__Communication__ is the tool that a manager must make use of to mobilise actions from his chosen actors. Communication is a process and not a singular event. It extends from the meaning that he selects and then through all the subsequent steps of converting the meaning into a message which he transmits as information making up a communiqué directed at a particular recipient. The process continues till it is received, interpreted and reconverted into meaning in the recipient's mind. But the process is not complete until the manager gets the feedback confirming that his intended meaning has been successfully transferred. The manager retains responsibility throughout the entire process. Language and culture enable communication and are not barriers. Focusing on the recipient leads naturally to the process required to generate the desired meanings in his mind. Any manager can make himself into a good communicator. Some will have to work harder at it than others. But being aware of the steps contained within a communications process is where the learning starts.

The elements of communication

I have often heard the statement "He did not understand what I meant"! But this is just an excuse and, to my mind, an invalid excuse which reflects poorly upon the speaker.

 "Information", "message, "communiqué", "meaning" and "communication" are not synonyms. I take these words to have quite distinct definitions:

- Information is anything that can stimulate the senses of an observer.
- A message is a collection of information (stimuli) which is coherent to an observer (who may be the assembler of the stimuli or the receiver) and capable of transmission.

- A communiqué is the message that is transmitted.
- Meaning is the interpretation accorded by a brain (or by a cognitive process) to messages it creates or perceives.
- A communication is the successful transfer of a meaning from one brain to another.

A piece of information such as a letter, or an e-mail, or an advertisement, or a report, or a speech, or a conversation or a broadcast is often described as "a communication". Sometimes just the transfer of information is defined as the process of communication. In my view, this is an incomplete and inadequate definition. For the true communication that must be practiced by a manager, a more rigorous description must be developed. While the study of perception, meaning and communication now spans the fields of management, the arts, sociology, psychology and philosophy we need only to consider communication from the perspective of a practicing manager.

It is perfectly true that merely by being present somewhere and without even saying a single word you are screaming to all within sight "I am here, I am here". You send information merely by being, and even by not being. By not being somewhere you transmit information, intentionally or not, to someone expecting you to be there. But note that there is no information transferred to someone who has no expectation of seeing you there. When a tree falls in a forest a pressure wave is created, but there is no perceived sound unless there is an ear to detect the pressure wave and a brain to interpret it as sound. Even a pressure sensor which may detect the pressure wave does not make the interpretation of sound. For a communication to exist it must first be detected as information and then interpreted as a meaning in the mind of the receiver.

S. F. Scudder

"All living entities communicate".

It follows that Scudder's phrase that "All living entities communicate" in his "The Universal Law of Communication" of 1900 is incomplete. It would be more correct

and complete to say that "Every living entity broadcasts information, but any resulting communication resides in the understanding of the receiver". We could perhaps speculate that every living entity needs to communicate but I am less sure that every living entity does communicate. A communication always includes a transfer of information, but while this transfer is necessary, it is insufficient for communication to exist.

Whenever communication is intended, the communiqué is, of course, issued by the communicator but, the final meaning of the communication resides in the mind of the receiver. Where a communication is intended, the responsibility for what has been understood lies always with the communicator, not with the receiver. It is why the statement "He did not understand what I meant!" actually reflects poorly on the speaker. The intending communicator cannot escape from the consequences of what has been finally understood by the receiver. A true communication is only complete when the meaning intended in the mind of the communicator and the meaning understood by the receiver are identical. In between the two lie the following necessary elements:

  i.   the purpose of the communicator which includes the choice of the recipient,
 ii.   translation of the intended meaning into a message,
iii.   the formulation of the message into a communiqué (where the communiqué is a package of transmittable information),
 iv.   the transfer of information to the chosen recipient,
  v.   the reception of the information,
 vi.   the decoding of the information received into a message,
vii.   The interpretation of the received message into a meaning, with
viii.   a feedback loop from the receiver to the communicator.

