The efficient presentation - obstacles, strategies, success

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Abstract: The making of presentations has become an omnipresent act of communication in the companies' practice, but also in the didactic one. The notoriety and the increase of the importance of an efficient presentation lie in the transformations felt by a society of knowledge, communication being the answer in front of a constant information wave.

Business people look in fear at the preparation of a presentation, the interaction with the audience and their feedback, all these leading to a low efficiency in transmitting the message.

The speaker must overcome a group of obstacles, the most important being the reduced human capacity to capture the information transmitted orally; in this respect, he has available a group of visual instruments and strategies to capture the attention. In order to achieve efficiency one needs mental and emotional preparation, knowing the audience and the presentation's objective and eliminating the old listing format in PowerPoint, for focusing the communication of the audience's necessities. The present essay aims to analyze the verbal, non-verbal and para-verbal communication act that constitutes the base of any presentation, the reasons that lead to failure and the ways to increase efficiency, in order to succeed in transmitting a well structured and easy to remember message.

Many researchers and practice workers within the communication, economic but also IT fields, have tried to find the solution for organizing and transmitting the message during a presentation, in accordance with the new technologies. In elaborating the present paper, we have used our personal experience and data obtained through 30 in-depth interviews, with managers in companies such Boştină&Asociaţii, Skoda, Petrom etc.; we have used in our research articles of honored professors in social sciences from the Harvard and Stanford Universities , researches of the Minnesota and Ulster Universities, as well as works of specialists in marketing and information technology, known for exceptional business presentations developed in collaboration with multinational companies such Jaguar or PriceWaterHouse Coopers.

Key words: efficient presentation, communication, presentation strategies.
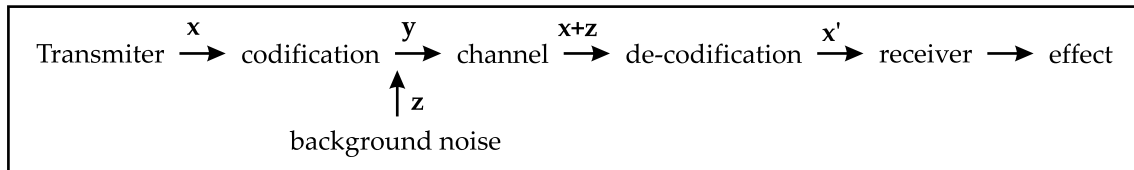
I.　Introduction

In a continuously transforming world, in a society of knowledge, in which the in-formation plays a vital role, communication has become an essential weapon. It makes the difference between superior and mediocre, between professional and amateur.

The subject of this paper pertains to the communication field, because a success-ful presentation represents an act of verbal, non-verbal and para-verbal communication between two or more persons (Bradbury, 2001).

In order to communicate efficiently, one must have basic information related to (1) what communication represents and the way that people capture the messages, (2) the way the individual processes the information and changes his perceptions and (3) what kind of communication channels and instruments

are most appropriate for a particular message (Wilcox et co., 2000).

Communication is the act of transmit-ting information, ideas and attitudes. (Wil-cox et co., 2000). In social science terminol-ogy, communication is *"The scientific study of producing, processing and of the effects of signal and symbol systems used by individuals for trans-mitting and capturing messages"* (Hargie O., 1992). Sociologist Harold Lasswell presents, under an article of 1948, one of the mostly known formulas in the communication field. He sustains that a communication act can be correctly described if the following questions are answered: Who (the transmitter)? What does it say (the message)? How (through what channel)? To whom (the receiver)? To what scope (the communication effect)? (Wil-cox et all, 2000). This process can be present-ed as follows:

$$\text{Transmiter} \xrightarrow{\text{x}} \text{codification} \xrightarrow{\text{y}} \text{channel} \xrightarrow{\text{x+z}} \text{de-codification} \xrightarrow{\text{x'}} \text{receiver} \longrightarrow \text{effect}$$

$$\uparrow z$$
$$\text{background noise}$$

(Van Cuilenburg, J.J., Scholten, O., Noomen, G.W., 2004)

In any communication act, the message (x) is coded by the transmitter through a lan-guage (code), thus taking the shape of signals (y), that shall pass a communication channel, and if they succeed to overpass the obsta-cles on the way (they might be distorted by a background noise or an irrelevant informa-tion surplus might appear – z), they finally reach the receiver; here they are de-codified with the help of a language characteristic to the receiver, the new resulted message (x') taking a shape preferably as similar as pos-sible to the initial one. An efficient commu-

nication does not mean a one-direction flux of information; it takes place when the re-ceiver gets the message that the transmitter whished to pass on and it responds with a feedback necessary for improving the follow-ing communications. Thus, a common code is obtained, for a benefic collaboration for both parties. This is way the understanding of the envisaged audience or auditorium is essen-tial in order to identify the way the symbols, signs and language are interpreted (Smith, P.R., Taylor, J, 2004).

