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# An inquiry on the paradoxes of the of the impact of oral presentation skills

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### ABSTRACT

In all kinds of forums communication takes place. These forums could be social, academic, political, cultural, and technological. In a communication setting, information, messages and the whole array of ideas and suggestions are exchanged by groups of people. This paper will use “presenters” and “listeners” for these two groups of people. A further clarification in this realm of communication is production and reception. The production realm of communication will emphasize the oral skills, which necessarily imply speaking, and forms of Non-verbal Communication. The reception will include reading and listening. Currently however, in the communication spheres, it has become difficult to draw lines among the 4 basic communication skills of Reading, Listening, Speaking and Writing. It is not clear whether reading lies wholly on reception or whether it can also be considered a production aspect of communication. The situation being referred to here is where one reads out aloud to an audience. The basic question we would need to consider is when reading, is one engaged in producing or receiving as the listeners do? The field of psycholinguistics discerns these differences. They are not the specific focus of this paper. Likewise, in a writing session when one generates ideas as one writes can one be termed to be receiving or producing? The confines of this paper will be productive skills and the emphasis will be on presentation skills in the jurisdiction of speakers. The paper stakes its claim on the issue that the person who gives information orally has others listening to him/her. The presenters use Language or words in speech and Non-verbal cues to get their messages across. These cues are categorized as gestures, facial expressions and expressive movements. As the presenter manifests these communicative acts, certain impressions form in the mind of those at the receiving end and these in turn affect the presenter and create an impact on the listener/recipient of the information. The objective of this paper will be to discuss the paradoxes of the impact of oral presentation. It is a known fact, albeit subtly, that those who listen to a presentation affect the presenters. The impact of the listener on the presenter determines the level of communication. This is the focus of this paper.

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### Introduction

The use of visual aids and other obvious factors such as physical outlook of the presenters will not be addressed. Other simplistic barriers in communication like language and content will not be considered as an area of discussion in this paper either.

Instead, the paper will look at the intricacies of the relatively unexplored area of the impact of a presenter's disposition on his/her listeners and the flip side of the situation on how the listeners impact on the presenters.

The pivot will be on the academic forums, seminars, workshops, conferences but mention will be made of other settings where the impact of the presenter and listener and vice versa exists.

The most common ways of communicating are through the use of Language orally and the often non-highlighted but important one that Osgood C (1956) calls Visual gestural channel of facial and postural expression. The human communication has faculties that can reserve and transit messages simultaneously when the presenters and listeners act either inadvertently or otherwise. This is what makes intentions clear: the message relayed may not be interpreted as was

intended but the fact that the presenter has presented and the listener has “heard” means that a message has been relayed.

A communication setting involves a presenter who influences, willingly or unwillingly, the state or actions of another by selecting alternative signals that can be carried in a channel connecting them Osgood C (1956). However, there are those unseen messages that also cause a reaction between the presenters and the listeners.

### Cues Developed By the Presenter

During presentation, the presenter tries to gauge the listeners' participation in various ways. A look at some of these ways follows:

Some parameters or checklist within the presenter helps him/her to find out how he/she is relating to the listeners. Eye contact is one way. Through eye contact, the presenter is almost 90% sure of the impact of the information. It should be mentioned at this stage, however, that the personality of the presenter comes into play here. If the presenter leans more on introversion then eye contact may not be there; again the expectations of the presenter may cloud what he/she sees as the presentation goes on, so eye contact may not be a very reliable measure of “*my listeners are with me*”. Further discussion on eye contact will be done else where in this paper.

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What are the likely effects on the presenter realizing that the listeners have adopted a negative stance to the presentation? The position of this paper will be that Psychologists over the years have grappled with personality factors and the abilities of individuals to **“stand up and be counted”**. “If a personality is threatened by the “eye contact judgment” of the listeners, several things can happen among them are the presenter may i) falter ii) discontinue presentation iii) or take flight. A fourth alternative also exists. The impact of this realization will have a dent on the presenter. Since the presenters’ world will not end here, it would be an experience trying to relate to the victim of this situation in different forums. It would be worse if the presenter were to deliver a second or third paper to this audience. He/she may develop excuses for **“not being available; or cancel or postpone the presentation**. On the other hand if the presenter is able to counteract the feedback from the eye contact” that judged him/her negatively then the tendency to alter the presentation to suit the whims of the listeners could manifest itself. Alternatively the presenter would take a stand of giving the information the way it is because his/her personality allows him/her to. The question arises:

*“Do presenters resonate with their general impressions to listeners?”*

Janis (1965) recognized that fear is a drive state which tends to multiply tendencies to respond. Fear or anxiety is a cue that elicits responses of hostility towards the source. The defensive avoidance of the presenter interferes with the reception. Thus the Psychologists advice that the “introvert” who exhibits fear should be encouraged to speak, by being rewarded positively, hence reinforcement in the hope that the acceptance level will help diminish fear in the presenter.

The complexity and paradox of the situation described above is that a number of studies have found that in positive relationships, *“the higher the fear arousal the greater the opinion change”*. (Janis, Kaye and Kirscher 1960). What should a presenter do in situations like these? Advertisements and advice on smoking and the dangers of cancer, tetanus injections and the dangers of serious injections by avoiding tetanus injections have been promulgated by juxtaposing variables that should cause fear. But, what do we observe in the world today? ***A”non caring attitude”*** Bates, Michael (1991).

