

STRATEGIC LANGUAGE OF THE EFFECTIVE MANAGER

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Abstract: The approach is based mostly on the non-verbal language that can be noticed with managers in relations with their employees. From this we can observe several peculiarities of the management when it comes to imposing its authority. The analysis views some of the communication forms the managers employ, unwillingly or deliberately, in order to define their position, establish hierarchy and get things done the way they consider it proper.

PRELIMINARY VIEWS

Early preoccupations on the subject of building a relationship with the subordinates in order to ensure a good atmosphere at the work place, proved understanding of the very core of the communication inside companies. It has been always clear that the manager is primarily required to know how to communicate and advice on the matter has most often underlined the idea of seeking collaboration, openness and trust "Don't live in a private world where subordinates fear to tread. Don't turn your foreman's chair into a throne. Come out from behind your paper work every once in a while and meet your staff on the floor ... The best company to work for, and the company that gets the best work done, is the company with a strong company-group feeling ... This state is reachable only by foremen who obtain the collaboration of people in their work groups through loyalty and liking and co-operation ... the foreman seriously seeking production in quantity and quality knows that success is attained when he wins the willing and interested service of his subordinates".[10]

The question of what strategy would be most effective seems to have one clear answer, that being the rejection of authoritarian approaches and the preference for a collaborative, friendly, human atmosphere and for a well-qualified, open, enthusiast and skilful person as a manager: "Can one win the trust of others by fear or by personal respect? The answer was respect. If you have knowledge of the work subject, and if what you want is the involvement and cooperation of your subordinates, then you have found a sure way to get what you want from your department. A successful manager must first of all have passion for his/her work. This is the basis for transmitting your personal enthusiasm to the people you are working with and to inspire them to work with you to reach the organizational targets...A good manager must also be *accessible* to his/her subordinates in both business and personal terms. People are indeed the most important issue within the organisation and the art of handling them should be one of the major abilities a manager should be endowed with."[3]

A clear-cut distinction can be nevertheless noted between the strategic approach that the mature and talented manager follows, knowing how to be both authoritarian and informal, depending on the demands of the circumstances, and the rather hazardous leading 'techniques' applied by less driving personalities, lacking either experience or ability of leadership, with who more constraints and distant approach would be referred to, in order to maintain control and discipline. Still, as most researchers agree, "Often, the manager's force of persuasion grows when appeal is made to arguments of emotional nature, aimed at the employees' sentimental side (loyalty towards the company, beliefs, moral consciousness, honesty, enthusiasm etc.)".[9]

TOWARDS IMPROVEMENT IN COMMUNICATION

Of course, no one expects managers to be very effective and successful from the very beginning. Some might say that the managerial talent is partially inborn, but what might be considered as inborn is in fact the propensity for leadership and the right personality and character: "Nobody starts his/her career as manager. And if this is the case, they are bound to fail. Only by understanding and considering the position of a subordinate—this is by taking his/her place at least once—then the management of the people and the department can be fair and effective".[3]

Hence, it is obvious that the managerial abilities have to be formed in time and thus we'll be done not by requiring more and raising standards without offering fundamental basis from which to develop preparation and increase performance, but guiding this training and suggesting solutions to meet the efforts halfway: "We cannot expect to get the executive performance we need by raising our standards for abilities, let alone by hoping for the universally gifted man. We will have to extend the range of human beings through the tools they have to work with rather than through a sudden quantum jump in human ability".[2]

Thus, along with other abilities, the manager has to train his skills of communication and be prepared to overcome the difficulties and identify the traps inherent to the field. There are, as Robbins and Coulter distinguish [6], several relevant barriers to effective communication, such as: filtering, emotion, selective perception, information overload, defensiveness, national culture and language and we may add the gender bias, the various prejudices or expectations, discomfort, exhaustion etc. The situations might differ when the manager is a woman, from that when the manager is a man, because, even if "formal authority should wipe out any effect of group sex composition ..., women in same-sex groups will use more supportive language (as learned in their peer groups) than men in same-sex groups, who will be more dominant".[4, p.128]

Robbins mentions [8] some methods by which the communicational barriers can be bridged, among which: using feedback, simplifying language, listening actively, constraining emotions, watching nonverbal cues, empathizing with others, using multiple channels, matching your words and actions and tailoring the message to the audience.

