Communicating for Results

Chapter Learning Objectives

- Understand and appropriately use the ***signals of credibility*** that allow participation in the decision-making process.
- Understand and appropriately use ***principles of argument and evidence*** as they are used to persuade business audiences.
- Understand the ***impact of narrative, empathy, and image*** to move audiences beyond anticipated decision parameters.

Presenting Ideas in the Decision Process

Because business decisions are made through a process of communication, decision effectiveness can depend on the communication techniques that drive them: credibility, persuasiveness and the change-inducing behaviors that are sometimes called leadership communication or eloquence. Whether explaining a product to a potential client, updating your boss on the status of your project, or motivating a team to reach its quality targets, the ability to sway people with words will have an impact on a person's career success (Peoples, 1992 4-6; Porter, 2001)

Effective participation in a business's decision-making process requires competence in all elements of the organization's rhetorical culture. An individual must meet the relationship standards that define who ought to be involved in the process, base the decision on the information deemed most useful, and demonstrate fluency with the communication methods that are used for decision-making.

An electronic rather that Aristotelian model of rhetorical effectiveness….

> Your Professionalism is On the Line
>
> "Let us in no way minimize the opportunity, or the danger, involved. The thirty minutes an executive spends on his feet formally presenting his latest project to corporate superiors are simply and absolutely the most important thirty minutes of that or any other managerial season."
>
> –Walter Kiechel III, Fortune magazine's board of editors (Wilcox, 1985)

Entering the Conversation: Establishing Credibility

The basic principles of persuasion have been studied for centuries, but their successful application within a real organization depends on being part of the decision-making conversation in the first place. Those who have the ability to "judge, in a given situation, whether they should be communicating at all and, if so, to what constituency" are the organizational members with the ability to influence opinions and actions (Argenti & Forman, 1998).

Influence is a two-way relationship, and simply wanting to communicate with others is only one half of it. Someone else must be willing to listen. Status as a member of the decision-making community is earned, and making a bid to enter is an important step in the process. Within an organization, a good communicator is sometimes the one who has learned how to "go through channels" to talk to the right people. In other cases, success depends on "making an end run" around barriers to get buy-in from those who support the idea. Even a member of the team might not always have a "say" in any given decision until he or she demonstrates just the right relationship with the rest of the group.

Deciding to Communicate

Strategic communication thus begins with the choices of whether to communicate at all, when to communicate, and whom to address. In many cases a communication task is assigned as part of normal work responsibilities, which has been treated in previous chapters in terms of the productive transmission of information. There are other occasions, though, when the decision to communicate is a difficult one. Should the brand new person on the team propose her idea to the old timers? Should the sales director request a raise now, or after the end of the quarter? Does the desk clerk want to become part of the hotel's decision-making process? or simply to have some input on the question of scheduling?

A multitude of factors play a role in the decision to communicate, including the likelihood of success, the difficulty of the communication task, the communication skills of the individual, the information available, and the impact of a message on organizational relationships or stakeholder interests. Sometimes, with some analysis of the situation, a communicator will decide to wait until conditions for success have improved.

Targeting the Message: Selecting an Audience

Usually, decision-making communication is directed toward an audience that already perceives the communicator to be a part of the decision-making process. In most business environments, individuals will have some automatic right to participate on the basis of the *status* that comes from job title or position within the organization.

- Generally the right to communicate follows the organizational chain of command: everyone has the right (and the responsibility) to speak to an immediate supervisor or subordinate.
- Peers are presumed to have the right to speak on decisions that affect each other: a team member can expect to be included in decisions that affect the group's defined work responsibilities.

> Theresa, a new sales person, notices there is an error on her commission slip. She thinks about complaining to the marketing director about the "working conditions" but realizes that she would be violating the chain of command. Instead, she stops by her supervisor's desk, inquiring politely about the proper procedure for initiating a correction.

With time, individuals are given access to more decision-making situations as a result of their *expertise* in relevant areas.

- Once others recognize a person's competence in a technical area, general good sense, or sensitivity to relationships, he or she will generally be invited to join various decision-making teams, task forces, and committees.

- The frustration, of course, is that getting invited is to appear to have something to contribute, which involves demonstrating good contributions! A strategic contribution to the decision-making process that demonstrates expertise can thus open a door for future participation.

> After several months of employment, Theresa realizes that commission errors occur whenever she makes a sale on the last day of the month. Although the corrections are made, she thinks her experience indicates a problem that should be resolved. Furthermore, she thinks with a little investigation, she'll be able to come up with some kind of explanation. She decides to stop by the accounting office to ask whether the same pattern of errors is occurring for all salespeople.

Over time, access to the decision-making process begins to reflect the network of a person's past *relationships.* Business organizations vary with respect to how widely dispersed the typical decision-making process is, but those who are participating in a decision are generally quite well aware of who else is involved. Entering into the decision-making process can often come about by having developed relationships with others who are already involved.

- The classic line, "it's not what you know but who you know," reflects the importance of relationships in the business world. Access to various decision-making processes often comes from developing a network of personal relationships across the organization.
- Often, communicating with multiple audiences is an important strategy in a decision-making process. It is generally not appropriate to involve those who are not already legitimate decision-makers, but advocates will sometimes send copies of a message to stakeholders, supervisors or allies in order to emphasize and gain support for a position.

> In conversations with her supervisor and the accounting department over the next few weeks, Theresa discovers that the month-end figures for sales are cut off at midday to allow the sales manager time to create district reports, throwing commissions into the following month. Theresa sends a summary of the issue to the marketing director, with copies to her supervisor and the payroll supervisor. Both supervisors are pleased with her analysis, and they keep her in mind for a position on any task forces that might come up in the future.

Method of Communication: Selecting a Channel

Decisions can be made with virtually any kind of communication, but organizations will usually feel only a few of them are effective or acceptable. At some organizations, for instance, it is considered inappropriate to make decisions "behind closed doors" in oral conversation. Other companies, on the other hand, find the formality of written decision-making procedures to be a waste of time and detrimental to social relationships.

