

Chapter 1

What is communication?

One cannot not communicate.

Watzlawick, Beavin and Jackson, *Pragmatics of Human Communication*, 1968

This chapter provides a general introduction and background to the whole book by explaining four important aspects of communication:

- 1 How we experience communication, and how this experience can be analysed.
- 2 How communication serves our personal, social, economic, creative and play needs.
- 3 Ways of describing and explaining communication processes.

SATURDAY MORNING

SPOTS? TRY THIS. IT'S NEW
CLEARASIL COMPLETE. IT'S FIVE TIMES BETTER
THAN SOAP AND IT'S DEAD SIMPLE!

SOUNDS A BIT
LIKE YOUR MEN!

IF CLEAR, RADIANT SKIN IS WHAT YOU WANT, THEN NEW CLEARASIL COMPLETE FACEWASH IS A DEAD SIMPLE WAY TO HELP STOP SPOTS.

IT'S FIVE TIMES BETTER THAN ORDINARY SOAP AT BEATING SPOTS* AND AVAILABLE IN AN EASY TO USE PUMP ACTION BOTTLE.

CLEARASIL COMPLETE FIGHTS BACTERIA BUILD-UP WITH ITS DEEP CLEANSING MICROBEAD FORMULA AND SPECIAL SPOT STUFF, BUT IS STILL GENTLE ENOUGH TO USE EVERYDAY.

AND WITHIN WEEKS, YOU'LL KNOW THAT WITH CLEARASIL COMPLETE THERE'S NO EASIER WAY TO CLEARER, SMOOTHER SKIN.

ALL YOU NEED TO HELP BEAT SPOTS!

*CLINICAL STUDY RUN OVER 4 WEEKS



1 How do we experience communication?

CATHY'S STORY

Cathy was a bouncy kind of person. Even her hair, which caused her private despair, was springy and irrepressible. One of her friends had nicknamed her Tigger. Cathy wasn't sure if that was a compliment or not. But it didn't stop her being disgracefully cheerful in the morning. This one was no exception. Most of her friends were sitting at the table in the college canteen like a scene from Return of the Zombies. Cathy was punching buttons on the juke box and then chatting to the assistant on the till before she came bouncing back to the table. Tom was out of it anyway. You could hear his music even though it was coming through his headphones. Jacob had his head in his hands, but was not dying, only looking at a music mag. Sarah was reading a chapter for the next class, which she should have done a week ago. Cathy felt guilty at this, and pulled out her folder. She was looking at her notes, but not really concentrating. She had put in for entertainments officer in the union elections and this was very much on her mind. She wouldn't say anything to the others, but she really wanted to win the election. She had run her own poster campaign and had even made a tape for the college radio, with Jacob's help. Only the lecturer running the course had vetoed electioneering on the radio. Cathy glanced at her watch. She had just remembered that she wanted to photocopy something, and the class time was coming up. Tom waved his hand languidly as Cathy bounced out of the canteen.

ABOUT CATHY'S STORY

If you were asked to spot references to communication in this story, you would probably refer to objects that communicate: things like magazines or television are what many people immediately associate with the word 'communication'. In fact we also experience communication through other things such as talk and gestures. One could say that all such examples are, in one way or another, means of communication. See what you can find in the story, and see if you can guess what affects how the people in it communicate, or don't, as the case may be.

1.1 Means of communication

In this case, communication is defined in terms of the means by which it takes place. It seems that if we are talking about radio, or painting, for example, then we must be talking about communication. But this isn't good enough because it doesn't tell us how the means of communication is being used. It doesn't tell us why the communication is happening. In fact, it doesn't tell us a lot of things, all of which partly answer our main question, what is communication?

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Still, we have to start somewhere, and it is useful to sort out how one describes the many means of communication that we use and experience. Not all of them are, strictly speaking, individual and separate forms. So we suggest that you use the following three terms:

(a) Form of communication

is a way of communicating such as speaking or writing or drawing.

Forms are distinct and separate from one another in so far as they have their own system for putting the message across. So, when marks are made on paper according to certain rules (such as those of grammar and spelling), then we create words and the 'form' of writing.

As a generalization, many of what we would call 'forms' are ways of communicating which we control directly, such as non-verbal communication (gestures, facial expressions, etc.).

(b) Medium of communication

is a means of communicating which combines different forms.

A medium often involves the use of technology that is beyond the control of most of us. So, for example, a book is a medium which uses forms of communication such as words, pictures and drawings.

(c) The media

are those examples of mass communication which have come to be a distinct group of their own.

We are going to discuss these in chapter 5, and say something about what they have in common and how they communicate with us. Examples of these are radio, television, cinema, newspapers and magazines.

These media are also distinctive in the way that they may include a number of forms of communication. For example, television offers words, pictures and music.

Again, the term 'media' often identifies those means of communication which are based on technology that makes a bridge between the communicator and the receiver.

Comment

Some qualities of forms or media of communication are 'built in'. So, something like speech is necessarily transient. There is no permanent record of what is said. A magazine, on the other hand, has the quality of storing what it communicates: there is a permanent record on the page and we can go back to the communication any time we want to.

Some qualities of forms or media of communication are imposed. For

example, cartoons, whether in a newspaper or on television, would probably be described as funny, but they don't have to be. Serious cartoon films have been made. Commercial interests and film-makers have imposed a habit of using the medium in a particular way.

To take another example, we tend to think of radio as a broadcast medium. But this quality is also imposed, and is not a natural consequence of the technology of radio. Setting aside problems of crowded airwaves, there is no technical reason why radio should not be used by us for exchange of messages, as much as for transmission. Radio telephones are of course such a use, but we think of them as telephones not as a form of radio.

All forms or media of communication extend the power of our senses. All the communication that we give or receive must pass through our five senses, especially those of sight and hearing. This is true even when we use some piece of technology to aid our communication. A public address system extends the range of the human voice. A tape recording extends our ability to communicate over distances, or even through time. It can be carried from place to place and can be kept for many years. Computers are interesting because they are also extending human powers such as that of memory. A computer never forgets what it has been 'told', and can do the same job over and over again.

Most means of communication are intentional. That is to say, someone created them with the intention of communicating a message. This could include even unusual examples such as a church spire. It can be argued that this is intended to draw attention to the building, to its function and to a religion.

However, it is important to recognize that messages and meanings can also be understood in some cases where the means of communication is used unintentionally. For example, every day we deal with a flood of messages about our environment. Neighbours may not intend to tell us about their activity when they are using a lawnmower. But of course we do take a message about what they are doing and where they are from the sound of the lawnmower.

In chapter 2 we will see that this question of intention can be particularly important when understanding people's non-verbal messages. They may send these to us unintentionally.

1.2 Communication makes connections

In everyday experience we find that **communication is something which makes connections.**

The connections are made between one person and another, or between one group of people and another. Sometimes the connection is immediate, as when we talk face to face. Sometimes it is 'delayed', as when advertisers communicate with

us through street posters. But still a connection is being made, mainly through what we have called forms or media.

What flows through the connection are the ideas, beliefs, opinions and pieces of information that are the material and the content of communication. Our television set links us with the world at large through news programmes. Speech links us with each other.

But bear in mind the fact that being able to speak to someone doesn't mean that we can get across what we want to say. Having made the connection, we then have to learn how to use it to the best of our ability.

1.3 Communication is an activity

We experience communication as an activity.

It is something that we do, something that we make, and something that we work on when we receive it from others. In this sense, communication is not just about speech, but about speaking and listening; not just about photography, but about photographing and viewing photographs.

When we are talking to someone, we are actively engaged in making sense of what the other person is saying, as much as talking ourselves. For the same reason, it isn't true to say that watching television is passive. On the contrary, just as a group of people have been actively engaged in putting a programme together, so we are actively engaged in making sense of the programme.

1.4 Communication is learnt

Communicating is something that we learn to do.

In fact, we not only learn how to communicate, but we also use communication to learn how to communicate. This is what is happening in schools and colleges at the moment. It is what is happening as you read this book – we hope.

Our earliest experiences as babies include others talking and gesturing to us. We learn how to do the same thing, by practice and trial and error. There are some people who believe that we are born with some basic skills which help us learn how to talk and to understand what we see. Nevertheless, most of our communication skills must be learnt. An English baby, born in this country but brought up in Japan, will be Japanese, except in appearance. That is to say, that person will learn to communicate in the ways that a Japanese person does.

