UNIT 3 ORGANISATIONAL COMMUNICATION

Contents

3.0 AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

In this unit, we introduce you to the basic knowledge of communication process and pattern in organisations. Upon completing the unit, you should be able to :

a) understand the important element of communication process;

b) explain the factors influencing organisational communication;

c) understand communication network and flow in organisations;

d) discuss different forms of organisational communication; and

e) identify barriers in communication and explain what steps can be taken to improve communication.

3.1 IMPORTANCE OF ORGANISATIONAL COMMUNICATION

Communication is the means by which we are linked to one another in any organisation. As organisations consist of people, it is important that they exchange ideas, and information to achieve desired goal. Thus communication is the essence of an organisation. According to Barnard (1938)[1] "in any exhaustive theory of organisation, communication would occupy a central place, because the structure, extensiveness and slope of organisations are almost entirely determined by communication techniques". Without effective communication it is impossible to carry out the major activities of any organisation such as planning, organising, directing, supervising, co-ordination, reporting and budgeting. Various studies have indicated that one of the characteristics of effective managers is the skill in informal communication in getting the message across, as well as to find out the problems of employees. Effective managers also lead and motivate employees towards efficient working. Since communication is the very life of any organisation, it is important to know the concept, process and flow of organisational communication.

3.2 CONCEPT AND PROCESS OF COMMUNICATION

3.2.1 Concept of Communication

The word communication is derived from the Latin word 'communis', which means common. Gode (1959)[2] defined communication as the "process that makes common to two or several what was the monopoly of one or some". However, the concept of communication also involves the following components (Dance 1970)[3] :

a)   communication is a process of understanding and sharing of ideas, facts, feelings etc., with one another;

b)   communication involves interaction and relationship among members of a social system;

c)   transmission or exchange of information, ideas, emotion and skills;

d)   a mechanism by which power is exercised; and

e)   a process by which various people are linked to achieve a common goal.

The above concept of communication applies to all types of communication including the interpersonal communication in organisations. Interpersonal communication refers to face to face exchange between two individuals. The above meaning of communication also implies that communication is a process. This means that the relationship among various elements of communication is dynamic, continuous and flexible. This dynamic interaction will be affected by different variables. In order to understand this, we will now discuss various elements of communication process.

3.2.2 Elements in the Communication Process

Communication has been defined as follows :   ·

i)   "a process consisting of a sender transmitting a message through media to receiver who responds" (Kottor, 1977)[4];

ii)   "an act of establishing contact between a sender and a receiver, with the help of a message; the sender and receiver have some common experience which lends meaning to the message encoded and sent by the sender, and received and decoded by the receiver". (Schramm, 1955)[5].

The above definitions indicate various elements in communication process such as   sender, message, and receiver. The communication process model developed by Berlo (1960)[6], clearly shows various elements in communication process (Fig. 1). It is also known as "S-M-C-R" model of communication. The elements of this communication model are discussed below.
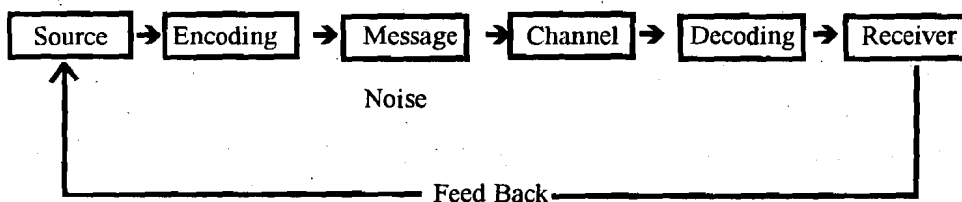
Fig. 1. S.M.C.R Model of Communication Process

Source: The source or sender shows the origin of message. The source can either be an individual or institution which has some ideas or information to be transmitted to other persons. For example, the extension agent may like to communicate the improved farm practices to the farmers.

Encodings: Encoding refers to the translation of ideas into a set of symbols. Without proper codes or symbols, ideas can not be transferred. For example, languages, gestures and pictures are some of the important symbols which can express ideas.

Message: The message is the stimulus or idea that is communicated. It is the physical form into which the ideas are encoded. Ideas are encoded in the form of spoken or written words, facial gestures or pictures.

Channel: A channel is the medium or means by which a message is transmitted. The commonly used media are face to face exchange, group meetings, telephone, radio, newspapers, television and written materials.

