

AN OVERVIEW OF COMMUNICATION SKILL

Sarita Singh

Department of Humanities & Social Sciences, U.N.S.I.E.T., V.B.S. Purvanchal
University, Jaunpur – 222001 (UP), India

ABSTRACT

Communication is not only required in an organization or institution but it is indispensable in living organism. There is an excellent, effective and elaborative system of communication in living cell failing to which leads to devastating diseases like cancer, AIDS etc.

Key words :- Communication Skill, Process, classification.

INTRODUCTION

Communication is the process of transmitting information from one person to another person. It has been derived from Latin word 'communicare' or 'communico' which means sharing - sharing of information or intelligence. Various authors describe communication in their words. According to Brown, communication is the 'process of transmitting ideas or thoughts from one person to another for the purpose of creating understanding in the thinking of persons receiving the communication'. Alien defines communication as 'the sum of all things that one person does when he wants to create an understanding in the mind of another. It involves a systematic and continuous process of telling, listening and understanding'. Pfiffner considers the communication as 'the heart of management' while, Millet describes it as 'the blood stream of an administrative of the various functional groups within the enterprise to understand each other and each other's functions and concerns'. According to Dr. A. P. J. Abdul Kalam "Most of the time, communication gets confused with conversation. In fact, the two are distinctly different. A conversation full of pleasantries is most often devoid of any useful information, whereas communication is meant only for the exchange of information. It is very important to realise that communication is a two-way affair which aims at passing on or receiving a specific piece of information."

Human beings have been using language as a tool of communication to interact with environment in which they live and to regulate social behaviour. It is one of the major factors for the rapid development. There is a mutual relationship of support between communication and civilization. Each has contributed to the growth of other. More and more efficient patterns of communication made it possible for the human of a more civilized society motivate it to invent more efficient

vehicles of communication (Gupta, 2007). One of the greatest gifts of civilization to mankind is language. Though there are a number of means of communication, language is the most widely used means (Bhattacharya, 2006). No communication can be complete without language.

Communication is the need of the day and not having the basic knowledge of many communication system (such as telephones, computers etc.) could easily imply to your being uneducated (Bharhoke, 2000).

ELEMENTS OF COMMUNICATION

The communication is a process, the main elements of which are sender, message, channel, receiver and response. Figure 1 shows these elements along with their relationship. In a communication system sender and receiver interact within a common frame of reference. Cooperation exists between them. If you speak to a person who is totally lost in his thoughts or use a language he does not understand, no communication will take place. Hence, without a common background, purpose and interest there can be no effective communication. Communication, in fact, is a social function and each community develops a common medium for the purpose. The medium may consist of a language or code—a set of symbols which stand for certain ideas, feelings, notions, things, etc. To encode a message, relevant symbols are selected and arranged into a pattern to convey meaning (Sharma, 2006).

Sender and receiver are isolated from each other and it is the channel that connects them together. The choice of the channel and the type of symbols is determined by the situation. When addressing a conference of research workers a scientist uses technical language and audio-visual aids. He speaks distinctly and makes suitable gestures to drive home his points. On the other hand, when he talks to family members he uses simple everyday language and speaks in an informal manner. Usually when a receiver receives message, he sends response to the sender. The sender after sending a message becomes interested in knowing how his message has been received. The observation of the receiver's response is called feedback.

In many cases the message fails to produce the desired response because of a semantic gap between the sender and the receiver. The failure occurs because the sender may not be clear about his objective or he may use inappropriate language to convey his ideas. It also occurs if the receiver is not able to understand and interpret the message properly. Therefore, a great deal of importance is attached to acquiring skills of communication in all spheres of life (Sharma, 2006).

Nature and types of communication

The nature of communication is social, collective, extrovert, dynamic and multidimensional.

AN OVERVIEW OF COMMUNICATION SKILL

It involves impression as well as expression (Gupta, 2007). It can be enlightening as well as misleading depending upon one's skill and proficiency.

