

## LECTURE ONE: Introduction to Human communication

In this lecture, attempts have been made to explore the different meanings and interpretations of communication in general and human communication to be specific. The next step will be to understand the types of communication, then key important characteristics of communication competence and finally the main misconceptions about communication that exist in our world today. Communication is one of the areas human needs to survive in this world.

### Learning Outcomes



- To be able to define communication, and human communication
- To be able to explain the different types of communication.
- To analyze functions of communication
- To apply skills of a competent communicator.

### Communication defined:

#### What is communication?

According to Merriam-Webster dictionary, **Communication** is the act or process of transmitting information (as about ideas, attitudes, emotions, or objective behavior), exchange of information between individuals through a common system of signs, symbols, or behavior. **Communication** is the giving and receiving or exchange of information opinion or ideas by writing, speech or visual means – or any combination of the three – so that the material communicated is completely understood by everyone concerned. **Communication** is the process of transferring information from a sender to a receiver with the use of a medium in which the communicated information is understood by both sender and receiver. It is a process that allows organisms to exchange information by several methods.

#### What is human communication?

**Human communication** refers to the process of human beings responding to the *symbolic behaviour* of other persons (Adler and Rodman, 2006).

#### What are the key characteristics of communication?

**Communication is human** though other animals and creatures communicate; human communication is a complex one. Sometimes we communicate with our pets.

**Communication is a process** it is a continuous ongoing process. Communication is not a series of incidents pasted together like photographs in a scrap book; instead it is more like a motion picture in which the meaning comes from unfolding of an interrelated series of images.

**Communication is symbolic:** symbols are used to represent things, ideas, or events in ways that make communication possible. Symbols are arbitrary in nature for example why should the letters *book* represent the object you read? We overcome the arbitrary nature of symbols by linguistic rules and customs. Effective communication depends on agreement among people about these rules. Spoken or written words are verbal, however nonverbal behaviour also do have symbolic meaning for example in many countries nodding your head up and down means “yes”. (Adler and Rodman, 2006)

Take Note



This meaning is not universal. Much of nonverbal behaviour is ambiguous for example does frown signify anger or happiness? Does a hug stand for a friendly greeting or a symbol of the hugger’s romantic interest in you?

### Types of communication

According to Adler and Rodman, (2006) the different types of communication include:

**Intrapersonal communication** is language use or thought internal to the communicator. Intrapersonal communication is the active internal involvement of the individual in symbolic processing of messages. The individual becomes his or her own sender and receiver, providing feedback to him or herself in an ongoing internal process. It can be useful to envision intrapersonal communication occurring in the mind of the individual in a model, which contains a sender, receiver, and feedback loop. Intrapersonal communication can encompass: Day-dreaming, Nocturnal dreaming, including and especially lucid dreaming, Speaking aloud (talking to oneself), reading aloud, repeating what one hears; the additional activities of speaking and hearing (in the third case of hearing again) what one thinks, reads or hears may increase concentration and retention. This is considered normal, and the extent to which it occurs varies from person to person. The time when there should be concern is when talking to oneself occur outside of socially acceptable situations.

**Dyadic communication** Social scientists call two persons interacting a *dyad* and they often use the adjective *dyadic* to describe this type of communication it is often called **Interpersonal communication**. **Communication scholars in numerous ways define interpersonal**

**communication**; though most definitions involve participants who are interdependent on one another, have a shared history. Communication channels are the medium chosen to convey the message from sender to receiver. Communication channels can be categorized into two main categories: Direct and Indirect channels of communication.

**Group dynamics** is the study of groups, and also a general term for group processes. In psychology, sociology, and communication studies, a group is two or more individuals who are connected to each other by social relationships. Because they interact and influence each other, groups develop a number of dynamic processes that separate them from a random collection of individuals. These processes include norms, roles, relations, development, need to belong, social influence, and effects on behavior. The field of group dynamics is primarily concerned with small group behavior. Groups may be classified as aggregate, primary, secondary and category groups.

**Organizational communication**, broadly speaking, is: people working together to achieve individual or collective goals. People can relate to each other only through some form of communication. The survival of an organization depends on individuals and groups who are able to maintain among themselves effective and continuing relationships. If we can understand organizational communication, we will understand the organization itself. Communication can be defined as "the transfer of meanings between persons and groups". The purpose of communication may range from completing a task or mission to creating and maintaining satisfying human relationships. The word transfer means more than the simple process of "packaging" an idea as conceived by a sender and transporting it to the mind of a receiver, where it is "unpacked". It implies the creation of meaning in the mind of a sender followed by a re-creation of the same meaning in the mind of a receiver. If something occurs along the way to change the sender's original meaning, the communication has failed in its intent.


