

## **Study Unit 3: Public Relations and Communication**

### **Introduction**

Organisations today are encountering numerous issues that 50 years ago would have been considered unthinkable. Companies are not just concerned with making money, but they must also learn to navigate the land mines set by social justice warriors, activities, conservationist and other human rights organisations. Furthermore, it is important to note that crisis will arise sometime in the lifetime of any organization and it is the job of the PR person to be prepared and ready to respond to this issues as they arise.

It is therefore imperative that students of Public Relations must be given a background of the histories and definitions of PR.

This study unit will begin by explaining what communication, the levels of communication, core concepts and models of communication.

### **Learning Outcomes of Study Unit 3**

Upon completion of this study unit, you should be able to

- 3.1 Define communication and levels of Communication
- 3.2 Core concepts in communication
- 3.3 Models of communication

### **3.1 Communication: Definition and Levels**

**It is impossible not to communicate – you don't need words, grammar or syntax. Humans communicate before and after they can use language by using sounds and gestures. Babies yell at different frequencies depending on whether they are hungry, frustrated or have a full nappy. Usually their carer can tell the difference. Later, on holidays, people point and smile and nod at strangers and, usually, find the beach, bank or souvenir shop.**

**All you need to communicate is someone else. 'It takes two to speak,' said Thoreau, 'one to speak and another to hear.'**

**Windahl and Signitzer (1992) point out that there are two main traditions in defining communication – the one-way transmission model and the two-way exchange concept.**

**They quote Theodorsen and Theodorsen (1992: 6) who define communication as 'the transmission of information, ideas, attitudes, or emotion from one person or group to another (or others) primarily through symbols'. The Shannon–Weaver model of communication illustrates this approach. In contrast, Rogers and Kincaid define communication as 'a process in which the participants create and share information with one another in order to reach a mutual understanding. It is therefore worth clarifying some of these terms.**

#### **3.1.1. Levels of communication**

**Berger (1995) identifies four levels of communication:**

- Intrapersonal (thoughts): makes use of neurological/chemical apparatus of the brain as the channel of communication.**
- interpersonal (conversations) and small group communication (like a lecture) uses the airwaves to carry the verbal message, as well as non-verbal communication, like body language, facial expression and so on.**

- **and mass communication. Mass media communication uses print, broadcast or phone wires to communicate with a wide range of geographically scattered people.**

### 3.2 Core concepts of Communication

The following are some key concepts in communication:

1. Intent (when both parties are aware that communication is occurring)
2. Meaning (shared understanding of the words and symbols.
3. Noise (interference)- technical, semantic, psychological noise.
4. Feedback: differentiate between one-way and two way communication
5. Mediation (means by which the communication is transmitted.

- Communication can be unmediated or mediated

### 3.3 Models of Communication

Aristotle (384–322 BC) is often cited as the first authority on communication. His works on rhetoric – the art of influencing others through the spoken word – developed with the growth of democracy in Ancient Greece and are still highly influential. Many political speeches depend on the techniques he advocated, such as the use of repetition in Tony Blair’s ‘education, education, education’ speech. Aristotle believed communication consisted of three elements:

1. *ethos* – the nature or qualities of the communicator
2. *logos* – the nature, structure and content of the message
3. *pathos* – the nature, feelings and thoughts of the receiver or audience.

More recently, in 1948, political scientist Harold Laswell created a formula to describe the communication process:

- who says
- what
- to whom
- with what
- effect?

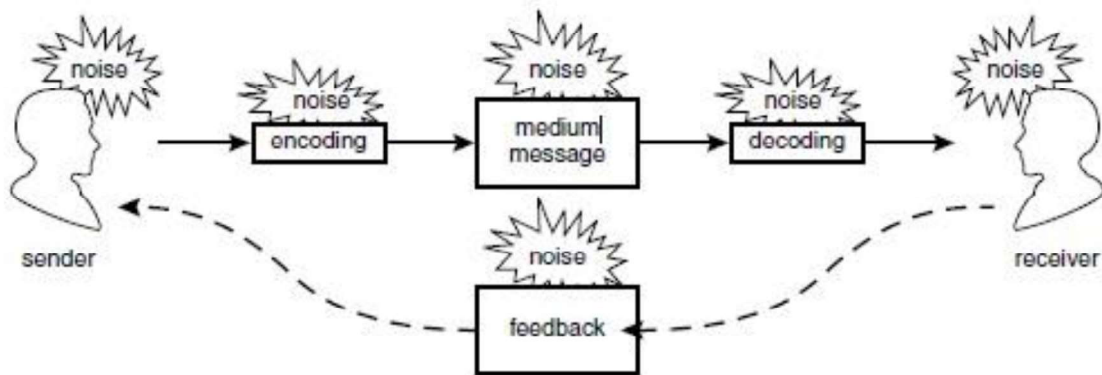
This has been very influential, and reflects interest at that time in the power of propaganda. But it assumes that communication will always have an effect and suggests that communication is always persuasive. In this model, the communicator or sender decides what and how to communicate and the receiver just waits to be affected – an approach that is now considered very limited.

