Principles of Professional Communication 1

What is Communication – meaning or message?

Myra Gurney
School of Humanities and Communication Arts
What is communication?

- The ordered **transfer** of meaning
- The **process** by which messages are sent and received
- **Social interaction** through messages
- The **reciprocal** creation of meaning
- The **sharing** of information, ideas and attitudes between or among people
When constructing a message we consider ...

- **WHAT** we wish to communicate
  - the content
- **WHO** we wish to communicate with
  - the audience
- **HOW** we wish to send the message
  - the medium or channel
- **WHEN** we wish to communicate
  - the timing of the message
Why communication models?

According to Dennis (2012, p. 1), a model, be it a model car or an economic model, is a simplified representation of a more complex mechanism. A model is typically smaller, simpler and easier to build than a full scale replica. A model sheds light on the main features of the reality it seeks to represent.

- They are useful but limited.
Two ways of looking @ communication

- **Transmission** models which see communication as the transfer of messages through various stages eg Shannon & Weaver, Berlo

- **Transaction** models which see communication as the creation or negotiation of meaning in two or more parties responding to the environment
Shannon & Weaver’s Model of Communication

EXHIBIT 1.2  The Shannon and Weaver model of communication

Source: Shannon and Weaver 1997.
Shannon & Weaver’s Model of Communication

- Devised in 1949 to describe the process of telephonic transmissions
- Sees communication as linear
- Uses mechanical terms to describe the process eg encoder, decoder
- Identified the concept of noise
- Important because it was the first attempt to systematically analyse communication as a series of component parts or steps
What is noise?

- Any interference in the process of communication (first identified by S & W)
- **Physical** noise eg telephone static, poor acoustics, background noise
- **Semantic** noise arises from the misuse, misunderstanding or misinterpretation of language
- **Psychological** noise where interpretation is affected by the attitudes, motivations or prejudices of the sender or receiver
BC – an example of semantic noise in a message

Source: Sadler & Tucker, 1981, 3
Berlo’s Model of Communication

- Devised in 1960 by David Berlo, from Michigan University
- Builds on Shannon & Weaver’s model but shows communication as a human rather than a mechanical process
- Analyses the elements of each part of the process
- A problem in any part will impact on the rest
- Emphasises the need for communication to be purposive
Components of a message

- **The Elements** – letters in words, non verbal actions or gestures
- **The Structure** – the way the elements are assembled eg order of information
- **The Content** – information of the message as the source intends it
- **The Treatment** – the way the message is presented eg use of humour, series of quotes
- **The Code** – how particular elements are combined eg certain style of language, pictures, use of colour, font types etc
Transaction models take a more holistic approach

- See communication as the result of the *interaction* between a range of elements
- More focus on *contextual*, *situational* or *environmental* factors
- See meaning as *negotiated* not *fixed* but
- Meaning is an *evolution* not a *process*

Source: Mohan et al., 1997, 40
Comparison of the two approaches

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Transmission models</th>
<th>Transaction models</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>See communication as <strong>linear</strong> or as a series of steps</td>
<td>See communication as <strong>dynamic, circular</strong> and unrepeatable</td>
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<tr>
<td>Assume the “meaning” lies in the components of the message itself: words chosen, treatment etc</td>
<td>Believe the “meaning” lies in the individuals who participate in the communication. Shared experiences and common language important.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Show that any <strong>variation</strong> in the <strong>elements</strong> eg inappropriate channel, can impact on the clarity of the message</td>
<td>See communication as being <strong>dependant</strong> on a wide range of factors, including: situations, contexts, psychological characteristics of the sender (encoder) and receiver (decoder) of a message</td>
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<td>Believe communication describes the production of messages.</td>
<td>Believe communication describes the evolution of meaning rather than the production of messages.</td>
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Cultural contexts

- Culture has a profound effect on communication
- Cultural norms dictate the meanings of objects, symbols (including words), and actions
- Sometimes we can be blinded by our own culture
Communication Breakdown

- Can be said to occur when the message sent differs from the message received in ways not intended
- People look at the same things and can interpret differently
- People misunderstand each other’s motives
- People fail to transmit messages, leaving gaps in the data available
Communication Breakdown

- People can be reluctant to risk embarrassment, conflict or animosity by making contact to negotiate differences in their readings of a situation.
- Too much information or information overload can cause messages to be missed or misinterpreted.
- Too many links in the communication chain can create “Chinese whispers” syndrome.
What happens when we get it wrong?