

Effective Team Working and Communication Skills

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1.0. Introduction

In any business setting, effective teamwork and communication are two concepts that are intertwined. One cannot be achieved without the other. Massinham, (2019) proposed that, coordination and communication are important for effective teamwork,

The dictionary meaning of communication is “the exchange of thoughts, messages, or information, as by speech, signals, writing, or behaviour” (American Heritage Dictionary 2006) cited in college of Dietician handbook (2008). Therefore, communication is a two-way process that occurs between the sender to the receiver through different channels such as, speaking, writing, listening and observation as individuals share information conveyed in ideas, thoughts and feelings.

However, we can encounter numerous obstacles or problems while communicating. Occasionally, the message is not passed correctly or is lost. There is the possibility of a miscommunication between the sender and the receiver. The vocabulary or medium used in conversation is often misunderstood. Consequently, there is a breakdown or failure in communication. The difficulties in the communication process can be caused by a variety of factors.

In my current role, as a Team Leader, working in the Health Care sector, communicating effectively with different hierarchy of personnel, clients and external agency daily is without its own challenges. Doing this course has broaden my knowledge and enhanced my skills on how to effectively communicate in and out of the workplace.

This report will examine the models of communication backed by theories, the importance of effective communication in the workplace while referring to a few real-life experiences. It will also illustrate how communication can be improved in the workplace.

2.0. Models of Communication

There are three well known models of communication, which are Linear, Interactional and Transactional. Each model helps to create a visual understanding of a complex interaction and the various elements of communication. It serves as a form of map to show how different parts of the communication process are interrelated. The different scholars of communication models are analysed in order to compare their similarities and differences for a more comprehensive understanding.

2.1 Shannon and Weaver (1948's) Model

According to Jordan (2018), the Shannon and Weaver model of communication denotes a single linear communication mechanism. The diagram below gives a visual picture of their model:

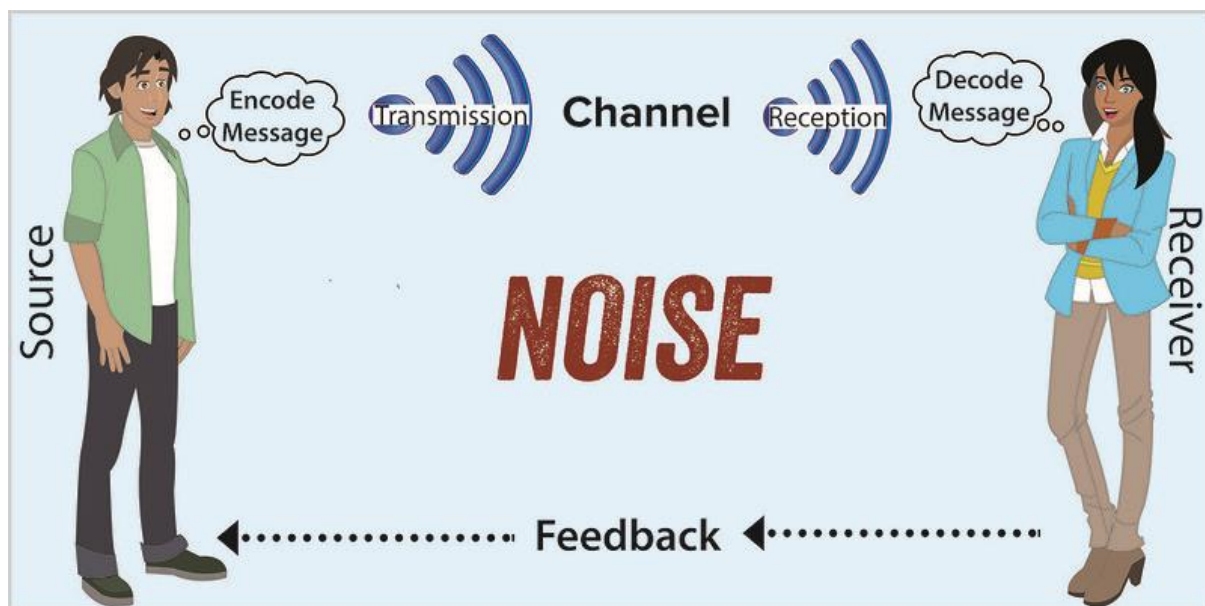


Figure 1

Source: LibreText

Shannon Weaver explains that the Sender Encodes the message and sends it to the Receiver using the Channel for Decoding in this correspondence. During the process of transmitting information through the channel, Shannon Weaver illustrate that distortion may occur which may affect the quality of the message transmitted, this distortion is the result of 'Noise'. Noise from the internal and

external can make messages lose its intended meaning before getting to the receiver.

