

Effective Team Working and Communication

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Understanding communication skills

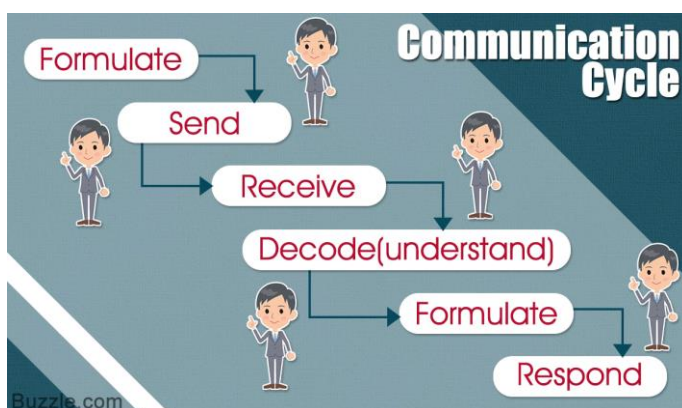
Introduction

Communication is an essential part of business interactions and teamwork. Communication can impact on the processes of the company and influence efficiency, improving employee collaboration and productivity (Gutierrez, 2017). Communication is defined as the process that enables people to share and express their opinions in different manners (Angelo, 2014). Also, communication can be verbal or non-verbal, and the literature shows different models that shape communication.

The aim of this essay is to produce evidence regarding to a variety of business communication skills. An analysis of different situations in which communication plays an important role and of communication examples in the workplace is conducted using models of communication and communication theories.

Models of communication

Communication models can be described as systematic representations of processes which explain how communication functions (Angelo, 2014). They are used to form a general perspective on communication, by breaking down the process and ordering the components of communication. The main components of communication are the sender, the message, the receiver and the feedback. The sender formulates the message, which can be sent through multiple channels (verbal, telephone, voicemail, email, letters, media etc.) to the receiver, who decodes the message and formulates a feedback. The feedback is then returned to the sender from the receiver via similar channels, the sender having the task to decode the feedback. The diagram below illustrates the process:



Source: Social Mettle (2020)

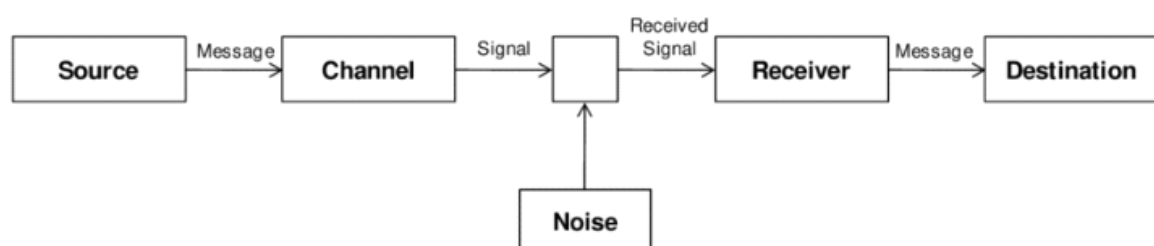
There are several communication models issued (Angelo, 2014) which can be categorised by the type of communication they represent. The three main categories are linear models, transactional models, and interactional models. The table below depicts how communication models are divided into these three categories:

Linear models of communication	• Lasswell's Model • Aristotle's Model • Shannon Weaver Model • Berlo's S-M-C-R Model
Transactional models of communication	• Barnlund's Transactional Model • Helical Model • Becker's Mosaic Model
Interactional models of communication	• Schramm's Interactive Model

Source: Adapted from Angelo (2014)

Linear models of communication describe a simple, one way communication, in which the message flows in a straight line between the sender and the receiver (Youself and Cheng, 2017). In these models, the concept of feedback does not exist, the receiver having only the task to receive the message. One of the most prominent models of linear communication is the Shannon-Weaver Mathematical model (1949). This model has been used as a reference for early thinking in PR, together with Berlo's model (1960) and Schramm's model (1954):

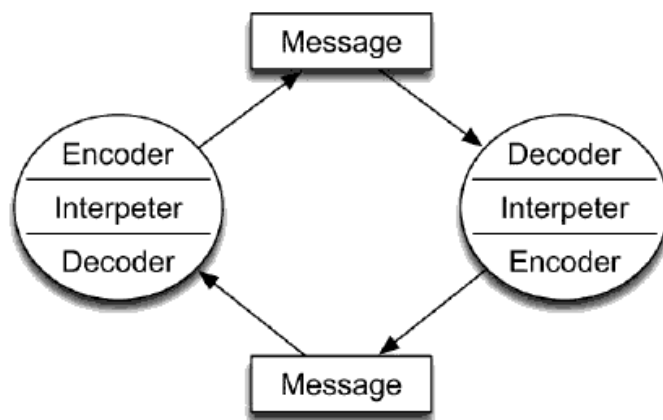
The model is depicted in the image below:



