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Role of Language in Effective Managerial Communication

Madhulika Jha, Ph.D.

Introduction

Why are some managers more successful than others? Why do some managers seem to make all the right decisions while others flounder?

You might at first assume the successful ones are lucky, or can attribute their success to intelligence, personality, or even the environment in which they grew up.

What might not be readily apparent is that successful practitioners have acquired specific knowledge that contributes to their high performance.

The New Spirit of Business: Importance of Managerial Communication

The new spirit of business must be marked by efficient managerial communication. To build, to develop and to run business means, first of all, to communicate, to transmit information, opinions and decisions and, at the same time, to receive answers to such. In practice, the manager is required to have certain qualities that are indispensable for the managerial activity, and the ability to communicate efficiently is one of them.

Because of the changes occurring in the business environments, and the ever-growing complexity of business and of the managers' responsibilities, the topic of managerial communication has become a matter of great interest and significance.

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Role of Language in Effective Managerial Communication

A series of valuable theoretical studies have been published lately. They focus on the role of managerial communication and its implications for efficient company performance. Also special courses of business communication and negotiation have been introduced in universities.

This article emphasizes the role of communication competence in the fulfillment of the manager's complex tasks. The study discusses several approaches and types of managerial communication and analyses their implications for the efficiency of the managerial act. The study insists on the necessity of developing the managerial communication abilities by means of grasping the modern communication techniques and psychological techniques that allow harmonizing the interpersonal communication relations in business.

Content and Significance

Interest has been shown in the art of communication since the classical age. The Ancient Greeks developed specific communication methods and techniques that developed into the science of communication. In the contemporary age, the theory of communication has seen an impressive growth, being a major preoccupation for many specialists in extremely different domains (psychology, philosophy, marketing and public relations, management, etc.).

In Dance F.'s opinion (1970, p. 36), communication is the process of sending a message, via a communication channel, towards a receptor, whereas Abraham Moles (1974, p.64) understands communication "as establishing univocal correspondence between a space and time A- transmitter universe and a space and time B – receiver universe which includes the notion of understanding, transfer and which takes place from the field of phenomena to the field of symbols connected in a structure".

To define communication as an exchange of messages between a transmitter and a receptor is the simplest reflection of the essence of this process. The general elements found in most of the communication theories are, in essence: communication is a psychosocial process, a social relation of informational, interpersonal transfers between individuals and the group, and also between groups. The analysis of the message exchange shows that it is equally useful for one to know that the message transmitter tends to influence and modify the receptor's behaviour in all the aspects of his/her actions, in the sense of the receptor getting adapted to the context generated and promoted by the transmitter.

The Purpose of Communication: Feedback and Other Processes

As a matter of fact, from a broader perspective, the purpose of communication is to perform changes, to influence an action. Communicative competence is assessed based on the way in which, by means of using the adequate means of communication, one influences the behaviour of his/her interlocutor. The existence of a feedback system, which indicates how correctly the

information goes from the transmitter to the receptor, is necessary, because the information may often be distorted or modified.

What Is Managerial Communication?

Managerial communication has a special status, which derives from the organizational framework in which it is performed, from its goals, purpose and role. It represents the decisive means by which the manager fulfils his/her tasks and duties and employs the competences and skills pertaining to his/her role in the company and in the relations with the business partners.

The manager sends information to the members of the organization and the business partners, and their response influences his/her decisions and behaviour. The quality of the communication channels, formal or informal, depends on the functionality of the communication system.

This system needs to be conceived as a dynamic organism, capable of adapting to the information needs of the company at any moment, at all the levels and in all senses, laying the stress on the problems that influence and condition its normal functioning.

Within the company, the individual and the group performance of the employees while fulfilling tasks largely depends on the quality of the managerial communication process. The manager communicates for the purpose of sending and receiving information, of triggering the adequate answers and, implicitly, of influencing the receptors' decisions and their response to the transmitted messages.

