

Basics of Effective Communication For Community Education

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Introduction

Communication is an important and vital function carried out by all living beings. In this respect, the human beings have the unique ability to execute this function in a refined, orderly and effective way due to our supremacy of possessing inherent and acquired biological skills using modern technology. The ultimate object of communication is to transfer information and ideas from one individual or source to the other. Basically, communication could be carried out using several media, multiple modes and a variety of methods.

Amongst the primitive human beings, communication developed through using sign languages, which later took the form of permanent inscriptions on rocks. Thereafter, with the gradual advancement of technology the printed media came into popular usage. With the subsequent invent of the telephone system and wireless technology, the field of communication gained a very rapid advancement. This again was further boosted by satellite technology and the invention of computers and television. Here we are today in the world of Information Technology with the ever fast expanding and advancing systems of global communication with multiple technology and media.

In the light of the above advanced status, at present the delivery of communication encompasses several key aspects.

They are;

- nature
- purpose
- target group
- medium used
- mode utilized
- methods adopted
- time devoted and
- feedback obtained.

In this article, I shall address issues of basics of effective communication for educating the public on the fundamentals of scientific methods and elementary concepts involved in their daily work.

The Nature Of The Message

The message in this issue is concerned with simplified scientific principles involved in routine activities of the people in our society. Thus, it is imperative that any scientific concept should be simplified to a basic and clearly understood format. Therefore, it is necessary to plan the contents and present it in a logical and stepwise sequence. This is where, very often the personal creativity helps.

The communicator should first understand the nature of the message to be delivered, whether it is, (a) directly concerned with a routine experience, (b) an activity beneficial for a particular reason or (c) just a piece of knowledge which is good to know?

The Purpose of The Message

Before preparing the presentation, the communicator should have a clear understanding of the *objective* or *purpose* of the message. Thereafter, it should be spelt out in its simplest form before starting the actual presentation. This exercise would definitely clearly give to the receiver the main intention of the message.

In addition, along with defining the purpose prior to the presentation, the communicator also could have certain self-imposed restrictions, which would guard him against deviating from the topic addressed, and its purpose. Furthermore, such prior identification facilitates to limit the contents of the topic discussed at its required length and depth without confusing or overloading the receiver with unnecessary information.

The Target Group

The proper understanding of the target group aimed by the message is extremely important while preparing the manuscript. The type of language used, the examples cited, the depth of information presented, and the specific purpose spelt out, all depend on the nature of the target group. The main features of the target group to be considered are the (i) language they speak, (ii) age and gender, (iii) level of education, (iv) interests or common work pattern, and (v) religion and ethnicity.

It would be very effective if the communicator shows familiarity with the daily activities of the target group as well as their aspirations. Such an exercise would bring close the communicator to the receiver and both parties will be at ease. One must remember that a

communication definitely has a reactive component. That is, even though the receiver may not be able to respond to the communicator, we should remember that the receiver reacts to the message within him/herself.

The Medium Used

The medium of language used in the message is vital in the Sri Lankan context. It is although necessary on some occasions to refer to hard scientific technical jargon in order to introduce certain concepts, the basics should be explained in simple language familiar to the target group. The sentences should be very simple and short. Make an attempt to give explanations to highlight the relevance and applicability to day-to-day activities of life. Perhaps even repetition of key statements may be very beneficial to stress a point, especially in a verbal communication. It may be better that certain elementary technical words are identified in English rather than introducing complicated and unfamiliar Sinhala or Tamil words. Thus, a communicator is allowed to use a mix of languages to facilitate easier and more meaningful communication.

The choice of mixing of language and the extent of explanation, which needs to be given, should be determined by a careful pre-planning of the message, perhaps experimenting it on a 'pilot' presentation.

The Mode Utilised

The presentation has to be either through single or multiple modes, such as using print, verbal, electronic (audiovisual) and/or interactive facilities. The choice of the mode of presentation depends on the (i) nature of the

topic (ii) availability of facilities and (iii) preference of the communicator.

The Methods Adopted

Several methods or techniques could be adopted in the presentation. They are as a (i) one-way presentation (print media in particular), (ii) dialogue between an interviewer and presenter, (iii) discussion between several resource persons, or as a (iv) interactive session with an audience. Again, the choice of single or several methods depend on the resources available for communication and the time allowed.

Time Devoted

The availability of time is an important determinant in deciding on the content to be presented. Invariably the quality of the presentation also depends on the availability of a critical time period in verbal presentations.

Thus, it is imperative that at least a minimum period of time is essential in enabling the communicator to (i) introduce the issue (ii) spell out the objectives (iii) refer to existing prior knowledge, which the target group already possesses (iv) introduce new knowledge (v) stress the relevance and applicability, and (vi) summarise the salient points or key concepts.

Feedback Obtained

It is essential at the end of a presentation to summarise the important issues and recall them as to how the receiver has perceived the issues. Similarly, a feedback should be obtained on the whole message to ascertain the effectiveness of the exercise. A questionnaire could be used to methodically find out the response of the receiver or target population.

In this short article, I have tried to stress the basics of communication so as to make it more meaningful and effective.