Workplace Orientation: Norms, Rules, Roles and Values as Principles of Ethical Behaviour and Effective Communication

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Abstract

The nature of human communication provides an in-depth look at some key situational factors in workplace orientation, the core of company culture, ethical behaviour and effective communication.

The aim of this paper is to discuss the importance of different ways of thinking and acting in interpersonal communication from four points of view: firstly, an analysis of norms as culturally ingrained principles of correct and incorrect behaviours; secondly, a description of the new rules which are formed to clarify cloudy areas of norms; thirdly, an approach to role behaviour within a culture and how it is affected by norms and rules; fourthly, a helpful way of examining core values in corporate culture.

The results of the research show that sharing such workplace issues as values, goals and priorities can help to defuse tension and conflict in professional relationships. They are an integral part of any company culture where a purposeful effort to accommodate the needs of our employers and colleagues can strengthen our communications.

1. Introduction

In the next few years, communication techniques will become increasingly sophisticated in the world of business. There is not the slightest doubt that adaption to the worldwide phenomenon of globalization, or the rapid pace of free market and trade will have to come naturally to leaders and managers, both in the present and future, on condition that they have the ability to remain sensitive and responsive to different ways of thinking and acting in interpersonal communication.

Clearly, mastering these skills will work to their advantage, help them operate more successfully, and fight the other players in the business arena for influence and economic power. Gaining job satisfaction often involves taking on new roles or assuming new role identities based on their corresponding beliefs, capabilities and strategies.

From a broader perspective, a highly competitive business environment requires highly skilled business people (negotiators, sellers, investors), able and willing to stay attuned to the values and behaviours of their customers, suppliers or business partners.

As business contacts occur between companies, diffusion takes place. People engage in expected as well as unexpected patterns of behaviour, which are not always easy to manage, assimilate or adapt to, but are essential for the process of communication. Conducting businesses at a local level, or, over international borders, implies communicating with the other side's culture, understanding their specialized interests, ideas, attitudes and values through various levels of communication, i.e. interpersonal, organizational, mass or public. Jandt (2000) noticed that every cultural pattern or act of social behaviour revolves around the communication process. Thus, the focus is on how culture and communication intermingle by analyzing to what extent communication is culture-specific and the misunderstandings that can be caused in multicultural teams.

2. Theoretical background

Considering that all business activity is inevitably tied to communication, knowledge of key situational factors is important. Such terms as norms, rules, roles, or values are often used in relation to workplace orientation. All companies pass along norms and values to their employees, thus creating their own *culture* which shows the universal characteristic of this concept. The idea is shared that cultures allocate values, and even display reprehensible behaviour. No two individuals see the outside world in the same way. To put it differently, no two maps are exactly the same. Two individuals may encounter different psychological stimuli and share different sensory receptors when sending and receiving information/messages. The cognitive approach to studying communication styles and listening skills in Andrews' DK Essential Managers suggests that "Everything, from the culture in which we live to the norms or standards of the groups to which we belong, can influence how we perceive the messages, events, and experiences of everyday life" (Andrews, 2015, p.13).

Milton Rokeach's (1973, 1979) studies, which are value-oriented, point to the idea that values should be understood as beliefs about what is good and desirable. In the context of workplace, he draws attention to the two types of values, namely *terminal* and *instrumental*. In his view, the former category is related to *ends* (our goals/aims/targets – a comfortable job, a sense of accomplishment, social recognition, job enriching), whereas the latter type refers to *means* (the way we conduct our professional lives – ambition, determination, responsibility, self-discipline, broad-mindedness).

During negotiations, both terminal and instrumental values come into play. By way of illustration, arranging an agreement successfully or resolving a dispute peacefully need terminal values, and skilled negotiators' imagination, astuteness, self-control, honesty, cheerfulness are the mark of instrumental values.

