

BUSINESS COMMUNICATION IN ROMANIA: TRENDS AND OPPORTUNITIES

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ABSTRACT:

Business communication trends and tools broadly deal with technological developments and applications connected to business processes that can relate to back office operations, data management and analysis, professional services and support, to mention only a few. They cover almost any type of businesses, in manufacturing and/or services. Some of the most recent and relevant ones are discussed in this article.

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1. The current trend in business communication

According to Hartley et.al. (2002), business communication can be defined as any kind of business communication at the organizational level designed to provide a service, a product, an idea or even establish partnerships so as to enhance organizational or business activities. At any workplace, business communication plays a number of diverse roles. To begin with, business communication has helped in the enhancement of all the functions in the organization.

That is, through business communication, the organizational functions at any workplace including stuffing, controlling, planning as well as selling and reporting are coordinated in a better way and with that comes efficiency at any workplace. Guffey et al. (2009) notes that business communication is also critical when it comes to the execution of basic management functions by both the middle level managers as well as the top management.

Business communication plays an important role as far as both the coordination and the direction of activities by the two levels of management which is being concerned. It is also important to note that through forum boards at any workplace, which is taken to be a method of business communication, individuals have been able to post data instantly in a centralized location. Business communication also enhances the interaction between managers and other clients.

The importance of business communication skills is rising. Employees are increasingly being asked to present to international audiences the latest sales figures, to unveil the latest product or to explain changes in strategy, and all in English. Many factors can influence how well you communicate. These include your preparation, the type of audience, the room in which you talk, your level of English, your voice, the visuals you use, and whether you smile. The list may seem depressingly long, but a good business presentation requires you to handle a few basics well and to avoid certain pitfalls. Before reading on, ask yourself the following questions:

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- What should I say in the first few minutes?
 - What makes a good visual?
 - What can I do to handle questions well?
 - What cultural factors could influence the success of business communication?
- There are four steps to be used in order to make a better business presentation.

Step one: Good Planning

Planning is the key to a good business presentation. This means considering the three “Ps”: people, place and purpose.

People

We need to think about our audience. Everything should be geared to its needs and expectations. So, who are they? What do they need to know? Do they want to just listen or to contribute? Do they value punctuality and good time-keeping? Do they prefer a flexible style to rigid structure? Do they see informality as a lack of professionalism? Do they see digression as irrelevant?

We also need to think about cultural differences. It is said that, typically, German audiences love to hear facts; US audiences expect a show; and Italian audiences love to participate (see also *Business Spotlight* 2/2001).

Place

If possible, visit the lecture room beforehand. How big is it? Are the acoustics good? How is the seating organized? Where can you stand to show visuals? Do you have the necessary equipment? Can you check that it works?

Purpose

Why are you giving the business presentation? This must be clear – both to you and your audience. Are you looking to inform, educate, persuade, entertain, motivate, get feedback, impress or create a relationship? Or do you have a hidden agenda?

Step two: Getting started

We make a good impression by starting confidently.

Organization

When choosing content, we must follow a four-step process;

- First, collect ideas.
- Next, select the most useful ideas for your objective.

- Thirdly, group the points into logical units.
- Finally, sequence these units to create a clear thread.

Introductions

When making business presentations, first impressions count. You can win or lose an audience in the first few minutes. It is necessary to choose elements from the classic introduction in order to make a professional start, to make your objective very clear, and also plan to hook your audience at the beginning, to create an impact that will engage them and build interest for the whole business presentation. There are three simple techniques to be followed:

- **Surprise your audience**

“Did you know that Cisco does 80 per cent of its business online? Now you know why I am talking about e-business today.”

- **Make an offer**

“Imagine a consultant who could send you a 20% increase in your productivity in 12 months. Well, don’t just imagine it. That’s I intend to do today.”

- **Use rhetorical questions**

“Why are you here today? Well, the subject is quality. Why quality? Because without it, you can’t succeed.”

