A. COMMUNICATION IN ORGANISATIONS

Communication may be defined as the process of transmitting or exchanging information and instructions. Ideas, orders, reports and explanations are all examples of the kind of material that flows through the communication system of an organisation. A more detailed definition is:

> *Communication is the activity whereby an individual or group conveys, consciously or unconsciously, information to another individual or group and, where necessary, evokes a response. The information may be facts, feelings or ideas.* (adapted from Eric Moonman "The Manager and the Organisation").

You should note the key points of this definition:

- Communication can be by, or to, **a group** – not just by or to individuals.
- Communication is often intended to evoke a particular **response** – and is effective only when it does, in fact, produce that response.
- Communication is not only of factual information, but it may be of **feelings and/or ideas**.
- The recognition of **unconscious** as well as conscious communication, so whenever we interact with others we are communicating.

Koontz makes a valuable addition to the definition of communication when he states:

> *"Communication is the transfer of information from one person to another with the information being understood by both the sender and the receiver".*

Notice that to qualify as communication there has to be **understanding** at both ends of the process.

Purposes of Communication

In very broad terms, the purposes of communication may be grouped under three headings:

- **Informative**

  This is probably the first purpose that comes to mind, and one we can readily understand: giving facts and figures; making reports; giving explanations; describing events.

- **Directive**

  As a result of this type of communication, you expect that the receiver will change his or her behaviour (e.g. do something, or not do something; do it more quickly or slowly, or another way). Alternatively, the receiver would be expected to change his or her way of thinking.

  This type of communication may take the form of an express instruction or order; it may be persuasion or advice. Whatever the form, the purpose is to get the recipient to take a particular action or line of thought.

- **Expressive**

  This function can best be described as follows:

  > *"The way in which one expresses one's feelings towards another."*

  For this purpose, communications may express praise or admiration for other people, perhaps of their performance or behaviour; they may express sympathy or understanding, show dislike or apportion blame. In all cases, you are telling other people what your feelings are towards them or about them, or something connected with them, such as their work or behaviour.

All of these broad purposes are easily identifiable in organisations, but if we are to appreciate the importance of good communication for organisations, we must grasp the functions and goals that communication fulfils for them. The functions of communication include:

- **To bring about change** – certain information is passed from one section or level of an organisation to effect change in the actions of the receivers, e.g. sales figures may influence the level of production when communicated.
- **To sustain stability** – information may be passed so that activities are continued in the same way; if existing behaviour is achieving objectives the message may mean: "Don't change a winning game".
- **To lead people into a common purpose** – Chester Barnard argued that this linking to achieve objectives was the most important function of communication.
- **To integrate the activities of management** – this is a wide-ranging function in that it makes communication responsible for:

  (i) Linking the levels of the organisation together.

  (ii) Linking the sections and departments of the organisations to each other ((i) + (ii) = structural integration).

  (iii) In addition communication integrates the functions of management to see to it that all the things management do are pulling in the same direction towards achieving organisational goals ((iii) = functional integration).
- **To establish links between an organisation and its environment** – an organisation needs a two-way flow of information with sections of its environment, e.g. with customers, suppliers, governments, the community, etc.

In order to facilitate these functions, organisations need effective systems and channels of communication. These may be said to be essential for the following purposes:

- To convey information about what is happening, both inside and outside the organisation.
- To inform staff of the organisation's policies and objectives.
- To lay down rules and regulations governing the organisation, procedures and modes of behaviour, especially in specific situations (e.g. grievance).
- To provide explanations about the nature and implications of current (and foreseen) problems and to explain changes necessary.
- To stimulate action where necessary.
- To create the relationships necessary to enable people to work together successfully and achieve the objectives of the organisation.
- To create, confirm or modify the attitudes of members towards the corporate identity, or the corporate image.
- To enable collective decisions to be made and render them acceptable.
- To provide the means for upward communication of feedback from staff to management, which will give early warning of problems, provide the benefit of the skills and creative ability of staff, and encourage cohesion and co-ordination between the various sections of the organisation.

Channels of Communication in Organisations

All organisations, irrespective of type and size, have a need for effective communication. The owner of a one-person business must communicate with suppliers of goods, customers and others necessary for the running of the business. He or she must also record transactions in the books of the company. Problems of communication grow as organisations become more complex. This is so whether the organisation is a commercial body, a private or public enterprise, a trade union or a social organisation. Communication in multinational companies, nationalised industries, local authorities and other large organisations tends to be very complex.

(a) Formal Internal Communication

This refers to the flow of information **within** an organisation. The formal lines of communication are those which are officially recognised and given official approval. They may be set down in the organisation structure, e.g. the rules and procedures for operation of the organisation, committee procedures, or the authority and responsibility allocated to particular jobs or sections. In all cases these lines of communication are officially recognised and they are those which members of the organisation are expected to use.

There are several pathways of communication that can occur within an organisation:

- ***Vertical Communication***

  Perhaps the most obvious is what is called vertical communication, i.e. the flow of information between levels of authority in the organisation. When the flow is from the top levels to lower levels we talk of downward vertical communication; when the flow is from lower levels back to the top we talk of upward vertical communication.

  Downward vertical communication follows the line of command – decisions made at the top have to be communicated and explained to the lower levels. We have seen that decisions taken at the top of an organisation are broadly-stated policies in line with organisational goals, but as these decisions become translated into action they must be detailed and specific. The nature of messages therefore changes as they move down the organisation – decisions have to be broken down to explain just what it is that has been decided and what the implications of this are for the level concerned. Broad policies become converted into orders and instructions.

  This process can present difficulties for communication systems. If the instructions are too brief they may not carry the exact meaning of what is required of the subordinates; on the other hand, if they are too detailed they may be so cumbersome that subordinates are confused. Another problem is the time it takes for instructions to reach the bottom of the organisation, and the accuracy of the instructions. Each level of the organisation must receive, interpret and develop in more specific form and then pass on the information, so clearly there is considerable room for error.

  Upward vertical communication involves the reverse of the downward process. What starts as detailed specific information at the lower levels has to be compressed into broad policy terms; the implications of the data have to be abstracted and passed on upwards. The messages flowing upwards are not orders or instructions – they are likely to consist of information on the progress being made at the lower levels, details of requirements for resources, problems being experienced, etc. Although not orders, these upward-flowing messages may exert pressure on management and affect policies because they reflect grassroots findings within the organisation, and management must take account of the attitudes of people and groups at the lower levels.

The upward flow of information also faces problems. At each stage, detailed specific data has to be compressed, key details abstracted and then the reduced message passed on; there are considerable risks in this process that something of importance may be filtered out. Sometimes any criticisms and problems tend to be watered down as the information passes along, because those at one level do not wish to antagonise the people above them in the organisation – people do not like to be the bearers of bad news to their superiors. The time element is also crucial.

- ***Horizontal Communication***

  Another important internal communication flow pattern is horizontal communication, i.e. between individuals in different departments or divisions within the same organisation. This form of communication may cut across the levels of authority. In Figure 4.1, you will see two forms of horizontal communication illustrated.

  Direct horizontal communication refers to the flow of information between individuals of similar rank or position, in different departments. In our example it is shown between middle management levels in the two departments, but it could be between any level in Department A and the similar level in Department B.

  Indirect horizontal communication refers to communication between one level in one department and a different level in another. In our example it is between middle management in Department A and foremen or supervisors in Department B.