The efficient management of the communication process when acting as a contact person who ensures interpersonal communication with the employees in the company, but also with the business partners, outside the company, is a tough responsibility for a manager, and the way he/she fulfils it is decisive for the good business and the success of the company.

On one hand, the manager needs to inform all the employees with respect to the company mission and goals, the costs of such, the quality and economy issues, the tasks that need to be fulfilled to attain the set goals. The manager is also interested to get information on the way in which such tasks are fulfilled, suggestions and opinions on the well-being of the company, as seen by the employees.

At the same time, the members of the managerial team must exchange information with regard to the main technical, economic and social problems of the company, to the management techniques and methods that need to be used to increase the efficiency of the activity. Thus, a system of reciprocal cooperation is created, which facilitates for the fundamental objectives of the company to be attained.

Managerial communication acts as an integrating factor of the relations from inside the company, as well as those from outside the company, with the business partners, pursuing to harmonize interests and creating the premises needed to attain the set goals. Competitive companies have understood this, and have promoted communicative competence as a philosophy assumed by the management and the entire team. In many such companies, communication is considered to be and is used as one of the most valuable instruments of managerial strategy. At the opposite pole, the defective transmission of information, communication breakdowns and the lack of transparency and honesty most often account for business failure.

Models of Managerial Communication

The managerial communication process becomes more and more complicated as the complexity of the company activities and that of the manager's responsibilities increases. The manager's communication behaviour is the one that may generate adequate behaviour on the part of all the members of the organization, mobilizing them around the values tied to performance and the competitive spirit. In time, several models of approach of the communication² process have been built.

According to specialists³, four of these models are the most significant and most widely used in the managerial practice: the one-way communication model, the circuit communication model, the interactive communication model and the behavioural model.

The One-Way Communication

The one-way communication model of approach is a classical model of the communication process. It was developed by the Engineer Claude Shannon in 1949. The managers who choose the classical model of approach (from transmitter to receptor), which Phillip Clampit called "the arrow approach" (1991, p. 1), start from the presupposition the receptor's feedback is not needed as long as the information and decisions transmitted were clearly formulated, in a language that is adequate and clear to those whom they are addressed to.

This idea relies on the belief that if the message is clear for the transmitter, it must be equally clear for the receptor and the latter will act in complete accordance with the content of the message received. By taking up this type of communication, the manager considers that, by using a clear and precise language, the decision that he/she transmits will be correctly understood and complied with by the receiver, without a feedback being needed. The person receiving the message is regarded as a passive receptor, without taking into account the fact that he/she decodes the message and interprets it based on his/her own system of values and on the context in which he/she acts.

This type of communication is a model that, in many cases, proves defective, as it generates problems at the organizational level.

The employees often complain about the lack of information or about the fact that the information reaches them distorted. In the absence of a response, this sort of information can no longer be corrected. The inadequate distribution of the information from the upper level of management to the lower levels was explained by Peter Drucker (1993, p. 172) by the fact that, when taking up the one-way communication model, the managers ignore the receptor.

Communication is incomplete if the information is not understood, many theorists considering that we may speak of communication only when the receiver gives feedback. As long as there is no response from the part of the receiver, there is no certainty that the message (the arrow) has attained its target, i.e. being received, decoded and correctly understood. This type of communication is preferred by those managers who prefer the formal, rigid, plain and authoritarian style and who do not develop interpersonal communication relations within the organization.

Mention must be made that, apart from the afore-mentioned advantages, the classical model of approach of the managerial communication has the advantage that it shortens the path from decision to action. The managers concentrate over the short and specific messages, transmitted firmly, avoiding any collateral discussion over the topic of the message.

On the other hand, the employees execute or comply with the decision as soon as they receive it. Taking into account these positive aspects and starting from the idea that the expression of a clearly stated message is a compulsory and sufficient condition for efficient communication, many managers appreciate this model of communication. Obviously that is true provided the receiver uses the same system to decode the message he/she receives as the one the transmitter used when encoding or sending the message. We must specify that we do not entirely impart this point of view.

