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Engineers and Oral Business Communication

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Abstract: Communication represents one of the most important human needs that reach planetary, continental and government proportions. Communicative activity, as an essentially important social process, depends on many different factors, first of all on the age and social position, but it also depends on the level of education, which determines a kind of interest and need for specific information type. There is no doubt that, in the time of advanced technology, especially in the domain of new terms, engineers in electronics have an advantage over other professions, particularly when dealing with communication in planetary proportions.

Key words: communication, meetings, presentation, conference, engineer.

Communication is a very important social process. Social life would be impossible without, and it refers to conversation, understanding, in other words a kind of discourse. So, although the term has been clearly determined by etymological analysis of words, it has plenty of meanings. The Latin word "communication" can be translated as connection, behavior, announcement, touch, circulation. Numerous meanings have been derived from this basic term, and all of them, with no exception, refer to community. Thus, the word "communicate" (Lat. communicare) means to make something common, in other words, to announce something or to declare. The word "communicative" (Lat. communicatio) refers to communication accessibility and communication skills, whereas the word "communicator" (Lat. communicandus) refers to communicant, a person who received communion in a Christian church, and by it is united with God and other believers. The term "community" (Lat. communities) refers to a group of people where the sense for general well-being is dominant. Presumably, this word, from which the French term commune was derived, referring to local government and municipality, became very important as a form of social order after 1871.

Even communism (Lat. communis), as a form of social order, refers to the community of people for who the only "good" is general well-being, though, only as a theoretical model. Finally, the Serbian word "zajedno" (eng. together) is a coined word (za/jedno = to/gather) which points out that community members are those who actually have unique, identical goals [1].

Having communication skills in the business world, as well as the communicative competence within a company, enables people to more effectively participate in every business, particularly in engineering, while effective communication enables career development [2].

Communicative activity depends on many factors, first of all on age and social position, but it also depends on the level of education, which determines a kind of interest and need for specific information type, whereas successful communication is possible only it technical, psycho-physical and socio-cultural conditions are fulfilled. Or, as M. Pejcic says: "In order to communicate successfully with other people, a man needs to behave in a friendly way, answer without making any accusation, show interest for the opinions of his companions,

reduce resistance, contribute to confidence building, and talk without blaming another party" [3].

Communication implies sending messages from sender to receiver through certain channels. The message, no matter what form it takes (written, oral, photo, music, and move) is transmitted through channels as a signal, after being exposed to an appropriate way of coding. The message is being conveyed by decoding before it arrives at final "destination". Communication process consists of the following elements:

➤ Coding refers to the process of putting one idea or communicative content into another symbolic system that has the same meaning.

➤ Transferring messages from sender to recipient while using appropriate communication channel or medium.

➤ Receiving messages that are being decoded before they arrive at final "destination", so that they can be understood, interpreted and accepted or rejected in an appropriate way.

➤ Effect of messages represents the consequences that affect recipient's attitude and his behavior as well.

In order to achieve effective communication between sender and recipient, common assumptions are the most important: without them communication would be impossible.

Theory of Communication is a science that makes study interaction between people distinguishes between formal and informal communication. Formal communication is usually standardized and is distributed in an organized way according to the formally established communication channels, while informal communication is referred to as sending rumors that tend to be spread by word-of-mouth to spontaneously established contacts.

Formal communication can be unforced, interpersonal, verbal and nonverbal. There are interpersonal communication and communication within a group, as well as the mass communication that is achieved through mass media, such as the press, magazines, radio, television and internet.

In business, there are also informal communication channels through which rumors and speculations about possible events are spread. Rumors usually occur due to lack of objective information that leads to uncertainty, so people tend to explain the situation with their speculative assumptions.

Both oral and written types of communication are of crucial importance in business operations.

Oral Business Communication

Business communication is a special form of communication and it refers to information transfer through different communication channels so that certain business activities could be performed. It is a skill that involves interaction between business partners. Communication skills require the following communication values: flexibility, respect for interlocutor's personality and teamwork. It also means that "basic rules and conventions in terms of content, order and interrelationship must be obeyed, and moral norms should be fulfilled" [4].

Business communication is based on ethics and cooperative culture as well. Business moral consists of moral norms that are applied in business relationships, and some of them that are of special importance are: mutual respect, keeping promises, honesty, responsibility, punctuality, respecting mutual interests and obeying the good customs. Business culture has been defined as an attitude toward people and as an attitude toward each segments of business as well [5].

Oral or personal business communication is the oldest but the most simple form of communication which takes the central position in business relations. Face to face

communication is irreplaceable because it helps to exchange and complement the information, and adapt it to a newly-created situation.

Oral business communication ensures that:

➢ business partners are in the same place at the same time,

➢ business partners are in the position to give and receive information necessary to perform certain tasks,

➢ business partners use standard language in order to understand each other,

➢ business partners can influence decision making with their authoritative attitude and the way of communication,

➢ business partners can get an overall impression of the given situation by following the nonverbal communication.

