

Effective communication – an essential step towards public success

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Abstract: *Mastering effective communication and structured speech represents, nowadays, one of the most important elements of public life, as it can open or close the door to success in public life. Attracting and, more important, being able to persuade the audience is the key to advancing on the social and political hierarchy. Any public actor, may he / she be a political person, a business leader or a PR specialist must know and apply the basic standards and rules of a correct speech.*

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Learning to master speech, debate discourse strategies and verbal communication has become increasingly important during the past decades, as competition among political, social and economic actors sharpened. Public communication has got to a point where everything depends on effective communication skills and especially political actors turned effective public communication into a real science based on clear regulations and standards. From this point of view, anyone attempting to become a clear, distinct public voice must know and master the 7 C's of effective communication¹ which are applicable to both written as well as oral communication:

- 1. Completeness.** The communication must be complete. It should convey all facts required by the audience. The sender of the message must take into

1 <http://www.managementstudyguide.com/seven-cs-of-effective-communication.htm>

consideration the receiver's mind set and convey the message accordingly. A complete communication develops and enhances the reputation of both the communicator and the organization he/she represents, always giving additional information wherever required and leaving no questions in the mind of receiver, never missing any crucial piece of information. Also, complete communication improves the better decision-making process as the audience gets all desired and crucial information, being easily persuaded by the full message content.

2. **Conciseness.** Communicating what one wants in least possible words is an essential aspect of an effective communication process, being both time-saving as well as cost-saving. Also, one must know that by providing short and essential message in limited words to the audience avoids repetition and makes the message more appealing and comprehensible to the audience, considerably reducing the risk of misunderstanding.
3. **Consideration.** Consideration implies "stepping into the others' shoes", taking into consideration the audience with its view points, background, mind-set, education level, emotions, and so on. A considerate communication process must empathize with the audience and exhibit interest in the audience, stimulating a positive reaction from the audience. It also shows optimism by emphasizing on "what is possible" rather than "what is impossible".
4. **Clarity** implies emphasizing on a specific message or goal at a time, rather than trying to achieve too much at once. Clarity in communication makes use of exact, appropriate and concrete words, makes understanding easier, enhancing the meaning of message.
5. **Concreteness** implies being particular and clear rather than fuzzy and general, avoiding misinterpretation. It strengthens the confidence by using specific facts and figures, clear words that build the reputation.
6. **Courtesy** in message implies the message should show the sender's expression as well as should respect the receiver. The sender of the message should be sincerely polite, judicious, reflective and enthusiastic, positive and focused at the audience.
7. **Correctness** in communication implies that the message is exact, correct, accurate and well-timed, having thus an increased impact on the audience.

Besides the seven C's we have presented above, any specialist in communication may he/she is a PR specialist or a public person, must follow other extremely important rules that influence the effectiveness of a public speech and that are presented below:

Tolerance towards separate opinions is one of the most important values in any society. The ability to plead for diverse standpoints helps the understanding

of the fact that pros and cons exist for every idea or topic in such a way that no one can have a monopoly on the absolute truth.

Critical thinking or the process of examining one's own thought process along with the others' way of thinking in order to clarify knowledge and improve the level of understanding. This implies reading, listening and active participation, as well as careful exploit of certain situation through questions, analysis of those situations from various perspectives or backing up one standpoint with logical arguments and proof.

Argumentation means pleading with clear arguments from a certain point of view, and is achieved through 3 steps:

- *Research*, which implies active reading (taking notes on the side of the written material or video, identifying questions related to the studied material and elaborating ideas);
- *Exploiting possibilities of interpretation* of a motion in question through the analysis of definitions and key concepts in its wording. This activity involves the actual analysis of the problem from all viewpoints possible;
- *Elaborating the system of argumentation*, which involves analysis, evaluation, interpretation and synthesis of facts identified in the phase of research, as well as backing up one standpoint with arguments, evidence and reasoning.

Persuasion is practiced because speakers, while in a Pros and Cons discussion, must convince the others around them that their allegations are just through clarity, structure and valid logical reasoning.

Concision – an essential quality in a world in which efficient communication is primordial, is acquired by the course participant though limitation of the time allowed to every speaker, time in which the person in question must clearly display every argument, show the impact of the arguments in the discussion and sum up the entire debate.

Active listening involves not only listening to the arguments presented by a speaker, but also the effort on understanding and analysis of those arguments right during the presentation. This course will develop this capacity through sessions of analysis of video and written materials, followed by group debates on every conclusion drawn by students in order to facilitate understanding, jumpstart analysis and possibly elaborate the answer or rebuttal of the withstanding position right during its presentation.

