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MASTER'S THESIS

THE USE OF INTERPERSONAL COMMUNICATION STRATEGIES BY SLOVENIAN SALES MANAGERS

Ljubljana, June 2021   LUKA MEJAČ

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INTRODUCTION

Every day, there are numerous occasions where business people have to convince somebody of something. The skills of influence and persuasion are especially valuable among sales and marketing personnel, whose main job is to inform customers about the value of the product or service that they advocate. Influence and persuasion however extends far further from just selling a certain product or service. Sales managers also have to sell ideas, stories and views on different matters, which importantly affects their business. Maes, Weldy and Icenogle (1997) found that oral communication was one of the top three competencies needed to succeed in a managerial position.

Early studies on sales communication focused more on the subjective perceptions of the speaker (Spiro & Perreault, 1979; Soldow & Thomas, 1984; Williams & Spiro, 1985) and introduced a number of different approaches. Examples include task- vs. self- vs. interaction-orientations (Sheth, 1976; Williams & Spiro, 1985), accommodating vs. underaccommodating styles (Sparks, 1994; Sparks, B.A., Bradley, G.L. & Callan, V.J., 1997), aggressive vs. responsive styles (Stafford & Greer, 1965), product- vs. person-orientation (Farley & Swinth, 1967; Weitz, 1981), and the division into self-exposing, self-actualizing, self-bargaining, self-denying and self-protecting styles (Polsky, 1971; Hellriegel & Slocum, 1983). These approaches help us understand the way in which people communicate, especially how they handle negotiations, conflicts and stressful situations.

Complementary to this approach, studies have also examined the effectiveness of the verbal presentation and sales presentation quality (Gibbons, Busch & Bradac, 1991; Sparks, Areni & Cox, 1998). Language style seems to be a major factor in predicting the quality of a sales presentation and therefore serves as a basis for the conceptualization of sales presentation quality. The study of powerful vs. powerless language style, originated by O'Barr (1982), showed that individuals with similar levels of social power exhibited similar patterns of speech. In contrast to the patterns of speech that define powerful language style, powerless language style often shows usage of hedges ("I sort of did."), intensifiers ("We really did."), hesitations ("I ... uh ...like this."), deictic phrases ("That man over there ..."), tag questions ("It is, isn't it?") or declarative sentences with rising intonation and polite forms ("Yes sir ..."), which have been described by Bradac and Mulac (1984, p. 307). It has been noted that speakers with powerful styles of speech are evaluated more favorably by their audiences with respect to social power, sociability, credibility, competence, attractiveness, and intelligence than speakers using powerless styles of speech (Bradac & Mulac, 1984; Erickson, Lind, Johnson & O'Barr, 1978; Gibbons, Busch & Bradac, 1991; Hosman & Wright, 1987; O'Barr, 1982).

Another important feature in explaining influence is the theory of nonverbal communication, which studies the use of body language, voice, touch and interpersonal space in the context of interaction. Studies have shown different methods of accommodation to the body language of co-participants in interactions that could positively impact sales performance outcomes (Giles,

Coupland & Coupland, 1991; Gregory & Webster, 1996; Thakerar, Giles & Cheshire, 1982). In addition to the effectiveness of non-verbal communication, studies in the sales performance literature also examined the contribution of communication adaptiveness (sometimes termed "adaptive selling behavior" or "working smarter"). Research from this sphere suggests that sales performance efficiency largely depends on the salesman's ability to create and modify messages through interactive communication with customers (Spiro & Weitz, 1990; Sujan, Weitz, & Kumar, 1994; Weitz 1978; Weitz, Sujan H., & Sujan, M., 1986).

Recently, the field of communication has been affected by trends in behavioural science and psychology. These frameworks and models have allowed communication researchers to produce detailed descriptions of the communication process and to form detailed predictions of how the verbal and nonverbal exchange between people would be affected by factors such as social norms and values, bounded rationality, systemic biases and mental shortcuts. The impressions that people aim to convey are influenced by their role and norms in the social context as well as values, their view of how they are perceived, and their self-beliefs (Leary, 2001). From the perspective of cognitive and social psychology, Simon's (1955; 1979) theory of bounded rationality launched a new stream of research that helps us understand why people often make irrational choices. For instance, one way of explaining irrational behaviour is by intuitive decision-making, which works as a mental short-cut and can be based on a number of different systemic biases (Kahneman, 2003; Kahneman & Tversky, 1979; Slovic, Finucane, Peters & MacGregor, 2002), including affect heuristics, framing, risk aversion and others.

In order to apply these findings to the study of communication in sales, several frameworks have been proposed. One of them is the MINDSPACE system, which includes nine effects that influence people's behaviour - messenger, incentives, norms, defaults, salience, priming, affect, commitment and ego (Dolan et al., 2012). The author with the most prolific work in the field of interpersonal influence is Robert B. Cialdini (1984a, 1984b, 2001, 2003; Cialdini, Kallgren, & Reno, 1991; Cialdini & Trost, 1998; Cialdini & Goldstein, 2004), who explained his framework of human influence in the book *Influence: The Psychology of Persuasion*.

While past empirical work has examined the extent to which the theories of communication, negotiation, sales and marketing are evident in everyday business contexts of managers in the USA, UK, and several other geographical contexts, there is limited research examining the extent to which Slovenian managers are aware of these principles and apply them in their business operations. Particularly interesting is whether specific communication strategies are present in the practices of successful Slovenian managers, whether they consciously rely on persuasion strategies, and whether particular communication styles are in fact related to successfulness in sales. In this thesis, I will examine how communication strategies of social influence and persuasion are used in interpersonal sales and business communication by managers in Slovenia.

The purpose of this thesis is to understand how communication strategies and influence principles are applied by managers in practice. This knowledge is especially useful in the business environment, particularly in the fields of sales, marketing, and management. The results of the research can help us better understand the factors of successful sales strategies, as well as to help business people understand how theoretical notions of persuasion can be applied to improve business performance.

The goals of this thesis are:
- to provide an overview of influential and persuasive communication strategies that contribute to persuasiveness and communication effectiveness
- to test whether these strategies are used by Slovenian managers and communication coaches
- to provide an overview of influential and persuasive strategies most commonly used by Slovenian managers and communication coaches
- to analyze the differences between communication strategies of sales managers and communication coaches
- to determine most common challenges in persuasion and communication effectiveness

Methodologically, the thesis consists of a theoretical part and an empirical part. In the theoretical part, I review the literature on subjective perceptions of the speaker, the various communication styles, the role of language style and communication adaptiveness, social role, norms and values, bounded rationality, mental shortcuts and systemic biases and communication frameworks. In the empirical part, I performed a qualitative study of Slovenian sales managers and communication coaches. The data collection technique included in-depth interviews of chief executives in Slovenian companies and communication coaches. The goal of the interviews was to collect detailed information about the individual's thoughts and behaviors and to thoroughly explore the topic of interpersonal communication, which makes in-depth interviews the most suitable technique of qualitative research in this case. The sample includes three sales managers and three communication coaches with many years of experience in their field and are deemed competent and effective interpersonal communicators in the business environment. The data analysis of the interviews was carried out using the method of pattern seeking and thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

Following the introduction, the first two chapters discuss the research theory of communication. The first chapter focuses on different types of verbal and nonverbal communication as well as cognitive biases that may occur during the communication process. The second chapter discusses different communication strategies and tools that have stem from theoretical research and may support individuals with gaining stronger influence and persuasion skills. The third chapter opens the methodological overview of the thesis and includes research framework, data collection, data analysis and sample description. The fourth chapter summarizes the empirical findings and results of the thesis as well as discussion of the proposed research questions. The final chapter includes a joint discussion of the theoretical overview and empirical findings as well as limitations and suggestions for potential future research.

1   COMMUNICATION MODELS AND TYPES

The term communication is defined as the process of conveying information from a sender to a receiver with the use of a medium or channel in which the communicated information is understood the same way by both sender and receiver (Rubin, 1988). The main models of communication process include the linear, non-linear and transactional model.

There are different types of communication processes that take place in different contexts. For the purpose of this thesis, I focus on the interpersonal communication, defined as a process of face-to-face communication between people (Dainton & Stafford, 2000). A businessperson engaged in persuasion or direct selling must communicate in a way that evokes a change in behaviour of his prospect, which emphasizes the importance of interpersonal communication. As Nirenberg (1958) stated, "Managing and selling can be no better than the face-to-face communication involved in them" (p. 33). Studies that build upon the rich collection of communication theories show there are certain universal communication factors that positively affect the outcome in communication process, especially in interpersonal selling, influence and persuasion. In general, these factors can be divided in two main communication groups: nonverbal and verbal communication. These models are described in detail in the remainder of this chapter.

1.1   Models for understanding communication processes

The communication process can be presented in a visual form with the use of models, of which the main ones include the linear model (Shannon & Weaver, 1949) and the transactional model (Barnlund, 1970).

Shannon and Weaver (1949) described communication as a linear process where a source encodes a message and sends it to a receiver, who then decodes its meaning. The process can be disturbed by noise, which negatively influences the reception of the message and can be any of the four:

- Semantic noise – linguistic influences;
- Physical (external) noise – bodily influences;
- Psychological noise – cognitive influences;
- Physiological noise – biological influences.

Figure 1: Communication process
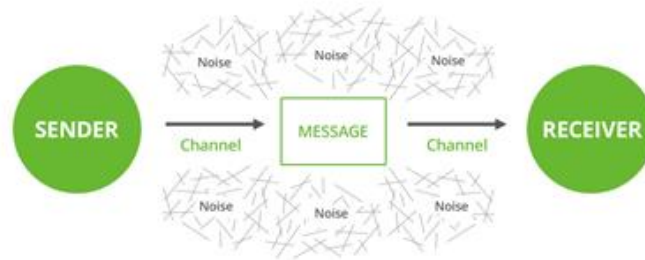
Source: Crawley (2020).

The linear model was initially used to explain how information passes through radio and telephone channels and is therefore a very oversimplified representation of a communication process. The model assumes there is only one message in the communication process and that communication flows in one direction only, from sender to receiver.

The transactional model presented by Barnlund's (1970) offers a more realistic representation of communication process, as it depicts simultaneous exchange of both sending and receiving the messages and demonstrates its fluidity. The transactional model builds upon the linear model by introducing an overlapping personal field of experience of the sender and receiver who are then mutually responsible for the effectiveness of communication. The model assumes that people build on shared meaning in their communication.

Figure 2: Transactional model
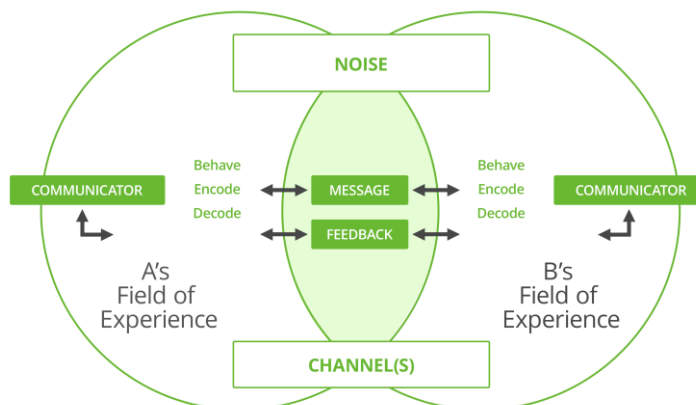
Source: Crawley (2020).

These communication models help us better understand what communication process actually is, what key aspects it includes and what factors are at individual's disposal to enhance their communication skills. The underpinning point is that communication is a two way process between two (or more) subjects with different backgrounds and fields of experience. The two-way path represents the message and feedback loop, which helps diminish the effects of noise that comes with specific channel of communication.

1.2   Nonverbal communication

The study of nonverbal communication dates back to ancient times, when the Greeks and Romans considered gestures to be an important persuasive addition to rhetorical discussions. Charles Darwin was the first who conducted scientific research of nonverbal communication in 1872 in the publication *The Expression of the Emotions in Man and Animals*. Darwin studied nonverbal interactions between animals and argued that mammals communicate their emotions by gestures and expressions. Since then, the studies of nonverbal communication factor have been present in fields like linguistics, semiotics, anthropology, and social psychology (Littlejohn & Foss, 2009).

The best way to describe the impact of nonverbal communication is that we speak, before we even speak. Expressive body movements display or emphasize thoughts, emotions, feelings, moods, intentions and attitudes that can be used in combination with, or instead of, verbal communication (Littlejohn & Foss, 2009). Oftentimes, people give out these bodily signals unconsciously and unintendedly; this phenomenon is in psychology known under the terms "unconscious communication" or "honest signals", and includes all cues that are expressed involuntary. Due to these unconscious signals, nonverbal communication is often believed to convey even more meaning than verbal communication (Petak, 2019).

In 1971, Albert Mehrabian conducted a study on the relationships between three main elements of communication: the verbal, the vocal, and the visual. The verbal referred to the spoken words, the vocal referred to the intonation, projection, and resonance of the voice and the visual referred to the nonverbal elements like posture, face expressions and other aspects of body language. Mehrabian concluded that the verbal element accounts for 7% of the liking of the person speaking, while tone of voice and body language account for 38% and 55%, respectively. Furthermore, the study showed that the nonverbal elements become a major factor of deciphering the message when the verbal and nonverbal message are incongruent. Concretely, if meaning of spoken words is not congruent with the message conveyed by the tone of voice and facial expression, people tend to focus on the latter two to decipher the message (Mehrabian, 1971).

Giri N. Vijai (2009) defined nonverbal communication as transmission of messages through a nonverbal mode, which includes body language (kinesics - eye contact, facial expressions, gestures, posture), the distance between two individuals and physical environments/appearance (proxemics), voice (paralanguage) and touch (haptics). Common literature defines three main functions of nonverbal communication (Argyle, 1972):
- to convey attitudes and emotions
- to act as a support and complement of verbal communication
- to be used as a replacement for language.

Nonverbal behaviour has also been categorized in other ways. Ekman and Friesen (1969) classified bodily movements in five groups based on their psychological origin. **Affect displays** (also called emotional expressions) mostly take form in face expressions and display unconscious feelings and emotions. **Regulators** are used to support the interaction flow between communication partners, like expressing approval through head nods or disbelief through leaning the body back. **Adaptors** are used to relieve tension or stress by fiddling with objects, touching others, nail biting, rubbing the eyes, scratching an itch and others. **Illustrators** assist verbal language by visually illustrating what is being said, for example with batons (used for emphasis), deictics (pointing gestures) or spatials (used for depicting spatial relationships). **Emblems** have a direct verbal translation and are used as a substitute for words, examples include different universal gestures.

1.2.1 Body language

Body language (*kinesics*) is the interpretation of bodily activity in nonverbal communication such as eye contact, facial expressions, gestures and posture. Anthropologist Ray Birdwhistell (1952), who is now considered the founder of this research area, did first studies on how people communicate through body movement. The interest in kinesics gained popular attention in the 1960s and 1970s through non-academic publications, which used the research findings as a groundwork for teaching people about how to read and use body movement in business and social settings. An analysis of recorded sales interviews and negotiations during showed that, in business encounters, body movement accounts for between 60 and 80% of the impact made in a meeting (Pease A., Pease, B., Kassin & Muin, 2015). Furthermore, studies have shown that people form 60 to 80% of their initial impression about a new person in less than four minutes (Pease A., Pease, B., Kassin & Muin, 2015).

Mehrabian (1981) argued that through kinesics people also communicate social status, liking and relational standing. For example, individuals of higher social status tend to use more space when they interact with other people and romantic partners or family members more frequently use touch to express affection.

Previous research focused on studying kinesics in relation to the nature of interpersonal interactions and quality of communication showed that face is considered the most expressive part of the body and that people tend to observe it the most in understanding nonverbal cues (Ekman & Friesen, 1967). It has been estimated that an individual can produce 250.000 different facial expressions, which can encode a variety of both communicative (conscious and intentional) as well as informative (unintentional) messages (Birdwhistell, 1952). **Facial expressions** are oftentimes used as a primary method of sharing feelings and emotions (Ekman & Friesen, 1967), especially in social settings with strangers. Kellerman, Lewis & Laird (1989) conducted a study to learn about the effect of eye contact on feeling of liking, where the opposite-sex individuals have done a two-minute casual conversation. Half of the subject were instructed to maintain intense eye contact with the other person by counting the number of times

that they blinked, while the other half of the subjects did not receive any special instructions. The analysis of subjects after conversation showed that the unsuspecting blinkers reported significantly higher feelings of liking and respect for their partner who had been counting their blinks. The emotional reaction to a profound gaze also has a physiological effect by increasing the observed person's heartbeat (Wellens, 1987). In general, studies have shown that eye contact is minimized towards disliked addressees, maximized for addressees toward whom the liking and attitude is neutral, and slightly somewhat diminished for addressees who are position among highest degree of liking (Mehrabian, 1969).

Similar to facial expressions, **gestures** can also be either communicative or informative. Communicative gestures (also called active gestures) are produced as a way of intensifying the meaning of the verbal message and can be both intentional or unconscious in their origin (Abner, 2015). Informative (also called passive gestures) on the other hand provide information about the speaker as a person and do not serve as an additional explanation to the message; examples include scratching, adjusting clothing, tapping and others (Krauss, Chen & Chawla, 1996). Gestures tend to have the most cultural-specific meaning out of all nonverbal behaviour, which is further explained in section 1.2.5 below.