Source: Macnamara and Likely (2017)

Transactional and interactional models are more complex, as they present a two way communication where the receiver sends feedback to the sender (Vine, 2020). These models depict situations which usually happen in conversations, where the participants play both the

role of receiver and the role of sender. One of the most prominent models used in theoretical work is Schramm's model (1954), depicted in the diagram below:



Source: Elkins et al. (2012)

This model of interaction can be applied to business situations, in meetings and in situations when teamwork is required (Svennevig, 2012). In fact, Svennevig (2012) argues that turn taking in informal meetings is based on Schramm's model (1954), because the cues for turn taking are often considered as feedback that follows certain messages being transmitted, and can be both verbal (e.g. "If I may speak", "Excuse me") or non-verbal (e.g. leaning forward, gazing at a person, doing a hand gesture). Kimura and Fairbrother (2020) discusses the context of interactional communication in the workplace as well, arguing that language is also important, because it determines the manner in which the message is conveyed. This is particularly crucial in multi-cultural, multi-lingual workplace settings, where language barriers may emerge and interact with people's ability to decode messages. This can lead to misunderstandings, which can diminish the productivity.

Hargie (2016) argues that communication is one of the key skills employees must have in order to achieve organisational effectiveness. Successful communication leads to increased productivity, greater level of trust between members of the same organisation, engagement and commitment from employees, a higher level of creativity, better workplace relationships, greater job satisfaction and employee morale, reduced staff turnover and higher quality of services and products provided for the end customer. Hargie (2016) identifies seven components of communication in organisational settings: the communicators (the skills that they must have for successful communication), the goals, the message/messages, the channels, the feedback, the context and the effects. Further, communicators can be divided

into leaders and followers depending on the role they have, but also on their communication skills. It is argued that leaders (Hargie, 2016) have communication skills which allow them to be persuasive, make themselves understood, be more trustworthy and credible.

On a similar note, Agarwal and Garg (2012) argue that in an organisational setting, communication is a key component to ensure the efficient functioning of the firm. While in this type of setting oral communication is more common, this does not mean non-verbal communication does not occur. In a face to face communication, voice tone and body language play an important role and contribute to the manner in which a person decodes a message. Still, in this situation, barriers to communication may arise (Agarwal and Garg, 2012), including message overload and complexity. There may also be physical barriers (e.g. staff is located in different buildings, areas or countries, and technologies at their disposal are outdated and do not allow proper communication), system design barriers (e.g. the organisational structure is unclear and people have trouble to know who to communicate with), or barriers related to attitude (e.g. people have a bad attitude, are difficult to communicate with or are behaving in a manner that raises conflict. Moreover, as argued by Kimura and Fairbrother (2020) also, Agarwal and Garg (2012) indicate that one's linguistic abilities and the ambiguity of the words they use can also constitute barriers to communication in a work setting.

This dimension relating to linguistics is particularly true in a multinational setting. In this context, another barrier emerges, namely the cultural barrier (Lahti, 2015). In a cultural context, a transactional model of communication can be applied. Lahti (2015) discusses the appropriateness of Barnlund's Transactional Model in explaining communication skills needed in this context. According to this model, communication is dynamic, complex, irreversible, continuous and circular. This means communication involves not only a sender, a receiver, a message and a feedback, but also encoding and decoding, public and private cues and non-verbal cues which all contribute to the understanding of what is being transmitted from one person to another (Lahti, 2015). In this situation, considering a multicultural environment in which people of many cultural backgrounds interact on a daily basis, their own culture can become a barrier to communication. Non-verbal cues, gestures and verbal manifestations can have different meaning in different cultures (e.g. the thumbs up gesture that means something is good for Americans, but it is a severe insult in Iraq and Iran). To account for these types of new barriers and improve communication, scholars are not necessarily applying the known models of communication, but have managed to develop new

models that are more appropriate to modern day business and work contexts (Petersons and Khalimzoda, 2016).

Analysis

The models of communication as well as the aforementioned barriers to communication can also be applied to practical examples. The first example is depicted in Appendix 1. In this example, the professor's house catches fire because he fell asleep smoking his pipe. Living in a small village with a population of uneducated people who did manual jobs, the professor tells them "the edifice is being consumed by a great conflagration". The people however do not understand the academician's message and do nothing to help him. Later, after his house burnt down, he asked the people why they did not help, and their response indicated that they did not understand that his house was on fire. Applying Schramm's model (1954) in this situation, where the receiver is also seen as the decoder and the interpreter of the message, it can be said that the people did not have sufficient knowledge to decode and interpret the professor's message. The language the professor used was unfamiliar to them and, as Kimura and Fairbrother (2020) argued, a language barrier occurred and interacted with people's ability to decode messages. Later on, when the professor used a simpler language that the people of the village could decode, the message was understood.

