

THE BASICS OF COMMUNICATION - INPUT

INTRODUCTION

The principle medium of exercising leadership is communications, whether written, verbal, or even non verbal (see Module 1 - Nature of Leadership Work). Leaders constantly communicate, by sharing their vision, mission and strategies, by setting goals, providing critical feedback, giving recognition, etc. Given its importance, communication is rated as one of the key characteristics of leadership work and one of the roles of any manager. Not only is it critical for generating effective results, but also for building relational trust and shared commitment to bold projects. Communicating successfully is however not easy, and intentionally developing communication as a “practice” is key.

MAIN IDEAS

Just like loving is an art¹, the case is the same with communication. Both call for an open disposition, continuous practice, vigilance, active presence and learning by trial and error. Good communication goes hand in hand with good interpersonal relationships: the more we invest in strengthening our relations by nurturing mutuality and trust, the more we will be able to communicate in an edifying way, similarly the more we practice resonant and emotionally intelligent communication the healthier our relationships. The role of Emotional Intelligence will be explored further in the module *Emotional Intelligence and Resonant Communication*.

Understanding the communication process is a good start to improving our skills and building our communicative capacity.

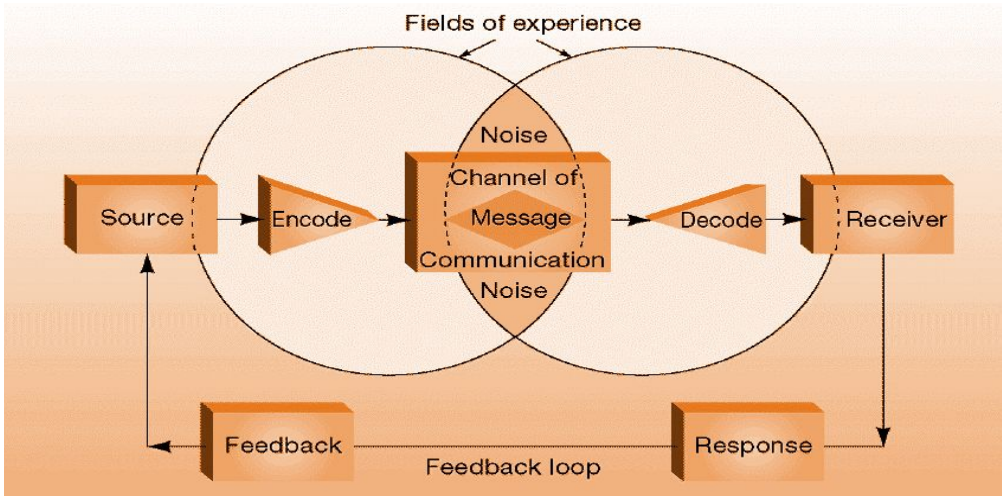
Note: One should keep in mind that no single model can capture the richness and complexity of the communication dynamic. The model on the next page provides a simplified description (a lense) through which we can see some aspects (although limited) of the process. Interpersonal communication is much more than a mechanical information transfer. The process includes expressive, hidden, creative, and spiritual dimensions that play a role in relationships and communications.

The following section attempts to briefly introduce the communication process and identifies factors that contribute to strengthen and hinder effective communication. Those who wish to deepen in the topic can explore the following worksheets in the Exercises and Practices section:

- **Introduction to Listening** for insights and tools on the different types of listening.
- **The Four Parts of Speech** (by Bill Torbert) for a model of communication combining advocacy (making your position/opinion explicit) and inquiry (finding out more information). This practice helps you structure your speech to generate resonant, intentional and mutual communication.
- **Keys for Effective Communication and Listening** for a compilation of behaviors and practices that we can experiment with. This exercise can also be helpful as a personal assessment.

1-“The Art of Loving” Erich Fromm

The meeting of various fields of experience:



adapted from Wilbur Schramm, 1954

In its simplest forms, communication is a two-way process where a source (or communicator) sends a message using verbal or nonverbal cues, the receiver listens and interprets the message and gives feedback verbally or nonverbally, while the source is listening and gauging how the message was received.

- **The Message:** Subject matter of the communication, often intangible (it could be an idea, opinion, advice, attitude, feelings, views, directions...).
- **The Source:** Also referred to as sender or communicator. This is the person who intends to convey the message to others (who will be referred to as receivers).
- **The Receiver:** This is the person to whom the message is addressed.
- **Encoding:** The process of communication requires the Source to use certain symbols (such as words, actions or pictures...) that best convey the message they want to communicate. The conversion of the message into these symbols is known as encoding.
- **Communication Channel:** This is the medium (formal or informal, verbal, written, non-verbal...) chosen by the Source to send the required information, ideas etc.
- **Decoding:** This is the process of converting by the Receiver the message/symbol person sent by the Source, in such a way that the receiver extracts its meaning and attempts to understand it in the best possible way.
- **Response/Feedback:** Feedback is the process of ensuring that the receiver has received the message and understood in the same sense as sender meant it.
- **Noise:** The Source and the Receiver interact in a space where a third factor comes in: "noise" or static. This refers to any type of disruption that interferes with the transmission of the message and distorts the interpretation of information from the source to the receiver.