**Public communication** occurs when a group becomes too large for all members to contribute. One or more people are likely to deliver their remarks to the remaining members, who act as audience. It has therefore limited verbal feedback. However audiences often have a chance to ask questions and offer brief comments and their nonverbal reactions offers a wide range of clues about their reception of the speaker's remarks.

**Mass Communication** consists of messages that are transmitted to larger, widespread audiences via electronic and print media. Mass communication is aimed at a larger audience without any personal contact between the sender and the receivers unlike the other types of communication. Most messages here are developed or at least financed by large organizations. It is therefore far

less personal and more of a product. It is always controlled by gate keepers who determine what messages will be delivered to consumers, how they will be constructed and when they will be delivered.

**Computer- mediated communication:** Communication between people that takes place through some computer connection, for example E- mail, Chat room, News group, instant messaging, website and blog communication.

Others include: **Visual communication, intercultural communication etc.**

<p>Question</p> 	<p>Write brief notes on any other types of communication which are not provided in the notes.</p>
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### **Functions of communication**

Functions of communication include:

**Physical needs:** Personal communication is essential for our wellbeing, research evidence show that an absence of satisfying communication can jeopardize life itself such as early deaths, terminal cancers, common cold, and coronary disease and so on depending on the nature of isolation.

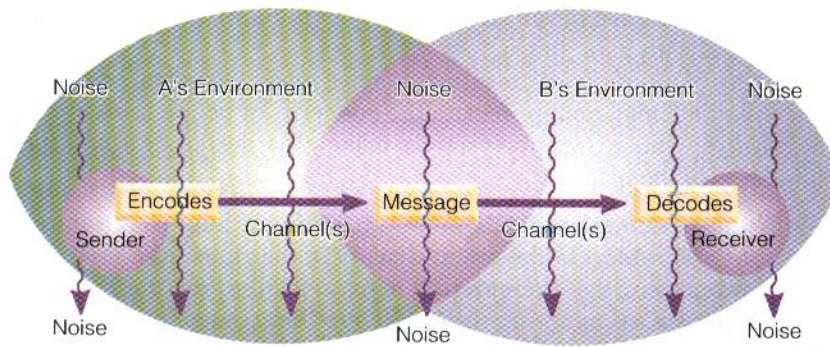
**Identity needs:** our sense of identity comes from the way we interact with other people. The others' messages shaping who we think we are, the messages we create often are attempts (some more conscious than others) to get others to view us the way we want to be seen.

**Social needs:** communication provides a vital link with others. Some of social needs we satisfy by communicating are Pleasure, affection, inclusion, escape, relaxation and control.

**Practical needs:** communication is an important key to effectiveness in a variety of everyday settings for example, a survey of over 400 employers identified "communication skills" as the top characteristic that employers seek in job candidates. Communication is important for any practical instruction to be carried out (Adler and Rodman, 2006).

### **Modeling communication**

**A model** is a systematic representation of an object or event in an idealized and abstract form. Models are arbitrary by nature.

