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COMMUNICATION APPREHENSION: A CONCEPTUAL OVERVIEW**ANJALI PASHANKAR.****ASST. PROFESSOR****SHREE CHANAKYA EDUCATION SOCIETY'S****INDIRA SCHOOL OF BUSINESS STUDIES****PUNE****ABSTRACT**

Researchers and industry experts have extensively discussed the importance and role of communication skills in the today's world. Communication skills are commonly understood as the ability to write, speak and present in English. It is important to note that several factors can affect the development of communication skills and one of them is Communication Apprehension. "CA" or Communication Apprehension is defined as the "individual's level of fear or anxiety associated with either real or anticipated communication with another person or persons" (McCroskey 1977). Studies of communication apprehension deal with problems related to communication avoidance and anxiety. This paper discusses the concept of communication apprehension, causes of communication apprehension and suggests possible areas for further research.

KEYWORDS

Communication apprehension, PRCA 24, communication avoidance, anxiety, communication.

INTRODUCTION & IMPORTANCE OF THE STUDY

Good communications means what you intent to say has been conveyed to the receiver without any distortions or misunderstanding in the meaning. This is important in personal communication with friends and relatives well as professional life where communication is with a co-worker on one-on-one basis or in a meeting with several or more people. Good communication skills help to get the job done well and on time. People who communicate well in any form are often able to contribute to the company more. Such communicators are highly valued in today's complex and competitive business world, and are often earmarked for promotion and increased responsibility. Poor communicators are not necessarily incompetent communicators, but they are often known to suffer from fear or anxiety that profoundly affects their ability to communicate well and may well affect their self esteem and social skills. This debilitating condition often not discussed or even acknowledged is called "Communication Apprehension". It can also be understood as the anxiety an individual experiences when he or she engages or anticipates communication in different forms.

Over the years many communication experts have tried to understand the impact of individual's fear and anxiety on his ability to communicate orally. It has often been observed that higher the level of anxiety one experiences the greater the negative impact on communication and sometimes even in other areas of life. Communication skills are commonly understood to be oral & written English, however the apprehensions one experiences in areas like public speaking are not language specific. Everyone will agree that competent communication skills are essential for success in any business area. Therefore having apprehensions while communicating with others will affect the degree of success.

Usually communication apprehensive people may not appear apprehensive unless they are exposed to a communication in unfamiliar surroundings and people. It has been noticed that individuals rarely face communication apprehension in friendly and safe environment. Friendly environment affirms positive and helpful reaction while communicating, so we feel comfortable in sharing information, in answering questions, and in giving speeches in friendly environment.

Two prime factors affecting communication apprehension are hereditary and the existing circumstances of the person. In other words, we can either be born with certain innate characteristics or we can acquire them through learning. However the existing surrounding conditions are more dominating than genetic inheritance. Some of the elements, which are supposed to be the situational-causes of communication apprehension are low childhood nurturance, subordinate status, unfamiliarity, dissimilarity, the degree of attention from others, evaluation and prior history including schooling and higher education. If an individual is introduced to a novel situation, which may develop concerns and fears like how to deal with the new situation, this concern can result in anxiety. A person may be communication apprehensive in one situation but not in another. Additionally, as communication does not confine itself to just talk, a person may, for example, be apprehensive about communicating by engaging in talk but feel quite comfortable while writing.

Hence it is important to study and understand what type of anxiety affects the individual to be able to address his or her apprehensions.

RELATED LITERATURE

Recent researchers have expanded Communication Apprehensions to include *state-like* communication apprehension, or anxiety associated with particular communication contexts. Personal traits also contribute to Communication Apprehensions.

Glaser (1981) presented his 'Negative Cognitive Appraisal Model' which assumes that the quiet child is criticized for his or her early language performance and the child learns to expect negative reactions and subsequently as a reaction he learns to avoid them by keeping quiet.

Gumperz's (1982) presented "Interactional Model" of communication that takes communication as the outcome of exchanges involving more than one active participant. According to Gumperz (1977: 199) contextualizing cue is "any aspect of the surface form of utterances which, can be shown to be functional in the signaling of interpretative frames when mapped onto message content."

