**Lecture 5. *Types, models and barriers to intercultural business communication***

**The aim:** to analyze the multiplicity of communication types, linear and transactional models of communication and different sorts of barriers to intercultural business communication.

**Plan**

1. Types of communication.

2. Models of communication.

3. Barriers to communication.

**Keywords:** types of communication, models of communication, barriers to communication, behavioral differences, differences in skills, components of human communication.

**1. Types of communication.**

Communication can be categorized into different types depending upon the level at which it take place, the direction it takes or by its very nature. Some of the commonly referred to types of communication are:

1. Personal and business communication.

2.Internal and external communication.

3.Upward and downward communication.

4.Formal and informal communication.

5.Lateral communication.

6.Interactive communication.

7.Mass communication.

8.Global communication.

9.Social communication.

10.Grapevine.

*Personal communication* concerns communication that take place between any two individuals, be it in a family, group, community or even an organization. It takes place in an individual capacity and is characterized by informality. *Business communication* takes place to further the goals of a business. It takes place among business entities, in markets and market places, within the organizations and between various groups of employees, owners and employees, buyers and sellers, service providers and customers, sales persons and prospects and also between people within the organization and press persons. *Internal communication* takes place within the organization or group – among people, among different groups of employees and between employers and employees. It could be oral or written, visual or audio-visual, formal or informal, and upward or downward. Unlike internal communication, *external communication* flows outward. It addresses people outside the organization, like the prospective customers, competitors, public, press, media and the government. External communication can take place in various ways and through different channels.

Large organizations have different hierarchical levels or tiers. The process of communication to be complete and effective should encompass all these levels and tiers. *Upward communication* (Table 4) is one which moves upward, from the bottom to top levels in the hierarchy. Any communication that moves from employees to supervisors, supervisors to managers, managers to executives and regional manager to general manager may be categorized as upward communication. Similarly, communication from branches to regional offices, regional offices to zonal offices, zonal offices to the head office is referred to as upward communication. Employee suggestion, market reports, performance reports, feedback on new products and requests for facilities or instructions are all examples of upward communication in the organizational context.

Table 4 – Upward communication

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Supervisor  🡩  Employee | Manager  🡩  Supervisor | Executive  🡩  Manager | Chief executive  🡩  Executive | Zonal office  🡩  Branch |

*Downward communication* (Table 5) moves from top to the bottom, from the CEO downwards. It travels through senior executives to junior-level functionaries, from the controlling office to the branch, from the head of the divisions to the head of the unit. Corporate goals, business priorities, motivational letters, work-related instructions, newsletters, letters from the CEO/General Manager’s desk are all typical examples of downward communication.

Table 5 – Downward communication

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Chief executive  🡫  Executive | Executive  🡫  Manager | Manager  🡫  Supervisor | Supervisor  🡫  Employee | Zonal office  🡫  Branch |

To ensure communication on an ongoing basis, organizations develop formal systems. Staff meetings, union-management meetings, branch managers’ conferences, periodical sales review meetings and customer meets are examples of forums that facilitate formal communication. *Formal communication* generally follows a well-defined hierarchical pattern and periodicity. Memos, circulars, instructions, guidelines, clarifications, agreements and reports are some of the channels that facilitate the flow of formal communication in business organizations.

*Informal communication* takes place in an unstructured manner and outside the formal fora. Informal communication works well in smaller, loosely knit organizations. Informal communication takes place through chats, conversations, informal talks and the like.

*Lateral communication* (Table 6)generally takes place in an organization and is neither upward nor downward. It proceeds in a horizontal manner and takes place among equals and at peer level. It may also be described as peer-level communication. Any communication that takes place, orally or in writing, from one branch head to the other, from one division head to the other, from one group head to the other, may be described as lateral communication. An important point worth noting in any such lateral communication is that there is not much difference in terms of the hierarchical levels or positions of the sender and the receiver.

Table 6 – Lateral communication

|  |
| --- |
| Supervisor 🡪 Supervisor  Manager 🡪 Manager  Branch 🡪 Branch |

*Interactive communication* is essentially two-way process. It takes place through meeting, teleconferencing, multimedia presentations, group discussions and other such active two-way exchanges. *Mass communication* is distinctive in view of its scale. Essentially, it addresses a large mass of people. Public speaking, newspapers, magazines and journals, radio, television and dotcoms are channels of mass communication. *Global communication* relates to communication that takes place beyond the national boundaries. Global communication has its own characteristics in terms of language, culture, etiquette and time factor, which have to be reckoned within the process of communication. *Supportive communication* is a form of communication in which people are encouraged to speak freely and come out with their feelings and concerns.