As "an average manager spends 80% of his or her time communicating in one form or another (10% writing, 15% reading, 25% listening and 30% speaking), communication is affecting a company in every possible way ... Therefore effective communication is of extreme importance".[11, p.9]

The ways a manager chooses to communicate is also extremely important, he must know what channels of communication to use for each particular situation: "As a manager in the 21st century, you can make use of a wide variety of communication methods thanks to the rapid progression in information technology. These include: face-to-face, telephone, group meetings, formal presentations, memos, traditional mail, employee publications, bulletin boards, audio and videotapes, hot lines, electronic mail, computer conferencing, voice-mail, teleconferences, and videoconferences. As a manager, it is of crucial importance that you select the appropriate method/channel to communicate a specific message. Recent research has found that channels differ in their capacity to convey information. Some are rich in that they have the ability to (1) handle multiple cues simultaneously, (2) facilitate rapid feedback, and (3) be very personal ... For example firing a person by sending him/her an e-mail isn't quite effective. Instead, sending an e-mail to let him know that he/she's invited for a personnel party this Saturday ... is so".[11, p.10]

STRATEGIC SETTINGS AND BODY LANGUAGE

An overview shall be depicted, of both the nonverbal elements, from the body language particularities to such aspects, for instance, as regarding even the positioning of the office, and the actual vocabulary and language used, formally and informally, by the executive addressing to the subordinate.

It was noticed and commonly presented in the literature of speciality how the higher the rank in the organisational chart, the bigger the office, the more imposing in size and interior decoration, the higher the level of its placement in the offices building. The uppermost functional and well-equipped storey of the building would be designed for the highest ranked.

It was also remarked that the interior design of the manager usually inspire not just distinctness and respect but also, even if subliminally, a certain distance and the sensation of power. The desk being placed, for instance, far from the door and facing it resolves that the employee has to come a long way in the scanning sight of the executive, before getting any chance to utter the intention of their visit to that office. This long and unsheltered distance to close near the desk under a scrutinising eye would amplify the feelings of fear or pressure, will nourish those of respect and recognition, and might smoothen or boil down the aggressiveness, thus manipulating the emotions of those coming in, whatever their intentions might be. Feeling of humiliation, reverence, value, concern, defence, retreat, frustration, coercion, obedience etc. can all be triggered by this simple trick, without even being perceived rationally by those affected, so that no comments are possible as for the fair attitude of the management. Still, psychologically viewing, we can understand that their minds are thus manipulated, toward compliancy, deference and subordination. This would be both effective in sounding out or at least reducing the strength of the claimers and simply a reminder of the position demanding respect to other visitors or maintaining awoken the sense of subordination for the other employees. With the protective and impressive wall in the back, and situated on a base, a somewhat lifted floor, the superior's position will seem overwhelming, sometimes higher when sitting than the some of the employees that are still standing. Hence, he will be literally looked up to.

The pose and the gestures are then important, the position of the manager when talking or being talked to, his imposing posture inspiring distance, respect and, again, obedience. The sometimes preoccupied air and the blank tone of voice give the impression of relevance and of the fact he is rather busy and very concerned, so that no one dares to disturb him, while the smile and the friendly hue in the inflection will signal disposition to listen and to communicate. Both these variants can be either wilfully undertaken by the superior in order to get a desired response or truly natural and not perverted in any way, but getting the same reaction as a result of common sense and observed social rules. The strategic approach of the mature manager will of course make use of this aspect, using psychological triggers like pose and gestures, to enforce a wished response from the collocutors or audience. It is nevertheless a risky ground to attack on, as any mistake can harm and errors are very likely to occur if those who employ these methods are not experienced or careful enough. They can fall in their own traps if their gestures do not match the words they say and the meaning of the entire strategy would come to be interpreted as fake, either by attendants with a minimal communicational experience or, again, due to the simple common sense of any human, as a result of living in society. What would an error consist of in this respect? Mainly, it will dwell in the behavioural dissonance.

Lack of concordance between words and body language would be a primary fault. Inviting the boss to a family ceremony, let's say a wedding or the baptising of the baby,

and being answered positively but seeing him keeping his arms and legs crossed, looking sideways or quickly and repetitively moving his eyes from you to various objects in his office (let alone his own watch) will leave you with a feeling of frustration even if in his verbal language, in his uttered reply, he said he was willing to come or even expressed enthusiasm. The gestures he made unconsciously are felt by the collocutor as not at all in accordance with the words said. Even if not aware why that impression stays with him, the collocutor would describe the meeting with the boss as 'he said ok but sounded rather unsure about it, he did not seem to enjoy very much being invited', and that would be because of the unconscious interpretation of the gestures. That is not to mention the case in which the collocutor is a bit familiar with aspects of body language and can see right away the dislike, the confusion, the surprise or the lack of interest denoted by the superior's behaviour against his actual words. On the contrary, smiling or joking and exposing, at the same, serious problems will mean either irony or sarcasm, which can sometimes be charming but often annoying, or lack of maturity and even bad manners, depending on the particular circumstances. Such mistakes or omissions will create bad feelings, damaging the image of the superior, making him duplicitous, less trustful, not so reliable or double-faced. So, coordination between words and the body language accompanying them are very important to ensure trust and openness.

