

COMMUNICATION: AN ART OR A SCIENCE

The controversy with regard to the nature of Communication as to whether it is an art or a science has created a great deal of confusion. The classification of exact nature of Communication as science or an art, or both, is necessary to specify the process of learning of Communication as the learning process in a science differs from that of an art.

I. Communication as an Art

An art is the application of knowledge in skilful and creative way to accomplish the set objectives. The following are the essential features of an art:

1. Personal Skill
2. Practical Knowledge
3. Result-oriented Approach
4. Regular Practice
5. Creativity

Let us apply these features of art to Communication to determine if it qualifies as an art or not.

- 1) **Personal Skill:** Communication can be called an art as one has to use one's personal skill and knowledge in solving many complicated problems to achieve enterprise objectives. Like most arts, Communication is personal in nature in the sense that every manager/person has his own method of communicating. That is why; there arises a difference in the performance of different persons at the same level in spite of the fact that they possess equal technical qualifications.
- 2) **Practical Knowledge:** Communication does not merely mean the knowledge of principles of communication, but it includes the application of this knowledge which makes it effective. A person cannot be called a good communicator even if he has learnt the principles of communication unless he can apply these principles practically while communicating with others.
- 3) **Result-oriented Approach:** Communication is concerned with accomplishment of objective and hence has result-oriented approach. Communication is to ensure that whatever message the sender wants to convey is received by the receiver in the same sense as the sender intends and sender receives the feedback from the receiver.
- 4) **Regular Practice:** Like an art, a communicator tries to achieve higher objectives to reach the state of absolute perfection. This efficiency and effectiveness can be attained through regular practice. One cannot be a good communicator unless he regularly practises the art of communication.
- 5) **Creativity:** Communication is a creative art which is concerned with getting desired results by getting feedback from others to achieve the organisational objectives.

Hence, we can say that Communication is an art.

II. Communication as a Science

A science is a systematised body of knowledge acquired by mankind through observation and experimentation which is capable of verification. The basic difference between art and science is that art implies knowing how to apply whereas science is concerned with knowing why to apply. The following are the essential features of a science:

1. Systematised body of Knowledge
2. Continued Observation

3. Universal Application
4. Cause and Effect Relationship
5. Validity and Predictability.

Let us apply these features of science to Communication to determine if it qualifies as a science.

- 1) **Systematised body of Knowledge:** Communication can be called a science as it is a body of useful and universally applicable principles which can guide the managers to create an understanding among different minds/people with widespread use of advanced information technology. It is growing as a systematic body of knowledge with its own theories, principles and concepts.
- 2) **Continued Observation:** The knowledge of Communication has been acquired through continuous efforts of many theorists. The knowledge so acquired has been systematically composed over a period of time.
- 3) **Universality in Application:** The principles of Communication, like science, represent basic truths and can be applied in all situations at all times i.e., they are universally applicable.
- 4) **Cause and Effect Relationship:** The principles of communication, like science, establish cause and effect relationship. For example, incomplete messages can lead to misunderstanding or miscommunication, and misunderstanding can result from incomplete message.
- 5) **Validity and Predictability:** The principles of Communication put to several tests and, like science, have been found to be valid. These principles help us to predict the results, though not accurately.

Hence, we can say that Communication is a science.

Conclusion: The above discussion shows that Communication is an art because it involves personal skill in handling a particular situation and is result-oriented and needs regular practice. Communication can be called a science as well because it provides a body of universally applicable principles which create an understanding in the minds of the people with the use of advanced information technology.

