

INNOCENT SIMBA

UB18934BBU26778

THE SCHOOL OF BUSINESS AND ECONOMICS

**PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF ACADEMIC REQUIREMENTS FOR THE ATLANTIC
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BUSINESS COMMUNICATION

ATLANTIC INTERNATIONAL UNIVERSITY (AIU)

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BUSINESS COMMUNICATION

Introduction: Stories and stories

In Africa communication is equal to storytelling until to now and even the western world stories are enjoyed whether written or oral. In my country Rwanda, there was a time when the cell phone was totally unknown. It is just in December 1998, that MTN Rwandacell was launched as the first mobile telecommunication company. Back then it was extremely expensive to own a cellular phone and be able to purchase one's airtime. Then in the year 2000, the cost of communication was halved. The next year, even mobile phones could be purchased at lower prices. MTN agreed with another company called Business Communication Solutions (BCS) on the sales of airtime by vendors who had an interesting technique of attracting customers. They used to hire people who would walk close to the vendors and then tell stories about how it is cheap calling with this public call phone. Every time one thought of purchasing airtime, it was the same scenario. I was also attracted to it and finally realized that it was the same amount of money except one could pay exactly for the time they called. You could easily hear in the streets of Kigali people sharing about MTN fairness by introducing these Tuvugane public phones.

I was born in an African type village with no electricity connections, no TV, no radio other than shortwave and you could see the whole village gathered in one place in evening listening to an old man/woman telling stories. It was very simple to share important truths about the community with stories. Sports people are more attracted by stories around their preferred teams. It is not uncommon to find how fast rumors run compared to any public communication in the same field. That way even business grew up by telling stories to pull customers to their products.

MTN, a South African telecommunication company with head office in Johannesburg, understood this and took advantage of people by telling them stories but taking from them exactly the same amount it would if it had stayed in the classical marketing styles. It expands its network in all areas including the most remote ones. For this cause, MTN delivers public phones with affordable call rates – that is Tuvugane and Tel'imbere in Rwanda. The message varies from internet advert to storytelling as I said earlier.

Selected questions to be addressed in this paper:

- What is Business Communication?
- What is the role of Business Communication?
- What are hindrances to Communication?
- What are strategies for better communication?
- What are components of Communication?

**Case study: A Rwandese returns from exile
(Story written from The New Times daily newspaper)**

A Rwandan returnee was resigning from his first well paid job before even obtaining another one and people were so surprised that some approached him to know what was wrong with him. The man was in great trouble because of communication barriers created by his ignorance in the Rwandan language. He had been born and brought up in one of Rwanda's neighbor countries because of the first wave of Rwandan migrations forced by former colonialists hoping to stay in the country by the divide-and- rule politics.

That fellow was so disappointed when he realized that people were referring to him as "the Munyamahanga (foreigner)". Currently he is conversant in Rwandan language.

The problem he had was not really big since he was willing to learn with time, but colleagues at work made it hard for him to do anything in those conditions that he finally had to resign.

We all are aware that the cross cultural interaction is not a new experience in our world, but it is still undermined by the communication barriers and is reflected on the final output as well. It seems as if the globalization is in need of better communication preparation to smoothen interactions for better work productivity.

This is possible through keeping a positive attitude, understanding the importance of cultural and demographic diversity, emphasizing person on person interaction, planning and implementing orientation programs to familiarize new employees with the organization's offices and other workers and strictly forbid any form of discrimination at the work place.

Interpreted from The New Times, Rwanda's daily. **Business Perspective: Train employees on the importance of intercultural communication.**

WHAT IS BUSINESS COMMUNICATION?

- **Definitions**

Business communication can be defined by taking term by term:

- a. **A business:** *It is an action of a legally recognized organization, designed to provide services and/or products to consumers.*
- b. **Communication:** *It is a process by which information is exchanged between its sender and the receiver through a common system either in verbal, nonverbal or written form.*

The term “Business Communication” is an activity and a skill of exchanging information for business purposes. With skillful communication tools, people can increase their turnovers, greater social status and the persuasion power in the world of business. It matters both to customers, producers, marketers, governments, religious people, politicians, lecturers, students, administrators, managers and employees. I can declare confidently that without the communication ability, a business is condemned to utterly fail.