Receiver: Receiver is one who perceives the sender's message. For example, the message of extension agent may be received by a large number of farmers. To make the communication more effective, we should make the message in such a way the receiver can understand and act on it.

Decoding: Decoding refers to the process by which the receiver interprets and translates the message and gets meaning out of it. The symbols are interpreted into appropriate meaning. The interpretation of message depends upon receiver's background and experiences. The successful communication depends upon the extent to which the receiver decodes the message which matches with the intention of sender.

Feed back: Feed back is important to know whether the receiver has received the message and understood it. It refers to the response of receiver to the sender's message. In organisational setting, it is important that the managers receive positive as well as negative feed back from their employees. This will help the managers to assess the effectiveness of communication.

Noise: Noise refers to factors that destroy the quality of communication. Absence of noise increases the fidelity (truthfullness) of communication. Noise can interfere with communication effectiveness at any stage of communication process. For example, problems in encoding and decoding can create difficulties in understanding. The quality of radio and telecast signals can be reduced due to bad weather conditions.

Check Your Progress 1

Notes : a) Write your answers in the space provided.

b) Check your answers with model answers provided at the end of the unit.

1) Define the term 'Communication'. What are the various components of the concept of communication?

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2) Name the elements in communication process.

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3.3 COMMUNICATION FLOW IN ORGANISATION

3.3.1 Factors influencing Organisational Communication

Important factors which affect organisational communication are :

i)   Nature of the organisational structure and

ii)   Nature of channels of communication use.

Organisational Structure: The organisational structure refers to properties of organisation such as degree of formalisation, centralisation and specialisation. These properties affect the nature and efficiency of communication in organisations. For example, under bureaucratic hierarchical structure, there are written rules and norms to regulate actions. These rules while contributing towards uniformity and rational actions also lead to inefficiency. Further, under hierarchical structure 'commands and instructions come down the organisation, reports and other information go up. (Roger and Agarwala (1976)[7]. Communication among members of same work group or job specialisation will be effective when compared to communication among members of different work groups.

Channels of Communication: The Channels of communication in organisation can be classified as formal and informal channels. Formal channel of communication are strictly official in nature and will be generally in written form, and controlled by executives.
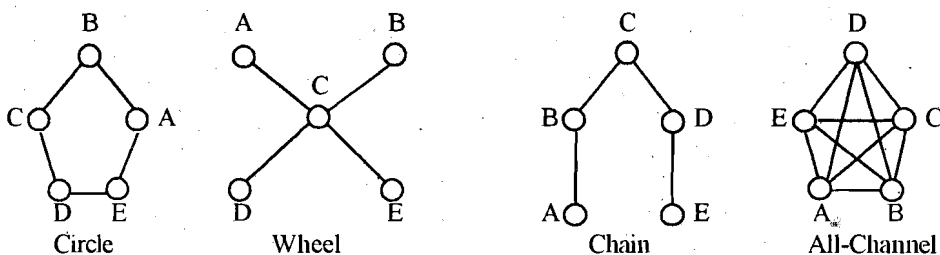

Fig. 2 : Small Group Communication Network

Informal channels of communication are interpersonal communication among work groups. The informal communication through peer relationship occupies an important role in reaching organisational goal as it springs up spontaneously within organisation. It is not controlled by executives and motivated by self-interest. The formal and informal channels are usually complementary and substitutable. We should also remember that often informal structure of communication is a breeding ground for spreading rumours.

3.3.2 Small Group Communication Network

Organisation can be seen as having several units, each unit consisting of a small group of members. The nature of communication structure or network among these members of small groups will affect the efficiency of communication. The experiments conducted on different types of communication structures have revealed some interesting findings which have implication for designing organisational structure. Four types of communication structures such as circle, wheel, chain and all-channel (Figure-2) were tested. In case of 'circle' net work, the person 'D' can directly communicate with 'C' and 'E'. But if he has to communicate with 'B' he has to communicate through 'C'. In case of 'wheel' network, the person 'C' can communicate directly with A, B, D and E. However, these persons (A, B, D, E.) can communicate with one another only through 'C'. In chain pattern, 'C' can communicate directly with B and D. Likewise B can communicate directly with C and A. However, A and E can directly communicate with C only through B and D respectively. In case of 'all-channel' network all members can directly communicate with one another directly. The conclusions of these small experiments as reported by Rogers and Agarwala (1976)[8] are as follows :

● 　The centralised communication networks like the wheel are suited for routine and simple tasks, but the error rate is high.