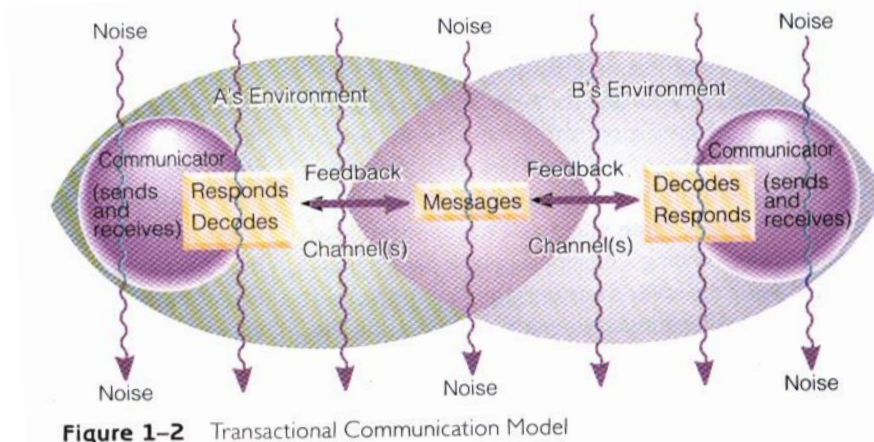


**Figure 1-1** Linear Communication Model

**Linear model** shows that communicators often occupy different environments that are fields of experiences that will help them understand other's behaviour. Environment here not only refers to a physical location but also to the personal experiences and cultural backgrounds that participants bring to a conversation. The model shows that environment A and B overlap. This area represents the background that the communicators must have in common. As shared environment becomes smaller, communication becomes more difficult. In linear communication model, communication is like giving an injection: A sender encodes ideas and feelings into some sort of message and then conveys them by means of a channel (speech, writing, and so on) into a receiver who decodes the message. In linear model noise is a term used by social scientists to describe any forces that interfere with effective communication. Noise can occur at every stage of the communication process.


***Types of noise:***

- i) *External noise (physical)* - includes those factors outside the receiver that make it difficult to hear, as well as much other kind of distractions. For instance, too much cigarette smoke in a crowded room might make it hard for you to pay attention to another person, and sitting in the rear of an auditorium might make speaker's remarks unclear.
- ii) *Physiological noise*- involves biological factors in the receivers or sender that interfere with accurate reception, these include: fatigue, illness
- iii) *Psychological noise*- refers to mental forces within a communicator that interfere with the ability to express or understand a message accurately.



**The transactional model** reflects the fact we usually send and receive messages simultaneously. In this model we are capable of receiving, decoding and responding to another person's behaviour, while at the same time that person is receiving and responding to ours. The response of a receiver to a sender's message whether verbal or non- verbal is called a **feedback**. It shows that communication is indeed a two-way affair.

Question



Analyze the Shannon and Weaver model, and Wilbur Schramm's model; compare them with the linear and transactional models in the notes.

**Communication competence: what makes an effective communicator?**

**Defining communication competence** is not easy. Scholars are yet to agree, however most would agree that effective communication involves achieving one's goals in a manner that, ideally, maintains or enhances the relationship in which it occurs. The following are important *characteristics of communication competence*:

1. **There is no ideal way to communicate** the type of communication that succeeds in one situation may be a colossal blunder in another. For example the language a youth use with his/her peers might offend a family member. A competent communicator requires flexibility in understanding what approach is likely to work best in a given situation.

2. **Competence is situational** it is more accurate to talk about degrees of competence or areas of competence because competence with one person may vary from one situation to another and also from one person to another.
3. **Competence can be learned** communication is a set of skills that anyone can learn at any level of life, be it at child hood or adulthood. Even without systematic training, it is possible to develop communication skills through process of trial-and- error and observation. Along with maturity, systematic education (class-studies) can boost communicative competence.
4. **Competence is relational** because communication is transactional it is something we do with others rather than to them, behaviour that is competent in one relationship is not necessarily competent in others. Apparently relational satisfaction arises in part when our style matches those of the people with whom we interact.
5. **Other Characteristics of competent communicators (Common denominators of competent communicators)**
  - **A wide range of behaviours-** effective communicators are able to choose their actions from a wide range of behaviours.
  - **Ability to choose the most appropriate behaviour-** simply possessing a larger array of communication skills is not a guarantee of effectiveness. It is also necessary to know which of these skills will work best in a particular situation.
  - **Skill at performing behaviours-** after choosing the most appropriate ways to communicate it is necessary to perform the necessary skills effectively. After performing the new skill again and again one will find that they can perform it without conscious thoughts.
  - **Empathy/ perspective taking-** the value of taking the other's perspective suggests one reason why listening is important skill. The ability to imagine how an issue might look from the other's point of view is an important skill.
  - **Cognitive complexity** is the ability to construct a variety of frameworks for viewing an issue. It allows us to make sense of people using a variety of perspectives.
  - **Self-monitoring-** it is a term used by psychologists to describe the process of paying close attention to one's behaviour and using these observations to shape the way one behaves.
  - **Commitment to the relationship** people who seem to care about relationship communicate better than those who do not. This concern shows up in commitment to the other person and to message one is expressing.