Broadly there are two types of communication - (i) written communication and (ii) oral communication. As the name indicates, the written communication makes use of the written word, while the oral communication makes use of the speech. The former is naturally more formal and objective than the latter. In written communication verbal resources are exploited fully.

In written and oral communication, both verbal as well as non-verbal means are used. This leads to another basis of categorizing communication into (i) verbal and (ii) non-verbal communication (Gupta, 2007). Figure 2 shows the diagrammatic presentation of types of communication.

Verbal communication refers to all the messages or information expressed in oral or written words. However, non-verbal communication includes all messages other than those expressed in oral or written words.

In non-verbal communication, we are concerned with such things as body movements, space, time and voice system as well as general characteristics of the environment (Ranjan, 2004). Non-verbal communication can be categorized into (i) kinesics, (ii) Proxemics, (iii) Chronemics and (iv) Paralingual.

Kinesics refers to body movement and also called body language. On analysis it has been observed that different aspects of communication account for percentages as -verbal communication - 7%, body movement, gestures - 55%, voice tone, inflection etc. - 38%. This is illustrated in figure 3.

Kinesics reflects our thoughts, feelings and position since all the body movements are guided by our thought processes, emotions etc. By blinking our eye, nodding, waving and various other ways we send out signals and messages that often speak louder than words. Our body carries messages, attitudes, moods, feelings and so on. To infer these meanings from body language we need to look into facial expression, gesture, body movements, posture, eye contact and haptics (touch) etc.

Proxemics is the study of how we use space to communicate message. It is the study of space around us; how we arrange in it. In other words, proxemics is 'personal space language' as kinesics is 'body language'. Hall Edward describes human relationship in terms of four kinds of distances - intimate, personal, social and public. This relationship is depicted in figure 4.

Chronemics deals with time. It is another important form of non-verbal communication

describes use of time or time language. Time is money for almost all of us and in business it is very sensitive factor. Delay in replying to a personal or business letter, or making a phone calls for the work or meetings etc. are examples of chronemics (Ranjan, 2004).

Paralanguage is a systemic study of how a speaker verbalizes. We know verbal communication contents of the 'what' or the contents of words. However, paralanguage involves the 'how' of the sender's voice or the manner in which he speaks (Ranjan, 2004).

FLOW OF COMMUNICATION

Flow of information is essential for an efficient functioning of an organization. No organization can survive without a network which maintains the flow of information. Broadly there are three flows of communication based on the direction of communication: (i) downward, (ii) upward and (iii) lateral. Downward communication refers to the instructions and other official messages originating with the top personnel of an organization. These are transmitted from top to down through hierarchical set up and reach the lowest ranking official in the chain (figure 5). The top level for downward communication makes use of devices, such as directives, written or verbal orders or instructions, manual staff conferences, budget sanctions, other authorizations to inform the lower rings about its attitude and ideas as well as to direct, guide and advice (Ranjan, 2004).

In upward communication messages are passed by the lower levels in the hierarchy up to those heading the organization (figure 6). This includes whatever information is passed up through methods, such as written and verbal reports pertaining to performance and progress, statistical and accounting reports related to work, written and verbal requests for seeking guidance, suggestions and discussions (Ranjan, 2004).

Lateral communication may take place among officials of the same level in the hierarchy or among the officials who are out of superior-subordinate relationship. It can also be called as Across Communication and even known as horizontal communication (figure 7). An informal system of information flow in an organization is through grapevine communication network. Like far-stretching branches of grapevine, this system is very complex, uncontrollable and unpredictable. It feeds on rumor and gossip which form a significant part of personal conversation. There may be several groups of people in an organization that knowingly build up this network of information. Grapevine might seem to be unworthy of being taken seriously, but a clever professional or manager -, knows how to use it for the good of the organization (Gupta, 2007).