- A decentralised network like 'circle' is appropriate for complex jobs where innovative thinking is required.

- The effectiveness of 'all-channel' network was not more than that of 'wheel' network.

- The satisfaction of members was relatively higher under decentralised network (circle), as compared to centralised one (wheel).

Apart from small group communication network, one has to understand various directions under which communication flows in an organisation. Communication flows in three directions namely downward, upward and lateral.

3.3.3 Downward Communication

Downward communication refers to flow of communication from high levels to lower levels in the organisational hierarchy. The message passes through various levels till it reaches the lowest level. There are five types of downward communication (Katz and Kahn, 19978)[9]:

- orders and instructions about job,

- information designed to produce understanding of the task,

- information about organisational procedures and practices,

- feed back about sub-ordinates' performance and

- information to indicate a sense of mission.

Media of communication such as letters, rule-books, telephone and the meetings are used for downward communications. Since many of the written materials are not fully read and understood by the members of organisation, it is essential to have a feed back system to know the effectiveness of downward communication which is highly prone to distortion. The downward communication is often filtered by managers and only the required information is passed on to the sub-ordinates.

3.3.4 Upward Communication

Upward communication flows from subordinates to supervisors. The upward communication includes reports on subordinates' performance, problems related to work, organisational practices, opinions and feelings related to organisational policies and rules and innovative ideas and solutions. Due to fear of ridicule and punishment, sub-ordinates do not freely express their opinions which inhibit the free flow of upward communication. Further it does not have the support of organisational hierarchy and the middle managers tend to filter data and do not pass all information, especially unfavourable news, to their superiors. The upward communication lacks spontaneity. In many organisations, the following measures are adopted to improve upward communication : suggestion scheme, grievance procedure, complaint system, joint-consultative council, union of employees, opinion surveys, open door polices and informal gatherings.

3.3.5 Lateral Communication

Lateral communication is the sideways flow of information among people of same organisational levels as well as different departments. It takes place outside the chain of command. The direct communication between members of same work group or different departments help in improving understanding and achieving co-ordination. The lateral communication improves human relationship among members of organisation. This informal communication in organisational setting is also called the grapevine. The grapevine consists of several informal communication networks in the organisation and links various members regardless of rank or hierarchy. The members organisation discuss their common problems and interact with one another for social relationship. These informal communication interactions are spontaneous, informative and information spread more rapidly than through formal channel.

An understanding of how the grapevine or informal communication operate helps us in making use of grapevine to achieve organisation goal. In a research study conducted by Davis (1953)[10] four types of informal communication chains have been identified : single-strand, gossip, probability and cluster as given in fig. 3.
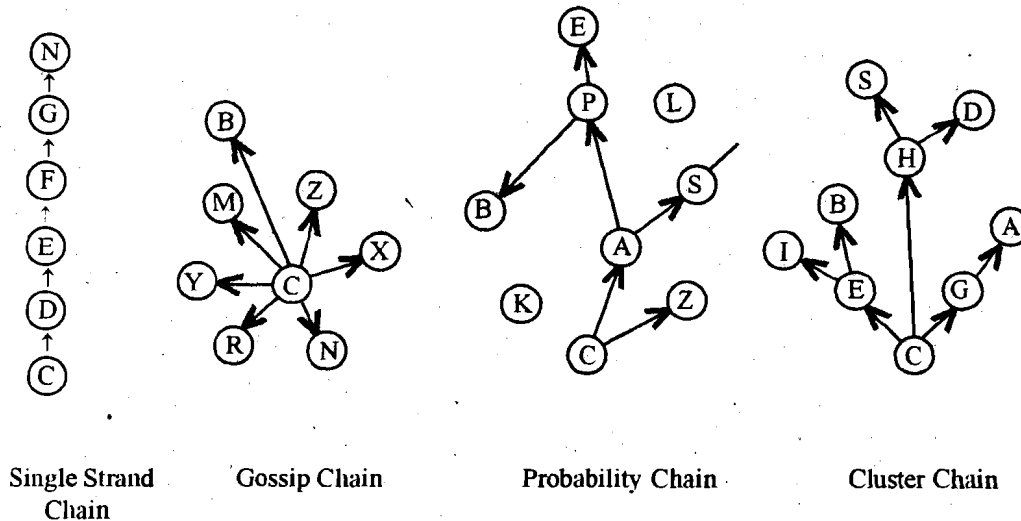

| Single Strand Chain | Gossip Chain | Probability Chain | Cluster Chain |

Figure 3. Four Types of Informal or Grapevine Communication Channels

Source : *Adapted from Davis, K (1953) 'Management Communication and the Grapevine', Harvard Business Reviews, Vol. 31, pp 43 - 49.*

The single-strand chain: In this chain, C tells D, who inturn tells E and so on. Under this chain high distortion of message is likely to happen.

