PRINCIPLES OF COMMUNICATION

Introduction

Interpersonal communication is the foundation of human interaction. Its importance for innovation and change can hardly be overemphasized. In this section, communication from different viewpoints including listening and speaking is ex.

Objectives

- To introduce communication and to demonstrate the importance of communication in a variety of contexts including that of the manager of innovation and change.
- To evaluate and discuss the characteristics of good communication and how to improve our communication.

Outline

- Principles of Communication
- Oral Communications
- Visual Communications
- Written Communications

PRINCIPLES OF COMMUNICATION

Communication is a two-way process of giving and receiving information through any number of channels. Whether one is speaking informally to a colleague, addressing a conference or meeting, writing a newsletter article or formal report, the following basic principles apply:

- Know your audience.
- Know your purpose.
- Know your topic.
- Anticipate objections.
- Present a rounded picture.
- Achieve credibility with your audience.
- Follow through on what you say.
- Communicate a little at a time.
- Present information in several ways.
- Develop a practical, useful way to get feedback.
- Use multiple communication techniques.

Communication is complex. When listening to or reading someone else's message, we often filter what's being said through a screen of our own opinions. One of the major barriers to communication is our own ideas and opinions.
There's an old communications game, telegraph, that's played in a circle. A message is whispered around from person to person. What the exercise usually proves is how profoundly the message changes as it passes through the distortion of each person's inner "filter."

**Environmental factors**

Communication can be influenced by environmental factors that have nothing to do with the content of the message. Some of these factors are:

- the nature of the room, how warm it is, smoke, comfort of the chair, etc
- outside distractions, what is going on in the area.
- the reputation/credibility of the speaker/writer.
- the appearance, style or authority of the speaker.
- listener's education, knowledge of the topic, etc.
- the language, page layout, design of the message.

**People remember:**

- 1/3 of what they read
- 2/3 of what they hear
- 3/4 of what they see
- 4/5 of what they hear and see

**Communication with Decision Makers**

Innovation and change often depends upon persuading potential users of the benefits of an innovation.

To deal persuasively with decision makers, it is necessary to know and understand their interests and opinions. The following questions are helpful in organizing technology transfer efforts:

- Who are the key people to persuade?
- Who will make the decisions about innovation and change?
- What are these decision makers' past experiences with innovation and change?
- What are the decision makers' current attitudes toward innovation and change? Are they neutral, friendly, hostile or apathetic?
- What is the most appropriate way to approach the decision maker?
- What are the work styles of the decision makers? Are they highly formal people who want everything in writing and all appointments scheduled in advance? Or are they more flexible, responding favorably to personal telephone calls and informal meetings?
- What networks or groups is the decision maker a part of?
- What programs or services will the new innovation improve?
- What programs or services will the new innovation cause problems with?
How will the innovation or change benefit the decision maker?

**Principles of Effective Persuasion**

Whether making a formal presentation at a meeting or writing a report or fact sheet, the following principles hold.

- Do not oversell or overstate your case. Make effective use of understatement.
- Outline the topic you are trying to cover into two parts. The first part should give broad background information, while the second part provides a detailed summary.
- Persuasion depends on clarity and simplicity. Avoid the use of jargon and buzz words.
- Be prepared to back up claims or facts immediately.
- Incorporate major anticipated objections into your program or presentation.
- Address all relevant aspects of a topic, especially those that may affect the functioning of an organization.
- Use graphics and audiovisuals appropriately.
- Consider ways to get meaningful input from people. Find out what they think about the innovation or change.

**Selling New Ideas**

**Creating Isn't Selling**
Often the creators of an innovation feel that convincing others of the idea's value is somehow superfluous to their activities. To them, conceiving the idea is enough. This combines with their inner conviction that their idea will "sell itself." Change agents provide a link between creators of new techniques and users.

**Ideas Need Selling**
Someone must recognize when an idea is good. It is important that when an idea is good it is sold to those who can act on it--those who have the power to evaluate and adopt it. Understanding users is an important activity for any change agent. People must be convinced that a particular idea or innovation has enough merit to warrant adoption.

**Selling Ideas Takes Effort**
Selling innovations requires preparation, initiative, patience, and resourcefulness. It may take more effort than originating the idea. In an age of technical complexity and information overload, new ideas seldom stand out. Information on new ideas must be targeted to the appropriate users and relate to their needs and motivations.