The rejection of the message, the

misinterpretation or its misunderstand   -
ing are the opposite of an efficient com   -
munication and prevent the achieve   -
ment of the communication process's
objectives, as information, persuasion, moti -
vation or obtaining mutual understanding.
The research workers have developed differ-
ent models in order to explain the communi-
cation process. The most representative is the
model of Roman Jacobson:

CONTEXT
|
TRANSMITTER – MESSAGE – RECEIVER
|
CONTACT
|
CODE

In the above scheme, the transmitter
sends out the message to the receiver, and in
order to have a successful communication,
both must use:

1. a common code,

2. a physical channel through which the
communication takes place – represented in
the above scheme by contact-

3. the same context, with the signifi   -
cance of "referent" – the message theme.

Any presentation constitutes an act of
communication that may be explained and
rendered efficiently with the help of commu-
nication theories and with the analysis of a
group of elements:

• the information source in order to
structure the message;

• the way in which the codes used by
the transmitter (presenter) and the receiver
(auditorium) – both verbal and non-verbal
are superposed; the acquaintance of the au   -
ditorium's characteristics – social, cultural,

personal, professional intervenes here in or -
der to understand the way it de-codifies and
receives the message;

• the used channel (image, sound) and

• potential perturbations that might
damage the signals (background noises,
qualitatively weak images etc)

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tional business presentations developed in
collaboration with multinational companies
such Jaguar or PriceWaterHouse Coopers.

II. The importance of an efficient presentation

The capacity to communicate orally
is deemed by the human resources special   -
ists as essential for the professional success
(O'Hair et co., 2002).

A study performed on 1500 persons
working in recruitment of personnel in Amer-
ican companies has evidenced that over 50%
of the respondents have placed oral and writ-
ten communication in front of the capacities
requested for applicants (Moody, J.et co.,
2002). A new thorough study involved 500

managers pertaining to different fields: en-gross and en-detail sale, manufacture, services, public administration, transport, insur-ance and finance. Again, the result revealed that the main competence for graduates en-tering the labor market is represented by the capacity to communicate verbally. Moreover, in concretely describing the abilities that con-stitute such competence, a leading place has been granted to persons drawing up presen-tations, with regard to both importance and practice frequency (Maes, J. et co., 1997). The research conducted at Stanford University showed, also that positive attitude towards public speaking represents decisive factors of success and social ascendance (Cosnett, G., 1990).

Executives in superior positions in cor-porations use presentations as motivational modality for the personnel, but also as mo-dality for conducting and coordinating the ef-fort. As far as the members of the board of ad-ministration are concerned, the presentation is always part of the decision taking process, having as goal the outlining of the company's politics. In the foreign relations context, the new business approaches and tactics need quality presentations in fields such as market researches and publicity. Thus the company assures its contracts and efficiently informs. Sherman has conclusively stated such idea, underlining the fact that inevitably the qual-ity of presentations represents the business card for both the executives and the compa-nies they represent (Sherman, R., 2002).

The importance of an efficient presen-tation is conjugated with the primarily role of communication in every person's success, re-gardless of the field of activity. It may be:

• a job interview, when we have to con-vince the employer of our capacity to fulfill the professional tasks;

• the report of the activity performed;

• an opportunity to expose one's own ideas and strategies in front of superiors, col-leagues, subordinates;

• the classical presentation of a product/service in order to convince the client, etc.

Regardless of the specific details of the situation and objective, an exhaustive and in-exorable necessity to apply the communica-tion capacity intervenes. Presentations may vary depending on the objective – informa-tion, persuasion, motivation and entertain-ment of the auditorium-, on the formality and exclusivity level or on the characteristics of the present persons, but they always rep-resent an inevitable part of success manage-ment.

