

COMMUNICATION SKILLS IN AN ORGANIZATIONAL SETTING WITH EMPHASIS ON REPORT WRITING, BRIEFING AND RECORDING OF MINUTES OF MEETINGS

Ewulo Maria Olanrewaju

Institutional Seminar

Ogun State Institute of Technology, Igbesa, Ogun State

Abstract

The crucial need to upgrade professional ethics in various businesses; organizations and institutions call for effective communication skills in the daily operations of the employees and the management. To address the situation, this paper has delved into the following concepts of organizational communication, which are: types, purpose and factors that influence communications; the communication skills of listening, speaking, reading, writing and their application in an organizational setting; report writing, types, characteristics of a good report and report format, briefing, and recording minutes of a meeting. The overriding conclusion is that the acquisition of communication and interpersonal skills make for better services and greater productivity.

Introduction

Communication is the exchange of information by the sender to the receiver with the purpose of receiving a feedback. It is a lifelong activity starting from the cries of a new born baby to call the attention of the mother or care-giver to attend to his needs, as a child develops. Communication becomes more complex. A child has to develop certain skills such as speaking, listening, reading, writing and even observing become part of the communication process. Today, other methods of communication include letter writing, telephone conversations, and electronic media such as voice mails and video conferencing which allows people in different locations to exchange messages quickly and conveniently.

Types of Communication

Three main categories of communication are oral, written and non-verbal.

Oral Communication – uses spoken words to exchange ideas and information. This includes one-to-one conversations, meeting, voice-mail messages and telephone conferencing, spoken messages can be sent instantaneously and usually result in source immediate feedback. The disadvantage to oral communication is that there is often little opportunity to reflect on what is said.

Written Communication – can include letters, memorandums, electronic mails, reports, news releases, tables, diagrams, charts and graphs. The advantage here is that written communication provides proof that the information was exchanged. The disadvantage to written communication is that immediate feedback may not always be possible.

Non-Verbal Communication – this is communication without words. Without saying a word, you can express your feelings with body language such as gestures, facial expressions, and body movements or positions. Many times, the non-verbal message is stronger and therefore more believable than the verbal message. The non-verbal message also may reinforce or contradict the verbal message. Combining oral and non-verbal communication techniques makes communication more effective “actions speak louder than words”.

Purpose of Communication

These include the following:

To inquire

To inform

To persuade

To develop goodwill

It all depends on the needs to be met by the sender and the receiver.

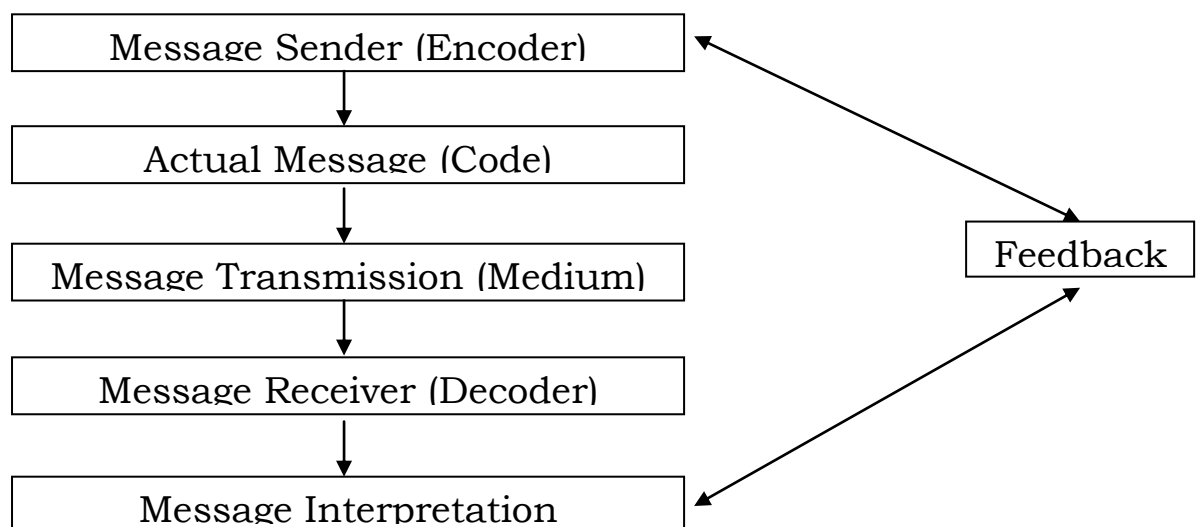
Components of Communication

Communication can take place only if we have both a sender and a receiver whether we are speaking or writing. The six basic components of communication are as follow:

1. Message sender (Encoder): the sender composes the message (code), he/she may be a writer, a speaker or a person who sends a non-verbal message through gestures and body language.

