

Effective Communication Traits: “The Godfather” Perspective

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Abstract “Communication” has become very important in the modern professional and social context. It has broken the conventions of just give and take of messages. For an effective leader or manager the importance of communication becomes manifold. It is a very important tool that drives home the effectiveness of the leader or manager. How does he communicate? When does he communicate? To whom does he communicate? How does he respond to communication? These are the important elements for a leader or manager in communication and communication management. Leaders or managers or would be leaders and managers have to comprehend and perceive this communication and look ahead of the road. One can grasp the untold word, the invisible symbol or sign or reading the unwritten word and the unexpressed body language. “The Godfather” a very famous fiction work by Mario Puzo is an excellent tool of learning for the students of management, management professionals and even leaders and managers from variety of perspective, especially the HR and managerial communication. Intent reading of the novel also gives one an idea that primarily it is not a novel of crime, justice, character and a thriller; it is an in-depth study on human mind and psyche. It is a great work on the communication patterns of individuals in variety of situations and while dealing with variety of people. It goes beyond the conventional aspects of communication of speaking, listening etc. The novel has emphasized the importance of serious communication and seriousness in communication, be it with anyone. The research paper strives to throw light on the various aspects of communication in day to day professional life, the intricacies involved in serious communication and what aspects a professional can learn about communication from “The Godfather”.

Keywords Communication, Communication Management, Leadership Communication, Managerial Communication

1. Introduction

The Godfather, a classic novel by Mario Puzo has been hailed in every part of English reading world. The popularity of the novel itself speaks volumes for the various aspects of the great work of fiction. The novel is masterly crafted and designed, taking any aspect from description, narration, depiction, characterisation intricacies of plot structure and so on. In the very first time reading the precision of depiction and description appeals the reader and he is struck with the idea to be conveyed.

“Don Vito Corleone was a man to whom everybody came for help and never were they disappointed. He made no empty promises, nor the craven excuse that his hands were tied by more powerful forces in the world than himself.” [1]

The novel has often been quoted by experts as a great study in management, psychology and criminology

The Godfather is a great work in communication; rather it depicts the aspects of communication with all its varieties and intricacies ranging from simple talks and listening to Neuro Linguistic Patterns. Of course, that may not be in the mind of the author when he wrote but the depth of inter-human dealings provided him the scope to describe the various aspects of communication. In fact, the success of the novel itself manifests the power of the written word or the effect of the written fictional communication.

2. Methodology

When we allude to communication as a manner or art almost on the threshold of science, The Godfather provides great insight and illustrations of communication. A student of management as well as a professional can learn a lot about the nitty-gritty of communication, get sensitized about it and go to the advance stage of communication process. The novel also depicts the psychology reflected on the communication process of an individual. Here we will touch various aspects of effective communication and how the novel is a study in the said aspect of communication.

To go deeper into the depiction and depth of communication manifested in the novel between and among various characters, one needs to understand the characters, the various situations and the psychological level of the

character and how is it reflected on the aspects of communication like speaking, listening and body language. These three aspects have been vividly and impeccably dealt with in the entire novel and the course of unfolding of the plot. The characters like Don Corleone, Michael Corleone, Tom Hagen and Sollozzo are worth studying in communication. Similarly, some situations like the Don's daughter's marriage and his listening to the visitor's woes and conversation, Tom Hagen's conversation with Jack Woltz, Michael's talk at the hospital, with the family and Sollozzo, Don's talk with everyone around are worth observing as it provides ample of psychoanalysis and its reflection on communication of the individual. The author reasserts the plain connection of the mental make up with the communication like the umbilical cord.

Here we will study some selected situations from the novel and what aspect of communication is dealt with will be discussed. The scenes would furnish plenty of room for interpretation, psychoanalysis and the effect of communication delivered.

3. Discussion

3.1. Listening

Listening has been given a lot of importance in the communication process; some even put it ahead of speaking as it is the first step of an amicable and fulfilling conversation, effective dialogue, a win-win negotiation and dauntless argument. It is very pertinent for anyone to listen intently and feed the mind for more thoughts to speak, rebuttal, argue. An excellent example of listening is seen when the guests who come with a request for favours to the Don narrate their experiences or wishes and the Don patiently and intently listens to each and every word spoken. He not only listens to the spoken word but also the unspoken words, observes their body language and interprets the conversation in his own way supported with strong logic and reasoning.