When you consider the beliefs about communication, or assumptions, made in this model, you can easily see its shortcomings. For instance, this model assumes that communicating is only one-way. An individual may be a sender or a receiver in this case, but not both. Since communication in action is more complex than the linear model implies, this is an issue.

Based on this criticism, they added the feedback process to the model. A feedback is the response that the receiver gives to a sender to get a clearer meaning of the information passed. For example, in Pedro-Maria case study (see appendix 1) discussed in class, if Pedro (the receiver) had repeated what Maria (the sender) had said to him, he would have understood that he was meant to buy chicken, instead of meeting Maria in the kitchen. While Shannon Weaver model proposed feedback, its limiting because it allows only one channel for only one message and it is a computer- mediated type of communication which is not an ideal in the real world.

2.2. The Schramm (1954) Model

Out of all the models of communication, Schramm's model elaborates on the importance of both sender and receiver, turn by turn, in the message. Schramm's communication model is referred to as a circular model since it implies that messages will travel in both directions. As a result, once a message has been decoded, it can be encoded and sent back to the sender. Through the diagram below, you can understand the circle of communication and how each person is important at respective places.

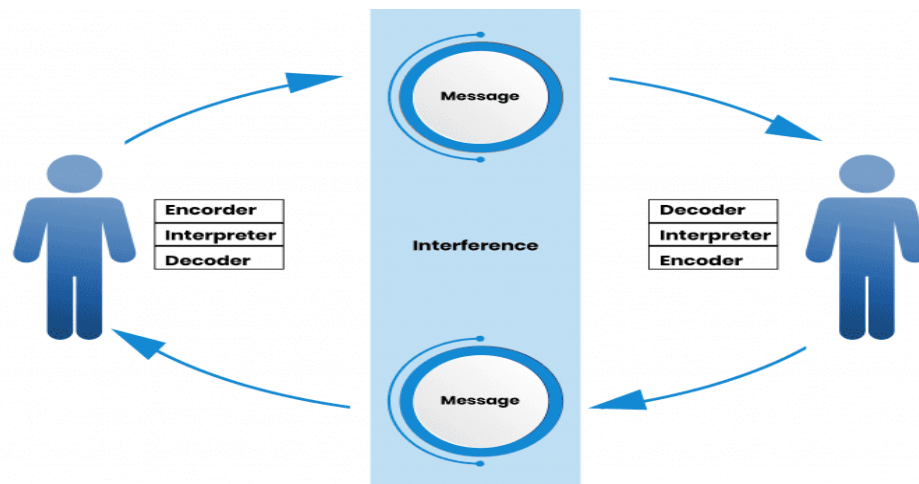


Figure 2.

Schramm's Model Source: Leverage Edu

In this model, both the sender and receiver keep encoding and decoding in a never-ending loop. It shows the circle of communication that is reciprocal and equivalent, messages are based on interpretation, and that communication includes encoding, decoding, and interpreting. This model demonstrates that feedback is cyclical. It also demonstrates the complexity of communication by considering the possibility of misunderstanding. In Maria- Pedro case studies, the interference could have been avoided, if there was a feedback process as proposed in this model.

However, this model does not consider that communication can be unequal. It did not consider a group setting where the speaker is of a higher authority than the rest of the listeners. For example, in a classroom setting where the teacher is speaking and everyone else is listening and trying to interpret the message. This makes communication less equal as proposed by Schramm.

2.3. Berlo's SMRC (1960's) Model

David Berlo introduced the SMCR (source, message, channel, receiver) model in 1960, which differs from other linear models where the sender receives feedback from the receiver. Berlo's linear model of communication eliminates feedback and interference like noise. He postulates that communication skills, attitudes, intelligence, social structure, and culture all affect the source and receiver. Structure, content, treatment, and code are all important aspects of the message.

