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PEOPLE AND COMMUNICATION

Stuart Harris



A Threshold/Diploma Text

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人与通讯系统的关系

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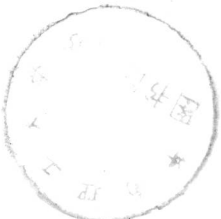
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This book is designed as a key element in the Threshold/Diploma courses dealing with human communication. It contains frequent suggestions, requests and exercises — all characteristics of the typical interactive student/lecturer situation. However in dealing with topics of wide relevance to many important human activities, *People and Communications* addresses a much wider audience than the student population.

Topics covered include: Study Skills; Written Communication; Oral Communication; Applying for a Job and Interviewing and being Interviewed.

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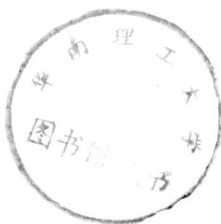
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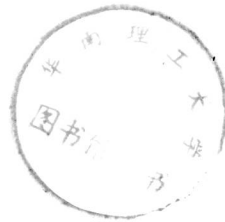
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Lecturer's Guide to the Course

INTRODUCTION

This course book is designed to provide students with the necessary written and oral communication skills to enable them to interpret and write documents relevant to today's business world. Parts of the course are suited to formal exposition, but the majority of the unit objectives require that students exercise their communication skills individually and in groups. Students achieve the aims of the course through an integrated approach by dividing the unit into four broad areas:

- gathering, processing and transmitting information;
- working in groups;
- information technology;
- individual research.

STAFFING

It is important that the course is not regarded as similar to a traditional English language course. While the development of self-expression and interpretative skills are valuable, the emphasis here is on group interaction, personal development and oral skills, as well as on looking at the communications process within and between firms. In particular, some role-play situations may test the communication and persuasive skills of the lecturer even more than the students, especially if some of the students happen to be lacking in confidence or motivation.

STUDENTS

The course assumes no particular age group or relevant experience, though the student should be competent in the use of the English language.

1 Introduction to Communication

PURPOSE OF THE SESSION

Over the course of this book we will consider the process of communication. It is a process which most people never think about analytically, a fact that is often the cause for breakdowns in communication or manipulation and abuse of the receivers. Those who do analyse the use of the communication process gain an unusual insight into human nature.

WHAT IS COMMUNICATION?

Group activity: ask the group for ideas and write them up on the blackboard.

At the centre of any definition of communication (see Figure 1.1) must be the intention of conveying a message, even if the message is abstract (modern poetry, for example). The message may not be intended for anybody in particular and may be simply for the enjoyment of the creator: so there may be no intended receiver. There will always, however, be a transmitter.

A message is usually both transmitted and received (see Figure 1.2), though some messages may not reach their destination if there is a barrier to communication. Such a barrier may vary from a reception problem with your radio or television, to a listener whose mind is on other things or who does not understand the message.

