

---

## UNIT 8 COMMUNICATION: MEANING, NATURE AND PROCESS\*

---

### Structure

- 8.0 Objectives
- 8.1 Introduction
- 8.2 Communication: Meaning and Definitions
- 8.3 Interpersonal Communication
- 8.4 Process of Communication
- 8.5 Networks Communication
- 8.6 Types of Communications
  - 8.6.1 Formal Communication
  - 8.6.2 Informal Communication
  - 8.6.3 Grapevine Communication
  - 8.6.4 Rumour
- 8.7 Transformational Theory
- 8.8 Building Effective Communication
- 8.9 Barriers to Communication
- 8.10 Conclusion
- 8.11 Glossary
- 8.12 References
- 8.13 Answers to Check Your Progress Exercises

---

### 8.0 OBJECTIVES

---

After reading this Unit, you should be able to:

- Understand the meaning and definitions of interpersonal communication;
- Describe the process and types of communication; and
- Examine the steps to build effective communication and identify barriers to communication.

---

### 8.1 INTRODUCTION

---

Communication is one of the main processes and components of organisation. It is found in all organisations irrespective size and nature. It has been considered as an effective tool for achieving the goals of an organisation. Chester Bernard was one of the first writers to give serious thought and attention to communication in a large-scale enterprise. He viewed communication as a unifying means by which organisation members were linked together to achieve a common

\*Contributed by Dr. Ch.C.Prasad, Assistant Director, Dr. B.R.Ambedkar Open University, Hyderabad.

objective. The concept of communication is inter-related with other concepts like motivation, coordination, leadership, structure, and decision-making in organisations. In this Unit, we shall discuss different aspects of communication in an organisational context.

---

## **8.2 COMMUNICATION: MEANING AND DEFINITIONS**

---

The word ‘communication’ is derived from Latin word *Communis* which means ‘common’. Communication is a process in which the sender of information seeks to establish a commonness with the receiver of information. Thus, communication refers to the transfer of information from the sender to the receiver. It is the process of facilitating an interchange of information, understanding and ideas between two or more people, and mutual interchange of ideas by effective means. In other words, communication is exchange of thoughts, opinions or transmitting information by speech, writing or signs.

Pfiffner considers communication as “the heart of management,” while Millet described it as the “blood stream of an administrative organization”. Ordway Tead has defined communication “as that process whereby one person makes his ideas and feelings known to another”. Peter Drucker has described communication as “the ability of the various functional groups within the enterprise to understand each other and each other’s functions and concerns”.

According to Webster’s Dictionary, communication is “intercourse by words, letters or messages, interchange of thoughts or opinions”. James L. Gibson and others have viewed communication “as the transmission of information and understanding through the common symbols may be verbal or non-verbal” (Koontz & O’Donnell, 1984).

After analysing the above definitions, three aspects deserve emphasis: Firstly, when interacting with others, words, letters etc., are used; secondly, two or more persons are involved in the communication process, and thirdly, the interaction process is motivated by sharing of information or opinions toward a common end. Thus, the essence of communication is information as well as understanding.

---

## **8.3 INTERPERSONAL COMMUNICATION**

---

Communication in organisational behaviour includes communication technology, interpersonal communication and nonverbal communication. In the continuum of the communication process, on the one end is sophisticated communication technology, while on the other end is relatively simple nonverbal communication. Interpersonal communication represents the middle ground in the continuum. For the study of organisational behaviour, interpersonal communication is the most pertinent of all. In this kind of communication, the major emphasis is on transferring information from one person to another. Further, communication is viewed as a basic method of effecting behavioural change, and it incorporates the psychological processes such as perception, learning and motivation, on the one hand, and language on the other. Today, the introduction of various sophisticated electronic communication technologies and better forms of interaction greatly influence the nature of interpersonal communication.

The classical hierarchical organisation structure gives recognition only to vertical communication. However, horizontal communication is also required to facilitate coordinated effort in achieving organisational goals. The horizontal requirement becomes more crucial as the organisation becomes larger, more complex, and more subject to the downsizing and the flattening of structures. Because of the dynamic interpersonal aspects of communication, the interactive form seems more appropriate than the horizontal form.

