BUILDING GOODWILL IN WRITTEN BUSINESS COMMUNICATION

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In the age of digital, global businesses, it is essential for organizations of all sizes to effectively communicate not only within their organization, but also with shareholders, vendors, clients, and customers.Effective communication is at the forefront of significant business processes and must be efficient so that personnel can successfully share and communicate information that helps to run a successful enterprise, and to drive the most critical business processes.Of which written business communicationis integral to modern day businesses thanks to changing workforce demographics and the evolution of remote workspaces.This paperpresents theoretical guidelines on some strategies to build and promote goodwill and demonstrates them in the light of genuine examples of100 employees from 10 companies writing English business messages with a view to comparing their real performance at the workplace with what they perceive.The status of the research findings shows thatemployees are not really competent at employing goodwill strategies in writing business messages even though they have fairly good understanding of as well as eager attitude toward these strategies.The results also confirmed the importance of raising the awareness of goodwill strategies as well as cultural differences in producing effective business messages.

Key words*:Goodwill, Business Communication, Business Messages*

1. An introduction to Business Communication

Definition of communication

The word communication has been derived from the Latin word 'communicare' that means 'to share'.Communication may be defined as interchange of thought or information between two or more persons to bring about mutual understanding and desired action.According toMerriam-Webster.com Dictionary,communication is "the act or process of using words, sounds, signs, or behaviors to express or exchange information or to express your ideas, thoughts, feelings, etc., to someone else". "Communication is the process of understanding and sharing meanings", saysPearson, J.& Nelson, P. (2000). Nordquist, R.(1995)offers a definition that highlights the means of communication: "Communication is the process of sending and receiving messages through verbal or nonverbal means, including speech, or oral communication; writing and graphical representations (such as infographics, maps, and charts); and signs, signals, and behavior". More simply, communication is said to be "the creation and exchange of meaning." In his book Communication in Business, Little, P.(1986)defines communication as follows: "Communication is the process by which information is transmitted between individuals and/or organizations so that an understanding response results."

It has been shown that there exists various definitions for communication, as there are different disciplines.

Types of communication

There are different kinds of communication of which two major ones

are verbal communication and non-verbal communication.

Verbal communication

Verbal communication is the sharing of information through speech. It includes the information that people hear on radios, televisions, telephones, speeches and interviews.

Non-verbal communication

When there is no use of words, and the recipient understands what the sender is asking, then it is known as non-verbal communication. Non-verbal communication is conducted through eye contact, postures, gestures, facial expressions, chronemics and haptics.Visuals are also an excellent way to represent any information. Use of pictures, symbols and graphs can help a person communicate effectively.

Written communication

Written communication includes the kind of information transfer where the encoding of a message is done in written form. The message may only be written in words, or it may include different symbols, or sometimes even machine codes.

Now, written or rhetorical communication is one of the favored and primary means of talking to one another — be it an instant message or a text, a Facebook post or a tweet (Nordquist, R., 1995).

Written communication includes memos, letters, fax transmissions, e-mail, instant messaging, organizational periodicals, notices placed on bulletin boards(including electronic ones), and any other device that transmits via writtenwords or symbols.

Writtencommunication is oftentangibleandverifiable. Both the sender and receiver have a record of the communication;and the message can be stored for an indefinite period. If there arequestionsabout its content, the message is physically available for later reference. This feature is particularly important for complex and lengthy communication. A final benefit of all written communication comes from the process itself. People are usually forced to think more thoroughly about what they want to convey in a written message than in a spoken one. Thus, written communication is more likely to be well thought out, logical, and clear.

CommunicationProcess

Before communication can take place it needs a purpose, a message to be conveyedbetween a sender and a receiver. The sender encodes the message (converts it toa symbolic form) and passes it through a medium (channel) to the receiver, whodecodes it. The result is transfer of meaning from one person to another(Berlo, D., K.,1960).The key parts of this communication process (Bovee et al., 2000)are (1) the sender, (2) encoding, (3) the message, (4) the channel, (5) decoding, (6) the receiver, (7) noise, and (8) feedback.