Later on, Neer (1987) developed a contextual model of Communication Apprehension, to assess the apprehension felt by a student toward communicating within the context of the classroom environment, which was targeted at the classroom environment about Participation

Wilder (1999) gave the five basic sources of fear of speaking in public. These fears take one of five forms: I) career terror, ii) perfectionism, iii) panic IV) avoidance and v) trauma. Wilder defines the five fears as follows: career terror is "rooted in the awful feeling that your job, your career, your future is on the line every time you step before a group, enter a meeting, or pick up the telephone". Perfectionism paralyzes the speaker when they demand of themselves that each speech or presentation be perfect. Panic is the combination of unreasonable expectations with fear of failure and real physical symptoms. Avoidance "is a self-sabotage that virtually guarantees anxiety, fear, and diminished performance". Trauma is fear rooted in a long history of being told you're not good enough.

This paper relies extensively on the works of James McCroskey who first defined the term "communication Apprehension" with reference to the anxiety real or anticipated in relation to communication.

OBJECTIVES OF THIS PAPER

This paper hope to throw light on the concept called "communication apprehension" that affects the individual's communication competency and discuss research done in understanding communication apprehensions. The broad objectives of this research paper are to discuss the concept of "communication Apprehension" as given by James McCroskey, recognize the different types of apprehensions- general and specific communication apprehensions, understand the causes and effects of communication apprehension and suggest ways to treat communication apprehension. The papers also elucidates on the important research done in this area by earlier researchers.

DEFINITION OF COMMUNICATION APPREHENSION

One of the primary elements found to be associated with poor communication skills development is a phenomenon known as Communication Apprehension (CA), that is, an "individual's level of fear or anxiety associated with either real or anticipated communication with another person or persons" (McCroskey 1977). Communication Apprehension is one perspective dealing with general concern about problems with communication avoidance and anxiety (McCroskey, 1984a) and it has received substantial attention from communication scholars.

This definition makes two important points about CA. First, it is an anxiety-based response and is similar to the wide range of phobias that can be found in the areas of psychology and psychiatry. The second issue that is raised by this definition is that CA can be produced by merely thinking about or anticipating having to communicate. In effect a person does not have to be placed in a communication situation to be effected by CA. Rather the thought of communication alone can generate significant levels of anxiety

James McCroskey (1970) was the first person to float the idea of Communication Apprehension in "Communication Monographs". He operationally defined a one-dimensional 24-item scale called the Personal Report of Communication Apprehension (PRCA) that has been the dominant and frequently used assessment measure. PRCA scale does not purport to be a direct measure of actual communication. Rather, it is a measure of anxiety related to anticipated communication (Chan and McCroskey, 1987). The scale provides six questions for each of the four specific communication settings: Public speaking, participation in meetings, Group discussion and dyads (two person conversations). Questions are randomized within the questionnaire and responses are scored on a five point Likert scale based on whether the subject agrees or disagrees with the statement. Choice of "1" indicates strongly agree and choice of "5" indicates strong disagreement. The instrument contains a mix of positively and negatively contained phrases for the subject to evaluate to avoid bias. Scoring is done by adding the responses of positively worded statements and subtracting from the responses of negatively worded phrases. Completing the scale allows the user to know where he or she falls within the normative range of scores. Scores on the PRCA24 scale should range between 24 and 120 (if they are below 24 or more than 120, a computational error has been made). The PRCA24 scale is designed to measure a general trait of communication apprehension—how a person typically reacts to oral communication with others. The higher a person scores on the PRCA, the more apprehension that person generally feels about communicating.

Another definition of CA is anxiety or fear of communicating in different situations. According to Berger, McCroskey & Baldwin (1984), it is "the way a person *feels* about communication, not *how* they communicate". Even those who have high level of proficiency in a language can experience CA. Some people may be good at communicating through writing but they may have problems speaking in front of an audience. Some may be good at interpersonal communication, but may not feel comfortable making presentations and vice versa.

TYPES OF COMMUNICATION APPREHENSION

Communication apprehensions are often learnt as people learn the expectation about outcomes of communication interchanges with others. When expectations are confirmed people develop confidence and when they are different from expectations, the person is unable to successfully predict actions of others. This leads to anxiety and is often reduced by avoiding communication opportunities or minimizing opportunities for interactions.