Another important mode of communication is body **posture**, which can provide important information about individual's attitudes and interpersonal relations in a social setting, social standing, current emotional states and personality traits (Cozolino, 2006). In general, posture can be characterized as either open or closed. In an open posture, the most vulnerable parts of the body are exposed: throat, lungs, abdomen and genitals. On the other hand, a person in a closed posture unconsciously tries to protect these vulnerable body parts with hands, arms, either shoulders or legs. Research has shown that closed posture usually signals unpleasant feelings, like detachment, hostility or lack of interest, whereas open posture signifies relaxed and friendly attitude (Rossberg-Gempton & Poole, 1993). Other body posture signs that convey accessibility and positive attitude towards addressee are body movement imitation, slight inclination and relatively high degree of direct orientation towards the person (Machotka, 1965; Hergenhahn & Olson, 2009). Studies about posture and position of a communicator, in relation to the social status of him/her compared to the addressee, have yielded the following patterns. In general, higher status and more powerful individuals have an open body posture, maintain strong eye contact and accommodate less than their lower status, less powerful co-participants (Giles, Coupland, N., & Coupland, J., 1991; Gregory & Webster, 1996; Thakerar, Giles & Cheshire, 1982). When a person is speaking with addressee of a higher status, body orientation is more direct, leg and arm movement is less relaxed, arms are more open, the distance between communicators is higher and eye contact is moderately strong (Hearn, 1957; Lott & Sommer, 1967; Mehrabian 1968a; Mehrabian 1968b; Mehrabian, 1969).

Studies have shown that body posture is often indicative of a person's mood and emotional state, which affects muscle tension, energy levels, breathing patterns and similar. Stress, anger, sadness and other negative emotions usually results in slouched and closed posture, muscle

tension and shallow breathing. On the other hand, positive emotions result in heightened energy levels, straight and open posture, relaxed muscles and normal breathing patterns (Coulson, 2004).

While posture is often indicative of the context of a certain situation and can provide information about the current social and emotional state of the individual, it should also be considered and analysed independently of the context. Posture can be affected by different psychological and physical conditions, anatomical body composition, repetitive physical movement patterns as well as personality traits of an individual; these factors should be taken into consideration when assessing body position in the context of communication. An example of posture-affecting condition has been presented by Lowen (1991), when he studied the relationship between muscle tension and negative emotion suppression. Prolonged suppression of anger or fear results in chronic muscle tension, which can in turn affect body posture.

1.2.2 Interpersonal space

Interpersonal scape (*proxemics*) is the study of communication through interpersonal space and distance. It is an important indicative factor of character and emotional state of the communicator as well as his relationship with the addressee (Littlejohn & Foss, 2009). Edward T. Hall, the founder of the term proxemics, described the interpersonal space of an individual relative to the people around and categorized it in four distinct zones (Western, Anglo-American standard):

- intimate space (distance between 0-46 centimetres),
- personal space (distance between 46-122 centimetres),
- social space (distance between 1.2-3.7 meters) and
- public space (more than 3.7 meters).

Figure 3: Interpersonal space
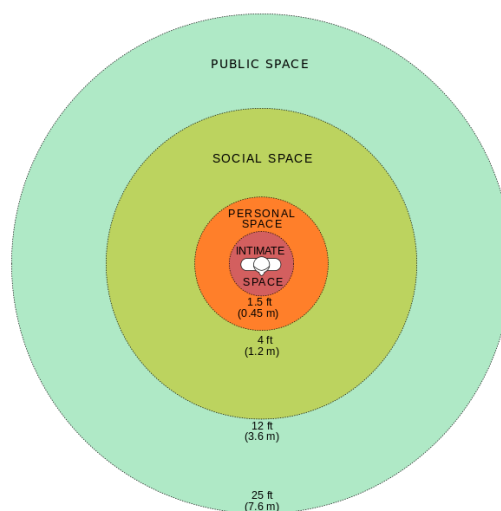
Source: Wikimedia (2009).

Use of personal space varies among different cultural definitions, nature of social setting where communication take place as well as communicator's social relation, sex and status. In general, interactions with family members, friends and liked individuals are most proximate, interactions with acquaintances and individuals of a neutral affect occur at intermediate distance and encounters with strangers and disliked individuals usually take place at larger distances. When there is potential for threat or when conversational partners produce negative emotions (discomfort, anxiety, annoyance), individuals tend to move further away (Aiello, 1987). Women generally stand closer when interacting, while men maintain larger distance when talking to other men and shorter distance when communicating with women. The spatial distance also increases with the status and respect (Littlejohn & Foss, 2009).

1.2.3 Vocalics

Vocalics (*paralanguage*) is a vocal but nonverbal component of communication that characterize the meaning by using verbal sequences like pitch, rate, volume, intonation and others (Littlejohn & Foss, 2009). First theory of paralanguage has been introduced by George L. Trager (1958; 1960; 1961) in the form of a classification system, which consists of voice set, voice qualities and vocalization. Voice set represents the context in which an individual is speaking and provides information about culture, age, gender and mood. Voice qualities include studying volume, pitch, rhythm, tempo, resonance, articulation, nasality, breathiness, hoarseness and accent, which all result in a unique vocal print. Vocalization includes vocal characterizers (which portray emotions with crying, laughing, yawning, etc.), vocal qualifiers (which refer to the style of communicating a message, like yelling or whispering) and vocal segregates (nonlexical utterances, which help maintain a conversation – an example is "uh-uh") (Littlejohn & Foss, 2009). How a word is said often expresses greater meaning than the word itself, which is why paralanguage is an important component to study in interpersonal communication.

Bolinger (1978) argued that fundamental voice frequency conveys the size and likely also the power of the speaker. Overall body mass is correlated with the size and mass of the vibrating vocal membrane. If the fundamental vocal frequency is low, this gives the impression of being mature, large and powerful. Furthermore, Bolinger noted that the messages, which are conveyed in a rising voice frequency allude to states like deference, politeness, submission and a lack of confidence. On the other hand, falling or low voice frequency convey state of assertiveness, authority, confidence, aggression and threat. An important aspect of paralanguage is also using the silence, which conveys confidence of the speaker, significance of the message or create a state of rising anticipation for what is to come.

1.2.4 Touch

Touch (*haptics*) refers to the study of touch as a form of nonverbal communication and include handshakes, holding hands, kissing, a pat on the shoulder, back slapping and arm brushing. The

term also includes touching of oneself during a conversation in the form of licking, picking, holding, and scratching. The meaning, conveyed through touching, depends highly on the manner of touch, context of the situation, relationship between the communicating partners and their cultural background. The meaning of touch is very diverse and can extend from love and care on one side to anger and violence on the other (Littlejohn & Foss, 2009).

Handshake is the most widely used form of haptic touch in a business environment. It is an important part of a first impression and different forms of the handshake convey a different meaning. For example, a firm grip handshake may indicate confidence, credibility and strength, a limp handshake may communicate weakness and dishonesty, while a handshake with a twist can serve as a sign of intimidation and dominance (Wesson, 1992).

In general, touch has the power to comfort and connect, but its use depends very much on the person and social context. The lack of nonverbal communication competence related to touch can negatively impact the conversation and relationship as it can be potentially threatening an inappropriate (Hans & Hans, 2015).

1.2.5 The role of culture in nonverbal communication

Culture plays an important role in interpreting all aspects of nonverbal communication, as communication cues can be very culture-specific. Hofstede's six cultural dimensions analysis shows the effects that a society's culture has on the values of its members and explains how these values relate to their behaviour. In this way, the big gestures and loquacity of Italian people is not only a general stereotype, but rather a culture-specific factor. Due to that, indulgence and emotions are expressed much more openly in the Italian culture than for example in Norwegian culture. This assumption has been confirmed by a study of middle-aged male usage of nonverbal gestures in 25 European cultures (Morris, 1979). Participants who lived closer to the Mediterranean Sea that are strongly fixed in their national culture-specific behaviours have used far more exaggerated and bolder gestures than participants living in the northern European or Scandinavian countries. This discrepancy between nations has an important implication, since it is in general more difficult for individuals of different nationalities to interpret nonverbal cues of the other person.

Certain gestures are very culture-specific and can even have different meaning in different countries. For example, the thumbs-up gesture, which generally signals approval and positive connotation in Western-speaking countries, is considered offensive in some parts of West Africa and the Middle East, including in countries like Iran, Iraq, and Afghanistan (Strazny, 2005). Another example is "the OK sign", performed by connecting a thumb and index finger and holding the other fingers straight. In most Western cultures, this sign denotes approval and agreement, however in certain countries it holds a different connotation; in Japan it is used to symbolize money or a coin, and in parts of the Middle East and Latin America, the gesture may be interpreted as a vulgar expression resembling a human anus (Armstrong & Wagner, 2003).

In general, high contact cultures such as South and Latin America, Southern Europe, Africa and Middle East, people tend to share more physical contact and convey many messages through touch rather than verbally. These cultures also tend to use longer gazes, hugs and a decreased personal space (McCornack, 2017).

Although much of nonverbal behaviour is based on culture-specific symbols, many scholars argue that a big part can be universally understood by people of different origin. Wundt (1900) asserted gestural cues have universal meaning and his findings have later been further developed by Ekman (1970) who determined that there are six universal facial expressions: anger, disgust, fear, joy, sadness, and surprise. Having awareness about culture-specific and universal nonverbal communication is a useful feature in developing international business relations, which are nowadays a common practice in almost every business industry.

1.2.6 Effect of nonverbal behaviour on emotional state and attitude

Recent studies have consistently demonstrated the effects of body posture and movement on the emotional state of an individual. A study done by Briñol & Petty (2003) showed that different head movements have affected participants' attitude about a certain topic. When participants were instructed to nod while listening to a persuasive message, the head movement enhanced their confidence about the message. On the other hand, when instructed to shake their head to signal disagreement, their attitude towards the opinion changed in a negative way. The findings of the study have supported the "self-validation" hypothesis, which states that head movements can change one's attitude towards a topic.

The infamous study done by Strack, Martin & Stepper (1988) showed how facial activity can affect emotional state of an individual. In a study, participants were instructed to rate the funniness of cartoons using a pen that they held in their mouth, which induced a smile. The results supported the facial feedback effect, as participants rated cartoons as funnier when they held the pen with their teeth. The study has been replicated many times to confirm the reliability of the effect and support theories of embodied emotion (Niedenthal & Maringel, 2009). A recent study by Marsh, Rhoads & Ryan (2019) collected facial feedback data from over 400 undergraduates over the course of 9 semesters and provided robust evidence in support of the initial study and emotional embodiment theory.

A study done by Wilson & Peper (2004) compared how upright and slumped posture affected their ability to induce positive and negative thoughts. Around 92% of the participants indicated it was easiest to recall positive thoughts in the upright posture. In another recent study (Peper, Harvey, Mason & Lin, 2018), results have showed how upright posture has significantly helped participants in securing better scores on mathematics tests.

The results of another study (Carney, Cuddy & Yap, 2010) have showed that posing in high-power nonverbal displays (as opposed to low-power pose) causes both behavioural as well as neuroendocrine changes. Participants who were instructed to display high-power pose experienced elevation in testosterone level, decreases in a stress hormone cortisol, increased feelings of power lower risk-aversion. On the other hand, low-power posers displayed the opposite pattern. The findings of this study suggest that specific nonverbal behaviour extends beyond just positive thinking and feeling, it also significantly affects individual's physiology and behavioral choices.

These are all important implications for sales effectiveness, since individuals who are in the positive emotional state and feel confident about participating in interpersonal sales settings are able to communicate more effectively, which in the end positively affects business and sales performance outcomes (Spitzberg & Cupach, 1984, 1989; Wiemann, 1977).

1.2 Verbal communication

Verbal communication is defined as interaction through the use of words in an agreed-upon and rule-governed system (Chandler & Munday, 2020). It includes both speech (oral communication) and written communication. We all know different words produce different effects on people. Verbal messages can vary along linguistic dimensions such as vocabulary range (Bradac, Konsky & Davies, 1976), dialect (Giles & Powesland, 1975), and language intensity (Bowers, 1963). The vast variety and multiplicity of verbal communication facets make it necessary for researchers to draw limitations and focus on a few selected aspects of the theory. Therefore, for the purpose of this thesis, I am going to focus on the parts of verbal communication theory that are related to the effectiveness of verbal presentation in business and sales situations.

In the past, researchers have examined a variety of verbal communication variables to explain their effects on persuasion and communication effectiveness (Spiro & Perreault, 1979; Weitz, 1981; Williams & Spiro, 1985). Early studies focused more on the **subjective perceptions of the speaker** (Spiro & Perreault, 1979; Soldow & Thomas, 1984; Williams & Spiro, 1985) and have introduced a number of different approaches, summarized below. Communication style is the basis of these analyses and is defined as a synthesis of content, code and communication rules into unique combination, known as the individual's particular pattern of communication (Barber, 1978). These approaches help us understand the way, in which people communicate, especially how successful they are in influence and sales, and how they handle negotiations, conflicts and stressful situations.

A study of a task- vs. self- vs. interaction-orientations (Sheth, 1976; Williams & Spiro, 1985) has examined whether the sales success can be determined by a task-orientation, a self-orientation and an interaction-orientation. The task-oriented communication style is goal oriented concerned with efficiency and minimizing time, cost and effort in the interaction. The

interaction-oriented style is more personal and social, even to the point of ignoring the goal of the interaction. In the self-oriented style, salesperson is preoccupied with himself/herself in a conversation, focuses on his/her own welfare and is less empathetic toward the other customer. Results of the study have shown that all styles are determinant of the success of sales interaction, which draws the conclusion that all three aspect are important to be considered in a sales interaction.

A study on accommodating vs. underaccommodating communication style (Sparks, 1994; Sparks, Bradley & Callan, 1997) investigated how satisfied customers were with service quality when employees were empowered at different degrees (full, limited, and none) and used different communication styles (accommodative–informal and personal, and underaccommodative–formal and impersonal). Results of experiment within the context of service failures showed that the fully empowered employees yielded the highest degree of customer satisfaction, but only when they used an accommodating style of communication. When an underaccommodating style of communication was used, there were no differences in customer satisfaction among fully empowered and none-empowered employees.

In a study of assertive and responsive communication styles, differences in communicators' interpersonal motives for communication have been investigated (Anderson & Martin, 1995). Results showed that competent communicators (high assertive, high responsive) communicate from affection and pleasure needs, while non-competent communicators (low assertive, low responsive), communicate more from control and escape needs. In contrast to competent individuals, who are open to communication and stand up for themselves, aggressive individuals (high assertive, low responsive) are control-oriented and are less immediate and attentive. Submissive persons (low assertive, high responsive) are self-sacrificing and do not stand up for themselves (Richmond & McCroskey, 1992).

Another study that compared product vs. person-orientation style (Farley & Swinth, 1967), where the first presentation stressed product attributes and the second conducted a complimentary personal discussion of how the product is consistent with salesperson's role in life. Results showed that recipients of both communication styles chose the product with approximately the same frequency and thus concluded that well-balanced sales message must pay significant attention to both material and nonmaterial aspects of the sales interaction.

Besides the above mentioned approaches, the sales performance literature has presented another important contribution to the field, which is the concept of communication (sales) adaptiveness (also termed adaptive selling behavior or "working smarter") (Spiro & Weitz, 1990; Sujan, Weitz & Kumar, 1994; Weitz 1978; Weitz, Sujan H., & Sujan, M., 1986). Research from this sphere suggests that sales performance efficiency largely depends on the salesman's ability to create and modify messages through interactive communication with customers. While mass media communication channels (social media marketing, commercials, magazines, etc.) work on the principle of "one message fits all", personal interaction is the only communication sales

communication that allows for adaptation of the message to the specific needs and beliefs of each person. The ISTEA model (Weitz, 1978) provides a framework that can be used both for personal selling situation as well as any other communication setting – in our case negotiation, persuasion and influence. The framework consists of five stages: (1) collecting information about a prospective customer or conversation partner, (2) developing a (sales) communication strategy based on the acquired information, (3) transmitting messages according to the strategy, (4) evaluating the impact of the messages and (5) making adjustments based on the evaluation. A high level of communication adaptiveness is achieved when a person uses different communication strategies across different encounters, according to their specific needs. In contrast, a low level of communication adaptiveness is used when the same message is conveyed to all encounters.

Overall, communication style has been shown to have influence on persuasion, but mostly in the context of low audience ability to process information (Sparks, Areni & Cox, 1998). When participants in studies received a message in the form of a written transcript with unlimited reading time, their information processing ability was high (Chaiken & Eagly, 1976; 1983) and language style had a much smaller impact on persuasion. However, in the situation of presenting the message through audio or videotape, limited exposure time inhibited participants' ability to process the arguments, which resulted in a significant role of language style for persuasion. In an interpersonal communication context, particularly during initial stage of the conversation, high verbal presentation quality is crucial for delivering a strong, persuasive message (Sparks & Areni, 2002). Different studies have examined the effectiveness of the verbal presentation and sales presentation quality (Gibbons, Busch & Bradac, 1991; Sparks et al., 1998; Sparks & Areni, 2002) and the results have shown language style seems to be a major factor in predicting the quality of an interaction. Sparks & Areni (2002) have conducted a study in a sales presentation setting and concluded that participants who drew simple relations between the quality of the presentation style and the desirability of the proposal, which confirmed previous suggestions that presentation quality acts as a simple persuasion cue (Petty, Cacioppo & Goldman, 1981; Petty, Cacioppo & Schumann, 1983). Furthermore, poor presentation quality distracted participants from using argument-related thinking and encouraged biased assessment of proposal by using language style as a basis for drawing conclusions about both the salesperson and the product proposal (Sparks & Areni, 2002). The authors noted that in specific occasions, language and presentation style may be even more important than message content in the decision making process, especially if the interaction serves as the first contact between communicators.

1.3   Biases in communication

Recently, the field of communication has also been affected by trends in behavioural science and cognitive and social psychology. These frameworks and models have allowed communication researchers to produce detailed descriptions of the communication process and

to form detailed predictions of how the verbal and nonverbal exchange between people would be affected by factors such as **bounded rationality, mental shortcuts** and **systemic biases**.

Simon (1955, 1979) initiated the discussion with the theory of bounded rationality and his work was a starting point for further research that helps us understand how people address issues and why they often make irrational choices. Besides the expected rational or reasoned decision making, research in cognitive and social psychology has presented an alternative way to solve problems, which is by intuition (Kahneman, 2003a; Slovic, Finucane, Peters & MacGregor, 2002). Intuitive decision-making serves as a mental short-cut, which is especially useful when mental resources are limited and the required decision is complex. In these situations, decision-making is based on a number of systemic biases, which replace the objective and rational reasoning (Slovic, Finucane, Peters & MacGregor, 2002). Systemic biases can oftentimes help us explain why people behave, communicate and respond in certain ways, which is why this field is so relevant in exploring principles of communication, influence and persuasion.

