.



They convey various meanings, emotions, feelings etc. 'Face is the index of mind': facial expressions betray what is really running in your mind but your words may not.

Eye contact is a very crucial feature in nonverbal communication. In transmitting information from one person to another person, eye contact play important role. Proper eye contact indicates your interest in conversation. Avoiding eye contact is considered as rude or inattentive. Eye is the most powerful among the body parts in terms of conveying messages. Through eye one can express as many as possible feelings and emotions.

Space is a variant of privacy. Space can also act as a form of non-verbal communication. Here space means freedom or time to think or do what you want to. In communication space means how much distance you want to maintain with people both mentally and physically while you are interacting or communicating with them. The acceptance of the amount of interference of others into your personal or professional issues can be called personal space. This personal space is something that varies from one culture to another culture.

Touch, a form of non-verbal communication, is old as human race. But it is not accepted in all contexts and cultures alike. Touch as a form of communication is used more in informal context.

Attire or clothes that a person wear give an impression at the first place- be it fair or

bad. First impression is the best impression that you can give through your dressing. Along with attire, artifacts also play an important role in giving an impression on your personality. Artifacts include hairstyles, mustache style, whisker style, jewelry, cosmetics, watches, shoes, tattoos and body piercing etc.

Silence is an integral part of speech but considered as an aspect of non-verbal communication. Sometimes silence is understood as half consent. Sometimes silence indicates lack of information or negation of information.

IV. Verbal Communication

Sharing or transmitting information through words and/or signs is called verbal communication. Communication is one of the best and mostly used modes of exchanging information. In day-to-day communication, in formal or informal context, people exchange information orally and/or in written form using signs, signals and words. So, verbal communication can be divided into two types: oral and written communication.

V. Oral Communication

Speech is the best and most convenient and the surest communicative mode. Though oral and written communications are forms of verbal communication; they have their own advantages and disadvantages. Most of the human conversation is done through the use of speech. In personal life, we pass



information from one person to another person using word of mouth.

Apart from face-to-face conversations, we use lecture, announcement, presentation, meeting, discussion, telephone, video, radio, television, voice over, internet as the channels of oral communication. The advantage of oral communication is that it is influenced by pitch, volume, speed and clarity of speech.

Advantages of Oral Communication

Though oral communication is more personal than formal, it has its own advantages. It gets immediate feedback. In case of face-to-face communication, with the help of the postures, gestures and facial expressions, both the sender and the receiver can understand the real intentions of each other. We easily come to know that the other person is trustworthy or not because of these aspects.

Oral communication plays a vital role in building a team and keeping the team spirit among the team members. It is more preferable than written communication in case of problem, conflict, dispute resolution. It saves time since you can get feedback quickly. In oral communication, you get quick responses from others and problems get resolved faster than through written communication. Either in personal or professional life, oral communication is the best preferable one in the matters of private and confidential information.

If it is a telephonic conversation, tone of voice gives us clues to understand the other person.

Disadvantages of Oral Communication

There are some disadvantages of oral communication. Oral communication is not a reliable one; it cannot be produced as a witness or kept as a record. The presence of the other person may make you feel inconvenience. Negative emotions like fear or anxiety or anger rise within you while speaking to others; they obstruct or spoil the conversation. There are chances of rising a problem or conflict or dispute during oral communication because of misunderstanding or miscommunication. Oral communication is less effective while dealing with a large number of people than written communication.

VI. Written Communication

In informal situations and contexts, we generally communicate with others orally, whereas in formal or official situations and contexts, we prefer both forms of verbal communication but mostly written communication. Written communication is done through written words; not through word of mouth. Written communication is given importance in the administrative, business and other working sectors since it is the most effective and the most reliable communication option.

Some of various forms of written communication that are used internally for business operations include letters, notices,



circulars, memos, reports, office orders, bulletins, job descriptions, employee manuals, prospects, proposals, brochures, news releases, advertisements, emails, instant messages, faxes, internet, websites, etc.

Advantages of Written Communication

Written communication helps in laying down apparent principles, policies and rules for running an organization. It avoids personal contact so that the people who involve in it can avoid the sudden rise of a conflict or problem. Information can be passed through written communication. Message can be sent through letter or any electronic mode such as email, fax etc. Written communication is more precise and explicit. It presents accurate information. Delegation of authority is done through written communication. If it is written communication, it is easy to verify it. It is very useful and convenient when you want to send information to a large number of people. Written communication provides ready records and references. It provides authentic proof in case of a dispute. Legal defenses can depend upon written communication as it provides valid records. It saves money. Effective written communication develops and enhances an organization's image.

