

Instituto Superior de Ciências do Trabalho e da Empresa



PUBLIC SPEAKING AND PRESENTATIONS
A CRITICAL REVIEW

“THE CARING SPEAKER”

by
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Resumo:

Objectivos. Supõe-se que a vasta maioria das apresentações públicas que presenciamos diariamente nos nossos contextos laborais não são totalmente satisfatórias, devido à falta de uma visão estruturante, metodológica e profissional. Esta tese procura aferir se é possível melhorar os desempenhos individuais em discursos em público utilizando uma perspectiva de auto-aprendizagem gradual e progressiva. **Métodos.** Mais de 100 fontes (artigos, livros, páginas Web, vídeos e material áudio) foram revistas para estabelecer as “boas práticas” de discursos em público. Foi conduzida uma análise qualitativa focalizando em como oradores não profissionais perspectivam discursos em público. Finalmente foram desenvolvidas ferramentas e uma perspectiva prática para uma melhoria do desempenho de oradores não profissionais. **Resultados.** Em geral, a literatura falha ao não encontrar a ligação entre a capacidade oratória em discursos em público e a personalidade e o contexto nos quais os oradores não profissionais estão inseridos. Raramente os objectivos e os salários de tais oradores estão relacionados com a sua performance, que reflectem consequentemente o pouco tempo e oportunidade para treino e preparação. **Conclusão.** Conseguindo combinar as “boas práticas” que emergem da revisão da literatura, com a experiência das entrevistas realizadas com oradores não profissionais, possibilitou-nos encontrar uma perspectiva prática para tornar oradores não profissionais em oradores empenhados .

Palavras-chave – Gestão de empresa – Gestão pessoal – Gestão internacional de empresa – Formação

Abstract:

Aims. It is assumed that the vast majority of the presentations we attend in our daily work leave much to be desired, due to the lack of a structural, methodological and professional approach. This thesis examines whether it is possible to improve individual performances in public speaking through a gradual, incremental, self-training approach. **Methods.** Over 100 sources (articles, books, papers, websites, video and audio material) have been reviewed to establish best practice in public speaking. A qualitative insight into how professionals (non-professional speakers) approach public speaking has been conducted. Finally a practical approach and tools for the improvement of non-professional speakers skills have been developed. **Findings.** Overall, the literature on public speaking fails to make the link between oratory performances and the personality and the context in which non-professional speakers operate. Objectives and salaries of non-professional speakers are rarely linked to their proficiency at the podium, with consequently very little time and opportunity for training or even preparation. **Conclusion.** Merging the good practice that emerge from the review of the literature, with the experience from the interviews with non-professional speakers, may have allowed us to find a practical approach to turn non-professional speaker into caring speakers.

Keywords – Business administration – Personal management – International business administration – Training

1 Introduction

1.1 The idea

Speaking in public has become a component of many professions. Microsoft estimates, that around 450 million PowerPoint users around the globe give around 1 million presentations a day (Microsoft At Work, 2006).

This thesis, the final part of a Masters Degree in International Management, moved on the assumption that the vast majority of the presentations we attend in our daily work leave much to be desired, mainly due to the lack of a structural, methodological and professional approach to the task.

This research reviews a vast number of best practice, example and tips from professional speakers and communicators on how to address audiences successfully. It also analyses how a selected number of professionals (including managers, researchers and analysts) *who are non-professional speakers* face presenting in public. It finally tries to merge the two, *tips from professional speakers* and *everyday practice experience from non-professional speakers*, in a more practical approach termed here as the ‘caring speaker’. The project is ambitious and aims to create a self-training approach which, if implemented, gradually and thoroughly would move any *improvised, non-professional speaker* into a *caring speaker*.

In this thesis, the terms ‘speaking in public’, ‘presentation’ or ‘public speech’, are used conventionally without differentiating between them. They refer to an oral speech or presentation supported by a slideshow, structured, previously agreed and given before an audience.

1.2 The objective

The objective of this research is to identify an approach that, if implemented, could improve the quality, and the consequent performance, of non professional speakers called on to speak in public.

This work is the product of the combined analysis of the state of the art in communication skills and personal and contextual factors influencing the way in which professionals approach public speaking. The result aims to be a training approach intended to improve quality and consequently increase performance at the microphone. The gradual implementation of such an approach aims to improve the quality of non-professional speakers’ presentations and, indirectly, the image of a company through the

improved quality of its staffs public performances. Companies have indeed the responsibility to support and make it possible for staff to acquire experience in public speaking.

1.3 The methodology

The work was organised in three phases.

The first task was to undertake a review of public speaking and communication skills literature. In the process, over 100 sources among them articles, books, papers, websites, video and audio material have been reviewed. The aim of this phase was to identify 'best practice' in order to address audiences in a professional environment.

The second task focused on a qualitative insight into how professionals approach public speaking. The aim of this phase was to analyse the attitudes of highly recognised professionals to speaking in public.

The third and final phase was a comparative analysis of the reviewed best practice and attitudes of non-professional speakers. The end result is a practical training approach to improve public speaking performances.

2 Good practice in public speaking: a critical review of the literature

There is ample literature on public speaking, be it in the form of books, dedicated websites or blog postings. There, scholars, communication professionals and public-speaking coaches publish their recipes for success at the podium.

While varying in content and recommendations, all of the above appear to agree that applying communication skill methods when addressing audiences is a beneficial practice that should be considered by any speaker, however experienced, and can greatly impact on their performance. The following is a critical review of these practices.

2.1 Prepare and rehearse

I am easily satisfied with the very best
Winston Churchill

One of the qualities most appreciated in business is the capacity to take fast decisions, often improvising and finding the right thing to do or say without much preparation.

This, however, is not the case in public speaking and communication where it is generally agreed that only solid preparation and appropriate rehearsal can make the difference between success and failure. This is regardless of whether the speech is for a toast at a wedding or the budget proposal to a tough management board (Morrissey, Sechrest, Warman, 1997; Valenti, 2002; Morgan 2005).

Careful preparation and rehearsal, until the point where confidence is reached, is seen by communication experts as a ‘must’, even for very experienced speakers. This is in order to avoid negative consequences on the appropriateness of the speech or on its length. It is interesting to discover that Winston Churchill would rehearse for hours even the ‘improvised speeches’, that had been carefully prepared and memorised. A friend of his once said: ‘Winston has spent the best years of his life writing impromptu speeches’ (Wreden, 2002).

During the preparatory phase, some experts suggest applying a golden rule called the ‘elevator speech’. This is a short description, or just a phrase, that contains the *soul* of the speech, presented in the time it takes an elevator to go from one floor to the next (Morgan, 2003; King, 2001; Wreden, 2002).

Along the same lines, other authors propose to write the main purpose of the speech in one paragraph, or even a sentence, and move from there, always bearing in mind ‘*to give them the essential*’ (Dowis, 1999; Wreden, 2002). Others, propose screening all the material by answering the ‘why test’ with regard to the ‘disinterested observer’: ‘Why am I doing this?’, ‘What do I want to accomplish?’, ‘What reaction do I want from the audience?’. This is to develop the right ideas and decisions on *how much* and *what* kind of information is needed (Morrisey, Sechrest, Warman,1997).

Morgan (2003) adds to these recommendations an interesting factor: the *positioning of the speech* in the audience needs.

In fact, not all presentations have the same interest for an audience. Some will be highly expected, such as a key note speech, because of the importance of the speaker or because of the findings that will be unveiled, others will be more of an optional. A speaker who aims at doing a good job will solve this issue before building the speech and will present according to the position of his/her speech in the audience needs.

Within the pre-speech phase, *rehearsal* is seen as a key element. Experts list practice as one of the principal steps in preparing any presentation (Kuchner and Yeung, 2007). They propose taking the speech and repeating it in front of the computer screen or in the office. They warn not to use the mirror as it is too distracting. This is the phase in which the speaker *feels* the speech, *absorbs* it, *connects* with it

All these approaches and tips, share the same principle: finding the core message – the *elevator speech* – and only then go on the details, ‘walking the story’. This entails refining the language, spotting the right place for humour, paying attention to body language, and constructing an effective beginning and end (two of the most important points of any presentation).

It is argued that a good rehearsal will inspire confidence in the speaker, and keep the presentation under the allocated time, while rejecting unnecessary information.

Key point: Take the time to prepare carefully each speech and rehearse

2.2 Start with a ‘bang’ end with a vision

*In every phenomenon the beginning remains
always the most notable moment.*

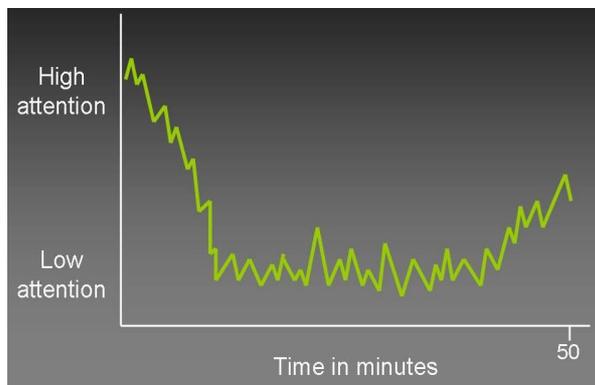
In my end is my beginning

– Thomas Carlyle, *Mary Queen of Scots*

Several communication experts argue that the first moments of a presentation are the most important. At the beginning of the speech, audiences are well disposed, they want to like the presenter and they wish to enjoy the experience. They will take the initial few minutes to assess if it is worth paying attention to the speaker, if he/she is going to say something interesting and if he/she is good at doing it (Reynolds, 2005; Gallo, 2005; Morgan, 2005; Decker, 2005; Carrada 2006).

Research into audiences attention at presentations confirms that it is highest at the early stages of the presentation such as during the introduction, and drops as the presentation progresses, with a sort of awakening near the end (Hartley and Davies, 1978; Hills, 1997; Decker, 2005; Burns and Mitchell, 2008)

Figure 1 Attention retention curve from Hartley, J., & Davies, 1978



Experts propose to make the most from these first moments, without rambling on too long about superfluous background information or professional history. Research shows that people have the tendency to ‘disconnect’ when they think that what is coming will not be interesting. Developmental molecular biologist, Dr. John Medina, in his book *Brain Rules*, suggests that what we pay attention to is profoundly influenced by our memory, and our previous experience predicts where we should pay attention. Therefore, we shut off when we foresee a boring experience in front of us.

The reality is somehow different. The first moment of most public speaking events, in particular PowerPoint presentations, are rather boring. The speaker gives a very dry outline of his/her intervention, a mechanic opening such as *‘I will open with this, I will*

say that and I will conclude there'. While the principle in itself sounds right, giving an outline of the presentation at its beginning, such a delivery is certainly non-conversational and is far from being an attractive opening.

The reality is somehow different. The first moment of most public speaking events, in particular PowerPoint presentations, are rather boring, opened by 'artificial' structures overviews that collide with the principle of 'having a conversation', such as *'I will open with this, I will say that and I will conclude there'*.

Figure 2 A bad way of starting a presentation according to experts



While the principle of giving an overview at the beginning of the speech, is in itself right, giving a too dry structure of the presentation at its beginning, is non-conversational and is far from being an attractive opening.

Experts suggest that a speaker who aims to do better should make the effort to open with a little more wit and interest, and some authors even say *with a bang*. This helps to attract the audience's attention when it is high, and maintain it throughout the speech, showing at the same time confidence and control (Morrisey 1997; Decker, 2005; Carrada, 2006; Morgan, 2003).

Starting with a *bang* however can be dangerous and must be thought through carefully, taking into account again the context of the presentation, the personality and status of the speaker, the expectation and the mood of the audience. Most experts warn that this *bang opening* is not a silly joke but a smart, subtle opening, in which the outline of the presentation or its main message – *the elevator speech* – can be uncovered by a punchy phrase: for example a confession: *'ladies and gentlemen figures of our sales are dreadful'*; or the key message of the speech: *'illicit drugs on the streets are cheaper than ever'*; or a funny (but related to the message) cartoon, photo or phrase.

A good example of a humorous start is given by Al Gore in the opening of his famous slideshow 'An inconvenient truth' when he says: '*Ladies and gentlemen, I am Al Gore, and I used to be the future President of the United States*', the audience obviously laugh and he adds, seriously: '*I don't find that particularly funny (smile)*', the ice is broken and the public intrigued (Al Gore, 2007)¹.

Speech-coach Janet Henderson in her book *There's No Such Thing as Public Speaking*, advises not to use speech-coach advice, especially the type that invites speakers to start with a joke (not advised by any serious communication expert). Communication professionals Tony Burns and Olivia Mitchell in their article 'The attention-getting myth', argue that there is no need to be ridiculous in a loud opening, especially because it is guaranteed that audience is paying attention in that moment. The speaker had better start in a conversational manner by simply introducing him/herself and the topic presented. A more experienced speaker can try out different ways of opening a talk, but always ensuring it is relevant to the topic. A useful technique, they say, is to choose something interesting from the body of the talk and to open with it. For instance, a good story or case study that would make a good opening, or an interesting statistic that will intrigue the audience (Burns and Mitchell, 2008).

The end of a speech or presentation is similarly crucial to the beginning.

A chorus of communication professionals agree with that. This is because it is argued that people remember best what we say last, therefore the last line or slide should not be a simple closure but the best part of the entire presentation (Dowis, 1999; Baldoni, 2002; Paradi, 2006; Gallo, 2005 Christ, 2007).

Marketing professional Basia Christ, in her article *End Your Presentation With Something That Will Leave Them Begging for More!*, suggests using a powerful quote or a phrase that is easy to remember or a clever line that compels the audience to think about the presentation. For professional speaker Dave Paradi (2006), in case of an informative presentation, the end can be a summary of the key points for the audience to remember and additional resources to learn more, while in case of a persuasive presentation (the sales type), the end could be a summary of the key benefits for the audience laying out the next steps in the process.

