

COMMUNICATING FOR RESULTS

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Abstract

This paper is designed to explore the very basics of communication. It recognizes that beyond an explication of the concepts of communication, there is a more serious need to provide across the board, vary situations of communication activities from writing to reading, speaking and listening, in order to effectively explore the mechanics of communication. In the main then, this paper recognizes that in all of life, communication is central. Consequently, it addresses human communication; principles, contexts and skills; audience communication, etc. All these are done in a bid to point at a particular direction: effective communication. There is also a conscious attempt in this paper to isolate for thorough scrutiny, writing and speaking as effective means/modes of communication. This is however referent to business communication. The reason for this is not far fetched most businesses fail as a result of management problems which often times, are tied to communication gaps. This study therefore, attempts to provide the balance for achieving results in this sphere of our socio-economic polity.

Introduction

Communication, both as a concept and phenomenon, has been variously defined. This variety of definitions stems from the fact that it is a cross between several disciplines. But most importantly, it is at the core of human development and this perhaps explains why so much attention has been given to it. At the end of this paper, it is intended that readers should be able to:

- (a) obtain, select and interpret information.
- (b) exchange information in writing
- (c) select and use correctly appropriate formats for the transfer of information
- (d) exchange information orally.
- (e) adapt communication to the needs of different recipients

Communication, in a nutshell, is generally thought to be a situation when information, of whatever sort, passes between people to affect an understanding. In a more circumscribed context, communication is seen as the exchange of meanings between individuals through a common system of symbols. This pre-supposes that for communication to take place there must be some kind of commonality between the referent and the referred, between the man communicating and the man to whom the message is addressed. It is this position that I.A. Richards (1967) tried to articulate when he said:

Communication, we shall say, takes place when one mind so acts upon His environment that another mind is influenced, and in that other mind, an experience occurs which is like the experience in the first mind and is caused in part because of the experience.

The forgoing isolates for us, very clearly, the entire concept of communication. The greatest contribution of Richards with the above extract, perhaps, is that it shows that to exist is to communicate and to communicate is to exist. Even De Vito, the great business communicator and Ugboajah have taken this same position. For instance, Ugboajah argues that:

To be is to communicate. Without communication, man is not different from the lower animals. Our ability to carry symbols around with us, to interpret them and relate them around, makes us distinct (from the lower animals). Without communication, man will cease to exist as social creatures because communication is a social affair (1985: 1)

Ugboajah's position is very clear. It would have been an exercise in futility if man acquired all the wisdom in the world without been able to share that same wisdom with his fellow man. Communication, therefore, has and will continue to be an invaluable feature of man, especially as without it, the human society will be inconceivable. Let us now shift the focus to communicating for results or effective communication. In most societies of the world, whether industrialized or not, there is a mutual relationship between effective communication and effective management. In other words, for results in whatever business to be achieved, there has to be very clear-cut lines of communication established. This has proved to be very important especially in organizational management. In fact, there are studies from the West which show with empirical evidence that about 90 percent of the time of all serious executives in an organization is taken up with one form of communication activity or the other. The obvious implication of this is that an activity which takes up about 90 percent of one's time can impair productivity if not effectively handed or conversely, it may enhance productivity if well managed.

This position has been recognized by management experts. Peter Drucker, the management consultant, for instance, argues that "No matter whether the manager's job is engineering, accounting or selling, his effectiveness depends on his ability to listen and read, or his ability to speak and write" (1954:24). The kernel of Drucker's argument can, of course, be said to be that the effectiveness of any manager is directly proportional to his communicating abilities. This is a position which Nelda Lawrence shares and which he captures more succinctly thus:

In business, a person's task as a writer takes equal rank with his assigned title, whatever that may be. You are an engineer-writer, a personnel manager-writer, an accountant-writer. When a company defines the various positions in the organization, it takes for granted that one routine function of each person is to

communicate appropriately with everyone in his circle of influence-above, below, and on the same level as his own job. Furthermore, the responsibility of contacting persons outside your company obligates you to present the company's news with sincerity, with facts, and with effective expression because to the outside reader you are the company. So your job has two parts: Doing something and telling about it (Lawrence, 1974: 1).

One point that is emphasized in both Drucker's argument and Lawrence's with reference to organizational communication, is that the task of effective communication cannot be left in hands of only the designated communicators. In other words, the secretariat or public relations department of any organization should not be left alone with the business of communicating. In more senses than one, virtually everybody in a particular organization has some form of communication to do, however unimportant the person or his job may be. Therefore, effective communication should be paid serious attention at every level of an organization's business.

