

Technical Communication and Soft Skills – Unit 1



Institute of Sciences, Humanities & Liberal Studies

Department of Languages

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Definition of Communication

- “ Communication is a process of exchange of ideas, thoughts, information, knowledge between sender and receiver through accepted codes”

- Oxford Dictionary

Process of Communication

- Generation of Idea (Ideation)- Idea striking in the mind of the sender
- Encoding- Shaping of an Idea
- Channel/ Medium- Way through which message/idea travels
- Decoding- Understanding the idea/message
- Response- Formation of response in mind of the receiver
- Feedback- Response sent back to the sender

Levels of Communication

- Extra personal: Humans & Other Species
- Intra personal: With self
- Inter personal: Between other humans

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- Organizational: within or across organizations
- Mass: with large mass of people (Ads, pamphlets etc)

Flow of Communication

- Downward : Senior – Junior
- Upward: Junior – Senior
- Horizontal: among members of a same group/level
- Cross-wise: Flow from all directions (Subordinate from a departments talks to authority of other dept.)
- Grapevine: Flows in all directions. Informal in nature. More of Rumor.

Barriers to Communication

- Physical Barrier: Noise, Distance, Physical discomfort, environmental condition. It occurs from the outside.
- Semantic/ Linguistic Barrier: Idiomatic language, Homophones, Syntax error, Technical jargons
- Interpersonal Barrier: Receiver's attitude towards the speaker improper. Lack of self-confidence, use of inappropriate language can create this
- Psychological: Your emotions (Fear, Anxiety, Extreme happiness, personal prejudices)
- Organizational: Information overload due to size of an organization, there is loss of communication.
- Mechanical: Faulty channel/medium causes breakdown
- Socio-Cultural: Class conflict, Nonverbal clues and beliefs specific to a culture must be kept in mind

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Non-verbal Communication

Definition: The exchange of ideas/information/knowledge/emotion/feeling without the use of words is known as Non-Verbal communication.

1. Body Language (Kinesics)

Kinesics is the name given to the study of the body's physical movements.

It is the way the body communicates without using words.

For example:- Nodding of your head, blinking eyes, shrugging of shoulders.

If you extend your hand with a smile on your face to congratulate a friend, then it becomes more effective than a word 'Congrats' said in isolation.

Thus a Handshake and a Smile become non-verbal means of communication.

Non-verbal communication is subtle and instinctive. When a speaker presents himself/herself, we SEE him/her before we begin to HEAR them. Hence we begin to develop certain impressions about the person based on the non-verbal signals s/he sends. Thus Body Language is crucial in communication. It includes every aspect of your appearance- what you wear, how you stand, look & move, facial expressions, posture, eye-contact, gestures, & physical habits.

2. Para-Language (Vocal features)

Paralinguistic features are non-verbal vocal cues/hints that help you to lend urgency to your voice. Your voice is your trademark; it is a part of your personality, which adds human touch to your words. It includes- Voice quality, Pitch, Articulation & Pronunciation, and Intonation.

Intonation is the tone of your communication. It emphasizes/modulates/modifies or contradicts the verbal communication.

Para-language takes into account the manner in which you speak and not the content.

3. Proxemics (Time & Space)

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In communication, one needs to decide when & how long to speak. For example- At a discussion, At an interview, At a meeting etc one can neither be too shy to speak nor too foolish to not stop talking. You need to learn to choose your time for a fresh argument. One has to give the other person time to listen to you and respond.

The place and space affect your body-language.

For example- When in conversation with your superior, you have to maintain a respectable distance.

To communicate extreme joy and jubilation, you see players jump and run around the field, which is the utilization of the space available to you, in order to express.

4. Sign Language

The system of communication through symbols & pictures is sign language.

For example- No Smoking Zone/ Traffic Signals/ No Honking zone/ Road Signs/ Logos of a Brand etc.

Mainly used at public places.