We believe that, under the conditions of the ever- increasing complexity of the company activities, the efficiency of the managerial communication process is not fully sustained by adopting the one-way communication model. Communication is a process of transmission and receipt of the information – facts, intentions, attitudes etc. – having the purpose of getting a reaction from the interlocutor. Consequently, the existence and quality of the feedbacks is of extreme importance, communication being incomplete unless the receiver confirms having received and correctly understood the message.

Organizational practice has shown that efficient managerial communication relies on a plurality of factors. Among them, the employees' feedback to the messages received from the company management certifies the correct understanding of the act of communication and makes possible the adaptation of the employees' behaviour to the manager's requirements and expectations.

Overlooking the employees' responses may have negative effects upon the effectiveness of the communication process, especially over the results of the company in general.

Circuit Model of Managerial Communication

Another model of approach of the managerial communication is the circuit communication, which supposes the existence, in all the cases, of the receptor's response (reaction) to the received message.

Unlike the "arrow" approach, this type of communication starts from the presupposition that the manager must know all the problems that the employees are facing in fulfilling the tasks assigned, all their opinions and views in connection with the activity they carry within the company.

This approach is specific of the managers having an open style of management, a free and understanding one, those managers who are interested in providing a harmonious organizational environment and in cultivating agreeable relations with their subalterns.

For this type of manager interpersonal communication with all the employees, the understanding of the employees, the adaptation of the messages based on each employee's personality and the certainty that the message sent was correctly understood are of utmost importance. The manager relies on the positive response of the employees to this sort of behaviour and, by way of consequence, on the increased quality of the work generated by this state of affairs.

The success of this type of managerial approach depends on the manager's skills of fine psychologist, of his/her ability to stimulate the employees' devotion towards the company. The disadvantage of approaching this sort of communication comes from the large amount of time spent in discussions and debates, which may negatively reflect in the effectiveness and efficacy of the activity. Interactive communication is another way of approaching the managerial communication.

Interactive Managerial Communication Model

Apart from the above two models presented, interactive communication supposes an exchange of ideas between those who communicate, each having, in turn, the role of receptor and transmitter. This model of communication is particularly characteristic of the organizations in which the employees' creative skills are appreciated and their participation into solving the problems that the company faces is stimulated. The manager trusts the subalterns' professional competence and has them informed and consulted about the occurring problems and the solution of such.

Interactive communication relies on group creativity, the valorisation of the proposals, suggestions and ideas expressed by the members of the organization and on the possibility to identify the best solutions generated by the exchange of ideas.

The effectiveness of this type of communication is conditioned by the compatibility of those who communicate, from the perspective of the level of knowledge, experience, share values and type of behaviour.

In 1985 David Campbell and Dale Level proposed a more complex model of managerial communication – the behavioural model. The two researchers analyse the managerial communication process from the perspective of the way in which the transmitter expects the receptor to react after receiving the message. The anticipation of the possible response of the employee upon receipt of the message helps the manager structure and adapts the message in such a way as to get a positive response from the receiver.

The determination of the receiver's behaviour subsequent to the communication must be, in the two researchers' view, the transmitter's first goal, while taking into account the interferences that might occur during the process of communication and the influences that other communication processes, occurring in parallel, might have upon the receptor's final behaviour.

Even though companies have gone through massive changes with respect to the way they approach managerial communication, none of the models presented above is close to perfection. Each has, as shown, both advantages and disadvantages. In essence, managerial communication must be approached in a manner that best suits the set purpose, the stress being laid on the manager's competence of good communicator. The manager must ensure the smooth going of the communication process on all the channels, both formal and informal, both inside and outside the company.

Development of the Managerial Communication Competence

While performing, the manager takes different roles in which his/her communicational competence is decisive. Upon analysing the activity of some managers with good business results, many specialists have placed communicational competence to the centre of the the roles that the manager must play into three categories: interpersonal roles, informational roles, decisional roles (Mintzberg, H., 1984, *Le manager au quotidien: les dix rôles du cadre*, Les Editions d' Organisations, 1984, Paris).

