



THE 5 PILLARS OF BUSINESS COMMUNICATION

Professional communication, although based on universally accepted principles in the business world, varies in structure according to cultural environment. For example, Americans often start their speeches with an insightful joke; an approach that is not appropriate for Germanic, Chinese or Japanese audience, to name a few. In the same way, communication in the African environment, which is essentially based on an oral tradition of proverbs and images requires different codes depending on the audience, the situation or the subject. The choice of arguments will also depend on these same variables. In Africa speakers use proverbs to share knowledge, offer advice, teach, reinforce morals, make an argument, relieve interpersonal tensions, help in understanding, or to console or inspire others.

Employees need to know and understand what management expects of them, so that management can count on their enthusiastic support.

Better still, nobody likes to be dictatorially told what to do. We all prefer to act according to our own ideas, or according to the ideas of others to which we subscribe out of conviction, persuasion or trust in the person promoting these ideas. The function of communication is therefore not to dominate, but to inspire, so that men and women take part in the action, because persuasion is the only true intellectual approach to resolve critical situations.

Communication can be approached from many angles: written or unwritten, verbal or gestural, digital or traditional. Here, we choose to talk only about the stages of the professional or social communication process, from conception to delivery.

- *Understand your objective. Why are you communicating?*
- *Understand your audience. Who are you communicating with? What do they need to know?*
- *Plan what you want to say and how you will deliver it.*

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- Solicit feedback on how your message was received.

By doing this, you'll be able to craft a message that will be positively received by your audience.

1. A PURPOSE: Leaders who are explicit about what they want from their employees are more likely to get commitment and energy from their teams. Communication is only meaningful if it leads to action. It's about asking a group of individuals or an organization to understand in order to act effectively to achieve a well-understood goal. The sender must ask himself.

- *Why does he want to communicate?*
- *What type of audience and what do they need to know?*
- *What message does he want to get across?*
- *How can he get these messages across?*
- *How these messages will be received ?*

The goal must be compatible with the audience's abilities and in phase with their cultural values. Kwameh Nkrumah, in his speech in Addis Ababa on May 24 1963, called for the creation of a United States of Africa, an integrated economy independent from the Western and Eastern Superpowers.

Communicating enables us to share information and feelings, consult with others, express our needs and let others know what we expect of them and what they can expect of us.

2. PREPARATION: This depends on the subject, the nature of the audience and the timing. There can be no quality communication without preparation:



- **yourself:** posture, tone, voice, choice of words, objective
- **the subject:** data, facts, figures, references, possible questions
- **audience:** number, nature, areas of interest, culture, history
- **timing:** time, sequence, before or after whom?
- **logistics:** room, screen, microphones, layout

The length and depth of preparation depend on the complexity of the subject and the emotional state of the audience at the time of presentation. Leaders whose reputations have stood the test of time (Mandela, Senghor, Gandhi, Martin Luther King, Steve Jobs, Mother Theresa, Wangara Mathai...) have been role models for their contemporaries and followers.

3. CULTURAL DIMENSION: Beyond the social macro-culture, there is a generational, academic, sporting, musical, urban, modernist or traditionalist micro-culture in every group. Analyzing and understanding this dimension is all the more important as the choice of words. Wrong examples or references can sabotage the spirit of motivation or adherence to the message.



Professional communication is not an exercise in promoting potentially conflicting values such as religion, politics, sexual orientation, customs and beliefs. It's about appreciating and recognizing the diversity of individuals, and rallying them to a common cause despite their individual differences. Stigmatizing, scorning or denigrating can have devastating effects on the expected impact. There are many pitfalls of this kind, and many examples.

4. COHERENCE BETWEEN WORDS, BODY LANGUAGE AND AUDIENCE: This is the indicator of the message's relevance and impact on the audience. It has 3 simple characteristics:

- **Passion:** *This is an intense emotional state, mirroring the sincerity of the message and the self-confidence positively perceived by the audience.*
- **Persuasion:** *This is the positive influence based on relevant, sincere argumentation with no hidden agenda.*
- **Personalization:** *The audience must recognize itself in the message and perceive it as if it were being addressed individually. That's why it's so important to use culturally relevant examples, expressed in a courteous, respectful tone.*

5. SELF-ASSESSMENT: Feedback ensures that the message is understood by the individual or audience, and that the desired goal is achieved. This feedback can be given verbally or non-verbally during or after the presentation, enabling you to correct your communication for greater impact.

- **By observing your audience's body language, i.e. facial expressions, gestures and postures, you can easily detect attitudes of confidence, mistrust, doubt or interest, and adjust your speech accordingly.**
- **Feedback can also be formal, by asking the right questions to the audience or to objective observers.**

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Culture is an integral part of communication. One can define culture as the beliefs, customs, traditions, practices and social behaviour of a particular community and its people. In anthropology, culture is further defined as the patterns of behaviour and thinking that people living in a social group learn, create and share.

African communication systems can be described as that form of communication that has its root in the African environment and culture. Below are some of the uniqueness of African communication systems.

- *Derived from the culture, beliefs, and the way of life of Africans. It is also understood by members of a community*
- *It readily appeals and connects with the people's language, culture, belief, myth, legend and customs which enhances effectiveness of communication (relates to values, norms and culture)*
- *Uses values symbols, proverbs and traditional institutions, which enhance messages' effectiveness*
- *Projects and praises African historical past (traditions)*
- *Rooted among the local people and respected by the people and becomes their driving force.*

Culture is necessary for a healthy society. It is usually established from enlightenment, acquired through education, observation and exposure to an environment therefore you cannot separate communication from culture,

