IMPROVEDAPPS

Effective Communication

Counting the cost of communication breakdown

info@improvedapps.com

UK: +44 (0)1276 804 800

US: +1 844 314 9796

Are we effective communicators?

In the world of business, we all tend to believe that we are effective communicators. This might even be true for some of us but if it is, then it is due largely to unconscious rather than conscious skills.

In fact, most people are not effective communicators and don't even have a clear grasp on exactly what communication is. We typically have a loose and ambiguous mental definition that might be adequate for every-day understanding but is completely inadequate if we want to make improvements.

Ineffective communications within an enterprise, or indeed anywhere, can prove extremely costly. Understanding communications and bringing to the fore the unconscious considerations we take into account when communicating are therefore an imperative.

Common parlance sees 'communication' as the transmission of information, but this is incomplete and misleading. The root of the word 'communication' in Latin is 'communicare', which means to share, or to make common.

Already then, a view of communication as simple information transmission does us a disservice, and we need to come up with something that includes the idea of a process of understanding to deliver shared meaning.

The consequences of poor communication

The examples of poor communications and the results are actually very well known:

- The Charge of the Light Brigade – "into the valley of Death rode the 600" – poor communication had them charging head on towards some heavy guns rather than harrying a retreating group of light guns.
- The BP oil disaster in the Gulf has been largely attributed to "poor communications" and a failure "to share important information."
- The Journal of Air Transportation in a report examining the Tenerife disaster claimed, "Accidents due to equipment failures are now thought to constitute just three to five percent of all airline accidents. The remaining accidents are attributable solely to human error. Of the accidents attributed to human error, nearly three quarters of them are due to poor human communication."
- Thousands of insurance staff at The Accident Group were sacked by text messages in 2003. The media were outraged by the means of communication rather than the actual redundancies, and the 'victims' later won a high court case for compensation.
- Failures to take into account the global nature of the market have led to many howlers, including one from Ford who seemed to have a problem in Brazil where sales of the Pinto flopped. On investigation the company found out that Pinto was Brazilian slang for "tiny male genitals."
- The list goes on to include some rather more mundane examples, such as advising email users of the steps they needed to take to recover from an email outage by email. There are numerous other cases of messages being sent by the wrong means with the result they arrived too soon or too late to have much effect.

The list goes on to include some rather more mundane examples, such as advising email users of the steps they needed to take to recover from an email outage by email. There are numerous other cases of messages being sent by the wrong means with the result they arrived too soon or too late to have much effect.

> **'"The difference between the right word and the almost right word is the difference between lightning and a lightning bug."**
>
> Mark Twain

Components of communication

Implicit in 'communication' are a number of elements that we tend to ignore but that are all vital for real communication to take place:
- The Source
- The meaning/message
- The means
- The receiver
- Acknowledgement/feedback
- The environment
- The context
- Interference

The Source

The person who has ideas or information that they wish to convey. The source is responsible for considering all of the relevant elements for that message. The ideas need to be encoded into an appropriate message that will depend on the other elements of the communication. Different means of transmission may be chosen according to the intended recipients and the message being delivered. It would be difficult to have a face-to-face with thousands of people around the world who all speak different languages. There are very few corporate presentations that interpret their results and strategy through the medium of mime!

The Message

The message is more than just the idea or words and images through which they are conveyed. The message is the idea or information that needs to be transmitted and is structured and delivered in a way that needs to take into account all of the elements of communication. It includes the way in which the ideas are presented and the tone in which they are presented. What is the hoped-for outcome? Does urgency or compulsion need to form part of the message?

The Seven 'C's

A widely used checklist can be used to assist in the construction of the message – the Seven 'C's of Communication.

All messages should be:

1. Clear	3. Concrete	5. Correct	7. Courteous
2. Concise	4. Complete	6. Coherent	

Components of communication

The Means

There are so many ways of delivering a message today including messaging, phone, video, email, letter, presentations, face to face meetings, television and many more. The selection of a particular means of transmission will depend on the type of message being delivered and the intended audience.

In the previous example of mass redundancies being made by text message, it would be expected that such a message would be delivered in person.

Similarly, urgent messages are not best delivered by email – there is no way of ensuring that the emails are opened or read in a timely fashion and no easy way of ensuring that the contents has been understood and acknowledged.

30% of emails do not even get opened as we collectively struggle to cope with the burden of over 100 billion emails a day.

The Receiver

The receiver is the targeted recipient of the information. They can use all of their senses to receive and understand the message that might be applicable. They will be making judgments based on the way that the information is presented/coded and transmitted that will affect their perception and understanding of that message.

Urgency can be conveyed even in text format with bold or red type. The receiver is constantly trying to anticipate where they are being led and then amending their reactions based on their feelings about that destination.

Glad tidings are unlikely to be delivered through a window and wrapped around a brick – expectations would be set before such a message was even read.

Components of communication

Feedback

Feedback is fundamental to completing the communication cycle. This feedback could be as simple (but vital) as an acknowledgment.

Information cannot be said to have been communicated until it is clear that the recipient has received and understood it.
In a business setting where the source and recipient may be distant, or it is a one-to-many communication, it is imperative to ensure that not only has the message been delivered but that it has been received and digested.