Step three: Delivering

Psychologist and author Albert Mehrabian once famously analyzed communication as being seven per cent verbal (the words we use), 38 per cent voice (tone, volume, etc.) and 55 per cent body language. While one can argue about these percentages, successful presenters clearly manage all three elements well.

Verbal

Language is the packaging for your message. Useful words and phrases, different forms and structures can enhance your message significantly. It is important to focus on the following ideas:

CLARITY

Structure your presentation explicitly and use “signaling” or “signposting” business language to guide the audience. For example: “OK, that brings me to the end of the first section. Now I’d like to move on to the second point. Also, remember the somewhat clichéd but still relevant rule of “Kiss”: keep it short and simple. Use the sort of language your audience will understand.

IMPACT

In today's ultra – competitive business world, it is essential to be persuasive. There are a number of techniques to be followed:

- Repeating. Repeat key points using synonyms: “Our solution is *very* cheap, *ultra*-fast and *extremely* reliable.”
- Contrasting. This technique gives your business information a clearer focus: “Last year was only average. This year is exceptional.”
- Simplifying. Simpler language can communicate more effectively: “ No profit? Solution? Invest! Acquire!”
- Questioning. Rhetorical questions vary your rhythm: “So what is the problem? The problem is cash flow.”
- Energizing. Add energy by punctuating strongly with filling words: “OK.../So.../ Right...”
- Engaging. Establish rapport with your audience by including an interesting personal anecdote.
- Personal Style. The words and phrases we use are often a question of personality, as is our style of delivery. It is important to know your strengths and weaknesses and adapt to the needs of your audiences. Be aware of whether you make the sound “er” (or “uh”) when you hesitate. This is very distracting. It is better to think in silence. Record yourself- more than one “er” a minute is too many.

Voice

Using your voice effectively may involve changing the way you usually speak. Good speakers also use sentence stress to highlight the key words, as well as pauses and rhythm to create a natural, dynamic delivery.

Body Language

This is a subject that is often complicated by cross-cultural factors. Your audiences may have very strong expectations of how you look and how you move. Probably the best advice is simply to be yourself. If you are relaxed and confident, your body will follow and communicate that naturally. However, there are some things you can do to enhance your performance.

- **Move a little.** Don't become too static. When taking a question, move toward the questioner.
- **Keep strong eye contact.** This suggests sincerity.
- **Maximize your body square.** Most of the time, your hands/arms should occupy the square between your shoulders and waist, with hands together or apart.
- **Use fingers** when describing points with numbers: raise your thumb for point one; thumb and index finger for point two and so on. The back of your hand should face the audience. Remember also that audiences are

easily distracted by personal tics. Video yourself giving a presentation, and then watch for mannerisms that could be distracting.

Step four: Finishing well

Psychologists tell us that we remember best what is said at the beginning and at the end of a presentation. A strong finish is therefore essential. Make sure that you summarize clearly the main points of a talk; have a simple, short message your audience will remember; and have time for questions. The question phase of a business presentation is the most challenging, as it is the least predictable. Try to anticipate the questions that you might receive, especially the critical ones, and prepare answers. This will enable you to remain confident and to appear authoritative. Also, don't be afraid to use the trick of planting someone in the audience to ask a first "friendly" question. When taking questions, remember the simple acronym RACE as a step-by-step guide of what to do:

R= Respond

This may be a positive response or a clarification of the meaning of a question. Clarification will mean you don't waste time answering the wrong question.

A= Answer

Keep your answer concise and, if possible, link back explicitly to something you said in your business presentation.

C= Check

Always check with the questioner that you have answered the question. In more interactive meetings, you can always ask the questioners for their thoughts and opinions.

E= Encourage

This means invite, or ask for, more questions. Be sure to allow time for people to formulate their questions.

Here are some other useful tips for the question part of your business presentation:

- Never say "I don't know." Offer to find the answer to a question you do not know the answer to, and get back to the questioner.
- Throw back a hostile question with the question "What do you think?"
- Don't enter into a debate with one person.