A communication method is often chosen for its effectiveness in transmitting the information, but the complexity of a decision-making situation can make the choice difficult. Communicators find that they must choose between the speed of email, the permanence of writing, or the feedback of conversation.

- A face-to-face meeting might come to decision with relative ease, but give the appearance that a small group of “insiders” made it alone.
- A long memo offers a way to carefully organize the arguments and evidence for a proposal, but the busy staff won’t have time to read it.
- E-mail allows a project’s international team members to stay involved in the problem solving, but misunderstandings and frustrations mount when conversations range across multiple time zones.

Timing the Communication: Selecting the Moment

The timing of the communication, whatever its format, can be crucial to the decision-making process. Timing can be thought of in several senses, and all of them will have an impact on how the communicator and the message are received:

Timeliness of the response If there has been a request for the communication, the businesslike style (Chapter Four) would require a communicator to meet any deadlines, of course. Late reports, presentations or emails are always taken as a sign of poor communication. In decision-making situations, the expectation can be complicated by the degree to which the decision itself is perceived to be critical. In most cases, business decisions need to be made quickly—or at least those involved in the decision will have a sense of urgency if there is action being delayed for the outcome. On the other hand, decisions based on incomplete, incorrect, or unconfirmed data can be disastrous.

Time constrains of the audience Timing can also be understood in terms of the best time for a particular audience to receive a particular message.

- A staffer might send bad news in an email late on Friday afternoon in the hope that others will care less about the information.
- A sales team might provide its information early so that its performance overshadows that of teams who wait until the regular meeting.
- An advocate might simply wait until the boss is in a good mood before proposing an idea.

The entire range of competing demands on a person’s time, energy, attention, should be taken into account, along with his or her personality and mood.

Appropriately Framing the Message

Regardless of the audience, channel or timing of a message, the willingness of the audience to listen to it will depend on its assessment that the speaker or writer understands the fundamental goals of the group. This is not to say that a group would never listen to an “outsider’s” perspective, but such a viewpoint will always come from someone who, by definition, is not part of the group’s decision-making process. For the individual who wants to be recognized as a legitimate and contributing member of the group, it becomes important to frame the message in a way that is consistent with the fundamental rhetorical norms of the culture.

Any proposal or idea in a business environment will thus be more acceptable to its potential business audiences when it is framed as something that exhibits organizational sensitivity, reciprocity, objectivity, and an orientation toward action. Getting just the right “tone” for a message can be challenging (Beaufort, 1999), and multiple versions of a message will sometimes be created before finding a way to communicate it so that the audience perceives it to be "our" message—a message that accurately reflects the organization's understanding of itself.

> Deb Ahrens-Vandahaar comments
>
> In sales, we talk about understanding an audience...same as what pr people sometimes call spin. It's not a bad thing, just a way of describing how an idea has to be made acceptable to multiple audiences; my boss, my trainers, my clients, and the managers that work for my clients who will be the students in the course.

Reputation and Presentation

Once the communicator has determine who to approach and what to say, the success of the bid to "join" the decision-making conversation will depend a great deal on the way in which the message is delivered. Our society puts a great emphasis on listening equally to every speaker, and many managers will pride themselves on an "open door policy" that fosters "open" communication with everyone in the organization. The reality is that some doors are more open than others. The effectiveness of a communicator is often determined by whether or not another person is willing to listen.

In the first few seconds of any communication, the audience will assess the personal credibility of the communicator, making a judgment as to whether the person is someone "worth" listening to. Competence, sincerity, and affinity—the elements of "professional" credibility—must be communicated rapidly in order to get the decision-makers' doors opened wide enough to allow communication to begin.

The three seconds it takes to gain the boss's attention might have more to do with the decision outcome than the content of the conversation you have. Some truly remarkable communicators are described as having "charisma", but nearly anyone has the tools to create a personal style that marks him or her as "someone worth listening to."

Claiming a Reputation: Projecting Competence

Much of a person's reputation depends on what he or she has previously done, of course, and there is no quick way to make amends for past incompetence. On the other hand, people do listen more readily to those who look and sound competent—those who project self-confidence in what they have to say.

> Present yourself authoritatively, and unless you provide evidence that is patently incomplete, illogical or false, you are more likely to be believed (Cialdini).

Virtually any speaker will say "more practice" is the key to self-confidence as well as a more polished and effective presentation. In the business organization, the stakes are high. A poorly prepared presentation is not just an uncomfortable experience, but also a lost sale, an angry boss or an insulted client. Effective communication requires attention to details that simply cannot be left until the last minute (Pearce, 1995). Furthermore, when the situation is a chance meeting in an elevator, an impromptu project update during a meeting, or a conversation spread out over eighteen holes on a golf course, there is little time to get warmed up and comfortable. The effective communicator must display confidence immediately and continuously.

Delivery

The real difficulty, of course, does not lie in understanding what professional delivery looks like; especially for the new employee, the mystery is in how to achieve the "polish." An important first step, of course, is to actually ***be*** competent, enthusiastic and friendly. However, even very competent people become apprehensive and tongue-tied in front of an audience. A few "tricks of the trade" can help you to become comfortable, and the good news is that most professionals actually find their presentations to be an enjoyable part of the job ("Happy to Be Here," 1999).

1. **Get a good night's sleep and eat a real breakfas**t. Many of the symptoms of "stage fright" are really symptoms of fatigue and low blood sugar. Don't sabotage your presentation by partying too late the night before.
2. **Arrive early**. Get acquainted with the surroundings and get acquainted with audience members as they come into the room. Talking to a group of new friends is usually much more comfortable than talking to strangers.
3. **Take command of the event**. Know how you want to start the presentation, and start on time. "A punctual start sends the message that you're taking your audience seriously" (Wareham, 2001), and you will feel more assertive if you take on the role of "host" at the event.
4. **Follow your plan**. You might have a brainstorm just before the event, and the ideas might be, in fact, absolutely brilliant. Make a few notes, and present them at the next event when you've had time to organize, illustrate and polish them up.
5. **Relax and be happy**. Nothing says confidence and enthusiasm like a big fat grin. Count your blessings and enjoy your moment as the center of attention. The audience thinks you're an expert, whether you feel like one or not

Prepare the content.