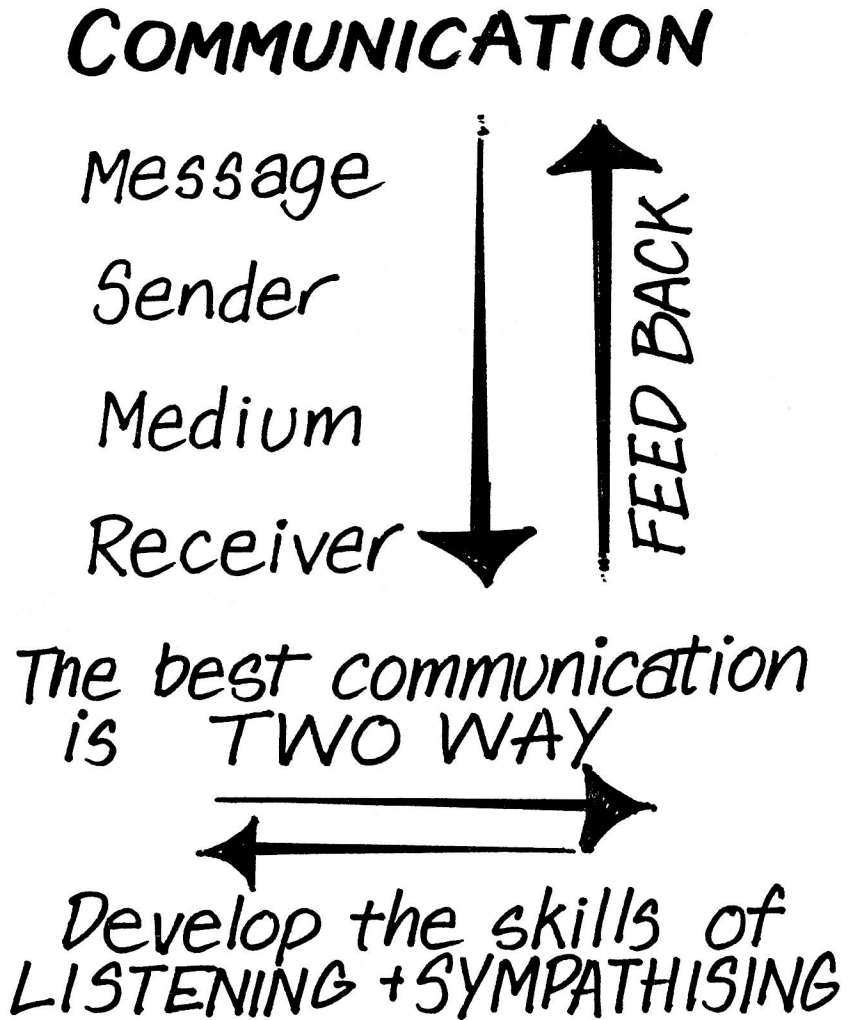


Figure 1.1

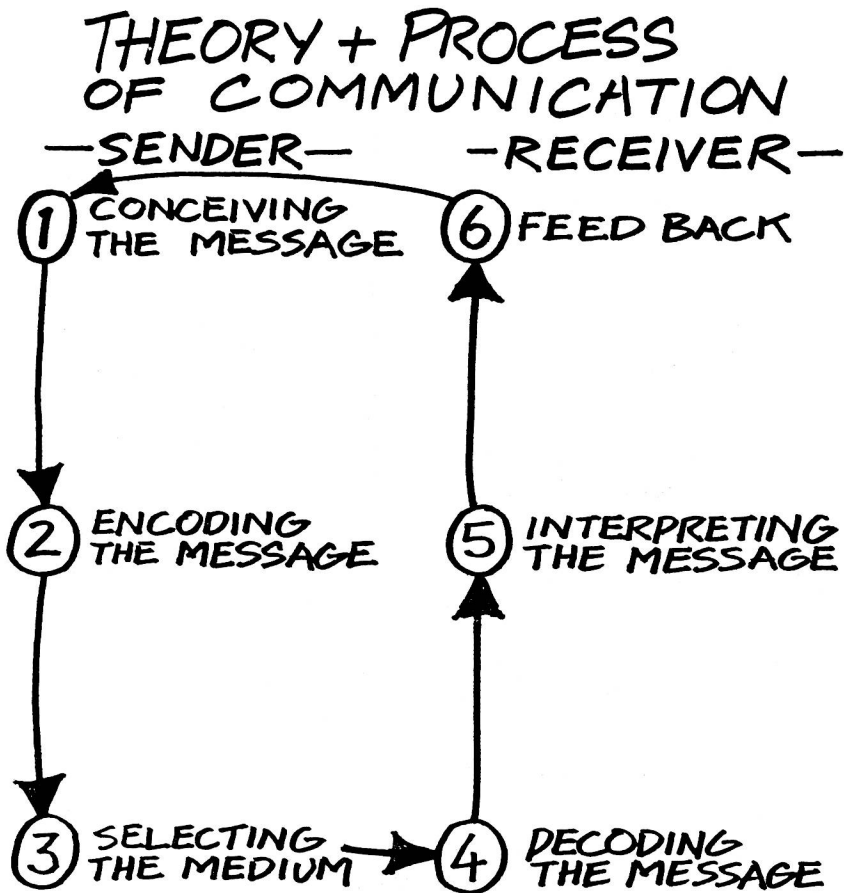
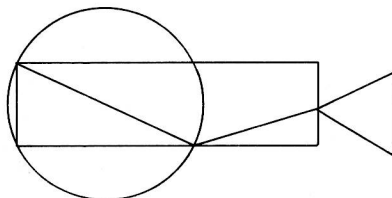


Figure 1.2

A DEMONSTRATION

Activity

(The lecturer should invite one of the group to leave the room for a few minutes. The remaining students should copy this diagram from the blackboard.)



