**The Process of Communication**

**Communication Process**

There have been several attempts by scholars to explain the process of communication. Depending on their background and objectives, different scholars have viewed the process of communication differently and have developed different models. You may have formed the impression that communication is difficult, if not impossible, to study and understand. If it is ongoing, how do we stop it? If it has no beginning or end, how do we get hold of it? Although the task is difficult, it is possible. Communication establishes relationships and makes organizing possible. Every message has a purpose or objective. The sender intends -- whether consciously or unconsciously -- to accomplish something by communicating. In organizational contexts, messages typically have a definite objective: to motivate, to inform, to teach, to persuade, to entertain, or to inspire. This definite purpose is, in fact, one of the principal differences between casual conversation and managerial communication. Effective communication in the organization centers on well-defined objectives that support the organization's goals and mission. Communication is the process of passing information and understanding from one person to another. The communication process is a system that involves an interrelated, interdependent group of elements working together as a whole to achieve a desired outcome or goal. We can study communication in much the same way we study biological systems within our own bodies. We can determine the elements involved (circulatory and digestive systems, for example), analyze how those elements affect one another, and thus determine the nature of the process as a whole. Applying this approach to the communication process, we find eight elements (1) a source/encoder of communication, which sends (2) a message (3) through a channel to (4) a receiver/decoder, which (5) responds via feedback with (6) possibilities of communication breakdowns (Barrier) in each stage of communication. However, these elements must be understood and analyzed in relation to (7) the situation or context, and (8) the system (such as relationship), which is created and maintained at some level by the communicators.

**The Source/Encoder**

The sender begins the communication process by forming the ideas, intentions and feelings that will be transmitted. As the sender, you are required to filter out the details that are unimportant and focus your energy on the most relevant information. The source, or encoder, makes the decision to communicate. The source also determines what the purpose of the message will be to inform, persuade, or entertain. You may ask how the message gets from the source to the receiver. First, the source must encode, or create, a message. That is, the information that the source wishes to convey must be put into a form that can be sent to the receiver. The source generates a message through his or her past experiences, perceptions, thoughts, and feelings. Every ounce of your being may tell you that you are in love, but until you code those feelings into a form that can be sent to the person you love, communication cannot take place.

**Message**

The second element of the communication process is the message, or that information which is being communicated. The source encodes an idea and then determines whether or not to inform, persuade, or entertain. After deciding what message to send, the source uses symbols to get the message across to others. These symbols stand for other things. The eagle, the flag, and Uncle Sam are all symbols of the United States, for example. But the most important symbols are words, which can represent objects, ideas, and feelings. These words permit us to share our thoughts with other members of our species. Important as words are to us, they can be tricky. We must remember that words are symbols. They represent things, but are not the things themselves. That lanky, bearded old man we call Uncle Sam represents the United States, but he is not the United States–– in fact, he doesn’t even exist. The letters a-p-p-l-e p-i-e represents an All-American pastry, but they are not an apple pie. To increase the likelihood of successful communication, the source must try to encode in a way that the receiver understands, so that the receiver can properly decode (interpret) the message. For example, many American tourists in Paris have discovered that even though their command of French is minimal, it is sometimes easier to communicate in halting French than in English. Some Parisians, despite their fluent knowledge of English, refuse to decode an “inferior” tongue.

**Channel**

Channels are the means (that is, pathways or devices) by which messages are communicated. Channels may be described and analyzed in two different ways. The first involves the form in which messages are sent to receivers. Forms include both verbal and nonverbal channels of communication. We use our five senses to receive messages from others. We may hear a call-in talk show on the radio, watch a soccer match on television, smell fresh break baking as we drive past the local bread industry, taste the flavors in a fresh cappuccino, or hug a friend to console him when his dog died. Channels may also be described according to the manner of presentation employed in communication. The source may speak face-to-face with the receiver, use a public address system to talk with a hundred listeners, or talk over radio or television to million of receivers. Each of these examples would demand different manners of presentation. Depending on the situation, the source would concentrate on verbal and/or nonverbal channels of communication. If the speaker were on radio, physical appearance wouldn’t matter, but if he or she were performing on a cable network program or before a live audience, personal appearance could easily influence the reception of the message. For example, when we go to watch a circus, we expect the clowns to have painted faces and appropriate costumes. If they were dressed in regular street clothes, their performance wouldn’t be as effective. Whatever channels of communication are used, the source must learn to adapt the message to make use of the most appropriate channels available for the situation.

**Receiver/Decoder**

The person (or persons) who attends to the source’s message is the receiver. The act of interpreting messages is called decoding. Receivers decode messages based on past experiences, perceptions, thoughts, and feelings. We receive messages through all our senses, but most often we decode messages by listening or seeing. We first have a physiological reception of stimuli (a noise causes sound waves to hit our eardrum or a movement catches our eye). We then pay attention to both the verbal and nonverbal stimuli and reduce all the stimuli bombarding us to one or two we can cope with more easily. Next, we try to understand the stimuli and interpret them into messages (we decide that the noise is a telephone bell or that the movement is a friend waving to us across campus). Finally, we store this information for later use so that next time we will be able to respond to the stimuli more quickly. It is important to remember that receivers make immediate decisions about what they will respond to in a given situation. During a lecture, an audience member may decide to take a nap. During an argument with your boyfriend or spouse, you may listen only to negative comments. During a crowded party you may watch the nonverbal behaviors of your date (yawning, standing off in a corner alone, and so on) to decide when it’s time to leave. As sources of communication, we need to learn to analyze our prospective receives to determine which communication messages will be most effective. Of course, all of us are both encoders and decoders; that is, we are capable of both transmitting and receiving messages. When we receive a message, we must interpret it and then encode a response. The response may be silent, noisy, or somewhere in between, depending upon the situation and the existence of any barriers to communication.

**Feedback**

Another element in the communication process is feedback. Each party in an interaction continuously sends messages back to the other. This return process is called feedback. Feedback tells the source how the receiver has interpreted each message. For example, if at the airport you ask your departing friend about his itinerary, and he replies that he didn’t pack one, you know your message has not been understood. This kind of feedback, which conveys lack of understanding, is known as negative feedback. Positive feedback, on the other hand, indicates that the receiver has understood the source’s message. It does not necessarily mean that he or she agrees with the source, just that the message was interpreted accurately. Feedback can also be ambiguous, not clearly positive or negative. “I see” and “mm-hmm” can be examples of ambiguous feedback. The effective communicator is always sensitive to feedback and constantly modifies his or her messages as a result of the feedback received. After a discreet pause, for example, you might ask your friend not about his “itinerary” but about the cities he plans to visit. Feedback doesn’t have to come from others. We can and do get feedback from our own messages. The fact that we can hear the words we speak and see the sentences we write sometimes lets us correct our own mistakes.