All the above steps must exist for a communication to be completed. No individual step is sufficient in itself. The process may well involve iteration based on the feedback. There are many processes, for just the transfer of information, which are, in common parlance, taken to be communications but which are not. A letter or a

conversation may be a well directed part of a communication but is not a complete communication in itself.

Unknown to David Signoff

"The wireless music box has no imaginable commercial value. Who would pay for a message sent to nobody in particular?"

A speech to a large audience, or a TV or a radio broadcast is not capable of being directed with precision. These may be part of a communication to some specific listeners but the transfer of information is not a communication by itself. A slide-show or a report or a sound recording or a movie is merely a package of information. Marshall McLuhan in 1964 developed the concept that "the medium is the message". This may well still be the prevailing paradigm today, that the message and the medium it is embedded in are inseparable. Since McLuhan coined the maxim, we have seen the explosive development of media; the fax machine, intranet and the internet, email, mobile telephony, text messaging, video conferencing, internet chat, web conferencing and now tweeting. But, in all cases, the media and the communiqués they carry are just channels with information packages being conveyed, sometimes – but not always - as part of a communication. The choice of medium itself is also part of the information package being transferred.

An intended communication comes into being only when the communicator has some purpose, has chosen his recipient and has a meaning to communicate. Meanings exist in peoples' minds. Messages are composed of packages of information which can be detected by our senses but they are not meanings. Words or pictures or other sensory information may generate meanings in our minds but they do not, in themselves, "mean". The transfer of information, without a purpose, without an intended meaning or without a recipient is not an intended communication as I define it here. The translation of the meaning into a message and coding the message into the information to be transferred is based first on the values, culture, language, history and social context of the communicator. The reverse process at the receiving end is now based on a decoding, and an interpretation based on the values, language, history and social context of the receiver.

The challenge for the communicator is to ensure that the final meaning at the receiving end is what he intends it to be. The feedback loop is vital. It needs to be established by the communicator since it is he who must own the communication process. The communication is not complete till the feedback loop, together with any iteration that it may initiate, provides confirmation that the meaning understood is that which was intended. Without the confirmation provided by the feedback loop, it cannot be known whether a communication has been properly completed or even if any information transfer has taken place at all. The absence of a feedback loop is perhaps the single most common reason for miscommunications.

When the communicator and the receiver share common values and language and social context and have similar histories, then the translation, and coding algorithms employed by the communicator are very close to those for the decoding and interpretation steps at the receiver. They may be so similar that these steps can be entirely implicit and almost invisible. It is the communicator who must determine the differences, if any, applying between himself and the receiver. It is by means of his judgment regarding the decoding and interpretation that will occur at the receiving end that he selects the translation and coding algorithms he needs to use.

The message intended by the communicator is converted into a package of transmittable information to make up the communiqué. The information to be transferred can be in any form or any combination of forms such that it can be detected by the senses of the receiver (verbal, written, visual or tactile). The media to be used for the transfer of the information package may also be any combination of the available means of transmission, as chosen by the communicator. The information package must be suited to the chosen media. The chosen media, in turn, must be capable of being directed at the recipient and overcoming any intervening noise. The information package and the method of transmission must be within the receiving capability of the recipient.

Peter F. Drucker

"The most important thing in communication is hearing what isn't said"

It is the responsibility of the communicator to ensure that unintended information, or information via an unintended transmission medium, is not transmitted. However, the communicator remains responsible for the meanings conveyed, whether intended or not, by the information he consciously or unconsciously broadcasts. It remains the communicator's responsibility to ensure that the information package he transmits is uncorrupted and not drowned by the noise that may exist on its way to the recipient. Note that lack of information is itself information, and may give rise to its own messages which may then be given a meaning in the mind of the receiver. A letter not sent, or a call not made, or a fax not received, or an issue not addressed, fall into this category and can easily generate miscommunication.

