

ORGANIZING COMMUNICATION SUPPORT FOR BUSINESS ACTIVITY: A COURSE FOR UNDERGRADUATE STUDENTS AND PROFESSIONALS

M. Frolova

SquirrLE school (RUSSIAN FEDERATION)

Abstract

Organizing communication is a new challenge in digital world. With high speed of spreading information and its massive influence communication skills should be developed with special attention and mindfulness. General recommendations are not enough without deep understanding of reasons and consequences.

The author relates the development of outside world (technical and economical processes) and internal evolution of the human being (processing information and developing communication), examines the role and consequences of values and points of view.

Following the milestones distinguished by McLuhan in communication evolution (tribal humankind, invention of alphabet, print culture, electronic age) the focus is on modern environment, business activity and communication support.

The article presents the structure and the results of the course "Communication support for business activity" conducted as part of International team internship program in the period from 2015 – 2018 for undergraduate students and as online course for company managers in 2023 (24 company partners, 122 graduates).

The goal of the program is to prepare the students for business interaction with partners and colleagues. The following notions are covered: business activity, communication support, language of communication, situation, international business communication, self-analysis.

Keywords: communication support, business activity, patterns of behavior and understanding, points of view, language of communication.

1 INTRODUCTION

We start with clarifying our understanding of the main notions of the course: business activity and communication.

The Britannica Dictionary gives the following definitions to the word BUSINESS:

1. a. the activity of making, buying. or selling goods or providing services in exchange for money,
b. work that is part of a job, c. the amount of activity that is done by a store, company, factory, etc.,
2. an organization (such as a store, company, or a factory) that makes, buys, or sells goods or provides services in exchange for money,
3. something that concerns a particular person, group, etc.,
4. something that must be done,
5. a matter, event, or situation [1].

Considering the definitions above we treat business activity in a broad sense, not restricted to entrepreneurial activity. Business activity involves more than 1 person to be implemented, definitions 3 and 4 can be implemented by individual alone but not necessarily, if so the results can affect other people. Therefore, there are three separate, but interrelated processes: business activity process, communication process organizing this activity and communication about this activity as a consequence.

During its history the mankind has undergone a number of evolutionary stages. In Table 1 we compare lifestyle and communication evolution, theories developed by Klaus Schwab (economist, World Economic Forum founder) and Marshall McLuhan (philosopher, "father of the media"). Due to cognitive activity people develop new methods that make production and communication faster and more

powerful, increase the productivity and massive effect on the environment, though for almost 2.5 million years, probably, it was environment that influenced the evolution of a human.

Table 1. Lifestyle and communication evolution.

<i>Lifestyle evolution (Klaus Schwab)</i>	<i>Time period</i>	<i>Communication evolution (Marshall McLuhan)</i>	<i>Time period</i>
1st Agricultural Revolution (the Neolithic Revolution) <i>transition from hunting and gathering to agriculture and settlement</i>	about 12 000 years ago	Pre-alphabetic, tribal humankind <i>oral culture, the culture of images</i>	
		Phonemic orthography <i>invention of alphabet</i>	2nd century BC, the Proto-Sinaitic script, Middle East
		Print culture <i>the invention of Gutenberg press change of society</i>	XV century, Germany
1st Industrial revolution <i>mechanization, steam and water power</i>	1760 - 1840s		
2nd Industrial revolution <i>mass production and electricity</i>	end of XIX – beginning of XX		
3rd Industrial revolution Digital revolution <i>electronic and IT systems, automation</i>	started in 1960s	Electronic age	XX century
4th Industrial revolution <i>mobile Internet, AI, cyber physical systems</i>	started in 2000s		

In the mid XXth century Marshall McLuhan noted that all the mechanical inventions of the mankind were related to the external extension of our bodies, like a fork is the extension of your hand, a car is the extension of your legs providing new speed, a book is the ability of the author to communicate with readers through time. Today with electronic technologies we extended our central nervous system to enormous scale and almost eliminated space and time difference in terms of communication opportunities. All extension types influence human psychology and social perception and behavior.

Pre-alphabetic, tribal society was the culture of images. The invention of alphabet detribalized and decollectivized people. The word split into a number of symbols. Print is the extreme phase of alphabet culture, it is the technology of individualism. In electronic age due to the electronic interdependence humankind again moves from individualism and fragmentation to the collective identity with a tribal base [3].

Marshall McLuhan analyzed the psychological and social consequences of the World Wide Web phenomena already in the mid XXth century. After almost three thousand years of fragmentation and the trend for specification, our world started shrinking and became "a global village". Societies are shaped by the media, electronic technology fosters and encourages involvement and the speed of

spreading information increases the importance of awareness and responsibility – the skills that are nowadays essential not only for media specialists but every human being as part of his education.

