

Interpersonal Communication: Lifeblood of an Organization

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Communication plays a crucial role in the functioning of organizations. In fact, what an organization requires mainly is communication. It is an inseparable, essential and continuous process just like the circulatory system in the human body. As a result, communication effectiveness becomes a very vital factor in determining the efficiency with which an organization performs as a whole. The existence of an organization depends upon a number of things like unity of command, delegation of authority and responsibility, teamwork and leadership, each one of which entails a strong support of interpersonal communication. Interpersonal communication, therefore, becomes the lifeblood of an organization. Fundamentals of interpersonal communication are communicators, message, noise, response, background and channel. Decent interpersonal communication skills support intimate relationship, counselling, selling, management, conflict management, etc. The various hindrances to effective interpersonal communication like sentiments, filtering, message crammed with information, defensiveness, cultural difference and argot can be overcome by simplifying language, controlling sentiments, listening ardently and using feedback. The paper examines the vitality of interpersonal communication for the subsistence of an organization.

Introduction

Interpersonal communication is the procedure by which people swap information, feelings and impart through verbal and non-verbal messages. This definition underlines the crucial fact that interpersonal communication is not only apprehensive about 'what' is pronounced, i.e., the language employed, but 'how' it is pronounced, e.g., the non-verbal messages sent, such as tone of voice and facial expressions. Hartley (1999, p. 20) defines interpersonal communication as having the following characteristics:

- Communication from one person to another.
- Communication which is face-to-face.
- Both the form and the content of the communication reflect the personal characteristics of the individuals as well as their social roles and relationships.

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When two or more people are in the same place and are aware of each other being there, then communication is said to be taking place, no matter how subtle or inadvertent it may be. Even without vocalizations, an onlooker may be using prompts of stance (posture), facial manifestation, and garb to impact other's role, poignant situation, persona or intents. Even though no communication may be aimed at, people receive messages through forms of non-verbal conduct. This is a significant thrust for those working in people-centered vocations, who require to foster an awareness of the assortment of prompts entailed in interpersonal communication. Hartley (1999) suggests that interpersonal communication includes the following aspects: non-verbal communication, reinforcement, questioning, reflecting, opening and closing, explanation, listening and self-disclosure.

Although interpersonal communication can include oral, written, and non-verbal forms of communication, the term is by and large related to spoken communication that takes place between two or more individuals in person. Some of the types of interpersonal communication that are generally used within a business organization comprise staff meetings, formal project discussions, employee performance reviews, and informal chit-chats. Interpersonal communication with those outside the business organization can be in various forms, too counting client meetings, employment interviews, or sales visits. So as to comprehend the principles of effective interpersonal communication, it is beneficial to look at the fundamental process of communication.

The basic process of communication initiates when a fact is perceived or an idea devised by a single person. That person (the sender) chooses to decipher the perception into a message, and subsequently conveys the message through some communication medium to another person (the receiver). The receiver then must construe the message and supply feedback to the sender indicating that the message has been comprehended and fitting action taken.

Regrettably, errors can be instituted during any stage of the communication process. For instance, misunderstandings can crop up when the sender does not have an apparent idea of the message he or she is attempting to communicate, or has a clear idea but is unable to articulate it perfectly. However, errors can also take place when the receiver does not take note warily, deduces a sense other than what was meant by the sender, or does not provide feedback. Eventually, blurred, imprecise, or thoughtless business communication can squander precious time, estrange employees or customers, and obliterate goodwill toward management or the business on the whole.

Role of Non-Verbal Communication in Interpersonal Communication

Non-verbal communication is also required in Interpersonal communication. At times, we don't need words. When words are not enough or we are not able to speak with entire comprehension, non-verbal communication works visually. Signs or emotions or body language can be termed as different non-verbal communication tools. A person uses non-verbal communication several times in his daily life. Emotions are of special importance in non-verbal communication because they have more meanings in them.

Facial emotions can be interpreted differently by every person. A word has a common meaning for everybody but each facial emotion has its own meaning and message and every receiver takes the message in a different way. There are basic emotions that we can see in a written communication. A person can express feelings in many different ways. Body language is the most important part of non-verbal communication. Moving head up and down means 'yes' while shaking it right to left means 'no' or shaking hand means 'hello'... and so on. These non-verbal communication kinds are used by everyone everyday. The reason for using this non-verbal communication tools is that they provide sense to words or messages that one wants to send, and at the same time manage our conversations.