"What is your justice?" "An eye for an eye." Bonasera said.

"You asked for more," the Don said, "your daughter is alive." [2]

A seasoned professional who has mastered the time-tested traits of good communication listens, listens intently and does not retort or respond immediately but lets the words move around among the faculties of his mind the response would come with the finishing of reasoning and evenness required.

3.2. Speaking

Speaking or delivery has generally been considered as the highest and the most important aspect of communication, though the experts would not put it ahead of listening or body language but at par only, as it is the medium to reach out to

others, impress and convince them. People are easily impressed by a good talker or speaker; with his manner, voice and intonations but that also does not mean he is a good all round communicator. The synchronicity of mental make-up, clarity of thought, reflection of personality and body language is very pertinent to speaking. What one says, or does not say manifests a lot about the personality traits. The fundamentals of speaking like clarity of speech, use of apt language, assertiveness, tone and intonation all play together to make it more and more effective. Speaking is the aspect of communication that is used for expressing emotions, thoughts, persuasion, negotiation, discussion and even reprimanding. The manner in all the aspects may vary and again may vary from situation to situation or person to person.

What one says also in a particular situation shows his level and capacity. During the wedding of the Don's daughter, when the Corleone family came to know that the cops are moving in the street noting the numbers of the visitor's cars, everyone was anxious and Sonny was angry. The Don calmly put the matter saying, "I don't own the street. They can do as they please." [3]

It shows his mental makeup, unperturbed manner of dealing with situations and confidence that 'nothing is going to happen'.

A seasoned man of negotiation and communication who understand the situation and people also knows how one would act in a particular situation. When the Don mimicked Jonny Fontane in order to reprimand his ways, he knew how each of his sons would have reacted to the mimicry.

'Santino would have sulked and behaved badly for weeks afterward. Fredo would have cowed. Michael would have given him a cold smile and gone out.' [4]

A seasoned communicator also anticipates the effect of his words and actions and manages his communication accordingly.

Negotiation is a day to day even for leaders and managers. It is not just a situation or temporary phase but a prolonged phase where one has learnt negotiation and skills of communicating. It comprises of everything- clarity of thought to begin with, listening, speaking and when to call the shots. Tom Hagen shows wonderful skills of negotiation when he meets Jack Woltz the Hollywood biggie. He keeps his mind calm and focuses only on the core of the negotiation without being carried away even though he was not treated well or abused. The noteworthy thing was he knew his role and limits in the negotiation process and was equipped for the negotiation with all its skills.

'Hagen had learnt the art of negotiation from the Don himself. "Never get angry," the Don had instructed. "Never make a threat. Reason with people". The art of this was to ignore all insults, all threats; to turn the other cheek.' [5]

After all, what is the purpose of negotiation or communication? To get things done or reach a conclusion you desired.

When we talk about communication and expressing, it is also important for leader or manager to know what to

communicate and what not to communicate. A professional who has a bigger picture or the entirety in mind, breaks down the communication process and content as well like WBS to avoid unnecessary hassles and confusion among others. He may be selective in expressing and listening and even discreet in what not to express or listen.

Don Corleone had this insight and smartness of communication.

The Don nodded. He did not think it necessary to mention that he himself had warned the senator not to come. "Did he send a nice present?" [6]

The Don smiled coldly, "No," he said.....It was then that Sonny made an unforgivable error in judgement and procedure. He said eagerly.....Hagen was horrified at this break. He saw the Don turning cold, malevolent eyes on his eldest son.....Sollozzo's eyes flickered again with satisfaction. He had discovered a chink in the Don's fortress. [7]

The Don turned to his son and said, "Santino, never let anyone outside the family know what you are thinking. Never let them know what you have under your fingernails." [8]

In the novel the second most important or famous character is of Michael Corleone, the youngest son of the Don who later on became the next Don. Michael had naturally inherited some of the qualities of his father especially, the clarity of thoughts, calmness in any situation, assertiveness and ultimately driving the things as per your wish. Like the Don's, character of Michael is also worth studying from various aspects of leadership, managerial qualities and communication. Michael was an ardent listener and observer of people like his father and assertive and clear in what he spoke. Throughout we see Michael speaking less like his father but speaking effectively and to the point. While dealing with the situation at home when the Don was shot and in hospital, he observed each one and talked calmly to all asking only pin pointed questions and one can easily see that the questions gave him an overall clarity of the situation and the world his father ruled. Again, as they say, it is not the quantity but quality which is important here. It is not important how much you speak or listen but what you speak or listen. Sometimes, a one liner is more effective than the entire essay.