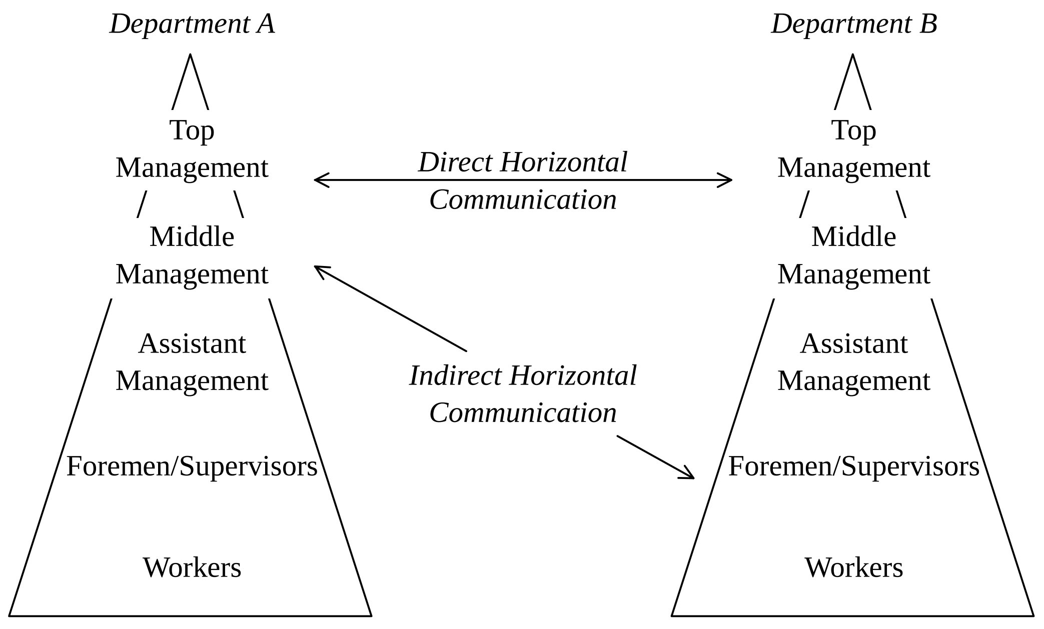

Figure 11.1: Horizontal Communication

Before we move on to consider informal communications, it is worth summarising the benefits which flow from effective formal channels.

Benefits of good downward communication

- Everyone is fully aware of the organisation's aims and objectives.
- Staff are aware of the content and consequences of policy directives.
- Staff properly understand changes in specific responsibilities or working instructions.

- Employees are consulted adequately and in good time about changes which are likely to affect them at work, such as changes in working conditions or prospects of career advancement.

Benefits of good upward communication

- Management will reap the benefit of the creative ability and experience of subordinates.
- Management will receive early warning of potential problems or trouble areas.
- Full scope is given to subordinates to participate in the consultative and decision-making processes.

Benefits of good horizontal communication

- There is a fully informed management team.
- Adequate co-operation and joint action is achieved more easily.
- The risks of damaging inter-section or inter-departmental rivalry are reduced.
- Genuine difficulties or problems, or genuine differences of opinion, are resolved more quickly and in good spirit.
- Changes, say, in systems or procedures which involve more than one section or department can be discussed, agreed and implemented more easily and successfully.

(b) Informal Internal Communications

Whereas vertical and horizontal patterns of communication are the formal paths along which information can flow, there is in every organisation an informal flow of information and opinion, the popular term for which is **the grapevine**. Individuals concerned with the formal passing on of information may also pass along at least part of it to people they know informally within the organisation, in the form of gossip. The possession of information that is not yet known to other people can make an individual socially important in the eyes of fellow workers.

The grapevine can function to speed up or spread information widely within the organisation. It can be useful for the organisation if it wishes to spread information informally to test the reaction of workers without making an official announcement or order. However, it can also be dysfunctional (i.e. act against the best interests of the organisation) by making known information which should have been kept confidential, or which is incomplete or distorted.

There are certain key positions in the grapevine structure, and many of these are held by people in relatively low organisational positions, e.g. secretaries have access to a great deal of written material.

When we consider informal communication, though, it would be wrong to write-off everything as simply part of the grapevine. There is much more to it than that.

Informal communication takes place when people get together and discuss a subject of common interest. Such discussions may well be within the authority of the participants but the actual circumstances may not be as officially prescribed and, to that extent, the communication is informal. Let us consider some examples.

- Some members of a committee may meet together, before the official committee meeting, to have an (informal) discussion on the matters to be discussed, and perhaps even to agree on how subjects will be approached, who will speak, and so on.

- As members of the committee, they are authorised to discuss the subjects of the committee but they hold this informal discussion to prepare the way for the official meeting. There will be no minutes or record of their discussion.
- A member of staff may wish to have a private, informal discussion with his or her manager about future prospects.
- A group of people may happen to meet in the canteen and a discussion on a subject of common interest about work or the organisation will develop. People will exchange information and give their views.

These are just a few examples of informal communications. They are usually oral. The subject and the line of communication may be within the authority of the people concerned but the actual manner or circumstances may not be exactly as officially laid down.

You may question whether informal lines of communication are desirable and whether they are useful. It is often found, however, that a considerable amount of communication takes place informally and that, provided it does not upset formal systems and arrangements, such informal communication is acceptable and may have the following advantages:

- Informal executive agreement on a problem or idea can promote rapid and effective action at top management level.
- Disputes can be resolved without involving higher management levels.
- Informal action or decisions usually tend to be more rapid than the, often cumbersome, process of official decision-making.
- Points can be made that would be too delicate or controversial if made officially.
- Early warning may be given of pending or potential problems or trouble.
- Good ideas are often first put forward informally.

(b) External Communication

Organisations have communication links with both their input and output connections. For example, a manufacturing firm will have communications with its suppliers of raw materials and spare parts, and with all its customers (e.g. wholesalers and retailers) who handle its products.

As organisations grow the number of communication links with the **outside environment** increases. It is important that the external communication system should be integrated with the internal system. For example, an order received from a customer (external communication) has to be processed and executed within the organisation (internal communication), then the documents of sale, invoice, etc. have to be sent to the customer (external communication).

The quality and quantity of an organisation's external communications are important for the following reasons.

- ***To meet statutory requirements***

  Legislation now compels organisations to disclose certain information. What has to be divulged can be divided, broadly, into the following areas:

  (i) **To recognised trade unions** – The Employment Protection Act 1975 requires employers to disclose such information to the representatives of recognised independent trade unions as it would be good industrial relations practice to disclose.

(ii) **To the public** – Since the 1850s there have been laws which require companies to publish details of their financial and trading positions in order to protect investors and possible suppliers. Successive **Companies Acts** have contained much of the provision in this respect.

(iii) **To government departments, agencies and other official bodies –** Many organisations are only too well aware of the number and complexity of official returns. Examples include Tax returns to the Inland Revenue, Accounts to the Department of Trade and Industry, VAT information to the Customs and Excise authorities, and many more

- ***To increase and improve business***

  For the majority of organisations, their suppliers and customers are external to the business and the level of business must be directly related to the level of external communications with those people.

  For example, your potential customers must be made aware that you exist. They must know the products or services you offer, prices and terms of business, etc. If you don't tell them, you will not get their business!

  Business improvement will come from good communications, which will include not only advertising or public relations but also the way in which you deal with orders and ordinary routine correspondence.

- ***To improve the organisation's "image"***

  The people with whom an organisation deals, or with whom it comes into contact, will have an image of that organisation. Such an image, whether good or bad, may depend on the standard of communication. The image will be improved if:

  (i) Telephone calls are answered promptly and courteously

  (ii) Correspondence is handled efficiently

  (iii) Letters are neat and well-written

  (iv) Information (such as catalogues, prices, availability, invoices) is supplied quickly, is accurate and is up-to-date

  Corporate image projection is achieved by use of external communications, and it is the image the company, or organisation, wants to sell to others. In this way, it is closely linked with the corporate culture within which employees work. Shortages of young people and of skilled workers make organisations more attentive to their image and culture, in order to attract and retain suitable staff against fierce competition from other organisations. The image can also be linked to the product, e.g. the Coca Cola image of young people belonging to a world-wide club merely through drinking their particular soft drink.