The gossip chain: Under gossip network, C non-selectively tells every one.

The probability chain: In probability chain, C tells to A and Z randomly according to law of probability. Likewise A tells S and P.

The cluster chain: In the cluster network, people selectively inform those whom they trust. Thus, C informs E, G and H. And E tells B and I who are trusted by E. It has been found that cluster network is generally predominant in organisations. The effectiveness of informal communication can be improved by increasing the number and effectiveness of cluster communication network.

3.4 MEDIA OF ORGANISATIONAL COMMUNICATION

The organisational communication can take various forms such as oral, written, visual and non-verbal communication. These days there are also advances in communication technology using electronic devices. Let us discuss these various forms of organisational communication.

3.4.1 Oral Communication

Oral method of communication is important as it is frequently used to communicate orders, instructions or making explanations or inquiries. It can be formal or informal. The oral communication enables us to get the feedback immediately. It can strengthen the interpersonal relationship and gives opportunities for clarification of difficult points and understanding of issues. However, oral communication may consume time and be less effective if the audience size is larger. It is difficult to maintain the consistency and accuracy of a message if the oral communication is to be given to several groups by different speakers. The commonly used oral methods of communication are meetings, phone, and interviews.

3.4.2 Written Communication

Written materials are important forms of communication in organisations since they provide records and references. The written forms of communication help in sending the message with

uniformity, accuracy and at low cost. Written materials are used to inform the members of the organisation about policies, plans and growth. Further, it is necessary to prepare written reports about the achievement of goals and target at frequent intervals. The disadvantages of written message are the problems in maintenance of records and files. The written materials can not be effectively understood by all members of organisation due to problems of poor handwriting and use of technical words. Written communications are impersonal. The media such as letters, bulletins, periodicals, rule books, annual reports and notice boards are some of the examples of written method of communication.

3.4.3 Visual Communications

Visual communication materials include different visual materials such as slides, film strips, pictures and photographs. The audio-visual materials such as television and videos make use of both the senses of hearing and seeing. A combination of different audio-visual media are used in organisations for effective communication. For example, the manager may deliver a talk along with slide presentation about the achievements of his unit. The audio-visual aids draw the attention of audience and help in efficient communication. The presentation of data in the form of picto-graphs will be more effective, rather than in the form of tables. Video-cassettes are becoming more popular aids in presenting a success story of an unit or introduction of new products. The preparation and use of audio-visuals depend upon the considerations of cost.

3.4.4 Non-verbal Communication

Non-verbal communication refers to communication through facial expressions, gestures and body movements. The non-verbal communication generally supports verbal communication.

3.4.5 Electronic Media and Computer Aided Communication

The technological changes related to information influence organisational communication. For example, it is possible to have instant dissemination of information across various units or members of organisation through computer network. The emergence of new communication devices such as cable television, personal computers, facsimile (fax) system, electronic mail system, electronic typewriters, cellular telephones, photocopying machines, desktop publishing facilities using computers, advances in printing, teleconferencing facilities, computerised systems to undertake different activities such as reservation of tickets and management of accounts have greatly changed the scenario of organisational communication. These technical advances greatly help managers, but it should be remembered that they also bring problems. The consequence of these technical advances have to be carefully studied and negative consequences have to be wisely handled.

The emergence of computers have helped organisations to develop effective Management Information System (MIS) to collect, process and communicate relevant data in order to help those who make decisions as well as consume resources. The MIS, which is essential for every organisation, can be defined as a systematised pattern of communication which helps in providing management with accurate and timely information to make decisions as well as in overall planning, monitoring and evaluation of different organisational activities. At every stage of the management process, from planning to reporting we need information to make effective decisions. This is known as 'management information', which includes not only technical data, but also data on organisational policies, recruitments, job, career development, and information about external environment. The management information generally reported in the form of reports, tables, summaries, figures, graphs etc., can be stored in computers. These pieces of information which can be retrieved with the help of computers will assist in making every day decision related to effective use of resources. The steps in designing a Management Information System are as follows : a) identification of basic characteristics of organisation, b) deciding the levels of information groups, information frequency and content. c) data collection, processing, documentation and presentation, d) ensuring the proposed systems flexibility and adaptability, e) scope for computerisation, f) evaluating the costs and benefits of MIS (Ramesh Babu and Sachdeva, 1994)[11]

Check Your Progress 2

Note : a)   Write your answers in the space provided.

b)   Check your answers with model answers provided at the end of the unit.

