



Contemporary Themes in Business and Management

COMMUNICATION STRATEGIES FOR CORPORATE LEADERS

IMPLICATIONS FOR THE GLOBAL MARKET

Pragyan Rath and Apoorva Bharadwaj



“Professors Bharadwaj and Rath present an in-depth look at the highly relevant topic of communication and persuasion. They compile a wonderful collection of concepts, research insights, case examples, and exercises for practice and reflection. This is a must-read for everyone who would like to improve their impression and impact on other people.”

Johannes Habel, Associate Professor, European School of Management and Technology (ESMT) Berlin, Germany.



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Communication Strategies for Corporate Leaders

Communication is the key to success in every aspect of life and ever so in a competitive business environment. This book examines managerial communication from seminal theoretical and demonstrative vantage points through an interdisciplinary amalgamation of sciences and the liberal arts. It presents new paradigms of managerial communication in the form of manoeuvres that can act as game changers in tug-of-war business situations, including difficult negotiations, conflicts and interpersonal dissonance that characterise the day-to-day corporate workplace tenor.

This volume:

- Develops persuasion strategies based on argumentation tactics derived, for example, from legal cross-examination.
- Introduces “problematisation” and “deconstruction” as effective communication tools into mainstream managerial discourse.
- Employs Harvard Business School cases to demonstrate problem-solving skills, which will further serve as a guide to writing business reports, plans and proposals.
- Positions business writing methods as taxonomical tenets that can help tackle complex business scenarios.
- Draws business diagnostic procedures from diverse fields such as Sherlock Holmes from popular culture, and Jared M. Diamond from ecology.

This book will be a significant resource for business communication practitioners, especially corporate managers and leaders, sales and marketing professionals, and policymakers. It will be of interest to teachers and students alike, in business communication, organization behaviour, human resource management and marketing communications. It will act as a useful aid for classroom efficacy for teachers and academics.

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Contemporary Themes in Business and Management

Series Editor: Anindya Sen

Professor of Economics,

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Business and management are shaped by both external and internal forces. The external forces are driven by the way society at large views the role of business and management in contributing to the social goals. The internal forces are driven by the changing nature of management thinking and research. These forces raise important recurring debates: should private corporates be left to their own devices or should there be monitoring and channelization of their activities? How intrusive should the state be in this respect? How to communicate more effectively within the organization and to the outside world? How to create new markets for basic survival as well as for completely new products?

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and Apoorva Bharadwaj

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We also acknowledge the help proffered by Harvard Business School for facilitating the intellectual import of two Harvard business cases, “The CEO’s Private Investigation” by Joseph Finder and “Taking the Cake” by Ben Gerson.

Thanks for theming our think tank.



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Prelude to communication strategies for global corporate leaders

In today's volatile business world with its multitudes of vicissitudes, the leaders all the more need persuasion skills to bind their workforces and lead them by their high-minded missions. Communication is the most pivotal tool of persuasion which can mobilise the immovable, inspire the mundane and galvanise the inertia that cripple the proficiency of progressive ambitions. The art and skill of communication have inspired the process of metamorphosis through centuries and have helped leaders worldwide from different walks of life – politicians, sportsmen, artists, corporate heads, scientists and many others – to stimulate new thought processes, to initiate new ways of life and to impart new meanings to human philosophy. Communication is a human *need* and a human *deed* that can lead the people *indeed!* Here is your manual of communication that can help you operationalise your visions and missions through transmissions that can provide a new visionary lens to the myopic world.

The aim of this volume is to develop content that can fill the void in communication literature available in the managerial domain. Most communication literature currently used by academic/industry practitioners in management has its thrust on presentation skills and authoring business messages primarily in conventional formats. Most do not cover detailed studies of case analysis, an integral part of contemporary managerial training in decision-making processes. In our work, we have evolved new strategic frameworks of communication and applied them to diverse corporate situations through numerous cases and examples, both domestic and international. The work covers a wide gamut of solved hypothetical Indian episodes, as well as Harvard business cases which act as its major differentiating factor in global communication discourse.

