

Understanding Communication

1. About Communication

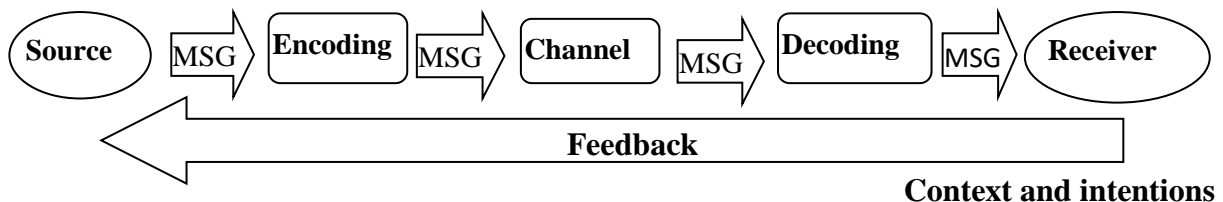
The meaning of communication is the act or process of using words, sounds, signs, or behaviors to express or exchange information or to express your ideas. In most communication situations, we have two or more communication partners with some internal knowledge who are connected to each other by the following five links:

- Information transmission and feedback
- Informational medium
- Referential knowledge
- Partner knowledge and mindreading
- Physical and social situation.

Communication is transactional Each person is both sending and receiving simultaneously. Parties communicating have an impact on each other

Communication is a Process Changes in events and relationships are part of a continuous flow. Every communication experience is the result of the accumulation of experiences preceding the present one. The new experience affects the future ones.

Communication is Sharing Meaning with Others. This means that communicating requires an understanding from the other party. If the meaning is not understood, the message is not communicated. And the process of sharing information or communicating a message could be illustrated as follows.



2. Types of Communication

Communication can be classified in the following different ways.

• **Intrapersonal Communication:**

When people talk to themselves, communication takes place within the brain. It embraces their thoughts, experiences and perceptions during a communication event. Behavior responses on all other levels of communication essentially begin on intrapersonal level. On this level, the individual forms personal rules and patterns of communication. Intrapersonal communication encompasses:

- Sense-making e.g. interpreting maps, texts, signs, and symbols
- Interpreting non-verbal communication e.g. gestures, eye contact
- Communication between body parts; e.g. “My stomach is telling me it’s time for lunch.”
- Day-dreaming
- Nocturnal dreaming
- Many others...

- **Interpersonal Communication:**

Interpersonal communication is also referred to as dyadic communication, or communication between two individuals. This type of communication can occur in both a one-on-one and a group setting. This also means being able to handle different people in different situations and making people feel at ease. Gestures such as eye contact, body movement, and hand gestures are also part of interpersonal communication. The most common functions of interpersonal communication are listening, talking and conflict resolution. Types of interpersonal communication vary from verbal to non-verbal and from situation to situation.

- **Verbal Communication**

Verbal communication occurs when we engage in speaking with others. It can be face-to-face, over the telephone, via Skype or Zoom, etc. Some verbal engagements are informal, such as chatting with a friend over coffee or in the office kitchen, while others are more formal, such as a scheduled meeting. Regardless of the type, it is not just about the words, it is also about the caliber and complexity of those words, how we string those words together to create an overarching message, as well as the intonation (pitch, tone, cadence, etc.) used while speaking. And when occurring face-to-face, while the words are important, they cannot be separated from non-verbal communication.

- **Face-to-face Communication**

Face-to-face oral communication is the most recognized type of communication. Here, what you express comes directly from what you speak. Again, this can be formal or informal: with your friends and family, in a formal meeting or seminar, at work with your colleagues and boss, within your community, during [professional presentations](#), etc.

This type of communication

- Gets better with practice. The more you practice with awareness, the more control you will have on your oral expressions.
- Is vibrantly a-live! This means that despite all past rehearsals, oral communication offers you a present-moment opportunity to tune, revise, revoke and fix what you express. It is hence the most powerful type of communication and can work for or against you with every expression.
- Engages your audience more than other types of communication. The listener (or an audience) often expects to speak-back to you with oral communication, enabling two-way communication more than any other channel.