The *sender* initiates a message by encoding a thought. The *message* is the actualphysical product of the sender's *encoding*. When we speak, the speech is the message. When we write, the writing is the message. When we gesture, the movementsof our arms and the expressions on our faces are the message. The *channel* is themedium through which the message travels. The sender selects it, determiningwhether to use a formal or informal channel. *Formal channels*are established bythe organization and transmit messages related to the professional activities ofmembers. They

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traditionally follow the authority chain within the organization.Other forms of messages, such as personal or social, follow *informal channels*,which are spontaneous and emerge as a response to individual choices (Langan-Fox, J., 2001).The *receiver* is the person(s) to whom the message is directed, who must first translatethe symbols into understandable form. This step is the *decoding* of the message.*Noise* represents communication barriers that distort the clarity of the message,such as perceptual problems, information overload, semantic difficulties, or cultural differences. The final link in the communication process is a feedback loop.*Feedback* is the check on how successful we have been in transferring our messagesas originally intended. It determines whether understanding has been achieved.

Business Communication

Business communication is a broad concept that is related to any sharing of information in a business or enterprise for the sole purpose of benefiting the organization. This includes relaying information in a variety of forms, which can be carried out on a myriad of platforms and devices. Business communication often includes two phases: *relaying* of information, and *feedback*, the latter of which is equally important in order to optimize all business workflows and to ensure that everyone is on the same page (Martic, K.,2020).

Importance of Business Communication

Business communication skills are critical to the success of any organization despite its size, geographical location, and its mission. Business communication is interlinked with internal culture and external image of any organization. So it is

the determining factor to communication inside the organization.Good business communication practices assist the organization in achieving its goal of informing, persuading, favorable relationship, and organizational goodwill. Organizations can only survive if they accept the rapidly changing global challenges and the communication processes are structured and delivered.The present workforce is dynamic in nature so communication is a challenge when executed against the backdrop of culture, technology and competition. The success of any business to a large extent depends on efficient and effective communication. Ittakes place among business entities, in market and market places, within organizations and betweenvarious groups of employees, owners and employees, buyers and sellers, service providers andcustomers, sales persons and prospects and also between people within the organization and the press persons. All such communication impacts business. Done with care, such communication can promote business interests. Otherwise, it will portray the organization in poor light and may adversely affect the business interest.

Armstrong, M. (2005) suggestedthat an organization should have a very effective communication in order to increase efficiency in their work. This form of effective communication will improve relationship between customers, suppliers and the organization with the public. It is,therefore, important to recognize that good communication practices, based on key ethical principles in a company's code of conduct (or code of ethics), can result in measurable gains associated with

productivity and overall workflow efficiency (Mandelbaum, A., 2019)

The importance of business communication in an organization can be seen in the below points:

- Effective business communication increases the productivity of staff by creating a trustworthy and understanding environment among employers and employees.

- Effective business communication can facilitate in attracting new customers and retain the current customers with a well-defined marketing strategy and public relations campaign, therefore generating interests and building the corporate image in customers.

- Business Communication improves partnerships in business by dealing with external business clients or vendors. Vendors may be required to communicate on products regularly for improvements. A business unit that has developed its image as an entity for easy partnership through its effective communication can attract other business units for forming business relationships with them.

- Effective business communication helps in business innovations as well as facilitates employees to convey their ideas and suggestions openly.

- Business communication helps effectively exchanging information with internal and external stakeholders.

- Through effective business communication, organizations can make their plans and policies properly through reliable channels.To implement or execute the prepared policies and plans in a timely manner, managers are supposed to communicate these throughout the organization by disseminating plans and policies to the internal and external

stakeholders. Moreover, managers get information about different routine and non-routine issues and based upon that they can take required actions to sort out those issues.

- Through communication, different plans and policies, critical issues, goals of an organization, etc. are described to employees that enhance their knowledge and make them efficient to do their tasks effectively. Also, employees become more attentive and productive in doing their jobs that result in the timely accomplishment of their tasks and easy goals attainment.

