The academic communication process model

Introduction

This is about academiccommunication process modeland its components; how they would breakdown into three different stages and steps to avoid them. Communication is the most important part of our life. We begin to learn some of the skills of communication before we are born, and most of us will continue to use them until the day we die. We communicate with friends, family, workplace; we may communicate indirectly: we watch movies, and listen to music. These are all communication process in different stages. We will discuss about it in this assignment.

According to Weick and Browning (1986), communication is the process of transmitting information from one person to another. Gerbner (1967) adds that communication may be defined as social interaction through messages. Another scholar Theodorson (1969) defines communication as the transmission of information, ideas, attitudes, or emotion from one person or group to another primarily through symbols. Osgood et al (1957) also comments that we have communication wherever one system, a source, influences another, the destination, by manipulation of alternative symbols, which can be transmitted over the channel connecting them.

On the basis of above definitions, communication is the sharing information between two or more people to reach a common understanding. However, reaching a common understanding does not mean that people have to agree with each other. They should have an accurate idea of what a person or group is trying to tell them.

Communication is also a process, and like most processes it can be usefully modelled. Gathering a model often helps in thinking about and understanding processes and systems.

The basic communication process starts when the sender formulates an idea or thinks of something to say. The idea is then encoded or transformed into meaningful symbols. Turning the formulated thoughts into spoken or written words constitutes encoding. Thought and ideas have to be in some form of code to form transmittable messages. These encoded messages are then transmitted via voice, letter, e-mail, telephone or some other channel to the receiver.

Getting the message from the sender to the receiver is very important, unless the communication goes from one person to another there is no communication. Messages transmit via a channel. Channel refers to the particular technology or method used to get the message to the receiver. Major communication channels are letters, e-mail, face-to-face conversation, telephone, fax, newspapers, brochures, film, video, radio, television, websites and posters. Then the receiver decodes the message – interprets the message, and gives feedback to the sender. Feedback helps both sender and receiver determine the clarity of the message. Feedback is a response from the receiver. With feedback, the process becomes a conversation or two-way communication.

Source: adapted from Himstreet, Baty and Lehman (1993).
However, a major advance in communication theory came with Claude Shannon's 1949 publication of his mathematical theory of communication.

He and other information theorists at the Bell Telephone Laboratories were concerned with the process of transferring signals accurately from sender to receiver. Their concern was not with words or word meanings but with coded material sent from one machine to another – from a satellite to earth or from one computer to another. Shannon's communication model was critical for communication research as Johnson and Klare (1961) say in their review of communication models:

" Of all single contributions to the widespread interest in models today, Shannon's is the most important. For the technical side of communication research, Shannon's mathematical formulations were the stimulus to much of the later effort in this area."

Source: adopted from Shannon and Weaver (1949).
Shannon and Weaver's ' mathematical model' describes communication as a linear, one-way process. According to Shannon (1949), communication process consists of essentially five components: 1. An information source which produces a message or sequences of messages to be communicated to the receiving terminal. The message may be various types such as a sequence of letters as in a telegraph or teletype system; a single function of time. A message is composed of a set of symbols. These symbols can be verbal or nonverbal. Verbal symbols are words used when speaking or writing. Letters, memorandums, reports, brochures, catalogues, manuals, and annual reports are composed of verbal symbols. These symbols are also used when speaking face-to-face or on the telephone, participating in a conference or meeting, or delivering a speech. Nonverbal symbols such as gestures, posture, facial expressions, appearance, and time, tone of voice,

