CHAPTER 6

INTERPERSONAL RELATIONSHIPS AND COMMUNICATION
People do not get along because they fear each other.
People fear each other because they do not know each other.
They do not know each other because they have not properly communicated with each other.

- Martin Luther King

6.1. Communication refers to sharing of ideas, facts, opinions, information and understanding. Simply stated, communication can be said to be the passing of information and understanding from one person to another. There are at least four elements involved in the process of communication, the sender, the receiver, the medium, and the message or the information. And effective communication is one in which the effect produced is the one designed by the originator. Communication can be aptly said to be the transmission of meaning.

6.2 It is a known fact that a body of men organised to carry out certain functions, technical or otherwise, work towards the goal by communicating with each other, when the work is a team effort, as most achievements are today; this passing of information from one to another is a necessary accompaniment of the communal life. Communication in fact is the nervous system through which passes the sensory perceptions of the group and the dimensions of this system are two: vertical and lateral. Men communicate up and down the line of authority, and across this line among colleagues, co-workers and friends.

Necessity of Communication

6.3 It is essential for the head of organisation to get work done through other people, and needless to say, to accomplish this he must communicate effectively with them. In fact, communication is the management skill most often required to be used. In addition, if the upward communication is throttled and management has no feedback then unethical practices will take root.

6.4 Lack of lateral communication keeps people in watertight compartments. It creates distances between man and man where none exists, and clogs the line of command by
flooding it with request for information readily available across the floor. Thus, a partial paralysis of the system results and a slow atrophy lingers on, in otherwise effective organs.

**Characteristics of Ineffective Communication**

6.5 Communication in any organisation cannot be taken for granted for its existence, health and viability. *Ineffective* communication has the following characteristics:

6.5.1 It is not free from interference and is distorted.

6.5.2 It is not purposeful.

6.5.3 It is biased.

6.5.4 There is no system of feedback.

6.6 **Characteristics of Good Communication.** Any good form of communication must possess the following characteristics:

6.6.1 It should be short and crisp to the point. Tendency to be verbose must be curbed.

6.6.2 Communication or information flow should be on need-to-know basis. It should be so structured keeping the target audience in mind.

6.6.3 It must be appropriately worded so as not to cause undue alarm and create a fear of uncertainty.

6.6.4 Timing of the passage of communication is important. It should be timely related to all concerned as also the receptivity levels of the recipient must also be considered.

6.6.5 Communication should be passed in such a manner to evoke feedback in some form of the other.

6.6.6 Communication from the *horse's mouth* has a greater impact vis-à-vis the one which finally reaches the recipient after travelling layers of hierarchy.

6.6.7 Before communicating one should clarify to himself the set of ideas he wants to communicate.
6.6.8 The purpose of the communication (i.e., what is intended to be achieved) should be examined first.

6.6.9 The deeds should not belie the talks - otherwise, the effect of the spoken word could be damaging.

6.6.10 To understand is as important as to be understood: listening begets listening.

6.6.11 Good communication should have inherent scope for discussion. However once the decision is taken it should be implemented in letter and spirit vigorously and faithfully.

6.7 The above aspects are common knowledge - perhaps they are, but nevertheless they are more honoured in violation than in observance. Awareness of these smaller points of communication will enrich its quality and consequently make it more effective.

6.8 It is important to understand whether the communication is oral or written, matters like those that affect the goal of the organisation and the information on the personal well being of the members of the unit should form the warp and the woof of the communication fabric.