People are never comfortable talking about concepts they don't understand. A potential audience's reaction to data can't be gauged until the data is gathered. A speech can't be practiced until it is written. The obvious tactic for effective communication is thus to become familiar with the concepts, gather the data, and prepare the language to talk about whatever topics the business requires. In reality, new issues come up in the middle of the conversation, key data is not available, and it seems altogether silly to write a script for "the next time I see the boss in the elevator." The point is not to simply "write a speech" and practice it; the real aim of the effective communicator is to prepare him or herself to speak confidently on a topic.

For each area of responsibility, product, or issue that must be prepared, begin with a general outline of the ideas that must be communicated.

- A sales person might create a list of features and benefits for each product in his line.
- A project manager can expect to be quizzed regularly on the project's goals, status, and estimated completion date.
- Before a strategic retreat, a department head can list each of her objectives for the preceding year.

Decide the single point to be made on each element, and begin gathering data, examples, and visuals to support it. The preparation process might begin with a file folder to throw clippings into, a spreadsheet that guides data gathering, or a note page on a PDA. These records will serve as the basis for more formal documents and presentations that might be created later, but in the meantime they create a mosaic of knowledge that will come across to others as a comprehensive grasp of the topic.

An effective communicator chooses the topics about which she wants to be prepared to speak competently, and then finds the material to support her position. She doesn't wait until she's asked to speak before "doing research" on a topic.

Rehearse the lines.

When the "speech" is just notes a manager has scribbled on a copy of his or her appraisal objectives, the notion of rehearsing might seem odd, but this is the moment when a good communicator begins to think, "what will I say when I'm asked about…." Not only do the ideas begin to take shape as clear, coherent sentences, but holes in the logic or evidence will begin to show up. There is still time—before that fateful conversation in the elevator—to get the ideas in order, gather up the supporting data, and prepare a self-confident opening to introduce the idea.

- ***Say*** the actual words *out loud*, ideally in a space—the shower or a car perhaps—where this won't seem foolish or be interrupted. Fluency can't develop without moving the tongue, and it's the fluency that signals competence with the topic.
- ***Plan the answers*** to anticipated questions, objections or explanations. Even if the questions are never asked, the sense of confidence that comes from knowing the subject matter comprehensively and completely will come across.
- ***Get feedback***. The point is not just to practice the words in order not to stumble over them later (although that is important!). An equally important goal is to determine how those words are perceived by others, and a trusted co-worker who fully understands the goals, content, audience and context of the upcoming communication can provide valuable advice.

The single most powerful feedback tool you can use is videotape (Decker & Denney, 1992). Your own perceptions are your best proof of ineffectiveness and your best motivator for improvement.

- ***Make corrections***. Don't practice the same ineffective lines multiple times! If colleagues are confused by the explanation of a particular chart or graph, don't simply plan to do a better job of explaining the graph in the big meeting; improve the graph the spreadsheet is generating!

Project confidence

Your capability is judged very literally in terms of how healthy and successful you appear to be . You want to seem normal and natural (Toogood, 1996 111), but well dressed, well rested and healthy. These are hard things to fake, and it pays in the business world to get in the habit of eating a healthy diet, getting proper exercise, and sleeping a solid eight hours every night. Not only will you live a longer and happier life, you'll have a more successful career and make more money.

On Stage

When making a proposal in a formal setting, take advantage of the opportunity to create a dynamic and powerful stage presence.

Avoid speaking from behind a lectern; stand at the room's focal point, facing the audience at about a 45-degree angle. Set up the equipment so that you are never turning away from the audience to see the monitor or screen, speaking in the dark, or standing in the glare of a projection bulb.

Move any furniture that lies between you and your audience, and use your whole body to interact with the audience, express your feelings, and emphasize the points you want to drive home. Stand a foot or two away from any furniture so you can comfortably gesture (Decker & Denney, 1992; Toogood, 1996 125), and move from your 45 degree position into a full face "power position" when you want to make the important point (Mucciolo, 1998).

Make direct, conversational eye contact—about 5 seconds—with each person in the room (Decker & Denney, 1992), ideally while moving around the room as well. Use a remote so that you can move around even when using projection equipment ("You Have," 1999 a10), and try to maintain a normal conversational distance with as many audience members as you can.

Perceived Relationship: Demonstrating Affinity

Many doors are opened because there is a previous relationship between the prospective communicator and the other decision-makers involved. In a business setting, there are few communications between total strangers, and previous reputation is often the factor that allows the exchange to happen at all.

- A financial analyst sends a letter of introduction before making a call to a prospective client. The elegant letterhead, professional brochure, and conservative language convey stability and success. When the analyst calls, she is able to make an appointment for a presentation later in the week.
- At their weekly mixer, a downtown business owner listens to another complain about his new landscape contractor, pointing to the distinctive flowerpots the company uses. Noticing the same flowerpot at a retailing expo the following month, the owner walks right past the display.
- Despite her hectic schedule, a production foreman stops to listen when a team leader asks for a minute of her time. Her policy is to discuss issues only during scheduled weekly talks, but she makes an exception. Based on their last few interactions, she knows he'll get right to an important and well-supported point.

The purchasing agent is more likely to listen to a proposal from a previous vendor than a salesperson making a "cold" call. The analyst who wants to get a hearing at the upcoming budget meetings might make a point of having lunch at the same time the controller does, hoping to strike up a conversation and develop a better "working relationship."