In order to be regarded as profession-als in a world of information, we must know how to communicate, respectively to be ca-pable to listen, to analyze and to express our-selves succinctly and persuasively. Such ca-pacities are not native, they are acquired step by step, along with learning how to structure and transmit the information. The capacity to centre on the objective and on the organiza-tion of ideas is developed through presenta-tions. Regardless of the type of presentation, whether a product inauguration, a business strategy proposal, information of the mana-gerial team, presentation of the company, re-searches and innovations in front of a client or journalists, the main goal is to convince the others to adopt our point of view. The goal of a presentation is to transmit information, but in the same time to convince the auditorium to agree with our ideas, to understand the information from a new point of view – our point of view - , and to act in the suggested direction. The success of an efficient presen-

tation of oneself or the elaborated project re - sults in developing an impressive reputation, in obtaining a superior hierarchic position and also in increasing the personal influence, together with the development of visibility within the interest group.

The superiors are always watching the employees' contributions, analyzing their in- volvement degree. There are 3 levels of pro - fessional ascension:

1. the first level of professional compe - tence is represented by the individual's ca - pacity to fulfill the tasks underlined under the job description;

2. the nest channel of valuation contains the ability to advise the ones around, because once we know pretty well the activity field, we can contribute besides the job obligations, showing the others theories, modalities and practices;

3. the third level of efficiency however analyzes the capacity to change, to bring pro- gressive contributions to the company and even to the profession, by research and inno- vation (Yate& Sander, 2003) .

For the persons at the first two levels, the ability to communicate is obviously es- sential, in order to efficiently transmit the owned knowledge and to induce changes by persuasion.

Whereas the development of a presenta- tion has become an omnipresent act of com - munication in the practice of companies and didactic practice, in order to have access to the superior hierarchic levels, we must de - velop the capacity to prepare an efficient presentation. An efficient business presenta- tion brings the necessary credibility and re- spect for being the perfect candidate for any dreamed job, in the same time developing the information area, because a good documen -

tation in order to conceive the transmitted message brings always new information, ap- proaches and experiences.

III. Reasons for failure and communication strategies

Taking into consideration the impor - tance of presentations, but also the fact that their advantages are most of the time under- stood and followed, it is surprising to find out that didactic practice and research stud - ies state the fact that most of the people be - come timid when learning that they have to draw up a presentation and, that, most of the time, the result is negative. The general presentation standard is not at the expected level. Aziz emphasized such idea, general - izing it at the level of researches performed within the Great Britain (Aziz, K., 1999). Re - search studies reveal the fact that a percent - age between 10 and 20% of the American students are severely afraid at the thought of formal communications in front of an au- dience, and an additional percentage of 20% are sufficiently affected that their intellectual activity is reduced. Moreover even, research- es having as subjects adult persons have re - vealed that the fear to publicly communicate was placed above the fear of heights, snakes or a poor health (Barker, A., 2006). Thus there is no surprise that the reaction of the major - ity is to avoid the preparation of a presenta - tion and to refuse the involvement in such an activity (Simon,T, 2001). Managers also are more or less subject to the same emotions. Thus, the results of a research stated the fact that 76% of the respondents – business men- believe that the most difficult part of the job is the presentation in front of the audience (Aziz, K.,1999), and 88% of the financial di -

rectors stated that they have the least trust in this aspect of their professional obligations (McCurry, P., 2002).

This chapter shall analyze the causes that lead to failure in preparing a presenta - tion and shall suggest strategies for increas- ing the efficiency of the communication pro - cess.

One of the most important causes that lead to monotonous, boring and confuse pre- sentations, is constituted by the fact that the formal education within schools and univer - sities is focused on the written word, under - mining the importance of verbal communica- tion (Harvard Business Review on Effective Communication, 1998); this reason is joined with the minor interest of managers for class- es in order to develop the abilities necessary for an efficient presentation. Grenville Janner has identified such causes and has under- lined their negative effect on the Great Brit- ain's economy (Janner, G, 1989).

The base of an efficient presentation is represented by a solid preparation: "any good presentation is a well prepared pre - sentation" (Davies, J.W., 2001). Most often, failure is connected to a superficial prepara - tion, the presenter does not check the details, does not exercise enough, or delays for the last moment the structural and conceptual organization, relying on the existence of pre- vious presentations and their simple amend- ment, forgetting that every situation requires specific details and that each audience has its particular characteristics. They wrongly consider that the duration of presenting the ideas is directly proportional with the nec - essary preparation; in this matter, Winston Churchill stated that he drafts a two hours speech in only ten minutes, while two hours are not enough to draft a ten minutes speech.