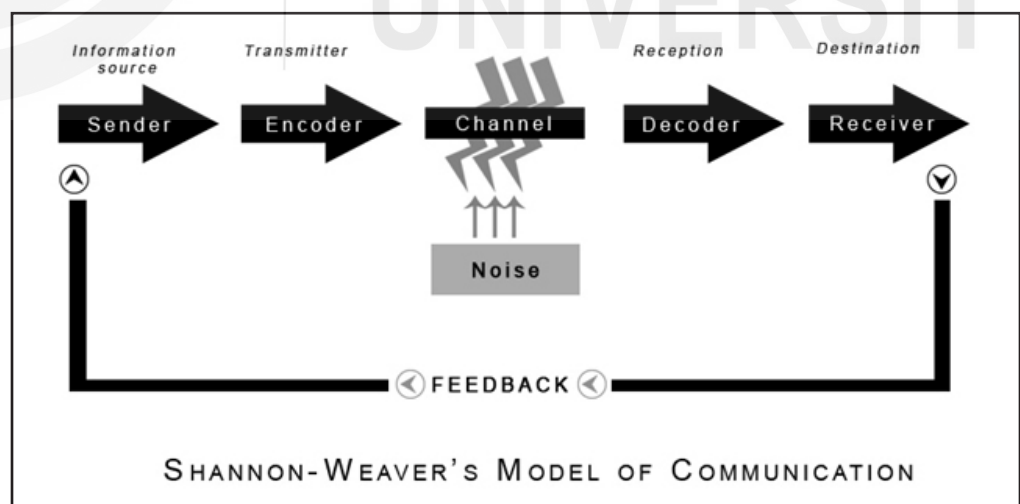
There are various factors that underscore the need for interactive communication. Several research studies have summarised four of the most important purposes of interactive communication, namely, a) task coordination, b) problem solving, c) information sharing, d) conflict resolution. Team meetings that take place in most organisations are among major methods of interactive communication. The quantity, quality and human implications discussed in relation to vertical communication process in an organisation are also integral to interactive communication.

---

## 8.4 PROCESS OF COMMUNICATION

---

The most widely used communication model has evolved from the work of Shannon and Weaver and Schramm. The basic ingredients of the model include a source, an encoder, a message, channels, a decoder, a receiver, feedback, and noise. Basically, the process of communication consists of a sender and a receiver. Communication begins with a sender. The sender transmits the information to the receiver either orally or in writing. The message may be transmitted through the computer, telephone etc. The proper selection of the channel is important for effective communication. The receiver should be ready to receive the message. Unless the sender and the receiver understand the communication in the same manner, the communication cannot be complete. Misunderstanding or wrong interpretation of communication by the receiver hinders the communication process and creates a communication gap.



*Source:* Shannon & Weaver, 1949.

To check the effectiveness of communication, proper feedback system is essential. Feedback makes it possible to know whether the communication has been understood as it should be and whether the organisational changes

have taken place as a result of the communication. Feedbacks also reduce the communication gap between the sender and the receiver. Thus, that communication process has five key elements, namely, 1) communicator, 2) transmission procedure, 3) form of communication, 4) recipient, 5) desired response.

---

## **8.5 NETWORKS COMMUNICATION**

---

A communication network is the pattern of direction in which information flows in an organisation. A network, in computing, is a group of two or more devices that can communicate. In practice, a network comprises a number of different computer systems connected by physical and /or wireless connections. All networks allow computers and/ or individuals to share information and its sources. There are various types of networks that are classified according to specific characteristics like connection types, whether they are wired or wireless, the scale of the network, and their architecture and topology. Network types include Local Area Networks (LAN), Wide Area Networks (WAN), Metropolitan Area Networks and Backbone Networks.

- **Local Area Networks (LAN):** This is a network that connects computers and devices in a limited geographical area like a home, school, office building etc.
- **Wide Area Networks (WAN):** It is a computer network that covers a large geographical area like a city or country; it spans even intercontinental distances.
- **Metropolitan Area Networks:** It is a large computer network that usually spans a metropolitan city or a large campus.
- **Backbone Network:** It is part of a computer network infrastructure that provides a path for the exchange of information between different LANs or sub-networks.

