

Chapter 12

The purpose of verbal communications in business

What are you finding out?

An organisation needs to create the communication channels that most effectively help it to be successful. One way of doing this is through verbal communications. The communication of information and ideas can be likened to transferring water by bucket from the tap in the kitchen to dry plants in a garden. A good bucket will not let any of the water escape, so that the job is carried out in an efficient way. However, if the bucket is leaky and has holes, the further the distance from the tap to the plants, the less efficient the system will be. This is why organisations need to use communication channels that best help them to achieve their business objectives.



Figure 12.1 The communication process

Communicating verbally is something that we do daily. It is a form of interaction between two or more people and, in its simplest form, may involve straightforward conversation. A key element in any form of verbal interaction is for one or more people to understand what the other person is saying. Some individuals are very good at expressing themselves and can make a discussion interesting, focused and exciting. Think of teachers you have had who have made their lessons exciting through the quality of their verbal communication. Verbal communications can therefore be considered a skill. This is because some individuals are very articulate and express themselves well to an audience. Skilled communicators often use humour when they speak, they change the pitch and pace of their delivery and are sensitive to their audience's needs.

This chapter will help you to:

- Understand the purpose of verbal business communications.
- Appreciate how verbal business communications could be used in at least four different business contexts.
- Identify and explain a range of situations in which verbal business communications are used.
- Discuss how verbal communications can be used effectively in different situations.

Precise verbal communications

Verbal communications are part of our everyday lives; from the moment we get up until the moment we go to bed, our thoughts are structured by our language. Almost everything we do involves some form of verbal communication. Sometimes communications bring us bad news and sometimes good news. The important thing to remember in verbal communications is to identify the correct words to use. By doing this, verbal communications become precise. They help the person that you are talking with to understand exactly what you mean. In business this is particularly important as it means that people are not guessing what you want or feel but, instead, know exactly what you want or how you feel.

questions such as: 'Who is my line manager?' 'Where do I find new stationery?' and 'How do I apply for holiday leave?' All of these will involve some form of verbal communication. By communicating effectively on your first day, you will be preparing yourself much better for the role that you will have to undertake.

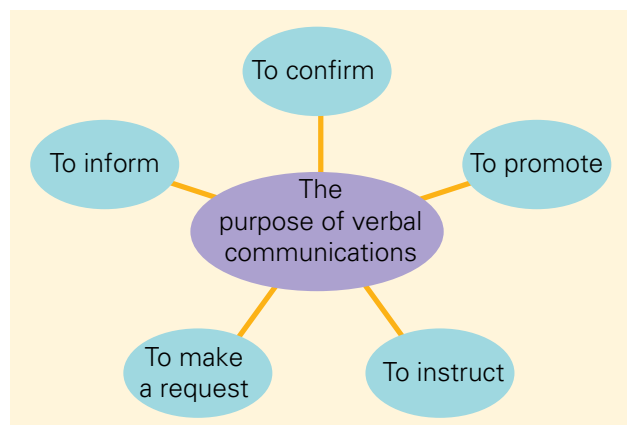


Figure 12.2 The purpose of verbal communications

Purpose of verbal communications

Verbal or oral communications describe interactions using the spoken word. Being able to communicate orally within a business is very important. Oral communications should be clear and precise. This is to ensure that the message or communication made through the conversation is understood by both parties to the conversation. Clear verbal communications are a valuable tool. They help to ensure that the actions of employees are all focused on a business achieving its business objectives.

In every type of organisation in which individuals work, employees will need to communicate verbally with others. Think about some of the situations in which individuals might communicate verbally. For example, imagine that you have just got a job with an organisation. There would be so much to learn on your first day. You would want to find out about procedures and what you are required to do. You may be allocated a **business mentor**, whose role is designed to support you while you learn your job role. You may wish to ask your mentor some

Task

This is a simple but very useful communication task that will help you with your verbal communications. Work in groups of two, possibly with somebody you might not know terribly well. Each person should, over a five-minute period, (total ten minutes) find out as much about the other person's interests and hobbies as they can. Having done so, each individual in turn should then use what they have discovered to describe the person that they interviewed and relay this back to the group.

When the task has been completed ask yourselves the following questions:

- **Did they ask the right questions?**
- **How did they feel about relaying everything back to the class?**
- **Could they remember everything that they learned about the other person?**
- **Does confidence play a part in verbal communications?**
- **Are some individuals just naturally better at communicating verbally than others?**
- **To what extent are verbal communications a skill?**

Using verbal communications to inform

Within a work environment, individuals need information. There are many different types of information that they might require. For example, they might want to find out about customer details, changes to working procedures, how to operate a new piece of software, new working arrangements, or find out about changes to the office. Although some of these details could be communicated in writing, they might also be transmitted through conversation.