In fact, communication affects your thoughts about yourself and others. It appears even in people’s ways of learning since it is based on their personal perception of ideas and meanings.

Communication is learnt since our early age; we observe how people express their feelings, their wishes, their views and generally their personality.

- **Contributing fields of study**

Business Communication finds its support from other social fields of study including:

- ✚ Psychology
- ✚ Management Principles
- ✚ Political science
- ✚ Sociology
- ✚ English language
- ✚ Philosophy
- ✚ Administration

WHAT IS THE ROLE OF BUSINESS COMMUNICATION?

In reality, there is no field of study that will not need business communication. In business, all kinds of written papers need to be understandable, concise, ethical and easy to read. There are various kinds of business communication such as memoranda, proposals, press releases, contracts, letters, emails, notices, reports, interviews, public speeches and presentation. Business communication utilizes also verbal as well as nonverbal expressions like public speeches, interviews and diverse kinds of presentations.

There are three main ways of communication in business as well as elsewhere:

- Verbal communication
- Nonverbal communication
- Written communication.

In this part I will look at business communication in the context of addressing individuals' problems by checking on the following issues:

- The situation in which communication is taking place
- Strategies for better communication process
- How to best take communication action
- How to tailor the message
- Ways of delivering the message

I will trace some situations one may encounter in their business and life where this communication process is likely to apply.

- **Perceptions about oneself and others because of communication**

Every human being shares the need to communicate. In communication we seek to understand and share what we mean. We express the meaning in what and how talk about either by writing or speaking. It would be terrible if human beings could not communicate. Needs are often cared for by others through communication. Therefore, one must express correctly and clearly what is on the mind.

Good communication means keeping confidence in oneself because failing to communicate right affects self-concept. That is dangerous since it makes individuals question their self-worth in the process.

I will share one more story at this point. It was when I was in the sixth grade when my school teacher told me that I make beautiful sentences and since then, I thought of myself as a good writer. I used to write small poems, and other kinds of texts just for the fun of it. I liked myself as a writer. Many years later in 2000, my church pastor surprised me by saying exactly the same thing as that teacher. I had worked a lot on my writing capacity to be better since there was an encouragement from someone I respected. Maybe was it not true but simply an encouragement. Liking to use one form of communication or the other is dependent on any kind of positive or negative feedback from others. Whatever the case, communication affects directly self-concept.

It is so surprising to realize how communication is crucial to human life. Even our clothing, our hair dressing, shoes including the music one may tend to choose are closely related to what people say about all those things. From morning to evening we communicate at work or anywhere else we are. The greatest blow a human being may face is to be left alone where he/she cannot communicate with others. Therefore it becomes obvious that in communication, people are expressing their personality, feelings... their self-concept in brief.

Communication helps also reveal others. Words are not just words, but their feelings as well, their reasoning ability, their perception about themselves too. They are expressing who they think they are. It is easy to read the tone of one's voice in a letter, know how they are by observing their gestures, mimics, the format of their documents provides

information of what are their values and their perception about that issue. It is important to watch out how we listen to people and how we read if we think of being good communicators. Audiences respond to a public speaker even without words.

There is a relationship between learning and communication

The process of learning is made of observing, listening, trying out by exercise the lesson. It does not come overnight but takes time to internalize it. That is how, I learnt to talk, to dress, to write and read, make a phone call, compose a message.... One day I made mistakes and then tried again and again until there were no more mistakes to make. That is the way to improvement by persistence and accepting correction.

Public speaking is not just a talent but is learnt through experience. It comes by simple conversations, answering questions, giving one's opinion and making a presentation in front of classmates. Then we are able to think independently. Whether it is speaking or writing, one is expressing their ideas and that reflects their education, experience and ethical aptitudes. All this is by learning from other speakers and analyzing styles of writing in the same field with the objective of becoming better.

The study of business communication helps obtaining thoughts for improvement from speakers and writers more experienced than oneself. It is possible to fail in first speeches and not be able to say exactly what was planned but with many exercises, finally a right speech can be delivered by someone who once had a number of difficulties.

