

Levels of Communication and Task Performance: An Experimental Study

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ABSTRACT

Communication has proven to be one of the essential elements of human daily life functioning and organisations are no exception. Communication in organisation serves as the binding forces that connects and holds different parts of organisation for smooth functioning of the organisation. One such functioning is task performance, which is highly affected by the nature and level of communication. The present study tried to investigate the impact of different levels of communication on task performance. By using items form Cattell's Culture Fair Test three conditions were made. Keeping the objective of the study in mind, 30 college going students were approached, and each condition was administered on the same participant with a gap of two days to control the practice effect. The results were analysed with one way ANOVA. The findings of the study suggested that there was a significant impact of level of communication on task performance. Moreover, the two way communication could be more effective than one-way communication, or no communication in term of task performance.

Keywords: *Levels of communication, task performance, ways of communication.*

The word "communication" has its roots in the Latin word "communis" meaning common. When people communicate, they are basically engaging in establishing a sense of commonness or sharpness with someone else. "To communicate" is defined as to import, bestow, or convey, to make known. In general terms communication is referred to as; a process by which information is exchanged between individuals through a common system of symbols, signs, or behaviour. Several theorists have tried to define communication, Newcomb (1953) defines communication as the process by which people influence each other or leave an impression on others. Robbins and Judge (2006) conceptualise communication as the transfer and the understanding of meaning.

In the context of the organisation, communication serves great functions and helps the organisation and organisational processes to run smoothly. In the context of the organisation as it serves some distinct functions, it is termed organisational communication, which is defined by Goldhaber (1993) as the flow of messages within a network of interdependent relationships. Baron, Greenberg and Grover (1993) define it as the process by which a

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person, group or organisation (the sender) transmits some type of information (the message) to another person, group or organisation (the receiver). Furthermore, Scott, Corman and Cheney (1998) conceptualise it as a process that involves the transmission and accurate replication of ideas ensured by feedback to elicit actions that will accomplish organisational goals.

Organisational communication chiefly concerned to establishing relationships and interacting with internal organisational members and other interested publics and personnels from outside the organisation. Most definitions of "communication" used in the organisational behaviour literature stress the use of symbols to transfer the meaning of information. One analysis stress that communication is the understanding not of the visible but it also incorporates the invisible and concealed meaning. These hidden and symbolic elements rooted in the culture give meaning to the apparent form of communication process. Communication does not only have personal implications it has behavioural implications as well, that it is means by which one person can influence another.

Modelling communication

To understand communication in a better way, theorists have given some "models of communication" which describe what happens when two or more people interact.

- 1. One-way (Linear) communication model (Shannon and Weaver's Model):** The model was proposed by Claude Shannon and Warren Weaver in 1949. In this model, communication is like giving an injection; a sender encodes ideas and feelings into some sort of message and then conveys them to a receiver who decodes them. The model is a simple model of communication. As per this communication model source is the dominant factor, along with the source, noise is also a disturbing factor. Talking about the advantages of one-way communication, it is relatively faster, occurs in an orderly manner and the sender has no problem they can carry on their work and not have to worry about anything. The downside of this model is that it ensures less audience participation, does not provide receipt of receiving the message and may result in less impactful, as the receiver can not state their opinion, ask questions and give responses.
- 2. Two-communication Model:** Schramm (1955) came out with an interactive model that saw the receiver or listener providing feedback to the sender or speaker. Here, the speaker also called as sender of the message also listens to the feedback given by the receiver also called as listener. Both the speaker and the listener take turns to speak and listen to each other. Depending upon the context and audience characteristics feedback is generally given either verbally or non-verbally or in both ways if required. This model also indicates that the speaker and listener communicate better if they have common fields of experience, or which overlap. Advantages of the two-way.

communication model includes greater audience participation, more impact for behavioural change, and senders and receivers get to discuss what they would like, receivers can respond to the sender and ask questions. The disadvantages of the two-way communication model include being more time consuming and hence relatively slower in terms of delivering information, and also putting tremendous pressure on the sender as s/he needs to cater to individual reactions and satisfy them.

Task Performance

In their two-factor theory of job performance Borman and Motowidlo (1993) argued that most jobs consist of task performance and contextual performance. As per them, task performance is the behaviour that is directly linked to the completion of the job. Task-related behaviours contribute to the technical core of the organisation. Behaviour in the domain of task performance is usually recognised as a formal requirement of an individual's job. Task performance represents substantive duties and tasks that differentiate one job from another.