  However, questions can be raised as to whether the corporate image projected via the media and other means of external communication is, in fact, a structural or just a cosmetic exercise. If the latter, then employees attracted to the organisation by its image will be disillusioned upon finding out the reality – more disillusioned than if not attracted by the image in the first place.

  However, having said that, we all project an image of ourselves to others, using various communication methods and media to achieve the desired effect. In a way, we "market" ourselves in day-to-day situations, as organisations market themselves through the image they project and the culture they adopt. Think of the advertisements for shares in the former nationalised industries when they were being privatised. Each projected an image of that industry via television and newspaper advertising. The intention is to create a favourable image but, unfortunately, external factors can sometimes turn that into an unfavourable image, e.g. advertisements for water privatisation which coincided with a drought and fears over water safety. As with our own image projection, a banana skin is often lurking nearby, ready to show us up! Organisations threatened with being taken over often project favourable images of themselves to shareholders, and unfavourable images of the prospective buyer.

(c) Communication Networks

Another way of classifying communications is into types of networks. Communication networks are the patterns of individuals or groups who are the transmitters and receivers of information in a given organisation. Some patterns of communication are restricted, e.g. confidential financial information is made available to very few individuals. At the other extreme some sorts of information need to be disseminated widely and this results in a large, complex pattern.

When modern managements decide upon the pattern for a given type of communication network they can draw on the "need to know" concept. This view argues that a network should contain only those individuals or groups who **need** to have a given type of information in order to achieve their objectives.

B. THE COMMUNICATION PROCESS

In order to understand the nature of the problems facing communication systems in organisations, we need to study what actually takes place in the communication process. This process is concerned with the transmitting and receiving of messages; these messages may be in the form of language, written or spoken, or of symbols, but in all cases the objective is to transfer the ideas of the sender accurately to the receiver.

Figure 11.2 shows the simple mechanics of the communication process. In this diagram we see the three key elements in communications: the sender, the message, and the receiver.

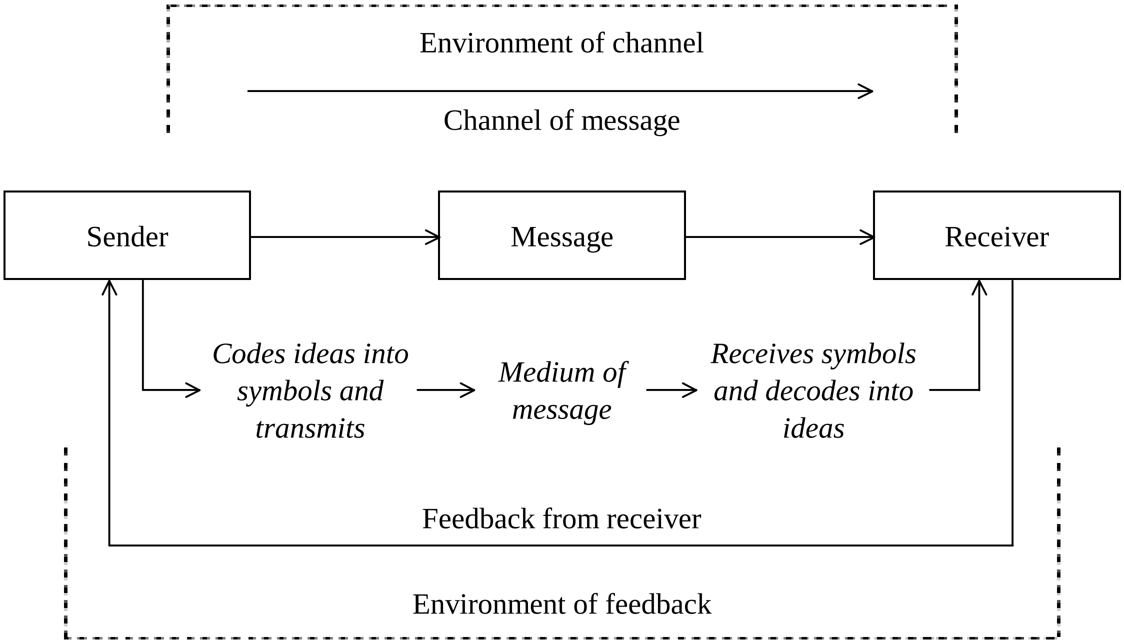

Figure 11.2: The Communication Process

Sender

The sender has certain functions to perform if the communication process is to work smoothly. He must clarify his ideas, i.e. he must get it clear in his own mind just what it is he means to say. Next he must code his ideas into the language or symbols he intends to use, bearing in mind that his main objective is to transmit the ideas clearly to the receiver. In order to succeed, the sender must have a good appreciation of the receiver and his circumstances. When a sender codes a message he needs to pitch it at the level of understanding of the receiver; he should not pitch it so high that the receiver fails to grasp its meaning, nor should he insult the receiver by pitching it at too low a level of comprehension.

The sender must decide which symbols he is going to use for his message. In communications the most frequently used symbols are words and figures, or bodily movements and signs. In close contacts, tone of voice or facial expressions can also convey certain attitudes of the sender of the message.

Having decided on appropriate symbols, the sender has to decide which **medium** to use. The medium is defined as the means of transmission, e.g. by telephone, written memo or letter, or face-to-face conversation. The sender must also decide on the **channel** he will use to send his message. The channel is defined as the route which the message will take to reach the receiver, e.g. a written memo may be delivered by hand to be absolutely sure that it is received (the channel selected is hand delivery). Finally, the sender has a responsibility for the quality of transmission of the message, e.g. has he spoken clearly if the medium is oral, or has he written clearly if the medium is in written form?

Message

Having been coded from the ideas of the sender into symbols (words, figures, etc.) the message is taken up by the medium and passed along its selected route. The route of a message involves a particular environment, e.g. the oral message follows the route of sound waves through an environment of noise from other quarters, or the written memo goes through the physical environment of the organisation as it moves from one office to another.

Receiver

This is the person that the sender wishes to reach with his message. He receives the message and decodes the symbols back into ideas. If the message has been correctly sent, clearly received and is pitched at the correct level of understanding, the idea or image in the receiver's mind should be very like the one in the sender's mind. Normally the receiver will send back a message to the sender to confirm receipt of the sender's communication. From this feedback the sender will usually be able to tell how his message has been understood; if understanding is poor he will have to retransmit, possibly altering the level of understanding (e.g. explaining in a more simple way) or changing the medium (e.g. putting it in writing instead of saying it) or changing the route if there have been problems with a given channel. Only when the sender receives positive feedback can it be assumed that the transmission of the message has been effective.

Problems in the Process

Problems in the process will mean ineffective communication – or no communication at all. It is important, therefore, to know where these obstacles to good communication lie.

(a) Networks

We have already stated that the extent and pattern of a communication network should embrace all those who need information and feedback to achieve their objectives. However, ascertaining just who should and who should not be included in a network requires care and constant updating.

(b) Load

The concept of load is related to the speed and nature of information flow. Where speed is low and the information is of a simple nature, we may have the problem of **underload**, i.e. a situation where the receiver could handle a higher quality and quantity of information. Underload gives rise to boredom and dissatisfaction in receivers, who feel that their talents are being underused. In contrast we have the problem of **overload**, where the flow of information is so great in quantity, complexity or both that the system cannot cope.

(c) Medium and Content

It is crucial that management select the appropriate medium, e.g. written, oral or visual; a wrong selection can impede effective communication.

The content of a message should be adequate and appropriate. Communication experts offer the following guidelines:

- Never use a long word where a short one will do.
- Avoid jargon if an everyday English word will give the same meaning.
- If you can leave a word out do so.
- Never use the passive tense where you can use the active, e.g. do not say *"Action was taken this morning"* (passive), but *"I took action this morning"* (active expression). The reason for using the active is that it is more direct and honest. It is direct because it shows people initiate actions and it is honest because it states just who took action.

