Volume : 4 | Issue : 9 | Sept 2015 ISSN - 2250-1991

Research Paper English

Encompassing the Scope of Western Models of Communication

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ABSTRACT

We teach the same models of communication today that we taught forty years ago. This can and should be regarded as a mark of the enduring value of these models in highlighting key elements of that process for students who are taking the process apart for the first time. It remains, however, that the field of communication has evolved considerably since the 1960's, and it may be appropriate to update our models to account for that evolution. This paper presents the classic communication models that are taught in introducing students to interpersonal communication and mass communication. It then introduces a new model of communication that, it is hoped, more closely maps to the range of materials we teach and research in the field of communication today. This model attempts to capture the fundamental interaction of language, medium, and message that enables communication, the socially constructed aspects of each element, and the relationship of creators and consumers of messages both to these elements and each other.

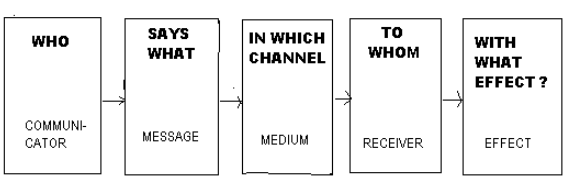
KEYWORDS

The Lasswell model of the Communication Process

Western theories and models of communication have their origin in Aristotle's Rhetoric. According to Aristotle, rhetoric is made up of three elements- the speaker, the speech and the listener. The aim of rhetoric is the search for all possible means of persuasion.

Perhaps, the most widely quoted definition of communication in terms of Aristotelian rhetoric is that of Harold D. Lasswell, the American political scientist. He stated that 'a convenient way to describe an act of communication is to answer the following questions.

- Who
- Says What
- In Which Channel
- To Whom It May Concern
- With What Effect



The Lasswell model of the Communication Process

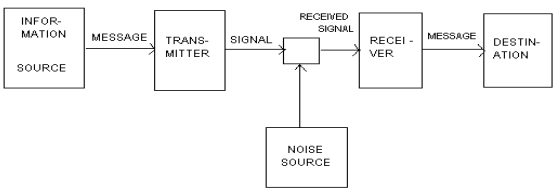
Lasswell saw communication as performing three functions: surveillance of the environment, correlation of components of society, and cultural transmission between generations. Such a mechanistic and 'effects' approach to communication was to influence communication theory for decades to come. Essential to this understanding were the notions of transmission and transfer of information for intended effects.

A definition on similar lines was given by Bereslon and Steiner: "The transmission of information, ideas, emotions, skills, etc. It is the act or process of transmission that is usually called communication".

The primary goal of communication, according to western communication theory, is influence through persuasion. Osgood's definition is an illustration. In the most general sense, he explains, we communicate whenever one (the system), (the source), influences another, (the destination), by manipulation of alternative signals which can be transferred over the channel connecting them.

The Shannon and Weaver Model:

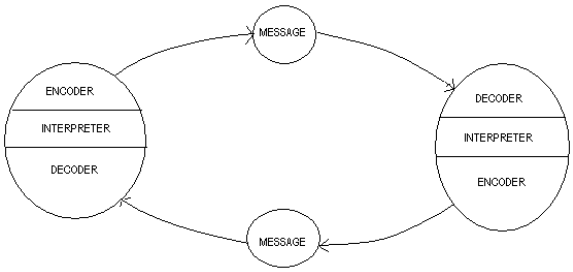
The effect-oriented models or approaches to communication derived from Shannon and Weaver's Mathematical model of communication. Shannon and Weaver conceived of communication as a system composed of five essential parts plus 'noise': (1) an information source, (2) a transmitter, (3) a channel, (4) the receiver, and (5) the destination. As engineers during World War II at the Bell Telephone Laboratories in the United States, their primary concern was finding out the most efficient means of using the channels of communication (the telephone cable and the radio wave) for the transfer of information. They, however, claimed that the mathematical model they worked out as a result of their research at Bell, was widely applicable to human communication as well.



The Shannon and Weaver 'Mathematical' Model of Communication

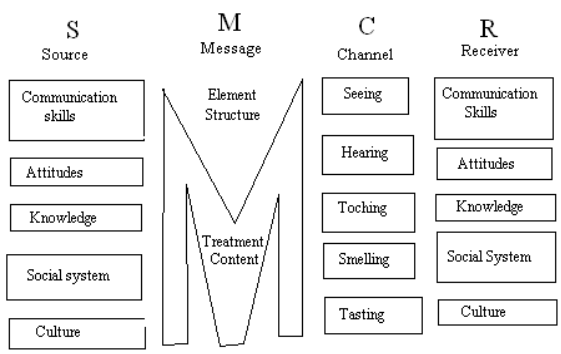
The Osgood and Schramm Circular Model:

Wilbur Schramm, whose theories have influenced much Indian planning on the role of communication in development, adapted Shannon and Weaver's model to human communication, but stressed the encoding-decoding aspects as crucial. He defined communication as ' the sharing of information, ideas or attitudes'. He endorsed the Aristotelian principle that communication always requires at least three elements - source, message and destination.