Psychologists would like to prove and indicate how this happens. A listeners mind could be wandering about in a different sphere but simply wants to portray a picture of ***“I am with you just go on”***, it takes a very astute presenter to assess the status quo. This paper emphasizes that the impact of the reaction of the listeners can then affect the presenter. If the information relayed by the listeners borders on ***“what are you saying” “I do not trust you”*** and such like elements that show mistrust of the presenter, then the presenter may be affected. His/her presentation is bound to falter. The personality of the speaker is important here but the point is: does the reaction of this listener especially if it is negative or non conforming or showing disregard, have an effect on the presenter?

If we consider a classroom situation where the teacher is regarded as the source of information, how is the teacher affected by reaction of the students that show ***“we do not regard you as important”***? The teacher may ***“give the students what they want to hear”*** and thus wrong unintended information is passed on, the teacher may want to ***“save his face”*** by restructuring the information due to fear or the desire to be held in some kind of esteem.

It may suffice to throw light on what a good listener is: generally, when opinions are sought from a conglomerate of people, about personalities, at times expression like ***“so and so is a good listener”*** are heard. What does this mean? In most cases it refers to ***“does not talk much”***. Studies by Ehlich M (1965) and Baten M (1994) indicate that these are people ***“who have no positive values to us” “not easily palpable,” “with low self esteem”*** or are, ***“passive”, or lack self assertiveness***. What confounds or clearly stands as a paradox is, should there be a relationship between a listener and a presenter? Does the comprehension of the message need the relationship, between the two parties or is the message more important? How does character contribute to listening or listening ability? In communication forums, the attention should hinge on a desire to understand the meanings of the other.

Beatty J. (1999) expounds on the above scenario and states that ***“good listening is an intellectual and moral virtue and that at the center of virtuous or good listening is a kind of detachment. By ones good listening, one’s own and the others character are brought to awareness, scrutinized and revised”***. The Socratic view on listening as discussed by Osgood C (ibid) is that it ***“requires a fruitful inquiry, the thoughtful comprehension, and articulation of the others view creates all purposeful careful listening”***.

Hence, according to Beatty J. (ibid) during listening, the following activities should be given prominence ***“achieving a kind of fidelity to the intention”*** and other projects must recede; for instance solving the others problem, appraising the others behaviour and gaining approval of the other, counseling the other, reducing the other to an emotional object thus distorting the meaning intended.

The ambiguous position here is that a listener is in all fairness supposed to indicate that he/she is of the same footing as the presenter even if he/she takes an opposing stand and be able to express these at the appropriate time. Once again the predisposition of the presenters is of great significance. If the prejudged ***“attitude”*** tends to indicate ***“I am ignoring you”*** then the presenter will adopt tactics that may not have been intended earlier for instance:

*“In Anton Chekhov’s Early Short stories “Heartache” a Sleigh Driver attempts to tell his various friends that his son has recently died --- they respond with impatience, annoyance and indifference to this revelation. It is possible that they understood the content of the Sleigh Drivers’ communication, they had not really appreciated the meaning of his experience since they did not feel with him and identify the character traits he was wishing for.”*

Does this mean they did not detach themselves? If the friends had been human, they would detach themselves and yet identify with the experiences of the Sleigh Driver. According to Beatty (ibid) they should detach themselves from their own moods and contents and understand the painful experience of the other”.

The Sleigh Driver developed a dislike for his friends due to this gesture. Once again explanations abound in Psychology for this behaviour, Beckhat (1990) Atkinson H (1976) Clark P (1960) Tandii K (1985).

This shows that people select what they want to believe and understand. This is technically referred to as *selective exposure*; Beatty (ibid) *a person’s receptive capacities (his stimulus encoding ability) are limited relative to the information available in the environment”*. He goes on to say that people use

random choice; acquired distinctiveness cues due to previous reinforcement current drive states and persisting values, modality”.

In Psychological terms, the word “ego defensive”, “seeking and avoiding” are used this means that there is a tendency in human beings to seek information that conforms to their preconceptions and “**Actively avoid information that disconfirms them**”, that is why we avoid, with a lot of effort, what we do not believe. Beatty (ibid) states “*people avoid awareness information discrepant from their initial positions*”. The incongruity of this scenario is that anything that is not usual is regarded with askance. Could this also be the reason for change in any circumstance taking a long time? Is the Sleigh Driver then right in hating/disliking his friends? His friends also do not want to nurture this “**sad emotional feeling he has over the loss of his son**” did his friends behave appropriately?

If among his friends there was one who listened to him and behaved in the way he expected then the other friends would say of him that he is a good listener and is “*lazy, inattentive, desires comfort and does not want to help the Sleigh Driver*”.

It is indicated through surveys Oliech and Ambam (1981) Cruink Albert (1959) that good listeners seem to be people who live in their own world and pay attention to other spheres of life. Society, these studies goes on to say regard shyness and those withdrawn with hostility as highly undesirable. They do not want to tax their brains they do this overtly in their own time. Identifying with the Sleigh Driver in the manner of showing compassion would not help the Driver get relief from his state. However, disregard for his state did not help him either.

An aspect that can be misinterpreted but which has been elucidated by Beatty (ibid) is empathy. Beatty defines empathy as **allowing the listener to be detached. Detachment is reason or intelligence's attempt to free itself from whatever is or could be an obstacle to the understanding of what is real/true / meaningful. The Presenters should be aware of this because it enables a more cognitive access to the true meaning.** “Beatty (ibid) purports that some people unfortunately bash this off as being unrealistic, impractical and far fetched. It could explain the conundrum people are at times faced with leading them to say “**I understand why you did that” if only to help the other person realize he/she has support**” after a deed that is an outright crime. “**If I were in your shoes, I would do the same**”.