- Using effective communication, managers can acquire information from different sources and can utilize it for making correct decisions.

- In the workplace, business communication plays a significant role in maintaining harmony inworkers and management industrial relation, upon which the success of any business depends.

- In today's competitive business environment, to sell their products in a good manner, businesses need better communication to promote products and services in an effective way.

- Through effective communication different business parties can exchange information in a smooth way. This results in fewer conflicts, controversies, arguments between them.

- Effective communication which is fair and smooth creates better mutual bonding and the understanding between employees and management. This helps in increasing the satisfaction level among employees who put their maximum efforts to achieve the goals.

- Through effective business communication, employees are well

informed about their performance from time to time. Also, employees get appreciation, rewards in both monetary and non-monetary terms for their better performance.

- Effective business communication leads to an increase in the operational efficiency of managers. With the help of fair communication, managers can perform different managerial functions like planning, directing, organizing, controlling, etc. smoothly.

- If information is shared smoothly and effectively in inter-departments and intra-departments then different departments of any business like accounts, finance, purchase, operations, HR, IT, and production, etc. can do their tasks more accurately and timely.

Types of business communication

Business communicationfalls into the following categories (Leonard, K., 2019):

Internal upward business communication is communication that comes *from a subordinate to a manager* or an individual up the organizational hierarchy. Internal upward communications usually include *surveys, feedback, forms and reports* that employees deliver to their managers or team leaders.

Internal downward communication flows from a superior to one or more subordinates. This type of communication might be in the form of a letter, a memo or a verbal directive.When communicating with employees, leaders should keep communication professional and clear.

Internal lateral business communication happens *among employees* in the workplace. Today, there are many different ways employees can communicate: chats, messaging, email,

employees communication software solutions.

External business communication is any communication that happens with external parties such as customers, prospects, vendors or partners (Martic, K.,2020)

Criteria of Effective Business Messages

In written communication, how something is said is almost as important as what is said. Nevertheless, many writers tend to focus only on the "what" of their documents. In fact, how something is said contributes much to the success of the business. When the recipient understands the message, and more importantly, accepts the message, the message is considered effective. The below seven "Cs" describe the effectiveness of the business message.

Clarity. Clarity depends on the use of words. In general, the writer should use simple everyday language and avoid technical terms when appropriate to make surereader understands the message. Clarity also means organizing the message so that each paragraph deals with one main idea, and presenting the ideas in a logical order.

Conciseness. Conciseness means saying all that need to be said and no more. A concise message should eliminate all unnecessary words.

Completeness. It is important that all the information needed must be included in the message so that the reader has enough information to evaluate the message and act on it.

Correctness. Correctness refers to correct data, accurate statements, and explicit identification of assumptions and opinions. The message must also be free from errors in punctuation, spelling, grammar, word order, sentence structure and document

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format.

Courtesy. A courteous message takes the reader's feelings and point of view into consideration and offers help where necessary.

Confidence. A confident message approaches problems as solvable when the reader and writer work together. A confident message eliminates the implication of doubt in conveying its message.

Conversational tone. Conversational tone involves using language that resembles conversation, which is warm and natural. It is also the language that people use most and understand best.

These qualities, in general, create goodwill in the reader and construct better climate that will lead the customer back to the organization for future business.

2. Strategies of building goodwill in business messages

Creating goodwill among people is important in almost every area of your life. Spreading goodwill makes people feel good about you, and it encourages them to spread goodwill to others. Companies have long been aware that treating customers well pays off in more sales and higher profits. Government organizations now realize that they need citizen support—goodwill—to receive funding. More and more organizations are realizing that treating employees well is financially wise as well as ethically sound.