ETHICAL ASPECTS

The code of ethics is a basic guide to professional conduct and imposes duties on the practicing professional with respect to society, employers, clients, colleagues and himself/herself (Singh, 2007). The ethical aspects of organizational culture centres round values such as fairness, integrity, honesty, equality, compassion and dignity. These values are reflected directly in certain written and spoken messages and indirectly in verbal and non-verbal behaviour of the members of an organization. Ethics as part of organizational culture is communicated directly by several means. For example, a company may set aside a portion of its profits for charity and social welfare. It may voluntarily reduce the gap between the salary of the top executive and the worker at the lowest rank and create an employees' welfare fund to be used for financial assistance to employees and their families on humanitarian grounds. Actions such as these would clearly show that the organization has a human face; doing business and making profits is not its sole concern. The ethical standard of a company is also communicated through ethical codes, policy statements and public messages. Ethical codes are in the form of conduct meant to shape employees behaviour. Direct and formal means of communicating ethics through employee's manual, annual reports, official articles etc. suggest a broad framework within which an organization functions (Sharma, 2006).

With the rapid advancement in communication technology the quality and integrity of information is going to permeate the products and services more intensely. There is thus, a greater need for the cultivation of ethical standards. As a professional you will have to be more discerning in your business judgements and decisions and communicate with greater caution and care (Sharma, 2006).

LEGAL ASPECTS

One must be aware of legal aspect of business communication dealing with individuals, governments, other organizations and agencies. When a communication made publicly about an individual is false or jeopardizing his reputation or character, a case of defamation is filed in the court of law by the individual. When this is done in writing, it is termed as libel and when orally, it is slander.

There are instances when employees have filed suits against unfavourable references, adverse reports on their work and conduct and disciplinary action. Communications related to these actions should be strictly based on facts and be completely objective so that they can withstand legal scrutiny (Sharma, 2006).

With the increasing use of electronic media for transmission of information and exchange of documents, the responsibility of organizations has increased. It has to be ensured that the privacy of a user is not intruded upon. In fact, a policy should be evolved by every organization regarding access to an employee's e-mail and data base. The circumstances in which it is permitted and the method of access should be clearly laid out. The organization and its employees should feel secure in using modern means of technology and should know the limits of intrusion into privacy and the stage at which it becomes illegal (Sharma, 2006).

BARRIERS TO COMMUNICATION

Communication is a complex interactive process, involving shared assumptions and unspoken agreements between individuals. Understandably, there are frequent errors and misunderstandings in communication. Several types of barriers prevent us from transmitting our ideas meaningfully. It is hard to identify these barriers. The reason is obvious: it is difficult to realize fully whether the message we get is complete and correct, or truncated and distorted. The feedback gives only a partial clue for determining whether the communication has succeeded or failed. Another problem is the identification of the criteria on the basis of which one should evaluate the effectiveness of communication.

We can classify the barriers into three groups: (i) psychological barriers, (ii) interpersonal transactions barriers and (iii) organizational network barriers.

The barriers of the first group are of a psychological nature. People tend to assume that others have more in common with them than what they actually have. The differences in backgrounds are overlooked and the fact that an event can be perceived differently by different persons is ignored. Also there are persons who neither learn from new information nor accept any view contradictory to their own. This rigidity of thought blurs their power of discrimination; they are unable to distinguish between things that seemingly appear to be the same. Another category of persons is the 'know-it-alls'. This attitude distorts their vision. The receivers tend to say, "I know everything about this subject, so I am not listening to you", "I have been doing this job for years; there is nothing I can learn from you", "I am an expert in the field, so what can you tell me?" etc. This malady affects the senders too. They jump to conclusions on the basis of inadequate evidence and generalize that: "Everybody in this organization is against me", "Everything is wrong in this section", "All employees of this department deserve punishment", etc. (Sharma, 2006).