During presentation, a presenter should engage Listeners in the following activities.

A presenter should realize that a listener pays attention to

- *How the presenter expresses himself/herself*
- *The order of the concerns.*
- *The emphatic and the discounted*
- *The timing of the concern.*
- *The discounted and the why now.*
- *Fitness of the communication given the existing norms and the relationships.*
- *The gestures*
- *The posture*
- *The tone*
- *The feelings*
- *The moods*
- *Coherence*
- *Locutions and the fit between coherence and locutions.*
- *What is said and what is done to communicate it*
- *The significance of an action*

#### • The concern for the listeners.

This is an exhaustive summary from Beatty's study on Good Listening (ibid). There are assumptions that are made by all presenters when information is being relayed, he goes on to say. These assumptions are that “*beliefs, customs, prejudgments are the same for all*”. It is important for a presenter to gauge the entry behaviour of his/her listeners so that the appropriate approach is adopted. After gauging the stance of the listeners should the presenter pitch his approach to the disposition of the majority or the minority?

The presenter should therefore be very wary of what audiences are likely to do so that they are not caught unawares. What is interesting is that despite all these, we have situations where some presenters are at a loss over what to do in certain circumstances. For instance, it is very useful that after a presentation, there should be reactions, comments or clarifications. Due to time constraints or other forms of mismanagement of time, we find that presenters may be told that the original 30 minutes they had for their presentation, have been reduced to 10 minutes and that no time will be given for questions or clarification. How does this impact on the presenter? How does the information get delivered in this kind of time? Or situations abound where we know that when given the opportunity to express oneself clearly it would take time, and for us to say that communication was effective we should know that our intended meanings were relayed.

An example from life's daily events would help shed light on this:

Have you ever wondered why at times when one has the opportunity of baying out the heart/mind there is always an interruption either external to the communicants or perpetuated by either the listener or presenter as a defense so as to create a barrier in communication or cause a communication breakdown? These situations make communicators unable to relay their messages fully for the desired effect. For instance, the listener feigns illness and becomes incommunicado, yet the climax of most meaningful things is usually less than a minute. If only the communication barrier was not created by the listener, the time intended for the communication would have rendered very effective relayance of the message?

In other words, when “**given**” the chance to express oneself clearly it would take time and it would be effective from the point of view of the presenter. Could this be the reason why study areas are quiet places, without any distraction so as to allow maximum concentration? Could it also explain why examination rooms require utter silence for presentation of information? Why do other situations deserving similar relayance of communication have opposing contexts e.g. a school next to a milling factory, and yet the students from that school perform equally well: Is it because the noise (Physical) and other disturbances become part of what they can take in their stride?.

#### Need For Interaction

Beatty (ibid) believes that most institutions pay lip service to the cultivation of communicative virtues in public discourse. No time is given for interaction. He says “*some include class schedules that permit few temporal open clearing between classes for exchanges between presenters and listeners. In fact such relations of interaction between faculty and students are discouraged, Beatty (ibid) because of fear that they will turn amorous relations and incur law suits*”.

Other situations where the interaction is not given its due place is where sending the project report or presentation of good grades in a school are seen as underlying objectives of seminars/conferences and School situations respectively. Listeners whose pursuit of understanding is framed by a grade system are unlikely to engage in dialogue system. This is because, Edel A (1990) states *listening is not considered as important; the precious innocence of inquiry is lost. The physical presence of presenters and listeners in a room is enough to show that something is going on otherwise why were grown men and women engaged in the activity for so long?*" he asks.

How does a teacher teach when she knows that *the students attempt to understand will be objectified in a grade asks Norman A (1997)?* The importance of the grade as a determiner of future success is vital. Norman (ibid) summarizes this situation by saying that *"the risk presenters run is that listeners will come to see listening as having no intrinsic value at all"*.

The ability of a presenter to convince an audience whether in class, seminar, or workshop relies heavily on presentation skills. According to Gardener (1991) a presenter should fetch from Shulmans (1981) outline which states that there is content knowledge (knowledge of the subject) and pedagogical knowledge (knowledge of how to present content that is specific to what is being relayed). How to explicate particular concepts, demonstrate and rationalize certain procedures and methods and how to correct naïve theories and misconceptions about subject matter should be the task of the presenter.

In seminars, workshops and conferences a presenter should be wary of what the theme of the meeting is. Some presenters go about relaying content of a subject versus analyzing the theme of the meeting. An example from teacher training institutions would suffice. How much subject content does a teacher need? Did the teacher not cover these aspects while in school; doesn't the teacher only need to know how to relay this content? Isn't the methodology of relaying the content more important than the content itself? This has been a debate for many years leading to attitudes of *"why tell us what are already know"* from listeners.

Generally, presenters use discourse or language makers in their presentations to touch base with the listeners. It renders the listeners in pace / tandem with the presenters. This paper will explicate three major sections of a presentation.

The first to be considered is the introduction, followed by development and finally the conclusion.

**Introduction** What is a presenter expected to say in the introduction and what is the impact of these statements and actions on listeners?

