

Verbal Communication at Workplace: A Pragmatic Approach

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Abstract:

The academicians and the professionals classify communication into two broader categories; verbal and non-verbal. These two labels of distinction might have earned popularity on the basis of easier way of understanding things but the gravity of the subject calls for a fresh and new approach which is felt quite essential to have in-depth and holistic study of the issue. The verbal is said to have direct and rational relationship with communication through words whereas the other forms of messages have been categorized as non-verbal. The paper explores some of the unexplored aspects of verbal mode of communication that encompasses within its purview the pragmatic approach to linguistic discourse in the total system of communication. Further, the paper also endeavors to point out some of the aspects of communication that relates to the principles of management of an organization which need be considered in the matter of TQM (Total Quality Management).

Keywords: communication, understanding, holistic, pragmatic approach, language discourse, TQM (Total Quality Management).

1. INTRODUCTION

The critical thinkers, philosophers, literary theorists and anthropologists along with some social scientists and cultural theorists have often express their view that the verbal mode of communication is always in want of some inevitable supports of the non-verbal aspects of communication as it makes communication effective. Certain traits of non-verbal get mixed into verbal and the vice-versa. It is true that every coin has its two sides and one side of it cannot be understood in totality without the other. The verbal communication just the same way cannot ignore certain vital aspects of words which pronounce the reality of their identity in different socio-cultural milieu. The heteroglossic, dialogic and polyphony nature of language generate inconsistency ‘meaning exclusion’ that goes across the words must not be ignored when language comes in operation. Furthermore, the two vital aspects of Pragmatics such as phenomena like performatives and presuppositions need be elaborated to expose the neglected aspects of verbal communication. As Celce-Murcia and Olshtain in *Discourse and Context in Language Teaching*

(2000) posits, “As such, pragmatics is concerned with people's 13 intentions, assumptions, beliefs, goals, and the kind of actions they perform while using language. Pragmatics is also concerned with contexts, situations, and settings within which such language uses occur” (19). In fact, this is a matter of common understanding that the purpose of any communication is not merely to inform but more than that it is directed and guided to perform. The performatives are such utterances which differentiate themselves from the constative or informative. The speech act theory as has been expounded by J.L. Austin in his famous text *How to Do Things with Words* (1962) talks about locution, illocution and perlocution where perlocution creates the effects planned by communicators and their interlocutors. In reality, the corporate world demands from the professionals to have certain planned mode of presentation that may appeal to the participants in the matter of negotiation and business. The perlocution act of the speech decides the apt mode of verbal expression taking into consideration the diverse non-verbal clues supplied and also the communicator is expected to use his/her foresight to move with clear cut objective in mind. The cross-cultural values, varied manners and etiquettes, differences of the tones and stress patterns of the speakers have certain bearings of the imperatives that cannot be ignored in the context of verbal mode of communication. The locutionary act on the other hand may be counted simply as communicative or verbal act that simply demonstrates and presents the message to the targeted audience whereas illocutionary one reports the verbal acts. The perlocutionary act expresses the effect of the utterance on the speaker. The presuppositions are such characteristics or

features which are assumptions denoting the context of the verbal communication which may either be verifiable or appropriate.

The basic tenet of any communication is to make it effective by obliterating barriers coming in its way. Communication through words which is known as verbal be that in spoken or written form cannot be understood without comprehending the unstructured behavioral and cultural aspects which get so intertwined and intermingled thus making way to complexity. E.T. Hall's *The Silent Language* (1973) argues "The portion of the communications spectrum which embraces political events is composed of units of much longer duration. Meanings must be found in the context of hundreds of years of history...the message is composed of numerous situations and acts...isolate, set and pattern"(99). The structured mode of presentation must give some scope for informal relationship and that is made possible only when certain digressions are allowed to discourage monotony. The verbal communication in the corporate situation has experienced so many setbacks and breakdowns due to the stereotype and congested mode of delivery. The audience who shares the message have certain limitations that must be addressed otherwise the very objective of perlocution gets defeated at several points. The frequency of delivery of words in oral communication cannot be pre-decided. The speakers have to count the gestures and postures of the audience and mostly their inference so that the effect of verbal communication may be persuasive and motivating. So oftener it is experienced that the connotative sense of the words are found struggling hard to establish meanings with their denotative sense. The question is whether the so called denotative attribute of the word ever meets fixity to reveal consistency? The verbal mode of communication has certain loopholes or shortcomings which need to be addressed in the broader perspective of socio-cultural aspect of the fast changing corporate world today.

In case of the written mode of verbal communication in the particular context of an organization or a profession, the message needs to be toned up on the bases of different factors like the values, strength of vocabulary, knowledge level, relationship etc. of the audience to help adaptation. Since the smooth and effective execution of the various functions of management can only be ensured by proper documentation of the facts in proper formats, it is mandatory that the text of the message is to supply the meaning categorically to the context. The purpose of the verbal communication in this mode should be to eliminate all the abstract and connotative meaning so that the actual problems may get addressed and real solutions may be found. The execution of the plan by and large depends upon the preparation of the people all triggered with action in proper direction. The verbal written mode of communication must not be mistaken for free play or blind administration of the power of language. The judicious use of action words framing minimal length of the writing space has the capacity to eliminate confusion and conflict in the organizational setup. The verbal communication in any organization works as a catalyst that gears up operations at different levels. It has the potential to minimize conflict through judicious reinforcement of formal rules and regulations which have very important roles to play in coordination of job positions.