Communication for the manager

For a manager, all his communications, without exception, are to generate some action. Even reporting to a superior, which may well be an action mobilized by the superior, is a managerial communication where the manager is also looking for an action (sometimes implied and sometimes at a later time) from the superior. It should not be forgotten however, that his role as a "manager" may not extend far beyond the confines of the workplace. It may not necessarily extend to his social activities or to his family life.

Whenever a communication is intended a transfer of information is always required. Not all information transfer however, is as part of an intended communication. A manager needs to be aware that he is constantly radiating information. His mode of listening influences the other party's readiness to listen as well. His body language provides primary information as well as feedback. His attitude, posture, his unconscious gestures all provide information whether intended or not. For a manager, the communication process is never an end in itself. It is merely a tool to be used in the pursuit of his fundamental objectives – the mobilization of actions for a particular purpose. We should distinguish between, first, the quality and capability of the tool itself, and second, the manager's skill at using the tool. The capability of the

tool is contained in the rigorousness or the quality of the entire process. This, in turn, requires all the necessary steps to be present and that each step is effective. The skill of the manager lies in the effectiveness with which he implements each step.

A sloppy process, for example with missing steps, or without a clear purpose, or one not properly directed to the receiver, or with poor translations, or with incomplete information, or communiqués which are difficult for the receiver to decipher, all detract from the communication to be achieved. If no feedback loop is available, or if the media required for information transfer are unavailable then the tool itself is poor. But, if the feedback loop exists but is not well utilized, or if an inappropriate medium for information transfer is chosen, or if the meaning received is garbled, then it is the manager's skill which is lacking. In all such cases however, the manager retains the responsibility for the failing in communication. Lack of ability to capture information at the receiver's end does not diminish this responsibility.

> Robert McCloskey
>
> *"I know that you believe you understand what you think I said, but I'm not sure you realize that what you heard is not what I meant".*

In the quotation from Robert McCloskey above, the "fault" as I see it is not with the receiver, the "you" as it is implied in the quotation, but lies clearly with the speaker, the "I" in the quotation. It has always irked me when I have heard the excuse that somebody has the "wrong perception". My usual response is "And whose fault is that?" The responsibility for a wrong perception lies with the person creating the perception not with the person who passively perceives. The quality of the process and the manager's implementation skills are very closely intertwined. It becomes all the more important that a manager, if he is to have any chance of improvement, be able to distinguish between the process being applied and the skills required.

A common mistake, in my opinion, is the focus that is put on the message or the communiqué or on the medium, rather than on the received meaning. It is all too easy to get diverted by the information package and its contents (reports, pictures, presentations, films, or letters for example) and to lose sight of the recipient. The

communiqués can be overwhelmed by all that the communicator wants to say and not based on what the receiver needs to hear. Reports and memoranda often become much too long for the chosen recipient. Material is included just because it exists and looks "nice" and even if it does not contribute to the generation of meaning with the recipient. The communicator can become so enamoured of the "quality" of the information package he has created that he sends it to the whole world to demonstrate his competence and loses track of the original purpose and the intended recipient. It is very easy also to be seduced by the "glamour" or the technology attached to the medium to be used for the information transfer. Video-conferencing or audio-video presentations or net-conferencing or "live streaming" broadcasts are all real examples where I have observed the novelty of the technology and its use can completely drown the communication intended.

When I was an apprentice engineer in the 1960's with GKN at a factory in the British Midlands, information was still being transferred internally by putting documents into metal cylinders which were then pneumatically transported down air-filled pipes to the various factory departments. Needless to say this was a source of great fascination and amusement for all the apprentices. It was great fun to send those canisters whizzing around the factory and we probably used the system in ways never imagined by the designers, but we never really had anything to communicate. In the 1980's, when fax machines first came on to the scene we used to invent documents to be sent around the world just so we could operate the machines.

I wonder sometimes how many of the e-mails and text messages circulating around the world today are actually part of some real communication.