So, abilities such as talking or writing are not natural. They are taught us by parents, friends and school. And, as growing creatures, we want to learn at least some of these communication skills because we can see that they are useful. For example, to explain to others what we want.

The fact that we experience communication as something which we learn to do has important consequences for anyone studying the subject. It means that we should consider important questions such as why we learn, how we learn and what effect this has on us. Answers to these questions help explain other aspects of communication study, such as what effect television may have on us, or why we may have problems in communicating with others. So when we examine examples of communication in given situations, there is more to them than what is going on at the time. We must also examine what is behind the communication, what came before, what comes afterwards.

1.5 Categories of communication

We can divide our experiences of communicating into four categories.

These categories are loosely based on the numbers of people involved with the act of communication. They are a useful way of trying to define our field of study, like the terms 'form' and 'media'. Some forms or media belong more to one category than another, though there is no absolute rule. The remaining sections of this book are based on these categories.

(a) Intrapersonal communication is communication within and to the self.

When we think, we are communicating within ourselves. We could be reflecting on the events of a day, or working out a problem in our heads. Arguments about how we think, for instance whether we use words or pictures when we think, have not been resolved.

We also talk to ourselves, and write diaries for ourselves. Again, the person making and receiving the communication is us.

(b) Interpersonal communication is communication between people.

Usually this category is taken to refer to two people interacting face to face. There are 'odd' examples which could fall within this category, such as a telephone conversation. And it is worth remembering that face-to-face communication takes place in situations where there are more than two people present. Examples of familiar interpersonal situations are an interview, a salesperson talking to a client and a conversation between friends in a café. It is the fact of face-to-face contact and the emphasis on speech and non-verbal forms of communication which make such situations in this category distinctive.

(c) Group communication is communication within groups of people and by groups of people to others.

In this case it is convenient to make two more divisions: small groups and large groups. Small groups behave differently from pairs. But they still interact face to face. More will be said about them in chapter 3. A family is a

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small group; so is a group of friends out for an evening together, or a committee meeting at work.

Large groups behave differently from small groups, not only because they are bigger, but because they are often brought together or come together for purposes that are rather different from those of small groups. Examples may include an audience at a concert and some kind of business organization or company. It is this last example that we will concentrate on in chapter 4.

(d) Mass communication is communication received by or used by large numbers of people.

In making a definition based on numbers, we don't have to be specific. An open-air concert for a thousand people might reasonably be called mass communication. The point is that the numbers involved at any one time are much bigger than anything we would reasonably call a group. It is the fact of large numbers being involved that makes this category special, in terms of who is able to control the means of communication, and in terms of what its effect may be. This will be explored in chapter 5.

There are two kinds of examples to cite. The mass media form one subdivision, where obviously we are talking about large audiences. Apart from the examples already given, it is worth adding those such as the pop CD/cassette industry.

The telephone and postal systems are examples of the other kind of mass communication. There may not be large audiences for the kinds of communication which are sent out. But such systems are used on a large scale, by thousands of people at any one time. So they do fit this category on general grounds of number.

1.6 Communication is used

We use communication in different ways regardless of what means of communication are used in these ways. Examples of such uses are:

- to warn others (e.g. road safety signs or a warning shout)
- to inform others (e.g. teletext or a fact sheet)
- to explain something (e.g. a manual or the write-up for an experiment)
- to entertain (e.g. telling jokes or a film)
- to describe (e.g. a TV documentary or telling someone about a holiday)
- to persuade (e.g. a trailer for a radio programme or a poster for a charity)

These uses are talked about from a different angle, as functions of communication, in section 3.2 of this chapter.

1.7 Communication is culture

How we communicate and what is ‘said’ through our communication helps define what is ‘our culture’.

Linguists have long argued that spoken languages, their words, say a lot about how a given set of people see the world. In the case of Hopi Indians it is literally the case that they have their way of seeing the world because they have a few words for colours which other people don’t have. But culture is a very broad term for describing the beliefs of a people as represented through their arts, their religion, their social customs and so on. The point we would make is that one only knows art, religion, customs through acts of communication – therefore culture is communication and vice versa. And of course this means communication in the widest sense, it includes forms other than just words.

Cultures often have dominant symbols or icons, such as the turban for Sikhism or the tartan for Scottishness. But there is more to both these cultures than recognizable items of clothing. We suggest that you try making a list of verbal, visual and non-verbal communication for a culture of your choice, in order to work out what seems typical of that culture. Then you should try to describe what sort of beliefs and attitudes your list represents. In this way you will have worked out one example of how communication does define culture.

What is it about different forms of communication that makes them useful in doing different jobs of communicating?

Hint: think about reasons why you would choose to use video or would talk to someone face to face.

2 Why do we communicate?

SARAH’S STORY

It was Friday night and a bad time for Sarah. The mirror was no help, so she took it off her wall. The darkening evening outside her window was cheerless, so she drew the curtains. She tripped over her sports bag as she turned away from the window, so she kicked it.

What would be the third thing to go wrong, she wondered. Last week she had lost her Saturday job. Not enough customers coming to the wine bar, he had said.

Business is bad. Not so bad, she had found out, that he couldn't keep on the other part-timer. And we all know why he kept her on, thought Sarah darkly to herself.

And now she had broken up with Neil. She had to admit that they hadn't been getting along so well. But she hadn't expected him to actually break it up. It wouldn't have been so bad if it had been her idea. . . . So here she was looking at the wallpaper, bored as hell, and not feeling good about herself.

'Is there something wrong with me?' she wondered. 'I just couldn't stand him sulking every time I wanted to go off and do something different, maybe go out with some girl friends. Still, maybe I should have been more considerate. Maybe there's something about me that puts them off. After all, he's not the first to go.'

Sarah's morale sank again. She looked at the clothes that she had put out to wear before that abrupt phone call.

'I'd better do something before I commit suicide,' she thought.

It was then that she remembered that O'Rourke had given her a further day's pay in lieu of notice. Not that he had to, she thought, to be fair. But it meant that she could go shopping in town. Because she had some money, and because now she wouldn't be working tomorrow.

'I'll ring Julie,' she decided. 'Perhaps I can go round there and talk things over with her. That's what I need to do – talk to someone – get it all in proportion. And Julie might want to come to town tomorrow as well. New clothes and a day out . . . and who knows who we might meet,' thought Sarah.

ABOUT SARAH'S STORY

This tells us something about what communication does for us. There has to be a reason why we decide to communicate in the first place. If we consider what Sarah did, and what she was going to do, then it is clear that her thinking was a piece of 'intrapersonal communication', and that when she rang Julie she would be within the category of 'interpersonal communication'. And when Sarah talked over her situations and her feelings with herself, she was impelled to communicate by something within herself. The same could be said of her conversation with Julie – when it took place. Sarah wanted to feel better about herself, she wanted someone to talk to. We all want something to happen through communicating. In other words, we have needs, which communicating can help to satisfy. Having recognized a need to express ourselves, we identify aims or purposes to fulfil those needs through communicating with other people.

2.1 Needs and purposes for communication

Needs and purposes can therefore be seen as mirror images: a need is felt from within, a purpose recognizes the outcome we want.

People must have a reason for communicating. It is worth remembering that when people communicate, they may be fulfilling more than one purpose at the same time. For example, someone may tell you something that you want to know: their purpose may be to inform you, but at the same time, perhaps, to impress you with their knowledge.

The concept of purpose helps explain what people intend to achieve when they communicate. In our working lives at least, it helps to be clear about our own purposes when we communicate.

Purposes relate to needs in that our purpose is what we intend to get done through communicating in order to satisfy our needs.

We may not always be conscious of our purposes. In the example given above, the person might not be aware that they were ‘showing off’. But by examining how they use words, gestures and tone of voice, we might be able to understand that this was indeed what they were doing. When we communicate face to face, it is the non-verbal forms of communication which often reveal our unconscious purposes or needs.