Disadvantages of Written Communication

Written communication is a time-consuming process as it takes time to get feedback and response from the receiver. It takes time to

get to the intended recipient in case of sending message through letters. One cannot expect secrecy if a message is send through written form. If the sender and receiver are sitting next to each other, you still have to spend money on paper or internet service. Written communication is time-consuming as the feedback is not immediate. The encoding and sending of message takes time. Effective written communication requires great skills and competencies in language and vocabulary use. Poor writing skills and quality will leave a negative impact on organization's reputation.

VII. Barriers to Communication

Barrier is 'something that exists between one thing or person and another and keeps them separate.' (OALD) Anything that hampers the process of communication can be called a barrier to communication. In communication process, the barrier may be physical, environmental, semantic, organizational, cross-cultural, technological, psychological, sociological or non-verbal which creates some obstruction in the flow of information from a sender to a receiver. Sometimes this barrier causes for total failure of the communication process. Because of this communication barrier, the listener or receiver may not receive the message as the sender intended. These barriers cause for the partial or complete failure in communication.

Communication failure is a very common experience in both professional and private life. It is an everyday occurring in everyone's life. When a receiver fails to

understand or interpret the message as intended by a sender it is called communication failure. Communication failure is a result of a communication barrier. Communication barriers are of various types.

Physical or environmental barriers play prominent role in obstructing the process of communication and these are further categorized as listed below.

Noise: Among the physical or environmental communication barriers, noise occupies top position. Noise produced by people, animals or vehicles around or by any other means affects the process of communication. It may obstruct the process of communication partially or completely.

Physiological defects: Stammering, hearing defects, mumbling etc. are considered physiological defects. In case of oral communication, these defects cause for disruption in communication.

Time and distance: Here time means time as it is generally understood or date/day. If communication takes place between two parties belonging to various nations, time and date difference will take place. This difference in time and date will confuse the communicators. Distance, let it be short or long, between communicators will affect the communication.

Defects in communication system: Malfunctioning of communication mechanism causes for inconvenience in transmission of information. If the machines

which are used as communication channels, fail in functioning properly, the total communication will be a failure. Wrong selection of channel or medium also affects the process of communication.

Psycho-sociological Barriers: These are also known as individual or attitudinal barriers. Sometimes the improper attitude of either speaker or listener or both of them becomes a barrier to communication. Culture, customs, religious beliefs, lack of empathy, ego, natural jealousy, prejudice, weakness, overconfidence, quality of credibility, social status, economic, educational, organizational position, relationship etc. are responsible factors to form one's attitude. These factors are considered as psycho-sociological barriers. These aspects are also treated as inter-personal barriers.

Emotional Imbalance: If both the speaker and receiver or any one of them is not in position to control their negative emotions, the communication fails. The prime reason for rising emotion is that when the other (may be the speaker or listener) receives something that is different from their expectation or when the topic deviates from their line of thinking. For example, an employee approaches his officer with an intention of getting two days leave hoping his officer will grant the leave. But the officer declines his request for leave stating some reasons unexpected by the employee. The employee leaves his officer muttering something. This disappointment causes for rising negative emotions. The inability of



controlling one's own negative emotions becomes an obstruction to communication.

Expectations of the Receiver: One of the biggest drawbacks with human listening is that the listeners usually come to listen to somebody with expecting or assuming something or with preoccupied mind. When the receiver comes with assumptions to listen to the speaker, he frequently listens to what expects to listen to rather than what the speaker actually says. This process leads the receiver to jump into false conclusions of the communication. It takes some time for the listener or receiver to realize that the speaker or sender is saying something different from his expectation.

Inadequate Listening Skills: Poor listening is a resultant of the factors that distract the listener from listening to the speaker can be divided into broadly into two types: external and internal factors. Physical or environmental barriers, semantic barriers, organizational barriers, cross-cultural barriers, technological barriers can be considered to be external factors. The other factors that obstruct you from listening to the speaker are when one or both of the speaker and the listener maintain poor eye contact; when the speaker's voice is too fast or too slow. These are another type of external barriers which can cause for your poor listening. The contexts or moods that obstruct you from listening to the speaker are when you get angry; when you shout; when you grieve over something; when you are overjoyed to listen to it. Sometimes you stop listening when you start evaluating the

situation; when you let your mind wander thinking about your knowledge belonging to the speech or something else; when you don't want to listen because you are tired or disinterested; when you are not prepared for the conversation; when you get bored; when the speaker uses incomprehensible vocabulary or unknown subject; when the topic purely unnecessary to you. These are considered as internal factors which can cause for your poor listening. The unpreparedness of the receiver for the conversation is also a barrier to communication.

Lack of feedback: Without feedback no conversation or communication is complete. Feedback is something sent by a receiver to a sender in a conversation. Feedback in a spoken or written communication tells how the receiver perceived or understood the sent message by the sender. After receiving feedback from the receiver, the sender comes to know whether his message is understood as he intended or not. So, lack of feedback is sign of incompleteness of communication. In this way, you can understand that lack of feedback is a barrier to communication.