Starting from the seven essential C's and the rules governing an effective communication process, one must also take into consideration two main aspects that pertain to the growing popularity of verbal communications and argumentation abilities.

The first aspect regards the progress of civil liberal societies that has brought a much bigger emphasis on the individual and maximized the productivity po-

tential for each individual. As the importance of each individual has increased, as compared to the previous emphasis on the importance of the masses, so has the importance of having available tools for the self-actualization of each individual, verbal communications and argumentation being considered among the important tools of the trade. Another specific feature of liberal democracies is the dismantling of paternalistic and rigid hierarchies and their replacement with more flexible ones. This had the direct effect of creating more open societies, in which each individual would be in permanent and simultaneous communication not just with other individuals who would function on hierarchic levels directly related to his own, but also with individuals from very different, only vaguely related levels. Thus, the individual had to communicate with a much larger range of people, which led directly to the necessity of improving one's communication capabilities.

It became self-evident that, unlike totalitarian or undemocratic regimes where a limited set of ideas would usually be imposed as absolute truth, democratic societies directly depended on the free, unlimited exchange of opinions and ideas. For democracy to function, the values which democracy encourages – critical thinking, tolerance and the analysis of documents and proof – can be promoted only by individuals that are able to communicate, debate and bring proper argumentation to support their positions.

Following the history of debate starting from Antic Greece until nowadays, philosophers such as Karl Popper² have described the creation of the critical argument as a very important step in the development of human thinking: the truth is never final, but open to continuous improvement, and critical discussion is the only one that can lead us to the truth. Public debates for citizens' consultation, parliamentary or electoral debates, and also scientific or economic debates appear every time citizens do not agree over a certain subject and decide to expound their points of view using arguments. In order to have a good level of communication between individuals, and so that each of them can support their positions in the most convincing fashion, it is very important that the education system can provide an education program meant to develop these abilities for each individual.

Economic growth is the second main aspect that pertains to the growing popularity of verbal communications and argumentation abilities. This has led to the replacement of small production workshops with a vast number of enterprises of all kinds – small, medium sized or large – whose activity palette has broadened from production to services and research. The common employee must communicate with a large number of colleagues, facing increased interaction with company

2 Popper, Karl – *Societatea deschisă și dușmanii ei*, Ed. Humanitas, București, 2005

outsiders – suppliers, clients etc. Moreover, many corporations have started having economic ties with companies from abroad, thus further broadening the communication scope necessary for their employees. Hence, having communication and argumentation skills has become an essential skill within the workplace. One does not only hold a social incentive to improve such abilities but an economical one as well.

It has been seen that the more advanced educational systems have raised the importance of improving communication skills. It is not by chance that the first countries to introduce such elements in the educational curriculum are the first ones that have functioned as liberal democracies – the Anglo-Saxon countries.

England has set the tone in this matter through its universities. In 1815, Cambridge Union Society³ was established as a students' community within Cambridge University. Important political figures of Great Britain were invited to debate against the university's students. The example of Cambridge has been followed by Oxford⁴ in 1823 after which it became a general practice in every British university.

The second largest wave of this kind was in the United States of America, after the Second World War. On a background of unparalleled economic growth and rise in the standard of living, public debates have become more and more popular, culminating in the '60's with the first televised Presidential debates between Richard Nixon and John Kennedy. Following the British model, but wanting to promote this type of skill among younger age groups, mandatory verbal presentations of a personal projects or homework once a month has been introduced to Secondary school students (Grades 5th-8th). Because of this, American pupils obtain communication abilities from a younger age, therefore reaching higher performance in the future.

The American example was followed by Australia, which also took its own measures in the matter by introducing a special debating format for students in Secondary school. The best pupils participate in an annual Public Speaking national competition.

The steps made by Anglo-Saxon communities have been reproduced after the 90's by many other countries, including ones from Eastern Europe.

At the educational level, universities from Europe and Asia have become very active. Many college student associations have been founded, most of which participate at international academic debating and argumentation competitions, gathering hundreds of teams from the most important educational institutions in the world.

3 <http://www.cus.org/about/history-union>

4 <http://www.oxford-union.org/>

References:

1. <http://www.managementstudyguide.com/seven-cs-of-effective-communication.htm>
2. Popper, Karl –Societatea deschisă și dușmanii ei, Ed. Humanitas, București, 2005
3. <http://www.cus.org/about/history-union>
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