In business, creating goodwill can help you to build relationships that ensure the long-term success of your business.Goodwill smooths the challenges of business and administration (Novotny, E., 2017). In professional practice, goodwill means a responsive, welcoming, cooperative, and trusting feeling or attitude. Goodwill also represents a quantifiable asset that a company earns by offering its customers a value that exceeds the price charged. A business that cultivates goodwill is adept at navigating and avoiding difficult challenges related to providing high-quality customer service.The benefits gained from goodwill can be extended beyond treating customers well to treating employees well too. Today a growing number of companies recognize that financial and operational gains can accrue by extending goodwill to employees and suppliers.

Locker, K. (2017) statesthat business messages are to have one or more of four basic goals: to inform, to request (inquire), to persuade and to build goodwill. Effective business communicators know goodwill is essential to achieving the other three basic goals. Gaining goodwill helps writers to request: to learn by asking. Gaining goodwill helps writers to inform: to share knowledge with others. Goodwill also helps them to persuade: to elicit responses they need or desire when other responses are possible.

In short, all writers agree that goodwill helps create positive images in the minds of the reader as well as strengthen the relationship between the writer and the reader. Three most popular ways to build goodwill are You-attitude, Positive emphasis and Bias-free language.

You-Attitude + Positive emphasis+ Bias-free language= Success

You-Attitude

You-attitude is highlighted by various business analysts to be one of the key factors that make up the success of all communications ranging from memos, emails, phone calls, interviews... to business letters.

Simply put, a "You-attitude," is a communication strategy and a professional attitude that makes your message recipients the subject of the message. Whether you are communicating in person or by writing, you target their interests and needs, putting them above your own. Conveying a You-attitude means that the tone of the message is positive and free of language that sounds discriminatory or defamatory. By embracing a You-attitude, you create a message that will be perceived as friendly, professional, compassionate and persuasive. A You-attitude also suggests that you care about your customers, your employees and the overall welfare of the market you serve.

Regardless of the content, every message that you send serves to strengthen or weaken the recipient's perception of yourself and your business. While building goodwill by having a You-attitude is critical, your message also must be delivered professionally. If your message is an e-mail, make sure that it is free of typos and grammatical errors. If you are delivering your message as a speech, make sure to have a professional appearance and delivery. Before you craft a message, analyze your audience carefully and thoroughly to identify their needs, wants, and level of knowledge and role in decision-making about your topic. Such analysis is essential to achieving your own goal(Detlef, P., 2017).

You-attitude is a style of writing that looks at things from the reader's point of view, emphasizing what the reader wants to know, respecting the reader's intelligence, and protecting the reader's ego. You can also refer to this stylistic practice as focusing on reader benefits. What's beneficial to the reader is what's important, not what's beneficial to the writer or company.

Using more second personal pronouns

In order to write from the readers' wishes, preferences and interests, writers need to start from the simplest level: replacing terms that refer to themselves or the company they present with terms that refer to the readers. The fact is that the receivers are more concerned about themselves and are more likely to read the message when they see their names and the second person pronouns *(you/ your)* rather than the first person ones *(I, we, my, us, our)*.

There are two other ways that help minimize possible We-attitude: using passive voice or impersonal constructions. The passive sentence, which shows what have been done, not who has done it, can save the reader's ego. Similarly, an impersonal construction also produces the same effects by denoting things, not people, do the action. The following examples show the differences between "*I*", "*We*" view and "*You*" view (Guffey& Loewy, 2022).

"*I*" and "*We*" view	"*You*" view
We take pleasure in announcing an agreement we made with HP to allow us to offer discounted printers in the student store.	*An agreement with HP allows you and other students to buy discounted printers at your student store.*
We are issuing a refund.	*You will receive a refund.*
I have a few questions on which I would like feedback.	*Because your feedback is important, please answer a few questions.*

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Adapting the message to the reader