*"I will introduce.... define... and I would appreciate if the questions /comments/reactions are noted and then asked when I finish the oral presentation"*. One can imagine what would arise when such a presenter is interrupted by the questions during the presentation. How do such affect the introvert, extrovert? How does the nature of the question affect the presenter? Does it show agreement or controversial stance in the listener? Will this make the presenter redesign his presentation? Does the presenter have the capacity (ability) to accommodate such criticism without losing his/her string of thought?

Another introductory format used by presenters in seminars which could be termed as ice breakers is a situation where the presenter says *"I have just come back from --- and 2 months ago I met ---- who told me that I had to give a paper on ...and I said "wait a minute I am not available" so was pestered by*

*him/her so much that I decided to put Paper to pen and here I am today...*

Some listeners will feel offended by this because it may strike a feeling of *"this was not really his liking he seems to have been pushed into it so his content may also just be something of a "for the sake of"*

Again in this *"monetary after seminar presentation era"* the financial reward may be the motivating factor. How will the listener impact on the presenter in a situation of this nature?

How about presenters who start off with statements that may either be labeled as excuses for instance:

*"I am not feeling very well so my presentation will be short"*

Versus one who just has a short presentation and is unable due to illness, to present the content for a long time but does not bother to explain or alert the listeners?

Which of the two presenters will the listeners value more? It may be true that the one who explains his disposition will be accepted more but some listeners are bound to say *"that is just an excuse on his poor performance"* (if the performance is not up to the expected standards).

How does an ice breaker used as an introduction impact on listeners and the presenters? How about when the ice breaker fails? What does a failed ice breaker: for example flat / bouncing joke do to the presenter? How about a presenter who puts his hand in his pockets or folds his arms across his chest? Or shakes and has a trembling voice out of fear?

What about a different situation where the presenter dishes out handouts which have a lot of mistakes and has illegible handwriting ... and later on asks the listeners their evaluation of the presentation orally? What is he bound to hear from the listeners? If the presenter asks this without realizing the frankness of some participants and they tell him/her the truth how is he/she as a presenter supposed to handle the genuine answer *"you presented a hand out full of mistakes and it is illegible"*. Does the presenter ignore it, explain the reasons by blaming some one else or time? If the presenter is taken unawares by the genuine comments, what is he/she supposed to say *"I do not see anything wrong"* will erode all the confidence he might have earned. Likewise ignoring the concern will give an impression of *"I was only looking for a way of boosting my ego"*. If on the other hand the participants are not genuine in their comments, the presenter gets a different impact. Should this be the case: that inappropriate behaviour is rewarded? Will there be any one later on willing to *"bell the cat"*?

If the presenter asks for the evaluation orally after his presentation and the responses are *"very good work..."* amidst all kinds of fidgeting e.g. rubbing the nose, scratching their necks, pulling their collars, exhibiting blank and confused stares, what message could they be relaying to the presenter? How will this impact on the presenter? Why is the verbal communication at variance with the non-verbal communication? Psychologists indicate that every body has one or more repetitive gesture / body expressive movement that could signal boredom, tension, agitation, disbelief...

These repetitive signals e.g. nose rubbing; looking out of the window/ the far away look ... are often seen in situations where the listener and the presenter have lost touch or are developing attitudes.

In other circumstances a glass of water is provided to presenters. Does the presenter need it or is it a way of relaxing the presenter? Is it a stimulus variation for the presenter and the

listeners? How about a situation where the presenter drops the glass / spills the water on him/herself or chokes with the water? For each of these there would be different reactions. For each of these some would be embarrassing to the presenter hence causing an impact on the listeners and the overall communication process.

What led to the theory of *“water giving”*? How about the case where the presenter totally ignores the tea/water out of fear of the above mentioned accidents or lack of time? The listeners will still view the action as *“lack of courage”* or *“slight”*, some may see the presenter as *“composed”* ... *“tense”*.....

In some interview situations this *“tea giving”* is used as part of the assessment. How does the interviewer react in these *“social circumstances”*. As such the tea giving will be testing the degree of nervousness or ability to hold oneself in anxious situations.

How about a situation where the nervous presenter trembles so much that the listeners walk out? What impact does this have on the presenter? If the presenter were to hold a second session, how would the listeners react? What is the overall effect of this to the presenter? Such situations abound and the writer feels it could be the case of *“the presenter is unwell or has some other commitment or any other excuse given to the listeners to save the face of the presenter. The ability of humans to affect one another through empathy has been researched for a long time. The information obtained from the studies of Verducci Susan (2000) for moral Education is an indication of this.*

#### Expressive Movements

Several factors impact on the listener, the presenter should be aware of facial expression and general dispositions. To some extent the presenter has control over these aspects. For instance in the study of Sheldon, Steven and Tucker (1940) the error they caused in their calculations has made us realize that body dispositions dictate personality type... there is some contribution on the impact of perception. The studies on attitudes and personality by Allport (1976) have tended to support that a *slumped posture that moves slowly is dull, lifeless, depressed ... a flabby handshake suggests lack of warmth; Jerky erratic movements may suggest force, vigor and constraint of movements will suggest aloofness and reserve.* The film industry has also used these general impressions in anticlimaxes to thrill viewers. The slump posture that is considered lazy all of a sudden reacts swiftly in such a manner to keep the audience thrilled!

Other cues are the voice. Voice is judged as warm, neutral, cold and these reflect predisposition of the presenter. The clothing, age, Gender of the presenter all have an impact on the listener. These studies have been supported by a recent study on perception of students by Ahmed Zawedi (1998) which states that *“when confronted with a person whose attitudes are at variance with theirs, they exert pressure on him to change”* In other words a presenter is accepted if his/her beliefs tally with the listeners, or develops them in the direction they expect it to *“Members of a group whose beliefs have been shaken by an exposure to a counter communication would seek discussion partners who agreed with their beliefs* Brodbec K (1996).

