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ROLE AND IMPORTANCE OF COMMUNICATION

The word communication is used in common talk, usually, to mean speaking of writing or sending a message to another person. Communication is really much more than that. It involves ensuring that your message has reached the target audience, (that is, the persons to whom it is sent) and that the receiver understands and responds as you want them to. It also involves ensuring that you yourself are able to understand, interpret, and respond to messages that you receive.

Communication is an important aspect of behaviour; human communication is affected by all factors that influence human behaviour.

In the last sixty to seventy years, the study of human communication has been strengthened by contribution from many disciplines. Definitions, descriptions of the process, and analyses of the elements of communication have been developed by many scholars.

Role of Communication in Business. Entry into a good organisation requires excellent communication skills. The primary element in the skills of management is competence in communication. It is the tool with which we exercise influence on others, bring about changes in the attitudes and views of our associates, motivate them and establish and maintain relations with them.

Communication is central to everything that we do. We do things in organisations; our family, school/college, office, hobby group, community group, our city/town are the organisations in which we live and act. Our activities succeed or fail, and our goals are achieved or not achieved, according to our ability to communicate effectively with other members.

Communication plays a foundational role in the development of any healthy relationship. It can strengthen a mutual sense of commitment; it also helps to bridge the gap between people who have misunderstandings. Indeed, communication plays a

critical role in all phases of interpersonal relations, from creating a relationship to maintenance of relationships.

Communication is the mortar that holds an organisation together, whatever its business or its size. Without communication an organisation cannot function at all.

Without effective communication, information cannot be collected, processed, or exchanged; words and data would remain isolated facts. With effective communication, multinational organisations which are spread all over the world can function like a single unit.

The most important foundation skill for anyone in the new world of work is the ability to communicate. This means being able to express your ideas effectively in writing and in speech. Employers have always emphasized the importance of communication skills, and the current trends in the business environment make these skills even more critical.

Owing to advances in information technology, companies downsize and decentralize, and work is increasingly carried out by teams. Team members must be able to work together to identify problems, analyze alternatives, and recommend solutions. They must be able to communicate their ideas persuasively to others. Ability to work well in teams, to manage your subordinates and your relationships with seniors, customers and colleagues, depends on your communication skill. Production of goods is of no use if potential buyers have no information about the product. Communicating to the public about the product is the essence of business. A large amount of communication in the form of advertisement and public relations is needed in order to inform the public and to persuade potential customers to buy the products.

Business Communication

The term business communication is used for all messages that we send and receive for official purposes like running a business, managing an organisation, conducting the formal affairs of a voluntary organisation and- so on. Business communication is marked by formality as against personal and social communication. It includes both written and oral communication. Letters, reports, memos, notices are

all formal and part of commercial and business activity; so are interviews, meetings, conferences, presentations, negotiations. Some of these are more formal than others; a group discussion would be less formal than a company meeting; a letter is less formal than a report.

Friendly chatting, letters between friends and family, reciting poetry for one's own pleasure or telling stories to entertain friends, are not included in business communication.

The study of communication and efforts to develop skills of communication are needed because communication is absolutely necessary for business. And there is no one who does not have to engage in some kind of business activity. Persons in all professions need to cultivate skills as needed for their work. Doctors, engineers, chartered accountants, actors and others in the entertainment industry, managers of all kinds of organisations, educators, besides persons engaged in business enterprises have to engage daily in some kind of business communication.

Definitions of Communication

Communication has been defined by many theorists; some of these definitions are quoted here.

- Communication is a process of passing information and understanding from one person to another. - Keith Davis

- Communication is any behaviour that results in an exchange of meaning. - The American Management Association

- Communication may be broadly defined as the process of meaningful interaction among human beings. More specifically, it is the process by which meanings are perceived and understandings are reached among human beings. - D. E. McFarland

- Communication is the process by which information is passed between individuals and/or organisations by means of previously agreed symbols. - Peter Little

Communication is the transmission of information and meaning from one individual or group to another. The crucial element is meaning. Communication has

as its central objective the transmission of meaning. The process of communication is successful only when the receiver understands an idea as the sender intended it.