Drawing on Rokeach's extensive study, Carrell and Heavrin's (2008) research is much more behaviourally-oriented. The authors further conclude that, in a negotiation, "ethics, values, and behaviour rules are important because they influence how the parties view each other, how they evaluate the negotiation, and how they act during the negotiation" (Carrell and Heavrin, 2008, p.194) and classify them from an ethical perspective. The authors introduce the notions of *descriptive* and *injunctive behaviour rules* in order to explain how they stem from our values and influence our actions.

Thus, *descriptive* behavioural rules show the way people commonly behave in typical situations (what people *do*), on the one hand, and *injunctive* behaviour rules are defined as judgements on what behaviour is appropriate or reprehensible within the culture (what people *should* do). In this line of thinking, Carrell and Heavrin (2008) believe in behavioural rules as rules of proper conduct (codes of ethics) and diagnose behavioural drivers that guide people's actions and reactions in alignment with the values of an organization. They state the importance of the method of devising behavioural rules as a successful attempt to help both children (*educational role*) and newly hired employees (*organizational role*) to learn the proper rules of conduct in a community.

Their notion of 'behavioural rules' closely resembles Andrews' (2015) opinion which takes a similar stand when teaching how to properly pass along values and norms from generation to generation, therefore defining the core of a culture.

Enlarging upon the pillars of an appropriate behaviour, Carrell and Heavrin introduce two types of values, i.e. 'self-centered' and 'social-centered' to better explain the orientational patterns used in any kind of environment. The *self-centered* aspects are defined as intrapersonal, within ourselves, internalized standards, the way we work on a problem and think things over (our *own behaviour*), and the *social-centered* aspects are viewed as interpersonal, between or among people, external, the way meaning is transferred from one person to another (the values we expect from *someone else's behaviour*): "Values are both *self-centered* and *social-centered* because they involve both the individual and society. The self-centered aspects of values are standards that you have accepted for your own behaviour. External, social-centered aspects are guiding principles established by the social environment in which you live" (Andrews, 2015, p.197).

Irrespective of the communication level, company people encode and decode messages – verbally and nonverbally – with the hope of developing invaluable networks or *personal ties* in workplace situations. The capacity to build and maintain internal business contacts (with customers, professionals in similar positions to us, consultants, suppliers, experts) is as important as nurturing external networks (through business networking groups, conferences, and so on). By expanding the notion of networking, Gudykunst & Ting-Toomey (1988) state that we need to bridge between intercultural and multicultural environments: "The ability to develop networks in intercultural situations can enable you to do business more effectively in multicultural environments. In some cultures such as the Arab, Spanish, and Japanese, networking is essential because they prefer to conduct business with people they know or with associates of people they know" (Gudykunst & Ting-Toomey, 1988 quoted in Chaney and Martin, 2007, p.10).

3. Norms, rules, roles and values – Principles of ethical behaviour in company communication

The 'unwritten guidelines' that people follow within a company, i.e. norms, rules, roles and values are of the utmost importance in understanding ways to streamline communication.

● *Norms*

According to Chaney and Martin (2007), norms are firmly established principles of appropriate and inappropriate behaviours whose violation can lead to overt or covert punishment. Similarly, in relation with group members' behaviour and their conformity with the group's standards, Robbins (2005) remarks that group norms do not merely determine the proper dress code, or the friendships during or outside office hours, being used to deal with performance-related goals. He advocates a degree of alignment between the individual and the company's goals, giving primacy to the acceptance of preferred norms: "Work groups typically provide their members with explicit cues on how hard they should work, how to get the job done, their level of output, appropriate communication channels [...] Knowing the norms of a given group can help us explain the attitudes and behaviours of its members. Can managers control group norms? Not completely, but they can influence them" (Robbins, 2005, pp.104, 117). Robbins argues against the exertion of groups' pressure on members with high potential and strong abilities to perform at a high level: "Norms are extremely powerful in affecting an individual employee's performance. In fact, it's not unusual to find cases in which an employee with strong abilities and high personal motivation performs at a very modest level because of the overriding influence of a group norms that discourage members from producing at high levels" (Robbins, 2005, p.104). He rejects the negative influence of group norms on the individual's personal motivation in favour of a higher group cohesiveness embedding plenty of positive reinforcement, praise and rewards for good contribution to the group's overall performance. Robbins is among the business scholars to theorize the link between status and norms, status and group interaction, or status and culture. Within this framework, he defines status in terms of position or rank granted to group members who accept and develop rights and roles to conduct the group's activities. Rules, rights and rituals are the criteria for measuring status equities /vs/ inequities within groups.