> “If you have to walk into a final presentation needing to win the business based only on the one meeting, you’re probably in serious trouble.” –Mark Goldstein, Chief Marketing Officer, Fallon Worldwide (Zielinski, 2000)

Likeability: Creating a Dynamic Presence

Whether the relationship is personal or professional, an audience will listen more carefully to someone who is *likeable.* Even in the most formal business meeting, people are drawn to those who are friendly, relaxed and responsive. The advice to a communicator who wants to be perceived as dynamic is simple to describe (although not always as easy to perform):

- ***Be yourself.*** The person who is willing to engage with others conveys honesty in the relationship that is perceived favorably. This authenticity is a “way of being” as a person, rather than something you “do” as a communicator (Pearce, 1995), and it sometimes takes maturity in a job to get to know who you really are.

- ***Get acquainted.*** The likeable person is one who is not perceived as a stranger, and the goal is project a sense of knowing the audience. An effective communicator will take the time to anticipate how others think and what they will make of the message, not merely in a vague general way, but in terms of how the proposal will actually affect the way they do business on a day-to-day basis.
- ***Invite conversation***. Likable people don’t talk *at* an audience, even in the most formal of presentations. They *invite* an audience to listen to their ideas by providing a sense of safety, value, freedom, and openness to the speaking situation (Foss & Foss, 2003 5). The excellent communicator is one who listens to the questions, comments and non-verbals of his or her hearers, including both the questions that are actually asked and the “hidden” questions that are left unsaid.

Developing Personal Rapport: Revealing Sincerity

No decision can ever be based strictly on the “facts” because the validity of the facts themselves depends on a judgment of how well the speaker seems to understand and their interpretation. A listener must further judge whether the facts have been selected and interpreted according to the values he or she deems important. Especially when it comes to formal proposals and presentations, business audiences are “up to their eyeballs in information” and looking for ways to quickly determine whether they should place any faith in what someone has to say (Simmons, 2001). Audiences are not merely assessing the information presented by a communicator, but “probing, consciously or unconsciously, for someone to trust” (Pearce, 1995 2). The audience wants to know that the speaker sincerely values its own interests before it can trust the facts or interpretations he or she offers.

It’s been said that sincerity is one of the easiest things to fake. Yes, you can learn to project credibility, confidence and empathy, although we have names for people who sue those skills at another’s’ expense: hustlers, panderers, demagogues. On the other hand, honesty, vision and moral integrity can brand you as a leader without your ever saying a word.

Personal Ethics

If any information is available, an audience's judgment of a speaker's values and sincerity will begin with an assessment of personal values, character and ethics. To a large extent, ethics are judged on the basis of similarity; someone is ethical when she makes decisions in the same way as the person doing the judging. In the business community, a few commonly held values of ethical conduct do apply: contractual truthfulness, financial honesty, and organizational equity. Those who have a reputation for acting otherwise will find themselves hard pressed to gain an audience with someone who considers him or herself to be ethical.

Sincerity: The Intimate Speaking Style

Most people believe that they can't be too careful when dealing with strangers, and they are wary when listening to someone they don't already know. On the other hand, human beings are notoriously willing to believe those who give the signals of familiarity.

- Direct (but not too lengthy) eye contact is the universal signal that a human is "willing to talk" to another.
- Within a business environment, a firm handshake similarly signals a willingness to communicate as a peer.
- Other signals of familiarly and openness in the relationship include a relaxed posture, positioning the body to face the other, and, of course, a smile.

Words can be used to convey familiarity with the audience and a concern for its interests, but it is the non-verbal cues that will convey most of the information audiences will use to judge another (Mehrabian). Audiences judge any discrepancy between a person's words and body movements to denote dishonesty. In particular, signals of unwillingness to speak openly—slouching so the body isn't facing the audience, keeping ones hands out of sight, and fidgeting—are all interpreted as signs of dishonesty.

Making the Case: Argument and Evidence

One the information is selected that will support appropriate appeals, it must be structured for maximum impact on the decision. During decision-making, the typical context-information-action format takes on even more importance. The stakes are higher, conflicting interests and values are being addressed, and everyone needs to be assured that decision outcome will be acceptable.

Under these conditions, managers take special care to see that the decision-making process follows its ideal structure [, and the elements include features to assure the audience that

- The context is explicitly defined to demonstrate the relevance of the communication to the managerial decision to be made.
- The information presented in support of the ideas proposed meets the group's highest standards for acceptable evidence and reasoning.
- The implementation steps include sufficient detail to determine whether an idea is "actionable."

In decision making communication, information is very seldom presented as "pure" data. Instead, the organizational role of the communicator is to add value to the information by coming to a conclusion, advocating a position, or recommending a course of action. Clarity, brevity and professionalism will characterize decision-making communication, just as it does any kind of information transfer, but the communication is somewhat more complex and often requires careful attention to the strategic use of structural elements.

The structure of the main body of information will reflect the type of decision-making that is being conducted. Typically, some sort of analysis is being done, but a specific communication might be performing just one particular part of a larger process.

- An operating manager's monthly budget explanations might be organized to identify the variances that must be analyzed in order of their monetary significance.
- A sales person's proposal could arrange material to highlight a product's features and benefits to a potential customer.

Whatever the organizational structure, each point should be connected to what the audience already knows, believes, or does. In an oral presentation, a speaker can use immediate feedback from the audience to insure that everyone involved in the discussion understands each point before proceeding to the next. Writers should take care to provide sufficient detail, either in the text or as supplemental material, that any reader can understand not merely the information presented but its relationship to the decision issues that are being addressed.

Regardless of the overall structure of points, information is presented so that it specifically supports appeals that are being made, typically in a series of claims, with evidence provided to support each one, and an explanation of how the point supports the appeal.

Positioning the Argument: Audience Analysis

Having the right to be a part of the decision-making process is only the first step, of course. As a communicator begins to develop a proposal or put ideas into words, he or she will quickly realize there is a wide choice of things that could be said. Success depends on picking the right things to say to this particular audience under these specific conditions.