Little is known about the factors that enable a person to be more insightful in his evaluation of others in spite of the fact that such knowledge is extremely important in aspects of life. The question that arises at this stage is *“Is there any relationship between physique and personality?”*

What determines liking / disliking for people?

How do we arrive at Judgments about characteristics of other people? If we have attitudes about a person, we seem to carry these and observe the person with a view to supporting what we already possess and these could well be prejudicial.

Another impacting factor on the presenter and listener is the facial expression. Studies in this area point to the fact that facial expressions may be interpreted variously by listeners in three categories *“too sure” “not known” “very unsure”*. A presenter who adopts a *“too sure”* stance may develop such high self esteem that exaggerations bordering on Ostentatiousness and preposterous stance will be manifest. Alternatively, the *“very unsure”* facial expression may be looking for a way out and may terminate the presentation prematurely. The *“too sure”* facial expression may go on and on presenting information for extra time without receiving complaints from the audience.

We will now turn to the development and conclusion of a presentation.

#### Events during Presentation

In an instance where a presenter gets power or electric failure of technological devices, the presenter is meant to give some kind of explanation. What is the impact on the listeners if this explanation is not forth coming? If the presenter was going to use transparencies and the power supply is cut off, how does what the presenter do impact on the listener? Will it build his/her inability to continue due to the power failure or will it be a show of lack of preparedness? If it was something that was within the ambit of the presenter is he/she expected to go ahead indicating *“I am sorry I could elaborate more explicitly if I had power source”* or does it show that the presenter is ill prepared? If the presenter says, *“well power supply has been cut off”* some listeners many wonder why he/she is stating the obvious! What paradoxes these are.

It is generally assumed that one who keeps on explaining is giving excuses for shortcomings is weak! For instance one who says *“I have just had on attack of cold therefore my voice is a little husky”* versus one who just continues with a husky voice without explaining why it is husky to the listeners. One would argue that it depends on the listeners – In a situation where listeners are a little mature and a free atmosphere has been created such explanations may not be warranted.

How about a classroom situation? For instance, standard 6 children whose age is about 11 on the average. Will such children understand the explanation? Will it be of value? Is it the duty of the teacher to do this? Do the children need to know why the teacher is talking like that? When the teacher explains his/her situation does his/her activities later on in the day get better interpretation from his/her listeners? Do others say she/he was just looking for sympathy *“who does not become sick?”*

In some presentation situations, the presenter elicits support from listeners by nodding and asking for support in various non-verbal ways. These non verbal cues are at times meant to hoodwink listeners or are to persuade the listener towards a particular mode of thought?

#### Facial Expressions

Studies show that there is hardly any disagreement that facial expressions effectively influence those who perceive it. But to be able to read and interpret facial expressions requires cultural and cognitive steep age. Facial expressions alone cannot account for reaction. However, it is evident that there is a transfer of facial expressions from listeners to the presenter which affect the status quo.

Couple facial expression, with facial imitation and the result is that there is a relationship. Studies suggest that faces reflexively imitate other faces and that facial imitation induces affect.

#### Effects of facial expressions

One does not have to perceive that Michael is sad in order to induce sympathy. All one needs is to see Michael's facial expression (not what it expresses) to imitate unconsciously and then be affected. Imitation of facial expression therefore, allows a subject to be infected with the affect of another without knowing the context eliciting the original affect. Because this phenomenon can be induced with little cognitive activity, the transfer of emotion can be essentially affective.

If we were to walk into a room where people are fighting, our sympathies will be elicited by empathy our sympathetic feelings are elicited by the environmental cues. Our reactions depend on how we interpret the situation. Sympathy should not be confused with compassion. Compassion is described below.

**Compassion** It is sorrow or concern for the unfortunate condition or predicament of another. The difference between sympathy and compassion Osgood (ibid) is that with compassion you need not feel what the victim feels. All you do is show extreme concern. *"I am in your shoes is not part of the communication"* for compassion it is with sympathy.

It is important to distinguish these 3 areas for a listening situation. Do we feel compassion, sympathy or empathize with presenters when we are listeners? Whatever we do, how does it impact on the presenter? Listeners may or may not show any of these but they are affected, the presenter therefore has to be wary of the effects of his/her presentation skills.

**Sympathy** David Hume a (171-1776) Philosopher defines sympathy as *"a propensity to receive by communication the other inclinations and sentiments, however different from or even contrary they are to our own"*.

Beatty (ibid) goes on to say *however heroically dazzling, apparently sincere, cogently expressed or flattering, it may not accord with other aspects of what has been communicated. Nor should the poverty of language in common place expression, stereotypical pictures – necessarily disqualify an account. In Madame Bovary, because Rodolphe hears Emma professing her love for him in clichés he doubts the depth of her feeling. Flaubert's narrator comments on this bad listener.*

*Fidelity of meaning is difficult to establish but most people think precision and captivating description does it and that slovenly or trite language is not necessarily a sign that the meaning or experience has been falsified.*

The unsure people are always taken for not being convincing yet there are reasons for this (a) personality (b) predisposition. There are no rules that a listener needs to follow according to Beatty. *The presenter should realize that she/he needs to monitor the listeners' reactions to gauge the impact of the information: does the listener find it correct? Is it correct clearly and fully? Is the listener engaging wholly in the communication act by showing willingness to revise and abandon her particular understanding on the basis of the others responses?*

