UNIT 34 FACE TO FACE COMMUNICATION vs. TELEPHONIC COMMUNICATION & SENDING MEMOS

Structure

34.0 OBJECTIVES

In this unit we shall tell you about communication, its different types and its importance in business contexts. We also talk about written communication versus oral communication.

After you have gone through this unit you should be able to know the advantages and disadvantages of these two media of communication in business contexts and when to select an appropriate form of one of these two media for effective communication in business transactions.

34.1 INTRODUCTION

In this unit we will introduce you to some basic concepts in communication, its importance in business organisations, different types of communications, different forms to be used, and their comparative advantages and disadvantages.

34.2 WHAT IS COMMUNICATION?

Open the chapter on Communication in any book on *Business Management* and you find that it begins with defining what communication is. This is also true of books on *Business Communication* available at book shops. Of course, we all engage in

communication with others right from our birth. When we interact with others we are communicating with them. Right now I am communicating with you through this unit and while you are reading it you, too, are in fact communicating with me through this text.

34.2.1 Some Definitions of Communication

Before we look at some of the definitions, can you try and define this word *communication* on the basis of your own experience? Better write down your definition on a piece of paper. If you have your class-mates with you or if you are working in a group, then you may like to discuss the word with others before putting down your definition on a piece of paper. What is your definition? Compare it with those given by others in your class.

Let us now see how the word *communication* has been defined by scholars and researchers.

Hornby's *Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary of Current English* gives the meaning of this word as the act of passing on news, information, feelings; sharing or exchanging news, etc.

"Communication is the process of passing information and understanding from one person to another".

--Keith Davis

"Communication is a way that one organisation member shares meaning and understanding with another."

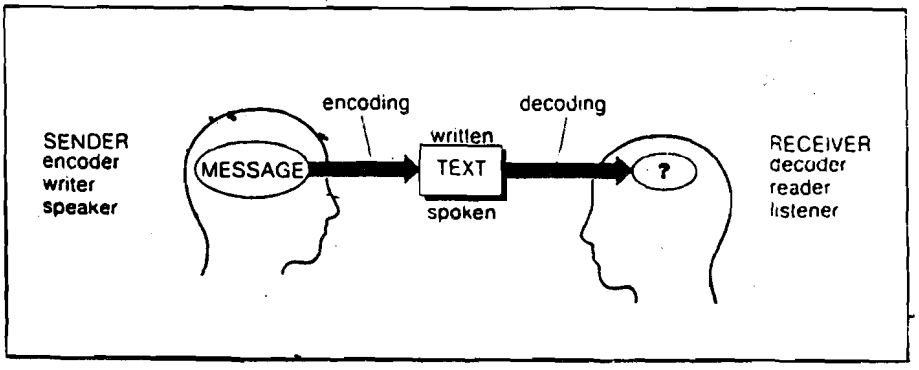
--Koontz and O'Donnell

"Communication may broadly be defined as a process of meaningful interaction among human beings. More specially, it is the process by which meanings are perceived and understandings are reached among human beings".

--Delton E. McFarland

34.2.2 The Process of Communication

The following figure gives a simple model of the process of communication:-



Check Your Progress 1

Look at the figure given above and try to answer the following questions:

1. At least how many persons do you need for communication to take place?

2. Can two people communicate if they do not share the same language?

3. If your answer to Q2 above is 'yes', then explain how they will communicate.

4. A saint sitting with his eyes closed says he is communicating with God. Do you think it is an example of communication? Give reasons for your answer.

5. A person was lost in his thoughts with his eyes closed. When asked he said that he was communicating with self. Would you term it as communication? Discuss with others in your group or with your partner.

34.2.3 Elements of communication

If we look at the figure given above we can derive the elements of communication as follows:

1. Communication involves at least two persons: (a) The addresser and (b) the addressee.
2. The topic: the contents of the message
3. The channel: the medium through which the message travels, e.g. letter, telephone.
4. The code: the language of the message e.g. English, French, Hindi, etc.
5. The message form: the selection of particular grammar and lexical choices of the message.
6. The setting: the social and physical setting.

Check Your Progress 2

Look at the figure once again. Can you write a paragraph now explaining the process of communication? Try and put it down in your notebook.

On the left is the addresser. He can choose to write his message or equally well speak it. So we can use the more general word **encoder** for him. The encoder has a message. It may be news, an idea, a feeling. He wants to convey this message to somebody. To make this possible he must first put it into words, i.e. he must **encode** it. Once it is encoded, it is available outside his mind as a text (written or spoken). The text is accessible to the mind of another person who hears or reads it, that is, who **decodes** the message the text contains. Once it is decoded, the message enters the mind of the **decoder** and communication takes place.