**Importance and Implication of Communication in Army**

6.9 One of the important roles of CO and Cdr in the Army at various levels is the *informational role*. They interact with the environment to seek information which will act as inputs in their decision-making processes. At the same time Cdr is the primary source of dissemination of information as required by the rank and file to maintain an optimal level of satisfaction. It is a known fact in the Army that a large percentage of time is involved in some phase of communication or other. *Good communication is the foundation for sound management.*23 The command functions of planning, organising, command and execution depend primarily on the type of communication in the unit. For successful execution of a task/operation it is mandatory that it is based on sound information which is not feasible without the good system of communication in the unit. In order to achieve the objectives, the leadership makes decisions, coordinates efforts motivates the rank and file and controls the operations. Each of these functions involves interaction with the rank and file. This

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23 Peter Drucker.
interaction is feasible when effective channels of communication are available which in turn are dependent on the ethical environment in the unit.

6.10 Cdr at various levels seek information from colleagues, subordinates and others about anything related to their job profile and responsibilities. They at the same time are a disseminator of information to their command about tasks, on need to know basis. As such a considerable part of their time is devoted to receiving or disseminating information within and outside the battalion. Good communication is a foundation of effective command in a unit.

6.11 The CO has to communicate with his command to be able to successfully command his battalion. Both in peace and war objectives are laid down which have to be attained in a specified time frame. To be able to accomplish this, the boss must effectively communicate with the troops. It is essential that all channels of communication in the Army are kept open to reduce the distance between the leader and the led.

6.12 The means of communication available in the Army have got revolutionised. The speed with which communication takes place today is truly amazing. It has its own advantages and disadvantages. The CO today has greater flexibility and greater reaction time to react to situations. Also he is able to monitor real time implementation of tasks and plans on ground. In short he is closer to reality than ever before. In a way modern means of communication has reduced distances between the leadership and men. Modern means of availability of communication to Cdr at all levels of communication has its own share of pitfalls. The biggest disadvantage is that Cdr tend to micro manage. The independence with which the lower levels of command are required to function is slowly getting reduced with increased levels of interference by the senior leadership. Instead of concentrating on own tasks, leadership at various levels is unnecessary trying to breathe down the necks of subordinates. The other disadvantage is the speed itself. The speed with which information travels is a source of encumbrance to command at various levels. Also due to the increased technology and availability of gadgets the laid down communication structure in the organisation is getting affected. For example, it is seen at times that before a CO is aware of the situation in his battalion the formation Cdr is already on the line inquiring into the details. Such like instances in the organisation creates tremendous pressure and suspicion. In addition unprincipled elements would attempt to take advantage of this technological revolution for personal benefits.
The Form and Substance of Communication in Army

6.13 The form of communication in a unit can be oral, written or both. These in turn can be orders, requests, conferences, interviews, sainik samelans, consultations, informal talks in roll call, written instructions, journals, 'audio-visual' means, sainik news letters or just a tête-à-tête in regimental barakhanas. One may resort to some or all of these to effect communication depending on the size of the recipients.

6.14 Substance of the communication is equally important. If only matters of no importance are communicated and those that affect the interests of the command are kept away from them, then all forms of communication are mere shadows and not substantial things.

Hierarchy and Channel of Communication in a Unit

6.15 The organisational structure and channel in a unit is depicted in a diagrammatic form in Chart No 6.15. It can be seen that the organisational structure of a unit is sound which provides appropriate channels of communication to enable free flow of information both in peace and operations. However this is an ideal state. Information is at times distorted resulting in ineffective communication in the unit.