*A presenter should be able to analyze feedback and to find out the impact of the communication act by*

- (a) *Tracking the literal meaning of the others statements*
- (b) *Attending to bodily signs of listeners*
- (c) *Having tone, mood,*
- (d) *Having internal dialogue with facial expressions.*

(e) *Interrogating own expressions*

(f) *Noting the impact of metaphors synecdoches, notes, coordinations, or the lack of the body expression after the impacts of words.*

*His/Her feeling of threat; boredom; Impluse, become more rigid or lax, and are at constant questioning as to the suitability of the situation.*

If the presenter realizes that there is a threat she/he should ask (a) what is the source of the threat? (b) Does it arise from similarity/difference (c) why is it a threat (is it because 'I' the presenter am not prepared/confident)? What precisely makes me afraid as the presenter? (e) who in the audience makes me afraid as the presenter? Does the subject give me solace and comfort and if not why?

**Empathy** Kohut wrote extensively on empathy as the primary therapeutic tool in Psychoanalysis. Kohut believes that only empathy allows the therapist to know the patient within his frame work of self Psychology, Kohut contends that empathy consists of both an affective in-tuneness and a value neutral mode of data gathering and processing "reality per se, whether extrospective or introspective is unknowable. We can only describe what we see within the frame work of what we have done to see it.

There is a danger in over dependence on the presenter of information hence making the listener not *"separate the wheat from the chaff"*. Sullivan (2000) warned of situations where *contacts with patients were characterized by the patients' strange dependence on what they think the doctor thinks they is suffering from. Such dependence is dangerous and causes the presenter to falsify or re-organize his/her information for approval. She/he may omit sections of the presentation that she/he knows may not augur well with his/her listeners.*

*Other affects between presenter and listener are also evident in the area of synchrony* which we will now turn to. **Synchrony** Richard Restak on Synchrony (1942) says that two clocks will tick in unison if they are mounted on the same support. If separated, this synchronization will stop, Richard Restak names a similar process that occurs between individual humans, he calls this process synchrony.

Restak claims that the drawing along of another or mutual entrainment (cause to flow along incorporate) that occurs with clocks also occurs with people Research on the menstrual cycles of women who live together bear this fact in a biological manner. Restak posits that this sharing of rhythm occurs with affect as well.

Restak believes this process to be a possible neurophysiological correlate of empathy.

**Medicine** Watch some one giving medicine to another. As the person opens the mouth to take medicine, the other feeder or an onlooker performs the same actions; at a bus stage somebody goes into a bus another lifts up the leg or performs actions similar to the person getting on to the bus. These could be reflex actions.

**Swallowing** In other instances, one may salivate or swallow simply because another is doing a similar action but if that which is being eaten is bitter then the facial expressions translates to the one watching she/he also grimaces as if the bitterness is in his/her mouth.

**Discontent** In situations where one is enjoying a meal that the observer finds unpalatable try to compare the two facial expressions, watch whose face affects the other: the one enjoying or the one disgusted by it all?



In presentation situations the effects of the listeners' predisposition impact on the presenter in almost similar ways.

An embarrassed look from a presenter elicits embarrassed stares from some listeners. Similarly a happy face elicits the same from some listeners. The reverse is also true and this points to the paradoxes of communication.

Laughter is another example of how listeners may affect presenters. If a person begins to laugh heartily, even if those around do not know what she/he is laughing about they will usually find it difficult not to join (at least with a smile)

Educationists distinguish among empathy, sympathy and compassion. All these three exist in the presenter and listening contexts.

Gunn (ibid) assumes that empathy necessarily makes the rather large claim of being able to transpose one person into another. Verducci S (ibid) explains that although theorists have considered empathy a singular phenomenon they have been capturing and explicating individual components of a complex phenomenon. They argue that empathy has *one facet and is motivated by a person's desire to help; to understand .... Most conceptions of empathy possess a primary affinity with emotions / cognition it is a mode of feeling / reasoning Susan verducci (ibid).*

Matin Buter (1965) states that empathy is the exclusion of one's own concreteness, the extinguishing of the actual situation of life, the absorption in pure aestheticism of the reality in which one participates".

The projection of *"feeling self into another signals empathy"*. The imagined mental representatives of the other and the viewers feelings become inseparable Buter goes on to say.

Vischers and Lipps (ibid) describe empathy as a human instinct desirous of unity and harmony with other humans. This is because there is a desire to merge with the others. Stern Edith (1891-1942) studied empathy extensively. He variously defines empathy as the *"experience of being led by the foreign experience"* it occurs in three grades

- (a) the emergence of the experience (we come into some sort of contact with another subject)
- (b) the fulfilling explication (our affect resonates with theirs)
- (c) the comprehensive objectification of the explained experience.

He says all levels, must occur and for an experience to be empathic they are equally valuable.

Do people alter their judgment with which they are associated? E.g. if people wear certain colors are they projecting different images? Do the stereotyping communication of various colors affect interpretation? For instance bright colors; (Whatever bright means) indicate-bright, alive person versus the attitude that dull and pale colors represent a dull person? Studies by Murila 1995, Njoka 1997) show that colour presentation predisposes certain cues in listeners.

Linguistically we know all these have an affect leading to the saying *the way you say something is more important than what you say*. This is a sure way to indicating that even if the content was not expressed in the manner it would ever be presented by presenter is of utmost importance.