### **Check Your Progress 1**

**Note:** i) Use the space given below for your answers.

ii) Check your answers with those given at the end of the Unit.

1. Explain the meaning of communication and give a few definitions of the same.

.....  
.....  
.....  
.....

2. Describe the various types of Network Communication.

.....  
.....

---

## 8.6 TYPES OF COMMUNICATION

---

Communication is a general term; different persons interpret it in different ways. Communication is an interpersonal process that involves exchange of behaviours. The behaviours that occur in an organisation are vital to the communication process. Discussed below are a few type of communication:

### 8.6.1 Formal Communication

Communication broadly can be categorised into formal and informal communication. There are three types of formal communication based on the direction of information flow viz., downward, upward and lateral.

#### *i. Downward Communication*

Downward communication flows from top to bottom. It refers to the instruction and other official messages originating from the top personnel of an organisation. It is transmitted through hierarchical channels and reaches the lowest ranking official in the chain. Downward communication is both oral and written. Instructions, speeches, meetings etc., are the media employed for the downward oral communication. Written downward communication is sent through letters, handbooks, pamphlets etc.

Katz and Kahn(1978) have identified five general purposes of the top to bottom communication in an organisation:

- a) To give specific task directives about the job.
- b) To give information about organisational procedures and practices.
- c) To provide information about the rationale of the Job.
- d) To tell subordinates about their performance.
- e) To provide ideological information to facilitate the indoctrination of goals.

In downward communication, information is often lost or distorted. Misunderstandings can easily occur when instructions pass through many channels and levels. As is well known, several instructions or directions are not understood correctly by the receiver of the communication. This calls for a feedback system to ensure that information is perceived as intended by its sender.

#### *ii. Upward Communication*

Upward communication is the opposite of downward communication. In upward communication information travels from the subordinates to the superiors. The means used for the transfer of information in the upward communication system are suggestions, appeals, grievances, complaints, group meetings, questionnaires etc. For an effective use of upward communication channel, an environment where the subordinates feel free to communicate is essential. Such an environment has to be created by superiors.



### *iii. Lateral Communication*

This type of communication is either horizontal or diagonal in nature. Lateral communication may take place among officials of the same level in the hierarchy or among the officials who are out of the superior-subordinate relationship. The aim of lateral communication is to spread information to all corners of the organisation and coordinate efforts to achieve organisational goals.

### **8.6.2 Informal Communication**

The deliberately established communication system in an organisation is called formal communication. But this system must be supplemented with informal communication. Information, advice and even orders flow, many a time, along informal channels and not along the deliberately established formal channels of communication. The informal network of communication is based on social relations existing within the organisation. Two or more persons at different levels in an organisation may be communicating with each other in a way not formally charted out. Social relations like friendship or distancing may create such informal conditions of communication. The rigidity of formal channels may give rise to informal channels of communication. Informal communication flows through small groups in the organisation. One positive feature of these channels is that they overcome certain problems of upward communication. Informal communication also facilitates downward and lateral communication.

A notable dysfunction of informal channels is that they can distort information. If the administration knows what type of informal channels are working in the organisation and what sort of information is circulated, it helps them in coordinating properly organizational affairs. Excessive dependence of employees on informal channels is an indicator of weak coordination in the organisation. Sometimes informal channels sabotage the prominent organisational purpose. To counter this risk, organisations need to develop openness in information sharing and the socialisation practices.

### **8.6.3 Grapevine Communication**

Grapevine communication is an unorganised, unofficial, and informal channel of communication in an organization. It is an integral part of the communication system in an organisation. Informal channels of communication, often called 'grapevine' are considered dysfunctional to organisational functioning. They are alleged to damage the organisational interests by creating and carrying gossip and false information. When the formal channels fail or do not work properly, people spread rumours, false and irresponsible statement or half truths in all the directions. It is called 'grapevine' channel of communication.