In interpersonal transactions barriers arise due to emotional reactions, negative attitudes (towards a message or its source) and the wrong timing of messages. The display of intense

emotions such as love, hate, anger, fear, jealousy and joy is likely to distort the message. It has however been found that positive emotions such as joy and love interfere less in the flow of communication than the negative emotions. When the receiver of a message feels threatened by a real or imagined danger, he becomes defensive or hostile. This attitude exercises a negative effect on the communication process. In such a situation he is likely to misinterpret, ignore, or overact to messages (Sharma, 2006).

Sometimes the wrong timing of a message may create a barrier. A delayed message may prove to be completely useless. Further, selection of the best psychological moment for delivering the message is equally important. One has to plan the timing carefully because each message is situation-specific. And in human dealings, situations change very fast because of a multiplicity of factors influencing them.

The third types of barriers are those originating from the communication networks established by organizations. The administrative hierarchy of an organization also indicates the route of flow of horizontal and vertical communication. In this traditional system of communication, especially in a large organization, sometimes employees feel lost and frustrated and turn to an informal system—the grapevine—for information. This channel often becomes a vehicle for rumors and inaccurate information. The system of having too many transfer stations also distorts and delays the message. The processing of information by several hands before it reaches the destination certainly causes loss of meaning and impairs the original message. To solve this problem, some organizations have modified the communication network to permit direct access from bottom to the top and vice versa on the ladder of communication. Other steps which can help remove this barrier are the dissemination of information through several channels and establishment of a feedback system involving more than one source (Sharma, 2006).

Huge amount of data is generated by professional organizations due to quantum jump in the industries and commercial activities with the advancement of technology. These data when sent to virtually every employee, a saturation point is reached and any further communication is either impeded or rejected by the receiver. This information overload can be reduced in two ways. Firstly, the information should be sent only to those who can benefit from it. Secondly, the messages should contain only the main ideas, devoid of all useless details. This can be done by efficient management of information, for which some organizations have set up cells manned by experienced and senior personnel.

GLOBAL ASPECTS

The world has become smaller with the unprecedented advancements in the methods of communication and transportation. The business organizations can now easily explore new markets and new resources of money and material across the globe. The growth of multinational companies is a pointer in this direction. Operating in heterogeneous social environment they have emerged as influential epitomes of international business work culture. There are certain aspects of communication that are of crucial importance in this context.

To some extent communication is culture-specific. The system of symbols, beliefs, attitudes, values, expectations and patterns of behaviour, differ from culture to culture. These differences are manifested in the notions of status, attitudes towards time, decision-making habits, use of space and body language and social behaviour. Recognition of these differences, mainly engendered by national variables such as education, religion, economic condition, political system, etc. and an awareness of relationship among language, culture, and behaviour are far more important, in respect to the communication with the member of a different culture. To avoid cross-cultural conflicts you need to be more open-minded, tolerant and courteous and keenly perceptive of the non-verbal symbols and clues because these may be different or even at variance with your socio-cultural norms and patterns (Sharma, 2006).

Foreign counterpart should be treated as per their culture and custom. For example the gift of a clock to a Chinese would offend him because it is supposed to bring bad luck to the receiver. Thus, while dealing with people belonging to a different culture, do not take things for granted. Observe carefully their social behaviour, study their values and be meticulous in making audience analysis before encoding and transmitting your messages, regardless of the form that you may use for communication (Sharma, 2006).

Essentials of Communication

It is worthwhile to mention the essentials of effective communication. The American Management Association has given ten commandments of good communication. These are as follows (Ranjan, 2004):

1. Clarify your ideas before you communicate,
2. Examine within yourself why are you communicating and what is the true purpose of this communication.

