ADMINISTRATION AND MANAGEMENT SKILLS
(LII312)

2. COMMUNICATION

2.1. Communication Principles

A basic definition of "communication" is a two-way process of giving and receiving information through various channels. Whether one is speaking informally to a colleague, addressing a conference or meeting, writing a newsletter article or formal report, the following is important:

- Know your audience (this will help to frame how you communicate)
- Know your topic (speak from a position of authority)
- Communicate a little at a time (people can only process small amounts of information at a time)
- Present information in several ways (varying presentation can enhance the processing of communication)

2.2. Verbal Communication

As Krauss (2002) states, " A species' survival depends critically upon its ability to communicate effectively, and the quality of its social life is determined in large measure by how and what it can communicate." As a result, our overall human social life as it is presently constituted is built upon a high level of communicative virtuosity. Without this, our lives would be quite different and our survival threatened.

2.3. Nonverbal Communication

You may have heard of the old proverb: "Actions speak louder than words." In essence, this underscores the importance of non-verbal communication. Non-verbal communication is especially significant in intercultural situations. Well, what is non-verbal communication? Basically it is sending and receiving

messages in a variety of ways without the use of words. This type of communication is both intentional and unintentional, but unfortunately most speakers / listeners are not conscious of how important nonverbal communication is. It usually consists of;

- a touch
- eye contact (gaze)
- gestures
- posture
- smell

Why is nonverbal communication important? Basically, it is one of the key aspects of communication and it has multiple functions:

- *Repeats* verbal messages (for example, point in a direction while stating directions)
- *Accents* a verbal message (for example, a verbal tone indicates the actual meaning of specific words)
- *Complements* the verbal message, but also may contradict (for example, a nod can reinforce a positive message and a "wink" may contradict a stated positive message)
- *Regulates* interaction (for example, nonverbal cues convey when the other person should speak or not speak)
- *Substitutes* for the verbal message (especially if it is blocked by noise or interruption, for example, gestures finger to lips to indicate need for quiet)

2.4. Effective Communication

As Lazarus (2011) mentions, "Everyone communicates in one way or another, but very few people have mastered the skill of truly effective communication. Breakdowns in communication occur all too often and usually lead to a wide range of social problems, from hurt feelings and anger to divorce and even violence." Effective communication can usually be achieved by sticking to two important guidelines:

1) Make sure you have the attention of the person you wish to communicate with by establishing and maintaining eye contact.
2) Try to send clear messages that are congruent in both verbal and nonverbal dimensions.

To be congruent, make sure the tone and volume you use agrees with the content of the message you send. For example, if you are pleased, look happy and sound happy, but if you are angry, look annoyed and sound annoyed without yelling. Also, in business, the ability to master important conversations can help your career. Research suggests that the most influential people are those that master the art of crucial conversations by getting things done while building on relationships. The key is to be able to navigate controversy or opinions and ensure that your message is heard.

2.5. Barriers to Communication

Every form of communication is complex. Whether we realize it or not, listening to or reading someone else's message, we often filter what's being said through a screen of our own opinions. One of the major barriers to communication is our own ideas and opinions. As an example, there's an old communications game, called telegraph, that's played in a circle. A message is whispered around from person to person. What the exercise usually proves is how profoundly the message changes as it passes through the distortion of each person's inner "filter." We all have filters that we use on a daily basis. Communication is both an expressive, message-sending, and a receptive, message-receiving, process. Failure to communicate effectively can be due to a problem on either or both ends of the process. Some common barriers to effective communication are;

- *The use of jargon* (Keep it simple and avoid overcomplicated, unfamiliar and/or technical terms)
- *Physical barriers to non-verbal communication.* (Not being able to see the non-verbal cues, gestures, posture and general body language can make communication less effective)
- *Language differences and the difficulty in understanding unfamiliar accents*
- *Expectations and prejudices which may lead to false assumptions or stereotyping (*Remember, people often hear what they expect to hear rather than what is actually said and jump to incorrect conclusions)

- *Cultural differences (*The norms of social interaction vary greatly in different cultures, as do the way in which emotions are expressed)

How can you make sure that you minimize possible barriers to your communication? A skilled communicator must be aware of these barriers and try to reduce their impact by continually checking understanding and by offering appropriate feedback. A caveat is that communication needs to be two-way to be effective. One party cannot be solely into the conversation and the other not want to dialogue. If this occurs, then basic communication will not take place.

