

### 3. EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION AND RELEVANCE OF SOFT SKILLS

*Ambika.G.Mallya\**

Effective communication is critical for the success of any organization. The success of an individual depends on his ability to communicate effectively in any given scenario, be it a formal or an informal one. Ability to communicate effectively increases the overall productivity. With good communication skills one can coordinate work, develop relationships and promote a sense of well being. Without effective communication, people misunderstand each other and the information is misinterpreted, leading to all sorts of chaos. Haven't we heard repeatedly of people complaining that they had not known about the time or agenda of a meeting, in spite of the information being circulated well in advance? Poor communication is the culprit here. For oral communication to be effective, a second communication skill, listening is also required. It is high time everyone is to be given at least the basic training so that each one of us can understand the implication and importance of communication skills.

How do we over come this hurdle?

#### EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION

First, you need to know the fundamentals of the communication process.

Communication is the process of sending and receiving verbal and non-verbal messages.

It becomes Effective communication only

when the message is understood properly.

The next pertinent question would be what is meant by 'soft skills'? What role does it play in effective communication?

#### SOFT SKILLS

"Soft skills" and "people skills" are terms used to describe a cluster of personal qualities, habits, values, attitudes and social graces that make someone an effective communicator. Each of us do possesses soft skills in varying degrees.

Soft skills are things like oral and written communication, organization, teamwork, creativity, time management and work ethics; to name a few important ones.

It is this myriad of soft skills that underlie and over pin the more measurable 'hard skills' and which are by far the more difficult to acquire. Soft skills need careful nurturing to flourish and it doesn't happen overnight and requires loads of patience, perseverance and determination on the part of the person who would like to excel; be it one's professional or personal front. Many of these soft skills are interdependent. That is, as one skill is developed, one or more of the other skills are also honed, increasing one's productivity.

Soft skills complement the hard skills and these two if acquired, make for a lethal combination of paving the highway to success.

*\*Faculty, Dept: Humanities Srinivas Institute of Technology Valachil, Mangalore.  
Ambika\_mallya@rediffmail.com*

Arthur Miller believes that it is not what you say, but how you say it, is important, because personality always wins the day. Hence, it becomes essential that soft skills are the much-needed skill set, which should be carefully nurtured, especially so if you aspire to give yourself a cutting edge over others, armed with a commitment and dedication to become a lifelong learner, constantly updating and revising skills, with an eye to meet the needs of the changing global scenario.

## INTERPERSONAL COMMUNICATION

Inter personal communication is the term applied to the verbal and non-verbal interactions that occur in both one-on-one and small group settings, which the social scientists refer to as "communication climate"—the quality of relationship that exist within an organization. A positive communication climate is the key to success. Listening, speaking and non-verbal communication are the primary elements of a person's "people skills", but writing can also reflect them.

Interpersonal skills exhibit themselves in the style with which people write, speak and behave.

## TEAM SPIRIT

Interpersonal skills are important in helping one become a better team player and much depends on how well you gel as a team member, contributing your best. This is one major aspect; potential employers seek in their employees.

Think about how we communicate. Many a times we realize the way we say something can mean the exact opposite of what we intended. The culprit here is our failing to understand the complexity of interpersonal communication. There is no doubt that the moment a child is born it starts communicating. Nevertheless, as we grow the equations change and it becomes imperative that we learn to chart our communication strategies. Good communication skills have always been

important. Today they have become more vital given the advances in technology and globalization.

## ETHICS

Ethics is the corner stone of personality and as the saying goes, 'Honesty is the best policy'. Being ethical is the capacity of an individual to do the right thing in any given circumstances. In simple words, it is your integrity that is the most valued of all soft skills, since it is not a thing, which is taught, but inherited. Moreover, at the end of the day it pays to have an ethical employee.

Advances in technology as the internet, e-mail, voice mail, faxes and other wireless devices have revolutionized the ways people communicate, zeroing towards a seamless communication network. This increased use of new technology not only demands effective and efficient communication skills, both on the part of the communicator and the communicatee, but also reveals his/her communication skills—writing skills in every email, verbal skills in audio conferences and with the advent of video conferencing one's entire persona is showcased.

Globalization has brought about culturally diverse elements into communication, thereby increasing communication challenges. Understanding the subtleties of cross-cultural communication—different backgrounds, personalities and perceptions—help you to become a more effective communicator.

Deborah Tannins, author of "Talking from Nine to Five" states: "Each individual has a unique style, influenced by a personal history of many influences such as geographic region, ethnicity, class, sexual orientation, occupation, religion, and age—as well as a unique personality and spirit."

## RELEVANCE OF SOFT SKILLS

Written communication, oral communication, non-verbal communication,

and listening skills figure prominently and ironically are the much-neglected ones. Peter F. Drucker emphatically believes that for communication to be effective there has to be both information and meaning. Moreover, meaning requires communication.