Effective Communication: What is it?

Effective communication, in summary terms, is communication that achieves results. And this is usually prosecuted in several ways. Some of these include: Writing, speaking, listening and the use of audio-visual materials. Since most communication practical in organization take the form of writing, whether by way of memos, reports, assessments, etc., we shall concentrate on writing. But where necessary, we shall draw illustrative materials from the other wings of the communicative experience.

Effective writing, has been defined simply to be that which conveys its message in the simplest, clearest, most concise and most readable (pleasing) way possible (Adesanoye, 1991). Again, it can be argued that effective writing is that in which the manner of expression blends perfectly with the subject-matter. In other words, there is a logical follow-up between the what and the how.

To be able to achieve an effective written piece, two things must be observed or paid particular attention: The choice of words and the order of the words in the sentence. This is very important because the difference between a good writer (communicator) and a poor writer lies principally on these two isolated units. This is a position that has been recognized by William Strunk and E.B White in their book, *The Elements of Style*, (1979). Gordon Wainwright in his book, *People and Communication* (1979) has also taken this position. In fact, Wainwright (1979:37-39) goes further to provide a list of differences between the good and the poor writer. This list is presented below for easier understanding.

Poor Writer	Good Writer
(a) Does not always check the accuracy of what he has written.	a) Makes sure that what he writes is accurate (i.e. that the facts are correct and the content reliable).
(b) Does not control the length of what he writes.	b) Writes as briefly and concisely as the subject matter will allow.
(c) His meaning is not always clear.	c) Makes sure that his readers will clearly understand what he has written.
(d) Pays little attention to keeping what he writes as simple as possible.	d) Keeps what he writes as simple as the complexity of the content will allow.
(e) Is unable to see the order and arrangement of what he has to say to his purpose in writing and the nature of the material to ensure effectiveness.	e) Writes effectively by seeing the order and arrangement of what he has to say to his purpose in writing and the nature of the material itself.
(f) Has a clear sense of purpose in writing.	f) Defines his purposes clearly before writing.
(g) Carries out preparatory work haphazardly and does not write to a plan.	g) Prepares and plans his writing systematically.
(h) Is unable to change his style of writing to suit different purposes or materials.	Has the flexibility to change his style of writing to suit different purposes and materials.
(i) His writing contains many obvious structural and grammatical errors.	Writes correctly, within the limits allowed by current acceptable usage.
(j) Writes only when he cannot avoid it.	Enjoys writing and has experience of a wide range of writing activities.
(k) Has a limited vocabulary.	Has a wide and constantly developing vocabulary.
(l) Has difficulty in spelling correctly.	Spells correctly.
(m) Has difficulty in punctuating his writing effectively.	Uses appropriate punctuation with ease and effectiveness.
(n) His writing has no identifiable style and is not easy to read rapidly and efficiently.	Has a clearly identifiable personal writing style, which can be read rapidly and efficiently.
(o) Writes illegibly.	Writes legibly.
(p) Has a limited general background of knowledge and experience.	Has a broad general background of knowledge and experience and a thoughtful and critical approach to both.

Wainwright's classification is self explanatory. But for purpose of synthesis, we can effectively argue that the various items isolated in his table fall under five separate but inter-locking categories, viz; Accuracy, Brevity, Simplicity and Effectiveness. We shall discuss these very briefly.

- (1) Accuracy: The effective writer must ensure that whatever he writes is accurate. This is to say, the facts should be verifiable, the arguments should be soundly based, the reasoning should be logical, etc. care then, should be taken to ensure that nothing that is written down misinforms, misleads or unfairly persuades a reader. This is very true both in academic and industrial writings. Accurate information is an essential basis for effective communication.
- (2) Brevity: As the aphorism goes, brevity is the soul of business". Nothing that is written down should be longer than it need be. But brevity should not be achieved at the expense of committing essential and significant information. Therefore, the tag to be applied in achieving this is not "can it be left out" but "must it go in"?
- (3) Clarity: It is relatively easy for a writer to make things clear to his own satisfaction, but he must make an effort to ensure that his readers will also clearly understand him. One sure way to achieve this is to allow a period of at least twenty-four hours to elapse between the first draft of material and its review. This should permit him to approach the material with a degree of objectivity ask himself whether his readers will understand him clearly.
- (4) Simplicity: Usually, if a material is accurate, brief and clear, then it will also be as simple as it is possible to make it without distorting the meaning. Also if a writer can reduce what he intends to communicate to the very essentials, then he will be able to achieve an accurate, brief and clear piece of writing. Many of the problems experienced in communication derive from unnecessary complexity in expression. Perhaps, the most avowed reason for this is that many writers over-estimate the reading abilities of their audience. The average reader, it has been argued, has a reading speed of about 225 words per minute and a comprehension level of no more than 75 per cent for most materials he is likely to read in the course of a normal week. Therefore, he is not capable of talking things of any great difficulty especially if the time available to him for reading is limited.
- (5) Effectiveness: Effectiveness can be achieved if a writer pays adequate attention to all the aforementioned points. But the key to effectiveness probably lies in marrying the order and arrangement of what is being communicated with the purposes in writing and to the nature of the material itself. Besides, there are three ways in which points can be ordered in a writing piece. They are:
 - (a) Chronological order
 - (b) The order of ascending importance, in which the main point comes last;
 - (c) The order of descending importance in which the main point comes first.