A trait worth noting in Michael was his frankness and assertiveness when he talked, his tone also would be shaped as per the content and the situation. It is not simulating but a natural trait or comes after time tested practice. The trait many leaders and manager can boast of. He talked to the point and for the effect in the right direction.

When the nurse on pretext of the hospital rules refused to help him in shifting his father, who had a threat of life in the hospital that night, he became persuasive.

'Michael spoke very quickly. "You have read about my father in the papers. You've seen that there's no one here tonight to guard him. Now I've just gotten word some men will come into the hospital to kill him. Please believe me and help me". He could be extraordinarily persuasive when he

wanted to be.' [9]

Michael also was good at sizing up people and the situation and use communication accordingly. When he was hit by the corrupt police officer in hospital who favoured Sollozzo, he kept his anger in check and even when asked by the lawyer he lied about the injury in order to hide his true feelings and motives.

'At all costs he wanted to hide the delicious icy chilliness that controlled his brain, the surge of the wintry cold hatred that pervaded his body.' [10]

Michael also had the knack like his father in practising 'Listen to the message not the words'. It is a wisdom that manager and leaders need to comprehend and practice when dealing with different people and complex situations. When he was negotiation with Sollozzo in the restaurant, he could read the message of threat, fear and desperation in Sollozzo as the Don had survived. There was a receding confidence in Sollozzo and he came to the table out of fear and not interest. Michael understood the message in its entirety and acted accordingly.

One has to comprehend why it is being said, how it is being said and its relevance with the past, current and future situations to understand the message from the words.

3.3. Body Language and Kinesis

In the entire communication gamut, body language or kinesis as they say plays a very significant role. It is said that the body with all its size, contours and movements speak more than the tongue. One must also watch the body movements as it is more important that listening to words sometimes. The Godfather is a fine specimen of these neuro linguistic patterns of people and its varied facets. The depiction of body language, natural or simulated, its role in communication and its effect have been brilliantly dealt with. Many a times it looked that an NLP expert or psychoanalysis expert described the kinesis of individuals, such was the intricacy.

A good communicator understands the importance of body language. So he is conscious about it while practising and observing.

'Sonny was listening intently to every intonation in Clemenza's voice. The emotion seemed genuine but it was part of the fat man's profession to be a good actor.' [11]

'The sudden relief from fear that flooded his body made Hagen flush with shame. Sollozzo watched him with a quiet understanding smile.' 'Hagen saw Sollozzo's face go pale, his eyes glitter with rage. Sollozzo was looking at him speculatively and suddenly Hagen knew that he was no longer to be set free.' [12]

'Paulie Gatto stood up to shake hand...but he sensed tension in the thin dark face.....Michael put these facts and understood.'

It is believed that one can easily simulate or fake the words but under certain conditions especially emotionally and mentally draining conditions, one cannot simulate the kinesis and it reflects what situation of one's mind then. Body is the

first thing that communicates and communicates transparently only thing required is to understand that language with precise observation skills.

4. Conclusion

Communication is a tool for an effective manager or leader not the end to express his thoughts or vent out feelings and frustrations. So he uses it like tool, sparingly and knows when to use which tool and how much. The entire cycle of communication begins from the overall bearing and personality- the mental condition and readiness then- sizing up the situation and persons- the method of communicating from speaking, listening, and body language effectively driving the point or matter home and or comprehending.

'The Godfather' has provided ample of examples of communication, negotiation, kinesics and personality traits and one can learn from such a depiction of human psychology and situation quickly than real life situations sometimes or put them into practice in real life situations.

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