

Chapter 4: Verbal Communication – Fundamentals

Overview

This chapter introduces the fundamentals of verbal communication—understanding the conveyed messages as it was intended. Emphasize the importance to all students; you might consider playing a game of “telephone” to illustrate breakdowns in communication.

Lecture Notes

A. Oral Communications as a Process

Communication is an ongoing process involving an exchange of information and meanings between senders and receivers, both knowingly and unknowingly; you are simultaneously sending and receiving messages and also communicating internally.

1. **The Importance of Verbal Communication** cannot be overstated; it is critical for success in any organization. Important communication outcomes include:

- a. Influencing task performance is important because it encourages employees to complete tasks that lead to meeting organizational goals.
- b. Linking plans and actions is done by connecting the “talking about” and “doing” stages within the organization.
- c. Making effective decisions is much more likely when relevant information is communicated clearly to all involved.
- d. Enhancing effective working relationships is done by helping people relate with others; communication enables them to resolve conflicts productively.
- e. Sharing emotions is done through verbal (and nonverbal) communication.
- f. Fulfilling social need for belonging is inherent in people; communication allows them to share their likes and dislikes with one another.
- g. Providing training aids to what employees are to do requires clear and complete communication.
- h. Assisting in problem-solving for work groups is accomplished through effective group communication.

2. **Sharing and Transmitting Information** in a manner that you feel the receiver will understand is critical; transmission without understanding is not communication.

- a. The Intended meaning of the message should be the same as the perceived meaning. Culture and previous experience play a role in the way we attach meaning to words.
- b. Transmission of information is done knowingly and unknowingly; how something is said is as important as what is said. The receiver can become confused if the two don't send the same message.
- c. Response of the receiver is called feedback; tells the sender a lot about the receipt of the message.

3. **The Communication Process** includes a number of factors that interact with one another. There are many places within the process where problems can occur; being aware of such obstacles makes a big difference. *Review figure 4-1 on p. 91 and the complete process on pp. 90-96.*

- a. The speaker is the source of the message; avoid communication problems as the message is planned, encoded, and spoken along with the nonverbals.
- b. The message is developed through the encoding process; avoid sources of misinterpretation, including multiple word meanings, semantics, and vagueness.
- c. The channel connects the speaker and the listener(s); different channels are available and the number of channels will vary.
- d. The listener is where the message is directed (the decoder), although others may also receive; effective listening is a practiced skill.
- e. Feedback can come in the form of a nod, return message, email, or memo. Misunderstandings can occur if there is a delay in the feedback or the feedback received is not specific.
- f. Distractions in communication serve as barriers, blocks, and create problems in communication. Distractions can be relative to time, external factors, internal factors, or semantics.
- g. The communication environment may be relaxing or stressful; the context of the situation or personal moods can impact the environment.

B. Telephone Communication Techniques

You are the voice of the organization every time you use the phone at work; the impression you relay is the impression the other person/organization has of you and yours.

1. **Applying Effective Speaking Skills** is important for effective communication.
 - a. Projecting voice quality at a moderate rate and volume with accurate enunciation affect the way you are perceived over the telephone. *Review the hints on pp. 96-97.*
 - b. Answering incoming calls quickly, identifying yourself, and attending to the caller demonstrates a professional manner.
 - c. Taking telephone messages and including all of the important details. *Review the tips and figure 4-2 on pp. 97-98.*
 - d. Delivering messages in a timely manner based on the urgency of the message.
 - e. Placing telephone calls accurately; be sure to use the appropriate methods for each type of call. Plan calls and voice-mail messages to make good use of time. *Review the techniques on pp. 98-99 and the long-distance/time zone options on pp.99-101.*
 - f. Listening to voice-mail messages is very helpful; it can reduce or eliminate phone tag and keeps business moving along even when the receiver is not at his/her desk when you call. Be sure to check voice-mail regularly.
 - g. Techniques for using voice mail should be utilized. *Review the list on pp. 101-102.*

- h. Techniques for Internet phones exist with computers and appropriate software. Long-distance may be accomplished at a lower rate, but some people block calls coming from computers.

2. **Using Directories and the Internet** to locate information has become very popular.

- a. White and Yellow Pages provide information about listed telephone numbers. White pages provide an alphabetic listing; yellow pages classify sections of the phone book.
- b. Telephoning procedures and emergency numbers are accessible in directories.
- c. Government listings include federal, state, county, and local offices.
- d. Locating information on the Internet is easy with sites like www.planetpages.com or www.yellowbook.com.

3. **Other Telephoning Techniques** allow usage tracking and permit special kinds of calls.

- a. A computer long-distance log is used to analyze long-distance calls for accuracy and accountability of costs.
- b. Conference calls allow three or more people to talk from different locations; they can also be referred to as audio conferences.
- c. Transferred calls within the organization avoid the caller repeating a call to a new number. It is important that all employees know the transfer procedure on the telephone system.
- d. Use of cellular phones to conduct business has increased greatly in recent years. *Review the guidelines set forth on p. 104.*

C. Giving and Receiving Praise or Criticism

While the two are very different, they can both be positive motivators.