To a person of high communication apprehension, avoidance of communication opportunities removes the possibility of unpleasant feelings and consequences and thus avoidance of communication opportunities may take the form of a reward than possible opportunities to interact. Although McCroskey (1970) gave the construct of CA he did not specify whether it is a trait of an individual or a response to the situational elements of a specific communication transaction (a state).

Trait like CA is viewed as relatively enduring, personality type orientation toward a given mode of communication across a wide variety of contexts (McCroskey, 1984a). A trait is a relatively consistent aspect of our personality or communication. It tends to be enduring and omnipresent. When CA exists as a trait, it means that the anxiety over communication is present regardless of any environmental circumstance. No matter whom we are speaking with, no matter where or when, an anxiety reaction exists. Thus communication of any sort public or intimate, serious or banal is problematic. Even talking with a parent or spouse can prove difficult. For those with high CA there is little escape from the anxiety that plagues them. The anxiety one experiences with trait CA is as real as any other phobia experienced. Individuals with high apprehensions are not necessarily incompetent communicators but often perceive themselves to be so.

Trait CA can also have strong physical symptoms like increased blood pressure, heart rate and breathing before communicating. State CA is on the other hand relatively short-lived and is usually caused by situational cues such as novelty, evaluation apprehension and formality. However research has shown that trait-like personality variables though resistant to change are often changed during adulthood. Therefore people having high CA can undergo treatment and change.

Trait like communication apprehension indicates that communication apprehension is a part of the personality of an individual. Such a trait is most important for those people who have either very high or very low levels of communication apprehension. It is this trait that the total score on the PRCA scale was designed to measure. An extreme score on this measure suggests that the behavior of an individual is influenced as much, if not more, by general fear or anxiety about communication as by any specifics of a communication situation in which the individual find himself or herself. At the extremes of the trait, an individual either experiences high degrees of anxiety in most communication situations or experiences very low degrees of anxiety in most communications situations. At one end are the people who are called "high CAs" (those who have high communication apprehension), and at the other end are the people who are called "low CAs" (those who have low communication apprehension). The people who are called "moderate CAs" (those who have moderate communication apprehension) are those who fall in the normal range. All three of these terms refer to trait communication apprehension.

Generalized Context CA refers to apprehensions in general context such as fear of public speaking. This implies that people can be highly apprehensive about communication in one type of context while having less or no apprehension in another context. McCroskey (1984a) identified four classic types of CA contexts: public speaking, speaking in formal meetings, speaking in small group discussions and speaking in dyadic interactions. McCroskey (1984a) argued that even research into twins has provided evidence that something other than environmentally based learning impacts on human behavior tendencies. He also stated that significant social traits like sociability can be measured in infants' shortly after birth and that there are significant differences on these traits. The interaction between heredity and environment can be understood as a precursor of adult predispositions and tendencies of CA. The causes of situational CA are much clearer than those offered for trait like CA. Buss (1980) suggested that factors such as novelty, formality, subordinate status increased apprehension.

Communication apprehension can be divided into oral communication apprehension and written apprehension. The term is also used specifically to refer to oral communication as measured by McCroskey's (1986) Personal Report of Communication Apprehension (PRCA). Writing apprehension (WA) refers to an avoidance of written tasks, a feeling of frustration and poor performance when faced with a writing task and a fear of having one's writing read publicly and evaluated (Daly and Miller, 1975, Scott and Timmerman, 2005, Mabrito 1991 and 2000).

Finally Richmond & McCroskey (1998) suggest that there are at least four types of communication apprehensions: (1) trait-like communication apprehension, which cuts across time, receiver, and situation; (2) context-based communication apprehension, which is associated with a single type of communication context cutting across receiver and time; (3) audience-based communication apprehension, which is associated with a single receiver or group of receivers cutting across context and time; and (4) situational communication apprehension, which is specific to a given context with a given receiver at a given time

THE CAUSES OF COMMUNICATION APPREHENSION

The causes of situational apprehension may be generated by the following eight elements: novelty, formality, subordinate status, conspicuousness, unfamiliarity, dissimilarity, excessive attention, and evaluation from others. The first day of a new class or a new job can be a difficult situation to deal with initially. It is the novelty of the situation that causes the anxiety. In fact, such novel situations may prevent people from being comfortable communicating with others.