¹ For an example of Al Gore oratory skills watch this talk - a follow-up to his now-famous presentation, featured in the movie, "An Inconvenient Truth." - Recorded in February, 2006 in Monterey, CA. http://www.ted.com/tedtalks/tedtalksplayer.cfm?key=al_gore

The fact is that there is not one type of conclusion good enough for all events and therefore several closing variations are worth considering. Dowis (1999), provides a useful list:

Box 1 Some closing tips (Dowis, 1999)

- *Summary – Touch on the high points of the speech;*
- *Wrap-up – The speaker brings everything together;*
- *Direct appeal – A request for some specific action;*
- *Inspirational closing – Offer a moving poem or quotation;*
- *Humourous or anecdotal closing – A story that makes a strong final point.*

Experts also suggest removing simple but common mistakes. Christ (2007), suggests using the expression ‘in conclusion’ only if the speaker really means it! Otherwise he/she will lose the audience by keep talking after announcing (s)he is done. While Dave Paradi (2006), invites speakers arriving at the end of their presentations to thank the audience by asking for questions but not via a slide. He says: a last slide with ‘Thank You! Any Questions’ is a quite wimpy way to end a presentation.

Key point: Prepare in advance a smooth, smart start and ending

2.3 Care about connecting

*Let us make a special effort to stop
communicating with each other,
so we can have some conversation
– Mark Twain*

A speech is good as the extent to which its content is retained by the audience. This is the essence of a presentation. It is not the metric of the speech, nor the speaker, nor the subject, but what stays with the audience after the speaker has gone, that matters. Communication experts identify this as the main objective for the speaker and see *connection* with the audience the fundamental prerequisite, for the message to travel between the speaker and the audience. Finding this connection is the main job of the speaker. It does not matter if the speaker aims to inform, persuade, sell, or even just get re-invited for the next conference, as long as (s)he connects (s)he will have reached his/her main objective (Di Resta 2000; Morrisey, Sechrest, Warman 1997; Morgan, 2005; Dowis, 1999).

Research shows that one of the best ways to find this *precious connection* is to adopt a *conversational informal style* (Grimshaw 2004; Mayer 2005)

A study of Mayer (2005), on the effectiveness of teaching approaches revealed that students who learned with personalised text built in a more conversational style (less formal text and the use of the word ‘you’), performed better on subsequent transfer tests than students who learned with formal text. So, according to communication experts, to connect the speaker must talk normally as in conversation not ‘present’ (Morrisey, Sechrest, Warman, 1997; Witheford 1999; Miller, 2000)

The difficulty is that conversations are spontaneous, full of pauses and interruptions, they vary in pace, tone and argument. On the other hand, during presentations, for obvious reasons there is less spontaneity and (usually) no interruptions. Experts here are saying that if a speaker wants to connect with the audience, (s)he might need to re-create some of this spontaneity through a *conversational presentation*.

Grimshaw in his Harvard Review Article, *Why best presentations are good conversations* (2004), suggests to do it varying the pitch of the tone, establishing eye contact, and using pauses strategically, and even asking rhetorical questions such as: ‘did you get that?’, ‘are you with me?’ and ‘do you see what I mean’? This is supposed to engage listeners, convey credibility, and force the audience to think about what the speaker is saying.

For speech coaches Tony Burns and Olivia Mitchell, conversational style in presentation works for the simple reason that it is easier to listen to somebody when they’re speaking in a conversational manner.

Box 2 Some tips on how to apply a conversational style (Burns, and Mitchell (2008))

- *Always talk to someone – even if this might seem obvious, there are still so many presenters who talk to the PowerPoint screen, to their notes or to the back of the room;*
- *Talk to one person at a time - spend a few moments with this person. It shouldn’t be so long that they risk feeling intimidated, but long enough that they do feel as if the speaker has been talking to them. This will normally be the length of a phrase, or a short sentence;*
- *Have a one-on-one conversation with that person. The speaker, they suggest, should let the other people in the room disappear from his/her consciousness for that time while (s)he is talking to that one person;*
- *Look for their reaction before carrying on. Most people will nod or smile.*

Speech coach Nick Morgan, author of the best selling book *Give Your Speech, Change the World: How To Move Your Audience to Action* (2005), also gives a crucial importance to the audience. He proposes to look for this connection with the audience through what he calls the '*audience-centered presentation*'. Morgan means with such definition 'the capacity to produce a performance which is in line with the audience's needs and expectations' (Morgan, 2005).

Many other communication experts agree on this, proposing that speakers should put the audience before themselves or their content when preparing a speech (DiResta 2000; Morrisey 1997; Dowis, 1999).

A broad *audience analysis* during the preparation of the talk seems the essential prerequisite. This phase will begin with some key questions about the members of the audience, 'who they are, 'what they know', 'what they want', about the motivation of the speaker 'Do I really want to connect with this audience or am I just satisfied to deliver my speech?' And by understanding the real importance of the speech in the audience perspective.

Box 4 Key questions during the preparation of a speech

Audience assessment

Who and how they are? (Experts, govt. officials, hostile, friendly, neutral). What they know? (on the topic I am presenting). What they expect from my intervention? Who do I want to address?

Motivation assessment

Why am I doing this? What do I want to accomplish? What do I want to get from it? What reaction do I want from the audience? What change do I want to obtain?

Positioning of the speech in the audience's scale of values

How important is the speech/presentation for the audience and for this meeting? (Is it the key note speech, just one speech among others or an 'agenda-filler')

Experts say that in the preparatory phase, these questions serve to structure the content, develop the right message, choose the appropriate words, examples and explanations, and ultimately remove superfluous information (Kushner, 2007).

This because, the more the speaker knows about the public, the more chances (s)he will have to find the right thing to say. Moreover, those listening to a speech vary i.e. business executives, government officials, politicians, scientists, and they might have different expectations and need different inputs. In addition, they can be pleasant, hostile or just neutral, listening on their free will or instructed by their boss. Likewise, they might differ by age, gender, educational level, occupation, ethnicity, religious affiliations, political inclination, language and nationality. Experts warn that all these characteristics influence the reception of the speaker's message and therefore must be carefully considered in the *audience analysis* (Kushner, 2007; Morgan, 2005; Di Resta, 2006; McCarty, 2001).

All that we read on *conversational style* reaffirms what seems obvious, and actually agreed by the overwhelming majority of communication professionals, that reciting bullets points or reading them from a slide is cold and artificial and therefore vividly discouraged.

This is also goes for reading from a text, especially if done by a non-professional speaker. Apparently it takes a great deal of coaching and experience to read in public effectively from a text, and only few well-trained people have this ability (Di Resta, 2006; Hofmeister, 2006).

Concluding this chapter we can agree that being *conversational*, applying *rhetoric*, and *pausing* with effect, calls for a certain degree of *acting*, implying a good confidence on the part of the speaker and presupposing some kind of relationship between the speaker and the audience. In consequence, it would be understandable if a speaker at a very high-level conference (ministerial level, or talking to CEOs), does not dare to look for such a *connection* especially if his/her status is lower than that of the audience. Instead s(he) may simply just try to be good, correct and discreet. On the other hand, a cold speaker will risk alienating the audience, therefore learning to speak or present in a *conversational style* (start practising at a low risk event for example), can have beneficial consequences for the speaker, increasing his/her own confidence and the quality of his/her performances.

Key point: When speaking in public don't present, just talk to people

2.4 Engage with emotions

*When dealing with people,
remember you are not dealing with creatures of logic,
but creatures of emotion
– Dale Carnegie*

Communication experts warn that, while speakers talk in public, they do not just provide data or information, they activate a *connection* between the two poles – the *speaker* and the *audience* – a connection that acts as a vehicle for a *flow of emotions*. It is argued that it is this *flow of emotion*, to and from the audience, that differentiates between a vibrating speech and the same content on the printed paper. It is also this *flow of emotions* that can make the difference between a great speech and just another one (Whiteford, 1999; Morgan, 2005; Reynolds, 2005).

Within the concept of *emotion*, professionals identify *energy*, *passion* and *expressiveness* as those human qualities that create confidence and trust and that can help to establish a ‘physical connection’ between the speaker and the audience. In particular, the capacity to be open to the audience, both verbally and non-verbally – *expressiveness* – is regarded as the *extra boost* that allows the speaker to ‘click’ with the audience (Whiteford, 1998; Morgan, 2005; Hoffmeister, 2006).

Australian professor Frank Miller argues that information ‘per se’ possesses no intrinsic meaning. Information functions more as a provoker and evoker of meaning in people, but it is made meaningful, understandable and contextualised only by the speaker: ‘only human beings can intelligently make sense of – and provide an appropriate context for – information’, he says. (Miller, 2000). Along the same lines, Winston Churchill would affirm: ‘Facts that build the foundation for a logical conclusion are not enough. Both the speaker and the audience must be emotionally engaged’ (Wreden, 2002). Therefore a speaker who aims to leave a trace on his audience must ensure that some emotions transpire from his/her performance and reach the audience.

Moreover, it appears clear in reviewed literature that the value of a speech or a presentation is not intrinsic to its contents, or its message, but resides in the interpretations and judgments made on it by its viewers. The ‘*trait-d’union*’ between *information* and the *audience* is the *speaker*. Only the speaker has the chance and must have the will and the ability to be a magnet for attention and lead audiences with the right dose of emotion, leadership and charisma (Morgan, 2005; Wreden, 2002, Baldoni 2002; Whiteford, 1999).

Indeed, communication skills are linked to leadership and charisma. It is not by chance that among great speakers there are also famous leaders. Former US President Bill Clinton is one of the most cited in communication literature, and is a regular on the guest-speaker circuit, drawing as much as \$350,000 per speech. In 2005 he earned \$7.5 million giving 43 speeches in 14 countries. Reviews of his style reveal that he is effective at the podium because of his engaging, *naked human style*. His verbal presentation of clear logic and evidence, as well as his solid story-telling skills, (such as providing clear examples and visual pictures), contribute to creating an effective flow of emotions to and from the audience (source). Other leaders are often cited as examples in communication literature, CEO's such as Richard Branson (Virgin), or Steve Jobs (Apple computers), successful TV presenters such as Oprah Winfrey or political leaders such as Tony Blair, Nelson Mandela, Winston Churchill, Martin Luther King, John F. Kennedy, all, beyond the importance or dramatism of their speeches, are considered as masters in the way they engage their publics through emotions.

However, it is arguable that from such leaders, politicians, business tycoons, showmen and women, being rhetorical, very passionate or energetic when in front of a public is to be expected. These are professionals for whom communicating ideas and persuading others, are fundamental assets of their professional lives.

Does this also go for those 'routine' public speeches or business presentations we are used to give in our professions?

It seems that, while the principle of *engaging your public with emotions*, is generally acceptable, the way to implement it must be carefully considered. Indeed it has a lot to do with the context of the presentation, the expectations of the audience and the personality of the speaker. On the other hand it seems clear that trying to imitate professional speakers would provoke at least hilarity if not disconcertation in many audiences. But what seems agreeable is that even in our 'routine' presentations, between a cold data provider and a dramatic speaker, a middle way is possible. A way in which a speaker is emotionally engaged in what he is presenting which thus helps him to connect with the audience.

Key point: Let emotions go

2.5 Presenting being present

*Eighty percent of success
is showing up
– Woody Allen*

Some people afraid to speak in public or just shy or too nervous, perhaps in order to maintain focused and concentrated find a spot, like the end of the room and stare at it until the end. This might well help the speaker to finish the speech, but probably the result will be that the public will wonder what (s)he is looking at.

Evidence shows that in order to be communicative, while at the podium, the speaker needs more than just speaking. (S)he needs to establish eye contact with the public, mind his/her posture, facial expression and gestures, his/her position in the space and even walk if possible (Whiteford, 1999; Reynolds 2005; Gallo, 2005;). The speaker needs to communicate with a non-verbal language important at least as much as the verbal. Indeed, already in 1971 a milestone study of UCLA Professor Albert Merhbian, studying communication of feelings and attitudes (like-dislike), found that *body language* was the main vehicle for communication with a 55% while just a 7%, would depend on *the words*. The rest, a 38%, would be imputable to the *tone of the voice* (Marahbian, 1971).

But is actually the tone of the voice, more than the body language, the element to which several communication experts attribute a capital importance. It is suggested that it should vary during a presentation, with punch on keywords and variation in the volume, speeding up and slowing down. The speaker should never talk too fast, this can be perceived as a sign of shyness or worst fear. Speaking at a slow pace, not being afraid of silence, pausing and thinking, gives the time to the audience to think, to understand and to absorb.

Grant-Williams in her book *Voice Power* refer how famous Hollywood actors would use silence to attract attention. John Wayne used to say that his entire acting technique lay in a simple trick: he counted silently to three before every line of dialogue (Grant-Williams, 2002).

Talking quickly because of a lack of time or stress can make a good presentation and hard preparation work vanish (Di Resta, 2002), and ultimately can make the speech incomprehensible (Grant-Williams, 2002).

Linked to the tone of the voice there is general agreement on a ‘magic trick’: *the pause*.

Experts affirm that pausing can dramatically increase the impact of a speech. This because pausing reveals power and builds interest and suspense, it shows that the speaker is under control (Decker, 2005; Audrieth, 1998; Baldoni, 2002).

It also gives time to the audience to absorb the message, it can be the gap leading to an important point in the speech, or a ‘command’ to the audience to think about what has just been said. Pausing is also natural, it is conversational and, even if the speaker has rehearsed the speech dozens times, the pause will give the impression that (s)he is spontaneous and not *too rehearsed* (Grant-Williams, 2002; Gallo, 2005; Morrisey, 1997).