His words emphasize the necessity of an in - creased attention in organizing a presenta - tion, being a short communication and a con- centration of ideas and information.

The presenter must analyze with an in - creased attention the 5 key-components of his communication: audience, presenter, con- tent of presentation, location and method for transmitting the information. In this matter, he must go through a number of necessary stages:

1. Defining the objective of the presen- tation

The envisaged objective is represented by the changes which the presentation aims to awaken in the audience; they can be relat - ed to amendments of the information, feel - ings or beliefs, but also of the attitude or be - havior of the present and thus the analysis of the audience constitutes an essential prereq - uisite to success.

2. Knowing the audience

„If I want to guide an individual towards a certain objective, I must know where this is and start from there… In order to help a person, I must of course understand more than such per- son, but primordially is to understand what this person understands." (Soren Kierkegaard) (in Ehrenborg, J. and Mattock, J, 2001). This im - plies the analysis of the audience's composi - tion, its homogeneity, social characteristics, education and knowledge regarding the in - formation the presenter transmits; all these signify the efficient development of a presen- tation (Van der Molen, H. and Granmsber - gen-Hoogland, Y., 2005). The absence of such information may lead to repeating ideas al - ready known by the audience or maybe us - ing terms unknown to the present, in which case a prior explanation or handing notes and indexes are necessary. Also, the expected

result of a presentation may be damaged by a condescending behavior towards the per - sons having the decisional power, but also by ignoring or not agreeing with them; these are fatal mistakes that lead to loss of costum- ers and even of the job, however they can be avoided through a good knowledge of the audience's composition and of the target- persons of the message.

Taking into consideration the fact that the success of a presentation is reflected in the quantity of information preserved by the audience, a psychological analysis of the at - titudes and thoughts of the present is nec - essary. The egoist human nature implies a strategy of attracting the attention of the present by underlining the benefits they can obtain upon information, respectively upon acting towards the direction created by the presenter, by conclusion of contracts or vi - sions changing. Thus, the first words must contain a message aimed at the audience, by addressing directly, by emphasizing the way in which their lives shall get better, speak - ing of a near future, of "now and here", tech- nique used successfully by press releases and newspapers articles and aiming to cap - ture the attention (Ehrenborg, J and Mattock, J., 2001). Walt Seifert, honored professor in public relations at the University of Ohio, to- gether with psychologists and analysts of so- cial behaviors, admit that the majority of the audience is not interested in a message or in adopting an idea, demanding and selecting just those communications that they can use (Wilcox et all., 2000). A direct application of this theory is represented by the underlin - ing, during presentations of new products and services, of their benefits and not of their general characteristics.

Another technique to catch the attention

of the audience – the channeling technique -, supported by the social sciences specialists, consists of using at the beginning of the pre - sentation, of a phrase reflecting values and predispositions of the present or opinions issued according to their point of view, for gaining their trust, showing an appreciation of their intellect (Wilcox et co, 2001).

The presenter must also keep in mind that the attention of the audience is maxi - mum at the beginning, respectively at the end of the communication (Bounds, A., 2007). The first ten minutes are vital, constructing the relation with the public, stimulating the interest and the attention, in the same time accomplishing the agenda of the presenta - tion's structure and of the audience's role in the discussion. Frequent mistakes are caused by a structure within which the presentation reveals the main ideas after the audience has lost its interest and attention for the infor- mation it receives. Thus, it is recommended that the essential is transmitted at the begin- ning, then details should be offered and the end should include a summary of the pre - sented information (Wilcox et co, 2001 ; Van der Molen, H. and Granmsbergen-Hoogland, Y., 2005); the attention may be captured at the beginning of the presentation by different methods: a provocative question, a captivat - ing information relevant for the audience, us- ing the humor – according to the situation -, an amazing prediction upon future evolution or emphasizing the importance of the pre - sented material for the audience

The interest of the audience can be lost also if they are handed from the beginning copies of the presentation, thus it is recom - mended to go through such stage at the end, and as the case may be, to offer informational notes along the way, taking also into consid -

eration the time set for such action

3. The creation of the message and its structure

The presenter must know what is the subject of the research and of the documentation and how the presentation shall be structured, and the possibility also exists for an electronic transmission during a video-conference

A revolving role is played by the information regarding the exact duration of the presentation and its location. They often dictate the used technology and the concentration of the ideas; regardless of the situation however, the presenter must be guided by the adage "more is less" and must try to offer significant details, new and creative information, in accordance with the assigned time, in order not to loose the attention and respect of the audience. Although, managers prefer direct, succinct and easy to understand communications, (Hamilton, C. and Parker, C., 1999), the result is often contrary, because they tend to abundantly use a specialized language, to offer useless information, in the same time including too little illustrating examples (Mandel, S., 1987). The audience receives the numerous offered statistics without considering them useful, their only goal being to state a vast aria of knowledge of the presenter. In this case also, a profound simplification is recommended, in order to reach efficiency in the time-audience context.

