

ERROR OF MIS-COMMUNICATION

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Abstract:

The purpose of analyzing the topic of miscommunication is not just language or dialect barrier but also sometimes misinterpretation of sign and body language. It is rampant in every aspect of human interaction since evolution. Through time the methods and processes have evolved with the current techniques yet this remains a critical point of human contention. Hence it should be dealt with dexterity to prevent ripple effects on mankind. Humans are considered the most evolved species on this planet yet their communication complexities make them endangered in their own tribe as well as with other life forms. Clarity of thought and its interpretation is important for sustenance of any life form on this planet in the future. The paper tries to find out different causes which are responsible for the failure of communication with a detailed analysis.

Keywords: Miscommunication, Mistranslation, Clarity, Encryptions, Emotions.

Introduction:

Lexicon defines "Communication" as a method of interchange of thoughts between two individuals. It is that simple. Hence to communicate one has to express ones ongoing thoughts to another in a meaningful way. To add more to this, the means of communication have to be understood by the other in the right form as expressed by the communicator. Now communication is not as simple as it sounds. If we look everywhere there is a problem of some form or the other and that can only be solved through "Effective Communication".

"*Effective Communication*" is the exchange of information and ideas among two parties in a meaningful process and form. Here the most important part is the "process and form". The evolution of communication form started with enactment which later transformed in an organized form like verbal or oral and written. Thus language was created. Other methods of communication that are in practice today are mere additions to the primary forms communication. In the digital age, communication is not restricted to individuals. Any exchange of information between two systems or entities that lead to processing the right output is also considered "Effective Communication".

Different people speak, read and write various languages. There are about 6,500 different languages spoken all over the world today by over 7.2 billion people. Chinese is the most popular language in the world followed by Spanish and then English language.

Through ages the world has been in financial, political, economic and social chaos due to “*communication collapse*”. People conversing in different languages may mean something which may be understood differently. This leads to misinterpretations and misunderstandings. History is witness to diverse miscommunications that led to negativity in the form of fights, battles, wars that led to massacre and deaths. The miscommunication may be limited to breakdown of relationships or as disastrous as political turmoil. The root cause is always miscommunication.

Deceptive Communication vs. Innocent Miscommunication:

The elusive style of speaking the words but implying something else is a common type of *Deceptive Communication*. The Machiavellian kind refers to those with dominant characteristics who consciously resort to various kinds of linguistic styles to distort the truth and dilute its identity. They allure others with skillful oratory to impose an idea, motivate to distort perception and hypnotize minds with wrong thoughts. This category known as the “Sincere deceiver” includes political leaders, corporate managers, religious gurus, terrorists and human predators of all kinds. [1]

Innocent Miscommunication is an honest unintentional misrepresentation, misinterpretation of the original thought or notion. The result of this is a fall out that hurts the integrity and intention of the mis-interpreter. Indian Mythology has many examples of miscommunications. In The Mahabharata when the 5 Pandavas were exiled in the forest, their mother Kunti made an innocent mistake of dictating her sons to equally share what they brought with them unaware that the surprise was Princess Darupadi who was the newly wedded wife of Arjun. This sharing of a wife by 5 brothers was the precursor to the war at Kurukshetra. This is a classic example of misinterpretation both by Kunti and subsequently by her sons the Pandavas. The Indian mythology like many others across the world are strewn with instances of mistranslations and miscommunications that led to misinterpretations and misunderstandings [2]

Political Consequences:

Historically there are many instances of miscommunication and misinterpretation leading to wars. The “Fat Man” and “Little Boy” were the only two nuclear bombs blasted till date by Americans at Hiroshima and Nagasaki in Japan. On demand of Allied forces’ unconditional surrender of Japan, the Prime Minister Kantaro Suzuki responded saying “Mokasatsu” which in Japanese meant “no comment”. The word was however misinterpreted as “not worthy of comment” which was considered as an insult to them which led to severe consequences. [3] In November 1956 the Russian Communist Leader Krushchev while addressing the Polish Embassy used the term “My vas pokhoronim” which is a Russian idiom that means “I feel bad about your ignorance, but it’s your funeral not mine”. Instead the American reporters mistranslated it as “We will bury you” that heightened the tension between countries during Cold War. In 1776 the American Revolution would have not been successful if the lack of English knowledge led German Colonel Johann Rall to lose the battle of Trenton as he ignored by misreading prior war intimation. In a similar situation George Washington did not know French and signed the treaty written in French without reading it. This led to a global war between the French and the British. However the worst comedy of errors was created that led to huge political insult and embarrassment for US President Jimmy Carter in his speech in Poland in December 1977. The interpreter misstated the President’s speech where he expressed his interest to learn the Polish people’s desire for the future. It was however

wrongly misinterpreted as the President would be “happy to grasp at Poland's private parts”. [4]

Medicine at stake:

Mistranslations can be clinically fatal to humans. The term “intoxicado” is used by the Cubans as an all encompassing term referring to something that is medically wrong due to intake of food or drink. [5] Instead the term was mistranslated as “Intoxicated” in English language that led to a Cuban patient Willie Ramirez being quadriplegic for life who could have been treated by doctors if they knew the right meaning of the term. A translation error in her medical records led to Teresa Tarry’s double mastectomy. A Norwegian student was hemophilic (high blood clotting time hence loses more blood) which was mistranslated as “Homofil” in English language which meant he was Gay. The student was wrongly treated that led to his death. [6]

Miscalculation due to miscommunication:

Miscommunications and miscalculations are rampant in every field of human activity. In fact miscalculations are a subset of miscommunication with serious negative implications. Even the renowned scientist Albert Einstein was not spared of his miscalculations as he used a cosmological constant in his equations considering that the Universe was static and stable. The famous traveler Columbus made a series of misinterpretations due to miscalculations. He mistook Arabic miles for Roman miles which made him pinpoint Japan about 8000 miles away from where it really is. This however led to the discovery of North American continent. Sir William Thomson in 1800s miscalculated the age of planet Earth to be 20-40 million years when in reality the planet was 4.5 billion years old. As recent as in 1998, NASA’s miscalculation of standard pound-seconds was not applicable on Mars Orbiter which used Metric system of

Newton –seconds and that led to its disintegration. Last but not the least in 2012 the miscommunication that the world’s end was inevitable on December 21st which was just a misinterpretation of the end of the Mayan calendar year. [7]

Business Failures due to miscommunication:

Communication blunders are a prime factor for business failure in local markets. When the children’s food company Gerber failed to survive in France as the name of the company is similar in sound to the French term that means vomit, Likewise “Intimidate Dating Service” was named so in Israel as in Hebrew “Intini” means intimate while in English the word “Intimidate” meant threatening or frightening. Again the Irish Mist Liqueur was not accepted well by the Germans as the term “Mist” means “dung” in German. “Traficante” was an Italian mineral water brand that did not do business among the Spanish. The term is similar to the drug dealer in Spanish which is “Narcotraficante” [8]

Various brands have failed in the market as the literal translations of their advertisements meant something wrong or misrepresented what the brand stands for. The famous US food chain Kentucky Fried Chicken (KFC) performed poorly in China as they promoted the line “Finger licking good” which implied in Mandarin “eat your finger”. Pepsi faced a similar destiny when its promotional line “Pepsi brings you back to life” was mistranslated as “Pepsi brings dead ancestors back from grave”. When General Motors launched their car model Chevy Nova in the Spanish market, the brand name Nova in Spanish meant No Go which did

not work out well for their car. Parker pens entered the Spanish market with the misinterpretation of the term “Embrazer” in Spanish as “It won't leak in your pocket and embarrass you”. The promotional line for Electrolux vacuum cleaner in US market fell flat as it translated to “Nothing sucks like an Electrolux”. The success of any business with global market lies with the usage of right promotional lines that approve of the culture, emotions and traditions of target audience. [9]

Corporate miscommunication:

The initiation of corporate miscommunication can be as simple as presenting, interpreting and explaining a profile of a person in resume to understanding the job description. Making the right match for the right person of a certain profile is the starting point of any miscommunication. Understanding the job requirements, analyzing data or information and misinterpreting them to the audience can be fatal. Internal miscommunications range from misunderstanding verbal or body language and dispute of opinion. Corporate miscommunication builds stress, disorder and misjudgments at workplace. Common misinterpretations lead to work overload, underpayment, absence of team spirit, inefficiency, arrogance and ignorance. Though employees follow the same code of corporate language and culture, miscommunication frequently occur due to human greed for money and power. [10]

In 2013 the CEO of AOL Tim Armstrong fired Abel Lenz the Art Director of Patch websites due to some dispute and misjudgment but later apologized for his misbehavior to all his employees. In 2006, Mike Jeffries, the CEO of Abercrombie & Stitch stated in an interview to a journal that the company's clothing line targets “this, attractive cool kids” which had severe backlashes for many years that hurt the goodwill of the company This is a classic example of Corporate arrogance and miscommunication.[11]

Work overload and multitasking often lead to email miscommunications due to superfluous reading and thereby sending a wrong response. Clarity of instructions and its right interpretation is essential for efficiency at a workplace. Harassment in terms of verbal or physical abuse is a serious offence. It is a disputable issue due to misunderstanding when someone intentionally or unintentionally has crossed the line of decency. [12]

Digital Miscommunication:

The current society has immense infatuation with the digital or virtual world. The underlying objective of digitization was to enhance communication across the virtual world. There are terabytes of audio, video and text information being exchanged across the globe. The risk of such Internet overhype is tantamount to the assertion that the “Message is the message”. This is in direct contradiction to McLuhan's aphorism “the medium is the message”. Another common means of miscommunication occurs during exchange of emails and text messages. The cryptic messages are decoded the way the receiver based on his/her own feelings or emotions. Hence what one understands may be very different from what the author wants to communicate. [13]

It the digital medium it is extremely difficult to separate fake or morphed data from the right information. The use of medium and its content is interpreted the way the initiator and its decoder decipher such information. Various Internet Laws have been implemented to prevent the dignity of digital news media. The world is seen as a global village which knows no boundaries of creation of terabytes of information and metadata whose authenticity is uncertain. Many hidden corners of the world have tech specialists who hack into the digital

mainstream to fabricate news items. [14] Unfortunately readers are deceived as they misconstrue such deception that lead to defamation, illegal action, dysfunction and chaos. Recently in India there have been a series of mob lynching due to rumors and miscommunication of morphed information being circulated in digital media. [15]

Conclusion:

Any misrepresentation, fraudulent or negligent activity can have severe consequences. Knowing and understanding a language is very important for understanding the speaker. Hence it is desirable to comprehend the words for right deduction. The age old methods of face-to-face interactions, telephonic conversations and letter writing have their own set of perks. In a one-to- one interaction people can express themselves through their attire, gestures, expressions, words and actions. But comprehending the language of expression and its correct understanding is important. Phone conversations are restricted to voice modulations and instant clarifications. Letter writing method is favorable due to the distance and time taken for the recipient to assimilate the information. In digitization, more encryptions lead to the need for right decryption of messages and their correct interpretation.

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