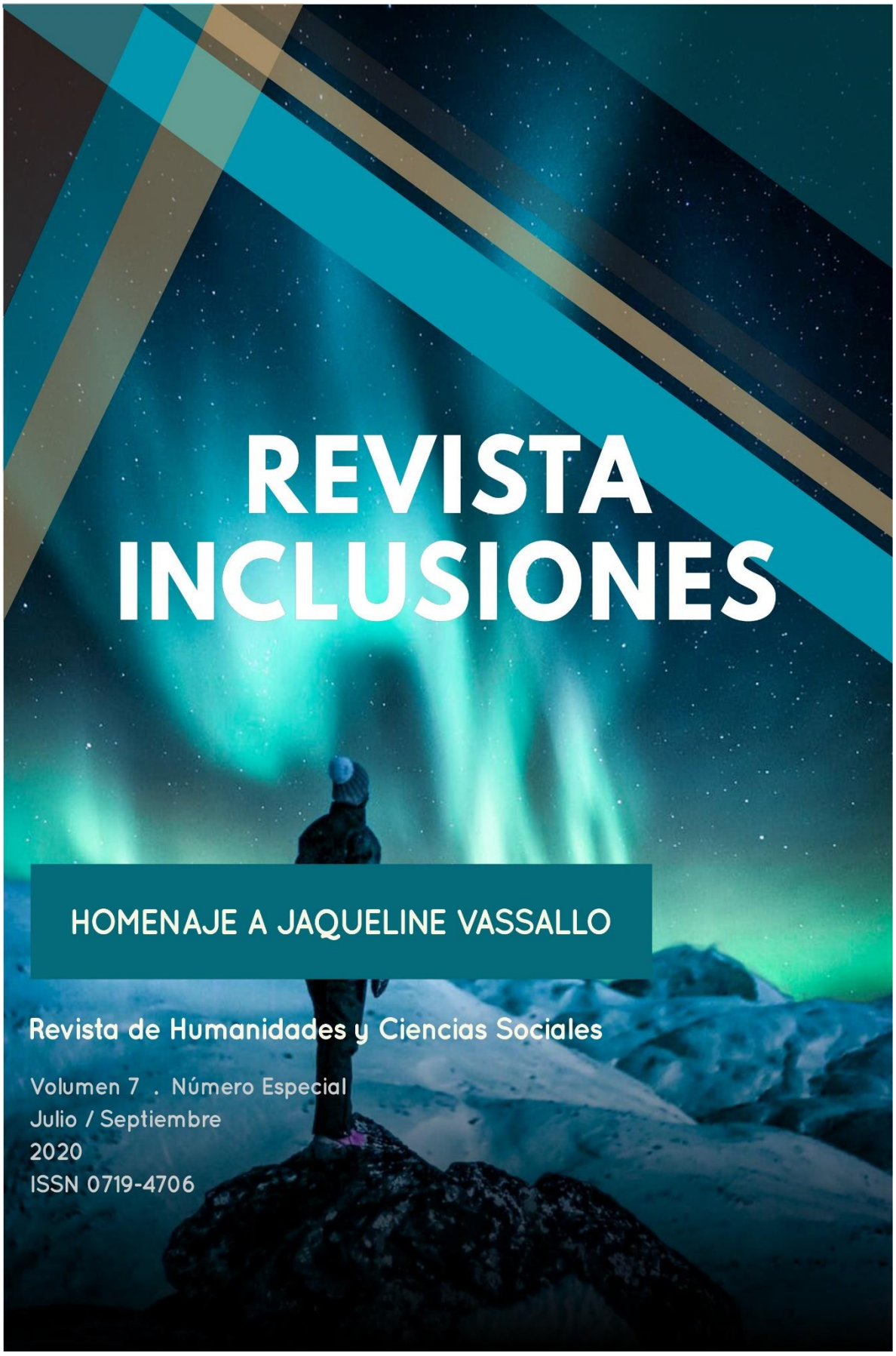

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DESIGN THINKING IN WRITTEN COMMUNICATION

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Abstract

Communication is one of the most important and useful processes in modern society. Good communication is essential for the mutual understanding between the parties involved in the communication process. It can only be effective if the parties are able to get over the mistrust and scepticism that are characteristic for the business relationships today. They must build relations based on trust and mutual respect - an important factor for the long-term success of the organization as well as for their career and personal development. The success of on organization depends on the effectiveness of its business communication (written and oral) in terms of achievement of the desired reaction or outcome. The information exchanged in the process of communication should not only be useful, but also make people feel good as members of their team, department, or organization. The timely exchange of information ensures that accurate and timely decisions are made, things are done better, and people are more motivated. The process of communication (sending, receiving, and interpreting the message) is the ability of people to understand and be understood while communicativeness is their ability to organize and formulate their ideas orally and in writing. The subject of this article is written communication and the requirements for composing different documents in terms of their type, style, and purpose. I believe that design thinking, i.e. the author's ability to use a great variety of design styles and text formats to produce comprehensive texts, plays an essential role in this process.