The management scientists and practitioners may have the realization that the verbal inputs in the communication network have certain advantages which cannot be overruled. The anatomy of the structured hierarchy needs proper support of the flow of information let that be through the pathway namely upward, downward or horizontal. The proper understanding of the physiology of the organization demands analysis of the verbal presentation that can only be the source of record to take future decision. Not only this even the future assessment and trend of business cannot have any say without in-depth knowledge of recorded past of the very organization. Today information technology whose object is to transform any information as usable resource to enhance and increase the productivity cannot be realized without verbal communication. The durability and usability of information can be realized at work place only when it is in verbal mode. There is no denying the fact that the mechanical setup of the geographically expanding business houses in the global world has the pressing demand to cope with the cross cultural environment that is volatile and multidimensional. The problem of absenteeism and monotony is the gravest situation faced by so many giant organizations and for that matter the verbal communication needs flexibility so that it may better fulfill the need of diversity. This is the misconception of so many scholars, academicians and communication experts when they hold the opinion that the verbal has the only attribute to have the uniformity to help the communication breakdown. The authors contend and posit disagreement to this commonly accepted opinion. Since communication in itself may prove to be futile and meaningless if it remains mostly as a part of meta-communication that call for academic discourse. More than that it is to be considered as doing and practicing at work place. The performative language and for that matter verbal communication has to facilitate such an environment in the organization so that the various resources may optimally be utilized. Since language has its major role to play in the formation of identifiable culture of an organization so that it may be a separate entity to negotiate with the outside environment. The verbal communication can have its better application in the context of the major and minor objectives that the organization carves out depending upon both the factors of what and how. Since the human resources are

considered to be the prime mover of the other resources the verbal communication should have the better understanding of the socio-political background of the public within and without the organization. The psychological makeup of the people is to be diagnosed and constantly analyzed so that the motivation level at the work places may be elevated. The verbal communication ensures scientific mode of decisions undertaken by the managers and executives discarding the scope of thumb rules and blind intuition based moves. The risk management and minimization of wastage of resources can have no other way out without the proper and wise use of verbal mode. Hence, the professionals in the organizations should be provided multi-pronged and in-depth training so that this soft skill may work effectively.

Information being the life blood of any organization, works as resource at every level of work which is performed. Therefore, its proper processing decides the time oriented performance and for that matter verbal communication has to be more performative. For the proper execution of the strategies and plans it has to support the actions which are free from digressions and deviations. The direction and control through the verbal mode of communication can prove to be more effective if the practitioners and managers apply their empirical knowledge as input that may holistically be fit for the fast changing and volatile business environment. The dissemination and sharing of information at different job positions in the hierarchy of the corporate organizations has always been supported by the verbal mode of representation. In the matter of policy decisions the higher level management is observed to have the final say and so the communication in this case does not allow any misinterpretation. Here also the verbal matters a lot. The flow of information to the lower level that carries with it the sense of authority needs to be designed and fashioned in such a manner so that the lower level managers may not have any difficulty in the proper implementation. The feedback system in this case should be made free from filters, manipulations and tempering. In any system of management the principles of direction and control are possible only when transparency is maintained and duplicity is discouraged on all fronts. The verbal communication in the organization has the advantages to do so. Not only this we know that the managerial functions of a particular organization are more or less determined by the past performance which gets documented so that the future actions may better be guided and checked from deviation. If we take planning function of the management which is mostly future oriented the past of the organization cannot be overlooked. The analysis of the written and documented past of the organization is quite mandate because that is to decide which decisions will be appropriate in case the almost similar circumstances prevail at present.

The fast and continuous change in the technological inputs demands new mode of behavior to be inculcated in the people at work. Be that the induction program or in service training which is imparted time to time by the trainers, the verbal mode of communication must be appropriated. Simple, straightforward and comprehensive language should be followed so that the audience may have the proper understanding of the situation. Most of the times, while demonstrating at the work places the specialists fail to drive home the message to the target workforce. This may cause serious hazard to the overall functioning of the organization. Those people who take up the operational management as the part of the responsibility must get it for a point that appropriate verbal mode of communication can win them half of the battle. The language which is helpful in developing conducive and friendly environment has also the credit to increase the productivity. The future managers have to understand that the wise use of verbal mode of communication can help them earn better future prospects. Hence, they should try to avoid any sort of distortion, deviation and disharmony in the presentation. They should know that words can motivate people to perform better. A few verbal expressions of appreciation can boost up the morale of the workers and set them to trap the maximum of the potential hidden in them. Clarity which is the heart and soul of verbal communication can check digression and deviation at every job position of the organization.