**Once is Not Enough**
A new idea has to be suggested many times before it will "catch on." Initial failures at promoting a new idea are to be expected, so don't get discouraged if you don't get the results you want the first time. Some ideas take years to catch on. However, first exposures are crucial to future prospects. Do it right the first time.
Feedback (Listening)

Getting and giving feedback is one of the most crucial parts of good communication. Like any other activity, there are specific skills that can enhance feedback. Listening is a key part of getting feedback:

Listen to the Complete Message. Be patient. This is especially important when listening to a topic that provokes strong opinions or radically different points-of-view. In these situations, it's important not to prejudge the incoming message. Learn not to get too excited about a communication until you are certain of the message.

Work at Listening Skills. Listening is hard work. Good listeners demonstrate interest and alertness. They indicate through their eye contact, posture and facial expression that the occasion and the speaker's efforts are a matter of concern to them. Most good listeners provide speakers with clear and unambiguous feedback.

Judge the Content, Not the Form of the Message. Such things as the speaker's mode of dress, quality of voice, delivery mannerisms and physical characteristics are often used as excuses for not listening. Direct your attention to the message--what is being said--and away from the distracting elements.

Weigh Emotionally Charged Language. Emotionally charged language often stands in the way of effective listening. Filter out "red flag" words (like "liberal" and "conservative," for instance) and the emotions they call up. Specific suggestions for dealing with emotionally charged words include

- Take time to identify those words that affect you emotionally.
- Attempt to analyze why the words affect you the way they do.
- Work at trying to reduce the impact of these words on you.

Eliminate Distractions. Physical distractions and complications seriously impair listening. These distractions may take many forms: loud noises, stuffy rooms, overcrowded conditions, uncomfortable temperature, bad lighting, etc. Good listeners speak up if the room is too warm, too noisy, or too dark. There are also internal distractions: worries about deadlines or problems of any type may make listening difficult. If you're distracted, make an effort to clear your head. If you can't manage it, arrange to communicate at some other time.

Think Efficiently and Critically. On the average, we speak at a rate of 150 to 200 words per minute. However, we think at a much faster rate, anywhere from 300 to 400 words per minute. What do we do with this excess thinking time while listening to someone speak? One technique is to apply this spare time to analyzing what is being said. They critically review the material by asking the following kinds of questions:

- What is being said to support the speaker's point of view? (Evidence)
• What assumptions are being made by the speaker and the listener? (Assumptions)
• How does this information affect me? (Effect)
• Can this material be organized more efficiently? (Structure)
• Are there examples that would better illustrate what is being said? (Example)
• What are the main points of the message? (Summary)

Sending Messages

Messages should be clear and accurate, and sent in a way that encourages retention, not rejection.

• **Use Verbal Feedback Even If Nonverbal Is Positive And Frequent.** Everyone needs reassurance that they are reading nonverbal communication correctly, whether a smile means "You're doing great," "You're doing better than most beginners," or "You'll catch on eventually."

• **Focus Feedback On Behavior Rather Than On Personality.** It's better to comment on specific behavior than to characterize a pattern of behavior. For example, instead of calling a colleague inefficient, specify your complaint: "You don't return phone calls; this causes problems both in and outside your office."

• **Focus Feedback On Description Rather Than Judgment.** Description tells what happened. Judgment evaluates what happened. For example, in evaluating a report don't say, "This is a lousy report!!" Instead, try: "The report doesn't focus on the information that I think needs emphasis," or "This report seems to have a lot of grammatical and spelling mistakes."

• **Make Feedback Specific Rather Than General.** If feedback is specific, the receiver knows what activity to continue or change. When feedback is general, the receiver doesn't know what to do differently. For example, in an office situation, instead of saying "These folders are not arranged correctly," it's better feedback to say, "These should be arranged chronologically instead of alphabetically."

• **In Giving Feedback, Consider the Needs and Abilities of the Receiver.** Give the amount of information the receiver can use and focus feedback on activities the receiver has control over. It's fruitless to criticize the level of activity, if the decision to grant the necessary monies for materials, personnel or technology is made at a different level.

• **Check to See if the Receiver Heard What You Meant to Say.** If the information is important enough to send, make sure the person understands it. One way of doing this is to say, "I'm wondering if I said that clearly enough. What did you understand me to say?" or "This is what I hear you saying. Is that right?"

