

Professional Communication and Its Challenges

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Abstract

Communication brings people together. It is the social urge for the subsistence of an individual as everyone needs to confer one's own feelings, reactions, emotions, information, and facts and figures with others. Communication involves transmission of message verbally or nonverbally through the proper medium in a proper environment for some purpose. Communication is pivotal not only for individuals but for professions where people work together in order to achieve a common goal.

In case communication is a social urge for an individual, it is the lifeline for any Profession. We spend ninety percent of our communicating time at workplace in communication. This is Professional communication that entails oral, written, digital and visual communication within workplace context. But Professional communication does not mean merely workplace activity; it also involves human conduct in those activities. Whenever two or more people come together to work, there is a chance of misunderstanding due to their different social and cultural backgrounds. Also every person has his/her own perception to view the things. People communicate through numerous ways, involving not only words but also facial expression and body language. As there are many ways to communicate it is very important to be sure that one should be clear in their intent while communicating.

It is a great challenge to make communication smooth and effective where so many professional with different languages, social and cultural backgrounds, having different views, opinions, knowledge and perception are working together.

The objective of this paper is to discuss these various challenges in Professional communication and how to handle these challenges in order to make the communication effective.

Keywords: Profession, communication, language, social, cultural, workplace

Introduction Communication

Communication is widely recognized and accepted as a tool of business, as a medium of expression, or as a connection with the globalized world. People communicate through facial expressions, verbal cues, and body language in various contexts. In various way of communication people need to be clear about the purpose, content, format, proper channel, context, time, venue, and lots of things in communication especially in the workplace when they are at important project, decision, team work in a progressive job that may prove miraculously help in uplifting the career.

Professional Communication

In *What's Practical about Technical Writing?* Carolyn Miller refers to Professional Communication as not simply workplace activity and to writing that concerns "human conduct in those activities that maintain the life of a community."

Professional Communication literally means of communication related to a business, job career or any specific profession. Sometimes a person is recognized by his personality that includes communication and soft skills. It includes verbal i.e., proper oral and proper formal structured communication. It also includes managing professional relationships in typical and strange and difficult situations.

Challenges

In any profession when there is a conscious or unconscious obstacle that affects the proper workable agreement between the two team members or project leaders: it is all due to lack of proper understanding between them and thus making the people stereotyped. Sometimes something seems "off" in their collaboration, but they have trouble in pinpointing what exactly causes the problem. These problems are in fact the challenges which are related to communication at various levels.

Levels of Challenges

1. **Language:** Expression, vocabulary, jargon and dialects.
2. **Time:** Context, formal and informal time, procrastination.
3. **Culture:** Ethnocentrism, stereotypic, basic etiquettes of specific nation while working if not followed may prove hazardous in profession
4. **Status Complex:** Hierarchy, rank
5. **Psychological:** Premature evaluation, trust, attitude and opinion

Language

In the world of globalization, along with the specialization in the technical knowledge the ability of expression is also required. In both the individual and Professional contexts, the professionals are required to develop their language abilities.

Language is one of the biggest challenges in Professions where written as well as oral communication with others forms the base of the professional work. Meetings, conferences, negotiations, Telephone talks, team work-all forms the cornerstones of every Profession. People spend 90% of the working time in communicating with other professionals.

- **Vocabulary:** Hence language becomes the challenge as people from different regions speak their native language. Even though the English is a professional and global language comprehending accents range or understanding the use of vocabulary of speaker’s native language might be difficult. English speaking boss and Tamil speaking employee have a great difficulty in communicating.

Also in written, inappropriate and inadequate use of words, poor vocabulary makes the communication difficult.

- **Jargons:** Besides this, every organization has its own typical form of language which includes lots of jargons and technical language. Whenever person speaks outside the organization or even outside the department, there may be a problem in translation. Also new comers face the problems.

Here is an Example

An office manager handed to a new assistant one letter with the instructions:

“Take it our stockroom and burn it.”

In firms language the manager means to make a copy of the letter. As the letter was extremely important the manager wanted an extra copy. But the puzzled new employee was afraid to ask questions and burned the letter with a lighted match and destroyed the only existing copy.