1.4.1 Anchoring bias

Anchoring effect is a type of cognitive bias that has been first observed by Sherif, Taub & Hovland (1958) in an experiment, where participants had to judge the stimuli of the weights along a continuum. The study confirmed the hypothesis that individuals depended on an initial piece of information offered (considered as the "anchor") to make subsequent judgments about the stimuli. Tversky & Kahneman (1974; 1992) further developed the concept of anchoring bias with the anchoring-as-adjustment theory, which has also been confirmed by later studies (Epley & Gilovich, 2001). The theory states that once an anchor is set, individuals make incremental adjustments from the anchor, however these adjustments are usually insufficient; as a result, the initial anchor becomes an important piece of information that influences future assessments.

While early studies suggested that experts (individuals with high experience, knowledge or expertise in a certain field) are more resistant to the anchoring effect, later studies have proved anchoring affects even people who are highly expert in a field. In one study (Northcraft & Neale, 1987), students and real-estate agents were shown a real estate property and then provided with different listing prices. Both groups then had to provide their opinion about the market value of the property. The results of the study showed that both groups were equally influenced by the initial listing price, which served as an anchor.

Anchoring bias is an important concept in the theory of negotiations and influence, because once the initial value of the anchor is set, all future arguments and estimates are affected by it. Anchor changes a person's attitude and affects future answers to have similar characteristics as the anchor, while information that is less related to the anchor tends to be displaced (Blankenship, Wegener, Petty, Detweiler-Bedell & Macy, 2008).

1.4.2 Affect and availability heuristic bias

Affect heuristic bias takes place when people consult readily available affective and emotional impression in making decisions without considering facts and objective information (Slovic et al., 2002). It is a type of a mental shortcut that allows individuals to make decisions and solve problems in a quick and efficient manner. It is typically used in a situation where a person needs to assess the risks and benefits of a certain decision; if their emotional response (or affect) towards a certain decision is positive, then a person is more likely to assess the risks as low and the benefits as high (Finucane, Alhakami, Slovic, & Johnson, 2000).

Availability heuristic bias is a similar mental shortcut to affect heuristic, where a person relies on immediate memories from the past when evaluating a topic or making a decision. This concept operates on the principle that if something is immediately recalled, it has to be important (Esgate & Groome, 2005).

Miller & Ireland (2005) showed how affect and the availability heuristic (also often called "intuitive feeling") affects managers in making important decisions. The goal was to evaluate the risk and benefits of using intuition as a decision tool and results showed that intuitive judgements and choices can be a troublesome aspect of decision-making. Irrespective which form of a heuristic biases happens to distort the rational behaviour, their effects cannot be ignored when we try to explain the reasoning behind individual's decision-making and communication patterns.

1.4.3 Confirmation bias

Confirmation bias takes place as a tendency to search for, interpret, favour and recall information in a way that confirms or supports a person's prior decisions, beliefs or values (Nickerson, 1998). This bias is present when a person may gather or remember information that supports their belief, while ignoring the remaining data that is not supportive of their argument. This type of bias is prevalent in everyday discussions where people have different opinions and provide arguments that confirm their existing beliefs, without considering the opposing opinion.

In situations where an agreement or a negotiation deal has to be made, it is important to keep the confirmation bias in mind for both ourselves as well as the other party. Awareness about confirmation bias and technique of active listening (Rogers & Farson, 2015) can help individuals view the issues and beliefs from another perspective, which is a crucial skill of a competent communicator. Confirmation bias will also be further discussed in the coming chapters as the consistency principle (Cialdini, 1984a).

An important aspect of confirmation bias is also the concept of self-fulfilling prophecy, which states that people's beliefs influence their actions (Biggs, 2013). If parallels are drawn to the field of interpersonal communication, studies have shown that a person can acquire affection towards other by self-inducing that thought. Researchers in a study told volunteers to treat unsuspecting subjects as though they liked them and when surveyed later, the results showed

the volunteers ended up liking the subjects. Unsuspecting subjects were also surveyed after the experiments and reported higher respect and affection for the volunteers who initially pretended they liked them (Curtis & Miller, 1986).

1.4.4 Framing

Framing is another form of cognitive bias where individual's decisions are affected by the way in which problems are presented. Kahneman and Tversky (1979) have demonstrated that people tend to be risk averse when a positive frame is presented and to be risk seeking when the problem is framed in the negative direction. In a study, participants were asked to decide between two treatments for 600 people affected by a deadly disease. It has been predicted that treatment A would result in 400 deaths, while treatment B posed that there is 1/3 chance that no person would die and a 2/3 chance that everyone would die. Even though the treatments have statistically same success rate, 72% of participants chose treatment A with a positive framing ("saves 200 lives"). Other studies have supported the theory of framing in different contexts such as penalty fee for late registration vs. discount for earlier registration (Gächter, Orzen, Renner & Stamer, 2009) or support for economic policies where employment rate is emphasized instead of unemployment rate (Druckman, 2001).

Studies have consistently shown that framing effect is one of the largest biases in decision-making (Thomas & Millar, 2011), which is why it is important to consider it when exploring concepts of influence and persuasion in communication.

1.4   Communication and the concept of power

The sociological and organizational literature emphasizes various bases and occurrences that make space for power differentials (Berger, Ridgeway & Zelditch, 2002; Brass & Burkhardt, 1993; Hinings, Hickson, Pennings & Schneck, 1974; Ibarra, 1993), most of which are focused on the role of status, social class and gender (in sociological research), and hierarchy and position (in organizational research). However, influential power can also stem from social role and language behaviour (Goffman, 1967; 1983; Naegele & Goffman, 1956). In this way, individuals can display relative power differentials through language and communication to reach a superior position in a relation and secure better position for negotiations and influence.

Early research in this field has focused on proving the theory that interaction among undifferentiated individuals results in status distinctions (Bales, 1950; Lewin, Lippitt & White, 1939; Slater, 1955). Later on, the research has put more emphasis on specific behavioural or communicative cues that distinct "dominant" players from "submissive" ones on the theoretical basis of observational coding schemes (Bales, 1950; Bales, Cohen & Williamson, 1979). Although the coding schemes were reliable in their ability to determine specific behaviours, conclusions lacked explanation of why these behaviours result in power distinction.

Important progress in explaining how language can contribute to power differentials came with the study of **powerful vs. powerless language style**. O'Barr (1982) showed that individuals with similar levels of social power exhibited similar patterns of speech and linguistic features. In his study of courtroom communication, powerful individuals such as judges and expert witnesses tended to use one style of language, which was relatively powerful compared to the one used by individuals such as defendants with little formal education. Concretely, powerless language style often showed usage of (Bradac and Mulac, 1984, p. 307):

- hedges ("I sort of did."),
- intensifiers ("We really did."),
- hesitations ("I ... uh ...like this."),
- deictic phrases ("That man over there ..."),
- tag questions ("It is, isn't it?") or
- declarative sentences with rising intonation and polite forms ("Yes sir ...").

In contrast, persons using the powerful style used a relatively small number of these forms in their speech. Their language style was generally more fluent, terse and direct, often using more one-word or short replies to questions. Even though the use of specific language style may be a product of factors other than social power, such as speaker's level of cognitive uncertainty in the situation (Berger & Bradac, 1982), powerless language style consistently produced lower rating of speaker power in research (Bradac, Hemphill & Tardy, 1981; Bradac & Mulac, 1984). Even more, speakers with powerful styles of speech are evaluated more favourably by their audiences with respect to social power, sociability, credibility, competence, attractiveness, and intelligence than speakers that use powerless styles of speech (Bradac & Mulac, 1984; Erickson, Lind, Johnson & O'Barr, 1978; Gibbons, Busch & Bradac, 1991; Hosman & Wright, 1987; Lind & O'Barr, 1979; O'Barr, 1982). Finally, fluent and skillful articulation of a message positively impacts comprehension, and consequently enhances persuasion (Chaiken & Eagly, 1976; Eagly, 1974).

Although the findings of these studies have been relatively consistent in assigning powerful language style communicator attributes like power, competence and attractiveness, social interaction is a lively, human-centred field with errors and subjective perceptions. There certainly are circumstances in which the use of a powerful style could produce impression of low attractiveness and low competence and, conversely situation, where the use of a powerless language style might result in high attractiveness and competence (Bradac & Mulac, 1984). For instance, in some circumstances, it may in fact be desirable for a person to appear powerless in order to attain a particular result (when apologizing, etc.). In these cases, a person who uses a powerless style may come across as very competent in communication, social and emotional intelligence.

As mentioned before, various indicators of powerful and powerless language, such as use of tags or hesitations, do not necessarily diminish ratings of power, competence or attractiveness.

In a specific context, the use of polite forms may serve as an effective tactic of a competent, sympathetic communicator.

Politeness is defined as "phrasing things in such a way as to take into consideration the feelings of others" (Brown & Gilman, 1991). The usefulness of this language style is best observed in situational acts of threat, such as contradicting, criticizing, disagreeing, interruption, borrowing, asking for a favour, requesting information, embarrassing, bumping into and similar (Morand, 2000). In these situations, politeness is used as an effective array of linguistic gestures to minimize the threat and to soften the interaction. For example, if there is a situation of disagreement, a person might state this directly ("You are wrong!") or s/he can phrase the message in a more polite manner ("I am not sure if I see things the same way you do. Have you perhaps considered …?"). Or, in the case of having to borrow something, it may be more effective to pose a polite question ("Excuse me, may I borrow …?") compared to directly demanding what is needed ("Give me ...").

Brown and Levinson (1987) formed the so-called positive and negative politeness language elements that function as softeners in interactions. The terms positive and negative here do not refer to good or bad, but rather as elements of approach (positive) and avoidance (negative). Positive tactics serve as an element of establishing commonality and familiarity by addressing the hearer by his or her name, using inclusive form ("we", "lets", or "us"), showing interest or noticing qualities of the hearer ("You look great in this dress"), referring to positive common events of the past ("Just like we did, when we were …"), providing sympathy ("I hear you") and similar. Negative tactics function on the basis of recognizing social distance between the speaker and hearer, usually for the purpose of elevating the hearer's status and conveying respect by using indirect questions as enquiries ("Can you tell me what time is it?"), using hedges ("Could you *perhaps* help me with…"), using words or phrases which minimize the request ("I need just *a little bit* of help"), using honourics ("Sir, can you …") and similar. Politeness theory suggests that power, social distance and the severity of a threat are all predictors of how many politeness linguistic elements an individual will use. For example, if a speaker is low in relative power, is in a socially distant relation or is in a situation where the threat is more severe, his language style should amount to greater use of politeness (Morand, 2000).

2   INTERPERSONAL COMMUNICATION STRATEGIES

Managers spend up to 90 per cent of their time engaged in verbal activity (Gronn, 1983; Mintzberg, 1973). Communication enables them to achieve their objectives, which is why it is crucial that they obtain skills and strategies needed to interact effectively. The following chapter presents a number of communication tactics and strategies that have been proved effective and are used in everyday interpersonal conversations in the business world.

2.1   First impression

We only get one chance to make a first impression. A study by Willis and Todorov (2006) demonstrated that it takes 100 milliseconds to determine certain personality traits about a stranger, like attractiveness, likeability, trustworthiness, competence, and aggressiveness. In the experiments, different exposure times of unfamiliar faces has been tested and results showed that 100 milliseconds is enough for the human brain to gather information from memories, personal experiences and intrinsic values to generate calculated judgements. Furthermore, other studies showed that negative impressions are difficult to be changed - people need to commit many good actions to appear substantively changed for the better, but relatively few bad actions to appear changed for the worse (Klein & O'Brien, 2016).

Even though there are many reasons that determine whether a person leaves a good impression, there are certain principles that have been shown to positively enhance the first impression. As it has been noted in the previous chapter, Mehrabian (1971) concluded that body language accounts for 55% of the liking of the person, the tone of voice accounts for 38% and verbal element accounts for only 7%. Another study (Argyle, Salter, Nicholson, Williams & Burgess, 1970), which analyzed the relative contributions of verbal and nonverbal signals, found that all types of non-verbal cues combined had 4.3 times the effect of verbal cues. If we draw conclusions from that, the first impression is highly dependent on the elements like posture, face expression, gesticulation (see chapter about *kinesics)*, personal space (see chapter about *proxemics)*, dress, haircut, jewellery and other accessories (see chapter about *liking principle*). Other major part of the first impression is the voice: pitch, rhythm, volume and similar (see chapter about *paralanguage*). In the end, words and their meaning also need to be considered to leave a good impression on people.

To review what has been noted in the previous chapter, research has shown that a person can make a good first impression by:

- having open and straight posture,
- maintaining eye contact,
- using an appropriate handshake and gesticulation,
- being dressed appropriately,
- making sure to look groomed,
- speaking in low vocal frequency,
- finishing sentences in falling or low voice frequency, and
- using powerful words and language.

Once the first impression phase is over, a person has to establish rapport and a sense of trust if they want to come across as a good conversationalist.

2.2 Mirroring

Mirroring is a type of behavior in which one person imitates the nonverbal (posture, facial expression, gesture, eye contact, breathing, proximity, touch) and verbal (specific words, speech pattern or attitude) signals of another person (Chartrand & Bargh, 1999). It has first been introduced by practitioners of neuro-linguistic programming (NLP) (O'Connor & McDermott, 1996; Steinbach, 1984) who argued that expressing similar behaviour may lead to an impression of familiarity and affection. This behaviour happens subconsciously among family member and close friends (Rochat & Passos-Ferreira, 2008), however mirroring can also be used as an intentional communication technique for building rapport with others (Iacoboni, 2008).

The author of a popular source about establishing rapport (Boothman, 2015) argued that when we express affection to a person with the word "I like you", we in fact subconsciously think "I am like you". He states that in contrast to hoping to see if a person has something in common with his communicating partner, mirroring is a way of building rapport by design, intentionally. By synchronizing behaviour of other people we make them feel comfortable with us.

Research has shown that people are more receptive to those that share the same values and beliefs in life. In one study, participants were given tests to determine their general personality and beliefs. Afterwards, they were split in two groups; one group was paired with partners, who were told to have similar beliefs, and the other group with partners, who supposedly had dissimilar beliefs – in reality, they were partnered randomly. After having spent some time together, participants who believed they were similar in their beliefs, liked each other a lot more than pairs who thought they had different beliefs. The results suggest that people have a predisposition of affection toward individuals, who they believe are like them (Byrne, Ervin & Lamberth, 1970).

The authors of NLP (Dilts, Grinder, Delozier & Bandler, 1980) further enhanced the concept of mirroring by categorizing people into three groups, according to how they filter the world through their senses: visual, auditory and kinesthetic. To convey their thoughts, feelings and emotions, visuals tend to use picture words, auditories oftentimes choose sound words and kinesthetics prefer to communicate by using words that relate to physical movement and feelings. Every person is a combination of the three types, however there is always one aspect that dominates the other two. Recognizing which sense a person uses the most could be a useful information in establishing rapport and effective communication.

2.3 Personality type assessment

Personality type assessment is a grouping of specific personality traits, which can help understand individual's personality. There are certain priorities, motivations, fears and limitations that are more common in a certain personality type. Recognition of a specific personality type can help one understand how an individual thinks, communicates and behaves.

That specific knowledge can be a useful key that can help an individual approach and build rapport with people of a certain personality type.

There is a wide collection of research focusing on personality types (Digman, 1990; Jung, 1971; Marston, 1928; Myers, 1962; Myers, 1980), some of which have been commercialized - Myers Briggs, The Big 5 and DISC method. However, personality trait assessment dates back to 4th century B.C. when Hippocrates introduced the four types of temperament - sanguine, phlegmatic, choleric, and melancholic. Some research suggests these traits are partially a product of genetic heritability as well as environmental factors (Jang, Livesley & Vernon, 1996). Other studies have explored the relationship between personality traits and cultural factors based on Geert Hofstede's cultural dimensions. Results have shown that higher degree of cultural individualism correlates with the average extraversion and that individuals from cultures with significant inequalities in power structures tend to be more conscientious (McCrae & Terracciano, 2005).

2.4   Active listening

Active listening is a communication technique that requires the listener to fully concentrate, understand what is being conveyed, retain information and then respond (Rogers & Farson, 1957). Technique involves both listening to the verbal message as well as observing the speaker's behavior and body language, which enables the listener to develop a more accurate understanding of the message (Atwater, 1981; Maley, 2012). This multistep process also includes making empathetic comment, asking appropriate questions and paraphrasing what has been said in order to verify the understanding of the message (Cramer, 1998; Gordon, 2003; Turnbull & Turnbull, 1990).

Active listening skill has an important role in effective communication (O'Shea, Algozzine, Hammittee & O'Shea, 2000), which has been mostly studies in the medical context. Studies have shown that benefits of this technique may include higher level of cross-cultural communication (Davidhizar, 2004), increased patient satisfaction and improved medical outcomes (Lang, Floyd & Beine, 2000). Furthermore, studies in labor-management negotiations have demonstrated that paraphrasing of the message tends to save time required to reach conflict resolution; time of negotiation has been cut in half when each negotiator agreed to accurately repeat what the previous speaker had said, before responding (Rosenberg & Gandhi, 2015).

2.5   Frameworks for understanding how communication affects behaviour

Interpersonal communication is only an external reflection of the internal thoughts and emotions. In order to understand how people are influencd through communication strategies, a specific behavioural foundation has to be set. This chapter presents two frameworks which have been proposed to link communication to people's behaviour.