Formal situations are associated with highly prescribed behaviors. In these situations, the prescribed behaviors are deemed appropriate and there is little scope for deviation from them. The same is true for subordinate status. In this situation, the person holding the higher status (e.g., an instructor to a student) defines what appropriate behavior is. Being conspicuous can also increase a person's communication apprehension. For example, when a person is put "on the spot," such as when giving a speech or introducing a speaker to an audience, the person can experience heightened anxiety. Unfamiliarity is involved when a person attends a social gathering and only knows one or two other people. Generally, the more unfamiliar the people and situation around one, the more apprehensive

a person feels. In much the same way, dissimilarity of those around one causes communication apprehension to increase. For the most part, talking to people who are similar to oneself is easier than talking to people who are different. For example, if an individual is an English major, he or she may find it hard to carry on a conversation with a person who is engineering major. There are always exceptions. Some people are less comfortable when they are talking to people who are like themselves than when they are talking to people who are very different, or even strangers. This happens because the former is more likely to make evaluations that may prove threatening. Likewise most people do not like others staring at them. Neither do they care to be ignored by others. A moderate degree of attention from others is usually the most comfortable situation. Excessive attention, such as staring or having someone probe into one's private thoughts, can cause the level of communication apprehension to rise sharply.

The underlying assumption of expectancy learning or learned helplessness, as applied to communication apprehension, is that people develop expectations about other people and situations and about the probable outcomes of communication with those people and/or in those situations. A person develops confidence in his or her communication to the extent that such expectations are fulfilled. When expectations are not met, the individual develops a need to form new expectations. If expectations are not continually met, the person may develop a lack of confidence. Anxiety is produced when no appropriate expectations can be formed. Fear is produced when expectations lead to negative outcomes that are difficult or impossible to avoid. These two occurrences, according to expectancy-learning theory, are the foundation of communication apprehension.

When a person engages in communicative behaviors that work i.e. when he or she receives reinforcement for the communication, that person develops positive expectations for those behaviors. The behaviors become a regular part of the person's communicative "storehouse". One of the most general expectations in life is to have regularity in one's environment. People expect to be reinforced for some behaviors and not reinforced for others. Reinforcement, or the lack of it, is the outcome that people learn to expect by continually engaging in certain behaviors over time and across situations. From this process, three things can happen: (1) people develop new positive expectations, (2) people develop new negative expectations, or (3) people become helpless. Negative expectations are developed in much the same way as positive expectations. People discover that some communicative behaviors lead to punishment or lack of reinforcement, and they tend to reduce those behaviors.

CONSEQUENCES OF COMMUNICATION APPREHENSION

The consequences of CA are emotional, educational, and social. Shyness and reticence affect the social skills necessary to make friends and build strong social and professional networks. It has been observed that shy students tend to confine their career aspirations to vocations that require little oral communication. Students with high CA often resist participating in class interactions and related activities. This in turn has a negative, spiraling effect--they are perceived as less capable, and are thus called on less frequently in class discussion. Their lack of initiative makes them less prone to attention by the teachers. A person's communication behavior also affects the way he or she is perceived by others. Higher and confident participation leads to greater perception of credibility, attractiveness and often leadership.

Trait CA particularly has a profound effect on those who suffer from it. Since it is a predominant feature of their personalities and cuts across contexts and specific relationships and situations, it has an impact on most aspects of their lives. In response to threats of all kinds, humans have two basic tendencies--fight or flight. For those with high CA the typical response is flight. This comes in the form of avoidance or withdrawal from communication. Avoidance involves managing communication demands so that communication does not take place. In educational settings, they may miss oral communication assignments. At work they are unlikely to volunteer for team projects, rather preferring to work alone. When communication cannot be avoided, they may attempt to withdraw from communication. At school they will choose seats in low interaction areas of the room along the back and sides.

Socially, people with high CA tend to have smaller friendship networks and professionally gravitate to professions they believe will involve low or less communication tasks or responsibilities.

