Subject: Public Administration

Course: Public Administration: An Introduction

Title of the module: Communication

The module is in the form of introduction to communication in organization. Module is divided into five parts. First part deals with introduction to the concept of communication in organization and various types of communication. Second part consists of communication process and communication networks. Third part is with regard to formal, informal means of communication and also essentials of communication. Fourth part deals with various kinds of barriers to communication and measures to be taken to overcome the barriers. Last part is regarding importance of communication in organization and conclusion.

Keywords: Organization, hierarchy, communication process, coordination, network, grapevine, channel, feedback, supervision, morale.

Introduction

Communication is the exchange and flow of information and ideas from one person to another. It involves a sender transmitting an idea, information or a feeling to the receiver. Effective communication occurs only when the receiver understands the exact information or idea that the sender intends to transmit.

The word communication is derived from the Latin word ‘Communis’ which means to share. Thus communication is the activity of conveying information through the exchange of thoughts and messages either by speech, visuals, writings or behavior.

Communication in organizations:

Organizations are designed to work towards time-framed objectives. There is a need for deriving proper coordination among all the parts of an organization and that is possible only through proper communication. All organizations, big or small, simple or complex, general or technical require a communication network. Millet rightly describes communication as ‘the life blood of
administrative organization’ and Pfiffner also portrays it as ‘The heart of management’. Thus communication plays a vital role in organization functions depending upon its availability. To put it in another way communication is the essence of organization.

Richmond and McCroskey (2009) describe it as ‘the process by which individuals stimulate meaning in the minds of other individuals, by means of verbal and nonverbal messages in the context of a formal organization’

Definitions of Communication:

- **Ordway Tead**, “Communication is the process whereby one person makes ideas and feelings known to another. The underlying aim of communication is a meeting of minds on common issues”.
- **Peter Drucker**, “The most important thing in communication is hearing what is’nt said.”
- **J.D.Millet**, “Communication is the shared understanding of a shared purpose.
- **Lawrence.A.Appley**, “Communication is that process whereby one person makes his ideas and feelings known to another.”
- **Herbert Simon**: “Communication is a process through which decisions are transmitted from one person of an organization to another.”
- **Keith Devis**, “Communication is the process of passing information from one person to another.”
- **Bill Gates**, “Any tool that enhances communication has profound effects in terms of how people can learn from each other and how they can achieve the kind of freedom they are interested in.”

Analyses of the above definitions reveal the following essentials of communication:

i. Communication is a process.

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1 Organizational communication, 5_60_66172_com21st3e_ch16.pdf
For communication to take place at least two persons are required.

Communication is a continuous process.

It involves both information and understanding.

It occurs at many levels in the organization.

**Types of Communication**

1. **Oral andWritten Communications:** Oral communication refers to the messages sent or received verbally and there is nothing in black and white. Face-to-face discussion, telephonic talks, conference, interviews, public speeches, whistle and bells, grapevine etc are some of the examples of oral or Verbal communication. Some merits for this form of communication are:
   i) It saves time and money.
   ii) It is comparatively more effective when a detailed explanation of a message can be done and doubts easily clarified.
   iii) The communicator can easily guess whether the recipient is able to understand or not. One major limitation of this kind of communication is that there is no evidence made and hence difficult to verify later.

   Written communication on the other hand refers to messages conveyed in writing form. For example newspaper bulletins, letters and memos, reports and forms, manuals and handbooks annual reports and written grievances. Advantages are:
   i) It is easily verified and precisely defined if there is a need for subsequent correction.
   ii) Lengthy and complicated messages are better understood if they are put in writing.

   Disadvantages include:
   i) Delays and red-tapism gives scope for corruption
   ii) response of the receiver may not be instantly available.
   iii) Written communication may not be understood by everybody in the organization.