Keywords

Design thinking – Written communication – Style rules

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Introduction

According to the theory, “design thinking is a methodology used by designers to solve complex problems. It can be defined as an approach for generation of ideas and solving of problems”[1]. According to Elena Medvedeva, “Design today is not associated with "beauty" but rather with "convenience" and "information". Design helps people find their way in a rapidly changing world, and companies deliver their messages to consumers. Moreover, design is no longer just an aspect of communication but a completely new way of thinking - design thinking”[2].

This method uses various creative tools to solve a wide range of problems and is extremely useful for solving complex problems through empathy, problem restructuring, generation of ideas along the process of communication, and adopting a practical approach to prototype development and testing. Understanding these stages of design thinking will enable everyone to apply appropriate methods to solve the complex problems that arise in the work process. According to John Clayton, "to become authors who reflect themselves in their writing is a responsibility that everyone has to assume for himself“[3].

Design Thinking as a means of written communication

The purpose of communication is to get the message across both clearly and unambiguously. It involves the efforts of both the sender and the receiver of the message and can be hindered by errors, which result in misinterpretation of the message by the receiver. When the message does not get across to the receiver, this can lead to confusion, wasted efforts, and missed opportunities. In fact, communication is successful when both the sender and the receiver interpret the message in the same way.

A key role in this process is played by personality traits such as the ability to assert positively the set goals, to overcome impulsive reactions and various forms of aggression, manipulation and passivity. According to M. Filipova, "People are prone to evaluate the others in terms of their goals and what they are trying to do, not necessarily in terms of their achievements or successes."[4] These skills are very important for gaining an advantage and a leading role in interpersonal communication. They depend on the way personal abilities are used and are based on the person’s authority established among their colleagues and clients, their ability to overcome constraints, inspire confidence and trust, fairly promote and share success, resolve conflicts and make compromises. Interpersonal relations have always played an essential role in all organizations, including the biggest corporations. They are believed to have a direct impact on the performance of both individual employees and the organization as a whole.

Communication is successful when the message effectively conveys the encoded information and unsuccessful when the transfer is hindered by obstacles of personal or

[1] An. Klimova, Design thinking as a method of creating a person-oriented product or service, (Russia: National Research University, 2018), https://mpei.ru/Life/psycholog/Lists/Psy/NewsDispForm.aspx?ID=28&

[2] El. Medvedeva, Design thinking in events - from empathy to test, (Russia: Event Live, 2018) (28.03.2019) https://www.event-live.ru/articles/shpargalka/shpargalka-1_644.html

[3] J. Clayton, The communication that informs and influences (When a style is not relevant to everyone), Harvard Business School Press, (Sofia: Locus Publishing, 2009), 125.

[4] M. Filipova, „Analysis and Selection of Leadership Leadership“, Economics and Management Vol: 2 (2015): 9.

professional character. A survey[5] conducted at Pittsburgh Joseph M. Katz Graduate School of Business points out that "communication skills, including written and oral presentations, as well as an ability to work with others, are the main factor contributing to job success."

The communication process is facilitated by dissemination, analysis, information transfer, and organizational tools. Dissemination tools include websites, bulletin boards, the text messages, company media, etc. Analysis tools include empirical research, surveys, and focus groups. Information transfer tools include various corporate events (training, team building, etc.) and the personnel management system. Organizational tools include meetings, management processes, procedures and standards.

To have an effective communication system, each organization has to determine the right combination of the above tools. This will allow responsible employees to control the flow of information in order to maintain a positive image of the organization and improve its overall performance. Professional people are expected to be aware of and understand the characteristics and processes of written and spoken communication. The subject of analysis will be the design thinking applied to written communication. We shall start with a review of the rules pertaining to written communication. Layout formats are pre-set or defined by certain standards. However, many people disregard these rules and create texts that do not comply with the accepted standards. Poor writing and spelling skills hinder the process of communication and given the huge amount of information that is exchanged today are unacceptable. This provokes me to systematize the rules for writing assignments, using design techniques that word processing programs allow.