AN OVERVIEW OF COMMUNICATION SKILL

3. Before you launch a communication measure, consider the total physical and human setting which will get involved in the process which you want to ignite.
4. Consult others for planning because your own subjectivity operates adversely in designing your communication network.
5. Be mindful of the content of human message, because it is possible that the message may be lost in the context, and the overall configuration of the contents may disfigure the message itself.
6. Convey other things to help him because a communicatee is not only looking forward for a command, but he is curious to seek guidance and assistance.
7. Follow up your communication, for it being a chain process, does not stop at a given point of a letter or the dispatch of a message. It needs to be continuously followed and strengthens at every bend of the way. It ensures effectively and keeps it moving till the attainment of goal.
8. Communicate for today as well as for tomorrow. It means that, communicator should establish a rapport and establish his own image as knowledgeable person with sound commonsense and robust pragmatism. This image makes him a better communicator and even those who do not take him seriously today, will gradually respond to his communications.
9. Action supports communications. Communication is not merely letter writing. It is desirable that the communicatee should watch and assess the behaviour of the communicator.
10. Seek to understand before you get understood. Commonly, understanding of situations requires more brains than imposing one's ideas on helpless subordinates as it is not easy to understand others, if someone is ignorant. These help in achieving a shared understanding of shared purposes. If these essentials are not observed communication process may break down.

Communication in living organisms

Cell is the basic unit of living organism. Cells together make tissues, tissues together make organs and organs make multicellular organism. There is an excellent and elaborative system of communication within cell and between the cells (figure 8). Communication is needed in a developing embryo to tell cells where to go, what to become and when to divide. This takes place by sending and receiving signals or molecular messages. When communication fails, the

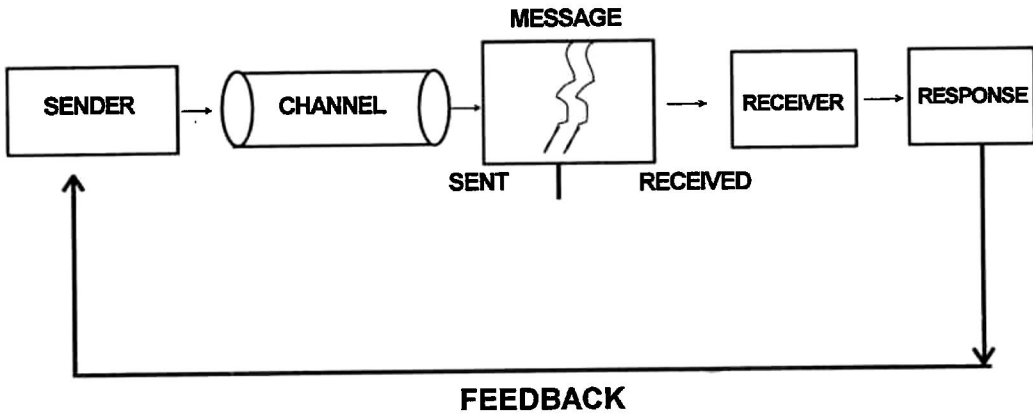


Figure - 1 Diagrammatic depiction of process of communication

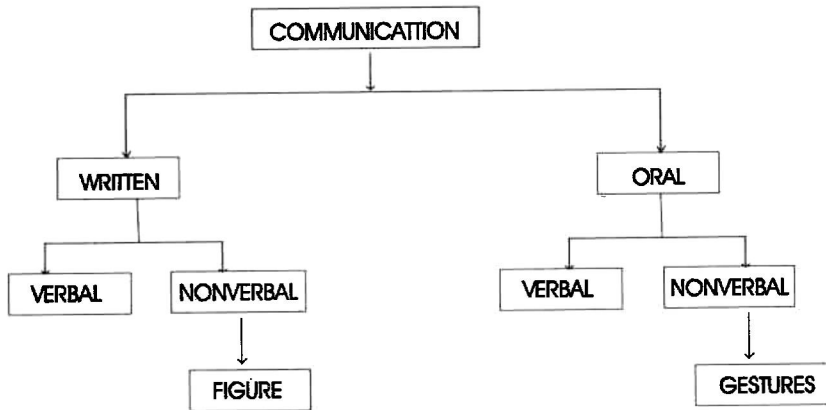
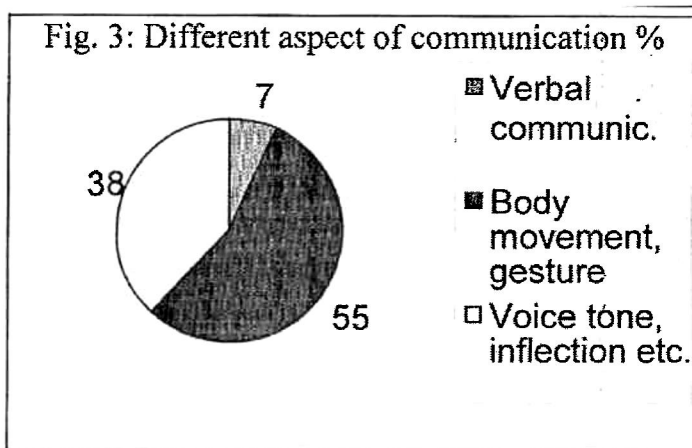