2 METHODOLOGY

The project "Communication in organizing managerial activity" in its first version appeared in Togliatti academy of management in 1998 developed by S. Semin, R.Boiur, Y. Gрязнова, V. Letvinov, G.Davydova. The program was used for training undergraduate students with Major in Public relations and Advertising. Starting from 2005 the program has been delivered together with Project Analytical Sessions (PAS) program and coordinated by Galina Davydova.

Project Analytical Sessions (PAS) were developed by A. Zinchenko and N. Andreychenko as a series of sessions conducted by coaches for the 1st year undergraduate students as participants and with the help of the 2nd year students as tutors. Project analytical sessions organize the work of students during the year and train various managerial skills including the ability to accept the situation change, change yourself according to the situation, grow personnel to work with. To make it happen a manager should be free in communication as communication process is the basic one for manager, he can understand both the situation and the participants involved, put himself in the shoes of another participant and from his place evaluate the current situation and attitude.

Project analytical session trains these skills in the form of project oriented work and reflective analytics when students, tutors and coaches discuss team projects and mistakes done in process. It is an intellectual game that speeds up the development of intellectual functions, self-discipline and personal identity [5].

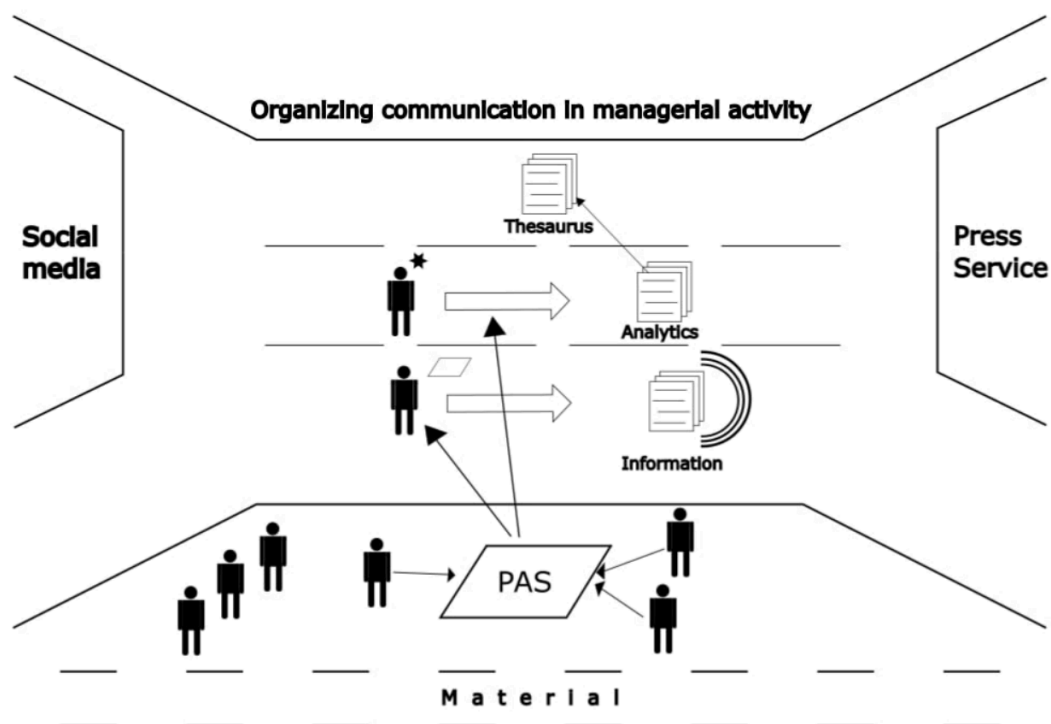


Figure 1. Communication in organizing managerial activity.

Communication in organizing managerial activity focuses on training two communication forms: information and analytics (situation analysis).

Information support uses mass media as the main channel to update the news (preparing press-releases, press-conferences, briefings, materials to publish in mass media). Students are taught not to be limited by one text but to manage the content, use different tools and create target audiences. Information text answers four questions to inform what is happening: who? what? where? when?

Analytical text answers three questions: what is the situation now? what should it be? what should be done to achieve "what it should be". The necessary part of the program work with analytics is to create the thesaurus of concepts and notions that are introduced and studied in the program.

Communication team follows the results of project teams work accomplished by the 1st year students and the way they go forward in projects and understanding.