2. Actual message (Code): this may be written, oral or non-verbal or it may be a combination of two or more types of communication.
3. Message transmission (Medium): Written messages can be sent in the form of letters, memorandums and reports. They could also be sent electronically using fax machines or electronic mail. Oral messages can be delivered through face-to-face conversations, meetings, presentations, telephone conversations and voice mails. Non-verbal messages include gestures, body language and facial expressions.
4. Message receiver (Decoder): the receiver’s knowledge, interest and emotional state will affect how the message is received.
5. Message Interpretation: the receiver takes in the message and breaks it down into meaningful units in order to interpret the message. The interpretation may be different from the intended or actual messages.
6. Feedback: Both the sender and the receiver respond to each other in writing, orally, non-verbally, or in a combination of these ways, it could be a written responses, verbal questions, and non-verbal gestures such as body language and facial expressions.

Fig. 1 The Communication Model



Culled from College Communication (Camp and Satterwhite)

Factors that Influence Communication

Four factors that influence communication either favourably or unfavourably are:

- B - Background of the sender
- A - Appearance of the receiver of the sender or presentation of the sender's communication
- B - Barriers to effective communication
- L - Language skills of the sender and the receiver.

Background of the Receiver

The receiver's possible reaction and response to the message can be determined by the following:

1. The previous knowledge both the sender and receiver already had about the message and the language used in the message.
2. The personality of the receiver as regards the emotions, attitudes and prejudices that are likely to influence the way the message is interpreted.
3. The receiver's experience that is relevant to the message content.
4. The receiver's interest and motivation regarding the subject of the message.

The communicator who considers these factors and anticipates the receiver's need before preparing the message stands a greater chance that his or her message will be accepted by the receiver than the person who ignores these factors.

Appearance of the Sender or of the Sender's Communication

The good appearance of the sender of the message, a distinct audible speech free of grammatical errors, a letter clearly written, devoid of errors and well presented go a long way to achieve positive responses from the receiver.

Barriers to Effective Communication

Barriers are factors that interfere with communication and might negatively affect the intended message. Barriers include physical distractions, emotional distractions, and cultural language differences. Physical distractions include noisy environment, poorly lighted, too warm

or too cold, it could also be a poorly written message, full of errors, emotional disturbances such as sorrow, anger or thinking about a personal matter distract the receiver's attention and interpretation of the message. Language differences in attention and misunderstandings caused by different interpretations of a word or an expression can have a negative influence on the communication process; cultural diversity can also be a barrier to effective communication.

The Communication Skills

Communication is a partnership in which both the sender and the receiver have the responsibility of acquiring the basic skills of listening, speaking, reading and writing. These skills are interconnected and reinforce one another. Communications are paired: speaker-listener and writer –reader. Oral communication requires a speaker and a listener. It is most effective when the sender has good speaking skills and the receiver has good listening skills. Similarly, written communication requires a writer and a reader, written communication is most effective when the sender has good writing skills and the receiver has good reading skills.

Listening skill - there are two types of listening; passive and active listening. In passive listening, the receiver is an inactive participant in the communication process; he simply hears the message but can hardly recall anything. In active listening you are able to jot down important points by taking note of the salient points in the message, ask and answer the questions to clarify the information received and obtain additional information.

Speaking skills - Speaking can be an excellent medium of expression. A good listener is often a good speaker. You provide feedback by letting the speaker know you understand by offering advice or asking for more details.

Reading skills - Reading is one of the major means of obtaining information. It may be in printed form such as a book or magazine or in electronic form on a computer screen. Reading is an efficient way to learn because it allows you to control the flow of information. You can

take notes or re-read a passage you have not fully understood or skip over materials you do not need.