Western philosophers have spent hundreds of years trying to identify the "good reasons" that any audience will find persuasive. They have found instead that every community, each audience, and even single individuals define for themselves the elements of persuasive communication.

Understanding the Audience and Situation

Strategic communication is particularly mindful of the content of a message, recognizing that audiences are induced to believe or comply for some complicated psychological and social reasons, as well as on the quality of the objective evidence and logic of the analysis. In fact, most effective communicators will find that their own decision-making process has been based on a series of cognitive steps that are not at all appropriate for justifying the same outcome to other people.

Recognizing that her increased insurance costs, increasing gas prices, and high mileage have made her company car too expensive to drive, Sarah decides to request a new vehicle. She crafts a memo to her manager that mentions none of these issues, however, but points out the positive image a new vehicle will project while she is driving clients to the company's job sites.

Developing Appeals

Appeals are the reasons that a communicator gives or the unspoken reasons an audience understands, which induce behavior or create shared meaning.

- ***Persuasive*** appeals are the direct attempts a speaker makes to motivate, for instance an appeal to fear, self-interest, or common benefit.
- ***Invitational*** appeals present reasons to change along with assurances that mutual understanding are respect are primary and that the speaker is also willing to change(Foss & Foss, 2003).
- ***Implicit*** appeals can include non verbal and even unintended communication, as when a dark, dingy conference room convinces the recruited college graduate that she does not want a job with the organization.

Appeals should be planned to take advantage of the audience's knowledge, belief and values, as well as the speaker's available evidence and the relationships between speaker and audience. The answers to some key questions can guide the creation of appeals:

- What specific action do I want my audience to take at the close of this presentation?
- What is the benefit to my audience?
- What are the needs, objections or concerns of each of the people who will be here?
- What is the evidence I am using to make or support this decision?
- How will the evidence be understood or interpreted by the audience?

Purpose and Context: The Problem Statement

The biggest difference between business presentations and the kind of "speech giving" or "paper writing" that most students have done is the overall purposefulness of the business environment. Meetings, presentations and report writing are expensive uses of professional time and should reflect considerable care in their preparation. When the outcome of the decision-making process depends on their accuracy and thorough development, these communication events become even more important.

"...most employees will complain about a problem or a needed change, but few will actually make the effort to express their idea constructively in a well thought-out piece of writing….who can write internal proposals will have the coveted "competitive advantage, " since this kind of writing demonstrates initiative, enthusiasm, and excellent communication skills"(Reave, 2002 10)

The Business Purpose

The key element of in presenting a case to management is its relevance to the overall decision-making process. No matter how charming the speaker or how interesting the statistics, a presentation will mean nothing to an audience that can't figure out how it applies those figures to the decision it is trying to make.

The introduction must clearly explain how the presentation or memo or email relates to the overall decision-making process. Ideally, it will be possible to clearly identify the stage of decision-making that is being conducted and the role this particular communication plays in the process.

The Business Context

The introductory section should also indicate how the material relates to decisions or decision making processes being conducted in other parts of the organization. If several departments are working on aspects of the same problem, their reports should never be written as though they are working as disconnected entities. The connections between the various parts of the process should be made clear.

Don't worry that you will "bore" an audience with a message that is too explicit. Management expects you to be explicit as a signal that *you* know what is going on.

While explaining the organizational relationships involved, the effective communicator will point out relevant differences in perception, understanding or values and identify decision issues that remain important at this point in the on-going conversation.

The Business Content

Finally, the introductory context should explain how the information or analysis being communicated is responsive to management's requests. Both the audience's needs and the speaker or writer's point of view, position with respect to any choices, or interests in the outcome should be clarified at the start of the communication.

Presenting the Claim: Evidence and Explanation

State the Claim

Any appeal is based on one or more "truth" claims, which create a chain of logic that can lead the group toward a decision.

> Jarrod, a marketing analyst, supports a proposal for an expansion of the product line by *appealing* to management's desire for profitability. He will make a series of *claims* to support the potential for profit: 1) the brand has a high value to customers, 2) new production is possible with current facilities, and 3) brand extensions lie within the current market segment.

An important part of professional persuasiveness is the clarity with each claim is stated. Management audiences, in particular, are using the communication of various positions as a means of testing the validity of each one. The point of the exercise is to determine whether the claims are true or not, and until the claim is clearly understood, the process cannot continue. Participants in the decision-making process are obligated to clarify the various claims, but this does not imply that they personally believe there can be no argument about its validity. In fact, it is usually because there is some question about the truth of a "truth" claim that a decision still has to be made.

Present Evidence

A business audience will always expect an advocate to "prove his point" but there are many forms of proof. While the expectation is that every point in a message can be supported with evidence, there are often multiple types and pieces of evidence and multiple interpretations of that evidence to choose from. Further, the evidence can be used to support a wide variety of appeals. It will be the persuasive communicator's job to select those that are most likely to convince his or her audience.

Show the Conclusion

Although there is an old saying that the facts should "speak for themselves," the reality is that every listener can hear the evidence "say" something different. If a communicator wants others to understand and interpret the facts in the same way she does, each fact must be presented in an interpretive context:

1. Be sure that everyone is clear on the data itself. Restate it, point to it, or demonstrate it, as needed, to insure that everyone is in agreement on the facts: "Dell Computers is the fastest growing personal computer manufacturer in the industry."
2. Provide the reasoning that you are using to draw a conclusion. When a group makes a decision, each person must understand how the logic of the decision flows: "Growth can be interpreted as a sign of happy customers, so Dell must be doing something to make customers happy."
3. Clearly state the conclusion you are reaching. Don't assume that listeners will "read your mind" and understand the point you are trying to make: "We ought to emulate Dell's customer service practices to improve our own growth."

