

THE COMMUNICATION STYLES IN THE DOMAIN OF PUBLIC AFFAIRS OR TO BE OR NOT TO BE ETHICAL²

Abstract: *The way of communication is one of the most important elements in an effective dialog in any democratic society. It includes a number of considerations and requirements. "Dialogue requires being taken out of the field of interest (...)". Usually, the pleasure of dialogue does not consist of reaching consensus, but of the constant and persistent enrichment" (Menyono & Dinimic 2000:15). Numerous studies explicitly state that the trust in a person involved in communication is often more important than the contents of what has been said. Insincere communication is associated with the manifestation of complex behavioral patterns in the process of interpersonal interaction, with the goal of prevailing in the communication process. The persuasion principle is one of the major tools in establishing the way of communication in the sphere of public affairs. But, the key to democratic and sincere communication is the ethical approach to a dialog in the first place. In the mosaic of communication, in the domain of public affairs, we will focus on the persuasive style of communication, ethical and non-ethical behavior of parties in the process of communicating, adopting the interdisciplinary character of analysis. "Embracing this kind of guideline deters us from imposing our ways and our values on others, whose experience and views of appropriate communication may differ from our own" (Wood, 2006: 40).*

Key words: *communication, public affairs, persuasion, style, ethics, non-ethical, dialog*

1. Introduction

Despite the fact that we are communicating continuously, we are not always effective. Communication is an everlasting process, especially in the sphere of public affairs. Even when we do not communicate with people, we interact with mass media and communication technologies. We perceive each other by the verbal, non-verbal and written communication styles, as the central magnifying energy of human personal, professional and civic prosperities.

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Communication permeates life in all segments and it is the only way of establishing and maintaining meaningful relationships in any democratic society. “Communication in the domain of public affairs and business is a complex, socio-psychological process in which people exchange information and it is carried out in writing (by exchanging documents of different types, nature and purpose, or written materials) or oral communications (through various channels), that need a response (feedback)” (Borisova, 2017: 11).

Communication requires the existence of, at least, two participants in the communicative act: the one who sends and the one who receives the message and the two, generally, try to reach an understanding and eventually agree on some issue. In order to reach an agreement (after the recipient decodes the message), the symbols that are exchanged during the communication need to be identical (or, at least, close enough) in their meaning. It is not, we all will agree, an easy task. The transmission of information is successful when the effectively sent message touches thoughts and ideas of the other side in communication. On the other hand, communication is unsuccessfully done when the process is disrupted and obstacles are created that stand in the way of a set of established goals. The major purpose of communication is to deliver the message to others clearly and unambiguously. In that process, honesty, as the major principle of ethical behavior, should be the leading principle. “In order to be able to communicate successfully with other people, one must be in a friendly mood, respond without accusations, show open interest in the views of the interlocutor and reduce resistance, and most of all, contribute to building trust” (Deletić & Pejičić, 2008: 33).

2. Communication styles and transmission of messages

Communication skills are vital to the health of our society, argues Wood:

“To be effective, a citizen in a democracy must be able to express ideas and evaluate the ethical and logical strength of the claims and reasoning of public figures. To make informal judgments, voters, for example, need to listen critically to arguments of the candidates and responses to questions. We also need to listen critically to the proposals about goals for our communities, for the institutions at which we work, and for the organizations on which we depend on for services.... Healthy civic and social management depends on our ability to listen thoughtfully to a range of perspectives and styles of communicating and to adapt our communication to diverse people and contexts” (Wood, 2006: 11).

Language is the main means by which agreements are reached in communication activities, as well as people’s consent to certain issues. Accuracy is the leading force, either in oral or written communications.

Oral communication is the most developed way of transmitting messages. This is the most significant achievement of the development process and the initiator of all changes and further development in the public affairs environment. The advantages of verbal communication are: brief exchange of ideas, immediate response, clarity...

Face-to-face communication is still the most reliable way of conveying information and getting feedback. Personal communication is based on the meaning of words and sentences, the intelligibility of speech, the clarity of the logical flow of thought, the intensity of the voice, proof and condition for any further development.

