

The Importance of Communication Skills in Developing the Art of Negotiation

Debdoot Mukherjee

State-Aided College Teacher, Category-1
Department of English, Bhangar Mahavidyalaya
University of Calcutta.
(Visiting Expert in English, Deptt. of Law,
University of Calcutta)

Abstract

The basic elements of any communication network are set in such a way as to achieve effective feedback. The interaction, exchange and perpetuation of ideas, thoughts, information, words and so on are directed to reach at successful completion of the process of communication. In this world, where human beings can hardly survive alone and without socialising, mutual interaction has become synonymous with our existence. Sharing ideas, thoughts, findings, observations, creations has been on the go like never before. Different types of media come into our aid according to our choice and need. Keeping aside the casual and daily part of the need of communication skills, one can also feel assured of the need of communication techniques as fundamental and essential skills in formal sectors, such as business, technology, academics, law and so on. In such environments, which we may call systematic, organised, disciplined, formal and goal-oriented, reaching a point of agreement is the primary aim, to carry forward the process of value-addition to the discussion and subsequent understanding. This is the juncture where communication skills become so important for negotiation. The present article would look forward to discovering the importance of communication skills in developing the art of negotiation. It would also try to understand and explain the concept of negotiation in general.

Keywords: Communication, Interaction, Agreement, Negotiation, Feedback.

Introduction:

The Cambridge Dictionary defines “negotiation” as “the process of discussing something with someone in order to reach an agreement with them, or the discussions themselves.” The short definition brings in mind a very known instance that we may have witnessed since our childhood, at least since the senses have taken their proper places in us: the act of bargaining at shops with shopkeepers for the sake of reducing the price of items and finally reaching at an agreed price. This act of interacting with the shopkeeper to help ourselves lead to an agreement regarding the price of the item involves a lot of other skills apart from verbal conversation. A closer comprehension of the said example brings to focus skills like body language, choice of words, eye movements, time management, anger management, questioning skills, patience, perseverance and so on. Undoubtedly, negotiation involves a lot of skills associated with communication which makes negotiation an art to practice as a life skill in today’s multilayered existence.

Discussion:

Before going ahead with the discussion on the importance of communication skills in developing the art of negotiation, it is necessary to point out that negotiation as a skill comes into play with the coming in of situations of opposing interests or what communicators may think to be opposing interests. These opposing interests can be eventually termed as crises or conflicting situations that demand the utmost necessity of loosening the tied knots of complex events. The society that we live in has been on its way to becoming diverse, multilayered, multifarious, multidimensional and multitasking. Every new day a new bargain crops up, which forces us to

think in different ways about the paths that can lead us to a constructive and agreeable end. The potential reasons can be varied, starting from simple competition in work sectors to long-standing competition between nations in solving international issues; there can be incoherence involved in decision making and selection of authority in sectors of significance, simple but misunderstood problems exist across perceptions, work culture, attitudinal viewpoints, individual choices, difficulties in assertive communication, lack of team building skills among low-functioning groups and so on. In organizations differences lie with regard to reward systems, division of responsibilities, transparency in attaining accountability, porousness in incentive systems, cementing the concept of equity and assuring equality. Thus, the need of negotiation as a life skill in ascertaining a valid place in being a credible medium to extract an equitable outcome as a feedback is the objective behind the thought of reconsidering the activity of communication skills in developing the art of negotiation.

Prem P. Bhalla in his book *Business English* writes, “Business is people. So is every profession. Success at the workplace in every business and profession comes from good relationships with the people one deals with everyday. The greater the harmony a person can develop with the people, the better the performance and greater the attainment of success (13)” If success in any desired form by the individual is considered to be the agreeable situation reached through negotiation and communicators involved are supposed to reach so, the concept of the so called “good relationships” evolves as the effective channel to communicate to lead to the coveted feedback. In the chronotope of negotiation, it becomes extremely important to decide on two crucial aspects: firstly how important or unimportant it is to assuage one’s own needs and secondly, how significant or insignificant is the other person. In the example that is given in the

introduction referring to a bargain between a customer and a shopkeeper, the customer is more concerned with the price being a reduced one as against a shopkeeper who may have to think in both the ways because s/he has to sell the item; and again the equation may change in a market which has the monopoly of the shopkeeper. Keeping in mind the varied situations that may arise in our lives, the responses cannot be said to be fixed. It is very easily comparable to the way that a driver drives in a busy road with an aim to reach the destination in a given time. Kumar and Lata argue in their book *Communication Skills*, “Since emotion, luck, and magic have no place in a successful negotiation, it becomes essential for us to know what steps the negotiation process involves and how to go about develop better negotiation skills in order to be successful. The process of negotiation comprises the following six stages:

1. Relationship Building
2. Information gathering
3. Strategy formulation
4. A win-win solution with persuasive tone
5. Concessions and agreements/contracts
6. Final offer for closing the deal (353).”

Going by what has been mentioned by Kumar and Lata in the chapter “The Art of Negotiation” in the book entitled *Communication Skills*, the response paradigms are indicated to change with the change of the time and space in which the opposing interest operates. As already mentioned, the opposing interests can be of different varieties. The communication process involved in the art of negotiation therefore, operates beginning with the management of relationship among the communicators or participants who are there in the negotiation environment, this relationship

building or relationship management is an interactive process and therefore, would definitely showcase the variety of human behaviour, it can be being competitive where contentment of one's own needs becomes more significant than that of the other person involved, it can be integrative or collaborative where equity is supposed to be the ultimate outcome (this is also the instance for "win-win" negotiation and is the preferred one among the negotiators), again it can be locating oneself as the compromising one where one's own needs become slightly less important than the other's need, situations can also lead negotiators to communicate in a way that they either become avoiding or accommodating. In the first case, the negotiator remains dormant without any such fruitful action because s/he does not give much weightage to the task; in the second case, the negotiator simply agrees to the other person as the matter in hand does not hold much importance for her/him. Actually, in the accommodating stage individuals involved in negotiation are in a hurry to reach an agreement as the time might have expired or is not that profitable anymore and they quickly reach to a result, incurring losses often. In this crucial stage of relationship building, the communication skills of a seasoned communicator should come into play, which may include listening between the said words and lines, which implies the way in which we understand what the person in front of me is trying to say but is perhaps unable to say because of some psychological barriers. The ultimate goal that lies in front of us is the successful wrapping up of the negotiation process and therefore the non-verbal cues are significant to note and capture for an effective response. This may include knowledge in comprehending the body language of a person, the time that s/he takes in answering a question, interpreting eye-movements, understanding smiles and so on.