QUALITIES OF GOOD COMMUNICATION SYSTEM

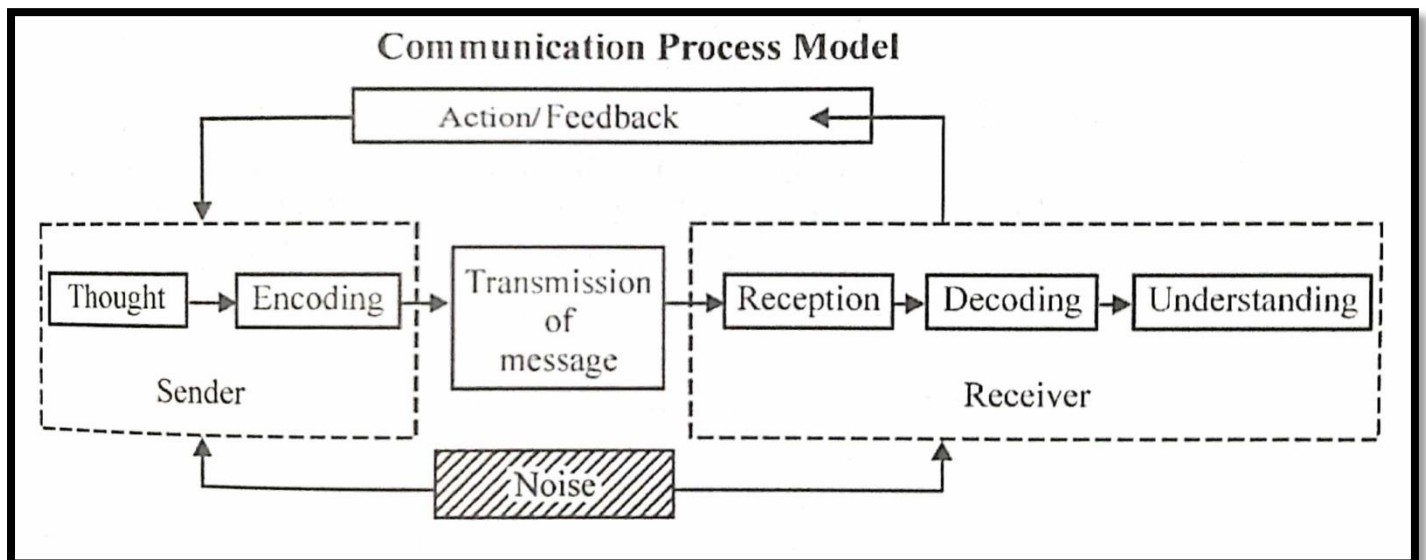
An ideal system of communication should have the following qualities:

- 1) **Speed:** The Communication system should be capable of carrying message speedily.
- 2) **Accuracy:** Communication system should be capable of conveying the messages accurately. Figures are likely to be misheard over telephone.
- 3) **Secrecy:** If desired, the message should not leak out. Certain modes of communication like television or public address system cannot keep the message secret.
- 4) **Record:** In certain matters authentic record of the communication has to be kept which may be needed as legal evidence in case of dispute later. An ideal system should be capable of keeping record of the communication. There can be no record of verbal communication.
- 5) **Cost:** The system should not be costly to install or operate. Anyhow, cost is measured in terms of benefits derived from the system.
- 6) **Convenience:** The system of communication should be convenient to use. If a system cannot be easily used it will lose its utility.

7) **Suitability:** Suitability of communication system will depend on the nature, size and dispersal of the organisation. In the case of a small office even the method of face-to-face talk will be sufficient, but internal telephone system is a must if different departments or sections of an organisation are located on different floors of a multi-storeyed building.

8) **Impression:** The mode of communication should not be clumsy; it must leave good impression on others.

COMMUNICATION PROCESS MODEL



PROCESS OF COMMUNICATION

The communication is the process by which two or more people exchange information and share meaning. By analysing the communication process, one discovers that it is a chain made of identifiable links. Link in this process includes: Sender message, encoding, decoding, receiver and feedback.

- 1) **Sender:** The process of communication involves two parties i.e., the sender and the receiver. Sender may be individual or group of individuals or any organisation, who desires to share information for a predetermined purpose or for an expected action or response. The process starts at the moment when an idea or feeling or information strikes the mind of the sender. The sender being the promoter of the process is required to have clear vision of his expectations of the communication process and the receiver.
- 2) **Encoding:** Encoding means to transform the idea into words, symbols, pictures, diagrams, gestures etc. The purpose of encoding is to translate internal thought patterns into a language or code that the intending receiver of the message will probably understand. Encoding requires common media which both the sender and the receiver can understand. Because there is a need for the receiver to interpret the information in a sense which the sender transmits. Thus, the language, symbols, gestures or expressions used in communication are to be common and mutually understandable.
- 3) **Message/Information:** The message is the physical form of the thought which can be experienced and understood by one or more senses of the receiver. Communication process facilitates transmission of information or message in the form of words, symbols or any such media, which carries the information to the receiver. In fact, message is an idea, feeling opinion or any expression generated in the mind of the sender which he desires to convey to the receiver with a predetermined purpose. In fact, message is the actual content of the information that enters into the channel.