2.6. Communications in the company

How do organizations communicate with their staff? Typically meetings are used and have become an accepted way of transmitting information out within businesses and organizations. As Pittampalli (2001) says, "Everyone thinks that meetings are important but few of us truly benefit from attending." The reasons are many, but primarily meetings often waste time, don't transmit important and updated information and there is usually a lack of timely follow up for important tasks that have been identified. To combat this issue, managers should remember that there should be a commitment to the use of effective verbal (formal and informal meetings) and nonverbal (memorandums, briefings) communication within a company.

2.6.1. Presentations

It is your message that is important. Your presentation is the vehicle for delivering your message and to create results. A sign of a successful presentation is one that moves people to action. You know it was a success if there is a purchase, increased work activity or follow up afterwards. To do that requires skill and a great presentation does not just happen. It is planned, rehearsed often then delivered with flair. An effective presenter is one who learns the skills of presentations and not one who believes that talent is enough to carry them. Public speaking is comprised of a set of skills not talent. There are many presentation structures that you can choose from. When you speak to a business group the most effective approach is to state your conclusions first, the actions required then follow with supporting information. This format has proven to be an effective in presentations. The most

boring and ineffectual presentation style to use with a business group is the stand and deliver lecture method that many of us learned in school. This lecture method starts with a problem, followed by a hypothesis, a method, results and conclusion. That sounds logical but most people in business today do not have the patience to listen to traditional lectures. In today's society, as most people have short attention spans and limited patience, presenters are wise to stay away from lecturing.

2.6.2. Diagnosis

In business and management, how can we diagnose the level of communication within an environment? In any profession, employees should possess great oral and written communication skills and have excellent interpersonal communication skills as well. Unfortunately, people tend to spend more time working on their technical proficiency than they do their communication skills. The result is a lack of career progression and sometimes, unfortunately, even career death. The following list of weaknesses can be used by managers when needing to diagnose the level of communication within their organization. Staff members should not;

- Have poor handshakes
- Possess poor written communication skills
- Use slang
- Have poor body language
- Have poor eye contact
- Have poor time management

2.6.3. Discussions

Patterson, et. al.(2012) says "Crucial conversations are defined as: A discussion between two or more people where stakes are high, opinions vary and emotions run strong. Despite the importance of crucial conversations, we often back away from them because we feel that they will make matters worse." So unfortunately, we have become adept at avoiding tough conversations. Co-workers routinely email each other instead of speaking face-to-face, voicemails are routinely left. Whether we are communicating informally with friends and family or within a business setting, the overall quality of our discussions indeed defines us.

2.6.4. Sales

Communication is the foundation of business culture. What are potential problems with sales? Poor communication skills can lead to low morale and high turnover. As suggested by Clarke (2009). "Low morale leads to lack of motivation, and soon that leads to salespeople missing their targets because they are emotionally disconnected (or actively against) the company. You cannot expect high sales performance from a sales team with low morale." Also, high turnover disrupts sales momentum, and subtly sends the message to everyone in the company that the management can't retain talent.

2.6.5. Meeting Management

Handled effectively, meetings are the way we make change and change is how we grow", as stated by Pittampalli (2001). The following suggestions can used as a blueprint for managing meetings;

- Gather input from all participants when designing meetings or during meetings
- Make sure that there is follow up with key tasks identified during meetings
- Consider the use of professional development during meetings as a way to teach a concept rather than merely lecturing on a concept

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2	Journal	Simple Keys to Effective Communication: How to Be a Great Communicator *Think Well*	Lazarus, C.N., Ph.D.	2011	The Lazarus Institute
3	Book	Sales Machine Land Mines: 6 Sales Revenue Killers and the Blueprint to Avoid Them	Clarke, M.	2009	The Jenkins Group
4	Book	Read This Before Our Next Meeting	Pittampalli, A.	2001	Do You Zoom, Inc.
5	Book	Crucial Conversations: Tools for Talking When Stakes Are High	Patterson, K., Grenny, J., McMillan, R. and Switzler, L.	2012	McGraw-Hill