(d) Interpersonal problems

Some of the most serious barriers to effective communication arise from human attitudes and behaviour:

- ***Lack of Willingness to Communicate***

  Willingness to communicate in the first place may not exist. "There are far too many managers who are secretive about their intentions and who feel that there is some sort of loss of dignity or face – or even power – in making sure that, all down the line, everyone knows what they are about" wrote Roger Falk in "The Business of Management". **Status** considerations apply, perhaps linked with **security** ones, if our sole possession of information helps us to feel irreplaceable.

  Subordinates may be unwilling to communicate upwards from fear of their senior's attitudes: fear, perhaps, of his temper, or some supercilious trait of the "You're not paid to think!" type. (Research shows that a fair proportion of the managers who pride themselves on the "ever-open door to my office" in fact have subordinates unwilling to communicate with them – for, apparently, good reason.)

- ***Preconceptions***

  Preconceptions on the part of the transmitter and/or the receiver are a common source of misunderstanding. Rosemary Stewart stresses that, especially where people have different backgrounds and experience, they do not see and interpret things in the same way.

  A manager must learn two things from these points:

  (i) He must take care that his own preconceptions do not unconsciously influence him in framing or interpreting a communication.

  (ii) He must allow – from his knowledge of his subordinates as individuals – for **their** preconceptions, i.e. what will their "inner selves" read into what he says, writes or does?

Guidelines for Effective Communications

We can summarise with the following guidelines for good communications:

- Include all persons in the network who should be included.
- Solve the problem of load either by redesigning the organisation so as to reduce load at heavily committed points, or arrange a system of queuing so that messages can be dealt with in sequence (ideally this should give priority to urgent messages). The well-organised communication system solves the problems of overload and underload.
- Be brief in the messages you send; simplicity is preferable to complexity. Use a direct style and simple effective words or symbols. Long, complicated messages lose their effectiveness because the receivers lose interest and concentration.
- Be accurate and precise. The good message has clear, accurate facts rather than vague estimates.
- Be swift but not over-hasty. Faster does not always mean better communications; speed should not be bought at the price of accuracy.
- Be selective in your message transmissions. Send only what needs to be communicated; there should be no unnecessary messages.

- The organisation should encourage two-way communication. The receiver should not only feed back to confirm receipt of a message but should also request clarification or ask any questions he feels necessary.
- Make the distortion in communication as little as possible by using as short a chain as is practicable for a given message.

C. METHODS OF COMMUNICATION

There are two main forms of medium for the transmission of information – written and oral communication. We also need to consider the impact of non-verbal forms of communication, including body language.

Written Communication

There are many sorts of written communication in frequent use:

- Informal note – this would be sent to close working colleagues.
- Letter – this would normally be used for external communications, e.g. to suppliers or customers. The memo is used internally.
- Forms – many communications are carried out on pre-printed forms. They can be used within the organisation and for external communication, e.g. order forms for suppliers.
- Notices – these are used to disseminate information to large numbers of people in the organisation. Often they are placed on noticeboards for all to read.
- Reports – these are more formal and set out to be a full and accurate summary of a particular topic of interest within the organisation.
- Press release or media news – these aim to convey information about the organisation to the public via the media, e.g. newspapers, TV, radio, etc.
- Training manuals and rulebooks – these set out the rules and regulations of the organisation.

(a) Advantages of written communication

- Careful compilation, with the chance to amend first thoughts and easier comprehension through reflection.
- Wider dissemination is easy, through printing and duplication processes, in particular communication with absentees, e.g. those away sick.
- Permanency is straightforward, assuming there is a sound filing system.

(b) Disadvantages of written communication

- Cost nowadays is a very real drawback, i.e. for labour (especially if a typist is used), postage, printing, etc.
- A mechanistic approach to organisation management will be assumed to exist if "putting it in writing" seems to be policy in the organisation, and there can be excessive formality.
- "Paper breeds paper" is unhappily one of the truest sayings.
- Obscurities are harder to clear up; an error means full circulation of all addressees again.
- Finally, permanency can be a drawback – amending or cancelling written instructions when they become out-of-date is a formidable task, rarely done thoroughly.

Oral Communication

The main forms of oral communication are:

- Planned formal talk – this is a prepared talk on a given topic.
- Unplanned informal talk – this is oral communication given when we meet people in our regular activities within the organisation.
- Interviews – these may be arranged for many purposes, e.g. appointments, promotion, counselling.
- Telephone calls – a swift and simple way of passing information both within the organisation and as an external form of communication.
- Meetings – these can take several forms, e.g. groups or sections can hold meetings, committee meetings.

(a) Advantages of oral communication

- Directness – the personality of each participant is brought to bear, so feelings and attitudes can be conveyed as well as facts. Each participant can see his relationship with others over the matters discussed.
- Understanding is surer, for questions can be raised and answered.
- Immediacy is both an advantage and a disadvantage; too often you think later of some important questions not asked, or some aspect of a complicated topic not clarified.
- When oral communications are conducted face-to-face, body language plays a large part in the transactions. If, for instance, a severe reprimand accompanied with a harsh tone is delivered, but is concluded with a wink, the meaning is turned upside down.

  Body language allied with oral transactions can often reveal much about what is not said and give a more revealing and reliable message.

(b) Disadvantages of oral communication

- Perception of meaning is likely to be less accurate, as the receiver has little time to brood over the precise meaning of words and figures, and puzzle out what the transmitter really means. We can interpret what is communicated in one particular way, then realise later that there is an alternative meaning. Few of us can weigh words and phrases as carefully in oral communication as we do when dictating a letter or memorandum. There is no draft of the message to be pondered over and given to an assistant for his fresh mind to seek possible double meanings or obscurities. Thus, a misleading message is a danger.
- Impermanence can be a drawback, if later there is an argument about what was said.

Non-verbal Communication

We speak with our voices but "converse" with our bodies. Our movements, gestures, appearance and facial expressions often convey meaning. Thus, the **person who is speaking** can emphasise or give additional information, while a similar feedback from the **listeners** often conveys a good idea of their reactions.

Let us consider a few examples.

(a) Facial Expressions

- Raised eyebrows – surprise

- Lowered eyebrows – uncertainty
- Smiles – pleasure, agreement
- Frown – anger, disbelief
- Eyes closed – considering or bored

(b) Gestures

Movements of the body, hand, arm, feet may all communicate a message:

- Nodding or shaking of head
- "Thumbs up"
- Pointing

(c) Movements

- Pacing up and down:
- Slowly – relaxed, deep in thought
- Quickly – worried, impatient
- Even standing up, sitting down or turning your back on the other person can indicate a message.

(d) Appearance

We are all aware of our appearance – and the appearance of others – and of how important self-presentation is to the individual and how each person likes to be seen in a favourable light by others. On the other hand, some people do not seem to worry how they appear – doesn't that itself give a message?

These are just a few examples of methods of non-verbal communication. As we said before, we use them widely but perhaps we may not be fully aware of their significance and how they can be used effectively to give a message. They apply equally whether speaking to one person or to a whole group of people, or even addressing a meeting.

We should mention one final method of non-verbal communication – **communication by silence**. Do not forget that abstaining or deciding **not** to speak can often be a very effective way of giving a message.

Selecting an Appropriate Method of Communication

When deciding whether to use written or oral communication (or a combinations of the two), contingency theorists argue there is no single best way to communicate; rather the kind of communication should be appropriate for the circumstances. This approach implies taking account of the objectives of the communication, the nature of the information, the audience or receivers, the culture and structure of the organisation, etc.