3 RESULTS

Situation analysis represented in introduction part and work experience gained in Togliatti Academy of Management inspired the author to develop International Team Internship Program (ITIP) in 2015 - 2018 and the program "Communication support for business activity" for adult professionals in 2023.

3.1 International team internship program

For the first time International team internship program (ITIP) was developed by the author in 2015 for the undergraduate and MBA students of Togliatti Academy of Management (Togliatti, Russia) and Alliance University (Bangalore, India). Business partner of the program was Autovaz-Ranault-Nissan purchasing organization, the teams developed on-demand projects for automobile industry off-line in Togliatti, Russia.

International cross-functional teams of students with different cultural and educational background worked together toward a common goal (Fig. 2). The teams were assigned to real tasks set by the business partner. Program focus was to provide both Russian and international students with the skills necessary for the efficient functioning in cross-functional international teams and operate according to the world standards, the skills that are of key importance to be successful in modern global corporations. Key skills to be trained in the program were system thinking, situation analysis (key players, processes, interaction), analysis of personal position, after-action review and self-analysis, creative thinking and team work. It was the English language program that lasted during 1 month.

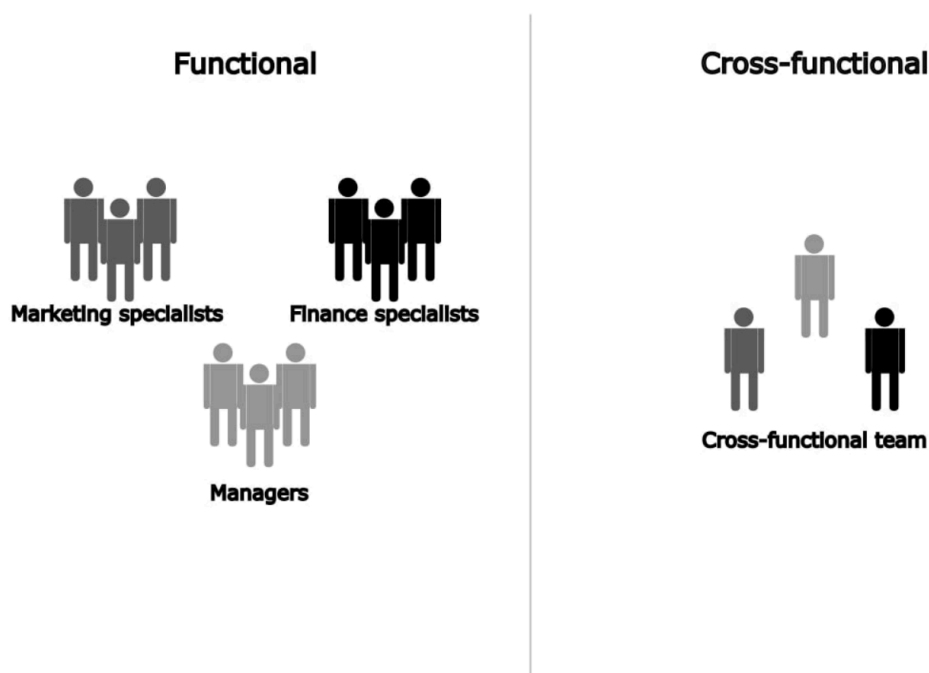


Figure 2. Cross-functional teams

The main program conclusion made after the first ITIP batch was the necessity to train the following skills: cross-cultural and cross-functional understanding, the ability to manage communication process using various tools, be able to work with information. It was necessary to add a module with cross-culture information, so that together with practical task it would stimulate better understanding of the situation.

In the period 2015-2018 four ITIP programs were delivered, 22 companies took part as business partners, 109 ITIP alumni including Indian, Russian, Slovenian students.

3.2 Communication support for business activity

The main challenge of delivering communication program is to organize the situation where students on their own can feel the necessity to think out of the box and understand the limits of any point of view, as colleagues and partners with different experience can feel and therefore act differently.

Theory and case studies are not enough in real time situation, when our emotions are involved our brain works automatically, neurons choose the habitual route and generate habitual reaction. Even if we consider various options and think about our behavior, we choose from the limited number of behavior patterns and communication tools that we already have in stock and are used to. It can work or it seems to us that it works when we communicate inside our own culture, and can be a failure with international partners.

In our first ITIP batches we widely practiced self-analysis and after-action review, however it was painful in most cases and the mind chose the lightest way out, the easiest way for our system to survive in the current state without changing, so the level of resistance was high.

Therefore the latest version of "Communication support for business activity" program is longer and consists of three modules (Table 2). The goal of the program is to prepare the students for business contacts and interaction with foreign partners, people with different mentality.