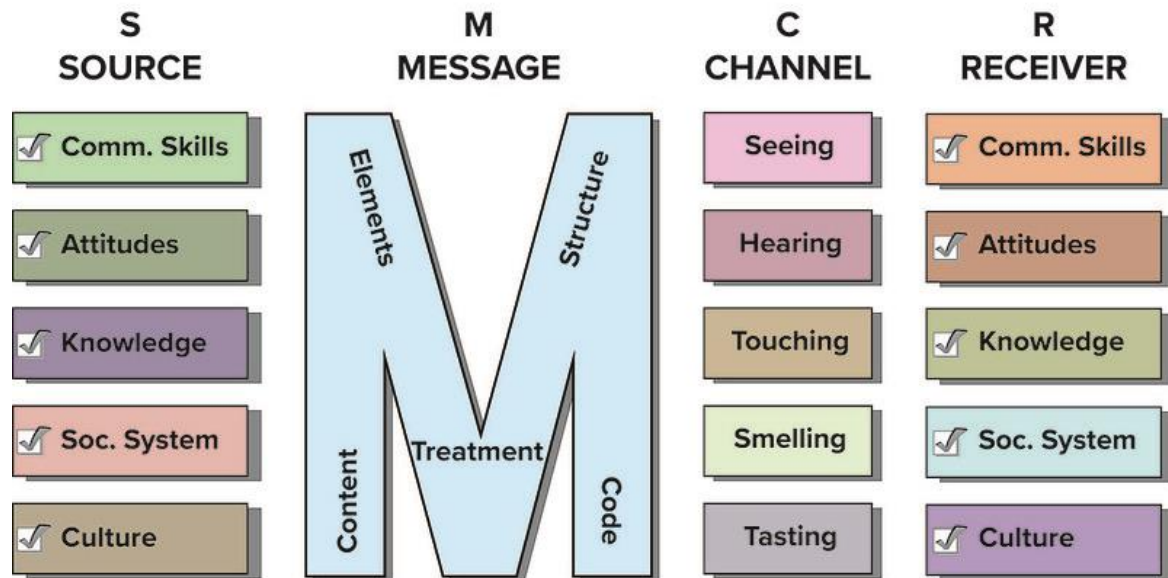


Figure 3.

Source: LibreText

The sensory elements of the channel, such as vision, hearing, and other senses, define it. Berlo's model identifies four critical aspects of the communication process, each of which may lead to message failure. A sender can misidentify a receiver's preferences, use the correct channel at an inappropriate time, the receiver may be more affected by his or her background than the sender expected, or even use the incorrect wording to alienate or confuse the receiver. This model was evidence in the Professor and the Villager's case study (see appendix 2).

The Professor did not communicate effectively because, he did not consider the background of the receiver and the appropriate elements of his message, hence he did not get the help he needed. Culture is an important part of Barlo's model. The setback of Barlo's model is that he believes that for communication to take place, the source and the receiver need to be on the same level. This is not usually the case in today's world.

3.0. Communication Skills

3.1 Importance of Workplace Communication Skills

The importance of communication cannot be over emphasised and inevitable in our daily lives. Good communication is critical for achieving efficiency and maintaining strong working relationships – and this has been especially crucial

since the Covid-19 outbreak forced many people to work remotely. Employers who devote time and effort to establishing clear lines of communication will quickly gain the confidence of their workers, resulting in increased efficiency, production, and overall morale.

The ability to communicate effectively is a skill that puts every employee at a competitive advantage. Some believes that effective communication is up to the individual employees' skill and hard work Keller (2019).

Effective communication involves the articulated use of verbal, nonverbal and active listening skills.

3.2. Verbal Communication Skills

Verbal communication is the use of both spoken and written words or language to communicate the meaning. When considering verbal communication, the choice of content and the way in which it is presented either in spoken or written format is pivotal in conveying an effective message to the recipient. There are some components that need to be considered in relation to the verbal aspect of communication, the contents need to create a positive message with a clear meaning, that will follow a logical structure, minimal jargon, and right to the recipients. In written communication, the choice of vocabulary is important, because the verbal and non-verbal aspects are reduced or absent thereby causing the receiver to translate the message solely on the word communicated to them.

Verbal communication transpires at work when employees engage in personal discussion (formal or informal), attends staff meeting, making calls, sending emails, publish company newsletters, video conferencing, even company policies and procedures are all forms of verbal communication. This can be done internally within the company or externally with customers and partners. When done effectively, it has the capacity to improve productivity, motivation and makes employees feel a sense of belonging, thus increases engagement. If communication strategy is not properly aligned with organisational goals, it can have a reverse effect, that is, low productivity, frustration, increased turnover, lack of trust and motivation.

3.3. Non-Verbal Communication Skills

Nonverbal communication is crucial for conveying meaning and knowledge to others, as well as interpreting the behaviour of those around us. Body language, expressions, how we dress or behave, where we stand, and even our smell are all factors to consider. We interact with others in a variety of subtle ways (perhaps even unintentionally). The sound of one's voice, for example, can reveal one's mood or emotional state, whereas hand movements or gestures can complement a spoken message.

Cultural differences can have a significant role on nonverbal communication signals and how they are perceived in an intercultural setting.

In my previous workplace, both verbal and non-verbal communication were often misunderstood due to lack of others' cultural consciousness. African cultures employ gestures to emphasise the message they wish to communicate to others, which may seem peculiar to people from other cultures. In Western culture, this can be interpreted as an infringement of personal space, which can trigger a disturbance (noise) in the overall process of transmitting a message to the intended recipient.