Another example is presented in Appendix 2. In this situation, Pedro, who speaks to his wife Maria while working on a building site, misunderstands her request to get a chicken on his way home, and instead waits for her in the kitchen. In this situation the linguistic similarity between kitchen and chicken is one of the sources of confusion and misunderstanding. Here the Shannon-Weaver Mathematical model (1949) depicts with precision what interrupted the two people's communication. The barrier to communication that arose could have been the environment in which the message was transmitted, and the channel. Working on a building site, there may have been noises which covered Pedro's wife's voice or the telephone (the channel) may have had issues preventing Pedro from completely understanding his wife's message. As per the Shannon-Weaver Mathematical model (1949), noise can interrupt the signal between the channel and the receiver, causing the receiver to misunderstand the message.

To the example presented in Appendix 3, Barnlund's Transactional Model (Lahti, 2015) can be applied. Lahti (2015) argues that according to this model, communication is dynamic, complex, irreversible, continuous and circular. The mistake in this example is that the management of the BMW dealership failed to properly communicate to their employees upon the brand owners' decision to cease distributorship. In addition, when people began to gain a sense that something is wrong and initiated informal communication with the managers, their response was "we are still BMW dealers as at this moment". This communication can be interpreted as a clear message that something is abnormal and that the dealership will no longer represent BMW in the future, based on the context in which it was transmitted and the external cues (these could be for example rumours, overheard information or the behaviour of the managers). A more appropriate manner to convey the message would have been to gather all employees and formally inform them of the brand owners' decision, as well as of the fact that the managers are discussing working with a Chinese electric cars brand.

An example of intercultural barriers to communication can be given from personal experience. Working in a multinational company in which there are many foreigners, the English language can be the first barrier when someone tries to transmit a message orally.

While in written communication messages can appear more clear, in verbal communication aspect such as mispronunciation, accent or the inability to find the appropriate wording to express one's ideas can diminish the receiver's ability to decipher the message (Petersons and Khalimzoda, 2016). For instance, a co-worker from Mexico was misunderstood when discussing with someone in accounting because he continued to demand to see the "layer" used in order to reach the KPOs presented in the meeting. The person showed him that they did not add any layers to the presentation beyond the graphs, but it was not until the co-worker from Mexico said he wanted to see the balances that it was clear to the person in accounting that he was mispronouncing the word "ledger".

Conclusion

To summarise, communication is a complex notion built from multiple elements, which can be influenced or impacted by numerous external and internal factors.

Throughout the literature there are many models which explain different situations in which communication occurs and summarise how this communication is done. By understanding those models, one can better understand how communication occurs and which skills are essential for successful communication. Given its dynamic nature and the many elements that can represent barriers to communication, these skills are clarity, confidence, accepting feedback and offering feedback, respect, active listening, empathy and understanding, responsiveness, attention and a proper understanding of both verbal and non-verbal communication.

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Appendices

Appendix 1

A Professor of English at a well-known Welsh University lived in a large house not far from a little village. He never went into the village, but shopped in the town near the University because he had nothing in common with the village people, who were largely uneducated and did manual jobs.

One night, the professor fell asleep while smoking his pipe and the pipe fell onto the carpet and started a fire.

When the professor awoke and saw the house on fire, he rushed into the village, screaming:

'The edifice is being consumed by a great conflagration!'

'The edifice is being consumed by a great conflagration!'

The village people looked at him and continued doing what they were doing

'Don't you understand?' He said. "The edifice is being consumed by a great conflagration!'

They ignored him.

When the Professor returned home, he saw that his house had been destroyed. He sat down on the ground and wept.

The next day, he went into the village crying. 'Why, oh why didn't you help me? My home has been destroyed by the fire. I came and begged you last night.' He wept.

'But Professor, why didn't you say that your house was on fire? We would have helped.'

Appendix 2

Pedro works on a building site and Maria is his wife.

One day Maria phoned Pedro.

'Hello, Pedro, when you're coming home, see if you can get me a chicken.'

'Okay,' replied Pedro.

When he got home, Pedro took off his boots and coat and went into the kitchen.

'Maria, where are you?' He said.

'Here – in the sitting room,' she said.

When Pedro went into the sitting room, Maria said, 'Where is the chicken?'

'What Chicken?' Asked Pedro.

The one I asked you to get on your way home.'

Oh, no! I thought you said when I come home I will see you in the kitchen!

Appendix 3

The team are the management of a huge BMW dealership in London and the South East.
(Pick another car brand if you do not like BMW)

They have been caught discounting vehicles against other dealers to close sales. The Brand owners in Germany have asked them to relinquish their distributorship. A Chinese electric car brand is eager to find a British partner to test the market for electric cars. They have made an exploratory phone call to management.

The work force knows something is wrong and people have started informally to ask questions to management. Management have replied with "we are still BMW dealers as at this moment..... You must concentrate on your work in front of you".

The work force has key members who are taking days off without warning or due cause. BMW have given them a deadline by which they must cease activity as a main dealer.