In addition, whether the person who receives the letter will understand it and be willing to cooperate will depend on how well the writer is able to anticipate his or her expectations, attitudes, and needs. Professor J. Larsen of North Carolina State University likes to begin her classes with the following quote: "*You can buy in your own language, but you have to sell in the language of the customer.*" The message can be understood that, to get our readers to do what we want them to, we have to talk in their language, in a way they understand, to make them see the benefits for doing what we want.To make sure of readers' understanding, writers may need to consider adapting their message. Adaptation means *"fitting the message to the specific reader"* (Lesikar et al., 1993).First, good business writers nowadays would appreciate simple, familiar words and avoid frequent use of jargons to make a message communicate better. Simple, familiar words coming from everyday conversations can convey the message quickly and naturally. As far as word selection concerned, jargons (technical words) should be used with caution. *Letter of attorney* in importing, *annuity* in insurance, *charter* in air transport... are technical words(Guffey& Loewy, 2022).Second, conversational style is highly advisable in writing letters. Gone are the days when cold, stiff, unnatural style was a typical feature of business letters. Instead of writing formally by using big words, difficult words, the writer nowadays will need to write a message that sounds like a person talking to another person.Many outdated phrases should be avoided such as *please find, enclosed herewith, we acknowledge receipt of your letter, thank you in advance for your kind attention, at*your *earliest convenience, please be advised/ informed....* The following examples contrast the traditionally formal style of writing and the modem conversational one:

Over formal	Conversational
Reference is made to your May 07 letter, in which you described the approved procedure for *initiating a claim.*	*Please refer*to your May 07 letter, in which you **told** how to *file a claim.*
Enclosed herewith is the brochure about which you make inquiry.	*Enclosed is* **the brochure you** *requested.*
*We wish to draw your attention to the fact*that you should sign the form before the 1st.	*Please note that*you should sign the form before the 1st.

Emphasizing reader benefits

As a matter of fact, readers are more interested in what they receive or can do rather than what the writer has done. It is important that the writers be especially careful to avoid emphasizing what they themselves need, want, desire, demand or require.When readers find in the message that their needs can be satisfied, they will be more likely to react favorably and do what the writer suggests.

Sender-Focused	Receiver-Focused
We are requiring	*Please complete*

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all staffers to complete these forms in compliance with company policy.

these forms so that you will be eligible for health and dental benefits.

Because we need more space for our new inventory, we are having a two-for-one sale.

This two-for-one sale enables you to buy a year's supply of paper, but pay only for six months' worth.

In short, when one is applying You-attitude techniques, he or she needs to employ more second pronouns than first pronouns in writing except in critical and refusing statements. More importantly, the letter should be written in a conversational, understandable style and show reader benefit. Being that thoughtful of readers, the writer is more likely to win their goodwill.

Positive Emphasis

Positive emphasis means focusing on the positive rather than the negativeaspects of a situation.Positive emphasis, therefore, can be understood as the techniques to emphasize the positive information while avoid or de-emphasize the negative information.Positive emphasis refers to the practice of using positive meaning words whenever possible even if you are conveying bad news. Multiple negative words convey a negative attitude and decrease readability means focusing on the positive rather than the negative aspects of a situation.

Business messages can be classified as those that give bad news, good news or neutral news. Obviously, positive emphasis has many things to do with bad-news letters. Writers should bear it in mind when writing messages of any kind in order to avoid negative connotation.

Eliminating negative words, using positive words instead

Careful business writers select words that not only convey the intended meaning but also create positive images in the minds of their readers. Lesikar et al. (1993) believes: "Positive words are usually best for achieving your letter goals".The writer should usually use positive words for they emphasize the pleasant aspects of the situation and pave the way for desired reactions. Negative words, by contrast, are very likely to cause the opposite effects. Phrases such as "*you failed to include*", "*as you claim*" and "*you neglected*" carry implicit accusations, and will often offend readers.Words like *refuse, unfortunately, unable to, cannot, mistake, problem, error, damage, loss...* also imply unpleasant facts and may stir up the reader's resistance to the goals and run the risk of damaging goodwill(Guffey& Loewy, 2022).

Focusing on what can be done rather thanwhat cannot be done

Most information, even bad news, had some redeeming feature. If writers can make their audience aware of that feature, their message will be more acceptable and they are more likely to maintain goodwill.