## WRITTEN COMMUNICATION

Writing reveals one's ability to think clearly and to use language effectively. Informative writing presents information, not opinions. Its purpose is to inform, educate, and is therefore written with maximum objectivity. The A, B, C of effective writing are Accuracy, Brevity and Clarity.

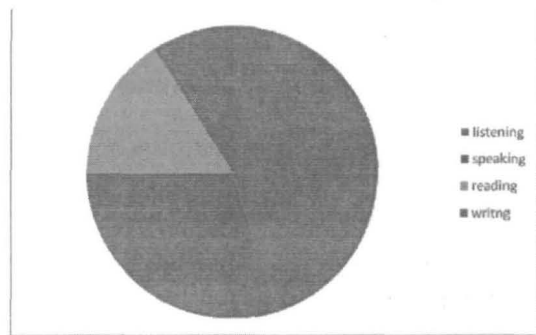
Short, simple words are the building blocks of effective written communication. Write to express—not to impress. Concrete words create a vivid picture.

Memos, letters, Emails, Faxes, Notices, circular, Reports, newsletters, proposals, Research papers, Bulletins, Brochures, manuals and in-house journals are examples of written communication.

Write to express and not to impress is the new slogan of the day in addition to the management mantra of the 'kiss' principle, i.e. 'keep it short and simple.'

## ORAL COMMUNICATION

In human interaction, oral communication is used more than written communication. The study of human behavior shows that 70% of our waking time is spent communicating. Out of the total time spent thus, normally 45% relates to listening, 30% to speaking, 16% to reading and 9% to writing; hence, 75% of our time we spend in listening and speaking. It is, therefore, of prime importance that people learn to use this time to their best advantage for creating and sustaining good relationship through their ability to listen and speak effectively. A pie chart demonstrates this most effectively.



Herta A. Murphy and Herbert W. Hildebrandt wrote in their book *Effective Business Communications*, "Knowing the content of the functional areas of business is important, but to give life to those ideas—in meetings or in solo presentations—demands an effective oral presentation."

The delivery of effective oral presentations requires a speaker to consider his or her vocal pitch, rate, and volume, along with other facets of presentation like gestures, posture, facial expressions, eye contact, clothes and accessories, which are also key factors in developing good oral communication skills, making you a good speaker, giving a terrific presentation. An effective oral communication skill helps students to improve on their academic performance, their personal and professional relationships, increases their employment options and professional competence.

Oral forms of communication are; face-to-face conversations, telephone conversations, meetings, seminars, conferences, dictations, instructions, presentations, negotiations, group discussions, interviews (employment, press), video conferences, voice conferences, and with the advent of video conferencing, long distance, face-to-face communication has become a reality.

In the current, tech savvy scenario, power point presentations are most popular, where a good amount of information can be communicated with the aid of visual projections

of facts, statistical data, figures, diagrams, pictures and numerical data easily presentable, enhancing the quality of presentations. A presentation is essentially an oral face-to-face communication, a live performance, where your non-verbal communication skills while speaking, influence the audience.

As Peter Ustinov rightly puts it, 'communication is the art of being understood.'

## NON-VERBAL COMMUNICATION

Non-verbal communication is a message without words. It is the study of body movements, gestures, facial expressions, etc., as a means of communication.

In our moments of excitement, we tend to convey our feelings of joy, love, anger, and hatred by smiling, patting, shouting, frowning, or using other wordless clues.

Such non-verbal expressions come spontaneously. Hence, the verbal and the non-verbal together form the total meaning of the message communicated.

We cannot not communicate. What it means is that even if one does not want to communicate he cannot stop communicating. In other words, we also communicate non-verbally –without words. Kinesics, oculusics, proxemics, chronemics, haptics, olfactics and silence; are all different components of non-verbal communication.

**Kinesics: body language** - Body language can change the meaning of an oral message

It has different components like personal appearance (clothes & accessories), gesture, posture and facial expressions.

Physical appearances influence first impressions. A person's credibility may be judged by his or her appearance. Gestures are what we do with our hands in order to communicate adding an emphasis and interest to oral communication. Posture is the position adopted by the body and speaks of your

confidence level. Facial expressions are a set of powerful non-verbal symbols we use to convey all sorts of expressions. A face is a mobile billboard.

### **Oculusics: eye language**

Is the use of the eyes in a communication setting. Eye contact forms the centerpiece of facial symbols in face-to-face interactions. Eyes are particularly interesting because they have a voluntary and an involuntary dimension. With your eye contact you communicate friendliness, respect, interest etc. Here culture plays a major role. Cultures differ in the importance they attach to eye contact. Children are so sensitive to the power of eye contact that if we do not look at them while talking they gently turn our face towards theirs. Speakers who manage to maintain eye contact are the most powerful among oral communicators.

