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ABSTRACT

Business communication is different from other domains in that its contextual meaning requires previous metacognitive mediation of signs. The communicative process in business is aimed at accomplishing a specific outcome. Various forms of meaning come into play in business communication such as denotative, connotative, stylistic, affective, collocative, thematic, aesthetic, and generative. In teaching business communication theory an uncalculated number of strategies have been used throughout the years. A study employed the strategy of extrapolating meaning from the communicative issues and/or events presented throughout the 1999 film "The Insider," which centers on the distracting euphemism used by top executives of the tobacco industries when testifying in court that nicotine is not harmful to people's health. Participants, 30 volunteer students from the Faculty of Business Communication, University of Puerto Rico, watched the movie and then wrote essays about how business communication theory concepts were related to the different issues and events in the film. Essays (n=25) were analyzed in terms of cohesive structure and modes of stylistic writing. Thirty-five categories and examples of the communicative event evolved from the group's writings. Findings suggest that the interrelated semiosis of icons presented throughout the movie escalates from the abstract metacognition of learning concepts to that of having students relate concepts to current business issues. Furthermore, the creative nature of writing is presented in cohesive sentence structures with meaningful and insightful analysis of the topic explored. Appended is a chart detailing communication concepts discussed in class related to the film. (NKA)

ABC Annual Convention, 2001

Title

*DEFINING BUSINESS COMMUNICATION USING THE MOVIE
"THE INSIDER"
AS MEDIATOR OF STUDENTS' THOUGHT PROCESSES*

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*Defining Business Communication Using the
Movie "The Insider"
as Mediator of Students' Thought Processes*

by

*Leticia Rodríguez-Talavera, Ph.D.
May 20, 2001*

**Defining Business Communication Using the Movie
“ The Insider”
as Mediator of Students’ Thought Processes**

Introduction

Business communication theory is both complex and creative. Its cohesiveness in language systems is endowed with constant transformation. These transformations are largely due to the contextual settings in which the language events are embedded.

The meaning potential of the spoken and written words have a definite outcome in a business situation. This view could also be ascertained to the use of language in different contexts or professions. What empowers a word with meaning is its communicative potential. Business communication is different from other domains in that its contextual meaning requires previous metacognitive mediation of signs. The communicative process in business is aimed at accomplishing a specific outcome. Various forms of meaning come into play in business communication such as: denotative, connotative, stylistic, affective, collocative, thematic, aesthetic, and generative. Communicating in business settings partakes of the integration of forms of meaning through the metacognitive screening of the appropriate syntax, semantic, and pragmatic use of language systems.

Problem

In teaching business communication theory an uncalculated amount of strategies have been used throughout the years. Ranging from the skill approach with its memorization strategies, the interactive approach, the transactional method, the

functional approach, and the holistic perspective. Each method has had its place in the development of teaching business communication.

It is this writer's contention that to teach Business Communication Theory:

1. The strategies used by the educator must be driven toward the outside world beyond the physical boundaries that circumscribes traditional classroom teaching.
2. Students should engage in cohesive analytic writing strategies such that he/she understands the abstract meaning they have about the business communication concepts as well as, their pragmatic application in current business issues.
3. The teacher should rely on innovative strategies that stimulate learning business communication concepts in a transactive nature one that challenges its transition from abstract to pragmatic thinking and *vis a vis*.

Methodology

The researcher used the strategy of extrapolating meaning from the communicative issues and/or events presented through the movie "The Insider", produced by Michael Mann and Pieter Jan Brugge in 1999 – based on the article from *Vanity Fair*, "The Man Who Knew Too Much", May 1996 by Marie Brenner. The movie centers on the distracting euphemism used by top executives of the cigarette industries when testifying in court that nicotine was not harmful to people's health. The voice of scientific men that worked for the cigarette industries inserting unnatural chemical components in the nicotine was silenced through different manipulative implicit and

explicit means of power. This chemical component caused the nicotine to produce through the act of smoking harmful addictive and disease threatening consequences.

Thirty volunteer students from the Business English Communication Course (BUEN 3005) from the Faculty of Business Communication, University of Puerto Rico, Río Piedras Campus watched the movie and were asked by the researcher to write essays about the how the Business Communication Theory concepts studied in class were related to the different issues and events that occurred throughout the movie. From the thirty students twenty-five handed in their written essays.

Evaluation

The essays were tabulated as categories emerged from the students written work. The categories composed of explicit and implicit meaning drawn from the students interpretation of the communicative encounters they identified throughout the development of the movie.

The written essays were analyzed in terms of cohesive structures and modes of stylistic writing.

Findings

Thirty-five categories on Business Communication Concepts and examples of the communicative event from the movie evolved from the groups writings: (For more detail look at Appendix A).

1. Students explored their knowledge about the business communication concepts as they related them to the issues addressed throughout the movie.

