The Use of Modern Tools to Enhance Communication Skills of Managers During the Strategy Process

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Abstract:

Researchers in both academic and practical fields have been seeking to find answers and solutions regarding business and firm issues, through testing hypotheses and trying different techniques; to do so it was necessary to turn towards the most important element and center and actor of every action, that is the individual, especially in such a dynamic environment that have direct and indirect influence on the way the work is done. Because of that, the importance of interindividual communication has become extremely high, especially during the strategy process.

In this context, NLP emerges as a modern set of tools that help develop communication skills which helps in its turn in facilitating the process of attaining goals and facing changes in business environment.

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INTRODUCTION

The affiliation of management sciences with human sciences and its connections with it, was the reason behind management taking the individual as the main subject of its research, and linking it with various variables to study its effect and the impact it has on that latter.

Defining management as the art of using science was proven through its various streams that has multiple approaches, all of which strived to explain the phenomena related to the individual and the firm from their own perspective, for example we find pioneers of the **Classical School** of management, most of whom were engineers who made a shift with the ideas they brought such as: Frederick Taylor and the **Scientific Organization Of Work**, and the **School of Human Relations** that was interested in the individual's role inside the firm and stressed its importance in comparison with the rest of the resources, whose pioneers were researchers in Psychology.

As management science is searching for ways to understand and interpret phenomena related to the individual as well as the firm and its environment by adopting ideas, tools and techniques from different fields and try to experiment and adapt them to the field of business and management, **Strategic Management** as a subfield has its own schools of thoughts that deals with strategic issues from different perspectives. It studies strategy according to various points of view using different tools and frameworks, through which it aspires to help firms handle and govern the strategy process and implement their strategies successfully and reach better levels of performance.

From the ideas and techniques adopted recently, we find the term NLP that penetrated the field of management and

gained great interest, after its success in the field of therapy and its use in other fields such as education, sports, law, training and business (Lime Joey 2015). Where the latter found its way into NLP because of its practical techniques and tools that help developing and improving the communication skills which are considered as a must, especially for managers. The communicational role of managers during the strategy process is considered essential, and researchers have acknowledged and still emphasize its extreme importance and the role that it plays whether directly or indirectly in the firm's success.

Objectives of the study: This research paper's objectives can be summarized as follow

- It gives an abbreviated view on the evolution of the research field of strategic management, and the transition of interest from one component of strategy to the other and from one perspective to the other.

- It emphasizes on the importance of communicational practices of managers especially during the strategy process.

- Elucidate the concept of neuro-linguistic programming, its source and origin, since it is proposed as a set of practical tools that help develop communication skills.

- Finally, it reviews a set of techniques proposed by NLP to improve the communication skills of individuals and a discussion about what makes them extremely important for managers.

The study Hypothesis: the research is based on the following hypothesis

Since NLP techniques have shown their relevance with existing models and theories in communication management and proved theirs utility in various field other than business, then it may produce an answer and a practical solution to improve managers interindividual communication skills, which can lead to a better understanding and interpretation of the strategic goals and objectives; in other words, a better deployment and implantation through the strategy process.

1 Litterature review

1 1 The strategy process

The concept of strategy originates from its earliest appearance in military use, and was later applied in the context of organizations. Therefore, if we observe the research on strategy in the organizational context we will find that strategy literature's definition and focus have evolved over time with the rising of different schools of thoughts (Ikavalko, 2005) ; Wittington pointed the importance of theories and he stated : « theories are important they contain our basic assumptions about key relationships in business life, theories tell us what to look out for, what our first steps should be, and what to expect as a result of our actions » (Wittington, 2001).

That is why we will discuss the development of strategic management's fields and point the main orientations of the research in the field. To do so, a brief overview based on two research articles that analyze the research on strategic management development and the book of Wittington in which he proposed a division of the different approaches that will be used.

The first article written by Anne. S. Huff and Honda Key Reger in 1987 in which they reviewed the evolution of strategy

process research in seven leading journals reported over a period of six years prior to the year their article was published.

