UNIT 1: INTRODUCTION TO COMMUNICATION

UNIT STRUCTURE

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1.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit, you will be able to -

- Know what is communication
- Know the types of communication
- understand the significance of communication

1.2 INTRODUCTION

Communication is a natural and cyclical process where an individual transmits an information, knowledge, signals thought or an idea (written words, non-verbal/ gestures, spoken words) with oneself or with others. It is a mechanism where we establish and modify relationships. According to Oxford dictionary, 'communication is the activity or the process of expressing ideas and feelings or of giving people information.' Communication is a continuous process and one starts to learn since childhood. The word 'communication' is derived from the Latin word 'communicare' or 'communico' which means 'to share'. It comprises of three important elements, that is, sender, message and receiver.In simple words, communication means the interaction between the sender and the receiver. Communication is said to be effective only when the message conveyed by the sender is understood

by the receiver and reciprocate a response or encourage the receiver to put out new ideas. There are various media to exchange one's thought, that is, old or new medium. Communication takes place in every sphere of life; when you talk to a friend about a latest movie or any issue or through public announcements, notices etc. In this unit we shall try to understand different meaning and definition and different concepts associated with communication.

1.3 COMMUNICATION: MEANING AND DEFINITION

Communication is a familiar term which is used in every aspect of life. In simple words, the interaction or sharing of information is called communication. To share any ideas, signs, opinions, thoughts or information, communication is essential for every individual in the social environment. It is an integral process of the society. As individual interacts he/she is simultaneously communicating. An individual has to communicate with a shopkeeper, government officials, village headman, colleagues, friends and even his family members. But the interaction with different individuals differ. For example- one does not share the same relationship with his/her friend and the shopkeeper. There exists a personal relationship with the friend where he/she shares emotions, feelings, thoughts, etc. Whereas, there lies an economic relationship between the shopkeeper and the customer as the communication is based on economic activities like bargaining, etc.The relationship is either intrapersonal (with oneself) or interpersonal (face-to-face or dyadic or mass or group communication). Intrapersonal communication involves communication with oneself based on three aspects, self-awareness, perception and expectation. For example- planning something, analysing a situation, diary or journal writing, praying, rehearsing a message before saying it to anyone else, etc. Interpersonal communication means interaction between different persons. It takes place with face-to face interaction between two persons (dyadic communication), between a group (group communication), or among a large number of persons (public communication). There is a feedback and response from the receiver. For

example- proving knowledge to students, clearing their doubts or motivating them, meeting, interaction at a cultural meet, etc.

The process of communication involves-

a) The Sender has a thought or an idea.

b) Encoding of the idea by the sender.

c) Transmitting of the idea.

d) Message is received by the receiver.

e) Decoding of the message by the receiver.

f) Feedback to the sender.

The concept of communication has been defined by several scholars in various ways. Mentioned below are some definitions of communication, given by different scholars.

John Adair defines communication as "Communication is essentially the ability of one person to make contact with another and make himself or herself understood".

Louis Allen defines communication as "Communication is the sum of the things one person does when wants to create understanding in the minds of other. Communication is a bridge of meaning. It involves a systematic and continuous process of telling, listening, and understanding".

Keith Davis defines communication as "Communication is the process of passing information and understanding from one person to another".

From the above description, we can say that communication is a two-way process where a sender and a receiver transmit a message through a medium or channel. This message can be either intrapersonal or interpersonal. A message varies with different persons based on the relationship sender has with the receiver.

As communication is a continuous process, the message sent by the sender will have a response from the receiver; the sender then replies or send a response to the receiver to which the receiver responses and the process continues. It is also a cooperative process as both sender and receiver must have a cooperation to have an effective communication. Communication can be formal or informal and the flow of information and

ideas is either oral (face-to face), written (journals, books, magazines) or through gestures or non-verbal (signs, symbols,). It is a purposive activity which aims at creating awareness or gathering information about a certain topic, action, procedure or ideas.

1.4 CONCEPTS OF COMMUNICATION IN SOCIAL SCIENCES

Communication covers all aspects of society, that is, social, economic, and political. Social science deals with human society and social relationship and behaviour of human in relation to various aspects within society. It deals with the relationship between the actors, their role, status, views and norms of the society. For example- the relationship between the father and daughter is different from the relationship between boss and the employee. Again, social science has its cultural implications on values, ethics, beliefs, morals, norms, etc. These are also affected by the interrelationship. An interpretation about a word, symbol or signs depends on cultural background. As culture varies from society to society, so does the interpretation. For example- it is normal to touch an eldes feet in one culture while it might be a cultural shock for another culture.