Communication influences most of our relationships with other people. That means a lot to everyone on earth including businesses and business people. Therefore, preparation is necessary so that the message may have chances of a lasting impact on the listener when given an opportunity. Success always comes after a well-planned and well done work.

How others think of us depends on our communication

Individual or corporate success is usually attributed to production but communication plays a very important role in the business growth. All of us want to make a good impression on our colleagues, friends, customers and employers but it is possible when we are able to convey our good image through effective communication. For a successful career, we are supposed to have quality written and spoken forms of communication.

Successful communication is possible when we take time to learn and exercise both the oral and written one. However this learning continues through improving the skills we have to keep our positive image for our jobs, our relationships and even our leadership ability.

1. Communication Skills in Business

Managers and employers consistently list communication skills as among the most desirable qualities of a prospective employee. Among these qualities sought in an employee there are;

- ✚ Oral and written communication skills
- ✚ Ethical practices at work
- ✚ Ability to work in a team
- ✚ Creativity, innovation and Initiative
- ✚ Analytical skills

With this in mind, it becomes clear that success in one's career is closely connected to their communication skills both in written and oral forms.

Hindrances to communication

The case of the National Commission on writing for America's Families, Schools and Colleges

In late 2004, a commission conducted and published a study on more than 100 human resource managers and gave it the title: *A Ticket to Work...Or a Ticket Out, A Survey of Business Leaders*. The research found out that having high skills in writing gives an employee high consideration with corresponding high salary. Bob Kerrey, president of New School University in New York and chair of the commission said, "People unable to express themselves clearly in writing limit their opportunities for professional, salaried employment."

Afterwards, a rough estimate states that more than thirty million Americans are illiterate; it means that they don't know how to read and write. In my country Rwanda, more than 36% of the active population is illiterate. In fact, on the African continent alone, lives half of the illiterate population of the world.

An individual with excellent communication skills is an asset to every organization. No matter what career you plan to pursue, learning to express yourself professionally in speech and in writing will help you get there.

<http://country-facts.findthebest.com/compare/15-31-61-165-173/Saudi-Arabia-vs-Canada-vs-Rwanda-vs-Iceland-vs-Kenya>.

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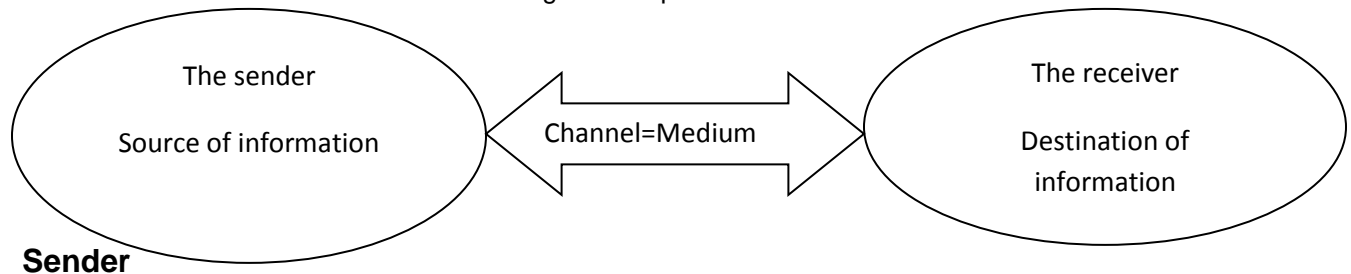
What are the key components of Communication?

In a simplified picture, communication is composed of:

1. *The sender*, source of information. This is the one who is responsible for the message transmitted in the process of communication.
2. *The receiver*; destination of the information. This is the one to whom was the message addressed.
3. *The channel* means by which the message was delivered from the sender to the receiver.

In addition to these components of communication, we will also see how circumstances surrounding it, interferences to it, the context and even the feedback of the receiver are an integral part of the whole process.

Fig 1. A simplified structure of communication



The sender thinks, organizes, and sends the message. When it comes to public speeches, the sender is obviously the individual doing the speaking in front of others. The sender shares information with the listeners. The sender gives away information with the tone of voice, gestures, the position of body and clothing.