In order to complete the process of negotiation to move ahead towards the desired goal of success, sufficient information is very important on the part of the communicators. The sender, receiver and the consequent feedback must fall in a line so that the desired data and information can be put forth to attain the necessary strategy. In this stage of the process, skills in verbal and non-verbal communication come into play. The wealth lies in the information accumulated and that information will be later processed to give impetus to the subsequent stages of development. The exchange of words, spoken or written, performs a major role in cementing the effectiveness of the comprehension of the transaction. The negotiator should be at her/his best in assuring that the flow of information from the other end does not stop or get clogged. The psychological components of the communication process must be assigned the respective role-play. Factors like comfort zones in speech making and conversations, perceptions and mis-perceptions, assumptions and preconceived notions about one another, the attitudes and the expectations, decision-making and conflict management and so on play a crucial role in assigning the upper hand to the negotiator. This stage lies in making sure that the process of negotiation is devoid of any misunderstandings.

One very important skill related to communication that starts the process involving the preparation of a strategic standpoint in view of the entire process is the decision regarding the choice of the subject for negotiation. And again as a negotiator, it is extremely important to know the other person with whom one is negotiating. These two give an upper hand to the negotiator as they help the negotiator to capitalize on her/his strength before the application of any particular strategy. If the negotiation involves a political competitor, the strategy will not be the same as can be used for a business competitor. If the buyer knows the product details before s/he moves

into the shop to buy the item. It becomes easy for the buyer to bargain. From the strategic point of view, negotiation or bargaining can be of two types: distributive and collaborative. In the distributive bargaining, one side wins while the other side loses. The main theme lies in establishing the dominating position in the negotiation process. In such a type of bargaining, the communicators or the negotiators should be bold and assertive in making offers and demands. At times, they may also choose to be aggressive because one never gets what one never asks for. The margin so received may convert itself in many ways possible: monetary, social, psychological, political gain and so on. The only point that a skilled communicator needs to keep in mind is that the behaviour and body language never smack of anger and ridiculousness. This caution seems to be extremely important for negotiators who may be working for political goals. On the other hand in the collaborative or win-win type of negotiation, the focus stays on joint outcomes or equitable outcomes. Here the matter is not of dominance but of understanding and adjustment, in such a way that the persons or parties are never at a loss. The outcome is just like any best deal that we get these days in online shopping platforms. The significance of learning communication skills in dealing with a win-win situation is the way one can handle the democracy of opinions. No single opinion should be given priority and again every single opinion should be given the platform to be heard. Listening skills, questioning skills, motivation related skills and above all problem solving skills play a very crucial role in shaping the character of the negotiator/communicator. One very popular way of encouraging a person towards a level where s/he can start negotiating towards maximum output is the practice of performance appraisal. Though the term is technically used for business related negotiations, it can also be applied metaphorically in all other fields that involve negotiation.

It is said by many that a person's face mirrors whatever lies in her/his mind. In the art of negotiation the sticky markers of one's action mark at that juncture where the percentage of success is the highest. If the entire process of negotiation is thought in accordance with the transactional model of communication, the feedback is effective when the deal/goal is finalised. In other words, the communication should be result-oriented, at any cost. It may be so that one needs to take the path of persuasion, concession and conditional agreement. The negotiator, with his approachable personality, should also be aware of the best alternative to a negotiated agreement. This is something which one generally calls a Plan B (if Plan A fails). The alternative should not be disclosed until very necessary.

The other skills in communication that should help in mastering the art of negotiation are effective team building skills, time management skills, stress management skills, creativity and innovation, knowledge of current affairs and varied subjects, strategic understanding of the ways in which human thinking is designed and also some extent of legal know-how. Asha Kaul in her book *Effective Business Communication* writes, "The ability to communicate is much more than a composition of certain physical attributes, vocal chords, and articulators. It is the ability to symbolise or to understand concepts in terms of images or symbols which facilitates communication (2)." This very ability to communicate effectively to share and exchange for the sake of attainment of success should give completion to the art of negotiation.

Conclusion:

The process of negotiation should conclude with the closing of the deal, i.e., the probable success. The process of effective communication concludes with feedback, i.e., the probable assurance from the receiver that the message was decoded and the meaning comprehended. In

both the cases, the common factor lies in satisfaction, or what may be called as the win-win situation. The negotiator, in all probabilities, must pursue this collaborative status to cement the fact that s/he has the right and quality to negotiate.

Works Cited

Bhalla, Prem P. "Business is People." *Business English: A Complete Reference Manual for Effective Business Communication*. V&S Publishers, 2016.

Kaul, Asha. *Effective Business Communication*. 2nd Edition, PHI Learning Private Limited, 2017.

Kumar, Sanjay, and Pushp Lata. "The Art of Negotiation." *Communication Skills*, 2nd Edition, Oxford University Press, 2015.

"Negotiation." <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/negotiation>, Accessed 7 Oct, 2021