The anatomy and physiology of an organization need to be supported by congenial and healthy environment. The cardinal principles of management such as planning, organizing, coordinating, directing and controlling can have better implementation in the organizational setup only when communication system is supportive. Today management practitioners focus on qualitative performance that may ensure productivity. In fact, the holistic sense of management is open to the prevailing market condition. The demand forecasting process depends by and large upon the proper analysis of the past performance of the organization considering all the changes taking place in outside situation which is so volatile. The verbal and documented record in the form of the technical report performs as a rich resource which is consulted by the managers to take decisions. The total quality management talks about timely and suitable execution. Any sort of change over that is brought at the infrastructure level or functional level must go in tune with the present condition of the market. The proposal like writing which is produced may prove to be effective only when the facts and figures are represented authentically. The verbal communication like this is acceptable to the organization only when it ascertains smooth functioning. Specific words and structure increases the value to the functionality of both the reports and the proposals. These two verbal documents decide the total quality management. Likewise the organizing function of the organization

follows certain rules of communication. To put the right type of people to do right type of job in right manner help the optimal utilization of the resources and for this the verbal communication has no other option. The coordination in between the operational units again demands the verbal flow of the communication in different direction like upward, downward, horizontal and others. The control function of management checks deviations and wastage. The direction like function is already hidden in it. The verbal communication has to be specific, brief and straight forward so that it may not create any type of confusion in the mind of the actual performers and operative workers. The performative function of language can be great help to the leaders to pass on instructions and directives to their respective subordinates. To exercise and delegate the authority the leaders are expected to earn acceptability of their followers. The democratic model of the organization has the tendency of over-ruling the rigid and restrictive operation of the formal mode of verbal communication. The boss may be harsh to his subordinate if his/her directives are not followed. He may take coercive action against his employees in case they violate orders and prove themselves as obstructions coming in the way of the functionality. The democratic model has shaken of the blind move of power. Cooperation is sought both from the top to bottom and the vice-versa and it is for this, that people at work places demand both the formal and informal mode of verbal communication. The morale of the worker can be boosted if generous and kind words are used so oftener than the prescriptive and accusing words. The workers at the work places nowadays are considered assets to the organization. They should be motivated by using positive words so that the true sense of belongingness may occur. Their commitment to the overall fulfillment of the objectives of the organization is possible only when the healthy verbal communication is ensured.

Every organization has certain structured manuals which contain operative rules that require to be interpreted verbally to different job positions. Sometimes the non-verbal signs and symbols are also added in work manuals to make instructions more understandable to the operative workers but here also the appropriate verbal mode of communication is required to bridge the gap in between the communicator and the communicated. To help accountability people at work place get through right appraisal system. This is the process of verbal feedback supplied to each and every responsibility area under the supervision of the authority. This is also imperative for the exercise of the direction and control functioning. In want of proper verbal mode of communication such exercises are not possible. The pragmatic approach of verbal communication comes forward to manage conflict which may be detrimental to the overall functioning of the organization.

Today, when we find that there is a craze for automation and specialization, the interface area wants much more attention. All the unit and sub-unit of the organization have the outlets which prove themselves as donors as well as receivers. The verbal communication has the responsibility to establish corporate functioning. The outside environment which consists of legal, political, social and administrative agencies must be responded through verbal communication in an appropriate manner. All the promotional strategies are engaged to establish the brand name and here also the verbal transaction gains prominence. The brand is nothing but an idea that sells in the market. The slogans of the advertisement must be catchy and appealing. The publicity of the brand demands proper mode of presentation to the public at large. To increase the productivity favorable situation should be created to collect more and more revenue from the market. The sales force engaged to push the product must follow certain imperatives of the verbal mode of communication. They are to convince and persuade the potential customers to convert them as actual customers. Through pragmatic approach their loyalty to the brand can be consolidated. The heart beat and the pulse of the market should be properly tested and for that the survey is conducted time to time. The questionnaire framed to help the conduction of survey requires apt use of words so that the information and data may be procured and analyzed productively. Most of the surveys which incur huge amount of money fail to give expected outcome or result due mainly to the faulty wordings of the questions. Here, also the pragmatic approach to verbal communication needs to be understood. The graphical and pictorial representations of data are to be observed and analyzed on the basis of which the managers and executives are taking their decisions. The purchase behavior of the customers can be shaped and reshaped by pursuing categorized promotional strategies. The slogans are written to appeal the minds of the, would be customers. Here also the professionals may be advised to follow the appropriate mode of verbal communication as to suit the cultural value of the targeted audience group. The segmentation of the market on the basis of the specific needs and demands of the potential customers may be targeted using appropriate mode of verbal communication so that the organization may be in a position to generate revenue.

Hence, the speech act which is based on the planned and object oriented mode of verbal communication should follow a pragmatic approach. The business is to be communicated today in a mode so that the outside environment which is so volatile and changing may easily be controlled through the process of negotiation and better adjustment. In the case of corporate business, the appropriate mode of verbal expression should be planned. The perlocution aspect of the speech act

is to be understood to check deviations and wastage of the sources. The ethics and value system of various communities cannot be overlooked by the decision makers and actual management practiti

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