

SCHOOL OF STUDIES IN COMMERCE

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TITLE OF LECTURE: PRINCIPLES OF COMMUNICATION

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INTRODUCTION

The exchange of ideas, news and views in connection with the business among the related parties is called business communication. To make this communication effective we should follow some principles. A fundamental truth or proposition that serves as the foundation for a system of belief or behavior or for a chain of reasoning. So we may say that principle of business communication is the guidelines which is used to make a communication effective.

When we talk about effective communication the foremost thing that comes in mind is the “principles of effective communication”. These principles guide in forming message, its style and importance so that it becomes more effective for the target audience. These principles are called 7Cs of communication.

PRINCIPLE - 1

You can improve your chances of ‘success’ in communication if you have clear purpose(s) and select appropriate strategies.

Effective communication depends on selecting the best strategy to achieve some communicative purpose. There is no one ‘best way’ which will work all the time.

In Part one we reviewed the various factors that affect communication. We emphasized that effective communication requires us to:

- *consider the purpose of our communication;
- * evaluate alternative means of achieving this purpose, taking into account those factors that will affect the communication;
- * select the one which has the greatest chance of success.

In Part one we noted that humans are always interpreting the meaning of events on the basis of the information available. Whatever our message, it will have *some* effect on our audience, and we should at least be clear in our own minds what outcome we wish to achieve. If we are unclear, then our audience will be more so. This may sound all very elementary, and yet we repeatedly find that people in organizations are vague about their purpose.

PRINCIPLE - 2

Communication always means more than 'the message'.

To communicate effectively, you need to anticipate how 'messages' will be interpreted in context. You need to consider the meaning which will be 'taken' from your behaviour.

We have highlighted examples where people in organizations took an 'over-simple' approach to communication. They concentrated on the superficial or literal meaning of what was said or written and failed to examine how it would be *interpreted*. In other words, they focused on the surface of 'the message' and omitted to consider how the other people involved would translate this into *meaning*.

For example, ambiguity is an inherent feature of both language and non-verbal communication. As a result, we can use humour to play on double meanings. And perhaps we can have some sympathy for the chief executive who suggested the following motto to celebrate his company's longstanding success: 'Our innovation makes us first – our quality makes us last.' This last anecdote is reported as an 'alleged true story' by Scott Adams in

one of his Dilbert books (Adams, 1997, p. 120), which repeatedly figure in the best-selling lists of management books. These very cynical (and very funny) accounts of business life emphasize that management often ignore the implications of communication.

And this also suggests some very simple approaches we can use to support this principle:

- * recognizing that ambiguity is an inevitable feature of human communication;
- * looking for feedback and checking understanding;
- * accepting that others' interpretations are legitimate;
- * realizing that discussion is essential to arrive at clear, shared meaning.

Do these approaches characterize everyday interactions in your organization?

PRINCIPLE - 3

Communication is always based in a specific social and cultural context.

We need to recognize the constraints that influence communication because of the social and historical context in which it occurs, and respond accordingly.

We have criticized attempts to provide guidelines or techniques for communication which ignore the context. For example, many management texts endorse the values of assertiveness without referring to the research which shows that assertive behaviour may be seen as aggressive or inappropriate in certain cultural settings or by certain individuals.

We must analyse both the cultural and the historical context. For example, Chaudry- Lawton and Lawton (1992) describe the experience of a British consultant working on an intensive management training programme in a Middle Eastern country. There were several important levels of cultural awareness which this consultant had to recognize. He had to understand that the historical principles of Islam would influence the managers' approach and expectations. Those principles created a much more fluid approach to agreements and relationships than he expected in comparable Western organizations. In terms of daily interactions, he had to recognize the 'important rituals' of 'lengthy greetings and the tea drinking at every meeting'. To ignore or dismiss these rituals would have created deep insult and threatened the relationship on which any effective consultancy is based.

This principle is very important in a situation of change. Management who wish to introduce new processes or procedures should be sensitive to the meaning of the existing patterns of behaviour.

PRINCIPLE - 4

Communication and action must 'match'.

We can communicate loud and strong but we will not be believed if our actions do not match what we say.