Remembering the information highly depends on a clear structure of the presentation, so that the audience can easily follow the ideas. The anatomic explanation resides in the fact that people think with a speed 400 times higher than the one of said (Oulton, N., 2005), and so the audience has enough time to wander from the idea expressed by the

presenter, and the secret consists of bringing it back to the main line, by granting breaks necessary for accumulating the information or by creating an interactive environment, for stimulating the expression of thoughts, also an efficient method for receiving the feedback.

4. The choice and manipulation of the visual support

A group of research workers at the University of Minnesota have analyzed the people's capacity to understand and remember what they hear. They have examined the ability to listen of several thousand of students and business men. Thus, in each case, the tested person listened to a short lecture of some members of the University, and afterwards they were examined with regard to remembering the transmitted message. These tests lead to a unitary conclusion: immediately after the subject listened to the information, he could not remember more than half of the message, regardless of the attention paid to the lecture.

Research reports of the Universities of Florida and Michigan have shown that after two months from participating in a conference, the remembering average is of only 25% of the message. Surprisingly, in the first 8 hours from receiving the verbal information, we forget in a proportion of a third to 50% (Kramar, J.J. Lewis, Thomas,B., 1951; p. 16; and Heilman, Arthur, W., 1951, p.308). A great part of the received information is wasted, because we remember only 10% of the read message, 20% of the verbal one, 30% of the visual one and 50% of what we see and listen simultaneously (Bovée, C., Thill, J., 2002).

Along the time, multiple researches regarding the functioning way of the human

memory have been performed. Thus, it was concluded that each part of the brain is re - sponsible for different activities: the left one – for logic and catching the short term memory-, and the right one- for creativity and ro - mantic elements and remembering the long term data. It was proven that people re - member more easily elements related to the stimulation of the right side of the brain-art, sensorial activity, emotions (Ehrenborg, J., Mattock, J., 2001). For these reasons, using the visual stimulus is recommended, but also the feelings associated with the transmitted information, by using jokes, analogies, sym - bols, known characters, epic lines, all these determining the stimulation of imagination and of connections in the mind of the audi- ence and so an efficient remembering of the message (Bovée, C., Thill, J., 2002).

In preparing the presentations, one of the aspects that lead to failure is the lack of consideration of the reduced human capac - ity to remember the verbal message. A solu- tion in front of this difficulty resides in us- ing the visual support, in order to sustain the presentation. In this respect, models, tables, graphics or diagrams, images or even films can be used, visualized with the help of vid - eo equipment, retro-projector, flipchart or of the combination laptop-video-projector – the most often used software being Microsoft Of fice PowerPoint, with the alternatives Har - vard Graphics, Corel or Astound; the choice is related to several factors, such as: costs, fa- cilities and dimensions of the location, time assigned, etc. Failure of a presentation may be however related even to using a visual support, from the point of view of its choice, of a wrong use or even as a result of using too many visual elements. If the flipchart or the black/white board are recommended in

case of an informal and flexible atmosphere that involves a constant interactivity with the audience, the use of the computer has be- come the symbol of professionalism, having multiple advantages: changing of screens by a simple mouse click, the possibility to use a remote control (allowing the presenter to move around in the room and to achieve a connection with the audience), the simplic - ity of a compact presentation, as well as num bering the slides, so an efficient organization; failure however often occurs because most presenters see the PowerPoint slides as an as sistance indicating what to say and in what order. They forget that the support must be aimed towards the audience, in order to cap- ture it and to help it remember the received information. Out of this conceptual error re - sults the classical monotonous presentation, containing multiple slides and bullet points, with complete phrases read consistently, the audience following the work on the projected screen, without paying attention to the pre - senter. The efficient strategy in such case in- volves changing the mentality by focusing towards the audience, using schemes, illus - trating graphics, that requires the interven - tion of the presenter, his explanations and comments; also, the 6X6 rule must be ob - served, respectively including no more than 6 bullet points on a slide, each containing maximum 6 words. In order to organize the information, the use of titles for every slide is also recommended, and the separation of ideas both by bullet points and by numbers or letters (Gilgrist, D., Davies, R., 1996).