As for the language used, the actual words, if strategic managers can use incentive vocabulary that can instantly bring the desired response from the subordinates, instantly bringing them together in a stronger team and making them feel safe under that 'patronage', there are also managers that can cause resentments or 'bore' the employees with their stereotypes, verbal automatism or emphatic language. Overused disclosure and lack of tact in approaching personal matters can be felt as intruding, as can certain opinions or remarks, seen as intrusive for the same lack of consideration in dealing with them.

Enclosed language such as: 'everything should be done to ensure...', 'we should combine our forces', 'I'll do everything in my power / whatever depends on me to make sure that...', or 'I value your cooperation and hope we'll continue ... for the prosperity and welfare of our company', can be felt as forced and obsolete, the same way the annoyingly familiar or lecturing tone may be: 'my dear children / beloved family...', 'in my youth / formerly, things used to be different / rules were stricter a while ago', 'there is too much democracy nowadays' etc.

A too defensive approach or the denial of responsibilities or implication, blaming others and especially the former management and the poor inheritance – 'this unfortunate inheritance', 'the previous defective leadership', 'the bad / poor management we've been through' – are other clichés long disused, not anymore 'bought', nor even tolerated by the employees.

Employees might obey but they will not be happiest with authoritarian and tyrannically demanding attitude, of the kind: 'I will never approve / I find that totally stupid and unacceptable', 'I will admit no disobedience / delay in having this task done / further comments / discussion on this matter / other questions / interruption / absentees etc.' Instead, anybody will of course appreciate encouragements, stimulating phrases, trigger words or appreciative remarks: 'well done', 'good job', 'keep up the good work'.

Bad feelings may as well arise from the scolding, but still, the manager is supposed to, entitled to and rather too often forced to tell employees off for not being punctual, not behaving reliably and trustfully, not complying with the internal rules or not doing their job properly. Everybody resents being lectured and the repetition of the scolding would be quite soon perceived as 'lecturing again'. Then this might affect future communication inducing a prejudice of the kind 'here comes the boss again with his old story / blah-blah',

an approach that will impede real communication as it will prevent the employee from hearing whatever totally different things the boss has to say that time.

If too formal or stiff is disliked, lack of seriousness and maturity is not eligible either. A manager complaining about employees work or about the difficulties of the firm or the hardships he has to pass, will sound rather childish and unprepared for the job. One that proves too open, too much human or lacks seriousness and does not even bother to try and save appearances when slipping off badly would lose authority or will be disregarded by those that have been exposed to or heard of the improper behaviour or comments

PROS AND CONS

Does it prove to be a good or a bad thing that the managers impose by different strategic tricks and several subliminal methods an attitude of compliance and subordination?

Some would argue that it is ethically inadmissible and morally wrong. At a closer analysis their approach, as long as proving mastery and exquisite enough to be efficacious without being felt as intrusive, is a good strategy, ensuring efficiency and successful business by a sound hierarchical system in the company's organisational chart and correct attribution of tasks to each member of the firm.

Pros and cons can be examined, showing the good points, the strengths that result from the managers taking those steps and respectively the threats, the bad parts, which are triggered by certain behavioural aspects. As for the pros, employees must be, even if unconsciously, induced with the superiority and the authority of the manager, in order to maintain a respectful and lucrative atmosphere even for the most rebellious personalities. In what the cons are concerned we can note that any lack of tact will drive to enmity, and the exaggerations to hostility, and indeed, after all, it is not at all ill-will from the subordinates and animosity between the hierarchical structures what a manager is looking for in helping him to strengthen his position and administrate the entire plant for the well-fare of everybody involved.

It is by developing qualities such as Integrity - honesty and truthfulness -, Competence - technical and interpersonal knowledge and skills -, Consistency - reliability, predictability, and good judgment -, Loyalty - willingness to protect and save face for a person -, Openness - willingness to share ideas and information freely - that a manager will encourage a trustworthy environment in his relationships with his employees.[6]

It is just common sense that, as a manager, one has to win people's cooperation, and that can be done by, first of all, caring about the people one wants to influence: "If you are concerned about the people you are trying to win over, if you value their needs and dreams, they will know it and they will reciprocate. They will communicate more freely, speaking their mind more openly and listening more attentively. They will give you the benefit of the doubt and they will want to cooperate".[1]

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