

The Mechanism of Communication

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THE MECHANISM OF COMMUNICATION is second in the series of articles on the subject of communication written by Miss Daisy Marion Hamesh Das for the *Nursing Journal of India* exclusively. In the last article on **FORMS OF COMMUNICATION** that appeared in the March '75 issue, the author introduced the topic and covered various types of communication. In the present article, she has skillfully dealt with the mechanism of communication, the constituent elements involved in the process and the variety of physical, psychological and organisational factors that impede effective communication.

In the final article scheduled to be published next month the learned author will dwell on the applied aspects of communication. (Ed.)

What is communicated or what a person thinks or feels about another individual or a particular person with whom he interacts is communicating. It involves certain communication skills and abilities. General abilities and skills in communication are required by all, but specific skills and abilities are implied in specific situations where effective communication between two or more individuals is required. The human interactions can be both similar as well as different and it is not possible to develop or adhere to any rigid rules and procedures in this regard. However, there are some guidelines for the development of communicating skills and abilities. Effective communication is an art and a skill on which depends the entire human interaction.

Mechanism of Communication : How two people communicate can be explained in a simple situation. An individual X transmits his message through his vocal apparatus i.e. muscles of head and face and Y, another individual, receives the message through his receptors such as ears and eyes and interprets this message according to his needs, values, attitudes, experience and responsive intelligence. Y prepares his answer based on these personal factors and transmits them back to X where upon X also follows the same pattern what Y had adopted when he had first received the message. From this simple example it is clear that both individuals transmit their messages via the vocal apparatus and facial muscles; both use some of the tools for non-verbal communication, e.g. the movements of hands and gestures. The fact remains that both individuals interpret different messages according to their own personal factors; both receive message through the same receptors e.g. ears and eyes; and both prepare answers which are based on their personal factors, and that both respond or behave according to their personality traits or responsive behaviour skills.

The following elements are involved in the mechanism of communication :

(a) **Sender or communicator :** The sender initiates the process of communication. It is his responsibility to tune his transmission for optimum reception.

For this he needs to have a clear idea of what he wishes to convey and also to know the technique, means and methods of conveying the message. For better results, the sender must develop a personal reputation with the others to whom he has to communicate. The reputation can be developed if the sender is consistently fair in dealing, generous in praising and objective in criticising. And also if he is predictable in his behaviour, is truthful and technically competent. The sender needs to develop empathy so that he may be able to appreciate the situation from others' point of view. This helps the sender to prepare his message in such a way that the message is acceptable.

(b) **Receiver or listener :** The receiver listens and receives the message, interprets it and reacts. He forms an equation with the sender. The acceptability and understanding of the message on the part of the recipient is facilitated if he has an orientation as required by the communicator.

The communicator is better understood by people whom he knows well than by those whom he does not know. For instance with a friend, a single word or a simple gesture is sometimes enough to convey the message. To an unknown person even a well written letter may fail to convey a simple message on the other hand. It is no exaggeration to say that the success in communication depends largely on sender's knowledge of the receiver.

(c) **Message :** Words mean what one makes them mean because words have different meanings. The words used in one way by the sender may be interpreted in another way by the receiver. Therefore, the sender must ensure that the receiver is adequately aware of the correct meaning and context of the message particularly if a word with several meanings is used. This indicates that the message should be worded in a simple language and using words that will

motivate the listener. It is futile to speak to a villager who has had no education by using technical terms that he never heard before.

(d) **Atmosphere :** A message is easily understood in an atmosphere of cordiality, confidence and frankness. It is easily distorted and strongly resisted if the atmosphere is suspicion, distrust, fear and hatred. A good reputation of the communicator helps in creating a congenial atmosphere for communication.

Break-down in communication. It is condition when one participant in human interaction, despite his correctly receiving and interpreting the intended message, does not wish the other party to know that the message had been correctly understood. Lack of good intention between the participants blocks communication.

For example no meaningful communication can take place if the participants fail to perceive one other as unique human beings. Similarly flow of communication is hindered by the use of cliches and automatic responses. A cliché is a meaningless phrase which is often used without any reflection or thought on part of the speaker. Also, failure to interrupt when others speak or belief that it is impolite to speak when others speak, cause a breakdown in communication.

Barriers to Communication : Failure in communication causes a chaotic situation. There are personal barriers which are natural impediments to communication. They are :

(1) *Language :*

i. Knowledge of professional terminologies. Sometimes these terminologies may mean very little or nothing at all to a lay person. Use of words which are not in common use for conveying some important message are potential barriers in communication. Also the assumption that every one uses words the same way as we do causes misunderstanding.

ii. Sudden emotions experienced by the transmitter. In human life there are many things which trigger off one's anxieties and hostilities. Some may happen to the transmitter. His status, his business or short of time may cause similar situations.

iii. **Personality complexes :** Clear understanding of what one may say is hampered if one is cold or inhibited during communication. People who have gruff ways of speaking with other people cannot expect to be successful in an interview.

iv. **Biases and prejudices :** Every one has some prejudices of which he may not be aware. These prejudices and biases betray one in his evaluation of people. Despite his being tolerant, broadminded and objective, he misjudges them.

v. **Impatience.** Purpose of communication is marred by forming opinions and reaching decisions while listening. In this regard one needs to be open-minded and reserve his final judgement till all the facts have been evaluated.

vi. The sender might hide information and thus make the communication incomplete.