Selecting the Best Communication Method

In communicating with decision makers, use the most appropriate communications method. One way to do this is to ask yourself the following questions.
• What is the purpose of your message? Do you plan to tell them something new? Inform? Do you plan to change their view? Persuade?
• What facts must be presented to achieve your desired effect?
• What action, if any, do you expect decision makers to take?
• What general ideas, opinions and conclusions must be stressed?
• Are you thoroughly familiar with all the important information on the innovation?
• What resources and constraints affect adoption of the innovation? How much time is available? How much money is available
• Which method, or combination of methods, will work most effectively for this situation? Personal contact--requires scheduling, time and interpersonal skills.

Telephone contact--requires good verbal skills and an awareness of voice tones as nonverbal communication.
Letter--requires writing skills.
e-mail—informal, needs to be short and to the point, but not get lost in clutter. May require frequent follow-up.
News release--requires writing skills and cooperation of the media and time.

ORAL COMMUNICATION

Speaking to Communicate

Spoken communication occurs in many different settings during the course of successful innovation and change. These may be divided into three main types:

• The formal and informal networks in which peers exchange information, such as professional associations, work units, work teams, etc.
• The activities of change agents, opinion leaders, etc.
• The contacts established at team meetings, conferences, training courses, etc.

Whether to use oral communication is a decision we all make frequently in the course of a workday. The change agent must be able to identify those situations in which oral communication is the most appropriate one to use. Don Kirkpatrick suggests the following guidelines for making such decisions.

Use Oral Communication When:

• The receiver is not particularly interested in receiving the message. Oral communication provides more opportunity for getting and keeping interest and attention.
• It is important to get feedback. It's easier to get feedback by observing facial expressions (and other nonverbal behavior) and asking questions.
• Emotions are high. Oral communication provides more opportunity for both the sender and the receiver to let off steam, cool down, and create a suitable climate for understanding.
• The receiver is too busy or preoccupied to read. Oral communication provides more opportunity to get attention.
• The sender wants to persuade or convince. Oral communication provides more flexibility, opportunity for emphasis, chance to listen, and opportunity to remove resistance and change attitudes.
• When discussion is needed. A complicated subject frequently requires discussion to be sure of understanding.
• When criticism of the receiver is involved. Oral communication provides more opportunity to accomplish this without arousing resentment. Also, oral communication is less threatening because it isn't formalized in writing.
• When the receiver prefers one-to-one contact.

Presentation Styles

There are different styles of making a presentation and different people will use the approach that suits them.

Good Old Boy: This is usually an experienced person who is the peer of most of the audience. Generally, there is a lot of good information but it may be poorly organized or poorly delivered.

The Entertainer: This person relies on jokes and stories to get their point across. Good visual aids could be an important feature of the presentation. Sometimes there is too much emphasis on satisfying the audience that little information is actually transferred.

The Academic: This person tends to be very precise and deliberate in presenting information. There is considerable content and it usually is well organized. Unfortunately, it can also be boring and irrelevant and not relate well to the audience.

The Reader: This person decides to read his material word for word. The material is often not especially prepared for an oral presentation and can be overly technical, boring and hard to understand. All topics are covered and what is said is precise and accurate.

The Snail: This person is nervous about the presentation and goes into a shell. Like a snail, this person also moves slowly and the presentation seems to last forever. What is best? You have to have a style you are comfortable with. Ideally, you have the rapport of the good old boy, the organization and content of the academic, the ability to get and maintain interest of the entertainer, and the precision of the reader. If you do this you will avoid the slow pace of the snail and effectively present information to your listeners.

The Gadgeteer: This person uses every gimmick and technique in his or her presentation and visual aids. It can be overdone with the message getting lost among the bells and whistles.

Components of an Effective Oral Report
**Introduction** Capture the attention of the group right from the start.

- Give the necessary explanation of the background from which the problem derived.
- Clearly state and explain the problem.
- Clearly state your objectives.
- Indicate the method(s) used to solve the problem.
- Suggest the order in which you will provide information.

**Organization**

- Provide sufficient introductory information.
- Use transitions from one main part to the next and between points of the speech.
- Use summary statements and restatements.
- Make the main ideas of the report clearly distinguishable from one another.