Similarly communication outcomes may be intentional or unintentional. If we hurt or upset people through what we say or do, we may not have intended to do this. An owl hooting outside a window does not intend to tell me that it is there and that it is night-time. That is not its purpose. For communication to have purpose, it must (even unconsciously) be directed from one person to another, or indeed from one animal to another. The people who manufacture a newspaper intend to communicate with their readers. The company which issues a report on its trading over the previous year intends to communicate with its shareholders.

There are several common purposes and needs of communication which are described below.

Survival

We communicate to survive.

In wealthy northern countries it seems strange to talk about survival, especially in its basic senses of warmth, food and shelter. Yet some of our communicating is still about these physical needs. For example we would communicate in order to rent a flat (shelter). The flat might be rather different from a village hut, but it still does the same job. If we felt ourselves in physical danger, we would also communicate with others to try to get help.

Co-operation

We communicate in order to work with others.

It could be argued that co-operation between people is the single greatest need

and purpose in communication. It is obvious that our need to form social groups actually comes from our need to co-operate with each other in order to survive. Organized groups of people in any society work together to provide basic needs and also less basic needs. We use communication to get along with other people and to work with other people.

Chapters 3 and 4 provide further information on this.

Personal needs

We communicate to satisfy personal needs.

This reminds us that, just as survival was about more than physical things, so also our needs are not merely physical.

We have a personal need to feel secure within ourselves. This leads to other needs – to have a good opinion of ourselves, to feel that we are wanted and valued by other people.

In the story above, Sarah had begun to feel badly about herself, to feel that there might be something wrong with her. She wanted to be wanted and valued, and so was turning to a friend for comfort. Communication with and from others helps to satisfy these security needs. All of this underlines the important fact that communicating isn't just about practical things like buying six kilos of potatoes. It is also about non-physical things such as emotions, feelings and ideas.

These personal needs are behind acts of communication such as dressing in the right way for an occasion; having a cry on somebody's shoulder; or giving people presents.

Relationships

We communicate to be involved with other people, to form and maintain relationships.

This follows naturally from the last two points. We need to have friends, because friends support each other. We need to get along with our work-mates, because working with people is about more than job tasks, it relates to needs for co-operation.

When one talks about being involved with others, this could be in terms of number (pairs or groups); in terms of what binds those involved (friendship or love); and in terms of what description we may give the involvement (family or social club).

Persuasion

We communicate to persuade other people to think in the way that we do or to act in the way that we do.

The most obvious example of this is advertising. The advertiser intends to persuade a certain category of people – car owners or old age pensioners, for instance – to buy a given product or service. Communication makes the connection with these people persuasively. It usually seeks to change the opinions or attitudes of those people regarding the advertised product or service.

However, persuasive communication is more common than we may realize and is not confined to flamboyant examples of advertising. We may want to persuade someone to loan us some money, or to join our drama group, or to help us with repairing our car. It is true that the word ‘persuasion’ has a certain sense of manipulation – to get what we want. But in this sense we are all manipulators, every day.

Power

We communicate to gain or exert power over other people.

To a certain extent this may seem to be like persuasion – our purpose is to get someone else to do something we want. But the word ‘power’ introduces something new into the situation. It suggests that the communicator intends to put the other person in a submissive or helpless position. It can suggest that the communicator has special privileges in terms of what they know or the means of communication they can use.

For example, a blackmailer has power. This person may possess such significant information about another that we call this other person a victim. If the blackmailer threatens to reveal this information to others, then their purpose in communicating is to exert their power, usually to get money.

Propaganda is communication used to control or manipulate others, usually large groups of people. It involves the control of sources of information and of the means of communication. This control represents power. The Union of Soviet Socialist Republics used propaganda to reinforce their economic and military power for several decades this century.

Mass communications are particularly well suited to this exertion of power because they can broadcast or distribute information and opinions to great numbers of people from a central source. Those who have power control that central source. That is why there is always concern about who controls the media in any country. The media can exert power over their audiences. It is argued that the most important way in which they do this is in shaping people’s attitudes and beliefs.

Even in democratic societies, information about the state and about defence issues is often closely guarded. In the United Kingdom in the past few years there has been a campaign for a freedom of information act which would provide more access to information about national and local government.

Social needs

We communicate to hold our society and our organizations together.

The bigger the society or the organization, the more communication is needed. It is the practical problems of running large businesses, for example, that have led to the development of new forms and media of communication. Data processing with computers seeks to solve the problems of handling huge amounts of information quickly by using new means of electronic communication.

These more practical social needs are to do with what goes on outside ourselves. They are to do with making the whole system work for us. Hospitals, schools, manufacturing organizations and government organizations all rely on effective means of communication in order to function.

Information

We communicate to give and receive information.

We are exchanging information with other people almost constantly. We may need to find out the time when a bus leaves. We may be keen viewers and readers of the news because we want to know about other people, events and places in the world. On a smaller scale, we are great gossips and conversationalists because we want to find out what is going on around us.

Making sense of the world

We use communication to make sense of the world and our experience of it.

We suggest that making sense of the world is about four important things:

- What we believe in
- What we think of ourselves
- What we think our relationships are with other people
- What we think is real

These ideas map out the physical world, our social world and the world inside our heads.

When a child asks questions in order to find out, for example, how granny is also mummy's mummy, he or she is making sense of the world of family relationships. When we watch a television documentary on the forests of South America, then we are making sense of another piece of the physical world. If we become involved in a discussion about the rights and wrongs of the way we treat animals (as when we use experiments on animals) then we are making sense of the world of our values and beliefs.

Self-expression

We communicate to express our imagination and ourselves to others. We like to be creative with our communication in words, pictures, sounds and other forms.

This is an important kind of need because it covers the creative aspects of communication. This creative expression of the imagination includes the kind of reasoning seen in a book on the possibilities of life existing on other planets, as well as that seen in a television play.

We use our imaginations to cover an infinite range of possibilities. One could argue that drawings representing the design concept for a new car show communication being used in the cause of self-expression. If stories are made up through the powers of our imagination then so is our view of ourselves.

Under this heading of self-expression comes the whole range of urges that all people have to express themselves through dress and body adornment. These may be regulated through social conventions. On certain occasions certain sorts of dress are considered appropriate: for example, if we attend a funeral then we wear dark clothes. These serve to express our feelings in socially accepted ways. However, we may seek to dress and adorn ourselves in ways that we think challenge social conventions.

It seems that humans have an innate urge to use their imagination and to be creative. Clearly, there is more to life than merely surviving or doing business. We use communication for more than carrying out transactions with other people. Our use of forms of communication, especially those using words and pictures, enables us to make up things that might happen, or create situations that will never happen. In particular we love stories and dramatic creations – fictions which give us amusement and pleasure and explore possibilities. Through a story we can be in places which we may never visit or meet people whom we would fear to meet. We can be involved with a relationship which reminds us of one which we once had, or one which we would like to have.

Each of us, then, communicates for a whole variety of needs and purposes. We could list other reasons in addition to those mentioned above. But all of them could perhaps be organized under four main headings: **personal needs, social purposes, economic necessities and artistic expression.**

Having seen why we communicate, in the next section we want to see what happens when we communicate.

2.2 Maslow's hierarchy

One much-used version of needs is that of Abraham Maslow, in which he describes people as being driven by sets of needs in a hierarchy, from the most basic at the bottom, to the most refined at the peak of a triangle (see figure 1).