eye contact, and space always accompany verbal symbols. All messages contain nonverbal symbols that help the receiver interpret verbal symbols. If verbal and nonverbal symbols conflict, receivers generally believe the nonverbal symbols over the verbal symbols. For example, a sales representative may say that your account is very important but then keeps you waiting. The representative's nonverbal communication may cause you to question the representative's sincerity, and you may decide to take your business elsewhere. 2. A transmitter which operates on the message in order to produce a signal suitable for transmission over the channel. 3. The channel is merely the medium used to transmit the signal from transmitter to receiver. The mode a sender selects to send a message is called the channel. Letters, memorandums, and reports are the most common channels for written messages. One-to-one conversations, telephone conversations, and meetings are common channels of oral messages. E-mail, videoconferences and voice mail are common channels of electronic messages. Selecting the appropriate channel is significant. 4. The receiver ordinarily performs the inverse operation of that done by the transmitter, reconstructing the message from the signal. 5. The destination is the person for whom the message is intended. Here the destination is the recipient. A person or things to whom a message is sent is the recipient. The recipient is responsible to give meaning to the verbal and nonverbal symbols used by the sender. The meaning receivers give to message depends on their respective educational backgrounds, experiences, interests, opinions, and emotional states. Miscommunication results if the receiver gives the message a different meaning than the sender intended.

As it is seen from the diagram, Shannon did not include feedback which is really critical for effective communication. Shannon's communication process model was stimulus stage for other behavioural scientists; because they developed his model more advanced and included feedback as an important stage. Feedback is a message or part of a message that the recipient returns to the sender so that the message may be modified or adjusted to make it clearer to the recipient. When one person responds to another's message, the response is called feedback. Feedback is the reaction of the receiver to the message received. It may also be nonverbal (a smile, a frown, a pause, etc.) or it may be verbal (a telephone call or a letter). Feedback is a critical component of effective communication because it helps determine whether the receiver has understood the message.

These communication process components may breakdown at different stages. First of all, we will define the meaning of breakdown or barrier. Breakdown to communication include anything that prevents a message from being received or understood. Barriers/breakdowns are, therefore, synonymous in many ways with noise though technological noise (e. g. static on telephone lines) is less of a barrier and more of an obstacle. A technological problem does not usually stop communication, though it may block it temporarily. Technological problems are also perhaps the easiest problems to solve. When equipment fails, is unsuited to the task for which it is used, or when the problem is as simple as an incorrect telephone number, this can usually be quickly identified and remedied. Technological problems are, therefore, a form of noise but they are an obstacle rather than a barrier to communication.

Barriers are usually of human rather than technological origin. Human barriers are often less visible but generally more consequential. These three barriers are: Socio-cultural barriers; Psychological barriers; Organisational barriers.

Socio-cultural barriers. Communication always involves other people. An individual can be a carrier of culture but one person cannot create culture. Culture is a group or social phenomenon. Culture is powerful. The language we use, the food we eat and how we eat it, how we dress, what we believe and so on, are all powerful cultural traits. We accept them as if they were non-confrontable and non-debatable. Culture occurs at national, ethnic, regional and even organisational level can be a barrier to communication precisely because culture is both powerful and defining of groups. The key socio-cultural elements that may be barriers are:

Groupthink is the social phenomenon which occurs when group behaviour dominates and stifles the decision-making process (Janis 1982). It occurs when social norms or a group's desire for consensus overwhelms its desire to reach decisions that are in its best interest. It is what happens when shared values and conformity get out of control. Group think is a major problem in business, where people work extensively in groups and teams. For instance, group members over-communicate or emphasize their similarities in beliefs and values while, at the same time, hiding or under-communicating their differences. This results in the appearance of tight similarity within the group. Another example, the group develops and maintains strong shared beliefs without questioning their accuracy or their underlying assumptions.

Rather than recognizing some management or strategic error to explain failure, the group will rationalize or blame external forces.

Conflicting values and belief. Culture is based on shared beliefs and values. When communication occurs across cultural boundaries, the potential for misunderstanding is magnified. Cultural and social norms are so ingrained that people act upon them without being consciously aware of doing so. When cross-cultural business ventures fail, the participants are often unable to understand why. It is usually a communication failure stemming from a lack of knowledge about each other's basic values and norms. Organisations need to ensure they are familiar with potential cultural differences before attempting to do business across cultures.