1)   What do you mean by informal channels of communication in an organisation?

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2)   Give a brief account of directions of communication flows in an organisation.

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3.5   PROBLEMS IN ORGANISATIONAL COMMUNICTION

Communication is a complex process as it involves human beings. The communication breakdowns or barriers are important problems to be tackled in an organisation. The communication barriers refer to blockage of flow of communication in any organisation. The communication barriers are related to factors such as organisational structure, poor planning and co-ordination. Different barriers of communication are as follows :

3.5.1 Barriers in Communicati ii

Problems in Perception : People have different background, knowledge and experiences. These differences result in perception of same event from different perspective which causes communication barrier. For example, the message on 'family planning' may be perceived differently according to one's economic status, education and value system.

Semantic Problems : Semantic barriers occur due to problems of encoding and decoding the message. Thus, the causes of semantic problems are due to language capacity. The message, "the meeting will be held shortly" will not be clear. Some may mean shortly in terms of hours and others in terms of days or weeks.

Poor Expression of Messages : The written or spoken messages have to be given with clarity, devoid of technical jargon and with right words. The lack of clarity and use of technical jargon cause difficulties in understanding.

Unclarified Assumptions : Practically all messages carry unclarified assumptions. If a receiver of a message falsely assumes certain things, then confusion will arise. A manager may ask his sub-ordinate to attend the next monthly review meeting. Then he may assume that the sub-ordinate will prepare a progress report of the unit and bring all details, for the meeting. But, the sub-ordinate may assume that the manager is asking him to attend the meeting since the manager may need his assistance during the time of meeting. Thus, the unclarified assumptions will result in misunderstanding and confusion.

Interpretation Problems : The message has to be delivered in a language which can be understood by all the members of organisation. If an organisation consists of people speaking different languages, it is essential that interpretation of message is done in appropriate languages so that all can understand the message. Efforts should be made to educate the employees to understand the common language used in the organisation.

Psychological Barriers : Psychological or emotional factors play an important role in effective interpersonal communication. The factors such as motivation, fear, love and jealously affect how one perceives the message and react to it. The receiver's attitude towards himself, towards the source and the content of message will also affect the perception of message. For example, a person's negative attitude towards family planning norms is likely to interfere with right interpretation of message on family planning. Other psychological factors such as one's tendency towards premature evaluation; preoccuption of mind due to personal or family problems; poor judgement and loss in transmission due to poor memory will interfere with effective communication.

Poor Credibility of Communication : Communicator's credibility is the degree to which a communicator is perceived to be trustworthy. The credibility of communicator depends upon various factors such as status of communication, his knowledge level, past experience of receiver and perceived honesty of communicator. The higher the perceived credibility of the communicator, more will be the effectiveness of communicator.

Organisational Barriers : As pointed out earlier, the organisational structure affects communication behaviour in organisation. Thus, various organisational factors such as number of managerial levels, decentralisation of power and authority, size of organisation, participation of lower level employees in decision making, facilities for use of various communication media, encouragement for informal relationship and nature of services undertaken by the organisation affect the communication flow in organisation. For example, if the organisation strictly follows the rule of communication through proper channel and has many levels of hierarchy, it is bound to cause delay in transmission of messages.

3.5.2 Steps Towards Effective Communication

If we have to remove the above mentioned communication barriers, we should take certain necessary steps to improve communication. The suggested steps are as follows:

☐ Ensure that all members of organisation understand the languages used and explain the difficult technical terms. Make arrangements for interpretation of languages when necessary.

☐ Properly and timely plan your communication according to the purpose by selecting appropriate media.

☐ The noise in transmission of message has to be eliminated. The human and physical environment should be kept in such a way which will facilitate communication.

☐ Be sensitive to the receiver's need and problems. One has to emphathise with receiver's feelings and situations.

☐ Develop listenining skill since good listening is important for effective communication. The listening can be improved by the use of following guides given by Davis and Newstron (1985)[12] :

- stop talking,
- put the talker at ease,
- show the talker that you want to listen,
- remove distractions,
- empathise with the talker,
- be patient,
- hold your temper,
- go easy on arguements and criticism, and
- ask question.