Although written communication leaves a trace in business activities, oral communication is very important for the profession of engineers, especially during the time of scientific and technical revolution. Even though, pedagogical thesaurus of engineering has been adjusted by reason of new terms usually found in English language, oral business communication requires significant preparation. The ordinary use of "technical language" is growing at presence, but nonetheless, it is necessary to first think about what to say and to avoid detailed and unnecessarily long conversations, making sure that the speech is clear, concise and understandable. Improvisation is excluded, and the conversational culture refers to both speaking and listening.

Besides verbal communication, nonverbal forms such as gesticulation, facial expression, body movements, intonation and look, are also significant as far as the oral communication is concerned. Certain gestures and face expressions are usually standardized among different cultures. Nevertheless, in Bulgarian culture nodding your head means "no", and shaking your head means "yes", while in Serbian culture and many other cultures as well, it means the opposite. In Chinese culture, sticking the tongue out expresses surprise, keeping your eyes wide open expresses anger, scratching your ears and cheeks expresses joy, and clapping your hands expresses bad luck or disappointment.

Serbian communicologists believe that body gestures represent the means of expression that show emotional state and characteristics of a person. Body gestures may express the feeling of superiority, friendship, animosity and arrogance. "The first contact is established with a glimpse, and the basic impression is created by taking into consideration the facial expressions that contribute to better understanding. Therefore, friendly and smiling faces are far more attractive than scowling faces. Friendly faces show that the person is eager to understand and support other people, and face expressions suggest agreement or disagreement, understanding or misunderstanding. A scowl is a gesture that expresses a bad mood, misunderstanding, a doubt or disagreement [6].

"A look, that is an eye contact, is the most powerful means of nonverbal communication. The look discovers the personality. If you look your interlocutor in the eyes during the communication, you will indicate respect and readiness to continue a conversation. The aim of the eye contact is to approve and support the conversation. Pleasure, surprise, and anger can be seen in the eyes." [7]. Avoiding eye contact with interlocutor is considered a sign of disrespect or bad education.

Arm gestures and nonverbal expressions must be in a harmonious relationship in which nodding encourages the interlocutor because, as Markovic says, "looking, listening, moving, using gesticulation and mime sends messages to the interlocutor and emits positive signals with the whole body" [8].

Engineers accomplish their business activities during the meetings, presentations and conferences.

a) Business meeting

Business meeting [9] is a gathering of business partners who lead a conversation with the aim of achieving cooperation [10]. Meeting are of significant importance for performing business, especially for engineers, which has been shown by statistics according to which employees spend more than 50% of their working time on various business gatherings.

Three types of meetings mostly mentioned in business communication are: *formal, informal and non-formal gatherings* [11].

The most important thing, as far as the meetings are concerned, is to arrive on time, therefore it is important to know the time it starts and the time it ends as well, so that all the participants can schedule their time [12]. *Formal meetings* are conversations in which the influence on business relationships needs to be made with regard to common business ideas, possible negotiations and agreements. Engineers attend them to make consultations mostly.

There are three different phases in conducting oral business meetings – to prepare, to call and to run the meeting. The final result of the meeting depends on good preparations. To prepare the meeting means to define the problems, to gather information about people who are going to participate in a discussion, and to provide time schedule which depends on the content and the number of participants. A secretary usually calls the meeting. Business conversation is the basis of every communication, and during the meetings, the following stages can be noticed: introduction, informing, argumentation, interlocutors' reactions, coordinating opinions and decision making [13].

The meeting is introduced by the person appointed and he must pay attention to the content of his introduction in terms of exchanging information by using communicative skills and interpretive elements. Language competence and expertise are mandatory – language competence provides two-way communication and eliminates ambiguity and confusion, while expertise refers to presenting argumentative information [14].

Duration of talking time should be in accordance with the discussion content, and participants should stick to the topic until the end without giving up on possible negotiations and agreements. Elementary humor, brief anecdotes and jokes are allowed. Coordinating opinions is a very significant moment, so it is important to make good estimation of decision making and negotiating the business.

Business Meeting Model:

Preparation consists of creating a database and making a concept. It is always conditioned by the topic of discussion and can be changed according to business partners and current conditions. A detailed information plan should be prepared and possible answers as well.

Preparation also includes providing a meeting room, technical equipment (a computer and projector), copies of material, records of previous meetings and refresher drinks.

To welcome guests is of crucial importance for gaining confidence. A host should be standing when receiving the guests. If the host is a woman, it would be enough to just stand up, but if the host is a man, he should receive his partners at the table, beside the table or moving toward them. As far as the acquaintance is concerned, it is important to remember the names and the titles, to exchange visit cards, and to greet the attenders.