2.5.1   MINDSPACE

A recent paper (Dolan et al., 2012) presented a thorough framework which affects people's behaviour through aspects like social norms, communication interventions and biases. For example, the authors suggest that people are heavily influenced by who communicates information to them, that their responses to incentives are shaped by predictable mental shortcuts and reciprocate acts. Even though the purpose of the research paper is focused on ways to improve public policy efficiency, the arguments are based on a better understanding of the reasons behind certain types of behaviour. The MINDSPACE system gathers up nine effects that influence people's behaviour, which are summarized below.

Messenger: the authors state that authority of the source of information ("messenger") seems to be an important part in generating compliant behaviour, even when such behaviour is harmful or stressful. Studies have shown how nurses unthinkingly complied with doctors' instructions, which were detrimental for the patients (Hofling, Brotzman, Dalrymple, Graves & Pierce, 1966) because of the authority of that medical group. Furthermore, evidence also shows that individuals are more likely to comply with certain behaviour when the messenger has similar characteristics to themselves (Durantini, Albarracın, Mitchell, Earl & Gillette, 2006).

Incentives: incentives have been indicated as an important external motivation of making people comply with certain rules and behaviour. The research line of behavioural economics has provided valuable insight into which factors affect individuals response to incentives in order to design more effective schemes (Dolan et al., 2012). These factors include anchoring bias, framing, risk aversion and others.

Norms: social and cultural norms are the rules within a society, to which individuals try to conform (Axelrod, 1986; Burke & PaytonYoung, 2011). Social norms influence behaviour in both conscious and unconscious ways, which is based on the pleasure from choosing to behave like everyone else, despite that rules may not be maximising overall utility.

Defaults: in most cases of making decision, there is a default option that will come into force if no active choice is made and oftentimes, individuals take no active part in making decisions, thus accepting whatever the default setting is. Structuring the default option in certain ways can influence the rate at which a certain choice is made (Dolan et al., 2012).

Salience: every day, an average person is exposed to a huge amount of stimuli and unconsciously filtering out majority of the information has become our coping strategy to survive. Research shows people are more likely to register information that is novel, accessible and simple (Houser, Reiley & Urbancic, 2008). Furthermore, information is taken into account only if it is salient; this draws to implication that certain communicative interventions that make important dimensions salient can importantly affect people's behaviour.

Priming and affect: priming of knowledge in memory makes certain information it more accessible and therefore more influential making decisions (Richardson-Klavehn & Bjork, 1988). This technique of inducing specific behaviour works on the principle of affect and availability heuristic bias, which has been mentioned in the previous chapter (see section on *affect and availability heuristic bias*).

Commitment: people oftentimes have difficulties making decisions that are likely to be in their long-term interests, like quitting smoking, weight loss and similar (O'Donoghue & Rabin, 1999). The lack of will-power can be strategically eliminated by commitment devices, which motivate individuals to achieve long-term goals (Becker & Mulligan, 1997).

Ego: people tend to behave in a way that confirms their impression of a positive self-image. This ego concept has been studied as a strategy to induce a specific behaviour, which would be motivated by people feeling better about themselves. Important part of making this behaviour sustainable in a long term is by making use of human desire to be consistent and rather change beliefs than behaviour, which has been projected in the past (Festinger, 1957).

2.5.2   Six principles of influence

The final framework has been presented by the author with most prolific work in the field of interpersonal influence, Robert B. Cialdini (1984a, 1984b, 2001, 2003; et al., 1991, 1998, 2004). In his book "Influence: The Psychology of Persuasion", Cialdini (1984a) presented six principles that influence human behaviour and indicated strategies that are most effective in persuading people into making a specific choice. These principles are supported by a number of different studies and serve as an important theoretical basis in studying influence and persuasion.

Authority: this principle states that the greater the perceived authority of an individual, the more likely other people tend to agree, follow or comply. The tendency to subdue to authority has been researched in the infamous Stanley Milgram experiment, which focused on the conflict between obedience to authority and personal judgement (Milgram, 1963). Cialdini notes that power of authority stems from indicators like title, status, attire and other status symbols, which affect the amount of authoritative respect received by the person associated with these symbols.

Social validation: every individual is strongly influenced by what majority of other people around are doing. This is especially true in the case of uncertainty, where people are not sure how to behave or what to do and are looking for instructions from the environment. Social validation principle becomes problematic when every person in the group is thinking in a way that is in fact irrational and not based on the objective facts (Cialdini, 1984a).

Liking: this principle states that individuals are far more willing to consent to a request from someone that they like. There are several key elements that determine how people are perceived by others:

- attractiveness – research shows physically attractive people and well-groomed are automatically assigned more positive personality traits such as kindness and trustworthiness even though there is no evidence to support these assumptions (Mack & Rainey, 1990; Eagly, Ashmore, Makhijani & Longo, 1991);
- similarity – people like people who are like them (also see section about mirroring);
- compliments – studies have shown people are susceptible to flattery, even if praise is not thruthful (Drachman, deCarufel & Insko, 1978);
- contact and cooperation – individuals respond more positively to familiar situations and people;
- conditioning and association – individual's association with positive events increases the liking of that person.

Reciprocation: the principle of reciprocation states that individuals inherently avoid being indebted to another person, so much so that sometimes a small favour can lead to a larger reciprocal response. Regan (1971) conducted an experiment where a fellow researcher named Joe, disguised as a participant in the study, gave the other participant a bottle of coke. Later Joe asked the other participant to buy some raffle tickets from him; the results of the study showed that when Joe gave the participant a soda, he sold considerably more raffle tickets. The same study has also shown how reciprocity principle even outweighs the liking principle – participants bought just as many raffle ticket in return for a coke if they liked Joe or not.

Consistency: individuals desire to remain consistent to their commitments and past behaviour. This principle (also present in MINDSPACE framework) has been supported by different studies (Kraut, 1973; Burger & Petty, 1981) and is manifested in the form of a commitment bias and consistency bias (Leising, 2011). Effect of a consistency principle is most significant in cases of voluntary, active and public commitments, ideally in the form of writing. A recent study (Perron et al., 2010) showed that a health center reduced missed appointments by 18% by asking patients to write down appointment dates themselves instead of a staff member in the centre.

Scarcity: scarcity is the perception that products and services are more attractive when their availability is limited. This principle has become a common tactic by many companies, stating promotions like "sale lasts for only 24 hours", "only two rooms left" or "only a few spots left". Furthermore, Cialdini (1984a) states that individuals are more motivated to act if they think they are going to lose something than if they are to gain something (behavioural pattern, often described as framing effect or loss aversion).

3   METHODOLOGY

Even though the area of communication and persuasion has been studied from various fields in the past, not many researchers aimed to gather information from variety of different areas and resources and test it among the professionals in the business world – especially in the cultural setting of Slovenia. The research work from this thesis represents an important contribution to communication and sales studies as well as human behaviour in the context of communication by exploring the interpersonal communication strategies of sales managers in Slovenia. For the purpose of this thesis, interviews with were considered the most appropriate method in order to fully utilize the perceptions of the managers and communication coaches.

The methodology chapter consists of the research framework, which describes the purpose and goals of the thesis. Furthermore, the methodology chapter describes the process of data collection, data analysis methods and sample description.

3.1   Research framework

The **purpose of this thesis** is to understand how communication strategies and influence principles are applied by managers in practice. This knowledge is especially useful in the business environment, particularly in the fields of sales, marketing, and management. The results of the research can help us better understand the factors of successful sales strategies, as well as to help business people understand how theoretical notions of persuasion can be applied to improve business performance.

The **goals of this thesis** are:
- to provide an overview of influential and persuasive communication strategies that contribute to persuasiveness and communication effectiveness
- to test whether these strategies are used by Slovenian managers and communication coaches
- to provide an overview of influential and persuasive strategies most commonly used by Slovenian managers and communication coaches
- to analyze the differences between communication strategies of sales managers and communication coaches
- to determine most common challenges in persuasion and communication effectiveness

Based on the purpose and goals, the thesis attempts to answer the **following research questions**:

RQ1. Which elements of nonverbal communication contribute to persuasiveness and communication effectiveness?

RQ2. Which elements of verbal communication contribute to persuasiveness and communication effectiveness?

RQ3. To what extent do Slovenian managers and communication coaches use communication strategies defined in scientific research?

RQ4. Which communication strategies are most commonly used by Slovenian managers and communication coaches?

RQ5. What are the main differences between communication strategies of sales managers and communication coaches?

RQ6. What are most common challenges in persuasion and communication effectiveness among Slovenian managers?

3.2   Data collection method: in-depth interview

For the purpose of this thesis, data has been collected with the use of in-depth interviews. This type of measurement instrument collects the primary data directly from the interviewee and is a suitable qualitative research method when the topic is related to behaviour, emotions and experience (Showkat & Parveen, 2017). The goal of this research was to collect detailed information about an individual's thoughts and behaviors and thoroughly explore the topic of interpersonal communication, which makes in-depth interviews the most suitable technique of qualitative research in this case. The main advantage of in-depth interviews is that they provide more detailed information than what is available through other data collection methods, such as surveys (Patton, 2002). Interviews allowed the participants opportunity to fully express their thoughts and share knowledge based on their past career experience.

For the purpose of this thesis, interviews were conducted with two different research groups, sales managers and communication coaches, which had a different set of interview questions (See Appendix B and Appendix C). The goal was to gather the practical experience and knowledge from sales managers, which complements the theoretical base of the thesis. Furthermore, information collected from the interviews with communication coaches served as a bridge between research theory and practical experience.

Interviews were conducted in person and online with video calls in October 2020. During the interviews, I actively participated in the process by adding follow-up questions for certain topics, where participants were able to share more in-depth, relevant information. The interviews, which lasted between 30 and 60 minutes, were recorded and then transcribed in their original Slovenian language. All participants agreed to share their answers for the purpose of this thesis and were granted full confidentiality.

3.3   Data analysis method

The data, gathered with the use of in-depth interviews, has then been analysed in the form of **content analysis, pattern seeking** and **thematic analysis**. Content analysis is a research tool used to determine the presence of certain words, themes, or concepts within some given qualitative data, in this example interview (Bardin, 2011). Pattern seeking tool involves observation with an effort to explain why a particular pattern occurs and to classify or identify a certain system (Lategan, Lues & Friedrich-Nel, 2011). Thematic analysis is done by identifying, analysing and interpreting various patterns of meaning or themes present within qualitative data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). This qualitative research method was originally developed is one of the most frequently used methods for encoding qualitative data, as it allows for a lot of flexibility in interpreting the data.

For this research, all the transcribed interviews have first been thoroughly reviewed, important parts have been highlighted and then labelled with codes to describe their content. In the next step, codes were reviewed and patterns were identified among them. In the last step, codes were formed into categories based on their familiarity. The method combined both the inductive and a deductive approach, which enabled to form the main themes and conclusions about the research topic.

3.4   Sample description

The sampling method used for the in-depth interviews, was **convenience sampling**. In this non-probability type of sampling, participants were reached based on the ease of contact and their availability. The only criteria was that they held the title of either a (sales) communication coach or a (sales) manager, who has been actively involved in the Slovenian business environment and has over 10 years of practical experience. Convenience sampling is generally used when the research is limited with resources, such as time, cost and availability (Etikan, Musa & Alkassim, 2016).

Due to the depth of analysis of each person, 6 people were chosen for the sample – 3 sales managers and 3 communication coaches. All the managers and communication coaches have years of experience in their field and are deemed competent and effective interpersonal communicators in the business environment. In order to fulfil a high variability of the samples, managers and coaches are representatives of various age, both genders and different industries.

Table 1: Research sample

	Gender	Age group	Position/job title	Focus of the company	Annual revenue in 2019
Interviewee 1	F	40-45	Sales manager	Insurance company	65,7 million €
Interviewee 2	F	35-40	Sales manager/Owner	Furniture and hardware	1,8 million €
Interviewee 3	F	40-45	Sales manager/Owner	Development of personal skills	*N/A*
Interviewee 4	M	40-45	Owner	Sales and communication coaching	*N/A*
Interviewee 5	F	40-45	Owner	Effective communication coaching	*N/A*
Interviewee 6	F	40-45	Owner	Business and personal coaching	*N/A*

Source: Own work.

4   FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS

The following chapter presents the thematic analysis and main findings of the interviews with two groups of participants, sales managers and communication coaches. Themes and challenges discussed in this chapter are deemed relevant because they either are linked to the theoretical overview of this thesis, have been consistently mentioned by participants, were surprising or were explicitly mentioned as important by the interviewees. The topics are analysed separately for sales managers and communication coaches in order to explore a possible difference in their way of perceiving effective communication strategies in the business context.

4.1   Communication strategies of sales managers

In-depth interviews with sales managers yielded important findings that provide insight into practical persuasive tactics and answer the proposed research questions. Participants shared their personal experience and insights gained from self-discovery and decades of working in different business environments.

4.1.1 First impression

The first contact with a person provides an initial insight into what the speaker is like, what is important to them and oftentimes even how high the potential for future cooperation is. Sales managers state that for a good **first impression** it is important to look tidy and groomed, one should always try to be on time and they always start a new relationship off with a confident handshake that is neither too strong nor too loose. During the first few seconds, eye contact seems to be an important trait and indicator of how confident the person is and what impression they leave on others:

"During the first contact, I am very attentive to holding a strong eye contact. I have oftentimes experienced that people could not hold an eye contact, their eyes have drifted to one side and this has somehow stuck in my memory. I can usually remember the people who have done that. / … / It is also important how tidy you are – outlook is an important factor when building trust with new acquaintances." (Interviewee 1)

"I do not stand neither too close nor too far, I respect people's personal space and rarely use touch as a means of connection. I use handshake on a European distance and I am lucky I do not have cold hands, even if I am a bit nervous. It makes me very angry when people use handshakes that are too strong, as if they wanted to make some point with that about their confidence. This only showed what kind of person they are - I am not even going to say it out loud."

When meeting a new person, it is advised one should have an **open attitude** and should strive to be polite and kind. In the process of building rapport, it is all about breaking the ice with different topics, starting a conversation and building a relationship:

"I usually find something that helps me start off a conversation. That can be a completely random thing, weather of perhaps even something that a person is wearing. No matter what it is, it is only about breaking the initial psychological barrier that people construct to keep limits from one another." (Interviewee 2)

The same manager also pointed out how it becomes easier to make new contacts as one grows older. This is especially the case when dealing with people of higher status, the decision makers and other influential individuals:
"In the past when I was not as experienced yet, it was difficult for me to stay calm when meeting people of higher status. This is where communication trainings and workshops helped and I can still remember the advice of one coach who said: "Just imagine all these important people on the toilet seat in the morning, they are just like you." These sort of advice helped me a lot in the beginning." (Interviewee 2)

When meeting a new person, people automatically sense something that goes beyond a physical look and words. The feeling that the person exudes is an important factor that makes for a big part of the first impression. Managers describe it as some sort of "**vibration**", that is felt in the moment the person walks into a room. It gives out information about the individual's mood, their attitude and openness to new contacts.

4.1.2 Nonverbal communication

It could be argued that an average person does not hold much attention to their nonverbal language. For most, it is only a signal they give out unconsciously, without being aware that they are transmitting opinion and emotional reactions to other people. Managers argue that **nonverbal communication** is an important aspect in interpersonal interaction and they seem to be aware of those aspects of nonverbal communication that have been regarded as disruptive by other people in the past. One of the participants interestingly pointed out that introverted people might be more aware of their nonverbal cues:

"I do communicate nonverbally, but not in a conscious manner. It might be interesting to ask introverted people if they consciously use their body language, as they most likely had problems with that and had to learn about these cues. They most likely had not had the feeling for gesticulation." (Interviewee 3)

Even though managers generally use nonverbal cues by feeling and intuition, they seem to be fully aware of nonverbal cues of their speakers.

"I very carefully read the other person's body language. This can be both an advantage as well as disadvantage, though. It is always useful to know what the person on the other side thinks, however when people receive a non-favourable facial cue this might impact their confidence, especially when a person is people pleaser - these people want a positive response and then become too needy and burdensome. I find it very helpful to split personal and professional life, because I do not react to people's response in the same way and do not take things personally. (Interviewee 3)

Training of nonverbal communication was pointed out as useful, especially in the field of interpersonal selling situations. One of the managers explained:

"In our company we put big emphasis on education and I was lucky to have had opportunities to attend these seminars and trainings in the past where I learned a lot. I would say this interval, when you are more consciously aware of your nonverbal cues and the mistakes you make, lasts around 14 days. There were some important things that I found useful and have consciously trained them until they became a part of me and my communication style - I have noticed the same pattern with my sales employees. We all noticed the correlation between the conscious use of nonverbal cues and sales success, especially with persuasion, but one should constantly

invest into these trainings and have some sort of mentor beside to remind them about it." (Interviewee 1)

Managers agree that the **pitch and tone of voice** are arguably a very important part of nonverbal communication, especially with phone calls. They appreciate the speakers who use their voice in a dynamic manner, which makes conversation more interesting and lively. The voice also gives out signals about the mood of a person and can be a useful tool in selling:

"When talking on the phone you can clearly tell if the other person is positive, smiling and sitting upright or if they are all bitter and lying on their desk. Some call centres which we have visited in the past even put mirrors on every desk so that the selling agent was constantly aware of their expression, that they were positive and smiling, because customers feel that." (Interviewee 1)

The same interview participant also mentioned the importance of **congruency** between body language and actual verbal message. When the words align with what the body is saying, this gives out the impression of a credible and sincere speaker:

"It is important that your body language is in line with what you are saying in order to come across as sincere. You can also feel that with the person in the conversation." (Interviewee 1)

4.1.3 Verbal communication

In terms of using verbal language, managers seem to be aware of different nuances of language and the power of words. Even in trainings, coaches put big emphasis on the use of language and managers are actively aware to use vocabulary that can be understood by the other person, that they do not use too many technical or foreign words as this cause a sort of distance or barrier between people. When the person feels discomfort or even inferiority in a conversation, they close off and are much less likely to make a purchase decision. Usage of appropriate words comes with experience and self-awareness, one of the managers also suggested reading to expand one's vocabulary and variety of phrases:

"I read a lot and this definitely impacts the variety of my vocabulary. The more words you know, the more ways of expressing are at your disposal. I even try to remember certain interesting examples and phrases by heart to use them in different situations." (Interviewee 3)

4.1.4 Self-awareness

After having reviewed the interviews, I noticed that certain aspects of communication seem to be very important but do not get much coverage in the research theory. One of the common topics is self-awareness, especially **authenticity**. All three managers at least mentioned the concept of being authentic and true to oneself. Knowing oneself and being authentic seems to

be one of the key aspects of effective communicators even in making a good first impression, building relationships and even in interpersonal sales situations. Interviewees stressed the importance of being themselves, being authentic and not artificial in order to feel confident and communicate successfully:

"I always strive to be myself, to not be artificial and to not go into position where I need to adjust so that the person would like me. /…/ I was put into a high corporate position at the age of 26, which was very early. When I look back today, I see how I often got lost in certain situations, because I played the game of other people, not mine. At that time, I wanted to be similar to them, I had a dress code and I wanted to be a part of their group. I had to prove my worth all the time. I would never do that today." (Interviewee 2)

An important part of being authentic is also being **sincere** about what the person is feeling. This is especially the case in important or stressful situations, during meetings and phone calls. One of the managers explained how they deal with stress, anxiety or nervousness:

"If I am nervous, I always check in with myself to see what is causing these emotions within me. Do I have a problem with authority, do I need to face an unpleasant problem or something else? At that time I am sincere with myself, allow myself these feelings and try to let go of them. If I am nervous, then I am nervous, what to do. In the end, all things resolve in a good way. In seminars I have learned different techniques of dealing with stress like bhastrika breathing, which I have also used in the past. Also, I used to have a shaky voice, especially in the beginning of meetings. When I accepted that this is the way of how my body reacts to stress and stopped resisting it, the shaking naturally vanished. You just forget about it, you let yourself be you and things start to run smoothly." (Interviewee 2)

In regards to making a strong impression in sales presentation, spontaneity seems to work better than knowing the presentation text by heart, as the latter comes across as artificial. It is also important to **know yourself**, your personal style of communication, your strengths and weaknesses and take full advantage of them. Only by keeping that in mind, one can reach their full potential as a speaker.