☐ Give importance to feedback in communication as communication is a two way process. Make efforts to know whether the receiver has received the message and understood it as well as the receiver's reaction to the message.

☐ Improve your writing by use of simple works, short sentences, active voice, less technical words and illustrations.

☐ Improve your oral communication skills through constant practice, a thorough preparation of subject to be communicated, use of effective speech plan, use of emotional appeal, improving memory, using metaphors to analogies to create interest and improvement of diction.

☐ Develop credibility or trustworthiness through one's technical competence, sincerity and commitment to work.

☐ The communication in organisation should also aim at creating a healthy atmosphere for work, motivating the employees to be efficient as well as challenging them to be more productive.

☐ Make use of improved communication devices, media and equipments to improve communication flow and production of written and visual materials.

Check Your Progress 3

Notes : a) Write your answers in the space provided.
   b) Check your answers with model answers provided at the end of the unit.

1) What are the major communication barriers in organisation?

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2) List some of the modern communication media which can be used for organisational communication.

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3.6 LET US SUM UP

In this unit we have discussed the basic process and pattern of organisational communication. Communication is the essence and life blood of any organisation. The concept of communication shows that it is a process of understanding and sharing of ideas, facts, feelings, transmission of information and linking of various people to achieve a common goal. Important elements in the process of communication are source, encoding, message, channel, decoding and receiver.

While studying various factors which affect communication we have seen that nature of organisational structure and channels of communication used are the most important factors which affect communication. There are two major channels of communication in an organisation: formal and informal channels. Formal channels such as letters, periodicals etc., are official in nature and controlled by executives. Informal channels of communication which are interpersonal networks are important to achieve organisational goal. The experiments on small group communication revealed that centralised communication networks are suit- ' for routine task while as decentralised network is appropriate for complex jobs where innovative thinking is required.

Looking at how communication flows in organ........ons, we found that it can flow in three directions—downward, upward and lateral. Further we also saw that different forms of communication such as oral, written, visual and non-verbal communication are used in an organisation.

We have also seen that the electronic media such as television, computers, electronic mail systems, electronic type writers, photocopiers, facsimile (fax) system, teleconferencing facilities and computerised system to handle various organisational activities can greatly improve organisational communication.

Major barriers in organisational communication are problems in perception, semantic problems, poor expression of messages, unclarified assumptions, psychological barriers, poor credibility of communicator and organisational barriers. We have also seen various steps towards effective communication. Some of the measures of effective communication are: proper planning of communication, avoiding technical jargons, elimination of noise, being sensitive to the needs of receivers, developing skills in listening, writing and oral communication, emphasis on feed back, improving the credibility of communication, and use of modern communication media and equipments.

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3.9 MODEL ANSWERS

Check Your Progress 1

1) Communication is a process consisting of a sender transmitting a message through media to receiver who responds. Various components of the concept of communication are : a process of understanding and sharing of ideas and facts etc.: interaction among different members; transmission of message; mechanism by which the power is exercised; and a process by which various people are linked to achieve a common goal.

2) Various elements in communication process are : source, encoding, message, channel, decoding, receiver, noise and feedback.

Check Your Progress 2

1) Informal channels of communication refer to interpersonal communication networks among members of organisation. The informal communication occurs through peer relationship and it is not controlled by executives. It is motivated by self-interest. Informal channels are important to achieve the organisational goals though it is often a breeding ground for spreading rumours.

2) Organisational communication flows in three directions namely downward, upward and lateral. Downward communication refers to flow of communication from higher levels to lower levels. Here the message passes through various hierarchical levels till it reaches the lowest level. The upward communication flows from sub-ordinates to

supervisors. Due to fear or redicule, subordinates do not freely express their opinions which inhibit the free flow of upward communication. Lateral communication is the sideways flow of information among people of same organisational levels. It takes place outside the chain of command.

Check Your Progress 3

1) The major communication barriers are related to problems in perception, semantic problems, poor expression of messages, unclarified assumptions, psychological barriers, poor credibility of communication, organisational barriers such as structural problems, and poor facilities for use of various media.

2) The modern electronic communication media which can be used to improve organisational communication are cable television, computers, facsimile (fax system), electronic mail system, cellular telephone networks, photocopiers, desk top publishing using computers and teleconferencing facilities.