Food serving is appropriate only when having informal conversations about the current situations, establishing closer relations or exchanging jokes.

When it comes to entanglement, it is the time to compromise. It is important to choose the right option, be patient, and manipulate time.

Asking questions. Questions are usually prepared in advance, but they could also be improvised as a result of that discussion. It is good to take into consideration the moment of surprise.

Active listening. It is the moment to analyze and notice all the elements related to business partners, including a nonverbal communication.

Decision making. The most important phase in business conversation preceded by comparison of opinions in relation to the starting point. There might be a two-way decision – a deal about common interests and additional cooperation, or disagreement and cessation of cooperation for some particular time.

Departure or saying "good bye" to the business partner. It is of crucial importance to save dignity, even in the case of misunderstanding.

Informal meetings

Meetings are organized within a company, at the level of individual sectors where daily, weekly or monthly duties are planned. Consultations are the most frequent form of these conversations. Informal meetings may happen even between different companies that can be reached at any occasion. Informal meetings can be arranged in advance or improvised.

Non-formal gatherings

Non-formal gathering is a common way of business gatherings with the aim of getting acquainted with partners, or examining the offers. They include business lunches or dinners, but also include promotions, trips, exhibitions or theatres [15]. Such gatherings usually take place at some sporting or cultural events, but office parties and other social events are important as well.

Presentations

Presentation is a specific type of an activity that requires various kinds of speeches for the purpose of introducing and explaining certain ideas and actions in front of the public in textual, graphic and audio form. The word "presentation" is of Latin origin and refers to lecturing, demonstrating and presenting. It is also a form of advertising.

As a form of oral business communication, presentation is a very complex activity that requires long-lasting and thorough preparation since the audience that is being addressed "judges not only what has been said, but also the way it has been said" [16].

Presentation is a special type of communication. Some people have a natural attitude for communication, while other people feel uncomfortable when presenting their opinions, especially when addressing a large group of people.

A presenter needs to be calm, concentrated and liable during the presentation, completely familiar with the materials he is presenting, and he should determine the methods and prepare additional means in advance.

The process of preparation consists of defining the topic, defining the objectives, time schedule, the place it is going to be held, and the number of participants.

Both structure and form arise from objectives. Structure determines the duration of the presentation, no matter if it is going to be held in one or more days, and it also determines the duration time of each elaboration. Each elaboration needs to be precise, neither to long nor boring, but compendious and persuasive while using defined terms. Assertions might take the form of monologue, dialogue or be the combination of both.

The place to hold the presentation depends on the number of participants. The acoustics of the hall and seating arrangement must be taken into consideration. Earlier, the ideas had been presented by using panel boards, fliers, newspapers, overhead projectors, slide projector, and today engineers present ideas by using computers and a special program – PowerPoint. Wireless microphones are used by presenters for free movement. If the presenter uses unfamiliar an unfamiliar space, he is supposed to arrive a few days earlier so as to be able to prepare the presentation, as well as to check audio and visual means.

For the purpose of effective presentation, the presenter should meet the audience before starting. It is achieved with collecting information about the number of participants, their educational profile, foreknowledge about the certain topic, the age structure, the principles of delegation and their objectives for attending the presentation.

Engineers usually prepare concise but effective presentations consisting of the most elementary information with clearly defined goals.

Conferences

A conference is a meeting organized according to the content. The word is of Latin origin and means council, agreement and meeting with the aim of conferring. The conference is organized by an institution that invites colleagues, experts and representatives of a vocational organizations engaged in similar activities. Organizing a conference is very hard and that is why organizations engage specialized agencies to perform the activity. If the institution is organizing the conference itself, it is necessary to form a team of experts and to appoint a main coordinator. Organizing a conference is a very expensive task as well. It includes: organizing transportation of the participants, gathering the participants, accommodating the participants, running the conference and performing accompanying activities.

Considering that the conference is the presentation of the host at the same time, the way of organizing the technical part is also very important. Providing technical means – wireless microphones, computers, projectors, video beams, is a special segment. Special attention should be paid to foreign participants, especially in terms of providing simultaneous or translation of any other kind.

The practice has shown that the conferences are followed by cultural activities such as a tour around culture-historical monuments, going to the theatre or going for dinner.

Press-conferences should also be taken into consideration. Journalists should be invited to the conference opening and closing, and should be provided with possibility to follow the course of events and to make a conversation with some of the participants

Modern technical means invented by engineers in electronics enable organizing audio conferences, teleconferences and videoconferences.

• Audio conference is a form of oral business communication that uses radio as a medium. A journalist/speaker in studio makes connection between two or more business partners and communicates with them. It is very important to occasionally include the audience, in other words the listeners.