When speaking in public, applying all these tips *being engaged, minding the posture varying the tone of the voice and pausing* seems to be common sense. It is better to have an at-ease speaker who smiles and communicates with the full body, that a dull speaker standing stiffly and reciting a speech. However, again this is not so clear cut. How does one, for example, stand up and walk, or establish eye contact, if speaking from a round table, where everybody is supposed to be seated and part of the audience cannot see the speaker; or in the case of video cameras in the room that take the speaker from different angles and not necessarily from the direction where the public is; or even worse when the speaker stands in the opposite position of the screen where his/her slide show is presented, so that the audience has to ‘ping-pong’ between the two.

Therefore a certain ‘acting’, in the sense of *pausing, varying the tone of the voice and talking slowly*, is certainly acceptable, and can have a beneficial effect on the overall presentation.

However for other more *emphatic tips*, the context of the speech, the personality and experience of the speaker should be carefully considered and imitation of professional speakers clearly avoided. Once again what is important to retain is to communicate with the full body without overdoing it.

Key point: Talk slowly, pause and look at your public

2.6 Learn to use some techniques

*Rhetoric is the art of
ruling the minds of men*
–Plato

The classical texts of *Aristotle, Cicero and Quintilian*, already two thousand years ago praised the art of rhetoric as a communication device (Sifonis et al., 2006; Gentikow 1998). In modern times however, and especially in the field of communication, rhetoric lost its status becoming synonymous of ‘empty phrases or attempts to cheat and manipulate people’ (Johannesson 1990 in Gentikow 1998). Today undoubtedly it still suffers from a questionable reputation but some report a renaissance of rhetoric as both an art and a science (Perelman et al in Gentikow, 1998).

In communication, rhetorical devices are presented as powerful tools to rend a speech more effective and the speaker more communicative. For the founder of the public speaking and presentation skills blog, *Six Minutes*², Andrew Dlugan ‘a speech without rhetorical devices is like a painting void of color’. In his article *Speech Preparation #6: Add Impact with Rhetorical Devices* he suggests speakers to add rhetorical devices into their speeches during the editing process.

Box 5 Three useful techniques in public speaking

Rhetoric (analogies, simile, anaphoras, etc.)

Stories

The Rule of the Three

For instance there is famous use of *anaphoras* which consist of repeating with emphasis words at the beginning of close phrases giving power to the speech. The ‘*I have a dream*’ of Martin Luther King is probably the most famous of them.

Nick Wreden, in his Harvard Review article *Language: Churchill’s Key to Leadership*, illustrates how Churchill would use powerful rhetorical devises in his speeches. For example a *chiasmus*, in which words are repeated in reverse, a classical example is what he said about Sir Cripps, a strict vegetarian ‘*he has all the virtues I dislike and non of the vices I admire*’.

² <http://sixminutes.dlugan.com/>

Simile, is a figure of speech used to make a comparison between two things, usually with the words ‘like’, ‘than’ or ‘as’. It can be explicit: ‘drinks like a fish’, from stereotype: ‘precise as a German’, or ironical: ‘as subtle as a sledgehammer’.

Box 6 Some rhetorical devises

Anaphora : *I have a dream (Martin Luther King)*

Chiasmus : *A pessimist sees the difficulty in every opportunity; an optimist sees the opportunity in every difficulty’ (Winston Churchill)*

Analogy : *The iron Curtain (Joseph Goebbels or Winston Churchill)*

Metaphor : *All the world's a stage/And all the men and women merely players (Shakespeare)*

Compare and contrast : *Ask not what your country can do for you, ask what you can do for your country’*

Analogies are also very much used in public speaking, probably because more instinctive than other rhetorical devises. An analogy is the comparison between two things that have no logical or physical relation to each other but that together make stronger a message, acting as mnemonic devise (Quebin, 1997; Simanek 1992).

Psychologists observe that analogy work because projects mental pictures in the mind of the listener helping to visualise and remember better. Moreover, the more ‘outrageous’ or illogical the comparison is, the easier it is to remember as a mnemonic device (Simanek, 1992).

Research also suggests that analogy works, because it relates to our way of reading the unknown. It feeds the way in which Man address new things or hard to imagine though ‘the likeness between things’ (Goertzel, 1993). To understand the internet we use terms, by analogy, that refer to tangible objects such as the net, while to understand electricity (something we cannot see) we use words from the movement of water, such as flow and current.

Metaphors are also an important tool for projecting mental pictures. A Metaphor is a figure of speech that uses one thing to mean another and makes a comparison between the two. Unlike *similes* that use the words ‘as’ or ‘like’ to make a comparison, metaphors state that something *is* something else. Carrada, in *Communication Science* (2006), affirms that metaphors have even won a place even inside mainstream science. Often atoms are explained as little balls or in evolutionary biology the hypothesis of the ‘selfish gene’ is presented referring to a ‘lazy gene’. As such, metaphors can be responsible for the

distortion or trivialisation of the facts. Therefore, after it has been used to introduce a subject, Carrada invites speakers to destroy a metaphor in order to attain a more correct explanation. Thus, atoms stop being little balls and genes lose every moral connotation (Carrada, 2006).

Compare and contrast is another of those old oratory techniques that has been used for long time. A memorable example is given by John F Kennedy aiming to encourage American citizens to become more active in helping the country. Instead of saying ‘We all need your help’, that would have been forgotten instantly, he said: ‘Ask not what your country can do for you, ask what you can do for your country’. Also Churchill was a master in the use of these rhetorical devices: ‘this is not the end. It is not even the beginning of the end. But it is, perhaps, the end of the beginning’ (presentation helper.co.uk).

The value of *rhetorical devices* in public speaking lies with the capacity, through *visual images*, to keep the listener interested and connected (Quebin, 1997).

However, among the rhetorical devices what seems to be the most valued rhetorical approach or technique, in communication literature, is **storytelling** (McKee, 2003, Morgan, 2005, Denning, 2005, Decker, 2005; Dupree, 2003, Gallo, 2005; Carrada, 2006).

Speechwriters argue that stories are the most powerful tool to persuade and interest people. Communication experts agree that storytelling would engage, involve and inspire people, arouse listener’s emotions and energy, and would be easier to remember. Cognitive psychologists describe that the human mind assembles the bits and pieces of experiences into a story. Therefore information delivered in the form of a story would have more probability of being received in other people’s minds. But at the same time, communication experts warn that this does not mean that a speaker banally has to tell a beginning-to-end tale. Some authors suggest that a story could be built using a *problem solution structure*, positioning the problem in the foreground of a story and then explain how to overcome it, in an hypothetical journey from the *why*, ‘why the problem is in this way?’, to the *how*, ‘how can we try to solve it?’ (McKee, 2003; Morgan 2005).

Others suggest that a speaker could start portraying a *desire* or an *objective*, then describe antagonist forces that might impede the achievement of the objective and then describe which action is to be taken to overcome these forces and reach the goal. It is

the struggle against antagonists that keep the audience hooked and it is up to the speaker to reveal this struggle (McKee, 2003).

Another curious but interesting ‘technique’ is the *rule of three*.

Although there might be many rules of three, in communications it seems to be based on the assumption that people tend to remember more easily a group of three things (Kushner and Yeung, 2007). Therefore it seems that putting simply the presentation message into a list of three will be better remembered. There are famous three-lines such as ‘*Friends, Romans, Countrymen*’, or ‘*Blood, Sweat and Tears*’ or ‘*Veni, Vidi, Vici*’.

It is argued in communication literature that the rule of three is also largely used in scriptwriting for drama and comedies. The three-structure would easily evoke humour. The first two items in the triplet set the pattern and the third item breaks it (see box 7) (Kinde, 2006; Brandl, 2006).

Box 7 Humour structure - the rule of the three

- *She was pretty, she was shapely, she was a man (Expected Trait/Expected Trait/Unexpected Trait)*
- *A Las Vegas wedding package contains everything you will need; music, flowers, a divorce document (Something Everyone Loves/Something Everyone Loves/Something Everyone Hates)*
- *I go to Las Vegas to see the shows, eat at the buffets and visit my money (Ordinary/Ordinary/Ridiculous)*

Key point: Adapt your style to gradually integrate rhetoric, visual images, stories and the rule of three

2.7 Humour works

A joke is a very serious thing
– *Winston Churchill*

Using humour in public speaking and presentations is presumed to aid persuasion in advertising, education and in business (Heinecke and Wallinger, 1997 in Lyttle, 2001; Antion, 1998).

Bob Orben, Former Director of the White House Speech writing Department and Special Assistant to President Gerald Ford affirmed ‘Business executives and political leaders have embraced humour because humour works. Humour has gone from being an admirable part of a leader's character to a mandatory one’ (Antion, 1998).

Humour enthusiasts argue that it helps to arouse interest, hold attention, lighten heavy material, disarm hostility and shows it the personality and self confidence of the speaker (Antion, 1998; Kushner 1990; Lyttle, 2001; Audrieth, 1998).

Communication experts however warn that being funny in public speaking is not easy.

First of all, it does not mean making jokes, or the presenter transforming him/herself into a comedian and the presentation into a comedy act (Audrieth, 1998). Second, the type of humour to use is not the one, even accepted in popular humour, made of ironical comments. It is more a light and moderate non-offensive clean humour. The best seems to be the *self-effacing humour*, when the speaker makes fun of himself. In this way the speaker shows strengths, confidence and leadership, particularly when s(he) has a high status. In case of top executives or VIP, this kind of humour acts as a bridge across the status gap. A 2001 study on the effectiveness of humour in persuasion found *self-effacing humour* the most effective compared to ironic humour or cartoon drawings (Lyttle, 2001; Kushner 1990).

Al Gore review of his ‘technique’ reveals how he bases on humour his first contacts with the audience. In a presentation in Monterey, California, in 2006, he uses the first six minutes of this sixteen-minute speech to establish a relation with the audience. Gore does this with several humourous observations and stories. The speech review (in the web-blog sixminutes) reveals that he gets nineteen laughs from the audience during this time, and primarily with self-effacing humour, stories and vocal variety.

However, for any other speaker, who does not have the capacity and – let’s recognize it – the *charisma* of Al Gore, an interesting concept developed by Audrieth (1998), in *The Art of Using Humour in Public Speaking* is the *mood of the audience*.

This is that particular atmosphere in the conference room or around a table that exists between the speaker and the audience, and that makes it possible for humour to find acceptance. Understanding this atmosphere, or trying to create one, can be very useful, especially for those speakers who are not confident enough to give an ‘Al Gore type of speech’. Indeed there is nothing more embarrassing that trying to be funny in front of a *glacial* public (Audrieth, 1998).

Key point: Humour works when speaking in public, but not always, not everywhere and not for everyone

2.8 ‘Kiss’ with your public

*I didn't have time to write you a short letter,
so I wrote a long one
– Mark Twain*

Another piece of advice which is paramount to be successful at the podium is to *Keep It Short and Simple (kiss)*.

In public speaking, it is widely agreed that *keep it short* is very valued by a public, ready for lunch or eager to ask questions or debate, and can also be very effective (Hoffmeister, 2006, Whiteford, 1999). Being too long, usually results in *losing* if not *irritating* the audience. Experts advise speakers to be always concise and never run too long. This does not necessarily mean giving too little, but *‘just give the essential’* (Dowis, 1999).

This might not be easy. It seems that one of the hardest tasks for a professional is to cut what (s)he thinks are relevant parts of his/her work. Professionals being asked to give a speech are usually masters of their subjects, they believe in it, they want to explain well and in detail, how interesting their findings are. It is therefore difficult for the author to cut out what (s)he think might be relevant information, and it is time consuming too. Some even argue that often there is no choice, especially in scientific presentations but to explain thoroughly and go into details.

McCarthy (2001), director of a training course company for research managers, is particularly harsh with scientific presentations. He argues that the problem lies in the fact that researchers are more interested in showing that they know their subject than educating the audience, focusing more of their activities than on their results. In this category of speaker there a tendency to try explain in long presentations, complex methodological issues, using jargon and buzz words, he says.

While this approach could be defended by scientists as useful or normal practice among peers, communication experts still warn not to underestimate how well simplified presentations are received even by technical audiences.

“Simplicity is the ultimate sophistication”.
Leonardo da Vinci.

Being *simple* is the other half needed in the *kiss* approach. Simplicity is very much valued in public speaking, even though we often listen to negligent speakers who use complex arguments, formulae, phrases or concepts, which are incomprehensible to all or some of the public. Dumping on the public too much information or being too complex, can *depresses* and *irritate* an audience, obliterate the reception of the presentation and the impact on the overall performance, even if what is said is full of wit and wisdom (Smith, 2000).

Churchill, famous for his oratorical flourishes and rolling sentences, concentrated on a single message in each speech applying strictly to the rule *one speech one theme* (Wreden, 2002).

Experts agree that the secret of being short and simple, lays in a correct and thorough preparation, done with the eyes of the '*disinterested observer*' and aimed at *connecting* with the audience. Some scholars even propose to apply the rule of always finishing a little before schedule. Most of the audience will be delighted if the talk is a little shorter than foreseen, not least because it may provide more opportunity for them to hear their own voices (Smith, 2000).

Key point: Just give them the essential and never, never run too long

3 Special cases

There are cases, special cases, in which speaking in public can be more difficult and where communication finds more obstacles, for example in an international setting or when presenting a scientific paper to a non scientific audience. This section analyses these cases including a very special one called: PowerPoint.

3.1 Scientific presentations

*Our most urgent and direct message must be to the scientists themselves:
learn to communicate with the public,
be willing to do so and consider it your duty to do so
– The Royal Society Report on the Public Understanding of Science, 1985*

Scientific presentations stand out as different or with different requirements, than others that is why this thesis offers a specific insight into it.

It is argued that many of the one million PowerPoint presentations shown each year worldwide, are used to teach and inform about science, technology, engineering and mathematics (Alley, 2005). In this way scientists, scholars and researchers share with their peers the development of their work. However they also inform the public and stakeholders about their research results, often in search of financial support (Alley 2005; Carrada, 2006).