Both parties must agree not only on the information transmitted but also on the meaning of that information.

These definitions show that communication involves exchange of thoughts between two parties.

In order to transfer an idea, we must use symbols (words, signs, pictures, sounds) which stand for the idea. The symbols must be understood by the person or persons with whom we intend to communicate. Both must assign the same meaning to the symbols used; otherwise, there is miscommunication. Unless there is a common understanding of the symbols, it is not possible to communicate.

Process of Communication

In order to analyse the activity of communication, we must know the process and the elements involved in the process of communication.

There are seven elements or factors which make up the process of communication:

1. Source /Sender, is the one who initiates the action of communicating
2. Audience /Receiver is the person(s) for whom the communication is intended
3. Goal/Purpose is the sender's reason for communicating, the desired result of the communication
4. Message/ Content is the information conveyed
5. Medium /Channel is the means or method used for conveying the message
6. Feedback is the receiver's response to the communication as observed by the sender
7. Environment /Context is the background in which the communication takes place.

Each of these is complex; any analysis of communication has to take into account the various possibilities of each of these. The process of communication involves decisions and activities by the two persons involved, the sender and the receiver.

The sender initiates the process of communication. The sender has to be clear about the purpose (or goal or objective) of the communication and about the target audience (or receiver) of the communication; that is, the sender decides why and to whom to send a message. Conscious or intended communication has a purpose. We communicate because we want to make someone do something or take some action, or think or feel in a certain way, that is, to influence the person.

The source has to decide what information to convey and create the message (or content) to be conveyed by using words or other symbols which can be understood by the intended receiver. The process of putting the idea into symbols is called encoding; in order to encode, the sender has to select suitable symbols which can represent the idea, and can be understood by the receiver.

The sender also chooses a suitable channel or medium (like mail, e-mail, telephone, face-to-face talk,) by which to send the message. The choice of the medium depends on several factors like urgency of the message, availability and effectiveness of a medium, and the relationship between the two communicants.

Finally, the sender tries to note the effect of the message on the receiver; that is, he checks whether the receiver has got the message, how the receiver has responded to the message and whether he has taken the required action; this information about the receiver's response is called feedback.

Sender's functions make up half the process of communication. The functions of the sender are:

1. Being clear about the goal/purpose of the communication
2. Finding out about the understanding and needs of the target audience
3. Encoding the required information and ideas with symbols to create the message to suit the receiver/ audience
4. Selecting the medium to send the message
5. Making efforts to get feedback, that is, finding out the response of the target audience.

The receiver becomes aware that a message has arrived when he perceives it with his senses (he may see, hear, feel, etc). The receiver attends to the message and

interprets it. The process of translating the symbols into ideas and interpreting the message is called decoding. Interpreting is a complex activity; it involves using knowledge of the symbols, drawing upon previous knowledge of the subject matter, ability to understand, attitudes and values, in order to create meaning.

The receiver understands and interprets the message on the basis of earlier knowledge. The meaning that a receiver gives to the words and other symbols is influenced by his/her knowledge, intelligence, past experience and relation with the sender. If the two have a common field of experience, the receiver's understanding of the message will be closer to what the sender intended. The receiver also feels a reaction to the message; this reaction may be conscious or unconscious; it may cause some change in the receiver's facial expression. It definitely leads the receiver to think. The receiver may take some action, if required. He may also reply to the message. This response and/or reply is feedback.

Receiver's functions complete one cycle of the process of communication. The functions of the receiver are:

- 1 Attending to the received message, that is, listening, reading or observing
- 2 Decoding the received message
- 3 Interpreting and understanding the meaning of the message
- 4 Responding to the message
- 5 Giving feedback to the sender of the message

This is a simplified description of a single cycle in the process of communication. Communication really takes place in several cycles and the two persons take turns and alternately carry out functions of sender and receiver. Both, the sender and the receiver have important functions in the communication process; it can be successful only if both are efficient and attentive. Each person's perception of things and interpretation of messages is influenced by his/her past experience and attitudes formed by previous communication events. Each one has a field of experience which is critically important to the process of communication. Unless there is an area of experience that is shared by both, the message is not likely to be communicated.