In your profession, you read memos, letters, reports, computer manuals, schedules, procedures manuals, and policy manuals. All these require reading skills.

Writing skills - Writing skills are important for communicating and creating information. Writing is probably the communication skill that is least used in our personal lives today. The major advantage of writing is that it provides a physical record of a communication that can be used as proof if necessary.

We write to take care of our personal and business correspondence such as letters of appointment, request, complaints and notifications.

Excellent writing skills can help you earn better grades on research papers and tests. On the job, you use your writing skills to compose electronic mail messages, memos, letters and reports.

Application of Communication Skills in an Organization

The four communication skills are interconnected and using all of them as the situation demands will strengthen your ability to communicate. No matter what your job is, your working day is basically a constant flow of information. As an employee in an institution, you will communicate with co-workers, management staff, and administrative staff in a variety of settings. You do this by giving information, listening or reading information provided by others. This enables you to keep informed and tap into an address supply of ideas and solutions to problems.

Flow of Communication within an Organization

Communication links members of a certain department and also provides a vital link between people in different departments.

Good communication makes an organization operate efficiently, creates a sense of unity, a team spirit and a striving for common goals among employees. Communication within an organization may be upward, lateral and downward.

Upward communication is communicating with people who rank above you.

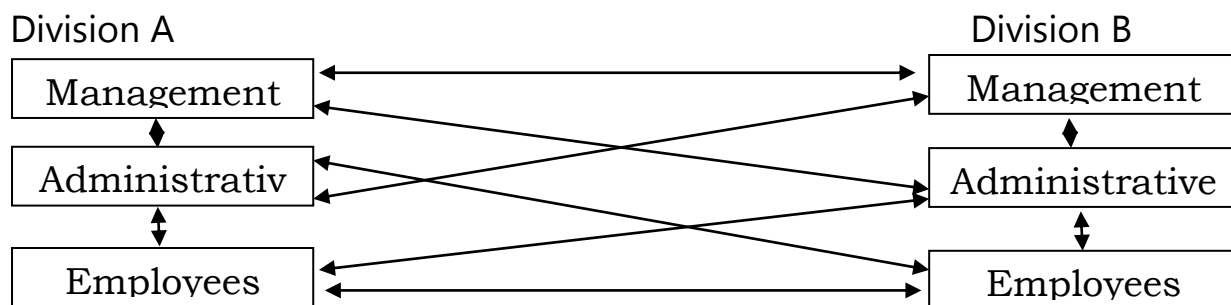
Lateral or horizontal communication is communicating with people who are at the same rank or level as you.

Downward communication is communicating with people who rank below you.

The direction your communication is flowing will influence how you communicate: the words you use and the methods you choose.

Fig 2 Flow of Communication within an Organization

Communication within an organization flows in three directions; upwardly, laterally and downwardly – to accomplish organizational directives.



Culled from College Communication (Camp and Satterwhite)

Types of Organizational Communication

Communication in an organization is of two categories: internal communication and external communication. Tone in this concept is the general manner of expression or effect of a written document, discussion or speech. The tone in internal communication usually differs from that used in external communication.

Internal Communication

This is the transmittal of information between and among persons within an organization. It is used to accomplish organizational goals and objectives. Internal communication may be carried out within the same department, in other departments and at other locations of the organization. Employees may communicate individually or as members

of a team. It may include face-to-face conversations, telephone calls, electronic mail messages and brainstorming ideas at a meeting. In internal communication, a person's tone may be friendly and informal. An employee must assess a situation and use the most appropriate tone. E.g. the tone you will use to suggest an idea to make your department move productive to your colleague is different from the tone you will use to communicate the same idea to your director.

External Communication

External communication is the transfer of information to and from people outside the organization. In external communication a person's tone more often is polite and formal. Using the right tone in external communication is more challenging than using the right tone in internal communication because in external communication you are representing your organization as well as yourself. The public is your client and often they will base opinions not only on what you say or write but also on your appearance and manner. This creates a first impression in their mind and determines how closed your client will pay attention to what you have to say.