However, before a writer begins to plan his materials, he should decide which of these arrangements will best meet his requirement. If the material is long for instance, it is quite possible that all the three arrangements will be used in different parts.

Before we leave the subject of writing, let us pause for a moment to consider how to prepare and write one of the more important instruments of business communication and this is the report.

Reports generally are produced in four states: preparation, planning, writing and revision. A mnemonic title for this approval is Paper Work. Three things must be known before work begins on the writing of the report.

They are:

- (a) What kind of report is required (i.e. its purpose and form).
- (b) What kind of information the report should contain (i.e. the nature of its content).
- (c) Who will read the report (i.e. its intended readership? In a sense, this constitutes the terms of reference and enables the writer to define the objectives of his report. It is only after this that work can effectively begin on the report.

Kinds of Reports

Reports can be seen from two perspectives:

- (a) according to their content and functions
- (b) according to their form and manner of expression.

Viewed from the perspective of content and function, reports may be progress reports (on work being done), completion reports (on work done) instruction reports (on work to be done), feasibility study reports, analytical reports, etc. Seen from the perspective of form and manner of expression, reports may be formal or informal, and long or short. They may be letter reports, memo reports, article reports, pro-forma reports, etc.

Content of Reports

Great care must be taken to separate facts from opinions, information from conditions, and the objective from the largely subjective, in reports. This is usually achieved by having separate sections for each. But generally, the body of report will contain an objective statement of facts relating to a problem or situation.

Readers of Reports

Reports are usually read by one or more groups they are:

- (a) The writer's sub-ordinate
- (b) The writer's colleague
- (c) The writer's superior
- (d) People outside an organization (for instance, the customers of a firm);
- (e) Two or more of the above groups.

It must be noted that the terms in which a report is written, the amount of information it contains, and the complexity of the report as a whole will change considerably according to the type of reader for whom it is primarily intended. It is advised however, that the intended readership is at all times kept clearly in mind so that the communication that takes place between the writer and the reader is not aberrant.

Objectives of Reports

A report may have one or more of the following objectives:

- (a) To inform others about a given problem or situation.
- (b) To persuade others to adopt a particular course of action in respect of a given problem or situation.
- (c) To indicate the likely effects of a proposed course of action.
- (d) To analyse and evaluate the results of work or research that has been carried out.
- (e) To provide an accurate record of a sequence of events, with interpretations of significance of particular events within the sequence.

Just as much as it is important for writers of reports to identify their audience before the actual business of writing, so also must they define their objectives before moving on to the main part of the preparatory stage which is the collection of information. Once the aforementioned steps have been taken into consideration, then the report is almost as good as ready. Now what is left to be addressed is yet another important area of communication and this is speaking.

Speaking or effective speaking for that matter is very important as a communication activity. This is because words underscore a number of situations and meanings and which in turn, help the audience to see itself as a partner in such a communication activity. Every so often, people receive invitations to speak at meetings or conferences or to serve on committees and or study groups. Sometimes this is seen as an arduous task, especially for those who are inexperienced in putting across a point of view. For this group, a methodical approach can save time and produce the confidence necessary for effective oral communication. One such approach is the SPEAKER method which consists of the following: Selection of subject, preparation and examination, Audience assessment, keeping it brief, expression and Rehearsal. Let us examine those briefly.