- **Dialects:** In India we have more than 22 major languages written in 13 different scripts with over 720 dialects. So technically people may speak the same language but dialect difference can create misunderstanding and confusion in communication due to linguistic mix-ups.

Time

Time is very important in Professional Communication. In a profession, time exhibits characteristic of a personality.

- **Punctuality:** Punctuality is vital in an organization. A frequent late person at workplace may not be well organized. He may be regarded as not loyal and sincere

towards the job. This also may show disinterestedness or lazy characteristic of the person. Procrastination in an important work or the habit of it may lead towards demotion like hazardous results.

- **Waiting Time:** Giving time to someone shows importance of the person in life. Giving time is also important in profession. Bosses could not be kept waiting for a work whereas employees usually have to wait for instruction or permission. In peer group if a person is kept waiting may feel that he or she is not regarded by the other person.

Culture

Culture is “the collective programming of the mind which distinguishes the members of one group or category of people from another.” (Hofstede, 1994, 5) [2].

According to Jens Allwood (2013, 34) [1] *“Cultural traits and differences can influence all aspects of communication, that is, production, interpretation, interaction and assumptions about context, for example, assumptions about the proper, or polite, way to carry out various social activities, like greeting, e.g. thanking, introducing yourself, getting to know someone, negotiating, etc.”*

Different cultural background of the people is one biggest challenge in professional communication. At workplace, People from different culture have different norms, value, attitudes, behavior and etiquette, which might cause misunderstanding and confusion between team members. Different approaches to punctuality, confrontation, or dealing with conflict can prove an issue.

- **Sharing of Ideas:** While working together, colleagues feel empowered in sharing their ideas and thoughts. Professionals from Asian countries like Japan or Vietnam may feel less comfortable in sharing ideas especially when they are junior or new to team while those from Western Europe or US who believes in flat organizational hierarchy, may be more inclined to express their views in meetings or discussions.
- **Style and Attitude:** Cultural values are also reflected in the working styles and attitude towards work. For instance while working in team people from Asia and Central America emphasize in working together while other like from Germany and America emphasize on independent working.
- **Colours:** Colours also conveys different meanings for things to the people of different cultural backgrounds

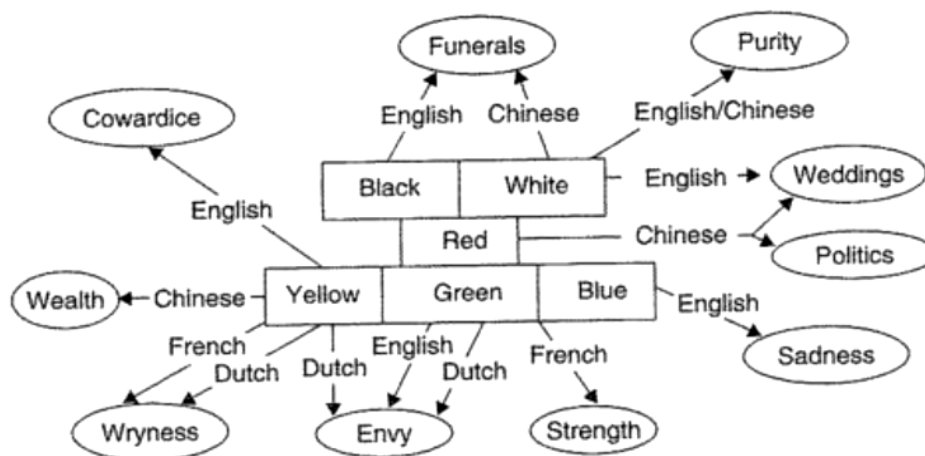


Fig 1: The cultural colour web

- **Signs:** Different signs and symbols have different meaning in different culture. The 'Swastika' symbol in Hinduism is auspicious and lucky, whereas in German this was used by Hitler for his rule and taken as fear.
- **Stereotypes:** Another problem in cultures is of Stereotypes. Stereotyping is the process of creating a picture of a whole culture, over generalizing all people belonging to the same culture as having similar characteristics and categorizing people accordingly. It can be done on the basis of many things like gender, Nationality, religion, race, Gender, ethnicity etc.