Furthermore, task performance has been perceived as the ability to meet expectations and demonstrate competency and expertise. Those expectations are directly associated with the organisation's technical core achieved by conducting, servicing, and maintaining its technical requirements (Harrison, Newman, & Roth, 2006). In general terms, task performance is referred to the effectiveness with which job incumbents perform activities that contribute to the organisation's technical core. So, task performance is behaviour that is directly involved in producing goods or services. It is the proficiency with which one performs central job tasks. Task performance varies across jobs and is likely to be role prescribed and is influenced by abilities, skills and job knowledge.

Organisational Communication and Task Performance

Organisational communication is a theoretical variable that measures the degree to which information about the job and workplace is transmitted by an organisation to its members (Price, 1997). In organisations, a basic factor for improvement in job performance is communication between the employee and the supervisor. Various studies show that there is a significant relationship between organisational communication and job performance.

Organisational communication dimensions such as trust in superiors, influence of superiors, the accuracy of the information, desire for interaction, and satisfaction with communication have shown a direct relationship with job performance (O'Reilly & Roberts, 1977). Studies conducted by O'Reilly (1980) indicated that communication overload tends to have an inverse and communication underload tends to have a direct relationship with job performance. Pettit, Goris and Vaught (1997) observed that appropriate and accurate information may enhance performance. Their findings implied that individuals receiving proper, correct, and clear information may perform adequately. Supervisors might promote adequate levels of job performance among their employees by providing them with appropriate and accurate information (Giri & Kumar, 2009). In their study on managers, regarding the importance of organisational communication on job performance Giri and Kumar (2009) also reported that organisational communication had a significant effect on job performance.

METHODOLOGY

Hypothesis

On the basis of reviewed literature, the following hypothesis is made;

H1: Different levels of communication will have an impact on the work performance of the individual.

Participants

The present study used convenience sampling through which 30 college-going students were approached. The age range of participants was 17-24 years.

Research Design

The study follows a within-group research design.

Measures

For the present study, items were selected from Cattell's Culture Fair Intelligence Test. The test comprises of two forms, Form A and Form B having 50 items in each, which are further divided into four sets; Set A, Set B, Set C and Set D. For conduction of the study, three conditions of items were constructed each having 24 items, which were further divided into four sets as per the original test. The difficulty levels of all three conditions were controlled as items were assigned in three groups in a manner that the final difficulty level of all three conditions remained approximately the same. In the study, the Independent variable was the level of communication, and the dependent variable was task performance. Here, the task performance meant the completion of reasoning items and was measured in terms of successful completion of reasoning items. The independent variable was manipulated by different levels of communication. Separate instructions were used in different conditions.

Procedure

In order to conduct this experiment, college-going students were approached. Two days gap was maintained between two successive conditions to control the practice effect. In the first condition, the participants were given condition-1 items, having no instructions, and asked to do the task. And no further communication was made. After two days the same group of participants were given condition-2 tasks, in this condition, clear instructions about how to do the task were given in printed form as well as also explained orally. Again, after two days, the final condition was administered to the same participants, here, they were given instructions as well as feedback in the form of verbal warnings/praise for two successive failures or true attempts. The feedback was given on two consecutive failures or two consecutive true attempts. A standardised form of feedback was used that was specially designed for the study.

RESULTS

Table 1 The Sample Size, Mean Task Performance, and Standard Deviation of Different Conditions

Condition	n	Mean	Standard Deviation
Condition-1	30	9.67	3.13
Condition-2	30	13.57	2.90
Condition-3	30	16.93	2.63

Table 2 Summary of one-way ANOVA

	Sum of squares	Degrees of freedom	Mean squares	F
Between Groups	793.48	2	396.74	47.16**
Within Groups	731.90	87	8.41	
Total	1525.38	89		