1. **Communicating Praise** is acknowledging the effective work of others.

- a. Giving praise in a sincere manner publicly is important. Tell the person what was done to deserve it.
- b. Receive praise with a thank you to show your appreciation.

2. **Communicating Criticism** has a negative image associated with it; but, if it is done right, it can enhance a person's knowledge and skills.

- a. Giving constructive criticism starts with respect; sandwich the news between positive comments. Maintain self-esteem and motivation.
- b. Receiving criticism without becoming defensive is important. Try to understand the person's perspective and try to understand it. Seeking advice from others may help you understand the criticism and make changes. Make changes in your behavior as needed.

D. The Effective Listener

Review a few statistics regarding listening: 40% of the work day is spent listening; the average person listens at a 25% efficiency level.

1. **The Listening Process** involves sensing, seeing, and interpreting what is being communicated.

- a. The listening sequence allows the listener to become more involved in the process.
 - Receive the message
 - Perceive the message
 - Interpret the message
 - Remember the message
 - Evaluate the message
 - React to the message
- b. Types of listening include content listening, critical listening, and empathetic listening. The ultimate goal of effective listening is to apply all three types.

2. **Problems in the Process** can be costly for an organization; the first step to correcting communication problems is to recognize them.

- a. Paying attention is a big problem; the problems may be related to an attention span, attention wandering, and concentration on the speaker's message.
- b. Understanding the information is key to effective communication. Problems may be in understanding the meaning or the difference between speaking and listening speeds.
- c. Remembering the information after the conversation is over is often difficult. Difficulties can be related to attention and understanding, short-term memory, and information recall.

3. **Behaviors That Inhibit Listening** are habits that need to be changed.

- a. Calling the subject uninteresting makes paying attention very difficult.
- b. Judging delivery instead of content makes it difficult to pay attention.
- c. Jumping to conclusions makes the listener miss key points and possibly the main idea of the message.
- d. Listening for details, not the "big picture" is a backwards approach to listening.
- e. Taking excessive notes takes a lot of extra time and energy during the listening process.
- f. Attentive listening shows respect. *Review the tips on pp. 110-111.*
- g. Creating or tolerating distractions make concentration almost impossible.
- h. Failing to listen to difficult material makes it even more difficult to understand.

4. **Techniques for Improving Listening** come from practice.

- a. Deciding to listen before a meeting clears your mind of outside thoughts.
- b. Getting rest and food allows for better concentration because you are not tired or hungry.
- c. Finding comfortable seating close to the speaker keeps your focus on the speaker and the message.

E. Nonverbal Communication—Listening Between the Words

It is more than choosing the right words to convey a message; the nonverbal factors affect the message and its reception.

1. **Nonverbal Cues in Communication** have as much as 90% of the impact of the message. The old saying holds true: “It’s not what you say, but how you say it and what you are doing when you say it!”

- a. Body language refers to posture and facial expressions. The study of nonverbal body movements and communication is known as kinesics.
- b. Paralanguage includes vocal attributes like speed, intensity, volume, accent, and silence.
- c. Space and distance affects personal comfort. Proxemics refers to the way people structure their space or territory.
- d. Touch is taboo in most office with increased concern over sexual harassment; you will find occasional “high-fives.”
- e. Clothing and accessories send a message, hence the term “Dress for Success.”
- f. Use of time communicates responsibility; you have to balance your own time but also be aware of time in other places (time zones).

2. **Interpreting the Nonverbal** by considering the 4 Cs.

- a. Clusters are formed with nonverbal signs; examine them together.
- b. Consistency refers to examining the signals with personality and with other cues.
- c. Culture influences communication styles; this is a challenge with increased global workplace.
- d. Communication (asking) is the key to finding out if you question the message’s meaning.

Additional Resources for Students

Recommended readings (no texts should be more than two years old):

- Boone, Louis E. and David L. Kurtz. *Contemporary Business Communication*. Prentice Hall, Inc.
- Bovee, Courtland L. and John V. Thill. *Business Communication Today*. McGraw-Hill, Inc.
- Guffey, Mary Ellen. *Business and Administrations Communication*. South-Western Publishing Co.
- Himstreet, William C. and Wayne M. Baty. *Business Communication*. Kent Publishing Co.
- Lesikar, Raymond V. *Basic Business Communication*.
- Ober, Scott. *Contemporary Business Communication*.

- Wolf, P. and S. Kuiper. *Effective Communication in Business*.

Current issues of periodicals or business publications are also an excellent resource. Some of the following periodicals have an accompanying Web site.

<i>Current Periodical</i>	<i>Web Address</i>
<i>Gregg Reference Manual</i>	
<i>IAAP Complete Office Handbook</i>	http://www.iaap-hq.org/products/handbook.htm
<i>Modern Office Technology</i>	
<i>OfficePro</i>	http://www.iaap-hq.org/officepro/toc.htm
<i>The Office</i>	