The second article cowritten by : Oliver Furrer, Howard Thomas and Anna Gousevskia in 2008, who analyzes 26 years of strategic management research published in four leading journals of the field. And Richard Wittington's book published in 2001.

Authors traced the beginnings of the strategic management field to 1960s in the words of: *Alfred Chandler's – strategy and structure 1962, Igor Ansoff's – corporate strategy 1965; Andrew's – the concept of strategic management 1971.* (Furrer, Howard , & Goussevskaia, 2008), (Huff & Kay Reger, 1987).

Then Furrer et all continues saying that 1970s period was a transition towards a research orientation and was characterized by the development of a dichotomy between two sets of research based on very different ontological and epistemological perspectives, which Anne and Rhonda mentioned in their article as a dichotomy between those who have focused on the process of the strategy versus its content (Furrer, Howard , & Goussevskaia, 2008).

In the other hand Wittington also suggested a classification of different approaches that studied strategy process in a book entitled : « what is strategy and does it matter ? » where he interduces the book with a chapter about four generic approaches to strategy each has very different conceptions of what strategy is about and how to actually do it. the following table summarizes the different views on strategy that he proposed.

Table 1. Strategy process from different perspectives of strategy

Perspective of strategy	What is strategy process like?
Classical approach	A process of calculation, analysis and rational decision-making of top managers, followed by implementation (by changing structure)
Evolutionary approach	Environment defines survival, the question of strategy process of an organization is irrelevant
Proceesual approach	Instead of formal planning process, strategy process is a pragmatic process of learning and compromise, which can also shape the strategy
Systemic approach	The process depends on the particular social system in which strategy-making takes place

Source: Heini Ikavalko, 2005, page 07

The four approaches differ fundamentally within two dimensions: the outcomes of strategy and the process by which is it made (Whittington, 2001). The previous table shows the difference according to the second dimension that dealt with how each approach sees and define the strategy process.

Although the study of strategy was carried out through tracking the events that ran the course of research and directed attention and focus from one side to another and from one component to the other, we find that firms actually adopt a mixture of the above-mentioned and employ them according to the context in which they are, whether intentionally or automatically. The bottom line is that it is hard to determine an

optimal way to see the strategy, but by relating it to the market, to the organizational and social environment, each approach can find its place (Whittington, 2001).

In this research, a focus will be placed on the aspect of communication practices during the process of strategy and how to develop individual communication skills, especially those who have direct or huge implication in this process.

To illustrate this idea we will point out what Altonen & Ikavalko mentioned in their research about implementing strategies where they stated that for the firms to implement their strategies successfully, the process should be described in an informative and comprehensive style.

They define several points to focus on, which are : **where the process starts and where it ends ? What are the most important phases in the process ? Who participates in the process and in what kind of role ?** (Aaltonen & Ikavalko, 2002).

The last point brings us to the most important element in the strategy process and the main reason for this research, that is the individual or precisely the manager and the sensitive role that he plays in the strategy process through communication in particular ; here again both Altonen & Ikavalko highlight the role of managers (middle managers) in strategy communication in which they describe as pivotal, they mentioned that for the strategic actors (individuals involved with the strategy process) to succeed in their role they must be aware of it first. So one of the managers tasks is to make the strategic actors consider their role through communication, and to do that, managers require adequate communication skills to succeed in their communicative role (Aaltonen & Ikavalko, 2002).

As one of the most recent tools used to develop such skills, we will be discussing in the following section what is known as neuro-linguistic programming, this set of tools that was developed and inspired by the observation of interpersonal communication patterns, and that hold an interesting view to what interindividual communication is and how to improve it.
A tool that holds the organization of information to achieve results at its core (Lubella, 2011).

1 2 Neuro- Linguistic- Programming

Although NLP itself is not very connected with theory, it is founded by four extremely successful people who revolutionized the world of communication, two of them were the co-founders of NLP Richard Bandler and Jhon Grinder.