When considering which means of communication to use (e.g. telephone, letter, radio, telex), you must be aware of the means available to you. In addition, you must be aware of the following factors:

(a) Speed

How soon **must** your message get to the other end?

- Now = telephone, e-mail
- Today = telex, fax

- Tomorrow or within a few days = letter – first or second class?

(b) Distance

Distance usually means time. For example, whereas a letter to an address in the same town or area will arrive tomorrow, one to another country may take several days.

(c) Time Zone

If you are communicating with people in other parts of the world, they will be in different time zones. They may be hours ahead of or behind you – so, your **common working hours** in which you may telephone may be very restricted. For people on the other side of the world, their day-time is your night-time.

(d) Accuracy

Where accuracy of a message (e.g. figures or technical data) is concerned, a written means is preferable.

(e) Record

If a record of a message is required – and we have already indicated that it may be vital or mandatory for legal or commercial purposes – you will use a written means, unless a spoken message is recorded.

(f) Secrecy and Security

Are secrecy and security important aspects? Do you use recorded delivery, registered mail or special messenger?

(g) Cost

Obviously, the cost of the different means of communication is an important factor and should be considered – but do you know how much it costs in your organisation to get a letter prepared and despatched?

As an example, it may be very convenient to give a car phone to a salesperson or an important member of staff who is always out and about – but it can be expensive. Also, do you provide such facilities "in case they are needed"?

(h) Volume of Communications

Look at this from two aspects:

- How many messages are there in a given period?
- To how many people are you sending those messages (or, perhaps, the same message)?

If it is just one message to one person, then you may have a wide choice, but if you are sending communications regularly to a large number of people (e.g. monthly statements to customers), the choice is probably limited to the ordinary letter mail. Anything else would be at prohibitive cost, unsuitable, and could not be justified on any grounds.

(i) Impression

What sort of impression do you want, or need, to give to someone (a potential customer or client)?

To some recipients, an individual word processed letter on high-quality paper with embossed heading would be impressive.

(j) Skills and Training

For particular means of communication, some special skills or training may be required.

For example, a telex operator needs to have keyboard skills. For other people, speaking on the telephone or the writing of letters and reports does not come easily, and training may be required.

(k) Special Needs

Every type of organisation is different, and their communication needs differ even more. So, it is essential to consider their particular character and requirements and tailor the means of communication to suit. For example:

- Some organisations rely heavily on the telephone for contacts with customers.
- A mail-order company will use normal letter and parcel services for the bulk of its business.

Each must have the appropriate facilities.

The above factors are those which you may need to consider when deciding on the particular means of communication to use. Of course, they may not all be relevant to your organisation, and you may not have all the means at your disposal. Very often, you may find that certain factors conflict; for example, the need for speed and accuracy and the special care required for important documents may lead to increased costs. In such circumstances, however, as with all other situations it is a question of arriving at the optimum solution. Nevertheless, you must be aware of these various factors and ensure that they are given due consideration.

D. EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION

In this section we shall consider four key areas of communication for the modern manager.

Making Formal Presentations

A manager today cannot avoid presentations: they are an increasingly important and expected communication format. It may be a short presentation of information at a meeting, or a longer, more involved conference presentation. In addition to there being a greater call for presentations, the audience also tends to be more demanding. Weaned on a diet of fast moving media entertainment, attention spans tend to be low and boredom thresholds even lower. The effective manager will work hard to polish the presentation tools needed to be a competent public presenter.

(a) Objectives

All communications should start with a careful consideration of their objectives. This need not be set out in detail as is the case with, say, training courses. However, it always pays to determine what you hope to achieve as a result of the communication. Only then can you start to plan its form.

(b) Content

Once you are clear about your objective you can start work on the **content** of your presentation. Begin by jotting down **all** your ideas. Don't worry about order or priorities at this stage. Take this random list of ideas and highlight the main subject areas. Limit your topics to about three or four main subject areas as more will lead to something too complicated. Now try to group the other points on your list as secondary points under each of the main subject areas. If there are points which do not slot easily into the main subject areas, you must consider whether or not they can usefully fit into your presentation. If these points are important and you feel that they cannot be left out perhaps you should redefine the main subject areas in order to include them. If they serve no real purpose, they should be omitted. Keep it as **short and simple** as possible. Logical structure, clear points and explanation or illustration where necessary will allow the audience to absorb the most from your presentation.

It is a good idea to have a **title** for your presentation. The title should reflect your objective and subject matter so that the audience has some idea in advance of what they will hear. Choose something short (four or five words maximum) which will arouse interest.

(c) Structuring a presentation

When it comes to putting your points in order and beginning to structure your presentation, you may find that there is an obvious "natural" order. This may be in order of importance, in chronological order, in order of cause and effect, etc. If there is a natural order it is important to follow it as it will be the most easy format for your audience to follow. If no logical or natural order is evident then you will have to create the simplest and clearest order that you can. Try to arrange your points in a way that will flow from one to the next: perhaps pose a problem and then provide the solution, or explain a need and then offer the answer.

Now add in the secondary points and begin to build the presentation. Do not write your presentation out in full. Note the main point with brief support information and secondary points. Note any examples you wish to include and write down phrases or points which link the sections to ensure a clear and logical flow. These outline notes will then guide you through your logical sequence of points while allowing you the flexibility to alter your language and speed, etc. to suit the reaction of your audience. By speaking "off-the-cuff" in this way your presentation will sound more convincing, enthusiastic and confident.

The presentation should have a clear **introduction, middle** and **conclusion**. The old maxim of "*Tell them what you're going to tell them, tell them and then tell them what you've told them*" stands true. The audience's attention is at its best at the very beginning of your presentation and rises again when they hear that you are coming to an end. Your introduction should preview your content so that your audience can follow it more easily. Your conclusion should highlight the main points that you have made to consolidate the information in their minds.

You may wish to write out your introduction and conclusion in full to ensure that it is clear and that you don't miss anything. However, do not learn it word-for-word as it will sound wooden and lack-lustre. Attempt to absorb its outline and any specific phrases or quotes that you want to use to illustrate your points and then deliver your talk with spontaneity and enthusiasm.

(d) The presenter

The way in which you deliver your presentation will affect your success just as much as its structure and content. Your personal appearance, body language, how you cope with nerves and how you field questions or interruptions will all influence the way in which the audience receives your message.

Your aim is to appear confident and knowledgeable with a clear purpose and a professional approach. It is important to be in touch with your audience. Establish eye contact with as many of them as you can and react to signals you receive from them. Are they getting bored? Are people nodding or shaking their heads? Do the members of the audience seem to be following the points you are making?

Remember that first impressions are very important. Make sure that you are dressed appropriately and comfortably. Even if you are very nervous try to look calm. Take your time, take a deep breath and smile!

(e) Visual aids

It can add interest and variety to a presentation if you use visual aids to help illustrate points. Don't add in visual aids for the sake of it – only use them if they help to make a point more clearly. Be sure to choose something which is suitable for the venue you are using, e.g. showing a video on a 12" TV screen or holding up a tiny article on the stage of a 500-seat conference centre would be completely pointless and would detract from what may have otherwise been a good presentation.

Some of the visual aids you might choose would include:

- Charts (pre-drawn or done on a flip chart as you talk)
- Slides
- Before/after pictures
- Demonstrations
- Video or film
- Maps
- Blackboard
- Handouts
- Overhead projector
- Flip charts
- Props
- Stunts
- Audience plants
- Sound effects

If you choose to use handouts it is best to pass them round at the point in your presentation where they become relevant. If they are handed out before you begin, they will distract people and be read out of context. If you wish your audience to have read a handout before the presentation it is advisable, where possible, to send it out in advance and request that people read it before they attend.

Whichever aids you choose to use make sure that they are relevant and effective. Check beforehand that any equipment is working, that your slides are in the right order, that your audience plant knows when to ask his question or make his interruption, etc. There is nothing more distracting than a badly used aid in the middle of a presentation.

