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Communication resources of managers and business professionals

Recursos comunicativos de executivos e profissionais em função operacional

ABSTRACT

Purpose: To analyze the communication resources reported by managers in the business environment and compare the resources used to those reported by business professionals. **Methods:** 82 professionals volunteered to participate in the research, divided into 50 managers (MP) and 32 business professionals (BP) from industry section in Caxias do Sul and the surrounding region (Brazil). A questionnaire with 4 topics was used: personal data, self-assessment of communicative behavior, self-assessment of communicative resources, and selection of positive and negative resources influencing communication. **Results:** Regarding communicative behavior, both groups reported normal voice but with significant differences regarding the use of softness in communication, 25% of MP and only 4% of BP. Both groups selected the following main positive resources: knowledge of subject, use of proper vocabulary, and objectivity. The negative resources were, similarly, the lack of subject domain, criticism or prejudice, and improper vocabulary. Finally, analyzing the degree of influence of each communicative resource, the MP highlighted tone of voice as an important positive resource, while the BP pointed the subject domain. Still, the monotonous voice for MP and nervousness for BP were indicated as the main negative influences. **Conclusion:** Managers value more communicative resources connected to communicative attitude, such as tone of voice and expression, while business professionals worry about demonstrating security and technical understanding of the subject.

RESUMO

Objetivo: Analisar os relatos de uso de recursos comunicativos por executivos no ambiente corporativo e compará-los com os recursos de profissionais em função operacional. **Método:** Participaram 82 profissionais voluntários, sendo 50 em funções executivas (GE) e 32 colaboradores em funções operacionais (GO), do setor industrial de Caxias do Sul e região. Para a pesquisa, foi aplicado um protocolo com 4 aspectos: dados pessoais, autoavaliação do comportamento comunicativo, autoavaliação de recursos comunicativos e seleção de recursos de influência negativa e positiva no discurso comunicativo. **Resultados:** Quanto ao comportamento comunicativo, ambos os grupos referiram ter voz normal, mas com diferença significativa quanto ao uso de intensidade fraca na comunicação, assinalada por 25% do GO e apenas 4% do GE. Ambos os grupos selecionaram como principais aspectos positivos na comunicação o domínio do assunto, o uso de vocabulário adequado e a objetividade. Quanto aos recursos que interferem negativamente na comunicação, os grupos indicaram, de modo similar, a falta de domínio do assunto, críticas ou preconceitos e vocabulário inadequado. Finalmente, quando analisado o grau de influência de cada recurso comunicativo, os participantes do GE destacaram como positiva a importância do tom da voz, enquanto o GO apontou o domínio do assunto. Por outro lado, uma voz monótona para o GE e o nervosismo para o GO foram referidas como as principais influências negativas. **Conclusão:** Profissionais executivos valorizaram mais recursos comunicativos voltados à atitude comunicativa, tais como tom de voz e expressividade, enquanto o grupo operacional parece preocupar-se em demonstrar segurança e domínio técnico do assunto.

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INTRODUCTION

Speech-language performance in the business environment is different to clinical performance, having as its main objective the development and improvement of communication within the cohort of collaborators in the company, as well as acting in the promotion of the health of these professionals⁽¹⁻⁶⁾.

Professionals working in the corporate environment are part of the population, which seeks out speech-language therapy, with the aim of improving communication⁽¹⁻³⁾. It is believed that such a demand is related to the competitiveness of the job market, to the need for a differentiating factor for improvement in terms of the urgency of closing deals, the tendency toward management by competence, and at times, insecurity.

Interpersonal communication has been considered a competence, and therefore, is valued as a differentiator in the corporate world. However, for companies, organizational communication is not only focused on transmitting information, but also on changing the behavior of team members in order for them to perform better, pushing the organization in the direction of its goals^(1-3,7).

Organizational structures are made up of hierarchies marked by power relations. The literature^(1-3,8) describes how executive roles are characterized by decision making, resource allocation and management activities with the aim of attaining determined goals, that is to say, defining objectives and the possible means of achieving them. In its turn, the operational group is responsible for executing, in a practical way, innumerable tasks, and is evaluated for this. It is on the group of managers that the greater requirement for expressive behavior falls, aimed at leadership, supported by abilities with public communication, attitude and persuasion. Therefore, the function exercised in the company (manager or functional role) can influence the way in which communicative resources are valued. These relations are established according to the degree of appropriation, production and communication represented by political and economic powers. Interpersonal communication and communicative relationships are factors that influence the attainment of a better standing on the economic, political and social plane, as well as denoting reliability, knowledge, creativity, self-motivation and ability to work in a team⁽¹⁻⁸⁾.

