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Group 1

BMSW4002 - Effective Team Working and Communication - Resit

1. Introduction:

My name is Maria and I am writing this paper on my personal experiences with communication in the workplace. This paper aims to identify, discuss and analyse potential obstructions of communication in my own workplace environment, and to apply solution to the identified problems according to the study material and skills acquired through this module.

1.1. The basics of communication

In order to successfully analyse the communication structure in a workplace setting, we must first address the basics of a modern-day communication process.

1.1.1 Verbal and Non-verbal communication

There are two main ways of communicating, verbal communication and non-verbal communication. In this paragraph we will discuss both forms in depth and analyse the importance of both forms of communication in my own workplace setting.

Non-verbal communication:

Non-verbal communication exist out of every form of communication without using verbal language. Examples of this are body language, gestures, eye contact, signs and symbols or facial expressions. Sign language is an example of a language made up of only non-verbal communication.

Body language is an extremely important part of the communication process, as the message a sender is conveying could be interpreted completely wrongly with the absence of body language. An example of this is the question “how are you?”.



This particular question will mostly be answered with “I’m fine thanks.” If the message is conveyed with the absence of body-language, the sender will understand the receiver is doing fine. However, when the sender can observe the receiver’s body language, they might be able to detect a hint of sadness in the receiver’s eyes, or body’s posture, or all over demeanour. To have a successful communication in this setting, it would be the receiver’s job to ask further questions as the receiver’s body language doesn’t convey the same message as his verbal communication. This shows the importance of both forms of communication in order to come to a successful transmission of the message.

Verbal communication:

Verbal communication is a form of communication in which words or language are the primary medium of transmission. As mentioned above, in order to communicate successfully, both forms of communication need to intertwine. Thus, both forms of communication need to be understood and successfully applied when used in a workplace setting.

In that sense, it is crucial to be aware of your own body language, verbal and non verbal ways of communicating. How am I conveying a particular message? Am I conveying it in the way the receiver will understand, is my body language saying the same thing as my verbal communication? Often times, this is where the obstruction of communication happens.

1.2. The importance of body language in a professional environment

It goes without saying that in a professional workplace setting, body language is crucially important. When an employer sees you for the first time, their initial impression usually comes from the non-verbal communication conveyed in the first few seconds the employer sees you.

“ Body language is a very powerful tool, We had body language before we had speech, and apparently, 80% of what you understand in a conversation is read through the body, not the words.”
– Deborah Bull (Published Author)

As mentioned above, 80% of human communication is done via body language. According to Psychologist World, the 20% of verbal communication strongly depends whether use of body-language matches the verbal communication message. A mismatch of both forms of communication could lead to misunderstanding and chaos. Especially in a workplace setting.

Body language is a language of emotion. And how that emotion is perceived by the receiving party is will have a large impact on the message interpretation and the communication process.

In a 2012 study conducted by researchers of NYU, The Hebrew University of Jerusalem and the University of Princeton, it was determined that body language is not only important, but in fact detrimental to a successful two-way communication structure.

In this study, researchers had presented photographs of people going through highly intense emotional experiences. These experiences exists of both negative and positive experiences in real-life situations. For example, they had shown photographs of professional tennis players when winning or losing a point. They had shown 3 different versions of these photos. A full photo of the tennis player's face and body. A close-up of the face with the body removed, and a body with the face removed. Surprisingly, the test subjects could easily pick out the winners and losers when being presented with the full body photo, and the photos in which the body was visible but the face was removed. However, they seemed to have more difficulty when being presented with only the close-up photos of the facial expressions. The subjects were then asked what part of the body they thought conveyed most emotion. Most subjects presented with the full body photo would go on to say that it was the face that conveyed most emotion. The authors of the study named this phenomenon 'Illusory valence'. The illusion of seeing clear valence in a what was actually a non-diagnostic face.

One of the researchers on the study, Dr Hillel Aviezer of the Psychology Department of the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, stated that: "These results show that when emotions become extremely intense, the difference between a positive and negative facial expression blurs." He also added that "Th results may help researchers understand how body/face expressions interact during emotional situations. For example, individuals with autism may fail to recognise facial expressions, but perhaps when they are trained to process important body cues, their performance may significantly improve."

1.3. Analysis of my own body language.

When trying to convey a message, whether in a workplace setting or a personal setting, you must first ask yourself if you're using the correct body language. You can reflect on whether you're using the correct body language for the message you are trying to convey.

These questions include:

- How do I want the other person to feel when I'm conveying my message?
- What is the outcome I am hoping to achieve from the transmission of my message?