According to Bovee and others (2000), "Grapevine is an informal interpersonal channel of information not officially sanctioned by the organization". Newstrom and Keith Davis (1993) observe that, "Grapevine is an informal system that arises spontaneously from the social interaction of the organization". In the opinion of R.W.Griffin(2013), "the grapevine is an informal communication network that can permeate an organization". The grapevine does not have any definite pattern or direction, though it is largely horizontal in nature". Keith Davis has classified it into four basic types:

- **Single strand chain:** It involves the passing of information through a line of persons to the ultimate recipient.
- **Gossip chain:** In this pattern, one person disseminates information to everyone, thus making a gossip chain.
- **Probability chain:** It is a random process in which some transmit the information to others in accordance with the laws of probability, and then the others communicate to still others in a similar manner. This chain may also be called a random process of communication.
- **Cluster chain:** In this pattern, a person gives information to a few selected persons who may in turn pass the information to other select persons. These linkages forms a cluster chain.

As is well known, grapevine communication spreads information, whether right or wrong, very fast. This is a highly sensitive channel. Constructively, it spreads information which cannot be disseminated through regular channels. On the other hand, the main disadvantages of grapevine communication is that it often spreads rumours and gossips that can cause distortions and misconceptions.

#### 8.6.4 Rumour

A rumour is a tall and unsubstantiated tale of explanations of events circulating from person to person and pertaining to an object, event, or issue in public concern. In social sciences, a rumour involves some kind of a statement whose veracity is not quickly or ever confirmed. The terms ‘rumours’ and ‘gossip’ are used sometimes interchangeably, but rumours are not quite the same as gossips. Both are “pieces” of information that cannot be verified, but rumours tend to affect organisations or groups of people, while gossips refer to more personal matters.

---

### 8.7 TRANSFORMATIONAL THEORY

---

Transformation is really about thinking differently and about connecting existing things in different ways to achieve new capabilities. Generally, transformation communication theory is related to military operations. The world of military communications is on the verge of massive and revolutionary change, from new generations of satellites providing greatly enhanced band width, speed, and capability. Transformational communication is a whole new way of looking at military operations, capability, and procurement. Operationally, the foundation of transformational communications rests on four primary supports: the Transformational Satellite Communication System or TSAT; the Global Information Grid Band width Expansion or GIG-BE; the Warfighter Information Network - Tactical Systems, or WIN-T; and the Joint Tactical Radio System or JTRS.

---

### 8.8 BUILDING EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION

---

After analysing different aspects of communication to achieving organisational cohesiveness, the following guidelines need to be made to build affective communication in an organisation:

- a. Communication channels should be straightforward and short to minimise delays and prevent distortion of information and its transmission.
- b. Arrangement should be made for the prompt transmission of information to those who need it.
- c. A fast and automatic transit system of information flow should be built into the organisational structure.
- d. Information should be reliable, accurate, credible, precise and clear.
- e. The language employed in communication should be simple and easy to understand.
- f. Feedback is an important component of an effective communication system.
- g. There is a clear need for supplementing formal communication channels with informal channels.
- h. The communication system should be flexible enough to absorb additional loads of information to incorporate new techniques of information and transmission and to adapt to the changing organisational requirements.

---

## **8.9 BARRIERS TO COMMUNICATION**

---

There are certain factors which come in the way of smooth flow of the communication process. Following are some of the barriers that often can make communication less effective:

1. Complexity of language can make the communication difficult. Unclear ideas in the mind of the sender of the communication may act as a barrier to effective communication. This could occur due to poorly chosen words, lack of ideas and unnecessary jargon.
2. Poor retention of information also leads to ineffective communication. Often people start writing without planning and stating the purpose of the message.
3. The size and distance of an organisation is another hindrance to the communication process. If the organisation is large and the employees are more in number, communication becomes difficult. Too many levels of hierarchy hinder or dilute communication.
4. Unclarified assumptions may cause confusion in the transmission of communication.
5. Lack of planning to communicate is another hurdle in making the communication system smooth and effective.

The chief executive must be aware of communication barriers like the lack of a communication policy, legal limitations, poor strategy of communication, over-confidence, underestimating the intelligence and overestimating the fund of knowledge of listeners, poor listening, lack of clarity, poor motivation and neglect in the use of available data.