While the planning function realized by managers includes the determination of organizational goals and the establishment of a general strategy to fulfill these ideas, it is the professionals in operational roles who carry out the steps and in their turn, require the reporting of the results to the managers. In this way, the investigation of communicative resources utilized in the corporate environment becomes important, since it allows the identification of modes of expression used to define objectives, as well as possible tools to attain them.

Therefore, the aim of this research is to analyze reports of the use of communicative resources by managers in the corporate environment and compare these with the resources of professionals occupying an operative role in the same environment.

METHODS

The present study was approved by the Ethics Committee for Voice Studies (review n° 616/08) and all the participants signed Free and Informed Consent. 82 professionals voluntarily participated in this study from different companies from the industrial sector of the city of Caxias do Sul and surrounding region, randomly chosen from a list of companies in the area. The region is a metal and mechanics industrial center in Rio Grande do Sul and around 33 thousand workers reside there⁽⁹⁾. The employees were invited to participate voluntarily in the present study, through personal contact within the Human Resources departments of their companies. The criteria for inclusion for participation in the study were: being older than 18 years, working in a company in the industrial sector selected in the city of Caxias do Sul and surrounding region and signing the Free and Informed Consent. Respondents were grouped into Manager Professionals (MP): collaborators from management levels – presidents, superintendents, directors, managers, coordinators and supervisors, and Business Professionals (BP): collaborators from the operational levels, such as assistants, analysts, aids and secretaries. In this manner, the total group was made up of 38 women and 44 men, with an age range from 19 to 59 years of age, and with a median age of 36.6 years. The group of managers was composed of 15 women and 35 men, with a mean age of 41.7 years, 44% (22) with a post-graduate level of schooling and 50% (25) of these with professional experience of more than 20 years. The operational group was made up of 23 women and 9 men, with a mean age of 28.6 years, 56.3% (18) having completed secondary schooling and 62.5% (20) with professional experience of between 1 to 5 years.

For this study, a specific self-assessment questionnaire was developed for communicative behavior (Appendix A, B and C) based on the main aspects related to the use of communication, compiled from the scientific literature and corporate journals^(8,10,11). After the presentation of the project to the companies, the employees who agreed to participate responded individually in writing to the questionnaire made up of 4 topics: personal data, self-assessment of communicative behavior, self-assessment of communicative resources and identification of resources with a negative and positive influence on their own communicative discourse.

In terms of personal data, the following items were included: age, gender, schooling, and duration of professional experience.

For the self-assessment of communicative behavior, the questionnaire included 14 questions. In the first 6, the respondent was asked to select the option that best described their communication in the professional environment, in terms of their vocal behavior: voice (normal or altered); tone of voice (heavy, fine or regular); volume (strong, weak, or regular); speed (accelerated, slow or regular); respiration (nasal, oral or mixed); and vocal intonation (expressive, monotonous or regular). In the following eight questions, participants were instructed to select a single option, which described the character of their own communicative behavior in terms of: presence of accent; articulation of words; gestures; visual contact; level of inhibition; control of time during speech; audiovisual resources

and objectivity. During this step, the responses could be indicated on a five-point scale: never, rarely, sometimes, frequently and always. For the statistical analysis, these responses were categorized into low frequency aspects (responses never, rarely and sometimes) or high frequency (frequently and always).

In terms of score for communicative resources used in the company environment, the participants received a list of 39 aspects, with 19 having a positive influence (Appendix B) and 20 a negative influence (Appendix C), to evaluate their own communication. Each one of the aspects was evaluated on a 10-point scale, from 1 to 10 whereby 1 signified the least influence and 10, the greatest. The positive resources evaluated were: tone of voice, accent, adequate vocabulary, objectivity, respiration, diction, voice projection, speed of speech, posture, gestures, visual contact, relaxation, knowledge of the subject, adequate use of audiovisual resources, creativity, preparedness and correct use of microphone. The negative resources evaluated were: monotonous voice, weak voice, inadequate vocabulary, being prolix, uncoordinated speech-respiration, problems with diction, nervousness, timidity, rapid speech, excessive pauses, inadequate posture, inadequate gestures, absence of visual contact, lack of teaching ability, lack of understanding of the subject, inadequate use of speaking time, inadequate use of audiovisual resources, lack of creativity, use of informal language and criticisms and prejudices.