For all managerial communications where the objective is to mobilize action, the focus, I believe, must start and end with the recipient of the communication and the meaning he ascribes to the communication. I have generally found that the best place to start is by focusing not on what I want to say, but on what precisely I want the recipient to do or think when the communication is completed. Categorization by type of information package or type of medium to be used generally provides the

wrong focus and can be very misleading. Many times, when I have been asked to review draft speeches or presentations or reports I have been astonished that the communicator has only a very vague notion about the identity of the recipients and what is expected of them. Speeches are all too often prepared to be what the manager wants to say and not on what needs to be heard and by whom. The communications processes to be established and implemented by a manager are, in my view, most correctly grouped according to the type of recipient. As soon as the recipient has been identified and is made the focus, the rest of the process becomes self-evident. It follows very logically to a consideration of the understanding the recipient must reach to undertake the required actions. It feels entirely natural and correct then to tailor the entire communication process to suit the recipient.

I have found it convenient to categorise recipients as follows:

    i. subordinates
   ii. peers
  iii. superiors
   iv. members of personal networks
    v. 3rd parties:
          a. supportive parties
          b. neutral parties
          c. opposing parties

Where a manager has direct subordinates they are generally the primary movers for the actions and for the chains of actions to be generated. By their very proximity to the manager they share many values, language, background and the algorithms for the conversion of meanings to information and back to meanings. Information packages can be, and usually are, truncated and verbal "shorthand" is commonly used. Ensuring that there is no chance of any miscommunication at the beginning of the action chain is one of the key responsibilities of the manager. Any mistakes or missteps at the start of an action chain are only magnified by the end of the chain. What distinguishes subordinates especially is that they are a captive audience for the manager. Communications to subordinates inevitably have the character of an

instruction or an order. Implicit in such communications is the understanding that complying with the instruction is an obligation. This does ensure that information transfer takes place relatively easily but it does need extra vigilance to ensure that the channels for reception are truly open. It is of no use if a subordinate attends a meeting only because he has to but does not really listen. The closeness of a manager to his subordinates itself can lead to carelessness regarding the feedback loops. Assumptions are far too readily made about what was meant or what was understood without full engagement of the feedbacks. In my experience I have generally found, that with subordinates, emphasis needs to be put on the feedback rather than on the transfer of information. Whether the feedback is obtained verbally or in writing or merely by body language, is not crucial. It is crucial however is that understandings are continuously checked, rechecked and reconfirmed, and not just as a one-off event. A manager not only needs to transfer information but must also avoid unintended transmissions of information. In a close-knit group, such as with subordinates, the possibilities of misdirected information transfer and subsequent unintended communications are high and must be explicitly guarded against. It pays to constantly reconfirm – even to the point of irritation - who is doing what and when and why and with whom. In large organizations, the category of subordinates can include all those with a lower hierarchical position than the manager, provided that there is acquiescence from their own line-manager.

By peers, I mean people of a similar standing as the manager but not necessarily falling within the same line of authority as the manager. They may well be in a different organization entirely. Inevitably their actions, or potential actions, are constrained by the lines of authority within which they are constrained to operate. They could be suppliers or customers or partners. They may be managers in other departments in the same organization. They could be government or public officials. Many such people will need to generate actions from time to time at the behest of the manager. When communication is intended, the information packages transferred need to be in a form that is intelligible in the context of their own responsibilities and obligations. Communications to peers cannot therefore be structured as orders except, perhaps, when the recipient belongs to a supplier organization. A higher

degree of formality is needed both for information transfer and for applying the feedback loop than with subordinates. Feedback loops cannot be operated continuously but must be used sparingly and with a high degree of specificity. Questions for confirmation of understandings must necessarily be very precise and yet not too onerous to reply to. Using the feedback loops also needs that the feedback channel itself is nurtured.