Low-status members cannot compete on a level playing field with their more privileged counterparts. Unlike their lower-status peers, who find status inequities frustrating by strongly affecting their productivity and willingness to stay with the company, high-status people have more power over the decisions and outcomes that affect the group. The influence and authority wielded by power-hungry individuals have significant behavioural consequences, largely due to their ability to make status differences visible and inhibit group creativity and diversity of ideas. Robbins adds these stereotypes of formal leaders and managers: criticize more, state more orders, interrupt more often, are more assertive.

In my opinion, these differences explain why top performing businessmen, through their valued attributes, seem unaware of the fact that they recklessly disregard the social norms which their low-status peers have to obey without hesitance, thus limiting their potential and hindering their participation in group discussions.

● *Rules*

Individuals in a group are expected to follow the company's rules precisely and the managers are there to enforce them to make sure employees do the things they should. As Chaney and Martin (2007, p.10) put it, "Rules are formed to clarify cloudy areas of norms" and everything depends on the intent of *today*'s new rules of work premised on gaining a keener and more subtle understanding of our interests, values, and motivations.

In an ever-changing world of work, career paths are no longer linear, but tend to proceed in great jumps. They can and must be 'plotted' from our "strengths, personal interests, and core values" (Cavoulacos and Minshew, 2017, p.15). Cavoulacos and Minshew state that the goal of a dream career is to figure out the kind of job that gives us true satisfaction, what gets us out of bed every morning, what we expect and want from work, or how we can click our employers and meet the requirements of our positions. Therefore, by embracing the *new rules*, they agree to the necessity of a major mindset shift and devise a 3-sized working tool (the Three R's): 1) Reflect; 2) Research; 3) Refine, allowing us to take the first check-in steps in our career, "This series of steps will enable you to navigate this preparatory stage of your process, narrow your options, understand your real choices, and get ready to make your move […] Finally, remember that the New Rules don't only apply to presenting yourself in such a way as to get that job, but also to what comes afterward: to acclimating at that job, thriving in that job, and then understanding where you want to go next" (Cavoulacos and Minshew, 2017, pp.10,11).

If Chaney and Martin's (2007) presentation of the differences between norms, rules, roles, and networks follows a synthesized path, somehow classical, Cavoulacos and Minshew's (2017) mapping seems to be more flexible, dynamic and to the point. From this perspective, their approach sets the stage for identifying the qualities and skills in thriving at our dream jobs. I have adopted Cavoulacos and Minshew's approach to leaving behind the *old* company *rules* and navigating or playing by the *new rules*, because, in my opinion, we are no longer bystanders, watching the world go by, but responsible makers and participators, capable of taking our careers in our hands.

Much more psychologically-oriented, Dilts and DeLozier (2000) widely acknowledge that rules typically link certain values to specific behaviours. In their opinion, rules should be interpreted as *generalizations*. In neuro-linguistic terms, behavioural rules are governed by *modal operators of necessity* (should, must, ought to), and, apart from increasing the connection between values and behaviours, they also act upon a person's beliefs. At the linguistic level, when rules become less flexible, and hence limiting, the next step is to run an ecology check and assess how behavioural change will impact upon the rest of an individual's systems. Thus, the appropriate use of Meta-Model questions will help challenge counterproductive rules or beliefs, their outcome being to create harmony between the elements of an individual's internal and external system: 'What would happen if you did, or didn't follow the rule?', 'What would happen if you bent the rules one time?', 'What kind of impact do you expect if you refuse to play by the rules?' Cavoulacos and Minshew (2017), in line with Dilts and DeLozier's (2000) standpoint against job decision hesitations or doubtful feelings, avow that the process of self-awareness can be difficult, but that it can and must be handled with *wisdom* and *grace*.