Finally, participants were instructed to select the three most important resources in the work environment, both in terms of positive and negative influence, in their own communicative speech, using 1st, 2nd and 3rd place classifications.

This research was a cross sectional, observational study, using the application of a questionnaire responded to by participants. The data obtained was submitted for statistical analysis, with the aim of comparing it between the groups studied and providing assistance for a more differentiated speech-language performance in these two groups of individuals. For the analysis of the data, statistical analysis was carried out using the Chi-square test or Fischer's exact test. In all the statistical analyses the level of significance of 5% ($p \leq 0.05$) was adopted.

RESULTS

In terms of the characterization of the sample there were significant statistical differences in the description of the manager and business groups regarding a: gender MP 70% men X BP 71.9% women ($p < 0.001$); academic level MP 44% post-graduate X BP 18.8% post-graduate ($p < 0.021$); and professional experience MP 50% >20 years X BP 62.5% /1/ - /5/ years ($p < 0.001$).

All 14 questions of this instrument were documented, however, in the present study, only the results from the questionnaire related to self-assessment of vocal behavior were used. Therefore, in terms of self-assessment of vocal performance, both groups reported presenting a normal voice. The results in terms of tone of voice, showed that, in the MP, 64% reported the use of a regular tone of voice and the same was found with 78.1% of the BP. Regarding vocal intensity, a significant statistical difference was seen ($p = 0.018$), since it was observed that 25% of the BP reported using a weak voice while only 4% of MP

indicated this item. In terms of intonation, 48% of the MP and 59.4% of the BP indicated using regular intonation, neither monotonous nor very expressive (Table 1).

When analyzing the resources, which influenced their own communication (Table 2), professionals from both groups selected, with the greatest score as the main positive aspects, knowledge of the subject, adequate use of vocabulary and objectivity in speech, reflecting a preoccupation both with content as well as the form of the message. In terms of the resources that interfered negatively with communication, professionals from both groups indicated as having the greatest impact the lack of understanding of the subject, the occurrence of criticism/prejudice and inadequate vocabulary.

The group of collaborators from the operational (BP) level, valued breathing control more than the MP, as a resource which positively influenced their communication. Creativity, as a resource that positively influenced speaking, showed a significant statistical difference, ($p = 0.031$) between MP and BP (Table 3). The BP valued creativity (median score was equal to 9.16) more than the MP, whose average score was 8.54.

Table 1. Percentage distribution of self-assessment of vocal behavior of the management professionals and the business professionals

Variables	MP (%)	BP (%)	p
Voice			
Normal	84	93.8	0.167
Altered	16	6.3	
Tone of voice			
Heavy	30	12.5	0.179
Fine	6	9.4	
Regular	64	78.1	
Vocal intensity			
Loud	32	25	0.018*
Soft	4	25	
Regular	64	50	
Intonation			
Monotonous	8	3.1	0.487
Expressive	44	37.5	
Regular	48	59.4	

*Level of significance of 5% ($p \leq 0.050$)

Caption: MP: Management professionals; BP: Business professionals; Chi-square test or Fischer's exact test ($p \leq 0.050$)

Table 2. Medians of the three highest scores of the resources that negatively and positively influence the communicative speech of the management professionals and business professionals

	MP	BP
Positive influence		
Knowledge of the subject	9.98	9.59
Adequate vocabulary	9.48	9.66
Objectivity	9.46	9.50
Negative influence		
Lack of understanding of subject	9.60	9.66
Criticisms and prejudices	9.14	9.75
Inadequate vocabulary	9.10	9.47

Caption: MP: Management professionals; BP: Business professionals

Table 3. Medians of the scores of the three aspects referent to communicative speech that show a statistically significant difference between the management professionals and business professionals

	MP	BP	P
Positive influence			
Respiration	9.98	9.59	0.028
Creativity	9.48	9.66	0.031
Negative influence			
Criticisms and prejudices	9.14	9.75	0.011

Caption: MP: Management professionals; BP: Business professionals; Chi-square test or Fischer's exact test ($p \leq 0.050$); Level of significance of 5% ($p \leq 0.050$)

Table 4. Numerical and percentage distribution of communicative resources of a positive and negative influence on communication, with highest frequency, in the management group and the business group

Communicative resource	Numerical	Percentage
Management group		
Positive influence		
Tone of voice	11	22%
Negative influence		
Monotonous voice	13	26%
Business group		
Positive influence		
Knowledge of the subject	10	31.3%
Negative influence		
Nervousness	7	21.9%

It was seen that the mean score for criticism and prejudice as a resource negatively influencing speaking (Table 3) was 9.14 in the MP and 9.75 in the BP. Therefore, criticisms and prejudice are more negative during communicative speech from the perspective of the operational group. When verifying the relevance attributed to the parameters of respiration, creativity, and criticism or prejudice, by the BP group, we notice that these are resources utilized in a strategic manner in relation to the hierarchical position of the MP.