- a. 70% of the writers sought out business communication concepts not discussed in class.
- b. 80% of the writers identified business communication concepts discussed in class.
- c. 50% of the writers integrated other reading events from diverse sources (journals, magazines, newspapers) related to the topic.
- d. 85% of the writers used the internet to read about the topic.
 - 40% sought information about the movie
 - 25% sought information about the specific case
 - 20% searched for information about the articles written by Marie Brenner
 - 19% searched for the article “The Man Who Knew to Much”
 - 4% searched about the author “Marie Brenner”.
 - 4% interchanged e-mail with Wigand

Accountability of the percent (%) of students that talked about the issue throughout the development of the Business Course could not be measured. However the topic was one that flourished in formal and informal class participation.

One issue that emerged with enthusiasm was the concept of perception in communication. In a class discussion students identified the plot development throughout the movie from three perspectives, that of Wigman, the cigarette industry and the insightful art that Mr. Mann used in the creation of the movie.

The expansion of the issues involved in the activity served as mediators for the discussion of topics in other courses. Two professors that teach Ethic courses and one

professor that teaches marketing courses acknowledged the said experiences. The measurement of this parallel learning integration has not been quantified, this because of its unlimited nature.

2. Students essays demonstrated that students applied cohesive structures in their writing performance as they categorized the events of the movie in communicative business concepts.
 - a. 75% of the students used business communication concepts within the contextual development of their sentences.
 - b. 85% of the students wrote in narrative style explaining vision icons and business concepts.
 - c. 60% of the students' writing demonstrated a systematic analysis of content development (created business communication sub-categories from main categories).
 - d. 80% presented through their writing more than one example from the movie to illustrate a specific business concept.
3. The students incidentally organized through writing the deductive, inductive, and abductive construction of meaning.
 - a. 60% of the writings presented a systematic analysis that started from the beginning of the movie and worked toward the end of the movie.
 - b. 40% of the writers identified their feelings with the events of the issues involved.
 - c. 70% of the students relied on a business communication model to develop their writing.

d. 50% used the model of problem solving to develop their writings.

One must clarify that some students integrated different modes of text writing.

Conclusion

The researcher contemplates that the interrelated semiosis of icons presented throughout the movie escalates from the abstract metacognition of learning concepts to that of having students relate concepts to current business issues. Furthermore, the creative nature of writing is presented in cohesive sentence structures with meaningful and insightful analysis of the topic explored.

Business communication educators should use innovation techniques such that the physical and psychological boundaries of “knowledge” in the classroom to be substituted for teaching and learning through current business events.

To challenge students’ natural inquisitiveness and nature of seeking information is the main goal of education today.

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Movie

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Appendix A

Communication Concepts Related to the Movie The Insider

Communication Concepts Discussed in Class Related to the Movie The Insider

Concept	Written Examples Provided	Times Mentioned
1. Ethics in the workplace	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The executives that fired Wigand made an unethical action by lying about the reason for firing him. The real reason was because Wigand send a memo to Sandefur explaining his dissatisfaction with the company's actions. • They violated Wigand's privacy by threatening him and his family. • Wigand had to consider the ethical agreement he made by signing the confidentiality papers. • CBS acted unethical by caring more about the money than about the audience when they did not want to air the interview. 	25
2. Technology	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The use of telephones, computers, electronic mails and faxes is common throughout the movie. 	23
3. Nonverbal communication	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Body language was very important in the movie. When Wigand sat alone in his hotel room we could feel his pain and frustration even though he did not talk or move. • When Wigand was playing golf and another man pursues him, they did not talk a word but you could feel Wigand's anger. • In the interview Wigand was very nervous as if he had something very important to say, which he did. 	22
4. Downward communication	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • From CBS executives to "60 minutes" management. • From the executives to tobacco company to Jeffrey Wigand. • From Hellen Caperelli to Lowell and Mike 	20

Concept	Written Examples Provided	Times Mentioned
5. Intercultural communication	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • When Bergmand and Wallace interviewed the Arab at the beginning of the movie they could not sit near him because of his high position in society. • Differences in cultures can also be appreciated in the movie when Wigand and Bergman are eating in a Japanese restaurant and they had to eat on the floor. • Even in the same country (U.S.A.) the states had differences. For example, Kentucky and Mississippi had different laws. 	19
6. Verbal communication	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The tobacco company relied on manipulative verbal communication 	18
7. Ethical dilemma (Individual and mind)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Jeffrey Wigand had to choose between two conflicting ideas. If he confessed everything he knew about cigarettes he could go to prison but if he stayed quiet he would have felt guilty all his life. 	15
8. Upward communication	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • From the people in the riots to Lowell. • From Wigand to his superiors at Brown and Williamson when he send them the memo. • From Lowell to his superiors asking to air the interview. 	15
9. Communication barriers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • When Wigand replied to Bergman through a fax, the fax was a communication barrier. • Language was a barrier between the Arab and Lowell. • CBS company failed to inform the employees of the possible selling of the company. The news crew did not understand why CBS did not want to air the interview. 	14
10. External communication	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lowell takes information out of the company when he called the New York Times and said that CBS was not going to air the interview. 	13
11. Formal communication	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Every time CBS management had some information they wanted to discuss with their employees they had meetings. 	11