(f) Rehearsal and delivery

It is important to rehearse your presentation before you do it in front of your main audience. This is necessary in order to:

- Time how long it will run
- Allow you the opportunity to make changes if points seem jumbled

- Give you practice at using your aids
- Assess your delivery technique

Learn the basic structure of your presentation and the way that the points link together. Write these on to small cards and number their order; use these cards as prompts to guide you but choose your words as you go along. This will sound far more "honest" and convincing than learning the speech word-for-word and then stumbling through it or reading from a script.

Rehearse out loud. If you can find a colleague with some knowledge of the subject to listen to you it will help. Your friend can tell you if your ideas are clear and whether you sound convincing. Some people like to rehearse on tape so that they can listen to it and identify any problem areas. If you can video yourself rehearsing even better. Watch out for any irritating or repetitious movements or speech patterns, such as scratching your head, waving one hand in the air or constantly saying: "*If you know what I mean*" "*Okay..*" or "*Now then*" etc.

Varying the speed of delivery and volume and tone of your voice are useful tools in speech making. By suddenly changing the speed at which you are speaking or by a sudden drop or increase in volume you can add emphasis to a point. Generally you should speak more slowly than in conversation and loud enough so that everyone can hear you. If you find it a strain to make your voice heard, arrange for a microphone to be available rather than attempting to shout your way through your presentation.

Part of your rehearsal should include a full practice with any visual or other aids you are using. Do this in the venue where you are speaking, with the actual equipment that you will be using. Make sure you are familiar with any equipment and check that there are back-up facilities (such as a spare bulb for the overhead projector, etc.) just in case.

Be prepared for questions. If you intend to hold a question and answer session at the end you should let the audience know this and ask them to save their questions until then. If you want them to ask questions during your presentation then you should invite them to do so. If you have assessed your audience effectively when preparing your speech you should have anticipated their questions and built them into your presentation. Should a question be asked during your speech try to answer it quickly and get back to your talk as soon as you can. It can be off-putting to the audience if you leave questions unanswered until the end as it can look as though you don't know the answer or are avoiding the point raised.

Effective Report Writing

Effective report writing requires many of the same skills as spoken presentations in so far as good structure, clarity and accurate assessment of the target audience lead to success.

As with letters, the written report should be made to look appealing and interesting so that people are encouraged to read it. It is a good idea to provide a summary at the beginning to assist a busy "audience" in understanding its basic content without having to read all the detail. You should also provide a list of contents so that different sections of your report can be accessed without having to search through the whole thing.

When preparing a report you should again first consider your objective in writing it, your intended audience and the result you wish to achieve from its presentation. One important decision is how much information to include: it is always best to keep the report as clear and simple as possible. Not only is it more likely to be read if it is short, but the background information often confuses. If you feel that the reader should have access to certain information such as research data, consider including it as an appendix outside the main body of the report.

The structure of a report should be as follows:

- **Executive summary** – one page summary of the report's objective and findings
- **Contents list** with page numbers
- **Introduction** and **background**
- **Main body** of the report using natural or logical structure if possible. Divide it into sections or chapters for clarity and present the report in an easily digestible manner using lots of white space, subheadings, different type sizes, underlining, numbered or bullet points, etc.
- **Conclusion**
- **Appendices**

To make a favourable impression a report should be given a title and bound. The method of binding should allow for easy use of the report – preferably allowing it to open flat.

Effective Listening

Listening is a very important management skill and one few of us are ever taught. To be effective listeners we must notice both verbal and non-verbal clues – listening to how a person sounds and watching how he/she behaves.

Our own preconceptions about a person, or our personal beliefs, attitudes and individual priorities, can all affect our ability to listen properly to what is being said. If the subject is a sensitive or emotive one we may react to the subject matter, introducing preconceived ideas before giving the person who is speaking time to say their piece. If we are being criticised a defensive reaction may stop us listening to the message properly.

The following pointers will help you to improve your listening techniques.

- **Concentrate**: Listen attentively to what the other person is saying, looking for non-verbal clues such as their body language. "Read between the lines" of what they say by listening to their tone of voice and their level of confidence.
- **Look the part:** Look attentive. Don't slouch, have your hands in your pockets or doodle whilst you are listening. Pay attention, be still and look at the person when they are speaking to you.
- **Encourage them:** Prompt, reassure and support the person speaking to you by your body language and reaction to their message. *"Yes, I understand", "Go on. Please continue", and "I see. How interesting"* will encourage them to feel that their message is being received. Look at them without staring and nod/shake your head, etc. to show your reaction. Do not interrupt – if you want to ask something or introduce an idea, wait until they have reached an appropriate gap in what they are saying.

Little is as demotivating as going to talk to your manager and feeling that he/she is not listening. It makes the individual feel unimportant, insignificant and rejected – of little value to the team.

Negotiation

Many of the communication activities which involve the manager entail negotiation. Within the team there may be negotiation over holiday rotas, workload allocation or changes which are required as part of a current plan.

How a manager presents objectives and strategies to his/her team and negotiates the detail of their implementation and outcome can have a significant impact on the motivation of staff.

The word "negotiation" seems to carry images of winners and losers, deadlocks and conflicts and all the combative vocabulary of warfare. This is unfortunate as in business negotiations the targets are agreement and compromise and the negotiating parties should be seen as partners rather than enemies.

This is true whether the manager is negotiating with staff or customers – we are all on the same side! The art of good negotiations is for both parties to win; we are seeking win/win solutions. Both parties should leave satisfied from a successful negotiation. If one side **loses** then negotiation has not taken place – but if there is the perception of a loser the skilled negotiator provides an avenue of retreat, allowing the loser to withdraw with dignity. It is too easy to "win" a battle and lose a war!

The member of staff who feels he/she has **lost** in a negotiation with the manager is liable not only to be demotivated, but also to unsettle the other members of the team with complaints and grievances.

(a) What is negotiation?

Negotiation is a process by which parties in a conflict attempt to resolve that conflict by agreement. "Conflict" is **not** synonymous with disruption, feud, quarrel, etc. Conflicts can be of:

- **Interests** – where terms of doing business have not been settled or are being renegotiated.
- **Rights** – where there is a difference of interpretation about an existing agreement.

When seeing negotiations as a process for resolving conflicts it is essential to centre on the issue which is in conflict and not upon the relationship in total. Because parties differ on an issue it does not follow that they have no common interest overall. It is essential to determine the central issue(s) and focus tightly upon them without allowing distractions to obscure and complicate the negotiation. It would be only too easy to let a negotiation with a member of the team become a grievance interview.

You must always assume that both or all parties have an interest in resolving any conflict and finding a win/win solution. However, that does not mean accepting a resolution at any price.

The manager will be bound by company policy, perhaps on pay or conditions of service, outside which negotiation is not possible. In fact we are all experienced negotiators: it is one of the earliest skills used by children seeking an extension to their bedtime curfew or an extra £1 spending money. You will find you can learn many negotiation techniques by watching others. The successful manager must work hard to perfect the skills of negotiation – they are a key tool.

The essentials of good negotiating skills are:

- Preparation
- Control
- Tactics

(b) Preparation

As with so many activities the key to success lies in thorough planning.

- **Know your objectives**. What would the best possible outcome be for you? What would you be prepared to accept if this is not achievable?
- **Know how far you can go**. Make sure that you are aware of the limits of your authority. It is possible that you could be offered a deal which affects or involves another area of the business, e.g. a modified payment system or a revised holiday schedule. Have you

the authority to make these decisions on behalf of others? You must never agree to something in negotiations only to have to renege on it later. Be sure your agreement with a member of your own team does not have implications for personnel and policy which take it outside your authority.

