

COMMUNICATION

According to Leagans (1961), Communication is the process by which two or more people exchange ideas, facts, feelings or impressions in ways that each gains a common understanding of the meaning, intent and use of messages. The term 'communication' stems from the Latin word 'communis'-meaning' 'common'. Communication, then, is a conscious attempt to share information, ideas, attitudes and the like with others. In essence it is the act of getting a *sender* and a *receiver* tuned together for a particular message, or a series of message. "Communication means the movement of knowledge to people in such ways that they act on that knowledge to achieve some useful result. This result may range all the way from a small improvement in doing some productive task, to the generation of a sense of national unity and strength in a country. Communication in this sense includes the whole learning process. It encompasses the teacher- the message or material to be taught- the means or media used to carry the message -the treatment given by those media- the learning achieved by the audience or student- and the actions by which the learning is put into practice". (Winfield (1957).

Good communication does not consist merely of giving orders, but of creating understanding. It does not consist merely of imparting knowledge, but of helping people gain a clear view of the meaning of knowledge. Most of the progress in the future will stem from better technology and greater skill in communicating it to others. Too many people saying the wrong things at the wrong time, in the wrong way, to the wrong people, slows down progress. What is needed is more people saying the right things at the right time, in the right way, to the right people. This is the formula for good communication.

Importance of Communication

1. Communication establishes a favourable climate in which development can take place.
2. Communication has multiplier effect
3. Communication varies the aspirations of the people
4. Communication is essential for all human activities
5. Communication is essential for good leadership

Elements of Communication

1. The Communicator

This is the person who starts the process of communication in operation. He is the source or originator of messages. He is the sender of messages. He is the first to give expression to message intended to reach an audience in a manner that results in correct interpretation and desirable response. When a communicator does not hold the confidence of his audience, communication as conceived will not take place.

The following are **the good qualities of a good communicator**

1. The Communicator Knows -

- a) the specifically defined objectives.
- b) the needs, interests, abilities etc. of the audience.
- c) the content, validity, usefulness and importance of the message
- d) the channels that will reach the audience and their usefulness
- e) the tactics of organising and treating the message
- f) his/her professional abilities and limitations.

2. The communicator is interested in -

- a) the intended audience and their welfare
- b) the specific message and its effects in helping the people
- c) the entirety of communication process
- d) the proper use and limitation of communication channels.

3. The communicator prepares -

- a) a specific teaching plan for communication
- b) materials and equipments needed for communication
- c) a plan for evaluation of results.

4. The communicator has skill in

- a) selecting messages
- b) treating messages
- c) expressing messages in verbal and written forms
- d) the selection and use of channels
- e) understanding the audience
- f) collecting evidence of results.

In contrast to the above, the following are **the qualities of a poor communicator**

- Fail to have ideas to present that are really useful to the audience.
- Fail to give the complete story and show its relationship to people's problems
- Forget that time and energy are needed to absorb the material presented.
- Feel they are always clearly understood.
- Refuse to adjust to 'closed' minds.
- Talk while others are not listening.
- Get far too ahead of audience understanding.
- Fail to recognise others' view - point and develop presentation accordingly
- Fail to recognise that communication is a two-way process.
- Let their own biases over-influence the presentation.
- Fail to see that everyone understands questions brought up for discussion
- Fail to provide a permissive atmosphere.
- Disregard the values, customs, prejudices and habits of people with whom they attempt to communicate.
- Fail to start where people are, with respect to knowledge, skill, interest and need.

2. Message or content

A message is the information communicator wishes his audience to receive, understand, accept and act upon. Messages, for example, may consist of statements of scientific facts about agriculture, sanitation or nutrition; description of action being taken by individuals, groups or committees; reasons why certain kinds of action should be taken ; or steps necessary in taking given kinds of action.

Features of a good message

A good message must be -

- in line with the objectives to be attained.
- clearly understandable by the audience
- in line with the mental, social, economic and physical capabilities of the audience
- Significant-economically, socially or aesthetically to the needs, interests and values of the audience.
- specific in terms of audience and locale
- accurate so as to be scientifically sound, factual and current in nature.
- appropriate to the channel selected.
- appealing and attractive to the audience signifying the utility values and immediacy of use.
- adequate in such a way to have effective proportionate combination of principle and practice manageable so as to be handled by the communicator within the resources availability.

In contrast, poor communicators often commit the following which mar the effectiveness of message sending

1. Fail to clearly separate the key message from the supporting content or subject-matter.
2. Fail to prepare and organise their message properly.
3. Use inaccurate or 'fuzzy' symbols-words, visuals, or real objects-to represent the message.
4. Fail to select messages that are sharply in line with the felt needs of the audience.
5. Fail to present the message objectively-present the material, often biased, to support only one side of the proposition.
6. Fail to view the message from the standpoint of the audience.
7. Fail to time the message properly within a presentation or within a total programme.