### **Misconception about communication**

It is very important that a communicator recognizes misconception about communication because they can get one into trouble, for example:

- Communication does not always require complete understanding

While some understanding is necessary for us to coordinate our interaction, there are some types of communication in which understanding as we usually conceive it is not the primary goal. For example:

- i) *The social ritual we enact everyday-* “How’s it going?” you ask. “Great,” the other person replies. The primary goal in exchange like these is mutual acknowledgement: there is obviously no serious attempt to exchange.
- ii) *Many attempts to influence others-* most television commercials are usually aimed at persuading viewers to buy products, not to understand the content of the advertisement.
- iii) *Deliberate ambiguity and deception-* When you decline an unwanted invitation by saying “I can’t make it”, you probably want to create the impression that the decision is really beyond your control when in actual fact you would rather do almost anything than accept the invitation.
- iv) *Coordinate action-* the term coordination has been used to describe situations in which participants interact smoothly, with a high degree of satisfaction but without necessarily understanding one another well. Consider the words “I love you.” This is a phrase that can have many meanings: among other things, it can mean, “I admire you,” “I feel guilty,” “I feel a great affection for you,” “I desire you” “I am grateful to you,” “I want you to be faithful to me,” or even “I hope you love me.”(Adler and Rodman, 2006)

- Communication is not always a good thing

Communication can be a tool for expressing warm feelings and useful facts, but under different circumstances the same words and action can cause both physical and emotional pain. (Adler and Rodman, 2006)

- No single person or event causes another’s reaction.

Because communication is a transactional ongoing collaborative process, it’s usually a mistake to think that any event occurs in a vacuum. Many factors play a role in how others will react to your communication in a single situation. (Adler and Rodman, 2006)

- Communication will not solve all problems.

Many of unhappy people or communicators believe that if they could just express themselves better, their relationships would improve. Though this is true, it is an exaggeration to say that communicating-even communicating clearly-is a guaranteed panacea. (Adler and Rodman, 2006)

- More communication is not always better.

Although it is certainly true that no communicating enough is a mistake, there are also situations when too much communication is a mistake. There are times when communicating too much can aggravate a problem. There are times when *no* communication is the best course. When two people are angry and hurt, they may say things they don't mean and will later regret. Therefore one key successful communication, then, is to share an adequate amount of information in a skillful manner. (Adler and Rodman, 2006)

- Meanings rest in the people not in words.

The symbols we use to communicate are arbitrary. It is a mistake to think that, just because you use a word in one way, others will do so, too. For example a statement like *he is loaded* may mean that the subject has too much to drink, only to find out that it meant he is quiet rich. Therefore meaning does not rest in words but in the people or the originator of the message. (Adler and Rodman, 2006)

- Communication is not simple

Most people assume that communication is an aptitude that people develop without the need for training-rather like breathing. Throughout history there have been cases of infants raised without human contact. In all these cases the children were initially unable to communicate with others when brought into society. Only after extensive teachings (and not even then in some cases) were they able to speak and understand language in ways we take for granted. Therefore communication skills are rather like athletic ability: even the most inept of us can learn to be more effective with training and practice, and those who are talented can always become better.

Reference:

Adler, R.B. & Rodman, G. (2006). *Understanding human communication*. 9th edition. London: Oxford University Press. Pages 19-26

Summary
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This chapter began by defining *communication* as it will be examined in *Understanding Human Communication*: the process of human beings responding to the symbolic behavior of other persons.

It introduced four communication contexts that will be covered in the rest of the book: intrapersonal, dyadic, small group, and public. The chapter also identified several types of needs that communication satisfies: physical, identity, social, and practical.

A linear and a transactional communication model were developed, demonstrating the superiority of the transactional model in representing the process-oriented nature of human interaction.

The chapter went on to explore the difference between effective and ineffective exchanges by discussing communication competence, showing that there is no single correct way to behave and that competence is situational, relational in nature, and it can be learned. Competent communicators were described as being able to choose and perform appropriately from a wide range of behaviors, as being cognitively complex self-monitors who can take the perspective of others and who have commitment to important relationships.

After spending most of the chapter talking about what communication is, the chapter concluded by discussing what it is not by refuting several common misconceptions. It demonstrated that communication doesn't always require complete understanding and that it is not always a good thing that will solve every problem. It showed that more communication is not always better; that meanings are in people, not in words; and that no single person or event causes another's reactions; and that communication is neither simple nor easy.

<http://staff.neu.edu.tr/~soznur/Understanding%20Human%20Communication.pdf>

Adler, R.B. & Rodman, G. 2006. *Understanding human communication*. 9th edition. London: Oxford University Press. Pages 19-26

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