Readership

We have developed the book that intends to reach out to diverse audiences by offering them multiple takeaways:

- Students can benefit from intensively worked out case studies from various managerial domains that relate to their career building endeavours.
- Communication instructors in management academia can benefit from the conceptual frameworks built and their detailed applications which can be used to make the process of teaching-learning more efficacious.
- Corporate professionals can use the communication manuals developed in the work for their daily transactions.
- Researchers can apply the theoretical contexts used in the work to develop new communication projects. As a majority of communication books (both Indian and international) have their content focus on formats and terminologies, this work intends to demonstrate how concepts have been evolved which rationally culminate into format designs, frameworks and terminologies that further add to the quintessential basis of managerial communications.
- Interdisciplinary scholars will find the work interesting since they would be able to comprehend how to use and apply their niche expertise in developing mainstream corporate communication literature.
- International students pursuing global careers can use this work to understand Indian markets and the application of interdisciplinary techniques of communication in the Indian as well as global contexts.

Methodology

We have sought to apply theories from variegated disciplines like humanities, social sciences and theoretical sciences to develop novel strategies and principles which can be used for communication practices. Contributions from landmark thinkers like Samuel Coleridge and Roland Barthes from Literary Studies, Pierre Bourdieu and Jean-Francois Lyotard from Sociology, J. Freedman and S. Fraser from Psychology, Einstein from Physics and even the Sophist rhetorician Protagoras, among others, have informed

the conceptualisation of new communication frameworks that the authors have developed. The existing scholarship in the area of managerial communication, including the works of authors like Mary Munter, Peter Cardon, Robyn Walker, Michael Gamble, Jane Thomas and Courtland L. Bovee (to name a few), have also been used as reference material to build up this research work. Hence, the rationale behind our project has been to offer new perspectives and frameworks as considerable departures from conventional literature available for managerial communication.

Highlights

The unique profile of this book is characterised by the following features:

- It is positioned as the only book of its kind which delineates powerful communication strategies and their applications unlike many mainstream books on communication which either do not cover communication strategies at all, or just theorise on these strategies without presenting their applicability in corporate scenarios.
- This book presents new paradigms of persuasion in the form of manoeuvres that can act as game changers in tug-of-war business situations comprising difficult conversations like negotiations, conflicts and interpersonal dissonance that characterise day-to-day corporate workplace tenor. It equips communicators with argumentation skills that can retrieve a lost argument. For the first time, persuasion strategies have been “insourced” from argumentation tactics
 - (a) used by lawyers to frame and position their wit to win a point (for instance, cross-examination);
 - (b) used by Critical Discourse theorists to frame and position their new theoretical inputs (for instance, Judith Butler positioning Body Theory in feminist discourse and Derrida positioning Deconstruction in Poststructural discourse).
- The book breaks the stereotypical taxonomy of business messages which routinely use four categories – routine, good news, bad news and persuasive. The book brings a comprehensive string of business situations that call for strategic *responses* rather than staying with formatting protocols. We have elevated

the process of writing messages from a formal routine etiquette or duty to a strategic tool for tackling critically intricate business scenarios. We have identified certain business situations not in regular circulation and used them to show how writing strategically becomes a powerful tool in the hands of the manager.

- It is the only book in the global market to take up case studies as one of its major learnings. Harvard business cases which are used worldwide in management institutes have been employed for the first time in a book on communications (both in India and outside) to demonstrate problem solving skills which also act as precursors to writing business reports, plans and proposals. As an addendum to this toolkit of **solved** Harvard cases, we also add some hypothetical but familiar domestic situations that call for critical thinking skills that contribute to intelligent configuration of business reports, plans and proposals. We deploy diagnostic procedures from medical sciences as well as taxonomical tenets from zoology and botany as guiding principles for scrutinising situations of corporate investigations. Sherlock Holmes and the evolutionary ecologist Jared M. Diamond have been invoked to give a new perspective to the investigative function of scrutinising not-so-obvious or camouflaged managerial problems to derive insightful problem statements and use them to present targeted solutions.

Preview: chapter snapshots

- Chapter 1: Prelude to communication strategies for global corporate leaders

The on-going chapter is a kind of orientation for readers as an initiating exercise into the content of the book. It provides a preview of the contents of the book, along with its highlights. It also informs the readers

- (a) how diverse audiences – students, teachers, researchers and corporate professionals, both Indian and international – can benefit from the book;
- (b) how the book is uniquely positioned as the only work of its kind imparting innovative concepts and frameworks with their pragmatic applications delivered.

- Chapter 2: Walk the talk: application of communication strategy

The chapter presents a toolkit of communication strategies based on theoretical inputs from diverse disciplines to enable managers to handle business situations. It is also rich in examples drawn from bureaucracy, media, business, entertainment, history and culture to bring alive these abstract concepts.