Fundamentals of Interpersonal Communication

Scores of researchers have split interpersonal communication into numerous rudiments so that it can be more easily comprehended. These are explained below.

Communicators

For any communication to take place there ought to be at least two people involved. Conventionally, communication is seen as involving a sender and a receiver of a message. Nevertheless, the problem with this way of seeing a relationship is that it presents communication as a one-way process, i.e., one person sends the message and the other receives it, which is a lateral process. Today, it is acknowledged that communications are roughly always complex, two-way processes, with people sending and receiving messages to and from each other, in any interaction.

Message

Message not only means the speech used or information communicated, but also the non-verbal messages swapped such as facial expressions, tone of voice, gestures and body language. Non-verbal behavior can transmit supplementary information about the message vocalized. Particularly, it can divulge more about emotional attitudes which may underlie the substance of discourse.

Noise

Noise has a unique connotation in the theory of communication. It refers to anything that deforms the message, so that what is received is dissimilar from what is proposed by the speaker. Even as physical 'noise' (sounds) can meddle with communication, things like the use of intricate jargon, unsuitable body language, negligence and cultural disparities can be considered 'noise' in the context of interpersonal communication. Thus, misrepresentations or discrepancies that might crop up during an effort to communicate are capable of being termed as noise.

Response

Response/feedback comprises messages the receiver replaces, which allows the sender to know how accurately the message has been received, along with the receiver's

reaction. The receiver may also reply to the unintentional message in addition to the intentional one. The various types of feedback range from direct verbal statements, to subtle facial expressions or changes in posture which might point to the sender that the receiver experiences discomfort with the message. Response/feedback permits the sender to regulate, acclimatize or restate his/her message to facilitate communication.

Background

All communication is influenced by the background in which it takes place. However, apart from looking at where the interaction takes place, i.e., the situational background (room, office, etc.), the social background needs to be referred to, i.e., the roles, responsibilities and rank of the participants. The emotional setting and participants' expectations of the interaction will also affect the communication.

Channel

It refers to the physical means by which the message is transported from one person to another. In the case of inter-personal communication, the channels considered are speech and vision.

Communication Channels

Communication channels are the media chosen to convey the message from sender to receiver. Communication channels can be categorized into two main categories: Direct and indirect channels of communication.

Direct channels are those that are apparent, and can be easily recognized by the receiver. They are also under direct control of the sender. In this category lie the verbal and non-verbal channels of communication. Verbal communication channels are those that employ words in some way, such as written communication or spoken communication. Non-verbal communication channels, on the other hand, are those that do not demand words, such as certain explicit facial expressions, controllable body movements (like that made by a traffic police to control traffic), color (red for danger, green means go, etc.), sound (alarms, sirens, etc.).

Indirect channels are those channels that are recognized spontaneously and unintentionally by the receiver, and are not under the direct control of the sender. This includes kinesics or body language that reflects the inner emotions and motivations rather than the actual delivered message. It also includes such vague terms as 'instincts', 'hunches', 'premonitions', or 'intuitions'.

Types of Interpersonal Communication

Interpersonal communication is subdivided into dyadic communication, public speaking, and small-group communication. Dyadic communication is simply a method of communication that involves only two people such as a telephone conversation or even a set of letters sent to and received from a pen friend. In this communication process, the sender can instantly receive and appraise feedback from the receiver so

that, it permits more specific couture of the message and more personal communication than do numerous other media.

Uses of Interpersonal Communication

Interpersonal communication can be used to:

- Furnish and gather information.
- Influence the stances and conduct of others.
- Develop acquaintances and preserve relationships.
- Formulate sense of the planet and our experiences in it.
- Utter personal desires and understand the desires of others as well.
- Bequeath and take delivery of emotional joist.
- Make decisions and solve problems.
- Try to anticipate and envisage behavior.

Good interpersonal communication knack support of such processes like intimate relationship, counselling, management, selling, conflict management and others.