Others have also said that it seems more was spent on the cage than feeding the animals in the zoo!

#### Incidents during presentation

##### Eyeball to Eyeball Contact

As a way of gauging impact of information on the listeners, presenters may choose to have eye contact. The personality of

the presenter dictates the eye contact style adopted. There are those who can almost look at each of the eyes / faces of all the listeners as individuals. There are also those who cannot do this. They instead look through, above, beyond or simply adopt a style that tells the listeners. *"I can see you"* The fact that eye contact has so many words to describe it means it is a complex affair the Oxford University Press Thesaurus of 2001 lists the following words for eye contact a *squint, a stare, a glare, gaze, goggle, gawk, watch, blank look, wink, blink, sparkle, flinch, wince, observe, consider, contemplate, regard, view, survey, inspect, scrutinize, study, scan, pay attention, attend, notice, witness, investigate, explore, research, check, glance, struck, wide eyed, open mouthed, dazed....* The list is endless.

Eyes of a presenter can send a lot of messages to the listeners. They may present confusion, fear, and self confidence. A trained eye may also just stare to feign or fake seriousness. The eyes of the Listeners also have impact on the presenters in similar ways. What about culture that indicate that you do not look back / stare / look at your elders? When an older person talks to you, you should look aside. What about professions like the armed forces where the juniors are not supposed to look at the eyes of their seniors? How about the eyes of a judge in a court who may be younger than the other staff he or she is dealing with? More information as to the value / worth of a presenter is obtained from the eyes! In some cultures a young one does not just look at the older person but looks down or faces the opposite direction for example some tribes in The Sudan.

How about the eyes of a lover? The lovers are usually *"swept off their feet"* depending on the intensity of the relationship through looking at the eyes which at that time assume a dreamy state. What about people quarreling?

They always have eye contact. The eye contact relays dislike, seriousness, hatred, murder, sorrow, hurt, forgiveness, submission, authority.... The list is endless. During presentation, the presenters' eyes can also relay similar messages. What is the impact of these looks on the listeners and what are the listeners' impact on the presenter? How does this enhance or inhibit effective communication.

**Activities** It is interesting to note that some embarrassing situations of clumsiness draw different reactions from listeners. If a presenter clumsily spills a cup of coffee/tea over himself / herself, in most cases there is increased attractiveness of the superior person. The average person appears less attractive. This was reported by Schmidt (1987). He defined a superior person as a *"popular person who has qualities of an extrovert on the average"* and not as one leaning towards introversion. It appears that when the expert has a little bit of human failing then the subject feels more rapport with him.

In actual social settings, Psychologists have found that people have little contact with those unlike themselves and are therefore much exposed to peer than to expert influence. The implication is that when the expert gets his message heard, he has more impact than the peer but that in the natural community he is much less often heard than are one's peers.

Further, studies on selected exposure (Janis, Kay, Kirschner, 1965) indicate that people tend to overexpose themselves to communication that they perceive as coming from sources with whom they expect to agree and underexpose themselves to sources with whom they expect to disagree.

### Sources of information and their impact on listeners

There is also ample evidence that a message is perceived and evaluated very differently depending on whether its purported source is positively / negatively valenced : more fair; factual; more thoroughly documented; when it is ascribed to high as opposed to low credibility sources.

**Lawyers** Lawyers believe that Belli T. (1963) man is innocent until proven guilty and thus the State must establish evidence of guilt before the defendant can be asked to present his case. This is because it is believed the presenter has a definite pursuance argument. Earlier studies talk of first impressions. They are impelling and they set the pace. We also realize that the issue of anticlimax effect is more meaningful at times. So is the *“first impression compelling more of a common sense issue?”*

Judges only listen to both sides of the case as the Jury and only comment later... they are patient with all the hullabaloo and the back and forth cross examinations. They are patient with all they hear before Saying IT. All the while they have to humble themselves. Patience and self control are dispositions akin to respect because they allow others to tell their story in their way. According Osgood C., (ibid), even if the Judge could do it more clearly and dramatically, any interventions are to pick the correct thread from the many directions that the dialogue could be going; to the mobility to listen. Those that are slow make listeners impatient. It is increasingly becoming common that this impatience makes listeners disregard the slow as people without substance (S.I.C.).

Acknowledging oneself enables the presenter to be open to whatever is there and enables the listeners to express the meanings that are indeed the others; free of the expectations of the kind of reaction expected hence more meaningful comprehension.

Presenters should thus consider the following:

What is the state of the person when she/he receives the information? Is she/he alert, willing to participate or is she/he thrown off. Do listeners who have been put off behave as if they preferred to succeed even though it is not what they expected?

**Monetary Reward** Role of monetary reward after participation in an activity has propelled all kinds of presentations in different fora: Does a favor for a person who deserves courtesy seems to be the new adage.

The dissonance theory prediction states that the lower the drive or reward the greater the performance or attitude increment. What is usual is the reverse. This is another of the paradoxes of presentation. The more satisfied the person feels with his performance, the more he/she will internalize the new position and the greater the participation.

Aronson and Carlsmith (1963) found that children showed a greater internalized negative attitude) of a forbidden toy when they were given a mild threat to deter playing with the preferred toy that was kept before them.

McGuire (1999) states that, *“those who show high conformity early in the situations tend to be high conformers at the later stages also”*.