Conclusion

Non-verbal communication enhances verbal communication. It serves its purpose without words, we instinctively communicate more often without words than we do with words.

In administrative and business/organizational set ups, public affairs etc, Non-verbal communication can make a significant contribution.

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Listening Skills

1. Features of a Good Listener:

Listening is an essential part of communication, and it is different from hearing. Being a good and patient listener helps you not only solve many problems at work or home, but also to see the world through the eyes of others, thereby opening your understanding and enhancing your capacity for empathy. In addition, you learn a lot from listening. Listening may seem a simple thing to do or acknowledge, doing it well, particularly when disagreements arise, takes sincere effort and lots of practice.

Place yourself in the other person's shoes. It is often too easy to wonder how what the other person is telling you impacts you. Active listening is not about inward thinking. Instead, you must look at the problems from the other person's perspective and actively try to see his or her point of view. It is not a good idea to consider yourself to be smarter than the speaker and assume that if you had been in his or her shoes, you would have seen your way through the problem much faster. Remember you have two ears and one mouth for a reason.

Create a conducive physical and mental space. Remove all distractions. Give all of your attention. Turn off cell phones. It may be easiest to arrange to talk somewhere that distractions will not occur. Quiet your mind and open yourself to whatever the person might have to say.

Stop talking and try to be silent. It might sound obvious and trite, but one of the biggest obstacles to listening, for many people, is resisting the impulse thoughts. Likewise, many think that empathy means sharing with the *listener* similar experiences that the listener has had. Both *can* be helpful, but they are easily abused. Put aside your own needs, and *wait* for the other person to talk at their own pace.

Follow and encourage the speaker with body language. Nodding your head will indicate you hear what the speaker is saying, and will encourage them to continue.

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Adopting body postures, positions and movements that are similar to the speaker (called mirroring) will allow the speaker to relax and open up more.

Practice the empathetic sounding back technique. At appropriate intervals during the conversation, it is helpful to "summarize and restate" and/or "repeat and encourage" the main points:

- *Repeat and encourage:* Repeat some of the things said by the speaker. At the same time, encourage the speaker with positive feedback. For example, you might say: "You didn't enjoy having to take the blame. I can see why." Go easy with this technique, however, because if you overwork it, it may come across as being patronizing.
- *Summarize and restate:* It is also very useful to summarize what the speaker is saying and restate it in your own words. This is a form of reassuring the speaker that you have truly been listening to what he or she is saying. It also provides the speaker with an opportunity to correct any mistaken assumptions or misconceptions that may have arisen during the course of the conversation. This is an especially good technique to try when you find yourself getting frustrated or restless in your listening.

Do not interrupt with what you feel or think about the topic being discussed. Wait for another person to ask your opinion before interrupting the flow of discussion. Active listening requires the listener to shelve his or her own opinions temporarily, and await appropriate breaks in the conversation for summarizing. Abstain from giving direct advice. Instead, let him or her talk the situation out and find his or her own way. Besides, if he or she takes your advice and something goes wrong, he or she will be likely to blame you (whether he or she tells you or not).

Ask meaningful and empowering questions. Do not seek to probe or make the other person defensive. Rather, aim to use questions as a means by which the speaker can begin to reach his or her own conclusions about the concerns or issues being raised. Once you have shown empathetic listening, it is time to move into empowering listening by re-framing the questions that you ask the speaker. For example: "You didn't enjoy having to take the blame. But I cannot understand why

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you feel blamed rather than merely being asked not to do something that way." Wording the question in this manner presents the speaker with a need to respond directly to *your* lack of grasping something. In the process of doing so, the speaker should begin to move from a more emotional response to a more constructive response.

