

UNDERSTANDING BUSINESS COMMUNICATION

Overview:

Business communication is information sharing between people within and outside an organization that is performed for the commercial benefit of the organization. It can also be defined as relaying of information within a business by its people.

Business communication (or simply "communication," in a business context) encompasses topics such as marketing, brand management, customer relations, consumer behavior, advertising, public relations, corporate communication, community engagement, reputation management, interpersonal communication, employee engagement, and event management. It is closely related to the fields of professional communication and technical communication.

Media channels for business communication include the Internet, print media, radio, television, ambient media, and word of mouth.

Business communication can also be said to be the way employees, management and administration communicate in order to reach to their organizational goals.

Business communication is a common topic included in the curricular of Undergraduate and Master's degree programs at many colleges and universities.

Methods of business communication include:

- Web-based communication
- **Video conferencing** – allows people in different locations to hold interactive meetings.
- **Reports** – important in documenting the activities of any department
- **Presentations** – popular method of communication in all types of organizations, usually involving audiovisual material, like copies of reports, or material prepared in Microsoft PowerPoint or Adobe Flash
- **Telephone meetings** – which allow for long distance speech
- **Forum boards** – which allow people to instantly post information at a centralized location
- **Face-to-face meetings** – which are personal and should have a written follow up
- **Suggestion box** – primarily for upward communication, because some people may hesitate to communicate with management directly, so they can give suggestions by drafting one and putting it in the suggestion box.

What is the purpose of business communication?

Business communication is important to managers as it helps them carry out their basic functions within the organization. They should have all the information pertaining to the specific tasks as well as the entire organization and must then seek to **communicate** this information to the employees of the organization.

What are the functions of business communication?

In addition to affecting employees, communication touches external elements of a business, such as customers, partners, suppliers and the media. It's important to understand the basic functions of verbal and written communication in business so you can use them to help your company reach its goals.

What are the benefits of business communication?

Increased **Productivity**. There's no doubt that clear, effective business communications increase **productivity**. When employees understand their assignments and deliverables, their quality of work improves. This way, employees can concentrate on their job duties with confidence.

What are the principles of business communication?

Key **principles of business communication**. Every form of **communication** requires interacting with another person or group of people – your audience. The message then reaches the receiver – the audience – who decodes it and may decide to respond.

Types of Business Communications:

The four basic types of business communication are internal (upward), internal (downward), internal (lateral) and external.

Internal, Upward Communication

This type of business communication is **anything that comes from a subordinate to a manager** or an individual up the organizational hierarchy. Leaders need information to flow upwards to have a true pulse on the operations of the company. Most communication that flows upward is based on systematic forms, reports, surveys, templates and other resources to help employees provide necessary and complete information.

For example, a sales report might include the total number of pitches, along with the actual sales. It may also ask for feedback such as a summary of problems or successes that management would like to track.

Internal, Downward Communication

This is any type of communication that comes **from a superior to one or more subordinates**. Communication might be in the form of a letter, a memo or a verbal directive. Leaders should keep communication professional and clear with subordinates. For example, a memo regarding a new operations procedure might involve safety requirements and new regulations. There should be no room for interpretation of the safety requirements; the language should concisely explain exactly what needs to happen.

Internal, Lateral Communication

Lateral communication is the **talking, messaging and emailing among co- workers in the office**. This might be cross-department communication or just internal department dealings. An example of a scenario involving cross- department communication is where the fulfilment manager has a question about a special order, and is requesting clarification from the sales representative via an email or office messaging system. Those in the same department might communicate to provide updates on status reports and coordinate schedules. Co-workers should always be encouraged to communicate in a respectful and professional tone when at work.

External Communication

External communication is any **communication that leaves the office** and deals with customers, prospects, vendors or partners. It could also involve regulatory agencies or city offices. Sales presentations or marketing letters need to be exciting to generate interest from the customer but they also need to be factually based. When corresponding to outside entities for partnerships or other business administration needs, state the purpose and be concise in communication, whether oral or written. Respect people's time by getting to the point and stating your request.

Different Types of Barriers to Effective Communication:

(1) Semantic Barriers (language-related barriers)

(i) Badly Expressed Message:

Because of the obscurity of language there is always a possibility of wrong interpretation of the messages. This barrier is created because of the wrong choice of words, the wrong sequence of sentences and frequent repetitions.

(ii) Symbols or Words with Different Meanings:

A symbol or a word can have different meanings. If the receiver misunderstands the communication, it becomes meaningless. For example, the word 'value' can have different meanings in the following sentences:

(a) What is the value of computer education these days?

(b) What is the value of this mobile set?

(c) Value our friendship.

iii) Faulty Translation:

A manager receives much information from his superiors and subordinates and he translates it for all the employees according to their level of understanding. Hence, the information has to be moulded according to the understanding or environment of the receiver. If there is a little carelessness in this process, the faulty translation can be a barrier in the communication.

iv) Unclarified Assumptions:

It has been observed that sometimes a sender takes it for granted that the receiver knows some basic things and, therefore, it is enough to tell him about the major subject matter. This point of view of the sender is correct to some extent with reference to the daily communication, but it is absolutely wrong in case of some special message.

(v) Technical Jargon:

Generally, it has been seen that the people working in an enterprise are connected with some special technical group who have their separate technical language. Their communication is not so simple as to be understood by everybody. Hence, technical language can be a barrier in communication. This technical group includes industrial engineers, production development manager, quality controller, etc.