A good salesperson or sales manager has to **know his/her goals and limits** in every sales meeting or conversation. They have to know what their minimum conditions for cooperation are, what is optimal and what is the best outcome for them in a certain situation. They have to know who they are speaking with and what they want to achieve in a certain interaction. Managers argued how important it is for a salesperson to have a positive mind-set and to have patience when reaching an agreement or finalising a sale, especially with new contacts. One of the participants explained:

"I always strive to keep a positive mind-set. I know that one unsuccessful sales meeting is not the end of the world, no matter the seeming importance of it. I try to come out of the meetings

with at least a small victory, but I am also very persistent. This is an important characteristic of a salesperson. If you get beaten down every time you fail to close the deal, that can seriously affect your confidence and willingness – then you are not the right person for this type of work. Sometimes, when I cannot get a hold of a certain person on the phone, I tell myself: "I am not going to stop calling until you pick up!" But not everyone is like that." (Interviewee 1)

The best business agreements seem to come out of **long-term business partnerships** and sales managers know that building relationships takes time and patience. They do not rush things and try to make the most out of every sales meeting:

"Building relationship is important, as it might results in making a sale in the future. That is why it is important to at least get a new contact or opportunity for another meeting, hoping to finalize the sale sometime in the future." (Interviewee 1)

On the other hand, while it is important knowing that your goals are, it is also helpful to realize **when it is the time to stop**, whether that is to stop negotiating or keeping contact with a certain individual. Sales managers are aware that there will always be some people that cannot be convinced into buying an idea, product or service. There are people who will not even give an opportunity to listen to others, but rather only express their own opinion of matters. If that is the case with business partners, interviewees advise to keep these people out of their business:

"If I face a person with a really strong ego who wants to be superior in our relationship, I have no interest in cooperating with them." (Interviewee 2)

4.1.5 Trust and relationships

One of the key aspects of a successful relationship, whether that is personal or business, is **trust**. Interviewees argued the importance of creating a safe space for the person, where they feel accepted and give them the opportunity to express themselves. In one way, that is an important step to building trust, but in the other way it is also an opportunity to get to know the person better and learn about them, their values, goals and way of thinking and doing – these are all valuable information one has to acknowledge when building long-term business partnerships. Building trust is also important with clients, as they have to feel safe investing their money into a certain product or service. One of the managers explained:

"I always try to stay on the same level as them, so that the person feels accepted and safe, not as if I am above them. /…/ I also make sure I adapt to the person in the conversation and try to connect with them. I believe this is where the intuition and emotional intelligence comes into play." (Interviewee 2)

It seems that one of the important elements of building trust is getting to know the person on a personal level and **making deeper connections**. Managers think hobbies are important part in

the business world, because when people have similar interests, they have similar themes to talk about. Learning about what people in the circle one wants to be a part of are doing in their free time and acquiring that hobby:

"In the past it came to the situation where I had to learn to play golf and apply for the golf license, which allowed me to be a part of that "high society" as we then had similar interests and things to talk about." (Interviewee 2)

Besides hobbies, family roles like being a parent and having children, also seems to be a **common point of connecting** people. One of the managers uses an interesting tactic and writes down the important information about a certain person in order to more easily establish a deeper connection in the future and give the person a sense of importance and being special to them:

"If it is possible, I go on the personal level, which is more common when talking to women. This is one of the tools to build a relationship. If the other person opens up and says they have children, mention some of their hobbies, what they did over the weekend – these are all important information for me, because these are fantastic cues for starting the conversation in the future encounters, when you can ask them about it. I even started writing their interests down. People also seem to value when they can give advice about certain things, because that gives them a sense of being helpful. Men usually take a bit longer to open up about private themes, but they often like telling you about some sports achievements – this is great because it builds up a positive atmosphere. It is also important to act natural, that is my number one principle." (Interviewee 1)

Even though personal conversations seem to be a helpful way of connecting business partners and sellers with clients, it is always crucial to recognize if a certain person wants to open up and **respect their boundaries**. One of the managers pointed out that they strictly separate personal side from business side in order to keep conversations and relationships professional:

"I very much separate what is personal from what is business. I try to build relationships with knowledge about different things, with conversations that are outside the line of business but are not personal. Oftentimes I rely on books or somethings similar, but I never talk about three things: politics, religion and sex." (Interviewee 3)

4.1.6 Communication strategies

In order to successfully influence the listener, one has to know who the listener is, what motivates him/her and which arguments would make them consider accepting the offer. Important initial step of making a strong impression is **preparation** and interviewees advise to do research beforehand:

"I always start off with research about the company and the person I would be speaking with. I try to find out as much as I can about them, where they have been employed in the past, how long have they been in their current position. I try to find some positive things, past successes of the company and some achievements they are proud of – this is always a good entry point for conversations." (Interviewee 1)

Even though **research** provides information and better understanding of what the person and company are about, one interviewee pointed out it can also have a negative effect on the presentation performance. This effect is expressed as a psychological pressure, which can make the speaker self-conscious and stressed:

"In the past I have always prepared for sales meetings, but have eventually figured out that preparation is not helpful for me, because it puts me under stress. If I know too much about a person, their authority, title and position, it is very easy to become fearful of the encounter. I get nervous and the entire body responds differently. I tested myself out and compared my performance for the meeting where I have thoroughly prepared beforehand and for the one where I did not do any research about the person, only about the company. When I went to the second meeting, I thought I was speaking with some product manager and his colleague. I was super relaxed and the meeting went phenomenally. At the end, when we exchanged contacts and business cards, I found out I was in a meeting with an owner and CEO of the company! Since that experience, I never do research about the person beforehand." (Interviewee 2)

Besides research about the company or the person, making a plan and a strategy is also a part of preparation, which was mentioned in the part of "Knowing your goal".

There are several aspects of a successful **presentation style** that need to come together to form a wholesome and persuasive sales presentation. When starting off a sales conversation or presentation, it is important to know who you are selling to. One part of knowing your customer is preparation, the other part is active listening, which means being attentive to every message that the person sends across. There is a meaning, need or a motivation behind everything people say. The majority of people spend their time talking about themselves and their wants and needs, whether that is consciously or subconsciously. One of the managers argued:

"According to my past experience, people like talking about themselves. You first need to get a feeling for the customer and try to sense what is important to them. You can do this by giving them an opportunity to speak, to say something about themselves, just so you can learn what the person is thinking and what is their motivation - this enables you to set the right tone for your sales pitch. /…/ I think persuasion is a process. According to what information I received from my customer, I then adapt my communication. If I manage to find out what motivates the person and what are their needs, I will know how to present the product and what that product means for them. The bottom line is that I have to persuade them so that they themselves think they need the product. I try to adapt to their way of thinking and listen to the person, even if

they are talking about their past negative experience - and then I respond to their pain. I need to be honest and agree with the truth, which is how you also bring the customer over to your side. If s/he feels I believe him/her and understand him/her, s/he will trust me." (Interviewee 1)

"I think the right presentation style is very important if you want to be successful in persuasion. I am especially attentive to listen carefully, because I am more of an extroverted speaker. My challenge is to listen carefully and listen until they finish. /…/ You also need to be a good observer and have empathy. This kind of sensibility cannot be reached through any training. /…/ I do adapt to the communication of the speaker, if it is a normal one, I adapt the dynamics of the conversation, speed and loudness." (Interviewee 3)

Adaptation of both the message and communication style seems to be one of the most important aspects of a successful sales presentation. Besides that, the customer needs to feel that what the salesperson is saying is sincere and s/he needs to convey genuine enthusiasm about the product. In order to exude the excitement, the salesperson needs to believe in the product. To be persuasive, s/he needs to know the product and provide strong arguments and possibly positive experience from past customers. One of the managers argued:

"It is all about putting energy into every conversation and presentation, it is about transmission of excitement, which is an energy process. You cannot persuade a person into something, if you are not excited about it. /…/ I never had issues with persuasion because I was always selling products I believe in. /…/ To persuade others, I use arguments, examples and practical experience. /…/ What I notice with speakers who are good in communication and persuasion, is that they are cultivated, respectful, that they provide solutions and answers to my questions, not just that they blabber." (Interviewee 3)

"I always wanted for my sales pitch to be alive and that I was allowed to be who I was. Of course, I made sure I was loud enough, that I used the right words, it is also useful to sometimes add a joke into the pitch – but these things should never be artificial, because people notice that from afar. /…/ I also try to include personal experience about the product, if that is possible. If you have your own experience, this is the most credible and you know you can stand behind your words. You feel secure, you believe in the product and this just exudes from you. In the end, this is what creates trust in the customer." (Interviewee 2)

One step further from adaptation method is also the **mirroring** technique, which means imitating the gestures, body position, facial expression, words and attitudes of the customer. All the managers said they mirror person's behaviour at least to some extent. One of them explained how this technique can have a strong influence on people:

"I think mirroring is important. If you know how to adapt to the person you are speaking with, you are on the right path to build a strong connection. Everyone likes to communicate with the same minded and similar people. I find this technique to be especially important when I

summarize the other person's point of view with their words, I think this has a strong impact on people." (Interviewee 1)

According to the sales managers, it is also important that the sales conversation is performed in a confident and strategic manner and that the salesperson is always the one to **lead the conversation**.

"In the beginning, it is important to be polite and build a relationship with the customer. When you get to a point where you start talking about the sale and business, you have to become assertive." (Interviewee 1)

"I am always aware that I dictate the dynamics of the conversation and take initiative. When I want to make a sale, I like to know I am in control of a conversation. If I am selling, I want to be selling in the right direction. It is also important to pose the right questions at the right moment, to finish the selling pitch correctly, to summarize – but you can only do all of this if you have prepared beforehand and have actively listened to the person, because you know them." (Interviewee 3)

Managers also stated that the outcome and success of a sales presentation is dependent on how the salesperson **finished the pitch**. As previously mentioned, they do not seem to be impatient about making the deal right away and they allow the relationship to develop, which is especially important with long-term partnerships.

"I think it is very important how you close the deal. I never rely on the "push" principle, because I realized in the past that this drained my energy. I like to use the presentation style and also use intuition and feeling – I would rather make less sales than more. I am simply not a "pushy" person and allow the option of making a call-to-action in the next occasion. This enables me to keep the doors always open and to reach more contacts with the person. I believe in building a relationship and do not push to close the deal on the first meeting." (Interviewee 2)

The final part of a successful sales presentation is **gaining feedback from the customers and listeners**. This enables the salesperson to work on their weaknesses, improve the presentation every time they perform it and learn something new about human behaviour and perception. Interviewees agree, that in the case of sales presentations, practice definitely makes perfect. One of the managers shared an interesting technique, which is both self-evaluation as well as customer evaluation:

"I think presentation style is definitely important. I usually go into some sort of "self-control" mode, where I observe myself and try to listen to what I am saying, how I am saying it and how I am presenting. I was also always open enough to ask people about the presentation and get their feedback, ask them what they would change about the presentation. /…/ Again, progress also comes with experience and kilometres." (Interviewee 2)

During the interviews participants mentioned some **other techniques and strategies** that seem to work in practice, but were not mentioned in the theoretical overview. They mentioned how important it is to be concrete and direct in scheduling meetings and setting agreements, otherwise customers seem to forget about it or just postpone them endlessly. Furthermore, a salesperson should always be respectful when talking about their competition and let the customer clearly know what are the advantages and disadvantages of choosing a product or service with them compared to their competitors. As one of the participants explained, this provides them the freedom to decide and customers seem to appreciate their honesty:

"I always say a good word about our competitors if they are better than us in certain aspects, I never criticize them. I give the person a chance to look at the competition, but also give advice what they should careful about. In the past, this turned out to be a good sales argument and customers appreciated it." (Interviewee 1)

4.1.7 Leadership and communication challenges

One part of a sales manager's jobs is also leading their employees, and effective communication is by all means an important part of successful **leadership**. Participants believe it is important to know members of your team well and what motivates them, it is not much different than in sales presentations. There are different motivation factors people have and it is again important to adapt the communication style to the individual's character. Two of the managers stated similar opinions.

"To me as a leader, it is very important to know my team members and what motivates them. I also found it is important that a person feels the sense of responsibility. On one hand people seem to be afraid of it, but on the other hand responsibility makes a person feel empowered. People are also motivated by approval and validation of their good work, especially if it is expressed before their colleagues – but there should always be a concrete reason for the approval. People are also motivated by money, but research tells us this only work in the short run. What I also find important in leadership is providing enough feedback to people, they appreciate if you can also provide constructive critique." (Interviewee 1)

"I always invest my time into conversations with my employees. Sometimes you have a feeling like you have not accomplished anything in that day, you just sent a few emails and talked to some people, but in reality, you achieved a lot – I talked to every person in the company, I know what is going on with their families, what challenges they are facing in life, when is their child's birthday and I even sometimes prepare surprise for them. This can be in fact valued so much more than if I spent the entire day doing some analysis on my computer." (Interviewee 2)

A successful leader should also be **assertive enough** in their communication and be very clear on what they expect from their employees. One participant described how she used to have difficulties with authority as people exploited her kindness and openness:

"People exploited my open character and have oftentimes not finished their tasks. I had to start writing the concrete tasks and responsibilities down and gave them deadlines. I never threatened them, but I had to set consequences if the tasks were not completed. It is very similar in raising a child, if there are no consequences, the child does not take things seriously." (Interviewee 2)

There are numerous communication situations that can take place with different people. If one technique worked one time, it does not mean it would work in the next encounter, as communication is a fluid and unpredictable process. One of the main **challenges in communication** is dealing with people who have a strong desire to prove everyone they are right. Besides these so called "wise guys" managers also find it most challenging to speak with people, who have a big ego. They find it most helpful to listen to these people and use arguments and data to prove their point. One of the managers mentioned another interesting tactic to deal with these people:

"My grandfather once told me an interesting point: "You know, sometimes, it is useful to bring the person so high up in the clouds, that they realize what kind of a moron they are." I tested his tactic out, I gave people confirmation, have flattered and complimented them, gave their ego food. At the end, the person can feel, that something is not right and they realize how egoistically they have acted." (Interviewee 2)

Another useful tactic that interviewees mentioned they found useful with negative and critical people, is simple **avoidance**:

"Sometimes, I deliberately overhear a person's negativism and attitude and continue with the conversation or sales presentation. Oftentimes, this technique works well." (Interviewee 1)

Finally, managers agree that trainings and seminars about effective persuasion and communication seem to be a useful and helpful way to make progress - these "learned techniques" are especially useful at the beginning of one's career. However in general, participants agree acquiring skills as well as maturity and confidence takes time and comes with years of experience.

4.2 Communication strategies of communication coaches

In-depth interviews with communication coaches serve as a knowledge bridge between the theoretical overview and practical insights from sales managers. Coaches shared both the communication strategies that they use and recommend to their clients, as well as provided an overview of what they see as the key challenges Slovenian managers have in interpersonal communication settings.