The opinion of many communication professionals is that presentations from scientists are often rather poor. This is probably because the kind of presentations scientists are used to using, while valuable with peers, are far from what the rest of society uses to communicate (Fathalla, 2004; De Robertis, 2002; Katchuburian, 2003; McCarthy, 2001; Carrada, 2006).

Dr. Neal Lane, Head of the US National Science Foundation, confesses: “with the exception of a few people we do not know how to communicate with the public. We don’t understand our audience well enough – we have not taken the time to put ourselves in the shoes of others to understand why it’s difficult for them to hear us speak. We don’t know the language and we haven’t practised it enough” (in Weigold, 2002).

The literature concerning scientific communication points out three of the most common mistakes for scientists speaking in public. First, '*not being understood by the audience*', usually because of use of complicated language and concepts.

Second, '*not being interesting for the audience*', usually because the content or reasoning selected represent priorities for the speaker as a scientist or the institution (s)he belongs to, but not for the public.

Third, '*taking too long to present a topic*', usually because of bad preparation and lack of rehearsal. These mistakes can give rise to '*physical barriers*' between the audience and the speaker (Fathalla, 2004; Carrada, 2006).

Box 8 Most common barriers for scientists when presenting

- *not being understood by the audience*
- *not being interesting for the audience*
- *taking too long to present a topic*

In the above cases, the speaker not only risks not to communicate his/her message but also transmit a signal of disinterest for the audience as well lack of respect. But, above all, the scientist speaking misses the most important quality for anybody speaking in public: *the capacity to connect with the audience*. Connection as noted (see infra), is the *gateway* to unforgettable presentations and it is entirely the responsibility of the speaker to establish that *connection*, keeping it alive and using it to convey the message. This is because 'usually there are no bad audiences, just bad speakers' (Blendstrup, 2003).

A wealth of literature offers methods to connect with a non-expert audience acting on potential *barriers*.

First of all, the 'preparatory questions': ask yourself why!

In the preparatory phase the speaker should ask him/herself: *Why am I doing this?*, '*What do I want to get from it?*' '*What change do I want to obtain?*' and *Who do I want to address?* Even though these questions may seem obvious and implicit in what a speaker does when preparing a speech, communication experts suggest that the simple fact of answering these questions forces the speaker to think about the public instead that about him/herself ourselves or the speech, shifting the focus where it should be placed, on the public and on their needs. In answering them, it is recommended however

to see the subject *through the public's eye*. The speaker should take a distance from the topic and try to assess it objectively from the audience's point of view.

Second, – again – Keep It Short and Simple (KISS)

We already saw the importance given to the 'KISS principle'. But it seems to be more valid in scientific presentations to non-peer audiences in order to refute the general perception that scientists ramble too much about minor (in the eye of some) aspects.

Professor Fathalla, Chairman of the WHO Global Advisory Committee on Health Research, in his *Practical Guide for Health Researchers* (2004), defines speakers who go overtime as being 'guilty of gross bad manners' towards the audience and also towards all the speakers who come after him/her.

Literature suggests some ways to be *short and simple* which can be summarised in two main actions: simplify the *content* and simplify the *format*.

To provide simpler content, it is recognised that the speaker should resist the temptation to talk about as many things as possible. (S)he must explain everything that helps to understand the topic but nothing more. The public's most limited resource, after their attention is their cognitive energy, if this is abused, they will give up, says Carrada, in *Communicating Science* (2006).

To do that, however, a 'painful' compromise must be made between the risk of losing a part of the topic's complexity or depth, against the risk of losing the audience. If precision and thoroughness imply a loss of attention and/or understanding by the public the presentation must be simplified. However, this should not be carried out to the extent that the message will be distorted.

This is a crucial but difficult phase. The extent to which the speaker should simplify or keep the speech technical, will probably depend on the will and on the capacity of the audience to understand. Obviously, technical terms should be avoided whenever possible or explained in their meaning, even when this might seem banal. The same thing can be said for concepts such as dimensions difficult to be grasped by our brain like 'nanometers', 'billions of years', 'hundreds of tonnes', that can be clarified through appropriate analogies (Carrada, 2006; Fathalla, 2004; De Robertis 2002).

Fathalla (2004), proposes to transform the written scientific paper into an oral presentation, through the '3S approach': *Select, Synthesise, and Simplify*. Select from the written article the points to present; synthesise the information in the article to

package it in the limited time available; simplify the presentation of the data, so that it can be easily followed and understood even by a non-expert audience.

The *format* of the presentation is the other element that needs to be simplified.

Slides are very valuable in scientific and technical presentations, especially when the audience needs to see images or visual relationships to understand the content (Alley, 2003). Moreover, a speaker who would present a scientific paper or research findings without a presentation PowerPoint would not only risk to be only one of the all conference to do so, but probably would disappoint a public used to receive talks with PowerPoint.

Box 9 Tips to remove barriers in scientific presentations

- *Work on the preparatory questions*
- *Keep It Short and Simple*
- *Show emotions*
- *Go at the level of the audience*
- *Tell a science story*

Communication experts therefore suggest, when PowerPoint cannot be left in the speakers's office, trying to use as much as possible pictures, graphs, maps and even videos if suitable, instead of non-inspirational and let's say it, boring, *bulleted text*. In scientific presentations Fathalla (2004) suggests to use a mix of text, data and figures, ensuring that complicated or crowded slides are avoided. Some ironical definitions exit in communication circles an overcrowded table, which is defined the '*Railway Timetable*', or for a slide with too many bars, which would be the '*New York Skyline*'.

But, it is the *text slide* that should be addressed with a maximum of care.

Consensus exists among presentation experts on the fact that they are not meant to be read by the speaker, it looks quite unprofessional and unprepared when the speaker reads 'verbatim' the slides to the public. But they are also not meant to be read by the public, that is there to *listen* to the speaker not to read from the screen. Slides are best suited to shows figures, lists, or quotes, all things difficult to memorise, but not entire concepts or phrases. When the speaker has this need (to introduce concepts or more general explanations) just keywords might be enough.

Third, show emotions

We saw already how being emphatic is important for any speaker. This is even more important for scientific-speakers whose according to Carrada, communication is reported to be usually neutral and lacking in emotion. Communication literature claims that emotions can serve to persuade more than indisputable facts and that a memorable presentation will rarely be a sequence of slides (Quigg, 2004). Carrada (2006), proposes to scientific-speakers to ‘identify their emotions as scientists, and then find the closest possible link with the audience allowing the passion to transpire’. This could help to make that fundamental transition from *communicating something*, typical of communication among experts, to *communicating with someone*.

Fouth, tell a science story

Telling a *science* story seems the best, and probably most difficult way, to attract the attention of a scientific as well as a non-scientific audience (Carrada, 2006; Gallo, 2005). The best example may be given by the Oscar winning presentation of Al Gore, ‘An inconvenient truth’, which while presenting a highly scientific, but potentially boring, argument, Gore uses stories, among other techniques, to ‘hook the audience’. Psychology suggests that this works because, the mental images created by stories are precious cognitive references since they organise our experiences and make them coherent. A story which captures our attention forces us to listen, ‘*to follow*’, until the very end, and information stick in our memory. We all remember about the discovery of gravity force and of the penicillin through the stories of Newton’s apple and Flemings’ mould. But the story does not necessarily have to reflect the order and reality of events, but there may be digressions, explanations, analogies, metaphors and so on.

The master work of Carrada, published by the European Commission in 2006, ‘Communicating Science’, describes very well how to turn a scientific presentation into a captivating story. He gives the example of a presentation on heart disease. To turn it into a story he suggests the speaker find a point of view that stirs an emotion. For example, begin the story with the sudden death on a playing field of a famous footballer. Describe then why this might have happened explaining how his heart is made, and how it works. Then explain further the various physiological mechanisms that ensure the functioning of the heart pump, highlighting the weak points that might have caused problems in the ionic channels of the footballer’s heart, but that can also be

protected if those problems would have been discovered in time. This might be more attractive than just explain technically how the heart works.

Carrada (2006), implies that this mechanism can be transferred to any other theme. For example in presenting figures about drug trafficking, instead of just delivering data, the speaker could start projecting a mental image about the fields in Afghanistan where opium is produced, could then refer to the truck that transports the opium across frontiers to the illegal laboratory, and then into the western markets where the heroin is consumed. At each step of the 'story', data and figures about production, routes, seizures along the route, dismantled illicit laboratories, street level consumption, could be shown. This, however, needs preparation and rehearsal, in order to make the presentation attractive but still sober. If this is done, the impact on the audience could be much higher.

In conclusion of this part, it is important to report how this relationship between *science* and *communication*, is somehow troubled and contested.

There is resistance in scientific circles '*to go public*', and in particular to '*down-grade*' scientific arguments using rhetoric or communications tips for the benefit of non-erudite audiences. At the same time there is a negative perception of scientists as communicating in a way that is *boring, distant and not interesting*.

A 2006 survey of factors affecting science communication by scientists and engineers, carried out by the Royal Society, confirms that some *barriers* exist between science and communication. Analysing those factors affecting scientific communication in British universities, it concludes that 'a research driven culture', the 'pressure to publish', 'attracting funding' and 'building career' are obstacles for scientists to communicate their work to the public. The survey reveals that several scientists consider public engagement work, such as debates, dialogues, exhibitions and media appearances, as being bad for their careers (The Royal Society, 2006). Indeed scientists may look down on colleagues who go public, believing that science is best shared through peer-reviewed publications. Examples exist of scientists harshly criticised because they stooped to offer science in a 'non-noble format' (Carrada, 2006).

Key point: 'Down grade' your science for the sake of the audience

3.2 Speaking internationally

*So God confused their language
to the extent that they could not
understand one another's speech
– Genesis 11:7*

People working in multinational companies or international agencies when presenting their work or their products are faced with several additional difficulties than the ones related to the quality of the presentation treated in the previous chapter. They might be requested to speak in a non-native language, the audience might be multicultural and multilingual, and the speech or the presentation might be simultaneously translated.

The findings available in literature in how to address an audience internationally do not help our review of best practice. Addressing the issue of internationalism, papers and manuals reproduce, highlighting, the same tips valid for speaking in public among nationals. They however tend to indulge on popular stereotypes without much sophistication: ‘Asians tend not to show excitement’, ‘Australians love humour’, ‘Japanese don't like humour’, ‘US audiences like passion’ (Antion, 2007; Kushner, 2007).

Moreover, due to the fact that most of the literature reviewed is North-American or Anglo-Saxon, what has been mostly portrayed is how a North-American speaker should relate to a non-North American audience. While this does not seem to be transposable in Europe, for instance, where many Europeans master more than one language³ and they might be able to address audiences in a non-native language, our experience might help more to identify challenges and answers that might occur when speaking internationally.

More than the social characteristics of the audience, the speaker might benefit to consider how the language difference is a potential obstacle to communication and how to overcome it.

The wise suggestion of speaking slowly, using simple terms and visual supports, is even more important here. But what can seriously complicate communication is a heavy accent or a poor grasp of the language. An interesting speech consulting company operating in the silicon valley, Blendstrup & Associates, addresses the issues of non US executives speaking to US audiences. Dr. Angelika Blendstrup warns about the

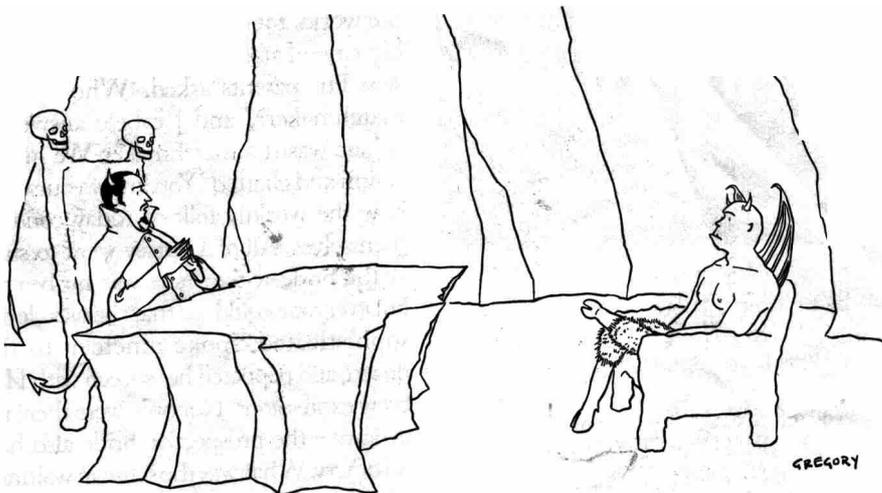
3 A 2000 EU survey found out that 53% of Europeans say they speak at least one European language in addition to their mother tongue, 26% say two (European Commission, 2004).

damages that heavy accent, poor English speaking skills and in particular, what she defines ‘terrible slides and organization of speakers’, can provoke to any speaker and their presentations⁴.

Key point: The audience nodding does not always mean they understood

3.3 PowerPoint or not PowerPoint...that is the problem!

PowerPoint is maybe the software programme most loved and hated in the world.



“I need someone well versed in the art of torture—do you know PowerPoint?”

The New Yorker, August 2003

It is a fact that is frequently used in many aspects of our life. In most professional settings, in leisure, and in the educational system. In the USA it is one of the most popular forms of teaching tool in schools. It is often a requirement in job vacancies and an asset in curriculum vitae. It is also a very ‘democratic’ tool, it is used by students and by world leaders.

When Colin Powell was attempting in late 2003 to convince the UN Security Council that Iraq possessed weapons of mass destruction, PowerPoint was the chosen tool⁵, and even the U.S. Central Command's war plan for invading Iraq was a PowerPoint slide show⁶.