Barriers to Effective Interpersonal Communication

Sentiments

At times when people communicate an idea, the receiver can feel how the sender perceives the subject matter. Very often messages are construed differently by different people. Intense emotions are most likely to encumber effective communication because the idea or message maybe misconstrued. It's advisable to avoid reacting to the subject matter when one is upset or irate because it is then that one is not able to think rationally.

Filtering

At this juncture, the sender manipulates the information that he communicates to the receiver. The purpose is that sometimes people tend to shape the message so as to make it sound favorable to the receiver. Sifting (filtering) information may deceive the receiver into thinking, into something favorable and the disappointment may be upsetting if it's found out that information has been sifted.

Message Crammed with Information

Excessive information about the same subject matter may be perplexing. For example, you have 20 e-mails on the same theme, each e-mail contains some part of the theme. Instead, it would be better to have a single e-mail from the sender which focuses in lucid form only the information you want. By and large, the human brain can only take in required information to process, and hence overloading it with irrelevant information will exceed the human processing capacity, and the receiver would often miscomprehend or not comprehend at all what the sender is conveying to him/her.

Defensiveness

Human beings are likely to decline a mutual understanding when they feel that they are being threatened or are put in a difficult position. Defensiveness normally comprises assaulting what the sender tells you, putting out sardonic remarks, questioning their motives or being excessively judgmental about the topic.

Cultural Difference

Our culture, at times, may be a colossal encumbrance for effective interpersonal communication. When two people with different cultures communicate, they often do not comprehend each other's cultures and might misinterpret the true meaning of what each other is trying to convey through such a sense.

Argot

Not all and sundry understand each other's argot/jargon words. Therefore, argot is best avoided when talking to someone who one is not familiar with personally or within one's organization.

Overcoming the Barriers of Effectual Interpersonal Communication

Simplify Language: By structuring your language to clear, uncomplicated sentences, the receiver would be able to effortlessly understand what the sender is saying.

Control Emotions: Constrain emotions at the time of discussing a certain sensitive issue. Articulating in a neutral manner allows mutual understanding to take place and for both sender and receiver to communicate rationally.

Listen Ardently: Often, when the sender says something, the receiver normally hears but does not listen. Place yourself in the sender's position and try to comprehend exactly what they are trying to convey to you. The receiver is trying to comprehend fully what the sender is trying to say, so putting the receiver in the sender's point of view makes understanding much easier.

Use Feedback: This is done by the sender, as a symbol of confirmation by using closed-ended questions such as "Did you understand what I have just said?" or "Is what I said clear to you?", or using an open-ended question to have the receiver recapitulate the message. This results in the sender knowing that the receiver has completely recognized what is being communicated.

Interpersonal Communication Styles

Generally, interpersonal communication can be categorized as either one-way or two-way. One-way communication takes place when the sender conveys information in the form of direction, without expecting any feedback. For instance, a manager may halt briefly by an employee's desk to inform him that a certain project would be due the subsequent day. One-way communication is quicker and simpler for the sender—because he or she does not have to deal with possible questions or discord from the receiver—but it is likely to be overused in business contexts.

On the contrary, two-way communication involves sharing of information between two or more participants in a productive exchange. For instance, a manager may hold a staff meeting in order to establish the due dates for a number of projects. Engaging in a two-way communication shows that the sender is amenable to feedback and eager to supply a response. Even though it is complex and time-consuming for the sender as compared to the one-way communication, it also ascertains a more precise comprehension of the message.

Apart from being classified as one-way or two-way, interpersonal communication can also be fragmented into a variety of styles. Bateman and Zeithaml (1990) identified six core styles of interpersonal communication that are used in business settings: controlling, egalitarian, structuring, dynamic, relinquishing, and withdrawal. "Different individuals use different communication styles", the authors observed. "A communicator should realize that some styles are more effective than others in certain situations."

The controlling style is a form of one-way communication that is used to direct others and gain their compliance. Managers using this style usually do not want feedback, and they tend to employ power and even manipulation to reinforce their message. Although the controlling style can be effective when it is used on occasion by respected individuals, particularly in times of crisis, it can also alienate workers. In contrast, the egalitarian style is a form of two-way communication that involves sharing information rather than directing behavior. It is used to stimulate others to express their ideas and opinions in order to reach a mutual understanding. In most situations—particularly when cooperation is needed—it is more effective than the controlling style.