What cannot be done	What can be done
We regret to inform you that we cannot allow you to convert the leasepayments you have been making on your Canon X1000 color copier towardits purchase, much as we would love to do so.	*Although lease payments cannot be credited toward purchase price, we can offer you other Canon models that are within your price range. The Canon 600 delivers the same reliability with nearly as many features as the top-of-the-line Canon X1000.*

Giving an alternative if possible

When writing a refusal or bad-news messages, the writer should always try to provide an alternative solution whenever possible. Although the writer cannot comply with the request, he or she may be

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able to suggest some other plan that may help the reader and explain how it is similar to or suitable with the requested item. For example, "If you are able to attend a similar conference in the spring and if ourworkloads permit, we will try to send you then"(Guffey& Loewy, 2022).

Burying the negative information

This technique is concerned with the approach of writing: direct or indirect and positions of emphasis in a message.Goodwill-conscious writers would think of an explanation preceding the refusal. According to Lesikar et al. (1993), an explanation may convince the reader that the writer's position is correct. In addition, an explanation helps cushion the shock of bad news.

Sometimes, by implying the bad news, the writer may not need to actually state it. Clearly, it is possible to write a bad-news message in a more positive way(Guffey& Loewy, 2022).

Direct strategy	Indirect strategy
I'm really sorry tohave to refuse your request to attend the conference.	*The last two weeks in October have been set aside for budget planning. Because you are the specialist and we relyheavily on your expertise, we need you here for these planning sessions.*

In short, in order to have positive-emphasis letters, the writer needs to remove negative words and replace them with positive ones, focus on what can be done instead of what cannot be done, give alternatives whenever possible and try not to put the bad information at the beginning and the end of the message or paragraphs.

The combination of these techniques can help the writer convey the bad news successfully and retain goodwill as well.

Bias-Free Language

A growing understanding of subtle forms of discrimination and stereotyping has prompted people to re-assess the way they speak and write. Even if discriminatory practices are not deliberate, they can be humiliating in their effects.

Bias-free language is language that does not discriminate against people on the basis of sex, physical condition, race, age, or any other category.

Nonsexist language treats both sexes neutrally. One of the most common areas for non-sexist language to creep in is in job titles. Courtesy titles are another area that can cause problems with sexist language. Tips to avoid getting into trouble are as follows:

• Use the standard Mr. and Ms. when you know the reader's name and gender;

• Use the professional title unless told otherwise;

• Use the full name, reader's title, or general group if you do not know the reader's name or gender.

Nonracist and nonagist language treats all races and ages fairly and avoids stereotypes. Never refer to someone's race or age, except if it's specifically relevant. For example, if you are writing a report about older people's Internet use, then you will have to refer to their age. Also, you need to refer to a group by the name they prefer. For example, Native American used to be the preference for those people who are descendants of the native people of North America. Now, that group prefers to be called American Indians.

Writing and talking about people with disabilities or diseases should focus on the

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person instead of the condition. For example, you should write people with mental retardation instead of the mentally retarded. It is important for people with disabilities and diseases to not be classified or defined by their disability or disease. You should also avoid negative terms or phrases. For example, someone uses a wheelchair; they are not confined to it (Guffey& Loewy, 2022).

- Masculine pronouns such as *he, him, his* should not be used when referring to humans in general. To avoid these sexist pronouns, writers can revise their sentences usingsubstitutes like articles (*a, an, the*), plural nouns/ pronouns, relative pronoun "*who*", pronoun pairs *he/she*, *his/ her*, etc.

- Job titles that contain "-*man*", "-*ess*" … should not be used for a group of both sexes. A job title can be made neutral by using suffixes like "-*person*", "*officer*", "*assistant*"...

- Courtesy titles in salutations may vary in different situations. It is usually best to use the receiver's names in addressing, and the recommended way for formal cases is *Dear Mr./ Ms.+ Last name*. When the receiver's gender is not known, "*Dear + full name*" can be used. When neither the name nor gender is known, use "*Dear Sir/Madam*", "*Dear+ job title*" or omit the salutation (Kienzler, L., 2018).

