

CHRONEMICS: A DIFFERENT WAY TO COMMUNICATE IN A BUSINESS ORGANISATION

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Abstract:

Non-verbal communication plays a pivotal role in daily business communication activities. It is concerned with such things as body movements, voice, inflection, space, time, colour and layout of the environment. Though very often neglected, the study of the use of time or 'chronemics' is of immense significance as far as daily business communication is concerned. The way we use time and the way we communicate with others what time means to us conveys a lot about us. It creates meaning in our minds and in the minds of others as well. Effective use of chronemic communication can definitely help in achieving the desired goals in business related activities. The paper attempts to study the nuances of chronemics and its relevance in business communication.

Key Words: Non-Verbal Communication, Chronemics & Time Management

Introduction:

'Communication', the buzz word in today's world, originates from the Latin word *communico* or *communicare* which means to share. The word has been defined variedly and used in many different contexts. Despite the different versions, it is commonly referred to as the transfer of ideas, feelings, plans, messages, or information through a common set of symbols. However, communication is considered effective only when it gets the desired action or result. The understanding created through one communication cycle can never be absolute or complete. It is an interactive and ongoing process in which common ground that is, assumed mutual beliefs and mutual knowledge, is accumulated and updated [1].

Non-verbal communication refers to the communication that involves neither written nor spoken words but takes place without the use of words. It is less deliberate and conscious: rather it is subtle and instinctive compared to verbal communication. While commenting on the significance of non verbal communication in the evolution of human language, Harrison and Crouch suggest that "in the development of each human being, non verbal communication precedes and perhaps structures all subsequent communication" [2]. According to Albert Mehrabian, a pioneer in the field of understanding communications, 7% of the meaning is in the spoken words, 38% is in the use of the voice, tone and inflection, and 55% is conveyed through facial expressions [3]. So 93% of the meaning is in the non-verbal component of communication. Non-verbal communication can occur together with verbal communication and can occur alone as well. It is concerned with such things as body movements, voice, inflection, space, time, colour and layout of the environment. It has been accordingly divided into various sub areas such as Kinesics, Proxemics, Chronemics, Paralanguage, etc.

Thomas J. Bruneau of Radford University coined the term "chronemics" in the late 1970s to help define the function of time in human interaction. Chronemics can be defined as the interrelated observations and theories of man – the way in which one perceives and values time, structures time, and reacts to time frames communication. Time perception plays a large role in the nonverbal communication process. Time perceptions include punctuality, willingness to wait, and interactions. The use of time can affect lifestyle, daily agendas, speed of speech, movements, and how long people are willing to listen. The present paper attempts to study the nuances of time language, its relevance across cultures and the significance it holds in daily business communication activities.

Discussion:

Chronemics basically involves the meaning we give to time, that is, how we communicate to others what time means to us [4]. The way we use or perceive time communicates a lot about us. A very simple instance is the time we reach for an interview or we arrive at office. Coming on late would simply mean unprofessionalism or lack of interest. On the other hand, arriving earlier creates a better impression and reveals our interest, sincerity and positive attitude. Young business professionals who have newly entered the job market can always create a favourable opinion about themselves in the minds of their superiors and colleagues by communicating their sense of time in a positive way.

The amount of time we devote to a certain task tells us about the importance it holds for us. Normally if we give more time to complete a task; it reveals that it is definitely more important to us. If a superior authority finds out time to talk to his subordinates or listen to their grievances, it suggests that he cares where as his not doing so would mean his lack of regard for them. If manager cuts short his time in one meeting to attend another, it suggests the relative importance of the second over the first. Time can be used as an indicator of status in professional organisations as well. For example, in most companies the boss can interrupt progress to hold an impromptu meeting in the middle of the work day, yet the average worker would have to make an appointment to see the boss.

Time has a definite relationship to power and this becomes quite explicit in the contemporary corporate context. Power is not merely the ability to influence people but status and dominance as well. For instance, people in a higher position in a business organization treat time differently and have their time treated differently from that of their subordinates. Chronemics and power converge at the workplace in a few situations like the waiting time, talk time, work time.

Researchers have noted that making someone wait is a sign of higher status in an organization. On the other hand, being made to wait symbolizes lower organizational status [5]. The power an individual enjoys in an organization is directly related to the conversations he is engaged in. Initiating a conversation, turn taking and the length of the conversation are all affected by who

the speaker is. A more powerful person in the organization can easily initiate a discussion, speak for any length of time and interrupt his subordinates where as people of lower status do not enjoy such privileges. Beginning and ending a communication interaction in the workplace is controlled by the higher-status individual in an organization. The time and duration of the conversation are also dictated by them. Scheduling of work time also reflects the status of individuals in the workplace. Scheduling reflects the extent to which the sequencing and duration of plans, activities and events are formalized [6]. Individuals of the higher status have relatively more precise and formal schedules where as those of the lower status have less formalized schedules.

As far as our personal life is concerned, we are taught to respect time and realize its value. Students are advised not to waste time as it waits for none. We are also made to realize that the future time is important and we must take steps to secure the future by making insurances and the right pension planning. So we communicate our ideas of time through our non-verbal behaviours, both personally and professionally.

It is important, however, to realize that the meanings we attach to time vary widely from one culture to another. Cultures are considered as monochromic or polychromic depending on the way they view time. In a monochromic culture, things are done one at a time and time is segmented into precise, small units. Under this system, time is scheduled, arranged and managed. Hall (1990) says that for monochromic cultures, such as the American culture, time is tangible and viewed as a commodity where time is money or time is wasted [7]. The result of this perspective is that monochromic cultures place a paramount value on schedules, tasks and getting the-job done. These cultures are committed to regimented schedules and may view those who do not subscribe to the same perception of time as disrespectful, inefficient or unreliable. People of such cultures are more committed to jobs and the end results and have a strong tendency to build temporary and practical relationships.

On the other hand, a polychromic time system is one where several things can be done at once, and wider view of time is exhibited and time is perceived in large fluid sections. Polychromic cultures, such as seen in Italy or Brazil, are much less focused on the preciseness of accounting for each and every moment. They prefer to have multiple things happening at once. They tend to prioritise relationships over tasks and do not consider time commitments to be binding. As Raymond Cohen (1997) notes, polychromic cultures are more focused on tradition and relationships rather than on tasks—a clear difference from their monochromic counterpart [8]. He notes that "Traditional societies have all the time in the world. The arbitrary divisions of the clock face have little saliency in cultures grounded in the cycle of the seasons, the invariant pattern of rural life, community life, and the calendar of religious festivities" (Cohen, 1997, p. 34). People of such cultures are more committed to relations rather than end results and have a strong tendency to build lifetime familial relationships as opposed to temporary and practical relationships that are preferred by their monochromic counterparts.

Conclusion:

Daily communication activities in a business organization are greatly affected by the way people use time and convey their perception of time to others. Chronemics is a very significant and unique way of communicating in a business organization. People do create an image of theirs through their use of time. Improper sense of time use can adversely affect a communication process; where as a good knowledge of the nuances of chronemics can substantially enhance the effectiveness of the communication process.

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