To understand the meaning of an interaction, we need to understand what society is and how it functions. Also, it is important to know why people act and react differently in society. To understand communication in social science, we can understand with the following concepts.

Social communication- Society is a web of social relationships, which means interaction with one or more individuals, and so, communication is deeply rooted in society. Sociology and Communication deal with the message, to whom it is meant for, the content, the message and the feedback. To N. Luhmann, communication takes place due to three important elements, that is, the selection of the information, the selection of the form, and the selection of the understanding (Anderson 2003).

Communication has impacts on people. Its main aim is to Read, Understand and React. The important part of communication is to make

people interact in society with different people and society at large. Once one understands the functions and structures of society, it becomes easy for an individual to share the ideas and thoughts and communicate with others. This interaction starts from home itself and leads to school and community at large as each individual has different status or role, thinks differently and based on social skills. Thus, here sociology plays an important role to understand the interaction and the relationship one has in formal or informal settings.

Cultural Communication- This aspect deals with how an individual understands different cultures, how they percieve the differences, languages or way of speaking speaking, communicating in the world around them. The culture rely on complex aspects like social class, status, power, values, ethics, etc. It helps people express their social and psychological thoughts. It promotes creative and innovative ideas.

Political Communication- Communication is an integral part of politics which influences the decision making process of the audiences by political officials, pressure groups, business sectors, etc. through a media (broadcast or print). The three important compositions of political communication are : it focuses on source and motivation; its flows from political sphere and always have a political aim; it fosters, education, relationship and trade. It also encourages completion and conflict as well as cooperation and cultural exchange. In political sphere, communication acts as a bridge between the government and the citizens.

Economic Communication-Economics and communication are interconnected as communication creates wealth from information gathered from individuals, states, group, organisation, institutions and international bodies. It helps connecting people and organising them to achieve the desired goals and these are regarded as the main principles of economic communication.

1.5 COMMUNICATION: TYPES AND ITS NEEDS

Communication basically involves the interaction and exchange of ideas, thoughts, feelings, emotions and information in the form of message between two or more persons. It will not be effectual if the message is not clearly interpreted by the receiver.

Broadly, communication is divided in two categories-

- **Formal Communication**

Formal communication is a form of communication which takes place in a systematic manner and through a pre-defined channels. It takes place in governmental departments, firms, NGOs, and other organisations for transferring instructions, orders, policies, plans, etc.

Formal communication can be further divided into -

- ***Upward Communication:*** This type of communication takes place when an idea flows from lower authority to a person with higher rank in the society. This kind of communication mostly takes place in an organisation. For example- between employees through feedback and suggestions, clarifications and grievances, etc.
- ***Downward Communication:*** This takes place when flow of information takes place from higher to lower. It moves downward in an organisation, that is, from higher authorities to middle to the lower employees in organisational ladder. It is a hierarchical process. It is generally used for sharing instructions, giving directions, explaining policies, etc.
- ***Horizontal Communication:*** This type of communication takes place where the exchange of ideas and information takes place among the people of same rank. In a similar type of work, co-ordination is important for achieving the desired meaning or result.

- **Informal Communication**

Informal communication, on the other hand, deals with the communication with close members, that is, family, friends, etc. It takes place through informal groups existing within or outside a formal structure. It does not have any specific flow of information through a prescribed channel

or medium. For example- Discussing about holiday trip, or about latest movie on social issues, etc.

Communication can also be divided into three types based on how the message is being conveyed. They are as follows-

- **Verbal communication** - In verbal communication, message is conveyed orally through face-to-face interaction or through a medium or a mechanical device. It involves listening to a person in order to understand the meaning attached to the message. For example- face-to face interaction, radio broadcast, etc.
- **Non-verbal communication**–Communication which takes place without the use of spoken language, speech or words is called non-verbal communication. Here, the message is conveyed through signs, symbols or gestures. This is also known as gestural communication. For example- facial expression-smile, flown, eye movement, body movement, voice modulation, etc. Non-verbal communication acts as supplementation and strength for verbal communication. It makes communication easily understandable. This type of communication is studied by different social scientists as it differs from culture to culture.

