

The Communication Cycle

Communication is an essential part of everyday life. There are a number of communication methods available to us – from simple chats with colleagues, to presentations and speeches, to text messaging and videoconferencing – and the range is growing daily. However, the underlying structure of the communication cycle remains the same, no matter what medium is being used. This article describes the component parts of the communication cycle and the theory behind it.

What is Communication?

Definition of communication:

“Communication: noun 1a the process or act of communicating;

1b the exchanging or imparting of ideas and information, etc.

2 a piece of information, a letter or a message. 3 social contact.”

Chambers 21st Century Dictionary

At its most basic level, communication is an interactive process for sending and receiving messages (either verbally or non-verbally). Ideally, the message sent would be identical to the message received; however this is rarely the case because messages will involve thoughts, emotions, impressions, needs, wants, and/or facts.

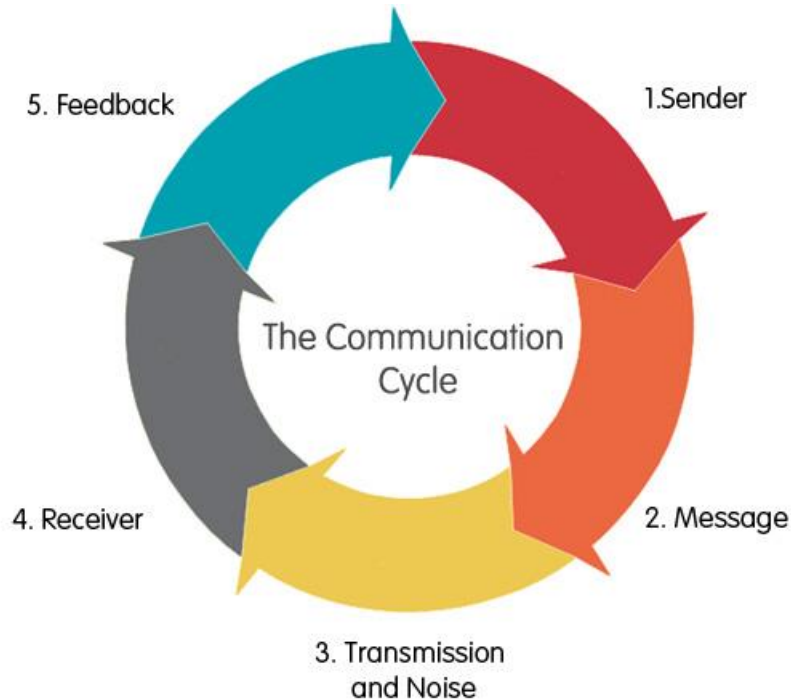
Effective communication obliges the message-sender to design their message and send it in such a way that is appropriate to their audience, reducing the disparity between the message sent and the message that is actually received.

When people communicate, human nature dictates that they assume they are doing so effectively. If anything goes wrong with the interpretation of the message, it is assumed that the responsibility for this rests with the recipient.

This is because people tend to decide what they want to say and how they want to say it, without considering their audience properly. Effective communicators, however, will pay a great deal of attention to each stage of the communication cycle, so that their message is suitably tailored to its recipient.

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The communication cycle consists of five elements as shown in the following diagram:



1. Sender

The sender is the individual who wishes to communicate a message. To send effective messages, it is important to have:

- A knowledge of the audience for that particular message. Failure to understand the audience will result in delivering messages that can be misunderstood.
- A clear idea of the purpose of the message, i.e. what they wish the receiver to do with the information contained in the message.

2. Message

The message is the information the sender wishes the audience to receive and understand. The message is encoded by the sender, i.e. the sender chooses the words and medium that suit the message they wish to convey. Written, oral and nonverbal communications are all affected by individual communication styles such as the sender's tone, the way they present the message, what information is contained in the communication and what has been omitted.

3. Transmission and noise

The transmission of the message is the actual process of sending it. This could be done via various verbal and written communication channels; for example email, letters, text, reports, face-to-face, telephone and videoconferencing.

It is important to transmit the message clearly and at an appropriate time, considering any distractions that could make communication difficult.

Noise is one such distraction. This is anything that could interfere with the transmission of the message. This can include physical noise such as buzzing on a telephone line or a mobile phone reception breaking up, to more personal noise such as an individual's accent, personal experience, feelings, culture, level of education, etc. which can all interfere with how the message is perceived.

4. Receiver

The receiver tries to interpret the message by decoding the words and symbols used. However, the receiver will also take into account their own previous experience, emotions, ideas and beliefs when trying to make sense of the message.



5. Feedback

The receiver feeds back their understanding of the message to the sender, to make sure that the message they received was the same message as the sender intended. This feedback can be a verbal or non-verbal response, for example saying yes or nodding the head.

Why is Communication so Important?

The purpose of communication is to convey a message effectively to others. This process involves both the sender of the message and the receiver. However, messages can often be misunderstood by one or more of the parties involved. It is vital to get communication right in the workplace, for example when a manager needs to inform his workforce of potential redundancies. Misunderstandings in the transmission of this message could lead to an unhappy and/or unproductive workforce.

A message is successful only when both the sender and the receiver understand to mean the same thing. If messages are transmitted successfully, thoughts and ideas are communicated effectively.

When transmission is unsuccessful, the thoughts and ideas conveyed do not necessarily reflect their true meaning, causing a breakdown in communications and relationships.