When questions are over, politely thank the audience for their attention. Plan to give them one more final message or observation to take away before you finish, and accept the rapturous applause!

Thomas Schulz is Head of European Project and Transition Management within the Asset Management division of Credit Suisse in Zurich. Within the company, he has to give one or two presentations a month in English, on aspects of strategy, business development, strategic projects and strategic control. The new trend in making his business presentation more effective is using an extremely clear structure, which means he often introduces points before he explains them and then summarizes what he has said. This way the audience can always see where they are. In fact, it is very important to say key messages two or three times to give your audience a chance to better hear and understand them. Once is not enough.

The use of tricks in business communication can be replaced by jokes now and then. People who are having fun have more interest in a subject. Variety is also very important. If we try to vary our voice, our materials, for example from flip chart to beamer, the audience gets involved. Asking questions from time to time is also extremely efficient.

Taking into consideration cultural differences in business presentations it is said that the most exciting presentations are made by native speakers from the UK and the US. In the US especially, the focus is more on communication rather than the facts – more on the *how* rather than the *what*. In German and Switzerland, there is a strong attention to facts and being correct, which may often lead to very uninspiring, boring presentations. The main tip for German people is to prepare seriously, to be professional and also try to show your feelings never try to hide behind facts or behind your beamer. The best solution is to stand up and tell people what you really think.

Consequently, presentations in German and in English are completely different but following the already mentioned principles, we can feel confident that we can do a good job in both languages.

2. The Knowledge Society in the Global Context of Romania

Since 2001, the Romanian government has declared the development of the Information and Communication Technology (ICT) sector as a strategic priority for the national economy.

The evolution of governmental policies to develop the Knowledge Society (KS) in Romania has been strongly influenced by the accession to EU in 2007. A significant body of legislation and initiatives has been developed during 2001-2004 to stimulate and sustain the development of ICT sector ¹. MCIT has elaborated a series of strategies closely mirroring the ones set by the eEurope/+/2005 programmes. To satisfy the

¹MCIT Activity Report 2001-2004, Communications and information technology in Romania

requirements of the EU accession, between 2001 and 2004 GPIT approved over 180 projects worth over 700 million Euros ¹.

International trade takes place within the framework of agreements worked out by countries in the **World Trade Organization (WTO)**, formerly known as **the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT)**. Business relationships all over the world are developing much faster nowadays as a result of the interaction of important vehicles of influence, such as: business environment, social media, education (Serban, M, Gruiescu, C., Mitrut, M., 2013) and blogs on internet etc.

Over the last 50 years trade barriers have been coming down and free trade, open borders and deregulation now form the ideal for almost all nations.

Trade negotiations are well-known for their epic eleventh hour negotiating sessions, where individual nations argue for what they see as their specific interests.

In the context of the Lisbon strategy and of the European regulation framework the government program mentions the following objectives concerning the development of KS over the period 2005-2008²:

- Increase of the competitiveness of the Romanian economy by stimulating the use of the most innovative information technologies;
- Consolidation of ICT industry;
- Increase of the public administration's institutional performance by coherent and generalized implementation of integrated informational systems;
- Improvement of the citizens' living conditions

Since 2001 scientific research as a strategic factor for development has been reorganized in the governmental program. The Ministry of Education and Research (MER), the key institutional actor involved in the implementation of the RDI Policies, implements the strategies for education and scientific research. Under the authority of MEC, in 1994 was created the National University Research Council (CNCSIS) as the main institutional body to fund scientific research in Romanian universities.

As highlighted in a recent report released by the World Bank³, “after a decade of one of the poorest reform performance in the region, Romania has made a remarkable progress in stabilization, growth and poverty reduction in the last four years.”

In the Global Information Technology Report released by the World Economic Forum, Romania registered the most important progress in Europe, a similar situation being recorded in Iceland.¹

¹ idem

² Romania government program 2005-2008, Chapter 20, Policy in the field of ICT.