Reflecting on the qualities that underlie the managerial success, John C. Maxwell (2002, p. 101) ranks the manager's ability to communicate efficiently first in importance, with a rate of 38% (it is noticeable that the importance that Maxwell gives to the other components is lower: creation – 31%, management knowledge – 19%, relations – 12%).

In turn, Peter Drucker (1977, p. 262) urged the managers to improve their communicative competence, so as to make themselves remarked for “the ability to communicate with the

people and to introduce to them their own thoughts and ideas in such a way as to get them to understand and be persuaded”, as “this ability to express oneself may be the most important aptitude one can have”.

Essential Skills: Communicating Both Positive and Negative Messages

The consolidation of the constructive actions oriented towards the values of the dialogue partners, the exploitation of the informal network of communication in a way that is positive for the company and the maintenance of a climate of open-mindedness and trust, lacking in conflicts and tension, all depend on the manager’s ability to constantly improve his/her abilities of good communicator.

Apart from the innate qualities that are important in the communication process, the manager may also develop his/her communicative competence by stimulating those abilities that allow the understanding of the subtle mechanisms of the communication act.

Communicating or transmitting unpleasant news or information with diplomacy and courtesy, diverting the conflicting discussions tactfully or solving the problems with firmness and authority when required are aspects that reflect the ability to communicate efficiently, and this is a vital quality for a capable manager. Business partners may have divergent interests, views or positions.

The open and positive attitude, the honesty, the appeal to rational or emotional arguments based on the interlocutor’s personality are manifestations that can be found in the communicational behavior of a responsible manager who is interested to keep the channels of communication open, regardless of how complicated or controversial the problem in discussion is.

This desideratum is possible through a correct appropriation of the communication techniques and the perfecting of their use. By using argumentation as a communication technique, the manager may influence the interlocutor’s actions and options through well-grounded evidence that can support his/her assertions and objectives. Through solid arguments that rely on real facts, figures, judgments and incontestable reasoning one can get the adhesion of the dialogue partner to the ideas sustained.

Obviously, the arguments need to be relevant, credible, verifiable, correctly understood by the interlocutor and they must come in support of the goals set. The more the problem tackled is complicated and harder to solve, the stronger the arguments used must be.

The argumentation strategy needs to be built taking into account the interlocutors’ personality, attitude (favourable, less favourable, indifferent) to the ideas presented. In order to achieve the convergence of interests and agreement one must use, apart from the logical arguments, arguments that appeal to feelings, cultural values and beliefs.

Emotional Elements

We need to mention that there are situations when the resort to emotional, affective arguments constitutes a strong support in persuading the business partners. The same may be true in the communication within the company.

Often, the manager's force of persuasion grows when appeal is made to arguments of emotional nature, aimed at the employees' sentimental side (loyalty towards the company, beliefs, moral consciousness, honesty, enthusiasm etc.) For a long time, the affective side of the communicational behaviour was entirely ignored.

In recent years, numerous studies have brought to light the relationship between the quality of the communication process and the degree of emotional intelligence of the people involved in the process.

In order to indicate the influence of the degree of emotional intelligence over the success attained in most of the human actions, the American specialists speak of the emotional intelligence quotient (EQ), whose importance in the success or failure of the human actions is decisive.

Implications of the Emotional Intelligence

The implications of the emotional intelligence over the effectiveness of the communication process within the company are a relatively new concept in business, which some managers find hard to accept. However, one cannot build an efficient communication system in which the EQ is minimized.

The research conducted has shown that businesspeople with a high EQ have better communicative abilities and grasp better the meaning of the messages transmitted by the interlocutor, whereas emotional intelligence deficiencies tend to jam the communication channels.

Three Applications

Correlatively, at least three applications of the emotional intelligence (EI) may be identified in business management: the possibility to motivate, to dissipate conflicts and to build an efficient communication network.