When communicating, it is important that the person receiving the information knows exactly what the person communicating the information means. The last thing they want is some kind of misunderstanding. Communicating verbally might add precision to the message and also provide the opportunity for the communicator to receive some **feedback** to their message.

Using verbal communications to confirm

Unlike some written communications, verbal communications are more usually a two-way process. Verbal communications might be used to confirm that particular policies are being introduced by a business. They might also be used to confirm that an arrangement has been made or that an agreement has been reached. In other words, they are, in a very precise way, letting individuals know for certain that something is happening or taking place.

Using verbal communications to promote

It is easy to forget that we are all salespeople of our own ideas. You probably find that even within your own conversation you sometimes say 'Well, how about...?' 'Wouldn't it be a good idea to...?' or 'Have you thought about...?' Verbal communications are a creative form of communication. They allow the user to think in a variety of ways about the sort of response that

they would like to make, so that they enable the individuals to promote their ideas and thoughts.

Using verbal communications to make a request

There are many instances within a workplace in which one person, usually the more senior, has to request another person to undertake a task or an activity. For example, they might ask them to pick up a package from the postroom, or to prioritise a particular job. Sometimes individuals need to be sensitive when asking or requesting others to do something. They would want to give them something that they would be happy with and prepared to do.

Using verbal communications to instruct

Instructing individuals is not just directly informing them what to do. It is also about helping them to get on with something by showing them how to do it. For example, an employee may know about some procedures but be unsure about how they work. When instructing them to carry out such a role, the person doing the instructing will also be supporting them and making sure that they have the knowledge to carry it out. Instructing is an efficient way of learning. In the office environment individuals are therefore learning by doing things or undertaking tasks. It is important that everybody in a work environment is able to undertake what they are asked to do. It is also useful for them to understand why they are being instructed to undertake certain work procedures.

Make the grade

P2

Remember to use this towards P2. Talk to somebody who works for a business organisation. Find out in what circumstances they use each of the above ways of communicating with others within their workplace. Ask them in what context they use each of the purposes when dealing with others.

The staff development day

As office manager, Daljinder really enjoys it whenever she organises a staff development day. She finds that on these days staff have time to discuss issues that have arisen within the workplace. It also provides them with an opportunity to contribute their ideas to the management of the office. There is also a clear purpose to such days. Daljinder wants to find out whether everybody is happy within their role and she wants to use her staff development days to help, support and motivate staff. Sometimes when changes are taking place within the office she feels that she has to give life to such changes that make individuals feel good about them. Staff development days are also used to inform staff of new working arrangements.

1. How do Daljinder's actions relate to the purposes of verbal communications?
2. If you were a member of staff working within Daljinder's office, what would you personally expect from the staff development day?

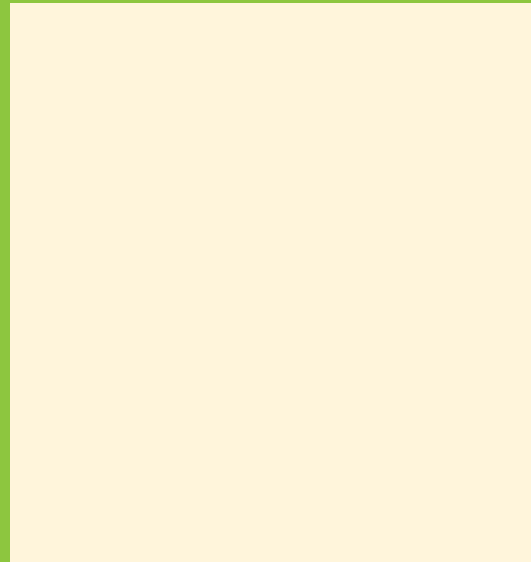
Business contexts in which verbal communications take place

No matter what form of communication takes place within an organisation, it is important that it is effective. When designing communication systems within a business, it is important to consider how people work and that the best systems for ensuring that good communication links are set up.

Did you know...



It has been said that your voice is one of the tools of your trade.



Task

Find out about the communication systems within your school or college. Ask your teacher/lecturer to tell you about how information is communicated and shared. Interview a senior member of staff and try to find out about the effectiveness of the various forms of communication.

