

Intra-Organisational Listening : A Brief Study of its Relevance and its Nuances

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ABSTRACT

Listening is the key to an effective communication process. It assumes greater significance in the context of a business organisation as it enhances managerial competence and enables business executives perform better. But it is very often seen that organisations fail to realize its importance. Intra-organisational listening is severely neglected in many business setups which adversely affects the daily business communication activities. Systematic training and development in listening skills can actually go a long way in achieving organisational goals. The paper attempts to study the nuances of intra-organisational listening and its relevance in business.

Key words: Intra-organisational listening, Managerial competence, Communication skills,

I.INTRODUCTION

Listening can be defined as the art of hearing and understanding what someone is saying. The dictionary meaning of the word 'listen' is "to pay attention to, or to give heed to". It is a communication skill used most often in human interaction, but many people do not perform it well. Effective listening is central to enhanced communication. This skill assumes even greater relevance in a business setting where intra-organisational listening forms a major portion of the communicative activities.

Listening can be categorized as active and passive listening. Active listening involves verbal feedback. Passive listening occurs when a listener does not verbally respond to the speaker. Besides these, listening can also be categorized into various types depending on its purpose. For instance, informative listening refers to a situation where a listener's primary concern is to understand the message. When the purpose is to understand and remember, it may be termed as attentive listening. Similarly, appreciative listening includes listening to music, radio, speech, etc.

Listening forms an integral part of everyday human communication. It breaks up barriers between people. It prevents miscommunication of objectives and priorities. We basically listen to obtain information, solve problems, share experiences and persuade or dissuade.

II. DISCUSSION

Studies reveal that individuals spend somewhere 70 to 80 per cent of their waking hours in some form of communication, though it varies depending on the type of work, the size of the organization and the responsibilities of an individual. Listening has been described as a key dimension of communication, with studies indicating that employees spend as much as one third of their working hours involved in listening [1]. Intra- organizational listening has become all the more essential in the contemporary business scenario. Here listening refers to a complex set of inter-related activities including: apparent attentiveness, non-verbal and verbal behavior, attitudes, memory and behavioural responses.

Listening, as opposed to speaking and writing, is the most significant for entry-level positions and for promotion to upper management. It is the most critical for managerial competency and for organizational success as well. Active listening to customers, employees, and supervisors helps business executives better understand the competition, increases sales, improves customer relations, increases employee satisfaction, promotes organisational goals and generally provides the key to productivity and success. Besides these reasons for improving listening skills, business executives experience an overall increase in communication confidence and competence by improving their listening skills.

Of all the communication skill, listening happens to be earliest learned and the most frequently used, yet it seems to be the least mastered. Listening is a skill that underlies all leadership skills. It is the key to developing and maintaining relationships, decision making and problem solving [2].

Only through effective listening can a manager in an organization know what needs to be communicated ; listening is essential to understanding. Since understanding is critical to effective management, organizational capability depends on the listening skills of management. Of all the management traits vital to the success of competitive organizations, listening and understanding a situation allows management to gain a significant competitive edge over others. Listening is fundamental to organizational functioning. Failure to listen can lead to a lot of functional errors. On the other hand, effective listening allows a business professional to be a more efficient problem solver and decision maker. Active listening creates an organizational climate responsive to the needs and motivations of employees. Such an organizational climate is conducive to employee involvement and increased productivity [3]. Good listening not only enables a professional to understand what needs to be communicated but also creates an ambience that is committed to excellence. Improving intra-

organisational listening enhances the job performance of an individual in particular and overall performance of an organisation in general.

It is very often seen that intra-organisational listening is interrupted and obstructed due to various reasons which in communication science are termed as barriers to the listening process. Pseudo-listening is a major flaw. This happens when the receiver only pretends to be listening. His mind is probably so preoccupied with other thoughts that listening does not take place. At other times he is interested to listen, but there is so much of information overloaded that he cannot actually take it all. In such cases the business professional listens and responds selectively to items that are of his interest.

Sometimes premature evaluation of the subject matter and the speaker creates obstruction in the listening process. The listener convinces himself that the speaker is inefficient or the message is unimportant or uninteresting even before listening. In such cases, a chain of negative thoughts starts, thereby hindering smooth listening. Sometimes the business professional does not agree to the speaker when he ceases to listen to him. Inattentiveness and distractions also act as barriers for the listening process. Use of jargon or technical language by an organization or a department in an organization also creates problems in interpreting the message.

Research studies conclude that employers find listening skills to be the communication skill most lacking in employees and that training in effective listening is needed [4]. In order to improve listening skills, business professionals must clearly understand the listening process, try to listen between words, and provide supportive feedback.

Listening is basically a combination of what we hear, what we understand and what we remember. It includes hearing or receiving aural stimuli from the environment, processing these into meaningful messages and storing the messages for retrieval. The process of listening in general takes place in four stages. These are perception, interpretation, evaluation and action. The conscious act of listening begins when we focus on the sound around us and select those we choose to hear. We normally tune in when the message is important for us or we are interested in it. Perception is reduced by impaired hearing or noise. Once attention is focused on a message, we try to interpret or decode. The interpretation is coloured by our cultural, educational and social frames of reference. So the interpretation varies from individual to individual as the frame of reference is different. The third step of the listening process is evaluation which involves separating fact from opinion and judging messages objectively. Responding to a message may involve storing the message in memory for future use or supplying feedback to the speaker.

Effective listening requires more than listening to just the words. One must learn to listen for deeper meanings. And this is possible only when one understands the way a speaker speaks, that is he is able to understand the paralanguage. The voice quality, the tone of voice, pitch, loudness, vocal fillers, all

contribute to the meaning of the message. Intra-organisational listening requires controlling external and internal distractions and become actively involved in the process. One must show that he is listening closely by leaning forward, maintaining supportive eye contact and responding with appropriate facial expressions. Interrupting a speaker either with a quick reply or opinion or with negative body language can also mar the listening process. Listeners who interrupt with their opinions sidetrack discussions and cause hard feelings.

Effective listening requires asking clarifying questions. Business professionals need to wait for the proper moment and then ask questions that do not attack the speaker. The listener must also make sure that he understands the speaker, rephrase and summarise the message and try to be objective and unprejudiced.

In a business setting, team members may sometimes intersperse critical information with casual conversation. At such times it becomes essential that one knows to identify important facts and act accordingly. Feedback is equally essential for any strategic communication to occur. Good listeners need to provide appropriate supportive feedback.

III. CONCLUSION

Intra-organisational listening is fundamental to a business setting. It increases sales, motivates employees and enhances productivity. It helps in developing managerial competence and achieving organisational goals. Lack of proper listening skills can adversely affect organizational communication where as a good knowledge of its nuances can substantially enhance the communication process. In spite of its immense significance business professionals miserably lack in this skill or very often fail to realize its role for managerial success. In contemporary corporate sector it has become an essential requisite that business professionals realize the relevance of intra-organisational communication and strive to enhance this skill.

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