

Writing for Business
Lecture 1
Introduction; The Communication Process
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Learning Objectives:

By the end of this lesson, you should be able to:

- a) Explain terms like ‘Communication’, ‘Business Communication’, ‘Writing for Business’, etc.
- b) Explain the communication process
- c) Apply the communication process in business settings

1.0 Introduction

This course is titled ‘Business for Writing.’ However, before we embark on it, it is important to understand these terms: Communication; Business Communication; and Writing for Business.

1.1 Communication

Here are some dictionary definitions of the word ‘Communication.’

Miriam Webster: A process by which information is exchanged among individuals through a common system of symbols, signs, or behavior

Collins: The act or an instance of communicating; the imparting or exchange of information, ideas, or feelings

Oxford Learners Dictionary: The activity or process of expressing ideas and feelings or of giving people information

The following are common definitions of the word ‘Communication.’

Communication is the exchange of meanings between individuals through a common system of symbols (Gordon, 2024).

Communication is commonly seen as an exchange of information, news, ideas, and so on via oral or written channels.

It is the process by which information is exchanged between individuals or groups of people through commonly agreed symbols.

Communication is the transmission of a message from a source to a receiver.

Thus, communication is two-way process where information is exchanged.

“Communication is the ingredient that makes organization possible. It is the vehicle through which the basic management functions are carried out...Virtually all actions taken in an organization are preceded by communication.” (Adegbola, et al., n.d)

The quotation above by Adegbola and others buttresses the importance of communication to an organization. Companies need to structure their communication well enough for successful business operations.

1.2 Purpose/Role of Communication

Uttarakhand Open University suggests at least three general types of communication goals:

- 1) Self-presentation goals (who we are and how we want to be perceived)
- 2) Relational goals (how we develop, maintain, and terminate relationships)
- 3) Instrumental goals (how we manipulate others, gain compliance, manage interpersonal conflict, use and recognize interpersonal influence strategies (anchoring and contrast effects, reciprocity, commitment, liking, social proof, authority, and scarcity etc.)

Allow me to explain the three goals above. The first goal concerns the individual. How do we communicate and what is our intention? How do we present ourselves? What we say and do will communicate who we are, and other people will judge/gauge us based on our communication. Hence, every member of the organization must purpose to communicate in a professional way for the collective good of the organization.

Relational goals concern our relationships with other members of the society or organization. Remember no man is an island and individuals exist within a social system. Thus, communication is vital to glue together the social system. The right communication is required to help us develop and maintain relationships. For example, the public relations organ in an organization is responsible for ensuring the firm establishes and maintains good relationships with its publics.

Communication can also be used to terminate relations. For instance, a letter from XYZ company to ABC company alerting the latter that they will no longer be their underwriter for XYZ’s medical cover.

1.3 Business Communication

Now that we have explained what communication is and discussed its three broad goals, it’s time to turn our attention to the term ‘Business Communication.’ It is a specialized type of general communication where information is transmitted or exchanged within and outside an organization to achieve a certain purpose (which is often for the good of the organization). Business communication branches into two types: Internal and external communication.

Internal communication can either be oral and/or written and involves members within the organization. Examples of internal business communication include:

- Communicating a change in policy: For example, the organization has amended the policy on dress code, where members are now mandated to wear the company T-shirt every Friday as a way of marketing.

- Conducting a business meeting: We use communication in business meetings such as sending the agenda of the meeting through email. During the meeting, minutes are taken to be used as reference points in future.
- Communication on promotions: Perhaps an employee is being promoted, so the manager issues an official letter stating the terms of the promotion.
- Directing employees: The manager uses communication to direct the affairs of the organization. For example, he/she may give instructions on an assignment.
- Motivating employees: Employees need to be motivated if an organization is to achieve optimum success. Motivation may be a word of encouragement, a pay rise, recognition, and so on.

External communication is either oral and/or written and involves members of the organization and those outside the organization (external stakeholders).

Examples of external business communication include:

- Accountability report to a sponsor: For example, a non-profit organization may be required to provide reports on how the money the sponsor donated was spent.
- Business prospects: Communication is vital when seeking business for the company. For example, the sales and marketing department can prepare brochures and fliers for circulation in the hope of getting new clients.
- Annual returns/reports about company performance: Companies use business communication in the form of annual reports to share information about a company's annual performance. These reports help the stakeholders to make decisions, for example, whether to continue investing in the company.
- Public relations activities: Public relations mainly focuses on establishing and maintaining a positive corporate image between an organization and its publics. Practitioners create and distribute communication through events, press releases, the media, etc. For example, a company can decide to host an event in a local village and distribute branded T-shirts, caps, and other gifts for those who win certain challenges.