As members of society, people everywhere will have to interact with others on a regular basis. *Social communication* takes place when people meet each other outside business and workplace situations. *Grapevine communication* is a kind of informal communication that prevails in organizations or businesses. The source of such communication may not be clear. It spreads by way of gossips and rumors. It may not always be possible to control the grapevine, but, nevertheless, an able communicator knows how to influence it.

**2. Models of communication.** Although definition of communication varies from discipline to discipline, scholars tend to agree that embedded in all definitions of communication are the factors of people message, channel, and context. Based on this consensus, we can identify *nine components* of human communication, which usually operate simultaneously and present in two communication models: **linear and transactional.** In their most basic form, these components are found in every culture. They are *sender, message, channel, encoding, decoding, receiver, feedback, noise and personal filter areas.* All these components exist in the specific context in which the communication act occurs.

Until about fifty years ago, researches viewed communication as something that one person “does” to “another”. In this **linear communication model,** communication is like giving an injection: **a sender encodes** ideas and feelings into some sort of **messages** and then conveys them to **a receiver** who **decodes** them. A **sender** is a person who starts the communication. A sender is someone who needs and wants to exchange information with others. The need may be conscious, such as asking someone directions (seeking information), expressing feelings about a wedding attended (sharing experience), or assigning tasks to an employee (accomplishing tasks). The need to communication may also be non-conscious – for example, frowning when hearing music one doesn’t like or in disagreeing with another’s opinion. Conscious or non-conscious, communication is the sharing of thoughts and feelings, with varying degrees of intention by the sender, and it affects the feelings and behavior of another person or a group of people.

**Message.** The message is the verbal and/or nonverbal form of ideas, thought or feelings that one person wishes to communicate to another person or in some place at some time within a specific context. A message is the composition of verbal codes such as language and/or nonverbal codes, including facial expressions, body movements, tone of voice, use of space, time orientation, and so forth. Each culture has its own way of forming and expressing messages.

**Channel.** One important element of these models is the communication **channel** – the method by which a message is conveyed between people. For most people face-to-face contact is the most familiar and obvious channel. Writing is another channel. In addition to these long-used forms, **mediated communication** channels include telephone, e-mail, instant messaging, faxes, voice mail, and even videoconferencing. The channel can be sound, sight, words, telephone, the Internet, fax, and so on. We receive messages when we listen to and watch each other. The degree to which an individual prefers one channel over another is often determined by his or her culture. In the US, words are highly valued, while in some Mediterranean cultures, touch is as a major communication channel. In Finland and Japan, silence is as significant carrier of message as words and sounds.

The channel you choose can make a big difference in the effect of a message. For example, a typewritten love letter probably wouldn’t have the same effect as a handwritten note or card. Likewise, ending a relationship by leaving a message on your ex-lover’s answering machine would make a very different statement than delivering a bad news in person.

**Encoding.** Since the subject matter of communication is theoretical and intangible, its further passing requires use of certain symbols such as words, actions or pictures etc. Conversion of subject matter into these symbols is the process of encoding. This is the process of taking the sender’s ideas and information and translating them into a set of symbols. Encoding is the action of transforming information into words.

**Decoding.** The person who receives the message or symbol from the communicator tries to convert the same in such a way so that he may extract its meaning to his complete understanding. Decoding is the process of translation and interpretation of the message by the receiver. Depending on the receiver’s prior experiences, value system, thought processes and numerous other factors, the decoding may come close to the sender’s original intent or it may be quite different. When the decoded message is close to the sender’s intent, the communication is said to be effective.

**Receiver.** The receiveris the person who receivesand decodes the message. Different receivers decode messages in different ways and may attach different meanings to them. The receiver is an intended target of the message. He or she normally shares the same code as a sender. Of course, in most interpersonal communication, participants are both senders and receivers, whereas mass communication may be one way. Unlike programmed computers or machines, human beings don’t respond uniformly to all messages, nor do they always compose the same message in exactly the same way. Individual characteristics, including those related to race, sex, age, education, culture, values, and attitudes, all affect how people communicate.