Languages and jargon. Even when we're communicating in the same language, words mean different things to different people. Age and context are two of the biggest factors that influence the language a person uses and the definitions he/she gives to words. When Michael Schiller, a business consultant, was talking with his 15-year-old daughter about where she was going with her friends, he told her, " You need to recognize your ARAs and measure against them." His daughter " looked at him like he was from outer space." ARA stands for accountability, responsibility, and authority. This point is that although we all can speak the same language, but the use of that language is far from uniform. If we knew how each of us modified the language, communication difficulties would be minimized.

Psychological Barriers are those relating to the individual and the individual's mental and emotional state. Key psychological barriers are:

Filtering. People tend to hear what they want to hear and see what they want to see. For example, at Beacon Research Associates, a mid-sized, social survey company, leaders of each research team were informed by letter of their budget allocations twice a year. When the project manager received his allocation, he scanned the letter, took note of the amount of his budget and promptly filed the letter. What he did not notice was the paragraph which stated that the research allowance had to be used up in this budget period within six months. Any surplus amount could not be carried forward into the next period. The manager selected from all of the information in the letter only the data in which he was interested – his budget allocation – and filtered out the rest. The result was that six months later he was very surprised to learn that the balance of his budget funds was recalled, which put severe pressure on some projects. Often our results and biases are a result of personal value systems or our cultural backgrounds. The key to avoiding filtering problems is to listen carefully, to read carefully and to be aware that we all have a tendency to be selective about the information and data with which we are confronted.

Perceptions are how we view the world. We choose our friends because they tend to think like us, act like us, believe the things in which we believe and do the kinds of things we do. We often are not even aware that our perceptions influence so many areas of our life. We have perceptions of reality that we trust and we behave according to those beliefs which, in turn, influence our behaviour. Our perceptions can be barriers to communication.

We can refuse to acknowledge or attend to what is being communicated because we have preconceived ideas about its relevance to our lives.

Faulty memory. Sometimes we don't remember what has been communicated to us; this will lead to incomplete or ineffective communication. Good memory skills can be learnt and should be practised in order to become an effective communicator.

Poor listening skills. Inadequate memory skills can also be attributed to poor listening. Day-dreaming, reading, listening to another conversation rather than the one in which we are engaged, looking around the room and just generally not concentrating on listening represent poor listening skills.

Emotional interference. Emotions can be a barrier to communication both in sending and receiving messages. When people are angry, fearful or sad their communication skills can be impaired. We cannot control somebody's emotions; however we can control our own emotions to a degree. How the receiver feels at the time of receipt of a communication influences how he/she interprets it. The same message received when we're angry or distraught is often interpreted differently than it is when we're happy. Extreme emotions such as jubilation or depression are most likely to hinder effective communication.

Organisational barriers primarily relate to the organisation's structure, culture, patterns of work and communication flows. The most common organisational barriers are:

Information overload. Individuals have a finite capacity for processing data. When the information we have to work with exceeds our processing capacity, the result is information overload. And with e-mails, IM, phone

calls, faxes, meetings, and the need to keep current in one's field, the potential for today's managers and professionals to suffer from information overload is high.

Message competition. Information overload leads to message competition. The amount of information we deal with every day forces us to make choices about what is important and what can be ignored. A manager can receive a hundreds of messages a day in different forms. Managers are put under more stress by the potential danger of missing or ignoring important messages and thus threaten their effectiveness.

Information distortion. A potentially bigger cost can be paid by organisations that suffer from information distortion. Taller structures mean that information has to pass through more departments and people before getting to its destination. This may cause the information to be distorted due to misunderstanding.

Message filtering. Managers select the communications to which they pay attention by filtering or screening them. When passing on information managers once again filter information or reproduce it in abbreviated form for the consumption of others. This process happens at many levels in organisations.

Status differences. Managers tend to listen less carefully to subordinates. This will lead breakdown of communication.

Structural problems. Organisations can be structured with many layers and managers in the top would have less communication with the below

employees of the hierarchical structure. The greater the distance – physical, social or cultural, between two points, the longer it will take to get information from one point to the other.