3. Research findings

Findings from the questionnaire

The majority of the respondents are well aware of goodwill techniques and can choose the mostfavorable option to each technique. Obviously, the respondents are well aware of the importance of reader benefit in messages when up to 75% show that they would be more concerned about their readers' view, feelings and benefit.

According to most of them, goodwill is important, even the most important factor to the writing of messages (as compared with format, useful words and expressions and the organization of messages).

More attention is paid to goodwill techniques, format and words and expressions than the organization of letters.

Findings from the analysis of thebusinessmessages(inquiries and refusals) written bythe respondents

You-attitude

You-attitude techniques are generally not applied effectively by the respondents. The emphasis tends to be away from the reader and back on the writer. Reader benefit index of their enquiry letters is not very high while it is very low in their refusal ones.

The respondents tend to use more first person pronouns (*I/we...)* than second pronouns *(you/yours...*) (32.5% in requests, 35% in refusals).

One third of them (7 out of 25 messages) involve *you* directly in refusal statements. The others know how to use impersonal structures, a noun for a larger group and use *I/ we* instead of *you* in refusals.

Generally, almost all of them employ a conversational style and simple, familiar vocabulary in their letters although now and then outdated expressions appear.

Nearly half of the enquiry letters (45%) and 10% of the refusals show reader benefit. To sum up, the reader benefit index of their letters is not very high.

However, they know how to make their messages more natural and friendly by using conversational style and simple, familiar words.

Positive emphasis

Some of positive emphasis techniques are

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exploited quite well in their messages. The greater part of them gives a helpful, considerate image by offering alternatives when they have to turn down requests, and applying indirect approach in their refusals. However, many of them seem not really conscious of their use of negative words and positions of emphasis in letters, which can make their writing sound negative.

When denying requests, 17 messages (42.5%) use phrases like "*we cannot*", "*you will not be able to*", "*we are unable to*", "*itis impossible*", "*we are not in a position to*". Some of the refusal letters use very negative words such as *disappoint, trouble, uneconomical, unacceptable, turn down, withdraw, not worthwhile, never* and *allow* - an authoritative word. Particularly, 8 messages (20%) are noted to have negative statements appear more than once in each, sometimes only to reinforce another negative statement.

More respondents focus on what cannot be done rather than what can be done (60% compared with 40%).

Up to 31 out of 40 messages (77.5%) provide some kind of alternatives to the reader and only 22.5% do not. The interesting fact is that many messages (40%), while turning down requests in a not very positive way, provide alternatives. More than half of the respondents choose an indirect approach for their refusals (60%)to make sure that the reader will not miss an important announcement.15 of the 25 messages are written in an indirect order; i.e. the reasons are stated first in preparation for the refusals to follow. 40% (10 letters) choose to give the turn-down before any explanation.

30% of the messages contain the refusal statements at the positions of primary emphasis (first or last paragraph), 40% have them at positions of secondary emphasis (first or last sentence of a middle paragraph) and 30% have these statements buried in the middle of a paragraph.

Bias-free language

The respondents' writing is generally free from bias-language. However, they need to be more effective in using appropriate salutations in different situations.

The respondents are well aware of goodwill strategies as well as its importance to business message writing. They even rank them the first element of importance, above words and expressions, format, andorganization of the letter. In fact, words and expressions are given the best concern.

Masculine pronouns and job titles appear in only three out of 80 messages (3.75%).

Generally, the respondents are conscious of bias language.However, they need to be more effective in using appropriate salutations in different situations.

4. Implications

Raising awareness of goodwill strategiesin business writing

Goodwill is really an important part in business messages writing at the workplace. To be competitive in the increasingly fierce business market, employees should equip themselves with the modem business writing techniques and know how to be popular with their customers. Goodwill strategies can help.