- (a) **Selection of subject:** Usually, most speakers have a free hand to select what to speak on. If the decision or choice is yours, select a topic which will enable you convey some of your interests in it to your audience. But if the choice is not yours, then find a way of doing your best with the topic. Usually this is achieved by researching into the topic or subject area.
- (b) **Preparation and Examination:** You must research into your subject area. You will speak more effectively if you are thoroughly familiar not only with the actual content of your speech but also with the topic in general. Examine your subjects from several angles, so that you can approach it in a new way for your audience. Also, in making your points, select not more than six main points to make.
- (c) **Audience Assessment:** It is usually helpful for the speakers to know how many people he will be speaking to, their approximate age range, whether male or female or both, whether the occasion would be formal or informal, the kind of room or hall he will be speaking in, and any other peculiar features about the audience. This is necessary for the speaker to be able to psyche up himself in readiness for the audience.

- (d) **Keeping it Brief:** Perhaps, this is the most important feature of the construction of any lecture or speech. There should be no room for verbosity. Keep your speech as concise as possible. The plan of your speech should be:
- (i) introduction tell them what you will be talking about,
 - (ii) body of speech develop your points (not more than six);
 - (iii) conclusion a brief summary of the main point made.
- (e) **Expression:** This is very important as it could make or mar your presentation. Speak naturally and avoid both over formality and a too casual approach. Speak with the aid of notes but have a full transcript ready in case you “dry up”.
Number the sheets of your notes and the points you wish to make clearly so that you do not confuse the order in which you want to say things. Speak clearly so that people at the back can hear you, but do not shout. Avoid mannerisms and posed and too much working about. Used concrete examples and (if they come naturally to you) anecdotes to reinforce the point you are making.
- (f) **Rehearsal:** This simply means practice and you can never over-emphasize it. Whenever possible, practice your speech before hand in private or in front of a sympathetic but critical friend. A tape recorder is useful here as it will tell you how you will sound to your audience.
There are several other hints to successful public speaking which we would consider. But perhaps the point to make is that the speaker himself must be a graceful person, very charismatic and must be willing to turn his disadvantages into plusses. Below are the other hints.
- (i) If your mouth dries up, relax your lower jaw, letting your lips scarcely touch each other, for a few seconds. You will feel your mouth watering and the dryness would disappear. Alternatively, suck a fruit sweet or chew some gum before going into the room where the speech will be made.
 - (ii) Remember the value of the pause in letting an important item of information sink in. Do not rush from statement to statement fearing that a pause means you have forgotten your point.

Work Sheet

Answer all questions as quickly as possible by selecting the most appropriate option to complete each statement.

- (1) Before a writer begins work on a report, he must know:
- (a) how long the report will be;
 - (b) when the report will be written;
 - (c) what his terms of reference are; (d) why he has been selected to write it.

- (2) The first stage in the production of a report is:
(a) the preparation
(b) the revision
(c) the writing
(d) the planning.
- (3) In collecting information for a report, a writer should obtain;
(a) only the information he will need;
(b) only the information he can
(c) twice as much information as he will need;
(d) all the information he can
- (4) The planning of report before writing it is:
(a) essential;
(b) desirable;
(c) unnecessary
(d) only necessary for poor writers.
- (5) Three good basic principles of effective writing are:
(a) neatness; cleanliness and shortness;
(b) accuracy, brevity and clarity;
(c) planning, abstruseness and preparation
(d) lay-out, legality, and loquacity.
- (6) In learning to increase your effectiveness in speaking, a tape recorder is useful because:
(a) you can hear the sound of your own voice;
(b) you can learn from others' mistakes;
(c) it helps to instill confidence;
(d) it enables you to refer back to actual performance.
- (7) An oral report will have:
(a) a predetermined, detailed structure;
(b) no signs of planning at all;
(c) the same structure as a debating speech;
(d) the basic structure of most speeches.
- (8) The last way to develop confidence in speaking is:
(a) though long training;
(b) by speaking only when necessary;
(c) though practicing as often as possible;
(d) by not being nervous.
- (9) Effective communication achieves:
(a) ambiguity;
(b) ambivalence
(c) clarity and understanding;
(d) a false confidence.
- (10) Communication is important because;
(a) we have to make money in business;
(b) we do not want to lose contact with other people
(c) all of life's activities depend on it;
(d) it helps us to interpret and understand the world

Conclusion

In concluding this paper, it is important to state that communication is very crucial to every human activity. In every sphere of life, the need for mutual and symbiotic relationship cannot be over emphasized whether at war time or peace time. Communication is very central to business both at the micro and macro levels. Where there is a break down of communication no deal is signed. It is against this background that we have isolated in this paper the trajectory of issues that constitute effective communication whether in writing, speaking, broadcast and/or other para-linguistic approaches. To communicate for result, one must not only be focused, but one must also acquire the appropriate skills in order to achieve deliverables.

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