According to Alison and David Price (2013), charging role models with breach of the company's rules is a mark of frail leadership and can create problems in a team, company or social system. Leaders failing to follow the rules cannot be considered models of the right way to behave. The authors aptly conclude that companies where role models constantly show a reckless disregard for rules are far from promoting a supportive, effective leadership style which, in turn, may trigger unacceptable behaviour and the loss of employees' respect and control.

● *Roles*

Personal ecology is of utmost importance when we set goals, comply with the rules, or clarify values. In this context, in-depth knowledge of how we can manage up in an organization will take our careers to the next level. From the basic definition of a role (Dilts and DeLozier, 2000; Chaney and Martin, 2004) to more conceptualized representation of role behaviour (Robbins, 2005; Cavoulacos and Minshew, 2017), the importance of a strategy for subordinate – superior interaction coupled with the right attitude for good collaboration become a priority. The role(s) we play at certain stages of our careers align with who we will become and work toward the position we want in the future of the organization. They don't remain static, but change along the ride,

preparing us to move to our next role: "Building, maintaining, and growing your relationships with colleagues and managers are key to thriving in your current role and setting yourself up to take your career to the next level […] as you manage the sometimes rocky waters of interoffice dynamics, always think about how your interactions serve yourself and others. So it's important to understand that interpersonal skills are vital to the trajectory of your career" (Cavoulacos and Minshew, 2017, p.271). To put it differently, when our role matches with our manager's goals and objectives, we eagerly step outside our assigned work, are able to multi-task and proactively engage in sharing the same priorities as our boss's without being told explicitly what to do.

Within this model of interpersonal communication, the self-starter's guiding principle will be: Don't just listen, be one step ahead! Roles can be offered a twofold interpretation, namely a function of an individual's relationship to other group members and the task that person is carrying out within that group.

I consider this approach closely related to Dilts and DeLozier's (2000, p.1135) opinion that "Roles such as *project leader, production manager, coach, administrator* are defined by the actions and activities assigned to, required from, or expected of a person or group". Moreover, roles are culture-bound and are based on the beliefs, values and expectations which that culture rests upon (Dilts and DeLozier, 2000; Robbins, 2005; Cavoulacos and Minshew, 2017). This approach is continued by Dilts and DeLozier who remark on the different levels that roles can touch upon and the set of questions which validates them: "Some roles may place more emphasis on the level of capabilities, while others are more related to identity and socially defined status […] Defining roles involves providing answers to such questions as: What is the overall structure of this organization or system? Where do I fit in? How am I valued and judged? Why should I commit myself?" (Dilts and DeLozier, 2000, p.1135). Their research on role development in groups closely resembles Hofstede's (1980) and Robbins's (2005) framework for assessing status and culture in organizations and demonstrates that role differentiation in small group interactions often leads to an imbalanced communication process, where high-status members' attitudes can easily bias the contributions of low-status employees.

However, there are similarities between Dilts and DeLozier's view and Chaney and Martin's (2007) view, who are also of the opinion that a (sub)group's business communicators develop jargon and exhibit behaviour that are particular to that (sub)group: "A role includes the behavioural expectations of a position within a culture and is affected by norms and rules" (Chaney and Martin, 2007, p.10). Similarly, "the vocabularies of subgroup members make it difficult for members of the macroculture to understand the intended meanings of the words used by subgroup members" (Samovar&Porter, 2004 quoted in Chaney and Martin, 2007, p.11).

In addition, a company culture characterized by role models (outstanding personalities in the field) will positively influence decision outcomes, set a playground for performance, and offer opportunities for career advancement. Both Dilts and DeLozier (2000) and Alison and David Price (2013) report similar results regarding role models as rich and powerful sources of learning which inspire their followers to achieve unexpected results. The findings of their studies reveal the role models' ability to keep a high profile, totally aligned with the values of the organization they identify with. Alison and David Price highlight that the more aligned we are to our values, the stronger the payoffs will come on-stream: "Reward people who role-model living the values. Some companies give bonus payments to people who have demonstrated the values. Other companies give on-the-spot bonus prizes for people who have done something outstanding to make a value live" (Alison and David Price, 2013, p.64). Thus, taking on new roles and assuming role identities – partner, supervisor, leader, etc. – could not be achieved without the full support of their corresponding beliefs, capabilities, or strategies.