Formal and informal oral communication

There are two ways in which oral communication takes place within organisations. This is either through **formal communication** or through **informal communication**. Formal communications within an organisation are communications that take place through recognised channels. In the context of oral communications, this might mean communication at meetings or staff briefings, as well as through presentations. Formal

communications are likely to be used more within a very large organisation. In a big business, fewer people know each other and so it may be necessary to set up systems where staff can talk and communicate. Informal communications are communications that take place, but not through the officially recognised networks of an organisation. For example, it may simply involve discussion within the staff dining room, or talking to a colleague while at the photocopier. Small organisations are likely to be more informal, quite simply because there are fewer staff.

Both formal and informal communications are important in supporting how an organisation operates. The formal functions are stated and are part of the systems within the business. For example, in staff meetings individuals would be able to communicate how they feel about changes that might affect them. However, just as important is the way in which staff communicate with each other on an everyday basis within a workplace. Staff talk to each other all of the time. This is generally good for an organisation. It is a way that they can provide each other with help and support. They can provide information for each other, make their points clearly and help to solve problems. If individuals do not speak to each other, they might not be able to support key initiatives that are happening at work. Research into the nature of communications within organisations indicates that it is important to have both formal and informal oral communications. For example, management may break information to employees through meetings or team briefings, but the full understanding of what management has had to say might come about only through informal discussion between team members. Most managers recognise the importance of informal communications.

Telephone contact

One of the most frequent forms of oral communication is through using the telephone. The great benefit of the telephone is that it is fast and allows people who might find it difficult

Task

In a school or college setting most of the formal communications take place within lessons where teachers/lecturers will deliver a presentation or some other form of learning to their students. This would be the more formal element of oral communications. However, think about other things that you do or other activities you undertake within your lesson. Identify where informal communications take place and explain how you learn from informal communications.

Did you know...



A good way to develop your voice is to take relaxation, breathing and voice exercises. Put your hands at the side of your rib cage and then breath in through the nose, breathing deeply. Sigh out through the open mouth and throat and then push all of the air out of your lungs. Do this ten times.

to meet in person to converse. A telephone may be both a formal and an informal form of communication. For example, when a caller from the outside calls an organisation, the telephone call may be the first form of contact with that business. It is important to make a good impression in that first call. The caller should also be put at ease. For formal telephone calls, the person taking the call should have all of the necessary information to hand and know how to deal with issues that affect that caller. In a more informal way, talking on the telephone is a quick and efficient way of exchanging information and ideas. Although there is no written evidence of the call, it is a quick way of dealing with an issue. However, if the issue is a long and complicated one that requires detailed information, perhaps the best way is to use a communication mechanism that involves writing information down.

Meetings

Meetings take place within nearly all organisations. Smaller meetings are likely to be more informal than larger meetings. For example, if a team of six members who work together have a meeting, they will know each other well and most, if not all, members of the team will probably contribute to the discussion. In very large meetings there will be an **agenda**. There will also be a chairperson who will manage the meeting. Reports may be read out at the meeting and there may be quite a few documents associated with the running of the meeting. Meetings therefore involve verbal and written communication methods.

Task

Give a description of a meeting that you have attended. The meeting might have been held at a place you work at. It could have been at school, at a formal meeting of people, such as an assembly, or it could have been a school or college council that you might have been a member of. Explain whether the meeting was formal or informal. What was the purpose of the meeting? What type of communication methods were used? Explain what the meeting achieved.

Formal meetings	Annual General Meeting of a large company Staff meeting in a large organisation Team briefing Meeting with clients/customers
Informal meetings	Meeting of a small team Unplanned meetings between staff

Type of meeting context

Technical enquiries

Having the information necessary to deal with a technical enquiry is important. For example, if you phone a school or college to find out the

term dates, you would expect somebody to have those details on hand. Within a business setting technical enquiries might include:

- queries about products
- requests for prices and quotations
- questions about delivery and reliability
- enquiries about the business.

The list is almost endless. It is important that staff are trained properly to deal with technical enquiries. It does not look good for a business if a member of staff cannot deal with any questions about technical enquiries. Technical enquiries might be on the phone or delivered in person when visiting a customer. Because of the nature of technical enquiries and the fact that in most cases they require a one-to-one response, they are usually formal oral communications. However, many customers might want the oral communication to be supported with a written statement.

Did you know...



BT has customer-service call centres in India that employ more than 11,000 people.

Communicating with a supervisor/colleagues and customers

Oral communications take place much of the time within a busy business environment. There is a whole range of individuals or groups that you may be communicating with. Some of these individuals might be within an organisation, while some might be outside the organisation.