Muddled Message: Muddled messages are information spoken or written by putting 'things in the wrong order or mix them up.' Misplace of words or phrases in a sentence confuses the listener. The receiver who receives the muddle message will definitely understand it differently from the actual intention of the sender. In this case the



wrong lies with the sender; not with the receiver.

Overloaded Information: When intentionally or unintentionally the speaker delivers heavy information at a stretch or speaks or sends many texts at a time, the message is called overloaded message. This overloaded communication confuses the receiver. The process of communication will be a failure if the receiver receives the overloaded message.

Misinterpretation of facts: The responsible factors for misinterpretation of facts are many: one among them is the receiver's preoccupied mindedness. Receiver's expectations, previous knowledge, prejudices, lack of knowledge of the subject of the communication etc. provoke him to misinterpret the message.

Misapprehensions by the Receiver: For the most of time and for most of the things, a little section of human beings is generally under the misapprehensions. This misapprehension is the result of the listener's arrogance; lack of exposure to things, issues and situations; pessimism; his false thinking that they know all. Of course, in a few cases, most of us are under misapprehension. This misapprehension causes for the incompleteness of the communication.

Ill-mannered language: Usage of rude or boorish vocabulary or phrases in conversation gets the listener embarrassed and sometimes, the receiver may withdraw from the conversation. Sometimes speaker

may not use such vocabulary or expressions with an intention to offend the receiver but such usage of vocabulary in the listener's culture may be a taboo.

Semantic Barriers: Semantics deals with the meanings of words or sentences. The semantic problems may rise like this: more than one word of same pronunciation but with different spelling and meanings (homophones); word with same spelling but with different pronunciation and meaning (homographs); wrong assumptions and wrong interpretation of words because of their multiple meanings; variation in dialect/accents and technical language/jargon are some of the semantic barriers which act as obstacles to communication.

Organizational Barriers: In case of business communication, interference from relative status and power of participants, incompatible needs and expectations, organizational culture, organizational rules and regulations, status relationship and lack of cooperation between senior and subordinate turn to be organizational barriers which are deemed as barriers to communication in an organization.

Cross-cultural Barriers: Whether in personal life or in professional, you may come into contact with other people belonging to different religion, language or region whose customs, traditions beliefs, sentiments, values and norms, race, colour etc. are different from yours. These factors cause for disturbance in communication process. These are called cross-cultural barriers. Non-verbal communication is one of the



most difficult aspects in cross-cultural barriers because the same non-verbal clue which is used for conveying a meaning or message gives different meaning or opposite meaning in different cultures.

Technological Barriers: When one of or both of the speaker and the listener are lack of knowledge of technology and they do not know how to use technology for communication purpose, the process of communication fails. If one or none of the speaker and listener does not have proper knowledge of using technology, the transmission of information cannot be complete.

VIII. How to Overcome Communication Barriers

You have learnt what a communication barrier is and how effectively it hinders the transmission of information. The occurrence of communication barrier is a natural phenomenon in human life. So, you cannot prevent them but you can avoid them and minimize them. You need to handle them efficiently for being an effective communicator. Unless you overcome the barriers, your conversation will be a failure. Overcoming communication barriers is a must for a successful conversationalist. If you want to be an effective communicator, you need to minimize the communication barriers.

In a conversation, there won't be a permanent sender or receiver; the sender will become the receiver as well as the receiver will become the sender over the

course of conversation. This means in the continuation of communication, one participant takes the role of a sender and a receiver. As to avoid or overcome the communication barriers, you need to understand the barriers created by both parties of the conversation. As you learnt it earlier that communication barriers are the unintentional occurrences. If you are careful about avoiding communication barriers in your conversation, it is not very difficult job. The following are important and useful strategies to overcome communication barriers. By understanding the strategies listed below, you are going to learn how to overcome communication barriers in personal life and professional life.

The first and foremost step in overcoming the barriers to communication is to recognise where, when and how the barriers occur. An experienced communicator can expect them ahead of the actual commencement of the communication. If you can expect the barriers prior to your conversation or communication, you can take precautionary steps to overcome them.

Start your conversation with a positive mood and intention. You are going to say or inform or present something to the receiver positively and assume that the receiver also gets ready to listen to you with the same sort of mood. Transmission of information, either in private or professional life, should not be done as duty. Communication is a skill and an art. So, it must be done with considerate passion and enthusiasm.



Noise is a natural barrier to oral communication so minimize the density of noise for the possible extent. Maintaining proper and suitable postures and gestures is very important for an effective speaker.

Having good relationships: Having healthy relations with the other participant(s) in a conversation is the very first thing in becoming a skilled communicator. A fair smile on your face, a nice handshake, a warm greeting etc. help you form good relations with the other party in a communication.