• Teleconference is the result of technical development, and is it is particularly popular in The United States and West European countries. In comparison to classical conference, teleconference has the advantage to eliminate complicated organization in terms of traveling, looking for accommodation for the participants, organizing cultural events. When organizing teleconference, certain rules should be obeyed: elaboration should be clear and concise, the pauses between speakers should be longer and special attention should be paid to

interpretation and word coordination, as well as the interpreter's engagement if there are foreign participants.

- Videoconference makes possible face-to-face communication among the participants that are found on different locations. At the same time, participants can use information, speech, images, graphics or animations.

- Oral business communication also includes telephone communication and skype communication.

- Telephone communication provides fast and effective information exchange. It also has an influence on forming opinion about certain institution, and therefore requires good preparation.

- Skype communication, that is a communication via web cams, makes possible for interlocutors to see each other, and therefore it are necessary to pay attention to some details. Attention should be paid to face expressions and the space in which the communication is going to be performed, which will contribute to better overall impression.

At the end, it should not be neglected that business bon ton, starting from manners such as addressing, greeting, etiquette, relation with foreigners and dressing code, is very significant for oral business communication.

Conclusion

Business meetings are important for managing and performing business processes. The system of rules that are acquired voluntarily and that determine the structure of the participants is of crucial importance for oral business communication. Certain rules are distinctive for certain cultures, but lately they have gone through various transformations and in contemporary business relations the tendency for communication assimilation has become noticeable.

In order to achieve successful oral business communication and to have good effects, initiator should:

➢ determine the time and place of the meeting, determine duration of the participants' discussion and provide information to other participants,

➢ emphasize the reasons for calling the meeting and inform participants about duration time

➢ organize transportation for the participants who do not have it or who commute long distance, and make sure they arrive on time.

➢ prepare for the meeting from different aspects – from reading records from previous meetings to preparing answers and alternatives as well,

➢ ask participant to obey seating arrangement, welcome and thank them, and let a chairperson run the meeting,

➢ arrive on time, respect other participants' time, not interrupt the participants/Balkan mentality/when something is not going the way he planned it,

➢ respect colleagues and their requirements, especially if they have certain remarks,

➢ provide recording secretary charged with keeping the minutes and

➢ stick to ethic norms and business bon ton.

Similar rules are applied to presentation, but yet it requires additional effort in terms of organizing and providing technical means for its realization. Presentation needs to be interesting, dynamic, coherent and not overwhelmed with redundant information, text or images.

In oral business communication, one should always rely on his charisma, and bring in his personality.

References:

[1] Jovanovic/Bojkov, 2011:574).

[2] Research conducted by the National Association of Colleges and Employers (2000) has shown top 10 characteristics that employers expect from applicants to have. Communicative skills take the first place, motivation, that is the initiative, takes the second place, and team working skills take the third place.

[3] Deletic, S./Pejcic, M. (2008): *Poslovne komunikacije*, Nis: Faculty of Electronic engineering.

[4] Himes, D. (1980): *Etnografija komunikacije*, Belgrade: BIGZ, 82.

[5] Deletic, S./Pejcic, M. (2008): *Poslovne komunikacije*, Nis: Faculty of Electronic engineering, 78.

[6] Markovic, M. (2003): *Poslovna komunikacija*, Belgrade: Clio, 63.

[7] Bazic, M. (2005): *Vestina komuniciranja*, Belgrade, 70.

[8] Markovic, M. (2003): *Poslovna komunikacija*, Belgrade: Clio, 57.

[9] According to the European Statistical Bureau Eurostat, business meetings are divided into congresses (forum, collegiums, seminar, symposium), public conferences, government conferences, conventions, team building, and other (testing candidates, promotional campaign, congregations…)

[10] Deletic, S./Pejcic, M. (2008): *Poslovne komunikacije*, Nis: Faculty of Electronic engineering, 82.

[11] Markovic, M. (2003): *Poslovna komunikacija*, Belgrade: Clio, 80.

[12] Most Americans would tolerate a 5-minute delay, while for Mexicans half an hour delay means to come on time. Russians are also late, as well as Chinese. In Israel, coming on time is the basic sign of courtesy, and the sign of seriousness as well. Similar situation is found in West European countries.

[13] Nikolic, Z. (2005): *Komunikacione tehnologije*, Krusevac: ICIM+, 52.

[14] Researches have shown that images are really important as far as the informing is concerned – things that are seen are better remembered than things that are heard.

[15] Nis Film Festival (Serb. Filmski susreti) is held in August every year, and it is not unusual to invite business partners to talk about current situations and future plans in a relaxed atmosphere. It is a very similar situation in Leskovac where The Leskovac Grill Festival (Serb. Rostiljijada) – a unique manifestation of making barbecue is organized every September.

[16] Researches have shown that the content of what has been said has the least of influence on basic impression. The interpretation of promoters is more important – their rhetoric, movement, appearance, clothes and shoes.

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