When copied, erase the diagram, cover student copies and re-capture the departed student. Instructions should then be given by the group (the lecturer hopes badly), to enable the returned student to re-draw the diagram. (Before the student re-enters the room, he/she should be requested to interpret the instructions as awkwardly as possible.) The person doing the drawing should not ask questions but should draw something absurdly wrong if, for example, no indication of size comes from the audience.

Discussion

The aim of this exercise is to show that a breakdown in the reception of a message will occur when the transmitter assumes an unreasonable amount of previous knowledge on the part of the receiver. This is a common mistake among teachers, though such examples will hopefully not be observed by the student of the present course.

One can imagine the confusion if the medium for this experiment had been the telephone. Additional problems would also have occurred if the receiver had not understood the terminology used. People working in particular environments (computer programming or engineering, for example), develop their own working terminology or restricted code to deal with specific events. The terms used may not be understood by those outside since, to the transmitter, they require an elaborated code to make understanding possible.

In all communications we must not take the receiver's understanding for granted.

Examples of breakdown in communication are given in the exercise on page 25.

WHAT'S SO SPECIAL ABOUT COMMUNICATION?

What is so special about communication? Animals communicate with each other, often in elaborate ways. For example, a bee discovering a plentiful supply of nectar several fields away from the hive, will return and give directions to its fellows by flying in a series of complex patterns in front of the hive. The other bees will then fly straight to the food source. Animal messages, however, tend to be limited in their purpose. (The group may care to think of the type of message that animals transmit and the lecturer to write their ideas on the blackboard.)

Although animals communicate, they do not have language. They do make noises but these tend to be situation-related: for example, a loud shriek to signify fear or pain. People also have situation-related noises (see Figure 1.3). If a Frenchman, an Englishman and a Russian were stood in line and blindfolded, you would get roughly the same noise from each of them if you stamped on their toes. The oaths that followed, however, would indicate by language the origin of the sufferer.

Jean Aitchison defines language as “a patterned system of arbitrary sound symbols, whose characteristic features of displacement, cultural transmission, productivity and duality are rare or absent in animal communication” (*Teach yourself linguistics*, 2nd ed, Fontana, 1978). Some words are perhaps less random in their component sound than others: for example the words buzz, fizz, pop and drip to some extent imitate that which they describe.

The debate on whether or not animals are capable of learning a language continues, concentrating in recent years on dolphin communications and the teaching of hand signals to apes. The miracle of human language acquisition remains a mystery. Why is it, for instance, that as infants we normally learn words and grammar at an incredible pace yet, when we have the know-how to analyse language in later years, we have such difficulty in learning enough French to buy things on holidays to France? The ability to communicate *is* special but it is often taken for granted and it is not always used to the greatest advantage (see Figure 1.4).

HOW DO WE COMMUNICATE?

We communicate in a number of ways (see Figure 1.5). Consider which medium is most appropriate (consider the example shown in Figure 1.6 and the options shown in Figure 1.7). Most of the methods illustrated employ either the use of spoken language or written symbols that represent the speech sounds. Some of the messages make no use of language at all: we call this non-verbal communication. The road sign for falling rocks, for instance, is universal: it is likely to be understood by all nationalities, as are most road signs.

OTHER INFLUENCES ON COMMUNICATION

- SITUATION CONTEXT

Role people find themselves in, eg
Stuck in lift with your boss

- FORMALITY INFORMALITY

Degree of formality
affects communication

- USE OF SPACE

Positioning of furniture, eg Being
placed on lower chair
Physical proximity

- NON VERBAL CLUES

- * Facial expressions
- * Gestures, hands, arms, nods
- * Eye contact
- * Body language

Figure 1.3