

# Constructing Communication Strategy Templates for Managerial Persuasion and Argumentation Cases

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## ABSTRACT

*The present paper discusses various evaluation templates the instructors can design as assessment tools for testing persuasion and argumentation skills of students pursuing management careers when they present their complex managerial cases to upper management for winning endorsements for their ambitious ideas. It discusses the application of diverse communication strategies based on the theory and practice of managerial communication. The paper encompasses presentation of application layouts that can help students chisel their thought processes to accomplish their coveted outcomes when they transmute the theories learnt in the classroom environment into corporate communication exercises. Instructors of managerial communication can benefit from this paper in shaping their own teaching- learning offerings in more practice- friendly formats.*

**Keywords:** *Evaluation, Persuasion, Argumentation, Communication, Template, Strategy*

## INTRODUCTION

Communications skills are cardinal for the upward mobilisation of managerial careers. This has been accentuated time and again by multifarious sources in business organisations (Du-Babcock, 2006). Managers have to present their discourses for persuading various stakeholders by deploying the rhetoric of ethos, pathos and logos. To hone their creative and critical thinking skills communication instructors can assign their students complex business cases to present their ideas in three variegated situations; for informing their clients, for persuading them, and for presenting arguments to prove their case points. The instructor can make this exercise more challenging by giving them a single subject for their informative, persuasive and argumentative presentations. To assist them in this process he/she can construct templates that direct them to apply different communication strategies discussed in the classroom for persuasion and argumentation. They fill up these templates and submit them to the instructor before delivering their presentations. Finally, their performance is evaluated on the basis of how well they could implement the communication techniques they had formulated as evidenced by their template outlines in their deliverables.

A lot of thought process has to be invested in these template architectures as they act as guideposts for the students to assess their preset milestones. This paper

presents these templates with a detailed discussion on the theory and practice of managerial communication.

## RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

Management Communication is a skills-based subject which needs a good complement of theory and practice. This course encompasses two parts; oral and written communication. The theoretical module of written Managerial Communication comprises teaching students the fundamentals of managerial writing, drafting business reports, business plans and proposals, case analysis, authoring different types of business messages – routine, good news, bad news, and persuasive messages. The oral counterpart of the subject mainly deals with delivering presentations and public speeches. Gray (2010) asserted that graduates often stumble at the inception of their careers owing to their impecunious oral communication skills, though there is no sound empirical evidence to vouch for the exact requirement of oral skills as demanded by the corporate recruiters. Thus the teaching of oral communications should not simply involve an assortment of tips on voice inflections, body language, art of delivery (which nevertheless form part of the instructor's agenda). Thematic focus is majorly on the communication strategies one chooses to apply to meet one's predetermined objectives. This task entails teaching the students various communication strategies and content preparation and enhancement methods to prepare the right

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input for a given audience profile. Once this is taught, the challenge for the instructor lies in planning a proper tool of assessment for mapping the competencies developed post this classroom teaching. This paper deals with the techniques of evaluation which the instructor can employ assisting students in chartering their progress. Sapp and Zhang (2009) opine that business instructors in essence have a very smattering knowledge of the industry skills required by the students to transact their professional dealings successfully. Hence coining new evaluation methodologies can give students a hands-on experience of communicating in challenging managerial contexts. The objective of this paper is to discuss the application of various communication strategies in evaluation paradigms in order to impart a pragmatic face lift to the theoretical framework of managerial communication.

## RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The paper addresses the following questions:

- How to teach, treatise and test the communication strategies that the students are required to learn in Managerial Communication oral course modules?
- How to make the exercise of oral skills test more practical, interesting and relevant?
- How to distil the learning from various Managerial Communication books and teach the students complex concepts in a way that they learn to apply them to real business situations?
- How to prepare effective teaching materials; a presenter's manual which students can readily follow while planning their presentations?
- How to design evaluation templates that are user-friendly for the students who are performing as well as the teachers who are evaluating the students giving them both quantitative and qualitative feedback?

## RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The paper is based on empirical learning which involves discussion of various evaluation procedures experimented and practised by the author in her own classroom settings. It contains a literature review of the current scholarship on diverse theories of teaching-learning and evolution of Managerial Communication as a discipline. In the light of these various studies focussing on teaching and testing of Managerial Communication, the paper lays out detailed discussion of the assessment programmes the managerial communication instructor can formulate to graph students' performances. The paper discusses the designing of evaluation templates that accomplishes dual task;

mentoring students on how to prepare their presentations and giving the instructor a step-by-step method of commenting their feedback on the nuances of the content strategy that the students apply in their deliverables. Thus this is a multi-dimensional tool that helps the students as well as the instructor in the preparation of managerial communication oral course modules.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

A massive research scholarship is still focussed on how the subject of communication skills should be taught (Russ, 2009; Blaszczynski, Haras, & Katz, 2010). It was the work of Kerby and Romine (2009) which deliberated on incorporating assessment as an essential component in content structuring. Laster and Russ (2010) discovered sharp disparity in pedagogic approaches in the teaching modes of instructors from business and communication disciplines engaged in teaching business communication as a subject. Scores of audits published over more than three decades investigate the evolutionary developments of business communication course corpus (Russ, 2009). There are instructors who propose that giving industry-oriented inputs might degenerate communication courses from academic disciplines into vocational training (Yu, 2010). The reason being the primary research done on communication focus on the text or talk as the communication outcome (Charles, 2009a, 2009b) with a company setup seen merely as a social context for professional discourses. But now there is a stiff international competition and hence greater thrust on performance barometers globally (Charles, 2011) because of which the instructors need to modify their course objectives. Slowly, the subject of communication evolved and many linguists began to brand themselves as research practitioners of communication (Louhiala-Salminen, 2009). Companies are now not seen as settings for communication but as the loci of communication practices so that research of late has begun focusing on language and communication usage in companies as their research apparatus (Charles 2009a, 2009b, 2011). Therefore, now communication is defined by the business it serves which no longer is relegated to the stature of a background element (Charles 2011).

## RESEARCH CONTRIBUTION

The instructor can ask students to select any topic of his/her choice. One rider can be that the topic chosen should be challenging. Give a weight of say, 10%, to the selection of the topic so that students choosing difficult topics are amply incentivised. Instruct the students to

prepare two scripts for the same subject; a sample of informative speech just for communicating information in a structured manner that is easy to follow and the other script for persuasive speech for which they are supposed to take a stance. The test is based on what communication strategies they choose for their speeches when they target different objectives.

This exercise can be given as an individual as well as a team assignment.

To guide them in their endeavours the instructor should prepare evaluation templates that would serve as step-by-step guide for the students to prepare their scripts. The instructor should elucidate the templates to the students before assigning them the tasks of filling them up. For example, the template given for informative speaking can be expounded in the following manner. The students are supposed to start their presentations with a preview, showcasing the roadmap that defines the itinerary of their speeches. They are asked to give preview stating clearly as to what are the salient points of the speech and in which order they will be presented. The order should not be patterned on random sequencing but should follow the logical evolution of the thought. An example can be given of a logically conceptualised agenda:

**Table 1: Agenda (No conceptual evolution of thought)**

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Overview</li> <li>● Product</li> <li>● Market investigation</li> <li>● Competition</li> <li>● Operations</li> <li>● Recapitulation</li> </ul> <p>Agenda</p> <p>Invest in XYZ Technology</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● What Innovative business model</li> <li>● Why Massive market with unrequited demands and no direct contest</li> <li>● How Implement a four-step process</li> </ul>
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Preview is very important since it helps audience understand the framework in which they are supposed to process the information which will be presented to them by the speaker.

Once the preview is given, the speaker should not start with the main text of the presentation right away. He should use a transition as a bridge to his second phase of the speech, the main body of his presentation. This transition can be

something like this; let's get started with our first point which means... Ask students to give only two main points in their content. Giving them pre-calculated tasks will help them prepare the right quantum of work required to understand the mechanism of structuring their speeches. Ask them to provide support for each point. For one major point ask them to provide at least one supporting point as evidence.

**Main Statement**

- We could bulge sales by extending business hours till late in the evening.