Adegbola et al (2020) identify the following functions of organizational communication. Let me explain them one by one.

- Information: Information can be shared both internally and externally. For example, the CEO may send an email to employees informing them that their company will be merging with another company.
- Control: Managers use organizational communication for control. For example, he/she may assign duties through issuing job descriptions. These descriptions tell the employee what is expected of them and if the employee does not measure up, he/she may suffer the consequences.
- Motivation: Organizations use communication to motivate their employees or other stakeholders. For example, a company can decide to begin the 'employee of the year' segment where the best employee is rewarded or awarded. The company can create space on the notice board where the employee's photo is displayed for that entire year.
- Relationship building: Communication is key to building relationships. These could be internal or external relationships. For example, a firm can get into a partnership with another organization. Often times, these relationships are mutually beneficial.

- Employee engagement: Employees need to be engaged time and again and communication is a useful tool for that. For instance, when the employees express dissatisfaction, it is important that management schedules a meeting with them to iron out the issues and create harmony in the organization.
- Employee coaching: The organization comprises individuals who are at different levels of experience. There may be some who have done the same job for more than twenty years while some who barely a year into the job. The new employees may require coaching and mentoring and communication is a useful tool to deliver that.
- Evaluation: Evaluation can take place through performance contracts. These are documents requiring workers to sign, and at the end of a certain period, require them to account for their performance. Thus, companies use communication to evaluate performance.
- Direction: Management uses communication to provide direction. For example, it can decide to create a strategic plan to guide the organization for the next five to 10 years.

1.4 What does ‘Writing for Business’ mean?

We have now covered sufficient ground concerning what communication and business communication are. Let us now discuss what writing for business entails.

Business writing refers to professional communication including genres such as policy recommendations, advertisements, press releases, application letters, emails, and memos. (The Writing Center- University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, n.d)

Business writing is a communication channel that companies use to communicate with their internal and external audience. (Technical Writer HQ, n.d)

In other words, any writing we engage with/in at the organization or business environment is termed ‘writing for business.’

1.5 Why write for business?

- To pass information professionally/officially. By this, I mean formal communication as opposed to informal communication. For example, Kenya Power and Lightening Company wants to carry out maintenance activities in a specific area. To do this, they must disconnect power supply to that region. It is incumbent upon the company to alert the affected members of the impending disruption. This is important so that the affected can prepare for alternative power arrangements. Think of a hospital that cannot operate without power. Thus, Kenya Power and Lightning Company must communicate via the most appropriate channel, such as social media, newspaper advertisements, mail, etc.
- To persuade so that the reader to act. Persuasion is an art that companies need to master. Business entities engage in it almost daily. For instance, a bank can send its marketers to the field to persuade as many as possible to sign up for accounts. Thus, communicators need the right words to share with prospective clients who see value in getting a new account with the bank.

Therefore, the goal of business writing is to communicate effectively, professionally, and concisely.

1.6 What are the forms of business correspondence?

- Emails
- Memos
- Letters
- Press releases
- Advertisements
- Reports
- Manuals
- Marketing literature
- Policy documents
- Any document that communicates business matters

1.7 What is good business writing?

McLean (2015) offers the following tips on what constitutes good writing.

- Follows the rules
- Is easy to read
- Attracts the reader
- Meets the reader's expectations
- Is clear and concise
- Is efficient and effective

Let me explain the above. Business writing follows certain conventions that must be followed. For example, the tone in a business letter must be correct, otherwise, the company may lose business. Then, writing the business document should not be complicated. The author is encouraged to focus on the reader and what the reader would want. Thus, the writing should be attractive enough to the reader, who is encouraged to continue reading by the type of writing the author has employed. Remember that readers have expectations; they know the company they are dealing with and do not expect mediocrity. For instance, they expect the most profitable internet service provider to compose a professional, error-free tweet. Further, the communication should be clear and concise such that when two different people read the same document, they should obtain the same understanding. Lastly, good writing should be efficient and effective, meaning that it should fulfil the purpose for which it set out.