Wait for the person to open up. In the process of encouraging a constructive response, an active listener must continue to be patient and let the speaker acquire his or her full flow of thoughts, feelings, and ideas. Keep yourself in his or her shoes and try to estimate why he or she is in such a situation

Use Body Language to express your interest. Active listening involves the entire body and face--both yours and that of the speaker:

- *Your expression:* Look interested and meet the gaze of your speaker from time to time. Do not overwhelm the speaker by staring intently, but do reflect friendliness and openness to what you are listening to.
- *Read between the lines:* Always be alert for things that have been left unsaid or for cues that can help you gauge the speaker's true feelings. Watch the facial and body expressions of the speaker to try to gather all information you can, not just from the words. Imagine what kind of state of mind would have made you acquire such expressions, body language, and volume.
- *Speak at approximately the same energy level as the other person.* This way, he or she will know that the message is getting through and that there is no need to repeat.

Try to reassure the speaker that all is well. Whatever the conclusion of the conversation, let the speaker know that you have been happy to listen and to be a sounding board. Make it clear that you are open to further discussion if need be, but that you will not pressure him or her at all. In addition, reassure the speaker of your intention to keep the discussion confidential. Offer to assist with any solutions if you have the ability, time, and expertise. Do not build up false hopes, however. If the only resource you can provide is to continue to be an active listener, make that very clear; in and of itself, this is a very valuable help to any person.

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Be attentive:

- Use your face, voice and body to show that you are interested in what that person is talking about
- Listen with an accepting attitude
- Ask questions which show that you like to listen
- Use ideas and emotions to try to communicate to the person
- Test your understanding

Use encouraging words to show you are listening:

- Mmm,
- I see
- Right
- Uh, huh

Use nonverbal actions to show you pay attention to what is being said:

- Relaxed posture
- Head-nodding
- Facial expression
- Relaxed body expression

Use encouraging words that will invite them to continue:

- Tell me more
- Let's talk about it

Things to avoid:

- Do not interrupt
- Do not interrogate
- Do not try to think of your response in your head while listening
- Do not change the subject

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Avoid phrases like:

- Are you sure?
- It's not that bad
- Sleep on it. You'll feel better tomorrow
- Do not be judgemental

2. Types of Listening:

- 1. Informative Listening:** It includes Scanning and aspects like Vocabulary, Memory & Concentration.
- 2. Reflective Listening:** It includes Moving beyond the specific message and Paraphrasing the idea and hidden meanings.
- 3. Relationship Listening:** It includes Attending, Supporting, & Sympathizing depending upon the nature of the relationship you share with the person.
- 4. Appreciative Listening:** It includes Listening to what you appreciate- Music or Theatre etc
- 5. Critical Listening:** It includes analyzing each and every statement & contemplating the reliability and validity of what is spoken.

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Process of Communication:

Since ancient times, communication has been natural to all the living beings. There have always been different modes, methods and styles of communication. But with the development of language and awareness about mediums, the process of communication has been systematized. This has enhanced social interaction and relationship.

The word communication has been derived from the Latin word *Communicare* which means to impart or to share knowledge/information.

The process of communication is divided into 5 important stages.

They are

- 1) Ideation**
- 2) Encoding**
- 3) Transmission**
- 4) Decoding**
- 5) Feedback**