**Feedback.** The discernible response of a receiver to a sender’s message is called feedback. Not all feedback is nonverbal, of course. Sometimes it’s oral, as when you ask an instructor questions about an upcoming test or volunteer your opinion of a friend’s new haircut. In other cases it is written, as when you answer the questions on a midterm exam or respond to a letter from a friend.

Feedback refers to the response of receiver after receiving the message. Feedback is information generated by the receiver and made available to the sender, allowing the sender to judge the communication while it is taking place. Feedback can adjust the attitudes and behaviors of both a sender and a receiver and is yet another component that is modified by culture. For example, while members of US culture would feel comfortable saying, “I don’t agree with what you said”, as a means of feedback in a conversation, members of Chinese culture would communicate the same though by taking a deep breath.

**Noise.** These models also introduce the concept of **noise** – a term used by social scientists to describe any forces that interfere with effective communication. Noise can occur at every stage of the communication process. Three types of noise can disrupt communication – *external, physiological, and psychological. External noise* (also called “physical”) includes those factors outside the receiver that make it difficult to hear, as well as many other kinds of distractions. For instance, too much cigarette smoke in a crowded room might make it hard for you to pay attention to another person, and sitting in the rear of an auditorium might make a speaker’s remarks unclear. External noise can disrupt communication almost anywhere in our models – in the sender, channel, message, or receiver. *Physiological noise* involves biological factors in the receiver or sender that interfere with accurate reception: illness, fatigue, and so on. *Psychological noise* refers to forces within a communication that interfere with the ability to express or understand a message accurately. For instance, an outdoors person might exaggerate the size and number of the fish he caught in order to convince himself and others of his talents. In the same way, a student might become so upset upon learning that she failed a test that she would be unable to understand clearly where she went wrong.

Noise includes all of those things that distort or break down the communication process. It’s not limited to any one part of the process. For example, a distracting mannerism, sound, odor or article of clothing may distort the receiver’s perception of the message. The surroundings may also hinder communication. If the people involved cannot speak in normal tones of voice, communication will be affected, literally, by the noise. If the environment is hot, cold or wet, the communication may suffer. If the receiver is tired, hungry or otherwise uncomfortable, the result may be poor. It’s impossible to list all the factors which can be categorized as noise, because so much depends on the specific circumstance. You should remember that noise causes breakdowns in communication.

**Personal filter areas.** This is one of the most important areas in communication process. We have seen how communication is a two-way process and how the word communication has its roots in the word common. We have also looked at decoding and encoding. One of the keys of effective communication is the commonness of the encoding and decoding processes. If the senders and receivers use very different encoding and decoding processes, then poor communication will result. In short, good communication depends upon the sender and receiver speaking the same language. If you and your clients don’t have a good command of English (or whatever language is chosen for the communication) the risk of poor communication is great.

To make sense out of our world, we sort out our experiences. When confronted with a new situation, we choose past experiences to help relate to the situation at hand. This process of sorting carries over to the communication process. Problems arise when the sender and receiver don’t sort in the same way. The sorting process don’t have to be identical, but if there is a large common experience between the persons involved, communication will likely be more effective.

And of course, these models show that communicators often occupy different **environments** – fields of experience that help them understand other’s behavior. In communication terminology, environment refers not only to a physical location but also to the personal experiences and cultural backgrounds that participants bring to a conversation.

Consider just some of the factors that might contribute to different environments:

* **A** might belong to one ethnic group and **B** to another;
* **A** might be rich and **B** poor;
* **A** might be rushed and **B** have nowhere to go;
* **A** might have lived a long, eventual life, and **B** might be young and inexperienced;
* **A** might be passionately concerned with the subject and **B** indifferent to it.

As the shared environment becomes smaller, communication becomes more difficult. Consider a few examples in which different perspectives can make understanding difficult:

* Bosses who have trouble understanding the perspective of their employees will be less effective managers, and workers who do not appreciate the challenges of being a boss are more likely to be uncooperative (and probably less suitable for advancement).
* Members of a dominant culture who have never experienced how it feels to be “different» may not appreciate the concerns of people from nondominant co-cultures, whose own perspectives make it hard to understand the cultural

blindness of the majority.

Differing environments make understanding others challenging but certainly

not impossible. Hard work and many of the skills described in our lectures provide

ways to bridge the gap that separates all of us to a greater or lesser degree. For

now, recognizing the challenge that comes from dissimilar environments is a good

start. You can’t solve a problem until you recognize that it exists.