Figure- 2 Classification of communication



AN OVERVIEW OF COMMUNICATION SKILL

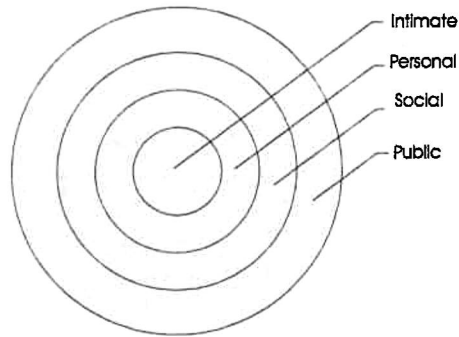


Figure - 4 Human relationship in terms of four kinds of distances

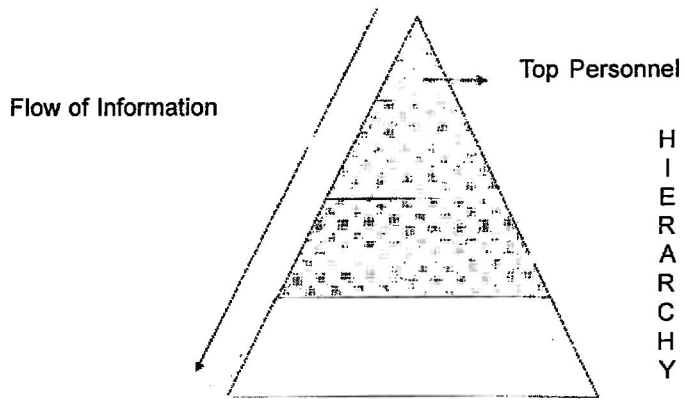


Figure - 5 Downward Communication

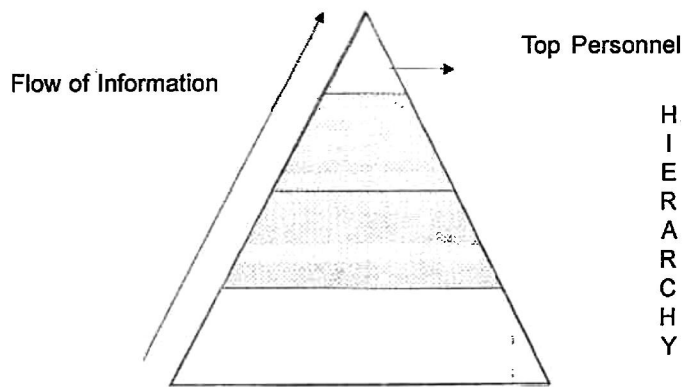


Figure -6 upward Communication

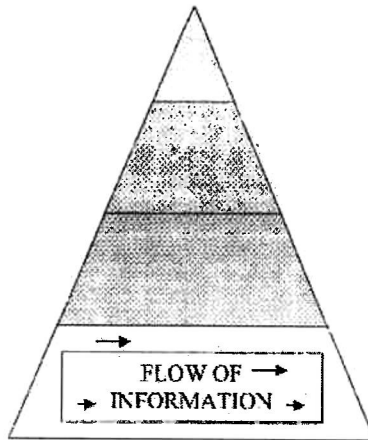


Figure - 7 Lateral Communication

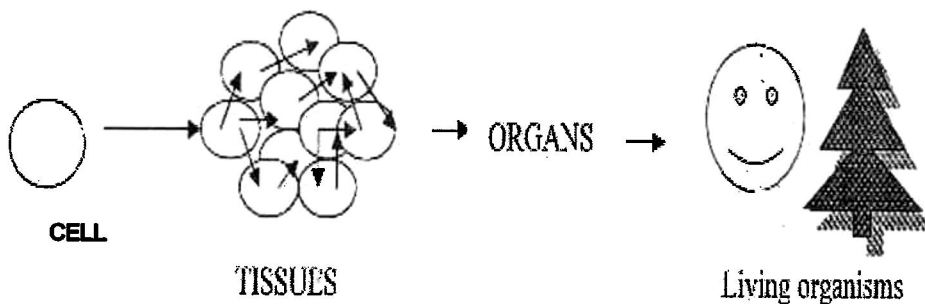


Figure - 8 Communication in living cells

consequences can be devastating from birth defects to cancer, AIDS etc.

So how do cells communicate? A message or signal (generally in the form of protein) released by a cell binds to a receiver protein called receptor of target or receiving cells. The receiver cells respond as per the message by initiating a series of biochemical reactions. In the living organisms cells are constantly bombarded with hundreds of different signals and continuously adapting and responding to their environment. Each is equipped with its own set of receptors and signals that meet its specialized role, allowing it to respond to some signal and ignore the rest (Ainsworth, 2004).

AN OVERVIEW OF COMMUNICATION SKILL

The fossil record suggests that sophisticated unicellular organisms resembling present-day bacteria were present on earth 3.5 billion years ago but that it apparently required more than another 2.5 billion years for the first multicellular organisms to appear. Why was multicellularity so slow to evolve? Although the answer cannot be known, it seems likely to be related to the need in a multicellular organism