Topic 5.1: Basics of communication

1. What is communication?

"Communication is a Latin word which means 'to share'. It is the sharing of information between different individuals. It includes the sharing of ideas, concepts, imaginations, behaviours and written content. Communication is simply defined as the transfer of information from one place to another. This transfer of information can be conducted in different ways" (Entrepreneur Handbook, 2019).

Although communication is a simple process, it is complex in some respects. The process is complicated by the different types of communication and the distances over which the information must be transmitted (Entrepreneur Handbook, 2019).

Communication requires three elements: the sender, a medium (the platform over which information is passed) and a recipient. The sender is the most intensively involved person with a detailed understanding of the matter he or she wishes to communicate. By contrast, the recipient does not necessarily know about the sender and the subject of the information the sender wants to transmit (Entrepreneur Handbook, 2019).

2. Steps of communication

Technically speaking, the communication process is divided into three main steps. These include thought, encoding and decoding. The thought is the subject of the information existing in the sender's mind. When the sender converts his ideas, thoughts or concepts into verbal speech or a written message, this is called encoding. The term encoding refers to the encryption of ideas from the sender's perspective (Entrepreneur Handbook, 2019).

When the message is received by the recipient, the recipient reads and interprets it. Thus, decoding refers to the interpretation of information from the perspective of the recipient. If the receiver clearly understands the information transmitted to him or her, the process of communication ends here (Entrepreneur Handbook, 2019).

Communication can be either a one-way or two-way process. When the information transmitted by the sender is received by the recipient, this represents the completion of a one-way process. It is not necessary for the recipient to reply to the sender, but if the recipient

formulates a message in response to the sender's message, the communication becomes a two-way process. Media content is an example of a one-way communication where the recipient is not obliged to reply, but only receives information (Entrepreneur Handbook, 2019).

3. Types of communication

There are three major types of communication: verbal, non-verbal, and written communication.

3.1 Verbal communication

"Verbal communication is the sharing of information through speech. It includes the information that people hear on radios, televisions, telephones, speeches and interviews" (Entrepreneur Handbook, 2019).

Effective verbal communication involves the use of interpersonal skills. Factors that influence the effectiveness of verbal communication are the clarity of the voice and the recipient's perception and listening skills (Entrepreneur Handbook, 2019).

Verbal communication, which takes place in a two-way loop, is usually based on immediate reactions. Verbal communication is also influenced by eye contact, facial expressions and gestures. The recipient's listening and comprehension skills help him or her to understand the context of information and to shape responses accordingly. Linguistics and the way information is presented determine the effect of the message on the recipient (Entrepreneur Handbook, 2019).

3.2 Non-verbal communication

Spoken or written words are not the only way to convey a message. When no words are used and the receiver understands what the sender is asking for, it is called non-verbal communication. Non-verbal communication is conducted through eye contact, gestures, postures, facial expressions, chronemics (the study of the role of time in communication) and haptics (Entrepreneur Handbook, 2019).

Visual representations are also ideal for displaying any kind of information. The use of graphs, symbols and pictures can be helpful to communicate effectively. A person's hairstyles and

clothing also convey information about their nature, mood and intentions. Individuals use architecture along with different colors and textures for both home and office surfaces to represent their personal preferences and interests.

3.3 Written communication

"Written communication includes the kind of information transfer where the encoding of a message is done in written form. The message may only be written in words, or it may include different symbols, or sometimes even machine codes" (Entrepreneur Handbook, 2019).

Written communication is affected by the writing and representation skills of a person. Written messages are developed by considering the addressed audience. Varying audiences have different levels of perceptive skills. Also, different types of messages require different ways of writing. For example, an analytical report is written in a different way than an essay (Entrepreneur Handbook, 2019).

4. Communicating across cultures

"Communication is the essence of intercultural interactions" (Nardon, 2017, p. 135). Through communication, ideas are exchanged, relationships developed and dissolved, and understanding, behavior and tangible results are negotiated. Communication also reveals cultural differences and can be a catalyst for both conflict and synergy. Although communication is strongly dominant in everyday life, effective communication is a challenging task even within cultural groups (Nardon, 2017, p. 135). Many have experienced difficult conversations in which expressing frustration or reaching agreement on emotionally charged issues has been a challenge (Stone, Patton and Heen, 2010).

When communicating across cultures, even basic interactions may become problematic and different assumptions can easily lead to misunderstandings and confusion. People may have different views on when things should be done, important information may not be heard, comments that should be harmless may be seen as personal attacks, etc. (Nardon, 2017, pp. 135-136). Therefore, it is crucial to learn about the cultures with which one is communicating and to develop intercultural competence to ensure effective communication between different cultures.

5. Difference between multicultural, cross-cultural and intercultural communication

When dealing with communication across cultures, the terms of multicultural, intercultural and cross-cultural communication are frequently used. As they are often mistakenly used as synonyms, the differences between these terms will be briefly explained.

The term multicultural describes a society consisting of several cultural or ethnic groups. People live side by side, but the different cultures do not necessarily interact with each other. In a multicultural neighborhood, for example, people can visit different ethnic grocery stores and restaurants without really interacting with their neighbors from other countries (Schriefer, 2016).

The term cross-cultural refers to the comparison of different cultures. In cross-cultural communication, differences are understood and acknowledged and can lead to individual changes, but not to collective transformations. Within cross-cultural societies, one culture is often regarded as the norm and all the other cultures are compared or contrasted with the dominant culture (Schriefer, 2016).

The term intercultural refers to communities in which there is a deep understanding and respect for all cultures. The focus of intercultural communication is on the mutual exchange of ideas and cultural norms and the development of deep relationships. In an intercultural society, everyone learns from each other and grows together (Schriefer, 2016).

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