According to research, our words account for just 7% of our overall interactions when we communicate with others. As seen in the diagram below, our vocal signals account for 38%, and our body language (non-verbal communication) for 55%.

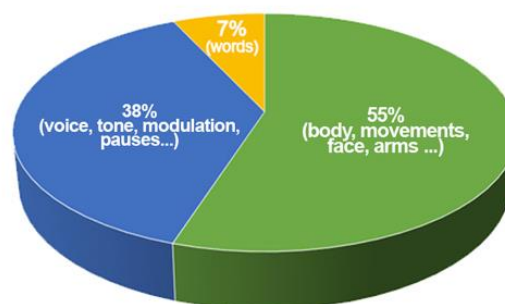


Figure 5.0

Source: Open learning

3.4. Active Listening Skills

Chapter three of Maund (2017) postulates that communication skills such as active listening and assertiveness aid in the transparency of information processing. Griffith and Dunham (2017) assert that it takes effort to actively try to grasp and interpret the verbal messages of others. However, for communication to be effective, the combination of verbal and some other non-verbal clues gives better meaning and clarity such as posturing, and identity markers (Polzer, 2003) cited in Maund (2017).

Active listening is soft skill about the ability to fully concentrate on a speaker, to understand the message and to react thoughtfully. Effective listeners have certain attributes which includes, ability not to judge but putting oneself in the shoes of the speaker. It also involves the ability to paraphrase and use the S.O.L.E.R acronym (Sit squarely, Open posture, Leaning forward, Eye contact and Relax) guidelines. S.O.L.E.R describes active listening as a medium to physically express a message or information.

As a manager in the health care sector, the art of listening is a vital skill to have. Supporting clients with their erratic emotion and showing empathy helped to increase trust and avert a potential challenging behaviour. By paraphrasing, keeping good eye contact, leaning forward to show attentiveness has helps both parties to engage more. I realised that my SOLER behaviour during a face-to-face discussion usually impacts the outcome of the meeting.

4.0. The Impact of Poor Communication in the Workplace.

Disconnected, uninformed employees can have a detrimental effect on any business and bottom line. Keller (2019) noted that poor communication creates a lot of barriers and inappropriate preservation of communication principles. I once experienced the effect of poor communication when I was newly employed to head a residential care home. The management employed me to bridge the communication and leadership gap in the service. There had been a safeguarding against that site. There was gross misconduct due to poor communication from top-to-bottom. Staff working in that site then were not properly informed of their roles and responsibilities prior to working with vulnerable adult. The staff induction

was blurred; hence employees made a lot of error which caused the safeguarding at the time.

Employee complained that there was no leadership presence on site and employee were not properly informed of their duties. This caused frustrations and stress amongst staff. Staff did not feel motivated to come to work, hence staff turnover was at an all time high in the company. Staff also felt abandoned and felt that management did not care about them and saw them as numbers. More prominent was the culture issues in the service. Staff did what they believe was right by them because the company had not communicated their expectations effectively. Their beliefs and past experience caused clashes among staff.

4.1. How Communication was Improved

To rectify this feeling and communication challenges, firstly, a staff meeting was held to address and communicate the steps that the organisation will take to resolve their concerns. A one-to-one meeting was conducted to get individuals views, all staff were scheduled to go through a one-week induction program which was communicated to them to ensure that all staff understands their roles and responsibilities. Company policies and location specific expectations were published to all staff and a periodic supervision was planned to address any individual communication barriers. Staff had a direct line of communication on site which helped to bridge the gap between management and care staff.

It is important that organisations invest energy and resources to ensure that communication across all levels are done in a way that makes work easy and seamless organisation. It is evidence that lack of effective communication caused, stress, low moral and productivity, staff turnover and mistrust in the organisation. This affected organisation's image with local partners and all stakeholders. Staff felt listened to, improved diversity and inclusion, organisational goals were clearly communicated, moral boosted. Client and all stakeholders were happy with the turnaround of the service. All stakeholders were promptly informed of any changes and were invited to be involved in the care planning of their family members. Trust was reinstated.

5.0. Conclusion:

Communication is the process of conveying information and ordinary understanding from one person to another. The communication process includes sending, encoding, transmitting the message across a medium, receiving, decoding the message, feedback, and noise.

There are several barriers to effective communication. Organizations must invest energy and resources from the start to improve communication effectiveness, while also ensuring that the company communication strategy aligns with their overall and long-term goals. Both Employers and their employees must work on their active listening skills.

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Appendixes

1- Maria and Pedro Case Study

MARIA and PEDRO

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!

Q: Why do you think Pedro misunderstood Maria?

Q: Whose Model of Communication explains this confusion and why?

Q: How could this have been prevented?

Q: Whose Model of Communication explains how it could have been avoided?

2- Professor and the Villagers