**Content**

- Have adequate supporting data to substantiate what you say.
- Avoid using extraneous material.
- Present supporting data clearly—in terms of the ideas or concepts you are trying to communicate.
- Were the methods of the investigation clearly presented?
- Visual Aid Supports
- Use clear drawings, charts, diagrams or other aids to make explanations vivid and understandable.
- Make visual aids fit naturally into the presentation.
- Be completely familiar with each visual used.
- Don't clutter your report with too many visual aids.

**Conclusion**

Conclude your report with finality in terms of one or more of the following:

- the conclusions reached
- the problem solved
- the results obtained
- the value of such findings to the county
- recommendations offered

**Question Period**

- Give evidence of intelligent listening in interpreting the questions.
- Organize answers in terms of a summary statement, explanation, and supporting example.
- Show flexibility in adapting or improvising visual aids in answering questions.
Delivery

• Be natural, "communicative" in your delivery.
• Use frequent eye contact to maintain rapport with the audience.
• Vary your delivery with appropriate movements and gestures.
• Speak distinctly.
• Display confidence and authority.
• Express enthusiasm for your ideas.

VISUAL COMMUNICATION

There's an old saying that "a picture is worth a thousand words." Life would indeed be difficult without paintings, photographs, diagrams, charts, drawings, and graphic symbols. These are some of the reasons why SHOWING is such an important form of communication.

• Most people understand things better when they have seen how they work.
• Involved, complex ideas can be presented clearly and quickly using visual aids.
• People retain information longer when it is presented to them visually.
• Visuals can be used to communicate to a wide range of people with differing backgrounds.
• Visuals are useful when trying to condense information into a short time period.

Visual aids--used imaginatively and appropriately--will help your audience remember more. Consider the following:

• People think in terms of images, not words, so visuals help them retain and recall technical information.
• Visuals attract and hold the attention of observers.
• Visuals simplify technical information.
• Visuals may be useful in presenting technical information to a nontechnical audience.

Questions to Ask about Visual Aids:

• Is my objective clear?
• What are my key points? Do they deserve the emphasis that a visual aid gives?
• What visual aid or aids have I planned to use?
• Will the visual aid clarify my spoken words? Will it support my spoken words rather than replace them?
• Is each visual aid simple, orderly and consistent? Is it free from incompatible and complicating ideas, symbols, art techniques and typefaces? Can my audience quickly and easily grasp what they see or must it be read to them? Avoid making it a reading session.
• Is it symbolic or pictorial? Which treatment is best for my subject? Which treatment is best from the standpoint of my audience?
- Is my visual direct and to the point? Is the art functional or ornate? Is it really one visual aid or several? If my subject is complex, will it be presented in easily comprehensible units? (Drop-ons or overlays) Was my artwork designed just for this presentation?
- Is my visual aid realistic? Does it give all the pertinent facts? Have the facts been distorted?
- Is my visual aid as effective as it can be made? Have I used all the available techniques to make it so?
- Did I put enough effort into the planning of the visual aid? Have I sought criticism from others?
- Will it achieve my objectives? Will my audience understand, appreciate and believe it? If my presentation calls for some action by the audience, will it stimulate them to do so willingly?
- Have I overlooked anything in the use of the visual aid? Have I tested the visual aid? Have I planned one or more rehearsals; if not, why? Will my visual aid material be visible to the entire audience?

**Visual Aid Checklist**

**Slides**
1. Does the projector work properly? Bulb, lenses, change mechanism, fan.
2. Does each slide present a simple, clear message?
3. Are the slides arranged and numbered consistently and consecutively?
4. Are the slides clean and mounted properly?
5. Will the audience be able to see slide details in the location I plan to use?
6. Does the slide tray have a title slide at the beginning and a blind slide at the end to avoid blinding the audience with light?

**Power Point or Transparencies**
1. Is the lettering large enough to be seen by the audience?
2. Is the projector placed so that the audience has an unobstructed view?
3. Is the projector and slide color scheme adequate for the lighting of the room being used?
4. Does the projected image fit the screen?
5. Are my slides in proper order?
6. Does each present a clear message?
7. Is the projector compatible with the computer being used?