Internal communications are communications within an organisation. No matter what role an individual undertakes within an organisation, he or she will work closely with others, such as a

supervisor or colleagues. Whenever you work closely with individuals there are constantly different situations in which you communicate. For example, we can match many of the types of communication against the purpose of verbal communications (see table below).

Communicating with supervisor and colleagues	To inform	You are told that a new colleague is starting work next Monday
	To confirm	The new working arrangement will start in a fortnight
	To promote	You tell your supervisor that you feel that the working space you are using is too small and that you need a bigger desk
	To request	You ask if you can have next Friday off work
	To instruct	You instruct a new colleague to complete the totals of some invoices and show them what to do with the information

People within organisations often have to communicate verbally with others outside a business. These are **external communications**. One of the most important groups of people to communicate with are an organisation's customers. When communicating with customers it is important to be knowledgeable and be able to refer to appropriate information. It is important that in these instances customers come away with a good image of the company.

Communicating orally with customers

Kathryn is concerned about the quality of verbal communication between her organisation and its customers. She is worried that sometimes her staff are a little bit too informal and are not particularly good at sticking to the point. This, she feels, wastes the time of the customers as well as that of her employees. She is also concerned that some staff are a little bit negative on the phone and that this puts off some customers. She has considered monitoring calls and also investing in training.

1. Make a list of rules and guidelines for communicating with customers.
2. In the longer term, how could Kathryn improve the quality of dialogue between her employees and her customers?

Complaints

One of the most difficult situations for any employer to be put into is to deal with a complaint. Complaints should be effectively dealt with and customers or others should be listened to. If somebody is not happy with a product or a service, there is nothing worse than for their complaint to be passed from one person to another. This creates a bad impression of the organisation, may cause a lot of personal anguish and wastes time. If an employee does not deal sympathetically and well with a complaint, then the customer may not return and further business will be lost.

Oral presentations



An oral presentation

Many people within business organisations are expected to give oral presentations. This is not just a discussion between colleagues or a meeting. An oral presentation involves making a presentation to a group of people. Planning and preparation are particularly important. You may want to create a **PowerPoint** presentation. Speaking as you think is not always easy. Something that you say in front of an audience cannot simply be erased. It is also sometimes difficult to keep the interest of an audience over a period of time. However, an oral presentation provides an opportunity to get some interaction with an audience. For example a speaker may take questions.

Task

Working in groups of three or four, prepare a presentation called 'Preparing for work'. The presentation should last around 15 minutes.

Key words

Agenda – A list of things to be considered and discussed.

Business mentor – Employee whose role is to help, support and counsel new staff in a way that positively helps them within their new role.

External communications – Communication with individuals outside a business organisation.

Feedback – A response from individuals to a message.

Formal communication – Communication that takes place through organised and recognised channels and lines of communication.

Informal communication – Communication that takes place through less rigid channels of communication and through which everybody has a chance to contribute.

Internal communications – Communications within an organisation.

Motivate – To encourage individuals and provide them with an incentive.

PowerPoint – A graphics presentation package from Microsoft.

Assignment

You must understand the purpose of verbal communication in business contexts.

Verbal communications within the workplace

The office in which Peter and Daljinder work has recently been restructured. The purpose of the change was to enable individuals to take on more responsibility. Instead of instructions always coming from the office manager, the changes were designed to enable staff to take charge of their role and take many decisions on their own. It was felt that by doing this staff would be happier with the work that they undertake. However, to be able to deal with the changes, it is important that verbal communication takes place within the office at a variety of different levels.

1. Peter and Daljinder are thinking about the purpose of business communications. Working in pairs, make a list of why oral communications are necessary in different business contexts. Provide examples of four different contexts in which oral business communications could be used.
2. Peter and Daljinder have been asked to make a list of the different ways in which oral communications could be used within the office in different business situations. List all of the purposes of oral communications within the restructured office. Alongside each of the different purposes, identify different situations that could be used to meet such needs. For example, if somebody is ill and their work needs to be covered urgently, staff would need to be informed. Role play a team briefing within your classroom for which your teacher will provide you with feedback. As part of the role play, explain the role of staff within the new office. At the end of the role play, comment upon what you feel to be your strengths and weaknesses in making presentations within a briefing.

In your assessment you will need to be able to do the following:

**To achieve a pass grade
you need to:**

P1 explain, using examples, the purpose of verbal business communications in four different business contexts

**To achieve a merit
grade you need to:**

M2 discuss how verbal communications can be used effectively in business situations

**To achieve a distinction
you need to:**