**Transactional and linear models of communication.** Despite its simplicity, **the linear model** doesn’t do a very good job of representing the way most communication operates. **The transactional communication model** presents a more accurate picture in several respects. Although some types of mass communication are two-way exchanges. The transactional model reflects the fact that we usually send and receive messages simultaneously. The role of sender and receiver that seemed separate in the linear model are now superimposed and redefined as those of “communicators”. This new term reflects the fact that at a given moment we are capable of receiving, decoding, and responding to another person’s behavior, while at the same time that other person is receiving and responding to ours.

Another weakness of the traditional linear model is the questionable assumption that all communication involves encoding. We certainly do choose symbols to convey most verbal messages. But what about the many nonverbal cues that occur whether or not people speak: facial expressions, gestures, postures, vocal tones, and so on? Cues like these clearly do offer information about others, although they are often unconscious and thus don’t involve encoding. For this reason, the transactional model replaces the term *encodes* with the broader term *responds*, because it describes both intentional and unintentional actions that can be observed or interpreted.

**3. Barriers to communication.**

At every stage of the communication process, however, there are barriers, which hinder or dilute the flow of communication. The barriers to communication in an organizational context may arise out of authority structure, status difference, reporting relationships, culture and background of individuals. The barriers to communication may arise out of behavioral differences, differences in skills and understanding as well as physical factors. While some kinds of barriers like behavioral differences and differences in skills may be commonly applicable to all methods of communication, barriers arising out of physical factors may be specific to the methods of communication adopted. Some barriers, which are specific to the written communication, are handwriting, spelling and legibility. Similarly, barriers to oral communication would include absence of felicity of expression, accent, speed of delivery and appropriateness of the language.

The power of expression of the communicator determines the quality of communication. To be effective, the message has to be properly developed from an idea. Barriers relating to expression result in poorly expressed messages. Lack of conceptual skills results in inadequate or incomplete shaping of the idea. Ambiguity as well as lack of clarity arise due to limited word power, improper organization of ideas and lack of coherence. Poor expression is likely to occur under the following circumstances:

1. When a person is ill.

2. When a person is fatigued.

3. When a person is under severe stress.

4. When a person is under the influence of alcohol.

5. When a person’s thoughts are not clear and vocabulary is limited.

These are true for both oral and written communication. The process of transmission, essential for any communication, is susceptible to errors of omission and commission. In the organizational context, the person transmitting the message may be different from the person who conceived the idea. The intent and purpose of the message may not remain the same as it moves from the originator to the transmitter. Not only that, the person transmitting the message may bring in his own bias, feelings and perceptions, which the originator of the message would not have intended. Or else, there may be occasions when the originator of the idea expects the transmitter to detail, illustrate and elucidate the idea, which the latter may fail to do.

Indifference and lack of interest is a very strong barrier in the process of communication. Organizations have to make considerable effort to insure that indifference to organizational communication is brought down to the minimum. Communication, to be effective, presupposes that the receiver of the message is also attentive or receptive. Attentive listening in oral communication, careful reading in written communication and keen observation in non-verbal communication are a must. Indifference or lack of interest on the part of the recipient, in turn, adversely impacts the enthusiasm of the communicator. When the students are not attentive, the teacher is likely to lose the interest. On the other hand, when the speaker lacks expertise or credibility, the receptivity of the audience wanes. Indifference and lack of interest creates barriers to communication, as a result of which the quality of communication suffers. The intended message is either not received at all or is incomplete and, worse still, is understood incorrectly.

Noise is yet another barrier especially relevant to verbal communication. Noise disturbs the flow of communication. The recipient fails to receive the oral messages sent by the communicator, as a result of which the message gets diluted. While noise certainly affects oral communication, it may also affect written communication to the extent that the person writing a letter or a report may lose his concentration and consequently his flow of thoughts may suffer.

The process of communication, especially transmission of messages, makes use of numerous channels, instruments and gadgets such as telephone, microphone, projector, printing, photocopying, telex, fax, radio, films, cassette and of late, the floppy, compact discs and the pen drive. All these are very useful when they function smoothly. At the same time, they act as barriers when they fail to perform their functions efficiently. As a result, communication fails to reach the target audience. Snapping of telephone lines, non-availability of meeting rooms, failure of multimedia equipment and disturbances of power supply may lead to delays in transmitting the message to the intended recipients.