34.2.4 The Role of the Decoder

The process of decoding by the addressee is not passive as some people think. His/her role is an active one. Language it is said does not have meaning; it has potential for meaning and it is the decoder who is actively engaged in making meaning on the basis of his/her background knowledge and the context of communication e.g. the knowledge of the subject, topic, addresser-addressee relationship, knowledge of the code, the physical and social context, etc.

Let us consider the following utterance:

'Mr. Smith is not coming.'

The textual meaning of the sentence is not difficult; it is quite clear but do we know what the speaker wants to convey? Is it a statement for our information? Is it a warning for the hearer? We can understand this text only if we know what the context is, i.e. who is the addresser; whom he is addressing; when, where and in what context. Suppose the addresser is the Managing Director (MD) of a company; the addressee is his Secretary; the MD utters these words on arriving in his office and going through a fax message; Mr. Smith is a consultant with the foreign collaborators

of the company; and he was due to arrive that day for a meeting with the MD and other officials of the company. If we possess this background knowledge, we will be able to understand the meaning of the sentence uttered by the MD. This sentence can now be called an utterance in this context. The secretary can interpret the **utterance** to mean: 'The meeting will have to be cancelled and the officials informed accordingly. Arrangements such as sending the car to the airport, hotel reservation, etc., if any, made for Mr. Smith, will have to be cancelled', etc. etc.

When we make an utterance we always do something; we use language to perform some function, e.g. to inform, warn, promise, persuade, etc. and the hearer or the reader can derive the meaning of an utterance only through actively processing the utterance in the context in which it is made.

Check Your Progress 3

Can you think of some of the functions of language? One can be to 'inform', someone; or 'warn'. Think of some more functions and compare your list with those drawn up by others in your group.

34.2.5 Macro Functions of Communication

The macro functions of communication are listed below:

1. **The emotive function**: to communicate the inner states and emotions, e.g. *oh no!*
2. **The directive function**: seeking to affect the behaviour of others, e.g. *Close the door, please.*
3. **The phatic function**: opening the channel or checking that it is working, e.g. *Hello, is it Thomas Cooks? or Can you hear me, Mrs. Gupta?*
4. **The poetic function**: the particular form chosen is the essence of the message.
5. **The referential function**: to carry information.
6. **The metalinguistic function**: focusing attention on the code itself, e.g. *'the use of both will or shall is correct in modern usage.'*
7. **The contextual function**: creating a particular kind of context, e.g. *Right! Let's start the meeting now.*

Check Your Progress 4

Which of these functions are often performed in business situations? Give examples to support your answer.

34.3 BARRIERS TO COMMUNICATION

It is said that communication can never be hundred per cent complete. Many factors are involved and something can always go wrong with one or more of these. From your own experience, make a list of some of the factors that can impede communication.

Let us now consider some of these barriers:

a. Code, i.e. the addresser and the addressee may not share the same language between them. The addresser is speaking in French and the addressee does not know French.
b. Vacabulary: *The market declined under persistent bear hammering.* One who is not familiar with the specialized vocabulary of the stock market may not understand what is meant.
c. Concept: *Schemas* are cognitive constructs.
d. Background knowledge and shared assumptions e.g. a *Victorian style mansion.*
e. Pronunciation, intonation, accent and stress in spoken language.
f. Culture specific communication.
g. Physical environment: Noise and other environmental disturbances or even physical distance between the addresser and the addressee can impede effective communication.
h. Affective factors: Personal factors, e.g. anxiety, fear, attitude, motivation, beliefs, values, lack of mutual trust, lack of time or pressure of work, lack of attention , and personal rivalries.