As far as the experiential learning of new skills is concerned, role behaviour and role playing overlap. When engaged in practicing interactive skills, assuming new roles, role playing becomes *a scaffold in developing new perceptions of behaviour.* So the essence of role playing is based on regular stimulated exercises whose aim is to relate the actions to a 'fictitious I' (Lev Vygotsky, 1978). This perspective blends in perfectly with Dilts and DeLozier's acting *as if* as a tool for learning, "Imaginary situations allow people to assume fictitious 'I' identities and to behave in forms that may be contrary to their daily identity, and the accompanying expectations […] Through

reflection on our own experiences and observations of role plays a person can begin to discover patterns and insights into their own socio-cultural learning" (Dilts and DeLozier, 2000, p.1134).

● *Values*

Given the rather profit-dominated business world, *values* are of paramount importance in devising an ambitious career plan. Employees are naturally industrious and more creative when they feel their opinions are valued and their work is intrinsically interesting. In increasingly diverse cultures, employees display different attitudes toward ethical standards and work. They discover along their professional paths that meaningful and purposeful work blends in perfectly with the personal values which bring them success and satisfaction in their professional careers.

Thus, each type of work can be associated with a specific value. Furthermore, on a scale of 1 to 4, each value can be graded in order of importance:

1. Particularly vital
2. Worthy/necessary, but not vital
3. Neither significant nor insignificant
4. I'd rather avoid

At the end, all the values ranked as 1 will be understood as the most significant taking into account our own work priorities and preferences at any particular time:

For the *mission and impact* criterion, the values can be:

-Organizational change:

e.g. *I want to radically redesign all the aspects of the company's activities.*

-Service:

e.g. *I want to make available to consumers cutting-edge, market-driven technology.*

-Influence:

e.g. *I want to stimulate motivation and stir my team to tremendous effort.*

-Decision making:

e.g. *I want to be one of the company's key decision-makers.*

-Ethics:

e.g. *I want my job to match with my principles and morals.*

For the *social interaction and teamwork* criterion, the following values can be displayed:

-Sociability:

e.g. *I want to visit employees at their workstations and discuss their work.*

-Teamwork:

e.g. *I want to work as part of a co-operative team to look for new solutions and explore alternatives.*

-Management:

e.g. *I want to supervise staff and monitor quality standards.*

-Autonomy:

e.g. *I want to feel free to schedule my own work and determine without supervision the procedures to be used in conducting it.*

As far as *job routine* is concerned, the most appropriate values are:

-Deadline:

e.g. *I want to meet work deadlines and get my boss appreciation.*

-Detail:

e.g. *I want to get involved in finicky work since I've always been a stickler for detail and accuracy.*

-Flexibility:

e.g. *I want to be able to plan my agenda in a way that suits me perfectly.*

-Travel:

e.g. *I want to go on business trips more often and share the results of my travel experiences with my colleagues.*

In relation to the *reward* factor, values are usually equated with:

-Recognition:

e.g. *I want to enjoy strong support and receive warm congrats on my work results.*

-Compensation:

e.g. *I want to relish the idea of earning a higher wage in exchange for good work.*

-Prestige:

   e.g. *I want to serve a company that has gained considerable prestige.*   ☐

-Security:

   e.g. *I want a salaried job and long-term career stability.*   ☐

The older we get, our preferences and priorities with respect to the above-mentioned categories or criteria and their accompanying values may fluctuate. What matters most in the 20-30 age group (glamour, creativity, praise, self-development, risk-taking) might lessen gradually in the 40-50 age group for which other values are given precedence (security, flexibility, reward, company culture).

