

# SUSTAINABLE BUSINESS COMMUNICATION MANAGEMENT – ARE NEGATIVE MESSAGES TO BE AVOIDED OR JUST COMMUNICATED PROPERLY?

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## ABSTRACT

Implementation of organizational communication, and education on managing communication processes and their correlation to business success are central to sustainable business management. In this regards, negative messages as part of business communication may have poor outcomes and it is widely and wrongly considered that they should be avoided. However, negative messages are an essential element of every business organization, they cannot be avoided and are of high importance for leading sustainable management. This is why an educated and thoughtful approach to communication is required. The main goal of this article is to determine the notion of negative messages, as well as to present the extent of negative messages in the everyday communication of an organization, and emphasize the importance of acquiring skills necessary for a direct and indirect approach to the communication process.

## KEY WORDS

business communication, direct approach to communication, indirect approach to communication, negative messages

## CLASSIFICATION

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## **INTRODUCTION**

Sustainable management system recognizes importance of good communication process for achieving business success. As well, all recent editions of the Quality Standards consider business communication as a key skill, with an emphasize on two-way communication at all organizational levels with all stakeholders. Globočnik Žunac et al. [1] stated that although importance of two-way communication is recognizing, managers do not have ready-made tools or steps they could use in practice. This is the reason why managers and workers that communicate with different target groups have to manage different communication situations while searching for appropriate methods. Uneducated communication is a high-risk because it can cause great damage to personal relations and organization business. Successful and sustainable organization management involves sending both positive and negative messages through verbal and non-verbal communication. It is often considered that negative messages should be avoided, but they are an integral part of business organization's communication. For example, any refusal of some kind of request is a kind of message with negative content to a sender. Negative messages are narrowly connected to negative emotions that influence the whole range of different behaviours. Based on the idea that any message affects the emotions and provides the knowledge of the results, Ishikura [2] conducted research on the reflection of pleasant and unpleasant messages on the performance of the sportsmen. Results of this research suggest that unpleasurable messages are disadvantageous as they rise unpleasurable emotions and may negatively affect cognitive processing. Aliyev et al. [3] researched the emotions of pupils in school in accordance with messages sent by the schoolteachers and concluded that humiliation, insults, blame and threats will develop negative and unpleasurable emotions. Contrary to that, praise and encouragement lead to pleasurable emotions. Once unpleasurable emotions are raised Frederickson and Branigan [4] report narrowing of the range of attention during cognitive tasks and as well they noticed person's decrease of the thought-action repertoire. Avoidance of negative communication may be equated with a poor conflict management technique, that is unsatisfactory for both sides and disables future collaborative relationships. Therefore, a distinction between negative content of the message and negatively conveyed message should be made, because most of the communication problems are experienced due to the lack of assertive communication skills. Practicing assertive communication leads to improvement of skills that are necessary for successful conveying a negative message, while eliminating or minimizing possible negative influence of interpretation or negative feeling of receiver, for maintaining good cooperation. Obligingness, communication competencies, punctuality, consistency and tidiness are qualities that contribute to a positive experience and send positive message of an employee and of the business organization. Opposite of that, lack of communication competencies, unrepresentable correspondence, inaccurate or incorrect information will affect negative impressions, negative work performance or even interrupt communication and cooperation. Management must react to such communication and turn them into a learning situation of how to send messages of negative content and change their way of communication with internal and external public. This implies having acquired knowledge and skills of sending negative messages with positive effect, because through communication, people influence psychological and social development of individuals [5]. Regardless of other talents and abilities, the consequences of unacquired quality communication skills have negative reflection on the image of the organization and employees nor organization can have high business competitiveness. Even the choice of the inappropriate communication channel can lead to misunderstandings, as well as the process of filtering information and diversion of communication from formal to informal