- Chapter 3: Checkmate: persuade to win

The chapter describes persuasion as an act of game changing manoeuvre deploying a “selling apparatus” for attaining desired targets in Catch-22 as well as dead-end situations. It equips readers with skills that can enable them to win lost battles. This chapter also introduces new terminologies not prevalent in managerial discourse, like problematisation and deconstruction, to redefine and reposition persuasion as warfare to be won through the subtle demolition of audience defence and resistance. In addition, it offers new insights to career builders for handling their recruitment communications for clinching a deal with their dream companies.

- Chapter 4: You’ve got mail: strategy in style

The chapter looks at the act of writing messages not just as exchange of information but as strategic responses to challenging business problems. It introduces a new taxonomy of messaging situations along with new strategic frameworks, concepts and terminologies. For each situation, email write-ups have been presented as tutorials in strategic writing skills. As the contemporary corporate scenario is beset with numerous raging controversies, which call for immediate tactful redressal, the chapter presents hypothetical controversial situations akin to real ones, for presenting a writing drill that entails application of new strategies not discussed hitherto in popular communication books.

- Chapter 5: Sherlock Holmes in action: managerial investigations (cases, reports, proposals, plans)

The chapter showcases Harvard business cases as well as hypothetical domestic cases as “texts” for launching investigations using new

diagnostic tools to unearth latent intricate business problems and solve them. New innovative concepts have been deployed for case analysis, like

- (a) domestication of problem through Anna Karenina Principle (evolutionary ecologist, Jared M. Diamond);
- (b) verification and falsification through medical patterns of diagnosis (medical practitioner and novelist, Sir Arthur Conan Doyle);
- (c) historicisation (New Historicism).

The chapter also covers writing analytical reports and business proposals along with authoring business plans as entrepreneurial tools for attracting venture capitalists.

The salient attractions of the chapter include:

- (a) two Harvard Business cases analysed and presented in the form of corporate reports;
- (b) two indigenous business cases analysed and presented in the format of submission ready corporate reports; and
- (c) one business plan and one business proposal completely drafted based on a hypothetical new business offering pitched in for funding.

In sum, the book offers a whole lot of new and exciting experiences and perspectives that are significant in a career builder's life in a contemporary business scenario.

*Strategies for global corporate leaders
Stimulating the curious minds of diverse readers
Steeped in the dense theories of the erudite past
For contemporary managers in the world, furious and fast.*

Walk the talk

Application of communication strategy

Communication strategy is the cornerstone of all communication episodes in managerial scenarios. Imagine that you are a Vice President in a multinational giant. You have recently won a bid on a very coveted overseas assignment. Now you have to accomplish a competitive delivery in a short stint of time. But the flip side of the bid is there are no immediate incentives you can offer to your team. Now the challenge is to steer a team of *these* employees towards your big ticket goals without rewarding them with anything. You know that you are on a sticky wicket. Then what are your options? See Figure 2.1 for the sticky wicket options.

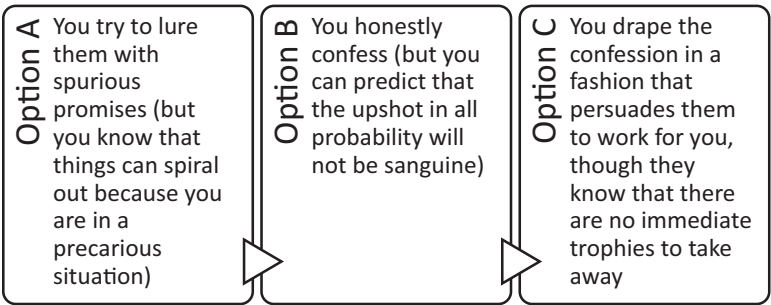


Figure 2.1 Sticky wicket options

Source: All figures, boxes and tables are by authors, unless otherwise mentioned.

When you elect and exercise Option C, you are acting as a Communication Strategist. How do we define a Communication Strategist? A Communication Strategist is a communicator who is *persuasive for being productive*. In other words, s/he knows how

to talk in a way that makes others walk the talk. The architect of this walk-the-talk model is a noted researcher and teacher in the Tuck School of Business in Dartmouth College. Prof. Mary Munter¹ has made walk-the-talk easier for all management practitioners by building a universal grammar for productive managerial conversations.

In an Indian context, the application of Communication Strategy is all the more relevant as managers have to grapple with multiple issues of resource deficits, both financial and human. The inherent problem for the Indian workplace has been to mobilise people from heterogeneous sub cultures, which is a stupendous task. Indians work when they are forced, owing to fear of punitive action, or even if they work of their own volition, their sub cultural pluralities make the workplace narratives more rhizomatic and, hence, chaotic. As managing people in Indian organisations is a supremely challenging task for any manager, Munter's grammar can give them a structured paradigm to formulate *their own* professional dialogues for positive outcomes from convoluted situational dilemmas.