2. **Gestural Communication:** Communication through gestures or postures is called as gestural communication. It is often used to supplement oral communication. Gestural communication is very useful in conveying feelings, attitudes and emotions. For Ex: Handshake with a subordinate, parting of lips, movement of eyes etc. A good manager cannot afford to ignore the role of gestures in the art of communication.
Elements of non-verbal communication vary across cultures. Colors and body language can convey quite a different in one culture than in another. For ex. The American sign for OK (making a loop with thumb and first finger) is considered rude in Spain and vulgar in Brazil. There is a need to fully acquaint oneself as far as possible in dealing with people from other cultures.²

**Formal and Informal Communications**

**Formal Communication** refers to official communication that is a part of recognized communication system involved in operation of an organization. The organizational structure reflects superior-subordinate relationship. Thus the scalar chain of authority established by the organization provides the channels for all official communication. Formal communication can be oral or written but it is mostly in the written form such as notes and letters reports and statements.

Chief advantages are: i) Formal communication is systematic and ensures proper flow of information and ideas. ii) Authority relationships indicate the direction and flow of communication in an organization, eg. between superior and subordinate communication is in the form of instructions and directions. In another form between subordinate and superior in the form of reports, complaints, grievance redresses’ etc iii) Division of work, responsibility can easily be fixed and control can be exercised.

The main disadvantage of this kind of system is that it is slow moving as it follows the scalar chain and is impersonal.

**Informal communication (Grapevine):** This type of communication takes place informally through inter-personal contacts among the employees. Members of informal groups pass on information to each other. Thus informal communication takes place independently

² Ricky.W.Griffin, Gregory Moorehead,“ Organizational Behavior: Managing people and organization”, Chapter 11, pg 293, USA 2011.
outside the official line of communication. It transcends the barriers and boundaries of formal communication channels. A grapevine is structure-less and information passes through it in all directions. The informal organization can in fact be a ‘shadow’ organization, a site of countervailing power and resistance — a shadow with a lot of substance, an anti-empire within an empire (Gossett & Kiker 2006; Thomas & Davies 2005; De Maria 2006; Brown & Coupland 2005; Groat, 1997; Katzenbach & Khan, 2010).

**Grapevine has the following characteristics:**

a) It arises from social interaction among people.

b) It is a natural and normal activity due to desire of people to talk to one another.

c) It generally operates like a cluster chain as every person tells in turn many other persons.

d) Only a few persons are active communicators in it. People are active on grapevine only when their own interests or interests of their friends or colleagues are involved.

e) It operates at a faster pace and this type of communication spreads like wild fire in a forest.

f) Grapevine functions partly in a predictable manner which offers managers the chance to influence it.

**Chief advantages** of Grapevine are that i) It helps in developing better human relations in the organization. ii) It serves to fill possible gaps in formal communication due to its flexible and personal nature. iii) Its speed is very fast because it is free from all barriers. iv) Grapevine helps to meet the social needs of the employees and provides an outlet for realizing anxiety and frustration among the employees.

**Limitations** of grapevine are that i) It is not authentic and may get distorted and hence gives rise to rumors in the organization. ii) Nobody can be held responsible for spread of any kind of message as grapevine has no definite origin. iii) Grapevine can easily mislead the people.
Keith Devis described grapevine as: a) People talk most when the news is recent. b) People talk about things that affect their work. c) People talk about people they know. d) People working near each other and contact each other on unofficial lines are likely to be on the same grapevine. Grapevine is a fast and substantially accurate channel of communication. It has tremendous capacity to carry information both helpful and harmful to the formal organization. In most cases it carries on the information which the formal channel may not or will not carry. The manager’s responsibility therefore is to utilize the positive aspects of grapevine and control or minimize the negative ones.

3. Downward, Upward and Lateral (Horizontal) Communications:

**Downward:** Downward communication flows from people at higher levels to those at lower levels in the organizational hierarchy. This kind of communication exists in organizations with authoritarian atmosphere. Communication flows from top level executives to various lower levels in the hierarchy of the organization in the form of orders and instructions, rules and procedures.