Finally, when analyzing the degree of influence of each communicative resource, 22% of the participants from the MP highlighted as positive the importance of tone of voice, while 31.3% of the BP highlighted knowledge of the subject (Table 4). On the other hand, for the management group, a monotonous voice was indicated as a negative influence, while nervousness, for the operational group, was indicated as the negative influence which most affected communication (Table 4).

DISCUSSION

When thinking about the current competitive corporate environment, more than ever there is a preference for competent, dynamic, creative, communicative, proactive and productive professionals in terms of the organizational culture of which they are a part⁽¹⁻³⁾. In the literature^(1-3,10), references are found that consider the management group, a more intellectual population, with little time available and pressure to obtain results.

Performance with internal communication, that is to say, involving all collaborators in the company in a positive interpersonal

relationship, including the operational group, generates a positive impact in the corporate environment. In different studies^(7,12-15) into the effectiveness of vocal training in voice professionals, it was found that such assistance strengthens working relationships, deals with emotions, and makes the group more cohesive and engaged in common objectives of the organization.

The findings of the present study carried out in the corporate environment suggest that, by mapping the communicative resources of managers⁽¹⁻³⁾, as other studies have done^(6,10,16,17) with other groups of professionals, we contribute to the dissemination of information, knowledge of their reality and communicative needs. In this context, the empowerment of the executive will occur the moment that they construct their image on the market via their abilities including amongst these communication, and more specifically the voice. Vocal quality, an important factor, which affects the others should persuade its audience and be in agreement with the profile of the organization.

According to the Brazilian Society of Speech-Language Therapy, it is estimated that 5 to 8% of the population has some vocal difficulty that can hamper communication, such as a hoarse voice, and straining or tiredness when speaking. The occurrence of these problems increases in voice professionals such as teachers (the population at greatest risk)⁽¹⁴⁻¹⁸⁾, actors and singers⁽¹⁹⁾, as well as tele-service operators^(6,13), at times reaching alarming levels of 25% in some working environments.

The literature^(3,10,20) shows that professionals, aware of their responsibility, seek to modulate, and project their voice with the aim of motivating and persuading their interlocutors. In the same way, in this research, the management group recognizes the importance of tone of voice to transmit information, express attitudes and emotions, and in this manner, indicate their position in relation to their speech.

Corporate communication follows a process of socialization, that is, employs a transmission mechanism for values and norms necessary to the integration of individuals. Therefore, indicating understanding of the subject, utilizing linguistic codes in an appropriate way, practicing respectful behavior, and being tolerant, enable the speaker to occupy positions in their social world. If we think about the innumerable combinations that include the modifications of articulatory, frequency and intensity parameters, it becomes clear that it is starting from these acoustic grounds taken from the spoken signal, that the speaker affects the listener⁽²⁰⁾.

Data from the literature^(10,17,21) reports that changes to the performance of the individual who uses their voice professionally can involve adequacy to the professional performance in question and awareness of the resources to be utilized for improvement of performance. Equally, in the present research, greater attention to communicative resources related to attitude and expressivity were observed in the management group.

The individual who frequently communicates in public, be it for professional or social reasons, can be aware that the form of their speech is as important as its content, however it is not uncommon that they are unaware of the resources to modify their patterns of communication. As a significant part of our communication is transmitted via the voice and body language, having ideas about vocal quality and gestures that can provoke a

negative impact on communication, can contribute to the speaker controlling them, making their communication more efficient.

The dissemination of practices based on evidence stimulates scientific research to achieve better results in dealing with rehabilitation and consultation for vocal improvement. The focus on health will always accompany speech-language therapy in its actions, however it is essential to understand the needs and demands of communication in the organizational world. Therefore, future studies need to be developed to describe the elaboration, development and results in voice professional consultancies in the corporate field. The limitations owing to finding few bibliographical references underline the need for publishing research in the area of spoken voice professionals so that they can be analyzed and the influence of the methods of these consultations on company outcomes verified^(22,23).