It all started when Richard Bandler who was preparing a PhD in Psychology at the university of Santa Cruz California, who met in 1973 with Jhon grinder who had a degree in psychology and a PhD in linguistics from the university of San Diego California (Cudicio, 2004).

Grinder supervised Bandler during his reproduction of Fritz Perls's technique the Gasthalt therapy, he analyses the linguistic paradigms in fritz technique used by Bandler ,then they both modeled those patterns and Perlz became the first model in NLP, after that they decided to do the same thing with other well-known therapists at that time Virginia Satir and Milton Erickson (Guirod, 2017).
The outcome of their research was three books they published during the time they worked together, and they are:

1 *the structure of magic volume 1&2 – 1975-1976*
2 *patterns of the hypnotique technique 1976*
3 *changing with families 1976*

The first and second book contained basic knowledge and theoretical models of NLP techniques (Cudicio, 2004), the term NLP was used at the end of the second edition of the book.

The second book as its title indicates, talked about the unique techniques Erickson used in hypnosis, while the third talked about Satir's approach in therapy (Cudicio, 2004). Tracing the Biography of these researchers and therapist enables us to link NLP to its roots, its theoretical and practical origins. The following figure gives an idea about the main actors whose ideas and works had a direct or indirect influence in NLPs foundation.

Neuro-linguistic programming – the concept idiomatic

we can see the impact of different researchers' thoughts in the work of **GRINDER** and **BANDLER**, for example when Grinder studied linguistics, he was influenced by Alfred Korzybski's work on general semantics, and its effect appeared on Bandler and Grinder's use of the term linguistic programming, a term that first appeared in one of **Alfred Korzybski's** most famous books: *«Science and sanity, an introduction to a non-Arestotelian systems and general semantic »1933.*

Dismantling the compound term of Neuro-Linguistic Programming enables us to better understand what it is and the sciences on which it is based on. Neuro in NLP stands for the basic idea that all behavior is a result of neurological process triggered by our five senses as we experience the world, make sense of the information we get from it, through the our neurvous system which influence our feelings and behavior (Hejase, 2015)

As for the term linguistic, it refers according to Linder-pels and Hall to the way language is used to make sense of the

world, and how the experience is captured and communicated to others (Oberholzer, 2013), while the term neuro-linguistic means the way the nervous system controls our perceptions and their manifestation in our language and behavior (Cudicio, 2004).

Then we have the term Programming that denotes the way actions are arranged to reach goals (O'connor, 2001).

After examining the significance of each term in NLP separately, here are some definitions proposed by researchers and those interested in this field. We will start by Gregory Bateson's description of NLP as « the first systematic approach to learning how to learn, and the first applied epistemology » (M.Brunner, 1993).

While John Grinders describes it as an accelerated learning strategy for the detection and utilization of patterns in the world (Hays, 2006), others define it as a systematic method of studying human communication (O'connor, 2001).

finally we will finish by Robert Dilts, who proposed definition to NLP where he tried to touch as many aspects as possible **«** The words that make up this term denote The three components that most affect the human experience: the nervous aspects, programming and language The nervous system plays the role of the regulator in the body's work, the language interferes with communication and interaction with others, and programming affects the patterns that we create in reality. It is a realistic, epistemological and multidimensional school that involves developing behavioral competence and resilience as well as the way of strategic thinking and understanding of the cognitive process underlying behavior, and supports communication skills »(Cudicio, 2004).

1 3 NLP Techniques that Help Improve Managers

Communicational Skills

Neuro-Linguistic programming includes a powerful set of techniques, that have a great impact on the interindividual communication, the most commonly used and related directly to interindividual communication and interaction are : Rapport, Leading and Pacing, Reframing, and Precision questions. These techniques can be used by managers to improve the quality of their communication, which in turn will help them lead their teams in a smooth manner that ensures the achievement of both individuals' and the firm's goals.