By superiors, I mean those within the manager's own organization having a higher hierarchical status. Inevitably and as a simple matter of survival, communications to superiors must take the form of requests and not be perceived as commands. Information packages must be modified – usually shortened – to suit. I have always found that a manager's superiors are a much under-utilised resource. A manager can and should mobilize actions from this very powerful resource group but must achieve this by proper communication. I have generally found superiors – even company CEO's as a junior manager – much more accessible than I initially expected. They are just as prone to appeals to their competence and to their egos as anybody else. The key, of course, lies in ensuring a complete communication (and not just in a bland transfer of information). Feedback loops are much more difficult to establish but are also perfectly feasible. Wherever the quality of the communication is capable of mobilizing some particular action, it is also perfectly able to get a superior to provide feedback. Engaging with and utilizing superiors can be a risky proposition which should not be taken lightly, but it is a necessary skill for a "good" manager. Within the category of "superiors", I also include individuals outside one's own organization but who have the appropriate gravitas as individuals or who have an elevated social or hierarchical status (for example, a Professor or somebody deserving of respect or a Government Minister or even just a relatively elderly person).

The people who are connections within a manager's personal networks form a separate class when considering communications. By personal networks I mean those sets of social connections which have some unique features which in the manager's perception distinguish them from each other. These may be, for example his current golfing partners, or the group of school friends he is regularly in contact

with, or a set of his extended family members, or all those within a particular customer organization he has access to and who have access to him. They could be the members of a professional or learned society, or a group of people who follow him on Facebook or members who regularly post to the same internet forum. As we will see later, the relationships he has with the individuals in his networks will necessarily circumscribe but will also enable the possibilities he has of mobilizing their actions. Actions that may be requested from some network partners may not be feasible with others. A close friend or family member may be willing to accept some requests which, if put to, say, a golfing partner would only damage the relationship. Communications with such network members must take into account the different foundations each network is built on. As with all the categories of recipients, the information packages must be geared to eliciting the desired meaning in the recipients' minds. An additional requirement that appears here is that the communication must not threaten the existence of the network and preferably should confirm and deepen the relationship between network partners.

Third parties are individuals with whom the manager has relatively few interactions, who are outside his own organization, who are not with any directly related organizations (such as with customers or suppliers) and who are outside his personal networks. The manager's knowledge about these parties is necessarily sparse. However, they may be required to be triggered into action, which could be crucial if such an action is part of a desired chain of actions. I have found it useful when interacting with relatively unknown parties to first make an assessment as to whether their own long term goals would render them supportive, neutral or opposed to the goals I was trying to achieve. This is a key enabling assessment. It provides the basis for, and permits the preparation of information packages to suit their perceived inclinations and for the establishment of indirect feedback loops. Feedback loops need to be indirect because not enough may be known about the party to be sure that a direct feedback will be available or feasible. These indirect loops usually involve using others who are in a position to observe the actions undertaken. Establishing the feedback channels as early as possible and preferably even before the information package is transmitted is advisable. People who are needed for the immediate action

chain but who are known to be opposed to the manager's long term goals pose a special challenge. They may be rivals in the same organization, or individuals within a customer organization or government representatives or even managers with a competitor. It is vital when embarking on such a communication that the manager be very careful in maintaining his own standards of integrity. (He must of course have his own standards of integrity). It is all too easy to get sucked into the quicksand of disinformation, manipulation and plain lies.

From meaning to message to communiqué and back again

Suppose that you are an observer on a hill and you see a child some distance away playing intently on a railway track and who is unaware that a train is approaching. Your purpose is to prevent an accident. To this end you judge that you cannot communicate with the driver of the train and choose the child as your recipient. You intend to communicate the meaning of "Danger" to the child, such that the child acts and moves off the track without delay. You translate this meaning into the message "A train is approaching and you are in its way." You choose the communiqué to be the phrase "Get off the track"; in English and to be transmitted by the medium of your voice – very loudly. But suppose further that you are a visitor in Russia. The child is probably Russian and perhaps, neither speaks nor understands English. You modify your planned communiqué to now consist of a scream, without any words, but now augmented by the visual signal of you pointing and waving towards the train. You scream and you point and you wave. The child hears you scream, looks at you, and then looks towards where you are pointing, sees the train and receives the information. In its mind it hears the words "Get off the track, quickly" but of course in Russian. The meaning of the danger is perfectly understood in its mind, exactly as you intended. The child is moved to action and jumps off the track to safety, as you intended. You receive visual feedback and confirmation that the communication was received and led to the desired action.