**Upward:** It flows from a subordinate to a superior and continues up in the organizational hierarchy. It is known as subordinate initiated communication. While the downward system is highly directive - giving orders, instructions, information and procedures - the upward system is characteristically non-directive in nature. Upward communication may consist of information relating to i) Subordinates work performance ii) Problems relating to work iii) Opinions grievances and suggestions.

Unfortunately upward communication is often hindered by administrators in the chain of hierarchy who filter the messages to be sent to their superiors. Effective upward communication requires an environment in which subordinates feel free to communicate. Since the organizational climate is greatly influenced by upper management, it is their duty to provide free-flow of upward communication to a great extent.
Horizontal, (Lateral) or Cross-wise Communication: Flow of communication between persons holding similar positions in the organization is known as horizontal or lateral communication. This type of communication promotes horizontal flow of messages enabling departments to work with other departments without having to rigidly follow the downward and upward channel of communication. It promotes coordination and team work among different departments. Lateral or horizontal communication takes place primarily at one level of the organization — for example, within teams, among heads of department, among others in coordination and liaison roles, or among virtually everyone at the lower levels of the pyramid (Adams 2007).

Some important purposes of crosswise communication:

- **Task coordination**: The department heads may meet monthly to discuss how each department is contributing for organizational success.

- **Problem Solving**: The members of department may assemble to discuss how they will handle and treat budget cut.

- **Information sharing**: The members of one department may meet with the members of another department to share some information.

- **Conflict resolution**: Through meetings, the members of various departments can resolve differences arising between them.

4. **Diagonal communication**: This is another form of communication that takes place between people who are neither in the same department nor in the same level of hierarchy. It cuts across organizational structure and facilitates speedy transmission of messages.

**Communication Process:**

Most simple model of communication process can be as follows in fig1:
This model indicates the most essential elements of communication i.e. sender and receiver and the message that is exchanged between them. If any one of these three elements is missing, the communication does not take place.

However the actual process of communication is much more complex phenomenon consisting of at least five elements which are subject to various influences. This model can be represented in the following figure 2

**a) Sender’s Thoughts:** The sender initiates information because he has some thoughts, needs ideas or information that he wishes to convey to another person or persons. It is the source of communication.

**b) Encoding message:** Encoding the message involves the thoughts of the sender to be transformed into symbols, words or pictures etc. Normally language provides the symbols that are used in the transmission of thoughts to another person. However language is not the only means to convey the thoughts. Non-verbal means eg. Gestures provide another form through
which thoughts can be transmitted. The more complex the ideas and thoughts, the more complex is the process of encoding them. Thus encoding of thought produces a message which can be either verbal or non-verbal.

c) **Channel for communication:** Channel is the link that joins the sender and receiver. The most commonly used channels are sight and sound. In an organizational environment the channel could take the form of face-to-face conversation, written memos, telephonic conversation, mobile exchanges, e-mails, group meetings, tele-conferences etc. Outside the organization the channels could be: Press notes, circulars, coverage, news channels interviews or TV shows etc. However the channel chosen would be influenced by the consideration as to whom the message is being directed.

d) **Decoding:** The receiver who receives the message, decodes it i.e. interprets and translates it into thoughts, understanding and desired response. A communication is said to be successful only when the receiver decodes the message and attaches a meaning to it which nearly approximates the idea, thoughts or information the sender wished to transmit. Decoding might be effected by several factors like: receiver cannot decode a message in a language unknown to him. Or one symbol may mean differently to the sender and receiver. Also the receivers past expectations and experiences color the meaning that is attached to the message. All these bring divergence between the intended and perceived meaning.

e) **Feedback:** Response i.e. feedback completes the two way process of communication. It is through the feedback that the sender comes to know if his message was correctly received and understood. Sender’s effort to communicate is aimed at eliciting the desired response. However a communication is expected to produce the desired change or response from the receiver.

f) **Noise:** Surrounding the entire spectrum of communication is the noise that affects the accuracy of the message communicated. Noise is the only factor that can arise at any stage of communication process and cause disturbance and confusion. The receiver might misinterpret the message as different from the sender’s intentions.
Communication Networks:

A communication network is a pattern of inter-connected lines through which messages might flow in one direction or several directions. As a pattern of contacts among the organizations, communication network contains several channels. These channels determine the rapidity, accuracy and smoothness with which the messages flow in and outside the organization. Lengthy network delays the communication process and with the networks containing several filtering points, the message gets distorted. There are different types of communication networks depending upon the channels and the number of persons involved. These networks are broadly divided into two kinds:

Formal Communication Networks

Circle network: Here message moves in the form of a circle. It represents three level hierarchy in which there is communication between superiors, subordinates and with cross communication at the operative level. Such network offers a wide choice of channels and offers a greater satisfaction to the employees. But this network is noisy and unorganized.

Chain Network: Under this network the message flows in a direct vertical line along the scalar chain of command. All the subordinates receive orders from one superior. This type of network tends to be inflexible as the communication flow is formal. There is no horizontal or inter functional flow of communication at lower levels.

Wheel or star network: Under this network the subordinates report to a superior but do not have any connection among themselves. Wheel or star networks represent network with one centre point of communication which is connected to all the subordinates. It is faster and most authoritarian type of network.

Y type of network: In this kind of network two subordinates report to a superior. It may be regarded as four-level hierarchy. This network is less centralized than star network.
All channel networks: In this type of network all the members of group actively communicate with each other freely. It is the most decentralized type of formal communication network. It is also known as completely connected network.

Informal Communication Networks:

All channel Network: It represents free flow of communication. Every member is allowed to communicate freely with all other members. It provides highest satisfaction. It is unstructured and informal communication network.

Keith Davis has highlighted the phenomenon of grapevine in organizations. He investigated that the grapevine cannot be abolished, rubbed out, hidden under the basket chopped down, tied
up or stopped. If we suppress it at one place, it will pop up at another. If we cut off one of its sources it merely moves to another one. He identified four sources of grapevine networks.

**Single strand network:** Under this network, the information passes from one to one i.e. one member communicates to another member who in turn communicates to another and so on.

**Gossip network:** Under this network a member having information passes it to everyone he meets.

**Probability network:** Here information passes according to the law of probability i.e. one member communicates with others who in turn communicate with some other persons.

**Cluster network:** Under this network, the information passes selectively i.e. one member communicates with only those members whom he trusts and they in turn pass it on to some other selected members.

**Networking:** It is deliberately cultivating contact in one’s own organization and also in other organizations in order to create and improve informal system of relationships and also to develop one’s own career. Networking can take many forms, including:

- Establishing communication links with other people at formally structured social gatherings at which ‘shoptalk’ is the primary focus.
• Relationship-building behaviour at formal gatherings such as conferences, professional association meetings, and social activities associated with lectures and presentations and similar gatherings.

• Relationship-building behaviour within organizations such as service clubs, religious groups and lodges that often bind members together with rituals for the purpose of fellowship and, sometimes, creating systems of reciprocal preference for professional opportunities or the sharing of confidential information.

* Relationship-building at social occasions such as luncheons, dinner parties and golf matches that provide circumstances for professional payoffs.

* Loose coalitions of organization representatives who meet on an ongoing basis to exchange information and work towards unofficial, and sometimes official, cooperation.3

Means of Communication:

1. Personal contacts: Personal contacts in an organization are maintained through personal messenger, telephone, mobile phone SMS and Fax system. The alternative mechanical aids in telecommunications have widened the scope for personal contacts both within and outside the organization.

2. Formal correspondence: This is maintained in the organization through a system of files, memoranda, minutes etc. These devices facilitate the exchange of views and knowledge on the matters on hand.

3. Forms: All administrative agencies use official forms in order to secure information from their clients on the basis of information secured from the clients and administrators. The usage of forms, standardize the administrative process and ensures equality of treatment to citizens. However this is possible only when they are properly used.

3Organizational communication, 5_60_66172_com21st3e_ch16.pdf
4. **Reports:** Reports contain a lot of information regarding the progress of work or completed work. The report should be brief and avoid unnecessary details.