4 Foreign Accent Modification Therapy, www.gbmc.org/voice/foreign.cfm; Foreign Accent Reduction www.successfully-speaking.com; Accent Reduction & Pronunciation www.languageone.com/eng/accent.html

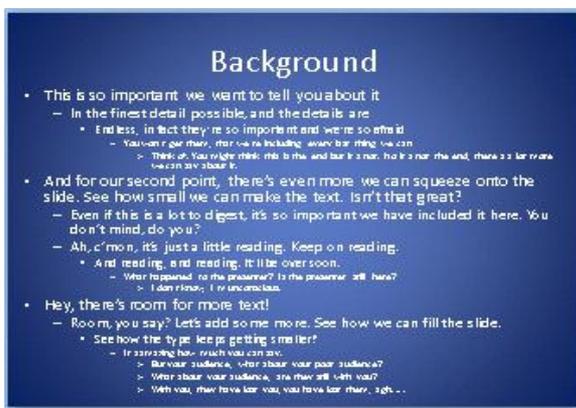
5 See Colin Powell PowerPoint presentation at http://www.gwu.edu/~nsarchiv/NSAEBB/NSAEBB234/Powell_slides.pdf

6 Obtained through the Freedom of Information Act and are posted on the Web by the National Security Archive (www.nsarchive.org)

However, despite its popular diffusion throughout the world – or because of it – a growing number of people are expressing a sense of frustration with the conventional bullet-point approach, and they are expressing themselves in a wide range of fora including discussion groups, surveys, books, essays, articles and blog postings (Antion, 1998; Parker, 2001; Jones, 2003; Tufte 2003; Thompson, 2003; Stern, 2003; Keller 2003; Barrett, 2004; Atkinson, 2005; Ruth, 2005; Kjeldsen, 2006;)

Even Microsoft suggest its million of clients around the globe to ‘kill heavy bulletised slides’ (Figure 3).

Figure 3 A bad use of a slide



In her article in Microsoft at work, Shellie Tucker, PowerPoint training coach, recognise that even at Microsoft, where PowerPoint is developed, people who use it tend more toward the text dump-a-thon approach than to tapping the program's high visual and entertainment potential.

According to several scholars PowerPoint makes the atmosphere formal and stiff impeding debate, disrupts effective conversational style and oversimplifies thoughts. Some companies have taken drastic measures to contain PowerPoint enthusiasts such as at Sun Microsystems that since 1996 has forbidden its use in internal meetings, or as General Hugh Shelton, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, who issued the following order to US military bases around the world, ‘Enough with the bells and whistles, just get to the point.’ (McNealy, 1996; Jaffe, 2000; Stern, 2003).

Probably the most relevant critic to the use of PowerPoint to present technical reports came from the US *Columbia Accident Investigation Board*, that investigating on the Space Shuttle disaster in 2003, officially criticised NASA for ‘the endemic use of PowerPoint briefing slides instead of technical papers’.

On the case, Edward R. Tufte, Professor Emeritus at Yale University, considered by many the foremost expert on information design, in his article *PowerPoint Does Rocket Science - and Better Techniques for Technical Reports* argues that the information delivered by Boeing Corporation engineers to Nasa in a PowerPoint format, provided mixed reading between lower-level bullets, presenting doubts or uncertainties, while high-level bullets conclusions were quite optimistic. The official Investigation Board recognised that the cognitive style of PowerPoint reinforced the hierarchical filtering and biases of the Nasa bureaucracy' (Tufte, 2003, Ruth, 2005).

Tufte indeed, appears to 'lead' the 'movement' against the software. In his monograph, *The Cognitive Style of PowerPoint* (2003), he attacks Microsoft's PowerPoint, asserting that the program is like a 'drug... making us stupid.' His criticisms are designed to make users of PowerPoint question whether they should use the software at all.

Tufte argues that PowerPoint 'reduces the analytical quality of presentations', 'weakens verbal and spatial reasoning', 'almost corrupts statistical analysis' and leads to a 'preoccupation more with the format than with the content'. Tufte is not alone, other scholars argue that PowerPoint slides have fundamental weakness, for instance the default *headline* that leaves unclear the purpose of the slide, but also the *bullet points* that, as pointed out in a *Harvard Business Review* article, would be 'too generic', 'leave critical assumptions unstated', and 'critical relationships unspecified' (Shaw, Brown, and Bromiley, 1998).

Box 10 Some PowerPoint flows

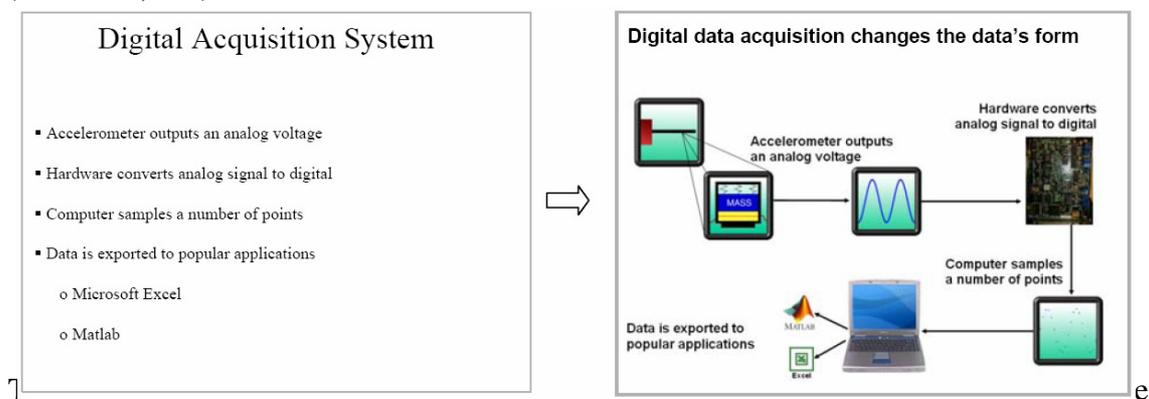
- *Reduces the analytical quality of presentations*
- *Weakens verbal and spatial reasoning*
- *Almost corrupts statistical analysis*
- *Leads to a preoccupation more with the format than with the content*
- *Drives a too generic reasoning*
- *Leave critical assumptions unstated, and*
- *Critical relationships unspecified*

Alley and Neeley, in a 2005 article appearing in the *Technical Communication Review* try to overcome some of these flows through what they call the 'assertion-evidence design'.

An alternative design that focuses on a *short sentence* to state the main message of the slide, instead of ‘the unclear headline’, and just pictures, graphs, charts – *visual evidence* – to show the content, instead of ‘unclear bullet points’. All in all, the *short sentence* would state the principal assertion of the slide, and the visual evidence would support that assertion in a *visual manner*. They admit the use of words in the slides but only as needed and not in the bullet point format.

In the example offered in Figure 4, the relations among bullets (left) would be clarified in the ‘*assertion-evidence slide*’ (right) (Alley and Neeley, 2005).

Figure 4 Transformation of a teaching slide from the traditional design to the assertion-evidence design (Robertshaw, 2004)



PowerPoint argue that it is not the software to blame for poor or boring presentations but its users. Dumping on the slides lines and lines of text, reading from the slides, showing and not explaining complex graphs and using annoying flying objects or sounds are all man-made mistakes says speech coach Dave Paradi through his website ‘think outside the slide’.

The bad reputation of PowerPoint would therefore be the consequence of its abuse by speakers that use it as their substitute more than as a support (Paradi, 2005, Shwom and Keller (2003). Moreover the reasons that are put forward by users (that with PowerPoint it is easier, or structured), are not acceptable. Also unacceptable is the claim that filling the slides with lots of information would become handy when they are distributed as handouts.

In reality the issue may be more trivial than that. PowerPoint is easy to make, easy to use, and - with the ‘USB revolution’ - easy to transport. It is the ‘perfect’ solution for those who do not have much time or will for preparation or do not care much about having an impact. The speaker has to show at the conference and just read or comment on the slides as they appear on screen. It is not unusual that even when a simple talk

would be more adequate and effective, PowerPoint presentations are shown. The fact is that PowerPoint is addictive and if not carefully contained can overtake verbal expressions and the ability of people to face ‘alone’ the audience (Stern, 2003).

The issue is that PowerPoint can be an *obstacle* to communication.

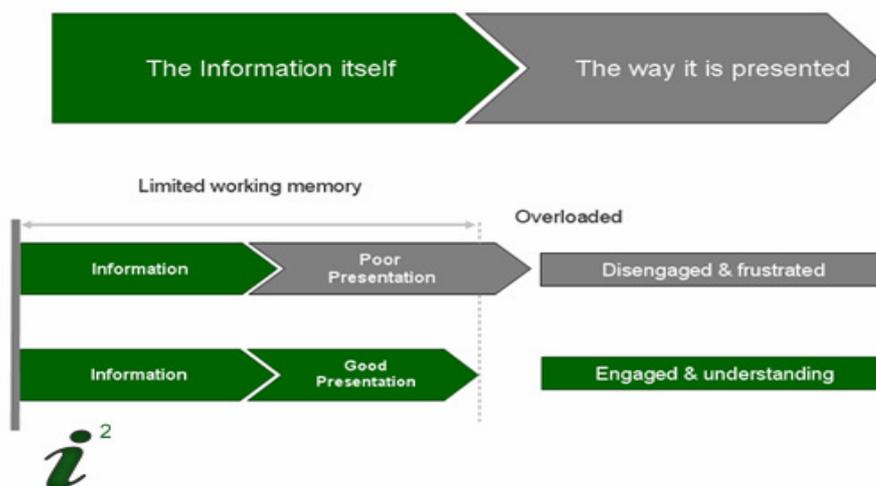
Australian Education Professor John Sweller and father of the ‘cognitive load theory’ claims that in filling slides with data and reading them to the audience, the speaker makes it harder for the audience to understand and remember content.

This is because humans have a limit to their ‘cognitive load’, and it is more difficult to process information if it is coming in the written and spoken form at the same time. In this case it seems that one plus one does not give two but zero.

The working memory is only effective in juggling two or three tasks at the same time, retaining them for a few seconds. When too many mental tasks are requested some things will be forgotten. Therefore Sweller permits the use of slides when illustrating something that is more effectively communicated as a picture, or when the slide contains words, that instead of distracting from the verbal point being made, actually help sum it up in a way that allows the audience to better comprehend and retain the information.

But overall, he argues, ‘the use of the PowerPoint presentation has been a disaster,’ and ‘should be ditched’ (Patty, 2007).

Figure 5 Cognitive Load Theory



Communication experts therefore advise speakers when preparing a presentation to think twice about whether PowerPoint is really necessary, taking into account that, when a presentation does not have visual supports, slides just with text can be an

obstacle between the speaker and the audience, instead of an advantage (even if they help the speaker to reach the end of the presentation more easily). In fact because something is easier for the speaker, does not imply that it is better for the audience. There are plenty of occasions when it is better not to use PowerPoint and, instead, to have a more persuasive ‘face to face’ *conversation*. The only requirement is preparation to progressively re-conquest the confidence to stand before the audience without ‘electronic help’ – a battle it seems speakers are gradually losing against the addictive software. On the contrary, when a presentation with PowerPoint is suitable, because figure or pictures or even videos must be shown, the speaker will need to implement those public speaking, principles largely reviewed in this thesis. It is clear that often PowerPoint is more of a support for the speaker than for the audience.

*“PowerPoint is also excellent for shy presenters:
they look at the screen,
and the audience looks at the screen
and they can hide in the dark”
Tufte, 2003*

For other scholar, poor presenters will present poorly regardless of the tool they would use. The issue seems therefore that poor presenters, with PowerPoint would dare to go public, but it is argued that the same presenters would even do worse without it (Barret, 2004; Keller, 2003).

Maybe Tufte and other critics against PowerPoint are sometimes harsh, and a little unfair on those who use it with moderation and apply communication principles, but their criticism might serve to stimulate a right way to approach to it, and maybe to avoid its inappropriate expansion.

Weighing the pros and cons of PowerPoint, the most agreeable the position is perhaps the one of those who argue in favor of a moderate use, or better an appropriate use, of it. A use in which the speaker would apply public-speaking principles, such as the KISS approach, using visuals, limiting the text, animation and colours, avoiding sounds or ugly clip art, and above all, not allowing PowerPoint to take the attention away from where it belongs: the speaker (Dowis, 1999).

*If you’ve nothing to say,
PowerPoint can help you say it loudly and clearly.
Kjeldsen (2006)*

Key point: Gradually substitute PowerPoint with yourself

3.4 Alternatives to PowerPoint

Even though PowerPoint is the tool most used in public speaking other means of communication in public exist. We analyse here just a few.

3.4.1 Oral speech

It is strange to present one of the oldest ways of communicating among humans as an alternative to software. But it is necessary to do when we consider that many seem to have a 'by-default' attitude to express in slides what they have to say.

The criticisms found in literature against the abuse of PowerPoint should serve as reflection for speakers to re-conquest their role and actually enjoy being the only source of information for the public. The question is that many might have lost confidence in facing the audience, without the filter, - or as some say 'the crutches' of PowerPoint.

However, there are plenty of occasions for people to train their oratory techniques provided they prepare well in advance, rehearse and apply basic good public speaking tips, as extensively available in literature and reviewed in this thesis.

Preparation is indeed a key issue. If with PowerPoint a lousy or busy speaker can address the audience without preparing, for a speech without electronic crutches, the same speaker would never dare to go public without careful preparation. Awareness of communication skills, and the gradual implementation of basic rules can move any PowerPoint addict away from dependence.

Eventually if the speaker is afraid to lose part of the speech, some *notes* on a paper or *flip cards* can be of help. A few bullets on a paper can help structure the speech pointing out the different chapters. However the speaker has to manage between talking to the public and following his/her notes on big, unaesthetic A4 sheets. It is not a simple task if the speaker aims at giving a relaxing and in-control image of him/herself.