If you had consulted your pocket dictionary and tried to translate your words into Russian, you would have been too late. If you had only waved, no matter how

vigorously, you would not have caught the child's attention. If you had chosen any other medium than your voice no information transfer may have taken place. If you had not shouted loud enough your information would have been sent but not received. If you had screamed without pointing, the child's attention would have been captured but the only action may have been just to look at you.

In the event, all the necessary and sufficient steps for a true communication were fulfilled successfully. You had a purpose and an intended action. You had a chosen recipient; you translated your meaning into a message and put it into the form of a communiqué which you modified and then transmitted. The transmission was well directed and overcame any intervening noise. The information was received and converted into a perceived message and this led to an understanding in the recipient's mind which led to action. The feedback confirmed that the meaning understood was the one you intended.

A manager's life is usually a little more complex. He rarely has to deal with just one recipient (though it could be argued that even when making a speech to a few hundred people he actually only ever deals with single recipients, but simultaneously with many such). The meanings he needs to convey are not usually so straightforward or unambiguous. In the industrial or commercial world, meanings come not only in all the various shades of grey but they also appear in every conceivable nuance of colour. The actions to be mobilised may involve a long chain of actions. The messages he needs to formulate to convey his meanings may involve long and complex reasoning and argumentation. The information packages he must use may involve speech, documents, sounds, and various audio-visual materials. He must choose from a variety of available transmission media to transfer the communiqués. He must perhaps use a multiplicity of transmission methods to convey different parts of the communiqué. If the transmission of information involves translation or the use of interpreters then he must ensure the correctness and the integrity of the transmission. He must arrange for feedback and choose the appropriate channels also from a variety of available ways.

But no matter how involved the communication is to be, the same simple steps of the communication process are involved. Even the most complex and intricate managerial communication, to an array of recipients scattered across the world, is exactly the same, in principle, as shouting at that child and pointing at that train.

Cross-cultural communications

In today's world, cultural differences appear not just across country boundaries but even within the same organisation and between peoples in the same country. Today's mobility means that managers of all nationalities and all backgrounds can be found anywhere across the globe. I find the Japanese concept that all communications consist of two parts to be universally applicable and a particularly practical and useful concept. The concept distinguishes between what lies on the surface (*tatemae*) which is the formal façade, and the true voice (*honne*) which lies underneath. Sometimes the two modes may be very clearly separated as they are in Japan. For example, this is well illustrated by the formal mode (façade) used when in the workplace and the informal mode which prevails in the karaoke bar. But any Japanese manager also knows that he does not have the entire picture until he has heard the true voice and put it in the context defined and bounded by the formal façade. Usually however, separation of the two modes is not as clear-cut as in Japan. Often the communicator will switch, sometimes continuously, from one mode to the other. The façade and the true voice may, from time to time, be seen and heard simultaneously. It is always the recipient who has to distinguish between the two. The other side of the coin is that the communicator must be able to discern which of his communiqués will be taken to be "on the surface" and which will be perceived as being his "true voice". This poses its own challenges in formulating messages, preparing the information packages and choosing the medium for information transfer.

The true voice *(honne)*, in any culture and in any language, is usually characterised by a level of informality, but it should not be confused with other informal information exchange processes. The true voice needs the framework of the formal

façade to be properly put into context. Gossip or small talk around the coffee table is unlikely to be taken very seriously and is not usually used for the true voice. Information obtained through the grapevine for example – which exists in every organisation – may be much more than just rumour and gossip, but is not the true voice of a communication since it has no formal context within which it can exist. It should be noted that the grapevine is a valid and feasible medium for information transfer but it carries large risks of misinterpretation and of misdirection.

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