5. **Manuals:** Most organizations prepare manuals for the use of their employees. They provide information regarding the organization and guide the employees in their work towards the organization objectives. However, preparation of such manuals is expensive.

6. **Staff Meeting:** Staff meetings help the officials to know each other and exchange information. They also build morale and secure coordination. Such meetings help the employees to have an overall idea about the organization problems and prospects.

**Communication and Technology:**

Advances in technology have increased the quality and quantity of communication in workplace. Six developments that illustrate the impact of technology on communication are e-mail, instant messaging, Social networking, internet or web logs (blogs), Power Point presentations & Video conferencing.

1. **E-Mail** uses the internet to send and receive computer generated text documents. Its benefits include – It can be written quickly, edited and stored and can be distributed to thousands of persons with a click of mouse.

2. **Instant Messaging (IM)** allows people who are online to share messages with one another instantaneously without having to go through the email system.

3. **Social Networking site SNS** is a phrase used to describe any website that enables users to create public profiles within that website and form relationships with other users of the same website. SNS is used to describe community based websites online discussion forums, chat rooms etc.

4. **Web logs (Blogs)** a blog is a discussion or communication site published on World Wide Web. It consists of discreet entries or posts typically displayed in reverse chronological order. Till
2009 blogs were only the work of single individual but more recently multi author blogs (MAB)s have developed. MABs from newspapers, other media outlets universities think tanks interest groups and similar institutions account for an increasing quantity of blog traffic.

5. **Power Point Presentations:** PPTs contain number of individual papers or slides with the help of a slide projector. The presentation can be printed, displayed live on a computer through a command of presenter. Slides may contain text, graphics, photos etc.

6. **Video conferences** are conducted by a set of telecommunication techniques. This allows two or more locations to communicate by a simultaneous two way video and audio transmissions. It has been called visual collaboration.

**Essentials of Communication:**

1. **Clarity:** Communication must be clearly and precisely stated. Clarity depends not only on simplicity of language but also on the expression of the reason for the decision. Brief and abrupt instructions given in most of our government departments are faulty and far from clarity point of view.

2. **Consistency:** Communication should be consistent with the expectations of the recipients. It should ordinarily express what the recipient expects by virtue of his past experience with the agency. Unexpected communication will not cause the expected response in the recipients and hence must be avoided.

3. **Adequacy:** The content in the communication should be adequate enough to stimulate the desired response but at the same time not so much as to over-burden the recipients. Administrative communication, however, is different from mass communications and it needs to be based upon sound principles of human relationships.

4. **Timeliness:** Communication should reach the recipient in time, neither too late nor too early. The purpose of communication is to produce the desired administrative behavior in the recipient and this cannot happen by providing him obsolete or advanced information.
5. **Uniformity:** Communication must be uniform for all those who are expected to behave in the same way. Discrimination in the nature or amount of communication causes heart burning or jealousies. So, if management expects uniform behavior from its employees, it must provide uniform stimulus.

6. **Flexibility:** Uniformity should not bring about rigidity in the form or character of communication. Since public administration involves human beings on both the sides of communication- sender and receiver, local conditions may require variations in administration. Sufficient discretion should be allowed to the local officials if people in different areas have to be served according to their needs. Communication in administration is meant to facilitate successful implementation of a program and it is not an end in itself.

7. **Acceptability:** Good communication is one which is readily relied upon and accepted to be true or factual. In an organization, communication is a technique of conveying the decisions of management to the subordinates and vice-versa.

8. **Use of informal organization:** Formal messages flow from superior to the subordinates but this channel is sometimes inadequate for handling all messages expeditiously and with understanding. Therefore managers often approach subordinates to manage urgency of the situations.

**Barriers to Communication:**

1. **Semantic barriers:** It refers to the barriers caused by failure to understand the language of the communicator. Word differences are big hindrances to mutual understanding. Faulty translation, badly expressed messages, un-clarified assumptions and technical jargons fall in this category.