** $p < 0.01$

Figure 1

The mean correct and error response percentages in all three conditions

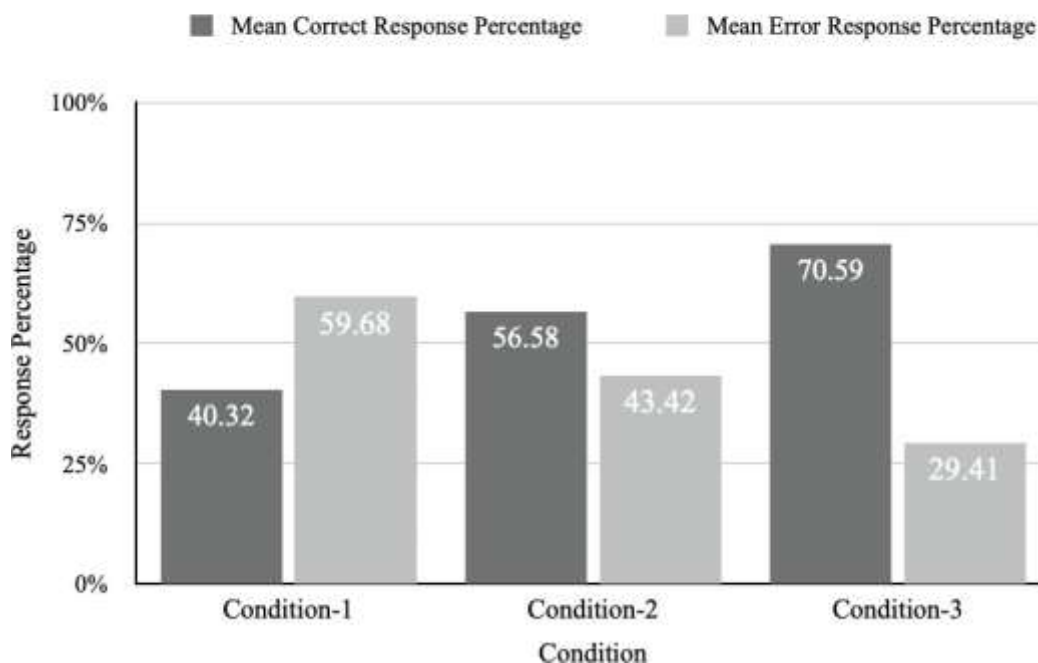


Table 1 shows that the sample size was constant in all three conditions, i.e., 30. Also, it reflects that there was a clear difference in mean task performance in all three conditions, as the mean task performance were 9.67, 13.37, & 16.93 in condition one, two and three respectively. The data was also more distributed in condition one (S.D.=3.13), followed by condition two (S.D.= 2.90) and was least scattered in the third condition (S.D.= 2.63). It could be noticed from Figure 1 that, among all three conditions in condition three the mean correct response percentage was highest as it was 70.59%, followed by condition two in which the mean correct response percentage was 56.58%, and the least mean correct response percentage was obtained in the first condition as it was only 40.32%. Conversely, the mean error response percentage was highest in the first condition, followed by condition two and the least in condition three; as the mean error response percentage was 59.68%, 43.42% and 29.41% in the first, second and third condition respectively. Table 2 which represents the One-Way ANOVA summary, shows that the sum of squares was 793.48 in between groups, and was 731.90 in within-group conditions, so the total sum of squares was 1525.38. The degree of freedom was 2 in the case of the between-group condition and was 87 in the within- group condition, moreover, the mean squares were 396.74 and 8.41 in between and within groups respectively. The F ratio reveals that there was a significant difference in task performance among all three conditions; as $F(2, 87) = 47.16, p < 0.01$. So, the H1, i.e., "different levels of communication will have an impact on the work performance of the individual" is accepted.

DISCUSSION

Acceptance of the hypothesis reflects the fact that there was a significant difference in task performance of individuals among all three groups. Moreover, it could also be noticed that the mean correct response percentage increased by 16.26% from the first condition to the second condition and further increased by 14.01% in the third condition in comparison to the second condition. Comparison between the first and third conditions reflects that the mean correct response percentage increased by 30.27% in the third condition than the first

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condition. In other term, the mean error response percentage was decreased by 16.26% in the second condition than in the first condition. And it further decreased by 14.01% in the third condition in comparison to the second condition. Also, the mean error response percentage was decreased by 30.27% in the third condition than the first condition. Such, increment in mean correct response percentage and decrement in mean error response percentage may be indicative of a pattern that giving more amount of information in communication or conveying information in more clear terms presume to have a positive impact on the performance level. The comparison between the first and second conditions reflects that when given adequate communication the performance level is enhanced. The pattern is in accordance with available literature as Giri and Kumar (2009) found a positive impact of organisational communication on the job performance of the employees.