Behavioral interventions are generally additional approaches to the communication tasks and work on an individual's physiological and or psychological state and include systematic desensitization, cognitive restructuring, assertiveness training, stress release exercises and visualization techniques. Pedagogical approach focuses more directly on communication tasks and seeks to promote success in communication tasks as a means to reduce apprehensions. Some researchers have also suggested structuring programs in which the writer should be allowed to view writing as a successful experience. More research is required to identify techniques suitable for classroom use.

APPROACHES TO TREATMENT OF COMMUNICATION APPREHENSION

Although skills' training is an important aspect of communication competence, it is not necessarily an effective way of managing Communication Apprehension. Improving skills does not necessarily reduce CA and vice-versa. Forcing an individual with high CA to make additional oral presentations may in fact increase the apprehension. It cannot be assumed that simply increasing the subject's opportunity to participate in writing and oral communication assignments will result in anticipated improvement in the skills. They may acquire the skills and they may perform, but it does nothing to improve their feeling for communication and may even reinforce their beliefs about how difficult or unpleasant it is because *how we feel about communication is a critical factor in communication competence*.

Systematic Desensitization (SD) and Cognitive Restructuring (CR) have consistently demonstrated that they can reduce levels of trait communication apprehension. Systematic Desensitization is a form of treatment or therapy for phobias, fears, and aversions that people have. The idea is to reduce a person's anxiety responses through counter-conditioning - a person who learned to be afraid of something is associating fear with that object or behavior, and the way to eliminate this is to teach the person to replace the feelings of anxiety with feelings of relaxation when the object or behavior is present. Cognitive Restructuring, on the other hand is a set of techniques for becoming more aware of our thoughts and for modifying them when they are distorted or are not useful. CR uses reason and evidence to replace distorted thought patterns with more accurate, believable, and functional ones. SD proceeds from the belief that anxiety is a learned or conditioned response to communication and therefore tries to condition the relaxation response to communication. This involves relation training such as using relaxing imagery to put the individual in a state of deep relaxation and pairing the communication with relaxation. In SD, the basic premise is - the physical & behavioral tension that the body resorts to is in response to anxiety thus if the tension is managed then the problem is managed.

Cognitive Restructuring works on the premise that the individual is thinking the wrong kinds of thoughts in response to the anxiety. The goal then is to identify the unproductive thinking and replace it with more productive thoughts. So that if they find themselves thinking about how stupid they appear, or how incompetent they seem, or that the audience is silently laughing at them, the therapists goal is to replace those thoughts with more productive and success oriented thoughts. This takes considerably more time to accomplish than SD although the techniques are similar.

CONCLUSIONS AND AREAS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

Communication apprehension is relatively new area in India; however the potential to apply it in educational or business areas is very high. Apprehensions about communications can prevent the individual from effectively communicating. Therefore an apprehensive communicator may not be distinguishable from an incompetent communicator. Research can be undertaken to study if there is relationship between mother tongue and communication apprehension as well as educational factors and communication apprehension. Since we have a plethora of languages and dialects a study of mother tongue interference particularly with reference to English speaking can help students from vernacular mediums understand and address their fears of speaking and writing English confidently.

In the education field a study of apprehensions based on gender and social background will also contribute in more focused syllabus for both undergraduate and post graduate courses.

Further studies in CA will also contribute to give goal directed training to students to reduce their apprehensions and improve their employability. This is very relevant today as competence in English has become an important factor in enhancing career prospects in almost any sector. Students are technically trained in their respective specializations but many fail to impress during the interviews due to weak communication skills which may be linked to communication apprehensions not identified or acknowledged therefore not treated.

In conclusion communication apprehension can affect many aspects of our lives and result in loss of many opportunities. What is important is acknowledging and understanding the apprehensions and taking the right steps to facing the problem. Even trait CA is treatable using the right approaches as discussed above. As a society we are becoming more vocal and laying greater emphasis on overt and expressive behaviors. Our business environment is also demanding professionals who are confident communicators underlying the fact that more research into communication apprehensions specific to Indian society will go a long way in enhancing career prospects and opportunities for the new India.

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