(2) **Physical impediments :** A person is deaf and dumb ; his hearing or speaking mechanisms are defective or he is mentally retarded. Therefore, he is unable to hear correctly or talk clearly or understand properly. Most probably he hears a little or speaks a little or does not understand quickly enough. Or he may have been born without any of these conditions or he may acquire and develop them any time during his life time. However, physical conditions such as already mentioned do cause a barrier in communication.

(3) **Psychological factors.** When a person hears, he hears with his ears, but listens with his mind, personality, feelings and emotions. Non-verbal communication such as smiles, glances, actions and even silences communicate unintentional feelings and attitudes which may or may not be apparent. Failure to consider the psychological factors in relation to communication will cause certain amount of hinderance in understanding and interpretation of the message.

(4) **Mechanical failures.** The obstacles may be caused by failures in the mechanics of communication. There is a failure in organizing the intended message and failure to determine the objective of the message. Message is misinterpreted. The speaker neither demands nor commands any listening concentration from the listeners. He simply assumes that his communication has a simple and easy procedure. He also does not understand the psychological factors in relation to communication and hence he attempts to cover or convey too much in too short a time.

(5) **Educational difference.** Great educational gap between medical staff, nurse and lay people, majority of them being uneducated and illiterate hampers communication.

(6) **Organizational barriers.** There are structural patterns in every organization which determine the status of each person and the purpose of communication. To communicate with people in authority means requesting for assistance, submitting suggestions and putting forward problems for solutions. Where as in communication with subordinates means giving guidance and assistance, providing necessary supervision and instructions, resolving conflicts and solving problems. Communication at a horizontal level means sharing ideas and suggestions with our colleagues. If there is no response or reaction horizontally i.e., from side to side, bottom upwards or top downwards there

will be a complete break-down in organizational communication. This being an ineffective communication creates increasing conflicts and frustration amongst staff.

Frustration is a defeat in purpose. Janet Muntz in her *Communication or Conflicts* describes frustration as "a blocking of an on-going goal directed activity". She also describes conflicts as "a state of indecision which occurs when a choice has to be made between goals, arises when the individual's socio-emotional needs are denied, or when it is not possible to achieve what, according to the particular values and beliefs of the individual, is his purpose of life". Sound communication is the foundation upon which an organization rests. Better means and methods of communication means better communication. Better communication helps get better results irrespective of the size and nature of organization or institution. Many management problems are traceable to failures in organizational communication. Organizational barriers are due to :—

- (i) Ignoring worker's suggestions, grievances and feelings on day to day matters.
- (ii) Distorted communication system prevents information from reaching those who can take necessary action.
- (iii) When morale is bad, and the management is not trusted, the communication is not believed.
- (iv) The failure to let the employee know his stand in the institution. Informing a person of his performance acts as an incentive. Also knowledge of results of his special performances increases personal efficiency generally and in some degree according to the completeness, exactness and clearness with which the knowledge of results is related.

Principles of good communication

1. There is a firm ground of conviction in good communication. To express with conviction is one's right which must be without malice and mis-interpretation. Ideals, standard, opinion and philosophy are easily expressed through communication. Since freedom to good communication leads to efficiency and good morals, necessary precautions are taken to be on a firm ground of conviction.

2. Good communication is appropriate to situation, person and time. Means and methods of communication are many. Non-verbal communication such as looks or gentle movements of the head or body make a very important part in the process of communication. In communication, messages can be modified by voice, facial expression and even by the movement of body. Gesture to remain calm and serene, speaking quietly and slowly, to be pleasant and demure are some of the examples of communication.

Whatever form of communication is used it must be appropriate to situation, person and time.

3. Good communication is objective and purposeful. The communication must be so effective that the purpose of communication is fulfilled, and the objective is obtained. Many a times such goals are never achieved because either the listener is not ready to listen and learn the objective or there may be a lack of background information and knowledge to understand problems, which blots out all attempts to be a good communicator. Sometimes, the listener may not see any reason to understand what is being communicated. If the purpose of communication is educational, the communication must be so effective that the listener may think the whole matter communicated as his/her own accumulated knowledge.

4. A good communication promotes total achievement of purpose. Unilateral communication is fast but not always effective, whereas bi-way communication is slow but more accurate and effective. As the purpose of communication is to reach a certain mutual understanding between groups of people, without effective communication the purpose of communication will not be achieved and there will be lack of development of potential functions in the organization.

5. A good communication represents the personality and individuality of the communicator. The spirit and content of the message must represent as a special production for the market.

6. A significant communication involves special preparation which involves the purpose of communication, the message to be delivered, to whom, by whom, and the technique of communication to be used, composition of the message to be delivered, persons responsible for conveying the message, persons to whom the message is to be communicated and the necessary skills and techniques of communication to be used.

The essence of good communication is that it is effective and clear. It does not confuse the participants. It is concise not clumsy. It is precise and not ponderous. Good communication is an evidence of clear thoughts and felicitous expressions.

Basically there are few principal methods of communication i.e. language and organizational charts and manuals. No method will be effective if there is an absence of clear expression on the part of the communicator or if there is complete absence for motivation and concentration on the part of the participants. All communication is futile if it is not clearly understood. In order to maintain good human relationship, communication must be effectively and suitably compatible at the level of both the participants.

(Look for communication skills and hints for fruitful communication in the May issue of the Journal)