for elaborate signaling mechanisms that enable its cells to communicate with one another so as to coordinate their behavior for the benefit of the organism as a whole. Intercellular signals, interpreted by complex machinery in the responding cell, allow each cell to determine its position and specialized role in the body and ensure, for example, that each cell divides only when its neighbors dictate that it should do so. The importance of such "social controls" on cell division becomes apparent when the controls fail, resulting in cancer, which usually kills the multicellular organism (Alberts *et al*, 1994).

REFERENCES

1. Ainsworth, C.2002. Secret language of cells. New scientist. Pp 1-4.
2. Alberts, B., Bray, D., Lewis, J., Raff, M., Roberts, K. and Watson, J.D.1994. Molecular biology of the cell.Garland Publishing, New york. Pp 721-785.
3. Bharihoke, D. 2000.Fundamentals of information technology. Excel Books, N. Delhi. Pp 451-470.
4. Bhattacharya, I. 2006. An approach to communication skills. Dhanpat rai & Co., Educational & technical publishers, Delhi. Pp 1-15.
5. Gupta, R. H. 2007. Professional communication. Pragati Prakashan, Meerut. Pp 1-70.
6. Ranjan, B. 2004. An approach to communication skills. Dhanpat rai & Co., Educational & technical publishers, Delhi. Pp 1.1 - 1.18.
7. Sharma, R.C. and Mohan, K. 2006. Business correspondence and report writing. Tata McGraw-Hill Publishing Company Limited, N. Delhi. Pp 3-11.
8. Singh, S. 2007. Role of ethics in acceleration of rural development. In R. Lal and H.C. Purohit (eds.), Rural development and NGO, Shree Publishers, N. Delhi. Pp 102-107.