Attitude change is the end product of a series of conditional behavioral elements: attentions to message, comprehension to its arguments and conclusion, yielding, retention, overt action. Is it true that the more intelligent person should yield less because he/she should have basis for belief; thus is less upset by opposing arguments and that he/she has better critical abilities therefore she/he can separate the wheat from the chaff hence has

higher esteem and therefore, is more tolerant? No! Because attention and comprehension are determined by message reception among other factors.

This principle therefore does not make us give confident predictions but simply calls our attention to the complexity of presentation. When the material falls in the latitude of rejection we see it as discrepant from our own position and this makes a contrast error. We then misinterpret it and hate the presenter. The 3<sup>rd</sup> zone is the zone of indifference. Any material here is neither accepted nor unaccepted. It does not go through any distortion.

If the message advocates a position too far from the recipients own position, she/he tends to respond by rejecting the source rather than by changing his/her own position and such a message could have a boomerang effect.

Hovland (1964) indicated that as involvement increases the import of highly discrepant messages decreases. What can the presenter do about such a situation? Muchuhan and Fiore (1967) say that the medium through which the message is communicated has more impact on the receiver than does the message content.

### Effect of communication modality

#### The written versus oral form

Efficacy is more with off the cuff speech over read speech but comprehension is greater with reading and hearing. Beightly (1952), Harwood (1951), Hague (1952), Toussaint (1960). There is also a relationship between the source and the receiver depending on whether he is reading or saying the message. There is anxiety; pressure; good taste to conform when the personalized spoken modality is used and the person is felt other than paying attention to what he is reading. So presenters should bring out themselves more / express themselves as the authors of the speech for impact. Rosenthal (1967) emphasizes on the role of Non-Verbal Communication (NVC). He says that a cathartic vicarious outlet effect the focus when the presenter is present.

**Educated aware versus Non Educated Audience** What is the effect on the presenter? How should a presenter relay information to an educated audience? Which mode impacts on such a group of listeners?

**Walk Out** Social constraints usually prevent the receivers from leaving the room, when another person begins to express opinions with which they disagree: boredom, fatigue, intellectually limited attention in face to face communication the demands of the presenter limit inattention so that the receiver will absorb more of the message. It is rare but not impossible for listeners to work out.

*Is this what we see anymore? In areas where presenters realize they are at cross purposes with the listeners walking out has become the order of the day. Even in the entertainment industry the audience will scream “we want our money back” courtesy or no courtesy walking out is not a difficult thing. But there are those who hold back? Why do they do this even if they know they are not benefiting? Is it because they are empathizing, sympathizing or being compassionate? Do they need to sit there and absorb all this?*

Osgood C (ibid) says that “decoding” is regarded as the process whereby the stimulus patterns we call signs, elicit distinctive representational mediators (significance) and encoding refers to the process where by *“the self stimulation produced by these mediators (intentions) elicit distinctive patterns of instrumental skills, linguistic or otherwise”*



Thus it is important that a presenter and listeners communicate what they intend to communicate. The impact of the presenter and listener as we may have noticed determines, in many ways, the trend of the communication adopted.

It is not uncommon to observe highly intelligent people in situations, where they need to be at their best, being unable to express themselves. Other people of relatively low intelligence may display a high degree of fluency both verbal and non verbal. ***Eloquence comes into play for reasons that determine an effective communicator : presenter and listeners.***

How presenters deal with issues that surprise them and how a situation where concentration is important indicates a lot of correlation of reaction between presenters and listeners. How does a presenter deal with a naughty smile, a threat? How does the presenters' naughty smile or threat impact on the listener? How do these two contribute to the communication process?

Can listeners alter the position of a presenter if they are not comfortable? For instance sometimes in a seminar a presenter could be using an over head projector and blocks the view of the listeners. Should this be left "unnoticed" by the listeners? Should the listeners tell the presenter? Or should the presenter ask the listener whether they can see what she/he is trying to share? In all of these cases there are repercussions. If we pick the case where the listeners tell the presenter and (s)he was uncomfortable about it; how does this impact on both the presenter and the listener; what about the mood of both the presenter and the listeners?

What is the impact of a presenter on listeners who keeps looking for confirmation as (s)he talks by constantly nodding the head?

What is the effect of pinpointing the deeds of inattention **"hey stop looking out of the window, I am saying something"**. What is the impact on the listener? What does this tell the presenter and how does (s)he then reorganize to move on? Meanwhile what about the communication process? Does it become less emphatic / effective?

**"Listen to the cues, because there is a lot"**. It is often said that when we have to make decisions, there are many voices in us. There are those voices that urge us on and there are those that slow us down and still others that warn of dangers so **"do not attempt"** the voices seem to be saying. Can this be equated to gathering courage to finally making the decision and being prepared for the consequences of the decision made?

It is not the speaking voice but the voice heard that is important in communication. Why is it not possible to maintain eye contact during conversation or a listening situation? There is always a tendency to look away, beyond, above, under, below; elsewhere. Do all these postures relay reliable meaning?

*"Perceptual distortion as a function of comprehension maintains the messages actual meaning"*, Osgood C (ibid). The receivers preferred position, the previous material which he has been judging, and the present context where the information is being judged all play a role in interpretation of information. The interpretation given to a message depends on whether it falls within the latitude of acceptance. Listeners tend to distort the message to be closer or like their own and hence accept it and it also depends on their acceptance of the source of the information.

The impact of the presenter on the listener and the impact of the listener play a great role in the communication process.

A more elaborate study could be done by designing tools to observe and report on the various situations of how presenters affect and are affected by listeners.

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