The encoding and decoding of the message were the most important components to him. As he explained: Substitute 'microphone' for encoder and 'earphone' for decoder and you are talking about electronic communication. Consider that the 'source' and 'encoder' are one person, 'decoder' and 'destination' are another, and the signal is language, and you are talking about human communication. In a communication model he developed with Charles Osgood, Schramm suggested that communication was circular in nature, where both the sender and the receiver were involved in encoding and decoding, and were equal partners in the exchange.

The Osgood and Schramm Circular Model
According to Berlo (1960) the ingredients of communication are :



Berlo's SMCR Model of Communication
Source: According to Berlo, all human communication has some source, some persons or group of persons with a purpose. In order to analyse and determine the effectiveness of the source, we should try to analyse the following about him (the source):

- His communication Skills
- His Attitude
- His Knowledge
- His Social System
- His Culture

Message: The purpose of the source has to be expressed in the form of the message. In fact, the communication encoder is responsible for taking the ideas of the source and putting them in a code, expressing the source's purpose in the form of message. In short, what is communicated is message.

Channel: The medium through which a communication message travels is known as channel. In fact, a channel is a medium, a carrier of message. It may be one of the natural senses i.e., seeing, hearing, touching, smelling and tasting.

Receiver: For communication to occur there must be somebody at the other end who can be called the communication receiver, the target of communication. In other words, the person who perceives the message and attaches some meaning to the message, is the receiver. If there is no receiver, there is no communication.

Edward Wilson notes that ``the ongoing fragmentation of knowledge and resulting chaos in philosophy are not reflections of the real world but artifacts of scholarship". The definition of communication developed below is both rigorous and general in capturing all and only the communication phenomena in the "real world." We are not trying to build on traditional definitions of communication and our definition isn't "an artifact of scholarship"; instead, we build a model of communications on both a precise definition of information and on a list of required characteristics for a definition of communication. Thus, there is no explicit preference for which side should win in long-running intra-disciplinary debates, such as whether there is intrapersonal communication, for example. We assume that communication has the following characteristics (derived in part from questions posed by Motley)

1. Communication is characterized by information transfer,
2. Processing takes place in communication systems,
3. Both the sender and the receiver are actively involved in a communication system
4. The quality of communications varies.

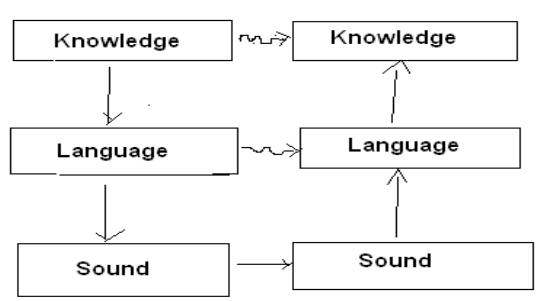
Communication should be defined without regard to possibly false assumptions made about portions of the communication system. Put differently, we will assume that numbers 1 through 4 above need be the *only* characteristics used in developing a definition of communication. We thus begin developing our model of communication from observable phenomena and the desirable characteristics of a definition describing the phenomena, not from traditional definitions.

As **Hauser** notes, the symbolic approach may not be the best in all situations, although it is certainly a reasonable assumption for some models of communication. We also choose not to focus on intentionality, motivation, or the behavior of the sender or receiver. Instead, we adopt an approach that, with the precise model of information developed above, provides us with a more physical, observable, and precise set of requirements for a definition of communication.

Communication occurs if, and only if, information moves from the input to one process to the output from a second process, the latter process being the inverse of the first process.

We refer to the information at the output of this inverse, receiving, process, as *a communication.* Communication is more complex than information; communication processes are composed of multiple complementary informative processes.

Here we have two informative processes, the second of which ``undoes" what the first process ``does." Viewed loosely, hearing, for example, undoes what speaking does. Telephones provide communication circuits, providing an input device at one end of a connection and an inverse, decoding process at the other end. Similarly, the language component of a person talking on the telephone may be said to communicate with the (inverse) language component of the listener. The knowledge components of the two are in communication.



Above figure shows a hierarchy of processes used for information transfer and communication. Consider each hierarchy representing an individual. One communicates her or his knowledge in language, which is further transformed or en-

coded as sounds. These are decoded on the right hand side, producing language from the sounds using an inverse function, and the language is converted back into knowledge, again through the function inverse to the function that initially transformed the information. The decoding takes place on the right hand side, with ascending function representing the inverse of the function. Right side in the figure "undo" what the earlier processes on the left "did."

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