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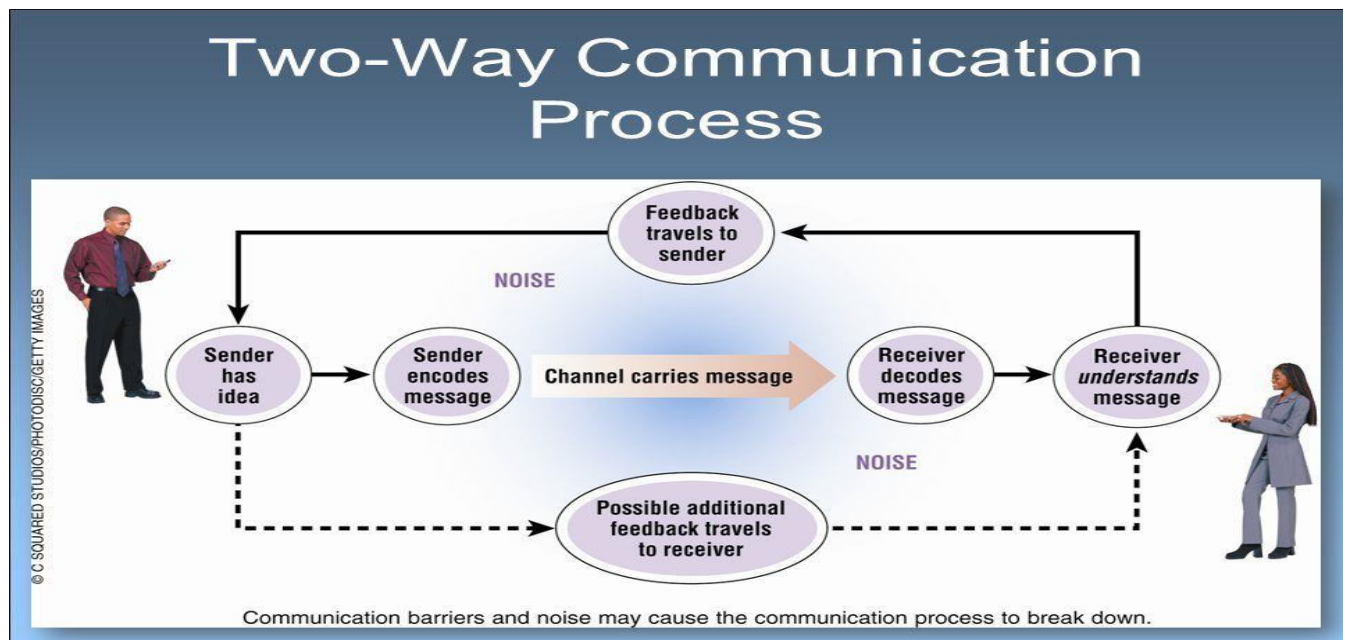


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1) Ideation-

The process of communication begins with an idea. The process of ideation itself refers to the formation of a particular idea or the information that is selected to be communicated. The content of the message is dependent on the knowledge and experiences of the sender. The content of the message is either logical or emotional. Logical content consists of factual information and data. On the other hand, emotional messages are filled with feelings and emotions. It may also be a combination of two.

2) Encoding-

Encoding is the second stage in the process of communication. It is the step where in the idea or the information chosen to be communicated during the first step is transformed into a logically coded message. The process of

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encoding is based on the purpose of communication and is determined according to the relation between the sender and the receiver.

In the formal set-up, the process of encoding involves following points,

(a) Selecting a language

Language plays an integral role in the process of communication.

Selecting a common language in the process is extremely important as it will enable the receiver to decode and understand the message.

(b) Selecting a right medium:

Selection of a medium for giving information determines the effectiveness encoding.

Making a right choice about the medium is the first milestone of effective communication. There have been three basic options for sending interpersonal messages, they are speech, text and non-verbal signs/symbols.

(c) Selecting an appropriate communication form:

Which form of communication is opted for is determined on the basis of the relationship between sender and receiver. The choice of the form also depends upon the need, purpose and urgency of the communication.

3) Transmission

Transmission refers to the transfer of message via chosen channel of communication. It is a major aspect of the process because it demands the sender to choose proper time, proper place and proper way of communicating a message.

4) Decoding

Decoding is the process wherein the sender's message is translated and interpreted by the receiver. This involves understanding, interpreting and analyzing the message. Proper decoding is very

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important in the process as misinterpretation of the message may result into breakdown of communication process.

5) Response:

Response is the fifth stage of the process. It is concerned with the reaction of the receiver to the sender's message. Ability to give proper response will also determine the effectiveness of the communication.