(2) Psychological or Emotional Barriers

The importance of communication depends on the mental condition of both the parties. A mentally disturbed party can be a hindrance in communication. Following are the emotional barriers in the way of communication:

(i) Premature Evaluation:

Sometimes the receiver of information tries to dig out meaning without much thinking at the time of receiving or even before receiving information, which can be wrong. This type of evaluation is a hindrance in the exchange of information and the enthusiasm of the sender gets dampened.

(ii) Lack of Attention:

When the receiver is preoccupied with some important work, he/she does not listen to the message attentively. For example, an employee is talking to his boss when the latter is busy in some important conversation. In such a situation the boss may not pay any attention to what subordinate is saying. Thus, there arises psychological hurdle in the communication.

(iii) Loss by Transmission and Poor Retention:

When a message is received by a person after it has passed through many people, generally it loses some of its truth. This is called loss by transmission. This happens normally in case of oral communication. Poor retention of information means that with every next transfer of information the actual form or truth of the information changes.

(iv) Distrust:

For successful communication the transmitter and the receiver must trust each other. If there is a lack of trust between them, the receiver will always derive an opposite meaning from the message. Because of this, communication will become meaningless.

(3) Organisational Barriers

Organisational structure greatly affects the capability of the employees as far as the communication is concerned. Some major organisational hindrances in the way of communication are the following:

(i) Organisational Policies:

Organisational policies determine the relationship among all the persons working in the enterprise. For example, it can be the policy of the organisation that communication will be in the written form. In such a situation anything that could be conveyed in a few words shall have to be communicated in the written form. Consequently, work gets delayed.

(ii) Status:

Under organising all the employees are divided into many categories on the basis of their level. This formal division acts as a barrier in communication especially when the communication moves from the bottom to the top.

For example, when a lower-level employee has to send his message to a superior at the top level there is a lurking fear in his mind that the communication may be faulty, and because of this fear, he cannot convey himself clearly and in time. It delays the decision making.

(iv) Organisational Facilities:

Organisational facilities mean making available sufficient stationery, telephone, translator, etc. When these facilities are sufficient in an organisation, the communication will be timely, clear and in accordance with necessity. In the absence of these facilities communication becomes meaningless.

(4) Inter-Personal Barriers

The above-mentioned organisational barriers are important in themselves but there are some barriers which are directly connected with the sender and the receiver. They are called personal barriers. From the point of view of convenience, they have been divided into two parts:

(i) Fear of Challenging the Authority:

Everybody desires to occupy a high office in the organisation. In this hope the officers try to conceal their weaknesses by not communicating their ideas. There is a fear in their mind that in case the reality comes to light they may have to move to the lower level.

(ii) Lack of Confidence in Subordinates:

Top-level superiors think that the lower-level employees are less capable and, therefore, they ignore the information or suggestions sent by them. They deliberately ignore the communication from their subordinates in order to increase their own importance. Consequently, the self-confidence of the employees is lowered.

(iii) Unwillingness to Communicate:

Sometimes the subordinates do not want to send any information to their superiors. When the subordinates feel that the information is of negative nature and will adversely affect them, an effort is made to conceal that information. If it becomes imperative to send this information, it is sent in a modified or amended form. Thus, the subordinates, by not clarifying the facts, become a hindrance in communication.

Effective Communication Strategy

- **Stop.** Focus on the other person, their thoughts and feelings. Consciously focus on quieting your own internal commentary, and step away from your own concerns to think about those of the speaker.
- **Look.** Pay attention to **non-verbal messages**, without letting yourself being distracted. Notice body language and non-verbal cues to allow for a richer understanding of the speaker's point.
- **Listen.** Listen for the essence of the speaker's thoughts: details, major ideas and their meanings. Seek an overall understanding of what the speaker is trying to communicate, rather than reacting to the individual words or terms that they use to express themselves.
- **Be empathetic.** Imagine how you would feel in their circumstances. Be empathetic to the feelings of the speaker, while maintaining a calm centre within yourself.
- **Ask questions.** Use questions to clarify your understanding, as well as to demonstrate interest in what is being said.
- **Analyze your own perceptions and improve them.** Question your perceptions, and think about how they are formed. Check in with others around you regularly, and be aware of assumptions that you are making. Seek additional information and observations. You may just need to ask people if your perceptions are accurate.
- **Focus on the issue, not the person.** Try not to take everything personally, and similarly, express your own needs and opinions in terms of the job at hand. Solve problems rather than attempt to control others. For example, rather than criticizing a co-worker's personality, express your

concerns in terms of how to get the job done more smoothly in the future.

- ***Empathize rather than remain detached.*** Although professional relationships entail some boundaries when it comes to interaction with colleagues, it is important to demonstrate sensitivity, and to really care about the people you work with. If you don't care about them, it will be difficult for them to care about you when it comes to working together.
- ***Be flexible towards others.*** Allow for other points of view, and be open to other ways of doing things. Diversity brings creativity and innovation.
- ***Value yourself and your own experiences.*** Be firm about your own rights and needs. Undervaluing yourself encourages others to undervalue you, too. Offer your ideas and expect to be treated well.
- ***Present yourself as an equal rather than a superior.*** Even when you are in a position of authority, focus on what you and the other person each have to offer and contribute to the job or issue.
- ***Use affirming responses.*** Respond to other in ways that acknowledge their experiences. Thank them for their input. Affirm their right to their feelings, even if you disagree. Ask questions, express positive feeling; and provide positive feedback when you can.