Avoid all your emotions that become hinder to your conversation. Your emotions are shown through your facial expressions and gestures. Like voice modulation, your body language also gives clues to the receiver to understand your real intentions. If they appear contrary to your words, the listener will suspect you and your words. In case of negative emotions like anger, fear etc. you should not show your emotions while communication as the receiver might misinterpret the message. Mood of sender also shows some impact on the receiver's attitude while receiving the message. While you are the receiver, you need to control all the unnecessary bad emotions and moods otherwise the sender misunderstands or doubts you.

Come with an open mind: Empty your mind if it is full of expectations, assumptions or prejudices, when you are going to participate in a conversation or communicate with somebody. Here, both the speaker and listener must be with free mind

without any preoccupied mind or full of assumption. The best you want to be a speaker or listener, the best you should keep yourself ego free; emotional free; prejudice free.

Remember, communication is a reciprocal process. The success of oral communication depends on not only the speaker but also the attention of the listener. Without the receiver's consent, you cannot convey any message to him. Listening has the same significance as speaking in conversation therefore receiver has equal position as speaker in conversation. So, give importance to listening. You must be an attentive and careful listener. You should not hear but listen.

Get proper feedback: As a sender, you should not think that your duty is over if you have sent the message to the receiver. You need get proper feedback from the receiver to confirm that the sent message has been reached the receiver as you intended. You should not neglect taking feedback thinking that the receiver can understand the message. You have to confirm that the message has been reached as you intended only after receiving the feedback from the receiver. Learn to give feedback when you are the receiver.

Clarity in message: Your message must be clear; it should not be mixed up with other things. Your message must have a purpose. It must be well focused and constructed one. Use simple sentences, and simple vocabulary. Convey the point straight away to receiver. Don't use any indirect ways to



suggest your message. Avoid unnecessary issues, suppositions and explanations and emphasize the point what you want to convey.

Minimize the semantic problems: For the possible extent, avoid the vocabulary which convey different meaning and which can mislead the receiver. Avoid ambiguous sentences, expressions, phrases in your communication.

Choice of vocabulary and sentences: Be careful in the selection of vocabulary and sentence structures that should be done keeping in your mind the receiver's ability of understanding them. This choice of vocabulary and sentence patterns will show much influence on your conversation. Simplify your message and keep it tidy and brief.

Avoid Jargon Usage: Either in oral or written communication, avoid excessive use of technical terms in your conversation; replace the jargon with common terminology for the possible extent. Unless you feel it is a must to use a particular technical term, avoid the use of the term.

If it is written communication, use grammatically correct sentences; proper vocabulary and punctuations. Don't overload your message with extra or unnecessary information.

If you are an employee in an organisation or business, you need to know the methods of communication; channels of communication and communication systems, links or

technology in that organisation. In the business world trustworthiness plays quite important role. So create a climate of trust and confidence in your organisation so that people who work there can receive the message without any reservations. Creating reliability in relationships is an essential factor for the smooth transmission of information in an organisation. See to have integrity and honesty in your communications with the people in the house as well as the people from outside the organisation. Create co-ordination among the superior and subordinate employees in the organisation. Understand the organizational system, rules, norms, policies etc. at the working place. Seeking suggestions and advices from others before sending information to a receiver is a welcome move on your part. Before sending messages to the receiver, it is always suggestible to know which channel of communication is convenient to the receiver. It is necessary to know when and how the message should be sent: time, mode or nature and context play vital role in making a communication successful. If the receiver is not in a position to receive the message, the communication fails.

Selection of proper communication channels: Before communicating, you need to check what sort of channel should be used. Availability of channels, awareness of using the channels etc. involve in this process.

To overcome the barriers of the non-verbal communication, take care of using your

postures and gestures. It will be very helpful to you if you know the meanings of the postures and gestures in the culture of the receiver when he belongs to other than your own culture. Maintain proper and accurate tone and intonation in your voice. Modulation in your voice while speaking gives clues to the receiver. It tells your attitude towards your task and to the listener. Particularly in oral communication the message information must be easier to listen to and to understand.

IX. Conclusion

Researchers say that communication skills play vital in every walk of our life nowadays and people with good communication skills are successful in personal and professional life. Thus, students of today need good communication skills as they have to sell themselves in the corporate market by presenting their skills. At the time of recruitment they have to present themselves effectively. In the matter of getting through the recruitment process successfully, having effective communication skills is as important as having sound knowledge of their field. Today communication skills are considered as one of the four top important skills required for an effective employee. Furthermore, effective communication skills are a must for the managers, team leaders even for team members. So, it is high time for the young graduates and technocrats to realize the importance of communication skills and to start improving their communication skills. This paper is

extremely useful and helpful for them in improving their communication skills.

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