The message

The message is the information released by the sender for the receiver. In planning to give a public speech or write an email, a report... the first idea is only words chosen to convey the message. But that is just the beginning. The words organized with the grammar but that is not all. The style one chooses, the tone of the voice for speeches, the format of the message for written messages and the context in which the message is placed play an important role in giving a meaning to the receiver. For instance, giving a speech when people are in the week of public mourning for their loved ones who perished in the Rwandan genocide and forget to mention anything about it may only end up when no one gave you any attention.

Channel

The channel is the medium through which messages are transmitted from the sender to the receiver. A verbal message can be sent face to face, through a cell phone, a radio,

a TV..., a written message can be sent through an essay paper like this one, a magazine, a book, a letter....

Receiver

The receiver is the destination of message from the sender. The receiver will analyze and interprets the message sent as intended and/or not intended by the sender. The audience observes carefully the speaker, evaluates words he/she is communicating along with the style and the tone of voice in the general situation of this activity. It is then possible to anticipate people's reaction by imagining it before the presentation were you in their place

Feedback

We all react to the message we receive whether willingly or not. That is called giving feedback. All verbal, nonverbal and written messages the receiver sends to the sender. By this feedback, the sender is able to evaluate to which extent the message was received. By giving feedback, the receiver can ask for further explanations, express agreement or disagreement. This helps the sender make clearer the communication. Therefore even when there is no clear feedback, the speaker will try to ask how the audience is taking the message.

The circumstances

The circumstances both physical and psychological are surrounding conditions in which persons send and receive messages. These can be material things like the furniture in a room, formal clothing of the speaker and the audience, sounds, clouds... or immaterial like previous conversations, the security of the area, the culture, the level of education of the audience etc. A speaker needs to check on these circumstances before giving his/her speech.

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Preparation before communication

Preparation is necessary for an effective public presentation. It is done selecting the topic in relation with the targeted public, collect the data for the specific topic, arrange the information logically and in a way that best suits the situation and finally choose carefully words that can facilitate the presentation.

WHAT ARE STRATEGIES FOR AN EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION?

- **Written communication**

Generally speaking good business writing is one that follows ethics within the organization, has logic in the arrangement of ideas, and appeals to emotions. In addition to this it must follow the organizational rules for a document. The document needs to be easy read for the average reader but may be written in a more sophisticated manner for a literate audience. The style of the document must also have something that attracts the attention of the reader.

According to Bailey, good writing will also meet the readers' expectations; it is concise and is effective.

There are many styles in written communication which vary according to the audience. These styles are the colloquial which is more of the conversational with regional phrases and does not follow the standard business English. The second style is the casual one which uses the everyday words and expression but does not follow the appropriate formal writing style.

In business writing, the appropriate style must be formal to a high level. Formal written communication uses professionalism in words and expressions. It cares a great deal about roles, protocol, and appearance. The vocabulary, the grammar and the syntax are carefully observed in making sentences. That means how much of variety in words and sophisticated words are arranged to give a clear message to the destination of the document.

There are many kinds written documents but we will consider letters, memos, e-mails, and résumés.

a. Letters;

- There are application letters written in the format to identify a specific job title, records the source of information about the job, gives a summary of qualifications for the job requirements, refers the reader to the resume, asks for an interview and mentions where you can be reached as well as your availability for the interview.
- Resignation letters, which starts on a positive note, explains the reason why you resign but without recriminations, it offers enough notice to allow for replacement and closes on a positive note.
- Acceptance letters, designed to recommend someone for employment. It mentions that you accept the job; identify it, state the salary; indicate moving and reporting for work dates; then close by affirming that you are looking forward to work...
- Acknowledgement letters, informing someone that you received what was sent to you. It is a short, polite note mentioning when the item arrived and expresses thanks.