4.2.1 Self-awareness

Similar to sales managers, communication coaches also stressed that **self-awareness** is a foundation for a successful communication. If a person knows what drives them, how they react in certain situations, what are their strengths and weaknesses, how they communicate and what are their biggest challenges, they are much more prepared for all kinds of different situations and encounters with other people. One of the coaches concisely explained what an effective communicator is like:

"They definitely know themselves, what kind of speaker they are, what their character is like, they know how they function, they are aware of their strengths and weaknesses. At the same time, they communicate in a way that is honest, straightforward, but well intended. It is important that they take into account three Socrates' sieves: that the message has a certain objective, that it is positive and that it is expressed in an appropriate way. In order to do that, one should definitely have practice (self)reflection, have some theoretical knowledge and also some practical experience. Communication is a dynamic act that changes with every conversationalist, moment and situation." (Interviewee 5)

Every person has specific fears, challenges and so-called shadows that they keep internally. Coaches believe a person should face and address these internal issues and struggles, if they want to become a better and stronger individual. This **(self)reflection** also results in an ability to not react destructively in encounters with people and communicate more effectively. One of the coaches suggested the process how one can become more self-aware:

"What if you cannot communicate with a certain person? You do not need to, but you can always ask yourself what you have to change within, to be able to communicate. If you constantly feel some revolt or disagreement, find the cause within. In these cases, I would recommend the method of self-discovery, where you ask yourself questions. You can use immunity-to-change method, where you ask yourself why are you immune to a certain change, why you do not do something, why are you afraid of certain consequences – you try to find reasons for that behaviour. I advise people to daily check in with themselves, to write down why they did something, why they have not done something, to track their feelings, emotions, thoughts, what they say and what they do." (Interviewee 6)

A concept in relations and communication that seemed to be important and was pointed out by the interviewees is **respect**. Open and constructive communication can only take place if there is mutual respect between the speakers. One of the coaches argued that in order to gain respect, a person needs to be competent and credible:

"If you want to be respected, you have to be a competent speaker. In the sales settings, it is important I know as much as possible about my business and my product. It is important I know the customer, to know what they are about, so I do not ask foolish things. If I want to have

respect, I cannot bluff – the moment someone finds out I am bluffing, I lost all respect. And of course, it is important I am a man of word, if I say something, it has to be true. I do not promise things, which I cannot do. Misleading people and bluffing is definitely not sustainable in the long run. If you for example do that in Slovenia, which is a small country – in term of doing business, you have shot yourself in your knee. /…/ If I respect you, you will automatically be more willing to respect me in return. If not, I would not allow that relationship to last. Either we talk normally or we will not talk at all." (Interviewee 4)

4.2.2 Preparation

In total 5 of the 6 interviewees stressed the importance of **preparation** as a starting point of being a successful communicator and persuader. All the coaches agreed that it is necessary to know who you are speaking with and that you prepare, if possible. One part of preparation is searching for all kinds of information one can get hands on and the second part is making some sort of a strategy or role-play of the conversation with that person. Coaches recommend thinking about the encounter and conversation, possible sales objections and motivators of the other person. If you prepare well, you can much more easily adjust your style of communication to the character of the person. One of the coaches explained:

"I always prepare for an important conversation. Successful communication is always a result of adequate preparation and great performance. To prepare, I first think about who I will be interacting with, who is my listener and I try to dig up as much information about them as possible. Internet is a great source of information nowadays, which helps me realize how the person functions in their company, I search for interesting posts and statements of that person, sometimes I would visit their LinkedIn or Facebook page to learn what kind of person they are. All this information allows me to profile the person and then adjust my performance. /…/ If possible, I also take initiative to set the location of the meeting, because these circumstances importantly affect the conversation. Just like in sports, the advantage of the home location counts. If I communicate in my own work space, I have psychological advantage and if I go to their location, I am automatically in the inferior position." (Interviewee 5)

"I make use of all options, I call someone who knows the person, check if there are any videos about the on youtube, check the newspaper articles and google sites to get information about them, what is important to them and why." (Interviewee 6)

After getting information about the speaker, interviewees recommended to **plan out different scenarios** down which paths the conversation could go. One of the coaches explained in detail:

"My preparation is always some sort of a role-play in my head about what the person could say and how I am going to react and what I would say back. I try to be two steps ahead of them, which means I need to play out all the possible scenarios. I think a lot about the situation itself and the person, how they would react to my comments. You cannot predict everything, but you

can avoid many difficult situations with that. /…/ I also think about the worst case scenario and visualize it – if I am okay with it I accept it, otherwise I make a different decision and plan to act differently." (Interviewee 4)

Choosing the right **strategy** before the conversation seems to be an important part of preparation. It is helpful both for the speaker to reach their goal of a conversation as well as for the other person, because their situation can be better heard and understood. One of the coaches described this process:

"I always set myself a goal for a certain conversation and then strategically lead the communication. /…/ If I am for example coaching a board member of a company, I need to know how this person functions, what is important for them, because whatever is happening in their lives will in a way be brought to a coaching session. I have to prepare for topics that s/he is constantly mentioning. If s/he is constantly talking about profitability, I cannot ignore that and have to check reports and get educated about it. Why? S/he will come to me with this knowledge and if I will not be able to keep up, I will not have a chance to cooperate with him/her. If s/he decides I am compatible with him/her, s/he will open up. This is also one of the elements that creates fascination in the other person, they think "Wow, she really knows a lot, she prepared well." /…/ If you know what kind of a person is sitting on the other side, you are the one who leads the conversation, you are not being led." (Interviewee 6)

4.2.3 First impression

Communication coaches confirmed what was already argued in the theory and by the sales managers, which is that visual effect is an important part of a **first impression**. One of the coaches summarized what they do to make a great first impression:

"People are visual being, if you like it or not, we tend to classify other people. First impression is extremely important, people will listen to you much more attentively if you make a good impression. Everyone tends to confirm the opinion they have created at first encounter. /…/ One of it is visual impression, which depends on where you are going – if I go to production site to talk to my employees with a suit and a tie, they will not hear me out as much as if I had worn a pair of jeans. On the other hand, if I go to a meeting with the CEO of the bank, jeans might not be the best choice. That is the visual part, I am not even going to lose any time explaining about using the comb and all of that. The other part is then of course eye contact, handshake and so on – all of that makes a part of an impression. If you want, you can also take it further and use some entry statements." (Interviewee 4)

It has already been discussed that mirroring could be a useful tactic that could help make a good impression with a person. One of the coaches introduced a similar method, which seems even more refined and effective than mirroring. They use it every time they meet a new person and want to make a good first impression:

"One of the most useful methods is definitely calibration of communication, which is harmonization of energy in communication. It is not the classical mirroring - some research has showed mirroring could sabotage the conversation instead of help making a connection. Calibration means adjusting your energy to the other person, if they are a high energy person, I try my best to communicate with more energy. If they are more of a slow and calm speaker, I consciously calm myself down as well and speak more slowly. /.../ In mirroring, one is supposed to repeat the same body movement and use the same words as the other person. However, in my experience people seem to notice that repetition pretty fast and expose it. Mirroring also seems a very studied and beginner method. On the other hand, people do not notice the calibration of energy, they only notice the fact, that they like the person they are speaking with." (Interviewee 5)

Besides the visual effect and the **calibration of energy**, coaches also believe it is important to provide enough **space** for the person so they can express themselves and feel accepted. As one of the coaches explained:

"I always provide space for them and make sure I am not intrusive. They have to get enough space and feel heard, this is what makes a strong impression – it is one of the key elements and people usually do not use it, because they want to expose themselves. Charismatic people do not speak a lot, they just appear and the room is theirs. It is important to provide space for the person, to hear them out and at the same time not judge them with energy so that they feel alright and feel accepted as they are." (Interviewee 6)

4.2.4 Non-verbal communication

In order to be an effective communicator, coaches believe nonverbal language should be **congruent** with what the person is saying. One of the coaches also pointed out how the correct usage of voice can help communicate the message across. They argue:

"I need to be careful about what I am doing with my body – the spoken message and body language should always be aligned in terms of meaning. The other important aspect is the tone of voice, which can indirectly communicate which things a person is saying are important. /.../ If I say something aloud, your ears close and you listen to me "more silently". However, if I say something very silently, your start listening more attentively. Many people think that if they raise their voice, other person would listen to them more, which is a complete myth. /.../ It would be almost impossible for me to believe a person who would be saying they are very happy, but their body would show they are miserable" (Interviewee 4)

4.2.5 Language style

Appropriate use of **language** can have a strong impact on the strength of a certain connection or relationship. One can use these aspects to establish closeness with the other person or set a boundary and keep a conversation and relationship more official. What is more appropriate depends on the situation, type of relation and the type of person standing across, but in general these principles apply:

"The language that I use or the proximity towards the person that I choose to take communicates how official a certain encounter is. If I use a very technical language, I come across as very professional, but at the same time keep a distance from other people. If I want to make a close connection with a person, I would use in a more informal language with less technical terms and use more practical examples, sometimes even tell personal anecdotes and stories. Sometimes, if the other person suggests and I think it is appropriate, we even call each other by first name, which makes for a more close and intimate relationship." (Interviewee 5)

4.2.6 Relationships

When asked how they build relationships and closeness with the person they have met recently, communication coaches recommend different strategies. Two of them are leaning more towards **opening up about personal life**, if appropriate and if the other person feels comfortable about sharing their personal things as well:

"It depends on the type of person, but I personally think more close relationships are good, which means I am not a cold or unapproachable person. After meeting the person, I relatively quickly open up and share personal experience with them, which usually enables me to better connect with them. /…/ If you open up, you are vulnerable, but you also get closer to the other person much more quickly than if you are closed off. Of course, one should always take into account the type of personality of the other person. If you are open and they are closed, they might feel pressured to open up as well, which will not make them feel good. Therefore, things are not black and white. In that case, I try to still be myself, but in a less expressive version with less details." (Interviewee 4)

"I usually take notice that my reasoning and communication style do not prevail in the conversation. People like to make assumptions about others through their own beliefs and filters. For example, if someone is very open, talks a lot about themselves and can quickly connect with other person, it does not mean this goes both ways. If I am in a business meeting and start talking about myself and if the other person is more reserved, I took this relationship off to a really bad start. The other person will think I am unprofessional and I will think they are uptight. The best tactic, therefore, is to gradually go deeper into a relationship and start off with safe and cliché small talk themes, which do not make other person feel threatened. I like

to offer a cue, which the other person can use to share a personal story, but I never harass someone with questions and never open up about stories that are too intimate. I think the person should reveal as much, as they feel comfortable with." (Interviewee 5)

The third coach however suggests keeping business encounters strictly professional:

"For me, the first and last word is professionalism. I always approach a conversation in a professional manner, with absolutely highest moral and ethics. I am here, you are there and we have strictly business interest. /…/ I think mixing up professional and personal is not a good decision." (Interviewee 6)

One challenge that seems to arise in business communication settings is how to be both professional and still act in an honest and **authentic** way. One of the coaches interestingly pointed out that authenticity also affects the level of authority one person achieves in a relationship:

"Yesterday someone said to me that it is sometimes useful to fake a little bit in a conversation. If they say they play golf, you can also say you play it – to me, this is bullsh*t. Try to find something that is authentic and that you genuinely both enjoy, a common interest, because if we have absolutely no common paths in life, it will be really difficult for us to strongly connect. /…/ Even with closed off people, I will always try to be myself and share personal things, but with less detail, otherwise I have a feeling I am acting, which I do not like. You definitely have to adapt to the communication of the other person, but not to the extent where you lose yourself, because if you lose yourself, you lose your ego. In a way, you lose authority, because you kiss up to them, which I think is pointless, no matter if they are a subordinate or a customer or anyone else." (Interviewee 4)

4.2.7 Communication strategies

All communication coaches agree that **presentation style** significantly affects the success rate of sales and persuasion. In order to make a person excited about the change, they believe a speaker has to be confident, strategic in their sales pitch and a good listener, so they can address the questions and objectives of the other person. Most efficient strategies of coaches are explained below:

"I have to know my customer and figure out how they think, what are their fears and objections and why they would not accept my offer. If I know the other person well enough – no matter it they are a customer, conversationalist, wife, brother, a friend or someone from the street – the better I know their reasoning, the easier it will be for me to persuade them. This is why listening is key. /…/ Of course, it is also important to use the right rhetoric, performance and have confidence. Persuasion comes out of confidence and confidence comes out of knowledge and experience, these are all connected. If I go to a nuclear physicist to sell them a nuclear reactor,

which I have zero knowledge about, I most likely will not be neither persuasion, confident, nor successful. If I am not confident, I will not be persuasive." (Interviewee 4)

"In most cases, I use the strategy of observation and questioning to get as much information as possible, what is a person's top priority and what benefits they want to achieve, why they would decide for the purchase or why not and when the moment of purchase decision would come. I want to give them full service so they feel accepted and wanted, even if they do not decide right away." (Interviewee 6)

"The key strategy that I use is storytelling, which means I talk about myself, my solutions, services and products through stories of my pleased customers, their successes or my successes in the process of coaching. This is a very "non-selling" method and perspective, which enables people to learn about my service and what are my sales advantages. It is not a classical sales pitch that most people use, but rather telling a story about successes of a person, who is similar to the potential customer. If needed or if I am doing a sales presentation for a bigger organization, I also include my references, present my past projects, certificates and experience, which is a classic sales presentation. /…/ I think communication style is very important in sales presentations. Here, I am especially aware of my level of energy, I think this is key. No matter how many great words you include in your presentation and how well you are dressed – if the level of energy is low, people will sense that you do not believe in the product or a service, you do not live by what you preach and there is no chance you are going to be persuasive." (Interviewee 5)

Practically every salesperson is bound to come across a person who acts cold and uninterested in their idea, product or a service. One of the most useful tactics to address these types of customers is through **asking questions**. One of the coaches depicted how they lead the conversation in these cases:

"If someone acts uninterested, I always start asking questions. Always. Even if they resist, I dig deeper to get to know why they think the way they do – that is the only way of getting their attention. If they say they do not have time, I would ask them "Do you not have time or are you just uninterested?" They could respond they are not interested and the coach would ask "Do you already have this product or you do not use it?" If they said they do not use it s/he would ask them why did they not give it a chance yet – this is how the conversation starts, even though a person had no intention in engaging into it." (Interviewee 4)

The same coach also mentioned a very interesting point about persuasion and sales. New ideas, products and services are all a new experience for the customer and in a way, persuasion means forcing them out of their comfort zone. During this process, there is no space for agreeability with people, because you have to prove them your own point:

"When I am trying to persuade someone into something, which they have not had yet or have not done yet, I am in a way taking them out of their comfort zone. If I am taking them out of their comfort zone, they are most likely to resist. The less confidence I have during this process and the more agreeable I am, smaller the chance they are going to want to do it. /…/ You have to have a strong performance, confidence and in a way take power." (Interviewee 4)

Effective communication also means making the message as clear and concise as possible. If there is too much information, people oftentimes seem to get lost, especially if the topic is new to them. When there is too much information in a presentation or a conversation, in the end people seem to forget everything. Here, the principle "less is more" definitely applies:

"I am especially aware to summarize what I have presented in no more than three points. /…/ I have to get people's attention, make a topic dynamic and memorable." (Interviewee 6)

In the past, sales theorists have struggled to answer, whether a sales presentation should be product-oriented, service-oriented, person-oriented, task-oriented or interaction-oriented. Recently, a new concept has been introduced, which is **experience orientation**. One of the interviewees has explained the reason why this concept seems to work:

"Today, I am not product-oriented, nor service-oriented. I am experience-oriented. Why? A customer can get a product or a service anywhere, but a great experience is rare. Especially if the business does not have experience, there is no way they are going to be the best in the market." (Interviewee 6)

As it has been already mentioned by the sales managers, having a clear **goal** of the conversation is what, among other things, makes a person an effective communicator. The coaches seemed to agree that trying to make the sales right away and using the "push" principle might not be the best option. One of the coaches put out an interesting perspective about setting goals, which is not only relevant for making a sale, but can also be applied in general:

"In a certain interaction, it is not important to reach a top result or conclusion, it is more important to open some doors and make room for new possibilities. /…/ My philosophy is that if I do one thing in a day well, that is enough. Why? On average people live for 70-80 years, 25 of those years is spent for growing up and education, when we finish a degree, we have a family and in a couple of years we retire and die. That is the reality. Therefore, do not multiply mistakes, enjoy your life, do not force all things to extreme, because that will end up in a burn-out or even something worse. You do not need to do that, you are not a millipede and you cannot do 100 things at once. Have focus on one thing, one story." (Interviewee 6)

After having conducted the interviews with both the managers and coaches, it seems **listening** is one of the more overlooked aspects in interpersonal communication. Especially the coaches

could not stress enough the importance of hearing out what the other person has to say in order to use that information for the goal of persuasion:

"A person who is a skilful communicator has at least two ears, which s/he actively uses. Most problems in communication occur due to the noise, which is not something a person says, but something that I think the person has said. Usually, the error occurs in listening, not in speaking, that is why I think it is crucial that we learn how to listen. If we will know how to listen, we will be able to communicate well." (Interviewee 4)

"I think that the most important part of successful communication is listening. /…/ It should not be like when to friends go out for coffee, one has this problem and the other has that problem. One is saying "Well you know my husband did this today…" and the other instead of listening responds "Oh, you need to hear what happened to me at the faculty today…" It is not much different in business. /…/ A person needs to be ready to listen in order for the communication to have an effect. I know a story of a woman who was a board member of a company in the US, there were four men and her. She had issues in communication and could not get an opportunity to express her opinion, so she went to see a coach, who advised her: "This is what you are going to say to the board director: You have talked for the past 20 minutes and I listened. Now you will give me 5 minutes and listen to what I have to say. Can you do that?" Everyone was silent and appalled of what she has said. The board director responded: "Say what you want to say." She presented her ideas and since then, they were always more attentive to her." (Interviewee 6)

Coaches believe that the style of communication should always be adapted to the interaction style of the other person, their character, mood and situation – this process is known as **communication adaptation**. What information listener gets through all the channels – verbal, visual as well as energy channel – should be an input for the other person to respond. Going into other person's shoes and trying to understand them and then adapting the message is a key element in successful communication:

"It is important we are aware of the response of the other person and to put yourself in their shoes. If I am writing a message, I need to put myself in the role of the one, who will read the message. Usually people respond with a lot of emotion, do not read the message before sending it and then also think that everyone would understand what they have said, as in "if I say something, everyone will understand – but this is not true." /…/ I need to get closer to the other person and understand their way of thinking, not force them with my own thinking." (Interviewee 4)

A very useful tactic that can help with message adaptation is **profiling** the other person. Profiling means understanding what kind of a character a person has and what kind of thinking and reasoning they use. This would result in a more effective communication:

"Every profile of the listener calls for a different strategy. People, who are analytical, need statements that are supported with data and percentages, for example how much the investment would cost, what exactly they would get. On the other hand, there is a different profile of people who do not care about anything else than just the energy that I give out. They say we get along great and do not need any other information, because they have already decided for the business. /…/ I always adapt the content of the message in a way, that is the most interesting for the listener. If a person in results-oriented, that they talk a lot about their achievements, goals and projects, I will definitely use results of my past projects to persuade them. On the other hand, if a person is more intuitive and esoteric, I like to open up softer themes like relationships and personal growth." (Interviewee 5)

"You can use storytelling and emotions, but that is American style, which works on the principle of inspiration. Europeans, especially Germans, need exact data, analytics, excel tables, etc. /…/ I always give an example of Apple and HP computer. If you insert numbers into an Apple computer, you will get a confusing table, however if you put colours in it, you will get beautiful pictures. If you have an "Apple listener", you need to use a beautiful, colourful way of communication. If you have "HP listener", who only needs three words to understand and you will try force him/her with colourful descriptions, s/he will tell you to clear off. You need to know who is on the other side, Apple or HP, creativity or logic." (Interviewee 6)

At this point it should be stated that communication adaptation happens in both ways, which means that the other person is bound to adapt to our communication style as well. The speaker can use that in their advantage and neutralise certain aspects of a person's personality, which can be problematic:

"I have to point out that one communicator always reacts to the other. If I have a calm energy, the choleric person will not have a lot of chance to erupt." (Interviewee 6)

Another tactic that can be used with difficult conversationalists is to take initiative and **lead the conversation**. Coaches suggested:

"When I am speaking with a person who is not skilled in effective communication, I make sure I am actively leading the way and that conversation is structured. In the beginning I always check how much time we have at disposal and what are the goals of the meeting. In these cases, you have to do everything for the conversation to work to meet the objectives of the interaction, so that both feel good about themselves at the end." (Interviewee 5)

"If my interest in cooperating with the person is big, I need to be more adaptable in the conversation. If they are not a skilful conversationalist, I try to make the interaction as simple and direct as possible. /…/ Every situation in communication is unique. People often think if they have communicated in a certain way with a person one time, they can use the same approach the next time – this is a problem. It is about daily strategy, the person might have

woken up on the wrong side of the best or had a fight with their daughter or is in filing for divorce – every communication is a new and different event." (Interviewee 6)

One step further than communication adaptation is **mirroring**, which has been discussed before. Coaches have contrary opinions about this technique, some think it comes across as unnatural and can even be exposed by the listener (see subdivision First impression), while others believe it can be a useful method to build rapport:

"Mirroring is a bit advanced technique, but it is very useful if you want to be successful and likeable in communication. When you mirror whatever the other person is doing, you somehow trigger a halo effect in them and they have no clue about it. Mirroring does not only have to be about words and body language, it can also be dressing more conservatively when you go on a meeting to the bank or more creatively if you go to the marketing agency – you consider the context of the situation." (Interviewee 4)

4.2.8 Leadership and coaching

One of the challenges that sales managers are facing is also being in the position of a **leader** to their employees. In terms of challenging situations, they have to be the one to communicate in a constructive and effective manner. When asked how they would lead their team if the communication would be on a low level, one of the coaches suggested:

"If you want to take the communication at work to a higher level, you need to let people know why is that important – why is that important for them, not for me. If people do not see a benefit in doing something, they will not do it. /.../ I would use questions to lead them to a solution where they would realize by themselves why something needs to change, instead of me telling them." (Interviewee 4)

Some people are easier to communicate with than others. Effective communicator is skilled enough to assess, who to engage with and in what way. Coaches suggest that sometimes, the best decision is to **step away**:

"If you interact with a non-competent speaker, setting boundaries might not work as a good strategy, because they might react from their ego. If possible, I try to avoid these kind of people and do not engage in conversations with them." (Interviewee 4)

In the interview, communication coaches were asked about the main **challenges** their clients are facing with in communication. First, they were asked about the problems that the customers want to resolve when they come for coaching sessions:

"One of the main challenges is that they do not know how to present their ideas, products or services. This is especially the case with people who are experts in their technical field, but do not have the skill of presenting and selling. Usually, their presentations are too complex and

their listeners do not understand them. /…/ The other problem is the actual persuasiveness. A lot of people think that a good presenting is a skill you are born with and it cannot be learned or that it is some sort of swaggering, which is not appropriate. They think that other are pretentious if they prepare for the presentation and dress well. In a desire to be authentic, they remain unconvincing." (Interviewee 5)

Then, coaches were asked about what they think are the main challenges of their customers. The **main challenges** are a lack of preparation, lack of goals and strategy, lack of self-awareness, inability to listen actively and making assumptions. They explained:

"They do not prepare well enough, they do not know themselves and what they want, they do not know their co-speakers and they very often only see themselves in a certain story, not the other person involved. /…/ They also have fear of communication and do not know how to lead the conversation in a strategic way – then they get puzzled in a situation, as if they were in a dark tunnel and do now know whether to go forward or backwards. /…/ And finally, they do not know how to be silent. Why? Because silence makes people uncomfortable and they get a feeling they need to speak. /…/ If they actually realized, what they are saying, they would be silent for 80% of the time." (Interviewee 6)

"The lack of preparation. People think communication is something that just happens spontaneously – they think in the moment in a certain situation, not before. This means they do not prepare enough for the meetings and go with the flow, which results in long meetings which do not yield the right results. They think communication is something spontaneous, not something that we can prepare for and improve. Preparation is important so we have a safety net, to at least reach some objectives. A part of it is definitely improvisation, therefore one also needs to be open and adaptable. For example in sales you can adjust the objectives and be satisfied that you have at least managed to present your product or service, the actual purchase can come in the next meeting." (Interviewee 5)

"Definitely the fact that they do not know how to listen and to rather listen to themselves than the other person. They rather talk than listen. And even if they listen, they listen poorly. Oftentimes they also assume – you say something and I assume I understood everything and that you have said exactly what I understood." (Interviewee 4)

Furthermore, when asked if they think Slovenian mentality has an effect on people's communication style and is related to the challenges they are facing, one of the coaches explained:

"Slovenian humility is not a good sales strategy. People here have been used to the saying that self-praise is not okay. In sales, people should speak up and present a good product with confidence. /…/ Slovenians often get annoyed by people who have their own back and often consider them boastful, self-centred, vain and such. For example women who are in the higher

positions where they have to communicate clearly, often get accused of being too manly, careerist and pushy. Men, who like to prepare for their presentations, are often accused of being too overwhelmed about how they would look and why should they think about how to gesticulate and what they should wear. In short, a whole bunch of prejudice and misconceptions that communication is something natural and if it is not natural, why even bother - that seems to be a key problem for all other prejudice." (Interviewee 5)

4.2.9 Techniques for improvement

Coaches believe persuasive techniques can be a useful tool to improve one's level of communication and persuasiveness, however, they should always be aligned with individual's character. They argue:

"I think techniques can be useful, but if you only learn them in theory it comes across as wearing pants that are too big and you want to look nice in them. Techniques should always be aligned with yourself, your character, not just learned word for word. You have to know who you are and how you communicate." (Interviewee 6)

"Technique is just like a hammer in a drawer – if you do not how to use it, it is useless. /…/ Theory is theory, practice is something completely different." (Interviewee 5)

By definition **coaching** is a strategic developmental conversation, which has been used since thousands of years ago, it just was not addressed in that name. Coaches believe that persuasiveness and effective communication is a skill that can be learned and improved. The tools that they use with their clients are usually based on academic research, but is tested in practice. In general, the most useful tools are really simple:

"People like simple things. /…/ I use models that are based on academic research, models that have been approved by decades of use. I usually do not follow any newest trends because there are too many and when you look at them in more detail, you usually figure out that they are simply a recycling of old concepts with a new name." (Interviewee 5)

When asked, what an individual can do to improve their level of persuasiveness and communication, coaches seem to agree that **practice makes perfect**. Besides that, to reach the best results one should invest in self-reflection, reading and preparation: "The best way to be better is to know who you are, what kind of communication style you use and when you know that, you start introducing certain exercises, you need to write a lot, speak a lot, read a lot and prepare a lot. I give the CEOs a text, titled "Why would people follow you?" and they have to write about that – if they do not know the answer, they cannot be a leader. Of course, coaching also helps because it is very difficult to rate yourself. It is important also how you communicate with yourself in the mirror, whether you like yourself or not. I sometimes give people a task to write themselves and email, read it and then see if they have persuaded themselves - if not, they

will not persuade others. /.../ The point of coaching is not that you multiply a number of new things, but to stop doing what is pulling you down. That is the point. When we get to that reason that is holding you back, your eyes open. I am not the kind of coach that tries to erase what is pulling you down. No, that is a part of you and it will always be. The point is to lower the percentage of it so you process it faster when it comes up, otherwise you cannot be yourself anymore. You cannot act in life, you have to be calm within, and your foundation has to be strong, without faking." (Interviewee 6)

"I think it is important to be knowledgeable about different topics so you can hold a conversation with people. The character is also important – if you are very talkative, you have to be aware of it, stop when you talk too much and try to listen. And thirdly, you have to learn how to visualize a conversation and prepare a strategy beforehand, learn about your co-speaker." (Interviewee 4)

"First, you have to know yourself to know your starting point. Then you have to decide what you want to improve, depending on the situation, work position, life circumstances. /.../ It is also important to know in what circumstances I communicate and what I need there. On the basis of that and knowing yourself you have to prepare a strategy on how to improve your skills. What helps the most is definitely experience. After 20 years of work experience I can confirm that no theory or tool helps as much as when you do what you want to learn, no matter if it is public speaking or sales. I know a lot of excellent salespeople without one hour of theoretical education, who have learned everything at work: they are great psychologists, who know exactly when to continue the sale and when to stop, what to say to a certain person and what not to say. That comes with practice. Practice makes perfect." (Interviewee 5)

5   DISCUSSION

This chapter contains discussion of results and aims to answer the research questions, defined in the introduction of the thesis. Limitations of the research are also discussed in this chapter, which are followed by recommendations for sales managers and suggestions for future research.

5.1   Summary of main findings

Tables 2 and 3 below summarize the main findings that have surfaced in the interviews with sales managers and communication coaches.

Table 2. Main findings from sales managers

	Variables that contribute to persuasion and communication effectiveness
First impression	Outlook (grooming, appropriate dress, tidiness), being on time, confidence, strong handshake, eye contact, open attitude, politeness, kindness, breaking the ice with mutual topics, positive attitude and "vibration", experience.
Nonverbal communication	Effective and natural use of nonverbal communication cues, pitch and tone of voice (especially in phone calls), dynamics and liveliness of voice, use of voice as an indication of a positive mood, congruency of body language and verbal message.
Verbal communication	Use of powerful words, using language that can be easily understood by the listener, avoidance of using too technical and foreign expressions, expansion of vocabulary by reading, experience and self-awareness.
Self-awareness	Self-awareness, authenticity, knowing your strengths and weaknesses, knowing your communication style, sincerity, management of emotions, spontaneity, knowing your goals in communication, knowing the limits of a communication situation, positive mindset, patience in closing sales, accepting not everyone is your client, cooperation with people that minimum communication standards.
Trust and relationships	Trust, creating a safe space for the other person, making people feel accepted and being open to what they have to say, learning about the other person (character, values, goals, way of thinking and doing), building long-term relationships, making deeper connections, having similar interests, family roles and topics to talk about, respecting the other person's boundaries.
Communication strategies	Research (about the person, company, topic) and preparation, having strategy and being the leader in the conversation, strong presentation style, active listening, adaptation of the message and communication style, conveying genuine enthusiasm about the product or service, knowing the product or service, mirroring (body language, words, attitude), confidence, strong conclusion of a sales pitch, gaining feedback from listeners, self-evaluation.
Leadership	Knowing your team members, knowing people's motivational factors, assertiveness.
Communication challenges	Listening to people's needs, avoidance of difficult speakers, acquiring skills and knowledge (especially in the early career stage).

Source: Own work

Table 3. Main findings from communication coaches

	Variables that contribute to persuasion and communication effectiveness
Self-awareness	Knowing your motivational factors, knowing how you react in certain situations, knowing your strengths and weaknesses, knowing your communication style, facing and addressing your inner shadows, (self)reflection, respectful attitude, gaining competence and credibility.
Preparation	Gathering available information about the listener, company, topic, visualization of different scenarios, choosing the appropriate strategy for the interaction.
First impression	Importance of visual effect (outlook, dress code), eye contact, strong handshake, entry statements, mirroring technique, calibration of energy, providing space and feeling of acceptance for the other person.
Nonverbal communication	Congruency of nonverbal cues with the verbal message, effective use of voice, use of silence.
Verbal communication	Establishing closeness with informal language, establishing authority with formal language, establishing a sense of competence and professionalism with technical language.
Relationships	Opening up about personal life for relationship building, having strict boundaries between personal and professional life for building a professional image, adaptation to how open the person is.
Communication strategies	Strong presentation style, confidence, strategic approach in presenting, being a good listener, addressing the specific questions and objectives of the listener, knowing your customer, knowing your product or service, storytelling technique, having high level of energy, leading the conversation, asking questions to gain feedback and cues how to adapt the communication, strong performance and confidence to get people out of their comfort zone of thinking and doing, expressing the message in a clear and concise way (less is more principle), experience orientation, having a clear goal of the conversation, communication adaptation, listener profiling.
Leadership	Helping people understand the reasons behind certain decisions, using questions to gain understanding, knowing when to step away.
Coaching techniques	Adapting the techniques to the character and communication style, self-reflection, reading, preparation, practical experience.

Source: Own work

Tables 2 and 3 present the main topics that were found to be significant in increasing an individual's level of persuasiveness. The ones that seem to be most commonly used by the participants and have also been supported by research evidence in the theoretical part are first impression, self-awareness, relationship building, trust building, preparation and specific communication strategies like presentation style, high energy level and positive attitude, active listening, mirroring and adaptation of the message and communication style. Findings from in-depth interviews, supported by extensive theoretical background have helped form explanations, suggestions and possible answers to the research questions of this thesis.

The findings from the interviews can be additionally supported by an extensive international study conducted in the US by researchers Conrad & Newberry (2011). Their study examined the perceptions of human resource managers in Minnesota, US regarding the importance of 24 specific business communication skills, which were the result of an extensive research review of 217 publications (98 organizational and managerial publications; 77 leadership publications; and 42 business communication skills publications). The authors of reviewed publications included recognized communication skills writers, leadership experts, management theorists and business communication skills writers. The communication skills identified in the review of literature were examined and only skills cited by a majority of the authors were included in the final listing.

The following 16 skills can be identified as strongly similar to the findings of this thesis: initiating open discussion, resolving conflict, providing performance feedback, negotiating, making convincing presentations, arousing enthusiasm, being a change catalyst, expressing encouragement, providing motivation, being persuasive, building optimism, active listening, building rapport, demonstrating emotion self-control, building trust and relating to people of diverse backgrounds.

Results of the study showed that managers value very highly all types of communication skills and perceive them as useful or essential for business. It can therefore be argued that business leaders from US have a similar view on the importance of specific communication skills, which provides additional support to the findings of this thesis.

5.2   Discussion of research findings in relation to theory

RQ1. Which elements of nonverbal communication contribute to persuasiveness and communication effectiveness?

Research theory covers the persuasion and communication strategy through two main aspects – nonverbal and verbal communication. A major part of being an influential speaker depends on how the person is perceived by the listeners. In the initial stage, also known as first impression, body language accounts for 55% of the liking of the person speaking, while voice and the actual message account for 38% and 7%, respectively (Mehrabian, 1971). This means

that effective use of body language can positively affect the image a person is going to create in the initial interaction. In general, higher status and more powerful individuals have an open body posture, maintain strong eye contact and accommodate less than their lower status, less powerful co-participants (Giles, Coupland & Coupland, 1991; Gregory & Webster, 1996; Thakerar, Giles & Cheshire, 1982). Findings also show that congruency of body language with the verbal message is another important aspect of persuasiveness as it signifies individual's credibility and sincerity, which builds trust between the listener and the speaker.

The findings of different studies suggest that specific nonverbal can significantly affect individual's physiology and behavioral choices. Posing in high-power nonverbal displays (as opposed to low-power pose) causes both behavioural as well as neuroendocrine changes. Participants who were instructed to display high-power pose experienced elevation in testosterone level, decreases in a stress hormone cortisol, increased feelings of power lower risk-aversion. On the other hand, low-power posers displayed the opposite pattern (Carney, Cuddy & Yap, 2010).

Voice dynamics is also one of the key elements, which makes the conversation and presentation more interesting and appealing. Research has shown falling or low voice frequency conveys state of assertiveness, authority and confidence (Bolinger, 1978). An important aspect of paralanguage is also using the silence, which conveys confidence of the speaker, significance of the message or acts as an incentive for the other person to speak their mind.

RQ2. Which elements of verbal communication contribute to persuasiveness and communication effectiveness?

Persuasiveness of one's verbal communication is significantly correlated with the power of the language and words that they use. Powerful language style is generally more fluent, terse and direct, with often usage of one-word or short replies to questions. Speakers with powerful styles of speech are evaluated more favourably by their audiences with respect to social power, sociability, credibility, competence, attractiveness, and intelligence than speakers that use powerless styles of speech (Bradac & Mulac, 1984; Erickson et al., 1978; Gibbons, Busch & Bradac, 1991; Hosman & Wright, 1987; Lind & O'Barr, 1979; O'Barr, 1982). Fluent and skillful articulation of a message also positively impacts comprehension, and consequently enhances persuasion (Chaiken & Eagly, 1976; Eagly, 1974).

Furthermore, studies have shown that poor presentation quality distracted participants from using argument-related thinking and encouraged biased assessment of proposal by using language style as a basis for drawing conclusions about both the salesperson and the product proposal (Sparks & Areni, 2002). The authors noted that in specific occasions, language and presentation style may be even more important than message content in the decision making process, especially if the interaction serves as the first contact between communicators.