➢ **Signs-** Signs have greater amount of meaning in it. The most common signs that we encounter in our daily life is through pictures, postures like man standing with hand poster of 'stop' gestures. In all known cultures, these signs are meant for sharing simple and common meaning. The meaning of signs in a society depends upon colour, settings, locations, etc. For example- the reverse 'V' sign speaks louder than words in many cultures.

➢ **Symbols-** Symbols and signs are different as symbols are those which are put forth by an individual's perceptions. Symbols are analogues or metaphor (written or spoken) which have some amount of reality in it. These symbols are not language by itself but with these difficult and dangerous meaning can be easily interpreted in a society. For example- the meaning involved with a wedding ring or a totemic symbol prevent in a society.

- **Gestures-** Body gestures have unique meaning in different cultures. It includes, gestures, facial expression and bodily gestures used by people in social interaction. As oral language, gestures also expresses our ideas, thoughts, and emotions. The alternative term 'kinesics' (R. L. Birdwhistell, Kinesics and Context,1970) is sometimes used in psychology, to refer to body movements which convey information in the absence of speech, and the study of such movements. (Oxford Dictionary of Sociology, 2009)
- **Written Communication**- It refers to the message which is delivered in a written or text form. For example- orders, instructions, reports, posters, etc. This type of communication is necessary as it creates a permanent record and allows to store the information for further references. For an effective communication, the information should be complete, correct, credibility, clarity, concise, validity and consideration.

Communication is essential for social being. In social and cultural reality, we need to interact with communities and people around us, to make sense of the world and to some extent of ourselves. The main need of communication is to convey a message and to change or guide an individual's behaviour or action. The interrelationship provides a need for releasing one's emotions or feelings and fulfilment of social needs.

Communication does not just end in talks and gestures. Listening, understanding and interpretation are important ingredients. Incomplete and incorrect way of communication can be dangerous and can destroy a personal, professional or a social relationship. As a social being, we need to express and understand the thoughts of others. Human relations thrive on communication. Different civilizations have risen and fallen based on the relationship it had with rest of the world. It is difficult to maintain a relationship if the lubricant of communication is not effective. Thus, the significance of communication can be understood in every sphere of life.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q.1 What is meant by communication?

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Q.2 From where the word communication is derived?

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Q.3 What are the two important types of communication? Give examples of formal and informal communication.

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1.6 LETS SUM UP

- Communication is a two way process where a sender and receiver plays a significant role in transmitting ones ideas, thoughts or knowledge.
- To make this relationship effective the meaning of the message should be clear, precise, complete and concrete.
- Communication is a continuous and cyclical process.
- Communication takes place between different people in the society and it can be dyadic communication, group communication or mass communication.
- The process of communication involves, the idea, encoding of the idea, transmitting of the idea, receiving of the message, decoding of the message and sharing the feedback to the sender.
- Communication covers the various aspects of the society, that is, social, economic, political and cultural.
- Sociology and communication go hand in hand. They have a deep rooted relationship as without communication or interaction a society cannot function.

- The most important aspects of communication are Read, Understand and React.
- It helps to understand the functions and structures of society and provides an easy way for an individual to share the ideas and thoughts, feelings, values, beliefs, emotions and communicate with others.
- Communication influences the decision making process of the actors or audiences like pressure groups, business sectors, terrorist groups, political officials, etc. through a media (broadcast or print).
- Upward communication takes place when an idea flows from lower authority to a person with higher rank in the society.
- Downward communication takes place when the flow of information or ideas takes place from higher to lower. It moves downward in an organisation, that is, from higher authorities to middle to the lower employees in organisational ladder.
- Informal communication deals with the communication with close members, that is, family, friends, etc.
- Verbal communication, message is conveyed orally through face-to-face interaction or through a medium or a mechanical device.
- Communication which takes place without the use of spoken language, speech or words is called non-verbal communication.
- Signs, symbols and gestures have large impact on different cultures as it brings with it meaning that varies in community or society.



1.7 FURTHER READING

1. Anderson, N. A. (2003). *Discursive analytical strategies: understanding Foucault, Koselleck, Laclau, Luhmann*. Bristol: Policy Press
2. Steinberg, Sheila. (2007). *An Introduction to Communication Studies*, Juta&Co.Ltd.