The six Cs apply to any communication situation, whether in speaking or writing, and whether you are communicating with someone inside or outside your organization. These are clear, complete, concise, consistent, correct and courteous. Using the six Cs makes your communication coherent and easy to follow.

1. **Clear:** the information must be clear and specific
2. **Complete:** the message must give enough details and answer the questions: who? What? Where? When? Why? How?
3. **Concise:** unnecessary words must be eliminated, use few words to express the idea you are communicating.
4. **Consistent:** all communications must be in fact treatment and sequence.
5. **Correct:** the information must be accurate in content, the spellings, capitalization, grammar, and punctuation.
6. **Courteous:** use the You-attitude instead of the I-attitude. That means keeping the reader or listener in mind when you write or say something. Use positive words instead of negative words. Use

tactful language and formats e.g. graphs, tables, short paragraphs that are easy to read and comprehend.

Report Writing

A report is an evaluative account given about an event that may have taken place. In an organization reports are written on almost every aspect of the organization such a study carried out on a proposed project workability of a policy such as staff punishment or promotion, workability of a staff welfare package etc. The report must contain necessary information that will be useful and relevant to the decision makers by the time the investigation submits their findings and recommendations. The aim of writing a report is to aid the decision of the management.

Kinds of Report

There are two kinds of report:

Short and Long Report

The short report is short in length e.g. the information report which brings out mainly some useful facts, for example News Report.

Long Report has extensive coverage of the subject and there is no attempt to abridge the presentation. The format is as follows;

Title page, Table of Contents, Abstract, Acknowledgement, Limitations of the study, Terms of reference, Methods of Investigations, Findings, Conclusion, Recommendation, Bibliography and Appendix

Types of Report

Formal and informal Report

The formal report is an official document prepared by a member of staff in order to discharge part of his duties e.g. the report of a workshop attended in the course of duty.

Types of Formal Report

The Routine Report: this is a report submitted periodically at regular intervals as part of a worker's daily responsibility e.g. the nurse is expected to take body temperature and pulse of her in-patients at

regular intervals. It can be a pre-designed form to be filled-in for the updating of data.

The Special Report: this is prepared as a response to a significant and unusual development. They are usually long reports and involve the setting up of a committee to investigate the case and make recommendations.

The Technical Report: this report has a specialized field where a group of experts work using a highly technical language and related diagrams.

The Analytic Report: this is used to study observable trends and give critical evaluations e.g. the Ministry of Education may want to know the Impact of Mass Failure in English and Mathematics on University Admission.

Writing of Formal Report

Formal business report in addition to being longer than the informal memorandum report are usually concerned with more complex problems and questions necessitating investigation, analysis, research and documentation.

There are some variations in the style and form used in formal reports, which are determined by the nature of the subject being investigated. For example: a technical report may be organized in outline form with very little text, while a scientific report may include many tables, graphs and charts. A business report is mainly narrative with tabular material. Before writing a formal report, the writer must determine the purpose and the scope of the report, gather reliable facts, assemble and analyze those facts, draw conclusions from the factual analysis.

Finally, makes recommendations in view of the organizational needs.

Fig 3. Table of Content for a Formal Report

<i>Introduction</i>	-	1
<i>Statement of Purpose</i>	-	1
<i>Scope or Limitation</i>	-	2
<i>Procedures</i>	-	3-4
<i>Summary</i>	-	5
<i>Body of Report</i>	-	6-9
<i>Conclusions and Recommendations</i>	-	10-11

Appendix	-	12-13
Bibliography	-	14

However, an informal report is made without serious official accompaniment, and usually in oral form. A mechanical engineer may want to give his director an update on the repair of an automobile engine.

Proficiency in the use of the language, organizational data presented and good writing skills are best practices in the writing of both long and short report.

Characteristics of a Good Report

Clarity – avoid the use of ambiguous language to prevent misinterpretation

Conciseness – be specific

Objectivity – be truthful and unbiased. Verify the data and avoid illogical conclusion.

Briefing

A brief is the instruction that a person is given, explaining what his or her job is and what his or her duties are. In a briefing the communicator gives precise instruction or essential information to the employee. Such instructions are meant to be executed by the employee. Briefing follows in the line of formal communication in an organization. The **six Cs** of effective communication must be follow in giving a briefing.