Flip-cards can provide a good solution enabling the speaker to stand in front of the audience or even walk, while following some key written points. These cards which are much smaller than an A4 sheet ($\frac{1}{4}$ usually), can easily be kept in the hand and 'flipped' as the speech progresses.

3.4.2 Apple Keynote

In 2003, Apple Computers released Keynote, a software conceived to be a better alternative to Microsoft PowerPoint. Running on Macintosh computers, Keynote suffers

from the marginal diffusion of these systems, compared to PC/Microsoft. The software is therefore not very known although its popularity is growing. Some professional speakers and graphic designers talk with enthusiasm about it, in particular being a better substitute for PowerPoint.

These favourable views increased in particular after the release in 2007 of the Oscar winning presentation of Al Gore 'An Inconvenient Truth'. While spectators around the world were alerted on the global warming emergency, communication people were admiring the outstanding presentation. Movies, pictures, cartoons, text and graphs in 'An Inconvenient Truth' were smoothly integrated to support a compelling message. According to professional speaker Garr Reynolds, this was possible because Al Gore used Apple Keynote, a software targeted at presenting images more than text (Reynolds, 2005).

For this thesis we have reviewed Keynote as a possible alternative to Microsoft PowerPoint.

First of all to use Keynote it is necessary to work with a Macintosh computer, and maybe this is the highest barrier for many potential users. The first difference from PowerPoint is given by the fact that Keynote promotes the use of photos, movies and graphs over text. The by-default templates allow the use text in a bullet approach, but it becomes clear that the software 'prefers' to work with photos and graphs then text. The transition of the slides and the animation of the objects is very attractive in Keynote. This alone would make a normal presentation, where there is a predominance of text, at least more original in the way slides are displayed. Another interesting feature, called 'Smart Builds', gives the possibility to animate more objects within the same slide offering, for example, the possibility to talk about the various points of a topic presenting each of them without 'leaving' the slide. Displaying data is another important feature of Keynote. Spreadsheets and charts can be easily created with a large number of possibilities and a large flexibility to integrate movies, data and pictures.

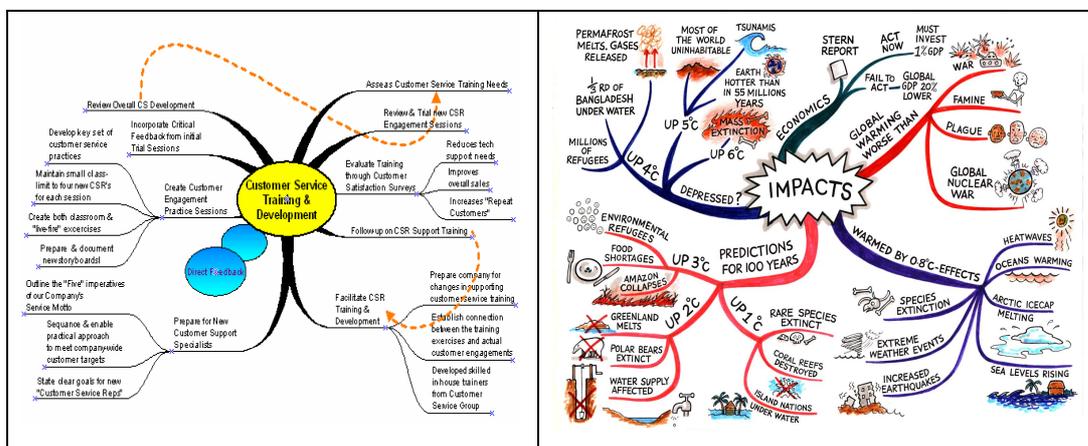
Even Edward Tufte, vivid contestator of PowerPoint, recognises that Keynote produces more gracefully designed slides than PowerPoint. However, he reminds us that both approaches have the same problems: 'low resolution, replacing sentences with grunts and relentless sequentiality' (Tufte, 2003). He adds to his thesis against the current way in which presentations are done, that it is not the 'interior redecorating of slides' that matter but the capacity to produce and present serious technical reports. 'Patches for

PowerPoint and slide redesigns by commercial artists cannot solve those problems for technical reports', he says in his 2003 article: *The examples of statistical graphics in Keynote are as weak as the PowerPoint templates.*

3.4.3 Mind mapping.

A mind map is a diagram (see Figure 7) used to represent words, ideas, tasks or other items linked to and arranged 'radially around' a central key word or idea. It is used to generate, visualise, structure and classify ideas. It finds its best use in brainstorming sessions, but also in problem solving and decision-making processes. There are softwares that allow one to work with a MindMap during a public presentation. But hand-made mind-maps could also be effective (Figure 6 right).

Figure 6 ConceptDraw MINDMAP and Hand-Made MindMap



It is argued that with PowerPoint, 90% of the value of the presentation is created in the preparation phase and just 10% in its delivery. In contrast with mind maps, the value of the presentation is all in the delivery. Those offer fewer visual tricks and are supposed to be more helpful in structuring and developing ideas. This is because the speaker can visualise and verify the relationships between the concepts that s(he) wants to communicate with the audience. It is argued that when done well, Mind-map can make complex concepts much clearer. When done badly, they can alienate even the friendliest of audiences, just as well as a bad PowerPoint (Duffill, 2007; Pimentel, 2005)

Mind-map enthusiasts promote them not only for presentations, but also for education. They are supposed to be efficient tools to take rough notes, from a lecture for example.

Key point: Take the courage to re-conquest your role as speaker

4 A non-professional approach to public speaking

“Presenter: can you hear me ok at the back?”

“Anonymous Aussie voice from the back:

Yep, but I’ll gladly swap with someone who can’t”

(Anonymous)

In the second stage of this thesis, ‘non-professional speakers⁷’ were interviewed on their attitudes, values and techniques while at the podium.

These interviews served to get a better insight into how a variety of professionals approach public speaking and to compare these attitudes with the best practice reviewed in the first part of this thesis.

Participants

The participants in these face-to-face interviews (8), were chosen from professionals working in the field of research, statistics, data and project management, with a practical experience in public speaking. They all work in an international environment, have a high level of education, long career, different backgrounds and nationalities. They perform between 10 and 30 presentations a year.

Gender	Profession	Education level	Presentation per year	Institution	Years of professional experience	Nationality
Male	Research analyst	PHD	About 20	International organisation	15	Luxembourgish
Female	Sociologist	MA	Between 20 and 30	International organisation	18	Italian
Male	Medical doctor	PHD	More than 30	International organisation	20	German
Male	Communication Manager	MA	Less then 10	International organisation	11	Danish
Male	Lawyer	PHD	Less then 10	International organisation	20	Spanish
Female	Lawyer	MA	Between 10 and 20	International organisation	10	French
Male	Scientific Manager	MD	Up to 20	International organisation	22	Bulgarian
Male	Manager & Communication	MA	More than 30	International organisation	22	Belgian

4.1 Who is at the podium?

The people interviewed are experts in their respective fields but are not by default master orators. For them, public speaking is not their main activity, but an accessory but nevertheless and important part of their job.

⁷ By convention we define non-professional speakers, those professionals for which speaking in public is an activity but not the main aim of their jobs.

Law enforcement officials, scientific analysts, researchers, government officials and managers, investigate crime, undertake research, respond to policy or business needs and are not by definition professionals of communication, even though they are increasingly called on to face audiences to describe what they do.

In doing so, they bring to the microphone their personalities, characteristics and values trying to do their best in a kind of ‘learning by doing’ process. While some of them have received some sort of training, overall the investment seems to be very little compared to the importance of presenting (and representing), their companies, their work and ultimately themselves. Not being professional speakers, their salaries mainly reward tasks other than presenting. The issue is that speaking in public and presenting is increasingly part of their work without this work being appropriately recognised and resourced.

The question of the role of public speaking in today’s professions is crucial. From these interviews it seems that while speaking in public is valued as important for example, for a scientist, showing research findings, or for a managing director reporting on the financial year, there seems to be a lack of consideration for the skills required to address an audience. It is as if speaking in public would be a natural characteristic of human beings or that, after all, the effects of a modest, or even a poor, performance would be negligible. This lack of professionalism is the most evident result of the interviews.

4.2 Fear of public speaking

None of those interviewed expressed a fear to public speaking. Surprisingly, this seems to contradict the common place that speaking in public is one of the most feared working experience at least in the USA. For example where Richard Dowis, in his paper ‘*The lost art of writing speeches: How to write one – how to deliver it*’ say that public speaking is fear no.1 for executives. Indeed, a wealth of literature is available on how to treat ‘fear of public speaking’ (FOPS), (see Pribyl et al., 2001; Anderson et al., 2005; Botella et al., 2004; Wiley, 2006; J Meltzer, 2002; Reece, 1999; Bronson, 2004; Dowis, 1999; Cunningham, 2006).

The professional interviewed reported instead a kind of ‘stress’, that motivated and provided them with the necessary ‘kick-start’ to remain focused on the task. Most of them actually responded positively to the question of whether they liked public speaking. Some responded that they were glad to be able to pass on a message or share something with the public. For others it was a task to do, ‘not my first choice’, but when

there is a good subject and a good public they might even enjoy it. Finally a few reported that addressing the audience fed their narcissism.

4.3 The issue of connecting

Most of the professionals interviewed declared that they *connect* with the audience and had the feeling to be overall successful. When questioned about the causes of this connection, many referred to the subject of the presentation: the more this is relevant to the public, the more the public is attentive. For another speaker, connection is achieved through a mix of the tone of voice, questions to the public during the presentation, pausing or even stopping to see if the audience is following. For another, the ‘magic trick’ to connect is being informal, ‘seducing with informality’, and connecting with body language, for example sitting on the table. It is interesting to see how in particular the last two answers coincide with the best practice viewed in part one of this thesis, in which connection would be first the consequence of a *conversational presentation*.

As indicators of such auto-assessment, the professionals interviewed mentioned the following: being asked questions; asked for a copy of the presentation; or just expressions of appreciation at the end of the speech.

A few non very successful events were also reported. The causes of a bad performance identified by the interviewees were: inappropriate subjects for the public; bad preparation (which in our view is one single problem and not two different causes).

4.4 Does the audience’s perspective matter?

In preparing for a presentation, most of the people interviewed declared that they begin from existing material, or even past presentations, adapting then to the new event. In general, the issue of modifying the presentation for the audience is considered and the relationship with the audience is considered important. But, overall, it seems that professionals interviewed tend to be rather introspective, concentrating first on *their* material, *their* objective, and *their* message and then on what the audience might really want and need. Only in few cases was the perspective of the audience presented as fundamental and consequently brought to the step one of the preparation phase with a sort of non-formally structured audience assessment.

In the first part of this thesis we saw how a structured beginning, focused on the audience needs (in the *audience centered presentation*), is suggested as good practice,

before the speaker passes on to the analysis of the material and the construction of the speech.

4.5 Preparation and rehearsal

Only in one case was preparation was considered fundamental, with preparation time increasing in proportion to the importance of the event, or of the issues at stake. For the other professionals interviewed, preparation depends on the ‘million of other things to do’.

The issue of time was in fact brought up as a key element hampering a thorough and systematic preparation. Nonetheless, it seems that even with sufficient time to prepare, non-professional speakers would not apply a systematic method but reproduce the habit of organizing the material and ‘constructing’ the PowerPoint.

None of those interviewed made a formal assessment of the audience, or of his/her personal motivation. Neither did they focus on the core of the presentation, writing down for example an ‘elevator speech’ and then constructing the presentation around it. They all however praised preparation and attributed to bad preparation their worst memories of presenting.

Rehearsal is very little practised.

The vast majority of professionals interviewed said they do not rehearse, as suggested in literature, in loud voice. This is because of lack of time or just lack of habit. Some said that rehearsal is not needed because basically they present always the same general subject. Instead, some people memorise the most important part of the speech, some others structure their speech in a logical sequence of events so to pass from one to other. Others write down in handouts the most important points to follow.

4.6 Stories, pictures and laughs do not live here

Those interviewed appeared to appreciate a good dose of humour in presentations. When asked about what constitutes the ideal presentation, almost all mentioned humour as one element that would make a presentation richer. But when asked if they used humour the responses varied.

For some humour is an integral part of their presentations (e.g. irony). Others referred that it can happen if the audience and themselves are in the mood, but in any case they

would not pre-construct a place for humour in the presentation. While in one case a speaker said to prefer to giving out information over being funny’.

All the professionals interviewed seemed to agree that humour should be spontaneous. They were also aware of the dangerousness of humour in public speaking, agreeing in particular that jokes are to be avoided, especially in an international context. On the contrary, literature on the subject suggests considering to include humour (ironical) proactively in presentations, provided the ‘speaker’ is confident enough.

Stories or storytelling mode, the other golden rule in public speaking, are very little applied by non professional speakers. Some of them declare that they ask the audience questions to make to make sure they are following, and in some cases the use of pausing and silences was mentinned to attract audience attention. One speaker mentioned the great value of analogies and metaphors, but, overall, the impression is that professionals interviewed go along without much technique to spice-up their performances.

4.7 Presentation assessment

Those interviewed relied on self-assessment to value their performance as public speakers. As stated above, external indicators such as *final questions*, *signs of appreciation* or getting *re-invited*, help to understand whether the ‘speakers’ were good or bad.

This self-assessment is an imperfect way to assess one’s performance. It depends too much on non-controllable variables. For example there might be situations in which questions are not foreseen by the agenda or the people in the audience cannot win their shyness. Overall, the best way to understand our own value as speakers seems to be with an external structured assessment where the members of the audience can give scores to the different elements of the presentation. This, however, is not the opinion at least of one of the interviewed speaker who affirmed that, especially among peers, there is no objectivity in assessing each others performances.

In academic circles *presentation assessment forms* exist, however they seem to be neglected from business public speaking literature. In companies that care for their external image some sort of assessment methods could be beneficial.