communication channels. A certain tensions and possibilities of misunderstanding are present in every communications, but it increases in the case of negative messages. Conflicts related to interpersonal relationships are dysfunctional and have negative effect to mutual understanding, which can result with conflicts on a personal level. A certain level of conflict during the working process can be constructive and stimulating because intense discussion can lead to different ideas and problem solving could end up with good new ideas and solutions. Conflict is considered constructive when it improves the quality of decisions, stimulates creativity, innovation, interest and curiosity among group or team members, as well as becomes a medium for expressing problems and liberation, and cultivates a working environment suitable for evaluation and changes [5]. Among other issues that might lead to a conflict there is improper listening skill. Vodopija and Weiss [6] argue that difficulties in communication arise due to superficial or poor listening, which can result in receiving poor or misunderstood instructions, loss of important information, frustration and feelings of shame and increased risk of hurting other people's feelings.

Besides oral communication, Quality standard system finds written communication as planned activity that requires careful planning, preparation, organization and detailed design of business content, especially while sending messages contained of bad news and negative messages. Business reports and letters represent a business organization, and high standards in written communication also suggests high standards in business in general. Every business letter results in reaction from a business partner, which will depend on the letter layout as well as on the content.

All mentioned assert the need to talk about negative messages. The article should answer the question if generally accepted statement that negative messages should be avoided is correct. Other research questions to be answered are what significant research related to organization management and process of negative messages management is conducted and what are the outcomes of them. The main aim of this article is to present an overview of the theory that will primarily define the concept of negative message, and then serve for future research and determination of preferred communication methodology.

## **AVOIDING NEGATIVE MESSAGES AS AVOIDING CONFLICT**

The conflict is a process that is based on perception of one party that the other party is having or will have negative influence on something that is important to the first party [7]. Lack or denial of information, different meanings, unsuitability of the chosen communication channel, use of informal speech, cultural differences and other obstacles in communication can be and are negative messages, as well as potential sources of a conflict. Conflicts are inevitable, both in private and in business life. The absence of conflict can often mean that it is a matter of avoiding, suppressing or denying problems. It is often called the speech of the deaf, who therefore agrees as in fact never listens or discusses about the contents [8]. Conflicts can be divided into subgroups based on [5]: content (conflict of interest and conflict of opinions or values); points of view (intrapersonal conflict and interpersonal conflict (among a group of people) and occurrence (open and covert). Tomić [9] emphasizes the quality of communication and mutual understanding as he thinks that communication is based on finding common interests and believes that results are achieved in cooperation, not in conflict.

Conflict is a form of confrontation between two or more people who disagree about facts, actions, goals and/or values. In accordance with mentioned, conflict is not an exclusively negative phenomenon. Conflict can have positive effect, such as raise of creativity, innovativeness and ideas, as well as negative – arguments, subterfuges and promotion of individual interests. Skupnjak [10] states that conflict can be constructive or destructive, and

the way of resolving conflicts is more or less effective, depending on the learned patterns of behaviour. Conflicts are increasing in case of data overloading (data dumping) or insufficient information, which can lead to misunderstandings. The amount of data is an important element in planning a negative message. This is why it is very important that sender estimate the required amount of a content so that recipient is not overwhelmed with the chaos of not interpreted information or deprivation by sparingly given information, since there is a negative content that the message conveys is itself a danger.

Transmitting messages of negative content mostly leads to destructive and not to constructive conflicts. Constructive conflict improves the quality of decisions, stimulates creativity and innovation, stimulates employees' interest, expresses problems and creates a work environment that is conducive for evaluation and changes. On the other hand, destructive conflicts can result in lack of desire to solve the problem and bring greater problems to already poor communication. The conflicts of that kind are marked by intolerance and disrespect for human values and may result with communication disruption [7].

A negative message is not necessarily a destructive conflict nor the base for such conflict. People should strive to manage communication that will lead to constructive solutions. Ways of resolving conflicts depend on two dimensions of human behaviour: cooperation or relationship building, and assertiveness, which is related to achieving the goals. Buble [11] distinguishes the following styles of conflict management: competition, collaboration, avoidance, accommodation, and compromise.