Having extensively dealt with what business writing is about, let us now turn our focus to the communication process. Every student of communication must make every effort to internalize this process because it explains many of the situations we encounter in business communication.

1.8 The Communication Process

There are certain words that stood out when we looked at the various definitions of the word 'communication.' These include 'exchange' 'information' 'symbols' 'channel' and so on. One prominent word that must be attached to communication is 'process' simply because communication is a process. It is not an event and neither is it haphazard.

Scholars, through years of research, have developed models of communication where they have tried to capture the communication process. One of the earliest models was by Harold Laswell (1948) who developed a model that is widely known as the 5Ws. It stated, “Who says What in Which channel to Whom with What effect.” This model is mainly known as linear because it tends to suggest that communication takes place in a straight line, which may not be realistic.

Criticism of Laswell’s model led researchers to continue investigating on the communication process. Thus, Shannon and Weaver (1949) came up with a model referred to as the transmission model of communication which also introduced the noise element. The authors discovered that some factors contributed to message distortion, which they termed ‘noise.’

Osgood (1954) introduced a model that demonstrated that communication is a dynamic process where the sender and receiver share an interactive process. Unlike Laswell’s model that ended with the receiver, this time, the receiver became the sender while the original sender now became the receiver, creating interactions.

Wilbur Schramm’s (1954) model furthered the conversation around the communication process by introducing another element: a shared field of experience or commonality. Schramm argued that communication is more successful when the sender and receiver have something in common, something they both share that enables better communication.

Gerbner’s (1956) model introduced the perceptual and receptive dimensions to the communication process. His model related the message to reality.

Meanwhile, Newcomb’s model (1953) emphasized the role of communication in societal relationships/environment. The author opined that the communication process is not complete without considering the social scene. Man is a social being and thrives in social environments.

Lastly, Wesley and MacLean’s model (1957) was anchored in mass media and introduced the concept of the gatekeeper. In news rooms for example, the editor, reporters, and other media professionals, determine which news leaves the ‘gate’ and which one stays behind the ‘gate.’ In other words, journalists determine what news the public consumes.

The information above was compiled by Radhika (2020).

Thus, based on the findings of these scholars and others, we get a general idea of what the communication process entails. It generally consists of the following elements/components:

- **Participant** (Sender (encoder), Receiver (decoder)): These are communicators who assume the role of sender and receiver during communication. The sender forms a message(s) and attempts to transmit it/them to other people/entities via a channel while the receiver processes the message(s) and behavior(s) that he/she receives and reacts to.
- **Message**: These are the meanings, symbols, etc. exchanged/transmitted through sending and receiving messages.
- **Channel**: The route/way/path/means of transportation traveled by the message

- **Feedback:** The response to a message and indicates to the sender whether the message was seen, heard, received, and understood
- **Noise:** Anything that draw people's attention and interferes with the communication process. These can be internal or external
- **Context:** Context is the physical, social, historical, psychological and cultural settings in which communication occurs.

1.9 Summary/Conclusion

Here is a summary of what you have learned today:

- Communication is a two-way process where messages/meanings are exchanged through mutually agreed symbols.
- The three main purposes of communication are to fulfil self-presentation, relational, and instrumental goals.
- Business communication is a specialized form of general communication, comprising internal and external communication.
- Functions of organizational communication include: information, control, motivation, relationship building, employee engagement, employee coaching, evaluation and direction.
- Writing for business is a branch of business communication.
- Business writing is professional communication in written form used by organizations to communicate to internal and external audiences.
- The two main functions of business writing are to inform and persuade.
- Forms of business writing include emails, memos, letters, press releases, web writing, etc.
- Good business writing follows the rules, is easy to follow and attracts the reader.
- The communication process consists of the following: elements/components: Source (sender), message, channel, receiver, feedback, noise, and context

1.10 Activity

John is the Human Resource Manager at XYZ Company and is conducting a workshop for employees concerning two amended policies that every employee needs to be aware of. He has divided the employees into groups for discussions, but this causes distractions to the CEO who is meeting an important client in the next room. During the Q & A session, John notices that Mary has been on her phone throughout and has hardly participated, unlike Mercy who showed enthusiasm throughout the sessions.

- a) From the scenario, identify the elements/components of the communication process.
- b) Relate your answers to the models of communications discussed above.

1.11 Homework

Watch the video titled, "What is Business Writing" and make short notes. Your answer is due in the next class.

<https://technicalwriterhq.com/writing/business-writing/>

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