The structured style of interpersonal communication is used to establish schedules imposed by the organization. Managers using this style would likely cite company standards or rules. Though the structuring style may be necessary to inform others of goals or procedures when complex tasks must be performed by a group, it should usually be counterbalanced with the egalitarian style. The dynamic style is a high-energy approach that uses inspirational pleas to motivate another person to take action. This style can be effective in crisis situations, but it is generally ineffective when the receivers do not have enough knowledge or experience to take the required action.

The relinquishing style of interpersonal communication is deferential rather than directive. It is highly receptive to the ideas of others, to the point of shifting responsibility for communication to the receiver. For example, a manager employing this style might allow her staff to discuss and develop the final solution to a problem while making little comment. This style is particularly effective when the receivers have the knowledge, experience, and willingness to assume responsibility. The withdrawal style is more like a lack of communication. Managers using this style try to avoid using their influence and may indicate a disinterest or unwillingness to participate in the discussion.

Finally, an often overlooked element of interpersonal communication is being a good receiver, which involves developing listening skills. Good listening skills can be vital

in finding a solution to grievances or even in making sales calls. Listening involves showing an interest in the speaker, concentrating on the message, and asking questions to ensure understanding. One useful listening technique is reflection, or attempting to repeat and clarify the other person's message rather than immediately responding to it with a message of your own. Used correctly, reflection can allow managers to view issues from their employees' point of view. Some other keys to effective listening include: keeping an open mind rather than allowing emotions to intervene; finding a part of the subject that may have application to your own experience; and resisting distractions such as the speaker's mannerisms or clothing. It also helps to be prepared for the discussion, to take notes as needed, and to summarize the speaker's statements.

Strong interpersonal communication skills, utilizing a variety of styles and techniques, are particularly important for small business owners who must supervise the work of others. Bateman and Zeithaml (1990) described some of the characteristics of supervisors who receive high marks from their employees. First, these managers tend to communicate more than other managers, explaining the reasons behind decisions and providing advance warning of changes. Second, they tend to employ an egalitarian rather than controlling style when communicating with subordinates, asking for instead of demanding their compliance. Third, they tend to take others' needs and feelings into account when communicating. Finally, most effective managers are good listeners, giving careful consideration to employee concerns and taking the time to respond to questions and complaints.

Interpersonal Communication – Different from Business Communication

Interpersonal communication is like casual talking between friends, family, peers, classmates and co-workers. This form of communication is used when questions are asked, jokes are told, relaxed conversations are held or during other informal meetings. Timbre can range in interpersonal communication based on emotions, and differences between the two participants. Informal language, improper grammar and slang terms are gamely accepted in interpersonal communication.

In contrast, business communication is used for transferring or gathering information. This is usually done in memos, e-mails, letters, meetings or teleconference calls. Employees use this type of communication when talking to managers and most co-workers. Business-to-business communication also falls into this category. Timbre will not sway as it does in interpersonal communication. A formal but friendly tone should be used along with correct grammar, lucid questions or orders and suitable language.

Conclusion

Interpersonal communication is when two people communicate beyond the roles of the circumstances at that point of time. When one's teacher takes the time out to speak with one about one's weekend, when one invites one's doctor over to one's family cookout, when one's boss invites one over for dinner—all such are likely situations leading to interpersonal communication.

In each of the above scenarios the two individuals are participating in communication that goes beyond whatever prescribed roles in society and relationships they may share. Consequently, interpersonal communication is born. Hence it is clear that interpersonal communication is the process of sending and receiving information between two or more people. The relationships between these people and the person individually changes, hence interpersonal communication has a crucial importance as it enhances the quality of relationships.

One speaks with lots of people in different places and for different purposes. The communication patterns change according to the kind of relationship people share like family, school, job, public, friends, etc. Each one has a different format in one's daily communication. The closeness and the context of these communications differ from each other and one kindles them according to their contexts and distances with the opposite sites. Roles are the most determinant in daily communication. Power distance affects the daily communication between people when it is in connection with social roles. Individuals use words to communicate. This process can be face-to-face, with roles and relationships, two-way, intentional, ongoing process or cumulative. The communication process between people is affected by many different situations in daily life. But people express their feelings with words or with their body and they have to because there is a need to communicate every time. Organizations are run by people and without interaction and communication, organizational existence would be very difficult. ●

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