The two main factors to consider when trying to reach the desired outcome is 'intention' and 'accuracy'. Intention plays the biggest factor in this, the level of accuracy in emotions felt and emotions conveyed will always depends on the intention behind the message. For example, when the sender wants to strengthen the relationship between them and the receiver, honesty plays a less significant role when in a workplace setting. If you want to create a returning customer, you must make sure to convey positive emotions and emotions of delight when seeing that customer. Even when the honest emotion you're feeling in that moment is the desire to frown or sigh. The honest emotion in this setting must be suppressed for intention, the frown will have to be suppressed to make way for a smile and a welcoming, open, demeanour. The point is to send a message and let others know your feelings and intention, whilst also always keeping the objective in mind.

Be aware of body language cues that may come across as uninviting or unproductive to the receiver. A few examples of negative body language cues in a workplace setting are:

- Folded arms
- Frowning or rolling eyes
- Dropped shoulders or slouched body posture.
- Avoiding eye contact
- Holding a dominant body posture

It's important to be aware when or if you're adapting these negative body cues, a few slight changes could effectively create a warmer and more connecting way of communicating.

Swap the above negative cues for the positive cues listed below:

- Relax your shoulders and unfold your arms
- Use welcome hand gestures
- Nod to show understanding and concentration when the other person is talking
- Slightly mirror the other person's hand gestures or smiles.
- Try being at eye level to the person you're communicating with

1.4 Personal experience

This stage of the assessment will describe, detect and analyse previous mishandling of communicating by myself or others in my own workplace setting. A significant negative experience will be further discussed and analysed in the following paragraph.

1.4.1 Detection and analysis of previous misuse of communication

Working in a sandwich bar for the past two years has taught me that customer service is key to running a successful business. Even though it may be hard to keep composure when a customer is being difficult or disrespectful, the main objective to the service you're providing them is always to 'be the bigger person'. To be successful at a job that requires day to day handling of customers in person, adapting a welcoming and warm body language is definitely key. Not only when handling customers however, working in a team can be equally as challenging, especially during rush hour or during the busier times. The objective in a setting where you're dealing with colleagues and managers, is to ensure you're contributing your fair share and helping to make your team work as a well-oiled machine.

The following story will describe the worst experience I had whilst working at my current workplace in which the communication within the team and the communication with customers were simultaneously counter-productive.

As a sandwich shop we also sell a wide range of coffees and hot drinks, on this particular occasion however, we were having operational issues with the coffee-makers and equipment required to serve our entire range of coffees. The day had already started horribly as two other colleagues called in sick, we were understaffed and the entire morning had been pure chaos. When a regular customer came in asking for a hazelnut coffee, I had to inform her the machine was out of order and we could not serve her this particular coffee at present. When conveying to her that her order couldn't be achieved, I was not making eye contact but was rather staring at my til, nor was I using the correct verbal communication required of me. I did not sound sincerely sorry, but my tone of voice was rather annoyed. The customer then asked to change her order to a different type of coffee which we could also not serve. Instead of sincerely apologising for the inconvenience caused to the customer, I let out a big sigh and repeated that the machine was out of order so we could not serve coffee. My tone of voice again was displaying my annoyance. In that moment my honest emotions took over the intention of making sure the customer felt valued. In this moment my manager took over, served the client and later that day pulled me aside to give me a warning.

When receiving my warning, I blamed my two colleagues who called in sick for today's chaos, instead of admitting I handled the situation wrongly, and conveying regret. The way I handled this situation, shows immaturity and could have ruined the dynamic of my team. My intention of course was not to insult the customer or ruin the relationship between my team and myself, but I was just not taking note on how I was communicating and how the way I was communicating would create a completely different outcome than I was hoping for.

2. Conclusion

When stuck in a situation like the one described above, the emotions one feels in the moment will urge to rise and suppress the intention or objective. In the above situation, I could have made eye contact with the customer, used appropriate tone of voice when conveying the message that our coffee makers were down, sincerely apologised whilst conveying I understood this was a inconvenience for the customer. I could then have proceeded to present the customer with alternate options, whilst adapting a warmer more open body language, holding eye contact, using a softer voice and smiling. When communicating within my team, since then I have learned that my mistakes are my own, and blaming absent colleagues will convey pettiness and lack of team spirit.

This module has taught me that it's not only your words, but your entire demeanour that's detrimental in reaching the desired outcomes. In short, it's worth "thinking before acting" when communicating in a workplace setting.

3. References

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