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LINKING THEORY & PRACTICE

The Way You Talk to Me: Bringing the Voice Back in Negotiation Practices

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This time the Linking Theory & Practice section contains a unique and agenda-setting article. Christophe Haag and Elizabeth Fresnel raise attention for the role the sound of the human voice plays in negotiation activities in their article “Implementing Voice Strategies in Extreme Negotiations: A Conversation With Christophe Caupenne, Successful Former Commando of the French RAID Unit.” Just a note about the French RAID unit: It is a unit that is renowned in France for dealing with hostage and kidnapping situations and the RAID guys are national heroes there. Caupenne is quite famous in France for his expertise as a negotiator. He was on French TV constantly during the recent hostage crises in mid January as a commentator; however, the RAID unit could never get involved before a move had to be made by French police since the perpetrators evidently came out with bullets flying in a bid to be killed in the process, which is what happened.

Paying attention to the nonverbal nuances in the actual sound of one’s voice is valuable for those who are interested in negotiation, conflict resolution, and persuasion in difficult circumstances. For a long time, most of our knowledge about these issues was based on the study of formal rules and procedures, on written protocols, and on the way formal organizational structures can be established to support negotiation. It is only since organization and management sciences have taken a linguistic turn that studies have appeared about the details of empirical material that lends itself to representations in the form of language, such as conversations and texts (Alvesson & Kärreman, 2000). But how organizational language—that is, negotiation—actually sounds has been a blind spot.

This article fills that gap. It presents an exclusive interview with Caupenne, the expert in the practice of negotiation in crisis situations. The authors’ idea is to investigate how his voice and vocal strategies psychologically impacted critical negotiations that he undertook. Caupenne was involved in many life-or-death situations throughout his career, especially hostage crises and kidnapping incidents. In addition to the interview that the authors undertook, the second author of this article, Elizabeth Fresnel, made an electrolaryngography analysis of his voice. From Caupenne’s testimony we can learn how the voice plays a key role in regulating the emotion at times of difficult negotiations.

The authors don’t focus on the academic debate. Instead, toward the end of their contribution, Christophe Haag and Elizabeth Fresnel formulate three basic and practical steps as advice for business negotiators: Always listen to the other’s voice to detect that person’s emotions; when you open your mouth, create empathy by accommodating acoustically; and if necessary, use a deeper voice to assert power. The authors rightly state that the “voice has been the medium for men’s words since the dawn of time,” and with this article, Christophe and Elizabeth bring the voice back in our understanding of the success and failure of negotiation processes.

REFERENCE

Alvesson, M., & Kärreman, D. (2000). Taking the linguistic turn in organizational research challenges, responses, consequences. *Journal of Applied Behavioral Science*, 36(2), 136–158.

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