Written documents should be composed using vocabulary in accordance with the literary norms of the Bulgarian language (or the language of which they are written). Unlike spoken discourse, written communication is presumed to be given more thought. The very act of writing implies purposeful editing, which makes it more meaningful. This is why formal statements that may be subject of interpretation are usually made in writing. Written discourse has another important advantage - it can be stored and retrieved and thus be accessible long after it is created. A rule of thumb is that such texts should be properly formatted, free of spelling and punctuation errors, and unambiguous. Moreover, written documents cannot be changed, can be stored in archives, and can be used as evidence. This reveals another advantage of written communication – its more detailed preparation. Although the advancements in audio and video recording capabilities have dwarfed the importance of written documents, the latter still have greater value as court evidence. Written text has another important advantage - a thorough, in-depth study of the subject of writing. It is not possible to write on a topic without the writer being aware of what he wants to say, i.e. what message is to be conveyed. Thus, written communication provides a valuable opportunity for enhancement of not only writing skills but also the intellectual capacity of the writer.

Choosing an appropriate tone, style, and design format

Suppose that you were assigned the task to write a certain text. How would you start drafting the text after you have collected the necessary information? How would you know

[5]. J. Manktelow and A. Carlson, Why Communications Skills are so Important (Business communication skills online Training, 2015) http://formatcomunicacion.com /BusinessCommunicationSkills/business-communication-skills-online-training

that your view on the topic has all the necessary characteristics and the quality to convey the same idea to the reader? Here are some practical recommendations:

1.- Start with a writing plan. Make sure that you are aware of requirements regarding the style, contents, and formatting in detail. In other words, you have to assume several roles:

- innovator – brainstorms various ideas that have not been exploited widely;
- compiler – compiles a writing plan and arranges the content chronologically;
- designer – designs the message (decides what techniques should be used to text more vivid and effective) and its structure in terms of paragraphs (a single paragraph should not exceed one page);
- assessor – check the content in terms of grammar, style, vocabulary, etc.

2.- Do not skip any of the roles described above and follow their sequential order, because:

- if you skip the role of "innovator", you run the risk of producing a perfectly correct text (in terms of grammar, style, etc.) that does not contain creative ideas;
- if you remain an “innovator”, you will be able to generate ideas for the subsequent roles, i.e. ideas which will then have to be arranged, checked and evaluated.

3. Make sure that your text is convincing. This is achieved by avoiding a template language (which sounds Internet-ish) and can be considered plagiarism. If you present other people’s ideas, make sure that they are presented and quoted correctly and are followed by your own conclusions and suggestions.

4. Compose and structure your text in compliance with the four C’s of writing, i.e.:

- clarity – use familiar and common words and expressions; use illustrations and other visuals if necessary; important passages can be highlighted using a different font, colour, etc. that make the text clearer and easier to comprehend;
- correctness – make sure that your text does not include spelling or punctuation mistakes;
- conviction – avoid wordiness; use concise and clear sentences; do not include information the reader is already aware of;
- concreteness – use active verbs and expressive nouns, adjectives and adverbs; avoid long expressions; be specific.

5. Writing strategy (how to write correctly and convincingly) and behaviour. You can use the following “try and buy” strategy:

- formulate the main idea and its advantages;
- support the idea with facts and examples;
- formulate conclusions and recommendations;
- writing behaviour: situation – suggestions - questions – answers – result – satisfaction.

6. Writing style – avoid without jargon and offensive phrases, adhere to the scientific style. The scientific style is clear, punctual, and informative. It is more formal and does not allow words and expressions that are acceptable in other styles (idioms, euphemisms, metaphors, etc.), assumes that the reader is familiar with the scientific terminology.

7. Check for grammatical errors – avoid expressions in whose meaning you are not entirely sure and rephrase the sentence replacing them with familiar words and expressions in order to avoid errors; Google-check the meaning or look it up in a dictionary. According to Mariana Usheva, "Literacy, both in written correspondence and in personal contacts, creates a good image of both the employee and the company they represent"[6];

8. Design – Use visual elements such as tables, charts, diagrams, and toolbars to support the text message. Parts of the text can be in bold (B), italics (*I*), or underlined (U) fonts using the Design toolbar function. Depending on the text, it may be animated using pictures, various fonts or frames according to author's preferences and skills.

Finally, avoid writing cumbersome texts by using design elements such as headings, subheadings, short text passages, and graphics for visualization. Even margins can be used as design elements. When used appropriately, they can make the document more attractive, more persuasive and faster to read. When headings and subheadings are used, they should be centered above the text and should be highlighted using all-caps or different fonts, or a new line. As long passages are more difficult to read and understand, many authors recommend that a paragraph should not exceed two hundred words or five sentences. Long passages can be made easier to read using appropriate numbering (numbers, symbols, or letters) or hanging indents.

The main design requirement pertaining to writing is that the text should be easy to read, appropriately formatted (suitable fonts, numbering symbols (numbers, letters, bullets), paragraph spacing, text alignment) and free from spelling and punctuation errors. By using appropriate graphic design, the author can convey certain emotions (emotional design) and thus establish a lasting rapport with the reader in order to achieve the goal of the written communication, i.e. to convey the message and get feedback from the reader.