Another important aspect of verbal persuasion is politeness. The authors of politeness theory suggest that power, social distance and the severity of a threat are all predictors of how many politeness linguistic elements an individual will use. If a speaker is low in relative power, is in a socially distant relation or is in a situation where the threat is more severe, his language style should amount to greater use of politeness (Morand, 2000).

RQ3. To what extent do Slovenian managers and communication coaches use communication strategies defined by scientific research?

There were important differences between the knowledge of communication strategies by individual sales managers and communication coaches. Majority of interviewees were acquainted with the concept of first impression, mirroring, communication adaptation, presentation style and preparation. Almost none of the interviewees were acquainted with the frameworks for influencing behaviors.

In general, the interviewees do not actively use specific strategies in their communication. However, there are certain concepts that they have learned in the past and have now become a part of their communication style, as they were in line with their character and it was easy and natural for them to acquire these elements.

RQ4. Which communication strategies are most commonly used by Slovenian managers and communication coaches?

Sales managers actively perform research about the person, company, topic in order to sufficiently prepare for the conversation or presentation. They believe knowing the person on the other side is a key part of being a successful persuader. A part of good preparation is also having a strategy, which is adjusted to the objectives of the interaction. Strong presentation style is what make the message interesting and appealing to the listener and managers make sure their energy levels are high, as these positive emotions are then also reflected in their listeners. During the presentation or conversation, it is important to be attentive to all the cues of the person on the other side and adapt the presentation style and message in a way that can be easily understood by the listener. A part of adaptation is also mirroring technique, which is used to synchronize body language, words and attitude between the speaker and the listener. Managers build authority by having extensive knowledge about their product or service, which gives out the impression that they are expert in their field. The final strategy that the managers use is gaining feedback from listeners and being sincere in self-evaluation of their presentation style. They are aware that effective communication is a skill that can be learned and the more they do it, the better they will become.

As expected, communication coaches believe self-reflection is one of the key important elements for effective communication. Furthermore, coaches also believe strong presentation style is the basis for successful persuasion. Even more than sales managers they stressed how

important the preparation and strategic approach is in achieving specific objectives of the interaction. Some coaches even use the visualization technique to prepare for all the possible scenarios of the conversations in order to remain the leader in the communication process. Active listening seems to be the main strategy that is used by coaches, as it enables them to learn about how the other person thinks and reacts, which provides significant advantage in the process of persuasion. One of the techniques that can be used to better adapt the message to the listener is profiling. In the course of presentation, coaches rely on storytelling technique, experience orientation and confident, high-energy performance. In terms of language, coaches believe less is more and the more the language is adjusted to the language level of the listener, the better it will be received.

RQ5. What are the main differences between communication strategies of sales managers and communication coaches?

In general, the techniques and strategies used by managers and coaches were very similar. As expected, communication coaches seemed to be more knowledgeable and aware of the use of certain strategies. Coaches gave more importance to the concept of self-awareness and specific communication style of the speaker. Knowing individual's strengths and weaknesses is what helps him/her choose the right strategy to achieve the objectives of the conversation; in the next step, the strategy is then supported by extensive preparation. During the conversation, active listening is the main focus of the effective communication, as it provides valuable cues and information that can help adjust the message in a way that sounds appealing to the ear of the listener. A more advanced concept of also the use of silence – many people fear silence, but in fact it is a very useful tool of retracting even more valuable information from the other person. Coaches suggested the speaker should also be aware of the fact that every new idea or preposition is bringing the listener out of their comfort zone – this is where the right level of assertiveness and confidence is needed to make the persuasion successful.

RQ6. What are most common challenges in persuasion and communication effectiveness among Slovenian managers?

One of the main challenges in communication effectiveness is that individuals do not know how to present their ideas, products or services, as they usually have not acquired the skill of presenting and selling. Presentations are usually too complex and provide too much unnecessary information for the listener, which is a reflection of inability of adaptation and lack of preparation. The other challenge is the lack of actual persuasiveness, as many people think good presenting is a skill one is born with and it cannot be learned. Furthermore, people lack self-awareness, they do not set clear goals of the conversation and do not know their co-speakers.

When asked if they think Slovenian mentality has an effect on people's communication style and is related to the challenges individuals are facing, coaches explained that Slovenian

humility can in fact be a problematic element in making a strong sales pitch. They argued Slovenians are generally not comfortable with self-praise and often get annoyed by people who are confident and have their own back.

5.3   Limitations

The main limitation of the study was the research sample, which was limited in size due to the time limitations of the research. A larger and more heterogeneous sample would allow for better identification of elements that contribute to the persuasiveness and communication effectiveness. Different industries might have different interpersonal sales techniques so it would be interesting to compare results from car dealers, insurance agents, retailers, real estate agents, etc. The sample could be further improved by comparing individuals from companies with the following factors: size, years of presence on the market, level of internationalization and company culture.

Other personal factors that could differentiate the sample could be different levels of education, social class, emotional intelligence, personality traits, motivators and goal orientation, experience with coaching and levels of experience in the management position, all of which seem to be important factors of communication effectiveness.

Empirical part could be further improved with the use of more diversified data collection techniques and analysis methods, which would contribute to a wider range of findings. For example, interview questions could focus more on personality traits and explore the correlation between certain personality features and communication effectiveness.

In addition, the topic of communication is difficult to assess due to its multi-disciplinary social background. The value of the findings of the study could be increased with the help of experts from other fields like psychology, sociology, linguistics and others. In the absence of resource limitations, the research could presents findings to more concise objectives, which would allow for better discussion with more depth and scope.

5.4 Suggestions for future research

In accordance with the listed limitations, there are many suggestions for further research of the topic. Due to the wide scope of the thesis topic, more specific segments of research could better explain the findings and reasoning of certain social behaviour. For instance, one study could focus on solely nonverbal elements, another study only on language, the third study only on biases in communication, to name but a few. Furthermore, conducting interviews with a larger sample size for each specific research segment could lead to more broad and generalized results of the research.

An important and very interesting field of research, which has been briefly summarized in the theoretical background and is still understudied, are the frameworks for influencing behaviour. Study of influential behaviour is one of the main avenues for further research, due to its practical use and value. According to Future of Jobs Report (World Economic Forum, 2020), leadership and social influence will be among the top 10 skills in 2025, which signifies the importance of this social research field in the future.

CONCLUSION

Effective communication is one of the top skills of every successful manager in the modern business world. There are different communication strategies that can help sell ideas, products and services to the potential customers. One major avenue of influence and persuasion is the effective use of nonverbal cues, which can signal different messages, opinions and emotions about a certain topic. Visual signals are one of the strongest forms of message transaction in terms of their effect on the listener and great communicators know nonverbal cues should be in sync with the verbal message in order to attain trust with the audience. Verbal communication, especially powerful words and language, is the other significant avenue that can help build authority, trust and enhance the image of the speaker, while also contribute to the attractiveness of his offer. Coming from this more generalized overview, there are specific strategies that have been found importantly useful in the course of interaction and these include strong first impression, mirroring and calibration, personality trait assessment, active listening and different frameworks for understanding how communication affects behaviour.

In this thesis, I explored the role of communication strategies in business performance of sales managers in Slovenia. On a sample of 3 sales managers and 3 communication coaches I tried to determine which are the most significant factors that influence communication effectiveness and explore the tactics and strategies that can help individual improve their success in interpersonal communication and influence. As one of the communication coaches in my sample explained, the formula to success is quite simple and straightforward: "Effective communication is always a result of adequate preparation and great execution."

One of the key characteristics of a successful communicator is the ability of self-awareness and self-reflection, which provides the base for the interaction. The next step is initiation into interaction with a strong first impression and here, every detail is important, from body position, facial expression and tone of voice to the groomed outlook and appropriate dress code. In order for the relationship to develop further, trust is one of the key elements that need to be established between the participants of the conversation. Among the most useful ways of developing a relationship is finding common topics and interests, which bring the individuals closer together and give them a sense of familiarity and homeliness. This process can be further supported by using the appropriate presentation style adapted to the specific person and situation of the interaction and active listening, which helps to build the bridge between the communicators. Findings of the thesis show that communicators should adopt a strategic approach to every

interaction in order to achieve their specific goals. Strategy and preparation, combined with extensive knowledge about the topic of conversation and confident performance is what brings the listener out of their comfort zone and consider a different perspective on the topic.

Effective communication and persuasion is a skill, which can be learned and improved. There are different paths that lead to this goal, where coaching is among the most established and recognized ones. This form of strategic conversation has been in use for centuries and works on the principle of strengthening the strong aspect and alleviating the weaknesses of every individual and it can be successfully applied to the field of effective communication. As with any other skill, practice and experience is what brings about best progress and lasting change.

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APPENDICES

TABLE OF APPENDICES

i

Appendix 1: Povzetek

Učinkovita komunikacija je ena izmed najpomembnejših veščin uspešnih managerjev v sodobnem poslovnem svetu. Poznamo različne komunikacijske strategije, ki pripomorejo k uspešni prodaji idej, produktov in storitev potencialnim strankam. Eden izmed vidikov vplivanja je učinkovita raba neverbalnih sporočil, s katerimi lahko izražamo različna sporočila, mnenja ali čustva o določeni tematiki. Večji del neverbalnih sporočil predstavljajo vizualni signali, ki veljajo za eno izmed najmočnejših kanalov za predajo sporočil in vsak uspešen komunikator se zaveda, da mora biti neverbalna govorica skladna z verbalnim sporočilom, če želimo med poslušalci ustvariti zaupanje. Poleg učinkovite neverbalne govorice so pri komunikaciji bistvene tudi močne besede, ki ustvarjajo vtis močnejše avtoritete govornika in pripomorejo k temu, da predlogi govornika delujejo bolj privlačni za poslušalce. Obstajajo različne tehnike in strategije, ki pripomorejo k učinkoviti komunikaciji, med njimi so najpomembnejše prvi vtis, zrcaljenje in kalibracija, prepoznavanje osebnostnih lastnosti, aktivno poslušanje ter posebne metodologije, ki nam pomagajo razumeti vpliv komunikacije na odziv posameznika.

Namen te magistrske naloge je bil raziskati vpliv komunikacijskih strategij na poslovno uspešnost prodajnih managerjev v Sloveniji. Na podlagi vzorca treh prodajnih managerjev in treh komunikacijskih trenerjev sem poskušal določiti glavne dejavnike, ki vplivajo na učinkovitost komunikacije ter določiti taktike in strategije, ki lahko posamezniku pomagajo do vplivnejše komunikacije. Kot je v intervjujih omenil eden izmed komunikacijskih trenerjev, je formula uspeha zelo enostavna: »Učinkovita komunikacija je vedno rezultat temeljite priprave in odlične izvedbe.«

Ena izmed ključnih karakteristik uspešnega komunikatorja je njegova zmožnost samo-zavedanja in samo-refleksije, ki predstavlja temelj za učinkovito komunikacijo. Naslednji pomemben korak je odličen prvi vtis, kjer je pomembna vsaka podrobnost, od pozicije telesa, obrazne mimike, tona glasu do primerne obleke ter urejenega videza. Odnos in komunikacija s sogovorniki se nato lahko razvija s prepoznavanjem skupnih tematik in interesov, ki ustvarijo globlji odnos med posamezniki in jim dajejo občutek domačnosti in pripadnosti. Ta proces lahko še dodatno podpre uporaba primernega stila prezentacije, ki je prilagojen poslušalcu ter okoliščinam, in veščina aktivnega poslušanja. Rezultati te naloge nakazujejo, da je za učinkovito komunikacijo potreben strateški pristop, podkrepljen z znanjem o produktu ali storitvi in samozavesten nastop, ki bo poslušalca izzval, da izstopi iz svoje cone udobja in spremeni svoje mnenje o določeni tematiki.

Učinkovita komunikacija je veščina, ki se jo človek lahko nauči ter izboljša. Obstajajo različne poti do tega cilja, pri čemer je osebno svetovanje (»coaching«) eno izmed najuspešnejših orodij za doseganje napredka. Ta oblika strateškega pogovora je v uporabi že stoletja in deluje na principu krepitve prednosti posameznika ter zmanjševanja vpliva njegovih šibkosti.

Posameznik tako lahko doseže veščine učinkovite komunikacije predvsem s treningom, prakso in izkušnjami, zato tudi v tem pogledu še vedno velja rek »vaja dela mojstra«.

Appendix 2: Interview questions for managers

<u>**In-depth interview open-end question:**</u>

1) Ko spoznate novo osebo - kaj storite, da bi na sogovornika napravili dober prvi vtis?
2) Ali menite, da vaš način komuniciranja oziroma stil predstavitve vpliva na to, kako uspešni boste pri prepričevanju? Če da, na kaj ste posebej pozorni pri svoji komunikaciji?
3) Ali se sami pripravite na pomemben pogovor (z zahtevnim sogovornikom, sodelavcem, pomembno stranko)? Če da, kako?
4) Na kakšen način ustvarjate odnos in bližino z osebo, ki jo na novo spoznate?
5) Kako vi sami komunicirate neverbalno? Ali zavestno uporabljate obrazno mimiko, gestikulacijo rok, položaj telesa?
6) Ali berete neverbalno govorico vašega sogovornika? Kaj razberete iz nje?
7) Na kakšen način se rokujete? Kako blizu sogovornika se postavite med pogovorom? Ali uporabljate dotik kot sredstvo povezovanja?
8) Na kakšen način uporabljate svoj glas pri komunikaciji? (ton, zvišanje/nižanje, …)
9) Kako komunicirate na neverbalni ravni, ko želite nekoga prepričati v kaj?
10) Kakšne komunikacijske strategije se poslužujete v primeru, ko želite nekoga prepričati v kaj (prodaja ideje, izdelka, storitve)?
11) Je pri prepričevanju bolj pomembno, da ste vljudni in zadržani ali bolj asertivni in močni?
12) Ali pri komunikaciji uporabljate močne besede in jezik (izogibanje besedam »mogoče, verjetno, nekako«, izogibanje iskanju potrditve, negotovosti, omahovanja)?
13) Ali pri prepričevanju uporabljate različne strategije za različne tipe ljudi (DISC, tip osebnosti – sangvinik, melanholik, kolerik, flegmatik)?
14) Ali se prilagajate komunikaciji sogovornika (verbalni in neverbalni)? Ali posnemate sogovornika (»mirroring«)?
15) Kaj opazite pri sogovorniku, ki je dober v komunikaciji in prepričevanju?
16) Kako bi komunicirali z nekom, ki ni vešč učinkovite komunikacije?
17) Ali je bolj mogoče, da boste sprejeli predloge osebe, ki:
    - ima močno avtoriteto
    - vam je všeč kot oseba (izgled, osebnost, ima podobne interese, vam daje komplimente, jo povezujete s pozitivnimi dogodki)
    - vam je v preteklosti naredila uslugo oziroma ji nekaj dolgujete
    - vas opomni na vaše mnenje iz preteklosti, ki nasprotuje vašemu trenutnemu mnenju
    - podaja mnenje, ki je splošno sprejeto v družbi
    - trdi, da bo sicer rešitev (ki jo sami lahko prodate) poiskala pri drugi osebi?

Source: Own work

Appendix 3: Interview questions for communication coaches

<u>**In-depth interview open-end question:**</u>

1) Kako komunicira človek, ki je vešč učinkovite komunikacije?
2) Ko spoznate novo osebo - kaj storite, da bi na sogovornika napravili dober prvi vtis?
3) Ali se sami pripravite na pomemben pogovor (z zahtevnim sogovornikom, sodelavcem, pomembno stranko)? Če da, kako?
4) Na kakšen način ustvarjate odnos in bližino z osebo, ki jo na novo spoznate?
5) Kakšne komunikacijske strategije se poslužujete v primeru, ko želite nekoga prepričati v kaj (prodaja ideje, izdelka, storitve)?
6) Ali pri prepričevanju uporabljate različne strategije za različne tipe ljudi (DISC, tip osebnosti – sangvinik, melanholik, kolerik, flegmatik)?
7) Ali se prilagajate komunikaciji sogovornika (verbalni in neverbalni)? Ali posnemate sogovornika (»mirroring«)?
8) Ali menite, da vaš način komuniciranja oziroma stil predstavitve vpliva na to, kako uspešni boste pri prepričevanju? Če da, na kaj ste posebej pozorni pri svoji komunikaciji?
9) Kaj opazite pri sogovorniku, ki je dober v komunikaciji in prepričevanju?
10) Kako bi komunicirali z nekom, ki ni vešč učinkovite komunikacije?
11) Ali je bolj mogoče, da boste sprejeli predloge osebe, ki:
   - ima močno avtoriteto
   - vam je všeč kot oseba (izgled, osebnost, ima podobne interese, vam daje komplimente, jo povezujete s pozitivnimi dogodki)
   - vam je v preteklosti naredila uslugo oziroma ji nekaj dolgujete
   - vas opomni na vaše mnenje iz preteklosti, ki nasprotuje vašemu trenutnemu mnenju
   - podaja mnenje, ki je splošno sprejeto v družbi
   - trdi, da bo sicer rešitev (ki jo sami lahko prodate) poiskala pri drugi osebi?

12) Ali menite, da so prepričevalne tehnike lahko učinkovito orodje v praksi?
13) Ali pri svojem delu uporabljate orodja iz znanstvenih člankov, knjig in seminarjev ali delujete po principu praktičnih izkušenj?
14) Kaj so najbolj pogoste težave v komunikaciji (predvsem v okviru prodaje in prepričevanja), s katerimi se srečujejo vaše stranke?
15) Kateri so najbolj pogosti razlogi za neučinkovitost v komunikaciji, ki jih vi opažate pri vaših strankah?
16) Ali ima po vašem mnenju slovenska miselnost vpliv na način komunikacije in težave v komunikaciji pri vaših strankah?
17) Predpostavljamo, da se je prepričevanja in učinkovite komunikacije mogoče naučiti. Kako? Kaj svetujete?

Source: Own work