4.8 PowerPoint is the favorite tool

‘It gives me structure’, ‘it is easier’, ‘it makes me fell more confident’.

These are some of the main reasons why interviewed people use so much PowerPoint. But they also said: 'I mainly show data and figures' or 'I have lots of charts'. These two reasons came out somehow mixed from the interviews.

The preference over PowerPoint would therefore be given by a mix between the software ability to show figures, pictures and graphs and the help it provides to the speaker to perform the presentation, even though the latter seems prevalent. Also literature suggests that PowerPoint is the preferred tool of non-professional speakers more because of the help it gives to the speaker than for the benefit it produces for the audience. Not all that is easier for the speaker is automatically better for the audience.

There is no doubt that with PowerPoint it is possible to make a presentation without much preparation and no rehearsal. The speaker needs just to organise a sequence of slides (many of which might be already prepared) and just show up at the conference illustrating them to the audience. This becomes obvious from the interviews in the words of an interviewed speaker: 'if I would do the same orally, I should have much more time for the preparation'.

Professionals interviewed said that often they have no time to prepare properly and rehearse, as described in part one of this thesis, with the exception of particularly important presentations where the 'speaker' *makes* the time for preparation.

The other interesting aspect is the habit. There is a general, silent agreement in the scientific, business political world about presenting using PowerPoint. Despite the remonstrations of some scholars, both speakers and public (which are often the same people), seem to be very comfortable with the use of the software. The question is that because of this habit, professionals asked to speak in public find it normal to use a slideshow without even asking themselves if another way, an oral speech for instance, would be more effective. At the same time it is not unusual to be requested by a conference organiser 'to send your PowerPoint in advance', witnessing a well rooted established practice of communicating through PowerPoint. On the other hand, if one will just speak orally, (s)he might find disappointment in the public, like if the speaker had no time to prepare or did not want to engage too much.

The key question is that good presentations require a great deal of preparation with or without PowerPoint. The difference is that with PowerPoint it is possible to do a presentation even with little preparation, while without PowerPoint a presentation with little preparation would be much harder.

Worryingly it seems that PowerPoint has some kind of addictive properties, in the sense that more you use it, less you are confident to go alone. An interviewee openly admitted to be addicted to PowerPoint and, as in all addictions, without the substance (in this case a software), he/she would feel more exposed, naked, in front of the audience, while with the slideshow the public can look somewhere else and not at speaker all the time.

‘Treatment’ is possible and starts from a fair auto-assessment and from attempts to abandon *the substance* gradually, one presentation at the time, then regaining pleasure in being the only source of information for the public.

4.9 Additional difficulties

An additional difficulty for international speakers could be the simultaneous translation. Sometimes a speech or a presentation is simultaneously translated, and the speaker has the additional difficulty to remember that what (s)he says will be repeated and filtered even in several different languages. In such a case, speaking slowly is the paramount advice but also the speaker should avoid acronyms and in particular humour, especially when culturally or nationally related. Moreover, in these situations some speakers considered a mistake to show text slides if the audience can not understand the text. Much better to have graphs, photos and drawings which are internationally understandable. Moreover, if we follow the ‘cognitive load theory’ developed by Australian professor Sweller, the two information together – text (*not comprehensible*), plus voice (from a interpreter), can result in a ‘brain-jam’ of the people attending.

5 A professional approach to public speaking

The inclusion in this thesis of the Oscar winning, 'slideshow' *An Inconvenient Truth*, is justified by the fact that it set a very high quality benchmark for presentations in public.

Former US Vice-President, and global warming activist, Al Gore synthesises in the 40 minutes of his slideshow, the best practice in public speaking and presentations whose findings are exposed in the first part of this thesis.

5.1 Al Gore's *An Inconvenient Truth*

The entire 'slideshow' is a long story, narrated in a storytelling mode. Gore tells many stories. He talks about a teacher he adored, his family producing tobacco and the loss of his sister, among others. All these stories are 'mounted' in the bigger story about global warming. To strengthen the concept he often pronounces the word *story* and affirms that what he is telling is a story.

He uses rhetorical questions for example while showing the picture of the earth, he says: '*Isn't that beautiful*', and he pauses. He *personalises* the presentation: '*this image was made by a friend of mine Tom Vincent*', and of course he moves on the stage, he establishes eye contact, is he very expressive, he varies the tone of the voice and the speed of the narration. He physically stands in the centre of the stage, the public is around him as in a small amphitheatre and he has a huge screen behind him on which he makes good use of visuals to help him make his points and tell his story. But while the large screen behind him is impressive and the images are important, it is the person and the message that take center stage (Reynolds, 2005).

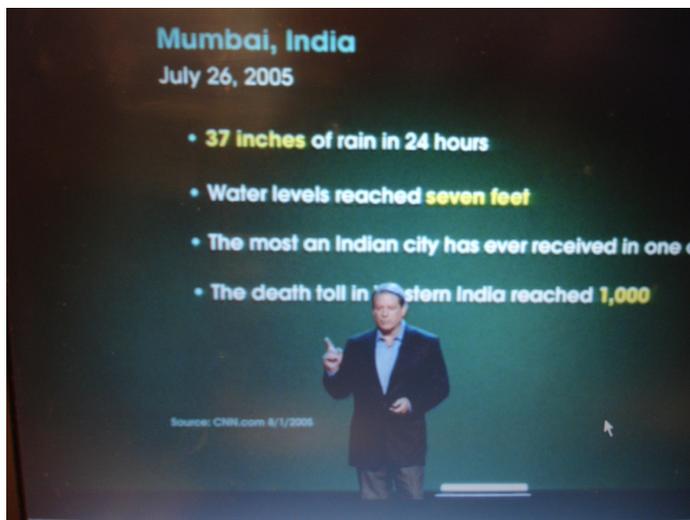
He connects with the audience because he is funny, relaxing and engaging. He repeatedly makes fun of himself, having lost the Presidency for few votes, *I used to be the future President of the United States*, or on the current administration or on the political world, in general.

Metaphors are another tools widely used by Gore. To illustrate the process of natural production of oxygen and carbon dioxide by the earth vegetation he says *it is like if the entire earth each year breathes in and out*. To illustrate the possibility to analyse in the polar ice the conditions and temperatures of the past, he says *we can count back the same way a forest reads tree rings*, and to describe the phenomenon of arctic pools and the damages they cause to the thick ice he says *they make the ice like Suisse cheese*.

He uses hundreds of pictures, videos and animated graphs to support the concepts he is explaining. To introduce the rising trend of carbon dioxide emission in the atmosphere he tells the story of his teacher at high school using 17 pictures, 1 video and 13 animated graphs. To illustrate the green gas effects he uses a cartoon similar to the TV series *The Simpsons*, with some mafia-like green gases that bully the solar rays, keeping them in the Earth atmosphere and impeding them to return into the space.

He uses only few text slides, and when text is shown it is just about punchy *quotes*, *formulas or numbers* that he recites while they are showed behind him, and of course without reading from the screen. The first ‘traditional text slide’ with bullet points comes only after 36 minutes, and there are just four bullets of few words each.

Box 11 The 1st bulleted slide comes only after 36 minutes of presentation



But, Gore’s slideshow has in particular one good lesson to teach all who engage in public speaking. And he says it himself: *I set myself a goal to communicate this very clearly*, admitting that he gave this slideshow at least thousand times spending most of the time *to identify all those things in people’s minds that serve as obstacles to them to understand*.

He also finished, as widely recommended by communication professionals, on a high. He gives a vision calling for action: *‘It’s up to us, it’s a moral moment, it’s your moment (pause), let’s solve this problem! Thank you’*.

But above all he uses Apple Keynote. As seen in the previous chapter of this thesis, Keynote makes it possible to integrate pictures, video, animated objects and graphs, which in Gore’s slideshow are carefully and timely displayed to support a very good speech.

6 Conclusion and follow up

*I hate books;
they only teach us to talk about things
we know nothing about
– Jean Jacques Rousseau*

It becomes clear from our interviews with non-professional speakers that while presenting is considered very important for their image and reputation they have normally very little time or opportunity to dedicate to training or even preparation. This is mainly because their objectives and salaries are not linked to their proficiency at the podium but at producing other products or services.

In this dichotomy, between the importance of public speaking on the one hand, and the lack of resources dedicated to it on the other, there is the reason of poor performances and the opportunity for improvement.

Once public speaking is understood as an asset for the company, and excellent performances, a career objective for professionals, improvement can start. The how to improve however is not so simple. The theories and the practical suggestions reviewed in the first part of this thesis, while interesting and in some cases enlightening, seem to fail to make the link between *oratory performance* and the *personality* of the speakers and the *context* in which they operate.

Only by taking into account *personality* and *context*, in a gradual process of improvement, can methods, tips and techniques be smoothly integrated into our public presentations. This is because presenting being interesting, engaging and even a little funny, is difficult and more time consuming and brings the presentation to a higher, more professional level. A speaker that clumsily tries to adapt storytelling techniques or humour to the presentation without a proper training risks losing the audience if not his/her reputation.

In the last part of this thesis we developed an approach that might serve to link the two: *oratory performances* and *real life*. In fact, merging key points and good practice that emerge from the review of public speaking literature, with the comments and experience from the interviews with professionals, we may well have found all the ingredients to turn a *non-professional speaker* into a *caring one*.

6.1 The caring speaker

A caring speaker is someone who cares about leaving a trace, who cares about being in contact with the audience, who cares about being better with every performance.

Becoming a caring speaker starts with the knowledge of public speaking skills. A caring speaker must know what constitute a good presentation, and knows the mistakes which should not be made when speaking and presenting in public. He/she has to be entirely focused with connecting with the audience.

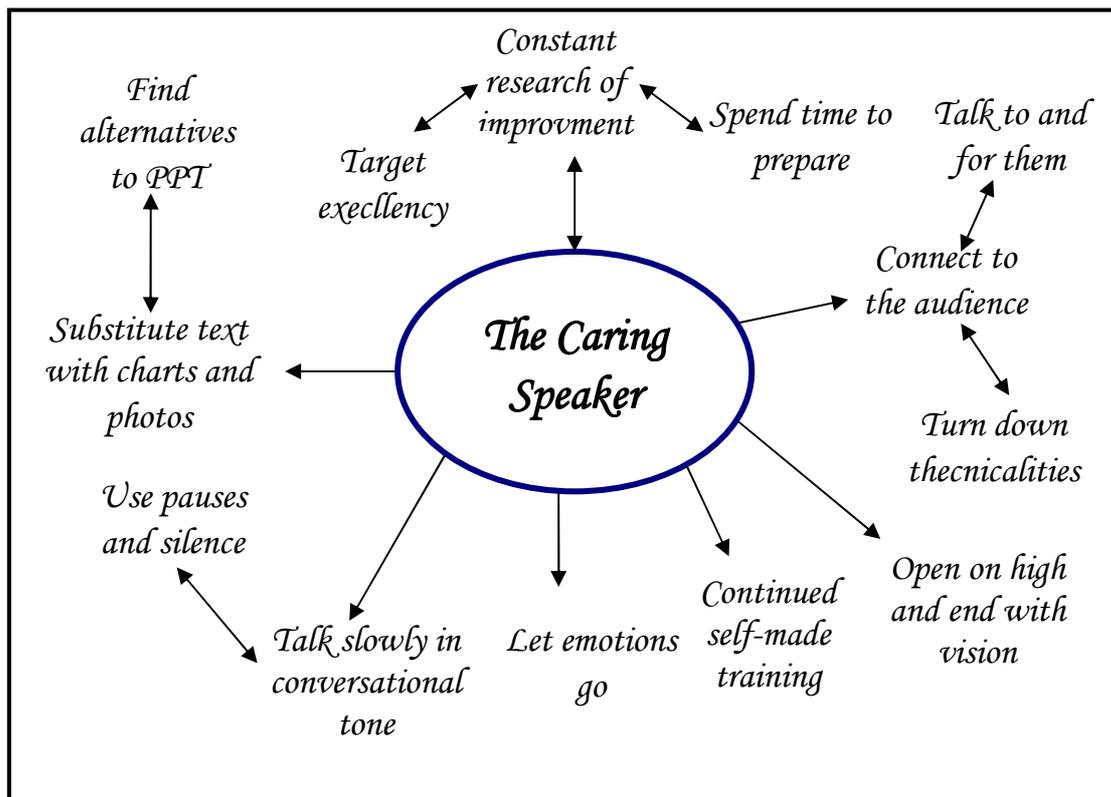
As a 'caring speaker', we will have to be very critical with ourselves, and as Churchill would say, we are satisfied only by the very best. In fact we try to assess each performance in a constant quest for improvement, adopting the attitude of continually looking for ways to improve even the smallest of details.

As a 'caring speaker' we will need to spend more time preparing our presentation, with method and structure (i.g. using the elevator speech technique), gradually removing text from the slides. So many respected professionals still fill up their slides with too many unnecessary, confusing words. Starting scaling down paragraphs into small phrases and phrases into keywords. This can set us on the path to improvement.

When considering the presentation 'to be given', the 'caring speaker' will always asks him/herself if PowerPoint is *really necessary*, if it is the best tool for the audience or if there could be better and more effective alternatives, such as a simple but more direct oral speech helped by flip cards for instance. In any case, when a slideshow is considered the most suitable tool, we must make sure that *we* are the main attraction, never the screen.

When presenting, we will need to consider first of all, what is important for the audience, what they need and want (and not what might be easier for us). For instance we will not be afraid to turn down technicalities, removing acronyms and formulas, being sure that the least experienced person in the audience gets the point.

Box 12 A Caring Speaker MindMap



We will need to open on a high and maintain the control of the audience, finishing with a pre-arranged finale. Therefore, in the preparation phase, we will construct a nice opening and a strong ending, linking them to the main message of the speech. While at the podium, we will let emotions go, making sure the audience understands, we believe in what we say. As a ‘caring speaker’ we will talk normally, *instead of presenting*, like in a face-to-face conversation. And in any case, even when there is not much time, we must talk slowly. As a caring speaker we appreciate the power of pauses and make good use of silence in our presentations.

