

Communication – Meaning, Definition, Functions, Elements & their Characteristics

The word 'communication' comes from the Latin word *communis*, meaning common. This implies that when we communicate, we are trying to establish 'commonality' with someone through a message. Communication then, is a conscious attempt to establish commonality over some idea, fact, feelings and the like, with others. In essence, it is a process of getting a source and a receiver tuned together for a particular message or a series of messages.

Definition

Definitions of communication are many. But a few selected ones are given:

1. Communication is anything that conveys meaning that carries a message from one person to another (Brooker, 1949).
2. Communication is all of the procedures, by which our mind can affect another (Weaver, 1966).
3. Communication is the mutual interchange of ideas by any effective means (Thayer, 1968).
4. Communication may be defined as a process by which an individual - the communicator, transmits (usually verbal symbols) to modify the behaviour of other individuals - communicatees (Hovland, 1964).
5. Communication is a process by which two or more people exchange ideas, facts, feelings, or impression in ways that each gains a common understanding of meaning, intent and use of message (Leagans, 1961).
6. Communication is the process by which messages are transferred from a source to receiver (Rogers and Shoemaker, 1971).
7. Communication is the process of sending and receiving messages through channels which establishes common meanings between a source and a receiver (Van den Ban and Hawkins, 1988).

Functions of Communication

Communication has four basic functions as follows.

Information Function – The basic requirement of adapting and adjusting oneself to the environment is information. There must be some information about what is going on in the

environment which concerns the people. The getting or giving of information underlies all communication functions, either directly or indirectly.

Command or Instructive Function – Those who are hierarchically superior in the family, society or organization, often initiate communication either for the purpose of informing their subordinates or for the purpose of telling them what to do, how to do, when to do etc. The command and instructive functions of communication are more observable in formal organizations than in informal organizations.

Influence or persuasive function – According to Berlo (1960), the sole purpose of communication is to influence people. Persuasive function of communication i.e. to induce people is extremely important for extension in changing their behaviour in the desirable direction.

Integrative function – A major function of communication is integration or of continuously offsetting any disintegration at the personal or at the organizational level. This helps to maintain individual, societal or organizational stability and identity.

Elements of Communication Process

Successful communication involves six key elements: a skillful *communicator* sending a useful *message* through proper *channels* effectively *treated* to an appropriate *audience* to evoke the desired *response*.

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 first to give expression to messages intended to reach an audience in a manner that results in correct interpretation and desirable response. The communicator may be a Village Development Officer, a Principal or an Instructor in a Training Centre, a Block Development Officer, a villager, an administrator or any other person. In order to be effective the communicator should possess the following characteristics.

- He should have knowledge of message, objective and the audience.
- People should have faith on the communicator.
- He should have interest in his audience and their welfare.
- He should select and treat the message properly.
- He prepare a plan for communication
- He knows how to organize his message.
- His language and cultural compatibility should be in the line with the receiver.
- He should have positive attitude towards the message and the audience.

2. Message

A message is the information a 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. The key objective of communication is to transmit useful message so that all receivers understand clearly and successfully. A good message should have the following characteristics.

1. In line with the objectives to be attained.
2. Clear and understandable by the audience.
3. In line with mental, socio-economic and physical capabilities of the audience
4. Related to economic and social needs, interests and values of the audience.
5. Specific, factual, correct and no irrelevant material should be included.
6. Appropriate to the channel selected.
7. Relevant to the audience.
8. Cover only one point at a time.

3. Channels of Communication

Channels 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 message to connect him with intended receivers. The crucial point is that he must get in contact with his audience. The message must get through. Common channels of communication in the extension situation are the 'Extension Teaching Methods'.

Certain characteristics of channels are identified and are delineated below.

- It specifies the direction of message flow
- It gives the message accuracy. Low (in interpersonal) and high (in mass media)
- It selects the recipient depending upon the channel
- It produces feedback to the sender of the message
- It overcomes the selectivity processes
- It is capable of bringing desirable effects as the part of the audience.

4. Treatment of Messages

It is the way of handling the message in such a way that the treated message be sent over the channels with the maximum probability of reaching the destination effectively. It relates to the techniques or details of procedure or manner of performance essential to have expertise in presenting the message. Hence treatment deals with the design of method for presenting the message.

The purpose of the treatment of message is to make the message clear, understandable and realistic to the audience. It usually requires original thinking, deep insight into the principle

of human behaviour and skill in creating and using refined techniques of message presentation. At this point, the effective teacher is separated from the less effective one, and the art of teaching comes into play. The message should be treated in the following manner.

a. Method of general organization

- Repetition of ideas and concepts.
- Contrast of ideas (positive and negative things).
- Chronological – compared to logical and psychological.
- Presenting one side compared to two sides of an issue.
- Emotional compared to logical appeals.
- Starting with strong arguments compared to saving them until the end of presentation.
- Let the audience draw the conclusion.

b. Use of symbols, variation and devices for presenting the ideas.

c. Message should be treated by giving quotation, jokes and contrary against the common opinion during the communication process.

5. The Audience

An audience is the intended receiver of messages. It is the consumer of messages. An audience may consist of one person or many. It may comprise men, women, or both; youth groups, villagers or their leaders. An audience may be formed according to occupation groups as farmers or artisans; professional groups, as engineers, educators, administrators etc.

The more homogenous an audience, the greater the chances of successful communication. Likewise, the more a communicator knows about his audience and can pinpoint its characteristics the more likely he is to make an impact. Communication to be successful must be target oriented. The communicator must know the target, their needs, interests, resources, facilities, constraints and even their approximate number and location.

Following specified aspects will help a communicator to clarify the exact nature of an audience and how to reach it.

- Communication channels established by the social organization.
- The system of values held by the audience.
- Individual personality factors.
- Original and acquired abilities.
- Educational, social and economic levels.
- Attitude of the audience.
- How the audience view the situation.

6. Audience Response

Response by an audience to messages received is in the form of some kind of action to 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.

- Mass communication intensifies propaganda conflicts
- Much available information is imperfectly absorbed
- Lack of primary experience affects communication
- Communication builds on existing attitudes
- Mass communication increases the communality of experience
- Communication devices have the ability for thought control
- Books, Newspapers, Magazines, and Leaflets have effects like instrumental, prestige, reinforcement, enriched aesthetic experience and respite.
- Cultural values and the social organisation are determinants of communication.