Avoidance as a style is also common when conveying negative messages. This approach is undesirable and works for a short period of time. Using this approach in communication person does not eliminate the source of the conflict, and it will lead to communicational breakdown at the first opportunity (the first new conflict) in the future. It is suitable to use this style of communication where a certain time of a delay is required to gather the necessary information that will resolve a conflict situation. Cvjetković [12] points out that use of avoidance style in conflict is justified when it comes to irrelevant or trivial issues or when the effort outweighs the benefits of resolving. Author states that this style may bring negative consequences in more difficult situation, which will eventually become more complex and the problem will not be solved. Kitić [13] believes that adapting tasks to individuals reduces conflict situations, directs employees to a common goal and their attention to cooperation. It also states that avoiding and withdrawing from a conflict situation does not lead to a solution, but postpones the conflict, as the causes of the conflict remain.

Each of the mentioned styles can be effective for the specific situation from which a person wants to get the most out of it, but these benefits will primarily depend on the communication skills of the person sending the message [14].

The purpose of sending negative messages is not to provoke conflicts and conflict situations, but to provide an opportunity to clearly express dissatisfaction, occurring problems or with inability to comply with the requests. Due to the above, it is necessary to improve communication competence in order to minimize communication conflicts and encourage mutual communication, but also to recognize signs that indicate conflict situations and tension before the conflict develops.

## **ASSERTIVE COMMUNICATION WITHIN THE PROCESS OF TRANSMITTING NEGATIVE MESSAGES**

When conveying negative messages, both the recipient and the sender face a communication challenge. The recipient of a negative message is under the influence of emotions and may

feel heightened tension or lowered self-confidence leading to unnecessary conflict with the sender of the message. The Psychological Counselling Centre from Rijeka [15] states that in communication with others a person can communicate assertively, passively or aggressively and that the behaviour of the recipient depends on the way the sender communicates. Skupnjak [10] agrees and states that communication is often influenced by emotions, but a certain style of behaviour depends on the formed beliefs, personality traits and learned patterns of behaviour. Both the recipient and the sender of the message have a certain style of behaviour that they apply regardless of the situation and the person with whom they communicate. Kassing and Avtgis [16] conducted a study to determine the relationship between aggressive communication and the selection of communication strategies of employees and based on the results they concluded that greater argumentation and reduced verbal aggression can predict the use of articulated disagreement. The same authors state that subordinates who witness their supervisors successfully articulating dissent may be more likely and more willing to adopt similar strategies for expressing their dissent. As well their results indicate that nonmanagement status of respondents and their verbal aggressiveness contributed to the use of latent dissent. Kassing and Avtgis [16] think that employees who are high in verbal aggressiveness may lack the skills to argue well. They say that these employees when placed in situations which require rhetorical skill to be presented in the workplace, may be more likely to choose aggressive forms of expressing their disagreements or contradictory opinions. Assertive communication style is extremely important for communicating negative messages because it refers to the clear and direct expression of one's feelings, opinions, values and needs, thus sending information about oneself to accept responsibility for one's behavior, which will gain the recipient's respect. Gregov [17] states that assertiveness is the skill of actively advocating for one's rights without compromising the rights of others, where needs and attitudes are communicated confidently and directly. This means that the individual argues for himself, in a calm and cultural tone, shows active listening and respect for the other side. It also means that a person communicates concretely and directly, takes responsibility and controls the own emotions, voice and posture, taking care not to endanger or harm others and to express criticism positively [5]. Skupnjak [10] explains that the assertive style helps to gain and retain attention during communication, but also that it is an effective tool in resolving conflicts that establish balance (affirmation of one's own values and dignity while respecting the values and dignity of others). That is why the assertive form of communication enables easier and constructive communication, which is the key to sending negative messages in order to accept them in a positive way. An assertive way of conveying negative messages provides a sense of satisfaction and self-esteem, increases efficiency, and makes suggestions for solving problems rather than determining someone else's guilt. Some theoreticians suggest that individuals' feelings of helplessness, propensity to avoid conflict, and feelings of rightness also have negative effect on their willingness to disagree [16, 18, 19].