Concept	Written Examples Provided	Times Mentioned
12. Informal Communication	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It is represented in the way that every media company knew the information the competition had because of the grapevine. • There were rumors about a 50 pages document containing information about Wigand. 	11
13. Horizontal flow	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The two companies represented in the movie had horizontal communication between employees 	11
14. Ethical lapse (The breaking down or losing)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Brown & Williamson management suffered an ethical lapse when hiding priceless information from their customers. 	8
15. Corporate culture	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The corporate culture of CBS gave more importance to monetary considerations than to ethical responsibility. • The corporate culture of the tobacco companies has the main goal of gaining as much money as they can no matter the health of their customers. 	6
16. Planning, composing, and revising business messages	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The program "60 minutes" has to revise everything they air to provide excellent quality programs to the audience. 	5
17. Crisis communication	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Both companies suffered from internal crisis situations. CBS when they realized they could be sued. Brown and Williamson when they knew Wigand could talk. 	5
18. Feedback	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Jeffrey received a negative feedback from Brown and Williamson when he sent the memo to Sandefur. • Wigand's reaction was negative when he knew CBS was not going to air the interview. 	5
19. Audience centered approach	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Neither CBS nor Brown and Williamson cared about the audience centered approach. Their needs come first than their customers. 	4
20. Mental filters	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • When Mike used a translator to understand Arabian. • When Bergman called Wigand and his wife did not put him on the phone. 	4

Concept	Written Examples Provided	Times Mentioned
21. Ethical and legal behavior	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Wigand testified in Mississippi and not in Kentucky because of their different laws. • Bergman never let down his source and he tried not to break the law by calling the lawyers from Mississippi. 	3
22. Personal space	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lowell and Mike had a problem of personal space with the Arabian they interviewed. 	3
23. Written communication	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The articles published in the New York Times. • The letters in Wigand's mailbox. • The fax both, Lowell and Bergman, sent to each other. 	3
24. Differing emotional backgrounds	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • When the hotel manager, a very calm person, is told by Bergman to say a strong phrase to Wigand he reacted very funny. 	2
25. Difference in perception	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Wigand did not interpret the fact that cigarette had "curamina" as the tobacco management did. 	2
26. Lawsuit in the business environment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Brown & Williamson tobacco company sued Jeffrey Wigand after he violated the confidentiality agreement. 	1
27. Code of ethics	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Brown & Williamson did not have a code of ethics hiding information was wrong. 	1
28. Credibility	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tobacco Companies lost their credibility by lying in court. 	1
29. Ethnocentrism	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mike Wallance assumed that the Arabian culture was like the U.S. culture when he interviewed the "Jeque". 	1
30. Stereotyping	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • At first, Wigand stereotype Bergman because he though he was a reporter who had the priority of having the information he wants and did not care of protecting the source. 	1
31. High context culture	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In the movie, the Arabs depended more on nonverbal communication. 	1
32. Low context culture	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The predominant kind of communication that appears in the movie is the U.S. 	1
33. Poor communication skills	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • This was the false reason from Brown and Williamson's management to fire Wigand. 	1

Concept	Written Examples Provided	Times Mentioned
34. Closed communication climate	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> At the moment CBS management knew that they might become sued by tobacco industries they closed communication and did not listen to anyone. 	1
35. Role and status	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Mike was fine with the decision of not airing the interview because he had a reputation to maintain. 	1

Percentage of students that mentioned each concepts

Concept	Times Mentioned	Percent
1. Ethics in the workplace	25	100%
2. Technology	23	92%
3. Nonverbal communication	22	88%
4. Downward communication	20	80%
5. Intercultural communication	19	76%
6. Verbal communication	18	72%
7. Ethical dilemma	15	60%
8. Upward communication	15	60%
9. Communication barriers	14	56%
10. External communication	13	52%
11. Formal communication	11	44%
12. Informal communication	11	44%
13. Horizontal flow	11	44%
14. Ethical lapse	8	32%
15. Corporate culture	6	24%
16. Planning, composing and revising business messages	5	20%
17. Crisis communication	5	20%
18. Feedback	5	20%
19. Audience centered approach	4	16%
20. Mental filters	4	16%
21. Ethical and legal behavior	3	12%
22. Personal space	3	12%
23. Written communication	3	12%
24. Differing emotional backgrounds	2	8%
25. Difference in perception	2	8%
26. Lawsuit in the business environment	1	4%
27. Code of ethics	1	4%
28. Credibility	1	4%
29. Ethnocentrism	1	4%
30. Stereotyping	1	4%
31. High context culture	1	4%
32. Low context culture	1	4%
33. Poor communication skills	1	4%
34. Closed communication climate	1	4%
35. Role and status	1	4%



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