On the other hand, the advantage of written communication is in a written trace of communication. If there is any doubt about the contents, the message is available for the review. The written messages are usually well organized, logical and clear. The main disadvantage of written communication is the time required by this form of information exchange, the lack of feedback, non-verbal signs that consist of body movements, intonation and accentuation of individual words, facial expression and physical distance between the sender and the recipient of the message. Through non-verbal communication we can express our mental and emotional states. The two most important messages conveyed by body language are: how much we like someone, or how much we are interested in his or her ideas, attitudes and the level of relationship between the sender and the recipient.

In the process of communication, participants encounter many factors that make communication difficult and unsuccessful. Some are related to the subjects of communication, to the climate of communication or even the lack of appropriate means of communication, stereotypical prejudices... Communication processes are also susceptible to noise, harassment and interference in the process of transmission.

The style of any verbal or written saying, as part of speech called elocution, is very important in the process of communication. "The right word at the right place", as Jonathan Swift said once. In relation to style in written communication, "oral style is more direct, personal, and uses visual and audio aids, less formal, more related to our emotions than intellect. The style of oral communication has to be as simple as possible, well organized, and clear, yet, conceivable and comprehensible." (Avramović, 2008: 265). The communication style is an individual, stable form of communicative behavior which manifests itself in different conditions of interaction. "How important is the personal stamp in the communication can be seen in the case of British Prime minister W.C. who would arrange the order of historical facts in his own style to avoid gray reality and stress the importance of his original way of thinking" (Cvetanović, 2012: 86).

Desev defines style as "a set of characteristic, typical qualities, techniques, manners, forms and methods of action, which are manifested directly in the way of human behavior" (Desev, 1999: 554). Each style, as the means of using different language tools in the communication process, is well presented in the field of functional stylistics. The style of communication in the area of public affairs, for example, should be well organized as administrative, official, precise and fully bound by linguistic norms.

Speech decorations, thought figures, construction or discourse are related to the ideas or attitudes, with the same goals to convince the party in communication more effectively and emphasize their own attitudes or diminish the statement value of the opposing party. However, the goal has always been to have the desired impression, to prepare the recipient in conversation for easier acceptance of the presented ideas. (Radović, Cvetanović & Boykov, 2018: 104).

American psychologist and philosopher Willie James established his major scientific work on overcoming the boundaries between people participating in conversation. The great example is the research of Ballenger, (Stanojlić & Gaković 2008: 20) who stresses specific styles in the communication process characterized by the lack of mutual trust and honesty among the interlocutors: 1. *Delusion* (we are talking about trips that are not taken; about acquaintances that do not exist at all ...). 2. *Transformation* – trying to convince the others of the truth, and we ourselves know that this is not true. 3. *Concealment* (intentional mitigation, shortening, silence). 4. *Ambiguity* – hypocrisy and ambiguity. 5. *Insinuation* – deception. 6. *Calculation* is characterized by cunning, flattery, deception with illusions. 7. *Inappropriate criticism* – protection and fraud due to their own noninvolvement. 8. *Intellectualization* – reserved, calculated and seemingly calm behavior without the emotional contribution. 9. *Escape* – a state of escape in which the speaker bypasses, avoids or hides questions or twists the answers. 10. *Unnatural politeness* – diversion with the intention to win the respect and love of others in the name of some immediate interest. (Politeness becomes intrusive, expressive, and suspicious, when it goes beyond conventional frameworks. Such politeness arouses suspicion).

Virginia Satyr (Boyanov & Bojkov, 2020: 251) distinguishes four styles of communication: passive, aggressive (distracted), passive-aggressive and assertive. Only the assertive type is the preferred one in the domain of public affairs.

The main feature of the passive style is to avoid hurting other people at all costs. Passive persons do not express their needs, opinions and feelings. Such persons keep everything to themselves so the others do not acknowledge their intentions the right way. They speak quietly, or talk a lot, but saying little, and usually avoid eye contact. The advantage of this style is that people rarely get angry with the speaker.

The main characteristic of the aggressive style of communication is the domination over others: criticize, humiliate or transfer their responsibility to others. The advantage of this style is that such people often get what they want. On the other hand, the interlocutors feel pressure and discomfort.

The passive-aggressive style is a combination of both passive and aggressive style. The main feature of this style is that passively aggressive persons do not express their desires, opinions and feelings. They act politely, but do not follow the agreement and do not accept personal responsibility.