³ World Bank, Restructuring for EU integration – The Policy Agenda, 2004

3. Cross- Cultural Awareness and Training for Doing Business in Romania

By transforming its economic policies at the turn of the century, Romania experienced high growth and prosperity, which it continues to enjoy as a new member of the European Union. Its rapid economic growth and modernisation makes Romania an attractive market for potential business investment, but in order to be successful, one must have an understanding of Romanian business etiquette and culture.

The tools to develop successful business relationships with Romanian counterparts, achieving a deeper appreciation of Romanian social and business culture and also understanding the business practices in Romania as well as Romanian cultural nuances will ensure business partners' endeavors in Romania to be more effective.

3.1 Benefits of Romanian counterparts from abroad

For doing business in Romania business counterparts are provided with:

- A detailed overview of what motivates Romanian counterparts in the business world
- A comprehensive framework for better understanding your Romanian colleagues and how to appropriately respond to differing cultural nuances
- A summary of the current state of affairs in Romania as well as the future of its economic environment, particularly in light of its recent membership in the UE
- Business and social etiquette tips to help you develop more successful business relations with Romanian colleagues and clients
- Greater understanding of what Romanian colleagues, clients and suppliers expect of you to help you build more successful business relationships with them
- Practical strategies for conducting business more effectively with Romanian counterparts
- A better understanding of what can go wrong and how to deal with potential problems when doing business in Romania

3.2 Benefits of clients from abroad in Doing Business in Romania

- Considering or already doing business in Romania

¹ The Global Information Technology Report 2004-2005, World Economic Forum, uses the Networked Readiness Index (NRI) to measure "the degree of preparation of a nation or community to participate in and benefit from ICT developments." The NRI is composed of three aspects which assess the *environment* for ICT offered by a country, the *readiness* of the community's key stakeholders and the *usage* of ICT among these stakeholders;

- Travelling extensively to Romania on business
- Interested in establishing partnerships with Romanian counterparts
- Employing Romanian nationals with organizations from abroad
- Experiencing any challenges working with Romanian counterparts

Doing business in Romania is designed to meet the specific needs of our clients from abroad depending on their particular requirements and existing skills set. This typically includes knowledge on:

- Foundation of Romania: history, politics and economics and how they have shaped the nation
- A cultural profile of Romania: demographics, identity, religion, language and customs and their impact on business
- Romanian business and the future of Romania's economic environment as a new member state in the European Union
- Working environment and business etiquette in Romania: hierarchy, time orientation, relationships, appropriate greetings
- Leadership and management styles for doing business in Romania
- Effective business communication in Romania: degrees of directness, verbal and nonverbal cues, negotiating and communicating across cultures
- Tips on the potential challenges one may face while conducting business in Romania and the most effective ways to resolve these issues

4. Conclusion

It is important to note that effective business communication is the central pillar of a business. Therefore, for any business to remain relevant in today's increasingly competitive business environment there is great need to effectively manage the business communication system.

Social media means business. The coming years will see business exploiting and integrating social media networks and channels with their broader business processes. Social media will especially be important to those businesses relying heavily on business communication with a literate and accessible client base. Most blogs on the internet are interactive and allows the reader to participate by leaving a comment of their own. Over the past six years blogs have come into their own and are set to take off as major vehicles of influences.

Using tools like Facebook, blogs, public forums business can better know how to attract and keep their customers. Technology will continue to advance and new communication devices will emerge. The trick to successful business communication is in keeping up with trends and learning how they can make your business better.

Specialist vocabulary is now a crucial component of business English courses. Business English trainers are expected to be able to provide training in ESP as well as in

general business vocabulary and skills in order to meet more closely the learning needs and wishes of students. Teachers need to make use of mobile devices and tools in a targeted way.

Getting your students to give a presentation on the topic of their name takes the focus away from difficult content and shifts it instead towards presentation language, skills and structure.

It is important to encourage students to reflect on why they have done certain business vocabulary exercises, thus giving them the tools to become more autonomous in their learning.

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