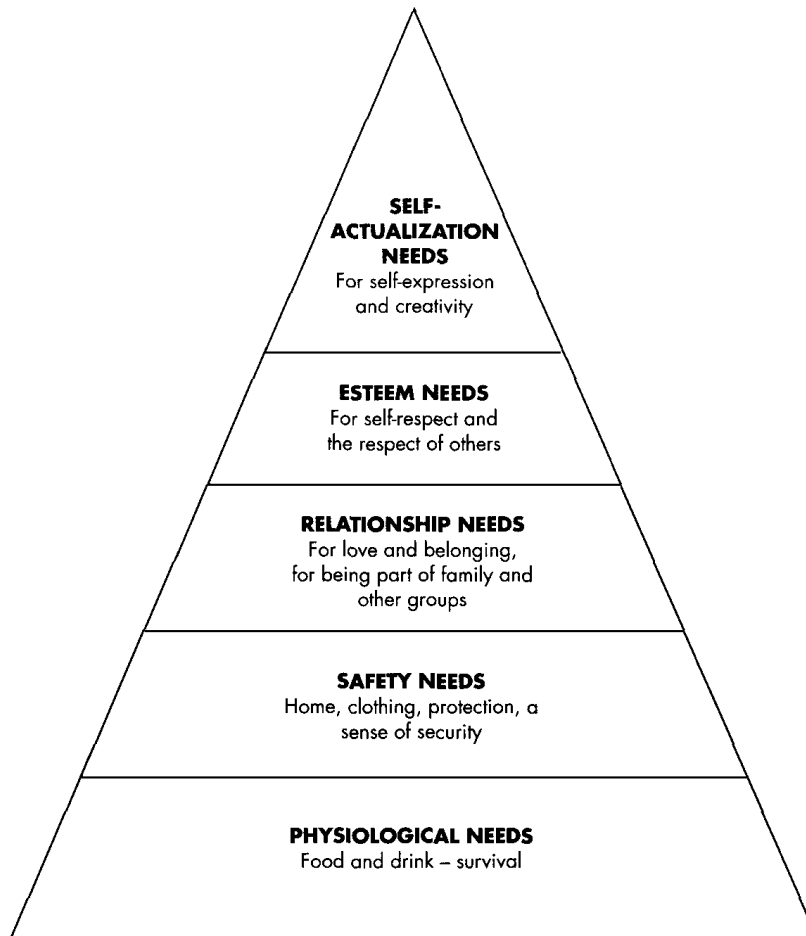


FIGURE 1 Maslow's hierarchy of needs

Basic needs are about wanting food, shelter, sex. Just above that come the needs for safety – having a roof over one's head and knowing that one belongs to some group like family. Then there are the social needs for things like love and friendship, which urge us into relationships. These are followed by ego and esteem needs, which are about us as individuals wanting self-respect, recognition, even power. Finally, at the top of the triangle comes the most sophisticated need – for self-actualization. This is about self-fulfilment, about finding and being oneself. Certainly these needs get more complicated and personal as one goes up the hierarchy. This sense of development also loosely relates to us growing up and becoming more complex human beings. But in terms of our lives and actions one cannot really say that we simply move away from 'baser' needs. They are always there somewhere. Why we are driven by different needs at different times very much depends on circumstances, on how we are feeling at a given time, on personality. In

one case a boxer is driven by needs which cause him to bite through his opponent's ear. In another case a sailor is driven by needs which urge him to rescue a fellow sailor a thousand miles from land and with the near loss of his own life. You can discuss what drives such different people in different ways.

2.3 Nature or nurture?

Does the ability to communicate come from learning or from our genes?

You should relate what follows to section 1.4. As a species we are biologically privileged by our relatively huge brains. It seems likely that to some extent this development is a survival/selection characteristic in which the ability to use speech and to visualize space and movement has helped us a great deal. But what we have done with this talk and this visualization, in respect of socialization or of creativity, is another matter. It is not apparent that anyone is born with special creative skills. We are not born talking.

Some linguists, particularly Noam Chomsky, have theorized that we are born with 'deep structures' in our brains. These are supposed to enable us to make sense of the conventions of speech, to learn to speak as babies. This was a theory which tried to explain how we learn to talk. However, there is no biological or physical evidence for these structures. But there is plenty of evidence that people learn communication skills by imitating others and by practising. Where writers or artists seem to run in families, this is not because of some inherited gene: it is because the children grow up in an environment which encourages one form of communication. It may also be because those children feel challenged by their parents' skills, and need to match these in order to satisfy their personal needs.

Education is a great nurturer of communication skills. Plainly, those who don't have certain kinds of education are not able to write, or cannot draw, and so on. This is why we believe that communication skills can be learned and developed. Our society has education because it believes that, apart from other knowledge and skills, it is useful and desirable to be able to communicate effectively in various forms. Communication is nurtured in children by family and the school. It (particularly speech) is the means by which we satisfy our needs, through which we function socially and economically.

Why is it that we don't communicate at times?

Hint: think of the times when one should speak up and when one should keep quiet.

3 What happens when we communicate?

LUCY'S STORY

It had been a tough day for Lucy. She had had a row with Janet Capstick, her supervisor at work, and now she was worrying about whether she would get the sack. Like many arguments, it had started with something apparently trivial and then got out of hand. The trouble was that Mrs Capstick, it seemed to Lucy, was a bossy woman. She wasn't that much older than Lucy herself, but seemed to think a lot of her position. And she was a great one for the rules. Lucy was on contract work, with thirty others, operating a telephone answering service for this insurance company. The rules were tight. If you were even a minute late in logging on, it counted against your pay. Today had been too much for Lucy. She had started on at Lucy in the first tea break.

'Could I have a word with you, Miss Johnson?' she had said, with that insincere smile on her face.

Lucy felt herself go all brittle. She followed her supervisor out of the tea room into the corridor. She really couldn't think what the problem was. But she felt resentful already. It wasn't the first time that they had had words.

'I wish to point out to you that you are improperly dressed,' Janet Capstick almost hissed into Lucy's ear. Lucy thought that she would laugh, but then realized that she would have to take it seriously. This person had no sense of humour.

'But I thought we sorted this out the other day,' she said. 'I'm wearing tights, I'm wearing an ordinary skirt. What's the problem?'

Capstick went a little pink. 'Your blouse. Too see-through. Too low. Not enough buttons.'

'Too much for who?!'

'It's the company's rules. They are quite clear. And indeed this is the third time that I have spoken to you about your dress.'

'Mrs Capstick, I'm working in a room full of women. I don't deal with the public. And as it happens, I was going to wear an ordinary top, only it's in the wash. I'll have it tomorrow.' I'm not going to strangle her, thought Lucy. I'll be polite. I need the money.

'Well, I'm afraid that is not good enough.' Janet Capstick stared at Lucy steadily and unnervingly. Lucy wondered if she would try it on if Lucy was as tall as her. 'I would like you to go home and change now, and be back in half an hour.'

Lucy couldn't believe her ears. 'You aren't serious, are you?!'

'I will be making a note of this incident on your file. I'd advise you to do what I ask – now.'

Lucy felt her eyeballs beginning to bulge. 'This is ridiculous. You really are a

power freak.' She turned on her heel, and tried to walk away with dignity.

ABOUT LUCY'S STORY

You may have noticed that this story suggests that people do think about communicating, not only after the event, but also while it is going on. Things that matter to the exchange are clothes, words, surroundings – the physical context. Phrases like this are the communication terms which we use to describe what communication is and how it happens.

You may also have noticed how the story of this communication is about a developing, changing situation, with various factors coming in. The relationship between Lucy and Mrs Capstick develops. It still isn't over: we don't know what will happen next.

We have already talked about communication being dynamic. Whether we are making the communication or we are taking it in, something is happening continuously. Communication, even reading a magazine, is an activity; it is a doing experience, it is a process.

3.1 Communication as a process

When we are in a conversation, there is a continuous exchange going on.

Ideas or facts or opinions are being turned into words and shifted from one person to the other through speech. In chapter 2 we will look at how, in another part of the process, non-verbal communication is also conveying messages.

So when we talk about the communication process, we are talking about this active flow.

And what we want to do is to explain what's happening, why and how. We want to know what is going on in the process, so that maybe we can improve our handling of it. Through knowledge comes understanding and the possibility of change. We look at the communication process from various angles in this book in order to become better communicators.

We use communication terms to describe various aspects of the process, breaking it down into stages and parts. We use terms to identify factors which may affect how communication is carried on. We interpret the evidence thus produced and try to make sense of it. Interpretation is not only about making deductions, but also saying why these deductions are significant.

For example, if we see context as a factor in the process, then what is important is to say why it matters in the examples that we are looking at. Theory needs to be applied.



Communication processes

One of the earliest and still the most useful attempts to describe the communication process in separate parts was made by Harold Lasswell in 1948. He said the process of communication could be described in these terms:

*Who
says What
in which Channel
to Whom
and with what Effect*

This is the same as saying that every example of a communication process can be broken down into the following terms:

*A Sender
directs a Message
through some Form/Medium
to a Receiver
with some Effect*

One may add other points to this list. These points are all examples of communication terms, or concepts, which identify different aspects of the process.