6.16 The Chart provides for a basic network of organisational structure in the Army. As it can be seen from the Chart the structure provides for uninhibited flow of information and interaction. It can aptly be described as a network of communication channels. Unique in this organisational structure is the presence of both formal and informal channels of communication. Basically the channel represents a structured form of communication as relevant to a hierarchical structure in the Army. The channels are so designed to keep the flow of information in an orderly manner and to protect the command as also the rank and file from an overload of unnecessary information. The flow of information is primarily designed to pass through certain critical links in the hierarchy. This is relevant to both the downward and upward flow of communication. Lateral form of communication is limited when it comes to communication from one structure to another. In the informal pattern of communication in this organisational structure there are two types of informal system of communication. One that is positive in which healthy interaction takes place between the peer groups. The second is what is generally referred to as the grapevine because it spreads to the unit in all directions in utter disregard of the laid down channels. It arises as a result
of the needs of the soldier for information which is not being met by the formal channel. In
the Army it has been generally observed that problems relating to work and unfavourable
reactions to various decisions of the CO either occur due to his inflexible approach towards
the formal structure of communication as also lower levels of monitoring of the grapevine.
It is a known fact that grapevine spreads information faster and unless regulated it could lead
to negative consequences. The information passed on through the channel of grapevine may
lead to a change amongst some of the men and affect their behavioural pattern also. The
informal channels of communication in a unit have strong possibilities of being distorted
wherein the actual picture of the real situation changes which would cause serious problems
in the unit. It is an important duty of the CO to maximise the positive aspects of the
informal channels of communication in the unit and minimise negative aspects of this
channel.
Barriers to Effective Communication in a Unit

6.17 Ineffective channels of communication in a unit greatly affect the behaviour of individuals and their response to instructions from superiors. The causes for poor level of communication could be due to any of the following reasons:

6.17.1 **Personality of the Source.** It is a known fact that the soldier’s mind gets tied up and affected with the personality of his boss. If the soldier admires the personality of his boss then the message of the order will be accepted immediately. However if there is resentment against the personality of the leader then the immediate reaction will be one of disagreement. An autocratic style of functioning of Cdr at various levels is the principal barrier to effective communication in the unit.

6.17.2 **Lack of Trust.** High levels of trust existing in the unit are a precursor to establishment of efficacious channels of communication.

6.17.3 Ignorance of the viewpoint of one by the other.

6.17.4 Inappropriate behaviour of those in authority at various levels and the difference in the social strata that tinges the word and actions differently for different personnel.

6.17.5 Assumption on part of the men in authority that communication has taken place and that the orders will be implemented as desired. At times it is seen that instructions and orders or simply dissemination of information from the leadership is not having its desired effects. This is plain and simple: messages are simply not being understood to the degree they were intended for. It is not only important that communication be sent, it is much more important that it be understood.

6.17.6 There could be subtle blockages or barriers in communication between the CO and his command due to vested interests. The role of JCO in this sphere has been discussed a little later in this Chapter.

6.17.7 Lack of clarity in the instructions or orders being passed by the men in authority.
6.17.8 Lack of communication skills of the leader.

6.17.9 Orders, instructions, information being disseminated which are not appropriate to the environment and mental framework of the target audience. At times the leadership at various levels has failed to gauge the pulse of the troops and went on to pass instructions without having achieved the desired results.

6.17.10 Jaundiced Eyes. At times the environment in the unit is vitiated due to jaundiced eyes of leadership at various levels. Take the example of a group of men maintaining particular equipment. On a visit the NCO notices these men resting and gossiping. This man can interpret the situation depending on state of mind and internal security. He could label them as lazy and playing truant with their work, or that these men are conspiring against him, and if he is motivated he could view it positively and conclude that they were enjoying a well earned rest.

6.17.11 Conducive Environment. To facilitate free flow of communication in a unit it is essential that an appropriate conducive environment is created. If the ethical behaviour of individuals is suspect then it will create a climate of suspicion wherein they will be enormous hindrances in the flow of communication. Lack of the conducive environment is therefore a main reason for the barriers in effective communication in a unit.

6.17.12 The men in authority do not attempt to understand the emotional or psychological status of the men before they pass instructions to them.

6.17.13 Biased Outlook. Prejudiced attitude of the men in authority is another reason for barriers of communication in the unit. If the command is not fair or seen to be fair then it will create tremendous suspicion and resentment wherein frank and purposeful feedback would not be forthcoming.