Miljković [20] believes that it is necessary to accept the five basic principles of assertiveness. The first principle talks about the importance of one's own reaction, which is the only thing a person has an influence on because influencing the behaviour of the interlocutor cannot be managed. The second principle refers to the need for a concrete articulation of a requirement or need because what remains unspoken will most likely not be taken into account by the other party since people are not mind readers. It is important to realize that because of diversity, not everyone will always approve expressed views of the individual, but caring about it will not change anything. As the last principle of assertiveness there is the importance of maximum investment in communication and striving to achieve the most favourable result for both parties, not just one. If an individual does its best and the other side remains dissatisfied, it becomes the other side's problem.

## **NEGATIVE MESSAGES IN BUSINESS COMMUNICATION**

Business communication involves the transmission of messages related to business inside and outside the organization. In this process, negative messages are transmitted, which, although they have negative content for the recipient of the message, do not necessarily have a negative outcome for either party and do not necessarily lead to disruption of interpersonal relationships. The role of the manager is to convey negative messages with a positive effect and thus influence the possible continuation of cooperation, if it is about the external environment, or motivation and perception of employees for better performance of tasks within the organization. Thomson [21] believes that how the message will be accepted is influenced by verbal and non-verbal design, but also the chosen communication channel, listening and noticing the reactions of the interlocutor. Negative messages that are transmitted may include, for example, the rejection of a candidate for the job he/she applied for, the refusal to give a speech at a meeting, and even negative communications related to non-acceptance of business cooperation, delivery delays or inability to deliver, late payments, inability to meet customer requirements, as well as cancellations.

In order that transmission of negative messages has a positive effect on the individual, reduce the impact of tension and lowering self-confidence and avoid conflicts, communication competence and message transmission skills are important. This is most pronounced in organizations that provide intellectual services. As Pejić Bach [22] points out, if the employees of such organizations are under excessive stress and workload, the work will not be done well and customer dissatisfaction will be result of that. Furthermore, Pejić Bach [22] states that efficient human resource management is crucial for the development of such organizations and offers a human resource management model used for identification of effective ways of managing human resources. For knowledge-based companies, the most important thing is the quality of service that is achieved in this way, which is impossible without good and successful communication.

Anderson et al. [23] believe that for effective targeting of negative messages, it is important that managers understand their employee as an individual. Understanding the basic characteristics and experiences of employees will allow managers to connect with their subordinates and create a sense of trust and appreciation, which will increase the likelihood that the information received will be processed in a serious and influential way. According to Bovee and Thill [24] when sending negative messages, it is necessary to keep in mind the fulfilment of 5 goals: (1) to convey bad news, (2) to encourage acceptance of bad news, (3) to maintain better relations with employees or business partners, (4) maintain a good image of the organization and, if appropriate, (5) reduce or eliminate the need for future correspondence on the subject. If all the first four stated goals are taken into account and if all of them are realized in the communication process, the efficiency of communication will increase and the negative effect due to the unwanted content that the message brings will decrease. Because of all the risks of the disastrous outcomes of sending a negative message, it cannot be transmitted ad-hoc or routinely based on known patterns through which messages of positive content are transmitted. Negative messages need to be planned precisely and it should not be forgotten that the interlocutor often does not want to receive a message that is intended for him precisely because of the negative content. Therefore, the one experiences it on a personal level and misinterprets it. In order to harm the business relationship as little as possible while encouraging acceptance of the message, the situation should be carefully analysed in order to better understand the context in which the recipient will process the message. At the outset, the goal should be thoroughly checked - whether it is direct (rejection of a job candidate) or complicated (writing a negative assessment of business results, which gives feedback to the employees on their work so far, but also helps them to improve their