**Video Tape**
1. Do you have the correct machine for the tape you plan to show (Beta or VHS)?
2. Is the equipment in proper working order?
3. Is the tape set to start at the proper place and does it "track" properly?
4. Will the WHOLE audience be able to see the presentation?
5. Is the sound level on the monitor(s) set at the proper level?
The Location
( ) Does the room match the size of the audience?
( ) Is the location accessible to the physically disabled?
( ) Can the lighting be controlled for showing slides and transparencies? If so, is a reading light available?
( ) Is the location equipped with a projector cart or table?
( ) Are electrical outlets conveniently located--do I need extension cords?
( ) Is the room equipped with an adequate screen?
( ) If using video equipment, can monitors be set up at appropriate locations?
( ) Does the room have a speakers table or podium?
( ) Will the location be available prior to your meeting so you can set up and test your equipment?
( ) Is the room equipped with a newsprint easel or chalkboard?
( ) Does the room have chairs and tables or desks? Can they be rearranged if needed?
( ) Is the main entrance separated from the speaker area so that late arrivals will not disrupt your presentation?

Always check out the room and equipment in advance to see that it works properly! Never assume that it will work without trying it first. As a general rule, the more complicated the technology for an oral presentation, the more likely it will fail.

Checklist for Tables and Charts

( ) Be ruthless with numbers: use the fewest possible that will still convey the point of the visual. Do not exceed twenty numbers or a single slide.
( ) Combine numbers into larger sums wherever possible; eliminate any number that does not contribute significantly to your message.
( ) Consider using a chart (pie, bar, etc.) for presenting some information, especially if you want to draw comparisons between two or more items.
( ) When preparing charts use colors or patterns with a lot of contrast.
( ) Split information into two or three smaller tables rather than using one huge table. Use no more than three or four columns per table.
( ) Have a short, yet descriptive, title that states the point of the visual. Put it at the top. Include a date at the bottom.
( ) Label columns clearly and at the top. Show the units (dollars or tons, for example). On the left, label the statistics being compared.
( ) Avoid footnotes and symbols that may not be generally understood by your audience.
( ) Use light horizontal lines if they improve readability.
( ) Be consistent. Do not mix pounds and tons, years and months, gross and net.
( ) Avoid decimal points whenever possible. Use round numbers for tables and graphs.
( ) Highlight the most important numbers with boxes, underlining, or color.
( ) If arithmetic operations are not obvious, state them: (less), or "Less Depreciation Expense."
( ) Eliminate zeros by expressing numbers in thousands or millions, if possible.
( ) Show negative numbers in parentheses, not with minus signs.
WRITTEN COMMUNICATION

Written materials often bear the greatest burden for the communication of new ideas and procedures. Effective writing is the product of long hours of preparation, revision and organization. One book that follows its own rules is Strunk and White’s Elements of Style, a short book which argues persuasively for clarity, accuracy, and brevity in the use of English. Its entire philosophy is contained in one paragraph:

“Vigorous writing is concise. A sentence should contain no unnecessary words, a paragraph no unnecessary sentences, for the same reasons that a drawing should have no unnecessary lines and a machine no unnecessary parts. This requires not that the writer make all his sentences short, or that he avoid all detail and treat his subjects only in outline, but that EVERY WORD TELL.”

Clear, vigorous writing is a product of clear, vigorous thinking. Clarity is born of discipline and imagination. Kirkpatrick gives the following guidelines for using written communication:

Use Written Communication When:

- The sender wants a record for future references.
- The receiver will be referring to it later.
- The message is complex and requires study by the receiver.
- The message includes a step by step procedure.
- Oral communication is not possible because people are not in the same place at the same time.
- There are many receivers. Caution: the receivers must be interested in the subject and will put forth the time and effort to read and understand.
- It is cheaper. Caution: the same as above.
- A copy of the message should go to another person.
- The receiver prefers written.

Advantages of Written Materials

- Highly technical topics can be presented using words and diagrams.
- Written material provides a permanent record that can be referred to from time to time or passed on to others.
- Written material can be duplicated in large quantities or distributed on the Internet relatively inexpensively.
- It is fairly easy to distribute written material to many people, but this practice is getting increasingly expensive and its effectiveness questionable.
- Written material is preferred when it is desirable to get the same information to a group of people.
- Written records and reports are sometimes useful in legal matters.
- Written material may be useful for documenting the success or progress of some project or activity.
Disadvantages of Written Material

- People seldom take the time and effort to read technical materials.
- The preparation of written documents is time-consuming.
- Once prepared in large quantities, printed documents are difficult to change.
- Written material provides little feedback for the sender.
- Technical documents are often too long and complex for the majority of readers.
- A portion of the population may not be able to read written material.
- Too much reliance on written material as a communication method may obscure the true needs of potential users.