Before getting to know these techniques, we must talk about one of the most important and basic findings of Bandler And Grinder which a lot of NLP techniques depend on, the way information is received, stored, and encoded in our minds using the sense of hearing, seeing and touching that NLP calls representational systems : Visual, Auditory, and Kinesthetic that includes everything that relies on the sense of touch, taste, and smell, also that people tend to use one of these more often than the others (O'connor & Seymour, Introducing NLP, 1993).

O'connor said that if the loop of communication has any beginning, it starts with our senses, they are the doors of perception and the only points of contact with the world…When we think about what we see, hear and feel we recreate these sights sounds and feelings inwardly, we conceive and attribute meaning to these received information, the funny thing is that we tend to think about what we think about, not how we think about it also we assume that other people think in the same way as we do (O'connor & Seymour, Introducing NLP, 1993).

In fact, while Grinder and Bandler were recreating the Gastalt therapy sessions, they defined the characteristics of individuals belonging to each category and made clear how they

can be identified through their spoken and physical language since language reflects the representational system we prefer

Knowing such details is very important to analyze the messages we receive from others and enables us to create an atmosphere of sympathy by speaking in the same language as they do and knowing how they are receiving our messages and be aware of the manner they may experience a situation.

This brings us to the first NLP technique that helps improve communication among managers and their staff, and contribute significantly in creating confidence among them in preparation for the stage of delivering the messages they want which is called Rapport.

 Rapport is the mirroring process which is matching the body language, posture, breathing, tonality through following the person to create a harmonious environment after identifying the main sensory perception of the person, since different sensory perceptions use different types of rapport (Yazdanifard & Lime , 2015). It is also important to mention that the process of mirroring is not a blind imitation of the person's gestures and words, as it is considered rude and unacceptable behavior.

The second technique, is pacing and leading, like rapport pacing enables the speaker to build a bridge of trust towards others, and the only difference is the manner in which pacing is established , while rapport relies on a mirroring process of verbal and non-verbal language, pacing works by showing others understanding towards them. The choice of words can be used to show understanding and appreciation of the other person's point of view (Yazdanifard & Lime , 2015).

Once that comfortable atmosphere is created, the communicator's behavior can begin to change gradually and the other person will be more likely to follow smoothly and be

responsive towards what is being communicated (O'connor & Seymour, Introducing NLP, 1993).

The third technique is called Reframing and it is the process whereby a component of communication is showed so as to change a person's perception to the definitions by focusing on the choice of words used (Yazdanifard & Lime , 2015). Robert Dilts believes that Reframing allows any behavior to be the subject of an adaptation process according to the particularities of the context in which it occurs.

Reframing does not change the main picture of a behavior or an event, but rather the way it is viewed, it is commonly used to modify perspective (Kotera & VanGordon, 2018).

The last thing that will be discussed is the technique of using Precision questions or the Meta Model, and to understand this technique, we will start by explaining the language structure suggested by the linguist Noam Chomsky, he distinguished two levels of language : *Surface structure*- everything we say, either to ourselves or to other people and *Deep structure*-the underlying meaning of what we say, containing information neither expressed nor known consciously (Knight, 2002).

Sue Knight explains that the intent of communication can be lost or changed in the process of converting one to the other, and states that it is necessary to recognize the habits or processes that occur in our thinking on a daily basis and that spoil our language, these habits are: *Deletion*, *Generalization* and *Distortion*. We delete, distort, and generalize information so that it becomes disconnected from its deeper meaning this result to our use of an imprecise form of language in speech described as lazy language (Knight, 2002).

Below is a sample of linguistic patterns and examples of questions that have been proposed by Grinder and Bandler that are used in processing these linguistic patterns to obtain

information accurately and reach the implicit meaning of what is being communicated.

The following example of Metamodel helps us, as Ahsan and Mamuna mentioned in their article, answer quite fascinating questions about the process of communication itself (Ahsan & Mamuna, 2012).