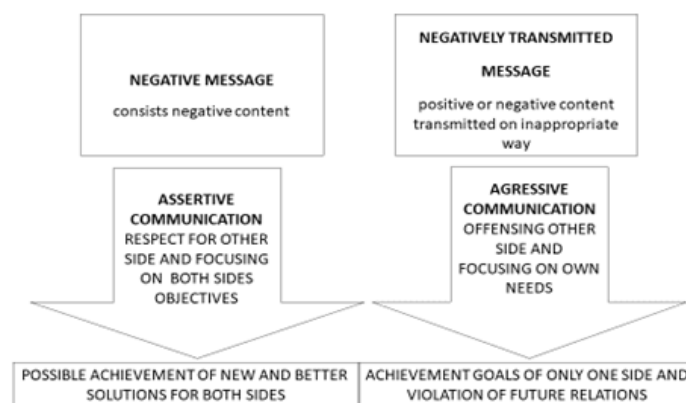
relationship towards the work in the future). At the same time, the employee profile can be simple and obvious in some situations (rejection of vacation requests) and much more complex in others (notifying the business partner of the termination of the partnership). Once the purpose and needs of the employee are clarified, the information needed by the employee or business partner to understand and accept the message should be identified and gathered. Messages that the interlocutor perceives as vague or unkind increase stress and lead to conflict and dissatisfaction. Likewise, if the manager does not have authority with the interlocutor, the interlocutor will challenge the decision, reject the message and negatively perceive what is said, which leads to frustration, dissatisfaction and spreading a negative image of the manager and the organization itself. Emington [25] believes that the development of digital technologies has increased the ability of distribution of negative messages, which he sees as a danger because it will not be seen by just one recipient, but can easily and quickly become available to a larger group of unplanned recipients. That increased the importance and influence of negative messages. The same author in his article links the formation of negative messages with the perception of the reputation of the business organization and found that the tactical approach to the formation of a negative message will have an optimal impact on reputation. In addition, he confirmed the usefulness of negative messages especially in cases of rejection of job candidates. Once the message has been planned and customized, the next step in the transfer is to be completed as well. This means that the message is clear, complete and concise, that errors are removed and that it reaches the recipient quickly and successfully. When transferring negative messages, whether they are conveyed in writing or orally, it is necessary to: (1) keep a calm and professional tone, (2) start the message by clearly stating the bad news, (3) emphasize the key thesis and put things in a particular context, (4) explain why the news is negative (depending on the situation determine whether bad news requires a detailed explanation or it would be excessive and complicated) and (5) end with a positive and optimistic prediction or opportunity, in a polite and honest way [24]. With a direct approach to transmitting negative messages, the focus should be on the bad news, not on the failures of the individual. If the message is conveyed indirectly, the purpose is to soften the shock and help the recipient of the message to accept the situation, and the message then will begin with a softening that builds a common ground with the other part (e.g., thanks, agreement, understanding, cooperation, praise, etc.) [24]. Schiemanck [26] conducted research on the impact of criticism on work performance and overall well-being for a business organization and based on exploratory analyses found that respondents show more frequent agreement with criticism when it comes to competence than when morality was the problem. Also, if respondents agreed with the criticism received, they showed a greater tendency to change their behaviour. An important finding of this research is the fact that respondents were more likely to react with negative feelings towards criticism if it came from a person outside their group, and were more likely to change their behaviours accordingly when criticism was directed by a member of their own group. Of particular importance is the preparation of a negative message that also needs to contain the necessary explanation of how the cause of negative content. This was observed by Limaye [27] who believes that the problem of negative messages is not sufficiently represented in contemporary research. She sees the reason for this in the lack of conceptualization of explanations and believes that negative messages should be viewed from two aspects. The first opportunity cost is viewed from the perspective of economic theory according to which senders of negative messages should make up for the cost incurred by bad news by offering an explanation. Another aspect discussed by this author is the adapted concept of attribution from marketing theory which states that senders of negative messages may benefit by stating reasons for their rejection of a request because, for lack of reason, the rejected persons will attribute motives and create reasons themselves. In this way, the sender of the negative

message gives the recipient the opportunity to completely deform the message, while the sender himself loses control over this communication.