**Supporting Statement**

- An article in 'Business World' dated February 15, 2015 records statistics demonstrating that shops that extended their working hours to 9:30 p.m., could push up their profits by more than 30 per cent.

This act will make them question their each point of information as they need to win audience credibility for each point of their assertion by giving adequate proof to substantiate the information put forward.

Again, the speaker will have to use a backward/forward transition when he will graduate from one major point to the other which can be exemplified by the following excerpt from a speech:

“Now that I've highlighted the benefits of this programme (backward look), I'll come to my last point- why the government policies make this investment attractive (forward look).”

In this way if one employs explicit language linking the previous section to what comes next, he/she will create a clear and helpful segue- a “backward-look/forward-look transition.”

Once both the major points are given, the presenter can close his speech simply by offering a recapitulation of his major points. With this simple outline the instructor will be able to teach the students clearly how an effective informational speech can be delivered. The instructor can give feedback in the form of comments in each blank signing the sheet off with the final commentary on the overall effectiveness of the speech.

This application-based autonomous mode of learning can prove far more effective than the conventional theoretical pedagogy.

The students will fill up the blanks given in the template. As they will take up this exercise, it will help them gather their thoughts, form links between the disjointed chunks of their thoughts, conjoin them into meaningful patterns, and present them in an audience-friendly format. Once

they complete penning these template blanks, they submit them to the instructor. The instructor then invites them to present their speeches and correlates their delivery with the predesigned deliverables as outlined in the templates.

As a specimen, two scripts are given which the instructors can use for their classroom communication testing modules:

**Table 2: Managerial Communication – I**

<b>Evaluation Form – Informational Presentation</b>	
Team No/ Student name:	Date:
Introduction – Presenting preview:	
Transition:	
Main Point 1:	
Supporting Points/ Evidence:	
Transition:	
Main Point 2:	
Supporting Points/ Evidence:	
Transition:	
Conclusion – Recapitulation of the main points	
Instructor’s Comments, if any: _____	

To teach the students the skill of persuasion one can use a theoretical base first, like taking up the chapter of ‘Communication Strategy’ from the book, ‘Guide to Managerial Communication’ by Mary Munter. “When you deliver a persuasive speech, your goal is to modify the thoughts, feelings, or actions of your audience” (Gamble & Gamble, 2010). Then in lieu of just explaining them the concepts with examples, the instructor can apply them to construct a template which will serve as a manual for the students. Since the topic will remain the same, the students will learn how to change their strategy if their communication objective is not merely to inform about a subject but to take a stand on the subject. To comprehend this distinguishing point the instructor asks the students to write their communication objectives in the beginning. Writing communication objectives will assist them in preparing a speech which is focussed; editing it to prune all sorts of digressions so that the time allotted can be effectively utilised. To make students understand this point of departure from informational speech, the teacher can give them scores of examples:

**Informative Speech Objective:** To explain how much money the government is pumping into the project of cleaning the river Ganges.

**Persuasive Speech Objective:** To convince the audience that the money government has allocated to the project of cleaning the Ganges is simply a waste of resources.

To motivate students to challenge their own communication competencies a certain score is assigned to the selection of topic. As students are granted prerogative to elect their own topics it is necessary to desist them from choosing “easy” topics. Hence, the instructor can demarcate some score like ten marks out of fifty on the difficulty level of the topic chosen. On the template itself this is reflected as a level of difficulty which might range from average to difficult on a scale of five for the topic chosen and the perspective taken.

Some examples of difficult topics or “common” topics with “uncommon” perspectives taken are as follows:

- Global warming is not a threat.
- The use of plastics should not be banned.
- The trepidation surrounding Ebola epidemic is overhyped.

One such presenter’s manual can be prepared in the following manner for an exercise assessing a team of five students for their persuasion skills:

**Template**

**PART A**

Team No.
Names of the Speakers/Reg. No.:
Topic:
Communication Objective:

**INTRODUCTION**

**Speaker One** \_\_\_\_\_

(Name/Reg. No.)