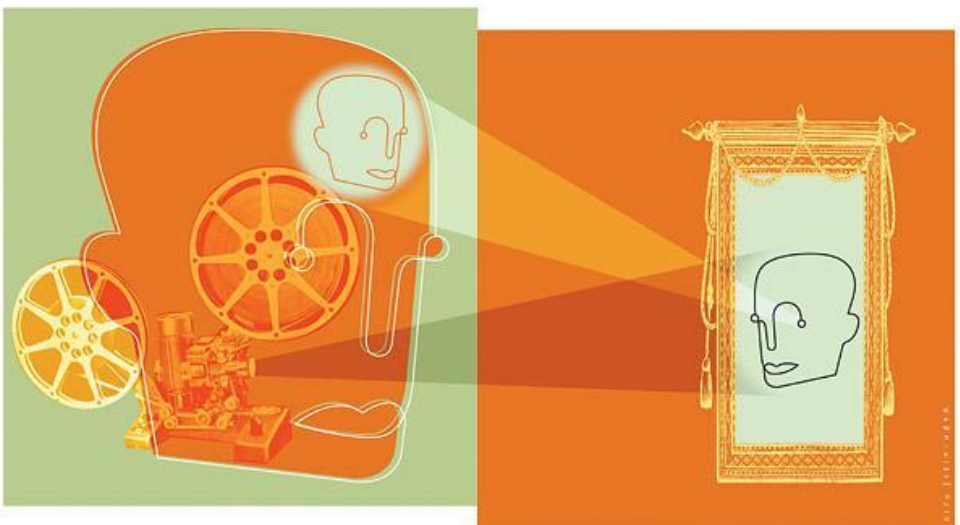
These barriers may be physiological, psychological, cultural, semantic.. and all constitute filters which obstruct the communication process.

Among these filters we cite: *expectations, interpretations based on assumptions; hearing what we want to hear, distortion that comes from internal blocks (to the message; to the messenger; to the implications of the message), strong emotions, and external noise and unwanted disturbance from the environment,...*

A not so easy process

The challenge is that we often believe that good communication is about common sense and that it will naturally arise when needed, while reality shows that this is easier said than done. Good communication requires that all parties are focused, present, aware and committed to the process. However, the complexity of our world and various adverse conditions (stress, dissonance, noise, information overload...) make the communication process quite challenging:

- **We live in a highly stressful environment.** Stress triggers our limbic brain to protect ourselves and turn from others toward our self-interests. In stressful situations, we automatically become focused on preserving our image, our resources, our sense of success... In this context, exploring our stressors and how they affect our communication is relevant for building our emotional intelligence and communicative capacities.
- **In addition, our experience and the story we make up about our experience are distinct** (check below image). Each one of us is different in the way we perceive the world and make meaning of situations. This becomes even more complicated when interacting with people from different cultural backgrounds. Taking the time to understand others' intentions, interpretations and the way they make meaning helps us limit the risks of communication breakdown. Hence the necessity of developing communication as a mindful practice.



In addition to the above, keeping ourselves grounded through general practices such as mindfulness, action inquiry, deep listening, or Ignatian practices such as the examen, spiritual conversations, and discernment help us limit our reactive responses and be more purposeful and edifying in our communication. You will find these sections in the Integration part and the Exercises section.

IGNATIAN NOTE

The book “Directions for Communication” by Fr. Willi Lambert SJ is a helpful resource that discovers Ignatius as a master of communication. The book does not merely focus on ‘leadership’ or ‘management’, but also on the spiritual life in general. Particularly useful are:

- Chapter 1, which steers its way through the narrative traditions about Ignatius, using the idea of ‘communication’ as central,
- Chapter 2, which draws on what seems to be Willi Lambert’s favourite text, the 1546 letter to the Jesuits working at Trent,
- Chapter 6, on communication and community, particularly p. 104 onwards. Lambert draws on two letters for communication between superior and subject; Constitutions part IX, chapter 2; and traditions about Ignatius the delegator.
- Chapter 7, about Polanco’s instructions on letter writing.
- The book also provides helpful insights on feedback and *Correctio Fraterna* (pages 143-148) and good communication practices (pages 229-239).

Ignatius understood the value of communication very well. In the Spanish version of his book of the Exercises, the formulation of “Love consists in sharing” is “El Amor consiste en comunicación” in other words: “Love consists in communication”, in “mutual confiding”. The underlying presupposition here is that the essence of communications is relationship, with a focus on mutuality.

Summary notes from Lambert are provided as a handout. We invite you read the book for further deepening and exploration.

EXPECTED LEARNINGS AND OUTCOMES

1. Understanding the basic elements and dynamics of communications
2. Identifying factors that contribute to strengthen and hinder effective communication
3. Becoming more intentional about developing communication as a key practice for leadership

“Communication is part of God’s plan for us and an essential way to experience fellowship. Made in the image and likeness of our Creator, we are able to express and share all that is true, good, and beautiful. But when we yield to our own pride and selfishness, we can also distort the way we use our ability to communicate.”

Pope Francis