Fig.1. Meta Model
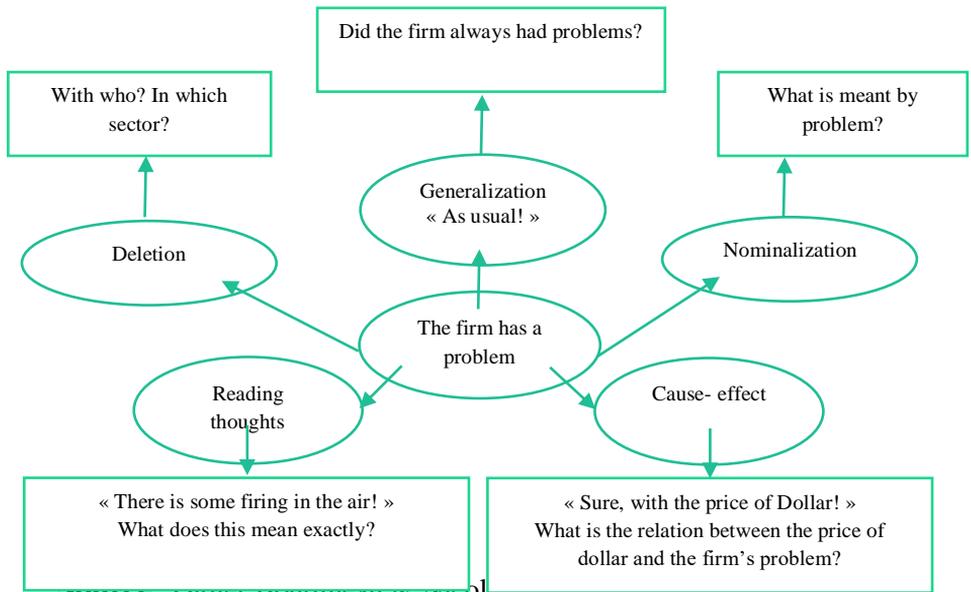
Source: Didier Boudineau & Nicole Catona, 2006, page 212

NLP techniques may be used to improve work performance by reducing language barriers and boosting confidence. As leaders (managers and senior managers) have to be able to understand the language of their subordinates, they can achieve this by incorporating the methods that NLP is known for (reframing, meta model…), calibrate the needs and capabilities of their members, initiate useful activities, and maintain rapport through good communication skills and find the right formula that make it work.

NLP's practical techniques boost managers' communication skills to a whole new level, it helps them find the appropriate response to critical situations, crisis and ways to negotiate. As mentioned before, NLP techniques allow to recognize linguistic patterns, and cognitive processes underlying behavior, reading signals of non-verbal language (body language) that could be crucial to elaborate the best way to get the best outcome possible which sometimes can be crucial for the company's future when talking about a process of formulating deploying and implementing new strategies.

2 presenting the case study

To give our research credibility, we tried to investigate empirically the use of NLP techniques and its possible contribution in the element of communication through a qualitative investigation, by the means of a set of interviews held with some managers and senior manager at **Condor Electronics -**a Branch of Ben Hammadi Group specialized in manufacturing electronic and multimedia devices situated in BBA.

Since it was difficult to reach the information about the possible interest and use of NLP directly, we tried to investigate the training programs that the company schedualed to its members (staf and managers and senior managers) and look for the techniques of NLP that might be implicitly included , and if there is an interest and use of this particular set of tools as a means to boost and elevate manager's communication capacities.

2 1 Cheking the possible use of NLP communication techniques by Condor Electronics's managers

After meeting with an employee in the reports section of the Human Resources department, whose task is to collect, sort

and analyze employees's performance data and compare them with indicators to measure performance of different departments. A set of training courses that the employees underwent at the end of 2019 and the beginning of 2020 were reviewed, and a set of potential programs were selected for objectives related to the communication aspect, which could contain and use NLP techniques, even in an implicit or indirect manner.