Context refers to the idea that every act of communication must happen in some sort of surroundings. Only what we mean by this is actually quite complicated. Most obviously there is the *physical context* – whether we are talking to someone in our living room or on the terraces at a football match. But then there is the *social context*, which is to do with the occasion involved and the people in it. This might be a group of friends in a club or a family meal or a group of mourners at a funeral. And then there is the *cultural context*, which refers to an even broader set of circumstances and beliefs, which still may affect how we talk. For example, it would matter if the funeral was in a Hindu or an Anglican context. It is particularly important to see that **the media are part of the cultural context in which we operate**. How we talk, what we talk about, what music we listen to, has a lot to do with the influence of the cultural context of the media.

Purpose and need are also factors in the process. They refer to the basic question of why any act of communication takes place. Everyone has a need that causes them to communicate, and everyone has a purpose in communicating.

Audience refers to the receiver mentioned above. This idea focuses on where messages go to, on the person or people to whom the communication is addressed. **The nature of the audience always affects the treatment of the message**. You don't talk to teachers in the same way that you talk to friends. You don't talk to one person in the same way that you talk to a group. You don't write a letter to a relative in the same way that you would write to your local councillor.

Of course there are other factors at work, such as the important question of what you are trying to say anyway. You need to look at all these factors, including audience, as you try to describe process and the nature of communication.

So, communication is a process, and this process can be broken down into parts which help explain what is happening, how and why.

When we use certain terms to explain parts of the communication process, we will try to suggest what they mean and give examples. But also remember that there is a glossary near the back of this book which you can use to check out special words.

3.2 Exchange of messages

One dominant idea is that **when we communicate, we exchange messages.**

We give messages and we receive them. These messages are taken into our minds, interpreted, stored or acted upon.

The messages can be about all sorts of things. They could be about something that is happening – a fire in the house next door; or about someone’s feelings – they are very unhappy because a relative has just died; or about opinions – we tell someone that we think a certain film is well worth seeing.

In this sense we can also list certain functions of messages (and of the act of communication which puts them across). These functions could be:

- to warn,
- to advise,
- to inform,
- to persuade,
- to express opinions,
- to amuse.

You will recognize some of these words from elsewhere in this chapter. So, rather than our giving you examples this time, see if you can devise word messages which do the sort of jobs we have just listed.

The idea of message, in its broadest sense, is held to cover a wide range of communication forms and media. Maps give us messages about the area of land they depict. Graphs can give us messages about things like the increase in the number of goods which we import into our country. Photographs can give us messages about what people look like in countries that we have never been to. It is even argued that a piece of music is a kind of message from its composer – perhaps about an experience, a mood or feelings.

When we receive such messages we are involved in an exchange process with their makers, just as we are when we make messages ourselves.

Sharing

When we communicate we are also part of a process of sharing.

Communication forms and media carry messages that allow us to share thoughts, feelings, opinions, information and experiences with others. This makes the point that communication, especially in our everyday dealings with others, isn't just about facts. It is about emotions, attitudes and beliefs. These are important to us. They are bound up with the personal and social needs which we have already described.

Such sharing, especially on a personal basis, affects many aspects of our lives, including the time we spend at work. It is all too easy to see work as a business of handling messages of a factual nature. But if our jobs involve dealing with people, then this cannot be the whole truth.

At work, for example, we are frequently concerned about what people think of us, and we of them. We spend time, however briefly, exchanging messages about personal background and experience. Indeed, there is evidence to suggest that how well we deal with 'job messages' depends on how well we are exchanging 'personal messages'.

So sharing is an important aspect of the exchange of messages.

Neutrality of messages

Messages are rarely neutral.

It is possible to argue that simple messages of fact are neutral. For example, a message expressed in word form, such as 'There are two wheels on my motorcycle', seems quite objective.

But then such messages rarely come on their own. In the example just given, there would probably be other verbal and non-verbal messages around that sentence. It would be said in a particular situation and could be said in a particular way. In this case, the speaker could be addressing a friend whose motorcycle is laid up with a smashed front wheel. In that case, the message is not just a statement of fact. It is also saying something like, 'My bike's OK but yours isn't. Hard luck!'

And of course messages in advertisements are never neutral. Even a factual list of functions in a car advertisement is not just a neutral list. It is a selected set of messages about the good points of the car. We don't hear about any possible bad points. We shouldn't be surprised about this lack of neutrality. Any student of communication who examines the purpose behind the message in the communication can see very well why the messages are not neutral.

This isn't to make a moral judgement on the purposes of messages. People may say things with the best of intentions. But we should understand that they do

have intentions and are dishonest or unconscious of what they are doing if they say that they don't. This leads on to the idea that messages we exchange may be overt or covert.

Overt or covert messages

Some messages are clear and obvious; some are hidden and not so obvious.

This is another argument for the study of communication. It means that we should look carefully at what is actually being expressed in any example of the communication process.

Sometimes a piece of communication actually intends to hide some of its messages. How good it is at doing this depends on how sharp the receiver is at decoding the communication. For example, an advertisement could be saying overtly, this is a good fabric conditioner which makes your clothes feel soft. But it may also be saying covertly, you aren't a very good mum to your family unless you buy this fabric conditioner. Incidentally, it also conveys opinions about what the advertiser suggests good mums should do!

Sometimes there are hidden messages in a piece of communication which are not intended by the sender. For example, a friend might tell you overtly that she has not been out for the past two weeks and hasn't seen many other friends. What she could be saying covertly is that she is lonely and wants some company.

Multiple messages

Communication usually involves the exchange of more than one message at a time.

This is implied by what we have just said. If there are overt and covert messages in a piece of communication, then clearly when we communicate we don't just pass back and forth single, simple messages. Indeed, there is another proposition that goes with this. Communication usually takes place through multiple channels. In the examples given above, we can see that the advertisement probably communicates through pictures and words and the people communicate through speech and non-verbal communication. Indeed, where people are concerned, it is often the non-verbal channel which carries the covert message.

The nature of messages

We shall discuss messages under the heading of linear models later. But it is worth emphasizing the fact that **messages are not just about what is said. They are**

about how things are said, and about what channel (or code/codes) is used.

The American writer D.K. Berlo refers to this when he describes the message in three parts: the *code*; the *content*; and the *treatment*.

He also points out that everything we know or experience (including communication from other people) can only enter our consciousness via one or more of the five senses – sight, hearing, touch, taste and smell.

Berlo also refers to the fact that our knowledge, attitudes, communication skills and cultural background affect how we communicate with others. In other words, our effectiveness as communicators depends on what we know, our attitudes, how good we are at communicating and how we have been brought up to communicate.

Whatever happens when we communicate is something that we have learnt to do, in certain ways, for certain reasons.

However, there are other ways of explaining what happens when we communicate.

Communication and meaning

Although we are going to talk about meaning in the next section, with reference to signs, the idea of meaning is important enough to comment on now.

Messages are really about meanings. We use the word ‘message’ as a convenience. It makes some kind of sense when for example one is talking about passing memos around an organization. But in fact communication is not really about passing around little ‘packages’ from one person to another through talk or pictures or whatever. It is rather more complicated than that.

Every piece of communication, whether it is a conversation or a photograph, means something to those involved in creating it or receiving it. What those involved think the communication means is, however, not cut and dried. Most pieces of communication mean more than one thing to most people (see ‘Multiple messages’, page 24). What is more, they may not mean the same thing to everyone. Even an invitation to a party ‘starting at 8.00’ won’t mean the same thing to everyone (see figure 2). People will arrive at different times.

Some forms of communication tend to be more ambiguous in their meanings than others. So one is more likely to argue about the meanings in a photograph, than what is meant by the write-up of a physics experiment.

When we ‘take in’ some example of communication, when we decode it, what we are really doing is to deconstruct it and reconstruct meanings in our mind (see figure 3). A lot of this book is really about the factors which affect how we construct those meanings. If someone yells at us ‘Look out!’, what do we do? We work out that we are being warned about something. We work out that we should use our eyes.