Being assertive means expressing all desires, opinions and feelings honestly and clearly, while empathetically respecting the desires, opinions and feelings of others. This type of style is considered to be the most effective way of communication. Persons who use this style speak in a calm tone, equate the verbal with the non-verbal communication, listen to the interlocutor and do not interrupt. They use the most effective way of getting an agreement. (Radović, Cvetanović & Boykov, 2018:104).

3. The mechanisms of manipulation

The problem of manipulation in the sphere of public matters is among the major ones. Philip Breton in his outstanding book, *La parole manipulée (Manipulated Word)*, writes about the conditions that lead to manipulation in the sphere of public affairs: weak management in cultural and educational systems, media and political sensations, populism in all segments of public life, corruption, production of inner and external enemies, and the lack of trust in institutions and other. His concern is that people are not aware of the strength of manipulation. He is very disturbed by the fact that people of present democratic societies have a common belief that they have the ability to easily decode manipulation. For many of them the mass media should be the decoder of false motives of those who have the intention to manipulate. However, he insists that media has one of the leading roles in implementation of manipulation, and it is the reason why he strongly alludes to people to be much more aware of this problem because the mechanisms of manipulation exist in every spore of public affairs. (Breton, 2000: 22).

“The act of manipulation is to enter into the soul without them being aware of its persistence” (Breton, 2000: 25). According to Breton, in today’s world, a new kind of sophisticated approach has been created, partly due to the new communication technologies. The new powerful tools of that new method of persuasion are propaganda and disinformation. In fact, manipulation is the process of communication, but not through discussion or dialog, but the constraint or seduction by the demagogic approach, repetitions, the fear of authority, even the seduction by certain style. All of this leads towards conformism as the collective hypnotic state of people’s minds. Breton is very aware, first of all, that we do not have the mechanisms to easily decode those manipulative methods. It looks like, he argues, that the language of persuasion develops outside our culture, and outside the educational system. On the other hand, there is the tendency in science to encourage thoughts about language as a way of manipulation. Those who use persuasive style in communication should certainly be responsible for the way of adopting those ideas. How to fight manipulation? “The fight”, he says, “against manipulation should start, at first, with learning how to decode manipulative expressions we are exposed to. In that direction, we should try hard to better understand the mechanisms of communication in general, why we are involved in certain communication and on what base we build our decisions” (Breton, 2000: 180). But the first step, according to Breton, should be to see our own manipulative intentions, even if we do it unintentionally. For that reason, self-examination can lead toward an open negation of messages with manipulative content. And finally, it is important to implement the methods of correct reasoning through analogy, testimony, narrative, and cause so that the parties in the process of communication can decide together whether the evidence really support the claim.

4. Persuasive way of communication

After an oppressive regime was overthrown in ancient Greece, the democratic society was established. The new way of life established the new way of communication in the sphere of public affairs. In order to bring legal claims against the overthrown government, the citizens needed to learn to speak effectively and persuasively. Cxorax and Tissues were the first teachers of the persuasive speaking style. However, sophists were unconcerned with the ethics and the search for the truth. They were assuring people that in a short time they can be taught how to win arguments by using special techniques. Ethics for them did not have any role. Their only goal was to teach people how to win by any means available. They left almost no trace of any scholarship, but even today, there is the name for deceptive reasoning in argumentation well known as sophistic reasoning.

Persuasion is the process of motivating someone, through communication, to change a particular belief, attitude or behavior (Rodman, 1997: 324). According to The Oxford Dictionary, persuasion is the action or process of persuading someone or of being persuaded to do or believe something. However, false or misleading information shouldn't exist in searching in the favor of the audience or change of attitude or behavior in the way that is of our selfish interest (Frank, 1983: 97). Being wrong on moral grounds, the credibility of the persuasion style will suffer on a long range. Frank states several elements of unethical persuasion: dishonesty as deliberate lying, withholding information, statistical manipulation, pandering, inaccuracy as ignorant misstatement, reporting opinion or rumors as truth or strategies that are not in the interest of another party in communication. Most importantly, one unethical act can cast doubt on future truthful statements. For all the reasons, honesty has been the best policy in any form of communication. A very good example is the article published in the New York Time magazine in 1987 that shows Biden plagiarizing parts of an English politician's speech; as a result, he had to drop out of the race for Democratic Presidential Nomination. Ironically, 35 years later, he was elected president. It shows that voters have short electoral memories and the lack of moral grounds of politicians in general.