To see the content of those programs, we interviewed the director of Condor Academy, who provided us with documents about two programs we thought could serve the purpose of the research, investigating training programs that aim to elevate communication skills).

TRANNING PROGRAM NUMBER 1 leadership et development personnel

Condor Academy director explained that this Training peogram was held on the forme of one day seminar and was dedicated to high level managers in the company's hierarchy, and which he was one of the participating mumbers.

He further explained the objectives of that seminar which we mention as follow: Explore and understand leadership roles, learn to adapt the leadership style to the context, enhancing the sense of responsibility among employees while creating an environment of trust within the team, finding the right level of influence and control, learn how to build a future vision, communicate it to their teams while preparing them and pushing them towards change projects, and learn how to act on the pillars of informal power and exploit their influence to practice a horizontal management style based on trust.

TRANNING PROGRAM NUMBER 2 Formation de Formateurs

This course revolves around training the trainers, as expressed by the Director of the Training Center. It is intended for a group of managers with important practical and technical skills in the various disciplines that the company contains. Its purpose is to provide them with the skills to transfer knowledge, experience and skills to other employees.

the training center aspires to train an elite group of employees on training skills so that the company can exploit these new capabilities and dispense with the external trainers and traning centers.

This course included a five-day training aimed at: enable the trainee to define the pedagogical goal, enabling the trainee to acquire the ability to adapt the methods and styles of communication according to different pedagogical situations, good use of assistive devices and technologies, learn the methods of evaluation in the various stages of the cycle, with the identification of the necessary adjustment methods.

After looking at the detailed course program for the five days, we found that on the fourth day of the course, a simulation was carried out by the trainees on topics of their choices. What caught our attention was that the first simulation was intended to focus on the elements of non-verbal communication, and the second simulation was based on the use of the principles of Neuro-Linguistic Programming as stated in the file related to the program course, but without mentionning in detail what techniques were used.

2 2 Discussion

After Analyzing the content of the programs presented in the previouse section, and how they were divided in order to realize the above-mentioned objectives, we came to the following conclusions:

Concerning the first training program, after checking the most important references used to make the content of the lecture, as well as a detailed conversation with the director of Condor Academy as one of the participants in the course, the conclusion was reached that this course did not include any sign on addressing or using NLP techniques.

Concerning the second training program, despite the importance of the goal for which middle managers were subjected to such a program, the context in which NLP was used is far from using its techniques for developing communication skills in order to better communicate during the strategy process.

However, it is possible that these aquired skills can be used by managers in other ways if they realize the importance of exploring them during their daily communication and including them in their strategic discourse to communicate informations related to strategy.

CONCLUSION

Because of the growing recognition of the importance of communicational aspects in the strategy process, this research paper focused on one aspect of communication which is the interindividual communication, and emphasized the communicational task of managers by pointing how crucial their role can be in the firm's strategy process, and that it could be an enormous leverage if managers had well-developed communication skills, then proposed one of various methods or ways to do so, which is the **Neuro-Linguistic Programming** techniques related to interindividual communication, and explained their practicality and why they may have a very desirable outcome when it comes to getting messages across different levels , motivating staff, establishment of buyout and

strong formal and informal communication channels that support the strategy process and other organizational practices and activities.

After that, a survey was conducted in Condor Electronics, one of the ambitiouse Algerian Firms, which is keen to adopt and use modern administrative methods in management, and the following results were reached:

There is an interest in training managers at various organizational levels of the firm , especially Senior Managers and Middle Managers on skills that can be described as behavioral and on communication skills, for example, leadership and negotiation and others.

It turned out that the use of NLP in the training programs that Condor's middle managers underwent was implicit, but for purposes other than strengthening the communication skills of managers, but rather for pedagogical purposes related to the transfer of knowledge, experiences and training.

Based on the results reached, we find that this opens the horizon for a deeper future research to investigate whether the skills acquired from learning NLP techniques have a possible positive impact on the daily communication of the managers subjected to such programs.

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