George Eliot says: " The people of the world are islands shouting at each other across a sea of misunderstanding."

It is very vital to have effective communication in order to be successful. It can be achieved by avoiding communication breakdown. These steps are: sending clear messages to the receiver, and complete the message enough to enable both the sender and the receiver to reach a mutual understanding; sender should avoid the specialised language such as jargon when writing to an outsider; message should be in commonplace language not clichés or local sayings that mean nothing to a non-native speaker; the receiver should also be a good listener by stop talking, put the speaker at ease, maintaining eye contact, being open-minded, asking question or giving a feedback. A communicator should tolerate bad habits in order to establish good rapport sometimes; should avoid accusations; should focus on behaviour not a person; should be specific rather than general; should avoid defensiveness; should share information rather than giving advice; should suggest more acceptable alternatives; should give positive feedback. Deep breathing, staying alone for a while will help overcome emotional barriers.

Organisations should focus on problems and issues; they should listen and encourage subordinates effectively despite of their status. Employers should pay attention to the words and feelings of the employees that are being expressed. If an organisation receives many messages from the customers,

they should employ extra staff for specifically looking after the messages and faxes.

Communication is good or effective when members of an organisation share information with each other and all parties involved are relatively clear about what this information means.

Conclusion

We have discussed about communication, Shannon's mathematical communication process and its components; the barriers to communication and steps how to avoid them. As discussed earlier we communicate because of a need: a need to get our ideas across to others. Like animals, we communicate with sounds, although unlike animals, we have evolved speech, which can convey complex ideas. Unlike animals, too, we can encode these sounds into symbols, thus giving the ideas their own extended and independent life spanning the generations.

Communication can be seen as a circular process. Someone has an idea they wish to pass on. They determine who is to receive the idea, and how it is to be recorded and transmitted. The chosen recipient becomes a sender when they deliver feedback to the originator of the idea to show that is has been received and understood. People engaged in communication encode and decode messages while simultaneously serving as both sender and receivers. In the communication process, feedback helps people resolve possible misunderstandings and thus improve communication effectiveness.

Communication takes two forms – verbal and non-verbal. Although non-verbal is important, verbal communication is the way that we communicate

the ideas, thoughts or instructions we need to pass on. We do this in two ways: spoken and written.

For a communication to be effective it has to be received and understood. There are two particular skills concerned with understanding: listening effectively and reading attentively.

Communication is one of the most important processes that takes place in organisations. Effective communication allows individuals, groups, and organisations to achieve their goals and perform at high levels, and it affects virtually every aspect of organisational behaviour.

Bibliographical References

Forsyth, P. and Madden, D. 2005, Business Communications, ICSA Publishing Ltd, Norfolk.

George, J. M and Jones, G. R. 2008, Understanding and Managing Organizational Behavior, Pearson Prentice Hall, 5th ed., US.

Himstreet and Bary 1965, Business Communications, 2nd ed., Wadsworth Publishing Company, California.

Himstreet, Baty and Lehman 1993, Business communications, 10th ed., Wadsworth Publishing Company, California.

Judge, R. 2009, Organizational Behavior, 13th ed., Pearson Prentice Hall, New Jersey.

McQuail, D. and Windahl, S. 1982, Communication Models for the Study of Mass Communication, 2nd ed., Longman Publishing, New York.

Rouse, M. J. and Rouse, S. 2002, Business Communications, Thomson Learning, Cornwall.

Shannon, C. E. and Weaver, W. 1949, the Mathematical Theory of Communication, the University of Illinois Press, Urbana.

Steil K. Lyman 1983, Effective Listening: Key to your success, Addison-Wesley Publishing Company, Canada.

http://patchwork-st. blogspot. com/2007/03/how-to-avoid-communication-breakdown. html (13. 04. 2009)

http://www. coachingachievement. co. uk/overcoming_communication_barriers. htm (13. 04. 2009)