Crombie and Samujh [28] view the notion of negative messages as a strategic tool. Their case study shows that although it is generally accepted that a strategic advantage in business communication is the emphasis on positivity, negative messages can also be used in this regard. By discursive analyse of the content of an annual report, they conclude that negative content achieves a threefold function: distracting from more serious problems, undermining the credibility of potential challengers, and providing a context in which the writer can present himself and other company directors as problem solvers. The authors themselves state that although their research has proven the possibility of using such messages for strategic purposes, in the long run such use raises the question of credibility and damages the reputation and directly business success in the future.

## **NEGATIVE MESSAGE AS CONSTRUCTIVE COMMUNICATION**

Negative messages in business cannot be avoided and are a daily occurrence. What can be influenced is the way in which such a message will be conveyed. In internal communication, negative messages are sometimes necessary due to the need to draw employees' attention to mistakes or omissions made in business or in the implementation of business processes or in relations with other employees, but also in external communication, primarily customers and suppliers. Because a message that contains negative content for the recipient means rejecting or failing to achieve the goal that the one wanted or should have achieved, such messages will often be experienced on a personal level. Robinson and Smith-Lovin [29] conducted research and proved that people does not matter if they are of high or low self-esteem, negatively perceive a bad message, but also found that people with low self-esteem value criticism more and will trust it more than those with high self-esteem. Therefore, when formulating a negative message, it is necessary to show the intention to achieve a constructive goal, as much as possible. In business practice, but also in everyday life, there is often no distinction between a negative message and a message conveyed to the interlocutor in a negative or unacceptable way, and according to the theory presented in this article, the difference is significant (Figure 1). Psychological Counselling [15] highlights the benefits of assertive communication of negative messages which they see in expressing their own attitudes, opinions and feelings, while respecting their own and others' rights and increasing the likelihood that others understand well because they express it clearer. In addition, the same source states that assertive communication leads to increased satisfaction and self-confidence and to an increase in one's own efficiency in dealing with conflict and criticism. In the end, the value of assertive communication based on all of the above is in achieving sincere and open friendly, partner and working relationships.



**Figure 1.** Distinction of negative message and negatively transmitted message.



Bovee and Thill [24] believe that the selection of the appropriate communication channel is crucial in the transmission of negative messages, since it is the channel that influences the perception and acceptance or non-acceptance of the message in a positive way. The transmission of negative messages itself is not easy and it is necessary to define the main purpose of the negative message, but also to explain why it is sent and leave room for the interlocutor to ask questions. Management nowadays uses e-mail or other electronic media to send negative messages to employees. When it comes to communicating a negative message or criticism, such a choice is not good because it can negatively affect the morale of employees. Since this is a complex communication requirement based on mutual communication and the possibility of asking questions, the proposal is to choose another communication channel to convey constructive criticism. When shaping a negative message, it is certainly necessary to make sure that it does not become a critique or at least to become a positive critique, or a constructive message that will ultimately have some other benefit for both parties as a result of the communication process. Baron [30] studied how students receive constructive criticism as opposed to destructive criticism, that is, how receiving such criticism affects their work. He conducted three studies in which constructive criticism, as a fundamental principle, was defined as specific and careful feedback that does not attribute poor performance to dispositional causes. In contrast, destructive criticism is one that is inconsistent with the basic principle of constructive criticism. Respondents who were exposed to destructive messages in the Baron's research showed a higher level of anger and tension and clearly expressed a preference for future avoidance of contact with the source of such a message, rather than the possibility of cooperation and compromise. In another study, subjects exposed to destructive criticism showed reduced goals and reduced self-efficacy compared with subjects exposed to constructive criticism. In the third study, respondents were employees of a large company tasked with listing the possible causes of the biggest conflicts in their business organization, and poor communication of critiques found itself at the top of that list, behind employee competition or even legal disputes. To move away from criticism alone, the cause of poor performance from the Baron's definition can also be transferred to an explanation of the cause that led to the negative content of the message. This means that a constructive approach will tend to move away from dispositional attribution towards situational and thus reduce the experience of criticism on a personal level at the recipient of the message.

