

THE CULTURAL APPROACH TO BUSINESS COMMUNICATION IN ITALIAN COMPANIES: EMERGING ISSUES AND CHALLENGES¹

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I owe the idiomatic expression *business communication* to Professor Brioschi. For a long time I ignored it, since I used to think in terms of business, advertising and communication often separately from each other, or interacting one by one, as distinct areas that sometimes may be interactive.

The term "business communication" really seems to be the best way to express the connection and profound sharing, observable today perhaps more than in the past, between the business world and the communication world.

Advertising is currently *only one part* of the latter and is undergoing an exciting transformation, when not experiencing a narrowing trend compared to recent decades.

I believe that "business communication" is the best way, because it is more effective and more efficient, to say that we are not concerned with the abstract field of business nor with the even more abstract area of communication. We are greatly interested in the ability of the entrepreneur, doing business, to use communication as a resource and operational strategy for economic growth and, conversely, in communication to acquire economic consistence and avoid the temptation to remain on the surface as a mere paint glistening on the company.

Well, explained this approach, the title of the round table by defining the scope of reflection, that is "business communication", ask the participants to think about the *emerging issues*, that is the aspects more visible today than in the past, or more problematic today than in the past, and then to reflect upon *the challenges* that lie ahead. In my opinion, with regard to emerging issues, today's most pressing ones *are two*.

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Certainly, there are others, in the excitement of media digitalization, with their actual impact and future stabilization on the web. With all the consequences that are already tangible today or that are going to take shape.

However, if we consider strictly “business communication”, the main emerging issues are the following *two*:

- to intercept, using appropriate tools, *the media diets* of your target, or your plural targets, and to understand which are the prevailing patterns with their varying combinations (time slots, seasons, places etc.);
- to work out a media mix consistent with the scenario of the media diets of your target, or your plural targets, to adopt a relevant communication and a common identity with your consumers/customers.

First, then, the big question, and the related task of experts and communication managers, is to identify and to describe, in as much details as possible, media people dealing with the business are familiar with. The multimedia approach is prevailing along with digitalization. Without detracting from the weight of each single media, what we are chasing is the exact sum of individual weights (of all media available), at the individual level, which obviously is not of arithmetic type, otherwise it would be too simple and probably it will be enough to consider television or just the web. But that is not the case.

Moreover, one of the most interesting features of this work involves the construction of varying patterns of multimedia composition at the individual level. The personal media diet is neither static nor strict: there are variations in the timetable, weekly variations, seasonal variations, changes due to the physical place where you are. We must therefore design variable geometric patterns, in a continuous monitoring and analysis of the target audience.

Secondly, this knowledge aiming at the fine-tuning of the media diet of your target must be the starting point to invent, literally “to invent”, the most appropriate and effective media mix for my target. It’s the specificity and sharing of languages you use and places you move in (speaking figuratively, in this case I mean media), that create the relevancy of communication as well as the corporate identity and the identity of the company’s consumer relationship.

Owing to the complexity of communication and individual behaviour, more than 50% of the work of the business community focus on these two points.

Much of the other half of the work is directed to the measurement of the economic return on investment of this type of strategic effort.

More than half of the work addressed to the communicative business is focused on these two issues arising from the complexity of communication and individual behaviour.

Regarding *the challenges* that lie ahead, in my opinion, probably today there is *only one* (even if it brings together many).

WHAT to communicate It is not particularly important any more, since it's more and more obvious that we communicate emotions, high-tech content, positiveness, values etc. Only a few don't know yet these basic aspects of communication. *HOW MUCH to communicate* has almost no relevance either because it is increasingly obvious, we do not communicate too little or too much and even these highly quantitative aspects of the communication are now almost technical, automatic, that you can easily standardize, or are already standardized in the communication business.

WHEN to communicate is also almost irrelevant: because it is increasingly obvious, that we almost always communicate, and not only because, it is a well-known fact, that "it is not possible not to communicate", but also because today if you do not communicate you would certainly not exist, in the sea of communication in which we are constantly immersed.

The real challenge for a company is only one, namely *HOW to communicate*, which today means above all, how to mix the various parameters to get the most optimal mix for your particular company, for its products/services and their customers or the public.

This is basically the same concept expressed by an American journalist expert in technology after the presentation of the Apple Tablet. I think it was the most acute and far-sighted comment, which was made in the huge global chatter sparked by the launch of the iPad, for he said: "The iPad is not so much about *what* you can do – Browse, do email, play games, read ebooks and more – But *how* you can do it" (ed. Baig, USA Today).

Here I believe that today the extraordinary and unprecedented resources made available by the digitalization and the convergence of the media put the communicative business realistically and for the first time in a position to re-think, re-write, re-establish the paradigms of communication as a tool for economic growth.