The process illustrated in Figure 1 below:

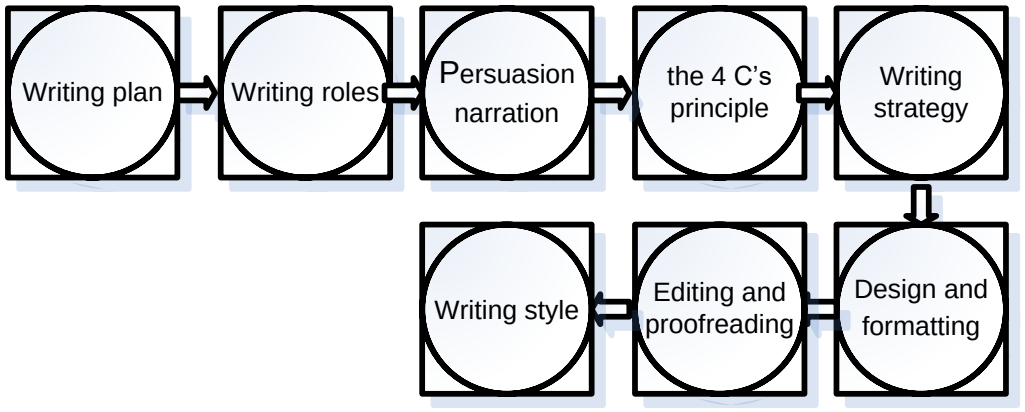

Figure 1
Author's design thinking process
Source: Author's design

According to Yordan Vedar, the title is the "business card of every written or oral discourse and must convey certain information".[7] An appropriate title will help the reader understand

[6] M. Usheva, Business Management Label (Blagoevgrad: University Publisher N. Rilski, 2017), 85.
[7] L. Borissova and Y. Vedar, Written and Oral Communications (Sofia: IBS, 2008), 231.

the essence of the text more easily and in greater detail. As a “business card” of the message, it must therefore convey certain information about the contents of the text and in doing so, should be interesting and attractive. In order to attract the attention of the readers, it should excite them. Therefore, titles have three the basic functions – to inform, to attract and to convey certain emotions.

The first and the last paragraph are very important for all types of written documents. This is proved by the sayings "First impressions are the most lasting" and "What is read last is remembered best". There is no general rule for using design elements. However, bear in mind that their excessive use may backfire. Use design elements which are appropriate for the specific situation at hand. If you are not sure how to design your document, use a template or a design made by a professional. The most important consideration is to make sure that all key ideas and supporting arguments are displayed in logical order and in a reader-friendly format. And last but not least – do not plagiarize!

Conclusion

Design thinking is an active creative process that is suitable for solving various practical problems - from creating a new company logo to composing complex texts. Written discourse is easy to comprehend and unambiguous when it is well-structured, when its elements (separate words, sentences, ideas, definitions, etc.) are highlighted using different fonts and font sizes and styles (italics, bold, underlined, etc.), when it is supported with visual elements (figures, diagrams, graphs, pictures), and when concepts that are difficult to understand are explained using appropriate examples and metaphors. According to Stella Baltova, the goal of communication is "to provide useful content to those who need it by delivering a personalized message directly to the individual user“[8].

Although design thinking in written communication requires the acquisition of certain knowledge and skills, it reflects authors’ a way of thinking and attitudes rather than their formal competence. The text reflects individual character of its author by means of specific figures of speech, techniques for establishing rapport with the reader, and the author’s own opinion and views regarding the topic. Design thinking uses the formal language of the administrative style within the boundaries of the normative literary language. Until recently, the use of 1st person singular (I) was not acceptable but now it is considered appropriate for scientific texts**.**

Written business communication aims to minimize uncertainty about certain situations, human resources management, the achievement of immediate or long-term goals, etc., i.e. to ensure the normal functioning of the enterprise. The prompt and accurate delivery of the necessary information, tailored to the specific business processes, allows rapid and clear analyses and adequate solutions. Communication is one of the most significant processes in modern society. Good communication is essential for the mutual understanding between the parties involved in the communication process. According to Sue Fox, "bad manners mean bad business"[9]. Who wouldn’t want to work in a company

[8] St. Baltova, „On the need for bloggers mapping in tourism as a tool for marketing and management solution“, Proceedings of the XIV International Scientific Conference „Development of Higher Schools in the Context of European Requirements for Quality of Education Services“ (Sofia: IBS, 2017) p. 466. https://ibsedu.bg/media/Conference/2017/Arhiv/2017_ibs_conf_book_section_table_of_contents.pdf

[9] S. Fox, Business etiquette for Dummies (Sofia: Alex-Soft, 2007), 355.

where good manners are valued? Good manners are not the end goal but only the beginning of a successful professional career driven by self-improvement and practical design thinking.

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