- **Know your business**. Have all necessary information at your finger tips before you start negotiating. Be fully informed about all aspects of your business/project which are relevant to the negotiation.
- **Know the other party**. Try to find out as much as you can about the other party. If it's a member of your team or a colleague you probably have a lot of information already, but try to put yourself in his/her shoes. What are his/her concerns likely to be? What do you think he/she will want from the negotiation?

  If it's an external client, who will you be dealing with and what are they like? What is their business? What are their desired objectives from these negotiations likely to be?

(c) Control in negotiations

In a negotiating situation you are meeting another party with a common interest in order to come to a mutually satisfactory arrangement: it may be a salary review with a valued employee, a settlement over a dispute where tempers are running high, a sales contract with a new supplier, or a revision of your contract with your search and selection agency. Every negotiation will be different but many of the same rules will apply. Control should be established in the following areas:

- ***Venue***

  The venue chosen for negotiations should be carefully considered. Whose home ground should it be on? Neutral territory may be best if there is conflict. Your office with you behind the desk is a formal setting and there is likely to be a perception of "unfair" power in the mind of your team member and a win/lose scenario.
- ***Atmosphere***

  What kind of mood do you wish to create? A friendly atmosphere is most helpful if you wish to hold productive discussions. Both parties will be weighing each other up at the beginning of a negotiation and such things as the seating arrangements, the hospitality offered and the way you greet each other all influence how the other party sees you. Will you sit in easy chairs and chat over a coffee, or have you set out pens and paper on opposite sides of a board room table ready for a battle?
- ***Attitudes***

  You must maintain self-control throughout negotiations. Do not get angry, rise to the bait or insult the other party. Be professional at all times.

(d) Tactics in negotiation

Successful negotiating can be like a game with strategies, tactics and point scoring, but unlike a game there should not be winners and losers. The ideal result of successful negotiations should be that both parties are winners: each should come away satisfied with the deal that they have made. If one party is unhappy with their side of the bargain they will carry out their duties begrudgingly and it will be even harder to agree the next time the deal needs to be revised.

The way in which negotiating situations are handled differs greatly depending on the personalities involved, the comparative positions of strength of the two parties, the type of outcome required and the relationship between the two parties. The type of negotiation you are in will affect your style in relation to how you open discussions; how you bid; how you interact with the other party; and how you close.

(e) The phases of negotiation

- ***Research***

  Research the other party and form **assumptions** concerning their position, likely requirements, concessions they may make, sticking points, strategy. Negotiation relies on **identifying** accurately at the **preparation** stage:

  (i) The other party's needs

  (ii) Your needs

  (iii) The point of balance

  (iv) Their likely initial stance

  (v) How they can be moved from their initial stance to the point of balance

  (vi) Value of your potential concessions to the other party

  (vii) Benefits of their potential concessions to you

  (viii) Concessions they could/will give, and how their cost can be minimised

  The cost of a concession to one party is not likely to equal its perceived value in the eyes of the other. A day off in lieu of overtime may be valued more highly yet cost less to the firm than overtime payments.

- ***Preparation***

  (i) Define your **objectives**, from those you would like to get, through to those you must get.

  (ii) Consider what **concessions** you might make and what you require in return.

  (iii) Decide what **information** you require and what information you are going to disclose.

  (iv) Prepare a simple **strategy** to achieve your objectives – but keep it flexible.

- ***Discuss and signal***

  (i) *Opening the negotiations*

  How do you begin? Do you wish to "lay your cards on the table" straight away or do you want to spend time sounding out the "opposition"? In most circumstances it is best to have a period of relaxed chat in order to break the ice. Is the other party relaxed and confident, or anxious? Are they taking control of these early discussions or allowing you to lead?

  (ii) *Interaction between parties*

  The way you interact with the other party depends on the variables mentioned above, i.e. personalities, comparative positions of strength between the two sides, the importance or urgency of the required outcome, etc. Adopt a style of your own which is suitable to the individual circumstances of each negotiation.

It is a good idea to begin by touching on areas on which you are both agreed. This will introduce a mood of co-operation, demonstrating how much common ground there is between you. Later in your discussions, if things appear to be proceeding slowly or if there is conflict, it can be useful to come back to these areas of agreement in order to re-establish a more conspiratorial or co-operative attitude.

Use this initial phase to:

- Test assumptions
- Exchange information
- Explore interests and inhibitions
- Listen and watch for signals
- Recognise, confirm, enlarge, reward signals

In due time move into the next phase.

- ***Propose and package***

  Proposals are suggestions which advance the negotiation. They move the parties to the negotiation closer together. Use non-committal terms such as "What if ....", "consider", "maybe".

  Never interrupt. Question, clarify, summarise, then respond. A proposal is stronger than an argument. The best response to a proposal is a considered counter-proposal. Re-present the same proposal but in a different form – one which matches the expressed interests and inhibitions of the other party.

- ***Your tactics of bidding***

  This will depend on personal style and on how strong a position you are in. There are two basic choices: **go high** or **go low**.

  (i) *Bidding high*

  Go straight in with your optimum solution. If you are "buying", offer them a low price; if you are "selling", ask a high price or high commission levels. This is usually only possible as a tactic if you are in a position of strength and it may or may not work. This "take it or leave it" attitude can appear arrogant and even if you get away with it this time, next time round the shoe may be on the other foot and you will be made to pay for your bullying tactics. This is particularly true in the work environment where such an approach can be very demotivating.

  (ii) *Bidding low*

  It is normal practice during negotiations for the "buyer" to start with a low bid which establishes the floor for negotiations. Care should be taken to ensure this bid is not too low as to be derisory – causing offence to the other party and souring the negotiation. Both high and low bids must be defensible.

  Both parties can then move towards a settlement within these parameters.

- ***Bargain and agree***

  A stage of trade and exchange. The key form is "If ... then" as in "If you will take only one week's holiday at Easter, **then** we will grant the extended holiday request for September".

(i) State conditions before offers .... "If you do that, **then** we have a deal".

(ii) The final concession should be traded for an agreement.

(iii) Agree what you have agreed. Summarise it, write it down. Agree an action plan.

- ***Closing negotiations***

  Once an agreement has been reached, it is important to follow the steps below:

  (i) **Summarise** what you have agreed, to be certain that both sides have the same understanding. Each must know what they have promised and what the other party is expecting of them so that there is no room for misunderstandings at a later date.

  (ii) Discuss any **follow-up** that may be required, such as formalising the agreement into a contract and getting a copy signed by both sides.

  (iii) When a formal **contract** is not required, it is still a good idea to write out the main points and get both sides to sign as part of the closing of negotiations.

  (iv) Does the result of negotiations need to be announced to another party, e.g. the press, the workforce, other partners? If so, who will make this **announcement**? How and when should it be done?

  (v) **Agree** when the deal will fall due for renegotiation if necessary. Confirm any arrangements for monitoring progress or reviewing performance.

  (vi) **Thank** and congratulate each other on a job well done!

Remember that it will not always be possible to come to an agreement with the other party. If this is the case, decide whether or not it is worth trying again at a later date. Sometimes failure to agree is inevitable and it is better to "agree to disagree" and move on.

(f) Key principles of negotiation

- Negotiate only with those in authority
- Be prepared to trade
- Be calm
- Don't compromise your objective
- Don't oversell
- Don't show your thoughts on your face
- Don't underestimate your opponents
- Always appear reasonable
- Keep the meeting to your plan
- Be courteous – don't rush the other side
- Tell it like it is and say clearly what you mean
- Appear relaxed and enjoy yourself
- Listen carefully to all the other side says and the way they say it

(g) Key points of negotiation technique

- Never donate a concession. Trade it reluctantly.