Another frequent mistake consists in abusing the range of options available for the type, color and dimension of fonts, but also for animations and backgrounds, thus result ing a visual show in which the central mes -

sage is lost among the special effects. The answer consists here in using a font of 24, Arial, AvantGarde or Gil Sans style (easy to remember letters, without loops) in order to be easily visualized including from the back of the room, using a background compatible with the message and the audience, without bluring the text, and as animation technique, the psychologists suggest that the effect of the lines appearance to be from the right to the left, this being the direction in which we visualize adequately.

As far as the diagrams and the graphics are concerned, they are most of the time undecipherable, containing too many data and figures, and the presenters do not succeed in transmitting the relevance and connections of the information. The solution for over passing such obstacle is given by a strict selection of a reduced number of information pointed at graphic level and using different and relevant colors for helping the audience to remember both auditory and visually. The drawn axes and lines must be labeled, for avoiding the questions related to the way of expressing the dates (for example the time-in hours/days/weeks/years), and the sizes must respect a scale of proportions in order to be conclusive. Using a title for each graphic is also suggested (Baird, J.W., Stull, J., 2006), and in case one page contains several such elements, they must be inserted in frames, for an easy visualization. Tables, head of columns/lines must be marked and evidenced, and complete sentences must not be inserted in the cells, making more difficult the legibility of the audience (Yate, M., Sander, P., 2003)

Models and other objects brought for a better perception of the information can be rendered efficient by channeling the attention of the audience and changing the

rhythm. In this respect, involving the present in different ways can be used, for over passing a monotonous moment or a moment of lack of concentration; thus, they can be asked to write an answer on a paper, to guess a percentage, and later to be asked based on their answers; they can also be stimulated by rhetorical questions addressed by the presenter. Such methods are frequently used, but in a wrong manner, being transmitted consecutively and in an alert way. The audience needs a few minutes to record the transmitted information, the solution consisting in short breaks after every question, leaving the listeners to find the answer. The presenter must resist the temptation to answer himself; this does not mean that he must wait the answer of the audience, but to observe attentively its reactions (the non-verbal language of the audience), blinks, head movements, proving that the information has been processed and to restart the lecture the moment he receives the tacit consent.

In case of demonstrations regarding the capacities of the presented products, the presence of specialists, designers, engineers is recommended, to assure a proper development and to be able to answer the detailed questions of the audience. Regardless of the theme however, specialists invited during the presentation represent a reference weapon, because they assure both a benefic change of rhythm and the respect and credibility of the public that shall appreciate their competence and shall associate it with the received information.

Regardless of the used visual support, a high attention is necessary, a prior information regarding the location of the presentation, in order to know the facilities and the way they can be rendered efficient; this im -

plies the preparation of the technology, but also verifying the existence of elements such as the tripod and flipchart markers, the vid - eo-projector and the laptop or the black/white board. The décor, furniture elements, the position of the electric sources, the luminosity of the room-in some spaces are important, is necessary to turn off the light for optimal visualization of the screen, which prevents the presenter to observe the reactions of the au - dience, or that might even determine a sleeping state among the present. In case of using electricity, precautions are necessary, for personal safety and for the safety of the present people. The compatibility of the graphic programs must be also verified, the presence of an assistant being frequently recommended, for handling such technical details and for allowing the presenter to transmit the information. If possible, one day before the presen - tation, the visibility of the projected images and of the other visual elements must be verified from any space of the room, a general rehearsal being recommended, in order to eliminate the unpredictable component and to increase the surety of the presenter.

As far as the visual support is concerned, failure occurs also upon focusing the presentation around it, grating it the main role and forgetting that its objective is to support, not to lead the development of the communication. The audience must feel that the real leader is the presenter, that the situation is controlled by him with responsibility and competence.