### Check your progress 2

- Note:** i. Use the space given below for your answers  
ii. Check your answers with those given at the end of the unit.

1. Explain types of formal communication in an organisation

.....  
.....  
.....  
.....

2. State some of the barriers to communication.

.....  
.....  
.....  
.....

---

## 8.10 CONCLUSION

---

Communication is one of the most widely discussed phenomena in organisational theory. It is an effective tool for achieving organisational goals. Communication is a process to facilitate an effective interchange of information, understanding and ideas between two or more people, organisations and even nations.

There is a continuum of communication in organisational behaviour. It includes communication technology, interpersonal communication and non-verbal communication. The process of communication model includes a few basic steps such as a source, an encoder, a message channels, a decoder, a receiver, feedback and noise.

There are various types of network communications which include Local Area Networks (LAN), Wide Area Networks (WAN), Metropolitan Area Networks and Backbone Networks. In organisations, there are different types of communications – formal, informal, grapevine, rumour etc. There are certain barriers to communication which includes complexity of the language used, poor retention of information, large size of the organisation and lack of planning. Therefore, the chief executive of an organisation needs to build an effective communication system by removing these barriers to achieve organisational cohesiveness.

---

## 8.11 GLOSSARY

---

- MIS** : Management Information System (MIS) involves generating, processing and transmitting information.
- Interpersonal Communication** : Transforming communication from one person to another or among several individuals

<b>Interorganisational Communication</b>	:	Transforming communication from organisation to another.
<b>Grapevine Communication</b>	:	An unorganised, unofficial and informal channel of communication.
<b>Rumour</b>	:	Some kind of a statement whose veracity is not quickly or ever confirmed.

**Communication:  
Meaning, Nature and  
Process**

---

## 8.12 REFERENCES

---

Bhattacharya, M. (1987). *Public Administration: Structure, Process and Behaviour*. Calcutta: World Press.

Bovee, C.L., & Thill, J.V. (2000). *Business Communication Today*. Upper Saddle River, New Jersey, USA: Prentice Hall.

Griffin, R.W. (2013). *Fundamentals of Management* (7<sup>th</sup> ed.). Boston, USA: Cengage Learning.

Goldhaber, G.M. (1974). *Organisational Communication*. Iowa: Wm.C.Brown Dubuque.

Katz, D. & Kahn, R. (1978). *The Social Psychology of Organisations* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.). New York: Wiley.

Koontz, H. & O'Donnell, C. (1984). *Essentials of Management*. New Delhi: Tata-Mc Graw Hill.

Luthans, F. (2005). *Organizational Behavior* (7<sup>th</sup> ed.). Boston: McGraw-Hill.

McFarland, D.E. (1979). *Management Foundations and Practices*. New York: Macmillan.

Newman, W. & Warren, E.K. (1979). *The Process of Management*. New Delhi: Prentice-Hall.

Newstorm, J.W. & Keith, D. (1993). *Organizational Behavior*. New York, USA: Mc Grow-Hill.

Shannon, C.E. & Weaver, W. (1949). *The Mathematical theory of communication*. Urbana, Illinois, USA: University of Illinois Press.

Ordway, T. (1957). *The Art of Administration*. New York, USA: Mc Grow-Hill.

---

## 8.13 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS EXERCISES

---

### Check Your Progress Exercise 1

#### 1. Your answer should include the following points:

- Communication refers to transfer of information from the sender to receiver.
- Communication is the heart of management.

**Organisational  
Behaviour: Major  
Facets**

- It is a blood stream of an administrative organisation.
- Communication is that process whereby one person makes his ideas and feelings known to another.

**2. Your answer should include the following points:**

- Local Area Networks (LAN).
- Wide Area Networks (WAN).
- Metropolitan Area Networks.
- Backbone Network.

**Check Your Progress Exercise 2**

**1. Your answer should include the following points:**

- Downward communication
  - Upward communication
  - Lateral communication
2. Your answer should include the following points:
- Complexity of language makes the communication difficult.
  - Poor retention of information.
  - The size and distance of an organisation.
  - Unclear assumptions.
  - Lack of planning.