### **Proxemics: language of space**

The amount of space you use indicates your importance. There are four distinct zones of space, each meaning something different.

Demarcation of zones:

- i) public zone : 10-15 ft.
- ii) Social zone : 4-10 ft.
- iii) Friendly zone: 1.5-4 ft.
- iv) Intimate zone:

a) Near intimate sphere: up to 6".

b) Distant intimate sphere: 6-18".

Different types of communication occur at different distances.

### **Chronemics: time language**

Punctuality relays a non-verbal message. A person who is always on time is perceived as well organized. The importance of time varies among cultures. The importance we attach to time depends on our culture, our status, and

the specific situation

### ***Haptics: language of touch.***

Touch is one of the non-verbal symbols that is heavily influenced by culture. A culture determines who may touch whom, which part of the body, when and for how long. It is one of the very first non-verbal symbols a newborn baby is exposed to.

### ***Olfactics: language of smell /odor***

Olfactics is the sense of smell and it provides information on grooming aspects. Your taste, age, values, group identification, heritage conformity and sexuality. Many a times it could prove a distraction and, or, form a negative impression. For example—too much of perfume, smelling of sweat, bad breath, etc to name a few.

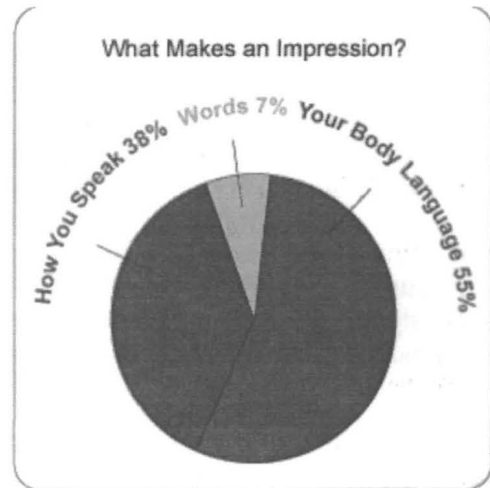
### ***Silence: the heart of Satyagraha***

This is undoubtedly the most intriguing among all non-verbal symbols. Silence can be a powerful weapon. It is a useful tool in negotiations and its ability to project contradictory meaning is what makes it special. The ability to keep your mouth shut for long duration during a conversation, it is said, makes the Japanese excellent negotiators.

All communication has a non-verbal component.

It is very true that people's actions speak louder than their words. Words are relatively easy to control, body language, especially facial expressions and vocal characteristics are not. In fact, people use non-verbal signals to support and clarify verbal communication, blending it with speech to carry part of the message through. It is more reliable, more efficient, and more effective than verbal communication. Body language and tone of voice reveal a lot about a person's emotions and attitudes. Physical appearance and style contribute to one's identity. Non-verbal skills can be improved by paying more attention to cues, both yours

and those of others. A simple pie chart can illustrate this quite effectively.



## **LISTENING SKILLS**

Listening is the mother of all skills. Listening is an important skill and is quite similar to reading, as it involves the reception and decoding of messages from the other person. No communication process is complete without listening.

Listening is defined as a process of receiving, interpreting and reacting to a message received from the speaker. It is a cognitive act. However, hearing is solely dependent on the ears, which is a physical act.

Hearing and listening are not the same. Hearing is merely the vibration of sound waves on the eardrums followed by the firing of electro-chemical impulses in the brain. (except physically impaired persons) whereas Listening requires voluntary attention and then making sense of what is heard. It requires a conscious effort to interpret the sounds, grasp the meaning of the words, and react to the message.

With good listening skills, you can understand things better, build excellent rapport, be a better team member, resolve



problems, answer questions, and be more productive.

According to Stephen Covey's expression in 'The Seven Habits of Highly Effective people', 'Empathic listener' is a good listener. Covey summarizes Habit 5 or empathetic listening – "first seek to understand, then to be understood"; which is the key life skill. Listening, the mother of all speaking. Listening is hard work. We are unaware of the depth of listening we need in order to communicate well. The world has shrunk; our knowledge has expanded tremendously; but our general awareness in using this most common channel of effective communication has not grown.

Good listening gives you an edge and increases your impact when you speak. Different situations call for different listening skills. Wilson Mizner emphatically believes that, a good listener is not only popular everywhere, but after a while he gets to know something.

### Dos

Listen attentively  
Concentrate on what people say  
Dress appropriately  
Choose safe topics for conversation  
Keep an open mind  
Use the YOU viewpoint  
Accept the facts  
Involve yourself mentally  
Be aware of your non-verbal signals.  
Give a constructive feed back

### Don't

Monopolize  
Behave aggressively  
Jump to conclusions  
Criticize negatively  
Interrupt  
Negative attitude  
Talk loudly  
Sloppy behavior

We have come across too many young men / women, and indeed older people, who are unable to do justice to their talents because of their disability in communicating effectively. Many academically brilliant people have an Achilles' heel—a weakness—their communication strategies. They are unbeatable in their field of specialization but vulnerable

We need to master different types of listening to be effective in communication;

Appreciative listening: e.g.: music, comedy.

