

COMMUNICATION

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Men live in a community in virtue of the things which they have in common; and communication is the way in which they come to possess things in common. What they must have in common in order to form a community or society are aims, beliefs, aspirations, knowledge – a common understanding – likemindedness as the sociologists say. Such things cannot be passed physically from one to another, like bricks; they cannot be shared as persons would share a pie by dividing it into physical pieces. The communication which ensures participation in a common understanding is one which secures similar emotional and intellectual dispositions – like ways of responding to expectations and requirements.

John Dewey¹, *Democracy and Education*, 1916

Communication occurs every time a living body is able to affect another body and modifies their structure or activity by sending them a piece of information (not by means of a direct action, as in the case of physical strength which generates some form of energy).

The theory of communication has undergone multiple changes along history, since the ancient Greeks up to the transactional analysis, the neuro-linguistic programming or the techniques of *Palo Alto School* ².

The word communication derives from the Latin *communis* and means to be in a relation with, to relate to although it used to mean to send something to somebody in antiquity. When we communicate we want to have something in common with the other one, to share some information, an idea, a feeling, an opinion. Communication is defined as an information exchange and stands for an essential need in our lives. Communication is present in everything we do. We could not live or work without it. Meanwhile, it is the most definite means by which is established the coordination of a human group in an organization.

The difficulty of defining communication lies in the diversity of viewpoints relating to it. For example, J. Gordon³ says that "the perception, motivation, personality and experience of each communicator influence the way in which a person receives the information sent by another person". Thus, communication is suggested a different perspective of defining and interpretation, that is even more useful within a

comprehensive analysis of the phenomenon. Roberts and Hunt view communication as "the acquirement, transmission and attachment of a meaning to that particular information"⁴ According to T.K. and M. Gamble, communication is "a deliberate or accidental transfer of meaning"⁵

As we may easily notice, even if defining communication seems rather simple, in fact it is quite a complex and intricate process, due to both its broad meaning and the everyday communicational practice. Denis McQuail⁶, the author of one of the most complex and comprehensive books on communication, grouped the definitions of communication into fifteen categories, in his attempt to cover thoroughly all aspects and component elements of the notion. These are:

- Definitions in which the stress falls upon aspects such as: symbols, speech, language
- Definitions that emphasise the role of perception – reception instead of sending messages
- Definitions which emphasise interaction, relationships
- Definitions which stress the importance of uncertainty reduction
- Definitions which give emphasise to the process (communication seen as a process)
- Definitions which give emphasis to transfer, to the sending itself (the message exchange)
- Definitions which emphasise the relation, union
- Definitions which emphasise common features (communication is seen as the amplification of what is mutually shared or accepted)

- Definitions which stress the channel, the medium
- Definitions which put emphasis on memory storage (communication leads to information storage)
- Definitions which show the importance of intention in communication (and stress the idea that communication always has a purpose)
- Definitions which place special importance on the moment and the situation of communication (the context of communication)
- Definitions which lay emphasis on the power of communication (seen as means of influence)

Specialized literature offers a wide variety of communication patterns; these have an instrumental value as they develop more efficiently the possibilities of the communication process dynamism. Taking into account the fact that in any kind of organization communication occurs interpersonally, within and between the group members, the approach to communication can be made from several viewpoints: of personality psychology, of small groups psychology or of organization theory.

Personality psychology views communication as a fundamental method in the behaviour determination, along with other psychological processes and phenomena such as: perception, motivation, language, learning etc. A better understanding of organization psychology requires thorough studies related to motivation – information, selective perception and subjective perception, verbal messages apprehension, new information integration into the already existing structures, the personality features and style of communication relationship, possibilities of developing the communication abilities etc.

Small groups' psychology – within social psychology – considers communication an essential social phenomenon, closely related to social interaction as communication creates and modifies relationships. Small groups psychology studies issues with reference to organization communication, such as communication – means of persuasion, the pattern of efficient communication within small groups, the relation between communication and negotiation, communication as a means of problem solving, the role of communication in establishing group

norms, communication as a means of group activity coordination, difficulties to communicate within a group, verbal and non-verbal communication within a group, communication within and between groups, etc..