CONCLUSION

Professionals from the corporate environment recognize the importance of the diverse aspects of communication for their professional activity. Managers value communicative resources aimed more at a communicative attitude, such as tone of voice and expressivity, while the business group is more concerned with demonstrating security and technical understanding of the subject. Possibly the choice of these resources is a reflection of the functional role, and of personal and professional maturity.

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Author contributions

CAP participated in the conception of the study, collection, analysis, interpretation of data and writing the article; MB participated, in the condition of supervisor; of the conception of the study, analysis, interpretation of data and writing the article.

Appendix A. Questionnaire for the analysis of communicative resources of managers and business professionals

QUESTIONNAIRE FOR THE ANALYSIS OF COMMUNICATIVE RESOURCES OF MANAGERS AND BUSINESS PROFESSIONALS

NAME:.....

AGE:..... GENDER: () FEMALE () MALE

SCHOOLING:

() HIGH SCHOOL () TERTIARY () GRADUATE

COMPANY:.....ROLE:

DURATION OF PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE:

- () Less than 1 year.
- () 1 year to 5 years.
- () 6 to 10 years.
- () 11 to 15 years.
- () 16 to 20 years.
- () More than 20 years.

1. Indicate the option that corresponds to the self-assessment of you communication:

VOCAL BEHAVIOR:					
1. Your voice is:	Normal	Altered			
2. Regarding tone, your voice is:	Heavy	Fine	Regular		
3. Regarding volume, your voice is:	Loud	Soft	Regular		
4. The speed of your speech is:	Accelerated	Slow	Regular		
5. When you are silent, you breath through your:	Nose	Mouth	Both		
6. Regarding the modulation/vocal intonation, you perceive your voice as:	Monotonous	Expressive	Regular		
COMMUNICATIVE RESOURCES:					
7. You present an accent?	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Frequently	Always
8. Do you articulate words correctly?	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Frequently	Always
9. Do you gesticulate when you speak?	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Frequently	Always
10. Do you maintain visual contact when you speak?	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Frequently	Always
11. Do you consider yourself uninhibited during professional communication?	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Frequently	Always
12. Do you control the time when you speak?	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Frequently	Always
13. Do you use audiovisual resources?	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Frequently	Always
14. Regarding communication, do you consider yourself objective?	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Frequently	Always

Captions: Low frequency aspect (responses Never, Rarely and Sometimes) or high frequency (Frequently and Always)

Appendix B. List of scores of positive communicative resources

Indicate on the scale below, from 1 to 10, the degree of importance of the resources that positively influence communication in the corporate environment, with 1 for those that have little influence and 10 for those that have much influence:

	Little								Much	
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
1. Tone of voice	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
2. Accent	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
3. Adequate vocabulary	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
4. Objectivity	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
5. Respiration	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
6. Diction/Articulation/Pronunciation	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
7. Voice projection	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
8. Speed of speech	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
9. Pauses	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
10. Posture	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
11. Gestures	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
12. Visual contact	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
13. Relaxation	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
14. Knowledge of the subject	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
15. Adequate use of time while speaking	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
16. Using adequate audiovisual resources	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
17. Creativity	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
18. Preparedness	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
19. Correct use of microphone	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10

Captions: 10-point scale, from 1 to 10, in which 1 signifies the lowest influence and 10 the greatest.

Choose, amongst the resources that you scored the highest, the three most important items:

- 1st.....
- 2nd.....
- 3rd.....

Appendix C. List of scores of negative communicative resources

Indicate on the scale below, on a scale from 1 to 10, the degree of importance of the resources that negatively influence communication in the corporate environment, with 1 for those that have little influence and 10 for those that have much influence:

	Little								Much	
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
1. Monotonous voice	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
2. Soft voice	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
3. Inadequate vocabulary	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
4. Being prolix	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
5. Uncoordinated speech-respiration	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
6. Problems with diction	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
7. Nervousness	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
8. Timidity	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
9. Rapid speech	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
10. Excessive pauses	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
11. Inadequate posture	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
12. Inadequate gestures	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
13. Absence of visual contact	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
14. Lack of teaching ability	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
15. Lack of knowledge of the subject	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
16. Inadequate use of time during speaking	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
17. Inadequate use of audiovisual resources	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
18. Lack of creativity	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
19. Use of informal language	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
20. Criticism and prejudice	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10

Captions: 10-point scale, from 1 to 10, in which 1 signifies the least influence and 10 the greatest.

Choose, amongst the resources that you scored the highest, the three most important items:

- 1st.....
- 2nd.....
- 3rd.....