Attention grabber employed

Credibility factor chosen – goodwill/rank/expertise/image/common ground/association

Message structure used – direct/indirect

Audience benefits stated for persuasion

**MAIN TEXT FOR PRESENTATION**

Speaker Two: Point One \_\_\_\_\_

(Name/Reg. No.)

**Use any one (or combination) of the following strategies**

The problem/solution structure  
 One-sided versus two-sided structure  
 Pro/con versus con/pro  
 The inoculation technique  
 Ascending versus descending order  
 The “ask for less” (or “foot in door”) technique  
 The “ask for more” (or “door in face”) technique  
 Consistency reminders  
 Benchmarking  
 Bandwagon appeal  
 Speaker Three: Point Two \_\_\_\_\_

(Name/Reg. No.)

**Use any one (or combination) of the following strategies**

The problem/solution structure  
 One-sided versus two-sided structure  
 Pro/con versus con/pro  
 The inoculation technique  
 Ascending versus descending order  
 The “ask for less” (or “foot in door”) technique  
 The “ask for more” (or “door in face”) technique  
 Consistency reminders  
 Benchmarking  
 Bandwagon appeal

**Speaker Four** \_\_\_\_\_

(Name/Reg. No.)

**Use pathos (through storytelling)****Conclusion**

**Speaker Five:** \_\_\_\_\_

(Name/Reg. No.)

**Use a punch line for appeal/challenge/motivation:**PART B (Leave blank for the instructor)

Topic chosen - level of difficulty – average (A)/difficult (D) – scale of one to five

Perspective taken – tough (T)/easy (E) - scale of one to

five

Instructor feedback comments, if any

In just 10% of the total presentation time devoted to introduction, the students are asked to accomplish the following tasks.

They are asked to employ an effective attention grabber. Their options are a story, an example, an exhibit, startling statistics, rhetorical question, humour, quotation. Using attention grabber helps them in creating curiosity in the audience to listen for more.

After crafting an effective attention grabber the next task for them is to build credibility. In s sentence or two, the speaker gives reason to the audience as to why they should believe him. To win the belief of his audience the student can use the following forms of credibility; expert credibility, goodwill credibility, rank credibility, common ground credibility, or credibility by association. Expert credibility can be used if the speaker is able to convince the audience that he is an expert in the given field and is qualified enough to speak on his chosen topic. He can either present himself as an expert or cite expert sources. He can get the benefit of goodwill credibility if he is able to prove to the audience that he is a fair-minded analyst by discussing both the pros and cons of a given issue. In case of rank credibility, the speaker can use his own position or rank to gain audience confidence. Credibility by association can be used if the speaker has the privilege of working or being known by somebody whom the audience holds in great esteem. Lastly, common ground credibility emanates from points of similarity that link the speaker with the audience; for example, if the speaker has faced the same problems which the audiences are facing, or the speaker hails from the same background which the audience have. This exercise is very important since it makes the students brainstorm and find from their CVs their selling points.

After this exercise of credibility building the speaker is required to lure the audience by showing them audience benefit. This concept of audience benefit is based on the assumption that till you are able to demonstrate how listening to you will help the audience in making their careers or lives better they will not give you their precious time. Hence the speaker should be able to show how his topic of speech is relevant to the audience and how listening to him will benefit them in taking crucial decisions. This act has to be undertaken in the beginning itself so that before the speaker tunes in to his main text the audience will be favourably oriented towards his discourse.

Lastly, if the speaker chooses to use direct pattern in his message strategy he should use introduction to give his thesis statement like it is wrong to give too much importance to the menace of global warming, it is better to choose other careers rather than management. In case the speaker elects indirect strategy, he can hold back his advocacy of a given point and establish it at the end as a conclusion derived from the analysis he has presented in the main body of his text. Whether to use direct or indirect structure is left to the student discretion. Generally, direct structure is used when the audience interest is high in the subject. If the audience bias is negative, using indirect patterns is more prudent.

In this test, the students are directed to use only two points of persuasion. They can select any one or a combination of communication strategies listed in the template.