- Leave the other party feeling they've done a good deal, too.
- Watch for danger phrases such as:
  (i) "A few small details"
  (ii) "It's in your interest"
  (iii) "Fairer to both sides"
- Aim high – once you start backing down it's difficult to climb back up again.
- Maintain neutrality in early stages.
- Absorb an attack by making notes.
- Anything the other side accepts as a constant can nearly always be made into a variable.

E. WORKING IN COMMITTEES

A committee is a group of people set up for a specific purpose. Committees can be convened on a permanent or temporary basis.

Committees may draw on persons from the same level in the organisation (such as directors and senior management), or they may be composed of people from different levels, whereby persons of different rank or status are brought together.

Types of Committee

At the most senior level, the Board of Directors is a committee established for a very specific purpose. In turn, the board is likely to have:

- **Standing committees**, such as:
  (i) Finance
  (ii) General purposes
  (iii) Lending
  (iv) Funding and treasury

  Standing committees are permanent with membership drawn from the Board, supported by senior executives where required.
- **Special committees**, such as:
  (i) Remuneration and benefits
  (ii) Information technology

  These tend to be convened for more specific purposes.
- **"Ad-hoc" committees**, which are convened for "one off" matters, such as regional reorganisation or purchase and development of a major new building.

Many organisations have a **Management Committee**, sometimes called an Executive Committee. This is the body which will propose policy to the board and take overall responsibility for key business areas. Membership of this committee will be drawn from executive (i.e. full-time) directors and those senior managers who are heads of function but not on the board.

Purpose of Meetings

A survey by American management consultants **Booz-Allen** showed that managers spend 46% of their time in meetings – which are the largest single user of management time. So it is obviously important that managers make the best possible use of meeting time. Unfortunately it is not always the case, and any practising manager will have personal memories of meetings which were a complete waste of time for all participants.

Meetings can be held for any of the following reasons:

- **To define the group**: regular management or department meetings are often held partly or mainly to define who the members of the management or department are. Although these meetings are also used to transfer information, this purpose may be secondary.
- **To transfer information**: this may be one way or two way. An example of a one way information transfer would be a presentation to staff on company policy by senior management. Although questions will normally be invited, it is unlikely that points raised at the presentation stage would affect the policies described. An example of a two-way information transfer would be a liaison group between two departments with overlapping responsibilities. In such a group both departments involved will give and receive information.
- **To take decisions**: one example is a meeting of a company's Board of Directors. In practice, they are relatively rare and meetings called to take decisions may be confined either to ratifying decisions already made or to recommending courses of action.

Ideally, all meetings should be called for a single, clearly defined purpose. The membership of the meeting should include only people who are able to contribute to that purpose and should comprise the smallest number of people able to achieve it. In practice these conditions are rarely met, for the following reasons:

- If the purpose is one that can be achieved quickly, it is **inefficient** to go to the expense of convening a meeting only for that purpose. This is especially true if another meeting, including all or many of the same participants, then needs to be called for a different purpose, which results in longer meetings with more people present. There are no absolute rules for the length of a meeting. A sales conference (the primary purpose of which is to define the group) can last for days and still serve a useful purpose. A meeting to make decisions on complex issues should last no more than a couple of hours.
- Even though a meeting may be held for the purpose of transferring information or taking decisions, it also serves the function of **defining the group**. Thus people may wish to be present to demonstrate their group membership, even though they have no direct involvement with the matters under discussion.

Running Meetings

The most important meeting roles are **chairman** and **secretary**. The secretary organises proceedings and the chairman actually runs them.

Probably the single biggest reason for wasted meeting time is **inadequate preparation** by the participants. Here the secretary's job is particularly important. There is a need to draw up an agenda, agree it with the chairman and issue it to participants. The secretary must make the physical arrangements (meeting room, any necessary flip-charts, slide projectors, etc.). The secretary may also need to issue papers for discussion at the meeting and must ensure that participants receive them in good time.

The chairman is responsible for agreeing the agenda with the secretary, including discussion on the importance of various agenda points, so that meeting time can be concentrated on important matters.

Other meeting participants need to ensure that they have studied any papers that have been circulated, and that they are in a position to make any individual contributions required by the agenda.

Role of the Chairman

It is the chairman's responsibility to ensure that the meeting achieves its objectives.

One approach is for the chairman to try to force personal views through the meeting. Although not uncommon, this is not an effective way of operating:

- The chairman becomes the only person who is making any significant contribution. If the purpose of the meeting can be met with input from only one person, then the meeting should not have been held in the first place.
- The chairman's conduct may lead the other participants to actively oppose the chairman's views and actions.

A better approach is for the chairman to minimise personal contributions. Instead, the chairman should:

- Ensure that contributions are relevant to the purpose of the meeting, cutting short any speakers who stray from the point.
- Where necessary, stimulate discussion, which may be done by introducing a controversial idea or by asking for comment from someone known to have controversial views.
- Protect the less assertive participants and ensure that they are given the opportunity to contribute to the discussion.
- Control the order in which participants may contribute. Where senior staff are present at meetings, it is often a good idea to take their contributions last.
- Summarise discussions and conclusion. Ensure that someone is made responsible for any action points that arise.
- Ensure that the meeting timetable is adhered to. If the meeting looks likely to over-run, propose which items should be deferred until the next meeting.
- In the event of stalemate on a decision, make a casting vote.

The chairman's role is extremely important, and a good chairman greatly increases the efficiency of meetings.

Role of the Secretary

A Company Secretary is the organisation's chief administration officer. The Secretary has specific duties laid down by the **Companies Acts** and, for a public limited company, certain minimum professional qualifications or period of experience requirements are laid down.

Here we are concerned with the role of the secretary to a meeting, though the duties of a Company Secretary are similar in respect of formal company meetings, such as the Annual General Meeting and meetings of the Board of Directors.

The secretary is the driving force of the meeting in respect of keeping records and flow of information. He/she has duties before, during and after the meeting.

(a) Before the meeting

It is the responsibility of the secretary to:

- Ensure that the minutes of the last meeting have been prepared well in advance for either prior circulation or distribution on the day of the meeting.
- Ensure that recommendations and resolutions from the last meeting have been communicated fully to relevant persons so that all necessary follow-up action can take place.
- In consultation with the chairman, prepare the agenda for the meeting by communicating with all committee/board members and anyone else who has responsibility for bringing matters to the meeting.
- Ensure that those preparing working papers for the meeting make these available in good time for preparation and circulation prior to the meeting, or for laying round the table at the meeting itself.
- Prepare an aide-memoire for the chairman, setting out detail on agenda items and including information such as who is to lead the discussion on each item.
- Record any pre-meeting comments from committee/board members on matters arising from the minutes.
- Notify time, date, venue and proposed duration of the meeting – these details are normally sent out with the agenda.
- Prepare the meeting room.
- Record apologies for absence received in advance.
- Deal with pre-meeting queries from committee/board members.

(b) During the Meeting

At the meeting, the secretary should:

- Have all previous minutes and other records available should the meeting call upon him/her to consult them.
- Have the formal copy of the minutes ready to be signed by the chairman once the content has been approved by the meeting.
- Have the terms of reference of the committee/board available should there be a need to check whether matters are within the brief of the meeting.
- Note whether a quorum (minimum number of members) is present for the meeting to convene.
- Make comprehensive notes on all matters discussed so that a true and accurate record of proceedings can be made afterwards.
- In particular, record resolutions (actions agreed upon by the meeting) and recommendations (formal recommendations to a higher committee or board) so that these can be acted upon.
- Advise the chairman on any constitutional aspects of the meeting.

(c) After the Meeting

As soon as the meeting has finished, the secretary should write up the minutes while they are fresh in his/her mind. On matters which are not absolutely clear, he/she should liaise with the chairman to ensure that his/her understanding is correct.

In addition to these responsibilities at meetings, a Company Secretary has additional duties, such as registration of company documents and communications with shareholders.