For example, there is the research which shows that verbal and non-verbal communication must express the same meaning if you are to be believed. If your body language contradicts what you say, then the other person will have to choose which channel to believe. Early research suggested that the non-verbal channel would always be believed. We now know that matters are more

complicated, but we do know that people are very sensitive to this sort of ambiguity. In other words, if your speech and body language do not agree, then this will almost certainly be noticed and interpreted by your audience.

Linked to this idea is the oft-quoted statement that 'you cannot *not* communicate'. In other words, failing to act can be seen as meaningful. For example, how do staff feel about the chief executive who always stresses the importance of communication in public meetings and in media interviews but who never contributes anything to the staff newsletter? And this suggests how to follow this principle: act in the way that you say that you do. Of course, there may be some issues of interpretation and these should be sorted out as soon as possible. The management team who announce that they have an 'open door' policy to all employees would be wise to clarify what they mean with some examples or through discussion. It is very easy to set up expectations with a snappy slogan which makes claims that are obviously over-optimistic when you consider the likely interpretation by the audience. A similar fate could await the management who promise 'one computer per desk'. Such a policy could be interpreted as one computer per staff member, or as one computer per office, and so on.

PRINCIPLE - 5

Communication can always be improved.

Although we accept that some people are inherently more skilled in their communication, we can all improve our skills with the right coaching or preparation.

At first sight, this principle may seem almost obvious. But it is often denied in practice. In other words, if you believe that

communication can be improved, then you will devote time to at least some of the following activities:

- * reviewing the impact of your own behaviour on others;
- * requesting feedback from others;
- * developing strategies or plans to improve your communication;
- * trying new techniques and reviewing their effectiveness.

This philosophy of review and improvement is often neglected in the pressure of daily business. In the same way that most time management texts argue that you should make some space in the daily routine to plan long-term objectives, we recommend some attention to communication.

PRINCIPLE - 6

Communication is a fundamental management responsibility.

If management do not accept responsibility for the quantity and quality of communication in the organization, then who will?

This principle can be translated into practice in various ways. For example, we can ask how far the behaviour of managers at all levels throughout the organization reflects concern for and commitment to communication. Werner David (1995) proposes five fundamental steps:

1. making a senior manager formally responsible for 'linking every employee into the communication network' ;
2. systematic training in communication;
3. building the organization's communication network in a way which uses all the available media and which is especially sensitive to information that indicates the need for change;
4. continually monitoring the network to make sure it works

effectively;

5. Costing communication so that its effectiveness can be measured.

As with all general strategies, there are possible pitfalls. For example, the notion of making one senior manager 'responsible' could lead to other managers 'leaving it to him or her' rather than taking equal responsibility. Costing is difficult to organize and monitor. Although we have reservations about some aspects of David's approach, we wholeheartedly agree with the overall concept – that management should have an explicit strategy which is regularly reviewed.

PRINCIPLE - 7

New media can enhance communication.

Most modern organizations now have a much wider choice of communication media than at any time in history. These media can make a profound and positive impact if they are carefully introduced and maintained.

We have discussed various aspects of new media throughout the book, including:

- * the potential impact of ICT on organizational structure and functions;
- * use of email as a rapid and effective channel for bypassing the possible rigidities of the organizational hierarchy;
- * use of intranet and Internet technologies to distribute

information both within and outside the organization;
* application of video conferencing to enable meetings which might otherwise be too expensive to sustain.

All these examples depend upon management strategy – upon management who are able to justify the investment to provide the facilities and then the commitment to sustain the appropriate use of this technology. We do not have to look far to find examples of computer failures and the ‘ghastly consequences of some of these failures’, including the pessimistic suggestion that ‘for both corporate and individual users, software failure is still not only a likelihood but a certainty’ (Tenner, 1996, p. 189). But we can learn from the mistakes of the past and devise effective ways of using ICT to augment human aptitudes. And the same is true of communication in general. Reflecting on some of the problems and pitfalls of human communication in organizations can show us how to avoid them, provided we are prepared to take the responsibility. So we end by emphasizing Principle 5. And if management ignore communication, then we should remind them very quickly of its importance!

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