**The Problem/Solution Structure:** In this case, the speaker first tries to establish that there is a problem. This act is also referred to as problematising the situation, or using balance theory as the speaker disturbs the equilibrium of the audience by puncturing their complacency through his statement of problem. Once he is able to convince them that there is a problem, his task of persuasion becomes easy; he has to present his point of view as a solution to this problem. For example, if the speaker wants to introduce a new HR policy, he can first try to prove that there are problems with the current HR policy and then persuade audience to adopt the change he wants to present as a remedy to this problem.

**One-sided versus Two-sided Structure:** The speaker can use one-sided structure by telling only the positives or benefits of adopting his line of thinking to audience in case he believes that the audiences are already interested in his topic and/or his credibility is high. Otherwise, it will serve his purpose better if he is able to present both the sides of a given issue and then establish why his perspective is better.

**Pro/con versus con/pro:** The speaker can start with the pros of the perspective he has chosen on a given issue in case audience interest is high and/or his own credibility is high. On the contrary, if the topic is very controversial and the audience is sceptic, it will be more advantageous for him if he starts by listing the cons of his perspective first before proving its pros. This gives the audience satisfaction that the speaker is not biased and is presenting an objective evaluation of the situation.

**Ascending versus Descending Order:** The speaker can start by citing his strongest point and then descending to

his least strong point in case his credibility is high. If his credibility is low, he can start with his least strong point and then gradually scale up to his most important point like a crescendo.

**The “ask for less” (or “foot in door”) Technique:** This is a smart strategy of asking for a very small favour which the audience are likely to grace very easily before asking them for major involvement.

**The “ask for more” (or “door in face”) Technique:** This is the opposite strategy of foot in door technique as in this case the speaker deliberately starts with a magnanimous request which he knows very well will be declined so that when he comes to his actual request it sounds moderate.

**Consistency Reminders:** In this case, the speaker reminds the audience of their previous stand or commitment so that the audience experiences a pull of consistency and is compelled to approve the speaker’s opinion. For example if the speaker is recommending adoption of a new employee-friendly medical policy to his CEO he can remind how he had made a publicly avowed statement that for him his employees are his greatest asset so that it will become difficult for him to say “no”.

**Benchmarking or Bandwagon Appeal:** The speaker can use bandwagon appeal by telling the audience how others in their reference group are following a certain practice which he is advocating. People tend to follow what others do and hence this strategy is known as bandwagon appeal. Benchmarking is a variant of bandwagon appeal. In this case, the speaker cites examples of people or organisations revered by the audience.

But the exercise does not end with the use of logos only. Pathos should also be applied in the form of storytelling that captures the emotions of the audience. The art of storytelling is particularly effective in case of leadership communication which the students need to master.

Thus, the entire evaluation act can become a test kit for the Aristotelian framework of persuasion; use of ethos for credibility, use of logos for argumentation and the use of emotion for pathos.

The act has to end with a punch line that creates impact for motivation, appeal, or challenge in lieu of just summation which is the mode of conclusion in the case of informative speaking.

Thus, diversification of the communication model for informative and persuasive speaking on the same subject will give students an insight into strategizing their communication deliverables for variegated purposes.

## CONCLUSION

Thus, this kind of testing method can prove to be more interesting and efficacious for managers to be tutored to handle diverse complex communication cases of persuasion and argumentation. For each parameter listed on the template the instructor gives quantitative and qualitative feedback thereby structuring the 'subjective' element of communication audit in a way that it can be standardised and objectivised to a great degree. The results of such examinations are easier to calibrate and to elucidate to the examinees and the upshot is better learning of theoretical concepts due to their applicability involved in these assessment stints. As Mary Munter (2010) rightly points out, "Managerial Communication is different from other kinds of communication. Why? Because in a business or management setting, a brilliant message alone is not sufficient: you are successful only if your message results in your desired response from your audience."

## FUTURE DIRECTIONS FOR WORK

This testing methodology can be administered to a group of students with other group undergoing conventional evaluation procedures and the two groups can be interviewed to comprehend which evaluation methodology facilitates better learning mechanism. If this kind of feedback is taken year after year with different batches of the students, a researcher can constitute a sound empirical research work based on these findings which can eventually lead to even more advanced evaluative investigations to be coined.

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