Flow of Communication:

Each and every organization is divided into certain levels for ensuring efficient working. The direction in which the communication will flow is also determined on the hierarchical establishment of the organization. The pyramid of power and position in the organization is demonstrated below:



Image source: <https://images.app.goo.gl/FNGb3SRKfWoSW7xR8>

Based on the above pyramid of power, four formal channels of communication have been enlisted. They are Downward communication, Upward Communication, Horizontal Communication and Diagonal Communication.

1) Downward communication:

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The major function of downward communication is giving directions. Here the communication takes place from the upper body of management, flows to the middle body and finally received by the lower body. It increases staff awareness as they are communicated about their duties, roles, work and targets.



Image source:

<https://images.app.goo.gl/uGabsomm6EwWmqQz6>

2) Upward Communication:



Image source: <https://images.app.goo.gl/1G7ore1VeZzK91u46>

As the name suggests, upward communication takes place from the lower level to the middle level and then to the upper level. This also enhances employees' involvement in the process of decision making. It is also the duty of the people working at the lower management to give feedback and draw middle and upper level's attention towards the minute issues that can be out of the league for the upper level.

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3) Horizontal Communication:

Horizontal communication refers to the communication taking place among the employees belonging to the same level of management. It promotes team work and group co-ordination in an organization. Horizontal communication is comparatively less formal and less structured than the downward and upward communication. It may also occur in an informal fashion via telephones or routine meetings, etc.

An instance of Horizontal communication is as follows.

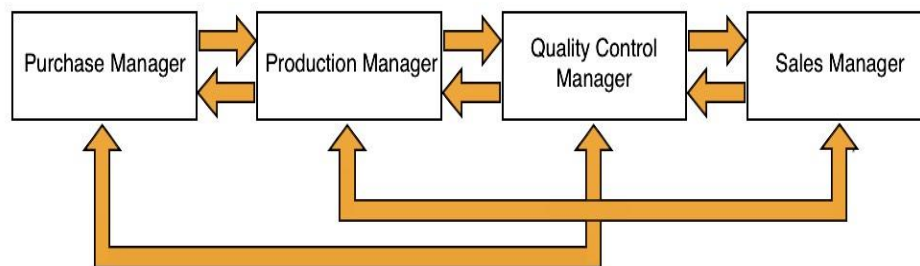


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4) Diagonal Communication:

Diagonal communication does not follow rigid norms and protocols concerning communication process. It is a result of realization about equality in the organization structure.

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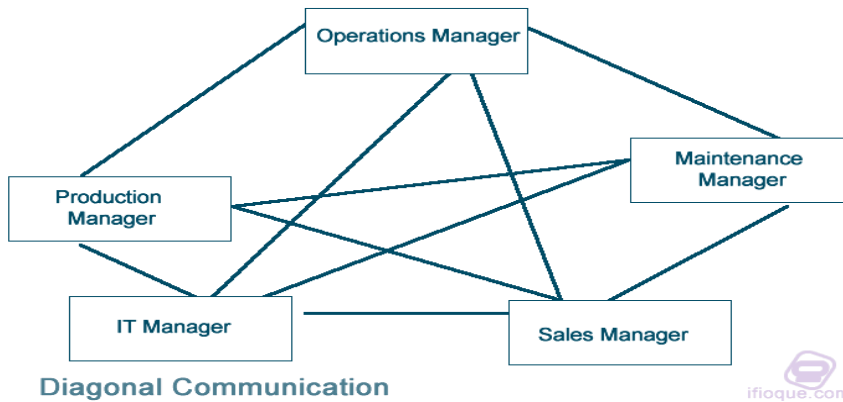


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5) Grapevine communication:

Grapevine communication refers to the informal nature of communication happening in an organization. It spreads rapidly among employees belonging to each and every level of management. It is in form of gossip.

Grapevine Communication



Image source: <https://images.app.goo.gl/T9Zb3HjdcdV9RWom9>