The findings show that the employeesare not really competent at employing goodwill techniques in writing even though they have fairly good understanding of as well as eager attitude toward goodwill strategies. In fact, most of them graduated from economic universities which provide them with

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access to this area of business message writing.It can be said that goodwill techniques have not been paid adequate attention to at universities. It is time for syllabus designers and material developers to reconsider their courses in business communication in general and English business writing in particular so that *goodwill techniques* are not something theoretical to economicstudents, but their own assets.

Raising awareness of cultural differences

Cultural differences give rise to a great deal of complexity in the encoding and the decoding of messages not only because of the difference in languages, but also because of plenty of culture-specific assumptions at work in the mind of the sender as well as the receiver.People belonging to different cultures may attach different meanings to words, symbols, gestures, and behaviour or they may perceive each others' social values, body language, attitude to space distancing and time, social behaviour and manners, etc., i.e. the entire culture in general, very differently depending upon their own standards, attitudes, customs, prejudices, opinions, behavioral norms, etc., i.e. their own distinct culture. Thus, cultural barriers arise when people belonging to different cultures insist on preserving their cultural identities and at times, judge the other cultures as inferior to their own.

Certainly, there are a great number of differences in the way Vietnamese and Western people think and write. For example, Westerners highly appreciate punctuality; establish credibility by using more facts and sources than background knowledge; like to look at things as "black and white" pictures and separate emotions

from the problem. We also would like to highlight two differences that we came across in the course of study.

- Native speakers of English often use two below conventional ways to address someone:

Correct **Incorrect**

Title + last name:*Dear Ms.Smith,* Title + first name: *Dear Ms.Mary,*

First name only: *Dear Mary*, Last name only: *Dear Smith,*

The first way of addressing is often used in formal situations while the second in intimate or less formal settings. In Vietnamese culture, hardly is anyone addressed by his or her last name, but always by the first name: "*Dear Tung,*"/ "*Dear Mr. Tung,*". Of course "*Title + first name*" is usually used in formal situations; but age is also another important factor that governs the choice of address term. In formal or informal situations alike, it may sound rude to address an older person by name without a title. For example, that a 30-year-old manager writes to a 50-year-old employee using "*Dear Tung,*" may be regarded as improper.

- Western people want to think of themselves as independent units while the Vietnamese emphasize the belonging to a group. That partly explains why Vietnamese writers may want to refer to their company's names instead of referring to themselves or paying more attention to the reader. Hai, T.T.T. (2001)reaches important conclusions concerning You-attitude shown in English and Vietnamese sales letters:In brief, even though the percentage of "*I*" or "*we*" used in the English sales letters is not much lower than that in Vietnamese sales letters, You-attitude is applied throughout English sales letters and I-attitude is used in Vietnamese

sales letters with the emphasis of the company name and the focus on the writer.This may be due to the difference in organizational cultures of English and Vietnamese companies. Companies of English native speaking countries may consider the customers the first and the foremost, so they apply You-attitude approach in the sales letters to persuade the customers to buy the product of service. However, Vietnamese companies may consider sales letters as a means of promoting the company and also the company's product or service. Therefore, they apply I-attitude approach throughout their sales letters with a great deal of repetition of the company's name.

There are some connections between Hai's conclusions about You-attitude in messages and the findings in this research although Hai's study is on sales letters written in Vietnamese contrasted with those written in English. This research findings show that the employees are not applying You-attitude techniques very well in their requesting and refusing letters. It is very much likely that their Vietnamese thinking and reasoning style interferes in the way they write English business messages. So it is essential to note thatbusiness messages written in English are generally friendly and consider readers as final point, central point; among those messages writers try to point out the readers' purpose and demand.

5. Conclusion

The research is an attempt to investigate some goodwill techniques that can help writers of English business messages win the goodwill of the reader, and thus achieve their goals better. Besides reviewing such theoretical issues as communication in business, business written messages, the research presents three goodwill strategies as You-attitude, Positive emphasis and Bias-free language. The major focus of the research is on providing facts and figures about employees' performance of these techniques in two kinds of messages - inquiries and refusals. Finally, some practical tips for applying goodwill techniques into writing are available.

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