- 4) **Channel/Media:** It is a vehicle in the transmission of a message. In this stage the message is actually sent and the information is transferred. The technological revolution has brought about a wide range of telecommunication methods. Sender must consider all aspects: speed, cost, quick receipt, printer record, confidentiality etc., for making an intelligent decision before sending his message. Time and money can be wasted if the wrong medium is chosen. Selection of suitable channel is essential for effective communication. It assures immediate feedback from the receiver. It also helps to reduce noise during communication process. So, it is necessary to select a channel, which is familiar, convenient and suitable for both the parties.
- 5) **Receiver:** the person or group, who perceives the message and attaches some meaning to the message, is the receiver. If there is no receiver, there is no communication. The situation is not much improved if the message reaches receiver but the receiver does not understand it.
- 6) **Decoding:** Decoding is translation of information received, into an understandable message to interpret it. Even the most expertly fashioned message will not accomplish its purpose unless it is understood. After physically receiving the message, the receiver must comprehend it. If the message has been properly encoded, decoding will take place rather routinely. But perfect encoding is nearly impossible to achieve in our world of many languages and cultures. The receiver's willingness to receive the message is a principal prerequisite for successful decoding. When decoding is done according to expectation of the sender, the communication could be deemed as effective. The chances of effective decoding are greatly enhanced as the receiver knows the language and vocabulary used in the message. The more the sender's message commensurate with the receivers understanding, the more effective the communication will be.
- 7) **Action /Feedback:** Feedback is the response to the message received by the receiver of the information, which sends back to the sender of the information. Feedback is the reversed of the communication process. This is the stage where major and serious distortions take place in a message and such distortions are due to receiver's perception, value system, attitude, past experience etc. Normally the message interpreted by the receiver is different from what the sender had intended to. Therefore, feedback is necessary to ensure whether the receiver has understood the message as desired by the sender or not and if not, the message is modified or certain additions are made in the message by the sender in order to make communication effective. Appropriate forms of feedback are determined by the same factors that govern the sender's encoding decision. Without feedback, senders have no way of knowing whether their ideas have been accurately understood. It may be noted, that in oral communication, feedback is often immediate and direct, in meetings the audience may nod or smile to show understanding and agreement. Immediate feedback offers an advantage to the sender of the information to clear off doubts, bring modification or change the topic of information to make the communication effective. In addition, indirect means of feedback (such as declines in productivity, poor production quality, increased absenteeism or turnover and poor coordination and/or conflict between units) may indicate communication breakdowns. In a nut shell, prompt and suitable feedback improves the efficiency of communication process.
- 8) **Noise:** Noise is not an integral part of the chain like communication process, but it may influence the process at any or all points. Noise is any interference with the normal flow of understanding from one person to another. Noise may be with the receiver or channel or the message or sometimes the external environment. Psychological noise consists of forces within the sender or receiver that interfere with understanding i.e., egotism, hostility, prejudices, etc. Noise reduces the effectiveness of communication. Therefore, it is necessary to take preventive steps to reduce the level and intensity of noise to make communication effective.

IMPORTANCE OF FEEDBACK IN COMMUNICATION

Sending back the knowledge about the message to the communicator is known as feedback. After receiving the message, the receiver will take necessary action and send feedback information to the communicator. On the other hand, communicator must know how well the message has been received by the receiver, understood, interpreted and acted upon. Feedback helps to determine this process. Feedback is one of the important elements of the communication process. A communication process without a provision for feedback is not an effective communication. To check effectiveness of communication, a person must have feedback. One can never be sure whether or not a message has been effectively encoded, transmitted, decoded and understood unless it is confirmed by feedback. Feedback is the yardstick which measures the effectiveness of communication and is used for evaluation and review and to amend message in the light of response. Efficient managers have reliable feedback and they succeed in their effective communication.

