

FUNDAMENTALS OF COMMUNICATION

1. Introduction

Communication is the process of exchanging messages or information between two or more parties. Organizations today are heavily dependent on information to meet organizational needs. Effective communication plays a key role in fulfilling these needs and contributes significantly to organizational success. Despite its importance, communication has not been given enough attention and grown as it should have between civil and military entities.

2. The Importance of Communication

Effective communication is crucial for the success of individuals as well as organizations. This is true within the individual organization itself as well as how that organization communicates with other organizations within its sphere of contact, influence and competition.

Communication is a complex two-way process, involving the encoding, translation and decoding of messages. Effective communication requires the communicator to translate their messages in a way that is specifically designed for their intended audience.

Creating and delivering an effective message requires a basic understanding of the communication process. Most aviation related proposals or presentations require the clear and unambiguous communication of a message in a way that can be clearly understood by the recipient.

It is human nature to assume that when we communicate we are doing so effectively, and that if anything goes wrong consequently the responsibility for that must rest with the recipient. It is critically important to understand that civil and military organizations have drastically different funding streams, daily mission requirements and bottom line benchmarks for determining success.

Communication is a skill and like any skill it requires practice. It is improvement through practice that differentiates a skill from other forms of knowledge. Understanding the theory of communication and effective presentation will not in itself make you a brilliant communicator or presenter but should make you aware of how to maximize the impact of your presentations.

The most important thing to remember is that the message that you intend to communicate is likely to be misunderstood. Therefore, in addition to carefully preparing and presenting your message, stay alert for any signs that your audience are mis-interpreting it. It is up to you, the presenter, to continually check that your message has been received, understood, correctly interpreted and filed in the receivers mind.

3. The Basic Forms of Communication

The basic forms of communication are of two types such as verbal and non-verbal communication. It can be in the form of meetings, speeches or writing, gestures or expressions.

Non-verbal communication

Non-verbal communication is a primitive form of communication that does not involve the use of words. It rather uses gestures, cues, vocal qualities, spatial relationships etc. to convey a message. It is commonly used to express emotions like respect, love, dislike, unpleasantness, etc.

Non-verbal communication is less structured compared to its verbal counterpart and is most often spontaneous. As it is not planned, it is sometimes considered more reliable than verbal communication, as it reflects the communicator's true feelings.

Non-verbal communication enhances the effectiveness of the message as gestures and body language are registered easier and quicker with the audience than verbal communication.

Non-verbal communication, when combined with verbal communication, makes a presentation more effective and has greater impact on the audience.

Verbal communication

However, non-verbal communication has its limitations. Many complex ideas, thoughts or messages have to be communicated sequentially to be meaningful. Verbal communication involves the arrangement of words in a structured and meaningful manner, adhering to the rules of grammar. The message is then conveyed to the audience in either spoken or written form.

Speaking and Writing

Effective verbal communication involves the use of both speech and writing to transmit a message. While oral communication is more effective in reaching a focused target audience, as it involves interaction and additional non-verbal cues to augment the speech, written communication is necessary for reaching a large number of scattered recipients. Depending on the situation and the requirements, organizations use both the spoken as well as written channels for communication.

Listening

Organizations have not paid much attention to listening as a skill. Equal importance should be given to listening and expression. Oral communication cannot be effective unless the audience is good at listening and most of its content is forgotten after a presentation. Developing good listening skills is essential for grasping the contents of an oral presentation and retaining them.

4. The Process of Communication

Communication goes through a process, involving the following phases:

- **Sender**
- **Message**
- **Channel**
- **Receiver**
- **Feedback**

5. Barriers to Communication

The process of communication is susceptible to many barriers. These can be categorized into problems caused by the sender, problems in message transmission, problems in reception, and problems in receiver comprehension.

6. Dealing with Communication Barriers

Though most communication barriers require situation specific handling, a few basic methods for dealing with them are available. These methods such as know your subject, focus on the purpose, know your audience, and be organized.

7. Summary

- Communication is the process of transmitting messages.
- Communication can be verbal, non-verbal or both. Non-verbal communication involves the use of gestures and facial expressions to convey a message.
- Verbal communication involves the written and spoken forms.
- The process of communication comprises the sender, message, channel, receiver, and feedback.
- There are many barriers to effective communication.
- These barriers can arise at the level of the sender, receiver, in the channel of communication, the medium or at the stage of message comprehension.
- The barriers to effective communication can be overcome by a thorough knowledge of the subject, by focusing on the purpose, by **knowing or understanding the audience (their background, experience, what are they here for, etc)** and by organizing the content of your briefing or mission.