Many authors talk about different communication strategies and techniques for which a successful manager must have acquired knowledge and developed skills and choose the right approach given the situation, but also the manager needs to recognize personality of the employee. If a person at the other side is prone to aggressive communication (provoking, insisting or attacking) when sending negative messages, the technique that can be applied is selective ignoring. Granić [31] explains that it is wiser to ignore these feedbacks so as not to create a bigger problem or to start another topic that will calm the situation. Skupnjak [10] warns that sometimes the recipient of the message expresses anger and rage, and in that case, it is best to apply the technique of neutralizing anger and rage, that is, to refuse communication until the person calms down and that needs to be made clear to that aggressive part. Tomić [32] presents a 'blurring technique' in which three options are possible: explicit expression of agreement with a part of the offensive statement or a separate fact that is contained in the offensive statement; expressing agreement with the general principle underlying the offensive statement or expressly agreeing with an aggressive comment or negative criticism (offensive statement), then taking a break (without "but"), pointing out the situation, taking into account the tone and body language as a constructive dialogue will be continually led. Forgas [33] emphasizes the importance of mood when sending and receiving

a negative message. The presented researches talk about the influence of mood on the acceptance of messages and found that people in a negative mood create better and more effective interpersonal persuasive messages than people in a positive mood. The author has found that mood affects processing style, resulting in the creation of more concrete and thus more effective messages in a negative mood, and the same author discusses the role of negative emotions in information processing and creating interpersonal strategies.

Anderson et al. [23] conducted a study on the specifics of millennials (those born between 1982 and 2000) with regard to receiving criticism. The authors chose this group of respondents because they are currently an active workforce that is still entering the labour market and as such form the basis for future forecasting and human resource management. In addition, this millennial generation shares some specifics that are different comparing to older employees. These differences mainly relate to values, attitudes, and job expectations. To ensure the effective transmission of negative messages to Millennials, they must be consistent. In addition, the results of Anderson's research show that millennials must understand the benefits of such a message that will be seen in the very moment or in the future. Therefore, according to the same authors, it is important for managers to be assertive enough to make sure that the employee understands the concerns, but also, they need to be sensitive to the fact that many Millennials have difficulty accepting such negative messages. The authors themselves state that there is a possibility of correlating the results with the cultural factor and suggest future research regard this topic within the non-American area.

Gneezy et.al. [34] start from the question of whether there are situations in which people should lie. Their research showed that respondents when they had to give negative feedback, prefer to choose lying rather than giving an honest answer. The same authors find this aversion to providing negative feedback costly because it encourages excessive investment of resources such as time or money. They show that improving participants' self-esteem is associated with the possibility of increasing their earnings, but also that honest feedback can be crucial to achieving better outcomes.

The research, based on an analysis of the content of 13 codes of ethics issued by 18 public relations associations at the international and national levels in the US and the European Union, dominantly approaches the issue of social responsibility from a public relations perspective. Kolić Stanić and Barišić [35] state that the normative imperatives of ethical codes of public relations show that the profession is moving towards a two-way symmetrical model, confirming the concept of the "ideal communicator" who establishes social dialogue. Although, compared to socially responsible behaviour, the value of loyalty is less represented (although more recognized as a principle) codes of ethics have suggested that if a PR practitioner must choose between loyalty to a client or organization and socially responsible behaviour, one should choose to be socially responsible.