Organization theories regard communication as an essential element. In the late 1930s, Chester Barnard⁷ placed communication at the centre of his theory, claiming that communication is the power which maintains the function of an organization and coordinates its objectives to the employees'. According to him, the organization function largely depends on the quality and effectiveness of information transmission.

The principles of communication can be found in almost all studies about communication. However, some principles have a more general or specific meaning than others. The principles of communication derive from discourse analysis theories, cybernetic data and the inter-actionist approach (Paul Watzlawick)⁸

- The alterity principle – the necessity for the interlocutors to recognize their identity; the differences between the sender and the receiver's characteristics (regarding gender, age, cultural background, social status, or interests which generate motivations, linguistic abilities, sensitivity, perception, beliefs, moral values etc.) would be sources of inadequacies
- The pertinence principle – the adaptation of the message to the context and to the purpose of information exchange
- The influence principle – "It is impossible for us not to communicate" – any type of verbal or non-verbal behaviour as well as any member in a relationship or group generates interpretation
- The regulation process – each individual who socially interacts is responsible for his own deeds and discourse, being able to influence and modify the information exchange process
- The economy principle regarding time and methods; the methods have to correspond to the degree of the message's importance; if the message requires too much effort to understand, listening to it may become a failure.

To conclude, communication means more than just information exchange and interpretation.

Communication represents a sum of factors either in harmony or in contradiction. All these factors belonging to communication (time and space may generate constraints), the purpose of the message (informing or persuading), the type of the message (logical and rational or emotional), the partner's identity (the interlocutor's status and role), the message elaboration, all can contribute to effective communication, to the positive effects of the message on the receiver, on his/her reactions and understanding. Communication involves agreement, suggestions, opinions or disagreement, a clash of viewpoints and negative feelings. In any type of organization, communication enables information (the basis of decisions), motivation (cooperation and the achievement of goals), as well as control (authority, responsibility, duties).

According to T. K. Gamble and M. Gamble⁹, communication involves understanding and knowledge (self-knowledge and knowledge of other people come into mutual relationships): it develops a solid relationship with others, influence and persuasion, collaboration and mutual effort.

The process of interaction between people or groups of any kind of relationship involving words, images, symbols or gestures used by people to share knowledge, experience, interests, attitudes, ideas or opinions have the very specific purpose of persuading, giving explanations, conveying information or getting informed as well as expressing points of view. In other words, the purpose is to achieve effective **communication**.

Every communication is an opportunity to empower someone. Learn when you should be uncompromising, agreeable or ambiguous. Realize (keep in mind) that your words may carry more weight than you think, and that there is a difference

between what you say and what is heard. (Bruce Hyland)

References

1. Gamble, T. K. & Gamble, M. (1993) *Communication Works*. New York: McGraw-Hill.
2. Gordon, J. (1993) *Organizational Behaviour*. New York: Allyn and Bacon.

Endnotes

1. John Dewey - 1859-1952 - an American philosopher, psychologist and educational reformer whose ideas have been influential in education and social reform. His philosophy is known as *instrumentalism*. He belongs to the group of functionalist psychologists who founded the so-called *Chicago group* of psychology Democracy and Education, 1916
2. The Palo Alto School (a small town situated in the south of San Francisco) refers to a group of researchers from different fields of activity who have studied communication. The main representatives are Paul Watzlawick, J.H. Beavin and D. Jackson. Their researcher focuses on the relation of the component elements rather than on the separate elements themselves. They claim that any human behaviour has a communicative value.
3. Gordon, J. *Organizational Behaviour*, Allyn and Bacon, New York, 1983
4. *Ibidem*.
5. Gamble, T. K. & Gamble, M., *Communication Works*, McGraw-Hill, New York, 1993
6. Denis McQuail - Emeritus Professor at the University of Amsterdam and Visiting Professor in the Department of Politics at the University of Southampton
7. Chester Barnard Irving 1886-1961 - an American business executive, the author of pioneering work in management theory and organizational studies. He studied Economics at Harvard University, was elected a Fellow of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences in 1939. He was also President of the Rockefeller Foundation
8. Paul Watzlawick - member of The Palo Alto School
9. Gamble, T.K., Gamble, M., *op. cit.*