Selecting and 'packaging' messages so they have a good chance of being understood, accepted and acted upon when received is a crucial step in the communication process. It is one of the six keys to success in efforts to influence people to change their ways of thinking and of doing that lead to social and economic improvement.

3. Channels of Communication

The sender and the receiver of messages must be connected or 'tuned' with each other. For this purpose, channels of communication are necessary. They are the physical bridges between the sender and the receiver of messages-the avenues between a communicator and an audience on which messages travel to and fro. They are the transmission lines used for carrying messages to their destination. Thus, the channels serve as essential tools of the communicator.

A channel may be anything used by a sender of messages to connect him with intended receivers. The crucial point is that he must get in contact with his audience. The message must get through.

However, channels are no good without careful direction or use in the right way, at the right time, to do the right job, for the right purpose with the right audience, all in relation to the right message. So, proper selection and use of channels constitutes a third determinant of successful communication. Without proper use of channels, messages, no matter how important, will not get through to the intended audience.

Many obstructions can enter channels. These are often referred to as '**noise**' - that is, some obstruction that prevents the message from being heard by or carried over clearly to the audience. 'Noise' emerges from a wide range of sources and causes.

Sources and causes for noise:

1. ***Failure of a channel to reach the intended audience.*** Usually, no one channel will reach an entire audience. Some examples: Meetings-all people cannot or may not attend. Radio-all people do not have access to a receiving set or may not be tuned in if they did. **Written material**-many people cannot read, and others may not.
2. ***Failure on the part of a communicator to handle channels skillfully.*** If a meeting, tour, radio programme or any other channel is not used according to good procedure and technique, its potential for carrying a message is dissipated.
3. ***Failure to select channels appropriate to the objective of a communicator.*** All channels are not equally useful in attaining a specific objective.
4. ***Failure to use channels in accordance with the abilities of the audience.*** Written materials, for example, cannot serve as useful channels for communicating information to people who are unable to read or to understand the level of complexity or abstraction of the message.
5. ***Failure to avoid physical distraction.*** When using the channel of meetings, for example, distractions including people moving in and out, loud noises in or out of the group, heat, lighting, crowded condition and many other forms of distraction often obstruct successful message sending.

6. ***Failure of an audience to listen or look carefully.*** The only messages that get through to an audience are those which are heard, seen or experienced. An unfortunate tendency of people is not to give undivided attention to the communicator. This is a powerful obstruction that prevents messages from reaching desired destination.
7. ***Failure to use enough channels in parallel.*** The more channels a communicator uses in parallel or at about the same time, the more chances he has for the message getting through and being properly received. No single channel will ordinarily reach all people who need to receive a message. Research indicates that up to five or six channels used in combination are often necessary to get a message through to large numbers of people with enough impact to influence significant changes in behaviour.
8. ***Use of too many channels in a series.*** An important principle of communication is that the more channels used in a series the less chance a communicator has for getting his message through to the intended audience. In this context, the following principles are to be borne in mind : (1) The more steps by which the communicator is removed from his intended receiver, the greater are his chances of losing the proper message. (2) When lines of communication get too long for assured communication they can be improved in two primary ways : (a) by using additional channels in parallel, and (b) by eliminating some of the channels in the series.

4. Treatment of Messages

Treatment has to do with the way a message is handled to get the information across to an audience. It relates to the technique, or details of procedure, or manner of performance, essential to expertness in presenting messages. Hence, treatment deals with the design of methods for presenting messages. Designing the methods for treating messages does not relate to formulation of the message or to the selection of channels, but to the technique employed for presentation within the situation provided by a message and a channel.

The purpose of treatment is to make the message clear, understandable and realistic to the audience. Designing treatment usually requires original thinking, deep insight into the principles of human behaviour and skill in creating and using refined techniques of message presentation.

Treatment of messages can be varied in an almost infinite number of ways. The following are the three categories of bases useful for varying treatment

A. Matters of general organisation

1. Repetition of frequency of mention of ideas and concepts.
Contrast of ideas.
2. Chronological-compared to logical, compared to psychological.
3. Presenting one side compared to two sides of an issue.

4. Emotional compared to logical appeals.
5. Starting with strong arguments compared to saving them until the end of presentation.
6. Inductive compared to deductive.
7. Proceeding from the general to the specific and *vice versa*.
8. Explicitly drawing conclusions compared to leaving conclusions implicit for the audience to draw.