2. **Psychological barriers:** Message is interpreted by the recipient depending upon his psychological status. This is equally true for the person who sends the message also. Some barriers of this category are: carelessness, lack of mutual trust etc.
3. **Ideological barriers:** In words of Pfiffner Ideological barriers include misunderstandings arising out of differences in background, education and differences in social & political views. All these differences lead to differences in perception of a problem.

4. **Rigid rules and regulations:** Communication through prescribed rules and regulations can lead to delay and delay inevitably leads to distortion.

5. **Status relationships:** Hierarchical system in the organization places people in superior subordinate capacities. The greater the difference in the hierarchical positions, the greater would be the possibility of communication breakdown.

6. **Attitudinal barriers:** Conservative attitude of the superiors lead to withholding the information, strict adherence to the proper channel, lack of confidence in the subordinates and ignoring communication from them.

7. **Complexity of organization structure:** The larger the organization, the greater is difficulty in communication process. There is scope for delays and distortions.

8. **Resistance to change:** Human beings by nature want to maintain their status quo. When communication involves a change in the organizational functions seriously affects the employees.

Lastly there is lack of definite channel of communication, formal or informal. Formal channels are established procedures through which communication flows. ‘Through proper channel’ epitomizes this concept. However among the detailed and comprehensive formal channels there is a tendency to develop informal means of communication which make information reliable and interesting. Pfiffner and Persthus supported this idea by saying that, ‘The ability to short-circuit formal channel is, thus a necessary and valuable art.

As Latham has pointed out, “Impediments to free exchange of thoughts are difficult enough to overcome in the same city or building or even room. They become even more difficult in increase of distance between central office and field.”
Importance of Communication:

Thus in any organization administration cannot be carried out without an effective system of communication. It facilitates planning, decision making, coordination and motivation in an organization. It is no exaggeration to say that communication is the means by which government administration is unified. It may be looked upon as means by which behavior is modified, change affected, information is made productive and goals are achieved.

Peter Drucker states quite bluntly that poor communications are the direct result of our ignorance (Schwartz, 2004)

Over years authors like Chester Bernard viewed communication as a means by which people are linked together in an organization to achieve a purpose. This being a fundamental function of communication, group activity is impossible without communication, coordination and change cannot be affected. Communication occupies central place in the organization because the structure, extensiveness and scope of organizations are almost entirely determined by the communication techniques.

Barnard called communication a foundation of all group activity. In practice, effective communication has been the basic pre-requisite for attainment of organizational goals, but it has been one of the basic problems facing modern administration today. The importance of communication in administration can be judged from the following points:

a). Communication is required to establish and disseminate the goals of an enterprise.

b). Smooth functioning of an enterprise totally depends upon effective communication system.

c). Communication helps the administration in arriving at vital decisions.

d). Communication also helps in planning and coordination.

e). Communication is a tool of supervision.
f). It is a basic tool for motivation and helps in increasing the morale of the employees.

g). Communication is a means for judging maximum production at the lowest cost by maintaining good human relations in the organization.

**Towards Effective Communication:**

According to Millet there are seven factors necessary to make the communication effective, namely – it should be clear, consistent, adequate, timely, uniform and acceptable.

Terry recommended eight practices to achieve this goal:

1. Inform yourself fully
2. Establish a mutual trust in each other
3. Find a common ground of experience
4. Use mutually known words.
5. Have regard for context.
6. Secure and hold receiver’s attention
7. Employ examples and visual aids
8. Practice delaying reactions.

**Summing Up**

Peter Drucker rightly stated, “Good Communication is the foundation for sound administration”. Communication is a necessity to an organization as the blood stream is to a person. Effectiveness of organization largely depends upon the effectiveness of its communication. If the network of communication is poor the organization gets adversely affected and vice-versa.
George Cheney: Organizational Communication in an age of Globalization: Issues reflections practices (Long Grove IIs, Waveland Press 2011)


iv Hearther Canary, Communication and organizational knowledge: Contemporary issues for theory and practice.