For superior face-to-face communication,

- Always meet the **eyes** of your audience with confidence, conviction and openness.
- Practice before a mirror to perfect your *tone* and *expressions*, so they suit the message you want to convey. They two facets often convey more than your words do.
- Practice using **role-play**. This means that even when you rehearse before a mirror, candidly ask yourself, “**Am I ready to receive this message with this tone and expression?**” If you aren’t convinced, your audience won’t be either. So practice again until you get it right.
- Consciously **engage** your audience’s participation. This is the strength of this type of communication, so never let your oral expression be a one-way rant to

yourself. You can do this by asking questions, getting their opinion and encouraging expression of new ideas.

- Finally, become an active listener. An effective oral communicator not only speaks, but also actively listens to his audience.

• **Distance Communication**

Distance (oral) communication has made the world a smaller and more accessible place. Mobile phones, video-conferencing, 2-way webinars, etc. are all modern expansions of distance communication, taking its expression to the next subtle level. And in this type of communication, your tone of voice and pace of delivery take priority over other expressions.

For effective oral communication over distance,

- Give higher priority to your **listening**. When you fail to listen, you will find that multiple people attempt to speak at the same time, undermining the value of this form of communication.
- Speak slightly **slower** than you would in face-to-face communication. This will make sure that you remain aware of the subtle nuances of your tone, and the receiver has time to grasp what you convey.
- Always **re-iterate** what you understand when you listen. This type of communication misses the non-verbal signals that you would receive in face-to-face communication (that can indicate subtle expressions like anger, friendliness, receptivity, sarcasm, etc.) So paraphrase what understand and confirm that this is indeed what the other party also meant to convey.
- Where appropriate, wear your **friendly face** with a smile on your lips and eyes. Feel this friendly face. Your tone will automatically convey your openness and receptivity to the other person. (This may not be appropriate if you expect to convey a warning on the phone, so ensure that your face suits your message.)
- Finally, back this up with **written communication** where possible. The intent is to confirm the take-away from the communication so all parties are on the same page. This makes sense even for an informal call with your friend – perhaps you can send a quick text message to re-iterate how pleasurable it was to speak to him, and then confirm the final call-for-action.

• **Small Group Communication:**

Small group communication is an interaction process that occurs among three or more people interacting in an attempt to achieve Soft Skills commonly recognized goals either face-to-face or through mediated forms. This is sometimes included in the interpersonal level — the most obvious difference is the number of persons involved in the process. The small group may be a family of three talking at supper, or a meeting of an organization with just a few members.

• **Public Communication or Public Speaking:**

The speaker sends messages to an audience, which is not identified as individuals. Unlike the previous levels, the speaker is doing most, if not all, of the talking.

• **Mass Communication:**

Mass communication occurs when a small number of people send messages to a large anonymous and usually heterogeneous audience using specialized communication media. It

represents the creation and sending of a homogeneous message to a large heterogeneous audience through the media.

- **Non-Verbal Communication:**

In non-verbal communication, people can send messages to each other without talking. They communicate through facial expressions, head positions, eye contact, arm and hand movements, positioning of legs and feet, touch, body posture, gestures, tone and pace of voice, and [the attitude](#) with which you communicate. How people use “space” also transmits a message. By being aware of non-verbal communication, one can interpret the signals of others, or send signals to others. Awareness of non-verbal communication helps people:

- Project an image of confidence and knowledge.
- Demonstrate power or influence
- Express sincerity, interest and cooperativeness.
- Create trust.
- Recognize personal tension in self and others.
- Identify discrepancies between what people are saying and what they are actually thinking.
- Change behavior and environment to encourage productive discussion.

However, what we do while we speak often says more than the actual words. Therefore, Non-verbal communication is not the synonym of communication without words. For example, if you’re engaged in a conversation with your boss about your cost-saving idea, it is important to pay attention to both their words and their non-verbal communication. Your boss might be in agreement with your idea verbally, but their nonverbal cues: avoiding eye contact, sighing, scrunched up face, etc. indicate something different. This type of communication is more subtle, yet far more powerful. In the past few decades, [body language](#) experts have revealed how the posture you adopt, the hand gestures you endorse and other facets of your physical personality affect your communication. It is worthwhile to spend a few hours coming up to speed on basic body-language gestures, so you don’t inadvertently send mixed messages with your gestures and speech. You can also use this to support your message, making it more impactful. But despite what these experts tell you, there will be times when the body language you are meant to adapt is in complete contrast with how you feel (like using a “friendly” posture when you internally feel threatened or intimidated).