This process, from ‘improvised speaker’ to ‘caring speaker’, is a self-training process.

It can start at any moment with a fair assessment of personal strengths and weakness understanding how good (or bad) we really are. An ‘external assessment’ might help. Any ‘caring speaker’ to be, may need to do this incrementally, over time, and according to personal characteristics and experience, in a kind of continued gradual self-made training (see box 13).

Box 13 Incremental improvement

Beginner

Take more time to prepare and rehearse your presentation, always thinking to what the audience want; use forms to assess audience, motivation, place of your speech and main message (in annex);

Construct a KISS presentation, Short and Simple; Avoid slides full of words

Turn down technicalities;

When presenting look at everybody in the audience, but do not present just talk;

Intermediate

Substitute text with charts or photos;

Talk normally, slowly and make use silence and pauses;

Vary the tone of voice;

Let emotions go;

Mind posture and use gestures;

Find occasions in which you leave PowerPoint at home;

Advanced

Construct an interesting and entertaining opening and add an ending with a vision;

Include places for humour;

Construct analogies, contrasts, anaphoras and simile and the rule of the three;

Structure your presentation is a storytelling mode.

We will gradually learn how to use metaphors and analogies - to project mental images - and anaphora and parallelism to give power to the speech. When appropriate, we will indulge in a little humour, pre-constructing a place for it in the speech.

For many of us, willing to improve our performances at the podium, the hardest part might be to lose the 'crutches', provided by an 'abuse of PowerPoint', or the bad habits consolidated in a learning by doing fashion. Experts say how PowerPoint can be addictive removing confidence to go 'solo'. For those 'addicted' to PowerPoint, Christopher Fahey, (2007), in an interesting article *In Defense of PowerPointism*, suggests to remove texts and slides from the slideshow until reached a comfortable and elegant level in a gradual progressive development.

The will to improve can lead to a continuous self-made training which will change the way in which we approach speaking in public. This can also can represent a 'competitive

advantage' for the company in which caring speakers work. After all in this field it requires just a little to shine.

The initial idea developed in this thesis is that appalling presentations happen everyday, and all too often (if not always) we, as audience, are too polite or shy to embarrass the speaker in front of everybody, telling him/her how irritating and time wasting his/her presentation was. An easy forecast is that this will continue, and appalling speakers will continue to be dismissed with the usual clap that ends any presentation, even though it might signify more relief than gratitude. Our responsibility is to try not to be those appalling speakers, and more, to trying to be excellent speakers. We can try to be speakers who care about leaving a trace, who care about being in contact with the audience, who care about being better every time, in a nutshell we can try to be 'caring speakers'.

6.2 Follow-up

The conclusion of this work is that improvement is possible and, besides professional training, it starts in every person willing to improve his/her public performances gradually adopting a series of measures to their approach to public speaking.

This thesis started from the assumption that mainstream presentations and public speaking leave much to be desired, and focused on the way to improve.

This work would find a natural follow-up in a assessment study of audiences exposed to different kind of presentations. Via such a study different performances would be graded by the public and therefore it would be possible to know what the audience really wants.

Annexes

Practical tools

Annex 1

Assessment tools

As said in the beginning, this thesis has the ambition to be as practical as possible. Therefore, after having analysed best practice in public speaking, having reviewed the modus operandi of non-professional speakers and having identified the ‘caring speaker’ as the objective that any non-professional speaker could reach, the final chapter includes practical tools for the speaker to apply a method, that hopefully will come regular with practice, in order to 1) assess the audience; 2) the motivation of the speaker and 3) the positioning of the speech in the audience values. An incremental stages box indicates which actions are required to improve at any stage of experience begin, intermediate or advanced. Finally a presentation feedback form is provided. This can be very useful for speakers that want to improve in understanding their strengths and weaknesses

Before the speech – (*Speech forecast*⁸)

It is argued that 90% of the success of a presentation or a speech is due to what happens before. It is the preparation that makes the difference between an embarrassing flop and outstanding performance’.

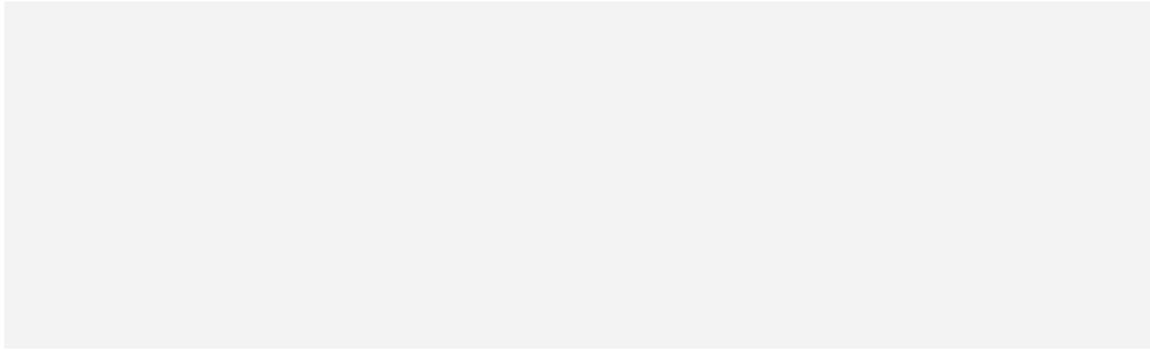
1. Audience assessment

Who and How they are? (Experts, govt. officials, hostile, friendly, neutral). What they know? (on the topic I am presenting). What they expect from my intervention? Who do I want to address?

2. Motivation assessment

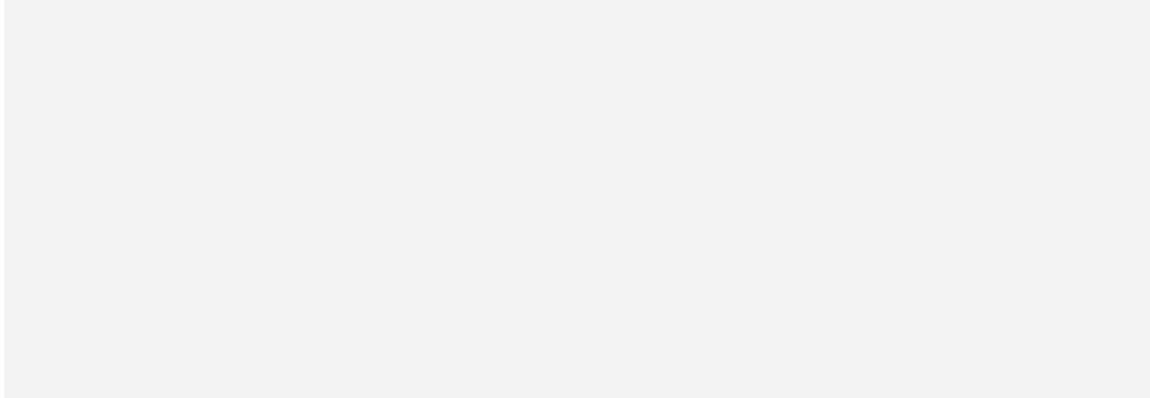
Why am I doing this? What do I want to accomplish? What I want to get from it? What reaction do I want from the audience? What change do I want to obtain?

⁸ The speech forecast helps the speaker or the author of the speech to identify the way in which (s)he wants to be during the presentation. On which communication elements he wants to acts and on which (s)he prefer to abstain. According to the event the speaker might want to use humour or not, might want to be passionate or cold depending on the results he expect from the audience.



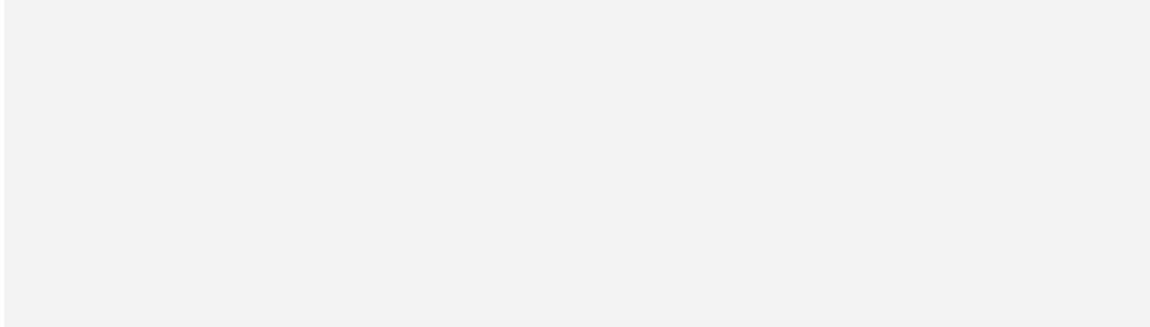
3. Positioning of the speech in the audience scale of values

How important is the speech/presentation for the audience and for this meeting? (is it the key note speech, just one speech among others or an 'agenda-filler')



4. Main Message

What is the main message of the presentation (Elevator speech? ⁹- Write it down in a few lines or a paragraph)



⁹ The Elevator Speech is the speech you would do to a very important person, and very influential for your work, if you had the chance to meet him alone in an elevator. Those few seconds should be best used to concentrate on the main issue of your message.

Presentation checklist (to fill after presentation/speech is finalised and before the event)

				yes	no	
<i>Advanced</i>	<i>Intermediate</i>	<i>Beginner</i>	- Is the presentation Short and Simple enough?			
			- Have buzz words, acronym or complex charts been avoided?			
			- Are text slides few and simple (no slides full of text)			
				- Have you considered an alternative to ppt		
				- Do you have a smooth opening?		
				- Have rhetorical devises being included (analogies, simile, compare and contrast, etc.)		
				- Is the rule of three being applied?		
				- Do you end in high		
				- Is there a moment of humour?		
				- Is structured in a storytelling mode (or there is a part on story mode)?		

After the speech – (speech assessment)

Goering (2003), sees two major problems with student oral presentations: serious underestimation of the amount of preparation it takes to give a good presentation and not enough will to learn from their peers. *Mutatis mutandis* this is a situation that we see in semi-professional speakers. The cause of a bad presentation is often a bad preparation but above all there is little or non at all assessment of performances so that is very difficult to correct mistakes for lack of feedback.

The following is an assessment form realised upon the research made for this thesis. It is divided to include the key elements of a presentation or a speech, the opening, the content, the delivery, the ending and the final questions.

Presentation stages	Level of attainment					Overall comment					
	high	average	low								
Opening <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Engaging opening, (cleaver, interesting, even funny). 	10	9	8	7	6	5	4	3	2	1	
Content <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Clarity of argument (logical relations among points) Quality of delivery (no buzz words, no complex formulas, etc.) Knowledge and understanding of core material Well sourced material 	10	9	8	7	6	5	4	3	2	1	
Quality of delivery <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Pacing of presentation (voice, tone, pausing, speed) Posture (eye contact, gesture, visual expression) Connect to the audience (Conversational style, example, rhetorical devises, stories, humour) KISS (being to the point, simple, effective) Time (the presentation was appropriate to the time allocated) Language (Confidence and fluency in use of the language) (If PPT) good use of slides 	10	9	8	7	6	5	4	3	2	1	
Ending <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Good closing (vision, call for action, clear conclusion) 	10	9	8	7	6	5	4	3	2	1	
Questions handling <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Knowledge of the subject Clarity, brevity and relevance of the answers 	10	9	8	7	6	5	4	3	2	1	
Overall assessment	10	9	8	7	6	5	4	3	2	1	
Comment											

Annex 2

Questionnaire

Name	
Gender	M F
Academic titles Degree	BA MA PHD
Professional belonging (<i>academic background</i>)	
Years of professional background	
Do you like speaking in public?	
Why?	
Are you afraid of speaking in public?	
For your job how many time in average you address and audience as speaker in a year?	Up to 10 _____ up to 20 _____ up to 30 _____ more than 30 _____
Would you define these presentations	Very technical, ____ Semi-technical, ____ A little technical ____ Non technical at all ____

Who is the public?	
In what percentages they belong to	Technical-Peers _____ Stakeholders, govt. officials ____ General public _____ Media _____
Do you use tools to speak in public. Which among these. Give percentages	
PowerPoint	
Reading a text	
Videos	
Flip chart	
Apple Keynote	
Oral speech	
Black board	
Mind mapping	
Do you usually rehearse?	
How (front of the computer? Using a mirror? Reciting at loud voice?)	
and for how long ?	
Do you use humour during your presentations?	
Do you ask questions, rhetorical questions to the public? i.e. Are you with me? Can you believe that? that's incredible isn't?	

Do you make use of pauses?

Do you use analogies or metaphors?

Do you tell stories? Or construct a presentation as a story?

What is the impression you have on your audience usually?

Do you think you connect?

Did you followed training? And what do you think about it?

And what needs would you have for a training ?

Does normally your audience show interest?

Do you think you are effective while speaking in public ?

What is the reason of it?

What is the objective of your presentation? Sell? Persuade? Motivate to act? Inform?
Share findings with colleagues?

But What is *really* important for you when presenting?

- To pass the message, _____
- to show you know the subject, ____
- to go smooth without troubles, __
- to be brilliant, _____
- to get re-invited, _____
- to surprise your audience _____

As spectator, what is for you ideally the best presentation/public speech?

As spectator, how do you assess the presentations in general you are exposed to?

What is for you the worst presentation public speech?

Your best memory of a performance?

Why you think it was your best?

And the worst? And Why it was the worst?

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¹⁰ Associated Content is a platform that enables everyone to publish their content in any format on any topic and then distributes that content to engaged audiences through its website and content partners. Those who contribute to Associated Content's ad-supported collection of original text, video, audio and images gain exposure and often earn cash for their participation.

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