6.17.14 Information Overload. Another problem seen in the units is that too much of information or conflicting instructions are being passed by the men in authority to the jawans. The rank and file fed up with too much of information from different sources tend to be selective in receiving and responding to instructions. Communication that conflict with the soldier’s viewpoint tends to be ignored. Often the other point of view being asked by the leadership may not only be ignored, it
might indeed be regarded as unfriendly. If this happens frequently, subordinates are in a constant state of confusion as to what their superiors really want to hear. As a consequence, much of the unfavourable news in the unit would never get reported to higher levels until the problem has assumed the form of a crisis.

6.17.15 **Rigid Structure.** As seen from the chart in this Chapter the channels of communication in the unit are both formal and informal. However if the leadership is rigid in strict adherence to the flow of information through the various channels in the hierarchy then it will inhibit truthful reporting from subordinates.

6.17.16 **Feedback.** The definition of feedback in management language is, ‘feedback is the communication of feelings and perceptions by one individual to another individual about the latter’s behaviour and style of working’. In the Army feedback is a crucial and vital element of operational plans as also in the sphere of management of men. It provides valuable inputs and data to effect mid-course corrections. It provides the leadership several alternatives from which to choose upon. If taken in the right perspective feedback assists leadership to carry out introspection. Feedback encourages openness and mutuality. Feedback should be instrumental in building relationships of openness, trust and spontaneity. Feedback will lose its significance if the leadership does not pay due attention to its content. In the Army it is directly related to the style of functioning of the superior.

6.17.17 **Effects of Filtering.** This happens when the communication passes through a large number of persons. The larger the number of filtering points in an organisation, the greater are chances of distortion. As seen from the chart in this Chapter there are several layers before an instruction, order or information reaches the rank and file in the unit. In case the environment in the unit is vitiated and there is poor ethical health in a unit the information/order is passed on to the rank and file interpreted at various levels with the result that the original order of communication has been altered in the process. Similarly subordinates tell the boss what the boss wants to hear. It would be pertinent to mention at this stage the role of JCO in a unit in today’s environment. This cadre was created in the British Indian Army as a link between the leadership and the Indian soldiers. There is a need for introspection in
EFFECTS OF FILTERING: THE MY LAI INCIDENT

THE ORDERS RELATING TO THE INCIDENT ARE REPORTED TO HAVE TRICKLED DOWN THE LINE IN THE FOLLOWING MANNER:

DIV TO BDE CDR – ON NO ACCOUNT MUST HAMLETS BE BURNED DOWN
BDE TO BN CDR – DO NOT BURN DOWN ANY HAMLETS UNLESS YOU ARE ABSOLUTELY SURE THAT THE VC ARE IN THEM
BN TO COY CDR – IF YOU THINK THERE ARE VC IN THE HAMLETS, BURN THEM DOWN
COY CDR TO TROOPS – BURN DOWN THE HAMLETS

the Army whether this cadre is actually required in today’s scenario and whether it is acting as a barrier in effective communication in a unit. In the Army the channel of communication is particularly subject to influence of filtering. The upward communication essentially serves two purposes: first it helps the leadership in coordinating and controlling the tasks at hand and secondly it helps the leadership to appraise the performance of the subordinates. The second aspect has behaviour implications. The tendency of the subordinates to show his actions in better light at times results in withholding, altering or fabrication of facts.

6.17.18 Dependency Syndrome. In the Army the superior-subordinate relationship is all encompassing. The subordinates in the Army are totally dependent on their superiors for advancement in career. Due to the dependency of the subordinate on the superiors for fulfilment of his needs, there is tendency to filter information often of the unfavourable kind. The subordinates are generally unwilling to communicate unfavourable information as they know that the superior has the power to punish them in many ways. Only positive aspects of performance are communicated upwards.

Pre-requisites for Effective Communication in a Unit

6.18 For any person in a unit to be able to achieve a wholehearted response from his subordinates to his instructions the following pre-requisites are essential:

6.18.1 Presence of an environment which is conducive for a free flow of information. If the CO creates a climate in which the men are confident that their
voices will be given due consideration and acted upon in a meaningful manner then
the channels of communication will be sound and ensure free flow of information.
This is however possible only in an environment of trust which has to be essentially
generated by the CO and his team of officers.