B. Matters of speaking and acting

1. Limit the scope of presentation to a few basic ideas and to the time allotted. Too many ideas at one time are confusing.
2. Be yourself. You can't be anyone else. Strive to be clear, not clever.
3. Know the facts. Fuzziness means sure death to a message.
4. Don't read your speech. People have more respect for a communicator who is sure of his subject.
5. Know the audience. Each audience has its own personality. Be responsive to it.
6. Avoid being condescending. Do not talk or act *down* to people, or over their heads.
7. Decide on the dramatic effect desired. In addition to the content of messages, a communicator should be concerned with 'showmanship'. Effective treatment requires sincerity, smoothness, enthusiasm, warmth, flexibility and appropriateness of voice, gestures, movements and tempo.
8. Use alternative communicators when appropriate, as in group discussions, panels, interviews, etc. Remember that audience appeal is a psychological bridge to getting a message delivered.
9. Quit on time. Communicators who stop when they are 'finished' are rewarded by audience goodwill.

C. Matters of symbol variation and devices for representing ideas

To represent ideas by effective treatment with reference to the desired behavioural changes, a variety of audio-visual aids may be used. Communicators should be aware that teaching message to achieve maximum audience impact is a highly professional task. Treatment is a creative task that has to be 'tailor-made' for each instance of communication. Experience, thinking and planning, skill in verbalisation and writing, understanding of the principles of teaching and learning, knowledge of a) the subject b) the audience to be reached and c) skill in the use of channels etc will help the communicator to undertake the process of message treatment.

5. The Audience

An audience is the intended receiver of message. It is the consumer of messages. It is the intended respondent in message sending, and is assumed to be in a position to gain economically, socially or in other ways by responding to the message in particular ways. In good communication the communicator already identifies the audience aims.

The importance of clearly identifying an audience cannot be over-stressed. The more homogeneous an audience, the greater the chances of successful communication. Likewise, the more a communicator knows about his audience and can pin-point its characteristics the more likely he is to make an impact.

The following are some of the issues to clarify the nature of audience:

1. Communication channels established by the social organisation.
2. The system of values held by the audience-what they think is important.
3. Forces influencing group conformity-custom, tradition etc.
4. Individual personality factors-susceptibility to change etc.
5. Native and acquired abilities.
6. Educational, economic and social levels.
7. Pressure of occupational responsibility-how busy or concerned they are.
8. People's needs as they see them, and as the professional communicator sees them.
9. Why the audience is in need of changed ways of thinking, feeling and doing.
10. How the audience views the situation.

It is useful to a communicator to understand these and other traits of an audience in making his plan for communication.

6. Audience Response

This is the terminating element in communication applied to rural development programmes. Response by an audience to messages received is in the form of some kind of action of some degree, mentally or physically. Action, therefore, should be viewed as a product, not as a process; it should be dealt with as an end, not as a means. Consequently, the five elements hitherto analysed *viz.*, communicator, message, channel, treatment and audience are intended to be viewed as an organised scheme (means) for attaining the desired action (end) on the part of an intended audience.

The number of possible kinds and degrees of response to messages received are almost infinite. The following gives an idea of possible variety in response that may result when a useful message is received by the intended audience:

1. **Understanding Vs knowledge.** Knowledge of facts alone does not constitute understanding. It is only the first step. Understanding is attained only when one is able to attach meaning to facts, see the relationship of facts to each other and to the whole of a proposition and the relationship of the total body of facts to the problem under consideration. Communicative efforts often fail because it stops simply with laying facts before people and does not continue in a systematic way to promote an understanding of the facts presented. People usually do not act on facts alone, but only when an understanding of facts is gained. Communication must promote understanding.
2. **Acceptance Vs rejection.** A free, alert and thinking human mind requires that understanding precede acceptance of facts and propositions. In turn, it insists on mental acceptance before resorting to action. For it is what human beings come to

believe, not what they merely know or even understand, that determines what they do when they are free to act as they choose

3. **Remembering vs. forgetting.** When opportunity for action is not immediately available or action is delayed, the factor of forgetting what was learned influences the kind and extent of action taken at any point of time in the future. This basic principle has extensive implications for timing in communication programmes. Transmitting the right message to the right people at the right time is often a crucial factor in successful communication.
4. **Mental Vs physical action.** Changes in the mind of man, must always precede changes in the actions of his hands. In short, man's mind controls his overt behaviour. Consequently, a message suggesting physical action could receive all the mental action required, except the final decision to act. This is sometimes referred to as 'lip service'.
5. **Right vs. wrong.** The intent of a communication is to promote desirable action by an audience as determined by the communicator and expressed in his objectives. Consequently, resulting action in line with the intended objectives is assumed to be 'right' action. But the problem is more complex. Unfortunately, 'noise' often plays mischief at this point. For a variety of reasons, people often fail to behave precisely according to instructions, even when they understand and accept them.

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