- **Written Communication**

Whether it is an email, a memo, a report, a Facebook post, a Tweet, a contract, etc. all forms of written communication have the same goal to disseminate information in a clear and concise manner – though that objective is often not achieved. In fact, poor writing skills often lead to confusion. One important thing to remember about written communication, especially in the digital age, is the message lives on. Thus, there are two things to remember: first, write well – poorly constructed sentences and careless errors make you look bad; and second, ensure the content of the message is something you want to promote or be associated with for the long haul. To be an absolute pro at this type of communication, below are 3 rules that can help you get there.

- Follow a clear structure so your communication is not all over the place.
- Clarify the context of your communication where possible.

- Always err on the right side of caution by adapting a semi-formal tone, keeping your communication clean (in language and expression) and open (without offending any group).

- **Listening**

The act of listening does not often make its way onto the list of types of communication. Active listening, however, is perhaps one of the most important types of communication because if we cannot listen to the person sitting across from us, we cannot effectively engage with them. Think about a negotiation – part of the process is to assess what the opposition wants and needs. Without listening, it is impossible to assess that, which makes it difficult to achieve a win/win outcome. Communication is a powerful activity that comes to us as naturally as breathing. With a little bit of awareness, our communication can be flawless so the other person not only receives our message, but is also open to it. **“Communication begins with Listening!”**

- **Visual Communication**

We are a visual society. Think about it, televisions are running 24/7, Facebook is visual with memes, videos, images, etc., The images we post on social media are meant to convey meaning – to communicate a message..

We communicate continually throughout each and every day. We do it visually, auditory, formally, non-formally, etc.,

- **Formal Communication**

This type of communication is also referred to as “official communication” and covers the gamut of verbal expressions that address a formal need. It is:

- Conducted through a pre-determined channel. For instance, a large number of your interactions within your profession, financial communication (from and to your bank, creditors, debtors, etc.) and legal expressions are examples of formal communication.
- More time-consuming than non-formal communication, as it follows a particular communication protocol.
- Even in cases of oral expressions ([in meetings](#), seminars, etc.), it is often backed by written communication that can provide documentation evidence of the oral conversation.
- Considered a reliable source of information. (So when you receive a legal notice from your bank, you better take notice of it!)

Formal communication forms the core of our professional lives (though not all professional communication is formal). Hence becoming an expert in this type of communication is central to professional advancement and success. Below, we provide you simple tips to excel in your expression and profession.

- Begin by **clarifying the purpose** of your communication.
- Whether you use an oral or written expression, always follow a **well-defined structure** that can be easily understood by your audience.
- Keep your tone **open**, professional and friendly.
- End by **re-iterating what you expect to cause** through this communication: clarification on your stance, answers to questions, a call to action, etc. Also clarify any

constraints that apply to this communication (like confidentiality, time-limit for response, etc.)

- Finally, **thank your audience** for their listening. (This works well for written communication too.)

- **Informal Communication**

Informal communication is surprisingly popular, and also referred to as “the (unofficial) grapevine”. This is often by word-of-mouth information. In fact, it is this type of communication that opens you up to unofficial yet provocative information. Informal communication is :

- Spontaneous and free-flowing, without any formal protocol or structure. Hence this type of information is also less reliable or accurate.
- A communication channel that spreads like wildfire, as there are no formal rules to follow.
- Mostly oral, with no documentation evidence. Due to this, many undermine the value of informal communication, terming it mere “gossip”.

Despite its drawbacks, informal communication is considered “user-friendly” and hence offers huge advantages when used wisely.

Note: In modern times, social networks from “unofficial” sources (like your personal Facebook and Twitter feeds, LinkedIn, etc.) are powerful sources of informal communication and are often used to shape public opinion.

3. Communication Skills

The complexity of communication, the wide variety of related cognitive and social abilities, and also the huge situational variability makes it difficult to define the different skills related to communication. Each type of communication includes a wide range of skills. Burleson (2003) specifies a number of fundamental interaction skills, such as nonverbal communication skills, discourse and conversation skills, message production and reception skills, and impression management skills. The researcher also discusses functional skills such as informing, explaining, arguing and persuasion, as well as specific skills in personal relationships and in public and professional contexts. Specifying communication skills for a rather narrow range of particular behaviors and situations makes it easier to define them and to analyze methods for assessment and intervention. Hence, we highlight the following as mainstream skills in communication,

- Strategic revelation of information
- Questioning
- Listening
- Explaining
- Arguing
- Reinforcing
- Persuading
- Negotiating
- Mentoring and coaching
- Relational communication and others.