Engineering the walk-the-talk grammar

You need appropriate tools in your toolkit to manoeuvre your drive on the communication highway. One of the biggest misconceptions that we as communicators need to fight springs from our self-obsession bubble. We invest a lot of our time thinking about our attire, our presentation style, our content, our delivery and our preparation, and in the middle of all these activities we forget that the most important player in this game is the audience. Why? Because *the liberty to respond or to reject, to explore or to ignore, to select or to neglect* lies solely with the audience.

During the 1960s and the 1970s in the Occidental academia, there was a strong movement in philosophical thought gravitating towards the primacy of the reader on an equalitarian footing with the author in developing meanings in the process of reading the text. The zenith of this movement was reached when the French Literary theorist Roland Barthes came out with his seminal work "The Death of the Author"² in 1967. His work totally exterminated the grandiose that an author enjoyed till then and, for the first time, instituted the Reader as the new acknowledged legislator of the literary world. In the same vein, now the audience is the acknowledged legislator of successful communications. It is all the

more true in the managerial context as the actor of the desired outcome intended by the speaker is the listener.

The first question that should intrigue you as a strategic communicator is not what will be your content, but why the audience would listen to you. So imagine yourself navigating through this trilogy of initial questions before you even gear up to walk the talk, as illustrated in Figure 2.2

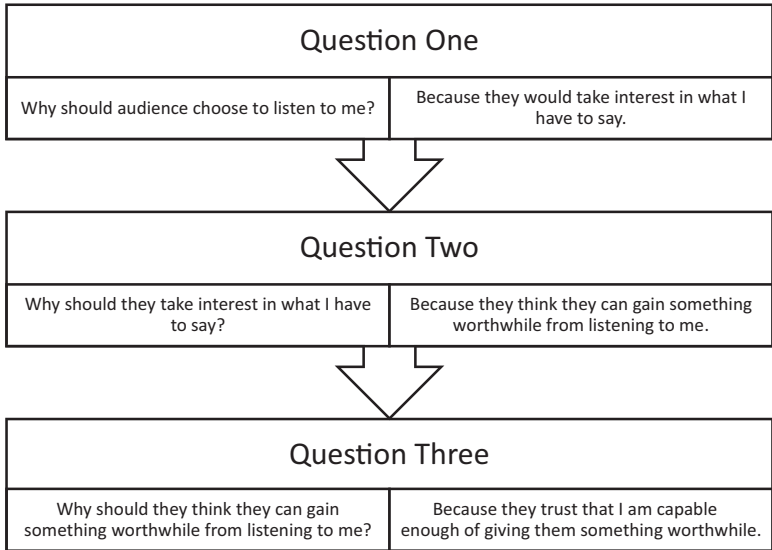


Figure 2.2 Hypothetical dialogue

This hypothetical dialogue helps develop your credibility, which is your first tool as a Communication Strategist. This tool is the Credibility Builder.

Let me imagine I am Mukesh Ambani. Do I need to build credibility? The immediate answer is “no”. The world is at my feet, because I have proved my credentials already. I walk-the-talk with my baggage of credentials, wherever I go. I need not announce that *I am Reliance*, because the world vociferates that *Reliance is Me*. This is my Initial Credibility, my multi million bank account, a brilliant metaphor used by Munter to explain the concept of credibility. As I speak, I am using my currency. But every time I use my currency, my savings get depleted if I do not replenish it. In other

words, is it enough to be Mukesh Ambani always? Is it possible that post my speech as Mukesh Ambani, I find my audience exclaiming, “I expected more!” The audience expectation would be even more for a celebrity because her Initial Credibility is very high. The more the credibility, the more risk of criticism. So what do I do as Mukesh Ambani, and even more, what do I do if I am *not* Mukesh Ambani? For both, the answer is the same. Don’t stop at Initial Credibility. Build more and more. And build more while communicating. In other words, my communication should create credibility irrespective of the fact that I may or may not have Initial Credibility. In short, credibility is not given, it is manufactured, and the act of manufacturing credibility is called acquiring credibility. So, let us look at the manual of how to manufacture credibility, which will move your communication towards your motive.

The master kit of Credibility Building tools includes the following, as documented in Figure 2.3.