6.18.2 The free flow of information must be monitored in a subtle manner to
prevent flow of distorted information.

6.18.3 A closer contact between the officers and the men as also an optimal level of
frequency of contact must be maintained.

6.18.4 All channels of communication should be kept open. This is dealt in detail
subsequently in this Chapter.

6.18.5 Communication must never be one way; in fact feedback is very important to
enable the leader to decide the efficacy of instructions passed by him. Needless to
say, feedback must never be distorted or be filtered through the hierarchy as
prevalent in a unit. There are two types of responses, viz; one that is an automatic
reflex reaction ingrained in the individual, the other response is the one which is well
thought of. In both situations the response must be from within.

6.18.6 For successful accomplishment of objectives in the Army it is essential, as
stated earlier, that genuine free flowing channels of communication are available.
The moot point here is that many a time it is greatly affected by working
relationships that are coloured by personal prejudices. The moral values of each
individual have to be high which is to be knit by the CO into a fine fabric of trust and
mutual confidence.

**Impact of Ethics on Communication in the Army**

6.19 As seen from the issues raised so far it can be clearly seen that communication is
‘for’ the people, ‘by’ the people and ‘with’ the people. Essentially, it deals with the ‘human
being’. If this were so then it goes without saying that communication is directly affected by
the ethical behaviour of individuals. An organisation like the Army is greatly influenced by
the ‘men in command’ at various levels. The style of leadership of an individual largely
dictates the type and quality of communication he has established in his organisation. Salient
features of the impact of ethics on the communication in the Army are highlighted
The behaviour of the man-in-charge affects communication in his unit. Personal interests at times does colour perceptions at various levels. Needless to say, behaviour of an individual is a direct outcome of his background, professional capabilities and the moral values he upholds.

Deeds must match words, as stated earlier. For example, a person preaching honesty indulging in acts contrary to it will not be able to establish effective channels of communication.

Unethical behaviour will send such signals in the communication channels that will create a climate of mistrust, fear and uncertainty. A general climate of insecurity will prevail.

For any channel of communication to be effective and resilient it is important that the man in command must evoke confidence in his men wherein he is above narrow parochial considerations and is able to uphold the highest ethical codes the organization is so endowed with.

Mutual cooperation, trust and faith in leadership are the backbone of effective channel of communication free from external influences.

Grey Areas

Impact of ethics on communication in the Indian Army is profound and has long term implications and unless attended to with all the seriousness it will have effect on the efficiency of units. Commonly noticed grey areas are enumerated below:

There are leaders who are autocratic and do not appreciate views contrary to their beliefs thereby creating gaps in communication between the leader and the led.

There is a need of developing leaders on mass scale who are scrupulously upright and morally correct. Lack of such gentlemen develops poor channels of communication leading to calamities.

Lack of concerted effort by leaders to keep open all channel of communication at all times.
6.20.4 At times channels of communication in a unit are reflective of the personality of the CO. This leads to an environment of uncertainty amongst the men.

6.20.5 Poor ethical health of certain units leads to disruption of certain well tested channels of communication. Sycophancy in such units is all pervasive.

6.20.6 The responsibility of establishing effective channels of communication in any organisation in the Army rests with the senior officers.

6.20.7 The narrow pyramidal structure of the Army leads to stiff competition amongst officers and to some extent amongst men. This stifles growth of genuine channels of communication so essential for the health of a unit.

6.20.8 There is a lack of serious effort on part of training institutions of the Army at various levels to teach ethics to young entrants. Growth of communication channels at the very inception stage is stunted.

6.21 It can therefore be seen that organisational behaviour directly influences the type and quality of communication in the Army. A message or instruction will only be received, registered and fully acted upon once it has found acceptance in the mind of the recipient.