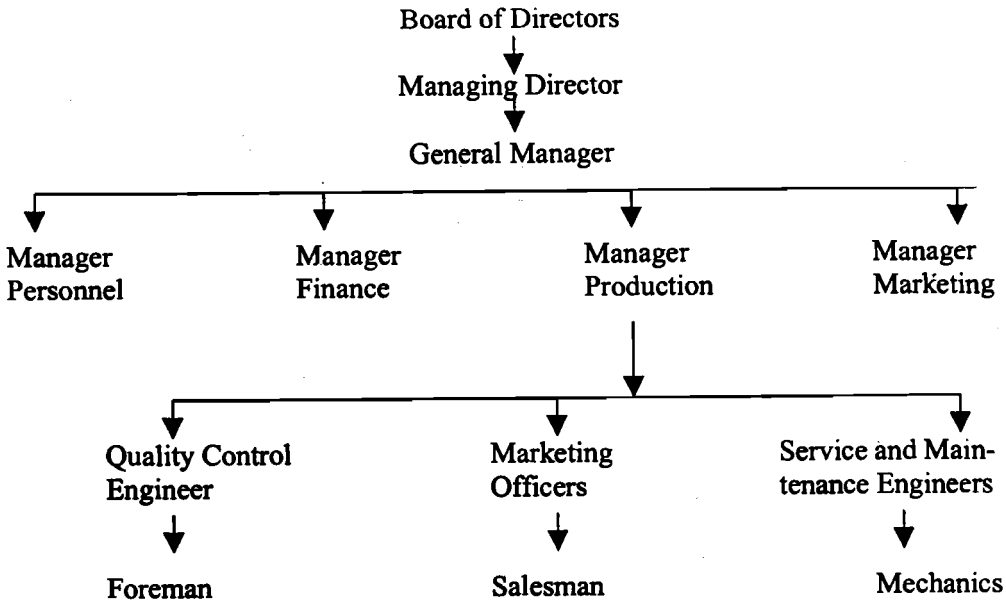
Exercise 5

How can the barriers to communication be removed? Discuss with others in your group or class.

34.4 THE IMPORTANCE OF COMMUNICATION IN BUSINESS

In order to understand the importance of communication in business, we must first understand the nature, organization, objective and functions of business firms. Modern business houses are not simply sole proprietorship concerns or small partnership firms. They are very complex business conglomerates, which have many branches in different parts of the country and even in some foreign countries. They employ a large work force and have many departments to look after the various aspects of business. These different departments may be located in different storeys of a building, in different rooms on the same floor, or sometimes in different buildings in a city. Although it consists of various departments, branches and many employees at various levels of management, it must act like a living organism for effective results. In spite of individual differences, all must think alike, move in the same direction, with the same purpose and act in unison for achieving the common goal.

Let us look at the organisation of company ABC given in the figure below:-



How can all these employees at different levels act in unison if they do not communicate with each other? Communication thus is the essence of good business management.

Check Your Progress 5

Think of some of the advantages of communication in a business house at different levels, i.e. board of directors; between the directors and the managers; among the managers managing different departments; between the managers and the supervisory staff; and between the supervisors and the workers.

34.5 DIFFERENT TYPES OF COMMUNICATION

Communication may be classified into several categories on the following bases:-

1. **Expression**: Written, oral and gestural
2. **Flow**: Internal (Vertical & Horizontal) and external
3. **Relationship**: Formal and informal

34.5.1 Various Media of Expression (Written, Oral & Gestural)

Communication can be achieved through various media, such as writing, speech, gestures and actions. One can use written words or draw pictures or one can use speech sounds. Speech is primary, writing secondary, that is, speech came first and the writing system is developed later on. There may still be some languages which are spoken but not written. Deaf and dumb use actions and gestures in order to communicate with each other -- it is also a language, but they can communicate with ordinary people only by using commonly understood actions and gestures e.g. asking for water by cupping your hand near your mouth.

In business, communicating in writing is the most popular form of communication. It can take various forms such as letters, circulars, office memorandums, telegrams, fax

messages, newsletters, brochures, bulletins, reports, manuals, house journals, magazines, etc. You are already familiar with some of these.

This does not mean that oral communication is not used in business transactions. Speech is also used and quite often. It takes the form of face-to-face interaction, telephone conversations, lectures and talks, meetings and discussions, etc.

Expression through body language is known as **gestural communication**. Who is not familiar with *the nodding of the head from side to side to say no or up and down to convey yes?* Parents often use this means of communication with their children if they tend to be naughty in the presence of guests and it is often used in business situations as well in similar circumstances or when verbal communication is impossible e.g. in the factory where the noise of machinery makes verbal communication difficult.

Check Your Progress 6

Can you think of a situation when gestural communication would be more effective than oral communication? What kind of messages can be communicated through gestures? Give some examples from your own experience.

Pictures, charts, diagrams are also used either on their own or in combination with written or oral communication for greater effect and better understanding Business houses make use of them in their illustrated catalogues and brochures meant to promote their product.