Program tasks:

develop the understanding of key program notions: business activity, communication inside business activity, communication about business activity, language of communication, situation, information, analytics; nation, mentality, culture, cross-cultural business communication;

give the overview of the mentality of people living in Thailand, India, China, the history and culture of these countries;

practice analyzing speech and action.

Table 2. Communication support for business activity program. Structure

ONLINE	OFFLINE
Join without your own case <i>We provide online courses</i> Personal output: practical skills and relevant cross-cultural knowledge, ideas for career path or the case you want to develop	a visit to the country\countries studied on the program Personal output: offline international experience with professional support
Join with your own case <i>We provide a coach who navigates with contacts and information</i> Personal output: case strategy and implementation start, contacts	

The program is developed for undergraduate and postgraduate students, adult professionals, whose Major is other than communication studies. Applicants can join the program already with their own case or without, the case or understanding of the next career steps can appear as part of the program. Online courses include two modules represented in Table 3.

In 2024 three countries were chosen to demonstrate the differences in the national history, religion, values, art and literature as the forms revealing the internal cultural and national processes: India, China, Thailand. Final control was organized in the form of the essay. Offline part was organized in Bangalore, with Alliance University as a partner. There were 13 graduates.

Table 3. Communication support for business activity program. Online courses

Organizing communication course		Cross-cultural business communication course
Key program notions	Business activity, communication inside business activity, communication about business activity, language of communication, situation, information, analytics; nation, mentality, culture, cross-cultural business communication.	Thailand
A human and communication	Evolution of a human being and communication, stages of civilization development.	India
Conflict management	Conflict types, situation inside and around the conflict.	China

4 CONCLUSIONS

In the present day world of high speed information, its massive influence, close interrelation of different cultures, when the societies are shaped by the media, communication becomes an important basic skill for every high school graduate.

Communication program content is based on concepts and notions developed coherently and consistently. Key focus skills are work with information and analytics, situation analysis (key players, processes, interaction), cross-cultural interaction.

Communication programs should contain both real life practical part and theory, when students are stimulated by real-time challenges to find solutions in theory and case studies.

Work with program concepts and notions should be organized in the form of the reports, when student teams make after-action review and self-analysis, coaches and tutors comment and check understanding by asking questions, work for program goals.

Cross-cultural communication experience contributes to improving inter-personal relations within your own culture. Understanding and accepting various points of view and flexibility should be practiced before being involved in real situations with overwhelming emotions.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank Prof. Dr Elena Zarova for her great enthusiasm and high-level professional skills, the example she sets and her great influence on my development as a researcher.

For a number of years I was lucky to be part of Togliatti Academy of Management and my cordial thanks to Nikolay Andreychenko, Alexander Zinchenko, Galina Davydova, Yuriy Tepper, Andrey Reus,

Svetlana Kraychinskaya, Igor Bogdanov. For many years they are doing big job of training the new generation of open-minded, well-educated people.

My cordial thanks to my colleagues in International Team Internship program: Anna Kaparova, Galina Muravieva, Daria Shestopalova.

I am proud of our SquirrLE school team of unique and talented specialists: Svetlana Taran, Mikhail Ignatiev, Lidia Cherevko, Aleksander Bibuykov, Ivan Malyutin. With your contribution our Communication program discovered new horizons.

REFERENCES

- [1] The Britannica Dictionary. Retrieved from URL <https://www.britannica.com/dictionary/business>
- [2] Klaus Schwab, *The Fourth Industrial Revolution*. Moscow/ Russia: EKSMO, 2016.
- [3] Marshall McLuhan, *Understanding Media. The Extensions of Man*. Moscow/Russia: Kuchkovo pole, 2019.
- [4] Yuval Noah Harari, *Sapiens. A Brief History of Humankind*. Moscow/Russia: Sindbad Publishers, 2023.
- [5] G. Davydova, E. Fedorova, "Communication support for managerial activity", *Models and technologies in management and education*, vol. 10, pp. 209 – 213, Moscow/ Russia: Development institute named after G.P. Shchedrovitskiy; Methodological school of management "Pestovo", 2019.
- [6] Vladimir Propp, *Fairy-tale morphology. Historical roots of a fairy-tale*. St. Petersburg/Russia: Azbuka, Azbuka-Attikus, 2022.
- [7] V.B. Khristenko, A.G. Reus, A.P.Zinchenko, *Methodological school of management*. Great Britain: Bloomsbury, 2014.
- [8] S.A. Semin, *Time of communication*. Moscow/ Russia: Togliatti Academy of management, Development institute named after G.P. Shchedrovitskiy, 2021