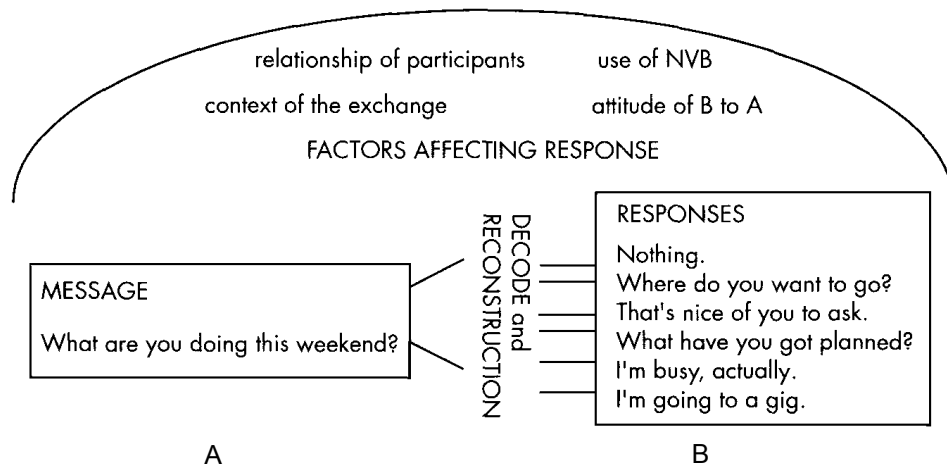


FIGURE 2 The response that we give to a message depends on what it means to us. There may be many possible responses affected by a variety of factors.

But do we look behind us? Or look up? Do we duck? Do we yell back? What do we assume the warning is about? There may be factors in the situation which help narrow down the meaning of the message. But having deconstructed the shouted words, still there are different meanings that we may reconstruct in our heads. And that is important to remember: that the meanings are in our heads. Communication may involve physical objects or physical activity. But ultimately it is all in the mind. As James Watson says, 'Can we ever be sure that we have understood a message or conveyed a message as we intended?' (Watson 1985).

3.3 Communication as signs

Communication is all about the giving and receiving of signs which have meanings attached to them.

This is one of the most convincing views of what happens when communication takes place, because it seems to apply to all examples in all situations.

So the idea is that when you speak to someone, you are making signs at them. As long as they know what these signs mean, then they can decode them and the message will have been put across. The same could be said of any form of communication. A non-verbal sign might be a wink, meaning 'Keep quiet, it's a secret between us.'

A picture sign might be a low camera angle, meaning this person is important and dominating. A musical sign might be a black mark (called a crotchet) which means play this note for a specific length of time. And this page is covered with signs, called letters and words. We hope that they mean something to you.

Signs and meanings

But a sign can only be a sign for us if we assign meaning to it. And there are four problems here:

- (a) To say that something is a sign doesn't tell you what its meaning is.
- (b) The same sign can have different meanings in different places or at different times.
- (c) One sign can have more than one meaning.
- (d) The same sign can mean different things to different people.

The answer to the first problem is that **we learn to connect a sign with a meaning.** Mainly, we learn to do this through parents and friends, as part of growing up. We are also taught formally in school. And we should go on learning something about signs and their meanings for the rest of our lives.

If we want to learn the word signs of the spoken French language, then we go on a course where we are taught to make the signs, and are taught to attach meanings to the signs. This second point is important because, of course, being able to say a French word correctly doesn't tell one what it means. Signs are useless unless one knows the meaning. Which is why archaeologists have spent years trying to decipher (decode) some ancient scripts.

The second problem must also be solved by **learning the 'rules' for the right place and the right time.**

Don't tell an American that you want to wash up if you mean that you want to help with the dishes. An American will think that you want to wash yourself. And beware especially of non-verbal signs. You might, as an English person, raise your hand casually, palm outwards, in greeting to someone whom you pass by at work. But for a Greek, the same sign looks suspiciously like an insult! Even within our

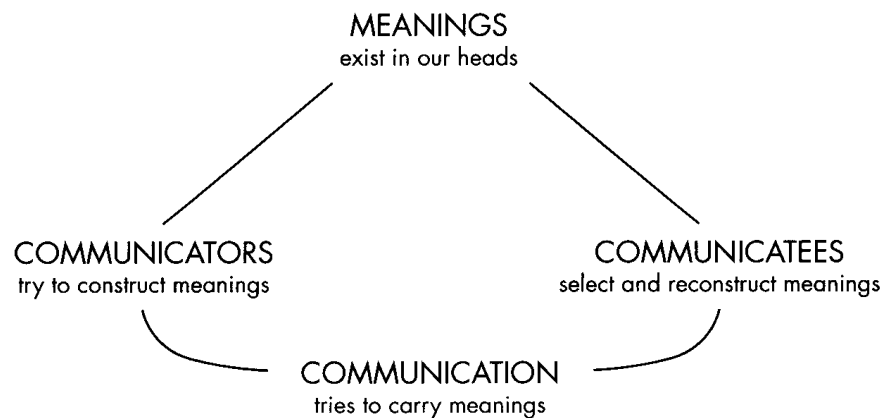


FIGURE 3 Communication and meaning: it's all in the mind

own culture, we know that putting an arm around someone's shoulders signals different things according to the situation that we are in (and who is involved).

The third problem is obviously connected with the last one. Indeed the last example could also apply here. But place, time or person doesn't have to be involved in this case.

Take a written word sign such as 'bow'. As a sign on its own it could refer to the action of bending the body, and an object which projects arrows, and an object which is drawn across the strings of musical instruments. Knowing all the possible meanings of the sign doesn't help, even though it is a lot better than having no idea at all of what the word means.

From this example we learn that **we often understand the meaning of a sign from other signs around it**. A sentence (string of signs) such as 'She raised the bow and loosed off an arrow at the target' helps pin down the meaning of the word.

Or, to take the example of a party game such as charades, we know that the more dress and gesture signs the player gives us, the more likely we are to guess the character being portrayed.

So, if communication is about exchanging signs, or giving and receiving meanings, then the ability to use a wide range and number of signs is likely to aid communication.

It may also appear that in some cases we have more than one sign for the same meaning. The sets of words 'naked, nude, starkers' and 'slim, thin, slender' are examples. But in fact, because in the first case the words mean rather more than 'without clothes', one can say that they are not just different signs for the same thing. You work out exactly what they do mean.

The fourth problem may also seem to overlap with the second. But the point is that **even when people are speaking the same language in the same place at the same time, signs can still mean different things**. Take the word 'disgusting'. A dictionary might have us believe that it means something like loathsome or nauseating. But, for example, do parents really mean this when they express their disapproval of the state of their child's room by saying it is disgusting? They probably don't mean that the room actually repulses them. More likely they mean that they disapprove of its untidiness. And if we use a sentence such as – 'It's a disgusting state of affairs when you can't rely on the buses to run on time' – we aren't really talking about physical loathing. We mean that the situation is very annoying and unsatisfactory, so far as we are concerned.

So we really do have to learn a wide variety of possible meanings for signs, and be careful about choosing the meaning which seems to best fit the communicator's intentions. The reverse is also true of course – we must be careful about picking the signs we use, in order to be able to express what we really intend. It is not easy to say what we mean.

Codes

When we communicate through signs we use codes.

A code is a system for using signs. This system is based on rules and conventions shared by those who use the code.

Morse code identifies itself literally. It is a code of long and short electrical signals (dots and dashes) which stand in place of other codes and signs – such as the alphabet and writing, or numbers.

Speech is a series of sound signs which forms a code that we know as spoken words. A photograph of a person represents two forms of communication and two codes. One is the non-verbal code composed of the various dress and body language signs which we see represented in the picture. The other is the pictorial code composed of signs such as de-focused background or closeup on head and shoulders.

The forms and codes of communication are bound by certain ‘rules’ as to how they are used. These ‘rules’ are called conventions.

In some instances the conventions are quite strong. One has an organized system of signs. Here the best example is that of spoken or written language. We have all been taught the rules of spelling and grammar; and if we haven't, then we must have learnt them from others. The act of speaking involves knowing which sign goes where. And just as we share knowledge of signs, and more or less agree what they mean, so also we more or less agree on these conventions. Without the organizing power of these conventions, we wouldn't be able to communicate at all. Anyone who mispronounces or mis-spells a word badly, fails to communicate that word and so fails to communicate what they mean. And when someone mis-spells a word only slightly and is still understood then it is still the organizing power of those conventions that has saved the day for them and got the meaning across. Because we know how words should be spelt we can work out what a mis-spelt word is probably intended to represent.