34.5.2 Downward, Upward & Horizontal Communication

Companies have to communicate with outside agencies and other companies, government and private bodies, newspapers, advertisers, manufacturers of plant and machinery, builders, suppliers of goods and services, clients and customers, etc. But there is also the need to communicate within the company itself, e.g. communication between a superior and a subordinate, i.e. from higher to lower levels of authority. This is an example of *downward communication*. There are also occasions when communication flows from a subordinate or subordinates to a higher authority. It may be a report, suggestion, opinion or a charter of demands from the workers. We call this *upward communication*. Both these are forms of vertical communications.

Communication between officers working at the same level of management is called horizontal or lateral communication e.g. interaction between Manager (Production) and Manager (Marketing). It involves exchange of ideas, information, opinions or seeking clarifications, etc. between personnel of the same rank.

34.5.3 Formal & Informal Communications

In business, these two terms are used in a bit different sense than what we generally understand by them. Communication done through the chain of demand is known as *formal communication*. It involves the transmission of official message in the formal organisation structure. Such communication is planned and established by management and clearly indicates the authority relationships involved and these generally are in writing e.g. orders, decisions, instructions, etc.

Informal communication does not flow through the official channels of communication. These arise out of the information relations and is also known as the grapevine. It involves the spontaneous expression of reactions and ideas and is

usually done orally e.g. rumour, gossip. Hence it may carry incomplete or incorrect information.

The words *formal* and *informal* are also used to indicate change in form and language of communication according to change in relationship between the addresser and the addressee and the context of situation. For example, you will use informal language while talking to your brother at home. But if your brother also happens to be your boss in office and a formal meeting is going on in office, you will address him in a different way, i.e. in formal style.

34.6 WRITTEN VS. ORAL COMMUNICATION

When we speak of language as a tool for communication, we mean both spoken and written forms of the language. Both these modes can be used for communication. While they perform the same functions, their form and manner of use differ in many respects. For example, one makes use of sounds, other of symbols. The speaker has available to him/her the full range of voice quality effects, as well as facial expressions, postural and gestural systems, but these paralinguistic features are denied to the writer. The writer, on the other hand, has typographical variety at his/her disposal. The speaker is face-to-face with the hearer while the writer writes for an absent reader who may also be far away in space and time.

These different features have their own advantages and disadvantages. In oral communication the speaker, being face-to-face with the hearer can monitor and match the reactions of the hearer. At the same time s/he can simultaneously plan his/her next utterance and fit it in the overall pattern of what s/he wants to say. S/he must keep on talking during the period allotted to him/her; s/he must decide when to take his/her turn, how to interrupt his/her interlocutor, how to hand over the turn - in fact s/he must be in command of all the conversational skills. S/he has certain advantages as well; s/he can observe his/her interlocutor and, if necessary, modify what s/he is saying. Oral communication is quicker, more economical and more effective than written communication. Doubts and misunderstandings can be cleared on the spot as immediate reaction and response is available.

But it has certain disadvantages also. There are variations in spoken language and also in the way it is delivered. These could be on account of geographical or social and cultural differences. There are dialectical differences. accent differences and also differences in the use of paralinguistic features and body language. Speech is less organised than written language; it contains many incomplete sentences; often it contains simply sequences of phrases. These features may easily create misunderstandings. Oral communication is less reliable because it is not available in future; it is also affected by the attitudes and personality, self-interest, beliefs, values and prejudices of the sender as well as the receiver and also the time and circumstances of the communication. Oral communication is also not suitable for lengthy messages to be communicated to distant and widely scattered people.

Similarly the written mode gives the writer certain advantages as well as disadvantages over the speaker. Since the writer is writing for an absent reader, s/he may look over, reflect, and edit what s/he has already written, with no fear of being interrupted by his/her interlocutor; s/he can take his/her own time in choosing a particular word, even looking it up in the dictionary, if necessary, reorder what s/he has written, and even change his/her mind about what s/he has to say. S/he is under no pressure to keep on writing; s/he can even destroy what s/he has written and throw it into the dustbin without fear of offending the reader. But the writer has disadvantages too: s/he has no access to immediate feedback and simply has to imagine the reader's reactions. This non-reciprocal nature of written communication makes it more difficult to learn.

Written communication ensures the transmission of information in a uniform manner and there is little risk of unauthorized alteration in the message. Since it is put in black and white, it provides a permanent record for future reference. Written communication tends to be complete, precise and unambiguous. The message can be repeated at regular intervals and lengthy messages can be sent to widely scattered readers. But written communication is time-consuming, expensive and rigid and it becomes difficult to maintain secrecy.