Furthermore, the results also indicate an important pattern that two-way communication may produce better task performance than, one-way communication or no communication. As, the one-way and two-way communications differ in only one aspect, i.e., feedback the increment in the correct response percentage in the third condition could be attributed to the introduction of active feedback, so it can be argued that when individuals are given feedback their performance may enhance in comparison to the condition in which they are not given feedback. Such pattern is also supported by already existing literature as Bilodeau (1966) found that more feedback on simulated tasks allowed individuals to make better use of feedback information to learn key task strategies and improve their performance over time. Based on their empirical study Farroq and Khan (2011) argued that feedback can increase the performance level of all sorts of organisations. Similarly, in another study on vehicle workers, Komaki, Heinzmann, and Lawson (1980) found that vehicle maintenance workers who received more feedback were able to more effectively learn safety-related knowledge and acquire information on how to change their behaviour to improve safety performance, relative to workers receiving less frequent feedback. Similar findings were also obtained by Bilodeau, 1966; Chhokar & Wallin, 1984; and Salmoni et al., 1984 all of these found a positive impact of feedback on performance. The reason for such finding could be that feedback provides insight into one's current level of functioning, and give an indication about whether the individual is working in the right direction or not. Feedback also clarifies any misconceptions that result due to poor communication processes. It suggests how much task effort is required to achieve specific objectives thereby enabling individuals to learn what task strategies are most effective, learn what level of task effort is required to perform effectively, and revise their strategies and effort as needed to enhance task performance (Carver & Scheier, 1982). Constructive feedback also enhances the motivation level of the employees so they expend more cognitive resources for the task at hand. Feedback may take the form of psychological appreciation, which is linked with enhanced performance (Abdullah, Shonubi, Hashim, & Hamid, 2016).

Implications of the study

The study has a wide range of implications in various settings. In the organisational setting, the study has managerial implications, as the managers would be suggested to use a two-way communication model, and to put an adequate amount of information in the communication process, instead of simply assigning a work without much information, or providing information via the poor mode of communication. Furthermore, managers should be actively involved in providing feedback to the employees and not just allocate the task to the workers, rather they should communicate properly and ask for any complexities or issues and listen to them as well as provide constructive feedback as it is a balanced form of feedback. Since such practices may ensure better production and efficiency. Similar

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suggestions can also be given to leaders as to be an effective leader they need to listen to their followers and provide appropriate feedback as it may indirectly enhance the effectiveness of the team by intensifying the motivation level of followers. The study also has implications in educational settings, it can be suggested that despite giving written materials to learn, or just providing information via one-way communication model i.e., without providing any insight about the relative standing of the student or clarifying any issue or doubts, in such case it won't help the students to achieve higher goals. So, feedback related to their performance should also be given to the students so that they can have a clear understanding of their position and direction and they also need to be encouraged; it is especially required in a distance learning program, in sum there has to be a two-way communication instead of having one-way communication in educational settings. The study also has implications in general life, in daily life people simply assign some tasks to somebody, but do not follow in the meantime and when the time comes they often find incomplete work or poor quality of work. In the everyday context despite simply assigning some tasks to someone constant feedback should also be given as it helps the worker or doer to have an idea about his relative standing and helps to take necessary steps.

Limitations of the study and future direction

The major limitation of the study was that the sample size as it was small, also the sampling method was accidental sampling, so the findings could not be generalised with much certainty. The study did not focus on demographic details like gender, and level of education. Further study can be done considering gender as an important factor, and comparison can be done in literate and illiterate groups. The impact of different modes of feedback can also be studied like, non-verbal feedback; furthermore, impact of negative and positive feedback can also be studied.

CONCLUSION

In the study, the hypothesis was accepted. As the study found an impact of varying levels of communication on the task performance of the individual. Also, a pattern was noted that the two-way communication could be more effective than one-way communication, or no communication in terms of task performance. Further, the role of feedback on task performance was elaborated. Implications of the study were marked and suggestions for various sectors were given. The limitations of the study and the future directions were also elucidated.

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Conflict of Interest

The author(s) declared no conflict of interest.

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