5. Analyze of the verbal, non-verbal and para-verbal language

Another reason for failure of many presentations, which unfortunately appears even in case of a solid preparation, consists in emphasizing the information as an essential element in the detriment of its transmission method. During a presentation however, the verbal as well as the non-verbal and para-verbal communication take place concomitantly. Research workers have discovered that we judge the persons around us depending on three main characteristics: verbal content – 7%, vocal interest (tone, volume and rhythm of the voice) – 38% and body language – 55% (Bradbury, 2001) and still a reduced impor - tance is granted to such elements, fact that leads to inconsistency in transmitting the messages and in maintaining the interaction with the audience. Thus, the presenter must pay attention to the way he presents himself, in order to transmit credibility from the first moments. A positive thinking is very impor - tant here both during the preparation and along the entire presentation; the idea that the audience is on the side of the presenter must be remembered, it looses valuable time to listen to him and wants to remember the information (Denny, R, 2006, p. 20). If how - ever there are persons that interrupt the pre - sentation due to various reasons, constantly asking or criticizing, then the presenter must maintain clam and must explain that he will answer during the questions session, in or - der not to outrun the assigned time. During such session, preparation is decisive; in case of questions with answers that he is not sure, it is preferable to politely propose the sub - sequent transmission of a complete and de - tailed (Denny, R., 2006, p. 127). The present - er must assure that he will come back with this answer, his credibility in the business field depending on it; the respect of the pres - ent people comes also from the way of orga - nizing the questions and of an eventual feed- back (that shall demonstrate the interest for the audience's opinions), from listening the

audience's points of view and from the final thanks for the paid attention.

The voice betrays emotions and that is why an as good as possible nerve control be-fore entering the room is necessary. Relax-ation techniques involve respiration, muscle control, as well as brain calming. For a cor-rect respiration, the presenter must:

1. close his eyes,

2. take deep breaths using the dia-phragm muscle – to inhale through his nose, then to stop breathing and to exhale through his mouth, each of these steps taking 3 sec-onds (usually, repeating such process 5 or 6 times is useful).

In order to control his muscles, he must:

1. close his eyes

2. focus on his ankles, imagining how they become flexible, then focus on his knees, on the entire superior part of the body, until the spine, inducing the same mental state of flexibility.

3. consciously move his head in front 1 or 2 cm – this has as effect the relaxation of the muscles around the vocal mailbox, that shall allow the presenter to talk efficiently, preventing the tendency of throat constraint and thus of strangling the words.

For calming mentally, the presenter en-joys the following steps:

1. to silently stand with the eyes closed and the finger tips joined.

2. to try to visualize mentally the infin-itesimal distance between the fingers, elimi-nating any other thought – the relaxation state shall appear in just 2 or 3 minutes.

Besides using such techniques, a bal-anced behavior is also useful, thus avoiding lost nights before the presentation, alcohol and other stimulants that induce a nervous state.

The clothing and accessories must be adequate to the situation and to the formal/informal frame, taking into consideration the fact that image counts and the audience shall analyze it in detail; thus, accessory excess must be avoided, in order not to distract the attention from the presentation.

The beginning is vital, and thus the first visual contact must be a positive one, the smile and naturalness being the key to any situation. This is because the audience eas-ily senses the forced professional style or an imitation of laughter, automatically rejecting the presenter in such a case. The expressed feelings are sometimes a real weapon for touching the audience, the secret consisting in maintaining within the limits accepted by the audience, without reaching paroxysm.

With regard to the hands position, they must always be at sight (for inspiring trust for the audience) and in a position as natu-ral as possible (Bounds, A., 2007), depending on the situation: behind a desk, in front or in the middle of the present people; depending on the formality of the presentation, moder-ate gestures represent a benefit for emphasiz-ing the ideas. The eyes must maintain contact with the audience, trying to cover the entire room, not chaotically, but fixing the persons in strategic places of the room (so as the en-tire group among them to consider them-selves noticed), efficient method for main-taining the attention also.

Other elements benefic for success de-pend on the presenter's attitude, that must always have in mind the envisaged objective, but in the same time to try an involvement of the audience, whether by the simple use of a language close to the audience and of

active verbal constructions, or by interactive discussions; also, an efficient strategy implies the construction of arguments and way of thinking, so that the present people reach by their selves a well constructed conclusion, but in which they strongly believe, because they have concluded it.

IV. The business environment
in Romania

In order to illustrate as eloquent as possible the opinions and experiences of business men in Romania, with regard to participating in presentations, whether active – presenter/organizer , or passive – audience, we have performed a number of 30 in-depth interviews in some of the most prestigious companies and institutions in Bucharest: Popovici&Asociaţii, Skoda Romania, Boştină & Asociaţii, National Agency for Dwelling (ANL), Philip Morris Trading, Exceed Consulting, EOS KSI Romania, Petrom, Barnett McCall Recruitment, Bancpost.