Effective Communication Cycle: Communicate → Receiver → Feedback → Sender
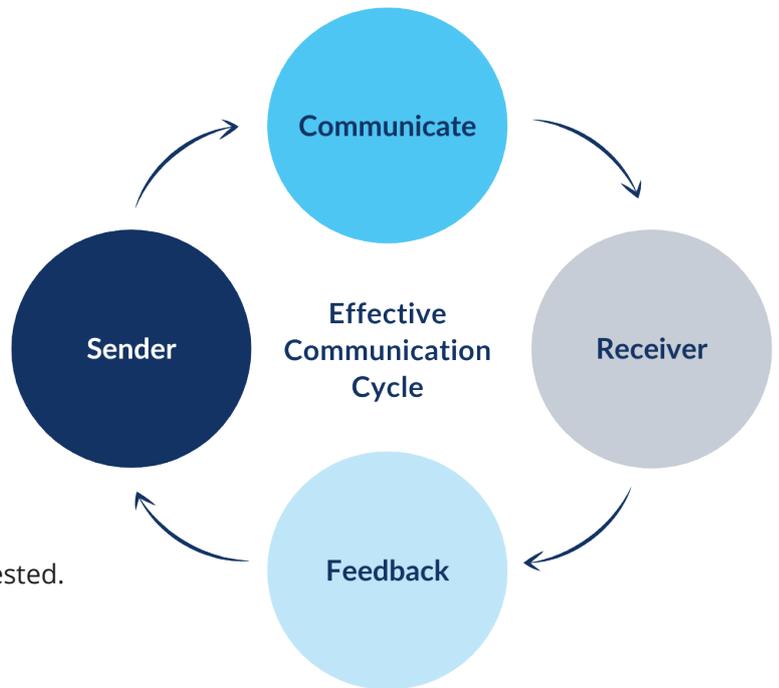
Simply sending out blanket emails is certainly no guarantee of success. After sending an e-mail, people wrongly assume many things, including that it is read in a timely fashion, the message is understood by the receiver(s), and that it is enough to generate the action/result desired by the sender. It is only by getting timely feedback that we can be confident the message has hit home.

The Environment

In direct verbal communication this can be the room that you are in – its atmosphere, lighting and acoustics - all of which create an impression on the recipients.

In written communication, the choice of means may need to take into account the enterprise within which you are operating, as well as the religious, cultural, race, sexual and linguistic considerations of a global group of receivers. It would be a foolhardy person who ignored these issues in their choice of approach and language.

Components of communication

The Context

The background to the communication is important in helping to determine some of the other communication components. Context involves understanding the environmental clues. If the information relates only to a particular group of people – for example users of a particular software application, then it might make sense to deliver the message within that application and to the people affected. Context will shape the message itself and help determine tone and content. Is the setting formal or informal? Has the situation become urgent and actions need to be taken by those involved.

Following the Tenerife air disaster, a whole new protocol for crew communications was created to ensure that the crew could raise fears and doubts to the captain, in a clear way that demanded attention and consideration. In that case the captain had failed to listen to what his crew was telling him and 583 people died in the worst aviation disaster ever.

Most communications do not have such potentially deadly outcomes but it is clear that context plays a significant part in shaping our communications.

Interference

Interference or 'noise' is anything that might block or impede a clear understanding of the message. This could be something to do with the state of mind of the receiver or the tone of the message that causes an unintended reaction.

When we use emails, we should be mindful that the level of background 'noise' is typically very large, in that we all have to deal with many emails every day and therefore try to do so quickly and with as little investment as possible.

If we choose a webinar to deliver a message we should be aware that many of those in the audience will be doing something else at the time that they should be listening to what is being transmitted. Perhaps we have the presentation slot in a day's meeting right after or before lunch: Attention is rarely strong either of these times.

In all of these cases it is clear that even though everything might be exactly as we would want it in all other respects, the communication will be ineffective due to the prevalent interference, and unless we get acknowledgement of understanding, we can make no assumptions that the message has been received and understood.

Communication as a Transaction

The model of communication as a simple transmission of information is far from sufficient to describe or improve what we do. There are a number of inter-related factors that make for good communications.

All of these elements point towards a view that meaning is essentially 'negotiated' between source and recipient depending on the context, interference, message and so on.

Even if all of the other elements are considered and aligned with the intent and ideas of the source, it counts for nothing unless we can be sure that understanding and appropriate action have been the result.

About **Improved Apps**

Improved Apps Ltd was founded in 2011 to deliver innovative applications that drive Salesforce adoption through ease of use and an enhanced user experience. We support customers' Salesforce cloud strategies – which are about creating a unified experience across:

• Standard Salesforce applications – CRM, Console, Communities, and mobile
• Enterprise applications built on the Salesforce platform
• Third-party applications bought through the AppExchange
• Applications that are non-native but integrated for access by Salesforce users

Our Improved Apps are born out of many years of real-world Salesforce.com experience – implementations, developments, training, and our own day-to-day administration and usage. Our applications are all 100% native salesforce – guaranteed and trusted.

IMPROVED
HELP

IMPROVED
NOTICEBOARD

salesforce

PARTNER
SINCE 2013