- Refusal letters, to refuse some kind of request. It has a buffer beginning, reviews facts, and then the bad news because of facts and closes with a pleasant note.
 - Reference letters, the writer mentions the names, title, employer and address, states how long he/she knows the applicant and circumstances of that acquaintance, addresses specifically the applicant's skills, abilities, knowledge and personal characteristics in relation to the requested job title.
 - Inquiry letters, written to request assistance, information or merchandise. This letter makes questions concise, clear and specific. Most of the time questions are numbered so that the reader can use little time responding to them. It expresses appreciation.
 - Complaints letters, these letters are from customers asking for certain corrections in a given situation. It begins by identifying all data; the body goes into details what happened...and then makes a friendly request in conclusion.
 - Adjustment letters; it responds to a complaint letter. It begins by giving good news to the reader; it continues by explaining away the causes of the problem; it goes on by stating how you intend to correct the situation and mentions any step taken to prevent recurrence. The conclusion is a pleasant note.
- b. Memos:** A memo is a brief business document which is used in the organization to inform, ask for further clarifications about an issue or convince employees on certain decisions on policies, procedures, new processes or some course of action.
- c. Emails:** An e-mail is useful for both internal and external business communication. To format and compose an e-mail, one needs to follow the company's rules of etiquette without forgetting to be professional like for all formal documents.
- d. Résumés:** A résumé is a summary of someone's identity, education, work experience and other skills acquired on one document. Today's business use more and more résumés like searchable databases.

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- **Oral communication**

Spoken communication has proved to be the fastest, direct and gives the quickest feedback of all kinds of communication. It is so because the receiver can show

emotional reaction immediately after spoken communication. We all know that our emotions reveal our true self more than anything else. Thus this communication can be rated as the most reliable in terms of feedback. Our everyday life is guided by spoken communication far more than the written one.

It is of prime importance to know how to communicate in this spoken manner for our chances to succeed in life lies heavily on it. Thus our listening and speaking skills promote our capacity at work and in business and our social life.

How can we improve our spoken communication?

When considering spoken communication, we realize that the phonation, the articulation and the pronunciation come forward.

- (i) The phonation may be composed of *the pitch* referring to how high or low our personal vocal cords are (we should use a medium flow pitch); *the volume* referring to the loudness of our vocal tone (we are advised to use a normal volume); *the tone* referring to the feelings we transmit by our voice (we are advised not to show up our problems through our spoken communication); *the tempo* referring to the speed of our talk (we are advised to neither be too slow nor too fast).
- (ii) The articulation refers to the way a person pronounces vowels and consonants. It is supposed to be given their right pronunciation to sound pleasantly in the ear of the audience. The main barriers to good articulation are the lack of proper education, carelessness in speech, rapid speech and organic defects/disorder of teeth, tongue and/or lips. It is possible to improve one's articulation by learning to pronounce correctly vowels and consonants; speaking conveniently, not too slowly or too quickly; and be careful while talking; avoid using dialects when giving a public speech.
- (iii) The pronunciation; it is one thing to articulate correctly but it is another thing to pronounce properly. It is advisable to use the most current dictionary to know how a word is pronounced.

The role of listening in oral communication

Listening is as important as speaking in communication. Let us consider a powerful statement spoken with the most artful ability to a person who did not listen. It is equal to a total loss. By improving our listening we increase our knowledge and become more efficient.

- Employees need to listen to their supervisors to have clear instructions so that they can perform their duties as required. They have to listen properly to their fellow workers. Their failure to listen correctly carries a heavy cost both to the organization and to their job.
- Employees need to listen carefully their customers to avoid costly mistakes and offer a good service and products that meet the customers' expectations.

- Supervisors must listen carefully to understand the workers' messages both the spoken and the unspoken. This is necessary because workers know a lot more of the work's realities and they are usually on the field.

It would be a terrible problem for a hotel if the receptionist cannot listen attentively to customer. Let us think of a secretary in a certain company who receives a telephone call concerning the payment of a bill but fails to understand the whole information. The company will incur a sure loss. The waitress who does not listen properly to customers will not serve what is ordered and will cause much loss of customers. Obviously such worker cannot be a candidate for promotion but instead risks to be dismissed.

How to improve listening skills

Listening is an activity rather than something that happens to people when they are passive. Therefore we;

- Learn to be attentive by keeping our mind from wondering which happens if we don't train ourselves to listen;
- Make notes of important points as we listen;
- Nodding the head when we are in agreement with the speaker;
- Asking questions to clarify where we do not understand;
- Answering any question the speaker brings about.