## **NONVERBAL COMMUNICATION AT COMMUNICATING NEGATIVE MESSAGES**

The manager must not only take care about what is said (or written) but needs also to take care of non-verbal communication (in the case of business letters a manager should take into account the form and appearance of the written content). In accordance to the tone and colour of the voice, pause in speech, pitch and hardness of voice, intonation, fluency, and posture and body language, the interlocutor will either find it harder to understand and not accept what was said or will accept a negative message in a positive way and extract meaning from it. If the verbal and nonverbal part of the message are inconsistent, people are more likely to trust the nonverbal part. Miljković Krečar and Kolega [36] believe that when talking to another person, people attach as much as 55 % of importance to facial expressions, gestures and

surroundings, 38 % to the voice and vocal elements that form a verbal message, and only 7 % to the person's words or the content itself. This indicates far greater importance of nonverbal communication in interpreting messages than verbal. Marot [37] points out that behavioural scientists in collaboration with experts in sociology, anthropology, pedagogy and psychiatry have estimated that as much as 80 % of the first impression created about a person is based on body language, i.e. that gestures and facial expressions have a stronger effect on a person. in relation to the words spoken. Non-verbal communication either repeats what is said verbally or contradicts the verbal statement, and therefore when sending negative messages, it is necessary to harmonize non-verbal and verbal so that possible different combinations do not occur, and to ensure prevention of misunderstanding and dissatisfaction of the interlocutor. In addition to body language and paralinguistic signals, the environment in which the message is conveyed must also be taken into account. Škarić [38] points out that the reaction of the interlocutor will be influenced by the sound, lighting, temperature, colours, internal environment and other elements in the space, as well as the distance from which he communicates and the people around the interlocutor.

Knapp and Hall [39] gave the insight into the meaning of precise nonverbal signs. They think that maintaining the eye contact with the other party in the process of transferring the message is an important rule. Significant functions of eye movement in human interaction are: showing interest in another person, enabling feedback, synchronizing speech and showing attractiveness [40]. If the interlocutor observes the person for more than 2/3 of the total time and his pupils are narrowed, he has a hostile attitude and sends a non-verbal challenge to the sender of the message. Pease [41] gives the range of different nonverbal signals that are valuable to the manager who wants to perform quality communication and says that if one conveys a negative message to the interlocutor by holding his hands on his back, where one hand holds the wrist of the other frustration is betrayed and one is trying to regain self-control. The same author says that if the closed fist rests on the face with the index finger up, the person is uninterested in what is being said, and when the index finger is up and the thumb is holding the chin, the person has a negative and critical opinion about the interlocutor and the topic. Other signs of importance when transferring negative content in the message are: a) crossed arms and clenched fists show a hostile attitude; b) holding the documents over the chest creates an enclosure in relation to the interlocutor; c) leaning fists on the table or looking into the article is a sign that a person wants to avoid talking about the topic or part of the topic; d) the hands on the hips send a certain degree of tension and aggression, as opposed to touching one's own clothing which sends signs of insecurity, discomfort and nervousness; and when a person is reclining in an armchair with the hands behind the back of the head, great superiority is shown.

All of the above reinforces the verbal utterance and is reflected in the way the negative message and reaction of the recipient will be accepted.

## **CONCLUSION**

Negative messages are presented in this article based on the reflections of experts, and are proved to be important area of business communication. Their importance for the business of an organization is confirmed in the scientific literature. As well, the fact that they are an inevitable part of business communication for which it is necessary to have specially developed skills is proved. The transmission of negative content of a message does not require avoidance as it is often practice and as it is misperceived but requires a special approach and preparation. In addition to the importance of defining the communication channel through which the message will be transmitted and whether to apply direct or indirect access in content formulation it is important to take care of nonverbal signals that will achieve the desired goal

while eliminating or minimizing potential harm to the sender and relationship with the recipient. As for the damage to the recipient of the message, it is sometimes impossible to completely avoid it, but by properly communicating a negative message, it is possible to reduce it. This article emphasizes the importance of distinguishing a negative message that involves the transmission of a message of negative content for the recipient from a negatively transmitted message that potentially aggressively approaches the interlocutor. This article opens the door to thinking about the problem that still needs to be studied or to determine the extent to which those involved in business communication distinguish these concepts and whether they have competencies to manage the communication process in a necessary and desirable way when it comes to transmitting negative messages.

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