Empathetic listening: e.g.: psychiatrics—patients.

Comprehensive listening: e.g.: classroom—students.

Critical listening: when the purpose is to accept or reject critical listening is used.

e.g.: purchase, book review.

Active listening is listening attentively, concentrating on what the speaker has to communicate.

We can learn to project courtesy, confidence and a professional image by following and internalizing these simple ground rules.

when managing people. They achieve far less than what their knowledge and analytical skills warrant.

### WHY SHOULD ONE ACQUIRE SOFT SKILLS?

In other words, **Why are Communication**

## Skills Important and Necessary for Professionals?

The Importance of Soft Skills is sadly undermined in today's tech savvy scenario.

According to psychologist Daniel Coleman, a combination of competencies that contribute to a person's ability to manage him or herself and relate to other people-matters twice as much as IQ or technical skills in job success. Soft skills are not a replacement for hard / technical-skills. They are, as stated earlier, complementary and fuel the potential for effective performance in technically qualified / qualified people.

For many professions, the importance of soft skills is obvious - for example for a teacher what is better than to connect with her/ his students? A teacher, who is able to communicate well with students, can inspire them to learn and participate in class. We, as teachers should walk the talk by learning new techniques, excelling ourselves, so that our students look up to us. It is the need of the hour too, what with the explosion of knowledge on the 'net'. There is a real threat that if we do not, then we might become redundant and cease to exist.

For freshers—at the entry level-the situation is a tough one. In the current job market with highly qualified people vying with each other to land the coveted job, soft skills is a window to one's potential, it has become the only way to assess one's capabilities and to eliminate the less promising ones. Students from all streams should really make a sincere effort to learn these soft skills to enhance their 'employability'. The development of 'soft skills' in this market is important when there is intense competition for the available positions, has a lot to do with career opportunities and development, just as harder technical skills do.

For some people, these skills come naturally, while others need to work harder at them. . Soft skills training should be tailored to

take into account the experience, situation and personality of the target / learners. A training session should strike a right balance between theory on the one hand and practice and interaction on the other, to make it a sure success.

Many technical institutions have already initiated the soft skills sessions for their students from the first year itself .By the time they graduate they would have mastered it sufficiently to secure a job. These sessions also bridge the gap between the academia and industry, making the students market ready.

Soft skills training is about gaining a better understanding of the ways people think and behave and presenting yourself and your ideas in a way that will have the best impact. It also creates a welcome awareness as to the expectation of industry standards and the hard reality of life.

The softer aspects of one's job requirements can be broadly classified as 'soft skills'. The more soft skills that an individual exhibits, the greater and faster his career growth.

Soft Skills lend the 'final touch', the gloss of a finished product and enhances a person's overall effectiveness, catapulting him/her into the orbit of success. Now who wouldn't want that?

But, of course, it needs constant tending and unless it crystallizes into a habit-and interestingly, one of the meanings of the word habit is dress, without which we would not dream of going out - there is no help.

People often think that communication is easy. Nevertheless, contrary to popular belief communication is a messy, touch and go affair. Brian Tracy is of the opinion that 'communication is a skill that you can learn. It is like riding a bicycle or typing. If you are willing to work at it, you can rapidly improve the quality of every part of your life.'

In the recent years, several research

surveys conducted, repeatedly, have come out with the same result. When Employers were confronted with the question as to what skills they would want to see in their employees, soft skills such as good communication skills, interpersonal skills, ethics, a willingness to change / learn have topped the list. Technical knowledge or computer skills came second, compared to communication skills. Unfortunately, these skills are in short supply. More the reason to address it at the earliest, is a task that academicians should make haste with. Therefore, an individual who has this precious skill set handy is in great demand, improving his employability / career growth dramatically.

## REFERENCES

1. Bovee., et al, Business Communication Today, Pearson Education, VII Ed.
2. Charturvedi, P. D et al, Business Communication, Pearson Education, II Edition.
3. Krizan., et al, Business Communication, India Edition, VII Ed.
4. Lesikar, V .Raymond, et al, Basic Business Communication, Tata McGraw, X Edition.
5. Monipally, M. Mathukutty, Business Communication Strategies, Tata McGraw Edition.
6. Murphy, A .Herta, et al, Effective Business Communication, Tata McGraw, VII Edition.
7. Ober, Scot., Contemporary Business Communication, Indian Adaptation, V Ed.
8. Raman, Meenakshi. , et al, Technical Communication, Principles and Practice, Oxford University Press Edition.