- Instructions must be clear, complete, concise, consistent, correct and courteous.
- Know the strategic group or person you are addressing i.e. the level of education, experience and maturity
- The personality of the receiver
- Be tactful and courteous
- The content of information must be brief and arranged in order of priority.
- Allow for feedback through questions and answers to clarify issues.

Minutes of Meetings

It is important that organizations keep records of proceedings of meetings called minutes to serve as permanent records of decisions reached and actions that are to be taken. Minutes also help to inform those who were not at the meeting. Minutes must be accurately written because they serve as the only historical record of a meeting.

Recording the Minutes

The agenda of a meeting is a brief chronological list of the business to be transacted and acts as a guide to the person presiding at the meeting. The agenda must be prepared before hand as it helps the secretary check that all scheduled items are accounted for in the minutes. The secretary recording the minutes must be very good in the use of English and note taking. The following general guidelines will be helpful in recording the proceedings of a meeting:

- ⌘ List the name of the group, committee, or team and whether the meeting is a regular or special one.
- ⌘ Record the day, date, time and place of the meeting.
- ⌘ List the persons attending and those absent. In a small group, list actual name; in a large group, however, either state the number of people present, as in "Forty-five members were present," or list the names of the absentees only.
- ⌘ In the opening section of the minutes, mention that the minutes for the previous meeting were read and approved, amended, or not approved.
- ⌘ Record the important points in the discussion of each item on the agenda. Presenting supporting facts helps those who were present recall the discussion and informs those who were not present. Reports or papers read during the meeting are often attached to the final minutes because it is usually not possible for the assistant to record verbatim all such information.
- ⌘ Record verbatim all resolutions and motions, as well as the names of the persons who introduced and seconded the motions. If the assistant should request that the motion be repeated or even put in writing so that the exact motion is recorded.

- ⌘ Keyboard, edit and prepare the minutes in final form. Sometimes, the assistant may want to get another person's approval before issuing the minutes in final form. The assistant signs the minutes, thus certifying their accuracy according to his or her notes. Sometimes the presiding officer countersigns them.
- ⌘ File one copy of the minutes in the folder, notebook, or binder used for this purpose. Usually minutes are duplicated and sent to each member of the group and to designated officer who would be interested in the business of the meeting.

Conclusion and Recommendation

There is need to sharpen your writing skills and apply interpersonal skills in all forms of organizational communication. To sharpen your writing skills you must use words effectively, master spelling techniques, structure phrases and clauses carefully in order to write effective sentences and build effective paragraphs. Revise, edit and proofread your writings. Also develop the reading culture. Application of human relations skills or interpersonal skill involves the ability to understand and deal with people in such a way that a favourable relationship and goodwill are maintained.

- Use the 'you attitude' which shows you are considerate e.g. 'Your presence is needed in the Rector's office'.
- Demonstrate a positive attitude and build good working relationships with peers, superiors, subordinates, students, and parents. Be enthusiastic about your job, cooperate with others, control your emotions and demonstrate a positive attitude.
- Be considerate, courteous, honest and patient in dealing with others.
- Be a good listener, show interest. Ask questions and take notes.
- Maintain confidentiality, release information to authorized personnel only and at the appropriate time.

Practicing human relations techniques described above will help you improve your communication skills.

References

- Camp and Satterwhite (1998) *College Communication*. MC graw Hill Publishers. USA.
- Ewulo, M.O, (2014) *Communicative Competence in Business Communication*. Godspeed Publishers, Lagos.
- Ewulo, M.O. (2013) *Effective Business Communication Skills I*. Godspeed Publishers. Lagos.
- Jiboku, O. (2000) *Communication in Organizations*. Antonio Nigeria Publishers Ltd. Lagos.
- Mgbemata A.J (2011) '*The Use of Communication: An Assessment of the Communicative Competence of Undergraduates in Written Discourse*' in English Language Teaching Today.

Reference to this paper should be made as follows: Ewulo Maria Olanrewaju (2016), Communication Skills in an Organizational Setting with Emphasis on Report Writing, Briefing and Recording of Minutes of Meetings. *J. of Education and Leadership Development Vol. 8, No. 2, Pp. 18-31.*