Feedback varies from one situation to another. In face-to-face communication there is immediate and continuous feedback; the facial expression of the listener can tell the speaker, whether the message is understood. The speaker can modify the message according to the needs and understanding of the listener, and also make it more acceptable. In a nutshell, the audience can control the speaker through feedback on the spot.

In written communication, feedback is slow. The writer cannot see the facial expression of the receiver. There is no chance for immediate clarification or modification or even for finding out if the message has been understood. Feedback may also be collected through grapevine. In case, feedback is negative, the speaker can go in for self-improvement through self-introspection and he can go in for major changes in delivery and manner of speeches.

In a nutshell, feedback is an error correcting machine and therefore a good speaker is always attentive to the feedback and always on toes to modify the message in the light of reaction of the respective audience. So feedback is not an error finding or fault finding exercise. Instead it is aimed at continuous improvement of the speaker as well as of the listener.

Two-way communication takes place when the receiver provides feedback to the sender. For instance giving an instruction to a subordinate and receiving its acceptance is an example of two-way communication. On the other hand, in one-way communication feedback is totally absent. Here the sender communicates without expecting or getting feedback from receiver. Two-way communication is superior to one-way communication in the following respects

- a) Two-way communication is more accurate than one-way communication. The feedback allows the sender to refine his communication so that it becomes more precise and accurate.
- b) Receiver's self-confidence is higher in case of two-way communication as they are permitted to ask questions and seek clarifications from the senders.

When two-way communication occurs, both parties experience greatest satisfaction, frustration is prevented and work accuracy is much improved.

Feedback helps to reduce misunderstandings. The information is transferred more accurately when the receiver is given the opportunity to ask for clarifications and answers to any questions about the message. Two-way communication, even though more time consuming, avoids distrust and leads to trust and openness which builds a healthy relationship between the sender and the receiver and contributes to effective communication.

HOW TO MAKE FEEDBACK MORE EFFECTIVE

Feedback can be made more effective by taking into account the followings:

- 1) **Alert Listening:** The listeners have to be alert, attentive and interested in the message to be able to give a good feedback. Passive, bored and disinterested listeners can never give a good feedback. An alert listener would be interested in getting more information and clarity of the message.

- 2) **Speaker must understand his Responsibilities:** The speaker must be a willing partner in communication. A speaker who is not responsible will not be willing to invite feedback. His superior and intimidating attitude might discourage feedback. The speaker must be interested in feedback and must understand that only feedback can help him to communicate properly.
- 3) **Proper Note Taking:** The listeners should take notes properly during the lecture to ensure that important information is not forgotten. It also helps the speaker to get an overall picture. It also makes the listeners aware if any detail is omitted by the speaker.
- 4) **Preparation before Discussion:** Preparing before the topic is discussed and a little bit of reading and research will ensure better feedback. Hence more awareness helps the listener to give an appropriate response.
- 5) **Positive Mental Attitude of the Listener and Speaker:** Mental attitude of the listener and speaker goes a long way in ensuring an effective feedback. An open, unprejudiced, unbiased attitude is essential. If the listener and speaker both have a positive approach, it ensures an effective feedback.
- 6) **Concentration and Focussed Approach:** Concentration and focussed approach will help a listener to give a better response. It also helps the speaker to judge whether his message is being properly interpreted by the audience. A blank look in the eyes of the listeners is the first sign to look out for. This is possible only if the speaker is attentive while giving his lecture.
- 7) **If Response is Prompt:** It is the duty of the listener to give a prompt feedback for it to be effective. Inviting the listeners to give a feedback promptly will ensure that the speaker will get an opportunity to immediately assess whether the message is being received properly. Based on the response, the speaker can decide to modify his delivery to ensure that the message is conveyed and received properly. It reassures the speaker and encourages him to be more forthcoming with his delivery. It shows that the listeners are active participants in communication and not passive and disinterested observers.

In the absence of proper feedback, the speaker is discouraged and might decide to cut short his message. If the listeners are not allowed to respond it might lead to a barrier in communication, for feedback is an essential component of the communication process. Feedback ensures that the message has been received, interpreted and evaluated accurately.