Codes are sets of signs. Conventions are rules for using these signs (see figure 4).

It is possible to divide a code into *primary and secondary codes*. A secondary code is a particular form of the primary main code. The primary codes represent the main set of signs for a given form: verbal, non-verbal, pictorial, and so on.

Secondary codes are composed of special sets of signs that work within the primary code. Secondary codes are often related to work (computer talk), or social/sub-cultural groups (bikers). These secondary codes may also have conventions governing their use. We slip into them on many occasions because we think they are appropriate (people baby-talking to young children). Our use of codes is not always appropriate to the occasion or to those present. You might consider the arguments for and against using babytalk with children as an example.

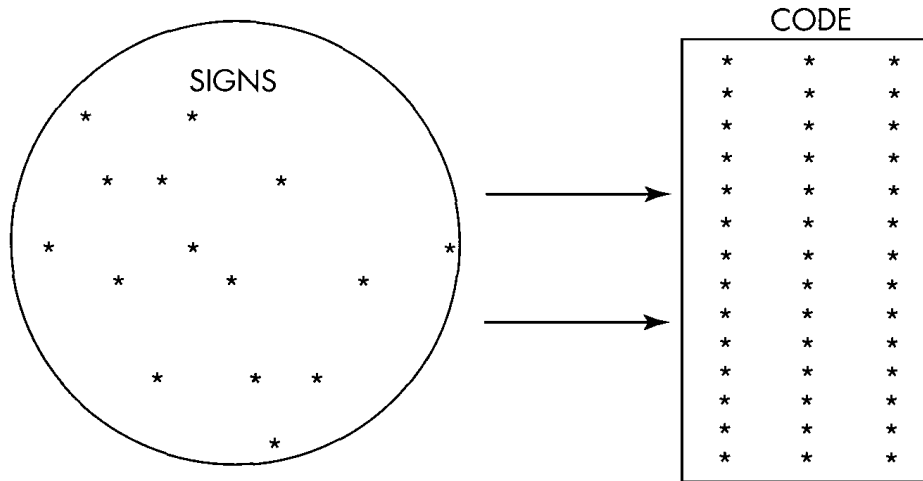


FIGURE 4 Signs form a code when organized by conventions

3.4 Communication as behaviour

This view suggests that the act of communication is a kind of behaviour. It also suggests that we communicate with others in order to modify their behaviour.

The first proposition suggests that communication is as much a kind of behaviour as eating, or banging a nail in a piece of wood. Again, this raises the question of what we know how to do when we are born and what we learn to do afterwards. There are those who think that we learn to do everything after we are born. Others would say that, in the case of speech for example, we are born with a certain *competence* to make speech. Then they would say we develop *performance*, or the skills of speaking.

Either way, there certainly is a lot of learning involved. And it is true that just as we may learn to use a knife and fork or chopsticks to eat with, so we learn to use words in certain ways to put over what we mean, whichever language we may be talking about. And it may be said, just as we learn to behave in different ways according to our upbringing, so **we learn to communicate in different ways according to our upbringing**. So the idea that communication is a kind of behaviour helps us look at why we communicate as we do. If we aren't much good at drawing it could be said that this is because we haven't been taught this particular form of behaviour. Or even if we aren't much good at apologizing to people this is because we haven't learnt much about how to do this.

The second proposition – about modifying the behaviour of others – is easy to understand if, once more, one looks at the example of advertising. Generally speaking, an advertisement wants to change our attitudes so that we then change our

behaviour. For example, it might want us to feel favourably disposed towards a certain company's life insurance policy, so that we then go and take out a policy with that company. However, the proposition can be applied to a wider range of examples. For instance, it could be said that a baby cries in a certain way because it has found out that this will cause its mother to give it food. It has changed the mother's behaviour.

The idea that communication changes behaviour doesn't have to be confined to simple examples, where something is seen to happen immediately. It could be said that everything we learn, every piece of information that we acquire, changes our behaviour to some extent in the end. Every piece of communication which we experience may affect our attitudes and beliefs in some small way.

We cannot help but change others and be changed by others when we communicate. So, for example, a person might choose a career in social work because he or she had read a publicity booklet which intended to persuade readers that this is a good and worthwhile occupation. On the other hand, someone might choose this career simply because of the many things heard, read or watched about it on television. No one was intending to change this person's attitudes and behaviour. But it happened because of an accumulation of messages.

This idea of communication as something which acts as a stimulus and which evokes a response relates to behaviourist psychology. This may be briefly described as **S–R theory**.

People like B.F. Skinner were convinced that all creatures' lives were defined by the responses that they gave to various kinds of stimulus, and that these responses could be modified by changing the stimulus. At its most simplistic, the approach proposed that anyone could be made to do anything provided you could find the right stimulus. Primary stimuli would be forms of pain or pleasure.

Propagandists might like to believe this! If one can only find the right kind of communication, then people can be persuaded to do and to believe anything. Fortunately, it is not that simple. People make sense of stimuli (such as words or pictures) in different ways for different reasons (see figure 5). Communicating is not like pressing buttons.

Nevertheless, when one is looking at communication between people it can be quite illuminating to hang on to some idea of response, to look at why people make the responses that they do. For example, in social interaction, we now know that there is a lot of cueing of responses – in taking turns to talk, or in getting to like someone. So one should not ignore S–R theory either.

3.5 Models of communication

Another way of describing the communication process is to use a model.

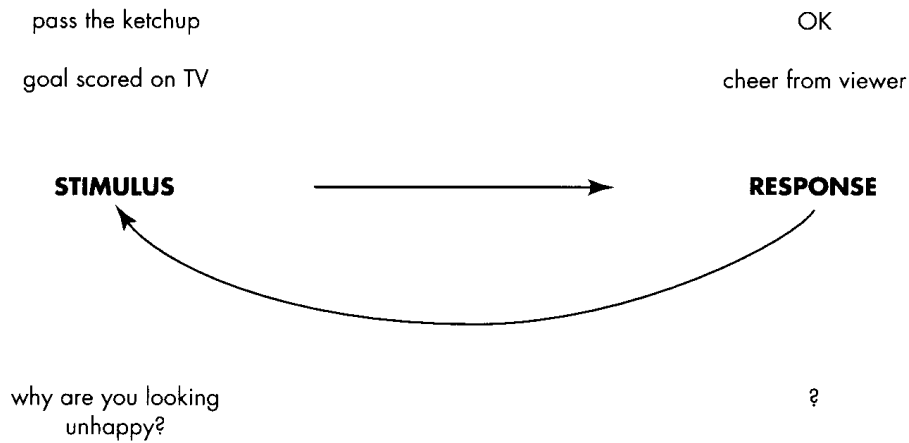


FIGURE 5 A stimulus–response model for communication. But is it that simple?

A model is a simplified description of a communication process, usually set out in graphic form as a diagram. It can show the elements of a communication process and the relationships between those elements.

A model is a medium which is mainly graphic. The parts of the process are laid out, for example to describe what comes first, second, and so on. And the parts are labelled using communication terms. Models are useful because they lay out the process, or a view of what the process is like, in a simple, visual way.

Because there are different terms and different views of what makes up the communication process, so there are different models.

And one can change the terms of a communication model without changing the layout. For example, we can talk in general terms about the receiver of a message, whatever the situation. But in fact, if we were referring to receivers of music at a concert or receivers of a radio programme, then it is more appropriate to use the term ‘audience’. And this is what models for mass communication tend to do. They do this because the term ‘audience’ draws attention to the fact that there is often more than one receiver for a piece of mass communication, and to the fact that such receivers are not engaged in the communication process in the same way as people talking face to face.

Models and the terms used in models may be changed to emphasize particular points about a situation – e.g. the difference between making a speech and reading a book.

There are a variety of models used in this and other books. You will find some models worked out by other people useful. But remember that communication studies is about doing. Be prepared to make up your own models. Models can be

more or less complicated, according to the number of terms used, and the ingenuity of the layout.

We will start with the most simple style of model.