Claude Shannon, a mathematician, created a representation of Laswell's formula as a linear, mathematical equation in 1949. He and his partner Warren Weaver worked for Bell Telephones and their interest was driven by the technical requirements of a medium.

They introduced the crucial concept of interference in communication, which they called 'noise'. Interference might occur in the handset of the speaker or receiver, or in the lines connecting them. As a result, the message could be distorted and misunderstood.

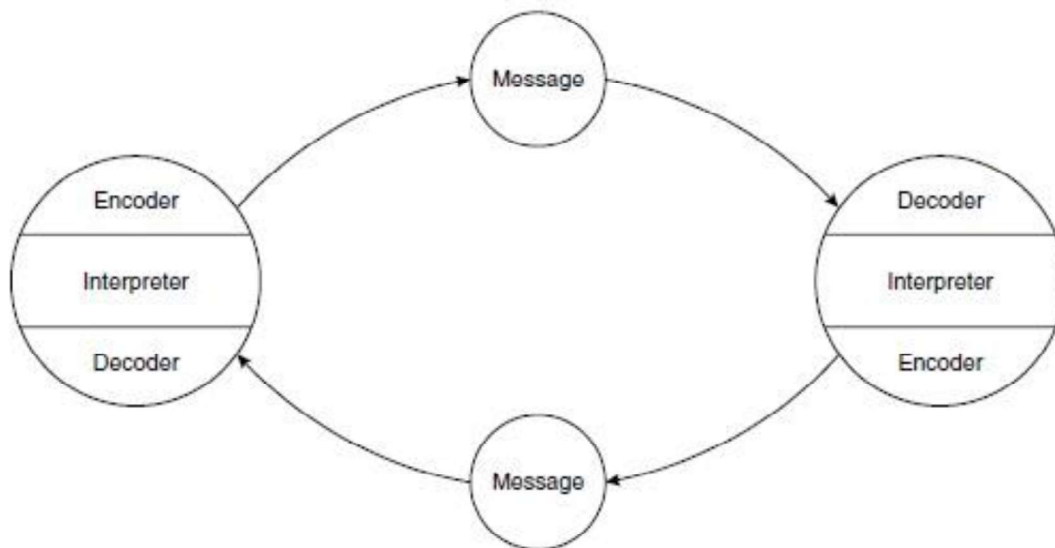
The same principle could be translated to different media, for example radio static, poor TV reception, small print, blurred photographs. Noise was later expanded to include daydreaming, physical discomfort or other kinds of distraction. It was an important reminder that communication sent is not always – if ever – the same as communication received.

A simple communication model will include a source or sender who selects information (encodes) to create a message that will be transmitted by a channel to a receiver who selects a meaning from the message (decodes) and responds with action or no action (feedback). Harrison's adaptation of the Shannon and Weaver model demonstrates this clearly.