> "State the points of the discussion out loud...and don't force senior execs to draw their own conclusions. Being coy, shy or indirect often leads to a lack of closure with senior managers. They have neither the time nor the inclination to decipher your subtle innuendoes or wad through the subtext of your data and anecdotes for the truth of what you are saying....The facts don't 'speak for themselves'—especially to senior managers. They expect you [to] explain what the facts mean...Don't let their lofty positions prevent you from telling them what to think and do—that's the kind of directness they respect" (Cook, 1998 30)

Implementing the Decision: The Action Step

The action step can be quite lengthy in decision-making communication. No business decision is complete without a plan for its effective implementation, and the communications involved in planning a course of action can be quite detailed. If the communication is directed toward the completion of a single stage of the decision-making process, the action step will clearly state how the information is to be used.

> An auditor closes her memo with a summary of the discrepancies that had been identified in the team's meeting and indicates that work remains to be done on two of the items.

The Language of Leadership: Telling the Story

The notion of "eloquence" has an old-fashioned ring to it; many people think of 18th century orators or impassioned political speakers and assume that eloquence is a thing of the past. Impassioned oratory was certainly the kind of communication used by political and social leaders during the 18th and 19th centuries, but eloquence does not refer to just one kind of leadership communication. Leaders are those who can use communication to move their communities "outside the box" toward ways of thinking that go beyond their "normal" decision-making processes.

Eloquence thus refers to an ability to move people with words—to create a vision they can see, describe a path they can follow, tell a story they can feel, and give words to ideas the audience cannot yet express. Anyone who expects to be successful in an organization needs the ability to participate in the decision-making processes of an organization. It is the eloquent communicator who is able to lead the organization beyond those decision-making processes. This is not merely language that convinces followers to act; it is the expression that creates a narrative that "followers tell themselves when they try to discover what they are thinking"(Weick, 1980 18).

The Occasions for Leadership

Leadership communication is often particularly important during some of the more formal speaking occasions of the business community, but eloquence in a meeting or an "elevator speech" can also have a dramatic impact on an individual's career.

> "In the past, only a few individuals in the executive suite needed to understand the big picture. In the new organization, everyone is a vision-keeper. All members of the team must deeply and fundamentally understand the context of what they are doing if they are to make fast, effective decisions." (Lindstrom, P20)

Ceremonies of Business

The speech of praise is a common event in the business world. Promotions, retirements, are building dedications are all occasions to honor those who have served the organization and to encourage others to emulate their good deeds. The speeches at these events are often mundane recitations of a person's resume, boring to the audience and useless to the organization. The eloquent speaker, however, can create a compelling vision of the future.

- Reaffirm the organizational values, highlighting the ways in which this person has conformed to them and providing a means for others to do the same.
- Provide an organizational identity, especially on those occasions when the group is in a state of flux.
- Renew the community's sense of self, reflecting on its shared values and offering a vision of the adjustments that are required in the context.

The result is a speech that uses the praise of one individual to renew a sense of shared values within the community and invokes those values to support future actions. (Werner, 2003)

Seizing the Moment

Although an important presentation obviously requires careful planning and preparation, the real leader is prepared to speak eloquently at a moment's notice. A project manager gets onto an elevator with the Vice President. A team leader finds she is sharing a cigarette break with the Budget Director. An auditor bumps into the client's CFO on the morning commute. At any of these moments, the simple "how's it going?" becomes an opportunity to speak quickly—but eloquently—about the job.

The elements of eloquence remain the same: tell a story, build personal rapport, and provide a vision. That project manager who has a great story about the client's reaction to a new innovation can smile broadly, provide a SHORT version of the story, and leave the VP with a vision of an energetic team burying the competition with a cool new product.

Business commentator Michael Schrage claims that "five minutes is more than enough time to get even the most harried manager or employee engaged in an initiative that matters." The eloquent individual will not stumble about trying to think of something to say, or ramble on about irrelevant detail. Instead, a clear vision, provided with self-confidence and clarity, will make a memorable impression and mark the speaker as a leader.

Elements of Eloquence

Over the past fifty years—since the advent of television, movies and radio talk shows—eloquence has changed dramatically. This century's great orators, John F. Kennedy and Martin Luther King, Jr., were probably the last of their generation. The new look of eloquence is personified in the press conferences and radio addresses of Ronald Reagan or Bill Clinton, and the lucid television of Walter Cronkhite or Norman Schwarzkopf [Decker, 1992 #2559; Hart, n.d. #2541; Jameson, 1988 #2288]. Whether the tool is a formal pulpit, a video camera or an overhead projector, the business speaker who wants to be a leader needs to develop this more contemporary eloquence, which is characterized by ***narrative***, ***self-disclosure*** and ***visual image*** (Jamieson, 1998).

Narrative: Telling a Story

Electronic media did not create the use of narrative. Stories were the first kind of public speaking, and the hunger for narrative is a basic human instinct (Ganzel, 1999). Rather, the "rational" philosophies have ignored storytelling in the interest of analytical, scientific thinking (Haynes, 1989).

Practical experience demonstrates that audiences are swayed by stories (Boje, 1991; Denning, 2001; Endicott, 1999 29; Gabriel, 2000; Toogood, 1996 17; West & Anthony, 2000) and they remember information better when it's presented in a narrative (Giuliano, 2000).

Elements of a Story

Stories are more than simply entertainment, however; they represent a fundamental reasoning pattern. A "good" story is not merely enjoyable, but on that listeners judge to be *plausible*, *relevant* to the point being made, and grounded in *values* the listeners embrace (Fisher, 1987).

Plausibility

A persuasive story requires coherence—an internal logic that explains why the various characters might have done what they did—and fidelity—a sense that the story is "about" the real world in which the audience could see this all happening (Fisher, 1987). The details of the narrative must be internally consistent, consistent with facts the listeners already know, including not merely the facts of the immediate situation, but with what is "known" to be true by members of the culture(Ralston, Kirkwood, & Burant, 2003).