There are many theories, started with Aristotle, on the issue of persuasion. However, there are three theories that, according to Rodman, have attracted a significant bulk of research in that direction. The basic idea of the balance theory is that people like to feel psychological consistency. In other words, they like to feel that their ideas about themselves are in a balanced and consistent state. On the other hand, the social judgment theory can be best seen during the months of a political campaign when candidates carefully watch the opinion polls, adjusting their appeals to the attitudes of acceptance. Inoculation theory deals with the audience's resistance to subsequent persuasion, which means that the other side of communication is presented with the arguments of opposing points of view. That way, even the more intelligent opposing party is persuaded much better through two-sided arguments. The objective in persuasive communication is to move the other side to a specific and attainable behavior (Rodman, 1997:352).

5. Ethical standards as the major determining goals in communication

The ethical standards should be the major determining goal of every communication. Along with being able to articulate this standard as the honest one, well supported arguments should also be a matter of respect to the parties in communication processes. As Quintilian, a Roman expert in Rhetoric argued, any of the participants in communication must meet the Roman Republic's definition of a virtuous man. That virtuous man or a good man who only has the right to be included in rhetoric matters, as Plato alluded to, can be labeled with the initial, the derived and the terminal credibility.

The Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy explains that the field of ethics or moral philosophy systematizes, defends and recommends concepts of right and wrong behavior. In a more precise way, it includes values such as loyalty, integrity, honesty, respect, and good communication. However, the history of human communication supports the trend of unethical behavior, especially in the domain of policy making, journalists' approach to the truth and unethical doing of public representatives. The cornerstone of the problem in general is the unethical reputation of modern day's communication. Officially, the code of ethics exists in the majority of professional associations, such as human rights, fairness, the freedom of speech and dignity. Plato wrote that good people do not need laws to act responsibly while, on the other hand, bad people will find a way around the laws.

Our essential question is to discover the reason for that kind of situation in present day's communication... Unfortunately, there are many. One of the major reasons is that this important branch of human communication is not on the list of priorities in the secondary or higher level of education. According to the research conducted by the International Association of Business Communication Research Foundation³ in the field of ethics, the majority of participants in the area of public relations had a few, if any, academic study of ethics. The Commission on Public Relations Education, a group of experts who, from time to time, examine the knowledge of ethics among public relations employers, advised colleges and universities to include more dedicated courses of ethics in their curriculums. They also strongly argued that education in public relations can provide a body of knowledge about the process of ethical decision-making that can help students not only to recognize ethical dilemmas, but to use appropriate critical thinking skills to help resolve those dilemmas in a way, resulting in an ethical outcome. Also, the Commission noted the need to raise the importance of particular issues and trends in the public relations field such as ethics and transparency. Their major concern is that young practitioners, unprepared to deal with ethics, would harm their careers and, even more importantly, reduce the reputation of the public relations profession itself. Adopting the ethical principles discourages parties in communication processes from deceiving others by distorting evidence or withholding information. One of the most

³ <http://www.commpred.org./report/>

important principles for ethical communication, as well, is respecting differences between people. Embracing this guideline deters us from imposing our ways and/or values on others, whose experiences and views of appropriate communication may differ from our own (Wood, 2006: 40).

Morale is on a very low level in all aspects of public life and one of the most important reasons is that the matter of ethics is very complex and difficult to apprehend (Jensen, 1990: 281). He argues that when discussing terms of ethical or unethical, there is oversimplification in approach and that it is more helpful to think in terms of a continuum rather than limiting it by black and white simplicity.

Politicians, who have the ruling role in public affairs, usually do not bring bad news to the voters, because if they did, they would be afraid of being beaten politically. "They believe that the voters do not want to hear about the cost and inconvenience of solutions to social problems" (Rodman, 1997: 55). On the other side of the line, opposite of politicians with usually ethical problems stand, for example, public relations firms, which usually twist the truth to serve specific interests of business organizations (Finn, 1993: 40).

Changes in communication technology have transformed the nature of the way of communication. To be able to avoid unethical, manipulative and dishonest behavior, the most important communication skill is critical thinking, using logic and reasoning, recognizing valid argumentation, and at the end, distinguishing discussion from manipulation.