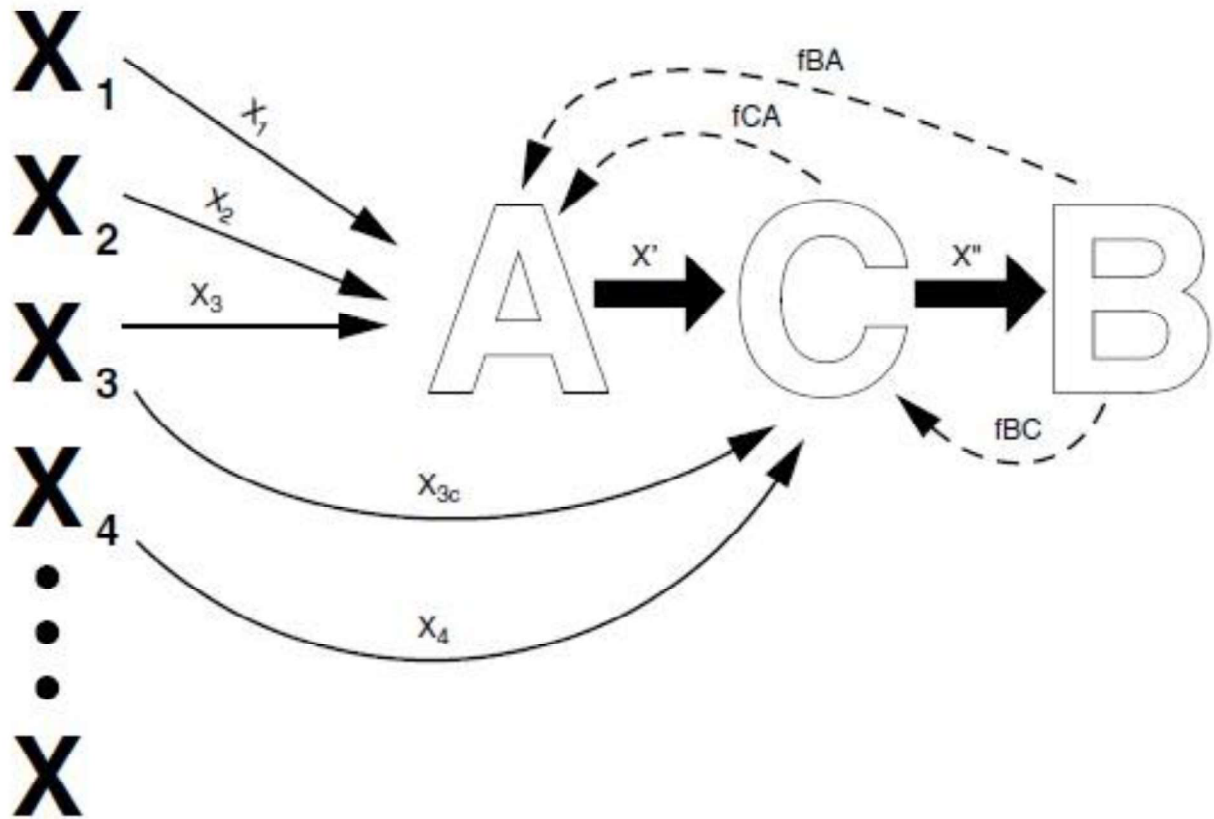
However, the Shannon and weaver model still presents two problems. First, it is linear: feedback is not the same thing as equal participation in the communication, and second, it is hard to place the mass media comfortably in this model.

The Osgood–Schramm model (below) suggests a more equal model of communication. In 1954, they created a circular model, which showed that the receiver as well as the sender is engaged in a continuous and active act of communication. Each party has to interpret the message and shape a response before sending it out or back.



The Wesley-McLean Model of communication (see next slide) discussed the role of mass media in communication. They introduced the role of the gatekeeper or channel (C) into the communication flow between A (source) and B (receiver).

However, they elaborate these roles so that (A) becomes the advocate, the ‘purposive role’, and (B), the individual or group public, is deemed to have a ‘behavioural role’. This model also shows events in the environment (X) and the response of all the players to those events. It is the first to describe the role of the public relations professional so clearly. (A) has to gather relevant information from the internal and external environment and create an appropriate message (X') to pass through the channel (C) or gatekeeper who may alter it (X'') before it can reach the public (individual or group) over whose behaviour (B) influence is sought. The model reminds the PR that the journalist or gatekeeper has access to more information (X3c) than their press releases. The model also describes the complexity of feedback in mass media communication with feedback loops running between the PR and the journalist, the PR and the public, and the public and the journalist, though the feedback via mass media is delayed.



## Summary of the study unit 3

In this study unit 3, you have learned the following:

1. Communication (definition and levels)
2. Core concepts in communication
3. Different models of communication

## Self-Review Questions (SRQ) for study unit 3

Now that you have completed this study unit, you can measure how well you have achieved its learning outcomes by answering the following questions. You can check your answers with the Notes on Self-Assessment Questions at the end of this study unit

1. What is communication?
2. Describe the levels of communication?
3. What are some of the core concepts in communication?