Linear models

These lay out parts of the process in a line, as if communication is all about sending messages from A to B. In fact, communication is rarely that simple, but it is a good enough way to begin. This model, shown in figure 6, with a simple situation indicated below it, suggests a few terms and ideas.

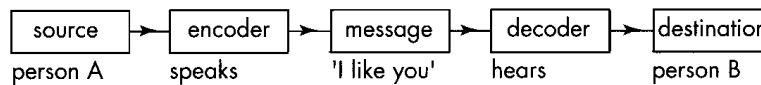


FIGURE 6 Basic linear model of communication

Source and *destination* make the point that communication always comes from someone and goes to someone. But it matters as to who exactly the source and destination are. For example, one would want to take into account whether person B is male or female.

The idea of *codes* has been described on pages 29–30. Communication has to be expressed through some form or medium and these all have their own codes. For example, the message in figure 6 could have been encoded through a non-verbal sign, such as touching. This is a different code from that of speech. In any case thoughts or feelings have to be expressed in some form to be ‘decoded’ and understood by someone else.

And then there is the term *message* – what is said, or expressed one way or another. As we have said, D.K. Berlo has broken this term down into three parts: content, code and treatment. In the example given above, the content is ‘I like you’, the code is that of speech and the treatment depends on how it is said – warmly, lovingly, factually, and so on.

Exchange models

These indicate that communication is at least a two-way process.

In the case of a group of people, it may seem to be more than two-way. In the case of someone watching television it may be difficult to see how there is a response to the messages coming from the television set. This will be discussed in the last chapter of the book. But for situations discussed in chapter 2, this kind of model,

shown in figure 7, is very useful. This model makes the point that messages go both ways in a conversation. It also says that everyone is a decoder and an encoder. That is to say, we have to find some way of putting together and expressing what we have to say, as well as some way of taking in what the other person says.

But then, we also have to make sense of what is said. This is where the term ‘interpreter’ comes in. We are all interpreters of messages, all day and every day. How we interpret messages is another matter. This will be discussed later. But we will find that there are reasons why people may interpret the same message in different ways. Here is a fundamental reason for studying communication. If we all got our messages across exactly as we intended, there would be fewer problems between people. But this doesn’t happen. When we examine the idea of perception, we will see that because we all have different kinds of experience, and make different kinds of assumption, so we interpret messages in different ways.

Sometimes the difference isn’t great. Sometimes it is, and it matters.

For example, looking back to the situation of the first model, if the person who is the source of the message (person A) is female and the person who is the destination (person B) is male, and if person B interprets the message as loving when it was meant to be just friendly, then the two people

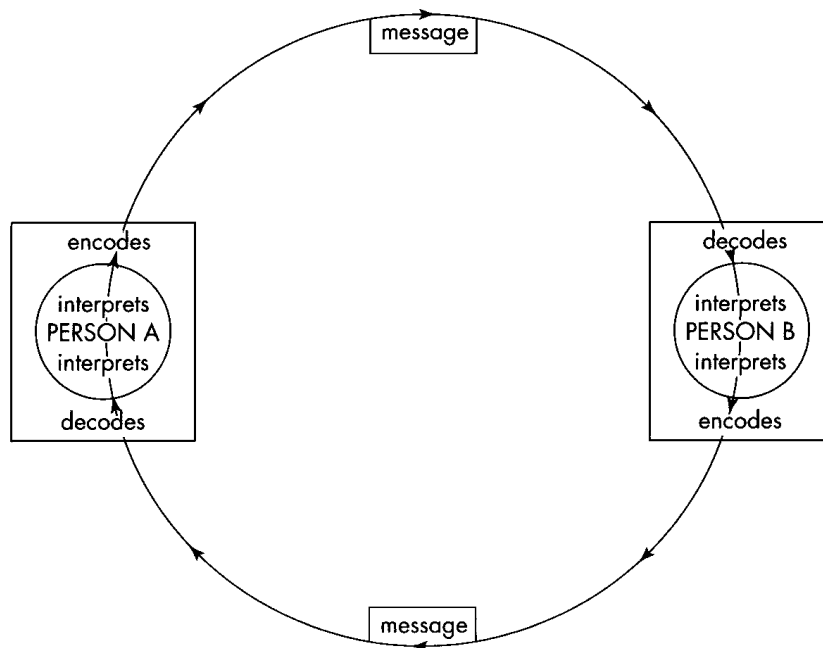


FIGURE 7 An exchange model of communication

concerned have got problems. We will return to examples of problems throughout this book.

Contextualized models

These models add the dimension of situation or surroundings.

This matters more or less to how communication takes place according to the particular example. But **context always affects the act of communication.**

For example, we would communicate differently in the situation of a formal dinner party with our boss, as compared with eating fish and chips in the kitchen with friends. This example shows that context has both physical and social aspects.

Figure 8 is a model which includes context. One other term is important.

This new term is *feedback*. It reminds us that communication is often two-way: that there are responses to messages sent. And that we adjust the way that we carry on a conversation, for example, according to the feedback that we get from the other person. The channel which conveys feedback does not have to be speech but may be non-verbal – for example a bored expression or a movement of the feet in readiness to leave.

You will also notice that we have changed the words ‘source’ and ‘destination’ in figure 6 to ‘sender’ and ‘receiver’. You may come across these terms in other books. Try to decide for yourself which words are most useful.

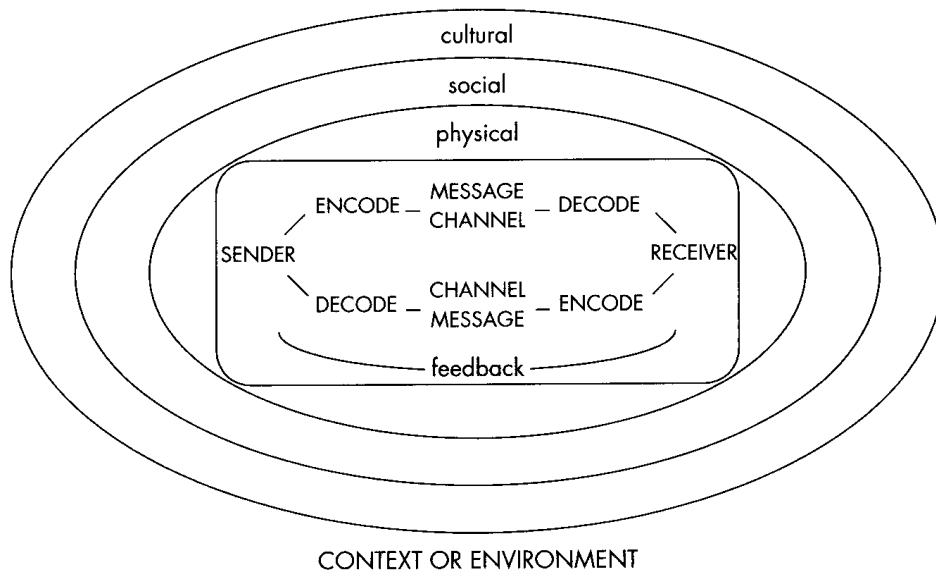


FIGURE 8 Contextualized model

Conclusion

We have argued that **the act of communication is one in which meanings are exchanged through signs**. We have made a number of suggestions about what happens when we communicate. And explaining what happens when we communicate helps explain what communication is.

Generally, in this chapter we have given ways of:

explaining why we communicate,
describing how we communicate.

Now you can check what we have said by looking at the summary which follows. After that, we suggest some activities which will bring out some of the points we have made, and which will encourage you to check our ideas and explanations as to what communication is.

Do we know what we are doing when we communicate?

Hint: when are you conscious or unconscious of the effect of what you are saying?

Review

This is to help you check on the main points of this first chapter, 'What is communication?'

First we said that communication is something that we experience in various ways. So then we asked ourselves:

1 HOW DO WE EXPERIENCE COMMUNICATION?

- 1.1 Through various means of communication which you should be able to define and give examples of, from the list that follows:
forms,
medium,
the media,
other kinds.
- 1.2 As a connection between people, joining friend with friend, or newspaper reporter with newspaper reader.
- 1.3 As an activity, because it is something that we do. We make communication in order to make things happen in our lives.
- 1.4 As something which we have learnt to do, like other skills and abilities which we have.