This perspective meshes very well with Dilts and DeLozier's (2000) opinion that we set ourselves goals which match our values and motivate us: "…goals can be considered values which have been placed into some future location on one's time line […]. A person's values will also shape how that individual gives meaning to his or her perception of a particular situation. This determines which kinds of mental strategies a person selects to approach that situation" (Dilts and DeLozier 2000: 1519).

I also consider guiding values/behaviour closely related to Alison and David Price's (2013) opinion that "Values are significant because they subconsciously shape our behaviour on a day-to-day basis" (Alison and David Price, 2013, p.59).

In my opinion, the more prominent and stronger our values, and the more headed they are towards our vision and mission, the more powerful and determined the action towards achieving a common goal.

4. Research methodology

This research has used four major principles of ethical behaviour with the aim of making business communicators aware of the importance of various patterns of behaviour, which are not always easy to manage, assimilate or adapt to, but are essential for the process of communication in an international business context. The emphasis was placed on both the key situational factors in workplace orientation which are an integral part of any company culture, whatever the business, and the understanding of the individuals' specialized interests, ideas, attitudes and values through different levels of communication, i.e. interpersonal or organizational. In this case, the paper has concentrated on our ethical belief system which becomes a platform for the values we develop. It has shown how values are based on the cultural setting in which we work and are influenced by those with whom we interact, i.e. co-workers or employers. Values mirror our beliefs about the outcome we aim to achieve and the 'means' for generating the desired outcome.

The article further pointed out that particular values provide a basis for behavioural rules. They speak of the power of behavioural rules and suggest that communicators should be aware that they are the accepted customs, standards, or models we expect of ourselves in the conduct of our life and our professional relationships.

The research method was based on highlighting the notions of descriptive and injunctive behaviour rules as codes of ethics. Thus, I have stated the importance of devising behavioural rules as a successful attempt to help employees to learn the proper rules of conduct in a community. In addition, the paper also proved that, when assuming new roles, role playing becomes a cradle of developing new perceptions of behaviour.

5. Findings

Understanding that valuing good networks will give us a competitive edge is mainly due to the very understanding of the norms, rules and roles governing them. Before we expect our opinions to be understood and considered, we first need to understand the 'unwritten guidelines' that people follow within a company. They involve three separate, yet related, situational factors. Following these factors will set the stage for the connections we are trying to establish within an organization and the attitudes or behaviour we will exhibit in a group and in relation to our prospects.

The findings of my research have also shown that role differentiation in small group interactions usually leads to a biased attitude of high-status members against the contributions of low-status members as far as rank/position and cultural assessment is concerned.

Thus, emphasis has been placed on the value of building relationships, through cooperation, or, to put it differently, on being skilled at creating and then claiming value.

Moreover, the paper highlighted that the hierarchies of values and criteria are crucial in deciding on the degree of importance/meaning we attach to various personal and professional experiences. It proved that communicators should be aware that the selection of values is a subjective experience and that people usually operate from different values. Even if two individuals may share similar values like *success*, *reputation*, *integrity*, *trust*, they may have different standards for judging on their achievement or violation. Such hierarchies are best put into practice in meditation, negotiation or communication, their role being to understand cultural diversity, on the one hand, and to resolve conflicts or disputes, on the other hand.

Consequently, only by harmonizing the personal and organizational rules, roles and values, can we create a positive, long-term effect on the process of changing corporate culture.

6. Conclusions

In conclusion, gaining job satisfaction often involves taking on new roles or assuming new role identities based on their corresponding beliefs, capabilities and strategies.

As a manager, the focus is on consistently leading a team by agreeing in advance on each member's role and responsibilities. In this respect, the manager might want to avoid putting group members under the undue pressure/influence of groupthink, create cohesive groups instead, influence rather than control group norms, and encourage member input.

As an employee, special attention is given to the need for alignment between individual and company goals. Agreed and clear rules will provide a framework for enhancing potential and increasing participation in group discussions.

To recap, only colourful leaders are able to understand that values are more important than rules. They make values come alive through their power to inspire, guide and motivate people.

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