**COMMUNICATION**

Communication can be defined as the passing of ideas, information and attitudes from person to person. Communication is used to describe the institutions and forms in which ideas, information and attitudes are transmitted and received, in other words the process of transmission and reception. It is also keeping in touch with others and to impart and exchange thoughts, ideas and opinions. Simply put, communication is the process of making contact between two points, or interaction in any form. There are various ways of communicating through language, symbols, codes and non-verbal means of communication. Communication may be vocal or non-vocal. It may be for a serious purpose, such as political propaganda or the passing down of oral traditions, or for entertainment or social relations.

**Elements of communication**

The communication process or cycle involves:

1. **Context**- Setting/environment: place, time, surrounding events, physical and psychological climates.
2. **Sources/senders/transmitters**- Human originators of the message or definers of the purpose of the message eg. our mouth, pen and paper for a letter, a cell phone or computer.
3. **Messages**- Content, that is, verbal (written/spoken) and non-verbal (gestures, movements, smells or objects).
4. **Channels**- Means through which messages are transmitted, e.g., sound waves, light waves or other sense-stimulating means.
5. **Receivers/decoders**- Ultimate goal or destination of a message; translators of messages eg. a person’s ear, eye, and may also include items such as TV, computer or cell phone.
6. **Interaction**- The back-and-forth nature of communication sometimes called transaction. All parties in the communication event influence and are influenced by the event.
7. **Interference/feedback/noise**- Responses, interruptions or blockages to interaction. A response maybe to give an answer to a question, to think about it, or to try to respond even without full understanding.

**Strategies for effective communication**

Effective communication in a business is the lifeblood of its existence. Internal communication is important because it:

* develops employer-employee understanding
* communicates instruction and intelligence
* furthers employee interests
* lessens the shock of technological change
* helps to create a good public image
* gives employees opportunities for communication

Good communication achieves efficiency. Without it there may be a breakdown or delay in production. This may increase the production cost. So, what can be done to increase effective communication?

1. Ensure that the communication is two-way. This means that the sender should allow the receiver to respond to what was received.
2. Make an effort to eliminate all distractions; anything that interferes with the message, e.g. noise and interruptions.
3. Choose an appropriate method or channel.
4. Ensure that all five communication elements are present.
5. Be specific by avoiding vague or general words, or words with several meanings. For example: Sales increased a little. This is a vague statement. It is more effective to say: Sales increased by 10 per cent.
6. Avoid distortions. This refers to people consciously or unconsciously changing the message.
7. Plan the message by thinking through the idea before saying or writing it.
8. Keep the receiver in mind by treating him or her with courtesy and respect.
9. Keep the communication as short as possible. This can be done by omitting unnecessary detail.

**Methods of Communication**

The four main methods of communication in business are oral, electronic, written and visual.

1. **Oral Communication**

The most common form of communication is oral. Oral communication refers to word-of-mouth communication between two, or among several parties. This includes direct speech, interviews, meetings, conferences, speeches and the use of public-address systems, the telephone, intercoms and walkie-talkies.

**Conversations:**

* Provide workers and employers with information
* Clarify ideas
* Offer suggestions
* Get immediate reaction to a message.

**Interviews -** which are more formal and organised - are used to:

* Recruit workers
* Discover much information about a matter by asking appropriate questions
* Evaluate performance, select candidates for promotion and get information.

**Meetings:**

* A formal meeting follows a set procedure in which the topics to be discussed are set out in an agenda
* An informal meeting is often unstructured and brief
* They are held in order to examine important matters to obtain ideas on issues with a view to reaching decisions on which action can be taken.

**Telephone calls are:**

* Used for both internal and external communication
* Used for transmitting information immediately, especially when an instant response is required

1. **Electronic Communication**

This involves the ability to exchange information through the use of computer equipment and software and includes:

* **Electronic mail** (e-mail) is an organised channel of communication to access information presented graphically and incorporate documents, audio and picture images sent to computers anywhere in the world.
* **Facsimile** (fax) is a formal channel of communication for sending written messages to anyone in the world with compatible equipment using telephone and a facsimile machine.
* **Teleconferencing** is a formal channel of communication which allows people at distant locations to talk to and hear one another on a specific topic or issue through telephone.

1. **Written Communication**

Written communication is more formal than oral communication and provides information in the printed form and includes agendas, annual reports, bulletins, letters, memorandums, minutes of meetings, manuals, suggestion boxes, magazines, journals, newsletters, emails and faxes.

**Letters:**

* Provide a permanent record of communication between organisations and between individuals.
* Perhaps, the most common form of external communication.
* Are used for a variety of purposes, including making enquiries, advertising, lodging complaints, replying to complaints and confirming information.

**Memoranda:**

Much less formal than a letter, these are used to communicate information within sections or departments of an organisation. They are essential in:

* Sending suggestions to superiors
* Clarifying decisions taken
* Requesting assistance
* Confirming conversations
* Providing instructions
* Seeking information or advice.

**Reports**, in business, provide formal communication. They may be used to provide a brief witness of an incident, or compile information after thorough investigation. At times, it is necessary to submit factual information on a problem in the office. A report of this nature is considered to be an occasional report.

**Notices** are less formal and are used internally. For example, the Human Resource Department may place a notice on a board to inform the staff of vacant positions.

**Agendas** serve as a guide indicating the matters to be considered at a meeting and the order in which they are to be discussed.

1. **Visual Communication**

Visual communication is similar in intent and effect, to written communication, except that it is more abbreviated. Visual communication helps to make oral or written communication more effective. Examples of visual communication include pictures, diagrams, symbols, closed-circuit televisions, films and film strips, charts, computers, posters and graphs.

**Charts** provide a visual channel of communication using lines or diagrams for illustrations.

**Signals** create a visual channel of communication using arrows, flickering lights, coloured lights, bells or sirens.