

## The Communication Process

Have you ever come across a situation where you communicated something which to you was very simple and straightforward, only to be surprised to find the other party had missed the point entirely? This is not unusual, and can be frustrating and disruptive in the workplace.

To understand what is happening in such a situation we need to understand how communication works. This is a five step process that includes formation, encoding, delivery, decoding and reception of the communication, as follows:

1. **Source.** This is the sender of the communication identifying the need, and formulation of the communication in their own mind. If we do not put any thought into this step we are assuming that the audience have the same understanding and interest in the topic that we do, which of course might not be the case. On the other hand if we apply thought to this step we might consider the audience's level of interest, existing knowledge, level of detail required and so on, which we will then use to encode the message accordingly.

2. **Encoding.** This refers to how we 'design' the communication, i.e. what words and phrases we use, where we place emphasis, and how much detail we decide to go into. This is the conversion of our thoughts into language. If we do not apply consideration to this step there is a danger that our communication will come across as confusing and incoherent, or that we will fail to make the point intended.

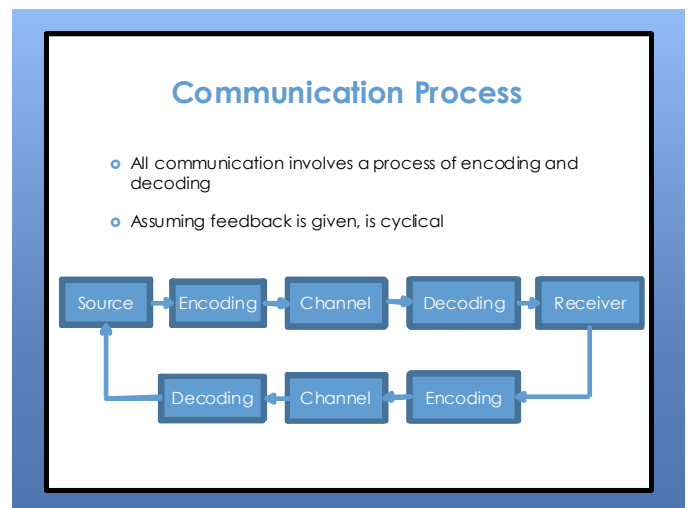
3. **Channel.** When communicating we usually have a choice of channels, e.g. face to face, email or phone. As each communication channel has different advantages and disadvantages, different channels will have different levels of effectiveness. Instead of quickly picking up the phone or firing off an email we need to consider which channel best suits the purpose of the communication.

4. **Decoding.** When receiving the communication the audience will decode the communication based on their own understanding, frame of reference and time spent viewing it. If the communication was not well planned (or even if it was) the receiver might interpret the message differently to what was intended, and miscommunication can occur.

5. **Receiver.** Having decoded the message the receiver will conclude what the message was. Ideally this will be the same as the intended message at the source, however if the communication was not encoded well or delivered via the right channel, or if the receiver only skimmed the message, we may have an issue!

The same process occurs again when the receiver sends feedback.

*Reflect: Think of some occasions when miscommunication occurred. At what step of the above process do you think the problem occurred?*



When the other party answers a call we first need to do two things:

Clarify that we have reached the right person: "Good afternoon, is that....".

State who you are and why you are calling: "This is...from X company, I am calling to request a meeting with you regarding project Y".

## Phone Etiquette

- Plan the call objective
- Give your name & establish who you are speaking to
- Establish the reason for the call
  - To inform
  - To make a request
  - To gain information
  - To make an offer
- Ask if it is a convenient time
- Confirm action
  - Whose responsibility
  - Timing
  - Call someone else?
- Reconfirm action if necessary
- Signal end of call
  - Don't hang up suddenly
  - Allow the other person to hang up
- Need to follow up with a written record?

It is then good etiquette to ask if you are calling at a convenient time. If not, it is in your interest to call back later. Calling someone at a time when they are available and have time to spare means that they are much more likely to listen and pay attention to what you have to say.

While speaking do not do so for too long without pausing and allowing the other person to speak or acknowledge what you are saying. When on the phone we do not have the benefit of eye contact or monitoring the other person's body language, and therefore cannot tell if they are concentrating or distracted. It is therefore important to keep the other party involved in the call.

At the end of the call confirm the result, i.e.

agreements or next step actions, and for anything important follow up with a confirmation email. Before hanging up it is also good etiquette to allow the other party to hang up first, especially if they are your customer or client.

## Voicemail

- One half to two thirds of all business calls go to voicemail
- Plan what you will say
  - Who you are (name, organisation)
  - Why you are calling
  - Request action
- Keep it short
- End courteously

Considering that a very large proportion of calls go to voicemail, you also need to be prepared for this possibility. Being unprepared means that we might leave a very hesitant message full of "umm..." and "ah...", or fail to leave a message within a reasonable 30 seconds or so before the voicemail system cuts us off. To keep things simple, be prepared to leave a concise message stating who you are, the purpose of your call and follow up action (time you will call back or request for them to call you).

In any case, plan in advance what you will say in the event that you reach voicemail.

## Listening

*Self reflection - Before we start on this section ask yourself:*

*Think of an example of when a misunderstanding occurred.*

*What caused the misunderstanding?*

*What could have been done differently?*