Not all stories are factually true, of course. The greatest stories have always been the myths and fantasies that allow human imagination to soar to new heights. Nevertheless, in the business world, the careless use of "made up" stories can have negative repercussions. Consumers were incensed, for instance, when they discovered that the humble pair of farmers selling Bartles & James was a fiction of the Gallo Corporation's advertising agency (Ganzel, 1999). Personal stories that are inspiring within the workplace might be embarrassing or incoherent when presented to audiences outside the organization. Good storytellers are careful to base their narratives in the experiences of real people, and while some embellishment and embroidery is inevitable, the power of the story is in its underlying *truthfulness.*

A convincing story, furthermore, provides sufficient detail to support its claim (Ralston et al., 2003). A story that includes enough details for the audience to "get" the point before the speaker has to explaining it will find the story more compelling. On the other hand, too much detail will overwhelm a story. A good story simplifies the issues. Large quantities of logical, substantive evidence can create information overload, and the story is a way to translate all that abstract data into concrete, local experiences the audience can truly understand on a personal level (Pearce, 1995).

The eloquent storyteller is one who is helping an audience to understand things in a new way, so the point of story telling is to create a shared context so that speaker and audience understand the issues the same way. Even thought the characters or situation are new to the audience, by the time the story is told, it should be able to understand *why* the characters acted the way they did, *why* they made the decisions they did, and *why* they should behave in the way the speaker suggests (Pearce, 1995 72).

Research shows that once jurors have heard a story that "makes sense" they will accept and remember only those facts that "fit" the story (Giuliano, 2000).

Relevance

Business stories are structured in the same way every other business document is structured. A beginning identifies the audience, the purpose of the occasion, summarizes the speaker's purpose and acknowledges any organizational resistance to it. The middle of the story provides the reasons or steps toward the vision; the ending summarizes the path and clarifies the specific action required of all members of the audience (Pearce, 1995 35-37). While stories to entertain can often be taking in multiple ways, and ambiguity is their entertaining element, leadership stories are most compelling when they lead to a single, clear conclusion (Ralston et al., 2003).

At least in Euro-American cultures, a narrative is expected to center around a single climactic episode, to be told chronologically, and to demonstrate the psychological development of its characters (Lipman, 1999). Something "happens" to someone in the story, which leads to a consequence of some kind. The single thesis of the presentation should be theme of any story (Toogood, 1996 44-45). In general, humor is not the point of a business story, even though humor can be useful for gaining and keeping an audience's attention (Hendricks, Holliday, Mobley, & Steinbrecher, 1996 82).

On the other hand, the audience usually is the point of the story, although a story is sometimes told from the perspective of some stakeholder who otherwise lacks voice (e.g. the customer, the environment). The tale will begin from the perspective of some sort of hero, or teller, or main character whose description of the world the audience is being asked to share (Hendricks et al., 1996), not with an introduction of the speaker, a history of the project, or other lead-in material. Start with the point, the overview, or the "big picture" in 45 seconds or less (Toogood, 1996 34). Too many characters can create confusion for listeners (Lipman, 1999 38), but the key point is that relevance is judged in terms of relevance to the audience. A storyteller might give the sequence of events going on in the project or explain the situation or issue from his or her own personal perspective, but the focus is not on telling a personal story. It is the organization's story and a tool for helping the organizational members to form a new story for themselves (Lipman, 1999 113).

In many ways, the point of the story is the presentation's action step. The end of the story is not, in a business context, merely a moral. The story offers a vision and illuminates the path to get to it. By the end of the story, your audience must be able to see not only where it is going, but also to clearly see the first step on the journey.

Values

Stories are a way to establish common ground between speaker and audience (Ganzel, 1999). The story is the way in which human beings call up their own emotional responses, giving moral and social value to information. Facts and figures abound in the business environment, so it is the eloquent communicator who can *translate* those figures into a story—turning vision into action, numbers into ideas, and presented facts into a probable future (Toogood, 1996 26). The story is a translation of one person's perception into a form that is so real, so compelling that others can believe the story and come to share the same perception (Ganzel, 1999). A good story is thus one that reflects the storytellers values, beliefs, identity, emotional outlook (Ralston et al., 2003).

Perhaps even more compelling, the story is a method of creating an authentic relationship between speaker and audience. Storytelling is an artform that requires the physical presence of both artist and audience (Lipman, 1999). Unlike the oratorical focus on powerful words and logic that seem to speak to a "universal" audience, the eloquence of narrative depends on the form and energy of an interaction that connects *this* speaker with *this* audience at *this* moment in time. However many times you've told a story before, you must still "show up" to tell it again to the audience in the room.

That relationship, furthermore, is a better one as a result of good storytelling. A good story makes people feel good. This is not to say that every story is pleasant or has a happy ending, but especially when the goal is organizational development, it is a positive to make an audience feel curious, hopeful and enthusiastic, but not guilty or fearful. Negative emotions can be persuasive, but they heighten individualistic behaviors (Todo, 1980). Especially in an organizational setting, it is important to offer a story that draws on socially cohesive feelings.

Becoming a Storyteller

Although every community comes to expect and appreciate a certain storytelling style, there is no one "right" way to tell a story (Lipman, 1999). Each storyteller has a unique way to tell his or her own story, and developing that sense of personal honesty is an equally important part of eloquence. Nevertheless, a storytelling event can be enhanced with attention to its oral and aural characteristics.

The principles of telling a memorable story have been known for millennia (Eric A. Havelock, 1968; Eric A. Havelock, 1986; Haynes, 1989; Ong, 1982).

- The structure is **additive**. Ideas are never laid out in the nice neat lists of a written document, but added to each other one at a time so that the links remain clear in the audiences mind.
- The plot of a memorable story is **agonistic**. There are good guys and bad guys, and of course, the audience should be able to identify with the good guys.
- Memorable oral presentations are **rhythmic**. Repeated phrases, rhymes, and regular pauses and silence will all serve to make an idea memorable to the listener's ear—and thus to the listener's mind (Hendricks et al., 1996 83; Lipman, 1999 33).
- The structure of a story is often **circular**, following the logic of human discovery rather than the "ordered" structure of an outline.
- The best story is one that is as rich as possible, with concrete information and vivid details (Haynes, 1989).

