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INFORMATIVE PRESENTATIONS

When information is used to accomplish a purpose of sharing, explaining, or instructing, this is normally considered as informative communication. An informative communicator has the purpose of creating mutual understanding with his/her audience of data and facts that are considered accurate and of ideas and concepts that are supported by reasoned argument and facts. Most people are open to receive this type of communication, especially if it helps them to understand themselves and their surroundings better. However, care must be taken to avoid the use of propaganda in informative presentations.

Propaganda is the deliberate and systematic attempt to shape perceptions, manipulate cognitions, and direct behavior to achieve a response that furthers the desired intention of the speaker. The implication here is clear: the use of propaganda is in the interest of the speaker only. Informative communication, on the other hand, is thought to be neutral and in the interest of both parties.

In informative presentations, the object is to inform the audience of some definite matter, such as accounting procedures, financial reporting, development of product lines or marketing approaches. Generally speaking, the audience is interested in the subject, they have come to be informed, and the presentation is free of dispute.

When an executive realizes that he has to make a presentation on a particular topic, he should consider some of the following points before he drafts his presentation:

1. What type of presentation is it to be—informative or persuasive?
2. What does he wish to achieve?
3. Who are his audience, and what is their attitude likely to be towards the speaker and the subject?
4. How much information and material does he have?
5. How long will the presentation last?

Technical note of the Research Department at IESE.
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The answer to these questions should give the presenter a degree of orientation. However, it is worthwhile at this stage considering such issues as preparation, presentation style, audience, feedback, nervousness, and organization.

Preparation

Unless you have a special gift for improvisation, decide as far ahead as possible what is to be the central theme of your presentation, so as to give time for your ideas to crystallize round this theme. During the intervening period, jot down ideas as they occur to you or as they emerge from reading round the subject – it is not necessary to arrange them in order at this stage. (Alternatively, you may use Spray Notes, if you wish). Select the facts and arguments which are strictly relevant to your theme while remembering that a listener, unlike a reader, does not have time to digest numerous facts and figures or sub-themes. If you must present statistics, do this by way of a visual or hand-out.

Presentation Style

Don't plan to read from a prepared text, if you can possibly avoid it – with your eyes on the text, you will be unable either to establish contact with the audience or to gauge their reaction. If you don't find speaking easy, or if your subject is a complex one, you may find it necessary to write out your presentation verbatim in the first place, in order to rehearse it and to estimate the time required for delivery. But in doing this, try all the time to use simple, direct language, as if you were in conversation with your audience, not reading aloud to them. The following list of points should also be noted:

1. Whether or not you have written out the full text in advance, when the time comes to speak, try to use only brief notes which will recall key points of your argument and any figures and names that you cannot carry in your head, with an occasional complete sentence where you wish to make a point with particular precision.

2. Use the simplest words which will express your ideas clearly. Avoid technical jargon as much as possible, unless speaking to an all-specialist audience. Don't be tempted to use 'vogue' words or phrases; they may already have passed out of usage, and they are likely to puzzle some members of your audience, particularly if it is an international one.

3. Speak more slowly and clearly than in normal conversation. Don't be afraid to ask whether those at the back of the room can hear you properly.

4. Look at your audience while speaking, not over their heads or onto the floor. It is important to establish a relationship with them and see how they react.

5. Use your hands to emphasise particular points, but not continually. If you find it very difficult to use your hands naturally, it is better to keep perfectly still while speaking.

6. Avoid mannerisms (scratching your head, taking your glasses off and then putting them on again, saying "Er-er" before each sentence and so on). You may be unconscious of these mannerisms, so ask a friend or colleague in the audience to tell you about them, or record a trial presentation on video to see yourself in action.

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7. If you are putting a case in favour of a particular course of action, note down the arguments that can be used against it, so that you will be prepared to deal with the arguments effectively either in your presentation or at question time.

8. Write your notes on small sheets of thick paper or on cards, using one side only. Number each sheet clearly, in case they get muddled up in your pocket or briefcase.

9. If you propose to read quotations from books or journals, mark each appropriate page with a slip of paper in the book and indicate in your notes the number of the page concerned. You must at all costs avoid keeping your audience waiting while you search for your quotation.

10. Good speakers usually speak fairly slowly, simply and clearly. Don't use long sentence structures, and stop at the end of each sentence. However, be careful that you alter your volume, pitch and quality accordingly. If you don't, you may find your audience asleep.

Audience

One of the most difficult (if not impossible) things is to communicate with your audience as a whole. Focus your presentation on one person at a time and speak directly to him or to her. This will establish a partnership between the speaker and the listener which should last about one minute (or the length of a full idea). Then the speaker should change his listening partner. When this change occurs it is a good opportunity to change both your standing position and your style. If, for example, the speaker changes his listening partner from one in the front row to one in the back row, his pitch, volume and so forth must change also.

If the speaker changes his listening partner frequently, he will ensure that each of the listeners he has concentrated on will be involved as an active participant fairly early on in the presentation. However, in large groups, it will be impossible to concentrate on each individual.

A speaker must beware of over-concentration on the topic because this often results in his forgetting his audience. It can also result in his talking too quickly.

Nervousness often makes people defensive, and this will kill the speaker's individuality and spontaneity. People who concentrate on themselves often forget the needs of their audience and when this happens they may become over-nervous about what people think of them.

The most important thing is that the speaker feels relaxed and comfortable. If the speaker is standing, he can more easily focus his attention on people situated at different positions in the audience by changing position when changing the individual listener. However, when standing, a speaker should realise that he or she is within full gaze of the audience, and such irritating habits as taking off and putting on glasses, or even turning one's back totally to the audience in order to write on a blackboard, will distract the audience from the content of the speech.

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