Status Complex

Status is a position or rank of a person in a group. It depends on the person's seniority, pay scale, ability, type of work assigned in a group.

- **Hierarchy:** Professions have systems of status hierarchy, based on honour and esteem. The people in higher status may feel snobbish to consult their subordinates whereas employees working in lower status may have inferiority complex in sharing their suggestions with their subordinates. When there is a need for all the employees to stand up together for a decision, people create challenges regarding their previous treatment. This comes as a big hindrance in team work.
- **Leader Versus Boss:** In a Profession there needs a strong leader and boss to get their team on board to follow them towards the vision of success of the profession. Leadership is to get people to understand and believe in the vision and to work for goals. Boss or manager administers and the day-to-day things are happening as they should. In a higher status the manager should inculcate the leadership quality whereas the problem exaggerates when the bossy nature and status consciousness overpowers and there becomes negativity in the workplace.

Psychological

Psychological challenges are the most difficult as they arise from human nature, feelings, emotions, aspirations, attitudes, judgment and social values of person. They create misinterpretation or misunderstanding among people.

- **Premature Evaluation:** It is a general tendency of a person to evaluate the communication prematurely. While working in team, this premature evaluation interferes the transfer of information and budgets the sense of futility in sender.
- **Trust:** Without trust no communication can be effective. Trust is the basic of every profession. Lack of trust cause negative meaning to the communication. This results in ill logical reviews and decisions in profession and also delayed it.
- **Attitude and Opinion:** Attitude is the established way in which a person thinks and feels about things and ideas. If any information agrees to the person's attitude and opinion than only he tends to agree with that. If a person make any wrong opinion about someone at workplace than every communication between become ineffective.

How to Handle the Challenges in Professional Communication

1. **Clarity in Objective and Expression:** Clarity in objective and message format reduces challenges as per the language and psychological context.

2. **Understanding Receiver's Perception:** Receiver's need, background, understanding level is to be given consideration for effectiveness in communication.
3. **Consulting others' Views:** In specific and important official work or decision consulting from all the employees leaving the status complex aside helps in effective communication leading to the growth of the organization
4. **Correct Language, Tone and Content:** Correct message and proper tone is important to avoid miscommunication. Brief and exact message keeps good impact.
5. **Value to the Receiver and Help:** Challenges are to minimum extent when we have empathy and offer help whenever required.
6. **Proper Feedback:** Proper feedback ensures the effective communication. There should be mutual trust, understanding and active listening. Message should be consistent and considered before the communication.
7. **To Understand the Potential Problem of Culture:** Be open to the problems of other cultures. Instead of been stereotype, communicate with people and try to adjust with them.
8. **Listen:** Be an active listener which helps in overlooking the misunderstanding.
9. **Be in the other Person's Shoes:** Try to put yourself in the other person's shoes and make to understand what they did or said and through which medium. It helps to disseminate a situation before it even arises.

Conclusion

Communication is a not only the social need for an individual, but also it is the lifeline for any Profession. Professional communication does not mean simply workplace activity but it also involves human conduct in those activities. Sometimes, consciously or unconsciously some problems occurs in free flow of working environment. These problems are in fact challenges which effect the communication at various levels. These challenges includes language, time, culture, status, and psychological. Different language always creates misunderstanding among people. Improper time occurs as challenge in any Profession. Cultural difference includes sharing of ideas, style, colour difference which occur as challenge in smooth Professional working environment. Status of working people act as a challenge in Professional communication. One of the biggest challenges is Physiological one as it comes from human nature, feelings, emotions, aspirations, attitudes, judgment and social values of person. In order to handle these challenges one should be clear in perceptive and objective. Also proper listening reduces miscommunication. Common and proper language helps in handling the smooth communication in profession. Non-verbal clues are the key to success in effective communication. Once communicated people cannot alter the words but non-verbal expression, mutual trust, bias free mind leads to free flow of communication.

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