Self Disclosure: Up Close and Personal

Human beings rely on a complex and nearly invisible set of cues to decide whether to trust each other. Using multiple non-verbal cues, in particular, our minds engage an implicit "gatekeeper" function to gauge another's trustworthiness in a complex process of social cognition (Decker & Denney, 1992 54). The result is that audiences are swayed by the personal rapport that a speaker builds with those non-verbal movements, gestures, expressions and actions (Toogood, 1996 17).

It takes an audience only *8 seconds* to decide whether a speaker is worth listening to (Toogood, 1996 96), and an eloquent speaker uses that first few moments wisely—this is not time to waste with a recitation of your name, department and the name of your project! Furthermore, a climate of openness, trust and persuasiveness is built with a consistent sense of personal connection with the audience. The contemporary eloquence of self-disclosure is a significant shift from the more traditional speaker-centered model in which the orator has full responsibility for persuading the audience. An eloquent speaker now recognizes the presentation event as one in which he or she will *invite* audience members to transform their understanding of reality into one that is shared with the speaker (Foss & Foss, 2003)

The idea is to go with the flow; the eloquent business speaker is not “in charge” of a lecture or a sermon; but participating in a discussion. It’s the leader’s job to carry on a conversation with the audience, telling his or her own story (Simmons, 2001), but equally ready to listen to the audience’s story. That might be a literal listening session, but an “experienced speaker learns to sense audience response even without verbal comments or questions” (Lindstrom, 1994 9).

Imagery: Communicating a Vision

Perhaps most obviously, contemporary eloquence is characterized by a new reliance on visual images. Business speakers have always been more likely than political and academic speakers to tell stories or rely on personal rapport for persuasiveness, and presentation software is common now in business (Nunberg, 1999) and increasingly expected by audiences raised in a media era (Hill, 2000).

The use of images in contemporary multi-media presentations is an important tool, but visualization includes far more showing the audience a series of picture. The most memorable thing about an eloquent leader is the ability to communicate his or her own internal vision to an audience—the ability to “see” a future that doesn’t yet exist.

The first step in communicating a vision, of course, is to have a vision. This might mean spending some time doing the detailed planning it takes to be able to explain a new program. A leader might need to spend creative time simply thinking about where she would like the business to go. Often, the eloquent leader is the speaker who can put into words the shared vision a group of people is already beginning to discover.

Next, the eloquent speaker strives for a presentation that helps the audience visualize for themselves, rather than simply showing the audience an illustration. This can mean providing images, graphs or charts as presentation slides, but it also means telling stories and developing a personal rapport to entice the audience into joining you in creative “re-visioning.”

The eloquent leader will use language to create a vision, using a rich vocabulary, precise language to allow people to “know their environment and themselves more fully and see more ways to cope” (Weick, 1980 21). Concrete language is important, but the eloquent speaker will also try to go beyond words, engaging as many senses as possible, perhaps passing something around for the audience to touch or smell (Tymson, 2001).

Of course, any good story paints a picture. A major element of good storytelling is the creation of visual images (Lipman, 1999). Visual images are an important aspect of contemporary eloquence and a basic tool of the presentation software and projection equipment you will be using in business presentations, but don’t neglect to paint word pictures as well. Be specific about who was there, what they did, and the details of what happened (Simmons, 2001).

Finally, recognize that leadership communication is a risky business. The ability to see clearly is not always comfortable, and an audience might be frightened by a vision of the future. “Words can capture nuance and detail, but sometimes what they capture is so stark and frightening that people flee from precision toward approximation, simplicity, and comfort” (Weick, 1980 21). The eloquent leader uses words to paint a picture of reality, but the leader who provides his or her followers with a clear picture of reality is also using language to produce strong emotions (Weick, 1980 21). There is risk in eloquence, but the speaker who uses the language of leadership will never be able to get lost in the crowd of ordinary workers.

Visual Identity and Credibility

The primary function of many business visuals is to create a corporate or product identity that will leave the audience with a visual memory of the speaker’s organization. The slide background thus “can make or break your presentation.” Rather than using the templates that came with the software, customized backgrounds say “my identity is important and I am different from my competitors,” a particularly crucial element in a sales presentation(Wilder, 1999 30). Generally, most large companies will have a fully designed visual “look” including logo, letterhead, and even slide templates. Use the corporate colors, design elements and prepared materials!

Your verbal and physical image should correspond, of course, with the visual images. In most business situations, you will be introduced as an employee of the company, with specific business responsibilities. You will be wearing the business suit uniform, and your posture and demeanor will convey a “professional” identity. Your visual images should support the image cues and corporate symbols with a clean, crisp, action-focused design.

The Jack Daniels logo is used to create a striking title series, then as a consistent background for the content slides that follow.

Presenting a refutation

Often a persuader will be offering evidence to refute the claims and evidence of another advocate. In this situation it is especially important that an audience understand which issue your own claim is addressing. Many decision-making groups have failed to reach good outcomes because the conflicting claims or evidence are not clearly articulated.

1. First, restate the claim made by your opponent that you wish to refute: “Joe claims that a lack of coursework is evidence of lack of knowledge about a topic.”
2. Next, clarify the relationship between the point and the opponent’s position: “Joe’s concludes that trainers can’t train a topic simply because they have no formal training.”
3. Explain how you will refute the point, noting whether you are addressing a point of fact, an alternative interpretation or a question of value. “I’m going to show that Joe’s interpretation of the training/knowledge relationship is flawed.”
4. Present the refutation you have promised, providing alternative evidence, better logic, or a value criteria that ought to be considered: “A study of award winning teachers found that most (65%) had never taken a course in the class for which they won the award.”
5. Finally, explain the importance of your point in terms of the overall decision: “Since we know that at least in some circumstances, great teaching can happen without prior course work, we can’t buy Joe’s logic. Therefore, we can’ agree that the cause of the poor teaching problem must be due to a lack of training.”

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