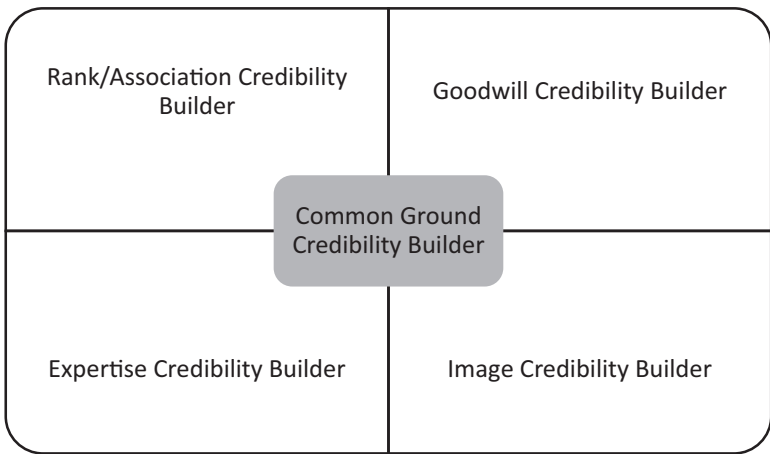


Figure 2.3 Credibility building toolkit

Rank/association credibility builder

If you are CEO of a transnational conglomerate, citing your rank itself will win your audience attention. But now the problem is that you do not have C or E or O in your rank profile. Then the question of how to build credibility might haunt you. The answer lies in this

script culled from an award winning speech delivered by Priyanka Chopra when she clinched the *black lady* as the Best Actor (Female) for her role in *Fashion*, a 2008 woman-centric Hindi blockbuster. We quote a few lines from her acceptance speech in Script 2.1.

Script 2.1 Priyanka Chopra's *Filmfare* acceptance speech, 2009

Priyanka Chopra's *Filmfare* acceptance speech, 2009

- . . . To Ronnie, thank you for taking chances and making cinema that means a lot . . . to UTV, the team of UTV, who have put their hearts and souls into so many movies, specially *Fashion*. To Madhur . . ., thank you for believing I could be Meghna Mathur even when I didn't.

Source: Speech transcribed from "Priyanka Chopra Speech Filmfare". Rajesh Chopra. YouTube video uploaded on 27 Jun 2009. Accessed on 30 January 2016 <www.youtube.com/watch?v=Xk0C2-UqyuQ>.

At its epidermal level, the text seems to be all about Priyanka Chopra awarding credit to Ronnie Screwvala, UTV team and Madhur Bhandarkar. But while billing credit, she is building her own credibility as well. We can easily transcribe the credibility-building attempt into its strategic outcomes, as attempted in our commentary on Script 2.1.

Commentary on Script 2.1 Credibility building episode in Chopra's speech

To Madhur . . ., thank you for believing I could be Meghna Mathur

- Mandhur Bhandarkar, who has already proved his mettle as a national award-winning director, who is well-known for producing woman-centric movies, has had the faith in **her** talent to have cast **her** in an author-backed role of Meghna Mathur, who is the prime leader in the script of the movie. Unlike other movies, where the male gets the meaty role, here it is a woman who is the protagonist, and that woman is me.

thank you for believing I could be Meghna Mathur even when I didn't

- Her downplaying her potential all the more highlights the same, when she credits the great director to have had belief in her talent, and not in her confidence in herself. (The emphasis is not on Bhandarkar here, but on his trustworthy choice – herself.)

thank you for taking chances and making cinema that means a lot

- UTV makes meaningful cinema. It took its chance by creating a woman-centric movie which had precarious box office prospects. And such an enterprising production house has chosen her to essay the protagonist of its movie. (The stress is on the choice made for a challenging job.)

the team of UTV, who have put their hearts and souls into so many movies

- UTV is a prolific production house, and she is working with them. (Again, the emphasis is on the choice made by a prolific production house.)

How many times when you author your curriculum vitae (CV) are you tempted to cite as your mentor for some summer internship project the title of an IIM/IIT professor to build your own credibility, since you did not have the privilege to secure admission in prestigious, coveted institutes? If you scan your own interview responses, you may be surprised to discover that scores of times you intuitively feel like citing you worked with some experienced or highly *ranked* professional from your domain to give the message to your interviewers that you have established yourself as a budding expert. You may recall a young doctor telling you how s/he worked with an experienced surgeon to win your faith in her credibility.

All these exercises display the use of Rank/Association Credibility. Rank is not simply a position. It is hierarchy. I am above someone in an organisation by dint of my merit. A rank derives its power not from its designation, but from this hierarchical number game.