These are three trumps for a businessperson, out of which derive several qualities that are important for a good communicator such as intuition, self-control, involvement, the listening ability, the persuasion ability, perseverance and flexibility in communication.

A high EQ favours empathy, the ability to perceive the interlocutor's feelings and emotions, to anticipate his/her intentions, reactions and behaviour, by transposing into his/her psychology and role.

In this sense, businesspeople and all the people involved in social relations should take into account the piece of advice given by Tadeuz Kotarbinski (1976) who recommended: "whatever you do, be able to imagine yourself in the stead of your partner, of your interlocutor... be able to examine the matter from his/her point of view, before making any gesture and, most importantly, before uttering a word."

In a very deceptive world, as the one of business and trade, empathy is a communicative skill that proves its efficiency chiefly in the process of negotiation. The development of the capacity to communicate empathically allows a deeper understanding of the attitude and conduct of the interlocutor, of the system of values on which he/she founds his/her actions and behaviour, thus increasing the efficiency of the communication act.

Change in Communicative Register for Success in Negotiations

A business meeting or a negotiation apparently destined for failure may often be saved by virtue of the mastery, tact and utmost diplomacy with which the partners may change the communicative register. In fact, the adoption of a flexible style of communication, adapted to the situation and the interlocutor's personality, along with tact and diplomacy are indispensable abilities in business practice. Influencing the business partner's behaviour, getting some favourable reactions from his/her part by resorting to certain communication techniques might be perceived as a form of manipulation.

Manipulation by means of communication is considered, to a certain extent, natural, particularly in the process of negotiation, when each party pursues to influence the other party's behaviour and decision in the direction most favourable for his/her own interest.

Psychological Techniques for Modern Management

Modern management resorts to effective psychological techniques of communication in business. These techniques allow a certain sort of manipulation of the interlocutor or partner's behaviour. We are speaking about the Transactional Analysis (commonly known as TA) and the Neuro-linguistic Programming (NLP).

These techniques allow interlocutors to establish an efficient communication rapport and they currently have very good applications in business negotiations and in the harmonizing of interpersonal communication in business relations. Through specific instruments of analysis and action they allow a better understanding of the interlocutor and, as mentioned already, even a certain form of manipulation of his/her Transactional analysis (TA) was founded by the American psychiatrist Eric Berne during the late 1950s as a new theory of the human personality.

At present, the applications of the TA have started being used in business management, particularly in communication and business negotiation. An excellent means of analysis and action in business communication, the transactional analysis makes available for entrepreneurs and managers certain techniques and instruments which allow them to understand their dialogue partner and help lose fear and negative emotions.

The study of Neuro-linguistic Programming (NLP) was initiated by Richard Bandler and John Grinder at the University of Santa Cruz, California in 1972. They started from the structure of what they called “excellence in interpersonal relations”. NPL was defined as a corpus of means of study of interpersonal communication and of the structure of positive experience of such. NPL constitutes a mean of effective interpersonal communication in business relations, as it allows to influence the interlocutor’s behavior and to assess the impact of the message transmitted over the interlocutor. (in detail in *Comunicare si negociere în afaceri*, Stefan Prutianu, Editura Polirom, 1998 ; *Managementul afacerilor*, Dan Popescu, Editura Economica, 2001).

In English the term has been used in the Neuro-linguistic Programming meaning specifically what has been achieved between the interlocutors in the course of communication behaviour in the sense of the adaptation to the context wanted. Obviously, the use of these techniques need not be abusive and must not be done in breach of the principles of ethics in business communication. The difficult challenges that the business manager faces and the complex activities that the manager has to carry out in a tougher and tougher concurrent environment have consecrated the use of the competitive communication techniques as a subtle means of knowing the business and action partners for the purpose of harmonizing the interpersonal communication relations in this domain. That way, certain communication abilities are developed that make it easier to overcome negative emotions and tensions that may arise in the relationship with the business partners. At the same time, in a good partnership relation, they favour the attaining of the set goals.

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