Why do we listen?

- (i) We listen to have the information either in conferences, public speeches or in interviews. If one is on a panel interviewing someone; it is good to set clear questions, listen carefully, get facts straight, take notes and ask for further explanations where necessary. If we are the one to be interviewed; we need to listen attentively to questions being asked, answer straight to questions and ask questions about the organization and the job we applied for when the panel asks for it.
- (ii) We listen to solve problems. When supervisors talk, employees listen to instructions and actively record all the information needed to solve any problem. To solve a problem some steps are normally followed including:

Defining the problem; analyzing it; identify potential sources of information; determine the time and the cost associated with the problem solving; evaluate possible solution and finally apply the best possible solution.
- (iii) We listen to learn from others experience. This is so important that either failures or successes of others inspire us in taking accurate decisions in our course of action. This is wisdom humanity has drawn from their predecessors generation after generation.

We listen to win arguments. Arguments are different from quarrels. Here is a useful way of organizing and remembering seven key argumentative strategies; argument by generalization; argument by analogy; argument by sign; argument by consequence; argument by authority; argument by principle; argument by testimony

- (iv) Having an argument is presenting one's opinion relevant to the issue being discussed. Consequently, to win an argument, one must have good listening skills and give sound reasons with good opinions relevant to the facts.
- (v) We listen to persuade the audience. In business, persuasion is necessary to gain consumers of products we offer, employers promote employees who can persuade the customers. To persuade is a skill one can learn. The use of questions followed by appropriate answers highlighting the importance of products or services we offer. Complimenting people motivates them to consider favorably what we present or offer.

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Recommendations

Business communication is of highest importance and is recommended for all the skills we acquire by looking closely into it. Whoever is in leadership position or aspires to be successful in business needs to learn how just as we learn everything since we are little children until we become old. This world is merciless and a slight mistake determines our sure failure. Our communication draws the image of our personality in the mind of our hearers. With technology our public presentation is made much better in the eyes of our audience. Multiculturalism is becoming the order of the millennium and anyone who thinks to do business nowadays will absolutely have a cross-cultural approach of their management. Business communication is a social field of study that draws its roots from other studies. It answers many of our communication problems by its thorough approach to language, psychology, sociology, and analyzes people's reactions to communication styles. An employee who wants to go a long way in the career needs to learn and practice skills of communication. Interviews are the first proof of how important communication is at the place of work. Memorandums, emails, reports, letters can be so motivating when well written but can be disastrous to the organization when they are not good since they carry the image of the entire organization. A well spoken word followed by a good listening are an asset to the company's credibility. In the social life, someone with a concise, clear and grammatical good message influences and is accepted as a model in any society of the world. The days when people used to turn to one individual who can write for them a well tuned letter to a potential employer are long forgotten because of communication skills acquired from this study.

Conclusion

Business communication shapes the image of ourselves and others around us. It helps us learn and grow in our chosen career. Communication is a process by which we understand ourselves and others; we share our ideas and help work through others too. The key elements of communication are the sender, the receiver and the medium through which the message is sent, the feedback, interferences, the context and the environment. In communication, preparation is very important so that the message can be ethical, organized and punctual. The language is made up of words organized to make sense and thus express ideas. There is a grammatical order it follows with rules of syntax, semantics and context. Communication has barriers like the use of jargon, slang, clichés; euphemisms...which can be avoided. It is good to emphasize our messages by artfully utilizing visual presentations, signposts, repeating key points and making summaries internally.

Our communication will be improved when we first make definitions of terms we use, choose concise words, manage the tone of our voice correctly and respect the audience. Finally, good listening is part of effective communication in oral communication.

In written communication, the text must be correct, easy to read, attractive and meets the reader's expectations. The style to be used can be formal, informal or casual but all depends on the audience and the circumstances.

Feedback from the audience is always necessary. It can be direct, indirect, internal or external. It can be in the media or through electronic ways but it will always be of great importance.

Research can be qualitative or quantitative, and it is important to assess the validity, reliability, and statistical significance of research findings.

Feedback may be evaluative, interpretive, supportive, probing, or understanding, and it is always an opportunity for growth.

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