6. Dialogical ethics versus persuasive ethics

Dialog should be the natural inclusion in any of the communication processes. Discussion is the only democratic way to underline the truth to which the parties can agree on. The persuasiveness and the advocacy, as the stylistic approaches, can be implanted only in the form of dialogical communication. Scholars, like Kent and Taylor, see dialog as the only way of communication and "if one partner subverts the dialogic process through manipulation, disconfirmation, or exclusion, then the end result will not be dialogic" (Kent & Taylor, 2002: 24). Further, Tilley argues that dialog is the best way in resolving ethical dilemmas through a mutual understanding of the truth (Tilley, 2005: 317). Ethical standards as part of campaign measurements should also be highly encouraged. Ethical principles should be strengthened by incorporating deontological philosophy into a dialogical way of communication. Deontology, as the study of duty based on Immanuel Kant's philosophy, can be unified with ethical principles only if there are positive motives on both sides in reaching any decisions.

The ability for all sides to be engaged in ethical reasoning is the only democratic, responsible, and important way of communication in the modern era of public affairs. In that matter, academic institutions and professional practice should be involved even more extensively in the matters of ethics. The crisis of trust has reached the top of the list among all crises in modern day's communication. The

obligation of all sides in the process of communication in the field of public affairs should be the priority among all. Approaching this urgent problem will definitely define the role of political and public relations organizations in the near future.

As Ljubomir Tadić elaborates at the end of his book *Rhetoric* (Tadić, 1995: 329), there is no better way of keeping democracy waken than critical wakening, or opening some kind of permanent Agora that will nurture rhetoric argumentation in contrast to the eristic model. Democracy has its roots in critically nourished public opinion.

7. Conclusion

In any of the particular communication processes, there must exist the balance and the commitment in giving and receiving messages as the essence of a meaningful relationship. Non-compliance or avoidance of settlement leads to accumulation of obligations, on one hand, and instability on the other, which can lead to relations termination.

The key to success in any professional communication, particularly in the domain of public affairs, should be a sincere relationship. However, in this so-called crossword puzzle commitment, there are often many unknowns, but the leading one is insincere communication when one side, for example, hides or manipulates, while the other side is completely unaware of that.

Practice shows that the atmosphere of comfort and mutual understanding in professional communication is crucial in maintaining the responsible and ethical balance. Successful communication depends on many elements, but the essential one is the ability to navigate the speech situation, select appropriate language tools for the relevant field of communication (Mitseva, 2011: 88-89).

Resolving the conflicts and clarifying the goals can be achieved through compromise (understanding), acceptance (open conversation, communication without confrontation) and partnership (forgiveness, honesty).

Finally, there are many clouds in maintaining fair, honest and ethical communication in the domain of public affairs. To be able to avoid the so-called empty talks or declamation, as Ljubomir Tadić wrote (Tadić, 1995: 328), there are no better ways than being fair and honest in communication.

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STILOVI KOMUNIKACIJE U OBLASTI JAVNIH POSLOVA ILI BITI ILI NE BITI ETIČAN

Apstrakt. Način komunikacije je jedan od najvažnijih elemenata efikasnog dijaloga u svakom demokratskom društvu koji uključuje niz razmatranja i zahteva. Posebno mesto u lancu komunikacije u oblasti javnih poslova zauzimaju stilovi i veštine u dijalogu. „Obično se zadovoljstvo dijaloga ne sastoji u postizanju konsenzusa, već u stalnom i upornom bogaćenju (Menyono, 2000: 15). Brojne studije eksplicitno navode da je poverenje u osobu koja se bavi komunikacijom često važnije od sadržaja izrečenog. Neiskrena komunikacija je povezana sa ispoljavanjem složenih obrazaca ponašanja u procesu međuljudske interakcije, sa ciljem da preovlada u procesu komunikacije. Principi ubeđivanja su jedno od glavnih oruđa u uspostavljanju načina komunikacije u sferi javnih poslova. Ali, ključ demokratske i iskrene komunikacije je etički pristup

dijalogu na prvom mestu. U mozaiku komunikacije u domenu javnih poslova focus je na stil nagovaranja, etičko i neetičko ponašanje stranaka u procesu komuniciranja, uz primenu interdisciplinarnе analize. „Prihvatanje ove vrste smernica nas odvraća od nametanja naših načina i vrednosti drugima, čije se iskustvo i pogledi na odgovarajuću komunikaciju mogu razlikovati od naših sopstvenih”. (Wood, 2006: 40).

Ključne reči: komunikacija, javni poslovi, ubedjivanje, stil, etika, dijalog