The answers and experience of the interviewed people have varied; the majority of the respondents (a percentage of 80%) however, have strongly affirmed that the preferred visual support in business presentations is represented by the PowerPoint slides, followed by the retro-projector – 10% and the flipchart – 10%. As far as the fear to present a report/strategy/offer to the team or the company's manager is concerned, the age was proven to be decisive, because the majority of respondents with ages under 40 expressed their state of fear and contraction regarding the coordination and expression of ideas in public. On the other side however, the older age and the superior hierarchic position imply a long experience in drafting presenta-

tions and the lack of fear related to a poten- tial failure.

Granting general grades to the presenta- tions they attended (on a scale from 1 to 10), the subjects have shown trust in an ascending trend regarding the efficiency in transmitting the information, because the majority (75%) granted grades of 7, 8 and 9 . Nobody grant- ed a maximum grade, which suggests the relativity of a communication act, in which perfection is most of the times unreachable, fact that results out of the feedback analysis or out of the self critical analysis.

As negative elements observed dur- ing presentations, I quote „insufficient cap- ture of the interest"(Daniel Gram, attorney, SCA BOŞTINĂ & ASOCIAŢII), „deficient technical support"(Mihaela Ion, at torney, POPOVICI&ASOCIAŢII), „non-conclusive information"(Dan Rada, Executive Direc- tor, PETROM), „insufficient verbal sup- port of the slides"(Costin Voicu, sales coun- selor, SKODA România), „monotony, monochromatism"(Mara Popescu, Distribu- tion Coordinator, PHILLIP MORRIS TRAD- ING). Also, the respondents also included as negative aspects: „there was no punctuality, a lot of discussions around the subject, it was not established what to do after the meeting, the participants gave too many insignificant details, the participants were too aggressive or too in a hurry to close the agreement, the time assigned for the meeting was not respected, the presenter did not know sufficiently well his products etc"(Alexandru Demian, Man- ager EXCEED CONSULTING), „structure with lack or organization and unprofessional attitude" (Bică Cristina Mădălina, Collection Manager, EOS KSI Romania).

Along with the critics of the language or of the attitude of the presenter or the lack

of communication and interactivity, the sub-jects have also noticed positive elements, such as: „clear presentation of products and their characteristics, direct communication style, but not agresive, sincerity towards the short-comings of a product, faith in one's capacity to have good results, punctuality, conscious-ly preparation of the meeting" (Alexandru Demian), „used materials"(Ioana Şampek, Associate Partner, POPOVICI& ASOCIAŢII), „concision, coherence, good drafting"(Mara Popescu), "ingenious and logic way of pre-sentation" (Daniel Gram), "well defined structure, pleasant visual effects and the fact that concrete data from the graphics can be used"(Bică Cristina Mădălina).

The conclusion after these interviews is that the general answers have been unclear and based on the omnipresence of the Power Point visual support, used in the classic way, rarely with cleverness and with expected re-sults, which suggests that improvement in the business presentations represents a fertile and unexploited land, and communication in the internal and external environment of the Romanian companies needs an indubitable improvement.

V. Conclusions

Drafting an efficient presentation repre-sents one of the most dynamic way of trans-mitting ideas and of influencing the people around (Nadeau, R., Jablonski,C. and Gard-ner, G,1993). It is also one of the most impor-tant ways to demonstrate the competence in front of the decisional persons within the or-ganization. For many people however, is in the best case a compulsory burden, which they try to avoid, because they are not capa-ble to defeat their fear and to understand the benefits they can obtain. The qualities of pre-senter are not gained at birth, they can be ac-quired with perseverance and practice.

A successful approach implies the at-tentive analyze of the communication act standing at the base of any presentation and transposing the concepts within the commu-nication theories. The base for increasing the efficiency is represented by planning and preparation; the necessary steps imply an at-tentive analyze of the presenter, the audience, the message and the transmission channel; this implies the clarification of the objectives, of the organization and structure techniques, of the visual support according to the situa-tion, but also the analyze of the verbal and non-verbal language of the participants.

The strategies elaborated by the spe-cialists in social sciences and information technology improve the quality of presenta-tions, because they represent the result of re-searches and analyzes performed upon the elements involved in drawing up a presen-tation.

The interviews performed within im-portant Romanian companies have revealed the fact that the business environment needs increased efficiency of the communication process and through it, of presentations so necessary for the professional, but also orga-nizational success.

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