In the business world, face-to-face and telephone communications are generally confirmed in writing by post particularly when the communication is with the world outside. Why do you think is it necessary to do so? Discuss with others in your group the comparative advantages and disadvantages of the telephonic mode of communication over face-to-face interaction.

Check Your Progress 7

1. Which mode of communication would you adopt in the following cases:-

   a) The message is very urgent.
   b) The message is important and lengthy.
   c) The message sent should be available in the records.
   d) The information is to be sent to all employees in different branches.
   e) You have to consult your boss, who is out of town, urgently and take a quick decision.

2. a) How does telephone communication differ from face-to-face communication? Are both these forms of oral communication?

   b) You are the Marketing Manager of a firm. You want to hire a sales supervisor. Which form of communication would you use to communicate your requirement to the Manager (Personnel)? Would you prefer to talk to him personally, over the phone, write a letter or memo? Give reasons for your answer.

34.7 LET US SUM UP

In this unit we have tried to understand what communication is and defined it as the process of meaningful interaction between two or more persons with a view to arriving at a common meaning and understanding. Communication can be achieved through use of language, written or spoken, and gestures. There are different types of communication and these are used on different occasions. Each of these mode of communication has its own advantages and disadvantages. Communication may involve repeated interactions or negotiations of meaning and the addresser and the

addressee play active roles in this process. Effective communication in business is as important as the blood circulating in the human body and hence managers do their best to overcome all barriers to communication.

34.8 SUGGESTED READING

1. Brown, Gillian and George Yule. 1983. *Discourse Analysis*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
2. Newman, William H., Charles E. Summers and Kirby E. Warren. 1979. *The Process of Management.* Delhi: Prentice Hall.
3. Halliday, M.A.K. 1989. *Spoken and Written Language.* Oxford. Oxford University Press.
4. Hymes, Dell. 1962. 'The Ethnography of Speaking.' In J.A. Fishman (ed.). 1968. *Readings in the Sociology of Language.* The Hague. Mouton.

Answers

Check Your Progress 1

1. Two persons. 2. Yes. 3. Limited communication is possible through gestures. 4. No. We'll not term it social communication. 5. Same as 4.

34.9 END UNIT QUESTIONS

1. What is communication? Discuss its importance in business and industrial world.
2. Explain the various forms of communication generally used in modern business organisation.
3. Explain the advantages of face-to-face communication over written communication.
4. Describe the barriers to communication. How can communication be made effective?
5. Write short notes on (a) horizontal & vertical communications; and (b) formal and informal communications.
6. Mr. Malhotra, Managing Director of ABC Distributors Ltd., New Delhi reads the following advertisement one morning:

WANTED EXCLUSIVE DISTRIBUTORS
FOR
INDIGENOUSLY DEVELOPED MILK-CHOCOLATE DRINK

Leading Milk Producers' Cooperative with extensive sales of milk-products wishes to introduce an indigenously - developed delicious milk-chocolate drink. We are looking for a distributor with good financial backing and excellent commercial experience in the consumer market. Write to the Managing Director, P.O. Box 332, Dharamshala, H.P.

Mr. Malhotra is interested in getting this distributorship for his company and plans to discuss the proposal with his general manager in the office. On reaching office he peeps into his secretary's room who is already there and has the following conversation:

MD: Malti.
PS: Good morning, sir. (In U.K. they tend to use the first name and not 'sir' when they know the addressee very well).
MD: Morning. Will you come to my office for a moment? Bring along today's paper with you.
PS: Which paper sir?
MD: Economic Times.
PS: O.K. sir.

a) What has been the advantage of this face-to-face communication between the MD and his PS?
b) Would the conversation be different if he were to talk to her on telephone (intercom)? Draft this interaction on intercom between the two.
c) Do you think he should have sent her a written communication? Draft this communication. What would be the advantages/disadvantages of this mode of communication over (a) and (b) above.

Mr. Malhotra later on asks his PS to fix a meeting with the general manager at 2.30 p.m. the same day so that he can discuss the proposition with him.

d) How should she communicate this to the GM? Draft it.
e) After discussion, MD wants GM to try for this business. How will the GM communicate with the advertiser? Try to draft this communication. Who do you think ought to sign this communication?
f) What action will the addressee take when they receive the letter from ABC? You may like to decide the mode of communication to be used, the addressee(s), and also prepare draft(s) for approval.